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# Keep Pushing

By Chris Maisano

When he campaigned for the White House in 2008, President Obama spoke admiringly of Ronald Reagan's status as a transformational figure who reshaped the nation's political order. In his State of the Union speech and in recent campaign appearances, Obama has sought to channel the Gipper's sunny, can-do spirit by declaring that "America is back." That's news to us, and it's news to the tens of millions of Americans still grappling with the devastation the Great Recession left in its wake.

Fifty years after Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) founder Michael Harrington published his groundbreaking book *The Other America*, the poor are not only still with us; over the last decade, their ranks have grown dramatically. DSA Vice-Chair Joseph Schwartz surveys the grim landscape of poverty in the contemporary U.S., while the distinguished historian Maurice Isserman reflects on the ways in which Harrington's democratic radicalism resonates in our own time.

Such hardships, of course, are not confined to our own country. A global crisis has produced suffering on a global scale, and the comparatively humane countries of Europe have not escaped its terrible grasp. The eminent sociologist Norman Birnbaum has been a keen observer of European society and politics for decades, and in this issue he applies his characteristic acuity to the contemporary crisis of European social democracy. From Greece to Spain to Ireland to France to Germany, the principles of solidarity and social welfare are under attack. They may not hold up under the combined pressures of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the financial elite. Capitalism's clear inability to deliver the goods, combined with the passing of the Cold War, have created clear political openings for socialists. Whether we take advantage of them is, of course, up to us.

But the story is not solely one of doom and gloom. As Phillip Logan, an Ohio-based Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) activist, demonstrates in these pages, the

long economic crisis has made American youth increasingly open to progressive political alternatives. If recent public opinion polls are to be believed, a majority of young adults actually prefer "socialism" (which the polls leave undefined) to "capitalism" (also left undefined). Capitalism's clear inability to deliver the goods, combined with the passing of the Cold War, have created clear political openings for socialists to take advantage of; whether we do so is of course up to us.

YDS has wasted no time in doing so. In February, the youth section held its annual outreach conference in New York; it was one of the biggest and most successful youth conferences in years. Skyrocketing student debt, cuts to public education funding, and the spectacular emergence of the Occupy movement have reinvigorated youth and student politics in the U.S., and YDSers have been on the front lines of the movement on campuses and in communities across the country. Temple University YDSer Beth Cozzolino reports on the conference's highlights and considers the prospects for rebuilding a new democratic Left for the 21st century.

These are interesting times indeed, and if there is to be a future for our vision and our values, DSAers will need to settle in for a long-term battle. The challenges are daunting, but there are signs that the tide may be starting to turn, however slightly, our way. Let's keep pushing. ❖

*Chris Maisano is the editor of Democratic Left and chair of the New York City local of Democratic Socialists of America.*



Chris Maisano

## Michael Harrington and the Other Americas

By Maurice Isserman

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, the book credited with inspiring Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" in the 1960s. There will be events throughout 2012 celebrating that anniversary, an occasion all the more meaningful for taking place in a time of economic distress and a renewed debate over income inequality in the United States. It's a shame that Harrington, the founder of DSA who died in 1989, isn't with us to take part in that discussion, for he'd surely have interesting things to say about the persistence of poverty, and about more hopeful developments like Occupy Wall Street.

On thinking back on Mike's political legacy to DSA, it's worth remembering that he used the phrase "the other America" once with a different meaning, and prior to the publication of his book on poverty. That was at the end of the 1950s, which Mike had spent traveling around the country as an organizer for the Young People's Socialist League,



Maurice Isserman

youth affiliate of the Socialist Party, one of DSA's predecessor organizations.

At the dawn of a new decade, Mike saw reasons for political optimism. Unrest in the Soviet bloc swept away the notion that totalitarianism was the wave of the future. Mike argued that it was time for American intellectuals to discard the equally mistaken notion that the spread of "mass culture" had destroyed the possibility of democratic radicalism in the United States. Drawing on his experiences as an itinerant socialist agitator, Mike concluded in an article for the liberal Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, published in May 1960, that an "other America," that is an alternative America – a nation of generous democratic values and artistic and social creativity, a nation not "dominated by gadgets and mass media" – lay preserved beneath the surface of a homogenized profit-driven mass culture. In Seattle, for instance, where he had recently visited:

The people live in the presence of Mount Rainier... Driving in the city, one never knows when the turning of a corner will reveal the aspect of beauty. On a clear day, each hour, each period, is given a special definition by the mountain. And this geography enters into a culture. It is, of course, intermingled with the history of the region: logging, the IWW [International Workers of the World], the Seattle General Strike of 1919...the weatherbeaten and brawling tradition of a port. Thus the coffee cups in many restaurants in Washington are bigger than they are in the East. Their shape developed out of an outdoor, working world and they are part of the

texture of life in the area. At the trucker's stop in the Cascade mountains where breakfast is ten strips of bacon, four eggs, and a pile of home fries, these coffee cups are one of the forms defining a history and a way of living. They are related to the towering fact of the mountain.

As an apprentice revolutionary in the 1950s, Mike had prided himself on his rigorous scientific socialism. But no stretch of dialectical materialism could get him from Mount Rainier to oversized coffee cups to the Wobblies. There was instead an unabashed lyricism in the passage, reflective of his earliest career aspirations as a poet. Although he would later be a critic of the more extravagant claims made on behalf of the revolutionary potential of the youth culture of the 1960s, Harrington's own radicalism contained within it a distinct countercultural strain. Not that he expected the masses to drop out and move to Greenwich Village, his home since the late 1940s. But he saw no contradiction between the personal impulses that had led him to the bohemian quarters of lower Manhattan and the larger social transformation to which he was committed.

