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## **DSA:** **Fronting for the Democrats**

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## **“Democratic Socialism” in the Service of U.S. Imperialism**



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## **Imperialist Social Democracy vs. Black Liberation**



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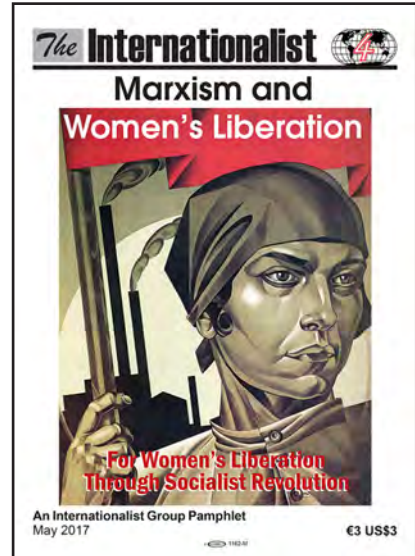
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# Revolutionary Marxism vs. Sanders “Socialism” for Democrats

## The ABCs of the DSA

*This article was first produced as a supplement to The Internationalist, of which over 180 copies were sold at the national convention of the DSA in Chicago on August 4-6. It was reprinted in The Internationalist No. 50, Winter 2017.*

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is proclaiming that it has surpassed 25,000 members on the eve of its national convention in Chicago at the beginning of August. This is almost quadruple the number it claimed only 15 months ago, and would make it the largest self-styled socialist organization in the United States since the late 1940s. DSA leaders are ecstatic. Vice-chair Joseph Schwartz and prominent DSA leftist Bhaskar Sunkara (the founder of *Jacobin* magazine) declare, “This is the most promising moment for the socialist left in decades” (“What Should Socialists Do?” *Jacobin*, 1 August).

So why have thousands of new members, many of them young people, suddenly decided to join a group describing itself as “democratic socialist”? Why, in particular, have “millennials” been drawn into this staid social-democratic organization that is so embedded in the two-party capitalist political system of the United States that it has long been known as the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America?

Above all, the sudden expansion of the DSA reflects the campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination by Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, who calls himself an “independent” and “democratic socialist” while being a long-time member of the Democratic Party caucus in Congress. Clearly, the DSA has picked up a significant number of disappointed Bernieites, who despaired when he lost the nomination to Hillary Clinton and even more when Donald Trump was elected president. According to DSA national director Maria Svart, membership went from 6,500 in May 2016 to 14,000 on election day in November, and nearly doubled again since then.

More generally, this is a reflection of the continuing worldwide economic crisis that opened with the financial crash of 2007-08. That exposed the bankruptcy of capitalism and led to increased interest in socialism and communism, but also to the growth of bourgeois populist currents of the left (Sanders, SYRIZA in Greece) and right (Trump), as well as violent racist and fascist political currents. But many populist movements arose quickly and then disappeared, including the “Arab Spring,” the “Indignados” in southern Europe and “Occupy Wall Street” in the U.S. The outpouring of Black Lives Matter protests rose and subsided, while racist police murder continues unabated.

Already in 2008, millions of liberal youth were attracted by Barack Obama’s message of “hope” and “change” and voted for the Democrats. So did African American, Latino and white working people and immigrants. Their hopes were dashed as Obama shoveled trillions of dollars to bail out the bankers and became deporter-in-chief. In 2016, Bernie Sanders won the mil-

**BERNIE NEEDS YOU  
TO BUILD A  
SOCIALIST MOVEMENT!**



### **Social-patriotism (& Democratic Party), anyone?**

lennial vote. When he lost to Clinton, many abstained, some went to Green Party candidate Jill Stein, a minority voted for Hillary while holding their noses at the stench of Wall Street cash, and sectors of white workers who had voted for Obama now voted for Trump to protest the Democrats’ job-killing policies.

Ever since the 1930s New Deal, the Democratic Party has held struggles of labor, immigrants, black and poor people in check, chaining them to a wing of the ruling class. This domination by one of the main capitalist parties has been the single greatest obstacle to militant class struggle in the United States. Yet at this crucial moment when the Democrats’ stranglehold has been greatly weakened, the vast majority of the U.S. left seeks to channel the massive discontent back into bourgeois politics, whether pressuring the Democratic Party from within by supporting Sanders or touting homes for homeless Democrats like the Greens.

The Democratic Socialists of America is perhaps the most successful of various opportunist leftist groups seeking to cash

# DSA Called the Cops on Trotskyists

The article “The ABCs of the DSA” printed here was evidently considered sufficiently dangerous by the Democratic Socialists of America that they repeatedly called the cops against our comrades for distributing it outside their convention, held August 4-6 at the University of Illinois Chicago campus. When Internationalist Group supporters asked DSA door-minders if there was an area where we could set up a literature table, they immediately called campus security, which forbade our comrades from distributing literature anywhere on campus.

The IG sales team was ordered to an area on the public sidewalk and then ordered to move behind a line on the sidewalk “one square further away.” But this was evidently considered too lenient by the DSA, as after each of several interactions at our literature table the notorious Chicago Police Department and Cook County Sheriffs showed up, on two occasions with a van.

For the social democrats, it really is second nature to use the cops and other repressive forces to try to silence communists. After a New York DSAer posted a photo on Facebook showing our literature outside the meeting, DSA Deputy Director David Duhalde boasted “I am a social demo-



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group literature table outside DSA convention at University of Illinois Chicago campus, August 5. Social democrats called campus security, Chicago police and Cook County sheriffs on the Trotskyists.**

cratic enforcer extraordinaire.” Another DSAer wrote, “We’ll get our Marshalls all over this.” In a self-conscious stab at irony, another wrote, referring to an IG salesperson in the photo, “I’m pretty sure it’s basically Karl Liebknecht. Please don’t murder him.”

Over the next days, on multiple occasions groups of DSAers marched past our table chanting “We killed Rosa!” (Together with Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg was murdered in 1919 on the orders of the German Social Democratic government of Friedrich Ebert and his “bloodhound” war minister, Gustav Noske.) This menacing filth is something that only wannabe Noskes would find funny.

Our article clearly struck a nerve: one DSAer spat on it, another tore it out of a comrade’s hand and threw it in the trash. Minders led new members away from our table by the hand to stop them talking with us. This vile display revolted some

of the DSA’s new members, who thought that discussing radical ideas might be something you’d do at a “socialist” conference, and wanted to hear what the Trotskyists had to say.

It’s all business as usual for these oh-so “democratic socialists,” but it can scarcely shield them, or the capitalist order they so loyally help “enforce,” from revolutionary criticism. ■

in on the crisis of the mainstream bourgeois parties. But the DSA’s explosive growth, while indicating that “socialism” is no longer the drop-dead epithet of the past, does *not* signify a break from bourgeois liberalism, or even from the Democratic Party. Even less is it support for socialist revolution to overthrow the capitalist system of racism, poverty and war. In fact, with their talk of “democratic socialism,” the leaders of the DSA (including its “left” wing) are building a virulently anti-communist, social-democratic *obstacle to revolution*.

In contrast, the Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, fights for a sharp *class break with capitalist politics* and to forge a party to lead a revolutionary struggle for workers rule. This call has been raised in the unions by militants of Class Struggle Education Workers in New York and Class Struggle Workers – Portland (Oregon), and taken up by Painters Local 10 in Portland which called in August 2016, at the height of last year’s election campaign, to break with all the bosses’ parties and build a class-struggle workers party.

## Social Democrats Bail Out Crisis-Wracked Democrats

Anyone paying attention to politics knows the Democratic Party is in big trouble. Economic devastation, skyrocketing inequality, racist police terror, unabated attacks on workers’ rights and jobs, endless war, mass deportations – this was the balance sheet of the demagogic promises of the Obama administration. Despite his efforts, not even “socialist” Sanders could remedy the tarnished reputation of the Democrats. Assuming Wall Street warmonger Hillary Clinton was a shoo-in to the White House, they were blind-sided when many hard-hit working-class Obama voters out of desperation voted for Donald Trump hoping the maverick would shake things up.

Immediately following the election, reflecting the Republican candidate’s campaign themes, racist attacks escalated across the country. On entering office in January, Trump launched his vile campaign to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. This set off an explosion of outrage among liberal and leftist young people, who rushed to the airports in the thousands to protest. The musty

Democrats have tried to capitalize on that anger, casting themselves in the improbable role as “The Resistance” – a band of beret-bedecked underground fighters (as if). They have been aided by the reformist left which hails Democratic rallies and marches that pretend to champion women’s and immigrants’ rights.

To the Democratic politicians, their defeat was inexplicable. Since November they have been desperately seeking a new “message” to sell their brand. Their main pitch is labeling Trump as a puppet of the Russians. Sounding like 1980s-era Reaganite Republicans, they denounce him as a “traitor” for selling out to Moscow. Bernie Sanders, after declaring that “the political revolution continues” in his concession speech last year, is still trying to rev up the disaffected and rope them back into the Democratic fold to ring doorbells and stuff envelopes. His latest vehicle, “Our Revolution,” co-sponsored a “People’s Summit” in Chicago in June.

Channeling activist energy into traditional bourgeois politics is as old as the illusions in reforming and “realigning” this party of imperialism, racism and war, for decades the be-all and end-all for the DSA. In an earlier generation, Democratic “doves” sought to contain the radicalization of antiwar protesters with liberal “peace” candidates like Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy (1968) and South Dakota senator George McGovern (1972). By hyping Sanders’ “socialist” credentials, opportunist leftists with the DSA in the forefront helped him pull off his social-control operation for Clinton and the Democrats.

Social democracy is a prop for capitalism, seeking to save the crisis-wracked system with promises to administer capitalism more “justly” plus anti-communism gift-wrapped in “socialist” rhetoric. Many of those joining Democratic Socialists of America are unfamiliar with what the organization really stands for and its history. Certainly most are attracted by the bourgeois liberal reform politics it packages under the label “democratic socialism.” But some may sincerely want to fight for socialism, though unclear and unsure about what that entails. The DSA’s right-wing leadership makes no bones about their organic ties to the Democrats. It is the DSA “left” that is key to the whole maneuver.

In its position paper, “Who We Are, Where We Stand” (August 2014), the DSA Left Caucus called for a “coalition strategy to prioritize working with radical leftist groups” and to “orient DSA’s electoral strategy towards supporting candidates that openly run as explicit socialists.” But along comes “independent” senator Sanders posing as a socialist while running for the presidential nomination of the arch-capitalist Democratic Party and what does the DSA left do? They “fervently supported” the “socialist” Democrat running for the nomination of this pillar of American capitalism *rather than calling for a clean break with the “people’s party” of U.S. imperialism.*

The DSA helps the Democrats use youth revolted by the status quo to yet again shore up that status quo by putting their liberal illusions in “democracy” in the service of the political system of imperialist rule. The DSA “left” does its bit with double-talk, fostering confusion and drowning any question of class principle in a soup of “flexible tactics,” with *Jacobin* adding a dollop of sophistication to the social-democratic broth. And behind them jogs a crowd of pseudo-socialists hoping to catch up with the DSA after losing out in the contest to see

who could best tail after “Bernie” and his “political revolution” for Democratic renewal. By pushing the Sanders “revolution,” they all helped the U.S. political system fulfill one of its central functions in a period of turmoil.

In contrast, as Leon Trotsky proclaimed in the Transitional Program, our duty was to “call things by their right names” and to “speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be” (see our article, “No, Bernie Sanders Is *Not* a Socialist,” *Revolution* No. 12, March 2016). For Marxists, polemicizing against phony leftists for their maneuvering and “coalition building” with “progressive” bourgeois forces is crucial to clarifying the vital issues to aid the workers and oppressed to throw off the capitalist chains and fight for their own revolutionary class interests. Rather than hoodwinking people with illusions of advancing the cause of socialism within the Democratic Party, what’s required is to frontally oppose all forms of class collaboration while openly fighting for the communism of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

### **“Democratic Socialism” = Counterrevolutionary Social Democracy**

By riding the wave of the Bernie Sanders campaign, the DSA helped funnel discontented voters safely back into the Democratic Party. For this it was hailed in the bourgeois press. Gushing articles have been published in Reuters, the *Huffington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *Al Jazeera*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and an honorable mention in *Vogue* (10 February), which prescribed knit DSA hats for those who wanted to “dress for resistance.” This notoriety has enabled Bhaskar Sunkara, editor of *Jacobin* and a vice-chair of DSA, to make it to the Op-Ed section of the *New York Times* (26 June). Yet for all the media attention this supposedly new political trend has attracted, its politics are deeply rooted in the old tradition of social-democratic opportunism.

While the DSA says it “draws on Marxism” (as well as “religious and ethical socialism, feminism and other theories that critique human domination”), its talk of “democratic socialism” is diametrically opposed to Marx. “Democracy,” after all, is a form of state organization, as is monarchy. Yet Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels defined socialism as a classless, stateless society, the first stage of communism. This is no mere semantic question. To achieve socialism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels emphasized, requires smashing the existing, capitalist state and establishing the rule of the working class – the *dictatorship of the proletariat* rather than the *dictatorship of capital* – to expropriate the means of production from the exploiting class.

For the DSA, in contrast, “democratic socialism” means a whole lot of “democracy” while *opposing* the conquest of state power by the working class leading all the oppressed. It *rejects* expropriation to the capitalist class and a centrally planned economy. In its “What is Democratic Socialism? Q & A,” the DSA says that “many structures of our [*sic*] government and economy must be radically transformed through greater economic and social democracy, so that ordinary Americans can participate in the many decisions that affect our lives.” What this means is that the decisions of “worker-owned cooperatives” and “publicly owned enterprises managed by workers and consumer representatives” *will be determined by the capitalist market.*

The founders of modern socialism, Marx and Engels, called

themselves communists, as did Lenin and Trotsky from the outset of the Russian Revolution of 1917, in order to distinguish themselves from reformist “socialists” aligned with the capitalist rulers. It is this latter, reformist tradition that the “democratic socialists,” or more accurately social democrats, invoke. Rather than revolutionary *workers* democracy, it means worship of *bourgeois* “democracy,” under which, as Marx put it, “the oppressed are allowed every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them.” In place of working-class internationalism, it preaches patriotism, tying the workers to “their own” national rulers.

In Europe, social democrats have led mass reformist parties of the working class. In the U.S., however, the D in DSA was deliberately chosen to express its founders’ strategy of “realigning” the Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders calls himself a democratic socialist, although he has caucused with the Democrats since being elected to the Senate and ran in the primaries on a platform of “revitalizing” the Democratic Party. When Sanders first launched his candidacy, DSA vice-chair Joseph Schwarz called it “a gift from the socialist gods” and national director Maria Svart told the *Wall Street Journal* (11 December 2015), “We definitely share the same immediate political program that Bernie is pushing.”

So what was that program? It included proposals to tinker with taxes, campaign spending, trade policy and so forth, and supporting U.S. imperialism while advising it to sometimes use more flexible tactics. Sanders, for example, backs the “war on terror” including U.S. military forces and “targeted killings” (assassinations) by drones in Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen, as well as U.S. saber-rattling against Russia, Iran and North Korea.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, these “democratic socialists” endorsed deporter-in-chief Obama, whose administration in its last year in office dropped three bombs every hour on average, 24 hours a day.<sup>2</sup> In short, in backing Obama and Sanders, the DSA supports predatory U.S. imperialism, tactical quibbles aside.

### Social Chauvinism and Social-Reformist Lemonade

The DSA is the main U.S. affiliate of the Second (Socialist) International. Although the S.I. had long proclaimed its opposition to militarism, the imperialist World War I showed the emptiness of its words. In August 1914, the majority of sections of the Second International pledged their allegiance to the capitalist classes of their respective countries, voted for the war budget and rallied the workers to slaughter their class brothers and sisters in the name of the capitalist fatherland. Many social-democratic leaders used their services enrolling cannon fodder to obtain seats in bourgeois cabinets. WWI unraveled the ambiguities of the reformist program, decisively showing the loyalty of its followers to capitalist oppressors “at home.”

<sup>1</sup> See “Democrat Sanders Aboard the ‘War on Terror’ Bandwagon” (*The Internationalist* No. 42, January-February 2016); “Bernie, War & The Empire’s Pie,” *Counterpunch*, 13 November 2015, and “Greatest threat to US? Sanders says ‘paranoid’ N. Korea, Clinton picks ‘belligerent’ Russia,” *rt.com*, 5 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> “America dropped 26,171 bombs in 2016. What a bloody end to Obama’s reign,” *Guardian*. 9 January 2017.

## Hands Off Rosa Luxemburg!



**The communist Rosa Luxemburg was no reformist social democrat. The political wall of the capitalist state, she wrote, is “strengthened and consolidated by the development of social reforms and the course of democracy. Only the hammer blow of revolution, that is to say, the conquest of political power by the proletariat, can break down this wall.”**

The Socialist International of today is the direct continuation of that historic betrayal of socialism, what Lenin described as “social-imperialism,” “social-patriotism” and “social-chauvinism” – socialism in words, national chauvinism, patriotism and imperialist militarism in deeds. Today its website boasts that “49 member parties of the International are in government.” The Left Caucus has called for the DSA to leave the Socialist International. Yet that would be a cosmetic maneuver that does nothing to alter the class collaborationism that underpins the DSA’s political program and outlook. Throughout its entire history, the DSA has supported the imperialist Democratic Party and the capitalist political system.

Against the wave of social-patriotism of the Second International, revolutionary Marxists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg fought to “turn the guns the other way” while V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky agitated for the working class to turn the imperialist war into civil war (class war) leading to a socialist revolution. It was on this basis that the Bolsheviks led the Russian Revolution, establishing the first workers state in history. Luxemburg and Liebknecht founded the Communist Party of Germany, opposing the Social Democratic Party (SPD) which had taken over the job of running the government for the bourgeoisie. In 1919, Lenin and Trotsky founded the Communist (“Third”) International.

That same year, the SPD leaders had Liebknecht and Luxem-

burg murdered by the Freikorps, the nationalist paramilitary bands that served as breeding ground for the Nazis. The differences between genuine Marxists (communists) and reformist socialists (whether they call themselves democratic socialists or social democrats) were indelibly marked in blood. There is further irony in the DSA left trying to claim the legacy of the Rosa Luxemburg as spiritual godmother to today's social democrats. "Red Rosa" made her name in the revolutionary movement as a fierce enemy of reformism and class collaboration of every kind. In her classic polemic (1899) *Reform or Revolution*, she observed that capitalism set the stage for the production relations of socialist society:

"But on the other hand, its political and juridical relations established between capitalist society and socialist society a steadily rising wall. This wall is not overthrown, but is on the contrary strengthened and consolidated by the development of social reforms and the course of democracy. Only the hammer blow of revolution, that is to say, *the conquest of political power by the proletariat, can break down this wall.*"

The position of Luxemburg, that is, of Marxism, is diametrically opposed to the utterly false notion that the DSA presents in its June 2016 document on "Socialist Strategy in the Age of Political Revolution": that some kind of socialism can be brought about "through reforms that fundamentally undermine the power of the capitalist system."<sup>3</sup> And in their recent article "What Should Socialists Do?" DSA leaders Schwartz and Sunkara advocate a strategy of "non-reformist reforms," citing French left social democrat André Gorz. As opposed to the call of the Third (Communist) International and Trotsky's Fourth International for *workers control*, Gorz called for "self-management," amounting to worker participation in administering *capitalist* enterprises.

Schwartz and Sunkara call "single-payer healthcare" an example of a "non-reformist reform" – i.e., national health insurance such as exists in Canada and most West European countries. Nothing "anti-capitalist" in that. In the same article the DSA leaders call to "be the glue that brings together disparate social movement[s] that share an interest in democratizing corporate power," and to build "a potential, progressive anti-corporate majority" by "taking on neoliberal Democrats." Just to make sure it's all clear, they add: "Of course, progressive and socialist candidates who openly reject the neoliberal mainstream Democratic agenda may choose for pragmatic reasons to use the Democratic Party ballot line in partisan races."

It's all there: the social-democratic chimera, which Luxemburg described as "turning the sea of capitalist bitterness into a sea of socialist sweetness, by progressively pouring into it bottles of social reformist lemonade." The DSA leaders even criticize the Socialist Party of the 1930s for rejecting Democrat Roosevelt's New Deal as "a restoration of capitalism." They prefer the Stalinized Communist Party's "popular front" policy of being the "left wing" of the "New Deal coalition" (noting the CP's growth from 20,000 to 100,000 members). In fact, they can agree on "people's fronts" with capitalist "coalition partners" because both Stalinists and social democrats are reformists who promote class collaboration rather than waging revolutionary class struggle.

<sup>3</sup> "Resistance Rising: Socialist Strategy in the Age of Political Revolution" (June 2016) at dsausa.org.

## Jacobin Gironde

The bloody history of social-democratic betrayal doesn't stop *Jacobin* editor Sunkara from calling for a "return to social democracy...that of the early days of the Second International."<sup>4</sup> But his attempts to revive what Luxemburg called the "stinking corpse" of social democracy can only recycle the class collaboration of his political predecessors. The hip social democracy of the petty-bourgeois *Jacobin* milieu is animated by deep-going anti-communism. Condemning the fight for independent *working-class* politics as "sectarian," they are hostile to the political *purpose* of Marxism: socialist revolution. Thus, Sunkara opines:

"The Communists' noble gambit to stop the war and blaze a humane path to modernity in backward Russia ended up seemingly affirming the Burkean notion that any attempt to upturn an unjust order would end up only creating another. "Most socialists have been chastened by the lessons of 20th-century Communism. Today, many who would have cheered on the October Revolution have less confidence about the prospects for radically transforming the world in a single generation. They put an emphasis instead on political pluralism, dissent and diversity."

This is the age-old canard that Stalinism – which was the nationalist antithesis of Bolshevik internationalism – was the price paid for making the October Revolution in the first place. A basic principle of working-class politics, "revolutionary defeatism" against "one's own" imperialist rulers, is presented as a noble but quaintly outmoded sentiment for today's democratic socialists. This is convenient if your "socialism" consists of supporting Bernie Sanders, who has voted the funds for one U.S. imperialist war after another, as the social democrats voted for war credits in 1914. For all its pretensions of 21st-century "democratic socialism," *Jacobin* is dishing out warmed-over 18th-century liberalism.

It is ironic that the editor of *Jacobin* would invoke Edmund Burke, the English conservative *par excellence* who was a staunch opponent of the great French Revolution of 1791, and especially of its most radical wing, the Jacobins. (In an interview one editor remarked that the magazine's name was chosen because it "conveyed militancy without tying us down.") It seems the "left" social democrats of *Jacobin*, admirers of bourgeois democracy, have far more in common with the "moderate" Gironde of the French revolution than with the Jacobin radicals. Indeed, they sound like the Thermidorian "party of order" that, seeking bourgeois stability, reviled the "unruly rabble" of Paris and put an end to the French Revolution's heroic phase.

There is a political logic at work here. Reformists seek to conserve, and serve, the existing, bourgeois state, as Rosa Luxemburg explained in *Reform or Revolution*. They buy the myth that it is not fundamentally an apparatus of class repression, but the expression of "democracy" and the vehicle for incremental progress. Marxists support genuine democratic reforms (like the right of gay marriage). But those who peddle the illusion that piecemeal reforms can pave the way to a socialist society are reinforcing the political chains that bind the working class to capitalism. Breaking from *all* capitalist parties – Democrats, Republicans, Greens, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Bhaskar Sunkara. "Socialism's Future May Be Its Past," *New York Times*. 26 June 2017.

– and building a revolutionary workers party is key to defending the interests of the workers and oppressed.

The state is not some impartial entity looking out for the interests of all its subjects. The function of these “special bodies of armed men” (Engels) – the police, army, courts, etc. – remains the same whichever political parties take office: they are a machine to defend the rule and property of the exploiting class against the masses of people it exploits. When capitalism crashes the economy, the state bails the bankers out. When capitalists need resources or markets, to “defend” their domination against rivals, or to crush revolutions or rebellions that threaten their power, the imperialist state sends its armed forces to slaughter for them. What social democrats want is a share in administering that power. When they get it, they use it to suppress the genuine socialists and communists.

Sunkara, in his op-ed in the *New York Times*, accuses the Bolsheviks of naively basing the October Revolution on “prospects for radically transforming the world in a single generation.”<sup>5</sup> This is a complete mischaracterization of revolutionary politics. Lenin and Trotsky did not have illusions of bringing about socialism instantaneously. Under the Bolshevik slogan “All Power to the Soviets” (workers councils), the workers of Russia overturned the Provisional Government, a coalition of capitalist and “democratic socialist” ministers that kept Russia in the imperialist war. They then set about forging a new state dedicated to the interests of the toiling people and the socialist reconstruction of society, which required the revolution’s spread internationally.

Key to that internationalist revolutionary perspective was highly industrialized Germany with its powerful workers movement. It was to prevent this above all that the SPD government of Friedrich Ebert and his war minister Gustav Noske (who famously declared, “I hate revolution like sin”) put down the workers uprising of January 1919 and had Luxemburg and Liebknecht killed. The bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet workers state under Joseph “Socialism in One Country” Stalin – which Sunkara et al. blame on the revolution itself – resulted most fundamentally from its encirclement and isolation, which the social democrats did all in their power to enforce.

### “Practical” Politics: The Lessons of the Democratic Party Socialists

In Europe, social democrats can aspire to government office. In the U.S., they look back to when DSA founder Michael Harrington had power lunches with top aides to Lyndon Johnson, helping design the “war on poverty” while LBJ’s bombs rained down on Vietnam. The fantasy the DSA sells – that some day in the future reforms will “radically transform” the capitalist system and bring about socialism – translates in the here and now into supporting the Democratic Party in order to be, in Harrington’s phrase, the “left wing of the possible.” Long before its support for Obama and Sanders, the DSA backed one Democratic Party candidate after another, from Jesse Jackson and his “Rainbow Coalition” to pro-war millionaire John Kerry.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bhaskar Sunkara. “Socialism’s Future May Be its Past,” *New York Times*. 26 June 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz and Sunkara call on socialists to “to broaden out the post-Sanders, anti-corporate trend in US politics into a working-class ‘rainbow coalition’.”



Clay Showalter

### Bernie Sanders and Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative.

In an article on “Socialism at the People’s Summit” – the 2016 Sanders love-fest of the DSA, Progressive Democrats, Socialist Alternative and others – DSA deputy director David Duhalde described decades-long efforts by the DSA and its predecessors devoted to “remaking the Democrats into a social democratic/labor party like those in Europe and Canada.”<sup>7</sup> Going back to the Realignment Caucus of Harrington and Max Shachtman in Norman Thomas’ Socialist Party, this strategy of “realignment” has shaped the outlook and trajectory of the DSA. Today, some elements in the DSA, including its Left Caucus, criticize this strategy without opposing it on the basis of independent class politics.

While claiming to be a resistance to capitalism, the DSA’s political activity bolsters it. Its justification can be found in the “Where We Stand” statement on its website, which states: “Much of progressive, independent political action will continue to occur in Democratic Party primaries in support of candidates who represent a broad progressive coalition.”<sup>8</sup> Independent? This isn’t even organizational independence from the Democrats, let alone working-class political independence from all bourgeois parties and politicians. Boasting of tactical diversity, DSAers are free to pursue local variations of the social-democratic recipe, but anyone moving toward revolutionary politics is likely to get the Harrington treatment – locked out in a jiffy, as was the fate of the early Students for a Democratic Society when they committed the cardinal sin, in then-Socialist Party leader Harrington’s view, of allowing a Communist youth group member into a meeting.

Pushing Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” to “revitalize” the Democratic Party is the same thing as the Harrington/

<sup>7</sup> “Socialism at the People’s Summit,” 12 May 2016, dsausa.org.

<sup>8</sup> “Where We Stand: Building the Next Left,” dsausa.org.





**CUNY Internationalist Clubs speak-out against racist police terror, 30 August 2016.**

Shachtman “realignment” strategy.<sup>9</sup> DSA National Director Maria Svart says: “It’s just that the Democratic Party is where many progressive people do politics.”<sup>10</sup> DSA leftist and New York City co-chair Rahel Biru, on the other hand, told the *Wall Street Journal* that, “The Democratic Party is where social movements go to die.” True enough, but does that mean the DSA left is expressing a fundamental difference? Hardly. The DSA right and “left” can “flexibly” agree that it’s not a principle to be in the Democratic Party everywhere or always, or vote for each and every one of its candidates – and they also agree on opposing the Marxist principle against support to capitalist parties and politicians, which they call “sectarian.”

In an article “Should Democratic Socialists Be Democrats?” in the social-democratic *In These Times*, DSAer Jessie Mannisto writes: “Should we work within the Democratic Party? I’d say yes. Is it *enough* to work within the Democratic Party? Definitely not.” She adds: “I hope we don’t exit the Democratic Party; I hope we infiltrate it.” Left Caucus member Chris Maisano counters that “Reformism doesn’t reform, and it has not succeeded in fighting the Right, either. At the same time, an oppositional approach to electoral politics seems like a recipe for marginalization.” So the left can build “progressive social movements” formally outside the Democratic Party, while at election time their votes are

<sup>9</sup> Harrington and Shachtman wanted the Democrats to lop off their Southern segregationist Dixiecrat wing. Ironically, the Dixiecrats eventually went over to the Republicans, but in the aftermath the Democratic Party has moved steadily to the right as the Clintons “triangulated” with Republican policies and Obama sought “consensus.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesse A. Myerson, “An Anti-Trump Electoral Strategy That Isn’t Pro-Clinton,” 9 September 2016.

funneled to Democratic candidates.

The DSA’s official position, though couched in nebulous-sounding verbiage, is simply the most recent “realignment” remix: “In the medium-to-long-term we will work to build the organizational capacity necessary to run candidates of our own ... to forge larger socialist electoral coalitions both within and outside of the Democratic Party and ultimately to create a majoritarian electoral coalition in support of socialist political and economic reforms.”<sup>11</sup>

The DSA has been so deeply embedded in the Democratic Party for decades that it doesn’t even describe itself as a distinct political party. Consequently it was hardly a factor at all in left politics. The DSA program amounts to nothing more than putting pressure on the Democrats, seeking to nudge them to the left, its calls never overstepping the boundaries of the capitalist order. And that is true of both the right and “left” of this reformist, pro-capitalist organization.

### Reformist Appeals Undercut Struggles for Black and Immigrant Rights

After the cop murder of Philando Castile, the DSA released a statement on “The Need for a Democratic Transformation of the Criminal Justice and Police System” – the title encapsulates social-democratic reformism – entreating the armed fist of the bourgeois state to “promote peace and justice,” with “the use of firearms as an absolute last resort.” Along with “greater community control of policing” and “stronger gun control policies,” this would supposedly amount to a “restructuring of the role of police in our society.”<sup>12</sup> So the DSA *supports* the apparatus of state repression that protects and serves the racist capitalist system against black people and the entire working class, but prettifies its role with appeals for it to more effectively embody “justice.”

This is supposed to be accomplished through the party founded to uphold chattel slavery, the Democratic Party of mass incarceration and police terror. Today’s “democratic socialists” follow in the footsteps of Bayard Rustin, Michael Harrington & Co., who worked to subjugate black protest to John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Marxists instead call for workers mobilization against racist police terror, and underline that racial oppression is in the marrow of American capitalism. As Internationalist contingents chant in the protests against racist police terror: *Only revolution can bring justice!*

As for the record number of mass deportations under Obama, which Trump seeks to escalate even further, the DSA responds with rose-tinted social-patriotism: “We can stem the ‘push’ for mass immigration from the developing world only if these economies are allowed to develop in equitable and internally integrated ways.”<sup>13</sup> Its fellow “democratic socialist” Sanders called for a “path to citizenship” for undocumented immigrants<sup>14</sup> coupled with “secure borders without building a fence.”<sup>15</sup> Much like Ralph Nader, Sanders’ populist message has included complaints

<sup>11</sup> “Resistance Rising: Socialist Strategy in the Age of Political Revolution,” 25 June 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Statement on dsausa.org 12 July 2016.

