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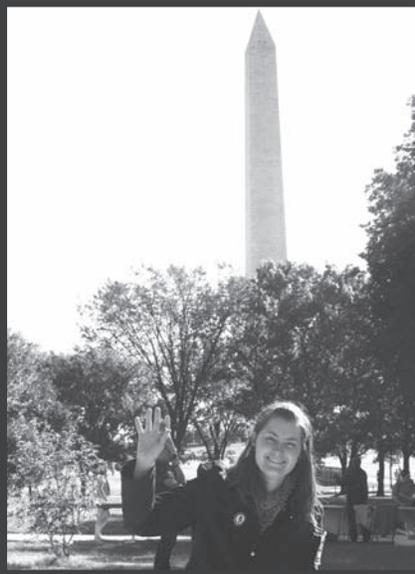
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Introduction: Start with Jobs Now For Social and Economic Rights - Now!

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Writing in 1894, French novelist, essayist, Nobel laureate and socialist Anatole France noted how “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.” France understood that rights, absent people’s capacity to exercise them and governments to protect them, were a sham. What was true then is true now, in the backwash of the Great Recession.

It should be axiomatic that when democratic societies claim a commitment to equality, they must provide each citizen palpable social rights, such as high quality universal health care, child care, decent housing, education and access to meaningful work. That’s not government policy, either in the U.S. or in most capitalist countries, where the “social market” or “welfare state” capitalist societies that once reasonably approached delivering on that commitment were upended by 30 years of neoliberal capitalist transformation. Naming and securing those necessities today is the thrust of DSA’s “A Social and Economic Bill of Rights,” the subject of this issue of *Democratic Left*.

The current hegemony of neoliberal economics flows from conscious decisions by multinational corporations. As basic industrial production moved from the First World to newly industrializing countries in search of cheap labor, the corporate neoliberal growth model favored the seemingly more profitable financial sector over the industrial, while engaging in policies of deregulation, union busting, and the privatization of public provision. These eroded the gains of the welfare state. Today, while the language if not the reality of individual rights remains, social rights and the programs they engender are at risk as governments of the right and in some cases the left vie to impose austerity measures with little regard for the effects on public goods.

While the stronger unionized and export-oriented economies of Northern Europe (particularly Germany, Austria, and Scandinavia) managed to preserve a somewhat more viable industrial sector than the liberal market societies of the United Kingdom and the United States, Northern Europe also trimmed –

though not yet seriously curtailed – its welfare states. But there’s little comfort in the trimming. With the left’s failure to develop an alternative economic development model to neoliberalism, the range of policy debate between conservative and “third way” social democratic governments was confined to how fast and how deep governments should cut back on social rights in order to achieve “fiscal discipline.” This bipartisan fiscal orthodoxy ignores the current collapse of private demand and private investment. When private demand and investment in real capital wane, only a massive public jobs program can restore a full employment, productive economy.

True, the U.S.’s popular and universal Social Security and Medicare programs have not yet been seriously eroded, but means-tested anti-poverty and affordable housing programs have been gutted. The serious erosion of the welfare state’s hard-won social rights (particularly the rights to unionize and to income security) resulted in growing economic inequality and environmental degradation.

Thus, the truism remains – absent strong social rights and movements defending those rights, political rights themselves shrivel. Countering the mantra that economic improvement means cutting taxes for the rich, mass public-sector layoffs, evisceration of pensions and further reductions in social spending, DSA and other progressives argue that these public goods should instead be increased and financed through progressive taxation on income and wealth.

As a first step, we need to formulate a government economic policy aimed at full employment through public investment in infrastructure and research and development. An economy that prioritizes the creation of useful goods and social services to meet human needs over financial speculation and military waste isn’t only possible, but necessary.

That’s why DSA believes that restoring the right to a meaningful job and working with allies to win a comprehensive jobs program must be the first priority in a renewed campaign for social rights. As Bill Barclay notes in “The Crisis in the U.S. Labor Market” (*Democratic Left*, Summer 2010, available at www.dsausa.com), a program to create 400,000

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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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public jobs per month could readily be financed by a 0.25 percent tax on financial transactions. Hundreds of thousands of the unemployed could immediately be put to work retaking abandoned lots, restoring public parks, repairing millions of dilapidated houses. In the longer term, millions of the unemployed could be trained and employed in building “green energy” and mass transit infrastructure. Contrary to the claims of Blue Dog Democrats and Republicans that such policies “crowd out” currently-anemic private investment, public infrastructure development would gin up job creation by spurring private investment in the green technology and mass transit sectors.

That’s why DSA chose the building of a mass movement for a public jobs program aimed at restoring full employment as its national and local priority. DSA locals and individual members are joining the emerging efforts by Jobs with Justice, the NAACP, and community organizations to build a grassroots movement, particularly among the unemployed, to demand “Jobs now.”

In the short run, however, the Republican gains in the recent Congressional elections have strengthened the “deficit hawks” stranglehold on the public policy debate. President Obama’s Commission on Fiscal Security, chaired by the

neoliberal Democrat Erskine Bowles and former Wyoming Republican Senator Alan Simpson, has called for major cuts in Social Security and Medicare. But previous efforts to cut the universal and popular Social Security and Medicare programs have been successfully resisted and we can once again build a mass movement to defend the basic social right to retire with dignity. Seniors and those nearing retirement readily abandon fiscal conservatism once they realize their retirement security is at stake. Social Security benefits can be shored up (and even increased!) by removing the cap on incomes subject to the Social Security tax (incomes above \$106 thousand) and making the tax progressive, creating a path to citizenship for the 8 million undocumented workers so more will be able to pay into the Social Security system, and by including in the Social Security system the 10 million state and municipal employees currently excluded.

Defending Medicare will, of necessity, raise the demand for single-payer insurance. Only eliminating the waste in advertising and bureaucracy of competing private insurers can slow medical inflation.

