

Organizing • Net Neutrality • Solidarity • 1917

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

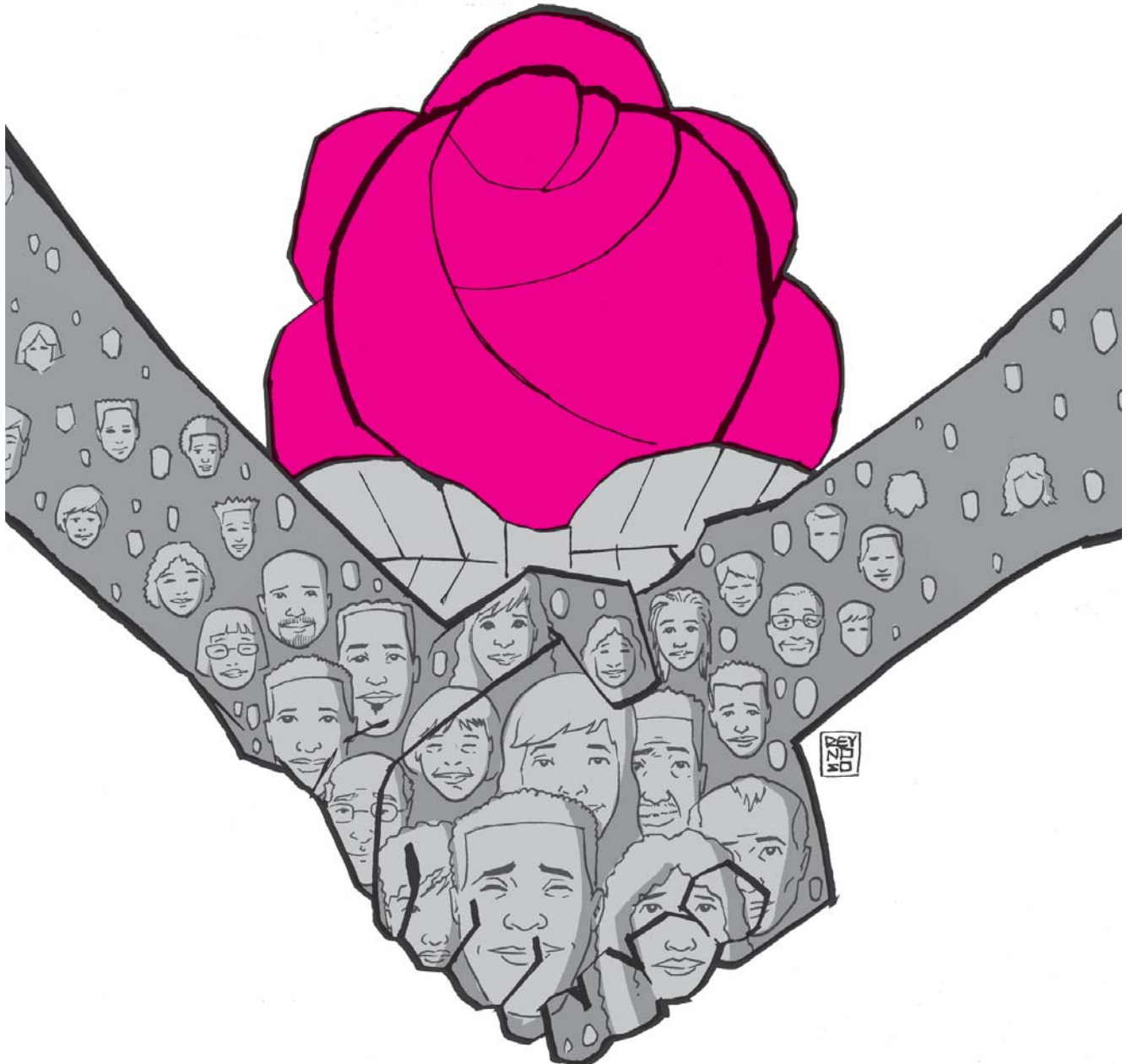
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A New Revolution



From the National Director

In Dark Times, Growing Pains And Opportunities

By Maria Svart

DSA is now almost quadruple the size it was last summer. It's a far cry from the organization I joined sixteen years ago as a student in Chicago. Many longtime members had lost steam, and new folks weren't joining, yet the politics and strategy of DSA resonated with me. I rose in the ranks as an elected YDS and then DSA leader, eventually joining staff as the National Director in 2011.



During those years, a team of national leaders and staff collectively transformed DSA. We held summer relationship-building retreats between YDS and DSA leaders. We developed more organizing trainings. We made the right strategic choices, such as supporting Bernie Sanders during the Democratic primary and using a highly democratic, bottom-up participatory process to develop a national strategy document, "Resistance Rising."

That work paid off. At our November 2015 convention I could *feel* and *see* the respect forged through joint work and the commitment to dealing with organizational weaknesses through practical and concrete new initiatives. Without the foundation that we built then, we could not now successfully absorb and be changed by the new members and energy we've experienced since the presidential election.

Make no mistake: what we build in DSA is an experiment in collective transformation. It is a foreshadowing of the vision we have for a democratic socialist society.

Organizing is not just about assessing dynam-

ics, planning campaigns, and winning victories. It is also about transforming ourselves into agents of change through the democratic process of collective struggle. It is impossible to restructure our society without unlearning the helplessness that capitalism teaches us. Our goal is to create space for all people to do this together. Giants from Eugene Debs to Peggy Terry speak of how, in the words of Ella Baker, we need "organizing to be self-sufficient rather than to be dependent upon the charismatic leader."

Central to this work is our commitment to participatory democracy. We operate through a federated chapter structure and elected leadership at all levels. Such a structure is an investment in transforming people and thus in our long-term strength. It's a truism among organizers that the good ones organize themselves out of a job. In other words, our work as an organization is to strengthen our community and build leaders and, to paraphrase Linda Sarsour, "open more doors to the movement."

On the other hand, our recent rapid growth puts a target on our back, and learning how to do democracy is tough. Capitalism doesn't train people from wildly different backgrounds to work through conflict respectfully and together come up with mutually acceptable solutions. Those who study history know how often movements have foundered on the shoals of our learned habits of competition and division.