<sup>13</sup> “Justice for Immigrant Workers,” dsausa.org, 31 January 2013.

<sup>14</sup> PBS News Hour “2016 Candidate Stands” series, 30 April 2015.

<sup>15</sup> 2016 grassroots campaign website FeelTheBern.org, “Issues.”

about undocumented immigration “pushing down U.S. wages” (echoed in the DSA statement’s warnings about immigration “endanger[ing] union wages and union contracts in many areas”).

In opposition to revolutionary Marxism, which it derides as “unrealistic,” the DSA presents its politics as practical and cool-headed. The reality is that the DSA’s politics are indeed pragmatic – for the bourgeoisie. But they are completely illusory, impractical, unrealistic – and reactionary – when it comes to any real struggle to put an end to capitalist oppression.

### Left Caucus: Realigning the Realigners

Meanwhile, the DSA’s amorphous left wing seeks its own kind of “realignment” – of the DSA itself. Within the DSA, the Left Caucus has called for an adjustment of the organization’s terms of its relationship to the Democratic Party. The hope is to nudge the DSA further to the left. “‘Progressive activism’ is not enough,” they say, the “DSA must be an organization of *socialists* organizing for *socialism*.” And so, it wants to “orient the DSA’s electoral strategy towards supporting candidates that openly run as socialists.”<sup>16</sup> A revolutionary party can sometimes present its own candidates in capitalist elections as a platform for the revolutionary program, explaining that only socialist revolution can transform society in the interests of the oppressed. It can occasionally give critical support to workers parties and candidates running independent of and against the bourgeoisie in order to expose their contradictions.

What the DSA left proposes is nothing of the sort. Does it call for a clear, principled break with the Democrats and other capitalist parties? Far from it. In a statement issued on the eve of the 2016 election it opposed campaigning for Clinton and claimed, “We reject the realignment strategy that has guided much of the left’s electoral orientation for decades,” only to declare:

“We do not, however, call for an immediate and total break from voting for or supporting any Democratic candidate. We all fervently supported Bernie Sanders in the presidential primary, and recognize that he probably would have been a footnote to the campaign if he tried to run as an independent. Voting for Democratic candidates in specific state and local races can be justified in many circumstances.”

“Give The People What They Want: DSA Members on 2016 and Beyond,” 29 October 2016

In the same document, the DSA leftists observe that the DSA’s official line is to “build social movements while voting for Democrats.” So how, exactly, do they “reject” the official strategy? Answer: they don’t. It’s all part of a political maneuver. The DSA rightists say: Vote Democrat! The leftists say: Vote Democrat Sometimes!

One of the signers of the “Give The People What They Want” statement then came out with an appeal: “Want to Elect Socialists? Run Them in Democratic Primaries.”<sup>17</sup> Socialist labels on Democratic candidates is about the clearest expression of class collaboration you could ask for. Others in the DSA left prefer a slightly less blatant approach, with more appeals to tactical “flexibility,” working with, in and around minor-

<sup>16</sup> “DSA Left Caucus Position Paper: Who We Are, Where We Stand,” August 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Moraff, “Want to Elect Socialists? Run Them in Democratic Primaries,” 21 April 2017, dsausa.org.

league bourgeois parties like the Greens that act as pressure groups on the Democrats. Under the Big Tent in the circus of left opportunism, each can peddle their wares in comfort.

In its relation to the DSA as a whole, the “DSA left” plays a role analogous to that of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Party. Sanders ropes in disaffected young voters with malarkey about revitalizing the Democratic Party, hoping no one recalls the history of past candidates who vowed to do the same. The “DSA left” talks of reforming the reformist social democracy, despite the latter’s decades of loyal service to the party of JFK, LBJ, the Clintons and Obama. Reviving the same old illusions, the political function of these ploys is to absorb opposition and generate mechanisms for subordinating new generations to the structures of American imperialist politics.

### Sliding Scale of Opportunism

The DSA is the biggest fish in the social-democratic pond, as it wants everyone to know, but it is not the only one. Oohing and aahing over its growth, smaller outfits of the opportunist left are scrambling to outdo each other in their efforts to make nice with the DSA. Like the latter, Bernie’s “revolution” warmed their hearts as they “felt the Bern.” Yet from the other side of their mouths, each proclaims itself to be the torchbearer of some revitalized socialist movement. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAlt) have held joint events with the DSA, like the “Pre-May Day Socialist Picnic and Sign Making Party” in San Francisco, amiably framing the differences between “democratic socialists” and Marxists as mere tactical questions.

The ISO’s criticism of the DSA is akin to its criticism of Bernie Sanders – which boiled down in practice to suggesting, recommending and beseeching that he run as an independent while continuously describing him as a socialist and running red-white-and-blue paeans to how his “political revolution” was putting “socialism in the air.” They claim that the DSA is forgoing “independent” politics. But tailing any “movement” in sight, the ISO has built one “independent” bourgeois campaign after another, from immigrant-basher Ralph Nader to Sanders cheerleader Jill Stein of the Green Party, and have themselves run as candidates of this minor-league capitalist party from NYC to the SF Bay Area.

On the sliding scale of opportunism, a smidgeon to the right of the ISO is Socialist Alternative, U.S. affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) which holds that cops are workers in uniform. They also administered the city of Liverpool for capitalism as the Militant tendency of the British Labour Party. After spending paragraphs congratulating the DSA on its influx of new members in “DSA Grows to 21,000 – Toward a New Socialist Party” (5 July 2017), SAlt slips in one brief sentence about the DSA’s origins: “Historically, DSA was an anti-communist, social-democratic trend that was committed to a long-term strategy of transforming the Democratic Party.” So what’s changed? According to SAlt:

“DSA is an evolving organization. Within it are a wide range of views on a variety of issues. There remains an important



**Painters Union Local 10 at June 4 Portland labor mobilization against fascists calls to break with all the bosses' parties and for a workers party.**

section of DSA that still maintains its traditional politics. But it appears that this wing is now a minority and that the new people joining are largely supportive of the more left-wing current around *Jacobin*.”

Yet the Left Caucus and *Jacobin* milieu within the DSA do not, as we have seen, represent any significant political break from the DSA's origins. They simply want to loosen a bit their commitments to the Democratic Party. Hailing the “enormous support for Bernie Sanders,” “the enormous movement of resistance” to Trump, and the “exciting” growth of the DSA, SAlt sums up: “Socialist Alternative urges DSA to take advantage of its rapid growth and dynamism to use this potential to launch a new, broad, democratic Socialist Party....” Enormous indeed is the appetite for opportunist maneuvering.

In a similar vein, a smaller group made up of SAlt's former comrades in the International Marxist Tendency's U.S. section hails the “exciting growth” of the DSA, and “agrees with DSA's support for campaigns to the left of the Democrats,” like a Green Party candidate for New York city council, while proposing that the DSA disaffiliate from the Socialist International to “clear the way for DSA to help build a genuine socialist international,” and so on (*Socialist Revolution*, July-August 2017). And just to make sure no one thinks they've gone “sectarian,” they call, in bold italics for “Bernie Sanders, [the Sanders support group] Our Revolution, and labor leaders” to break with the Democrats and “build a mass socialist party” (led by a bourgeois politician)!

Trailing along, *Left Voice* (25 April) enthused: “The DSA's upsurge is leading new activists into the workers' movement – a promising sign for the US left.” The web site masquerades as a neutral media outlet for a variety of leftist politics, but is the outlet of the Trotskyist Faction, led by the Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Workers Party for Socialism) whose specialty is engineering reformist left election coalitions. While hailing the DSA's growth, it also voices some “left” suggestions, like following the “example” of the election of SAlt's Kshama Sawant to the Seattle city council, which *Left Voice* (19 June) says “points to the potential for the

left to boldly advance socialist candidacies and politics.” Yet SAlt's municipal reformism led Sawant to praise the selection of a woman police chief, whose cops have kept on killing black people.

The sliding scale of opportunism in left groups' orientation to the Democratic Party and DSA reflects what they have in common. For all their talk about “independent politics,” they present themselves as basically being on the same team as the DSA – which is true enough. Their differences are tactical, a series of gradations on a scale of how best to build “coalitions” to pressure the Democrats. They put forward similar menus of reforms while trying to pull liberals to the left with “fight the right” rhetoric. Genuine Marxists, on the other hand, fight on a revolutionary *class* program, calling

to break with all the capitalist parties, and in particular with the liberals, “progressives” and those who falsely claim to be “friends” of labor, black people, immigrants, women and other oppressed groups.

As they tail after populist politicians from Nader to Sanders, the assorted social-democratic reformists dismiss the program of breaking with bourgeois politics and building a workers party to fight for socialist revolution as a pipedream. In reality, they regard it as anathema, loathing revolutionary politics “like sin.”

A real example for the workers movement, however, was shown by Portland Painters Union (IUPAT) Local 10, which in August 2016 passed a motion calling for no support to any bosses' party and instead to build a class-struggle workers party. Within a week of Trump's election, the union passed a motion to mobilize labor action to stop racist and fascist provocations, leading to similar motions by other area unions. And this past June 4, they mobilized several hundred unionists from 14 unions against a racist/fascist rally. But instead of a united action that could have shut down the fascists, a reformist/liberal coalition led by the ISO and including the DSA and SAlt deliberately split the protest and called a separate rally coordinating with the mayor and the police explicitly in order to *avoid* any confrontation with the fascists.<sup>18</sup>

Of the thousands of youth attracted to the DSA, those who actually seek to fight for socialism must choose a different path. What's needed is not an amorphous social-democratic organization in the framework of bourgeois parliamentary politics, but forging a democratic-centralist Leninist party that can actually lead the class struggle against the entire bourgeoisie (and its reformist hangers-on). Such a party must intransigently combat all forms of class collaboration, which leads to defeat for the workers and oppressed. And that begins with clearly and unambiguously drawing the crucial lines of demarcation between Democratic Party “socialism” and the communist program of international socialist revolution. ■

<sup>18</sup> See “Portland Labor Mobilizes to Stop Fascist Provocation,” and “How Do You Spell Class Collaboration? ISO,” in *The Internationalist* No. 49, May-June 2017

# Toward a Multiracial Revolutionary Party

## Imperialist Social Democracy vs. Black Liberation



Photos (from left): marxist.com; Warren Leffler/Library of Congress; Barbara Alper/Getty Images

**Rogues' gallery of Shachtmanism: acting on behalf of U.S. imperialism in sabotaging struggle for black liberation. From left, Max Shachtman, Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin in the 1960s.**

**By R. Tiffa**

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In the 1950s during the anti-Soviet Cold War – and especially as it was playing out in Africa – Southern racism was becoming an embarrassment to U.S. imperialism. The British empire was threatened by anticolonial movements but also by U.S. imperialism, which was demanding entry into all the markets formerly dominated by Britain and other European powers. The U.S. imperialists preferred, where they could, to rule using local dictatorships, rather than direct occupation. The U.S.' "neocolonial" model was the Latin American "banana republic," as they disparagingly called countries ruled by brutal military dictatorships that gave a free hand to U.S. corporations like the United Fruit Company ("Chiquita"), Kennecott Copper, Standard Oil, and ITT.

The U.S. looked at Africa and saw a giant treasure-trove of gold, diamonds and jewels of all kinds, rare minerals including uranium and cobalt, petroleum, coffee, cocoa, and what have you – potentially commodities worth many billions then (in the trillions today). But African peoples were rising up against the old colonialism, inspired by the war of the FLN (National Liberation Front) against the French in Algeria and the Mau-Mau uprising against the British in Kenya. At the same time, the U.S. imperialists, mouthing slogans of "democracy," were losing battles for African "hearts and minds" to the Soviet Union.

As the civil rights movement picked up in the U.S. South, images were flashed around the world of Ku Klux Klan night riders and fat cops with fire-hoses and German shepherd dogs

loosed on black marchers, many of them children. The ugly reality of U.S. "democracy" was there for all to see, undercutting Washington's effort to counterpose itself to British colonialism and what the imperialists saw as the Soviet "Communist threat." The brutal American segregation system known as Jim Crow was seen by the U.S. imperialists as a public relations problem. The American social democrats, dominated by followers of one Max Shachtman, believed they had a plan to solve it. They called it "realignment."

### **Imperialism's Fake-Socialist Servants: Whose "Southern Strategy"?**

Max Shachtman was a renegade from Trotskyism who became a crusading anti-Communist and eventually an ardent defender of U.S. imperialism. The most prominent Shachtmanite leaders were Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin. They were then running the U.S. Socialist Party, which was still formally headed by aging CIA "asset" Norman Thomas. (Yes, the formal head of the Socialist Party was a State Department propagandist who worked with and took the spy agency's money.)

Like the young, idealistic black militants of the civil rights movement before them, today's opponents of America's racist system of capitalist oppression must learn some hard lessons about how it functions. First of all, the Democratic Party – from Barack Obama and Bill Clinton to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren – is a bulwark of U.S. imperialism and the most dangerous enemy of all the world's workers: black, brown, Asian, and white. Second, many who call themselves "socialist" are sworn enemies of socialism: they are or aspire to be duplicitous



Photos: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service, AP

**The Shachtmanites' masters: (Left) President John F. Kennedy with FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. (Right) President Lyndon Johnson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey behind him.**

agents for the Democrats and the capitalist bosses. Latter-day Shachtmanite-like fake socialists include, most prominently, the anti-socialist International Socialist Organization (ISO) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

So back to “realignment.” Shachtman devised his plan with a close collaborator, Robert M. Martinson, and attempted to carry it forward with Harrington and Rustin. Shachtman understood that the Democrats were the dominant party of U.S. imperialism but could fall from power without the support of the KKK and the White Citizens’ Councils (the chamber-of-commerce bosses of the Klan). If the Southern racists left the Democratic Party, the balance of power in the U.S. would tip to the more isolationist Republican Party. To ensure the “American Century,” as the U.S. imperialists called their world domination, Shachtman proposed that the Democrats shift their alliances to line up with the Southern black population and the anti-Communist labor bureaucracy.

Shachtman did not act to put his plan into operation immediately, since political considerations over the election of Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) in 1964 caused the Shachtmanites to continue to support the retention of the Southern racists in the Democratic Party. “Realignment” did occur some years later, but in a rather different way. As black voting became more possible, the Republicans under Nixon courted the Southern racist vote. This caused a split in the Shachtmanites, with Shachtman and his tendency in the Socialist Party supporting Nixon in 1972 and then changing the SP’s name to Social Democrats USA (SDUSA), while Harrington founded the “Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee” (DSOC, forerunner of the Democratic Socialists of America) to continue supporting the Democrats.

Today we take it for granted that the white racist vote in the South (and across the U.S.) is mainly or all Republican, while black people who are allowed to vote (millions have been disenfranchised) generally vote Democratic. But this pattern contrasts sharply with the status quo during the civil rights movement. At that time the Democratic Party was the party of the KKK and Jim Crow, as it had been since the days when it organized racist terror in resisting Republican-led Reconstruction after the Civil

War. Now, even Klansman David Duke runs in the Republican, not the Democratic primaries. At the same time, since the days of Roosevelt’s “New Deal Coalition,” the union bureaucracy became more and more deeply enmeshed in the Democratic Party apparatus. Nixon’s role in getting the former “Dixiecrats” – Southern white racist politicians – to switch to the Republican Party is sometimes referred to as the “Southern Strategy.”

After Democratic president Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965, formally upholding voting rights for blacks in the South that had been suppressed since the defeat of Reconstruction in 1876, right-wing Republicans saw the chance to capture millions of racist votes. They would campaign in the South using code words like “states’ rights,” “traditional values” and “law and order.” Even the linguistically challenged KKK and their followers got the idea. The strategy was nearly derailed in 1968, when Alabama’s Democratic governor George Wallace (whose slogan was “Segregation Forever”) ran as the candidate of a KKK-style third party and gained most of the Southern states’ electoral votes. Nixon won the election anyway, running against Hubert Humphrey, Johnson’s widely hated vice president, who became the Democratic candidate after LBJ dropped out of the race as it became clear the U.S. was losing the Vietnam War.

Ever since those days, Republican campaigners have upped the racist rhetoric in the South. Reagan began his campaign for president in 1980 proclaiming “I believe in states’ rights,” in a speech delivered near Philadelphia, Mississippi – where the KKK and police murdered heroic civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner during Freedom Summer in 1964. The message got across.

### **SNCC and the Radical Black Challenge to Jim Crow Racism**

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged in 1960 amid the sit-in movement to integrate lunch counters throughout the South. Comprised mainly of Southern black youth, SNCC was initially tied to Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Beginning in 1955, with Rosa Parks’ refusal to surrender her bus

seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, the civil rights movement posed a high-profile challenge to the violent, reactionary American political regime of the 1950s. Black people took the lead in the most extensive social movement since the 1930s. SNCC became a courageous expression of youthful black defiance of Jim Crow and McCarthyism.

The official civil rights leadership under King wanted to limit the struggle to peaceful protest and moderate reforms, but the racist power structure of U.S. capitalism reacted with extreme violence to the slightest democratic demands. When King's SCLC attempted to impose its conservatizing will on SNCC, the results were mixed. For a time, SNCC was split between a more conservative wing wanting to focus on voter registration and a more radical wing seeking direct action: the integration of public facilities such as swimming pools and lunch counters. In practice, as SNCC leader James Forman argues in his book *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (1985), radicalism could not be avoided, since "the establishment" treated all civil rights activity as a mortal threat to its power.

At the highest levels, U.S. capitalist rulers recognized and feared the revolutionary potential of an organization of black youth fighting for black freedom in the South. While "nonviolent" was part of SNCC's name, many of its militants came to advocate self-defense against racist terror. As a SNCC leader, Forman joined Robert F. Williams in Monroe, North Carolina, in 1961. Williams had been head of the local NAACP when in 1957 he decided to fight back against deadly Klan and police violence. He and wife Mabel Williams organized a black branch of the National Rifle Association. (See "Who Controls the Guns?" *The Internationalist* No. 34, March-April 2013.)

This became an armed self-defense guard of black volunteers, mostly army veterans. Their militant and disciplined actions routed Klan night riders, driving these scum out of black neighborhoods. The Native American Lumbee tribe of North Carolina found Williams' example inspiring. In a compelling demonstration of the power of militant leadership in fighting racist terror, the Lumbee smashed a planned Klan attack. Hundreds of Lumbee people, armed and determined, suddenly advanced as the Klan gathered. The Native Americans sent the Klan scum scuttling into the swamps where they belong. This was the "Battle of Hayes Pond" on 18 January 1958.

Forman was present with Williams in Monroe as they tried to defend Freedom Riders from the North who were attempting to integrate interstate bus travel. The white racists rioted and Forman was nearly killed. Robert and Mabel Williams had to flee to Cuba following the revolution there, where they established "Radio Free Dixie," broadcasting music and political commentary from Havana. Forman's experience with Williams



**Armed members of Native American Lumbee tribe (right) drive off KKK night riders in Battle of Hayes Pond, 18 January 1958.**

raised the level of his militancy. Like many in SNCC, he was beginning to understand that revolutionary struggle would be needed to defeat racial oppression in America. However, as black youth put their bodies on the line – as they were arrested, convicted of serious crimes, spied on by the feds, beaten, shot at and lynched – Northern Democrats and labor bureaucrats sought to infiltrate, co-opt and squelch the struggle.

With the election of John F. Kennedy as president in 1960, the SCLC leadership committed itself to working within the Democratic Party, the party of Jim Crow segregation and the KKK. But the Democrats had become concerned about the "threat" of radical black militancy. The U.S. government also sent its operatives to infest SNCC meetings, including future liberal congressman Allard Lowenstein, whose far-ranging work with the CIA has been extensively documented.<sup>1</sup> Robert Kennedy had been a counsel for anti-communist witch-hunting senator Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s and later chief counsel of the anti-labor McClellan Committee. As U.S. attorney general from 1961 to 1964, RFK promised money and, reportedly, draft deferments if SNCC leaders would desist from direct action and focus on voter registration in designated areas.

### The "Liberal-Labor Syndrome"

Enter the professional anti-communist Shachtmanites and the Socialist Party.

James Forman described the forces arrayed against SNCC as the "liberal-labor syndrome," because they comprised Democratic politicians, government agents and union bureaucrats. He explained:

"[Lowenstein] represented a whole body of influential forces seeking to prevent SNCC from becoming too radi-

<sup>1</sup> Richard Cummings, *The Pied Piper: Allard K. Lowenstein and the Liberal Dream* (Grove Press, 1985), p. 224. On "Lowenstein's lengthy history of involvement" (as the author delicately calls it) "with groups and activities...shown to have CIA connections," also see William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (Basic Books, 1993), pp. 104-107, 254-261.

cal and to bring it under control of what I have called the liberal-labor syndrome....

“The liberal-labor syndrome...was typified by its close links with the Kennedy administration and later to liberal Democratic elements in the Johnson administration, by the influence of Walter Reuther of the United Automobile Workers, by its violent Red-baiting, and by its social democratic line – as embodied in Norman Thomas. Individual white members included Joseph Rauh (general counsel for the UAW), author and poverty ‘expert’ Michael Harrington, and various church leaders.”<sup>2</sup>

As the mention of Harrington suggests, the Shachtmanites played a central role in this coordinated bourgeois assault against SNCC. Their dreams of “realignment” notwithstanding, the Shachtmanites’ main objective during the Kennedy and Johnson years was to keep the Dixiecrats from leaving the Democratic Party. This was one of the reasons they sought to dampen SNCC militancy and witch-hunt “reds” out of the civil rights movement. They were especially incensed that the National Lawyers Guild was helping SNCC activists when they were arrested and jailed. At every meeting, Forman reports, the Shachtmanites and their allies demanded that SNCC sever ties with the Guild, which they believed represented a dangerous Communist threat to the capitalist system they served.<sup>3</sup>

In fact they were on the lookout for anyone they thought might be a supporter of the Communist Party (CP), or just “soft on Communism.” Many brave activists were sympathetic to the CP, including Rosa Parks (who had attended meetings of the CP’s International Labor Defense for the Scottsboro Boys), and they were hounded by the FBI as well as the Shachtmanites. Nonetheless, its revolutionary fiber destroyed by Stalinism, the CP had since the mid-1930s become a reformist party, beholden to the Democrats. Having gone underground due to the Cold War witch-hunting, by the late 1950s and 1960s, most supporters of the Stalinized CP were politically indistinguishable from the liberals, who however feared and hated them.

With their witch hunting and fraudulent civil rights activities, the Shachtmanites were serving the Humphrey wing of the Democratic Party. Then a senator from Minnesota, Humphrey led the pro-labor section of the bosses’ political apparatus. Humphrey had been the undertaker of the Farmer-Labor Party, a pro-capitalist party in Minnesota that he buried in the Democratic Party in 1944 and then purged the resulting Democratic Farmer-Labor (DFL) party of “reds” during the late 1940s. At the same time he gained national prominence by pushing a civil rights plank at the 1948 Democratic Party convention that led to a walkout by Southern delegations who set up a short-lived Dixiecrat party (the “States Rights Democrats”). By the early 1960s Humphrey was aligned with the red-baiting leadership of the AFL-CIO, and helped run their work as labor agents of U.S. imperialism.

Like U.S. government asset Norman Thomas, Walter Reuther had traveled some distance since the late 1930s. Back then, with supporters of the Communist Party playing a central role, Reuther helped organize the U.S. auto sector

on an industrial basis, under the auspices of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). He was a member of the Socialist Party, which was temporarily moving leftward at that time amid a rising tide of U.S. labor militancy. During World War II, however, Reuther became a flag-waving patriot and never looked back. During the war he prostrated the UAW to Roosevelt’s demand for a no-strike pledge. As the bosses made super-profits on government contracts, workers got nothing but speed-ups and deteriorating work conditions.

The Communist Party had supported Reuther’s wartime patriotism (and neglect of the plight of black workers), but this did not save the CP from the post-war red purge. Reuther carried out his purge systematically in the UAW in 1946, driving every known CP supporter out of the union. He became a leading anti-Communist in the labor movement and extended his service of the bosses by acting as a U.S. government agent, helping found witch-hunting outfits like the Americans for Democratic Action and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. In the 1950s, upon becoming president of the CIO he merged it with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), led by the notorious right-wing bureaucrat George Meany, who bragged that he had never walked a picket line and never led a strike. Reuther and Meany were Hubert H. Humphrey’s guard dogs, protecting the capitalist system while masquerading as labor leaders.

## Rustin and Harrington: All the Way with LBJ

Walter Reuther then went on to masquerade as a civil rights leader. Helping Humphrey become Johnson’s running mate in 1964 was Reuther’s real purpose. To get Johnson in the White House and Humphrey on the ticket, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy was called upon to put its boot on the necks of civil rights militants. Humphrey’s labor lieutenants were aided by Michael Harrington, who would become the “poverty expert” for the Johnson administration, as well as Rustin and other Shachtmanite social democrats. Every effort was made to ensure that the Dixiecrats would have nothing to fear in voting for LBJ and HHH.

Alongside Reuther, the Shachtmanites were going “all the way with LBJ.” They were masters of the double game. Out of their mouths came statements about “realigning” the Democratic Party as an alliance of organized labor and the Southern black population. In practice, they acted to keep civil rights activists subordinated to the Democratic Kennedy and Johnson administrations which rested on support from the Dixiecrats. As soldiers in this reactionary cause Harrington, together with his close associate, the “moderate civil rights leader” Bayard Rustin, targeted SNCC.

As they did in 1962 with another leftward-moving student organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Harrington and company attempted to force SNCC to exclude reds. They sent Rustin to SNCC meetings to demand SNCC adopt an anti-red clause in its organizational statements. It was soundly rejected. As Forman remarks, SNCC’s defiance against red-baiting “merely intensified the liberal Establishment’s determination to control the organization – or to destroy it, if control should prove impossible.”<sup>4</sup> Having experienced the effects of the Reuther-Rustin-Harrington game plan, Forman understood it well.

<sup>2</sup> James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Open Hand, 1985), p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, pp. 380-381.

<sup>4</sup> Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 220.

## “The Farce on Washington”

The largest demonstration of the civil rights movement, the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” took place on 28 August 1963. Remembered by many for Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, it was a thoroughly co-opted affair. Malcolm X criticized it as the “Farce on Washington,” caustically describing the Kennedy White House telling the organizers “how to come, where to stop, what signs to carry, what song to sing, what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn’t make.”<sup>5</sup>

The social democrats played a key role in this blunting of black militancy. (The current organization of the heirs of Shachtman and Harrington, “Democratic Socialists of America,” boasts on its website that the initiator of the march and its main organizers were members of the Socialist Party.) The March on Washington was originally planned by A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, as far back as 1941, as a means to pressure the Roosevelt government to extend civil and labor protections to black people North and South. The Communist Party abandoned its initial support of the march as part of backing the Roosevelt government during the imperialist Second World War. After the war – which the “democratic” U.S. fought with a Jim Crow army – Randolph revived his call for a march, but he was stymied year after year by the self-appointed “friends of the Negro” in the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy.

In the context of the mass actions of the early 1960s, pressure for the march became irresistible. Then the operatives of the ruling class sprang into action to control it politically. Foremost among these controllers was Harrington’s Socialist Party “comrade,” Bayard Rustin, with Shachtman disciples Tom Kahn and Rachele Horowitz busily backing him up. Speakers and speeches were strictly vetted by Rustin. Of course, he didn’t touch the conservative speech of anti-Communist NAACP head Roy Wilkins. Wilkins, a toxic FBI fink, had actually opposed the March on Washington; he frequently baited Rustin for being gay and from the podium even slyly red-baited radical black historian (and NAACP founder) W. E. B. Du Bois, who had died in Ghana the day before.<sup>6</sup>

But Rustin went after SNCC’s speech with a large scissor, cutting out its radical conclusions. Thus it was the Shachtmanites, forebears of today’s DSA, who carried out this notorious



**SNCC leader John Lewis speaking at March on Washington, 28 August 1963. Shachtmanite leader Bayard Rustin played key role in censoring Lewis’ speech, eliminating references to “revolution” and criticism that the Kennedy civil rights bill was “too little, too late.”**

editorial, in order to please the Kennedy White House. The gutted text was read by John Lewis, who is today a Democratic congressman. Carefully managed by the Kennedys and their sycophants, the March on Washington came to nothing. The more than 250,000 demonstrators went home with no more than the promise of a watered-down civil rights bill. In May 1964, in order to get some Republican votes to break a filibuster by Southern Democrats, Humphrey et al. put forward a “compromise” bill which relied more on private court suits than on federal enforcement of rights to service in public accommodations (like lunch counters).

## False Friends in Bloody Mississippi

A brazen episode in the campaign to undermine challenges to the racist U.S. political system occurred the following year. The target was the Mississippi Summer Project and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). It was, quite literally, a joint operation of the Shachtmanites, the Democratic Party, CIA “friends and associates” and the United Auto Workers bureaucracy. The most prominent operatives were Allard Lowenstein, Bayard Rustin and UAW lawyer Joseph Rauh.

Since the defeat of Reconstruction in 1876, the great majority of black people had no secure civil rights in the United States. Nowhere was this more evident than Mississippi in 1964, a state with a 50 percent black population, few black voters, and ubiquitous black poverty. SNCC leaders Bob Moses and James Forman developed a plan to lay siege to this bastion of racism. In an alliance with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), they mobilized thousands of black Mississippians and brought hundreds of volunteers from the North, to register voters, establish black schools and libraries, and integrate public facilities.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots,” 10 November 1963, on line at <http://thespeechsite.com/en/famous/MalcolmX-2.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, rev. ed. (Routledge, 2008), p. 87; and excerpt from Wilkins’ speech at <http://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2010/08/excerpt-roy-wilkinss-reluctant-tribute-to-web-du-bois.html>.





**Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, murdered by the Klan in Philadelphia, Mississippi in reign of KKK terror during “Freedom Summer” project of SNCC and CORE to register black voters.**

The main intention was to draw back the curtain on the savage repression black people experienced every day throughout the South – especially the nearly 1 million who lived in Mississippi. Many hundreds of civil rights activists were beaten and arrested that summer. On 21 June 1964, James Chaney, a black civil rights worker from Meridian, Mississippi, and Andrew Goodman and James Schwerner, white New York volunteers, were arrested by the police. In a coordinated action, after they were “released” from custody, they were murdered in the woods by the KKK. Partly because two of these heroic militants were white, a massive search was undertaken after they were reported missing. Their bodies were eventually found, but this search *accidentally turned up the bodies of eight other black Mississippians*, including a boy of 14! Their disappearances and murders had not even attracted attention. In fact, the KKK-police regime was on a rampage of terror in Mississippi.

When SNCC’s plan first became known to Lowenstein and Rustin, they set up their own operation to recruit volunteers, vetted by them, under the direction of future Democratic congressman Barney Frank. SNCC fought back and regained some control of recruiting, but plenty of selected volunteers were sent South.