Progressives also have to re-educate the American and European public that only a high-wage economy

that values the production of useful “home-spun” goods over financial speculation, as John Maynard Keynes said, will sustain a working population that can afford to buy the goods they produce. By contrast, a low-wage corporate development strategy yields a society with a lowered standard of living. To remain profitable, high-wage, unionized firms have to be more productive, not less.

As Japan’s past two decades of economic stagnation demonstrate, a deflationary economy, in which private households save more and spend less, and in which private corporations and investors prefer the safety of cash to the riskiness of new productive investment, can only be restored to health by wise public investment and by “unwinding” the balance sheets of banks riddled with bad assets. The U.S. government, rather than bailing out the banks with taxpayer dollars, should have followed the advice of Joseph Stiglitz (and the policies of Sweden during their early 1990s financial crisis) and at least temporarily nationalized the banks. It then could have – if it so chose – “unwound” them by getting bad loans off their books and reselling the healthy banks to new investors. Such restructured banks would be more willing to lend for major capital projects than our current “zombie” banks (whose liabilities may outweigh their secure assets).

Not only is agitating for the social right to a meaningful and remunerative job central to a road out of the Great Recession, so is the demand for a right to housing security. The United States cannot emerge from this economic crisis unless it frees millions of homeowners from the burden of being “underwater” on their mortgages or in arrears on their mortgage payments. With interest rates at an all-time low, only the failure of the federal government to enact mandatory mortgage-refinancing programs prevents millions of “underwater” homeowners from accessing mortgages they can afford.

In the Great Depression, the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation purchased “underwater” mortgages from banks and then resold these mortgages to the existing home occupants at the current equity value of the home and at the current, lower interest rate. The federal government covered half the banks’ loss in the decline in value of the original mortgage and forced the banks to eat the other half. We need to reenact such measures. If that proves impossible, an alternative means for enacting a social right to housing would

be a federal law mandating the right of underwater or financially-distressed homeowners to stay in their homes by paying the mortgage holder a market-rate rent (that would be much lower than their existing mortgage payment). This social right to housing makes sound economic sense, as if the financial burden of the bust in the housing market is solely placed on vulnerable working families we will soon witness millions of ill-housed fellow citizens, as well as a further disastrous decline in housing prices and in consumer demand.

Societies without extensive social rights are characterized by rampant social inequality, political exclusion and mass deprivation. That need not be our future; we have a choice. We can either go back to the days of Blake’s dark satanic mills and the mass pauperization of Dickens’ time or forward to a high-wage economy that guarantees full employment by means of public investment in green technology and mass transit. If the current ideology of “private investment good, public investment bad” persists, we will likely witness decades of growing inequality amidst economic stagnation.

But defeating that reactionary ideology cannot take place in a vacuum; without a revival of mass social movements – and disruption – in favor of jobs and housing and income security, progressives will not be able to challenge the “common sense” of neoliberal ideology. Even the voices of Nobel laureate economists Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman cannot break through this mindset. So the old socialist adage of “educate, agitate, and organize” remains as true as ever.

What the left needs to do right now is educate, agitate and organize for full employment as part of a comprehensive program for social rights. It’s not the whole of a socialist agenda, or even a full list of what socialists call immediate demands, but it is a practical program that meets a critical need. The achievement of such a “second bill of rights” (as FDR termed it in his 1944 State of the Union address) would be a giant step toward real democratic equality. Its success will empower people to make further demands on the state and set the stage for further winning battles with capital. ♦

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A Social and Economic Bill of Rights for the 21st Century

Americans are familiar with the language of political and civil rights – one person, one vote and equal treatment before the law. We are less familiar with the justification for the social rights that have been at the center of our great political and social movements over the last century. For all citizens to flourish in a democratic society, they must be guaranteed such basic human needs as high-quality education, health care and security in old age. These goods are provided to every member of most democratic societies not by purchase on the private market, but through equitably financed, high-quality public goods and social insurance.

Social and economic rights play a critical role in democratic societies because political and civil rights cannot be exercised effectively by citizens who lack jobs, economic security, good health and the opportunity to educate themselves and their children. Today economic inequality – the large and growing gap between wealthy households and the rest of us – means that too many citizens are denied full participation in our social and political life. The labor, women's and civil rights movements have all fought to limit the force of unregulated capitalist markets in order to insure equal social rights for all. Thus, the labor movement fought for unemployment, disability and old-age insurance. The feminist movement fought for parental leave and publicly funded childcare. Movements of the poor fought for income security, job training and affordable higher education.

Many Americans devalue the social rights we have because they believe that their security results from personal responsibility and individual initiative. Only in the United States are child support and health care for adults and children means-tested. Until the Obama health care reforms, only the poor received federally funded health care for their children and themselves. Only poor women unable to find jobs in the labor market that provided health insurance and sufficient wages to pay for child care received federal funds to stay at home to care for infants. Hence, citizens who earned just above the poverty line have resented the poorer members of their community who received state-funded health care and child support. Such resentment fueled the vicious politics of welfare reform and the hostility of elements of the American working class toward the poor.

In societies where the publicly funded goods and social insurance are of high quality, the upper middle class participates willingly, paying its share of the progressive taxes that fund these social rights. In Germany, France and Scandinavia nearly all health care, childcare and education through the university level is provided by and funded through the state. The result is rates of social mobility considerably higher than in the United States. The opportunities to realize one's full potential are not constrained by the wealth of one's parents or their position in the labor market.

In this proposal we detail a series of basic human social and economic rights whose implementation would help to achieve freedom and dignity for all. We also illustrate how these programs could be readily financed if we cut wasteful military expenditure and restore corporate and progressive income tax rates to their 1960s levels (when our growth rates were higher and our society more equitable). The social and economic rights that follow should form the basis of a second bill of rights for the 21st century.