It is in this context that I invite you to approach participation in this beautiful experiment called DSA by adopting these practices as we build socialist power together!

1. Ask well-posed, open-ended questions that demonstrate curiosity about the other person's experience and invite them to be introspective.
2. Take a moment to absorb and reflect on what others say to you, rather than immediately formulating your response. Does what they are saying change you?
3. Think of concrete organizing work as the place where we can better understand each other—including both our differences and our mutual inter-

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

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Coalition Politics and the Fight for Socialism

By Joseph M. Schwartz

DSA has thrown itself into resistance to Republican rule of all three branches of the federal government and twenty-five state governments. Highly visible DSA contingents have marched in every significant mobilization since the presidential election and shown up at local town meetings to push back against efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). DSA chapters also are challenging the Democratic pro-corporate establishment at the national, state, and local level. Since the election, in fact, thousands have flocked to DSA to make it—at 21,000 members—the largest socialist organization in this country since the 1960s.

DSA is a rare bird in United States politics: a democratic, national, federated organization (with local and state groups) that is almost completely member-funded. Chapters have considerable local autonomy, and democratically elected local representatives set feasible national priorities at our conventions. DSA is also a multi-tendency organization that believes in democracy as both a means and an end. We do not compel members to adhere to one ideological line. Our members' commitment to socialism derives from a multitude of traditions ranging from religious socialists to left social democrats, to various strands of democratic Marxism. We have spirited but comradely internal political discussions. Our most effective chapters build "unity through diversity" by focusing upon a few key activist projects that enable us to work with organizations representing working-class people of all races and nationalities. We function as an independent, visible socialist presence in mass social movements and focus our energy on "non-reformist" or "transformational" reforms—changes in public policy that constrain corporate power and that illustrate how economic democracy better serves people's needs, such as Medicare for All and free public higher education.

But as those who lived through the resistance to Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush will attest,

playing constant defense can exhaust and demobilize people. We have to build organization and not just show up for rallies. DSA will have to "walk on two legs," sustaining mass opposition to the Trump administration and its red-state equivalents while building social movements for economic, gender, and racial justice that can spur electoral challenges to pro-corporate Democratic incumbents.

Defeating the Republicans in 2018 will be a major priority for everyone. Using executive fiat, Donald Trump has already green-lighted the Dakota Access Pipeline; appointed a reactionary Supreme Court justice who will tilt the Court to the far right on labor, gender and reproductive justice, immigrant, and voting rights; terrorized the immigrant community by ramping up arbitrary anti-immigrant enforcement; unleashed the racist and reactionary tendencies within local law enforcement; and severely weakened federal regulations that slow climate change and protect workers' rights. As

Trump threatens massive military action in Syria, North Korea, and who knows where, the left and DSA have to build a mass anti-war movement.

Fighting Racism and Building a Multi-Racial Left

Absent the emergence of hundreds of racially diverse "Bernie and Bernice"-style candidacies, the Democrats will not win enough votes in 2018 from a sufficient portion of the white working class to be competitive in red states and the rural and small-town deindustrialized areas of the Midwest. Many DSA chapters already work with local groups that came out of Bernie Sanders's campaign (Our Revolution, Indivisible, and Swing Left, to name some). For these groups to transform the political order, they must form broader multi-racial coalitions than did the Sanders campaign. A divided working class is a defeated working class.

In-depth interviews show that although many white working-class swing voters oppose unbridled corporate power, they remain cynical about government programs and taxation. Some buy the



Frank Reynoso

Republican myth that government programs disproportionately benefit undeserving people of color (though whites are the largest beneficiaries of grossly underfunded anti-poverty programs). And taxes on working people are too high, given the regressive burden of sales taxes, user fees, and property taxes. Thus, left candidates, including open socialists, need to explain how progressive taxation can fund high-quality universal social programs such as Medicare for All and child care as well as public investment in job-creating alternative energy and infrastructure. But the left also has to take on the racist narrative of the Republican Party, which generates fears of undocumented immigrants taking jobs from the native born even in areas so economically devastated that almost no immigrants live there.

DSA also needs to argue that if robust social democratic levels of public provision (roads, bridges, schools) are good enough for affluent white suburbs, then they should be available to all.

That working people of all races can no longer afford to live in most major cities means that young DSAers have real skin in the game fighting for a “right to the city.” We need to bring back rent control and mass federal and state funding for public and non-profit housing, as well as fight against school charterization and for high-quality, well-funded public schools that are integrated by race and class. The multi-racial tenants’ rights work of our Brooklyn chapter can serve as a model for other chapters, as can our East Bay (Berkeley and Oakland, CA) door-to-door canvassing for a California-wide single-payer system. In blue states and blue cities, DSA can help build an independent left politics that challenges neoliberal Democrats. In red states, DSA chapters can work with black, Latino, labor, feminist, LGBTQ, environmentalist, and left activists trying to flip state legislatures (for example, the Moral Mondays Movement in North Carolina and the New Virginia and New Florida Majority multi-racial coalitions). Only then can there be the political space to make more radical demands. (State single-payer systems are on the political agenda in blue states such as California, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota. In red states, we have to fight to expand—or preserve—Medicaid funding to work-

ing-class families otherwise not eligible for ACA subsidies).

Activists are drawn to DSA’s message that building a majoritarian left requires constructing a powerful independent socialist organization. Any progressive reform that curtails the power of corporate America immediately gets red-baited. When open democratic socialist candidates become a greater part of the political landscape, the power of red-baiting will be weakened.

The space provided by the Sanders campaign for explicit democratic socialist candidates to run for office has already raised DSA’s visibility, with Khalid Kamau and Dylan Parker winning city council races in South Fulton, Georgia, and in working-class Rockford, Illinois, respectively. In addition,

Mike Sylvester and Mike Connolly serve as open DSAers in the Democratic caucuses of the Maine and Massachusetts state legislatures. These elected officials are open socialists as well as leaders in mass movements for economic and racial justice. There is historical precedent for these dual roles. In the mid-1980s, DSA counted more than 30 elected officials among its members. We now have 16.

