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DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Vol. XLIV, No. 4, Spring 2017

*the magazine of the
Democratic Socialists
of America*



www.dsausa.org

Building Democratic Socialist Power



From the National Director

Socialist Feminism & the Trump Regime

By Maria Svart

DSA has almost tripled in membership in the past several months and quadrupled in the number of organized local groups in red and blue states. Our growth alone shows that people want to be *for* something, not just *against* Donald Trump, and they want to have a voice. We have an ideological perspective that was missing from mainstream political debate until Bernie Sanders's primary run, and it's now on us to carry out a strategy to match. For this, we need a socialist feminist approach.



Building Bridges

What does it mean to bring a socialist feminist perspective to organizing? My own story may have some lessons in it. I grew up in a liberal but not left-wing household, watched my extended family win concessions from their bosses through participation in various unions, and became a feminist activist in college. My campus group promoted sex-positivity, abortion rights, and equal pay for women. But it wasn't enough. I wasn't satisfied but didn't know why. Then I attended a Young Democratic Socialists workshop, and the socialist feminist ideas I heard there were like a bolt of lightning. Suddenly I realized what was missing!

My epiphany about the interlocking systems of patriarchy *and* capitalism led me to bring our feminist group into new fights, such as demanding farmworker rights. I argued that immigrant women in the fields faced unique struggles and asked why the growers chose to hire these particular workers instead of white, male citizens. My feminist group helped kick Taco Bell off our campus; the school then pressured the corporation that owned the Taco Bell brand to pay their suppliers more, who then

paid their Florida tomato pickers more.

A similar bridge might be built today by socialist feminists. For example, mainstream feminists can forge solidarity with immigrants around the issue of domestic violence. Undocumented women often don't report domestic violence to police if they fear deportation. This is a real concern. As I write, a woman sits in a detention center after being picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in February at the El Paso County Courthouse shortly after she obtained a protective order to shield her from the man accused of abusing her.

The same expansive politics can expand the narrow fight for "choice" into one for reproductive justice. Some women now fear abortion will be made illegal, and many of us are contemplating mutual aid solutions, such as the underground abortion services provided by socialist feminists in the pre-*Roe* days. But poor and working class women *already* face often insurmountable economic barriers to getting a safe abortion. That's why every spring DSA chapters across the country participate in the National Network of Abortion Funds Bowl-A-Thon fundraisers and use that opportunity to bring a class analysis to mainstream feminists (see box on p. 12 and check out dsausa.org).

Working-class and poor women face many other issues, including affordable, quality child care and access to food stamps, given that almost one in four children live in hunger. The ability to raise a healthy family is a reproductive justice issue. Living-wage jobs, elder care, clean water for the families of Flint, Michigan are all feminist issues.

Healthcare, which we consider a human right and a means to promote democracy, is another bridge issue. Through a socialist feminist lens, we see that women are the primary caretakers of the ill and infirm in our society. Women also suffer disproportionately from medical bankruptcies. Medicare, which saved countless families from bankruptcy and desegregated hospitals virtually overnight, is an example of what we in DSA call a transformative reform. As socialist feminists, we organize not just to protect the Affordable Care Act (ACA) from the GOP, we fight for Medicare for All.

Fighting for Our Lives

Donald Trump and Paul Ryan have both released healthcare reform plans that would harm millions

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

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Radicals for our Time: The DSA Vision

By Jared Abbott

Thanks to Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign and Donald Trump's election as president, DSA's membership has nearly tripled over the past year. Sanders brought the "S" word out of the closet, and Trump sent thousands of people in search of an effective organization both to fight the right and to push forward with Sanders's political revolution. Whether you are a new member or have been with us for years, you know that DSA is a "big tent" organization. DSAers agree broadly on basic values and strategy, but there is no "party line." If you put fifteen DSAers in a room, you'll find those who want us to **become** a political party and those who want to **take over** the Democratic Party, with many shades in between. You'll find those who aren't interested in electoral politics and prefer movement building and those who are ready to run for office as open socialists. We want to bring all democratic socialists together in common struggle rather than divide them up into separate and less effective organizations. The diversity of political perspectives in DSA is a strength that we celebrate, not a weakness we tolerate.

Whatever your perspective, we can say that almost all DSAers share a broad vision about DSA's political orientation and strategy. The following is a short introduction to that vision.

Socialism as Radical Democracy

Socialists believe that capitalism is fundamentally at odds with democracy. For this reason, anticapitalism lies at the heart of our politics. This crucial perspective is missing from liberal and progressive analyses, and we put it front and center in our work. Yet socialism is a much broader project of liberation. Socialism means the full democratization of all areas of our lives. Whether in the workplace, school, family, politics, neighborhood, or anywhere else, all people should have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. This means that ending racial, gender, sexual, and other forms of oppression that keep people from freely determining the course of their own

lives is also at the core of the socialist project.

However, we need to remember that capitalism interacts with each of these oppressions in complex ways that structure how different groups are affected by economic exploitation. So, for instance, African American working-class women face a distinct (and more intense) form of economic exploitation compared to white working-class women. At the same time, because the vast majority of people face the short end of the capitalist stick on a daily

basis, class solidarity around our shared experience of economic exploitation can build bridges to unite working people against capitalism and all other forms of oppression. But this solidarity can only be built if socialists are on the front lines fighting against racial, gender and sexual, and other inequalities.

Our radical democratic socialist perspective is critical because it helps us connect the dots between what might seem to be separate issues in the organizing we do. For example, how does anti-charter-school activism relate to

the fight to raise the minimum wage to \$15? Progressives just say that those are two good things we should care about because they help ordinary people. We say that both are examples of organized working-class resistance. Both struggles chip away at capitalism and build toward democratic socialism by shifting the balance of power away from economic elites and toward poor and working people.