As in traditional Marxism, there was a teleological element to Mike's socialism, but it was no longer (if it



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Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

*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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had ever really been) based on his acceptance of some iron law about the falling rate of profit or the like. It was instead closely related to the outsider's stance that he had chosen for his own cultural orientation. His youthful bohemianism was not shaped by a desire to shock or deride his elders or mainstream culture. Rather, he assumed that what most people wanted, and lacked even in the "affluent society" of the 1950s and early 1960s, was some version of what he had already achieved in his personal life – that is, the power of self-definition. Socialism would come – not in his lifetime perhaps, but someday and inevitably – as people awakened to the claims of moral solidarity and to the joyous potential of community and meaningful work. As Mike shed the sectarian trappings of his earlier politics, his radicalism had become hopeful, generous, and expansive. Although

steeped in European intellectual theory (both Catholic and Marxist), his cultural impulses reflected a distinctly indigenous tradition of radical individualism. At the start of the 1960s, he had come to believe that if the "other Americas" – the alternative America of intellectuals and students and artists and his Greenwich Village neighbors, and the excluded America of the poverty-stricken and the dispossessed – could unite in coalition with a democratic labor movement, they would represent a powerful redemptive force for social justice. ❖

*Maurice Isserman is the author of The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington (2000), from which this article is adapted. He is also the author of the foreword to the 50th anniversary edition of Michael Harrington's The Other America, just released in paperback by Scribner.*

## Renewing Our Commitment to Ending Poverty: 50 Years After The Other America

By Joseph M. Schwartz

The November 2011 DSA convention set as a priority educational and activist work to turn back the rampant growth in inequality that 30 years of neo-liberal deregulation, regressive tax cuts, and anti-union policies created. These policies have resulted in a huge increase in poverty, returning poverty rates to what existed before the War on Poverty. This year, the 50th anniversary of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, provides DSA a unique opportunity to rekindle the public debate over how to eliminate mass poverty. Americans can choose either to perpetuate the "blame the victim" anti-poor policies of the past or fight for the massive job training and public works programs that Harrington advocated but were never adopted. While tackling the defects of the labor market that cause poverty, we must also reevaluate the needs of children and their caregivers (both paid and unpaid). Thus, any comprehensive anti-poverty program would have to introduce truly universal health care and publicly funded child care as well as revitalized public education (combined with serious efforts to desegregate class and racially segregated neighborhoods and workplaces). DSA locals can use our historic links to Michael Harrington to legitimate our role in anti-poverty work, while making the case that only radical systemic change can alleviate large-scale poverty.

*The Other America's* publication in 1962 sparked popular concern over the plight of the poor, which led to President Johnson's declaration of a "War on Poverty" in his 1964 State of the Union address. Now, 50 years later, poverty is not only still with us but at levels not seen since the early 1960s. The U.S. Census reported last September that 46.2 million people (or 15.1 percent of all Americans) now live

in poverty, the highest number in 52 years and up from 11.7 percent at the beginning of this century. Almost half of this group has incomes below 50 percent of the official poverty level. But the Census Bureau's current poverty line for a family of four – \$22,133 – is only 30 percent of the average family income. In 1962, the Census Bureau's poverty line was 50 percent of the average family income, or \$32,000 in today's dollars (in northern Europe, only about seven percent of individuals would fall below that poverty line). Thus, if we returned the poverty line to its former real value, over 22 percent of families would fall below the official poverty line, or the same percentage of American families that were poor when Harrington wrote his book in 1962!

Public discussion about poverty is marked by profound ignorance of the basic facts and the history of efforts to end poverty. The War on Poverty had considerable success but did not go far enough, particularly in regard to employment policy. Any real commitment to job training and public investment in impoverished areas died with the wasteful expenditure on the war in Vietnam. Yet the War on Poverty significantly reduced the proportion of the population living in poverty; from 1965 to 1978, this share dropped from one in six to one in nine. The Great Society created Medicare and about doubled Social Security payments and indexed them to inflation. These policies led to poverty rates among the elderly dropping from 30 percent in 1962



Joseph M. Schwartz

to only nine percent today. This is clear proof that well-funded social programs can solve poverty. After 1978, however, much of the effort to end poverty among children and adults under 65 was not only abandoned but actually reversed, as Republican-led administrations refused to increase the minimum wage and the Clinton administration “ended welfare as we know it.” From Reagan onward, the federal government also largely abandoned any role in providing housing assistance to low-income Americans.

The 30-year neo-liberal war on workers and unions has so devalued the minimum wage – and the bargaining power of workers – that having a full-time job no longer guarantees that a family will escape poverty. In 2012, almost all full-time jobs do not pay enough to lift a family of four above the poverty line of \$22,000! That is, one quarter of full-time jobs in the U.S. pay poverty wages.

But did the War on Poverty fail – or simply not go far enough? The core surviving War on Poverty programs – Head Start, which covers only half of eligible children; community health centers, which only cover a small percentage of the poor; and food stamps – lift tens of millions out of poverty. A major legacy of the War on Poverty has been the decline of rural poverty. While one-third of the poor still live in rural areas, official rural poverty rates today are just officially 17 percent, versus 14 percent in urban areas. In 1962 – before Medicaid and food stamps – close to one-third of rural Americans lived in poverty, versus 20 percent in cities.

Since the War on Poverty, the Right has engaged in a systematic disinformation campaign aimed at making the public see the poor as “immoral” rather than as workers without work or a living wage or as single mothers who engage in productive work caring for infants or who, if they are to participate in the formal labor market, need living wages and publicly-financed, high-quality child care. Harrington’s own work sometimes was invidiously appropriated by the Right, as the book perhaps too uncritically adopted anthropologist Oscar Lewis’s concept of “the culture of poverty” – that generations of impoverishment gave rise to low aspirations, hopelessness, substance abuse, and other “counterproductive” behavior among the poor. But Harrington, who used the term interchangeably with the “vicious cycle of poverty,” understood that such behavior characterized only a segment of the long-term poor and that a change in the structure of opportunity could readily alter such behavior. As a self-defined “democratic Marxist,” Harrington may also have underestimated the capacity of the poor to act as political agents in their own right, as witnessed by the welfare rights and urban protest movements of the 1960s.