Activists will build DSA rather than engage in single-issue activism only if working with DSA brings a tangible “value-added.” DSA trains effective organizers and strategists who can operate as a visible socialist collective within mass movements. If we develop a “farm team” of viable socialist electoral candidates, our visibility will increase. Only by winning victories that improve the lives of the majority can we make clear that another world is possible. Those who have organizing skills and who can articulate a socialist strategy can build the socialist project. Our task is to comprehend the challenging political terrain on which we must defeat both the far right and the neoliberal Democratic Party establishment. We can do so only if we remain committed to the long-distance socialist runner’s tasks of educating, agitating, and organizing. ❖

Joseph M. Schwartz is a professor of political science at Temple University and a national vice chair of DSA. A past chair of both the Boston and Philadelphia locals, he has been active in DSA since its founding.

“Activists are drawn to DSA’s message that building a majoritarian left requires constructing a powerful independent socialist organization.”

Pentagon Cries Poverty as Trump Marches to War

By William D. Hartung

When Donald Trump's administration ordered the bombing of a Syrian air base in response to a chemical weapons attack on Syrian civilians, the decision was greeted warmly in the mainstream media, as if it were a well-considered decision designed to dissuade the Assad regime from engaging in further chemical attacks. It was not. It was at best an emotional outburst, at worst an effort to distract attention from the growing scandal over the Trump team's ties to Russia. It had no military significance, as the airfield that was hit by 59 cruise missiles—at a cost of \$89 million—was up and operating the next day. But it did risk escalation of a war in Syria in which the United States has been far from passive, dispatching Marines and Special Forces to the battlefield and dropping 12,000 bombs on Syrian targets in the past year alone. Assad's killing of civilians in the hundreds of thousands is a crime against humanity, but dropping more bombs will only make matters worse.

Soon after the Syria bombing, the administration ordered the use of the most powerful non-nuclear bomb ever dropped by the United States—the so-called “Mother of All Bombs” (MOAB)—against ISIS forces in Afghanistan. The bombing did little to reduce the group's capability to do harm in Afghanistan and beyond, but it did allow Trump to posture as a tough guy while simultaneously diverting attention from his woes at home, from allegations of collusion with Putin's Russia in the 2016 elections to his inability to ram through some of his high-profile policy proposals.

The Syria and Afghanistan strikes are just one element of a sharp escalation in U.S. military activity in the greater Middle East in Trump's first months in office. He has unleashed U.S. Special Forces and increased U.S. drone strikes in Yemen; relaxed regulations on avoiding civilian harm in bombings in Iraq and Syria; lifted restrictions on

U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which has been engaged in a U.S.-backed bombing campaign that has killed thousands of civilians and committed what independent human rights groups have suggested may be war crimes; and discussed increasing the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Let's be clear: Barack Obama was no peacenik. He sharply increased drone strikes while waging war in at least seven nations—Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Pakistan—and he

reversed course on his pledge to remove all U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. But Obama also helped seal a multilateral deal to curb Iran's nuclear program, concluded an arms control treaty that will reduce deployed U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons by one-third, and opened relations with Cuba after decades of misguided sanctions and enmity. It is precisely these achievements that Trump seeks to undermine, even as he flails about, motivated as much by what he sees on Fox News and CNN as by any plan. Obama was a hawk, as

is Hillary Clinton, but Trump represents a unique threat to our safety, security, and even our survival, given that he has the ability to launch a nuclear attack on a whim—not likely, perhaps, but possible, which is in itself a frightening new feature of our foreign policy landscape.

Trump has backed up his aggressive policies with requests for a massive increase in Pentagon spending, with every dollar coming at the expense of diplomacy, the environment, and our already frayed social safety net. His proposed \$54 billion increase in Pentagon spending for fiscal year 2018 is huge. To give some sense of scale, the Trump *increase* in Pentagon spending is comparable to *the entire military budget* of the United Kingdom and higher than the military budgets of France, Germany, or Japan. This is on top of a budget that already weighs in at almost \$600 billion per year, more than the next



eight nations in the world combined, and higher than the peak year of the Reagan buildup of the 1980s. The Pentagon has no lack of money, but you wouldn't know it when a parade of generals and defense bureaucrats routinely goes up to Capitol Hill to cry poverty and ask for hundreds of billions more over the next five years.

Meanwhile, Trump's proposed domestic cuts will cost lives even as they attempt to dumb down America and create an even more docile, underinformed, and misguided citizenry. Shortly after he was confirmed, Trump budget director Mick Mulvaney assembled a "hit list" of programs that would be eliminated or defunded altogether, including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Legal Services Corporation, AmeriCorps, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Planned Parenthood. These programs' combined costs come to about \$3 billion a year, or about one-half of one percent of what the Pentagon receives per year, even before the proposed Trump increases. In fact, the programs on the hit list are less than one-eighth the amount of

From the National Director/continued from page 2
ests.

4. Use conflict with comrades as a way to learn. Remind yourself that we all have unique experiences but we are together in DSA to build a better world, and even when we push each other to grow, we have faith in our shared humanity. ❖

Films to Talk About

Join other DSAers for national discussions about insightful films. Go to www.dsausa.org/calendar to RSVP.

Pride, Sunday, September 10, 8:00-9:00 ET DSA members Eric Brasure and Brendan Hamill will lead a discussion on this British film. It's 1984, British coal miners are on strike, and a group of gays and lesbians in London bring the queer community together to support the miners in their fight. Based on the true story of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners.

Union Maids, Sunday, September 24, 8:00-9:00 ET DSA member and labor historian Susan Hirsch will discuss *Union Maids*. Nominated for an Academy Award, this documentary follows three Chicago labor organizers (Kate Hyndman, Stella Nowicki, and Sylvia Woods), who were active beginning in the 1930s. The filmmakers were members of the New American Movement (a precursor of DSA).

yearly bureaucratic waste in the Pentagon, according to its own business advisory board. These cuts have nothing to do with fiscal restraint and everything to do with conservative ideology. Some of the programs targeted by the Republicans have been in their sights since the Reagan era, while they had designs on eliminating others since the so-called "Gingrich revolution" of the 1990s.