Some readers of this proposal may say, "I agree with your goals, but we can't afford them." Yes we can. Most advanced industrial democracies provide these goods through progressive taxation, control of health care costs (either by providing publicly funded national health insurance or regulated insurance options offered by nonprofit health care providers), and the expenditure of a smaller portion of their GDP on the military than does the United States.

United States budget deficits are the result of public policy decisions. They were created by three decades of tax cuts for the rich and corporations, an inefficient and expensive health care system and out-of-control military spending. If we restored taxes on corporations and the rich to 1960s levels, eliminated waste, fraud and boondoggle weapons contracts in defense spending and eliminated private profit in health care, we could recreate the economy and society that existed between 1947 and 1973 when marginal tax rates on the wealthy and excess profits taxes on corporations ranged between 50 percent and 90 percent. During this period workers benefited from union density of 35 percent at its peak and an opportunity to enjoy middle-class standards of consumption, and income inequality reached its lowest point in U.S. history. Progressive personal and corporate income tax rates would fund a robust

public education system, childcare, parental leave and universal health care. Moreover, a simple and just reform in the financing of Social Security – removing the cap on income subject to the Social Security tax – would secure benefits for projected recipients into the foreseeable future.

The current federal budget deficit is nearly \$1.4 trillion – 10 percent of our GDP. Most economists, conservative as well as liberal, believe that half of this deficit was caused by the counter-cyclical spending required to combat the financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing Great Recession. Thus the deficit will shrink as the economy recovers, job growth resumes and personal incomes rise. The remainder of the current deficit, some \$700 billion, was largely the result of the Reagan and Bush tax cuts, the failure to raise taxes to finance two wars and a profit-driven health system that drives up costs for Medicare and Medicaid.

Reversing the Bush tax cuts would yield \$125 billion in additional federal revenue per year. Restoring corporate and income tax rates to those of the Eisenhower era would yield another \$300 billion in revenue. Eliminating weapons programs we no longer need and reducing our more than 200 foreign military bases would yield another \$200-300 billion in yearly revenues. Additional revenues needed to achieve the promise of the Social and Economic Bill of Rights should be raised by a modest transaction tax of 0.25 percent on all financial trading. This tax alone could raise over \$600 billion in annual revenue, while curbing financial speculation. What Willy Sutton once said about why he robbed banks, because “that’s where the money is,” remains true today.

Everyone has the right to a living wage job

This is the most fundamental criterion for judging the performance of an economy: that it generates living-wage jobs for all who are willing and able to work. A living-wage job is one that provides sufficient income to support both the worker and any dependents that rely on the worker’s income for their economic well-being. The right to a living wage job for all means the elimination of a low-wage sector of the labor force. It further means the end of unequal access to good jobs by race, ethnicity and gender. Low-wage labor is a subsidy to inefficient capital, discouraging both skill development and the creation of career ladders that allow workers to move up the wage scale over time. Coupled with the unemployed, the low-wage labor sector of the workforce puts

downward pressure on all wages, as capital always holds out the possibility that workers who seek “too much” at the bargaining table may be replaced by those willing to accept less.

In a market society, much of our self esteem is rooted in our work experience. Thus the impact of a wage or salary level is more than simply economic. Low wages devalue a worker’s contribution and demean the worker whose labor is not sufficiently remunerative to support oneself and one’s dependents. Living wage jobs, in contrast, send the message that the worker is a valued member of society. Living wages encourage the self-actualization of workers, both in the workplace and in their lives outside the workplace.

Living wage jobs may be in either the private or public sector of the economy. Because private capital has demonstrated neither the ability nor the willingness to create living wage jobs in much of the human services area, government at all levels will necessarily be the prime mover in creating many jobs that meet the social needs of an advanced industrial society and in achieving full employment at living wages.

Everyone has the right to a sufficient amount of nutritious and safe food

To say that sufficient, safe and nutritious food is a basic right seems a truism. Yet today, as in FDR’s day, large swaths of the American population lack sufficient or nutritious food. Recent gains in food provision have been reversed by the current recession, forcing a choice between food and medicine or utilities in many cases.

Reports from food banks tell a familiar story – demand is up, and these providers have a hard time keeping sufficient food on hand. Not surprisingly, one in eight Americans is using food stamps, including many formerly middle-class families, even with working family members. Parents frequently go without a meal to ensure that their children can eat. Rather than hunger, this phenomenon goes by a newer name – food insecurity, or not knowing whether you will have food. Why have improvements in productivity not resulted in adequate food for everyone?

The food that is available often lacks nutritional value. Supermarkets stock a wide variety of foods, but are they healthy foods? The corn sweetener and soy-based foods produced by agribusiness create highly processed, possibly genetically modified pseudo-varieties of questionable nutrition. Within wealthier

and more stable neighborhoods, locally farmed and varied products sometimes satisfy nutritional needs as well as environmental desires for shorter supply routes and less pollution. However, these are rarely available in poorer neighborhoods, which often have to rely on more limited supplies of less healthy foods.

In some inner city neighborhoods, urban gardening is taking hold. Fresh and healthy foods can be supplied directly to the families who need them. Contrary to agribusiness practices that deplete the soil, many of these projects use sustainable agricultural practices to continue to produce at greater rates. Farmers' markets should also be expanded to these neighborhoods.

Equally important is the safety of our food supply. Repeated cuts in the staff of public agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration that oversees our food chain have crippled this vital work. In addition, global trade results in widespread importation of foods that may not be safe – these practices have already spawned food scares and recalls. The answer to this is federal funding and a new respect for government's role in ensuring safety of the food supply, as well as recognizing that profit alone cannot be the standard for such a necessity.