Transformative Strategy

In addition to connecting the dots, we keep our eyes on the big picture. Our end goal is to achieve a democratic socialist society, but we obviously can't get there overnight. So we fight for ambitious, achievable reforms like Medicare for All or free tuition to public colleges and universities. These reforms are "transformative," because they move us in the direction of democratic socialism. Again, they do this by shifting the balance of power in our country away from economic elites and toward poor and working people, rather than simply reinforcing



Frank Reynoso

ing the power and logic of capitalism. Here is an example: both the health care exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act and Medicare for All provide health insurance for the uninsured. However, the exchanges leave power in the hands of private insurance companies while Medicare for All takes power away from those companies and puts it in the hands of a public agency that is accountable to the public. These reforms are also transformative because they open up new possibilities for what might be politically achievable in the future and increase the leverage working people have to make those possibilities a reality.

DSA on the Ground

Because we believe struggles across the full range of social movements are intricately connected, we are active in work from immigrants' rights and reproductive justice to labor solidarity and anti-police brutality. We work in struggles that defend the rights of the most vulnerable people in society (undocumented immigrants, Muslims, women), at the same time that we fight to expand the rights of working people and strengthen our power against capital (Fight for 15, paid sick leave, paid parental leave). We prioritize doing this work in coalition with working-class and poor-people's organizations, particularly those rooted in communities of color.

Social-movement work alone, however, is not enough. Achieving real power means having power over decision-makers. This means getting people elected to public office who will be accountable to poor and working people. We seek to elect progressive and, where possible, explicitly democratic socialist candidates to all levels of government. However, we focus on local and state level races where a group such as DSA—which has limited financial resources but significant people power—can make a real impact. Whether in Democratic primaries (the most likely option for state and national-level races in the short-to-medium term), nonpartisan races, or with independent/Green Party/or other socialist candidates, we put our organizational support behind candidates who will be accountable to a democratic socialist agenda. Over time, we seek to dramatically expand independent socialist electoral capacity (regardless of the ballot line a candidate runs on) to pull local, state (and eventually national) politics to the left.

Educational Activity

Throughout U.S. history, the word “socialism” has been used by capitalists to denigrate anything that would increase the power of working people. Socialists were murdered and imprisoned. In the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt took some parts of

the Socialist Party platform and folded them into the New Deal, thus bringing many who had voted Socialist into the Democratic Party. In addition, before the fall of the Soviet Union, socialism was often confused in the public mind with totalitarian communist systems. Fortunately, over the years socialism has lost many of its negative connotations. Even before the Sanders campaign, as income inequality reached levels unknown since the Gilded Age, public opinion (particularly among folks under 40) was shifting. Sanders brought the word into the open and created a huge opportunity for socialists to challenge conventional views about U.S. society.

Individualism, consumerism, self-reliance, and other related concepts are deeply engrained in U.S. collective identity. They run so deep in our self-understanding that most people take them for granted as “natural” features of our culture and society. Socialism, on the other hand, involves solidarity, community, being responsible to and for each other. So, to persuade people that socialism is worth thinking about, we have a lot of work to do.

The difference today is that in this post-Occupy and post-Sanders campaign world we have receptive audiences in communities across the country. Through conversations, discussion groups, public forums, and other venues, we must expose the “common sense” ideas of capitalism, racism, and sexism as defenses of inequality and oppression. Challenging people's basic assumptions about the causes and possible solutions of political and economic problems is at the core of what we do. This is truly counter-cultural education, and it is through this work that we expand the horizons of political possibility. As we expand the political possibilities, we open up new, more radical arenas of struggle.

Our recent rapid growth shows that there is a real hunger for a different perspective. Without a deep and wide pool of members who are engaged and active in our campaigns and educational activities, we can't win. We believe in constantly and deliberately reaching beyond “the usual suspects” who think like us or belong to our “group” to bring people from all walks of life into our organization. We will have to go outside our comfort zone to have conversations at information tables, when we knock on doors, and when we host friend-raising house parties.

The current situation has motivated thousands to democratic socialism and millions to an activism and coalition building not seen in decades. DSA is proud to be part of that resurgence. ❖

Jared Abbott is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and an active member of Boston DSA and the Harvard Graduate Students Union (UAW).

Attica and its Aftermath

Heather Ann Thompson talks with Matthew Countryman

Last year, on the 45th anniversary of the largest prison rebellion in U.S. history, historian Heather Ann Thompson's book Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Rebellion of 1971 and its Legacy was published to critical acclaim. The uprising of nearly 1,300 men for better conditions ended in mass bloodshed, with 39 people killed by the state on the day of the retaking and 128 shot and wounded seriously. Using extensive interviews with survivors, relatives of hostages and prisoners, law enforcement, and legal defenders, as well as never-before-published material, Thompson tells the story of what happened in the tense four days of the uprising, the state-sponsored violence that followed, and the decades-long struggle for prisoners' rights. Historian Matthew Countryman talks with Thompson about the rebellion and the "new Jim Crow." The transcript below has been edited for length.—Ed.

MC: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Could you talk first about the reaction to the book?

HAT: I'm just stunned and grateful that people have been interested in reading about people who live behind bars and that they see the connections between what happened in 1971 and the prison crisis we face today. In virtually every interview I've done, the host or the reporter prefaces it by saying that the book haunted them or that it really moved them. What they're talking about is how terrible the prison conditions were at Attica, and they have shared with me how disturbing it is to learn what it actually means to be incarcerated in America. We have been living with mass incarceration for so long now, and folks behind bars have been so marginalized, that I am glad this message resonated.

MC: Prison conditions have gotten worse over the past four decades. Do you find that this is news to people?