At this same time, the Shachtmanites were also attempting a takeover of CORE. As he recounts in his autobiography, CORE leader James Farmer was able only with difficulty to expel the paid staffers Rustin forced on him: Norman Hill (a close associate of Harrington and Shachtman in Thomas’ Socialist Party), Hill’s wife Velma, her brother, and others. They took a salary from CORE, did no Civil Rights work, witch-hunted reds and schemed under Shachtman’s instructions to replace Farmer with Rustin.<sup>7</sup> When the Socialist Party split after the 1972 elections, Rustin became the leader of Social Democrats, USA, the hard right-wing Cold Warriors (many directly tied to the CIA), a number of whom ended up in the administration of Ronald Reagan.

While Rustin never became the head of CORE, the organization was eventually flooded with Shachtmanites and succumbed to their Cold War machinations. (Farmer was later

<sup>7</sup> James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart* (Arbor House, 1985), pp. 260–262.

named an honorary chairman of the DSA.) In the 1970s under Roy Innis, CORE helped recruit CIA-backed mercenaries to fight with the forces of apartheid South Africa against the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and its Cuban allies in Angola. The Rustin-led Shachtmanite SDUSA was allied with Innis and CORE in supporting the South African apartheid regime’s bloody war on Angola. Fortunately, the Angolans, with Cuba’s help, smashed these racists and imperialists, in one of the most inspiring moments of Africa’s anti-colonial history.

### **Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Democrats**

In 1963 and 1964, adherents of MLK-style pacifism were increasingly challenged politically by those advocating black self-defense, following the examples of Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X and groups like the Deacons for Defense in Louisiana. Reflecting on harsh experience, many black militants were lending an ear to Malcolm’s repeated warnings against having illusions in reforming the Democratic Party. Coming the year after the March on Washington, the coordinated campaign to undercut the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was one of the key episodes. While the MFDP showed the potential for independent political action, it was from the outset subordinated to the Democratic Party, a pillar of racist American capitalism, as was soon demonstrated.

Literally under the gun of racist terror and hamstrung by government infiltrators and witch-hunters, the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 was unable to register many black voters in the official racist system. Nevertheless, it did organize unofficial black voting for the MFDP, which was founded that year in an effort to wrest the state’s Democratic Party structure away from the Dixiecrats. Sixty-four SNCC and CORE activists, all black but one, were designated as MFDP delegates and sent to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Their object was to gain credentials and be seated at the convention as the legitimate Mississippi delegation, on the grounds that the official delegation was a Jim Crow machine, selected through the violent exclusion of half of the state’s population.

The co-chair of the Freedom Democrats was a woman of legendary courage named Fannie Lou Hamer. She was a sharecropper from Sunflower County in the Mississippi Delta. In 1961, like many black women in the American South, she had been sterilized without her knowledge or consent. As she later testified, “I would say about six out of the ten Negro women that go to the hospital are sterilized with the tubes tied.” The experience drove her to join the civil rights movement and eventually to SNCC. In 1962 she attempted to register to



**Fannie Lou Hamer: “Sick and tired of being sick and tired.” A sharecropper who started picking cotton at age 6, she was a victim of involuntary sterilization and her family was evicted by plantation owner when she tried to register to vote. Hamer was the spokesperson for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at Democrats’ 1964 Atlantic City convention.**

vote. When plantation owner W. D. Marlow heard about this, he forced her off his land and seized all her family’s property. Undeterred by Marlow or by a KKK assassination attempt, Ms. Hamer continued her civil rights work. In 1963 she was arrested in Winona, Mississippi. While a captive, she was beaten at the command of the police: two large male prisoners struck her with blackjacks in turn until they were both exhausted. The beating caused permanent damage to Ms. Hamer’s eyes and kidneys.

At Atlantic City, Ms. Hamer gave riveting testimony before the Credentials Committee, telling of her attempts to register to vote and the horrors perpetrated upon her because of this. She noted the many recent racist murders in Mississippi, including the assassination of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers, which occurred a few days after she was let out of jail. She concluded:

“All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?”<sup>8</sup>

Her testimony was being televised nationally, but when Lyndon Johnson found out, he called an emergency press conference to distract the media and cut her off. Johnson and Humphrey then exerted pressure on supporters of the MFDP on the Credentials Committee and they fell into line. The Democrats would recognize *only* the official white racist delegation. The MFDP was offered two non-voting seats – on condition that neither seat would go to Fannie Lou Hamer. Humphrey explained, “The President has said he will not

<sup>8</sup> *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is* (University Press of Mississippi, 2011), p. 45.

that illiterate woman speak on the floor of the Democratic convention.”<sup>9</sup>

The MFDP delegates were defiant and refused to cooperate. Hamer’s answer was simply spoken: “We didn’t come all this way for no two seats.” The black delegates then sat in the unoccupied seats of the white delegation – which bolted the convention to back Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate. So dependent on the support of the racist Dixiecrats was the party of LBJ, Rustin, and Reuther, however, that they refused to seat the black Mississippians even then, after the racist delegates had left for good.

In a squalid display of their subservience to the racist system, Rustin and Rauh tried to get SNCC and the MFDP to reconsider their refusal and accept the “compromise.” Forman, who was present at the meeting, transcribed Rustin’s haughty lecture to the Mississippians:

“[T]here is a difference between protest and politics. The former is based on morality and the latter is based on reality and compromise. If you are going to engage in politics, you must give up protest.... You must accept the compromise. If you don’t, then you are still protesting.

“We must think of our friends in labor, Walter Reuther and the others, who have gone to bat for us. If we reject this compromise, we would be saying to them that we didn’t want their help.”

One SNCC organizer yelled, “You’re a traitor, Bayard, a traitor!” Veteran activist Ella Baker, who worked closely with SNCC, denounced Rauh as a mouthpiece for the white liberal establishment. At the same meeting, Moses and Forman heard one admonitory lecture after another from LBJ’s backers, including Martin Luther King. Meanwhile, Allard Lowenstein was taking notes of radical statements made by SNCC supporters, scribbling “heckling of Rustin,” “[Stokely] Carmichael’s talk ‘wild’,” as part of a list of those “to be ‘examined’.” This imperialist snitch was actually recording SNCC’s disillusionment with the Democratic Party. As one militant put it, “After Atlantic City our struggle was not for civil rights but for liberation.”<sup>10</sup>

What about DSA founder, Shachtman deputy and leading spokesman for the “realignment” strategy Michael Harrington? He “sided publicly with Rustin” (they were both in the SP) and then “urged MFDP supporters to put aside their bitter feelings.” The entire episode was widely seen by radicalizing youth, both black and white, as “proof of the bankruptcy of liberalism.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in “Fannie Lou Hamer,” *Freedom Summer*, American Experience website, pbs.org.

<sup>10</sup> Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 392; Cummings, *Pied Piper*, pp. 269-270; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 302.

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (Public Affairs, 2000), pp. 245-246.

## The Limits of a Movement

SNCC's homegrown militancy was partly based on an illusion that Northern Democrats would help black people overturn racial oppression. This was not and could not have been true. The Democratic Party was and is a party of the racist status quo. It had been the party of Southern Secession and slavery; it was the party of the KKK and race terror during Reconstruction; it was the party of Jim Crow after Reconstruction's defeat. When the Democrats made it to the White House again, their ultra-racist president, the reputed liberal Woodrow Wilson, scion of a pro-slavery, slave-owning Virginia family, fired every black civil service employee in Washington, while promoting the Klan propaganda film *Birth of a Nation*.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Democrats presided over a society, North and South, that was nearly completely segregated – de jure (by law) in the South, de facto in the North – in housing, schools, and employment. Today, despite civil rights laws and court decisions that are being steadily eroded, brutal segregation remains the norm and millions of black people are in prison, on parole, or branded as criminals by the system, whether it is ruled over by Obama or Trump. In American ruling-class mythology, Wilson, JFK and LBJ, as well as Clinton and Obama, are held up as enlightened rulers committed to freedom and democracy. They are compared to their great forefather, Thomas Jefferson. This is fitting in its way, since Jefferson was a slaveholder who as a politician worked to starve black Haiti and create a slaveholding empire across North America.

In the civil rights years Kennedy and Johnson yielded as little as they could, but yield they had to. They faced a determined black population that marched directly into ferocious repression, undeterred. From depraved white racists they endured beatings, torture, rape, mutilation, sterilization and uncounted murders, including of innumerable children. But they would not turn back. Living as they did in a modern capitalist state, black people themselves ripped up the maniacal racial laws and claimed their civil rights. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 simply acknowledged the *faits accomplis*, though with a fair amount of treacherous language. For its part, the white power structure in the South clawed back with strategies that characterize the entire country today: racist control of the social and political system, the creation of white “academies” and defunding of public education, the closing of public facilities, escalated policing of black neighborhoods, new laws targeting black people, mass incarceration.

When Martin Luther King Jr. marched in Chicago in 1966 against that Northern city's brutal system of housing segregation, he was met by a racist mob thousands strong. Marchers were attacked and King himself was struck in the



**Stokely Carmichael, chairman of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, in Georgia legislature, 1966.**

Bethmann Archives

head with a rock. “I have seen many demonstrations in the South,” he said, “but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I’ve seen here today.” The truth is that the whole American capitalist system is founded on racial oppression, from New Orleans to New York and Los Angeles to Chicago. Reformist protests will never break its grip. Only a revolutionary program can bring black liberation and the liberation of all the oppressed. And this will take integrated revolutionary struggle relying on the social power of the multiracial working class.

### Toward a Revolutionary Perspective

The SNCC militants learned hard lessons the hard way about the role of social democrats and labor bureaucrats in upholding the racist American establishment. They faced a stark choice: to find their way to a revolutionary position against the entire American capitalist ruling class or cave in to the corruption and lies of the likes of Harrington and Rustin, social-democratic servants of U.S. imperialism. Instead, because of the weakness of genuinely revolutionary forces, many turned to the dead end of black nationalism. The Communist Party, which had largely been driven underground in McCarthyite USA, sent many of its supporters into the South, but the CP had long ago debased the red banner of revolution in favor of reformist support to the Democratic Party.

At the time, in the early 1960s in the U.S., the program of revolutionary Marxism could have been represented only by the Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The SWP, however, fatally abdicated its responsibility to the struggle for black liberation – a struggle that is in its very essence connected to the very foundations of oppression and exploitation in the American capitalist system. Instead, on its rapid road toward reformism (and eventual irrelevance), the SWP told black people that they must go it alone; American Marxists would support them but take no leadership role.

The justification for this unpardonable abstentionism was

found in a petty-bourgeois nationalist orientation. The majority in the SWP supported a line worked out by a party theoretician, George Breitman, which held that blacks must struggle and organize independently and not as part of a multi-racial revolutionary party. During the 1930s, the Communist Party had developed its “black belt” theory after Joseph Stalin abruptly decided that African Americans should be considered a nation. Despite the Great Migration that began in WWI (and would relocate six million black people to urban centers outside the South), this theory advocated for a separate black nation in the most rural, least developed parts of the U.S. South.

While the SWP was not necessarily calling for geographical separation in 1963, its line of separate black struggle was consonant with a nationalist trend developing among petty-bourgeois radicals in the black movement. Like Stokely Carmichael, these activists were searching for deeper answers to the psychosis of racist America, and were disillusioned with the liberal integrationism of King, Rustin and others who demanded “moderation.”

Carmichael’s political trajectory offers an interesting view into what might have been. He would eventually call for “black power”: while voicing a desire for militancy and a break from liberal accommodationism, it was an ambiguous slogan, some of whose adherents sought salvation in “black capitalism.” Carmichael himself would later move to Guinea, change his name to Kwame Ture and embrace Pan-Africanism. In 1963, however, the young SNCC activist was actually a member of the Socialist Party’s Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL). At the same time, he was a contact of the SWP’s youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA).

Radicalized after seeing first-hand the treachery of the “liberal-labor syndrome,” he would have good reason to wonder why he was in YPSL. Carmichael was contacted by adherents of a minority grouping within the SWP/YSA, which had a revolutionary Marxist position on the fight for black freedom quite different than the majority leaders’ abstentionism. This grouping, which became the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) and later the Spartacist League that for three decades was the voice of authentic Trotskyism, held that the racial oppression of African Americans cannot accurately be categorized as a national question; the idea of forming a separate nation was illusory; and that black liberation is central to socialist revolution by and for the whole working class. This position of *revolutionary integrationism* is upheld by the Internationalist Group today.

The theory was developed by Richard Fraser, an SWP cadre in the 1950s, and is based on his years of engaging in



**Shirley Stoute, in 1963, when she was co-author with James Robertson of “For Black Trotskyism.”**

in the South. She was Shirley Stoute, co-author (with James Robertson) of a revolutionary-integrationist document called “For Black Trotskyism” (1963).<sup>12</sup> She and other comrades of the RT were tragically prevented by the SWP majority from engaging in black recruitment at a time when people of the caliber of Carmichael and Forman were searching for revolutionary answers.

“For Black Trotskyism” begins with a point Leon Trotsky made during a discussion with SWP members in Coyoacán, Mexico a year before an assassin sent by Stalin killed the founder of the Fourth International. Referring to the U.S. black population, he stressed: “If ... we in the SWP are not able to find a road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie.” Trotsky was speaking in 1939, yet his message to American communists was the same as 20 years earlier, when both Lenin and Trotsky delivered it. The SWP’s abandonment of that perspective sabotaged the chance that leading militants of the early-1960s civil rights movement might have had to be won over to revolutionary Marxism. The task of winning over and cohering a core of black Trotskyist cadre remains unfinished. It must be carried out because without overthrowing racist U.S. capitalism once and for all, there can be no black liberation in racist America; and there can be no socialist revolution in the United States without a multiracial revolutionary workers party. ■

<sup>12</sup> This document was included in the SL’s *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5, *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism*, originally published in 1978. This bulletin has been reprinted, along with the document “Black and Red - Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” adopted by the SL’s founding conference in 1966, as part of the Internationalist Group’s series of class readings.

# Max Shachtman, Norman Thomas and Democratic (Party) Socialism

## The Real Heritage of Michael Harrington's DSA

By Abram Negrete

Of all the “socialist” groups that hitched their wagon to the star of Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” – which, he proclaims, seeks to reform and “revitalize” the Democratic Party<sup>1</sup> – the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has reaped the biggest rewards. In April 2017, the DSA’s membership hit 20,000 members, three months later the figure had climbed to 24,000, and by the November elections it claimed 30,000. After the ballot totals were in, the DSA “announced that its membership now includes 15 new elected officials,” in “addition to 20 elected already in offices around the United States.”<sup>2</sup> A blurb for a workshop at the upcoming conference of the DSA’s youth group, Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), promises: “This coming year will pose even more opportunities for socialists to win big at the ballot box.”

The DSA website shows that eight of the group’s “new elected officials” ran as Democrats (the rest are listed as “independents”). So much for the illusions of those DSAers, including many new members, who talked of putting an end to the organization’s allegiance to the Democratic Party at the DSA’s August 2017 convention. Instead, the convention committed to building

<sup>1</sup> See Bernie Sanders, “Revitalizing the Democratic Party,” OpEd News, 6 November 2017.

<sup>2</sup> “15 DSA Members Elected! 2017 election” (9 November 2017) at dsausa.org.



Bernie Sanders at a DSA meeting in Detroit.



**Michael Harrington founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) in 1973 and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in 1982.**

an “electoral force inside and outside of the Democratic Party,” just as the DSA has for decades.<sup>3</sup> So hapless dissident DSAers are stuck with the Democrats – and will continue to be. Pressuring and supporting this mainstay of U.S. capitalism is and always has been the purpose and function of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America. It goes together with the DSA’s nauseating promotion of illusions in American “democracy.” *And it is inseparable from the history of American social democracy’s participation in the crimes of U.S. imperialism.*

This is no abstract or academic matter. Today, as Donald Trump threatens “fire and fury” to “totally destroy” North Korea, everyone on the left should know:

- how the DSA’s direct forebears boasted of their work with the U.S. war machine during the Korean War;
- how they red-baited young radicals for solidarizing with the heroic Vietnamese insurgents against the puppet regime the social democrats helped install;
- and how they denounced the call to free Angela Davis as equivalent to terrorism.

“Credit Bernie Sanders for DSA’s explosive growth,” says *Rolling Stone* (8 February 2017) in one of the innumerable accounts in the liberal bourgeois media pitching the DSA as hip, responsible and the biggest group on the left. Though

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Schwartz, “DSA Convention Adopts National Political Priorities” (16 December 2017), at dsausa.org.



**DSA brags about “election victories.” Most of the candidates ran as Democrats.**

“independent” senator Sanders is not, it states, a member, he calls himself a democratic socialist. Not only that: “DSA members point to Sanders’ involvement in the Young People’s Socialist League – a former student group under the umbrella of what was then the Socialist Party ... in the early Sixties as evidence of his alignment with their ideologies.” And the “DSA, too, is largely modeled on” the old SP.

DSA leaders highlight the connection. One vice-chair of the group, Harold Meyerson, says Sanders “follows a line of American socialist tribunes” including Norman Thomas, Bayard Rustin and Michael Harrington. Another vice-chair, Joseph Schwartz, repeatedly invokes the Harrington-Thomas “legacy” in his postings to the DSA site and emphasizes the organization’s continuity with Harrington. A third DSA vice-chair, *Jacobin* editor Bhaskar Sunkara – a leading light of the DSA “left” – repeatedly invokes Harrington’s “relevance.” And DSA national director Maria Svart also links the group’s enthusiasm for “socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders” and his “political revolution” to the DSA’s “roots” in the Socialist Party of “Norman Thomas and Michael Harrington.”<sup>4</sup>

No, Bernie Sanders is not a socialist, and his “political revolution” has been a big fat scam for the Democrats – as we explain in materials from *The Internationalist* and *Revolution* reprinted in this pamphlet. Here, we will take a closer look at what this talk of “democratic socialism” really means, and what those roots tell us about the DSA.

**“Left Wing of the Possible”**

Seeking “the left wing of the possible” within the framework of bourgeois politics in general, and Democratic Party politics particularly, was the mantra of DSA founder Michael Harrington (1928-89). (The phrase was a conscious echo of the right wing of the French Socialist movement, which in

<sup>4</sup> Meyerson report on DNC, 28 July 2016, dsausa.org; Bhaskar Sunkara, “Lean Socialist,” *In These Times*, 29 April 2013, and “What we can learn from Harrington,” socialistworker.org, 6 May 2013; Maria Svart, “Let’s Talk Democratic Socialism, Already,” *In These Times*, 7 November 2011, and “Next Steps in the Political Revolution,” 5 December 2016, dsausa.org.

the late 19th century called itself “Possibilist.”) On this basis, Harrington achieved a certain kind of success, cultivating connections with liberal media stars, labor officials and high-profile academics. There’s even a Michael Harrington Center for Democratic Values and Social Change at Queens College in NYC. Now this part of “Harrington’s heritage,” as the DSA website calls it, is being reprised as the DSA receives effusive media coverage – plus assiduous fundraising among well-heeled liberals for its 501(c)(3) DSA Fund.<sup>5</sup> It’s all to steer potential radicals into safe

social-democratic channels, and back to the Democratic Party.

Harrington’s heritage, however, poses something of a dilemma for the DSA today – and for its own amorphous “left” wing. Any young people who join in the hopes that it has something to do with socialism are being taken for a ride. Nor are they the first – far from it. As we will see below, in decades past some revolted when it became clear to them what “democratic socialism” actually stands for; others saw a career path in cynicism (and worse). Still others were promptly chucked out. A word to the wise in any locals where the DSA “left” holds sway: check the locks on the doors to your office daily.

The inside story of the DSA is quite an education. For those who want to learn where the DSA comes from, there are many paeans to Harrington on its website (dsausa.org). But when revolutionary Marxists bring up the real origins of his Democratic Party “socialism,” its complicity in the crimes of U.S. imperialism and its effects on present-day politics, DSA stalwarts wave this away as ancient history and sectarian muckraking.

The DSA’s official version, “A History of Democratic Socialists of America 1971-2017,” written by vice-chair Schwartz, refers to the group’s foundation in 1982 through a fusion of Harrington’s SP-offshoot, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), and a fragment from the right wing of the ’60s “New Left” called New American Movement (NAM). It states: “DSA made an ethical contribution to the broader American Left by being one of the few radical organizations born out of a merger rather than a split.” The factual claim is not accurate: most currents on the left were actually the result of splits *and* fusions. Continuing with this “anti-sectarian” sanctimony, Schwartz goes on:

“DSA also helped popularize the vision of an ecumenical, multi-tendency socialist organization, an ethos that enabled it to recently incorporate ... many thousands of new members, mostly out of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. If

<sup>5</sup> 501(c)(3) organizations are tax-exempt supposedly non-political outfits of the sort that well-heeled right-wingers use to influence politics in the United States. The Charles Koch Foundation and Heritage Foundation, for example, are 501(c)(3) organizations.

you are committed to a pluralist, democratic conception of a just society then you can join DSA's collective project, regardless of your position (or lack thereof) on some arcane split in socialist history, or even whether you believe in the possibility of independent electoral work inside or outside the Democratic Party ballot line."

Schwartz, a leader of the Harringtonite old guard, harps on the "inside-outside" theme as the soft-sell pitch to herd left-moving youth back into the Democratic Party fold. Both of the DSA's constituent groups made "significant contributions" to "rebuilding a left-labor coalition within and without the Democratic Party," Schwartz writes. In fact, he states, "DSOC's greatest political contribution undoubtedly lay in making real Michael Harrington's vision of building a strong coalition among progressive trade unionists, civil rights and feminist activists and the 'new politics' left-liberals in the McGovern wing of the Democrats." Its congenital ties to the Democrats logically led to "DSA's decision in late 2014 to make its number one priority the movement to support Bernie Sanders running for president." And while various reformist leftists tried to pussyfoot around the issue of the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism, the DSA was emphatic that "Sanders should not only run, but should run in the Democratic primaries."

Despite Schwartz's dismissive talk of "some arcane split in socialist history," the fact is that the origins of the DSA go back to a series of splits, in particular:

- the split between the social-democratic Second International and the Communist Third International of Lenin and Trotsky at the time of World War I and the Russian Revolution;
- the split between Trotsky and James P. Cannon on one side and Harrington's mentor Max Shachtman on the other at the outbreak of World War II;
- Harrington's split with Students for a Democratic Society at the inception of the New Left; and
- the disintegration of the Harrington-Thomas-Shachtman Socialist Party under the impact of the Vietnam War, which gave rise to DSOC and then the DSA.

This genealogy is what's behind the deep-seated anti-communism that has characterized the DSA from the beginning. It's there in Schwartz's preachments of "opposition to authoritarian communism as a central moral obligation of democratic socialists," harking back to what he calls the "left-wing anti-Communism" of Harrington and other DSA founders. Today, his DSA history states, the group views "the collapse of communism" as "a critical gain for democracy." On the contrary, as the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have explained – and millions of working people have painfully experienced – the demise of the bureaucratically degenerated/deformed Soviet bloc workers states led to an intensified capitalist drive against the social gains and democratic rights of working people the world over.

Far from "arcane," these issues are of the greatest importance for workers and oppressed people around the world. From Wilson's WWI and FDR's WWII to JFK/LBJ's war on Vietnam and the wars of Jimmy Carter (Afghanistan), Bill Clinton (Yugoslavia) and Barack Obama (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria),

Democrats have led endless wars for U.S. imperial domination. Opposition to the Democratic Party and *all capitalist parties* is not some matter of taste, but a bedrock class principle for opponents of imperialist war, racist terror and exploitation. The social democrats of 2018 echo the Second International of 1917 that reviled the Russian Revolution in the name of (bourgeois) "democracy." When the USSR, undermined by Stalinism, fell to capitalist counterrevolution in 1989-92, revolutionary communists – Trotskyists – fought against this, defending the remaining revolutionary gains, while the DSA hailed this historic defeat for the proletariat that led to U.S. imperialism's "New World Order" rampage of unending war.

## DSA "Left" No Alternative

In a recent online discussion of whether the DSA can be "pushed left," a member declaimed: "It's bullshit to claim that DSA is a pressure group on the Democrats." Nonsense, that is exactly what the DSA has been from the start and is today: witness the Bernie Sanders campaign. And the DSA's openly declared effort to push the Democrats to the left – shaped by the "realignment" strategy of Max Shachtman and Michael Harrington – is reflected in the attempts, "from inside and outside," to do the same with the DSA itself. See the article on "The ABCs of the DSA," reproduced in this pamphlet, for more on this.

Claiming to have drawn a lesson from history, a grouping of "left" members of the DSA vowed to "reject the realignment strategy that has guided much of the left's electoral orientation for decades" (DSA Left Caucus founding statement, 29 October 2016). So did this mean drawing a *class line against backing bosses' parties and politicians*, as dreaded "Trotskyist sectarians" do? Not at all, the DSA "left" hastened to promise: "We do not ... call for an immediate and total break from voting for or supporting any Democratic candidate." After all, "We all fervently supported Bernie Sanders" – and voting for Democrats "can be justified in many circumstances," they stated.

Still, citing the "rich history of third party challenges" in the U.S., this grouping wanted to join other leftists sometimes in backing the Greens and other minor bourgeois parties. They also expressed interest in attempts to form left-populist lash-ups like SYRIZA in Greece or the virulently anti-communist Podemos in Spain if the opportunity arises. This is music to the ears of social-democratic groups positioned just a tad to the left – International Socialist Organization (ISO), Socialist Alternative (SAIt), etc. – which tailed Sanders with less success than the DSA. Those same groups assiduously court the DSA "left," which pressures the DSA to consider being a bit more picky about when to vote for Democrats, and to diversify its tactics to pressure this capitalist party – and bourgeois politics in general – to the left.

As Sanders roped youth and discontented workers into the discredited Democratic Party, such "socialists" offered their services to coax "Bernie" to consider running as an "independent," and occasionally use the Greens as a supplementary pressure group on the Democrats. While the Left Caucus had petered out by the time the DSA held its national convention last August, its place was taken by the Momentum caucus and other tendencies. But the political function of the DSA "left"

remains the same: to use the liberal illusions of young, would-be socialists to bind them to the ultra-reformist Democratic (Party) Socialists of America.

This can only lead to lead to political disorientation and support for imperialism. Thus long-time DSA “leftist” Jason Schulman co-authored a piece with Joseph Schwartz on “The Democratic Socialist Vision,” denouncing Lenin’s theory of the state, saying “the end of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ... will hopefully lead to movements for democratic socialism in these countries,” and so forth *ad nauseam*.<sup>6</sup> Quite the contrary, counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc led to the growth of fascistic and outright fascist movements throughout East Europe and a decline of parties claiming to be socialist, while emboldening the imperialists, including the DSA’s beloved Democrats.

### To Take You for a Ride, Lots to Hide

You can’t understand any social institution (racial oppression or the subjugation of women, for example) without tracing its history, and when it comes to a political party, knowing its origin (like the fact that the Democrats originated as the slaveowners’ party). To understand the map of the left today you have to know how the organizations making it up took shape, and why they debated the big issues of politics and history so fiercely. Those who claim otherwise generally have something to hide. That goes double for the DSA, which boasts of its influence and numbers while providing a very partial and sanitized account of its past. Leon Trotsky famously remarked that the leading American social democrat of his day, Norman Thomas (1884-1968), “called himself a socialist as a result of a misunderstanding.” As today’s heirs of Thomas and Harrington push Sanders-style “socialism” in the service of the Democrats, they are promoting the same kind of confusion.

As for the social-democratic leftists who sidle up to the DSA or jump straight in (ISO, SAlt, IMT, Solidarity and innumerable smaller fry), their biggest argument is that the DSA is big. Perhaps its politics ain’t so great, they murmur, but it is so very, very large. Rummaging around in this great big bag of hugeness, they hope that they can grab a piece of the action for their own favorite flavor of reformism. Yet the brand of American social democracy of Michael Harrington and his heirs does not represent, as many European “socialist” parties do, significant sections of workers or the oppressed. Its *raison d’être* (reason for existence) is to block any break from the Democrats. Tailing Sanders and the Democrats themselves, the left groups pandering to the DSA may gently criticize its past and present now and then. But they tread lightly on what is actually a very explosive history, fearing it could blow up the delicate minuet with their fellow “socialists.”

To capture the essence of the DSA, you have to take note of how the bourgeoisie actively promotes these “socialists.” The same was true of Harrington. A remarkable number of articles touting the DSA founder’s life and works have appeared over the years in the mainstream media, from the *New Yorker*’s 50-

page promo back in 1963<sup>7</sup> to today’s *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone* and the *Mother Jones* (May-June 2017) puff piece titled “Donald Trump Has Made Socialism Cool Again.” Typically, such pieces tell a tale of the “charismatic” and eternally boyish Midwesterner Harrington, who aspired to be a poet, struggled with spirituality, hung out in Greenwich Village, and so on. In short, as American as apple pie. Accurately, they cite him as successor to Norman Thomas, the long-time leader of U.S. social democracy, dubbed “Mr. Socialism” by the friendly bourgeois press and “a friend and mentor” by Harrington.

Frequently, such hagiographic accounts have Harrington finally fighting free of “sectarian” trammels to embody a respectable, responsible, “relevant” Democratic Left. This term was one of his favorites – evoking the “left” of the Democratic Party and a “left” tailored to U.S.-style institutions of bourgeois rule. It has been key to the DSA’s politics since Harrington founded it and his *Democratic Left* newsletter became its publication. It harks back to *Toward a Democratic Left*, a book Harrington wrote in 1968 as co-leader of Norman Thomas’ Socialist Party. *Kirkus Reviews* (15 April 1968) captured its essence with the trenchant observation that Harrington proposed “not the reorganization of society which one might expect from a self-proclaimed radical – but the revival of liberalism, by moving leftward within the structure of the Democratic Party.” Touché. And that’s what the DSA has sought to do (not very successfully) ever since.

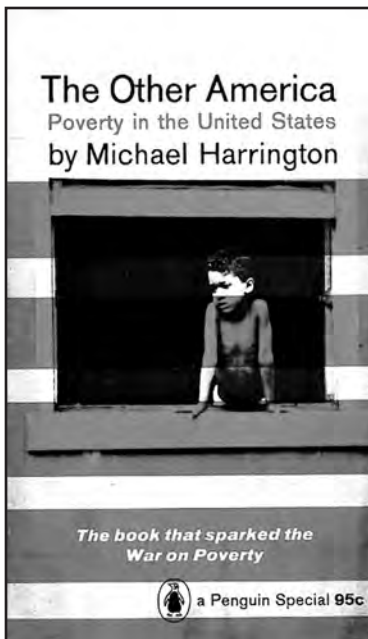
In reality, as the 2016 election cycle showed once again, you don’t have stand formally within the Democratic Party’s structures to pursue the policy of pressuring it, from “outside” as well as in. Thus “democratic socialist” senator Sanders attracted youth and some workers with his talk of “political revolution,” and then when they were hooked, after the predictable failure of his primary bid, urged them to vote for Hillary Clinton. The Green Party has a similar technique, running in “safe” states and elections where there is no danger of a Republican win. They are tailed in turn by a host of groups claiming to be Marxist, various of which sometimes run on the Green ticket. In doing so they judiciously temper mild criticism with “respect for Harrington’s importance” and for “his insistence that radical political action was necessary,” as the ISO’s paper (*Socialist Worker*, 8 May 2013) put it in an exchange on Harrington with DSAer Sunkara.