Everyone has the right to affordable and safe housing

The goal of the 1949 Housing Act was “a decent home and a suitable home environment for every American family.” However, even before the financial meltdown and the resulting tidal wave of foreclosures, FDR's depiction of a nation one-third ill-housed remained accurate. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, one in three households, split equally between homeowners and renters, confronts the problem of housing affordability. In addition, as many as 3.5 million people face homelessness for varying periods of time in any given year and another one million are chronically homeless, some suffering from mental illness or addiction. Ordinances criminalizing loitering, sleeping and panhandling behavior are enacted by cities to keep the homeless out of public view.

It was an economic system permitting home prices and rents to outpace inflation and rise faster than incomes that sowed the seeds of this crisis. For low-income households who need low-rent housing, especially among people of color, the situation is alarming. The Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates the average wait for a public housing unit is 11 months and Section 8 housing

vouchers are no longer available. The stock of low-income housing continues to decline as older public housing projects are demolished. As the federal government's role in providing housing has lessened, the influence of private real estate and business interests has grown. The result has been more housing for those with greater wealth and income and less for lower income households. This shift in housing supply facilitated the push of predatory mortgage lenders into lower income communities.

A progressive approach to housing affordability, in contrast, would treat housing as a social good rather than as a profit-producing commodity. Government should promote alternative forms of housing ownership – co-ops, nonprofit and community development corporations – that would also be committed to revitalizing communities. Despite being much maligned, public housing has served more low-income tenants than any other single program and should therefore remain a core element of housing policy. In order to meet the housing affordability crisis, all public housing units should be replaced with new units at no less than a one-to-one basis.

Banks and mortgage companies have created a maelstrom of foreclosures. Mortgage securitization, predatory lending practices and the steering of families into subprime loans generated over 4.5 million foreclosures in 2007 and 2008, with no let-up in 2009. With the high- and long-term unemployment patterns, another 8 million Americans may face foreclosures as Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARMs) move well above the “teaser” rate.

Banks were saved from insolvency by the bailout, but they have refused to extend credit or negotiate affordable loan modifications with homeowners, especially for those with an “underwater mortgage” (the mortgage amount being higher than the value of the home). Homeowners are bearing the burden of the housing market collapse.

Banks ignored prudential lending rules and should absorb the losses on their speculative mortgages. A governmental agency with authority, modeled on the Home Owners Loan Corporation of the New Deal, could require banks to renegotiate underwater mortgages, setting the loan at the home's present fair market value. If homeowners cannot meet the renegotiated mortgage payments, they would have the right to remain in their home and pay a current fair-value rent to the mortgage owner. Beyond such measures, federal anti-predatory legislation should be enacted prohibiting abusive loan practices, guaranteeing judicial review and just cause evictions

and providing for assignee liability so that transferees of the mortgage would be held liable for any violations. Finally, the bankruptcy code should be amended to allow a judge to modify the basic terms of a home mortgage.

The goal of affordable and safe shelter can be realized by government programs and subsidies with mandated targets and timetables. Then and only then will the right to housing be truly secured.

Everyone has a right to preventive, acute and long-term health care

In 1948, the United States ratified the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Among the rights explicitly mentioned in this proposal is the right to health care. However, roughly 50 million of our citizens have no health insurance. Another 50 to 70 million have inadequate insurance – insurance that would leave them bankrupt in the event of a major illness. It is not yet clear the extent to which the health care legislation passed in 2010 will address these problems because the problems with the United States health care system are deep rooted and long lasting.

The employer-based system of providing health insurance that has contributed to runaway inflation in the cost of health insurance premiums and pharmaceuticals threatens the competitiveness of American manufacturing and has become an untenable burden on small businesses. Despite our massive spending on health care, the U.S. lags behind most industrialized countries in terms of the quality of our health care system as measured by several common parameters used by the World Health Organization, such as life expectancy, infant mortality and doctor visits per capita. The contrast between the high level of health care spending and the relatively poor quality of service exists because we continue to utilize the wrong paradigm for health care delivery in this country. We treat health care as a commodity for sale rather than as a public good (such as education, police protection, and the fire department) to which everyone is entitled.

The corporate model of health care is inefficient, creates barriers to access and produces unnecessary deaths. In 2008, the U.S. spent \$2.2 trillion on health care – 16 percent of our gross domestic product. *Consumer Reports* has estimated that one-quarter of this spending is wasted. The largest source of waste is duplication of administrative bureaucracies. There are 1,500 private health insurance companies in this country, each with its own administrative staff and paperwork. Three quarters of health care expenditures

in the U.S. are consumed by the 10 percent of the population with chronic illnesses. Health insurance companies thus have a strong incentive to exclude people with chronic illnesses from their plans. If they do so, they can improve their margins while simultaneously offering lower premiums to their healthy customers. The resulting lack of access is not an abstract point. The Institute of Medicine (the medical branch of the National Academy of Science) estimates that 45,000 people die each year because of lack of health insurance.

Our market-driven model of health care is also responsible for the high cost of care in this country. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that if the U.S. were to adopt a single-payer health insurance system, we could save in excess of \$400 billion per year – enough to cover all those who are presently uninsured.

A single-payer national health system is the simplest, most efficient alternative to our market-driven approach to health care delivery. The features of a single-payer system are:

- 1) Universal, comprehensive coverage – Everyone receives a health care card giving them access to a wide range of health care services.
- 2) No out-of-pocket payments – Out-of-pocket payments create barriers to access for the poor and add administrative cost to the health care system.
- 3) Hospitals are paid “lump sum” operating budgets – The valuable time of clinical staff is no longer devoted to making sure a bill is generated for every aspirin administered but can instead be devoted to patient care.
- 4) Portability – Health insurance is no longer linked to employment or geography but instead follows the worker from job to job and from state to state.
- 5) Separate capital budgets – Money for expensive technology is distributed according to a regional plan based on the needs of the local population.

