



*the magazine of the
Democratic Socialists
of America*



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Labor Book Reviews
DSA Election Activism
Talking Democratic Socialism*

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updated 8:48 p.m. EDT, Sat October 18, 2008
McCain, Palin hint that Obama's policies are 'socialist'

Los Angeles Times
<http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/na-campaign19-2008oct19.0,1946625.story>
From the Los Angeles Times
Barack Obama
McCain says Obama wants socialism
The Republican says his rival would turn the IRS into a giant 'welfare agency.'
By Bob Drogen and Mark Z. Barabak
Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

Telegraph.co.uk
Barack Obama interview reignites fear of socialist agenda
A radio discussion in which Barack Obama lamented past failures to bring about "redistributive change" as one of the "tragedies" of history has reignited fears he plans to introduce socialist-style economic policies.

ACCURACY in MEDIA
FOR FAIRNESS, BALANCE AND ACCURACY IN NEWS REPORTING
Bush Embraces Obama's Socialism
AIM COLUMN | BY CLIFF KINCAID | OCTOBER 26, 2008

The Washington Times
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McCain decries Obama's 'socialism'
Democrat hits back on Republican's 'welfare' for wealthy
Joseph Dorf (Contact)
Friday, October 19, 2008

Barack Obama's Stealth Socialism
By INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY | Posted Monday, July 28, 2008 4:20 PM PT
Election '08: Before friendly audiences, Barack Obama speaks passionately about something called "economic justice." He uses the term obliquely, though, speaking in code — socialist code.

THE NEW YORKER
COMMENT
LIKE, SOCIALISM
by Hendrik Hertzberg
NOVEMBER 3, 2008

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Socialism Hits the News!

In the last month or so of the election campaign, candidate Obama suddenly became a “socialist” – a great surprise to most of us. While it didn’t cost him the election the way the Right intended, it has put the term back out in the public forum, giving us a small entry to that forum. We reprint excerpts from DSA National Director Frank Llewellyn’s response to a piece of redbaiting on page 14 to help with approaches to getting out the word.

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Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements – of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color – which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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Does Obama's Election Mean Real Change?

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Part I: Only if It Delivers for the Working Class and People of Color

Like confusing a terrific opening scene for a dynamic three-act play, discussion as to whether or not Barack Obama's presidential victory and increased Democratic majorities in the House and Senate represent a realigning election is premature. A realigning election – such as those in 1860, 1896, and 1932, when a majority coalition first gained long-term national political predominance behind a new governing model of economic and social policy that is seen as benefitting the coalition's core constituencies – can only be determined in retrospect.

The Obama victory depended crucially upon major gains among Latino voters and the return to the Democratic fold of a crucial segment of the industrial working class in the Mid-Atlantic and upper Mid-West. If one takes away the votes of first and second generation Cuban-Americans, Latinos went for Obama by a margin of 72 to 28, up from 55 to 45 Democratic in the 2004 presidential election. But only if the Democrats institutionalize a governing program that over the long-term redresses growing inequality will a new Democratic majority coalition emerge. The New Deal programs of Social Security, unemployment insurance, and labor rights forged the long-term allegiance of the white immigrant industrial working class to the Democratic Party, and post-war prosperity solidified the governing nature of the New Deal coalition (particularly by means of the “affirmative action” programs for the white working class, the GI bill and the federal home mortgage programs). And Reagan's war on government was the predominating ideology of both parties until Katrina.

The making of a new political context

The realigning election of 1932 prefigured the thirty-six year dominance of a Democratic coalition that embraced the democratic regulation of capitalism and the emergence of a modest universal United States welfare state. The New Deal coalition, however, despite opposition from radicals and progressive Democrats, excluded African-Americans and Latinos by denying the largely Black and Latino farm workers and domestic workers Social Security benefits and the National Labor Relations Act's federal guarantee of the right to organize. The ensuing struggle to include the disproportionately non-white poor in mainstream American life culminated in the means-tested programs of the Great Society. The reaction against these programs, particularly by workers whose income put them just above the level of eligibility for Food Stamps, Head Start, and Medicaid (not to mention AFDC's indirect child care benefits) engendered the portion of white blue collar workers who defected from the Democratic coalition as early as George Wallace's 1968 third party campaign.

And well before there were “Reagan Democrats,” there was Nixon's “silent majority.” This shift of political allegiance (at least on the presidential level) of a small, but significant portion of the white working class to the Republicans on “social” issues played a key role in establishing Republican presidential dominance from 1968 onwards. (Except for abortion, the “social issues” were largely racialized ones – the Democrats allegedly being lax on “law and order” and their alleged excessive “taxing and spending” to benefit the “undeserving” poor at the seeming expense of white workers.)

But the Reagan presidential coalition never established a stable “governing” economic and social strategy that firmly incorporated the new working-class strata into the traditional Republican coalition of small town white Protestants, farmers and upper-middle class economic libertarians. The Republicans never built a stable majority in the House or Senate because, while their racial and social conservatism facilitated gains in the South and Southwest, they increasingly lost moderate Republican seats in the Mid-Atlantic, New England and upper Midwestern regions. When hard times came (after the recessions of 1975, 1991, and 2008), a sufficient number of “Reagan Democrats” defected back to the Democrats to engender Democratic presidential and Congressional victories.

The strongest basis for claiming 2008 to be a “realigning” election is the continued Democratic gains in the House and Senate (it's not surprising that amidst a global recession the Democrats won the presidency). Some of those seats did swing because of demographic changes – the growth of Latino voters in the Southwest and in the economically most dynamic areas of the South, as well as the drift toward the Democrats of de-industrialized long-standing Republican areas of upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. But only if the Democrats can improve the economic circumstances of voters who (at least for now) have prioritized their economic needs over cultural or religious values will these gains be long-term. And some of the candidates who won in formerly Republican districts are quite moderate on economic issues.

As Latinos in the Southwest (and across the nation) increasingly gain citizenship and voting rights, Republican anti-immigrant and anti-worker sentiment is likely to cost them dearly. Absent the growing Latino vote, Obama's victories in Colorado, New Mexico, North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida would not have been possible. The percentage of the electorate that is Latino is estimated to grow by at least ten percent per election cycle through 2050. (The Latino vote went from 7 percent to 9 percent of the national electorate from 2004 to 2008). White voters only made up 72 percent of the 2008 electorate, and this will decline toward 50 percent by 2050.