Mulvaney's hit list is just the beginning. When the outline of Trump's budget plan was released in March, it included unprecedented cuts in the State Department (29%), the Environmental Protection Agency (31%), and crucial domestic programs such as Medicaid, which would be converted into a block grant in which each state would get a set amount of money regardless of the level of need of its population. Needless to say, the amount of the Medicaid block grants would be far below current levels. On the foreign policy front, one of the most tragic choices is the decision to slash funding for UN refugee and humanitarian aid programs at a time when countries from Nigeria to South Sudan to Yemen are on the brink of famine and people continue to flee the Syrian civil war in large numbers. And deep cuts in spending on diplomacy will deprive us of the expertise and initiative needed to come up with nonmilitary solutions to the wide array of challenges facing the United States in the Middle East and beyond—challenges that not only can't be resolved by force, but also have been made far worse by the military interventions of this century.

So, what is to be done? We need an all-hands-on-deck coalition of the kind we have not seen in decades to oppose Trump's twisted budget priorities. Successful efforts to block Trump's Muslim ban and slow his efforts to repeal Obamacare (rather than expanding it into a system of universal health coverage, as should be done) offer some hope that a coalition that promotes human needs and Pentagon cuts could have success if we stay at it. Of course, neither health care nor basic human security is safe under Trump and his team—as evidenced by the escalation of deportations of undocumented immigrants whose only crime has been to try to build a better life for themselves and their families and efforts to eliminate Department of Justice programs to monitor the activities of local police forces. But without abandoning these urgent issues, opposition to the militarization of foreign policy and the slashing of basic services should become an integral part of the growing resistance movement. ❖

William D. Hartung is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy and the author of Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex.

How to Canvass Door to Door

By Jamie Gardner

This spring, the East Bay DSA, working with the California Nurses Association, mobilized almost 200 volunteers for door-to-door canvassing to educate voters about the benefits of single-payer health care. The response was so positive that the local plans to use canvassing for a variety of issues.—Ed.

Why canvass?

Door-to-door canvassing can be very effective in reaching folks who wouldn't otherwise encounter our message. We've been experimenting with both big city-wide canvassing events and smaller, neighborhood-focused groups. By election season, we hope to have trained 1,000 local leftists to canvass—giving us a powerful tool to back socialists in local elections.

Step 1: Write a rap

Our goal is to find folks who care about our cause but don't know how to get involved. We live in an alienating and alienated society, so chatting with strangers about important political issues does not come easily to most of us. We're not asking for money or trying to get signatures. This frees us to have meaningful conversations with people who are interested in talking to us.

Rather than ramp up the awkwardness with a memorized script, we listen more than we talk. The rap—a flexible set of pointers and pertinent facts—is designed to guide the conversation from information to action. First, we ask what they know; we draw out the relevance of the issue to their lives and help them identify the need for action. Finally, we leave them with some way to take action. Canvassers should use their own words. The key is to get people talking, both so that they feel listened to and because they'll remember what *they* say much more clearly than what *you* say.

Step 2: Do a test-run/training

Before you recruit your general membership and friends for a big event, gather a few of the organizers for a test canvass. Use the same timeline, petitions/handouts, and rap you've designed for the big event. Doing this will turn your organizers into experienced team captains and give you a chance to work out any kinks before scaling up.

Step 3: Choose your neighborhoods

Send teams to a few different neighborhoods. You may discover support in unexpected places, or you may find that some neighborhoods are especially dense with gated apartments that make door knocking impractical.

Step 4: Plan, plan, plan

Secure a home base for your event early and announce the upcoming canvass at DSA events and through your social media. Consider phone banking your members to get a firm head count. Make sure volunteers understand that canvassing involves walking around for several hours. Offer sit-down roles for comrades who need them at the place designated as home base and round up a few volunteers to provide child watch.

Consider how your volunteers will get from the meet-up spot to their turfs—walk, bike, or carpool? Provide clipboards for each team, with enough contact info sheets, leave-behind flyers, print copies of your rap, and FAQ for everyone.

Step 5: Do the canvass and debrief

Allow four to five hours for a Saturday afternoon canvass: this includes the opening rally, with background information. Break into teams to role-play canvassing with friendly and unfriendly neighbors. Then send volunteers out in pairs to spend an hour and a half to two hours before coming back to base for snacks and a debrief. Inviting the whole group out to socialize afterward helps build camaraderie after a long day's work.

Step 6: Follow up

We use the NationBuilder software package to keep track of all the folks we contact, and we try to follow up by phone with new volunteers and promising contacts within a week or so. Use the feedback from your volunteers to refine your canvassing strategy, and keep on going. ❖

Jamie Gardner is a lab tech, cat dad, and activist in Oakland, CA. He helped found a progressive umbrella group in his Deep South hometown and joined DSA after the 2016 election debacle.



Solidarity Has Many Names

By Sarah Ngu

This strangely feels like church, I thought. I was at a Democratic Socialists of America meeting in Brooklyn. People all around me were singing, with lyric sheets in hand, “Solidarity forever... for the union makes us strong.” Many of us were trying to keep up with the words and match, however haltingly, the tune. People were, I’d guess, like me: at their first-ever DSA meeting, awakened by Bernie Sanders’s championing of democratic socialism and galvanized by Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States.

I’d never encountered collective singing before outside of a religious space. But, looking back now, I see that it makes perfect sense in a socialist space. Singing fosters solidarity. It gets everyone literally on the same page and connects singers not just to one another, but also to a tradition that goes before them. (“Solidarity Forever” was written by Ralph Chaplin of the Industrial Workers of the World, who self-consciously linked the song to the earlier abolitionist movement by using the tune to “John Brown’s Body” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”)

Because most organizing spaces tend to splinter off by identity or issue, it seems to me that democratic socialism’s great political promise is in its emphasis on solidarity, a solidarity that encompasses but is not limited to particular identities. “Solidarity” is what enables union organizers to rally workers of all identities to fight for what they deserve. At its best, it provides the organizing foundation for people to better understand the experiences of different identities, rather than to paper over them.