If we believe that health care is a human right to which everyone is entitled as opposed to a commodity that is for sale to the highest bidder, then we must legislate the financing mechanism consistent with this belief: single-payer national health insurance.

Everyone has a right to free, high-quality public education

In the rapidly changing world of the 21st century, a first-class education is a prerequisite

for the attainment of all the economic rights that we advocate. At one time, elementary school was considered the minimum requirement to participate fully in the society, then it became education through high school. In the present era, with the advance of technology and rise of global institutions, it has become clear that a post-high school education, whether in college, or alternative career and technical training, plays the same essential role as high school in an earlier era.

In each of these previous eras it was accepted that society had the obligation to provide high quality, free public education up to the level of the “terminal degree” of that era. Today, the right to education must include free or minimally priced education beyond the high school level for all those who desire it. Free public education is key to reducing the extremes of economic inequality, overcoming the debilitating consequences of poverty, integrating immigrants fully into society and creating the possibility for all members of a community to contribute.

Education for citizenship requires more than reading and math. Education must develop the ability to think critically and to question received wisdom and the willingness to challenge authority. This is why the current regime of high-stakes testing on a restricted curriculum and an excessive focus on “teaching to the test” must be opposed by anyone concerned with the preservation and extension of democratic values.

Thus, education at all levels must be funded adequately, with special attention paid to schools in low-income communities. Teaching must become a high-status profession. Teachers and teachers’ unions must be protected from being scapegoated for failures in the system. Finally, the institutions of tenure and faculty-shared governance must be defended because they are integral to the liberating education we seek, and the “business model” of the university must be resisted.

Every human being is capable of learning and acquiring knowledge and skills. It is the responsibility of society as a whole to ensure that each individual go as far on the path of education as they are capable and desire.

Everyone has the right to give and receive care

There are 40 million children in the United States under age 10 and approximately 50 million elderly and/or disabled. Both of these groups need caring support with many of the basic tasks of daily life.

Such care and support should be provided both by family members and by professionally trained, respected and well paid care providers.

As the number of people who need care has grown, the United States’ “care deficit” has also grown. Americans now work in the formal labor market, on average, 160 hours per year longer than they did 30 years ago. Nearly 40 years after President Nixon’s 1971 veto of a publicly funded child care bill, the United States ranks 168th out of 173 countries surveyed in regards to guaranteed paid parental leave (alongside Lesotho and Swaziland) and 146th in mandated paid sick days for short- or long-term illness. Unlike 134 other countries, the United States fails to legislate a maximum length for the workweek.

The United States is unique among advanced democratic nations by making caring for one’s loved ones primarily a private burden. Northern and Western European nations use policies that include high-quality public day care and preschool, as well as paid maternity and paternity leave. They have initiated child allowances to enable working families to better afford the costs of raising children, while their health and social insurance systems enable a high proportion of the dependent elderly to afford dignified, professional, in-home care.

Absent such social policies, the “care burden” falls disproportionately on women – who end up working a “second shift.” As more and more women have entered the paid labor force, combining full time work with the requirements of child and elder care has spread from working class and poor women to middle-income women.

But a just society must not only guarantee that those who need care receive it and that families are able to care for their dependents. A right to care must also mean the right for paid caregivers to be professionally trained so they can provide humane, high-quality care and be paid a living wage.

While claiming to “leave no child behind,” we underpay our teacher aides, day care workers and in-home care providers. Coupled with often exploitative working conditions, the result is high turnover, interrupted and all too often lower quality care. The average day care worker in the U.S. leaves their place of employment within a year; whereas in France, professionally trained, unionized pre-school teachers make more than well-paid elementary school teachers.

The justness of a society can well be judged by the status of its most vulnerable members – the elderly

and children. With the highest child poverty rate among affluent societies (20 percent versus four percent in northern Europe), the United States must institute a right to decent child care if it is to fulfill the promise of equal rights for all.

Everyone has the right to income security throughout their life

The assurance of income security, when coupled with the right to a living wage job, provides a web of economic well being that living wage jobs alone are insufficient to create. Income security means that loss of a job will not force the sale of a house or the dissolution of a relationship with loved ones. Income security means that our lives after our working life ends will be lived in economic fullness rather than in a financial vacuum. Income security means that a disabling accident or illness will not destroy our economic well being.

In a society that assures income security, loss of a job will open opportunities to new employment without the pressure to accept the first job offer that emerges. Thus, income security gives all of us the freedom to take a chance on a new job that may more fully develop our potential as workers and as human beings. Income security also provides the economic space for development of independent ideas and thinking. These in turn provide the basis for an independent politics that articulates the needs and wants of the population as a whole rather than the desires and fancies of a wealthy elite.

Finally, the assurance of adequate income for all, even in periods of employment transition, increases the economic potential of our entire society. Instead of desperate efforts to retain jobs in industries that are undergoing rapid technological change and possible employment loss, income security encourages cooperation between capital and labor to apply new technologies and seek new areas of investment. The result is a society that moves towards its economic potential and an economics and economic policy whose goals are for all of us to live “wisely, agreeably and well.”

Everyone has the right to leisure time

“Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what we will.” A truly participatory democracy requires that every citizen have adequate leisure time in which to fully develop intellectually, culturally, politically and spiritually in the manner of their own choosing. A democracy’s strength is

the thoughtful and full engagement of all of its citizens in the decision-making processes in their communities and at all levels of government. To reach our full potential, we must have adequate leisure time in which to think, learn and play. All the art that a society produces is only possible when people have enough time free from the demands of earning a living to freely express their creativity and ingenuity.

The pursuit of profits by capitalists is in direct opposition to leisure time. The relentless effort to squeeze the most work possible out of employees denies working people the supposed efficiencies of capitalism because they do not benefit from more leisure time to enjoy the fruits of their labor. If it were left to the unregulated market to determine workers’ hours, we would quickly see a return to the 12- to 16-hour workday, six or even seven days a week. Under such conditions, working people are simply too exhausted to think, let alone fully engage in the politics of their communities, receive an education or enjoy art and beauty.