HAT: Not to those closest to it, but I do find it re-

markable how many in America are clueless about what happens in prison. When they read, for example, that in 1971 people were being fed on 63 cents a day or that they were being abused by guards, [they] are horrified. Things are far worse today. Indeed, this book argues, it is precisely because we got the history of Attica so wrong that prisons got so much worse.

MC: In the immediate aftermath of the uprising there was a significant set of prison reforms within the New York State system. And yet you argue that the same Attica narratives that produced those reforms produced in the long term a much more significant retrenchment in prison policies.

HAT: On the one hand, for the lived lives of people there, it mattered that, at least in the short run, before the real backlash set in, the New York State prison

system humanized visitation rules. It meant that people could see their children. It mattered that parole rules were made less draconian. Were those reforms sufficient? Even if there had not been such a backlash, would reforms ever have been able to humanize that prison? The answer is no. No improvements at that level would have stopped the hyper-policing of black and brown communities that led so many of Attica's men to this terrible facility in the first place, nor would they have changed what is most brutal about all prisons: the caging of human beings.

If nothing else, the story of Attica reminds us that the institution of the prison is inherently barbaric. I tell the story of an old man whose name is Owl. On the first night of the uprising, tears are streaming down his face, because he hasn't seen the stars in 22 years. It's in those moments that you realize that no reform in the world would alter the fact that human beings are being caged. *Blood in the Water* is not an endorsement of reform as a panacea for the brutality of prisons. However, it does show that prisoners



Ty Paulhus

are the one force that keeps the brutality of prisons in check. To that extent, resistance matters—the Attica Brothers’ fight mattered.

MC: You spend more than half of the book on the struggle [for justice] after the uprising. What is the significance of such detailed attention to multiple decades of activism on the part of the Brothers and their families and their lawyers?

HAT: When I began the book, I imagined the vast majority of it to be about the uprising and the politics that led to it. But I soon found myself also wanting to sort out why it was that one of the most extraordinary human rights struggles in the 20th century led not to decarceration or to a humanizing of conditions behind bars but instead to the biggest prison build-up in American history. In order to understand that, I had to trace out how that rebellion was spun and understand what happened in its wake. I was taken aback by the extent to which at every level, from the lowest bureaucrat to the president of the United States, those with power were working overtime to suggest that the violence that ended that uprising was all due to the prisoners, and thus that the fight for prisoner rights was utterly illegitimate. Even those entities that should have known better and have done something, like the Justice Department or the U.S. Supreme Court, turned a blind eye to lies told by, and the trauma inflicted by, the state of New York at Attica. And thus, in a great and tragic irony, Attica becomes the emotional fuel that will drive the war on crime and mass incarceration. To this day, people think that the prisoners killed the hostages. To this day, they think that they castrated the guards. To this day, they think that Attica represents the worst of the worst people behind bars.

MC: The conflation of radicalism with crime and the “threat” of the black inner city seems to have been a core element of conservative politics at that time.

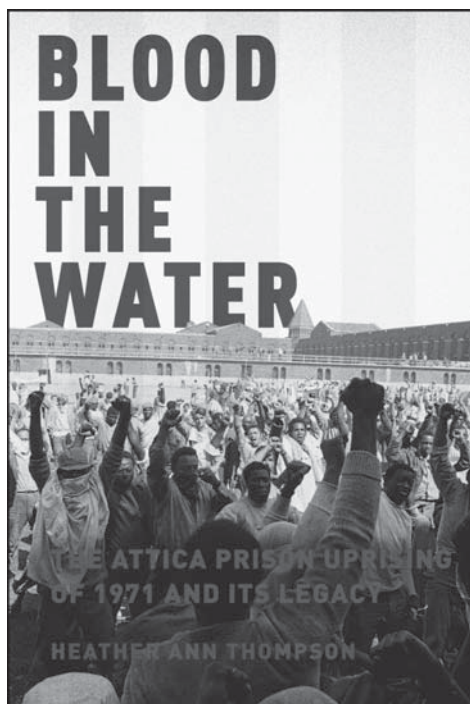
HAT: It was explicit. The missing piece that I don’t think I fully appreciated until researching the Attica book was the cold-war piece of it. [Nelson] Rockefeller [New York governor at the time of the uprising] was a rabid cold warrior. And so he really

saw this as both a racial threat and a communist destabilization. That the Soviets would use black prisoners as their dupes makes absolute sense to him and others in his administration. He, along with President [Richard] Nixon, was explicit that Angela Davis and her followers needed to be stopped from orchestrating a Communist Party-led black revolution on America’s streets and in its prisons. This is why we see the use of COINTELPRO [the FBI’s counter-intelligence program aimed at domestic organizations], which intended to eliminate social justice struggles via destabilization, by surveillance. And, if that didn’t work, “let’s just go in there with guns blazing,” which is what Attica was.

MC: I can’t help but think about the parallels between the state’s response to Attica and the Flint Water Crisis and what it tells us about race and government accountability.

HAT: The level at which state actors will go to not hold their own accountable is shocking. It makes you look at a current event like the Flint Water Crisis or even the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore or Michael Brown in Ferguson in a whole new way. Most citizens, even leftists, still have some modicum of

faith that if one has enough evidence, if one has the smoking-gun documents showing wrongdoing on the part of state officials, that somehow there will be accountability. What Attica clearly shows is that state actors will go to extraordinary lengths to protect themselves—even if it means outright tampering with evidence. And that’s why naming the names of the state troopers who shot the Attica prisoners for me was significant. It was simply saying, this is what the state actually knew about who had in fact committed harm at Attica and when it knew it. No state official or state trooper who committed crimes at Attica ended up being prosecuted, despite the evidence that was available to those charged with indicting anyone who had committed crimes there. And this was no accident. As my book shows, the governor and lawyers, the head of the State Police who had retaken Attica with such brutality, and the State Attorney General tasked with investigating crimes committed at Attica all met in a series of secret meetings at Rockefeller’s pool house to get their



story straight. It's inherent to the system. Grand juries are dependent on prosecutors. Prosecutors are dependent on police. Even if the evidence surfaces, it does not ensure accountability.