But this does not mean the Republicans are done for at the

presidential level. In the midst of a visible and rapid economic meltdown, Republicans still won 42 percent of the white trade union vote; 48 percent of the white Catholic vote; and 65 percent of the white Protestant vote. The union household “premium” remains substantial – 58 percent of white union households voted Democratic versus 42 percent of non-union households with similar incomes living in the same regions. Thus, the passage of the card-checking Employee Free Choice Act and Democratic party support for unionization is in the party’s self-interest. But if Obama cannot produce the economic goods over the next four years (and that will be difficult), Republicans will have a good chance to regain the presidency in 2012.

While GOP admonitions against “tax and spending” have lost some of their potency in the face of a near-depression, the Republican mantra that taxation means “taking money from us hardworking folks and giving it to those indolent folks of color” still resonates among a sizable portion of moderate income whites, as in their embrace of Sarah Palin and “Joe the Plumber’s” right-wing populist claim that Obama favored a “socialist” redistribution of income from the deserving to the undeserving. That mistrust in taxation and public spending can only ebb if Obama initiates government programs that make a real difference in working-class families’ lives. Ironically, those programs can only succeed if taxation is made more progressive

The Republicans are likely to retain a lock on the deep South (except in Texas, where the growing Latino vote will soon put this great electoral prize in play) and on the white, de-industrialized areas of Appalachia. While many point to Obama’s victories in Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida as evidence of a Democratic breakthrough in the South, these gains are mostly due to the in-migration into these economically dynamic states of Northern-raised university-educated middle-strata and Latino immigrants. In the deep South, which is largely excluded from the high-tech and financial centers of Southern capital, the white Democratic vote fell to new lows – below 15 percent in South Carolina, Alabama, and Louisiana, and a positively scary nine percent in Mississippi. The demise (that began in 2000) of the Democratic lock on the Appalachian districts of Tennessee, Kentucky, and, most strikingly, West Virginia demonstrates that once deindustrialization has run its full course and all rational economic hope is gone, the economically forgotten may cling not only to “guns and religion” but to a racially tinged populist resentment of a “liberal” establishment that does not readily speak for the excluded of all races.

Race and the election of an African-American president

Obama’s victory represents a great triumph over racism, but the punditry’s celebration of a “post-racial America” should give progressives pause as to the depth of this anti-racist victory. Already, both Republicans and moderate Democrats claim that the Obama victory means that “affirmative action” is no longer necessary. In fact, it is no accident that our first black president is not only bi-racial, but the child of a white

mother, raised by a white grandmother in a Hawaii that defies the (now outdated) black-white American racial paradigm.

Consider: would Obama have done as well if either (or both) parent(s) were direct descendants of an American slave, rather than his African parent being the one who disappeared from his life (and the campaign)? Would another candidate – for example, former House member Harold Ford, the most urbane, elite-educated descendant of American slaves in the Congressional Black Caucus – have been similarly able to win, let alone someone with a working-class, urban, or rural black Southern upbringing? While Obama’s elite education did not unambiguously serve as an electoral positive, one should not underemphasize the “bleaching” effect of elite Ivy League credentialization.

Once Bill Clinton chalked up Obama’s victory in South Carolina to Black racial solidarity with Obama, Obama’s hold on the African-American community became unshakable. This freed him up to run a “post-racial” campaign. This is not to deny the incredible emotional power his election had for an African-American community that knows to its core the “one drop of blood” rule of vicious American anti-black racism. Nor is this to deny the emotional power for this victory to any progressive who grew up under segregation. When I teared up after the media declared his victory at 11pm EST on November 4, I had a mental flashback to the summer of 1964 and my father explaining to his Northern-raised ten-year-old son that he had inadvertently but likely become the first white to use the “colored only” bathroom at the drive-in movie in Luray, Virginia.

Tears and memories aside, Obama ran a post-racial campaign, consciously avoiding appearing to be a “black candidate” by rarely speaking directly about inner-city poverty or the entrapment of millions of people of color within the prison-industrial complex. According to an unnamed member of his campaign’s urban committee, after Obama secured the nomination, the committee’s name changed to “the metropolitan issues committee.” Members were instructed not to “talk of race” and to only refer to two classes in their position papers: “the rich” and “the middle class.” This reliance on “symbolic” politics may well indicate how much pressure from below needs to be put on the new administration if it is to change the life opportunities of the working class in all hues and, in particular, the inner city poor.

Part II: Mobilizing from Below to Enact an Economic Justice Agenda

The impressive depth and breadth of Obama’s electoral victory, combined with Democratic gains in both the House and the Senate, provides the possibility of reversing three decades of growing inequality that is the primary cause of an impending global depression. But these electoral gains will prove temporary if the Obama administration does not improve the living standards of middle- and working-class voters. To do so, the new administration will have to govern “big”

and “quick.” While there is short-term consensus in favor of a major stimulus package, some of his centrist Democratic advisers are already warning that long-term spending plans will have to be put on hold, particularly universal health care and the increased taxes on the wealthy originally set to fund the program. And the moderate punditry, led by global-capitalism guru Thomas Friedman, reminds Obama that “excessive regulation” of the financial industry could “strangle” the “entrepreneurial risk-taking spirit of capitalism.”

We are in the midst of a global “liquidity crisis” in which banks will not lend capital out of fear that borrowers will not be able to pay them back. The mainstream media – and the Obama campaign and transition team – does not yet comprehend that this crisis has everything to do with the massive growth in inequality of the past three decades. The policies of deregulation, privatization, and deunionization, supported by both Democratic and Republican administrations, led working- and middle-class Americans to try to maintain their living standards by taking on massive consumer debt and borrowing against their home equity. Once the housing bubble collapsed, so did their purchasing power.

Only activist pressure from below can force an Obama administration to govern in a manner than could secure a Democratic realignment. With the constitutional system of checks and balances and separation of powers consciously aimed at forestalling rapid change, it is no surprise that almost all the reforms identified with the twentieth-century Democratic Party – Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act, the Civil Rights Acts, and Medicare – occurred in the periods 1935-1938 and 1964-66, the only times when the Democrats controlled the presidency, had strong majorities in both chambers of Congress, and had insurgent social movements at their heels.