In the United States the decades-long struggle for increased leisure time, weekends and overtime pay culminated in passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1938. The eight-hour day became standard thanks to both union bargaining and the FLSA requirement of “time-and-a-half” pay for any hours worked in excess of 40 during a single week.

Today in the United States, the eight-hour day is being eroded as corporate CEOs continue their pursuit of profits at the expense of workers. Extra pay for overtime hours was intended to be a financial penalty, encouraging employers to expand their workforce rather than rely on overtime to meet production needs. When job-based benefits like health insurance began to bulk up labor costs, premium pay ceased to be a deterrent to overtime. It became cheaper for employers to schedule overtime than to hire new workers.

The failure of FLSA to establish limits on the working day or week has left Americans working more hours than in other advanced industrialized countries. Productivity increases while pay stagnates, forcing people to work additional hours, take second jobs or max out their credit cards in order to keep up with the rising cost of living. This erosion of leisure time undermines the founding principles of democracy and exposes the contradictions of a capitalist system that exploits workers instead of benefiting them.

Everyone has the right to a healthy environment

Anticipating the concerns of today's environmentalists, Thoreau asked: "What use is a fine house if you don't have a tolerable planet to put it on?" The maintenance of ecological stability is an inherently collective endeavor. Owners of polluting factories may locate themselves upstream and the impact of pollution may vary, but what goes around comes around: toxic substances circulate through air, water and food. When species and ecosystems are driven to extinction, their loss affects and is felt by every person. The oil spilled by BP in the Gulf did not stop at the wellhead.

Everyone deserves the right to air, water, topsoil, food and a workplace and community free of pollution that degrades health and wellbeing. All should have access to parks, natural areas and information about the known hazards and uncertain risks to which we are exposed. Further, we demand the right to participate in decisions on resource use and living conditions, so that the natural world and its fantastic diversity of living creatures, habitats and interactions will be sustained and survive for posterity.

The grossly unequal distribution of wealth and power exposes communities with the least power to the greatest environmental abuse. Thus the struggle for environmental justice in the United States began with low-income communities of color.

Only when there are no more powerless communities to serve as environmental dumps can we eliminate pollution sources that belong in nobody's backyard: Not On Planet Earth. A basic environmental justice demand and an effective deterrent is the requirement that polluters pay full cleanup costs, including the mitigation of later health problems in exposed communities.

The great systems that sustain life on Earth – the atmosphere, oceans, lakes, rivers and groundwater, soils and natural ecosystems – must be recognized as commons belonging to everyone and managed democratically. Left to the logic of the private market, they will be exploited to extinction. Our posterity will inherit a healthy planet only if we end the profit-driven throwaway economy and replace it with a production system designed for systematic reuse and recycling of materials.

The global climate system is in grave peril from the unrestricted use of fossil fuels that powered the industrial revolution. We are moving toward conditions incompatible with those that made human

civilization possible. A transition to renewable energy and innovation in energy productivity can continue to raise living standards, but quality of life can improve even more with cultural change, in Bill McKibben's phrase, toward "fewer belongings and more belonging."

Healthy communities require managing metropolitan land use in the public interest, developing public transit and halting suburban sprawl. A political realignment that links older, working-class suburbs with inner cities can be the basis of an environmental and social justice politics.

We face a choice: to extend the right to an environmentally sustainable life to everyone, or face escalating ecological catastrophes and resource wars. This challenge is as radical as the industrial and agricultural revolutions. But nobody will have a tolerable planet unless the right to a healthy environment is extended to all.

Everyone has the right to associate freely at work and in their communities

The right to freely organize and to participate in decision-making within the workplace and community is the keystone to the arch of social and economic rights. Without that right, formal democracy is a sham and the workplace remains a bulwark of repression.

Elites throughout history have opposed popular participation in decision-making, dismissing community organizing as mere agitation and labor organizing as interference in the employer's right to manage. For example, the right-wing attack on ACORN stemmed from hatred of its success in mobilizing an interracial movement of poor and powerless communities to influence elections and political decisions on behalf of their interests.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935 ended the legal stigmatization of labor unions as illegal conspiracies. The NLRA committed the federal government to "protect the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization and designation of representatives of their own choosing," and to "encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining." But over the last several decades, the actual machinery of the National Labor Relations Board has been captured by employers. Today, the NLRB functions more as an obstacle to union organizing. Court decisions have narrowed the scope for the exercise of workers' rights to self-expression in the workplace,

while granting full license to employers, under the rubric of exercising “free speech,” to browbeat and intimidate employees from choosing union representation.

Illegal actions by employers to destroy union organizing drives, including the wholesale firing of pro-union activists, have become routine. The penalties for flagrantly breaking labor law are so limited that employers consider them simply costs of doing business. Some 60 million unorganized workers might choose union representation if they actually had a real choice in a fair election, but these opportunities are suppressed in the private and public sectors.

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) would restore the original intent of the NLRB by permitting workers to choose union representation without fear and intimidation. If a majority of workers

demonstrated their choice to form a union by signing union cards, it would be certified without a delay-ridden and coercive election process. Employer stonewalling on negotiating a first collective agreement could trigger an arbitration process. Penalties for serious abuses of workers’ rights to organize would be stiffened.

However, business and the right wing remain ferociously opposed to any restoration of the right to free association. Only a major mobilization by outraged citizens demanding this right could put enough spine in timid Democratic politicians to pass any substantive reform like EFCA.