The idea that we are all bound up in a shared struggle is not just a common trope within socialism, but also within certain traditions of Christianity—it certainly goes beyond it, but I’m speaking from my own religious tradition. The idea of solidarity extends beyond humans to include God, who took on human form in order to be with us. Liberation theologians go further and argue that God’s death on the cross should be seen as an unjust execution by the State. The cross, then, becomes an

empowering symbol of “God’s loving solidarity with the ‘least of these,’ the unwanted in society who suffer daily from great injustices,” as theologian James Cone writes in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

In that book, Cone makes a case for the parallels between the lynching of black people in the United States and the killing of Jesus by the Roman Empire. But he doesn’t stop there. He discusses how both blacks and whites who share a common religious heritage are joined together by the “blood of the cross of Jesus.” Reflecting on how God’s solidarity on the cross can transform ugliness into a kind of beauty, Cone writes, “No gulf between blacks and whites is too great to overcome, for our beauty is more enduring than our brutality. What God joined together, no one can tear apart.”

Of course, religiosity at its worst can morph into an arrogant zeal, one that has damaged and still continues to damage others, all in service to a supposedly greater cause. Socialists should understand this, for socialism at its worst can become a “true faith” that we are not to question, only follow.

Blind zeal has no place in either religion or socialism, but both need hope. Earlier this year, I was back in the same venue—Mayday Space, a social justice organizing center—that hosted my first DSA meeting, this time for a national Young Democratic Socialists conference. José La Luz, a seasoned trade unionist and vice-chair of DSA, took to the stage. After talking about his work with César Chávez’s United Farm Workers of America, he put down the microphone, stepped off the stage, and led the standing-room crowd in an electrifying chant of “¡Sí Se Puede!” for several long minutes. It felt like the socialist equivalent of an “altar call,” as La Luz held out to the enthusiastic crowd the hope that one day our broken earth will be transformed. ❖

Sarah Ngu, a freelance writer in Brooklyn, NY, is a member of Forefront Church, a progressive evangelical church, and the Religion and Socialism Working Group of DSA.



Kitchen Table Socialism: Net Neutrality

By Julianne Tveten

This spring, Congress passed anti-online-privacy legislation that could hinder organizing efforts by groups like DSA while channeling millions of dollars into corporations. President Donald Trump signed into law a bill that allows Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to harvest sensitive data, such as medical information, geolocation, and Web-browsing history, and sell it to advertisers.

This could be just the beginning. Many open-Internet activists fear that the anti-privacy vote is a bellwether for gutting another tenet of online democracy: net neutrality. Net neutrality is the principle that ISPs should allow users equal access to all online content and applications regardless of the source. It dictates that telecommunications companies aren't allowed to accelerate traffic for preferred sites (that is, sites that pay extra, are affiliated with them, or that they find politically savory) or obstruct traffic to sites they deem unfavorable.

Net neutrality has governed the Internet in the United States since February of 2015, when the Federal Communications Commission reclassified broadband as a utility and set forth regulations equivalent to those placed on phone service and electricity providers. This move followed a ruling in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that the FCC did not have sufficient regulatory power over broadband Internet. Only by reclassifying broadband as a utility could the FCC ensure net neutrality and curb fraudulent billing and price gouging.

To understand the gravity of losing net neutrality, consider this example: In 2007, Verizon severed subscriber access to a text-messaging program from the pro-choice nonprofit NARAL, explaining that it would not host communications from any group "that seeks to promote an agenda or distribute content that, in its discretion, may be seen as controversial or unsavory to any of our users." Fortunately, Verizon reversed its censorship of NARAL after large user protests.

Were net neutrality to be razed, the repercussions would be infinite. Comcast, an ISP, might decide to charge users \$5 per month to visit popular free sites, such as Facebook or Wikipedia, justifying the charge with such disingenuous labels as "con-

venience fee" or "service fee." In so doing, it would stymie the flow of information to low-income Internet users, who are already subject to slow speeds and prohibitive broadband costs. Similarly, if AT&T workers strike due to poor working conditions—which happened earlier this year—and create a website to publicize their grievances and seek support, the company might opt to prevent its broadband subscribers from accessing it, committing a veritable act of union-busting censorship.

Former Verizon lawyer Ajit Pai, who was appointed to the FCC by Barack Obama and voted against net neutrality in 2015, has been appointed head of the FCC by Trump. In April, spurred by telecom lobbyists, Pai proposed a far more lax "plan" for

ISP regulation: remove broadband's utility classification, replace net neutrality with ISPs' "voluntary" commitment to a select few net neutrality facets in their terms of service, and transfer oversight to the Federal Trade Commission, which lacks the FCC's preemptive regulatory power. In other words, Pai seeks to jettison any legal enforcement of the principle.

The opposition to Pai's proposals, however, is vehement and vast. Because eradicating net neutrality only truly benefits ISPs, a number of corporations and nonprofits seek to keep it intact. The Internet Trade Association—whose members include giants like Google, Facebook, Amazon, Reddit, and Netflix—is lobbying to maintain it. Its rationale, of course, is strictly pro-business: without net neutrality, user accessibility to these sites—and thus the companies' profits—will be compromised. Far more meaningful is the work of such groups as Free Press and the Electronic Frontier Foundation, which are legally defending digital rights while mobilizing activists to meet with elected officials, attend town hall meetings, and take other local action.

If capitalism is allowed to run rampant, the only thing free on the Web will be the market. Only public activism can create an open, democratic Internet in the people's best interest. ❖

DSA member Julianne Tveten writes about the tech industry and social issues. Her work has appeared in Truthout, Hazlitt, and The Outline, among others.



Hallie Jay Pope



Organizing for Resistance

By Jessie Mannisto

Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In

By Bernie Sanders

Thomas Dunne Books, 2016

Hegemony How-To: A Roadmap for Radicals

By Jonathan Matthew Smucker

AK Press, 2017

We live in a strange new political world, with a bigot in the White House on one hand and a swelling of the democratic socialist ranks on the other. How do we chart a path forward? One way is to learn from experienced leaders on the left, many of whom are putting their experiences out there as books.

One of those leaders is Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, whose *Our Revolution* is half recap of his run for the White House and half treatise on the issues he championed during that campaign. DSA members may not find much new in the anecdotes of capitalist abuses and examples of the policies Sanders espouses to address them, but they will find out why the message resonated so strongly during his campaign and how socialist activists can repurpose it to reach people who don't think of themselves as "political."