The legacy of Michael Harrington is the heritage of the DSA, and it is the polar opposite of everything that revolutionary Marxism stands for. In this article, we will show what that has meant in real life. Lionized by the capitalist press, trained by virulent anti-communist Max Shachtman (1904-1972), working in tandem with Norman Thomas – the embodiment of “State Department socialism” – Harrington served the capitalist-imperialist Democratic Party *against* the cause of socialism. The best place to begin is with how Harrington first became the poster boy for the “Democratic Left,” just as the Democratic White House of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson was trying to wipe out revolutions against U.S. imperialism, from Cuba to Vietnam.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight MacDonald, “Our Invisible Poor,” *New Yorker*, 19 January 1963. According to some accounts, this review of Harrington’s *The Other America* is what brought the book to John F. Kennedy’s attention.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Schwartz and Jason Schulman, “Toward Freedom: Democratic Socialist Theory and Practice,” 22 December 2012, dsausa.org.





Harrington's book *The Other America* (left) was his ticket to the big time of bourgeois politics. He later boasted of meeting with LBJ's cabinet members and an aide to U.S. war secretary Robert McNamara. Above: Johnson with McNamara (right) following NLF's 1968 Têt offensive that presaged U.S. defeat in Vietnam.

### "Mr. Poverty" Goes to Washington

The DSA's website trumpets the role of its founder in articles like "War on Poverty: Initiated by Socialist Michael Harrington" (10 January 2014), boasting that the publication of Harrington's *The Other America* in 1962 "was a seminal event leading [to] meetings with President John F. Kennedy and Sargent Shriver's work with the administration." The book "helped to shape President Johnson's plans for a War on Poverty," it notes. While Harrington never met with JFK himself, he came close enough that the experience was a milestone in that lifelong quest to be the "left wing of the possible" in the framework of capitalist politics.

An investigation of the persistence of poverty amidst myths of "The Affluent Society" (the title of a tome by liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith), *The Other America* was Harrington's ticket to the (relatively) big time, earning him the sobriquet "Mr. Poverty." Reportedly reaching John F. Kennedy's desk in the White House, the book came out in between JFK's failed attempt to stamp out the Cuban Revolution with the Bay of Pigs invasion and his threats to blow up the world in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Years later JFK's brother, Senator Edward Kennedy, said he viewed "Michael Harrington as delivering the Sermon on the Mount to America."<sup>8</sup> A nod from Kennedy's "Camelot" was virtually a taste of heaven for the man soon to be America's foremost respectable "socialist."

Not for nothing would Harrington be "knighted by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.," the former special advisor and court historian to JFK, as "the only responsible radical in America."<sup>9</sup> As Harrington's political heirs in today's DSA daydream about

a Bernie Sanders presidency, they hark back to that time. For Harrington in the 1960s, the tantalizing experience of rubbing shoulders with the powerful continued when Johnson assumed the presidency after JFK's assassination. LBJ appointed Kennedy brother-in-law and Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver to oversee planning for LBJ's vaunted "War on Poverty." Shriver then appointed Harrington to the War on Poverty task force in early 1964.

In one of his autobiographies, Harrington provides a name-dropping recital of the members of LBJ's cabinet and White House staff who attended the "very first meeting" of the task force, including "a whiz kid for Robert McNamara at the Department of Defense." For the imperialist social democrat, those were the days, as he fondly recalls: "It was all very heady and exciting to be arguing with Cabinet officers and indirectly presenting memos to the President."<sup>10</sup> "Mr. Poverty" wound up with one of the pens that Johnson used when he signed his anti-poverty legislation. Although bitterly opposed by the Republicans, the anti-poverty programs hardly wiped out poverty in the U.S., and they certainly had nothing to do with socialism. With a few palliatives, they attempted to prettify the ugly reality of capitalism.

Harrington went on, in the fall of '64, to "argue forcefully ... that the Left should support Johnson's bid for election to the White House in his own right."<sup>11</sup> His fervent endorsement came shortly after Johnson used the trumped-up "Gulf of Tonkin incident" as a pretext for massive bombing raids against North Vietnam, brain-trusted by McNamara, the former Ford Motor Co. president who became one of the most notorious war criminals in American history (chillingly depicted in the 2004 film *The Fog of War*).

A year later, the future DSA founder was able to score a brush with the imperialist bomber-in-chief himself. Not long

<sup>8</sup> Senator Kennedy's encomium was delivered in a speech to a celebration of Harrington in 1988, as recalled in an obituary for the DSA founder in the *New York Times* (2 August 1989), which praised him as "an inspiring political organizer."

<sup>9</sup> *Village Voice* (26 November 1964), quoted in Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (Public Affairs, 2000), p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Harrington, *Fragments of the Century* (Saturday Review Press/Dutton, 1973), pp. 174-175.

<sup>11</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 218-219.

after LBJ sent 42,000 U.S. Marines and Army troops to occupy the Dominican Republic, and as the napalm rained down on Vietnam, Harrington joined a planning session for Johnson's White House Conference on Civil Rights in fall 1965. "Along with the other delegates he was invited to a Texas-style buffet dinner in the White House, and Lyndon Johnson shook his hand," reports DSA member Maurice Isserman in *The Other American*, his generally favorable (though not uncritical) biography of Harrington. One of the other participants "came over to him and marveled, 'Mike, we're eating barbecue in the White House.'" <sup>12</sup>

### How It All Began

In his autobiographical reminiscence on his good old days with LBJ cabinet members, Harrington asks: "But how could an anti-capitalist radical [sic!] play a role within a capitalist government, i.e., in that institution Marx had described as the 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie'?" This was "a difficult emotional issue for me," he avers. "When I first became a socialist," he claims, "I accepted the revolutionary Marxist position as it derived from the Marx of the *Manifesto* and the Trotsky of the Fourth International." Actually, that is quite untrue; he was a disciple of the *anti-Trotskyist* Max Shachtman – but Harrington goes on explain that he eventually came "to understand how wrong I had been...."

For Harrington, the conclusion was: "So when I got the opportunity to work with powerful Democratic liberals in a struggle against poverty in 1964 I had no principled hesitations about accepting the invitation."<sup>13</sup> That is also true of Harrington's heirs in the DSA today, who jumped headlong into Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination: they have no principled objections to participating in a capitalist party. On the contrary. And to understand the DSA's origins and politics, it is vital to grasp the key to its founder's trajectory, as stated by his biographer Isserman: "Of all the mentors that Michael Harrington would adopt during his political career, including such notable figures as [Catholic Worker leader Dorothy] Day and [SP leader] Thomas, Shachtman was destined to exercise the most lasting influence upon him."<sup>14</sup>

A former editor of the *Catholic Worker*, in 1952 Michael Harrington was recruited to the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) by another future DSAer, Bogdan Denitch. A profoundly anti-communist, red-baiting organization, YPSL was the youth group of Norman Thomas' Socialist Party. Thomas' SP was known for its close collaboration with the highest levels of the U.S. government in the Cold War. Harrington's recruitment to YPSL came at a time when it was being courted by Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (ISL). For Shachtman, this was a way station toward the ISL joining the SP itself, as part of a project for "regroupment" on the basis of Cold War social democracy. In 1954 Harrington and Denitch helped form a new youth group for Shachtman called the Young Socialist League. Harrington soon became its national chairman.

The ISL/YSL put forward what Shachtman called the politics of the "Third Camp," claiming neutrality in the Cold War ("Neither Washington nor Moscow"), while embracing out-and-out Stalinophobia, siding more and more openly with Washington and imperialism generally against the Soviet Union. Shachtman's rightward motion took off from his vitriolic 1940 split from Leon Trotsky's Fourth International and its U.S. section, the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Shachtman and NYU professor James Burnham (later an editor of the ultra-right-wing, arch-anti-communist *National Review*) led what Trotsky termed the "petty-bourgeois opposition," which refused to defend the Soviet Union in WWII, breaking from the Fourth International's policy of unconditional military defense of the USSR against any capitalist state. Though it took Shachtman a while to cook up a theory to justify this, he eventually settled on the claim that the USSR was ruled by a new "bureaucratic collectivist" class.

Shachtman counterposed his version of anti-communist "totalitarianism" theory to Trotsky's explanation that the USSR was a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, still based on crucial gains of the October Revolution. As Trotsky emphasized, the defense of the USSR required a proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and re-establish soviet democracy and the policy of revolutionary internationalism. Some leftists try to treat the whole topic as an arcane Talmudic dispute. Quite to the contrary, Trotsky's warning that the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR would be a major victory for imperialism has been borne out in full in the quarter century since this historic defeat for the international working class occurred.

By the 1950s, the counterrevolutionary logic of Shachtman's anti-communist position on the "Russian Question" meant growing political convergence with the traditional social democrats. The remnants of socialist vocabulary were still useful for some sophist justifications. Yet particularly when imperialism's counterrevolutionary Cold War was carried out under "progressive" Democratic leadership, Shachtmanism meant, more and more brazenly, backing the aims and actions of U.S. imperialism. Norman Thomas' SP similarly backed Western imperialism in the name of democracy, against the "Communist totalitarianism" of the East. So Shachtman aligned with the "democratic socialism" of Norman Thomas in the Korean War, which Thomas called "a struggle to preserve civilization."<sup>15</sup>

This genocidal war was waged by Democratic president Harry Truman, who during WWII carried out the terror bombing of Japan, killing 100,000 Tokyo citizens in two nights of fire-bombing before dropping atomic bombs on civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Korea (1950-53), Truman's war killed 3 million Koreans by every means short of atom bombs. (Although he wanted to use them, he was advised that the USSR would retaliate.) Shachtman and Norman Thomas pitched in by writing propaganda leaflets that the imperialists literally stuffed into canisters which were otherwise used in germ warfare and dropped on the Koreans. The leaflets urged

<sup>12</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> Harrington, *Fragments of the Century*, pp. 176-179.

<sup>14</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 115, 363.

<sup>15</sup> Dwight Steward, *Mr. Socialism: Being an Account of Norman Thomas and His Labors to Keep America Safe from Socialism* (Lyle Stuart, 1974), p. 194.

## Eugene V. Debs vs. Democratic (Party) Socialists of America

The Ohio Repository



Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs, delivering his speech in Canton, Ohio calling for resistance to the imperialist World War I, 9 February 1918. As a result of his “incendiary” speech denouncing the war and capitalism, he was imprisoned for sedition.

The DSA’s pretense of standing in the tradition of Eugene V. Debs is a gross falsification of history. Though unable to make the leap from pre-WWI socialism to the communism of Lenin and Trotsky, Debs hailed the Bolshevik Revolution reviled Democratic politicians and class-collaborationist “labor skates,” fought to free class-war prisoners, and spent years in prison for leading “illegal” strikes and exhorting the workers to oppose imperialist war.

In a 1904 speech on “The Socialist Party and the Working Class,” Debs stated:

“The Republican and Democratic parties, or, to be more exact, the Republican-Democratic party, represent the capitalist class in the class struggle. They are the political wings of the capitalist system and such differences as arise between them relate to spoils and not to principles. With either of those parties in power one thing is always certain and that is that the capitalist class is in the saddle and the working class under the saddle. Under the administration of both these parties the means of production are private property, production is carried forward for capitalist profit purely, markets are glutted and industry paralyzed, workingmen become tramps and criminals while injunctions, soldiers and riot guns are brought into action to preserve ‘law and order’ in the chaotic carnival of capitalistic anarchy.”

the Koreans to love those who were bombing them, because the Communists were their true enemy.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Shachtman cited these leaflets to show why the ISL, as an anti-communist group, should not be included on the government’s “subversive list,” boasting in his paper *Labor Action* (28 September 1953) that they were dropped “by U.S. bombers ... presumably through the sponsorship of the State Department.” Also see Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagerman, *The United States and Biological Warfare: Secrets from the Early Cold War and Korea* (Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 176-178.

By 1956, Shachtman was campaigning for a merger of his ISL/YSL into Thomas’ SP and its youth group, in the name of their common commitment to “democracy.” In the newspaper of the still-Trotskyist SWP, Myra Tanner Weiss described what that actually meant:

“‘Democracy’ to the Social Democrats means capitalist democracy, support of U.S. imperialism in its drive toward World War III, support of the anti-Communist witch hunt, support of the dictatorial rule [over] the unions by the labor bureaucrats. When Max Shachtman and the ISL accept this kind of State Department ‘democracy’ and try to pass it off as socialism they have passed the point of no return...”<sup>17</sup>

Jolted toward the same conclusion by Shachtman’s lurch to the right, a group of YSL activists formed a Left Wing Caucus in early 1957. The caucus denounced the politics of the Socialist Party, which “can be defined as ‘State-Department Socialism’ and ‘Democratic Party Socialism,’” serving as a “socialist cover for U.S. imperialism and ‘liberal’ big business.”<sup>18</sup> Shaken from Shachtmanite assumptions by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 – which confirmed Trotsky’s view of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a brittle, contradictory caste, not a new ruling class – many in the caucus, including its leaders Tim Wohlforth, James Robertson and Shane Mage, were drawn towards Trotskyism. As Isserman tells it:

“In the ensuing factional struggle within the YSL ... Michael [Harrington] brought charges of consorting with Trotskyists against the leader of the YSL’s left-wing caucus, Tim Wohlforth (who had, indeed, been flirting with James Cannon’s Socialist Workers Party), and had him expelled from the YSL. Wohlforth, in turn, accompanied by several score of YSL defectors, helped to form a new radical youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), which affiliated with the SWP.”<sup>19</sup>

The founders of the YSA went on to form the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP, predecessor of the Spartacist League, which for three decades upheld the Trotskyist program defended today by the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International.

### Harrington-Shachtman-Thomas “Realignment”

Meanwhile, back in Shachtman-land, “Max’s boys,” experts at organizational maneuvers, joined the Socialist Party in 1958, sealing the deal with a statement pledging to uphold “the Aims

<sup>17</sup> Myra Tanner Weiss, “The Shachtmanite Regroupment Line,” *The Militant*, 21 January 1957. As part of his campaign to join the SP, Shachtman tried to lump Norman Thomas together with early Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs. The technique of linking their names became characteristic of Harrington, and his admirers. In a 1956 article, James P. Cannon denounced “charlatans” who did “an injustice to the memory of Debs” with efforts to use him as an icon for the “respectable reformist brand of socialism” (see Cannon, “E.V. Debs,” <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1956/debs.htm>).

<sup>18</sup> “On the Socialist Party,” *YSL Left Wing Bulletin* No. 1 (March 1957), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, 166. Despite Wohlforth’s subsequent evolution, his pamphlet *What Makes Shachtman Run?* (1957) includes useful material, as does *YSA – How It Began* (Labor Publications, 1973).

and Tasks of Democratic Socialism adopted by the Socialist International with which [the party] is affiliated.”<sup>20</sup> Quickly gaining ascendancy over the aged and slower-footed Thomasites, they proceeded to push the SP even further to the right, under their new strategy: “realignment.” This was the prospect of “realigning” the Democratic Party by jettisoning its Southern racist (“Dixiecrat”) wing, while tirelessly promoting the worldview of the virulently anti-communist AFL-CIO leadership headed by the personification of Cold War labor officialdom, George Meany.

The Shachtman-Harrington forces made “realignment” their calling card, organizing the Realignment Caucus of the SP in 1960. Though as a former Presbyterian minister he made a “principle” of not joining factions, “Norman Thomas ... nevertheless announced his support for the program of the Realignment Caucus.”<sup>21</sup> Thomas remained the SP’s titular leader for a number of years. But with Shachtman as coach, Harrington quickly became quarterback for the “democratic socialist” team. (He officially became chairman of the SP in 1968.) While pitching Harrington as a kind of renaissance man of reformism, his biographer Isserman underlines: “Foremost among [his] commitments in these years was his support for the Socialist Party, for the party’s ‘realignment’ faction, and for his faction’s undisputed leader, Max Shachtman.”<sup>22</sup>

When the SP launched a new paper called *New America* in 1960, Harrington was its first editor. Realignment was the theme of his editorial for the first issue:

“American socialism must concentrate its efforts on the battle for political realignment, for the creation of a real second party that will unite labor, liberals, Negroes.... Such a party as the Democratic Party will be when the Southern racists and certain other corruptive elements have been forced out of it.”

That fall, liberal Democrat JFK won the White House, opening a “new frontier” for *The Other America*’s “democratic socialist” author. Kennedy, who ran as a more youthful, stylish and aggressive Cold Warrior, launched the CIA-organized Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. Shachtman openly backed this attempt to bring imperialist counterrevolution to Cuba. Harrington did not break from his mentor. This was, however, too much for others in his organization. Hal Draper led a West Coast-based split, which eventually became the International Socialists (I.S.). This group remained viciously anti-communist, but did not so ostentatiously support U.S. imperialism, preferring to continue to uphold the pretense of the “Third Camp.” As the I.S. fragmented in the mid-1970s, some its leaders helped form Solidarity and an expelled Left Tendency influenced by Tony Cliff in Britain founded the International Socialist Organization.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “ISL Members to Join SP-SDF,” *New International*, Spring-Summer 1958. (“SP-SDF” referred to the SP’s merger with a group of former members called the Social Democratic Federation.)

<sup>21</sup> SDUSA, *For the Record* (1973), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, p. 265.

<sup>23</sup> In an exchange with *Jacobin* editor Bhaskar Sunkara, Joe Allen of the International Socialist Organization backhandedly acknowledges that the ISO shares Shachtmanite roots with the DSA; from its origins “the ISO tradition stood for ‘Neither Washington nor Moscow, but Workers’ Power, East and West,’” which “was similar to the slogan that originated with Max Shachtman during the Second World War” (“What Harrington shows us,” [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org), 2 May 2013).

Elsewhere in this pamphlet we look at the ravages of “realignment” when Bayard Rustin, Shachtman-faction YPSL members (known as “YPSLs” or “yipsels”) Tom Kahn and Rachele Horowitz, and others, applied it to the civil rights movement. As JFK’s war in Vietnam was escalated by his successor, Harrington, Rustin and others famously went “all the way with LBJ.” This meant lashing out against young leftists who recoiled from Johnson, and then his VP and hoped-for successor, Hubert Humphrey – the consummate red-baiting Cold War liberal who authored the Communist Control Act of 1954. As Harrington, Rustin et al. lobbied the White House to adopt what they called a Freedom Budget, they hoped to keep basking in LBJ’s War on Poverty. For liberals, the “tragedy of Vietnam” was largely that it dashed such hopes.

Until the end of his life, Harrington would insist that “the socialist and radical Left” would be “condemned ... to failure and irrelevance” unless it “learn[ed] to understand” that “mass movements for social change in America ... have been predominantly liberal.”<sup>24</sup> Making common cause with the liberals remained key to his politics, as it has to his successors (while their brethren in the ISO, SAIt and other reformist groups seek to be at most one step to the left of the liberal Democrats). Meanwhile, as the Dixiecrats switched over to the Republicans, the “realigned” Democratic Party and American liberalism moved further and further to the right. Shachtman and his disciple Harrington thus played a role in shifting leftists rightward into bourgeois American politics, reinforcing the sinister illusion that the Democrats are or could be the party of democracy and freedom, when in fact they no less than the Republicans are a party of racist police terror domestically and imperialist terror abroad.

### Hunting “Reds,” Locking Out Leftists

By the early 1960s, the impact of the civil rights movement, the Cuban Revolution and the escalating U.S. war in Vietnam began to break up the “Cold War consensus” in American society. “Socialist” Cold Warriors of the Thomas-Harrington-Shachtman kind had to face new challenges, notably the emergence of a student “New Left,” as youthful liberals found their illusions in JFK, and LBJ’s War on Poverty, shattered on the brutal realities of racism and imperialist terror.

Harrington, who liked to call himself “America’s oldest young socialist,” put his experience leading the Shachtmanite charge against the Left Wing Caucus in the late ’50s to use repeatedly in the following decade, most famously against the youthful leaders of Students for a Democratic Society. SDS began as the student affiliate of a Socialist Party front group, the League for Industrial Democracy. Its 1962 conference at Port Huron, Michigan was a key event in the early development of the New Left. The “Port Huron Statement” was still well within the bounds of liberalism, including standard pledges of “opposition to the communist system.” However, its mild criticism of “unreasoning anticommunism” and of excessive “paranoia about the Soviet Union” drove SP and LID leaders into a frenzy of accusations that SDS was straying from Cold War orthodoxy.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Harrington, “Liberalism and the Left,” *Taking Sides* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), p. 13.

“Egged on by Harrington, the officers of LID summoned the SDS leadership” to an “emergency meeting” in late June 1962, followed by another in early July. It was a veritable witch hunt in which Harrington “zealously played the role of chief inquisitor.”<sup>25</sup> Harrington’s red hunt became so notorious that it features prominently in virtually every history of 1960s activism. As one summarizes it:

“The presence of a teenage observer from a Communist Party youth group provoked a fierce internal battle with the anticommunist Socialists controlling the League for Industrial Democracy.... Socialist Party leaders like Michael Harrington had attended the Port Huron conference, and were disturbed by what they saw. They had long felt that the SDS ‘kids’ were oblivious to what Socialists saw as the overwhelming danger [of pro-Soviet Communism]. Permitting a Communist youth to attend, even as a nonvoting observer, was a last straw. In New York, the LID board changed the locks on the SDS office and fired the staff.”<sup>26</sup>

Today, DSAers pitch Mike Harrington as a kindly grandfather figure for a “reasonable” left with “unity” and fraternal feeling for all. Records of the 6 July 1962 LID/Harrington hearing tell a different story. The decision to allow a member of the CP youth group (then called Progressive Youth Organizing Committee) was just the first item on the bill of particulars:

*An LID director demanded:* “Do you think that the LID would allow a communist-front group to be seated at a convention?”

*Harrington:* “PYOC is the youth group of the CP! – it’s not a front group. There’s a tradition, and a good one, not to give it a voice or vote in the community.”

*An SDS speaker* pleaded that the Port Huron document was “not blind” in its attitude toward the Soviet bloc, and they had “just allowed [the CP youth group member] to be seated” at the convention, with no implication of supporting his views.

*Harrington:* “We should have nothing to do with those people.... United frontism [sic] means accepting reds to your meeting.... [T]hat you could countenance any united frontism now is inconceivable.... Documents shmocuments.”

*The LID board* “brought out other arguments,” the book *SDS* relates. “They objected to the fact that [the son of a former CPer] had been chosen as a Field Secretary for the fall – his father was a Communist, you know, and wasn’t he a Communist himself once? They harked back to a demonstration earlier that year in which SDS had joined other groups including PYOC,” against a rally of the right-wing Young Americans for Freedom. “And so it went.”<sup>27</sup>

### “Social Democrats Aren’t Radicals”

“America’s best liberals were on the lip of red-baiting us out of existence,” one of the SDSers said. An hour after the hearing (or as some accounts call it, “the inquest”), LID fired the SDS staffers, cut off funds to the organization, moved to seize its mailing lists, and changed the locks on its office. SDS leaders feared a full break would lead to an escalation of

<sup>25</sup> James Miller, “*Democracy Is in the Streets*”: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago (Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 127; Isserman, *Other American*, p. 240.

<sup>26</sup> Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 62-64.

McCarthyite tactics: “We knew LID would spend its energies trying to blackball us and make us [out to be] some Communist organization if we broke with them,” one recalled. “They were vicious,” said another.<sup>28</sup> The affiliation was kept in place for a while with a compromise (though LID still refused to pay the field secretary’s salary). One SDSer said the experience “taught me that Social Democrats aren’t radicals and can’t be trusted in a radical movement.”<sup>29</sup>

Harrington’s reputation as the “democratic socialist” specialist in locking out young leftists would hound him despite the gestures of reconciliation. In 1964, as Harrington pushed hard for support to Johnson, the still-liberal SDS went only “part of the way with LBJ.” Meanwhile Harrington’s Socialist Party was having new problems with its own youth group, YPSL, some of whose members were calling to “Vote No for President.” Others wanted a labor party instead of the Shachtman-Harrington faction’s strategy of “realignment” through the Democratic Party. Still others were (horror of horrors) coming out for Trotskyism. As Isserman tells it, “the SP gave up and dissolved YPSL.”<sup>30</sup>

So members of today’s self-styled DSA left should not be too surprised if they find themselves locked out some time in the not too distant future (unless, as is more likely, they are simply absorbed like so many loyal critics before them).

In late 1964 LID lashed out again at SDS, which had issued a call for an April 1965 march on Washington against the Vietnam War and was adopting a policy of “non-exclusion” towards reds. The author of *SDS* notes that the student group’s local branches were “known to have cooperated” on specific actions with “political groups of all stripes, including Communists and Trotskyists.” But “that paled to a mere transgression in light of the upcoming march on Washington: not only was it held in opposition to a war of undeniable anti-Communist intent, not only was it challenging a basic policy of ‘Communist containment’ which the LID regarded as sacrosanct, but it actually *invited the participation of domestic Communist organizations*.”<sup>31</sup> Horrors!

### Red-Baiting Viet Cong “Apologists”

The LID was a kind of joint venture between the Socialist Party and George Meany’s labor officialdom. Since 1960, Meany’s “AFL-CIO had served as a conduit for millions of dollars in American aid from the State Department to anti-communist unions in South Vietnam,” notes Isserman – i.e., fronts for government repression like the “unions” created by the American Institute for Free Labor Development in Latin America. The AFL-CIO’s 1965 convention proclaimed a resolution to “support the Johnson Administration in Vietnam.” Meanwhile, “Shachtman knew that the SP was useful to him only so long as it remained inoffensive to George Meany. And

<sup>28</sup> Sale, *SDS*, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Newfield, *A Prophetic Minority* (New American Library, 1966), pp. 98-99.

<sup>30</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, p. 234. The SP’s *New America* (31 October 1964) reported that the party had “suspended” YPSL. Some accounts state YPSL then dissolved itself (Thomas Barton [YPSL left wing leader] Papers, <http://scua.library.umass.edu/ead/mums539>).

<sup>31</sup> Sale, *SDS*, p. 177 (emphasis in original).



**During the Vietnam War Harrington promoted “my kind of anti-Communism,” denouncing those who showed solidarity with Vietnamese revolution by carrying “Viet Cong” flags. Above: Demonstrators carry NLF flag in Boston protest over the May 1970 massacre of antiwar protesters at Kent State University.**

that meant, among other things, that Shachtman could not permit the Socialists to take a strong stand in opposition to the Vietnam War, which Meany ardently supported,” Isserman writes. Moreover, supporting U.S. imperialism against the “red menace” in Southeast Asia was, even without prompting from Meany, the position of Shachtman, who in mid-1965 announced that he opposed U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Isserman seeks to present Harrington in as sympathetic a light as possible, but the facts are so devastating that even his toned-down summary speaks volumes. Harrington was “personally appalled by the war,” Isserman asserts, but “did not allow himself” to come out with an “uncompromising” condemnation. Instead, “Time and again throughout the 1960s he would refer to the war as a ‘tragedy’ – as if it were an earthquake, a hurricane, or a plague.” And “by not blaming Johnson for the war, he also could avoid blaming those amongst his closest and longest-standing political comrades who were supporting the slaughter LBJ had unleashed.” Harrington could “continue to view them as good socialists with whom he differed on peripheral issues ... while remaining allied with them on the crucial domestic issue of realigning the Democratic Party.”<sup>32</sup> To cover this, discussion of the war should consist of suggestions for “negotiations,” at most, with supposedly even-handed “blame” assigned to both sides – the imperialists and the heroic Vietnamese who defied their napalm, Agent Orange and cluster bombs in the ultimately successful fight to defeat them.

With TV news showing U.S. carpet-bombing, burning huts, free-fire “kill zones” and barbed-wire “strategic hamlets,” increasing numbers of campus activists were coming to see that Ho Chi Minh’s forces in the north and the National Liberation

Front (NLF, known as the “Viet Cong”) in the south were waging a just war against imperialist aggression. Viet Cong flags began to appear in protests. While the SWP moved into outright reformism by building a “popular front” with liberal bourgeois politicians to “bring our boys home” from Vietnam, revolutionary Trotskyists called for the defeat of U.S. imperialism, victory to the Vietnamese revolution, and workers strikes against the war. For the social democrats, who denounced even calls for immediate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam as an alarming sign that the “antiwar movement” was soft on communism, the appearance of NLF flags was cause for a full-scale freak-out.

Harrington was now the chairman of the LID board, and a young Shachtman disciple named Tom Kahn had become its executive

director. As SDS prepared its April 1965 march against the war, “Kahn let it be known that LID was strongly disapproving of SDS, not just for allowing Communists in the march but for refusing to repudiate them publicly.” The Shachtman circle’s spokesman on civil rights, Bayard Rustin, “tried to dampen the march by keeping liberal friends and moderate civil rights forces out of it.”<sup>33</sup> (It should be noted that by this time, the Stalinist CP was well to the right of SDS, forming popular-front “peace” coalitions with Democratic politicians, joining the Young Democrats and calling for negotiations rather than NLF victory.)

The drumbeat went on, with Norman Thomas writing in the SP’s *New America* (31 May 1965) to state “the democratic socialist position” of not being “openly or behind a pacifist façade ... supporters of Vietcong” but favoring “negotiation,” denouncing “individuals and groups ... who want a Vietcong victory more than they want peace” and who backed “revolutionary violence and hate.” Sadly, he opined, “President Johnson’s policy in Vietnam ... is made to order to advance pro-Communism, if not Communism, in the world and on the American campus.” Harrington took up the cudgels in the *Village Voice* (11 November 1965) with a screed titled “Does the Peace Movement Need the Communists?” Promoting what he called “my kind of anti-Communism,” he reiterated that “I would under no circumstances ‘celebrate’ a Vietcong victory.” The “peace movement” had to disassociate itself “from any hint of being an apologist for the Viet Cong,” he warned.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Sale, *SDS*, p. 177.

<sup>34</sup> Harrington considered “Does the Peace Movement Need the Communists?” important enough to reproduce it twenty years later in *Taking Sides*, pp. 106-115. Norman Thomas was also fond of the phrase “my kind of anti-communism,” using it, for example, in a subhead and the body of his column titled (just to be on the safe side) “My Anti-Communism,” *New America*, 22 March 1967.

<sup>32</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 267-270.

Two weeks later in the *New York Review of Books* (25 November 1965), Harrington joined Rustin, *Dissent* editor Irving Howe and Shachtmanite YPSL leader Penn Kemble in a statement denouncing those who – rather than ally with forces that “lend formal assent to the Johnson policy but might be persuaded to support specific proposals leading to a peaceful settlement in Vietnam,” as the authors advocated – were instead giving “explicit or covert” support to the Viet Cong or calling for its victory.

Recalling that he had once looked up to Harrington and Howe, Carl Oglesby, who became SDS president in 1965, pointed out that they were “denouncing me as a Red because I wouldn’t criticize both sides [in the war] equally – which seemed bullshit because both sides weren’t invading equally, weren’t napalming each other equally.” The following year, Shachtman held a meeting in Bayard Rustin’s apartment to discuss Vietnam. Isserman summarizes Shachtman’s argument: “As terrible as the war was ... anything was preferable to ‘Communist victory.’ The American war effort must continue until the Communists were beaten.” As for “offers of negotiation,” these were “permissible, but only if hedged with enough conditions to make it impossible for the Communists to accept.” Needless to say, “if Shachtman and his supporters took part in organizing an ‘antiwar’ group, they were dissembling.” So what did Harrington do? Claiming Harrington was naive about his mentor’s motives, Isserman relates:

“Michael helped Shachtman and others organize a new group called Negotiations Now, which promoted itself as a responsible, moderate alternative to the irresponsible, radical groups calling for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam....