If upon taking office the Obama administration boldly leads, it could pass major legislation for universal health care, massive investment in green technology, and labor law reform that would transform United States social relations for generations to come. But already the corporate community is mobilizing heavily against the Employee Free Choice Act. As a former community organizer, Obama understands that reforms do not come from the top down; in the past, they arose because moderate elites made concessions to the movements of the unemployed and the CIO in the 1930s and to the civil rights, anti-war, women’s, and welfare rights movements of the 1960s. But while the December sit-down at Republic Windows indicates that a new wave of labor militancy could be in the offing, the strength of the labor movement and the Left is even weaker than they were in 1932, when an economic crisis still demobilized workers fearing losing their jobs if they rocked the boat. Nor does there exist the degree of social

mobilization within excluded communities of color parallel to the vigor of the civil rights movement of 1960.

Specifics of a progressive agenda

Thus, a “realigned” new Democratic majority can only be built if the Obama administration enacts a legislative agenda that reconstructs a new “productive” egalitarian economy. I emphasize “productive” because as this economic crisis should teach us, an economy whose major “wealth” is created by the shuffling of paper assets by “mega-banks,” hedge funds, and corporate law firms will inevitably be divided between a privileged top 10 or 20 percent of credentialed “symbolic manipulators” and a precarious middle and working class who “serve” them. Only an economic system that invests in production for human needs – such as renewable energy, mass transit, and urban infrastructure, school, and housing construction – can generate a sufficient number of “good jobs at good wages.” The infotainment, finance, and service model of “post-industrial” capitalism is vulnerable to continuous speculative bubbles because it does not produce sufficient real value to sustain mass middle-class living standards.

And if the production of “useful goods” is increasingly off-shored, then United States living standards can only be sustained if the rest of the world will lend it the money to run massive trade deficits. If and when East Asian central banks decide that investment in Euros rather than U.S. Treasury bonds is a more secure way to preserve value, the entire United States model of indebted growth could collapse..

The dirty little secret is that aside from the auto industry, it is mostly military-related aerospace and military hardware production that sustains a high-wage manufacturing base in the United States. That base still produces 25 percent of our GDP, while only employing 12 percent of our workforce, whereas the financial industry has those figures reversed.. Such an imbalance between those who produce real value and those who shuffle paper value cannot sustain an egalitarian economic system. Republican intransigence and virulent anti-union sentiment is close to destroying our domestic auto industry. Our domestic parts manufacturers alone employ 650,000 workers – or nearly triple the 230,000 remaining employees of the (once) Big Three – and sizeably in states outside of the Midwest. Should domestic parts suppliers go under with the Big Three, we could well lose several million industrial jobs forever. Even foreign transplants will switch to importing parts and supplies from foreign suppliers. Add in the Big Three auto dealers, who employ several hundred thousand workers, and the magnitude of the problem is clear.

Our other major remaining industrial centers – aerospace and machine tools – are heavily tied to military production. While this is a form of high-wage industrial production, it is



heavily capital intensive and produces goods that have little “multiplier” effect. Tanks and planes are not capital goods – they don’t produce more material goods; rather they either depreciate or are blown up. Thus, the truth that no “strong-on-defense” Democrat speaks is that unless we transition our military production to industrial production for civilian use, we cannot create a new “productive” economy that creates a larger number of high-value-added productive jobs.

Obviously, not all jobs can be outsourced. There are, and will remain, large numbers of people employed in the “infotainment” industry, health care, retail, and the food and hospitality industry, and further unionization could raise the living standards of those employed in these service sectors. But if the purchasers of care and leisure goods are going to be able to pay human wages to their service providers, then there must be enough industrial high-wage jobs to sustain those not working in the service sector.

Only insurgent social movement activity will push the pragmatic Obama and his centrist, technocratic cabinet to govern “big.” While Obama’s web-based network of predominantly white and youthful middle-strata progressives could be activated in favor of “global warming” policies and major investment in green technology, they are unlikely to agitate for the industrial and social policies outlined above, which only mobilization by organized labor, new immigrant communities and excluded inner-city residents could engender. Obama’s victory raised hopes among these communities, but is there the organizational base within them to mobilize quickly around an economic justice agenda? A sense of hope may lead the excluded to engage in more spontaneous acts of disruption that can scare elites into offering legislative change. (FDR’s pre-1935 reforms responded more to the homeless and unemployed movements of 1932-33 and the labor unrest in Toledo, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Seattle of 1934 than to the later emergence of the CIO.) Perhaps we will see urban militancy akin to that of the mid-1960s – though the protests against police brutality that led to mass riots were led by working- and middle-class community activists who no longer reside in the largely impoverished urban ghettos.

Stimulus plan needed now

Even before taking office, the Obama administration confronts the most serious breakdown in the global economy since the Great Depression. Obama’s Treasury department and the Congressional Democratic leadership are likely to agree on a massive two-year stimulus package of at least \$850 billion, but Republicans – perhaps joined by fiscally moderate Southern and Western Democrats – are likely to filibuster against such “massive deficit spending,” particularly major public investment in alternative energy technologies is part of the package.

The Obama administration will have to remind the American public that Ronald Reagan ran deficits equal to seven percent of the GDP in each of 1981 and 82 (or the equivalent of \$680 billion per year [!] in today’s dollars),

in the face of a much less severe recession. In addition, the Obama administration must press Congress to implement a major anti-foreclosure program (similar to FDR’s Home Loan Corporation), as the income stream from homeowner payments on refinanced, affordable mortgages should significantly increase the value of the toxic assets of “securitized mortgages.” The Bush administration’s failure to protect the foreclosed (particularly those who could pay a reasonable renegotiated mortgage rate on a readjusted home value) explains in large measure its utter inability to improve the balance sheets of major financial institutions.

The stimulus package should include major government funding of job-training in the inner cities (in green technologies, for example) and of opportunities for both GIs and displaced workers to return to university as full-time students (and for women on TANF to fulfill their “workfare” requirements through secondary and higher education pursuits). While affluent suburbs provide their residents superb public education and public services, federal cutbacks in aid to states and municipalities has worsened the life opportunities of inner city residents. With all but seven states’ budgets in the red, cuts in social services and public-sector layoffs will devastate already hard-hit communities.