The Right’s disinformation about the causes of poverty and the “failures” of the War on Poverty has been carried out by a network of conservative journals, think tanks, and political leaders who all consistently ignore the structural causes of poverty that Harrington accurately highlighted. This has been the case from Ronald Reagan’s



Michael Harrington

fabricated story of “welfare queens” driving Cadillacs in Detroit to Charles Murray’s spurious claim that the allegedly generous benefits of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) provided a disincentive to work. The Right in the 1980s and 1990s succeeded in racializing the discourse about poverty in order to blame the victim rather than focus on policies that would alter the structure of opportunities for the poor of all races. In this highly ideologically charged period, the facts did not seem to matter. For example, AFDC’s real value declined to 30 percent from 1970 to the publication of Murray’s *Losing Ground* in 1985, yet welfare rolls climbed due to deteriorating job market conditions; ethnographic evidence found that most welfare recipients also worked off the books to make ends meet.

The price of Clinton’s welfare reform has been severe. Given the punitive requirements of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF, the non-entitlement program that replaced AFDC) and inadequate funding for child care, most women and children can no longer qualify for TANF. In 1995, 12.1 million children and women received AFDC; today only 4.9 million receive TANF. And during the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, welfare rolls have only expanded from 4.5 million in 2008 to 4.9 million in 2011! The brutal realities of the war on the poor can be summarized by two bone-chilling facts: in 2008, only 22 percent of poor children received welfare, compared to 61 percent of poor children in 1995. In 1991, 12 percent of poor women had no job and received no welfare. By 2007, the number was 34 percent – and is likely much higher today.

The conservative media’s current celebration of Charles Murray’s new book *Coming Apart* is another vicious attempt to blame the victims of poverty. Instead of recognizing the devastating effects of deindustrialization on working class communities of all races, Murray accuses impoverished whites of adopting the supposed “anti-work culture” of the non-white poor – out of wedlock births, rising divorce rates, and the increase in impoverished

single-parent families. Murray's analysis blatantly fails to examine the consequences of rising unemployment and underemployment – and decreases in social mobility – among low-income whites, particularly less-educated young men. As William Julius Wilson demonstrated in his 1980s work on inner-city poverty, when work disappears poverty and single motherhood increase, as there are few employed young men for child-bearing age women to marry.

A central theme of DSA's efforts to educate and organize around poverty should be that poverty today is everyone's problem: it affects not only "them" but touches all of us directly or indirectly, because poverty is caused by our race-to-the-bottom low-wage economy. Poverty is increasingly the result of low-wage workers trying to raise children. The conscious corporate and state attack on the right to organize unions has created a more vulnerable labor force, particularly in the service and care sectors. In addition, the absence of a road to citizenship and labor rights for eight million undocumented workers contributes to a weakening of wages, benefits, and working conditions for all low-wage workers.

Harrington and fellow radical Paul Jacobs served as consultants for all of 12 days in the spring of 1964 when Sargent Shriver's task force drew up the initial War

on Poverty proposals. The two radicals often impishly concluded their memos with the refrain "of course there is no real solution to poverty until we abolish the capitalist system." Today, for the U.S. to institute the type of reforms that keep many more Europeans out of poverty – universal child care and health care, plus larger and more effective job training programs and public investment – we have to build mass movements of those harmed by capitalism. The wealthiest society in world history certainly has the wherewithal to end poverty. Thus, the clarion call to justice of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* still rings true: "The means are at hand to fulfill the age-old dream: poverty can now be abolished. How long shall we ignore the underdeveloped nation in our midst? How long shall we look the other way while our fellow human beings suffer? How long?...For until these facts shame us, until they stir us to action, the other America will continue to exist, a monstrous example of needless suffering." ❖

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## Asocial Europe

By Norman Birnbaum

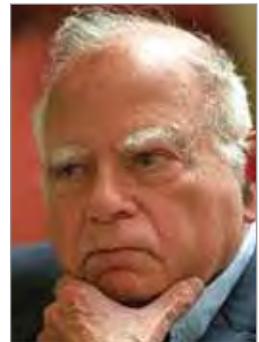
**W**e are used to thinking of the European Union (EU), and especially its longtime members in Western Europe, as the exemplification of welfare state institutions and practices, backed by a consensus involving the socialist and social democratic parties, the Christian social parties (Catholic and Protestant), and the enlightened, technocratic segment of the capitalist elite and its employees in the academy, government, and the media. No doubt, life chances are still better for someone in Bavaria or Paris than in Mississippi or Los Angeles. Large and increasing tears in the social fabric, however, are setting Europe down the road to the everyday forms of social disintegration we in the U.S. are used to living with: permanent unemployment or underemployment for large numbers, low incomes and impoverishment, deficient educational provision and health care, and widening inequality.

The EU is far from homogeneous, and its internal differences are enormous. Spain has unemployment rates of over 20 percent (and even higher than that for the young), while Austria is at four percent. German industry is doing well, but what is left of British manufacturing (not very much in a nation very dependent on its financial sector) is struggling. The general crisis of Western capitalism has resulted in a striking diminution of investment and growth in Europe. Unemployment in the EU as a whole stands at about 11 percent. Some of its member states (Greece of course,

Portugal, Ireland, even Spain and Italy) are confronting the possibility of state bankruptcy, on account of the high interest rates demanded by the purchasers of their bonds.

The matter is even more complicated by the fact that only 17 of 27 EU member states use the Euro currency (the United Kingdom and Sweden, for example, do not), and so the Eurozone nations relying on the European Central Bank for support stagger from improvisation to improvisation and have done so since the crisis began in 2008. Even the U.S. Congress is implicated in the stabilization effort. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) could help stabilize the Euro by allocating capital to a stabilization fund. That would compel the IMF, under the leadership of former French finance minister Christine Lagarde, to increase its capital, but under IMF rules such an increase can only be approved by Congress.

Meanwhile, the division of powers within the EU makes it resemble one of those self-destructing or moving Surrealist sculptures. There is the directly elected Parliament, the European Commission (the union's executive body), and the European Council (composed of the 27 heads of government).



Norman Birnbaum

All are involved in a continuous conflict over influence and power. In a masterstroke of unintended self-parody, Europe has given itself not one but two Presidents. The Portuguese Christian Democrat Jose Manuel Barroso (a Georgetown Ph.D. with good connections to Washington) is President of the Commission while the Belgian Christian Democrat Herman Van Rompuy occupies the relatively new position of permanent President of the Council. The paymasters have great power, and in Europe there are two of them.