“Negotiations Now was organizationally little more than a front group for the Shachtmanite faction of the Socialist Party.... [Its] chief function was to serve as the SP’s placeholder in the antiwar movement – something they could point to when challenged to show that they too were working to bring the war to an end. Negotiations Now also served as a convenient podium from which the Shachtmanites could criticize the rest of the antiwar movement as being, in contrast, extremist, misguided, and objectively pro-Communist.”<sup>35</sup>

It’s an object lesson in what “democratic socialist” politics mean in practice – but just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the social democrats and Vietnam. (See article on “‘Democratic Socialism’ in the Service of U.S. Imperialism” in this pamphlet.)

### YPSL Resurrected to Rail Against Reds

“Hurray! YPSL Back in Action,” blared a *New America* headline in the fall of ’66. Appearing over the byline of Josh Muravchik, the article made clear how the SP youth group was resurrected for the purposes of a) railing at reds and b) resisting the increasing rejection of the Democrats by youth horrified by the crimes of LBJ’s party in Vietnam.

Muravchik reported that YPSL’s refounding convention had passed a resolution on campus problems, stressing “opportunities for democratic socialists” in opposition to “totalitarian”

<sup>35</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 262, 271-272.

forces on the left. The convention elected a YPSL leadership whose “majority orients towards realigning the Democratic Party” by building “a coalition of progressive forces ... to transform [it] into a ‘real people’s party.’” It advocated “a democratic and progressive foreign policy,” counterposing the call for a “negotiated settlement” in Vietnam to demands for “unilateral withdrawal of American forces.” Side by side with Muravchik’s report was a piece by Penn Kemble, reviling the “mélange of pro-communists who linger about” the New Left.<sup>36</sup>

The following spring, a YPSL resolution printed in the SP paper denounced the planned “Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam” as “a continuation of the kind of united-frontism” that got “supporters of a Vietcong military victory ... lumped in with some who sincerely hope to make a contribution to peace.” (YPSL was again quite consciously putting forward the polar opposite of Trotskyists’ critique that instead of fighting for military victory to the heroic NLF, the Mobilization’s SWP organizers had put together a *popular front* with liberals calling vaguely for “peace.”) The YPSL resolution went on to denounce “anti-Americanism” and complain that the protest made “no demands on the Communists, as well as the United States, to de-escalate and end the war.” Instead, “YPSL supports the ... ‘Grass Roots Lobby for Negotiations Now.’”<sup>37</sup>

### Harrington Sticks with His Team

To recap: Harrington followed Shachtman into the Socialist Party in 1960, when its leader, Norman Thomas, was already notorious for heading up the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, as discussed in the accompanying article. Harrington stuck with Shachtman and Thomas through the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Then came Thomas’ role in helping U.S. occupation forces in the Dominican Republic install former dictator Trujillo’s right-hand man, Joaquín Balaguer, in 1965-66. Did *this* lead Michael Harrington to break from Norman Thomas? No, it did not. Thomas would be his “role model” up to the end of the DSA founder’s life.<sup>38</sup> The *New York Times* (22 February 1967) headlined “Thomas Defends C.I.A.-Aided Work,” amid a storm of exposés on CIA funding of Thomas’ Latin American “research institute.” So did *this*, perhaps, get Harrington to back away from Thomas, his State Department Socialists, or his Shachtmanite braintrusts? No way. On and on it went, year after year.

In 1968, at the SP convention, “the Shachtmanites secured a majority on the ruling national committee. They elected Michael as party chairman,” writes Isserman. Pushing Shachtman’s realignment strategy, that same year Harrington came out with his book *Toward a Democratic Left*. The “tragic war in Vietnam” had caused LBJ to “retreat” from his domestic promises, he lamented. Meanwhile, young leftists who “saw only the fight against American policy” were launching “purist” calls for “immediate withdrawal” and had even strayed into “supporting the Vietcong.” Unlike Lenin, they should understand that the U.S. was “almost” but not quite imperialist.

<sup>36</sup> *New America*, 30 September 1966.

<sup>37</sup> *New America*, 22 March 1967.

<sup>38</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, p. 357.

And the punch line: against the “intransigent position” of those calling to break with the Democrats, “the best strategy for the democratic Left is to seek the win the Democratic Party” in order to “transform it.”<sup>39</sup>

The text shows again how Harrington’s recipe shaped today’s DSA. Sauced with academic name-dropping and intellectual fashions of the day, visceral anti-communism is combined with the idea that bad “policy,” foreign and domestic, can be reformed away through a “coalition” to pressure the Democrats to the left. The *Kirkus Review* (15 April 1968) observed:

“Harrington’s proposals for a ‘new civilization’ include support of the ‘Freedom Budget,’ tax reform, the progressive use of government contracts ... etc., etc. In appealing to a broad spectrum, Harrington says he wants to ‘locate a ‘radical program’ midway between immediate feasibility and ultimate utopia.’ But who, nowadays, considers these proposals ‘radical’ unless it be the Wall Street Journal to which Harrington so often expresses his indebtedness. And can a book purporting to present a ‘radical program’ at home and abroad pass so fleetingly over Vietnam, the great dividing issue of our day?”

1968 was the year of the NLF’s Têt Offensive, which made it clear that the imperialists had begun to lose the Vietnam War, forcing Johnson to end his campaign for re-election. “Bourgeois defeatism,” the belief of some sections of the ruling class that the war was unwinnable, was reflected in some Democrats’ move to distance themselves from it. Harrington hoped Robert Kennedy or (after RFK’s assassination) Eugene McCarthy would get the presidential nomination at the Democrats’ convention in Chicago that year. But as Mayor Richard Daley’s cops savagely beat antiwar protesters in the streets outside, the convention nominated Hubert Humphrey. With opponents of the war repelled by the prospect of voting for LBJ’s sidekick, Harrington pushed hard to do just that, in what he frankly called “straight lesser-evilism,” while forming a new liberal pressure group called New Democratic Majority.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps as consolation for Humphrey losing to Richard Nixon, Shachtman lieutenant Tom Kahn arranged for the former VP to receive the LID’s yearly award in ’69. This brought an indignant letter of protest from Allen Ginsberg, Grace Paley, Jules Feiffer and others (*New York Review of Books*, 22 May 1969), denouncing Humphrey’s “consistent defense of the war in Vietnam” and of “Boss Daley and the police riot in Chicago.” The letter made a point of noting the LID’s “close association with the Socialist Party ... which continues today since both Michael Harrington, its chairman, and Tom Kahn, its Executive Secretary” were leading figures in the SP.

On the DSA’s website today, a contributor to “Memories of Michael Harrington” relates how in 1969 “I joined ... the youth group of the Socialist Party (SP) which Mike chaired.”

<sup>39</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, p. 286; Michael Harrington, *Toward a Democratic Left: A Radical Program for a New Majority* (Macmillan, 1968), pp. 3, 19, 203, 293, 294.

<sup>40</sup> Harrington’s “Straight Lesser-Evilism” was published in *Dissent*; his “Voting the Lesser Evil,” also from 1968, came out in *Commentary*. (“Dissident,” indeed.) Both are reproduced in Harrington, *Taking Sides*, pp. 137-150.

He liked YPSL’s opposition to what he calls “the self-defeating antics of some elements of the student left.” However: “My mistake consisted in thinking that YPSL shared basic goals of the student left, such as ending the war in Vietnam.”

A further lesson in Harrington’s heritage is encapsulated in an article that the *New York Times* (8 September 1969) published under the gloating title “Young Socialists Assail S.D.S., Calling It ‘Stupidly Irrelevant.’” It quoted “Josh Muravchik, a 21-year-old senior at City College, who is national chairman” of YPSL. Though Harrington fans go on about him ruing the day he locked out SDS back in ’62, the *Times* of ’69 quoted Harrington’s youth group ranting about “the physical and mental ill health” of SDS, which had adopted “the most grotesque stupidities which have characterized the failure of American radicalism.”

Muravchik denounced SDS for supposedly becoming “Old Left,” adding: “It was bad enough when the Communist party tried to apply to America the revolutionary program of the Soviet Union.” “The criticism of S.D.S.,” reported the *Times*, plus YPSL’s plan to “recruit many of the students who were most active in the campaigns of Senator Eugene McCarthy and the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy received affirmative nods from most of the delegates, including Michael Harrington,” the “chairman of the Socialist party ... whose most famous member was the late Norman Thomas.”

### SP’s Chickens Come Home to Roost

By 1970, even some members of the SP were questioning its line on the war. With LBJ out of office, Harrington himself now included criticism of the “tragic war” in some of his public speeches. But, *The Other American* laments, “Michael once again chose to ally with the Shachtmanites” in the SP. “Along with Penn Kemble, Harrington drafted a resolution on the Vietnam War designed to paper over the chasm” between opponents and supporters of the war, while stating that the “peace” movement should demand the “withdrawal” of North Vietnamese troops so that “it cannot be accused of encouraging or aiding a communist military victory in South Vietnam.” God and Norman Thomas forbid!

Yet “even as Michael was helping the Shachtmanites retain control of the SP ... the Shachtmanites came out in the open with a pro-war ‘Statement on Vietnam,’” which they circulated at the 1970 SP convention. In this blood-curdling document, leaders of Shachtman’s Realignment Caucus “described their position as one of ‘critical support’ of the war,” stating that “South Vietnam” was fighting for “self-determination”; that the issue was democracy versus communism, which had to be defeated in order to establish a “real peace”; and that South Vietnam had to receive the level of aid that would make it possible for “the maximum number of U.S. forces [to] be withdrawn.”

When this “proved too much” for Harrington, and he wrote a document criticizing the statement, Shachtman struck back. With cynical precision, Shachtman observed that Harrington was belatedly seeking distance from “those whom he helped make the leadership of the Party at its recent convention when he already had their Statement [on Vietnam] in hand, and from whom he accepted the chairmanship of the Party,” and “who



constitute the leadership of the caucus for which he was the spokesman at and before the convention,” and with whom he had “compose[d] a common ‘compromise’ resolution at Vietnam, which he championed at the convention.”

A Shachtman critic within the SP would soon remind Harrington: “You yourself were the leading spokesman on the convention floor for the so-called ‘compromise’ on Vietnam, which allowed the ultra-rights to seal their grip of control on the Party.” Dissident SP youth wrote him saying: “We have been at a loss to understand how you can so consistently ally yourself with people who support a criminal war against the peoples of southeast Asia ... a war which (to us this much seems desperately obvious) no socialist could support.”<sup>41</sup>

### “Free Angela Davis” = “Terrorism”?!

The social democrats’ pledge of allegiance to racist U.S. imperialism was challenged on the home front as well. The murderously racist war in Southeast Asia accelerated radicalization of black freedom activists facing the civil rights movement’s inability to alter the economic basis of racial oppression. Burning anger at racist police terror, all-sided discrimination and poverty led to upheavals that the press called “ghetto riots.” Fed up with the liberal pacifism and Democratic loyalism of official civil rights leaders, thousands of black youth were drawn to the Black Panthers and other groups advocating self-defense and solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles.

1971 was the year of the Attica Massacre and the nationwide campaign to “Free Angela Davis.” As governor of California, Ronald Reagan had tried to ban Davis from teaching because she was a Communist Party member. Now she faced frame-up charges of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy due to her support for the Panthers and the Soledad Brothers, whose martyred founder George Jackson was gunned down by guards at San Quentin. In the more than 400 pages of his biography of Harrington, Isserman does not mention the Panthers or Davis at all, but this is not because Harrington was silent on the topic.

“Free Angela Davis?” was the title of the column by “Michael Harrington, Chairman, Socialist Party” in *New America* (18 February 1971). No, it wasn’t a typo; Harrington did not accidentally put a question mark instead of an exclamation point. If you want to get the real measure of DSA founder Harrington, here’s how his column began:

“The demonstrators chant, Free Angela Davis! It is, I think, one more case of the radical heart prevailing over the radical mind. If one believes that this society is so totally corrupt ... that all forms of opposition to it are legitimate and wise, including terrorism against judges and courts, then the slogan makes sense....

“But as soon as one leaves the terrorist margin of the society and considers the merits of that slogan thoughtfully its reactionary [!] content becomes apparent....”

It “will be a sad day if liberals and democratic radicals fall for the simplistic slogan, Free Angela Davis,” Harrington reiterated. Instead, “What one must do is insist that Angela Davis get a fair trial....”

The same issue of Harrington’s paper carried an article titled “N.Y.C. Police Strike: Union Consciousness,” stating

<sup>41</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 287-295.



**When Angela Davis was jailed on frame-up charges as a supporter of the Black Panthers in 1971, thousands demonstrated chanting “Free Angela!” Harrington declared this call “reactionary.”**

that “New York’s Finest won their back pay parity suit with the City in court” after their January 1971 “strike” to get more pay for enforcing capitalism’s racist law and order and to express “their resentment against the contempt they feel emanating from City Hall.” The article counseled the cops that the best way to advance their claims was to merge the notorious Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association into an AFL-CIO police “union.”

The “Socialist Party’s strategy for realigning the Democratic Party by building a majority coalition for progressive change” continued front and center in “A Social Democratic Program for U.S.A.” (*New America* 26 June 1971). The SP paper also took time to trumpet an Israeli leader’s appreciation for “the S.P. and Y.P.S.L.’s understanding and support” as they smeared opponents of Zionist oppression as “anti-Semites,” promoted an array of union bureaucrats, and featured Penn Kemble pitching the Norman Thomas Fund as well as ex-YPSL chair Seymour Martin Lipset denouncing “revolutionary ideologies” at a panel with Michael Harrington.

Branding black radicals “terrorists,” preaching faith in “fair trials” by the racist courts, counseling capitalism’s blue-uniformed enforcers on how to get a better deal, praising Israel while reviling revolutionaries – no wonder anyone with a radical bone in their body loathed these social democrats at the time. “Certified political swine” was how the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency excoriated Shachtman for his backing of Kennedy’s Bay of Pigs invasion. As for his most prominent dis-



Following the 1972 election, the Socialist Party split between those who supported Democrat George McGovern, forming the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee led by Harrington, and those who favored Richard Nixon, forming Social Democrats, USA led by Rustin.

inciple, Harrington's own words and actions speak for themselves.

### End Game

Harrington and Shachtman finally fell out not long after a "Democratic Socialist Unity Convention" in 1972 reunified the SP with one of its offshoots (headed by Cold War AFL-CIO official Charles Zimmerman, closely linked to Jay Lovestone) and elected Harrington, Bayard Rustin and Zimmerman co-chairmen of the party. Unite-for-unity hoopla couldn't prevent conflicting appetites on how to serve bourgeois politics from blowing up the show.

What lit the match was liberal George McGovern winning the Democratic nomination for the 1972 presidential elections. Like Eugene McCarthy's campaign before him, McGovern's drew a large number of New Left-influenced antiwar activists into participation in the Democratic Party. (It also provided politicking experience for Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham, who worked on the campaign and were married not long thereafter.) While a "hawk" on the Middle East, McGovern was aligned with the "doves" of bourgeois defeatism on Vietnam, calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Shachtman was having none of it. He first supported the most right-wing Democrat he could find: the "senator from Boeing," Henry Jackson of Washington state, who was four-square for escalation and an even more massive Pentagon build-up.

When Jackson's bid failed, Shachtman made it clear he was backing Nixon. In this he was joined by his favorite right-wing union bureaucrats, especially AFL-CIO leader George Meany, who called McGovern "an apologist for the Communist world." Tom Kahn was hired on permanently by the AFL-CIO. Jeane Kirkpatrick, Penn Kemble, Muravchik and others formed the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, often nicknamed Democrats for Nixon or Socialists for Nixon.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> On Kirkpatrick, YPSL, and the birth of the neocon network, see Justin Vaïsse, *Neoliberalism: Biography of a Movement* (Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 86-96; and Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 327-365. Also see "Young Socialists Support Meany," *New York Times*, 31 December 1972.

The failure to support the liberal Democrat McGovern was too much for Harrington. He resigned his positions in the SP shortly before the presidential elections, criticizing its hostility to McGovern's "New Politics" coalition within the Democratic Party. He remained a member for the time being as the SP announced it was changing its name to Social Democrats, USA to avoid being "identified ... with the Communist world." The SDUSA hailed the West's "more or less successful containment of the Soviet Union over the last quarter of a century," warned against "surrender to Communist force" in Vietnam, and eulogized Max Shachtman (who died in December 1972) with obits by Tom Kahn, Carl Gershman and others, accompanied by photos of Shachtman with Norman Thomas, Bayard Rustin, labor luminaries and YPSL leaders.<sup>43</sup>

### DSOC Picks Up the Torch

In the summer of 1973, Harrington finally resigned his membership in SDUSA. Joined by other Shachtman graduates like Bogdan Denitch, Irving Howe and former Chicago YPSL leader Debbie Meier, he established the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. Despite the organizational break, DSOC reaffirmed its commitment to "coalition politics and realignment" to "win a democratic majority." DSOC's founding statement emphasized:

"We act, then, as part of the Left wing of the Democratic Party in order to change the Party itself, to turn it into a new kind of mass political party in America with a democratic Left program and the active participation of forces for social change."

In the statement, Harrington and his followers vowed, yet again, to stand in the "tradition" of Norman Thomas.<sup>44</sup>

On hand for the founding were a number of labor officials, most prominently Victor Reuther of the United Auto Workers. One of Norman Thomas' partners in the U.S. government's 1966 Dominican operation, Reuther headed the

<sup>43</sup> *New America*, 25 October 1972, 15 November 1972 and 31 December 1972.

<sup>44</sup> DSOC, "We Are Socialists of the Democratic Left," 1973.



**Buttons for DSOC-NAM unity convention that formed Democratic Socialists of America, March 1982.**

UAW's international affairs department from 1955 to 1972; in 1973 he became a vice-chairman of Harrington's DSOC. Then-president of the AFT David Selden was elected to the group's national board; International Association of Machinists head William Winpisinger (known as "Wimpy") joined up, as did a raft of staffers from unions from AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) to the UAW. DSOC even had a member of Congress: California Democrat Ron Dellums.

Harrington's hopes to hit the big time once again were fueled as the Watergate scandal pushed out Nixon, and the unpopular presidency of his unelected successor Gerald Ford set the stage for Democrats to retake D.C. Together with "Wimpy," AFSCME heads Jerry Wurf and Victor Gotbaum, UAW leader Doug Fraser and other leaders of unions that had supported McGovern, Harrington formed another group for realignment. Patriotically baptized Democracy '76 (and then Democratic Agenda) in time for that year's elections, it set out to get nominee Jimmy Carter – a born-again Southern Democrat and outspoken anti-Soviet militarist – to pledge support to some long-standing liberal hobby-horses like the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill for "full employment." Harrington was a "vocal supporter of the Carter-Mondale team in the fall."<sup>45</sup>

Once again, the politics of the DSA's founder had real-world consequences. Harrington had long argued, in line with Shachtman's theory, that the departure of hard-line Dixiecrats would free the Democratic Party to "realign" toward a social-democratic outlook. The departure had, in fact, occurred: Nixon's "Southern Strategy" succeeded in using white backlash against racial integration and the civil rights movement to draw Southern Democrats over to the Republican Party. However, the presidency of Jimmy Carter brought a sharp shift to the right, stoking the anti-Soviet war drive, religious reaction, deregulation and "one-sided class war" against labor that paved the way for Reagan's election four years later. Subsequently, the Clintons would help move U.S. politics even further rightward. What made the process possible was the continued subjugation of labor, and of one protest movement

<sup>45</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 319, 328-331.

after another, to the Democratic Party.

The union leaders who joined Harrington in helping Carter get elected personified the "progressive" wing of what U.S. Marxist pioneer Daniel De Leon called the labor lieutenants of capital. Their role subordinating unions to the Democrats was key to paralyzing labor's power to defend itself against the massive cutbacks, job devastation and union-busting that followed. Already in 1975-76, when fiscal crisis hit NYC, the AFSCME tops helped Wall Street's "Big MAC" (Municipal Assistance Corporation) junta ram through massive cuts and layoffs. In Detroit in 1980, Chrysler brought Fraser onto its board to push through devastating give-backs and plant closings.

"Wimpy" is mentioned in Joseph Schwartz's article on DSA history, if only to boast of his Kennedy connection: "In the spring of 1979, Machinists Union President (and DSOC Vice-Chair) William Winpisinger announced a 'Draft [Senator Ted] Kennedy' movement" for the 1980 elections. "The coalition brought together by Democratic Agenda reached its fullest political expression in that campaign," although, Schwartz laments, this "was ultimately unsuccessful."

The DSA history article does not say what Winpisinger did when Ronald Reagan launched his presidency in 1981 by firing 12,000 striking air traffic controllers. The Machinists head refused to pull the union's members out of the airports, which would have *won* the PATCO strike, and even sent them across strikers' picket lines. Doing this was not within "the left wing of the possible" for the Democratic Party's labor wing. So let's be clear: Harrington's labor lieutenant made it possible for Reagan to inflict a watershed defeat on the entire union movement, a defeat that unionists look back at still today as a *decisive* point in the union-busting offensive and the decimation of organized labor in the United States. Chaining labor to the Democrats brought ever more defeats when the leadership of the AFL-CIO itself passed to John Sweeney, a member of DSOC's successor, Harrington's DSA.

### **Back in the D.S. of A.**

At the beginning of this examination of the DSA's roots, we quoted Joseph Schwartz's online description of how the group was created in 1982, through DSOC's merger with the New American Movement, an outgrowth of the right wing of the old New Left, on the basis of mainline social-democratic reformism. While Malcolm X called the "American Dream" a nightmare for the oppressed, the DSA's founding statement makes sure, like Harrington and Thomas, to pledge allegiance to the red, white and blue. "Where We Stand" (updated in 1995 and posted at dsausa.org) declares: "Increasingly, many of our fellow citizens recognize that the American dream is becoming a chimera. We as democratic socialists believe that it can be made real." The rest is a painfully dull elaboration of tepid reformist nostrums.

Commitment to "electoral coalition building" via bourgeois politicians remains front and center in the DSA's founding statement. Still, "Where We Stand" projects an ecumenical approach to class collaboration. Wherever they stand at the given moment, it should not be on principle: "Democratic socialists reject an either-or approach ... focused solely on a new

party or on realignment within the Democratic Party.” Though “much of progressive, independent [sic] political action will continue to occur in Democratic Party primaries in support of candidates who represent a broad progressive coalition,” they should be open to variations.

Again, all this is diametrically opposed to the bedrock principle of Marxism that the working class needs its own party committed to fighting the class struggle through to the end, opposed to *all* parties and politicians of the capitalist class. There is no class difference between building coalitions for bourgeois politics via regular Democratic (or Republican) candidates, “socialist” Democratic candidates, or candidates of Green, rainbow, polka-dot or other minor capitalist parties – all are counterposed to the struggle for the *political independence of the working class* from the bourgeoisie.

Schwartz’s piece lists the DSA’s picks in the Democratic field in the series of presidential elections after its founding, giving particular emphasis to its role in Jesse Jackson’s “Rainbow Coalition” primary bids – which like the Sanders “revolution” worked to bring voters into the Democratic fold. Whatever its preferences in each particular race, the DSA came out with clockwork regularity for Harrington’s “straight lesser-evilism.”

Michael Harrington died in 1989, but as so many posts on the DSA site underline, his politics definitely live on in the DSA. Schwartz laments: “The collapse of communism in 1989 proved less of an immediate boon to democratic socialists than many of us had hoped,” while speculating that it might have been different “if Michael Harrington had lived beyond the collapse of the Berlin Wall” to articulate their case.

Still, Schwartz writes, “a new nationally recognized spokesperson for democratic socialism would later appear – Bernie Sanders.” While Sanders does not even pretend to be a member of any kind of “socialist” organization, it is certainly true that he personifies the politics of subordinating would-be rebels against the status quo to the parties, politicians and institutions of U.S. imperialism. The continuity of Harrington’s DSA from Shachtman’s “realignment” to Sanders’ bourgeois “socialism” is clear.

### Harrington’s DSA? Hell No – For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!

This reality can’t be wished or washed away: today’s Democratic (Party) Socialists of America was molded by Michael Harrington from the political program, practice and outlook shaped by Shachtman’s “realignment” and the “State Department socialism” of Norman Thomas. In some detail, we have shown what this meant in practice. By the time the DSA was founded in 1982, it’s true, Shachtman’s all too recent enthusiasm for the disgraced Nixon made it more politic to cite Thomas (vaguely remembered by some as a grandfatherly ghost of “socialism” past) as Harrington’s main mentor and role model. Meanwhile, Harrington’s “left wing of the possible” politics got favorable press reviews.

The *Boston Globe* (11 April 1983) wrote: “Harrington has assumed the mantle of the late Norman Thomas.” Unlike much of what the bourgeois press retailed, that statement was accurate. But what was that mantle? Thomas stood for flag-

waving service to the U.S. ruling class, assisting some of its most bloody crimes against working people oppressed and attacked by U.S. imperialism. “Democratic socialism” means loyalty, not to the struggle to defeat and overthrow imperialism, but to the institutions, symbols and ideology of its rule. On the stump for the DSA, Harrington would repeat like a pledge: “We are here, in the words of Norman Thomas, to cleanse the American flag,” proclaiming: “We are the real patriots.”<sup>46</sup>

Today, those who have grown up in the shadow of one U.S. war after another are not, by and large, looking to be used as “socialist” fodder for red-white-and-blue imperialism. But if you don’t want to wind up on Harrington’s path, some hard lessons must be learned and conclusions drawn. Social-democratic reformism is the deadly *enemy* of socialist revolution. V.I. Lenin showed this powerfully in *State and Revolution*, as did Rosa Luxemburg in *Reform or Revolution*. Lenin, and Trotsky fought for world workers revolution under the red flag in Soviet Russia – before capitalist encirclement, enforced largely by capital’s social-democratic helpers, led to its bureaucratic degeneration and Stalin’s nationalist dogma of “socialism in one country.”

In Germany, Rosa Luxemburg fought for international socialist revolution against “social-patriots” like Friedrich Ebert, Gustav Noske and Philipp Scheidemann, who tied workers to the capitalist fatherland (and had Rosa killed for it). We’re talking about the real Red Rosa – not the harmless, pink-tinged icon of comic books the heirs of her social-democratic murderers peddle today. The alternative that Luxemburg posed back then – *socialism or barbarism* – is all the more stark a century later. A century after she called social democracy a “stinking corpse,” the heirs of Ebert, Noske, Scheidemann and Shachtman, Thomas and Harrington keep trying to reanimate and revive it. Against this, revolutionary Marxism – the communism that Lenin and Trotsky fought for – stands for victory for the workers and oppressed all around the world. If that’s what you want too, we’ve got plenty to talk about. ■

<sup>46</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, pp. 344, 354.

## For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky



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## “Democratic Socialism” in the Service of U.S. Imperialism

By Abram Negrete

In “The Real Heritage of Michael Harrington’s DSA,” we show where the reformist “democratic socialism” of 2018 came from, and what it actually stands for. Today’s Democratic Socialists of America hails the “tradition” of Michael Harrington and Norman Thomas, longtime leaders of the Socialist Party (SP) that gave rise to what is now the DSA. In that article (see p. 21), we explain that this tradition has often, and accurately, been described as “*State Department socialism*.” Those unfamiliar with the left may think the term is a polemical excess or an empty epithet. Not at all. In fact, intimate ties to the Department of State are only the beginning of the intertwining of the official social democrats with the agencies of U.S. imperialism. Activists who want to devote themselves to genuine socialism need to know what’s what. So here’s the story.

A brief rundown: In the 1950s, SP leader Norman Thomas headed the U.S. affiliate of one of the most notorious CIA fronts of all time: the Congress for Cultural Freedom. He also campaigned in support of the genocidal U.S. war on Korea waged by Democrat Harry Truman. Michael Harrington joined Thomas’ youth group in 1952 and the SP in 1960. In 1961, Thomas brain-truster and Harrington mentor Max Shachtman supported Democrat Kennedy’s Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. As large numbers of young people were radicalized under the impact of black freedom struggles and the Vietnam War, Harrington and Thomas demanded that they exclude reds from their organizations and meetings. Organizers deemed soft on communism got locked out of their own offices. *The Other America* author Harrington would fondly recall how in 1964 he was hobnobbing with members of Lyndon Johnson’s cabinet and White House staff. That same year the *New York Times* reported that an anti-communist institute headed by Norman Thomas was being funded by a “CIA conduit.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Kaplan Fund, Cited as C.I.A. ‘Conduit,’ Lists Unexplained \$395,000 Grant,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1964.



Eddie Adams/AP

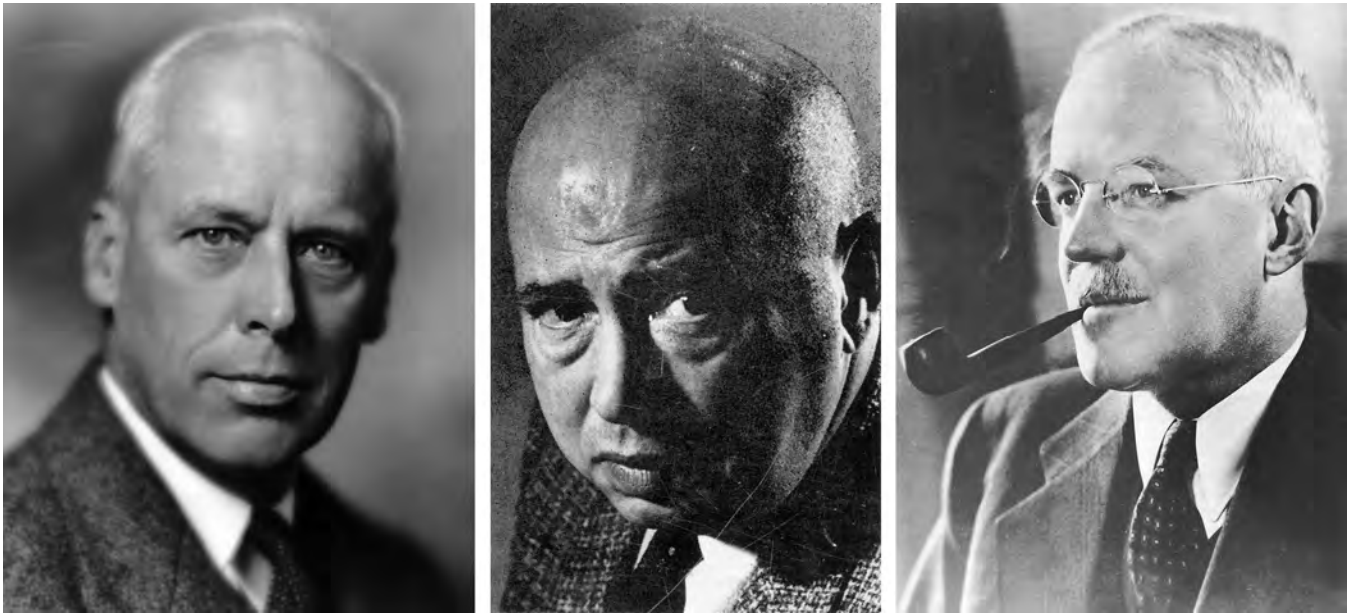
**South Vietnamese police chief, Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, executes captured Viet Cong member, 1 February 1968. Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas was spokesman for “American Friends of Vietnam,” a CIA front group that acted as PR agents for the South Vietnamese dictatorship.**

Throughout the ’60s, Harrington and Thomas lashed out against “pro-Communists” and “apologists for the Viet Cong,” opposing not only calls for victory to the heroic Vietnamese but even demands for U.S. withdrawal. When LBJ sent 42,000 Marines to occupy the Dominican Republic in 1965, Thomas – accompanied by Albert Shanker (then head of the United Federation of Teachers in New York and later of the national AFT), Bayard Rustin and other “democratic socialist” Cold War operatives – helped the Marines install a U.S. puppet regime there. It soon came out that Thomas had played a similar role in Vietnam.