The inefficient and inequitable United States health care system cries out for replacement by a universal and cost-efficient alternative. If private insurance administrative and advertising costs of 25 percent on the health care dollar could be reduced to Medicaid and Medicare’s three percent administrative overhead, both universal and affordable coverage would be achieved. Even securing “opt-out” provisions from the administration’s “pay or play” system of private insurance would be an improvement. Such “opt-outs” would allow states to create their own single-payer systems and enable Medicare or the federal employees health plan to market to employers as a lower-cost alternative to private group plans.

Looking at the revenue side

But how to pay for all this? The Obama administration should reverse not only the Bush tax cuts, but also the Reagan cuts in marginal rates on high-income earners, which would each return some \$300 billion in revenues to the national fisc. In addition, abolishing the preferential 15 percent tax rate on hedge fund and private equity managers’ earnings could garner another \$100 billion in annual revenues. Truly ending the war in Iraq should save \$100 billion per annum; a 1/3 cutback in United States military bases abroad and an end to Cold War era plans to build a next generation of fighters and an anti-ballistic missile defense could save \$216 billion in federal revenue per year.

The military budget is hideously oversized for a nation that claims armaments are necessary for defense and not defense of empire. One fights terrorism by intelligence and espionage cooperation among states and via a multilateral diplomatic strategy that provides hope for the billions who still live under authoritarian governments and in extreme poverty. Obama’s call to send more United States troops to

Afghanistan ignores the lessons of the Soviet experience: that foreign military presence only elevates the forces of Islamic fundamentalism into national resistance fighters.

When the ponzi scheme of “securitized mortgages” collapsed with the end of the irrational run-up in housing prices, the federal government had to bail out Bear Stearns, then Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and then AIG. American capitalism has “privatized” gain but “socialized” risk. Yet if risk is to be “socialized,” then so should investments. The Obama administration should not only demand equity shares in the banks and corporations that are bailed out by the public treasury, but should also require that consumer, worker, and government representatives be added to the boards of directors of corporations receiving government aid. And the administration must stick to the goal of re-regulating the finance industry so that it serves the interest of the productive economy and not those of run-amok speculators.

A “new New Deal” would have to restructure international economic institutions so that they raise-up international labor, living, human rights, and environmental standards. In large part, Obama owes his victory in the key battleground states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Pennsylvania to the efforts of one of the few integrated institutions in the United States: the American labor movement. Restoring the right to organize unions (a right that no longer exists in practice in the United States) is a key policy component in the battle against economic inequality. Given the already massive corporate and media offensive already launched against the Employee Free Choice Act, Obama will have to place the entire prestige of his presidency behind the legislation. He must use the bully pulpit to explain to the American public that NLRB elections are not “free” – not when the time lag between petitioning and the election works in management’s favor, allowing management to intimidate workers and require them to attend anti-union meetings and leaves management free to fire pro-union workers with impunity.

What’s next for the democratic Left?

An Obama presidential victory by no means guarantees the bold policy initiatives necessary to restore equity with growth to the United States economy. His campaign did not advocate major defense cuts, progressive tax reform, and significant expansion of public provision. But FDR did not campaign on bold solutions in 1932. It was pressure from below that forced FDR’s hand. Similarly, Obama’s victory may provide space for social movements to agitate in favor of economic justice and a democratic foreign policy. Let us hope that as a president who understands the process of social change, Obama will realize that those demanding the most from his administration are those who can best help him succeed in office.

Obama, a supreme pragmatist, will either respond to the balance of social forces that press upon his administration or ignore them in the absence of pressure. Thus, the work of DSA, YDS, and the rest of the democratic Left has just begun. We must join with our allies in the labor movement, communities of color, and immigrants rights groups to advance the trans-

formative social and economic policies outlined above and in DSA’s Economic Justice Agenda (see www.dsausa.org). And we should begin to gear up to defend progressive House and Senate gains made in the 2006 and 2008 elections and replace Republicans and conservative Democratic officials at every level of our federal government. To do this, DSA and YDS must not only build more capacity on the ground, but also build working relations with such groups as Progressive Democrats of America as well as trade unions and community organizations active in progressive electoral politics.

What will be the unique “value-added” of DSA and YDS in these broad coalition efforts to press the Obama administration from the left? As all crucial economic justice reforms – universal national health care, EFCA, massive public investment in green technology, and inner city infrastructure – involve state action to limit the prerogatives of corporate capital, the Right will charge these reforms as being “socialist.” DSA’s role is to educate the American public as to the historic role of socialist-inspired reforms in rendering mixed economies less capitalist and more democratic. Until more average Americans say, “What’s wrong with socialism?” even a less exceptional and more humane American democratic capitalism will remain a utopian dream.

Joseph M. Schwartz, a vice chair of Democratic Socialists of America, teaches politics at Temple University. His most recent book is The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America (Routledge, 2008). Parts of this article are revised from “Memo to Obama,” which will appear in the January-February issue of Tikkun magazine.



Members of Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), DSA’s youth affiliate, demonstrate with other progressives outside the Bank of America branch in Union Square (New York City), as part of a nationwide action in support of the striking/laid-off Republic Windows and Doors workers in Chicago. Republic blamed its closing on Bank of America, which had been “bailed out” though the Treasury Department’s TARP funds, saying it refused to continue lending to them. The very next day, Bank of America announced that it would lend the company the funds to cover the workers’ demands – sixty days of severance pay, earned vacation pay, and two months of health insurance coverage. Photo: Maria Svart

What We Did in the Election

compiled by Barbara Joye

As “the left wing of the possible,” DSA pursues a two-pronged strategy: building an independent progressive movement while encouraging our members to participate in electoral campaigns for candidates who will fight for policies that strengthen popular forces and weaken the grip of capital.

For the past year, especially following the nomination of Barack Obama, many DSA members worked energetically on the presidential campaign, especially in swing states, as well as in behalf of an array of candidates for U.S. House and Senate, and state and local offices. Together with Democratic Party campaign staff or independent community groups, we registered voters, phone banked, knocked on doors, and helped organize other volunteers. We are now reflecting on that experience while gearing up for what we always knew would be the next, harder, step: working in coalitions to push the new administration to enact a progressive agenda.