Sanders's message struck a chord with people who said they hadn't paid attention to politics until he showed up and spoke about crises in our country that mainstream candidates were ignoring and that people really cared about. That message hit home well before November 9, 2016, and sent hundreds of new members to DSA. After the presidential election, it drew thousands who now knew the words "democratic socialism."

But don't stop with Bernie. Another new book offers excellent guidance for amplifying the democratic socialist message. In *Hegemony How-To*, experienced activist and strategist Jonathan Matthew Smucker shares his experiences as an organizer and participant in movements such as Occupy Wall Street, MoveOn.org, and United for Peace and Justice. Smucker, who was raised in a religious commu-

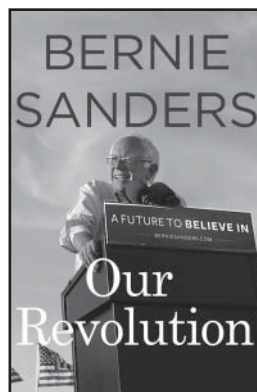
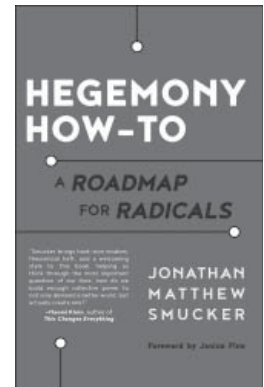
nity in Pennsylvania and is currently director of Beyond the Choir, became a radical while in high school, when he realized that the only way to achieve the goals of the Gospel was to immerse himself in the radical movement and fight for social and economic justice.

Of the many valuable recommendations in *Hegemony How-To*, one of particular interest in the wake of the Sanders campaign is Smucker's call for what he terms *narrative insurgency*. In contrast with *narrative attack*—that is, the kind of rhetoric that involves a direct assault on a person's entire worldview, and that therefore usually fails to convince people to change their minds—Smucker's approach is to begin by listening to others in an attempt to understand their values and concerns and then making the case for how your goals fit with those values and concerns. He suggests, for instance, that if you want to win converts to environmental activism in his hometown, you emphasize the biblical mandate to care for God's creation.

Smucker's technique sounds a lot like what grassroots activists such as Moumita Ahmed did while going door to door to drum up support for Bernie Sanders among working-class voters and voters in communities of color. Ahmed argued in the Spring 2017 issue of *Democratic Left* that instead of talking about the word "socialism," we should be prepared to talk about people's lived experiences and show how we're on their side. Smucker puts it this way: "We don't have to feign identification with the allied and neutral components within a community's narrative or culture [...] because our work for social justice is rooted in our love for real people, in all their complexity."

Smucker also talks about metanarratives—the grand philosophical stories that attempt to explain the world for everyone and that present *particular* interests as *universal*. For instance, the idea that the benefits of policies that favor corporations will trickle down to help everyone is a neoliberal metanarrative that was once widely accepted but has been fraying since the financial crisis of 2008.

Reading *Our Revolution* alongside *Hegemony*



How-To brings to light these shifting narratives. The Sanders campaign didn't create a whole new narrative, of course: Bernie ran with a narrative that had been fueled earlier by Occupy Wall Street's meme of the 99%. Bernie rightfully complains in his book that the media generally failed to report the content of his message, instead focusing only on the contest between him and Hillary Clinton.

But he refused to be distracted and hammered away at his message. Against the advice of professional political consultants (who preferred sound bites) he spoke in detail about the reasons for the crises people are facing and his proposals to address them. And people responded. Sanders highlights a favorite comment from the campaign: "Thank you, Bernie. You treat us as if we were intelligent human beings."

Our Revolution explains that most of the people who flocked to his campaign were not the usual suspects, faithful to the Democratic Party. They were newly engaged because someone was finally speaking to the realities of their lives. DSA's work to establish chapters in all fifty states, no matter how red they may look, is in line with the wisdom of Sanders and Smucker, who both urge us not to forget that there are people out there who are open to a new message.

In fact, our real problem, Smucker argues, is not that people disagree with us: it's that they don't believe we can be effective. The surprisingly positive response to Bernie's campaign, even as it exposes the obstacles we face, has given us a platform to show that we *can* make our concerns heard, and that we're therefore worth the time of all those po-

tential allies who are reluctant to engage in futile organizing efforts.

There's a review of *Our Revolution* on Amazon.com that shows the value in Smucker's advice to reach out to new communities. The reviewer, Mike M, posting in March 2017, doesn't agree with Sanders's proposals, but is glad to see the issues raised:

As a Christ-following, life-long Republican and business owner, I would likely be in the demographic of the least likely to recommend this book or to embrace any of Bernie Sanders' policies, but I found this book to be challenging at a personal level. [...] My own small business struggles with the rising costs of health insurance, my own kids struggle with the ongoing burden of student loans, even while they succeed in their careers. And I have to agree that the present trajectory of making it easier for the wealthy (individuals and corporations) to escape taxes and thereby a responsibility to society, is not right. I did not become a progressive or a socialist as a result of reading this book. . . but I agree fully that what he raises are certainly the issues that campaigns and our government should be focused on I strongly urge you to read this book.

When lifelong Republicans start thanking socialists for raising important issues, you know the narrative is shifting. And judging from DSA's swelling ranks, this is only the beginning. ❖

Jessie Mannisto is a writer and librarian from Detroit who now lives in Washington, DC, where she is the chair of the Metro DC DSA political education committee.



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Assessing Leon Trotsky

By Jason Schulman

The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky

By Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, published in France in 1951; Haymarket Books, 2015

Leon Trotsky

By Irving Howe, Penguin Books, 1978

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, a workers' revolution led by a Marxist party with the intent of sparking a Europe-wide revolution, which never came. These two books on the leader of the Bolsheviks' Red Army and the Marxist theorist of "permanent revolution" and "combined and uneven development" are worthy additions to any socialist's personal library. One is co-written by Trotsky's widow (herself a revolutionary) and an anarchist-turned-Bolshevik who joined Trotsky's small international movement of anti-Stalinist communists ("Trotskyists") in the 1930s. The other is by a former Trotskyist who became a founding editor of *Dissent* magazine and, with other erstwhile Trotskyists seeking a less "sectarian" existence, helped form what is now DSA.