The European Central Bank (ECB) is formally chartered to attend to the stability of the Euro. Unlike the Federal Reserve, it has no mandate to consider employment in the Eurozone nations or the possibility of collapse of several of its separate economies. With the consent of the Council and the Commission, former ECB chief Jean-Claude Trichet of France resorted to all manner of subterfuges to stabilize the Eurozone nations in crisis. His successor, the Italian Mario Draghi, headed the Italian central bank and had much experience in improvisation. He has interpreted its mandate broadly and most recently lent very widely and at a low interest rate to the Eurozone's private banks. That has incurred the opposition of Jens Wiedmann, the head of the Deutsche Bundesbank, who was German chancellor Angela Merkel's senior economic advisor and is of course working very closely with her. Wiedmann has publicly indicated concern over whether Germany could ever

get its own money back from the ECB, no small contribution to the reigning instability in the financial markets.

Chancellor Merkel, often coordinating closely with French President Nicolas Sarkozy (who may well face electoral defeat by the Socialist candidate Francois Hollande at the end of April) has pursued two objectives since the beginning of the crisis. One is to impose austerity on the other European nations in economic distress. She has demanded cuts in social expenditures and public employment which her own electorate would never tolerate, as the price for European and German contributions to financial stabilization. The other is to reconcile her electorate to a substantially altered German social and economic situation (see my article in the Spring 2012 issue of *Dissent*). There, a combination of government subventions and a generally reduced standard of living for at least a third of the nation has allowed investment to flow to export industries, where the labor force is often in the classical position of labor aristocracy. The German opposition parties (the Greens, the Left Party, and the Social Democrats) call for an expansive German and European economy with programs of public investment, and are critical of the Chancellor's open project of austerity for the other Europeans and her unvoiced continuation of it for her own citizens.

Should Merkel be replaced by a coalition headed by the Social Democrats in this spring's national elections, which

would then presumably cooperate with a French government headed by a Socialist, the revival of the European economy would still be extremely difficult. Competition from the cheaper labor in Eastern European (inside and outside the EU), not to mention even cheaper labor in Asia and Latin America, will not diminish. An aging European population is susceptible to xenophobia and open to one or another variety of Darwinian politics and is in no case receptive to long-term projects for investment in education, health, science and technology, or a new economic and social infrastructure in the entire EU.

The socialist and social democratic compromise with welfare capitalism no longer works: the new capitalism renounces welfare. In a way quite similar to developments in our own country, large segments of the educated have been converted either to positive views of a market economy or are resigned to its dominance, whatever the preferences they may have inherited from parents who may have joined with the European unions in a cross-class alliance for a decent minimum

of social solidarity. British Labour will be out of office for some years, the Spanish socialists have just been soundly defeated, the Italian Democratic Party is disunited and disoriented. It is unclear what intellectual and political resources the German Social Democrats and Greens or the French Socialists can draw on should they win upcoming elections. The intellectual triumph of the market has led to grotesque consequences, like the influence of



rating agencies on the European capital markets.

Brussels, like Washington, is entirely open to the influence of organized capital. The critical European economists are often political outsiders, like our own Galbraith, Krugman, and Stiglitz (whom they read and know). The rescue operations of recent years have required enormous expenditures of political energy just to ward off economic collapse. The French adage "*rien ne dure comme le provisoire*" (nothing lasts like provisional arrangements) characterizes the entire cultural and political landscape. European capital profits not only within but also from the crisis. It is entirely unclear that a new reformist synthesis of thought and action can be developed in the coming years, despite the combined impact of economic, environmental, and political crises. Yet the European unions, and parts of the European intelligentsia, have not surrendered. From resistance to counter-offensive, however, is a leap not yet taken. ❖

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# Indiana Becomes Twenty-Third Right-to-Work State

By Marvin Williams

**A**fter failing to pass Right-to-Work (RTW) legislation last year, in February the Republican-controlled General Assembly and the Governor succeeded in making Indiana the 23rd RTW state in the nation, the only one in the Midwestern industrial belt, and the first to enact such legislation in over a decade. The difference in how RTW fared last year and this can easily be explained. Last year the Democratic minority in the House could frustrate Republican efforts to drive through the bill by fleeing to Illinois for five weeks, thus denying a quorum. This year, with threat of a \$1,000-a-day personal fine hanging over their heads, House Democrats could only delay, not defeat RTW. Another major factor was Republican Governor Mitch Daniels declaring RTW his top legislative priority. Last year Daniels said he did not think RTW should be a subject of debate or vote in that General Assembly. As a candidate in 2004 and as Governor in 2006 he told union groups he did not wish to add RTW to the state's labor laws.



Less than a week before the General Assembly convened, the tone of the RTW debate was set when state authorities announced, for the first time ever, a limit on statehouse occupancy. Under this "public safety" policy no more than 3,000 people would be allowed inside the building at any time, really fewer than 1,500 when the 1,700 state employees are factored in. They can only enter through one entrance on the east side of the building, and may assemble on just one of the three floors. RTW opponents were quick to call it a ploy to stifle dissent and limit free speech, pointing out that 10,000 were there the day after the RTW bill came up in 2011 and averaged 2,000 the five weeks it was being debated. Democratic House Minority Leader B. Patrick Bauer said, "The people's Statehouse is no more. It now appears the governor will do anything

to silence the thousands of Hoosiers who oppose this plan." As it turned out, the Governor rescinded the policy at 10:45 a.m. its first day.

The State Senate is overwhelmingly Republican (37-13), so most of the RTW debate was in the House, where Republicans hold only a 60-40 edge. Principal players in the House were Brian C. Bosma, Republican speaker of the House; Democratic Minority Leader Bauer; and Jerry Torr, chief sponsor of the RTW bill. RTW was declared emergency legislation as an economic development issue because, according to Republicans, Indiana was losing out on new businesses for want of a RTW law. Also, the Republican leadership certainly did not want anything to interfere with Super Bowl XLVI, which was played on February 5 in Lucas Oil Stadium just a few blocks south of the Statehouse. For four days House Democrats boycotted proceedings. Although the Speaker let Democrats offer amendments, all were rejected by the majority. One that received some attention would have put RTW on the November ballot for public referendum. As if a RTW law was not bad enough, Republican Representative Jeff Espich inserted RTW language into a bipartisan regional mass transit proposal for Indianapolis and an adjoining county to its north, dooming an otherwise worthy bill to defeat. On January 25 RTW passed the House with 55 yeas and 44 nays. It was approved by the Senate and immediately signed into law by the governor.