In 1967, major media revelations led to a flood of details of how “Norman Thomas, the personification of social democracy in the United States,” had long “maintained ready access to top officials within the CIA,” among them not only his “trusted friend, Allen Dulles,” but also Cord Meyer of the “International Operations Division, the department handling the distribution of covert funding to front groups.”<sup>2</sup>

Thomas died in 1968, with Harrington succeeding him

<sup>2</sup> Eric Thomas Chester, *Covert Network: Progressives, the International Rescue Committee, and the CIA* (M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 5, 115-116.



Photos (from left): Library of Congress; The Donald Press; National Archives (Prologue Magazine).

**Anti-Soviet Cold Warriors: (from left) Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas, Max Shachtman and CIA director Allen Dulles. Thomas worked closely with Dulles, chairing CIA front American Committee for Cultural Freedom and praising witch-hunting Senate McCarran Committee. Shachtman wrote propaganda leaflets for U.S.’ genocidal war on Korea that were air-dropped by the Air Force.**

as SP chairman. When, under the impact of the Viet Cong’s Tet offensive, sectors of the Democratic Party turned against the Vietnam War, Harrington brokered a compromise between “doves” and fanatical pro-war “hawks” within his own SP. Graduates of the Thomas-Harrington school went on to promote death-squad “democracy” in Central America and capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe. In countless cases, they became leading figures in infamous fronts for “The Company” (as insiders call the CIA) like the American Institute for Free Labor Development, Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy. As for the DSA, it continues to hail the imperialist-backed counterrevolution that destroyed the former Soviet bloc as “a critical gain for democracy.”

Documented details of these events are discussed below and elsewhere in this pamphlet. *But the facts about Thomas, Harrington & Co. have been known for decades.* So what does it mean, in 2018, for the DSA to lay claim to the “tradition” of Norman Thomas, of his State Department Socialist Party and of Michael Harrington, Thomas’ successor and, as the DSA proclaims, standard-bearer of that tradition? What does it mean to present their “democratic socialism” as the path that would-be opponents of capitalist oppression should follow? What it means will become clear as can be, as we examine the real record.

### “Dear Norman” and the Congress for Cultural Freedom

In the 1950s, as Norman Thomas was deeply engaged in fighting “Soviet Communism” on behalf of “American democracy” abroad, on the home front he chaired an anti-communist group called the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. There was a public outcry when Thomas and the

ACCF vociferously supported the witch-hunting Subcommittee on Internal Security chaired by Senator Pat McCarran. Some liberals thought Thomas had gone too far. Harrington himself chided Thomas and the ACCF for this in 1955 – then helped lead Shachtman’s Independent Socialist League into red-baiter Thomas’ SP three years later.<sup>3</sup>

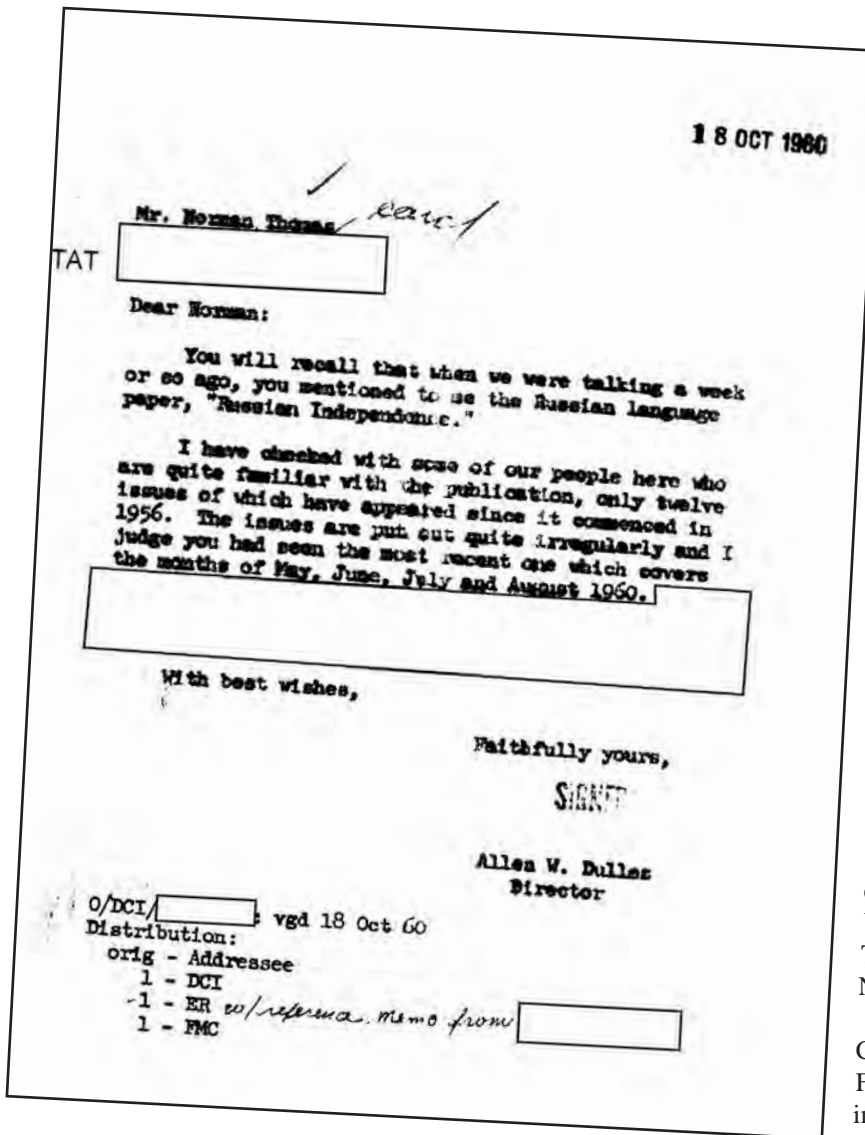
What Thomas stood for is exemplified by his role in the anti-communist “cultural freedom” campaign. His support to Sen. McCarran’s witch hunt was very public, but the SP leader’s services had a private dimension as well. The ACCF was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, and the fact that “Norman Thomas was a close friend and neighbor of [CIA chief] Allen Dulles” helped assure this, as a key study of CIA front operations points out.<sup>4</sup> The ACCF was the American branch of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. When the ACCF faced a financial crunch in 1955, another study of documents of Agency operations shows, Thomas promised to “phone Allen” to get him to take care of the problem, which he did.<sup>5</sup>

This was far from an isolated instance. Examples of “Dear Allen” and “Dear Norman” correspondence between Company chief Dulles and “democratic socialist” icon Thomas are on

<sup>3</sup> The merger of the Shachtman-Harrington ISL and Thomas’ SP is discussed in “The Real Heritage of Harrington’s DSA.” Harrington reprinted his 1955 article on the ACCF decades later, noting that it admonished “a man who was to become a friend and mentor, Norman Thomas” (*Taking Sides* [Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985], pp. 16, 20-33).

<sup>4</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New Press, 1999), pp. 134, 230.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 91-92. CIA chiefs liked to compare the Agency’s propaganda apparatus to a “Mighty Wurlitzer” jukebox, pumping out endless tunes at full volume.



More than pen pals: “Dear Norman, ... Faithfully yours,” Allen W. Dulles, Director, CIA.

line, including on the CIA website.<sup>6</sup>

### How “Democratic Socialists” Helped Establish “South Vietnam”

Seeing the role of “democratic socialists” during the Vietnam War should revolt any young leftist who wants to take a stand against U.S. imperialism and its endless dirty wars. This is the background to the vituperation by SP leaders Thomas and Harrington against young radicals who dared show solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution by carrying the National Liberation Front (NLF, or “Viet Cong”) flag. The incredibly courageous combatants of the NLF, whose struggle inspired opponents of imperialism throughout the world, fought and won against the imperialists and their hand-picked dictators in “South Vietnam” – *the U.S. puppet state Norman Thomas had literally helped set up in the '50s.*

In 1965, as Harrington and Thomas launched one diatribe after another against “explicit or covert” sympathy for the Viet

<sup>6</sup> “Dear Allen” from Norman Thomas (21 January 1959), “Dear Norman” from Allen Dulles (31 May 1960, 18 October 1960), etc., at [cia.gov/library/readingroom](http://cia.gov/library/readingroom) and [archive.org](http://archive.org).

Cong, the *New York Times* carried an article on “the American Friends of Vietnam, a private organization” that had “issued a statement announcing its support of the recent air strikes in North Vietnam and calling for a ‘stronger American action and involvement.’” The group, stated the *Times*, “was formed ... when the United States started a mission to help train the armed forces of South Vietnam.”<sup>7</sup> American Friends of Vietnam (AFVN) was chaired by Lt. Gen. (Ret.) John “Iron Mike” O’Daniel, who trained and equipped the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN).

The AFVN a “private organization”? Not hardly. For years, the AFVN and ARVN worked in tandem as cogs in the machine of U.S. imperialist domination. A few months after Harrington and Thomas reviled the first major march against the Vietnam war for encouraging Viet Cong “apologists,” a major exposé on the AFVN brought Thomas’ role to light. Titled “The Vietnam Lobby,” the July 1965 *Ramparts* magazine exposé detailed how generals, CIA spooks and “democratic socialists” had set up the AFVN in April 1955. It showed how the AFVN was instrumental in establishing the U.S. puppet regime in “South Vietnam” that year. And it showed how Norman Thomas helped found the AFVN, serving on its National Committee until 1958.

The “Vietnam Lobby” took shape after Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh decisively defeated the French colonialists at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. At the Geneva conference that year, the U.S. and France divided Vietnam in two. Seeking an illusory “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism, the Soviet and Chinese Stalinists pressured Ho to accept this, as the U.S. cynically promised that elections would soon be held throughout Vietnam. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department needed a dictator for the new puppet state in the south.

Edward Lansdale was the CIA’s man in Saigon, famously depicted in Graham Greene’s novel *The Quiet American*. Lansdale was convinced that former French collaborator Ngo Dinh Diem would be a perfect figurehead for the new puppet state known as the Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam. Lansdale “convinced CIA Director Allen Dulles ... [who] talked to his brother, the Secretary of State” (John Foster Dulles). They in turn enrolled New York’s fanatically anti-communist Cardinal Spellman, as well as Joseph Kennedy, who got his son, Senator John F. Kennedy, on board.

Key to the organizational side was Leo Cherne, a leading Cold War liberal from Freedom House who headed the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC was founded by socialists in the 1930s to aid refugees from Nazi Germany, but by the 1950s it was so closely enmeshed with U.S. anti-Soviet operations

<sup>7</sup> “Asia Group Here Backs U.S. Raids,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1965.



Photos, from left: National Archive; State University of New York Press; Douglas Pike Collection/Vietnam Center and Archive.

**Interlocking directorates. Gen. William “Wild Bill” Donovan (left), head of the WWII OSS, forerunner of the CIA, was honorary chairman of International Rescue Committee, a CIA front. IRC was headed for 40 years by Leo Cherne (center), later a top official of presidential boards supervising U.S. spy agencies. Social democrat Joseph Buttinger (right) was top IRC executive while funding *Dissent*, edited by Irving Howe, later a DSA leader. Donovan was also honorary chairman of “American Friends of Vietnam,” another CIA front that included Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas.**

that it functioned as an integral part of the CIA’s covert network. Wherever U.S. imperialism intervened (Vietnam in the 1950s and ’60s, Cuba in the ’60s, Laos in the ’70s, Afghanistan in the ’80s, Bosnia in the ’90s, Iraq in the 2000s, Syria today), the IRC has been there to make sure the “right” refugees were rescued. Not coincidentally, as it were, the honorary chair of the IRC in the 1950s was William “Wild Bill” Donovan, who had led the CIA’s precursor, the Office of Strategic Services, during World War II.<sup>8</sup>

Cherne made a trip to Vietnam in 1954, shortly after the Geneva accords divided the country. That September he sent his deputy, a social democrat of Austrian origin named Joseph Buttinger, to Vietnam. “Buttinger departed for Saigon as the Eisenhower administration took steps to safeguard and strengthen the Diem regime,” states a book on the Vietnam lobby.<sup>9</sup> In Saigon, Lansdale took Buttinger “under his wing and introduced him to the top security people in Diem’s government and the [South] Vietnamese Army. This convinced Buttinger that Diem had the strength to remain in power, if only the United States would give him complete support,” *Ramparts* reported in 1967.

Returning to New York, Buttinger worked with a public relations man named Harold Oram to consolidate the operation. Oram had received a contract to represent the South Vietnam government for \$3,000 a month (plus expenses).<sup>10</sup> In April

<sup>8</sup> Underscoring the intimate connection between the International Rescue Committee and U.S. intelligence agencies, Leo Cherne, who was IRC chairman for 40 years from 1951 on, was a member of the presidential Intelligence Oversight Board during 1971-76, appointed by Richard Nixon, then chairman of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board after Nixon’s departure, and then vice chairman of the PFIAB, appointed by Ronald Reagan, from 1981 to 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 18-28.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Scheer and Warren Hinckle, “The ‘Vietnam Lobby,’” *Ramparts*, July 1965. Maurice Isserman’s lengthy biography of Harrington, *The Other American* (Public Affairs, 2000), includes 38 index entries on Norman Thomas, but does not mention the AFVN at all.

1955, they established the American Friends of Vietnam. With Gen. O’Daniel as chairman, the AFVN decided to have an honorary chairman too, another general involved in U.S. efforts to take over from the French imperialists in the wake of Dien Bien Phu: “Wild Bill” Donovan. At the same time, Buttinger and his wife were subsidizing the social-democratic magazine *Dissent* edited by Irving Howe, a veteran of Shachtman’s Workers Party and a leader of his International Socialist League who went on to co-found the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee with Harrington, and then became a vice-chair of the DSA.

A biography of Donovan, “the spymaster who created ... modern American espionage,” states that after “push[ing] for propaganda and covert operations to keep Ho [Chi Minh] from taking over” in the wake of Dien Bien Phu, he lobbied Thailand’s secret police chief to aid South Vietnam, “pressed the CIA station chief in Bangkok to step up supply flights into Vietnam,” “and plugged Diem with lawmakers ... and in letters to Eisenhower.” The Donovan bio goes on: “Back in Washington he joined Iron Mike O’Daniel ... in forming American Friends of Vietnam,” which “became a propaganda organ for Diem,” who “turned out [sic] to be a corrupt, nepotistic dictator who was eventually assassinated in a 1963 coup given the green light by the administration of John F. Kennedy.”<sup>11</sup>

To be effective, an outfit like the AFVN didn’t need just a couple of generals as chairman and honorary chairman. And if its public face was the CIA’s godfather, a couple of wheeler-dealer Company friends plus a paid PR man, that could be a problem. It needed a National Committee. One was promptly assembled, featuring Democratic senators Kennedy and Mike Mansfield, Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas and other Cold War liberals plus a representative of Cardinal Spellman. A couple of right-wing social democrats

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), pp. 370-371, 375.



from *The New Leader* magazine were brought into the mix, but: “A far more prominent figure who joined the AFVN was Norman Thomas, the leader of the American Socialist Party.”<sup>12</sup>

### Thomas to Diem: “A Privilege to Serve You”

On AFVN letterhead featuring Thomas as a National Committee member, Gen. O’Daniel described the group as a “clearinghouse” for “groups seeking U.S. assistance” in Vietnam by referring “specific requests to sources of support.”<sup>13</sup> With Thomas on board, the AFVN focused “most of its initial work” on an effort to convince U.S. public opinion and the Eisenhower administration “that the future of Diem’s government should not be jeopardized by an agreement to hold the all-Vietnam elections for which the Geneva accords had called.” Eisenhower himself had said Ho Chi Minh would get about “80 percent” of the vote if the elections were held. While selling “South Vietnam” as a bulwark of “democracy” against the red menace, the AFVN lobbied intensively against the “threat posed by Communist demands for holding all-Vietnamese elections.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, as historian Hugh Wilford relates in his study of CIA fronts, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, “one of the organization’s earliest actions was to circulate a letter, drafted by Oram and signed by distinguished socialist Norman Thomas, defending Diem’s decision not to hold elections mandated for 1956 by the Geneva Accords.” Another carefully documented account, Eric Chester’s *Covert Network*, provides further details on how Oram and the AFVN used “Norman Thomas, the personification of social democracy in the United States and a celebrity of world renown,” in its work of “manipulating the media” in support of the Diem dictatorship. In October 1955, Diem staged a “plebiscite” to bolster his regime, which the AFVN hailed as “momentous free elections.”

“Soon after the phony plebiscite, Oram urged Thomas to sign a public letter citing [it] as evidence of Diem’s popular standing. Oram held that Saigon had been justified in refusing to permit the scheduled nationwide elections, since the Viet Minh would ‘certainly win in an election taking place in the near future.’ A statement from Thomas would ‘do much to influence intellectual opinion in certain key countries, especially Britain, Burma, India, and Ceylon.’

“Oram enclosed a draft of the proposed letter, which Thomas then signed, after having ‘made no change.’ The letter, which was then sent to influential newspapers in Europe and Asia, claimed that the overwhelming vote for Diem in the rigged plebiscite represented ‘a legal and moral mandate from the



**Lyndon B. Johnson, then U.S. vice president, with puppet South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem in May 1961. SP leader Thomas validated phony “election” of Diem, writing to the South Vietnamese dictator that it was “a privilege to serve you.” When Diem ceased to be useful because of massive protests against his brutal dictatorship, President John F. Kennedy okayed his assassination.**

people.’ The letter signed by Thomas concluded that holding a single election in both parts of Vietnam, in accordance with the Geneva agreements, could ‘only be regarded as ... contrary to the will of the South Vietnamese people.’”

Following up in early 1957, Norman Thomas wrote to Diem that he “held it a privilege to serve you and your country in your struggle for independence [sic] against the old colonial imperialism” (that is, France, whose place had been taken by the U.S. imperialists Thomas served so loyally) “and the new communist totalitarianism.”<sup>15</sup>

The effort to entrench the U.S. puppet regime was initially successful. Over the next years, the AFVN focused on promoting the regime of Diem and (after he was “terminated” with JFK’s blessing) his successors. Faced with a growing insurgency, the U.S. built up its military force of “advisors,” setting the stage for the massive, genocidal escalation of the U.S. war in 1964 under LBJ and his defense secretary Robert McNamara.

Those new to the left often ask: Why do different kinds of “socialists” fight among themselves? The sordid story of the Vietnam Lobby gives an idea of why pious wishes for “unity” can never overcome the gulf between revolutionary Marxism and the State Department or CIA “socialism” that prefers to don the cover of “democratic socialism.” In the Vietnam War, the Trotskyists fought for military victory to the NLF, proclaiming “All Indochina Must Go Communist!” It was a question of which side are you on, and the forebears of the DSA were not only firmly on the side of imperialism, they did a lot of the U.S.’ dirty work, both in Vietnam and on the home front.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, *Vietnam Lobby*, p. 25 (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> Letter from John W. O’Daniel, Lt. Gen. U.S. Army (Ret.), 9 September 1957, on line at <http://indochina1911.com/gsd/collect/tri-tran/index/assoc/HASHa18f/9569ce13.dir/doc.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, *Vietnam Lobby*, pp. 31, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, 175; Chester, *Covert Network*, pp. 5, 167-170.



**“It was necessary to destroy the town in order to save it.” This was the reality of the imperialist war on Vietnam. Above: U.S. soldier as village is burned down. Social democrats fronted for CIA operations backing South Vietnam puppet regime. Trotskyists proclaimed, “All Indochina Must Go Communist!”**

### The Company Connection

The activities of Norman Thomas prepared the way for innumerable “young socialists” trained in the Thomas tradition to become functionaries of the most sinister U.S. agencies over the following decades. The subsequent careers of countless figures trained as anti-communist operatives in the Thomas-Harrington school of “democratic socialism” were no bolt from the blue. As for knowing that Harrington’s “friend and mentor” Thomas was being financed by The Company and was carrying out major operations for it – that was in black and white and read all over, in the pages of the *New York Times*.

Already in 1964, the *Times* ran its report (mentioned above) on a CIA conduit funding an institute headed by Norman Thomas. The Company had used the J.M. Kaplan Fund to send hundreds of thousands of dollars to the institute, which conducted “educational research in undeveloped countries,” including a center in the Dominican Republic that also received funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development. The *Times* article also drew attention to the institute’s administrator, a Romanian exile named Sacha Volman, “a man who has long been identified with anti-Communist causes in Europe and America.”<sup>16</sup>

In a letter to the *Times*, Norman Thomas responded to the “conjecture” that “the C.I.A. might have channeled money through the Kaplan Fund for work done in the Dominican Republic by the International Institute of Labor Research, of which I am chairman.” “If so,” he claimed, “it was without the knowledge or suspicion of any of our board.” Dulles crony Thomas reiterated that he “found the conjecture surprising,” then went on to praise “our very able director, Sacha Volman, a man with creative ideas in whom I have the highest confidence.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “Kaplan Fund, Cited as C.I.A. ‘Conduit,’ Lists Unexplained \$395,000 Grant,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1964.

<sup>17</sup> “Dominican Republic Project: Norman Thomas Comments on Conjectured C.I.A. Link,” *New York Times*, 10 September 1964.

Three years later, with mounting anger over Vietnam, LBJ’s endless lies, and police repression, even mainstream reporters were digging into the Company’s dirty tricks. The topic of CIA fronts and funding blew up – and hit the pages of the newspaper of the Thomas-Harrington SP. Together with denunciations of “supporters of a Vietcong military victory” and Norman Thomas’ “My Anti-Communism” column, *New America* (22 March 1967) ran an article titled “Student Group Faces CIA Created Dilemma.” It bemoaned the fallout from the “scandal over CIA influence” in the National Student Association, which had broken the previous month and kept on spreading.

The scandal erupted with extensive press reports exposing how the CIA channeled funds to the National Student Association and used the NSA for U.S. foreign-policy objectives. This included “grooming” student leaders in the NSA international affairs division, which fronted for anti-communist operations from West Europe to Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. (The NSA president even traveled to Vietnam on the State Department’s tab.) It also included setting up the Independent Service for Information, “a CIA operation from beginning to end,” as *The Mighty Wurlitzer* describes it. Bobby Kennedy had a hand in the ISI when he was JFK’s attorney general. Moreover, one of its operatives was Zbigniew Brzezinski, the JFK and LBJ advisor who later became Jimmy Carter’s hard-line anti-Soviet National Security Advisor. Most famously, the ISI was headed up by future feminist icon Gloria Steinem. Wilford notes: “Among the many individuals named in [the] revelations, Steinem was one of the most forthright in acknowledging her wittingness” in the CIA front operation, while arguing that her motivations had been legit since there were “some liberals” in the CIA.<sup>18</sup>

The March 1967 *New America* article complained that the scandal had led to suspicions being raised against “a number of organizations and individuals who have in fact had no demonstrable or witting relations with the CIA.” The article’s author is described as a member of the Young People’s Socialist League’s delegation to a recent meeting of the United States Youth Council, an umbrella group that included YPSL (the SP’s youth group), the Young Democrats and Young Republicans, the NSA, YMCA and other organizations. “CIA influence in the Youth Council was high on the agenda” at that meeting, the article stated, noting that accusations were made that Agency funds had been channeled to it via the NSA. Denouncing “hearsay” and “scandal-mongering,” it reported that a resolution “drawn up by Penn Kemble, YPSL National Chairman,

<sup>18</sup> Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 142-147.

# Media Exposés of Thomas' CIA Ties

Washington Post  
21 February 1967

New York Times  
22 February 1967

## Labor Group Got \$1 Million From CIA

Institute Financed From 1961 to 1963 By a U.S. Conduit

By Dan Korman  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
NEW YORK, Feb. 20—An international and economic research organization headed by former Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas has received over \$1 million from a foundation identified as a conduit for Central Intelligence Agency funds.

Activities of the organization, the Institute for International Labor Research, were financed almost totally from 1961 to 1963 by the J. M. Kaplan Fund of New York, which congressional investigators described in 1964 as a channel for agency money. The funds were not exhausted until last year, officials of the research group said today.

The money was used to establish and operate the Institute of Political Education in Costa Rica, which has trained many Latin American leaders in "democratic leftism," a research institution in the Dominican Republic under the regime of a reformist president Just Bosch, who was

THOMAS' organization received \$1,065,940 from the Kaplan Fund from January 1961 to September 1963. This sum represented all but about \$23,000 of the total funds received in that period.

The New York Institute was formed largely under the guidance of Sacha Volman, a Rumanian-born U.S. citizen who had been working for Radio Free Europe, widely reported to be subsidized by CIA. He interested Thomas in the idea as a means of fostering anti-Communist democratic activity in Latin America.

Incorporated in February, 1957, the organization at first had little money with which to operate. In 1961 Thomas asked Jacob M. Kaplan, philanthropist and former president of the Welch Grape Juice Co., for a contribution from the fund he had founded.

The fund provided an initial sum of \$25,000 in January, 1961. It made 15 subsequent payments. The last, in September, 1963, amounted to \$100,000.

From 1961 to 1963, Thomas' New York-based institute contributed \$250,000 to the Institute of Political Education in Costa Rica, whose policies were controlled by 17 Latin American left-of-center political parties. Bosch was one of the instructors in the institute, in which tough democratic leadership techniques. The most influential institute leader was former Costa Rican President Jose F.

## THOMAS DEFENDS C.I.A.-AIDED WORK

But Ex-Socialist Head Denies He Knew Source of Funds

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS  
Norman Thomas, the former Socialist Party leader, defended yesterday a program under which Latin-American politicians of the democratic left were trained largely at the expense of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Thomas was chairman of the Institute of International Labor Research, which ran schools in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic and a publishing house in Mexico between 1957 and 1965.

J. M. Kaplan, former president of the Welch Grape Juice Company, disclosed last week that the foundation bearing his name had channeled about \$1-million in C.I.A. funds to the institute. Neither Mr. Thomas nor anyone else connected with the institute knew the source of the funds, Mr. Kaplan said.

The J. M. Kaplan Fund was identified as a conduit for C.I.A. funds during a Congressional investigation in 1964.

'What We Did Was Good Work'  
'I'm not ashamed of what we did,' Mr. Thomas, now 73 years old, said in a telephone interview. 'What we did was good work, and no one ever tried to tell us what to do. From someone we understood his C.I.A. business, though, if I had a choice I

Organized 17 Parties  
Mr. Volman then organized 17 left-of-center political parties throughout Latin America to oversee a leadership training school in San Jose, Costa Rica, Mr. Thomas said. The institute was formed in 1961 to provide funds, and Mr. Volman became director of the school, which was called the Institute of International Education.

Funds were scarce in the early years, and Mr. Thomas approached Mr. Kaplan for help in 1961. According to Mr. Kaplan, the first grant of \$25,000 was not C.I.A. money. Shortly thereafter, he said, the C.I.A. asked him if it could make substantial contributions to the institute through the Kaplan Fund.

The school in Costa Rica ran 10-week sessions with about 50 to 90 Latin American politicians in each group. According to Mr. Thomas' financial adviser, many American Senators, Representatives and senators helped in the Dominican Republic.

'We were teaching people how to run a country,' the adviser said.

The faculty also included Juan Bosch, later president of the Dominican Republic, and Jose Figueres, former president of Costa Rica. The two men have been among the most prominent democratic leftists in Latin America since World War II.

Moved to Costa Rica in 1963 when the Kaplan Fund said it could not contribute directly to political parties—which constituted the school—and retain its tax-exempt status.

The school was moved to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, where Mr. Bosch had become president. It was

## “Thomas Defends C.I.A.-Aided Work”

Thomas sang a similar tune in an interview with the *New York Times* titled “Thomas Defends C.I.A.-Aided Work.” The “Socialist Party leader ... defended a program under which Latin-American politicians of the democratic left were trained largely at the expense of the Central Intelligence Agency,” the *Times* stated,<sup>21</sup> digging deeper into the story it had broached in 1964. From 1957 to 1965, it continued, “Mr. Thomas was chairman of the Institute of International Labor Research,” which ran a school in Costa Rica where – among other things – former president José Figueres and Dominican politician Juan Bosch served on the faculty. The school moved to the Dominican Republic when Bosch was elected president.

The article continued: “J.M. Kaplan, former president of the Welch Grape Juice Company, disclosed last week that the foundation bearing his name had channeled about \$1 million in C.I.A. funds to the Institute.”

Yet Thomas told the *Times*: “I’m not ashamed of what we did... What we did was good work.” He said that “he had ‘heard rumors’ that the money came from the C.I.A., but ‘they were always denied...’”

The CIA calls this sort of calculated misdirection “plausible denial,” but the plausibility was paper thin. One would have to be a willful idiot to believe Thomas’ pious protestations. As we’ve seen, Thomas had been instrumental in getting his friend CIA chief Allen Dulles to continue funding the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, and was up to his neck in the CIA front American Friends of Vietnam. As histories of CIA front operations point out, Thomas’ “Institute focused on CIA projects in Latin America,” which meant doing work similar to that of another “institute” aimed against real labor and leftist organizers in Latin America: the American Institute for Free Labor Development.<sup>22</sup>

The AIFLD was a joint venture of “The Company” and the AFL-CIO tops, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (as well as the National Endowment for Democracy after the Reagan administration established the NED in 1983). It helped overthrow Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Cheddi Jagan in Guyana in 1964 and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, and it was key to building and backing death squads that terrorized Central America in the 1980s. Like Thomas’ institute, the AIFLD’s roots went back to the U.S. government’s post-WWII partnership with anti-communist labor officials to purge reds from unions in the U.S. and overseas. Another partner was Victor Reuther of

and also National Affairs Vice President of the USYC,” was passed, calling for a “review” of the matter.

In fact, as the *New York Times* (16 February 1967) had reported, 90% of the funding for the Youth Council came from the CIA. Most worrisome for the SP and YPSL were the media exposés shining a spotlight on CIA funding for their venerated leader, Norman Thomas, and particularly his efforts to combat communism in Latin America through “democratic leftism.” Far from hearsay or empty scandal-mongering, they were based on solidly documented facts, reported by a wide range of media including *Ramparts*, the *Times* and the *Washington Post*. A March 1967 CBS News special was titled “In the Pay of the CIA: An American Dilemma.”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Gloria Steinem, Thomas pled ignorance, again. He presented his brief in lawyerly lingo: if not sheer coincidence, then a mere overlap of good works and intentions lay behind collaboration with the CIA, receipt of monies therefrom being entirely unwitting on the beneficiaries’ end. In *New America*, Thomas wrote that while “most of the organizations, and their projects, supported by the CIA, were legitimate and valuable,” what “was most wrong, was that the CIA secretly dispensed these funds and duped a number of worthy organizations....” Michael Harrington’s co-leader of “democratic socialism” went on to aver: “I speak feelingly because I was the chairman of the Institute for International Labor Research, which received very considerable funds from the CIA through the conduit of the J.M. Kaplan Fund – which, in general, has done very good work with its money.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The media storm on CIA revelations is vividly described in Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 225-248, and Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, pp. 381-406.

<sup>20</sup> Norman Thomas, “CIA and Dominican Caper,” *New America*, 16 February 1967.