Serge and Sedova pack a great amount of detail into less than 300 pages, especially when discussing Trotsky's life from 1917 onward. Less comprehensive than Isaac Deutscher's well-known "Trotsky trilogy," it is a more approachable introduction and offers a more personal touch than Deutscher can provide, especially when Sedova—whose words appear in quotations—speaks. Particularly memorable (and grim) are the reminiscences of the Trotskys' lives in the Soviet Union between the end of the Russian Civil War and their forced exile in 1927, as well as their persecution in various countries during the early 1930s—the years when official Communism suddenly veered into a "strategy" of catastrophic forced collectivization in Russia and ultra-left sectarianism abroad. The latter development ensured the Nazis' triumph in 1933, even though Trotsky had repeatedly urged a united front of German Social Democrats and Communists to prevent this outcome. The deaths of all four of Trotsky's children are agonizingly recounted by Sedova, who, with Serge, makes clear what Howe succinctly summarizes: Trotsky in exile "feels guilty

with regard to his children, all of whose lives, in one way or another, have been sacrificed in the political struggle," while in his fight for a new mass revolutionary International during the years of what he believes to be "the death agony of capitalism," he "is overcome by the incongruity between the magnitude of his political perspective and the paltriness of his political means." Additional anguish comes when the Trotsky-aligned Left Oppositionists in Russia—some 8,000 or so "Old Bolsheviks"—die in Stalin's purge trials, described by Serge and Sedova as "the greatest political massacre in history."

Although Serge remained a Marxist to the end of his days and Howe did not, there is some symmetry in their assessments of Trotsky's strengths and flaws. Serge praises him for having "[a] sense of life integrated with both thought and action which is the antithesis of the after-dinner heroism of Western socialists," while Howe argues that "in the last ten or twelve years of his life Trotsky offered a towering example of what a man can be." Both men criticize Trotsky for, in Howe's words, his use of "deplorable means," although Howe does not give examples of specific acts.

In an appendix to his book, from a previously unpublished manuscript from 1940 on Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours*, Serge writes of Trotsky's uncritical defense of the suppression of the Kronstadt Revolt of 1921: "I see the worst sufferers of Bolshevik intolerance (which long precedes Stalinism) showing it here," and denounces, perhaps unfairly given the fate of Trotsky and his family, Trotsky's "contempt for different convictions. Contempt of the man who thinks differently." Unfortunately, this sort of intolerance has characterized the internal life of Trotskyist groups more often than not, which was reason enough for some of DSA's founders to abandon "Trotskyism" even if they still drew on Trotsky's writings as they saw fit.

Ultimately, regardless of how one assesses Trotsky as either man or author, both of these biographies provide excellent examinations of one of the most important socialists of the 20th century. ❖

Jason Schulman is a member of NYC DSA who teaches political science at Lehman College, CUNY. He is a co-editor of New Politics.



Bolsheviks and Beyond

By Michael Hirsch

Ten Days That Shook the World

By John Reed, originally published, 1919, Penguin Classics, revised ed., 2007

John (“Jack”) Reed wasn’t looking backward to the French Revolution or even the Paris Commune when he chronicled the seizure of power of the Russian Revolution of 1917. As a 30-year-old independent radical journalist, he was looking at it with fresh eyes. What he saw was not just the overthrow of a repressive monarchist oligarchy and its attendant bourgeois class, but a vast democratic, majoritarian movement based on “soviets,” or councils, made up of workers, soldiers, and peasants. Although he had been embedded in Pancho Villa’s rebel army in Mexico and covered Industrial Workers of the World strikes in New Jersey and miners’ struggles in Colorado, it was witnessing the cataclysmic events in Russia that confirmed him as a revolutionary.

The role that revolutionaries—and not just Bolsheviks but Menshevik Internationalists and Left Social Revolutionaries—played in displacing the post-tsar, all-party Provisional Government was catalytic. It was, as Reed saw it, a social revolution that outstripped its purely political implications. Its program—largely articulated by the Bolsheviks—was to break up the giant landholdings and distribute land to the peasants, to move toward socializing industry, and for an immediate armistice without annexations to end the First World War. Above all, it was to have no truck with any of the bourgeois parties, which in their own ways supported the war, opposed workers’ rights, and even looked to a return of the hated Romanov dynasty.

In this centennial year, there is much to herald in the revolution, if not in its aftermath, and Reed dramatically shows why. It was the first revolution in which the working class played an outsized, critical role. Both workers and peasants rebelled against a regime in which they were, in Marxist terms, “objects of accumulation” and not its subjects; they were historical actors, not acted upon by elite political formations. What the revolutionaries understood was that its ruling class can wheedle its way

out of any crisis if the working class allows it.

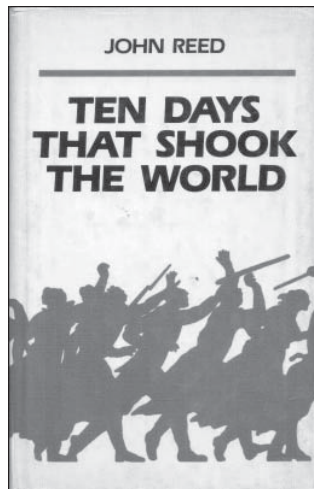
So, what did the Bolsheviks do? As a mass party by 1917, they were in a position to learn from the masses and generalize strategies and tactics from there. The party was, in labor-union terms, rank-and-file shop stewards beholden to their base. A libertarian Marxist (like me, for one) would say that a party has to lead the class, but above all it has to be in a position and a frame of mind to learn from it. Reed’s book is a testament to a class and a party in a unique historical moment getting the balance right.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels lay out their analysis: “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”

It is in the context of a real class upsurge that a party matters; the conundrum is that the party can’t be wished into existence overnight, yet it stagnates in periods of low fight-backs, either lapsing into a glorified study group, a newspaper-selling sect, a purely reform-orienting lobbying effort or turning into a group of action freaks—in the most extreme cases, a cult. Witness the disaggregation of Students for

a Democratic Society in the late 1960s or the German and Italian New Lefts of the 1970s. What does it mean to be a revolutionary in the age of Trump, or even a progressive reformer? It’s an open question we reds struggle with daily.