Despite Republican efforts to stifle opposition to RTW at the Statehouse, union members and other activists filled its hallways throughout the debate over RTW. While Governor Daniels spoke about RTW in his State of the State address, cries of protest could be heard from outside the House chamber. At 7:30 a.m. on the first day of this year's session, a line of demonstrators stretched down the east steps of the Statehouse and up the street, waiting to enter the capitol; there would be 7,000 there that day.

The Indiana AFL-CIO and Jobs with Justice were active in coordinating and getting out their members during the month-long campaign. Both sides in the RTW controversy bought television time. Even Governor Daniels appeared in a TV ad, paid for by the Indiana Opportunity Fund, one of those PACs no one seems to know much about. The National Football League's Players Association stood in support of "working families of Indiana and organized labor in their fight against



Marvin Williams

this attempt to hurt them.” When word of the passage of RTW went out, many of the demonstrators surged out of the Capitol and down to Super Bowl Village to vent their feelings. Some even returned before the game Super Bowl Sunday to demonstrate opposition to RTW to out-of-towners.

Central Indiana DSA has actively participated in the anti-RTW cause this year and last. Among these activities were a daily presence at the Statehouse; preparation of signs with the slogan “RTW is Wrong for Indiana. No RTW!”; creating anti-RTW leaflets and encouraging friends to contact their representatives and senators; handing out 500 Central Indiana DSA stickers worn by protesters at the Statehouse; and participation in the rally at the Governor’s State of the State address. The Local has used the Internet and social media to keep members and friends up-to-

date on events and actions. Central Indiana DSA has received support and participation from its comrades in the Indiana Socialist Coalition, the Socialist Party USA, and the Communist Party USA in all these activities.

Indiana passed RTW legislation once before, in 1957, only to repeal it in 1965. Perhaps that will happen again. In the meantime, Governor Daniels will be speaking to the Muncie Chamber of Commerce in March, first stop on what may be his victory tour to thank RTW supporters in the Indiana and U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Anti-RTW protesters plan to be there too. ❖

*Marvin Williams is Vice Chair of Central Indiana Democratic Socialists of America and Community Co-Chair of Central Indiana Jobs with Justice.*

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## No Future, No Peace: YDS Conference Plots Strategy in the Age of Occupy

Beth Cozzolino

**B**efore the emergence of the Occupy movement last fall, I don’t think any of us could have predicted the level of excitement and enthusiasm at this year’s annual Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) winter conference. Max Weber once described politics as the “slow boring of hard boards,” but this year’s conference certainly wasn’t boring. Everyone in attendance was highly optimistic at the recently revitalized prospects for rebuilding the democratic Left on college and university campuses in the U.S.

While the Great Recession has damaged the economic fortunes of people across all age levels and demographic groups, it has disproportionately affected the life chances of Americans in school and entering the labor force for the first time. We constantly hear from pundits and economists that a college degree is the key to success in

the 21st century, but the crisis has exacerbated a decades-long trend of government withdrawal from funding public higher education. State government spending on higher education dropped 7.6 percent nationwide in 2011-2012, according to a recent report in the New York Times, but cuts in education funding vary dramatically from state to state. In Arizona, for example, higher education spending has dropped by over 30 percent since the onset of recession in 2007.



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In response, colleges and universities have cut classes and programs while driving up tuition and fees, forcing us to pay more for less and take on increasingly burdensome debt. Last year, the average student graduated with about \$25,000 in student loan debt, to say nothing of the dramatic increase in consumer indebtedness among students and young people. It’s no wonder that we have been at the forefront of the Occupy movement around the country. We’re fed up with theft of our futures and we’re ready to fight back.

This year’s YDS conference reflected and benefited from this political ferment. It took place at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, N.Y., where over 170 people from 30 different schools participated. Many YDS chapters, including those from Temple University (Philadelphia), Wesleyan University (Conn.), the College of Wooster (Ohio), and the University of Rochester (N.Y.), brought large contingents. Activists had the opportunity to meet in regional groups to



exchange contact information and discuss the possibility of coordinating larger campaigns in their home regions.

From Friday night's opening plenary to Sunday's closing session, much of the conference focused on the opportunities and challenges confronting YDS activists as we work within the broader Occupy movement. Participants had the good fortune to interact with and learn from some of the most prominent figures on the intellectual and activist Left. Renowned sociologist and DSA Honorary Co-Chair Frances Fox Piven opened the conference with encouraging remarks on the prospects for Occupy and the possible openings for large-scale social change. James Miller, a professor of liberal studies at the New School and author of *Democracy is in the Streets*, sounded a more cautionary note regarding the potential pitfalls that come with an emphasis on direct democracy and direct action tactics. Students for a Democratic Society founder and DSA Vice-Chair Steve Max contextualized the



current wave of activism within the history of 20th century U.S. social movements. *Dissent* editor and political theorist Michael Walzer spoke on his formative experiences growing up in western Pennsylvania during the great steelworker organizing campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the future of democratic governance in a globalized world. And the inimitable Cornel West closed out the conference with his characteristic style and insight, and encouraged us to be “long-distance runners” on the long road to social justice. Dr. West set aside a lot of time to answer questions and field comments from the audience, and stuck around so that many of us could get pictures with him (a picture with Cornel is the definitive Facebook profile picture of a YDS member).

Workshops and panels addressed a wide range of topics, from socialist feminism and labor history to practical tips on how to build a chapter and run a campaign. A common theme, however, ran through most of the conference – fighting education cuts and student debt, the number one item on this year's YDS Activist Agenda.