MC: Now, 45 years later, we have reports of prison strikes that are inspired by Attica. Where do we go from here?

HAT: We absolutely need to pay attention to these prison rebellions. They are a cry for help. There are unimaginable human rights abuses going on right now. During the Attica uprising, the first thing the Attica Brothers did was to bring the media in. There's no media in the prisons. These are public institutions and yet we are not allowed in them. We should use this moment to demand transparency and accountability and access. Do what the Attica lawyers did in 1972. They just kept banging on the door. And they kept calling judges at three o'clock in the morning and demanding to get inside the prison. Attica is deeply instructive. It should alarm us about what is happening right now to the thousands of prisoners who dared to protest this past September and those who rebelled in Delaware in February. We know that these men and women are experiencing retaliation—some being moved to different facilities in the dark of night, some thrown in solitary, many tear-gassed, and God only knows what else. It's not enough to applaud prisoners for standing up for their humanity—it's not enough for people like me to write pieces that shout their struggles behind bars. It's also our obligation to mobilize ourselves on the outside of that prison to say, "We are not going away until we make sure that these guys are okay on the inside."

MC: The election of Donald Trump is obviously a blow to all movements for social justice. What do you see as the election's impact on the movement against mass incarceration?

HAT: When Trump was first elected I think that all of us who had been deeply involved in prison work felt a sense of terrible foreboding. And I know that this is also what the men and women inside felt

After reading about a socialist Sunday school in Brooklyn (Winter 2016), a reader has recommended the following article:

"American Socialist Pedagogy and Experimentation in the Progressive Era: The Socialist Sunday School," by Kenneth Teitelbaum and William J. Reese, *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Winter, 1983), pp. 429-454.

as well. Just when it seemed as if we might be rolling back some of the most egregiously abusive elements of our justice apparatus, we had a man take power who was vowing to resurrect the politics and policies of "law and order." Since November, though, I am feeling a new sense of optimism. In the wake of this election people seem to be mobilizing with new fervor, new energy, and new determination. I don't think that this fight is going to be easy—indeed I feel that we are moving toward a level of tumult that we haven't seen since 1968. But there still is a fight. And that matters. A lot. As I say in the book, Attica's ultimate legacy isn't repression, it is resistance. ❖

Matthew Countryman is Associate Professor of History and American Culture at the University of Michigan and author of Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia.



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Growing the Grassroots

Moumita Ahmed talks with Jessie Mannisto

Moumita Ahmed, cofounder of People for Bernie and its successor, Millennials for Revolution, is one of the thousands who have joined DSA since the end of Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign. We caught up with Ahmed to see what the rest of us can learn from her experiences—as an immigrant, as a working-class woman of color, and as a leader of a grassroots movement.—JM

JM: There are a lot of progressive organizations out there. What brought you to DSA?

MA: I joined around the end of Bernie's campaign because I was so frustrated with the Democratic Party, and I wanted to fully commit myself to a socialist movement. I'd never joined any organization officially before that—I'd always been unaffiliated as a socialist. But all of our editors at Millennials for Revolution are now members of DSA.

I really like how DSA members are working inside the Democratic Party to move it to the left, and that DSA does both movement and electoral work. I did electoral work, and I understand the value in it. I have a ton of friends who are registered Democrats, but they're really socialists—they have the same values. They can help push the Democratic Party to the left.

JM: What kinds of experiences led you to become a socialist?

MA: After we moved from Bangladesh when I was

six, my mom worked at a fast-food restaurant for years to raise me and my brother. So I really cared about labor and economic justice issues. I knew that if I wanted to be an organizer, I had to understand things from that point of view. But a lot of times when I was doing electoral work early on, knocking on doors for campaigns, the candidates couldn't address the people I was talking to. The amount of

money these people are earning isn't enough to raise a family.

Then there's the racial injustice that immigrants face every day. When I was 12, my dad was arrested for no reason, just because of his last name and his skin color. No one told us where he was taken—I had to call hospitals looking for him. They slapped him with a stupid charge for disorderly conduct, which was a lie. When our lawyer said, "You can fight this," we said, "This is gonna cost so much money. We might as well just let it go."

That's when I realized that justice costs money. And my parents couldn't exactly take off work to go sue the NYPD. I even had to talk to the police for my mom that day, because she didn't speak English well. It really took a toll on us. Being an immigrant, being a person of color, does impact where you are in society, and it plays a role



“Don't forget the working-class people out there who might not call themselves socialists [and] who might not have the time to get involved.”

in economic injustice.

JM: Where do you see the left going from here?

MA: What I'm hoping for now, and what I'm seeing, is that people are finally awake and want to get

involved. They want to come together and hold not just Donald Trump but all our elected officials accountable. It's getting harder for the politicians to hide their interests and their motives. People are looking to elected officials to do their job and work for the people, and they're ready to challenge them in primaries if needed.

JM: Tell us a little bit about some of the work you're doing now.

MA: I'm working on a resistance house in Washington, DC—we call it District 13, because the idea is similar to District 13 in *The Hunger Games*, the district that was secretly helping all the other districts unite and wage resistance against the Capital. But our District 13's not a secret: it's going to be an operating base for building resistance against Trump. The idea is for activists and organizers to have a place to call home, come and leave their stuff, stay a few days to organize an action. We're going to support them.

JM: There are lots of people just like that joining DSA today, and they're ready to get involved for the first time. With all the work you've done, do you have any advice to pass on to them?