I asked several DSA and YDS leaders to report on their electoral work this year and its significance for our organization. The response was quite positive, as most people had tasted victory, perhaps for the first time in a while.

Asians, Latinos, union members, antiwar and youth voters, many voting for the first time. “Sacramento DSA is proud to have played an active role in this campaign, working through the Sacramento Progressive Alliance...in cooperation with Progressives for Obama.” At Sacramento State University, DSA members tabled and conducted voter registration, raised funds, rallied, and sponsored a progressive forum with candidates for a variety of offices. One of the candidates for state Assembly won by a narrow margin. What’s more, says Campbell, “Because we were already up and tabling, we became a center for the ‘No on 8’ campaign [Proposition 8 prohibits gay marriage] on campus, distributing literature, bumper stickers, and signs when no one else had them.”

By contrast, DSA members in **Atlanta** worked separately with a variety of organizations on various aspects of the presidential and senatorial elections: canvassing with the Democratic Party, phone banking with the North Georgia Labor Council and True Majority, registering voters with Women’s Action for New Directions, dropping banners on expressway overpasses, and helping the NAACP monitor the voting process.

“The experience was good,” says Carol Coney, a poll monitor. “If I hadn’t been there when polls opened at 7 a.m. to report that the computers were all down, who knows how long it would have taken to get them on line? I had Election Protection at that precinct within 20 minutes. It was good teamwork, and I felt good that the computers were only down for the first hour.” Unfortunately, even with our help, neither Obama nor the liberal senatorial candidate Jim Martin – who could have helped the Democrats achieve a filibuster-proof majority – were able to overcome the superior Republican organization in the state. Jorge traveled twice to North Carolina during the primaries to organize Latino voter registration in Winston Salem and Charlotte and help deliver votes that proved key to the Obama campaign and later the governor’s and senatorial races in that state.

In **Ithaca**, New York, Teresa Alt reports that DSA and single-payer activists had first supported Eric Massa when he barely lost his first bid for Congress in 2006. In addition to being an advocate of single payer health care, Massa is a retired career Navy officer who wants to get out of Iraq and supports fair trade. This year a coalition of DSA, single-payer backers, PDA, and the peace movement mobilized early in the campaign, helping raise funds at a key point. “We are delighted to announce that he won by a little over 5,000 votes,” says Alt.

Detroit DSA members focused on local and state races in



Jim Shoch, Leisa Falkner-Barns, Bill Fletcher, and Congressional Candidate Bill Dursto at a Progressive Forum at Sacramento State University, October 9.

Even in **Alaska**, which went for McCain/Palin and barely managed to elect Democrat Mark Begich to the Senate, DSA Local Secretary/Treasurer Dick Ferris says that “overall,...progressive Democrats made gains” they can build on. They helped elect some members of the state legislature, and DSA members will be meeting with state representatives “to promote a progressive agenda for Alaska.”

Duane Campbell of **Sacramento** DSA points out that Obama’s victory resulted from an unprecedented mobilization of progressive sectors of the electorate – blacks, whites,

which a progressive Democrat was running for an open seat – a setting where the efforts of a small but disciplined group could provide the margin of victory and also contribute to turnout for the national races. After interviewing candidates to make sure their views on labor issues, health care, the environment, living wage, and progressive taxation ran parallel to ours, they voted to support four candidates for state representative. Their fundraising party that raised \$6500 provided critical seed money, as most contributions from progressive sources had already gone to candidates for national office. With steady help from DSA campaign volunteers, all four candidates won, despite redbaiting of one by the *Detroit Free Press* (which accused her of being funded mainly by radical groups like DSA) and robo-calls accusing another candidate of being a socialist.

Detroit DSA also did statewide mailings and e-mail blasts to members, urging them to vote for three lesser-known candidates running for local offices, all three of whom won. Finally, in the last three weeks of the campaign, DSA was approached by a county commission candidate who needed money for one last mailing to the voters in his district. He promised to work for a countywide living wage ordinance if elected, so the chapter conducted an internet fundraiser which collected \$500 for him in just one week. He won by a narrow margin.

Dave Anderson played a significant role in **Colorado**, despite having no functioning local right now. He served as a precinct chair and on the steering committee of the local Progressive Democrats. They defeated two of three anti-labor initiatives that were on the ballot (including the first defeat of a right-to-work law since the 1970s) and expect the third to be struck down in court. “Maybe now we’re headed to a period where being a socialist publicly means more,” he comments. “Those big questions are being raised, like what do you do with the auto industry?”

In **Columbus**, Ohio, DSA members campaigned for both Obama and congressional candidate Mary Jo Kilroy, who, after a suspenseful count of provisional ballots was declared the winner in December, raising the Democrats’ majority in the House to 257. Another candidate supported by a DSA member but not by the national Democratic party lost in a different district.

Some YDS members were very active in their home states or elsewhere. In Rhode Island, Will Emmons of **Brown University** served as the volunteer organizer for a state representative’s re-election campaign. The representative, David Segal, had started his political career by getting elected to the Providence city council at age 22 as a Green Party member and, according to Emmons, “acts as a megaphone for progressive organizations around the state,” helping them accomplish their goals. “I thought working for Dave was a good use of my time because we need folks on the inside of the political system standing up to racist anti-immigrant legislation, fighting for renewable energy and green jobs, advocating for workers’ and union rights, and arguing for a robust public sphere,” says Emmons, although he acknowledges that most

Democratic candidates are not as progressive as Segal.

New York DSA and YDS members were especially active. Some got up “at the crack of dawn,” says Jeff Gold, to take buses to support Obama in various locations in Pennsylvania, sometimes side by side with experienced trade unionists from Working America and at other times with first-time campaign volunteers. They also worked with the social democratic Working Families Party, which ran much of the New York Democrats’ field operations, to help the Democrats win their first majority in the state legislature since the mid-1960s (although at press time effective Democratic control of the state Senate is in doubt due to threatened defection by a group of conservative Democrats). DSA members living in rent-regulated housing in Queens and Long Island were especially active in behalf of pro-tenant Democrats on the WFP ballot line. Another member traveled all the way to south Florida to help turn out Jewish voters for Obama, especially during early voting, when it was easier to address problems at the polls.