The Hegelian maxim—via Engels—that freedom is the recognition of necessity takes its best expression in revolutionary situations, and Reed paints the moment vividly. As Lenin understood it, it was “an extremely unique historical situation,” one in which “absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political strivings” merged in a strikingly “harmonious” manner. Today, such an event sounds like magical thinking, but it happened, and in a nation where 80% of the population were landed peasants or soldiers and sailors from the peasantry and the bulk of the others were primarily urban working class. There is no *deus ex machina* in Reed’s history,



no factors independent of human agency, and no manipulative puppet masters, least of all the Bolsheviks, who, I would argue, learned as much from the workers' movement as they taught. What Reed describes is no less than what Marx analyzed: the basis on which a class can emancipate itself.

The two great classes had different origins and goals. The oppressed peasantry were ripe for revolt; they wanted to expropriate the private property of the large estate owners, but they also wanted their own small private properties. Socialism was not their goal, but it was the goal of growing numbers of workers. Both groups united behind the slogan of "Peace, Land, and Bread," none of which interested the provisional government, which could not even supply food to the starving army and masses.

What to do?

Reed cites Maxim Gorky, editor of the independent newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* (*New Life*) as "pointing out that the Bolshevik insurrection meant one thing very clearly; that all illusions about coalition with the bourgeoisie were henceforth demonstrated vain." Reed also noted that the idea that "the Bolsheviks would remain in power longer than three days never occurred to anybody—except perhaps to Lenin, Trotsky, the Petrograd workers and the simple soldiers."

For Reed, these soldiers, themselves peasants or workers in uniform, were hardly simple. What they needed was a tactical way forward, something the Bolsheviks provided. Timing was everything. As Lenin said, "Yesterday was too soon; tomorrow is too late."

Reed summarizes in what could be the book's coda:

Not by compromise with the propertied classes, or with the other political leaders; not by conciliating

the old Government mechanisms, did the Bolsheviks conquer the power. Not by the organized violence of a small clique. If the masses all over Russia had not been ready for insurrection, it must have failed. The only reason for Bolshevik success lay in their accomplishing the vast and simple desires of the most profound strata of the people, calling them to the work of tearing down and destroying the old, and afterward, in the smoke of falling ruins, cooperating with them to erect the framework of the new...

What was the outcome of the revolution? Reed can't tell us. A protracted civil war, stoked in large part by the British, French, and U.S. governments still smarting over Russia's exit from the war, left the country in a parlous condition. Reed's projected three-volume history was never written, and he died in Moscow of typhus in October 1920, one of thousands of victims of the Allied boycott of medical and other supplies to the devastated nation.

Would Jack Reed have remained a Soviet Union sympathizer, especially once Stalin completely destroyed working-class power in Russia? Who knows? It is indicative that in Reed's book, replete with laudatory mentions of Lenin, Trotsky, and other Bolsheviks, as well as of dissidents within the party, Stalin is mentioned just twice, in passing. More telling is that in the USSR during the Stalin years, possessing copies of *Ten Days That Shook the World* was considered a crime against the state. In capitalist Europe and the United States, with official enmity toward all things revolutionary, Reed's book has rarely been out of print. As thick description and analysis, it is still a classic. ❖

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Organizing for Socialism

Hannah Allison talks with Maxine Phillips

If you're in a DSA chapter you may have already heard from DSA's new full-time organizer. We caught up with her in between trips and asked about her enthusiasm for DSA.—Ed.

MP: Why did you join DSA?

HA: Friends I trusted were joining DSA. One in particular—a social worker like me, who is a leader in his union — had a one-on-one conversation with me and asked me to join. I pay monthly dues because I believe that we'll win by organizing people and organizing money. No one but us is going to pay to overthrow capitalism.

MP: What is your organizing background?

HA: I've been an organizer (paid and unpaid) since college. I got my start working for a small environmental organization called Appalachian Voices. They brought community members together to fight mountaintop removal coal mining. Since then, I've been a student and community organizer in places like Saint Louis, Missouri and Raleigh, North Carolina. As an organizer for Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment, I organized neighbors and community members to save families' homes from foreclosure. I also helped fight to increase the minimum wage in Missouri and to stop tuition hikes at state schools in North Carolina.

MP: What excites you about what's happening with DSA?

HA: In this political moment, DSA has a unique opportunity to be THE place to build a mass socialist organization—the kind of organization that can be an ideological anchor within the broader movement for social and economic justice. In a recent piece for *Jacobin*, Paul Heideman notes that, during the development of the Socialist Party of America, “class conflict was not something talked about in small rooms, but a fact of life for Americans as varied as

Texan farmers and Chicago stockyard workers.” I've visited DSA chapters across the country and I can tell you, we're not watering down radical politics in places such as Fargo, North Dakota. We're reviving a tradition of American socialism that spans the diverse landscape of this vast place. We're building an organization of the working class to fight for the things that matter to our lives—universal health-care, free education, affordable housing, and economic institutions where workers own not just their labor but the means they use to produce goods and services that benefit us all.

MP: What challenges does DSA face?

HA: For a socialist organization, DSA is big, but we need to get even bigger. We are in a battle for the hearts and minds of working and poor people in this country. And I believe they are with us. Why? Because they're us. We're people from across the country who are tired of being sick and tired.

We're ready to create an economy and a society that works for all of us.

The other challenge for us as an organization is to stop talking so much about how white and male we are and just fight like hell to dismantle patriarchy and white supremacy within our organization and in the world. Oh, and we've got to keep showing up for each other. Ella Baker, who organized poor black folks and young people in the South and was thought to be the more radical, grassroots counterpart to Martin Luther King, is one of my organizing heroes. While working to win the right to vote, she would travel around the country and stay with the people she was organizing. People would always say of her after she left that it was clear she really cared about them and their families and their lives. We have to be like Ella. We can't stop caring about each other. Not now. The stakes are too high. This once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a different world is too great.



Hannah Allison looks at a map that will soon show DSA chapters in 50 states. Photo by Maxine Phillips

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