MA: I think the advice would be to not forget the working-class people out there who might not call themselves socialists, who might not have the time to get involved or know as much as some of the peo-

ple who are involved in DSA. When I was traveling around doing door knocking for Bernie's campaign, when people asked me about his affiliation with socialism, I would pivot to a conversation about their own suffering: "Are you affected by South Carolina's minimum wage? Are you upset about how the police target your community?" Most people agree that the billionaire class is hoarding too much of the wealth. Even if they don't like the word "socialism," they're saying in their own way, "I agree with you." They said, "I'll look into Bernie if this is what he's trying to do." Whether people call themselves socialists or not, we should take the ideas of socialism and go door to door, talk to people, and do whatever it takes to get them on our side. Being a socialist means being on the side of the working class and fighting with them against racism and fascism. ❖

Jessie Mannisto is a writer and a member of the DC Metro DSA chapter.



DSA in D.C.

We have a Washington, D.C. office staffed by Deputy Director David Duhalde at 1301 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036: 202-787-5280.

YDS Winter Conference



Almost 300 YDSers from around the country gathered in New York on February 17-19 to learn socialist theory and action. Photo by Katie Schuering.

Gender and Sexuality in Iranian Politics

Janet Afary Talks with Peg Strobel

Janet Afary is professor of Religious Studies and Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her Sexual Politics in Modern Iran won the British Society for Middle East Studies Annual Book Prize. —PS

PS: How are attitudes in Iran about romantic love, marriage, and sexuality changing? And how do these changes affect politics?

JA: Iranians are more secular compared to many other parts of the Middle East, including Egypt. Many people no longer want arranged marriages. The median age of marriage in the country is 24; in the capital city, about 27. Love-based marriages, unmarried couples being together in public or kissing or holding hands — these activities, though taboo, are more common in urban communities.

It's women who are breaking barriers and taking risks, but in many parts of the country a woman who has a dating relationship before marriage becomes quite vulnerable if the community finds out. These love-based marriages are sometimes fragile compared to an arranged marriage, where the entire community backs it. The wife expects respect and to some extent reciprocity in a more arranged marriage, but not necessarily love. Most love-based marriages break some taboos, marrying outside your class, ethnic group, or religion. If you divorce, in a culture where employment rates of women are very low, if your family of origin doesn't take you back, you're in a really dire situation. Because men haven't changed that much. On the one hand, they want love-based marriages, but they still haven't given up on traditional norms about women's behavior.

PS: What about same-sex relationships?

JA: In the Quran, male homosexuality is a punishable sin but female homosexuality is not mentioned. Punishment for male homosexuality was rarely carried out, say in the 19th century. At the same time, male same-sex, status-defined relationships were tolerated so long as the sexually subordinate partner was lower status and the relationship took place in private spaces (houses, palaces) rather than public ones (parks and gardens). Elite men routinely kept boy concubines in their residences, for example.

The rise of the Islamist movement in the 1970s coincided with the birth of the gay rights movement in the West. Islamists then targeted both Western feminism and Western gay rights. They mostly ig-

nored this indigenous form of same-sex relationships, which had continued in the margins of society, including seminaries. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), like the U.S. right, activated his base against gays.

PS: Many Westerners assume that Islam is anti-sex. Is it?

JA: Islam recognizes both men and women as sexual beings. Jurisprudence manuals discuss sex and sexuality in great detail. A man may not deny his wife sexual pleasure. One of the few grounds for a woman to be granted a divorce is her husband's impotence.

PS: What about birth control and abortion?

JA: In medieval times, birth control was acceptable in Islam and quite prevalent. Women could practice abortion up till four months (when ensoulment was assumed to take place). Clerics recommended but didn't require a husband's approval. Birth control became a major political issue in Iran after the 1979 revolution, and again during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, when the Catholic church and Muslim clerics aligned against it.

PS: How did these contested ideas about gender and sexuality intersect with politics?

JA: The 1979 Iranian revolution resembles Donald Trump's recent victory: the rural/urban divide, anger at uppity women, antagonism toward minorities (religious minorities, whether Sunnis or Christians or Jews or Baha'is). But in Iran there was also a coalition of leftist anti-imperialists and dissident religious populists. Islamists initially banned contraceptives, but when faced with a population explosion in the mid 1980s, they promoted birth control. But on issues that their male base is angry about, they have hardly given an inch in nearly 40 years: polygyny, women's rights to divorce, community property, sexuality, and issues related to women's empowerment, particularly middle- and upper-middle-class empowerment.

The Islamists were initially good at advocating gender policies that helped the poor, education, vaccination, health care, clean water, and affirmative action in education for those who participated in the Iran-Iraq war. That's why poor women supported a regime that has remained hostile toward the feminist agenda.

PS: Is feminism seen as a Western idea?

JA: In the 1920s and 1930s, many middle- or



upper-class women's rights activists decided to support the shah's autocratic modernist regime only because it gave women many opportunities, and the alternative included clerics who were opposed even to women's education. In 1979, when Islamists came to power, they used that support to discredit feminism. But now, many people call themselves feminists. The big issue is more about personal freedoms: rights to your own body, birth control for single women, right to divorce, love marriages, and no longer education and employment.

PS: What would you say to Western feminists who want to be in solidarity with Middle Eastern feminists?