<sup>21</sup> “Thomas Defends C.I.A.-Aided Work,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1967; also see “Labor Group Got \$1 Million from CIA,” *Washington Post*, 21 February 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, 355; Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 185-186.

the United Auto Workers. Media exposés on Thomas et al. revealed that Reuther had been a conduit of CIA funds to pro-U.S. unions in Europe after WWII.<sup>23</sup>

While the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover was notorious for its right-wing ties, the CIA had a predilection for anti-communist social democrats and liberals. During the Cold War, they all worked together to purge the “reds,” in the U.S. and abroad. The most notorious operative in these efforts was Jay Lovestone, who had led the purge of Trotskyists from the Communist Party in 1928 before being purged himself as a supporter of Bukharin’s Right Opposition. Lovestone went on to work closely with the CIA as leader of the U.S. labor tops’ anti-communist international operations, seconded by Irving Brown (see below) and Charles Zimmerman. As discussed in “The Real Heritage of Michael Harrington,” in 1972 Zimmerman, longstanding SP chair Harrington and Bayard Rustin became SP co-chairmen.

### Dominican Republic: “Democratic Socialists” Help Install Balaguer

Norman Thomas’ Dominican connection, as well as his ties with Victor Reuther, were called into service again after Lyndon Johnson sent the U.S. Marines to occupy the Dominican Republic in 1965. LBJ claimed the bloody imperialist intervention was necessary to “contain Communism” and prevent the rise of “another Cuba” in the Caribbean even as U.S. imperialist forces rained death on Southeast Asia in their attempt to prevent an NLF victory.

Juan Bosch had been elected president of the Dominican Republic in 1962, after the assassination of longtime dictator Rafael Trujillo, but Bosch was soon overthrown by the military. Fearing that leftist forces would win the civil war that broke out in 1965, LBJ sent in 42,000 U.S. troops. The imperialists were backed by the puppet Organization of American States – “the Yankee Ministry of Colonies,” as Che Guevara called it. Occupation forces, cynically dubbed “peacekeepers,” remained until September 1966.

In May 1966, the U.S. staged elections to install its chosen puppet, Joaquín Balaguer. Balaguer had served as Trujillo’s right-hand man for decades, all the way back to the massacre of Haitians in 1937, when he was the dictator’s foreign minister. Given this history and the fact that elections were being held



**U.S. Army Airborne troops patrolling Santo Domingo after 1965 invasion. Thomas’ committee lent cover for 1966 rigged election under U.S. occupation.**

under the imperialist occupation, Thomas, Reuther and Rustin were tapped to provide some “democratic socialist” cover. With key assistance from Sacha Volman and Americans for Democratic Action operative Allard Lowenstein, Thomas put together the Committee on Free Elections in the Dominican Republic. His prior association with Bosch helped lend credibility to the “op.”

Balaguer’s U.S.-backed party “won the elections with the support of Trujilloist army officers, who sponsored a terrorist campaign” in which at least 350 opposition political activists were killed just in the five months preceding the May 1966 vote, states the main English-language history of the Dominican Republic. As for Thomas’ Committee on Free Elections, *Mighty Wurlitzer* author Wilford writes: it was “a CIA-inspired effort to lend international credibility to a 1966 ballot effectively rigged against ... former president Juan Bosch, with Thomas reprising the role he had performed in Vietnam in 1956 by declaring the elections fair before the results had been announced.”<sup>24</sup>

Enter Albert Shanker. A pamphlet from the Albert Shanker Institute states that his “first formal trip abroad as president of the United Federation of Teachers was ... to the Dominican Republic in May 1966,” where he was part of the Commission of Thomas, Volman, Reuther, Lowenstein & Co. “Staffed by Penn Kemble,” the pamphlet continues, “the Commission operated out of the offices of ... one of several democratic socialist organizations Shanker was associated with.”<sup>25</sup> Get the picture?

And Lowenstein? A close associate of Bobby Kennedy, he was a former National Student Association president deeply

<sup>23</sup> “Reuther Concedes UAW Got CIA Funds,” *Washington Post*, 8 May 1967. “AFL-CIA” history is usefully summed up in Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union* (Doubleday, 2010), pp. 515-525; Wilford’s *Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 51-69; and Ted Morgan’s Lovestone biography, *A Covert Life* (Random House, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Frank Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History* (Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 390; Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, p. 186.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Chenoweth, *Democracy’s Champion: Albert Shanker and the International Impact of the American Federation of Teachers* (Albert Shanker Institute, 2013), p. 11. Chenoweth was the national secretary of the Young Social Democrats, 1979-82.

implicated in the CIA funds scandal. His biographer William Chase reports that in the Dominican Republic, Lowenstein had another Commission staffer contact a “former FBI employee” and “a Bay of Pigs veteran who had been a trainer at the institute ... where Bosch taught.” That same year, Lowenstein ran for Congress, endorsed by Norman Thomas and “democratic socialist leader Michael Harrington,” who wrote in praise of Lowenstein’s “devotion” to just causes.<sup>26</sup>

Norman Thomas’ Committee on Free Elections helped establish a pattern that the U.S. imperialists employed in one country after another. “Sponsored by the Johnson administration and its organizational affiliates such as the CIA,” it exemplified public-relations techniques used in what came to be called “demonstration elections”: that is, supposed “free elections” staged by the U.S. to legitimize murderous puppet regimes. The year after the 1966 Dominican vote, another “classic demonstration election was held under U.S. auspices in South Vietnam” to bolster the regime of Diem’s successors, General Thieu and Marshal Ky. (Ky was famous for calling Adolf Hitler his hero and declaring, “We need four or five Hitlers in Vietnam.”) In El Salvador, the U.S.-staged election of 1982 provided cover for mass murder in Reagan’s drive to exterminate workers, peasants and youth fighting against the death-squad regime.<sup>27</sup>

Made in U.S.A. with the aid of “democratic socialists,” the 1966 Dominican Republic vote had a long-lasting impact on Haitians as well as Dominicans. Joaquín Balaguer ruled through rampant corruption and terror, using a police death squad, the “Banda Colorá,” to gun down communists. Both as Trujillo’s henchman and as president for most of the 30 years after the 1965-66 occupation, Balaguer was the key ideologue and architect of anti-Haitian persecution in the Dominican Republic, a bloody legacy that continues to this day.

### From YPSL to “AFL-CIA,” USIA, NED...

A crucial role throughout this history was played by the “young democratic socialists” of yesteryear. To understand U.S. social democracy, just ask: What became of them? The short answer is that having been trained as professional anti-communists, they ended up as key operatives for the anti-communist “AFL-CIA” labor officialdom, spearheading U.S. skulduggery in Cold War II, fronting for Contra terrorists and death squad regimes in Central America and funneling U.S. dollars to anti-Soviet Solidarność in Poland, founding endless front groups for CIA ops and serving as top officials in the U.S. government’s international operations, both under Republican Reagan and Democrat Clinton. Some went with

<sup>26</sup> William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running* (Basic Books, 1993), pp. 191, 244, 254-261.

<sup>27</sup> Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *Demonstration Elections: U.S.-Staged Elections in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (South End Press, 1984), pp. 42, 55, 115-119. Norman Thomas was key to positive media coverage of the 1966 Dominican elections as well as Bosch’s participation in them, the authors stress, also noting: “Subsequently, Lowenstein was associated with Freedom House, and served as a member of their mission to Rhodesia in 1979 and 1980. Frances Grant, one of the observers in (and apologists for) the Dominican Republic election showed up as a Freedom House observer in El Salvador in March 1982” (p. 250n).

Michael Harrington’s Democratic Socialists, some with Bayard Rustin’s Social Democrats. But they all ended up as part of the U.S. imperialist machine, and they all got their training as State Department (or CIA) socialists in the Socialist Party of Norman Thomas, Max Shachtman and Michael Harrington.

In 2006, former Young People’s Socialist League chairman Joshua Muravchik told the story in a nostalgic piece in neocon flagship *Commentary*. When YPSL broke up in ’64 with the departure of its left wing, this “cleared a path for our rump of right-wingers to re-create the YPSL according to our own rights.” The “moving force for this was a triumvirate” of Penn Kemble, Tom Kahn and Paul Feldman (to whom Harrington passed the editorship of *New America* around the same time). The three were nominated to the Socialist Party’s National Committee in 1966, together with fellow “yipsels” like Charlotte Kemble, Rachele Horowitz and Sandra Feldman.

A glance at “YPSL In Action” pages in *New America* shows that by 1969, under Michael Harrington’s chairmanship of the Socialist Party, Josh Muravchik had taken over from Penn Kemble as national chairman of the SP youth group; Charlotte Kemble (later Charlotte Roe) was now YPSL national secretary; a fellow named Max Green was the page’s co-editor, with Tom Milstein and Penn Kemble’s sister Eugenia listed under “Editorial Board.”<sup>28</sup>

Around the same time, Penn Kemble headed up a group called Frontlash to work on voter registration with the AFL-CIO. (The name was taken from LBJ’s election strategy to defeat Barry Goldwater’s appeal to a white backlash against civil rights in 1964.) Charlotte Kemble later became its executive director. Funded by the labor tops, Frontlash had close relations with New York teachers union leader Shanker. One of its organizers was David Jessup, formerly of the Bay Area YPSL. An old Peace Corps associate of Jessup’s named David Dorn became Frontlash representative to the U.S. Youth Council and a Shanker rep at international “free trade union” events, reporting back to Shanker “about different trainings and conferences in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” Penn Kemble’s sister Eugenia also became an assistant to Shanker, helping “coordinate international activities,” as the Shanker Institute pamphlet puts it.<sup>29</sup>

As of 1972 the SP’s National Committee included Paul Feldman, Rachele Horowitz, Tom Kahn, Penn Kemble, Josh Muravchik, one Carl Gershman, and others (including Harrington, of course). Gershman had become YPSL national chairman, figuring prominently in an article titled “Young Socialists Defeat Motion Favoring Recognition of Cuba” in the *New York Times* (28 December 1972). The article quoted YPSL leaders’ self-description as “rebels against appeasement” of any form of communism,” including U.S. diplomatic recognition of Cuba. The article also took note of how the SP/YPSL was divided between leaders closely linked to the AFL-CIO tops, who had back-handedly supported Nixon in the ’72 elections, and a minority that supported the liberal Democratic

<sup>28</sup> Joshua Muravchik, “Comrades,” *Commentary*, 1 January 2006; *Proceedings, 1966 National Convention*, Socialist Party; *New America*, 22 April 1969 and 31 March 1972.

<sup>29</sup> “Young Dems, YPSL Join in ‘Frontlash,’” *Harvard Crimson*, 6 March 1968; Wikipedia entry on Frontlash; See allthewaywithlbj.com; Chenoweth, *Democracy’s Champion*, p. 53.

From YPSL to ...

## Careers in Counterrevolution

- **Penn Kemble:** YPSL national chairman, SP national committee, 1966; executive secretary, SP, 1968-70; together with Harrington and Shachtman, founded SP front Negotiations Now, 1967; founder, AFL-CIO electoral group Frontlash, 1968; SP national committee, 1972; founder, Coalition for a Democratic Majority (opposing McGovern), 1972; president, Committee for Democracy in Central America, 1981-88, supporting Nicaraguan Contras and death-squad regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala; deputy director (1993), later acting director (1999), U.S. Information Agency under Democrat Clinton; Board of International Broadcasting under Republican Bush, 2001; later, Washington representative of CIA front Freedom House.
- **Tom Kahn:** head of League for Industrial Democracy; SP national committee, 1972; presidential primary campaign of “Senator from Boeing” Henry Jackson, 1972; permanent position, AFL-CIO, where he coordinated support for Solidarność counterrevolutionary drive in Poland; director, International Affairs Department, AFL-CIO, 1986-92.
- **Charlotte Kemble (later Roe):** YPSL, SP national committee, 1966; YPSL national secretary; executive director, Frontlash; State Department political officer, labor attaché, labor advisor and liaison to CIA front AIFLD, etc. in various posts.
- **Rachelle Horowitz:** YPSL, SP national committee, 1966; SP national committee, 1972; head of political department, American Federation of Teachers, appointed by hard-line Cold Warrior Albert Shanker, from 1985; later leader of Democratic Party National Committee.
- **Sandra Feldman:** YPSL, SP national committee, 1966; lieutenant to Shanker and executive director, United Federation of Teachers, 1966-75; president, UFT, 1985-97 (also vice president, New York state AFL-CIO); president, AFT, 1997-2005.



**Cold Warriors Penn Kemble (left) and Tom Kahn.**

- **Max Green:** co-editor, “YPSL In Action” page of *New America*, 1969; later Reagan liaison to Jewish community.
- **Joshua Muravchik:** YPSL national chairman, SP national committee, 1968-73; SP national committee, 1972; aide to Sen. Henry Jackson in presidential primary campaign, 1976; executive director, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, 1977-79; later executive committee, Freedom House; prominent neocon, writing in *Commentary*.
- **Eugenia Kemble:** editorial board, “YPSL In Action” page of *New America*, 1969; later head of education issues department of AFT, appointed by Shanker.
- **David Jessup:** Bay Area YPSL; organizer, Frontlash; point man for AFL-CIO anti-communist operations in Central America.
- **Carl Gershman:** YPSL national chairman, SP national committee, 1972; executive director, SDUSA, 1975-80; chief counselor to U.N. representative Jeane Kirkpatrick (also former YPSL) in the first Reagan administration, 1981-84; president, National Endowment for Democracy (1984-present), named by Reagan.

presidential candidate, George McGovern. This foreshadowed the following year’s split of Shachtman-trained forces into Social Democrats, USA (eventually headed by Gershman) and the followers of Michael Harrington, who formed the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and then the DSA. (See “The Real Heritage of Harrington’s DSA.”)

And the roster of Muravchik’s YPSL “comrades”? His 2006 reminiscence proudly lays it out. Having served U.S. imperialism through the medium of State Department “democratic socialism,” they cut out the middleman. Tom Kahn joined the presidential campaign of Senator “Scoop” Jackson (known as the Senator from Boeing for his ties with military contractors) in 1972; George Meany’s lieutenant Lane Kirkland then “gave him a permanent position at the AFL-CIO as, in effect, the house intellectual.” Penn Kemble “carved out a distinct place for himself in American politics, culminating in

a stint as deputy director and then as acting director of the U.S. Information Agency under President Clinton. Through it all, he never ceased inventing new organizations....”

Muravchik continues:

“Others in our old socialist group made meaningful careers as well. Tom Kahn’s stature at the AFL-CIO rose as Lane Kirkland succeeded Meany.... Tom became chief of labor’s foreign-policy programs, and in that capacity he orchestrated labor’s support for Solidarity in Poland. Rachelle Horowitz ... became a leader of the Democratic National Committee. I found my niche writing essays and books. Arch Puddington, at Freedom House, did much the same. Carl Gershman, who succeeded me as YPSL leader as I had succeeded Penn, became president of the National Endowment for Democracy.... Max Green was President Reagan’s liaison to the American Jewish community [etc.]....”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Muravchik, “Comrades.”

The U.S. Information Agency, Freedom House, the AFL-CIO foreign affairs department, etc., are notorious partners, promoters and fronts for CIA “dirty tricks” around the world. As for the National Endowment for Democracy, for three decades it has provided overt cover for covert Company operations, from Miami’s anti-Castro “gusanos” to Central America to Venezuela to U.S.-orchestrated “color revolutions” in East Europe. Major funding for Venezuelan “opposition” groups is also provided by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a project of the German SPD (Social Democratic Party). It is named after one of the patriotic “socialists” who ordered the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919. As in 1919, the SPD is a bulwark of the Socialist International.

As for the SDUSA, the Central America connection was a key nexus for these YPSL grads. Muravchik’s article proudly cites the fact that former Bay Area YPSL member David Jessup “became the point man for the quite substantial efforts by organized labor under Kirkland to resist Communism in Central America.” What that meant was “AFL-CIA” leaders promoting Reagan’s Contra cutthroats in Nicaragua, death squads in El Salvador and the U.S.-armed dictatorship in Guatemala that waged a genocidal counterinsurgency war against indigenous Maya peoples.

Meanwhile, Charlotte Roe filled a series of “diplomatic” posts for the State Department starting in the 1980s, including “Political/Labor Officer” in Bolivia, where she helped reopen an office for the AIFLD. She went on to serve as “Political Officer” in Chile; “Labor Attaché” in Israel; “Deputy Political Counselor” in Colombia (again liaising with local AIFLD projects); “Environmental and Science Attaché” in Hungary; then “Political Counselor” at the Organization of American States, “State Department, Senior Labor Advisor, Western Hemisphere,” etc.<sup>31</sup>

The DSA of 2018 would doubtless prefer that its young recruits be unaware of what became of their predecessor “young democratic socialists.” In the event that they do, it would doubtless argue that the DSA today has nothing to do with the neocons of SDUSA. But as Friedrich Engels liked to say, facts are stubborn things. The fact is that these former “yipsels” were intensively trained in the Shachtman-Harrington-Thomas school of “democratic socialism” over an entire period in which Harrington worked hand-in-glove with them denouncing reds and “Viet Cong apologists,” while one revelation after another of Thomas’ Company connections spilled forth. In 1972-73 they had their falling-out over which government party to serve: Democrats or Republicans. Harrington chose the former – the SDUSA crew the latter. Their training served them well, as they graduated from fronting for the U.S. imperialist elite to “carving out a place for themselves” as part of it.

### The Wages of Shankerism

Al Shanker, who led the New York City United Federation of Teachers (UFT) for two decades starting in 1964 and headed the national American Federation of Teachers (AFT) from

<sup>31</sup> Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview with Charlotte Roe, 10 January 2005, on line at <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Roe-Charlotte.pdf>.



**Social Democrat Al Shanker, UFT and later AFT president, was linchpin in funneling CIA aid to counter-revolutionary Polish Solidarność.**

1979, was another YPSL graduate, joining the SP youth group in the late 1940s. He was closely tied to the Shachtmanites in particular, and to the SDUSA after the 1973 split: Yetta Barsh Shachtman, Max’s wife, was Shanker’s longtime administrative assistant. Shanker was succeeded as UFT president by Sandra Feldman, the former YPSL and SP national committee member, who also took over the AFT upon his death in 1997. Under Shanker, the UFT and AFT served as key links in the CIA’s worldwide anti-Soviet and anti-communist campaign of subverting left-led unions.

Today, the Albert Shanker Institute trumpets Shanker’s role backing Lech Walesa’s Solidarność, touching off the “domino effect” that brought “the end of communism” throughout the former Soviet bloc.<sup>32</sup> Under Walesa, workers’ strikes at the Gdansk shipyards – voicing frustration with the Polish Stalinist government’s broken promises and concessions to IMF austerity – were exploited to launch to launch Solidarność which quickly consolidated as a counterrevolutionary political movement. Directly aligned with Reagan, British Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the Vatican, it enrolled thousands of right-wing nationalist activists and priests, together with millions of well-to-do peasants, to spearhead the drive for capitalist counterrevolution throughout the Soviet bloc.

As Solidarność prepared a bid for power, Walesa invited the AFL-CIO’s Lane Kirkland and Irving Brown to Poland. As the Shanker Institute relates:

“More than \$75,000 was raised [for Solidarność] by Frontlash

<sup>32</sup> “Domino Effect: The AFL-CIO and the End of Communism” (15 June 2017) and “Democracy’s Champion: Albert Shanker” (3 February 2014), on [shankerinstitute.org](http://shankerinstitute.org).

... [and] a coalition of youth groups established by the Young Social Democrats.... In late September 1981, Solidarity wanted to launch an information office in New York around its First Congress. Tom Kahn asked Shanker to provide help. Shanker provided office space, a large financial contribution, and the union's press office and expertise.<sup>33</sup>

Still, this was mere chicken feed. The CIA reportedly funneled at least \$10 million in covert funds to Solidarność, channeled through "third parties" (like U.S. and European unions led by social democrats), plus another \$10 million from the NED. Millions more were provided by the Vatican Bank, West German social democrats and other funders.

In September 1981, Solidarność opened a U.S. office in the New York headquarters of Shanker's union. Bayard Rustin of the A. Philip Randolph Institute joined other old comrades of Shachtman and Harrington on the platform. Outside, supporters of the then-Trotskyist Spartacist League protested with placards reading "No Rollback! No Capitalist Restoration in Eastern Europe," "Reagan Smashes PATCO, Loves Solidarność," "Social Democrats and the AFL-CIO Front for the CIA in Poland, Too," "Don't Sell Poland to the German Bankers," and other slogans. An important theme was upholding the revolutionary internationalist legacy of Rosa Luxemburg against that of Josef Pilsudski, the anti-communist dictator whose image appeared on Solidarność posters.

In response, the virulent labor-haters of the *Wall Street Journal* (29 September 1981) published an editorial titled "Communists and the AFL-CIO," praising "American labor's support for Solidarity," and ominously warning: "Anyone seeking to delegitimize its performance in this realm should be aware of just how serious an attack he is launching" and "should not be allowed to do so easily."<sup>34</sup> Given the "AFL-CIA's" close ties to the top levels of the U.S. government, this was an ominous threat. Wall Street was jubilant when Solidarność eventually succeeded in bringing capitalist counterrevolution to Poland. But for Polish workers it meant mass impoverishment and layoffs, including the closing of the Gdansk shipyards, and an all-out clerical-nationalist assault on the rights of women, abolishing the right to abortion.

The Shanker Institute pamphlet also devotes many pages to Shanker's activities with Bayard Rustin et al. in the U.S. propaganda campaign to "Save Soviet Jewry," which was ratcheted up in the 1970s following Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank. Many of the former Soviet Jews that the campaign helped send to Israel became settler shock troops there.

## Revolution or Counterrevolution

Though Muravchik doesn't mention Jeane Kirkpatrick in his reminiscence, she too was a YPSL grad, albeit of earlier vintage. Like Shachtman protégé Irving Kristol, Kirkpatrick was one of the most prominent pioneers of the reactionary backlash movement known as "neoconservatism." Ronald Reagan appointed her his ambassador to the United Nations,

<sup>33</sup> Chenoweth, *Democracy's Champion*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> See "Solidarity, the Polish Union, Is Open for Business in U.S.," *New York Times*, 25 September 1981; and the Spartacist pamphlet, *Solidarność: Polish Company Union for CIA and Bankers* (1981), pp. 2-6.

where her chief counselor was Carl Gershman.

Among her other murderous tasks, Kirkpatrick was point person for the counterinsurgency wars that devastated Central America in the 1980s. Muravchik and Penn Kemble were among the most vocal supporters of this imperialist-sponsored mass murder. Both were signatories to a full-page ad backing the Nicaraguan Contras in the *New York Times* (16 March 1986), titled "We Support Military Assistance to the Nicaraguans Fighting for Democracy." Muravchik also penned such *Times* op-eds as "Endowing Democracy" (18 June 1984) and "Topple the Sandinistas" (3 March 1985).

With Reagan in the presidency and former SP/YPSL colleagues serving as his minions, DSA founders Michael Harrington and Irving Howe (editor of *Dissent*) worked to rally the wing of American social democracy that wanted to stick with the Democrats through thick and thin. Interviewed together with Howe by the *New York Times Magazine* (17 June 1984), Harrington insisted that "by now practically everyone on the left agrees that the Democratic Party, with all its flaws, must be our main political arena."

In the same interview, Harrington underlined his loyalty to the patriotic premises of social-democratic politics: "When I criticize American foreign policy, our intervention in Central America ... I do that in the name of the national security of the United States.... Our critique is that President Reagan's policy with regard to Nicaragua does not promote the national security, it hurts it." Howe chimed in: "And you speak of the national security because you recognize that there is a totalitarian enemy out there which needs to be met."

Norman Thomas' crusade for imperialist "democracy" against the Soviet "totalitarian enemy" was the common heritage of both wings of U.S. social democracy as the anti-Soviet drive escalated by Carter was pushed to the max by Reagan and George H.W. Bush. After Harrington's death in 1989, the DSA carried on the tradition, hailing the wave of capitalist restoration that spread from Poland and the DDR (East Germany) to the USSR itself, bringing social devastation and nationalist blood-letting in its wake. Today, the DSA continues to celebrate "the collapse of communism," calling this counterrevolution "a critical gain for democracy."<sup>35</sup>

From ordering the murder of communists and championing invasion of Soviet Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution to promoting counterrevolution against the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the 1990s, the social democrats served as front men and women for imperialism. Do new members of the Young Democratic Socialists of America today want to become professional anti-communists, cogs in the machinery of imperialist domination, like those who went before them? The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, youth section of the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, seeks instead to develop professional revolutionaries, fighting for the liberating communism of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky.

Revolution or counterrevolution: it's a clear, class choice. So which side are *you* on? ■

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Schwartz, "A History of Democratic Socialists of America 1971-2017," July 2017, at dsausa.org.



# Cops, Prison and Security Guards Out of the Labor Movement!

## DSA Debacle Over Cop “Union” Organizer

*The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 49, September-October 2017.*

In early August, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) held a national convention in Chicago that caused a sensation among the reformist left and got oodles of favorable publicity in much of the mainstream bourgeois press. Long a staid and seemingly moribund pressure group on and in the Democratic Party, the DSA boasts of rising to 25,000 members and growing due to the combined impact of Bernie Sanders’ bid to win the Democratic nomination and the election of Donald Trump. The DSA has sought to give itself a more “progressive” makeover appealing to its new millennial base, even as these social democrats repeatedly called the cops on an Internationalist sales team for selling revolutionary literature outside the convention (see the introduction to “The ABCs of the DSA,” *The Internationalist*, August 2017).

Then came the Danny Fetonte scandal. A long-time leader of the DSA’s Austin, Texas branch, Fetonte was elected to the organization’s National Political Committee at this year’s convention. Endorsed by vice-chair Joseph Schwartz and other DSA leaders, Fetonte put particular emphasis on the growth of the Austin chapter and his role in “building the Bernie Campaign,” noting that “37 out of the 75 Bernie delegates to the Democratic National Convention from Texas were DSA members,” as well as touting his “years as a union organizer” (“NPC Candidates,” [dsaconvention.org](http://dsaconvention.org)).

Less than a week after the DSA’s convention closed in a crescendo of self-congratulation, the group erupted in full-blown crisis over the “revelation” that Fetonte’s vaunted organizing career included working for a cop “union,” the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT). In fact, Fetonte’s role as an organizer for CLEAT was far from a secret. Publicity about his activity in the Sanders campaign touted his CLEAT connection, as reflected in articles in the *Austin Villager* (11 December 2015) and *American-Statesman* (15 August 2016).

Yet for many new members, it came as a shock, particularly since the DSA convention had just passed a resolution for “abolition of the prisons and the police.” While such a call is completely illusory without socialist revolution, it reflected the widespread revulsion against racist police terror that led to mass protests after the cop murders of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and so many others. Many DSAers worried that Fetonte’s election would hurt work with “coalition partners” in Black Lives Matter.

Over the following weeks the Fetonte affair tied the DSA in knots, while also shedding an uncomfortable light



**Danny Fetonte (front left), together with Bernie Sanders. Fetonte, who was long-time leader of the Austin, Texas branch of the Democratic Socialists of America, was for years an organizer for a cop “union,” the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT). Police are the enforcers of racist capitalist repression. Cops, prison and security guards out of the unions!**

on the crowd of opportunist leftists doggedly tailing them. Amidst the myriad statements and counter-statements by groupings within the DSA, a common theme was what a group of labor bureaucrats described, in a statement supporting Fetonte, as “DSA’s image as a ‘big tent’ that does not seek to impose stringent ideological litmus tests on its members.” In the anti-communist social-democratic milieu, this is contrasted to the supposed evils of Leninist “democratic centralism.”

As Rosa Luxemburg emphasized in *Reform or Revolution*, the counterposition between revolutionary Marxism and social-democratic reformism centers precisely on the question of the state. The idea that cops – the armed fist of the bourgeoisie – are “workers,” and that organizations devoted to representing their interests are “labor unions,” is characteristic of social democracy. It is the ideological reflection of social democrats’ role as real or would-be administrators of the capitalist state.

***Cops of all kinds are not workers – they are professional enforcers of racist capitalist repression. Marxists fight for the elementary demand: Cops, prison and security guards out of the unions!***

## Post-Convention Turmoil

Many members of the DSA learned of the Fetonte scandal as they were traveling home from the Chicago convention. On August 8, the Interim Steering Committee elected by the new National Political Committee (NPC) issued a statement declaring that it would “investigate the facts of the matter” and was “moving towards a solution that emphasizes due process and transparency.” Some DSA members started an online petition opposing Fetonte; a number of local chapters and groupings within the organization submitted protests calling on Fetonte to resign or be removed from the NPC. Many of these calls focused on Fetonte’s failure to mention his CLEAT connection in his 2017 NPC campaign materials – though at a raucous Austin meeting on the scandal, his wife reportedly stated he had done so when running for the NPC in 2015.

Fetonte lashed out with denunciations of the leadership for showing “no moral courage” in the face of these demands. This complicated things for the DSA tops. They knew that as a minimum to appease the membership they would need to “censure” Fetonte, and tried mightily to negotiate with Fetonte to get him to resign so that they would not have to vote on his removal from the NPC. The negotiations did not work, Fetonte refused to acknowledge any deception or “wrongdoing.” In fact, Fetonte wrote, “some NPC members were afraid that what would come out is that they knew every bit of my history working for CLEAT,” as “there was ample evidence that my work history and my connections with law enforcement were widely known.” Moreover, he stated, “Texas DSA has at least a dozen members who organize or work with law enforcement” and “has a past NPC member” (whom he did not identify) who “organized police and correctional officers” while serving on the NPC.

Reflecting his links with much of the DSA’s old guard, Fetonte positioned himself as a defender of the organization’s mission of pressuring the Democrats: “I gained votes by a strong advocacy for a DSA strategy of working inside and outside the Democratic Party and opposed the position that DSA should only support socialist candidates. I gained support because I opposed DSA isolating ourselves from the millions of Bernie supporters” who are working together “with other progressive[s] in the Democratic Party.” Though just about everybody weighing in on the question swore fealty to the social-democratic framework of “big tent” reformism, Fetonte sought to portray his opponents as the sort of dreaded “sectarians” and “dogmatists” that DSAers are taught to revile, denouncing them as leftist “extremists.”

On August 27, the NPC issued a statement announcing that it had voted to censure Fetonte but that a vote to remove him from the body had failed by a vote of 8.5 to 7.5; 11 votes would have been needed to oust him. The statement censures Fetonte for “omitting what would likely have been relevant information in his campaign materials” but states that the NPC did not find him guilty of any “malfeasance” that would be grounds for removal. Strikingly, among those backing the decision were some key figures of the DSA “left,” including two of the three members of the Momentum Caucus (which

claims to be Marxist) on the NPC. Additionally, a “Statement by DSA Members of Color” cited the “pluralistic” nature of the DSA and the fact that “we are not a democratic centralist organization” as grounds for declaring that “we support the NPC’s decision not to remove [Fetonte] for malfeasance.”

A minority of the NPC issued a statement criticizing the decision as “a stunning failure of leadership on [the] part of those on the NPC who were unable to act decisively on an issue that gets to the core values of what it means to be a socialist and fight against racist oppression in our society. Those members chose to seat an unapologetic police association organizer – an institution of violence and terror against Black and Brown and working class people since its inception.” At the same time, the NPC minority’s declaration that “an unapologetic police association organizer cannot be anywhere near the leadership of a socialist organization” tacitly accepts that cop “union” members or promoters could be in the DSA so long as they’re not on leadership bodies.