Many of the DSA members who reported their experiences said they enjoyed working with a wide variety of people and the opportunity to see the awesome Obama campaign machine in action. They were exhilarated by the unprecedented enthusiasm expressed by newly energized volunteers and voters. “I’m a seasoned volunteer of 25 years..., but it was different this time,” said one. They strengthened ties with local grassroots organizations, and helped to elect some progressives who, we hope, will support DSA’s Economic Justice Agenda. But to paraphrase FDR, now we have to get out and make them do it.

The 2009 **DSA National Convention** will be held November 13-15 in Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. The convention site is adjacent to the Northwestern University campus.

DSA activists and others interested in the convention should mark their 2009 calendars now. The convention will provide an opportunity to evaluate the work of the new administration and Congress in carrying out a progressive agenda, as well as map strategy for the democratic Left in the struggle for economic and social democracy.

Any DSA member in good standing is eligible to be a delegate. Delegates are elected from local DSA groups and at-large next summer and early fall.

A block of rooms will be available for participants at special reduced rates. As the program of the convention develops over the next few months, a special page on DSA’s web site will provide information on the agenda, documents, serving as a delegate, making room reservations, and other convention particulars.

Those interested in attending as delegates or observers can write to Frank Llewellyn at the national office or email him at fllewellyn@dsausa.org.

Even More than Militant Unions, U.S. Needs a Working People's Movement, Fletcher & Gapasin Say

By Michael Hirsch

Bill Fletcher Jr. inscribed in my copy of his new book: "Never forget the class struggle." Wise words to readers who at their best treat the war of the classes as a Sunday catechism.

That's why if there is one analysis of the labor movement people should own and read and pass around this year, it's *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice* (University of California Press, 2008), co-authored with Fernando Gapasin. The authors, a longtime union organizer and quondam top assistant to the AFL-CIO's John Sweeney, and a Central Labor Council president and labor educator, come armed with critical and informed insiders' views not only of the strengths and limitations of American trade unions but also of the international capitalist context in which a war against working people is fought every day. They understand that unions, as institutions of resistance in that war, need to speak for more than their dues-paying members in bargaining, grievance handling and political action but also need to have a vision of fighting alongside and mobilizing working people as a whole.

For the authors, the new world of capitalist globalization holds no place for the Gompersian notion of cooperation with capital on mutual interests. It doesn't work anymore, if it ever did episodically and if working people can even locate business partners willing to collaborate. What's needed are unions that go beyond representing their members to representing a class.

Their vision entails more than taking sides on the ostensibly divisive and irreconcilable issue of organizing vs. politics that divided the AFL-CIO majority from those breakaway unions that formed Change to Win (CtW) in 2005. They think nothing short of what they call "social justice unionism" can survive in the new century. That's a movement including all those who work, plus the unemployed. It's where unions don't organize solely by craft, by industry or even by sector – the CtW model – so much as city by city, building social blocs and contending for power.

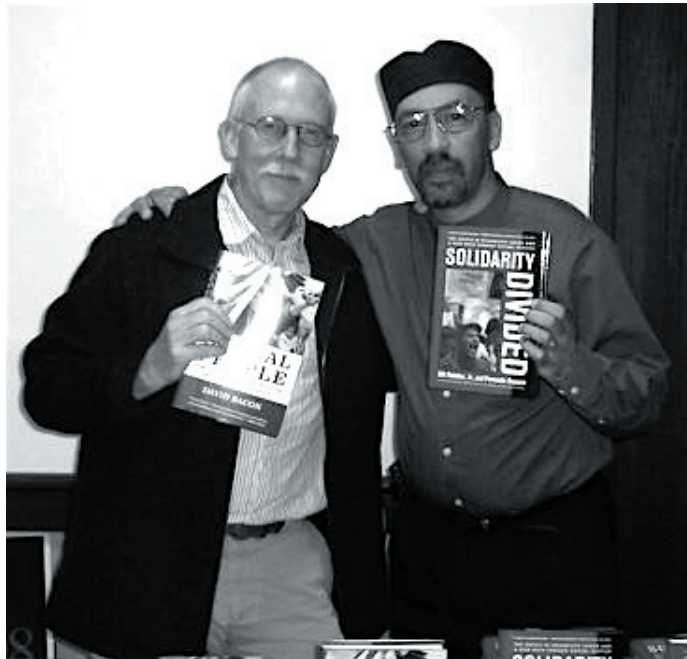
They even chastise the labor federations for short-shrifting the Central Labor Councils, venerable citywide institutions perfectly situated to organize by geography, not simply by sector, and they counterpoise to industrial or sectoral organizing the earlier Union Cities effort and the Jobs for Justice (JwJ) model as "a means for labor activists to connect to struggles outside of the normal parameters of the union movement." They call JwJ "an interesting experiment, serving both as a mass organization for individuals who wanted to be active but had been blocked by the bureaucracy of their unions and as a means of expanding the notion of workers' rights."

They chastise the international labor federations for being slow to fight multinational corporations across borders even as capital has gone on to re-organize the world, creating new forms of imperial domination and provoking new kinds of wars.

While much of the book deals with the shared weaknesses of much of the union movement, the authors are especially critical of the CtW federation for sounding like fired-up "revolutionary socialists" while in practice tamping down the heat and announcing, as SEIU President Andy Stern did, that "class struggle is a thing of the past." They appropriately knock Stern for offering "unions that solve problems, not create problems" to would-be business partners.

For the authors, it's class struggle waged by business that forces unions to fight, and limits what even supine labor leaders would otherwise concede. No amount of tripartitism, or company-union-government cooperation, as exemplified by the current industrial relations system in Ireland, can secure the future for today's unions. Only an effort to organize militantly and class-wide can do that.

One such opportunity squandered was on behalf of Katrina victims. Instead of the effort that did go on – a costly if simple act of charity the authors do commend – help could have been less short-term and one-shot, but instead aimed at building a movement and serving as a teachable moment: one that showed how capital is mismanaging, how neoliberalism was



David Bacon and Bill Fletcher conveniently pose with their books, which are reviewed in this issue.

bankrupt and how its victims are everywhere, even among the invisible poor of the ninth ward. It's the same paradigm the authors use to fault the unions, including the Sweeney leadership, for not railing against the Clinton administration's support for "welfare reform," of which the TANF program is correctly seen as "an attack on the poorest sections of the working class." Instead of at minimum speaking out, the labor movement let it happen. "An injury to one" [to make clearer the K of L / IWW allusion] was myopically seen as somebody else's problem.