Activists inside and outside YDS discussed their experiences in this struggle and exchanged ideas for more action. Cryn Johannsen, founder of All Education Matters, spoke about her work on spreading awareness about the student lending crisis. United States Student Association President Victor Sanchez discussed the challenges facing students in California. Isabel Anreus, a leader of the YDS chapter at William Paterson University (N.J.), shared lessons from their chapter's successful campaign to limit last year's

tuition increase. Stefanie Gray, the initiator of an online campaign against student loan giant Sallie Mae, shared the story of her successes fighting against the company's unemployment penalty fee and told us how we could get involved with the fight against predatory student lending.

Other events focused on the role of YDS chapters and activists in the burgeoning Occupy movement. Evan Hoskins, president of the Temple University chapter, and Luis Caza, founder of the Penn State chapter, each discussed their specific campus's accomplishments since the beginning of the Occupy. Mary Clinton, a New York-based activist who was among the core group that launched the Occupy Wall Street encampment last summer, offered a brief history of the movement and a glimpse of what actions are planned for this spring. And Sarah McDaniel Dyer discussed her role in the Occupy Student Debt campaign, which seeks to organize one million people to refuse to pay their bills.

Although female participation was higher than in previous years, women still comprised only about one third of conference participants. During the women's caucus, we discussed the specific concerns that we have as women, both in our home chapters and in the Left generally. We also discussed strategies for connecting with other women on our campuses to increase female participation, as well as feminist issues and campaigns that we could make central to our home chapters. The conference also created a caucus for LGBTQ participants to speak with each other about their particular interests and concerns, as well as a space for straight allies to discuss the importance of making our home YDS chapters safe spaces for LGBTQ members.

Of course, no YDS conference could be complete without a raucous Saturday night party. Readers should be spared all of the potentially embarrassing details, so let's just say that we took to heart Emma Goldman's old adage that if we can't dance, it's not our revolution.

This year's YDS winter conference offered us a valuable opportunity to regroup and prepare for the struggles that lie ahead. The Occupy movement has revived the energies of progressives and the Left, and has given us the opportunity to reach a far larger audience with our activism. This spring, we enter budget-cutting season with an enthusiasm and determination that has been missing from the student movement for a long time. With a major, nationally coordinated round of actions set for this March, we're ready to make a stand against the assault on our education and our futures. ❖

*Beth Cozzolino is an activist with Temple Democratic Socialists at Temple University in Philadelphia.*

# Millennials: The Red Generation?

by Phillip Logan

As “socialism” continues to be Republicans’ insult of choice against President Barack Obama, recent studies have shown that the word is beginning to be seen in a more favorable light by growing numbers of Americans. Socialism appears not only to have captured the interest of many young adults under the age of 34 – the so-called “Millennial generation” – but it is also starting to emerge as a viable alternative to capitalism for the nation’s youth. It’s not hard to understand why. The interests of young people have been disproportionately harmed by a grinding economic crisis that shows little sign of abating anytime soon.

In recent months, the Pew Research Center has conducted polls measuring Americans’ opinions on a number of highly charged ideological questions. In January, Pew released the results of a survey that showed a rising consciousness of class antagonisms across all demographic groups from 2009 to 2011. A perception of “very strong” or “strong” conflict between the wealthy and the poor rose from 49 percent in 2009 to 66 percent in 2011, an increase of 17 percent. But what is most politically salient for socialists is the dramatic rise in this consciousness among Americans in the crucial 18 to 34 age cohort. According to the survey, seven out of 10 in this group perceive a major conflict between the rich and the poor, a 17 percent increase from 2009. They are far more likely to recognize class conflict than Americans aged 35 and older.

While socialism is still viewed negatively by most Americans, the proportion of the population across demographic groups that views it favorably is on the rise. But like perceptions of class conflict, the proportion of Americans aged 34 and under who respond positively to socialism is strikingly large. According to Pew, socialism is actually more popular than capitalism among Millennials. Forty-nine percent of them view socialism positively, while capitalism is viewed positively by only 46 percent. Forty-three percent of Millennials viewed socialism negatively,

while 47 percent had a negative opinion of capitalism.

But it’s not just Millennials who are increasingly receptive to an explicitly socialist appeal. Among people of color, and African-Americans in particular, socialism is viewed far more positively than it is among whites. 53 percent of African-Americans respond positively to socialism while only 36 percent respond negatively. Conversely, only 41 percent of African-Americans view capitalism in a positive light while 51 percent respond negatively. By comparison, only 24 percent of whites respond positively to socialism while 68 percent respond negatively. The reverse also holds; 55 percent of whites hold a positive view of capitalism, while only 35 percent respond negatively. Among Hispanics (the survey’s term) attitudes toward socialism and capitalism are more mixed. More Hispanics view socialism negatively (49 percent) than positively (44 percent). But their attitudes toward capitalism appear to be far more harsh; only 32 percent of Hispanics responded positively to the “C word” while a solid majority – 55 percent – view it negatively.

Many Americans, especially those who lived through the Cold War and feared the Red Menace, would be puzzled and perhaps troubled about the rising interest in socialism in the U.S., particularly among American youth. Yet once one understands the bleak future young people in this country are facing, such interest should not be surprising. The Great Recession has hammered Americans of all ages, but Millennials have been disproportionately affected. Today, only 55 percent of Americans aged 18-29 have a job. The average college student graduates with \$25,000 in student loan debt and has little opportunity to pay it off in a timely fashion. Couple these bitter realities with a government that



Phillip Logan



has shown little interest in breaking decisively from neoliberal economic orthodoxy, and it's no wonder that young people are exploring alternatives like socialism that have long been labeled "un-American" by previous generations. Recent films like Michael Moore's *Sicko* and *Capitalism: A Love Story* have shown many Americans that they go without the basic social goods (such as universal healthcare or affordable higher education) that citizens in countries around the world, including some much poorer than ours, take for granted. Most Millennials came of age after the collapse of the Soviet Union and "actually existing socialism," and are largely immune to invocations of Bolshevik bogeymen. And the vast proliferation of political discourse on the Internet has exposed young people to a wide range of alternative viewpoints outside the ideological filters of the mass media and the educational system.