Social and economic rights might be codified in national law and international declarations, but their actual implementation is always dependent on an aroused citizenry willing to organize and fight for them. ♦

DSA Statement on the 2010 Election

The left should not be shocked at the results of the recent Congressional elections. Rather than mourn, we must immediately get back to organizing to defend and expand social rights. The center-right and corporate media reads these election results as a mandate to attack the rights to a humane retirement, universal health care and public education. For 35 years, the neoliberal corporate agenda has weakened unions, gutted means-tested social welfare programs, and tried to weaken universal social programs. Corporate America now senses a chance to finish off the labor movement and privatize Medicare and Social Security. The arguments in favor of a Social and Economic Bill of Rights contained in this special issue of *Democratic Left* help arm us programmatically for this impending struggle. But only the hard work of organizing from below can preserve the hard-won social rights of the New Deal and Great Society.

The left must get back to work, but we should not panic or misread the election results. The party of the incumbent president is bound to lose significant ground in midterm elections, particularly when unemployment is high and real family income is stagnant. Elections are usually referendums on the economic performance of those in power, and the Obama administration did little to limit the rebuke. While FDR rallied the American public to “chase

the money-changers out of the temple,” the Obama administration put the money-changers in charge of the Treasury. By failing to fight early on for a public jobs program and for strict financial regulation, the administration appeared to care more for the welfare of Wall Street executives than of ordinary Americans. Of the 34 percent of the Congressional electorate that thought Wall Street, rather than either Bush or Obama, was most responsible for the economic crisis, two-thirds of them voted Republican!

Even if a more populist, full employment program had gone down to Congressional defeat, at least the American public would have known on which side the administration stood. As it was, the core constituents of the Obama 2008 electoral coalition – young voters and voters of color – mostly stood on the sidelines in the mid-terms. The Congressional electorate was both older and whiter than in 2008. In 2008, voters under 30 outweighed voters over 65. This November twice as many people over 65 turned out than people under 30 (with the youth vote going from 18 percent of the electorate to 11 percent). In 2008, Obama won 43 percent of the white vote (the highest percentage since Jimmy Carter in 1976!). But in 2010, only 38 per cent of white voters went for Democratic Congressional candidates. Only the Latino vote in California, Nevada, and Colorado carried the

Democratic Senate candidates narrowly over the finish line.

Corporate America is desperate to weaken the last bulwarks of the New Deal and Great Society welfare state – by partially privatizing Social Security and Medicare. The administration has given these “deficit hawks” an opening by creating a bipartisan commission on deficit reduction. The commission’s report will be issued in early December and will likely call for a delay in the age for full Social Security retirement benefits and a cut in the real level of benefits. It will also claim that Medicare coverage must be scaled back in the face of allegedly inexorably-rising medical costs. But Social Security could be readily preserved if we lifted the cap on income subject to the Social Security tax and provided a path to citizenship for the millions of undocumented workers who work off the books. The single-payer health care systems of France and Canada guarantee high-quality health care for all at a low cost (11 per cent of GDP), while the corporate-dominated United States system leaves over 50 million uninsured and further tens of millions without adequate coverage when they need it, all at a much higher cost (17 per cent of GDP). If Medicare is unaffordable, then it’s time to put a universal single-payer health care plan back on the agenda!

The Republican leadership knows the workings of American politics; that’s why they will fight tooth-and-nail any stimulus funding and public jobs initiatives that might significantly lower unemployment before the next election. They desperately want Obama to be a one-term president. Progressives can debate how extensive a stimulus or public jobs program can pass given Republican control of the House. But only mass agitation for “jobs now” and a “right to stay in our homes” will force the Obama administration to push for as much aid for the economically distressed as possible. If the Federal Reserve can buy back \$600 billion in long-term Treasuries, why not use a subsequent “quantitative easing” to fund a public infrastructure bank?

This spring, centrist and conservative governors and state legislators will call for massive state budget cuts and public employee layoffs (which will gut public education and social services and further worsen the recession). Progressives should remind Republicans that it was Richard Nixon who first promoted “block grants” to states and localities. Students, teachers, parents, and social



Cartoon by Walter Reeves

service recipients and providers should mobilize and demand massive federal aid to states and localities. Even some Republican governors might be compelled to support these demands.

The left must also speak to rising populist anger by demanding a right for distressed homeowners to stay in their own homes. We need to build a mass movement for a “right to housing” and call for the administration to back legislation enabling federal bankruptcy judges to “cram down” mortgage payments. If that can’t be achieved legislatively, the government’s de facto ownership of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (which insure 80 percent of American mortgages) gives them considerable leverage over the terms set by mortgage-holding institutions.

During his 2008 presidential campaign, then-candidate Obama harked back to his community organizing days by reminding citizens that they would have to organize “to force me to do the right thing.” It’s time for the left to take him at his word. We certainly understand that the incoming Congress won’t take on corporate America unless mass protest movements force them to do so. ♦

DSA Locals Organize for One Nation Working Together

By David Duhalde

Preparation for the One Nation Working Together rally that took place in Washington, D.C. on October 2nd included individuals and organizations from the entire liberal-left spectrum in addition to organized labor. Democratic Socialists of America and Young Democratic Socialists were no exception. Several DSA locals organized for the rally. These are their stories:

New York

New York City DSA held several events to build support for the rally. On September 16, the local organized a panel with DSA Vice Chair Frances Fox Piven, former ACORN chief Bertha Lewis, and Arthur Cheliotos, president of the Communications Workers of America Local 1180. Despite near-hurricane conditions that night, nearly 40 DSA members and friends attended



NYC DSA Chair Maria Svart opened with remarks on the unemployment crisis, the need for public investment and the dangers of the Tea Party. Piven spoke of the collapse of Obama-induced euphoria among large parts of his base and the country as a whole. While One Nation activities brought some hope for new mobilizations to pressure elected officials, Piven showed that to be successful, movements need to engage in direct action and social disruption as well.