So what must unions do? Lots of things. They need to involve their members not just in mobilizations but also in education and in shop-floor activism and decision-making. They need to understand that "class struggle" is not an apocalyptic Marxist wet dream, but a permanent reality for working people that can only be mediated or reversed by contesting for power. They argue that unions can no longer – even for their own survival – limit their mission to representing their members or even attaining an uptick in membership but must instead engage the class. They also think unions are doomed without a revival of a consciously left labor current.

In some ways, the authors overreach, as when they reduce grievance handling from one level of struggle to an exclusively routinized "process" that traps even once – or would-be – militant practitioners. While that's sadly factual in the main, there are also stewards, elected officials and rank-and-file activists who know to use the contract as a weapon, and the actual grievance-handling machinery as one way to employ that weapon.

Fletcher and Gapasin also, while criticizing one union for "narrowing its views to issues of seniority," themselves take a narrow view of the 1968 teachers strike in New York, where they fault the teachers for striking "in effect, against the communities of color." There is no question that unions need to "reconceptualize their relationships with other progressive social movements," including the black freedom movement, as the authors say – something that has been ongoing at least since the mid-1990s. But any union that hopes to speak and act for more than just the current generation of dues payers, yet doesn't act in defense of basic due process in job transfers and firings – what the teachers saw themselves as up against in 1968 – sells out its own present members. Where's the value-added in trading one for the other?

Worst of all, Fletcher and Gapasin tend to fetishize the strengths and the wisdom of the trade union left of the 1940s, claiming that the post-war anti-communist purge of radicals was key to housebreaking labor militancy. As a source, they solely cite Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin's highly problematic work, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions*, in declaring that Communist-led unions were both more effective on bread-and-butter issues and more democratic than their socialist, non- or anti-Communist rivals. For this reviewer, the contrast is a wash.

None of the "sides" was committed to – if not mostly clueless about – how to build what the authors say was wanted: "a combative, class-conscious industrial union movement" in

the post-war period. Given the actually existing, fragmented left of the time and the strength and raging anti-union biases of business, all factions – CPers, socialists, radicals, Trotskyists, anarchists, Reutherites – better or worse, would have been at sea facing down the American Century leviathan. Having more lefties surviving as shop floor militants would have been a better problem; it would certainly have left more in the way of a birthright to the virtually orphaned New Left generation of the 1960s. Absent any counterarguments about the salience of class and unions, the New Left of the 1960s bought into C. Wright Mills's derisive depiction of a reigning "labor metaphysic," that was said to validate trade union leaders' potential, no matter their politics. While Mills was on to something, he clearly overstated. We'd have been better served if there were more than the handful of radical labor militants extant who knew he exaggerated and could say so with authority. No matter. Even without a purge of the mostly Communist Party left, big capital would still have called the shots.

At bottom, business didn't need collaborators in the postwar period. Nor were they looking for any. The Treaty of Detroit was convenient and cost effective. Like Mario Puzo's *Godfather*, business made an offer labor couldn't refuse – at least not then.

Still the authors are on surer ground about what needs doing today. They want a labor movement that isn't shy about public debate – something neither side in the AFL-CIO/CtW split acted on before the split. Instead of launching monologued broadsides, a better movement would have encouraged discussion about its future. It would have involved the ranks, rather than keeping discussion as a rarified exchange of position papers that never engaged an argument. It would continue what JwJ does in microcosm: the hard job of working on long-term institution building with anyone who would work with them. It would organize, speak for, listen to and involve every working woman and man, including – and not just including – its current members.

Like class struggle, that's also something never to forget.

Michael Hirsch is a labor journalist and union staffer in New York City. A member of the National Political Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America, he is on the editorial boards of New Politics and Democratic Left. This review appeared on ZNet in October 2008.

An edited version of DSA vice-chair Elaine Bernard's article, "The State of U.S. Labor and Building Union Power," from *Democratic Left's* fall issue (and also posted on DSA's Talking Union Blog) has been posted on the AFL-CIO website as part of their Point of View series. Two local union publications representing firefighters and police officers have also asked for and received permission to run the piece.

Illegal People: ***How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*** **by David Bacon (Beacon, 2008)**

Reviewed by Duane Campbell

On May 16, 2008, Maria Isabel Vasquez Jiminez, a 17-year old, pregnant undocumented worker, collapsed in the 105-degree heat while working with her husband in the fields near Stockton, California. She was one of at least six workers to die this summer from heat stroke in California's fields.

Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants, the new book by well-known labor journalist David Bacon, helps us to understand the economic processes and human tragedies which drive workers to migrate, sometimes to their death.

Illegal People provides honest, detailed and vivid accounts of how migration works, whom it exploits, its effect on labor, and the resulting crisis in both the sending and the receiving countries. Through interviews and on-the-spot reporting from both impoverished communities abroad and U.S. immigrant workplaces and neighborhoods, Bacon shows how the United States' trade and economic policies create conditions that displace communities and set migration into motion.

In developing countries such as Mexico and Guatemala, economic restructuring plans imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the trade policies of NAFTA, FTAA, and GATT have led to unemployment rates of over 25 percent. Presently unrestrained by governments, such neo-liberal (or global corporate capitalist) policies have devastated the countryside in Mexico, ending federal subsidies for corn, sugar, and produce and stopping development projects, driving thousands off their lands. This has led to the impoverishment of the vast majority and pushed millions to migrate, primarily to the U.S., in search of food and employment. Then, after creating migration, we make the immigrant worker "illegal" in order to provide more profits for corporations. Bacon argues, "In the global economy, people are displaced because the economies of their countries of origin are transformed to enable corporations and national elites to transfer wealth out."