Despite the potential political openings these surveys have uncovered, there are obviously still many obstacles to effectively challenging the status quo, much less achieving a socialist society. Lingering racial divides have marred the ability of people of color to unite with white activists to fight economic inequality. While Occupy the Hood was created by people of color to draw others into the core of the Occupy Wall Street movement, some African-Americans remain skeptical of the movement's willingness and ability to address

their particular concerns. However, persistent racial disparities and divisions are not the only obstacle confronting progressives and the Left. Many in the Millennial generation have been taught to believe that personal responsibility, individual action, and philanthropic efforts are sufficient to rid the world of its social ills. This in turn has brought about the depoliticizing of major social problems in our present-day society and the emergence of a politically vague "anti-capitalist" politics that rejects engagement with institutions and state power. If youth are going to move beyond being curious about socialism into becoming socialist activists, they must encounter an active socialist Left that combines critique with political organization and action.

There are real political openings for socialists among ever larger segments of the American population. Organizations like DSA need to continue our involvement in the OWS movement and work harder to bring our message to generations of young people hungry for change. If we fail to take advantage of our opportunity to win the hearts and minds of the Millennials, a dim future awaits us all. ❖

*Phillip Logan is an activist in the Young Democratic Socialists chapter at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.*

## DSA ONLINE

**Did you know that you can sign up for email updates from DSA if you go to our website, [dsausa.org](http://dsausa.org)? We send periodic updates about DSA campaigns and those of the Young Democratic Socialists; our take on current events; and notices when DSAs will be featured in the media, whether on *The Daily Show*, Thom Hartmann, Fox News, or in *In These Times* or other publications. We don't send emails too frequently, and we'll never sell your email address. It's easy to sign up. Simply go to [dsausa.org](http://dsausa.org) and click on the link on the right-hand side of the screen which says "DSA News." The website is also an excellent place to find downloadable fliers and other resources for grassroots activism.**

## DSA IS HIRING OUR NEXT YOUTH ORGANIZER!

DSA's youth section, the Young Democratic Socialists, seeks a new Youth Organizer. The position is based in NYC (with travel), starting this July. Help build and support campus chapters, organize conferences, and provide leadership development for our growing, dynamic youth section.

Applicants need excellent communication skills; knowledge of democratic socialism/YDS/DSA; organizing experience; time management skills; and to work well with diverse youth.

The application deadline is April 15. A full announcement and online application can be found at [ydsusa.org](http://ydsusa.org).



# THE DAILYSHOW *DSA Survives*

by Barbara Joye

The January meeting of DSA's National Political Committee (NPC), which carries on the organization's business between conventions, was enlivened by the presence of a film crew from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, the Comedy Central political comedy and "fake news" show with a viewership of over two million people. A new "correspondent," Jessica Williams, interviewed DSA National Director Maria Svart for three hours, conducted short interviews with four NPC members (including this writer), and filmed part of the meeting.

Of course the primary goal of the interview was to use DSA as a prop, but her sense of the organization seemed to be that we were much too reasonable and boring to be scary radicals. We knew that they would slice and dice what we said to achieve maximum absurdity, but as the saying goes any publicity is welcome so long as they spell our name correctly (which they did). We were relieved when the film crew left.

Six weeks later the day we had all dreaded arrived as our segment (called "The Socialist Network") aired on March 8. We saw that their purpose was to ridicule the right-wingers who call Obama a socialist, while at the same time making fun of the Left by juxtaposing us with a member of an obscure Trotskyist grouplet called Socialist Organizer who took great pleasure in dismissing DSA as "not socialist" and a "wing of the Democratic party." Distressingly, he resorted to derogatory, gendered language by agreeing with Williams' impish suggestion that compared with his organization, DSA were a bunch of "pussies."

By contrast, Maria came across as principled and articulate, even though they didn't include her lucid explanation of what socialism is or any other of her substantive comments. I'm just glad they left me on the cutting floor. Satirical TV is not for the faint of heart. ❖

## Watch for yourself:

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-march-8-2012/the-socialist-network>

## DSA Values Bequests of All Sizes

You don't have to be wealthy to leave a meaningful legacy gift to aid the socialist cause and our future. Many of us with modest means have insurance policies, pension benefits, wills or living trusts for which we designate beneficiaries; the "Democratic Socialists of America, Inc." can be one such beneficiary. Many bank accounts, including checking, money market, savings accounts and certificates of deposit or IRA accounts have survivor provisions allowing you to designate a survivor who assumes ownership of the account after your death.

It is important that all of us make arrangements to remember Democratic Socialists of America. A sentence or two in your will or living trust can help promote DSA's work and our socialist values:

"I give to the Democratic Socialists of America, Inc., 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038

("\$\_\_\_\_" or "\_\_\_\_% of the rest of my estate") to be used for general purposes."

This notice is not intended as legal advice, which should only come from an attorney. DSA's national office can assist anyone seeking general advice, but for estate planning it is best to consult a professional. But remember, many of the legacy options listed above, such as a bank account, do not require an attorney to set up a beneficiary or survivor.

If you do designate DSA as a beneficiary of a will, living trust, insurance policy or any other investment vehicle, we would greatly appreciate it if you inform the DSA national office with whatever degree of specificity you are comfortable with. By making a generous bequest to DSA, you can greatly aid the future of the socialist movement and the organization fighting for the values and programs to which all of us have dedicated much of our lives. ❖

# DSA Locals Active Nationwide

By Frank Llewellyn

Actions by DSA locals working in their communities on the issues of the day range from direct action and educational events to lobbying and electoral work in discrete campaigns. Much of our work is done in conjunction with other progressive organizations, for the most part around immediate issues of the day – the economy and jobs, housing and foreclosures, budget cuts, tuition increases, public employee layoffs, strike support and repelling right wing attacks on women and the labor movement, carried out largely by state legislatures. And while Occupy may have faded from the headlines it did not fade away.



**Boulder**

“Kansans Count” rally. On February 16, labor journalist and *In These Times* writer Mike Elk spoke to a Young Democratic Socialists meeting at Wichita State University. On the weekend, Elk spoke at Occupy KochTown (named after the Koch brothers, whose business empire is based in Kansas). More than 300 people from Sierra Club and Occupy groups from 23 states attended the event.