Arthur Cheliotos connected the labor movement to Martin Niemoller's classic poem on apathy and indifference, "First They Came..." Cheliotos recalled a shoemaker calling for solidarity against cheap foreign imports at a state AFL-CIO convention in the 1970s. At the time, Cheliotos felt he could do nothing



for the garment industry and only expressed pity for the garment unions. Now, compassion falls on public sector unions viciously attacked by the corporate media and opportunistic politicians.

The embattled Bertha Lewis, recently attacked for her speech at a YDS conference last March, addressed the need to take the Tea Party on head first. Unless we are open about who we are and express a clear alternative, the GOP is bound to use right-populism to marshal the support of disgruntled voters for its corporate agenda.

The local held a party to make dozens of posters and signs, which a full busload of DSA members and friends took to the rally. While comrades from Providence carried the big New York DSA banner, you could see many members from other cities holding signs made in the Big Apple.

Chicago

Chicago DSA, despite its long distance from Washington, made a huge impact on the Midwest's participation in the rally. The local sponsored One Nation advertisements and registration in its *New Ground* newsletter and on its website.

According to local leader Bill Barclay, three busloads with more than 20 DSA members each, plus community activists and high school students, went from Chicago to Washington. Before they left, they were sent off by over 2,000 Chicago activists from Jobs With Justice, SEIU, the teachers' union, and other labor groups.

Washington, D.C.

As the rally was happening in their home town, Metro DC DSA members felt that it was particularly important



for them to hold a successful event to help build local support for One Nation. Since some members were busy campaigning for candidates in the city's Democratic primary election on September 14th, the local decided to hold its event later in the month, on September 26th. It occurred at Plymouth Congregational Church, a religious community affiliated with the progressive United Churches of Christ, where DC Co-Chair Dave Richardson is a congregant.

DSA Vice-Chair Harold Meyerson and longtime DSA member and Economic Policy Institute President Larry Mishel served as panelists, speaking on the causes of and possible solutions to the unemployment crisis. Introductory remarks by the local's co-chairs explicitly linked the event with the One Nation rally. Mishel then laid out the causes of the crisis and outlined some possible ways to bolster the economy, including the establishment of a national infrastructure bank.

In all, about 35 people attended the event, including Medea Benjamin of Code Pink/Global Exchange and the chief organizer of DC Jobs With Justice. This was only the second event held by the recently rebuilt local, and it served as an excellent opportunity to introduce a host of newcomers to DSA. Some veteran



members who had been inactive for years attended, and some of them also joined the DSA contingent at One Nation on October 2nd. Overall, the event was a rousing success. The local followed up by inviting the local Jobs With Justice organizer to speak at the next meeting, when a vote will be taken on affiliation with JWJ to strengthen the DC local's ongoing economic justice work.

Detroit

Detroit DSA made another stellar contribution to the work of DSA on a national level despite their distance from Washington. The Motor City local worked with Peace Action Michigan and the Detroit-based Peace With Justice network to fill three buses, although they had originally only planned for two. More than 15 Detroit DSAers and Michigan State University YDSers swelled the demand for space on the buses.



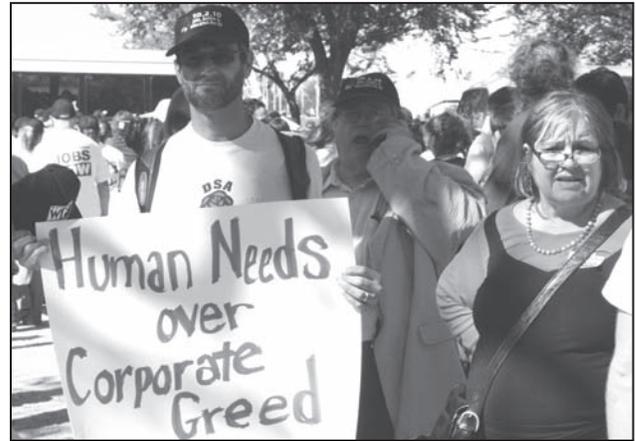
The local held a forum with Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute called "Economic Crisis: How We Got In and Can We Get Out?" Faux told the crowd the crisis was not solely caused by banking speculation, but also by 30 years of stagnant wages, leading to women entering the workforce and families accruing massive debts to maintain a decent standard of living. This arrangement, of course, was unsustainable and is intimately connected with the collapse of the housing market.

Faux blamed both parties under the Clinton administration for their support of banking deregulation. He promoted our view that the stimulus package adopted by the Obama administration was too small to lead the economy to recovery. Simply put: if nobody spends, nobody works. He addressed nearly 50 United Auto Workers representatives and 50 community members at Wayne State University in separate events.

Atlanta

Ten Atlanta DSAers made the trip to DC for the One Nation rally. They came every which way: car, bus, train and plane. Those who made it to the well-attended DSA reception after the rally were delighted by Congressman John Conyers' (D-MI) words of welcome and support.

"The weather was beautiful and I believe the total crowd was at least as big as the one Glenn Beck drew in August. Many buses arrived late while people were already leaving," said local secretary Barbara Joye. "We handed out hundreds of copies of our



SEBOR pamphlet and other lit, talked to loads of people and attracted lots of attention with the national DSA banner. The outstanding speech was Harry Belafonte's. It's true that there could have been a better turnout from the general progressive community and more calls for follow-up other than getting out the vote, but as DSA Director Frank Llewellyn pointed out, this was the biggest progressive demo following the election, signaling the end of a free pass for the administration, and should be the start of a push-back against the right's austerity agenda." ♦

Photos by Stuart Elliott

Change the USA! Join the DSA!

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- \$50 Sustainer \$35 Introductory \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:
- \$60 Sustainer \$45 Regular \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Enclosed is an extra contribution of: \$50 \$100 \$25 to help DSA in its work.
- Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

My special interests are:

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