Readers will learn some economics and come to understand trade policy. In Chapter 3, "Displacement and Migration," Bacon describes how NAFTA and neo-liberalism produced migration. NAFTA increased employment and exploitation in the low-wage Maquiladora sector along the U.S.-Mexican border. The Mexican agricultural sector suffered a steady loss of jobs, and today Mexico must even import corn to feed its people. Millions come to the U.S. driven out by increasing poverty and unemployment in their home countries – both created and re-created by capitalist systems. NAFTA is just the name of one policy of a capitalism where capital is free to move from country to country in search of profits while workers are not free to move from country to country in search of jobs, a living wage, or economic justice – at least, not legally. That is, in part, why DSA has a Renegotiate NAFTA petition at <http://www.renegotiatenafta.org/>.

Illegal People draws upon the author's extensive history reporting on labor and on immigration issues to describe several of the nuances of migration which those not engaged in the struggle may miss, including the role of indigenous people from areas such as Oaxaca and several of the complex divisions on immigration policy within U.S. major unions. He argues that "labor support for immigrant rights was not based upon ideology or morality, but on pragmatic considerations. Immigrants today are the backbone of organizing drives from the Smithfield pork plant in North Carolina, to Houston janitors and Cintas industrial laundry workers." I was pleased to find that Bacon included the important role of migration from the Philippines and such union leaders as Philip Vera Cruz in Chapter 7, "Illegal People or Illegal Work?"

As long as we have a rich country in the North and severe poverty and repression of indigenous communities and labor in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, people are going to flee, looking for work to feed their families, just as Germans, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Irish, Poles, and Russians did from 1840-1920. But times are tough for working people, particularly for the approximately 12 million immigrants among us, as the U.S. is experiencing a recession and the unemployment rate reached 5.7 percent in July.

Unless we find some way to end capitalist expansion, migration will continue. The critical issues are the terms and conditions of migration and how migration will affect current labor unions and labor markets. We need to understand the mechanisms and problems of this system, such as IRCA (1986), the Bracero Program, and H2A workers, because these programs are used as debating points in the current controversies. *Illegal People* puts a human face on those debates and clearly exposes the system that creates the problem.

Progressive movements have a common interest in resisting the current campaigns of racism and terror launched against immigrant communities. We have much to gain from union solidarity and building a united workers movement. And we have much to lose from the divisive and oppressive police state tactics of the Immigration Service and the Border Patrol. The militarization of the border has caused hundreds more deaths of innocents seeking to feed their families—and no real reduction in immigration, a clear failure of the policy. But while we need to combat all the results of the policy, we first need to understand "how globalization creates migration and criminalizes immigrants."

DSA Honorary Chair Barbara Ehrenrich says, "*Illegal People* documents how undocumented workers have become the world's most exploited workforce – subject to raids and arrests, forced to work at low pay and under miserable conditions, and prevented from organizing on their own behalf." A good recommendation.

In October, the Richmond Times Dispatch published a column by Ross Mackenzie that, in the process of trashing Obama, referred to DSA as “quasi-Communist.” DSA National Director Frank Llewellyn responded with an explanation of democratic socialism that may be useful to our members in discussing what we stand for with an unenlightened public.

Socialism is not Communism

Ross Mackenzie’s column, *McCain, Obama and ‘the Change We Need’* for the most part simply repeats the standard talking points of the McCain campaign and the Republican right. Unfortunately he threw in a few extra talking points about Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) that he picked up from even more extreme sources without bothering to engage in the fact checking that is the hallmark of good journalism....

Mr. Mackenzie [describes] our organization as “quasi-Communist” – with a capital C. This Joe McCarthy-style smear is a direct attempt to link us to the politics and political orientation of the now (happily) defunct Soviet Union. A journalist of Mr. Mackenzie’s age and experience cannot possibly be so uninformed as to not know the difference between democratic socialists and Communists. Even a few minutes research could have corrected the error.

Democratic socialists seek to strengthen, not harm, our society by extending democracy to our major economic institutions so they will be accountable to and work for the good of all rather than for the profits of a small elite. We are unfortunately seeing today the disastrous results of the opposite policy.

Democratic socialists believe in democratizing control over corporate behavior by giving workers and consumers a democratic voice in how these powerful firms are governed.

We are members of the Socialist International, a worldwide organization of more than 140 organizations, that includes currently or recently governing parties in Great Britain, Germany, France, Spain, and other nations that are allies of the United States. Only in the United States have rightwing propagandists been able to confuse the public about the nature of democratic socialism by equating it with authoritarian communism.

Democratic socialists have consistently defended political and civil liberties and argue that only by extending democracy into economic life can the full promise of democracy be realized. In addition, contrary to Mr. Mackenzie’s McCarthyite equation of socialism with authoritarian Communism, the social democratic, labor, and socialist parties of Europe staunchly opposed repressive Communist regimes as being antithetical to the values of democratic socialism.

Mr. Mackenzie’s uniformed journalism is typical of the discussion we have witnessed since the McCain campaign inserted socialism into the political debate. The recent financial bailout – something designed to preserve the basic capitalist structure of society (a bailout socialists opposed) – has been routinely described as socialist. The

progressive income tax, a reform instituted during the time of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, is now being labeled as socialist. Refundable tax credits, signed into law by Ronald Reagan in the form of the earned income tax credit, and a feature of John McCain’s poorly thought-out health care proposal, are described as socialist.

If journalists are going to use the socialist label as something more than a curse word, they ought to learn just a little bit about what socialism means today. There exists a rich, but often overlooked, democratic socialist tradition in the United States, upheld by such staunch democrats as Eugene Debs, Helen Keller, Norman Thomas, Walter Reuther, Michael Harrington, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Socialists played a key role in the building of the labor, civil rights, and feminist movements – all of which enriched American democracy. Throughout the twentieth century, many American cities elected socialist mayors who were known for good government, and today, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who identifies himself as a democratic socialist, is considered his state’s most popular elected official. Democratic socialist parties have brought universal high-quality health care to the people of all other developed nations, alongside an array of other social programs, such as universal pre-school in France and generous paternity and maternity leave in Scandinavia. These programs have raised the quality of life for all people in those countries. The United States suffers from a shorter life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, and far greater economic inequality than in the countries with strong democratic socialist parties.

Mr. Mackenzie, along with your readers who would like to learn what American socialists’ believe in and work for today, should visit our Website, www.dsusa.org.



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- Half of all bankruptcies are due to medical bills — and most of those people were covered.
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