DSA members circulated a petition supporting Senator Bernie Sanders’s proposed constitutional amendment to overturn corporate personhood. Greater Philadelphia DSA has been organizing public educational events. Talks have included National Political Committee member Joe Schwartz on neo-liberalism, Temple University YDS students on the



**Atlanta**

Occupy Atlanta has some 40 core members and has become increasingly involved in fights around labor issues. DSA, Occupy and other groups joined the action called by CWA against AT&T at which four DSA members were arrested. Occupy Boston has expanded its program to include a Free School and an Internet radio station. Former DSA National Political Committee member David Knuttunen has a weekly program on the radio station. In Iowa, DSAers work with Occupy Des Moines. They have lined up the president of the Central Labor Council to talk at an upcoming DSA meeting and are working on a labor history talk for Occupy.

There is a very high level of progressive energy in San Diego. The main focus of DSA members has been coalition work in support of these activities, particularly the Occupy San Diego Movement and the “A Better San Diego Coalition,” led by the San Diego Imperial Counties Labor Council. As Kansas Governor Sam Brownback pushes a far-right agenda, Wichita DSA sprang into action, riding the bus for three hours to attend a state capitol rally opposing the Governor’s anti-immigrant, anti-worker agenda. More than 800 people attended the



**Indiana**



**San Diego**

rise of student debt, and DSA Honorary Chair Frances Fox Piven on the future of the Occupy movement. Piven addressed over 200 students at Temple University, and over 150 at the Occupy Philadelphia encampment.

Detroit DSA has been active in the movement to stop home foreclosures. In January, a group of ten DSAers joined approximately 100 activists from Occupy Detroit, Jobs with Justice, Moratorium Now, People Before Banks and UAW Local 600 in stopping the foreclosure on the home of William and Bertha Garrett in northwest Detroit. The family had fallen behind on their mortgage after Mr. Garrett suffered a stroke and his daughter was laid off from her job. After the crowd blocked the mortgage servicer's representative from entering the house, the representative called the police. The officers took one look at the crowd and drove away. Later that day, Bank of New York Mellon Trust contacted the Garretts and offered to renegotiate the mortgage.



**Detroit**

In Madison, Wis., a newly recognized student group at the University of Wisconsin (including YDS members) is working to recall Governor Scott Walker, just as Ohio students worked to repeal the anti-union bill SB5. In California members are collecting signatures to put a

millionaire's tax on the ballot. In Oak Park, IL, members are working to revive a living wage campaign.

Nationally, DSA is launching a new project on the 50th Anniversary of the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* and the War on Poverty, and DSA groups are planning local activities to mark the occasion. In Seattle DSAers are planning to show the anti-poverty film *Ain't I a Person*. In Chicago the annual Debs-Thomas-Harrington Dinner is being organized around a poverty theme and will honor the president of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law as well as Chicago Jobs with Justice.

The struggle for decent jobs, good wages and strong unions is never far from our work. In Chicago, members have organized and participated in labor support work on the victorious campaign at Trader Joe's, the ongoing Congress hotel strike in Chicago and, most recently, an organizing campaign in the western suburb of Aurora, where a group



**Wichita**

of largely Latino workers just voted to form a Laborer's union local. In Washington, DC DSA members worked on a Jobs with Justice Wal-Mart campaign, trying to organize the store and obtain a community agreement – unfortunately DC council members were supporting Wal-Mart. They also worked with the local branch of the Restaurant Opportunity Center, fighting racially-based dismissals.

New York City DSA members active in Occupy Wall Street were involved in the fight-back by unionized art handlers at Sotheby's auction house against management's union-busting lock-out. Members also maintain a role in supporting the pro-labor Working Families Party. In Indiana, DSA members worked with Jobs with Justice on labor issues, particularly against the "right to work law" recently passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor. The local also worked with UNITE HERE on organizing the Hyatt Regency. ❖

*Frank Llewellyn is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and served as DSA's National Director for more than ten years. This report was compiled with the help of NPC member and Occupy activist Daniel Michniewicz and countless local DSA activists.*

# Local and Chapter Organizing Support from the DSA Program Committee

Coming out of last November's national DSA convention, the Program Committee of the National Political Committee of DSA has assembled a list of actions and campaigns that it strongly encourages all DSA locals and YDS chapters to participate in.

At the top of the list is the fight against state and local budget cuts. For locals and chapters with a strong Occupy presence in their area, we've encouraged them to collaborate with their local Occupy when it works on budget issues (or advances any of our convention priorities).

The Program Committee is working with locals to make concrete plans for the 50th anniversary of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*. It has assisted the 50th Anniversary committee in the creation of a memo that provides locals with suggestions for what they can do to mark the occasion. Suggested events include organizing a panel or forum on poverty; a showing of *Ain't I a Person or Michael Harrington and Today's Other America: Corporate Power and Inequality*; working with elected officials to organize a

public hearing on poverty (or an unofficial "hearing" where this is not possible); or a letter-to-the-editor writing party. Plus, Chicago DSAer Bill Barclay has developed a Q&A flier on poverty in the U.S. and how poverty has changed since the 1960s and the War on Poverty. The Program Committee strongly encourages locals to make use of this during their 50th anniversary events.

The Program Committee has also created an Occupy reading packet for locals to use. It's a collection of articles and discussion questions intended to guide discussion meetings on DSA's role (and socialists' role in general) in the Occupy movement. Also, the Greater Philadelphia local has an introduction to democratic socialism reading list (no discussion questions), which the program committee has sent out to the locals.

If you have any questions about these suggestions and resources or would like additional support from the Program Committee, please contact Dan Michniewicz at [michnied@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:michnied@mail.gvsu.edu). ❖

## Change the USA! Join the DSA!

- Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to Democratic Left) of:
- \$65 Sustainer     \$35 Introductory     \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:
- \$65 Sustainer     \$45 Regular     \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Enclosed is an extra contribution of:  \$50  \$100  \$25 to help DSA in its work.
- Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

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