JA: Social media and the Internet have opened up many possibilities. To give one example, as director of the Iranian Studies Initiative at UCSB I run a digital internship program for students who want to help immigrants in the United States and women's rights advocates in the Middle East. Many of our U.S. students are heritage students and know one of the languages of the region. Others enroll in our Persian or Arabic language classes before signing up for the internships. Our students help edit

women's rights publications in the region, create PowerPoint presentations for introductory courses in women's studies, and do research on women's health concerns, as well as human rights of religious and sexual minorities. This information is created in consultation with women's organizations in places such as Iran, Afghanistan, or Egypt. Our students also work with small non-profits in the U.S. that have direct links to the Middle East. Nearly all of these non-profits are organized by U.S. feminists of Iranian heritage. The experience is often an enormously important, and sometimes life-altering, one for our UCSB students and their choice of career after graduation. ❖

Peg Strobel, emerita professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, serves on DSA's National Political Committee, and co-chairs DSA's Feminist Working Group. For more information about this topic, see Roger Friedland, Janet Afary, P. Gardinali, and C. Naslund, "Love in the Middle East: The Contradictions of Romance in the Facebook World," Critical Research on Religion, 4: 3 (December 2016): 229-258.

Schedule: DSA Film Talks

Join other DSAers for national discussions about insightful films. Go to <http://www.dsausa.org/calendar> to RSVP and receive information on how to join the conference calls. You can view the films online or through your local library at little or no cost.

When Abortion Was Illegal, Sunday, March 26, 8:00 p.m. ET Nominated for an Academy Award in 1992, Dorothy Fadiman's documentary reveals, through first-person accounts, the experiences of women seeking abortions before legalization in 1973. Join Amanda Williams, executive director of the Lilith Fund, to discuss challenges to reproductive justice and abortion access. Learn about how to participate in April Bowl-A-Thons to raise funds for low-income women to obtain abortions. This discussion is not listed on DSA's website. Go to http://www.dsausa.org/mar-26-2017-at_8pm_20170326 to RSVP to receive call-in information.

People's History in Texas, Sunday April 2, 8:00 p.m. ET Join DSA members Glenn Scott and Richard Croxdale to discuss videos produced by People's History in Texas, a project that brings to life the stories of ordinary Texans in significant socio-political movements. They will discuss *The Rag*, which tells the story of an influential underground paper based in Austin from 1966-77. Go to peopleshistoryintexas.org and click on "documentaries."

Rosa Luxemburg, Wednesday, May 31, 9:00 p.m. ET Not your standard biopic, this film by feminist filmmaker Margarethe von Trotta won the German Film Award for best feature film in 1986. Star Barbara Sukowa was named best actress at the Cannes Film Festival for her portrayal of the Marxist theorist and economist Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919). Luxemburg played a key role in German socialist politics. DSA member Jason Schulman, editor of *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy*, will lead the discussion.

Free State of Jones, Sunday, June 11, 8:00 p.m. ET Join Victoria Bynum, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History, Texas State University, San Marcos, whose book by the same title served as the basis for the film. During the Civil War, an armed band of Confederate deserters led by Newt Knight, a non-slaveholding white farmer, battled against the Confederacy in an uprising popularly known as "The Free State of Jones." Joining Knight in this rebellion was Rachel, an enslaved woman who had learned how to read. From their relationship, there developed a controversial mixed-race community that endured long after the Civil War had ended. Directed by Gary Ross and starring Matthew McConaughey and Gugu Mbatha-Raw.

National Director's Report/continued from page 2

of people. Unfortunately, one reason they have a political constituency for these attacks is that although the Affordable Care Act is lifesaving for many people, for others, the coverage is terrible. Centrist Democrats don't have an answer for its problems because they are in thrall to the insurance industry.

This is why DSA fights for Medicare for All, which cuts out the insurance corporations. East Bay DSA is training hundreds of members to canvass for California single-payer legislation. NY DSAers, including in areas such as the Lower Hudson Valley and post-industrial cities such as Buffalo, are beginning to organize for the NY Health Act. Our members are asking tough questions in town halls and local media from coast to coast as they reach out to organize the working-class base we will need to win on this and all our issues. Denying healthcare to millions may be more difficult than the GOP hoped, and we have a shot at single-payer plans in at least a few blue states.

The healthcare fight is a clear example of the

“simultaneous defensive *and* offensive *and* ideological” strategy DSA pursues, one that should be seen through a socialist feminist lens. It's not going to be easy, which is why we need to think about “resistance fatigue.”

Training Long Distance Runners

In the capitalist patriarchy, women are socialized to bear the unpaid burden of sustaining families and communities. Capitalism pulls us apart, isolates us, and forces us to compete, breaking down the social bonds that hold us together. In this moment, when we are dealing with extreme fear in many communities and near-constant activism, women often do additional emotional labor to heal, or at least keep at bay, the pain and exhaustion many of us feel.

Being socialist feminists means recognizing the importance of that work and learning to share that burden. It means never forgetting that we're in this fight to link arms with each other and stand together across the walls that capitalism puts between us. We're in this to build democratic socialist community. We're in it for the long haul, and we're in it to win.

Raise Consciousness with *The Handmaid's Tale*

Hulu's 10-episode adaptation of Margaret Atwood's classic dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* starts April 26. The showing, to millions of people, of a frighteningly plausible scenario involving religious fanatics and the control of women's bodies offers enormous educational opportunities that extend beyond April.

The premise of Atwood's novel is that world war and environmental catastrophe have created an economy of scarcity for an embattled United States and made the majority of people infertile. A militaristic elite has used religion and brute force to turn women into walking incubators.

Because the series begins at the end of a month of Abortion Access Bowl-A-Thons, it's an excellent opportunity to organize a community of socialist feminists to have weekly watch parties and combine chilling “entertainment” with political discussion and collective action. Here are some thoughts for your gatherings.

Successful House Party Tips

1. Provide food and drinks.
2. Start with a small core of people and suggest that each person bring one friend.
3. Introduce yourselves to each other and ask who has done feminist activism before or is newly engaged.

Discussion Questions

1. At first glance, the government of Gilead seems to be built around religion. But what is the real goal driving its structure and practices?
2. What are the different ways the government maintains control in Gilead? How do they compare to what's happening to us today?
3. The adaptation of the novel is faithful to the language written by Atwood. Why might that be? Why is Gilead's vocabulary important?
4. Why was Offred's daughter stolen from her? Are there parallels in

today's world?

Organizing Ideas

1. Research state-level abortion restriction proposals and organizations you can work with to fight them.
2. Write letters to the editor or develop and practice talking points for calling in to radio shows.
3. Make rally signs.
4. Organize an abortion speak-out with a reproductive justice framework.
5. Identify DSA members in strategic political districts and phone bank them to ask them to call their elected officials about specific legislation.
6. Research places to table or plan a door-to-door canvass in target districts.
7. Choose an organization (or your DSA chapter's own Feminist Committee if you have one) for which to collect a little money each week.
8. Brainstorm ways to identify existing institutions (such as college campuses, religious institutions, PTAs for specific schools, libraries, or neighborhood groups) with a high proportion of women, in target districts, and then organize inside these institutions and organizations to build political pressure on elected officials.
9. Reach out to unions with a high proportion of women members, such as teachers and nurses, to begin working together.
10. Power map the community and identify businesses that fund the Christian right. Then organize public pickets or other campaigns to shame them, including media coverage.
11. Organize clinic defense teams and/or DSAer hosts for poor and working-class women who can't afford a hotel when they come from out of town to obtain a safe abortion.

Changing the Conversation

Saving the Soul of America: 1967

By Maurice Isserman

Fifty years ago, on April 4, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered an impassioned speech at the Riverside Church in Manhattan. In eloquence and power, it matched the one he gave at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. Unlike that earlier (and better remembered) effort, his topic was not civil rights but the war in Vietnam, an ever-escalating conflict that had killed nearly 20,000 American servicemen since 1963, along with hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, North and South, military and civilian.

Some of King's closest advisers urged him to remain silent about the war, fearing he would end any hope of influence with Lyndon Johnson's White House and damage fundraising efforts for the group he led, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King acknowledged their concerns: "Peace and civil rights don't mix," they say. "Aren't you hurting the cause of your people?" they ask. "Those were real concerns, and for the previous two years King had wrestled with them. By the spring of 1967, he had decided that the demands of conscience overruled the counsel of political pragmatism. To those who thought he should stick to civil rights, he responded that ten years earlier,

when a group of us formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, we chose as our motto: To save the soul of America. We were convinced that we could not limit our vision to certain rights for black people, but instead affirmed the conviction that America would never be free or saved from itself until the descendants of its slaves were loosed completely from the shackles they still wear.... Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read: Vietnam.

King was a Christian pacifist. He favored neither Marxist doctrine nor violent revolution (although he was sympathetic to democratic socialism). But this indictment of the war was as radical as any heard on the left in the 1960s. In King's view, the problem with the war wasn't just that it was a mistake or unwinnable. Rather, the war was evidence of something much more troubling and systemic. King declared that the Vietnamese, whose right to self-determination the United States professed to champion

must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1945.... Even though they quoted the American

Declaration of Independence in their own document of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its re-conquest of her former colony. Our government felt then that the Vietnamese people were not ready for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long.

King concluded by naming the war "a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit," and called on the nation to atone for its sins with a "radical revolution of values."

King's aides were right. The speech sparked a furious critical response, not just from conservatives, but from liberal politicians and otherwise sympathetic newspapers like the *New York Times*, which scolded King for addressing issues other than civil rights. He was unrepentant. As historian Thomas F. Jackson noted in *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, King was soon "proudly comparing himself to socialist Eugene V. Debs, who was sent to prison during World War I for the seditious act of praising draft resisters."

A week and a half later, on April 15, 1967, King led a huge throng of protesters in New York City, some 300,000 strong, who marched from Central Park to the United Nations Plaza, where he and others denounced the war. King's endorsement of the antiwar cause helped broaden and legitimize a movement that, until the spring of 1967, was largely confined to the margins of American politics. Within another year, in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in 1968, a majority of Americans had come to share King's opposition to continuing the fighting in Vietnam. (King would not live to see the end of the war; he was assassinated on April 4, 1968, one year to the day after his Riverside Church speech.)

King did not disdain the art of compromise when necessary for the achievement of a greater good. But when confronted with an issue of transcendent moral gravity, one that permitted no compromise, he knew what he had to do to save the soul of America. And in doing so, he helped change the conversation about the Vietnam War. ❖

Maurice Isserman's books include The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington (2000). King's speech, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence," can be found on multiple sites on the internet, including YouTube.

Books by DSA Members

We have limited space for book reviews, but once a year, we publish a list of books written by DSA members within the past three years. We can only list a book once. If your book is not here, please notify us for next year. Please buy directly from the author or from your local bookstore instead of from an online, non-union behemoth.

Browning, Preston, *Struggling for the Soul of Our Country*, Wipf and Stock, 2016. Browning asks how the life of citizenship influences our common future and addresses the spiritual dimension of the crises facing the United States.

Early, Steve, *Refinery Town: Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City*, Beacon Press, 2017. Veteran labor reporter and DSA activist Steve Early tells the story of 15 years of community organizing that curbed the power of Big Oil in a California town.

Edis, Taner, *Islam Evolving: Radicalism, Reformation, and the Uneasy Relationship with the Secular West*, Prometheus Books, 2016. An exploration of how Islam adapts to modernity by a U.S. physicist raised in Turkey.

Ellis, Frederick has republished, in a facsimile edition, *Debs: His Life, Writings And Speeches (1908)*, long out of print. *Democratic Left* readers get a 25% discount by sending a check for \$43.75 plus \$6 shipping. Email frederick658@hotmail.com for details.

Gutman, W. E., *A Paler Shade of Red, Memoirs of a Radical*, now available in an electronic version. Chronicles the life of a journalist who covered world politics from the Soviet Union to Central America.

Hogan, Patrick, *Imagining Kashmir: Emplotment and Colonialism*, University of Nebraska Press, 2016. This book “examines cinematic and literary imaginings of the Kashmir region’s conflicts and diverse citizenship, analyzing a wide range of narratives from writers and directors such as Salman Rushdie, Bharat Wakhlu, Mani Ratnam, and Mirza Waheed.”

Isserman, Maurice, *Continental Divide, A History of American Mountaineering*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2016. Through mountaineering, Isserman explores the creation of the National Parks Service and the modern environmentalist movement.

Kazin, Michael, *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918*, Simon and Schuster, 2017. For three years, a coalition of conservatives, liberals, and leftists kept the United States out of the First World War. Kazin tells what held them together and what drove them apart.

La Botz, Dan, *What Went Wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis*, Brill (September 2016), Haymarket, September 2017. Comprehensive work on why the revolution failed.

Meakes, David, *Perspective: The Golden Rule*, Outskirts Press, 2016. Drawing on a long lifetime of engagement in this autobiography, the author presents a plan for world peace.

Nottingham, Bill, and **Harper, Charles**, An updated and enlarged version of *The Great Escape that Changed Africa’s Future* (formerly *Escape from Portugal—The Church in Action; The secret flight of 60 African students to France*), includes interviews with African leaders.

Schwartz, Richard H., *Who Stole My Religion? Revitalizing Judaism and Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal Our Imperiled Planet*, Urim publications, June 2016, second edition, with new material. The author goes to the roots of the religion to find an approach to modern problems.

Sheldon, Kathleen, *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, second edition (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). Although aimed at an academic audience, this book is useful to anyone seeking to know more on the topic.

Yockey, Roger, *People Are #1* is the story of thousands of union grocery workers who were on strike for 81 days in 1989. Send a check for \$11 payable to Roger Yockey, 5910 West Lincoln Ave. #23, Yakima, Washington 98908. All money from the sale of the book goes for clean water projects in Latin America.

Kitchen Table Socialism: Taxes

By Steve Max

Do you find yourself having arguments about public policy with your loved ones or relatives you might see once a year? “Kitchen Table Socialism” is here to help. When you gather around the table, these talking points could be useful, especially at tax time.—Ed.

Many of us have seen the Disney film about Robin Hood and heard the villain, King John, rant, “Double the taxes. Triple the taxes.” With this message imprinted on young minds and old, it seems logical to read all of human history as one long tax revolt. Indeed, that is how the right would like us to think of it and how the history of our own country is often presented. Remember that tea dumped in Boston Harbor?

Then why do we—democratic socialists—defend the federal income tax? Why are we not for the flat tax that would reduce the current 73,954-page tax code to one single paragraph? Why, in fact, do we want the rich to pay more in taxes, when entrepreneurs are the “job creators” upon whom most of our livelihoods depend? The short answer is that we believe that workers are the true wealth creators and deserve a share of it. The rich got rich by paying low wages and taking advantage of taxpayer-funded projects (roads, the internet, bridges, schools that prepare an educated workforce, tax breaks) that allow them to turn handsome profits. They do not want to share those profits. We think they should.

Yes, some parts of the tax laws actually do transfer some wealth from higher to lower income people. The Earned Income Tax Credit—a program geared toward families—distributes \$69 billion a year to lower wage workers who pay no other federal income tax. It goes to 28 million people annually, and a family with two children received about \$5,572 in 2016.

And yes, there is some redistribution in the form of government spending on services compared to how much an individual pays in taxes. Here is what the conservative Tax Foundation (taxfoundation.org) says, but remember that the Foundation hates the income tax and tends to exaggerate:

American’s lowest-income families receive \$5.28 worth of government spending (federal, state, and local) for every \$1 they pay in total taxes. Middle-

income families receive \$1.48 in total spending per tax dollar, while America’s highest-income families receive \$0.25 cents in spending for every dollar of taxes paid.

Of course, the fact that Walmart and McDonald’s workers must often rely on food stamps or Medicaid is never seen by corporations as a government subsidy of their own businesses. You and I are paying for those low prices through our taxes, which could be going to programs that don’t enrich corporations.

In addition, the above calculations include far less progressive state taxes and sales taxes. Socialists oppose sales taxes, use taxes, and tolls because they aren’t progressive (that is, increasing as income increases) and fall more heavily on lower income and working people. The left-leaning Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy finds that, as a share of family income, low-income families pay a sales tax rate of 7%, middle-income families 4.7% and the wealthiest families 0.8%.



Hallie Jay Pope

For years, Bernie Sanders has campaigned to have corporations pay their fair share of taxes. Confronted with such effrontery, the right claims that the corporate income tax takes away money that would otherwise be invested to create jobs. This is a downright lie. Writing in the *NY Times Magazine* of January 20, 2016, Adam Davidson points out that “American businesses currently have \$1.9 trillion in cash, just sitting around. . . . If the companies spent their savings, rather than hoarding them, the economy would instantly grow, and we would most likely see more jobs with better pay.”

Davidson queries economists about this “unsolved mystery” and comes up with various answers, from tax avoidance (surprise, surprise) to appearing more attractive to investors to stockpiling money for the “next big thing.” To socialists, the answer is clear. Why would corporations invest in more production when they can’t sell what they make now because they won’t pay workers enough to buy all that stuff? Meanwhile, their executive salaries are secure.

Corporate tax breaks aren’t the answer, higher wages are. ❖

Steve Max is a vice chair of DSA and hosts webinars on socialist issues. You can find the webinar schedule at dsausa.org.

Democratic Left

(ISSN 1643207) is published quarterly at 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 701-960). Subscriptions: \$10 regular; \$15 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. Democratic Left is published by the Democratic Socialists of America, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. (212) 727-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the organization.

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