In a sharply-worded description of the turmoil over Fetonte, a disgruntled New Mexico DSAer wrote:

“Finally, after some dawdling, the NPC voted to keep him. This isn’t surprising.... First, the DSA’s origins aren’t as far left as many believe. To be crude, Michael Harrington founded the organization in the 1970s to force the Democrats further left. Look at the Democratic Party. Teddy Roosevelt on horseback in the Spanish-American War is farther to the left than the Democratic Party. And having police collaborators on the NPC wouldn’t be a first for the DSA.”

–“How the DSA Screwed Up with Danny Fetonte,”  
pastemagazine.com (1 September)

True enough – as the history of Harrington, his “State Department Socialist” colleague and mentor Norman Thomas et al. amply demonstrates. But how many of those revolted by this episode, and this history, can make the necessary break from social democracy to embrace revolutionary Marxism remains to be seen.

As for Fetonte, the cop organizer evidently decided to cut his losses and try to have the last word. On September 8 he issued a letter of resignation from the DSA in which he petulantly portrays himself as the victim of “factionalists” and “DSA extremists” (sic!) with “less than one year” in the organization. Underscoring his pro-cop stand, he admonishes: “We should look to the examples of law enforcement organizations in Sweden and the law enforcement union in South Africa.” In Sweden, police snatch squads have been resisted as they go after youths in immigrant neighborhoods of Stockholm (most recently this past February) and Malmö (on September 8). In South Africa, the POPCRU police “union” has defended the killer cops who gunned down dozens of striking mine workers in the 2012 Marikana massacre (see “Bloody South Africa Mine Massacre Unmasks ANC Neo-Apartheid Regime,” *The Internationalist*, August 2012).

While many in the DSA no doubt hope to return to patting themselves on the back for a “successful” convention, “stunning” growth and the like, the issues posed in the Fetonte affair will not go away. For starters, in New York City the DSA is

proudly proclaiming its central role in the City Council election campaign of Khader El-Yateem, a DSA member running in the Democratic primaries in Brooklyn in what his campaign manager calls “a battle for the soul of the Democratic Party” (*Village Voice*, 5 September). El-Yateem is *a clergy liaison for the New York Police Department*. At a public forum on the election last spring, he “called on NYPD to allocate more police officers to the 68th Precinct in Bay Ridge, which he said was chronically understaffed, so that more cops could patrol the streets” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 April).

In addition, DSA member Marc Fliedner is running for District Attorney in Brooklyn (*Village Voice*, 8 September). Fliedner has been an Assistant D.A. for almost 30 years and praised his former boss, D.A. Charles Hynes, notorious for numerous bogus convictions in which evidence was manufactured or withheld, and accusations of racist favoritism. District attorneys are linchpins of the police-prosecutor-prison system of capitalist state repression, and now a DSAer is trying to fill that slot.

### **Police “Unions”: Deadly Enemies of the Working Class**

As the Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), which is fraternally allied with the Internationalist Group, stated in a 2014 pamphlet, police, prison guards and security guards:

“are not fellow workers but the bosses’ agents of repression – ‘producers’ only of repression for the owning class *against* the working class, poor and oppressed. Whether public or private, proprietary or contract, police and guards of all kinds seek ‘unionization’ to improve and strengthen their position to ‘do their job’ of repression, which in the racist USA, founded on slavery, falls most heavily on doubly and triply oppressed African American, Latino and immigrant poor and working people and youth.”

The pamphlet notes that the Patrolman’s Benevolent Association (PBA) filed suit even against the toothless “anti-profiling” law enacted in New York City in 2013, and that “for years, contracts negotiated by the PBA included the notorious ‘48-hour rule,’ which required the city to wait two full days before questioning officers involved in ‘police-related occurrences’ – like shooting down black and Latino youth” (*Campus Protest, Capitalist “Security” and the Program of Class Struggle*).

In contrast, liberals and social-democratic reformists routinely support the police. In August 2014, following the racist police murder of Eric Garner, the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE), an opposition caucus in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), refused to support a protest march in Staten Island and issued a statement grotesquely calling for “the leaderships of the UFT and PBA to find ways to work together and unite” with “our brother and sister officers.” In contrast, the CSEW marched with signs denouncing racist police terror and the threats of the fascistic PBA chief Pat Lynch to defend the cops who chokeheld Garner to death (see “MORE Takes a Stand ... With the Police,” in *The Internationalist No. 38*, October-November 2014).

It comes as no surprise that in Texas, the CLEAT cop

“union” boasts that “effective legal representation” for police is one of the main benefits it offers. The statement on Fetonte by the minority of the DSA NPC noted:

“Fetonte had a direct hand in building police association power which was used by killer cops to cover for their actions. Fetonte organized the Bexar County Sheriff Deputies and successfully bargained a contract that included terms allowing officers under investigation to see all evidence before making a statement. Officers in the department Fetonte organized used that contract he negotiated to view all evidence against them after they shot and killed a man. They then made statements which omitted the fact that the man they shot had his hands up. It wasn’t until another video was released later that the truth came out, but to no effect. That was police union power in action, power which Fetonte helped to organize.”

Moreover, “during the time Fetonte worked at CLEAT, an officer raped a handcuffed woman in the back of a squad car and the officer’s CLEAT local spent \$1 million dollars in a public campaign to prevent changes to the police union contract that would’ve held the rapist accountable....”

The statement notes that CLEAT opposes “even the most tepid of reform legislation, including the Sandra Bland Act which would’ve put limits on racial profiling by police” and “is currently supporting a bill which would limit the liability of motorists who hit protesters with their vehicles.” What this means is shown by the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville by a Nazi who rammed his car into a crowd of anti-fascist protesters.

In “doing their job” of representing the interests of capitalism’s uniformed enforcers, police “unions” are, and can only be, deadly enemies of the most basic interests of the working class and oppressed. The “special bodies of armed men” that, as Friedrich Engels pointed out, are the core of the capitalist state, cannot be reformed, and the idea that police and prisons could be abolished under capitalism is the sort of feel-good reformist illusion that stands in the way of the struggle to actually smash the machinery of racist repression in the only way possible: through socialist revolution.

In Brazil, our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionista do Brasil led a struggle to oust *guardas* (police) from the Municipal Workers Union of Volta Redonda, the “Steel City” with a history of convulsive workers struggles. (See Internationalist pamphlet *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda Brazil – Cops, Courts Out of the Unions* [1997].) In Latin America, as in the U.S., reformists often claim that police are “workers in uniform,” going so far as to support “strikes” by the Military Police and military firemen in Brazil, police mutinies in Bolivia, etc. The same line is taken by social democrats in France, Sweden and other European countries, who have often taken the lead in organizing “unions” of the police forces they administer when their capitalist masters let them take their turn in office.

Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky responded to similar arguments raised by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany, which took on the task of administering

capitalism's repressive forces when defeat in World War I faced the ruling class with the threat of red revolution. (It was then that SPD leaders Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and their "bloodhound" Gustav Noske ordered the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.) As the social democrats looked to the Prussian police, which included quite a few former social-democratic workers, to resist the rise of Hitler's Nazis, Trotsky emphasized, "The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state is a bourgeois cop, not a worker" (*What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* [1932]).

Today, the Fetonte affair poses a bit of a dilemma for left groups seeking to ingratiate themselves with the DSA. All of them chimed in with the chorus of exaltation over the DSA conference, hailing the social democrats' growth, "moves to the left," etc., while mixing in a suggestion here, a bit of face-saving criticism there. In one way or another, they seek to avoid having the DSA monopolize the opportunist benefits of being "Sanders socialists," hoping that cozying up to the DSA – while positioning themselves a wee bit to the left on the social-democratic spectrum – will help them get in on the action.

The most prominent of these outfits is Socialist Alternative (SAIt), best known for its thoroughly reformist "socialist city councilperson" in Seattle, Kshama Sawant. SAIt – which holds that cops are workers – puts forward a recipe for police "reform" in which "elected civilian review boards" would take responsibility for the "priorities" and budget of capitalism's police apparatus. As we noted, in 2014 Sawant

"praised the process of hiring a new police chief, saying it was 'positive ... that a woman will be at the head of what has been and still is a male-dominated bastion.' She hailed the new top cop's 'openness' and 'commitment to build a relationship with the community,' as well as her 'tiered approach for policing protests,' so that riot police will only be deployed 'if absolutely necessary'."

–"Black America Under the Gun," *The Internationalist* No. 48, May-June 2017

The position of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), to which SAIt is affiliated, that police are supposedly workers is shared by the International Marxist Tendency, which likewise has its origins in the Militant tendency of Ted Grant, which buried itself in the British Labour Party for four decades. Their position on cops is far from abstract: both the CWI and the IMT hark back to the days when Grant's Militant Labour ran the Liverpool city council in the 1980s, when claiming the cops were "fellow workers" was all in a day's work (see "Her Majesty's Social Democrats in Bed with the Police," *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009).

Even some groupings that have taken up the call for police out of the unions (like *Left Voice*, associated with the right-centrist Fracción Trotskista led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo) evade the question of security guards, who are "unionized" by the Service Employees International Union, among others. For its part, while laudably issuing a call in 2015 for the AFL-CIO to break its affiliation



**Brazilian Trotskyists waged hard struggle to oust police from municipal workers union in Volta Redonda, Brazil. At July 1996 rally, signs say: "Bourgeois courts, get out of our union," "Bosses' courts, military police and municipal guardas out of the union."**

to the International Union of Police Associations, United Auto Workers Local 2865 (which represents student employees at the University of California) did not call for removing security guards from the labor movement.

Yet as the Class Struggle Education Workers pamphlet demonstrates in detail, security guards are a key sector of the bourgeoisie's repressive forces that works closely with the "regular" police. Moreover, the pamphlet notes, "in many circumstances, the 'private' basis of their authority *enhances* security guards' legal powers": among other things, they are not required to read Miranda rights to those they detain.

The Fetonte episode is a vivid illustration of a simple fact: the DSA is not, has never been and never will be a means to overthrow this capitalist system of racist police terror, war and exploitation. However much it seeks to accommodate its new millennial base, the DSA's politics remain thoroughly reformist – in other words, a means for accommodating would-be radicals to the capitalist state, as it seeks endlessly to pressure the Democratic Party to the left. Illusions that an influx of new members would "transform" the DSA crashed into reality just days after its biggest convention ever.

The flare-up over Fetonte should bring home to thoughtful activists the bankruptcy of groups that use "socialist" as a buzzword while disdaining the key questions of principle, program and history that have divided reformists from revolutionaries since the days of Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto. For those who actually do want to fight for socialism, it's high time to ditch the DSA. ■

# DSA Dodges Debate “Socialism: What It Is (and Isn’t)”

The following article is reprinted from *Revolution* (No. 14, January 2018), the newspaper of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York.

Since the election of Donald Trump, the term “socialism” has been on the minds of many, a popular topic of discussion among those disillusioned with the status quo and increasingly insecure about the future. In the last year, the United States has seen repeated rallies by violent racists, one of which resulted in the murder of anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia.

We’ve seen unending police violence and attacks by racists against black people, as well as massive Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) arrests of immigrants. We’ve seen a hurricane ravage the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico, which

because of the chains of finance capital that bind it to colonial slavery, is still without power on the majority of the island. We’ve seen racist, xenophobic president Trump threaten “fire and fury” against North Korea, whose people were slaughtered by the millions and whose cities were leveled by the U.S. in the Korean War (1950-53). As a result of widespread socio-political instability, many are becoming aware of the nature of capitalism, and the damage done by its exploitation of the working class and oppressed, of whole countries and continents.

Although the word *socialism* has gained attention, still fixed in the minds of many are the lies about socialism propagated by the bourgeois class. Even before the “first red scare” that was launched after World War One and the Russian Revolution, socialism and communism were vilified, frequently leading to investigation, arrest and blacklisting of those suspected of harboring subversive views. Anti-communist hysteria was used to whip up support for imperialist assaults on countries where capitalist domination was challenged. Yet socialism became the banner of oppressed people throughout the world. Colonial peoples seeking freedom from imperialist slavery were painted as their polar opposites – as dangerous enemies of freedom.

Lies about what socialism is still influence many today, and have been passed from one generation to the next. For decades, ruling-class politicians and media used the term “socialist” to discredit political viewpoints even slightly to the left of the status quo. Yet it has also been used cynically by pseudo-socialist groups that want to reform an unreformable system; and by capitalist politicians like Bernie Sanders



**A chair was reserved for the YDSA to have a political debate with us at the 19 October 2017 forum. Unable to defend pro-Democrat line, junior league social democrats refused debate challenge.**

to funnel disillusioned youth back into the Democratic Party. Therefore, clarity on the matter of what socialism is, and what it is not, is an important part of winning young people to the revolutionary Marxist program. That is, the genuine communist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, which upheld Marxist socialism against the social democrats who supported World War One – and was the basis for the Bolshevik Revolution, whose 100th anniversary we celebrated last November.

Going back to the *Communist Manifesto* (1847), polemics – political arguments aimed at achieving political clarity on an issue – are an important part of the Marxist tradition. Marx and Engels made arguments against the “utopian socialists,” who believed socialism could be achieved by convincing the ruling class it was a more just and rational way to organize society. Rosa Luxemburg wrote her classic *Reform or Revolution* to demolish the reformist nostrums of early “revisionist” Eduard Bernstein. Lenin exposed social democrats who made their peace with capitalism and became supporters of imperialist war. Trotsky polemicized tirelessly against Stalin’s anti-Marxist dogma of “socialism in one country” and “popular fronts” with capitalist politicians; and against those like Karl Radek who deserted the Left Opposition to become hack writers for the Stalinist bureaucracy.

On September 7, the Hunter College Internationalist Club issued a debate challenge to the Hunter College Young Democratic Socialists of America on the topic “Socialism: What It Is (and Isn’t).” The YDSA is the youth section of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has grown to a claimed membership of over 30,000 members since Sanders’ campaign

for the Democratic nomination and the massive revulsion at the election of Donald Trump. Many of those attracted to the DSA are unfamiliar with its real politics and record of supporting U.S. imperialism and the Democratic Party.

The YDSA did not write a response to our debate challenge until almost six weeks later. When it finally did so, it was only to dodge the debate with the pathetic pretext that it had “no intention of continuing to engage” (sic) with the Internationalist Club, citing what it called our “unprovoked hostility” towards the DSA – as exemplified by such “inappropriate actions” as “travelling all the way to Chicago” to distribute Marxist literature to DSA members at their national convention. Grotesquely, the YDSA message characterizes setting up a literature table on the sidewalk outside this “socialist” convention as seeking to “harass” them. This smear is consistent with the fact that the DSA called the cops on our comrades, whose offense consisted of distributing a leaflet criticizing their reformist politics. At its convention, the DSA elected police union organizer Danny Fetonte to its leading body, the National Political Committee. When some members attempted to have him removed from leadership, they were unable to do so, though he later quit. (See “The ABCs of the DSA” and “DSA Debacle Over Cop ‘Union’ Organizer” in this pamphlet.)

Fresh from appealing to the cops to seal members off from the “threat” of Trotskyism in Chicago, the DSA was aware that having to “engage” in open debate at Hunter, where the Internationalist Club has long been the leading left group, would reveal its inability to defend its real, *anti-socialist* history and politics. This is the real reason they refused to debate us. Instead, YDSA members devoted themselves to anti-political and anti-communist baiting and sneering. The Internationalist Club went ahead with the event anyway, holding it as a forum/“open chair debate” on October 19. A chair on the platform was left open for the YDSA in case they changed their minds, and we took the opportunity to explain our perspective on socialism and how it differs from that of the YDSA. We called the forum “Socialism: What It Is (and Isn’t).”

Presenting basic points about the real meaning of socialism and communism, presenters Will and Jacob linked this to such burning topics as how to uproot women’s oppression, the Marxist program for black liberation, why supporting capitalist politicians like Bernie Sanders is the opposite of socialist politics, the importance of defending North Korea against U.S. war threats, and other topics. The presentations were followed by a discussion period where audience members posed further questions and made pertinent comments. Comrades from the Internationalist Group’s recently founded youth section, the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth,

expanded on what it means when we call for a revolutionary workers party, why Marxists fight for the independence of Puerto Rico and all colonies, and other points.

While refusing to debate, or even to listen to the presentations, members of the YDSA evidently decided to make a bit of a spectacle of themselves. After two lurked in the back for a couple of minutes at the beginning, they took off – but one then darted into the room, snapped a photo, then darted out. Another came back and stood sneering before leaving again. Finally another came in after the presentations and worked up the courage to make a comment from the floor, stating, to the incredulity of the crowd: “I don’t see you building anything. I don’t see you going into the street and doing actual organizing work that’s going to fight against the social system that is actually hurting us. What do you think is the point of being so incredibly hostile toward the DSA and all the other groups?”

Comrades politely reminded the YDSAer that, as every politically aware student at Hunter knows, the Internationalist Club is the only left group on campus to consistently organize rallies, speak-outs and contingents in mass protests against racist repression, in defense of immigrants and against U.S. imperialism. Those who know the history of activism at CUNY know the club’s inception successfully mobilizing to defeat CUNY’s “anti-immigrant war purge” back in 2001, all the way down to its role in innumerable recent struggles bringing students and adjuncts out to workers’ picket lines from the Hot and Crusty bakery to the Verizon and Spectrum strikes, and immigrant workers’ union drive at B&H Photo – to mention but a few. Most crucially, we carry out this organizing work on the basis of a program for *socialist revolution*, a far cry from those who can only give socialism a bad name by identifying it with pro-Democratic Party class collaboration.

We publish below edited excerpts from the presentations at the forum.

#### Will:

The main question we are here to answer is, What is socialism? It’s important to understand that this term can have two types of meanings. One is to refer to a future society, that was mostly formulated by Marx and Engels. They didn’t create the term – that was done by their predecessors, the utopian socialists. The essence of what socialism is, according to Marx, is a society where there are no classes.

Capitalism has developed to such an extent that advances in technology, in agriculture, mass production of products, the global economy, actually provide the capability of producing enough for everyone. But Marx also says that you can’t just immediately jump to socialism – you can’t just decide “OK, let’s have a classless, socialist society” – and that was one of his biggest critiques



Cover of *The Nation* magazine gushing over the DSA’s membership growth in the last year.



**Which side are you on? (Left) Black Lives Matter protesters at a march on the Texas state capitol in Austin, September 2015. (Right) Danny Fetonte, together with Bernie Sanders. Fetonte, a long-time leader of the Austin, Texas branch of the DSA, was for years an organizer for a cop “union,” CLEAT. Police are the armed fist of racist American capitalism going b ack to slavery days. Cops out of the unions!**

of the utopian socialists, who believed that socialism was such a great idea that if we can just teach everybody what it is, then everyone in the world will agree it’s a better way of structuring society and we’ll just have socialism all of a sudden.

What the utopian socialists failed to understand is that the ruling class – the capitalists who control the wealth of the world – they’re not going to simply give up their wealth because socialism is a good idea. There has to be a socialist revolution that overthrows the capitalists that are ruling over society, that are ruling over the working class and the oppressed of almost the entire world. The capitalists are not going to simply hand over the keys to the kingdom to the people who work for them. The workers have to take those resources and create a socialist society through a revolution, and that’s a key difference that Marx had with the utopian socialists.

So socialism means the emancipation of all of the working class and the oppressed. One of the key aspects of that is the emancipation of women from capitalist oppression. The root of women’s oppression is in the nuclear family. Socialism would abolish the basis for that nuclear family that enslaves women to domestic servitude. It would do so by providing social institutions enabling people to voluntarily socialize the household chores and child-rearing that women are required to do today. By making childcare a free service available to all – freeing women to have leisure time to enjoy culture, which allows society to develop. Under capitalism half of the world’s population is stuck in this oppression of domestic servitude. Socialism releases women to be liberated and pursue their own desires and development.

In a similar way, socialism would destroy the material basis for racial oppression and racism. In the United States, capitalism was built upon slavery. The Constitution was written by slaveholders and the bedrock of the wealth that the 13 colonies and the U.S. as a young nation gained came through the labor of enslaved Africans and African Americans. And that is one of the things that allowed the U.S. to become the capitalist world power, the imperialist world power that it is today. In what we call the

Second American Revolution, the Civil War, where slaves fought for their own freedom, they joined the Union army, took up arms and fought for their emancipation. Yet even after the end of chattel slavery, and later the end of legal segregation, the oppression of black people did not end. Everyone in this room knows about the system of mass incarceration, where a huge percentage of the people being locked up are black (13% of U.S. population, 40% of the incarcerated population) and Latino (16% of U.S. population, 19% of the incarcerated population). That is happening because racial oppression is central to U.S. capitalism.

The police are a tool of the capitalist class to maintain the oppression of black, Latino and all working-class people. In a socialist society, however, there would not be a ruling class and an oppressed class, so there’s no longer a need to oppress a whole section of the population based on their skin color or their origin. A large reason for racism is to divide the oppressed classes, to divide black workers and white workers and Latino workers. The only way to smash capitalism is through the working class coming together to overthrow the ruling class.

Bernie Sanders, who said he was a “democratic socialist,” cannot be a socialist because he is working with a ruling-class party. He ran as a candidate for the Democrats. This is the party that dropped two nuclear bombs on civilian cities in Japan. This is the party that has the record under Obama for more deportations than any other president in history. So Bernie Sanders is by no means a socialist but rather a representative of the ruling class.

We were hoping to have a polemic, a debate with the DSA, but they decided that polemics aren’t productive. But I wanted to mention some of the political differences that we have with the DSA. First of all, they endorsed Bernie Sanders. We have said from the very beginning that Bernie Sanders is not a socialist – he is a mechanism to bring young people back into the Democratic Party. But it’s more than this.

At the recent convention of the DSA they elected a police union organizer – Danny Fetonte – as a part of their National Political Committee. If you are an organization willing to al-

low an organizer of cops – one of the tools of racist oppression under capitalism – to remain in your organizing committee you are certainly not socialist.

**Jacob:**

It is clear that we are living in a time of crisis. There is a real fear that the Third World War is looming, with the escalation of imperialist war threats against North Korea, and that millions will be the victims of nuclear annihilation; that our immigrant fellow students will be snatched away by I.C.E., detained in concentration camps and deported; that our black brothers and sisters will be the next victims of racist and fascist violence. What we are seeing is a reflection of the social system in which we live – the capitalist system – in decay. Amid the rise of nationalism, racism and attacks by fascist groups, many are coming to see that the ills of this society cannot simply be reformed away, but rather that they are intrinsic to the capitalist system; that to fight against oppression is to struggle for socialism.

Revolutionary Marxists fight for the overthrow of capitalism by the working class. Why the working class, and why do we spend so much of our time talking about it? First of all, it is the working class whose exploitation is the basis of the capitalist system. And second, it's the only force capable of shutting the capitalist system down. So while reformist organizations like the DSA draw illusions that socialism can come from the Democratic Party – preaching class collaboration – we say that the first step in the struggle against the ruling class is to break from its political parties. The working class must rely on its own independent political power.

When the working class becomes the ruling class, it will immediately begin to transform the structures of society to eliminate oppression, racism and sexism. The productive capacity of society will be used to meet human needs instead of private profit. Under capitalism, millions of people take part in the process to make the things that we require to survive, yet a small social stratum possesses the products of that work, despite not even participating in the productive process. Nevertheless, the capitalists sell these commodities as their own. They obtain luxuriantly higher standards of living than the working class and they make the decisions that decide the fate of millions of people.

In the capitalist pursuit of profit the markets are flooded with commodities, prices drop below the cost of production, and profit can't even be realized. Therefore our society doesn't suffer from crises of scarcity – like famines, crop failures, or even overpopulation. There is a “crisis of abundance,” called “overproduction,” where commodities just sit around because



**Karl Liebknecht, opponent of imperialist war and agitator for socialist revolution, speaking at mass meeting in Berlin's Tiergarten, December 1918. A month later, he was murdered on orders of the Social Democratic government. The DSA stands in the counterrevolutionary political tradition of social democracy.**

they cannot be sold at a profit. The latest example of this is the financial crash that began in 2008. During the housing crisis, overproduction of homes led to mass evictions and a rise in homelessness. How can you make sense of that? Why is this the case? Because if the possessing class doesn't at least break even, you can sleep on the street or starve for all they care.

So with the socialist transformation of society, the accumulated scientific knowledge and technological advances of humanity will be applied not for the maximization of profit of the possessing class, but for the true fulfillment of society's wants and needs, uninhibited by parasitic social relations of private property. You can radically reduce the amount of human labor necessary to maintain society. For instance, no longer will automation mean mass layoffs. Instead it will allow for a more rational allocation of human labor.

The racist institution of the police, which originated with slave patrols here in the United States, will be abolished. All of the vile discriminatory restrictions on immigration will be done away with. The burden of domestic labor, which falls almost entirely on women, will be transferred to society, which will take on the responsibility of childcare, education, cooking and cleaning. Thus collectivized property forms will uproot the material conditions of oppression and the ideologies that stem from it.

We say that the Soviet Union, though initially a healthy workers state, underwent a process of bureaucratic degeneration. In calling the former Soviet Union a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, and China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba bureaucratically deformed workers states, and defending them against imperialism, we are not saying that these countries are workers' paradises or some heaven on Earth. It is an objective understanding of how the property forms and social relations in these countries differ from capitalism, embodying



historic gains, and the specific course that must be taken there in the fight for genuine socialism in each of these countries.

With the case of China, many say that China is in fact a capitalist country, citing the expansive capitalist inroads that have been made there. But private Chinese firms have been able to make so much growth in the first place because the state is feeding them so much cheap credit, and because it's placed impediments on foreign companies gaining access to the Chinese market. However, the potentials of planned economies have been limited because of the bureaucratic administrations of these states and the lack of workers democracy, the result, fundamentally, of Stalinism – with its notion that socialism can be created in one country, which is a complete impossibility.

We defend these countries against U.S. imperialism. We call for the military defense of them against American war threats. We call for a proletarian political revolution to kick out the bureaucracy, save the nationalized property forms and establish genuine workers democracy. In the case of North Korea we remember that the United States killed off 20% of the population in the Korean War, that it dropped more bombs on the Korean peninsula than in the entire Pacific theater of World War Two. And Korea is only a third of the size of Japan. We remember that the U.S. installed a regime in South Korea of former collaborators with the Japanese colonial occupation.

In the October Revolution in 1917, amid the devastation of the First World War, the workers of Russia, led by the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, overthrew the capitalist state. This was the first successful workers revolution in history and with it came full citizenship rights for all immigrants, substantial gains for women like communal crèches and free abortion on demand, and the abolition of laws against homosexuality. The October Revolution was waged on behalf of the working classes of all nations and the Bolsheviks' goal was to extend the gains of October throughout the world.

However, even after being forced into a "robbers' peace" with German imperialism at Brest-Litovsk, the infant workers state was further ravished by civil war and an invasion by 14 imperialist powers, an economic blockade and political isolation. This coincided with the rise of the conservative nationalist bureaucracy that feared the spread of the revolution, which consolidated power in 1923-24 with Stalin at its head.

Today, we say that anyone calling themselves socialists can't take a reformist approach, and that those engaging in class collaboration in reality cease to be socialist. Because in seeking to "work with" the ruling class, in calling it "practical" to reconcile their demands with the ruling class, one foregoes the tasks necessary for socialism.

The DSA, since its inception in the early 1980s, has been dedicated to being the "left wing of the possible," and to 'realigning' the Democratic Party. In the wake of the Bernie Sanders campaign, they have said explicitly that the medium-to-long term goals of the DSA are to establish coalitions both *within* and *with* the Democratic Party.

The documents of the DSA from its establishment say that its tasks will consist in good part of campaigning on behalf of Democratic Party politicians. So they are most definitely not interested in – they oppose – making the break with the rul-

ing class that is necessary for the fight for a socialist society. As Will said, the ruling class won't give up the wealth it has, nor its power. This requires a struggle against the ruling class. It doesn't come through holding hands together and singing Kumbaya – it comes from organization.

*After the discussion round, Jacob gave a summary, stating:*

The difference, fundamentally, between so-called "democratic socialists" and revolutionary Marxists is a matter of principle. These social democrats are fighting for a completely different cause, and definitely not for a classless society. Instead, their program means trying to make minuscule improvements to our current society by making huge concessions to the capitalist class.

In contrast, based on the struggle of the working class, genuine socialism – communism – requires the most thorough break from the capitalist class as a whole, with all its parties and politicians, and a fight for revolutionary working-class politics aimed at overthrowing capitalist exploitation and establishing socialism on a world scale. ■

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# Marxism vs. “Sanders Socialism”

## If Donkeys Could Fly...

# Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left

*The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 40, Summer 2015.*

As Barack Obama’s second presidential term limps toward the finish line, the promises of “hope” and “change” which his Wall Street sponsors and political marketeers dangled before voters lie in tatters. Bemoaning widespread disillusionment in the American political system is a standard theme from talk-show pundits to academia. The press reports a weighty, “data-driven” Princeton University study finding that the “US is an oligarchy, not a democracy” – oh, what a surprise! – as it is “dominated by a rich and powerful elite.” Underlying much of the malaise is the fact that Obama has presided over a continuing economic depression along with the worsening of already spectacular levels of inequality. With Republican flat-earthers sparring over who is the most reactionary of all and war-hawk Hillary Clinton dominating the Democratic field, the electoral circus is back again.

The fact is that bourgeois “democracy” is and has always been the class dictatorship of the owners of wealth and property. It’s not just about the Koch brothers and Supreme Court decisions declaring corporations to be people. Long ago, Karl Marx “grasped [the] essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when ... he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them,” as Russian Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin wrote in *State and Revolution* (1917). Sound familiar?

Entering stage “left” to throw his hat in the ring in this tawdry drama is the senator from Vermont who poses as a loveable progressive, “Bernie” Sanders. Billed as an Independent, Sanders has long been a cog in the Democrats’ Congressional machine, including participating in their caucus and committee work. In the 2008 and 2012 elections, he supported Obama, who in turn went to Vermont to campaign for Sanders in 2012. Announcing a bid for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, Sanders brought in as campaign manager long-time Democratic operative Ted Devine, who got his start in 1988 managing the vice-presidential campaign of Texas Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, notorious for threatening to use nuclear weapons during the Korean War (see the chilling film *Atomic Café*).

Announcing his bid for the Democratic presidential



**Campaign of Democratic Party “socialist” Bernie Sanders (supporter of war on Afghanistan and legalizing NSA domestic spying) aimed to bring disaffected “progressives” back to the Democratic fold to vote for war hawk Hillary Clinton.**

nomination in early May, Sanders grabbed some headlines with the statement: “We need a political revolution in this country involving millions of people who are prepared to stand up and say, enough is enough, and I want to help lead that effort.” And what kind of “revolution” does he have in mind? Why, voting for the current government party, the Democrats. For her part, Hillary Clinton tweeted: “I agree with Bernie. Focus must be on helping America’s middle class. GOP would hold them back. I welcome him to the race.”

Sanders stated categorically that he will, as always, endorse whomever the Democrats eventually choose as their candidate for commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. Asked by ABC’s George Stephanopoulos, “But if you lose in this nomination fight, will you support the Democratic nominee?” Sanders replied, “Yes. I have in the past as well.” Stephanopoulos: “Not going to run as an independent?” Sanders: “Absolutely not. I’ve been very clear about that.” Like innumerable “progressive” campaign bids of the past – such as Jesse Jackson’s 1980s Rainbow Coalition, Howard Dean (2004) and Dennis Kucinich (2008), to name a few – the central political function of the Sanders campaign is to round up votes from disaffected voters, keep them in the Democratic fold, and deliver them to the eventual nominee.

It’s all a con game, and the first to fall for it is the opportunist left. Their appetites are whetted by the fact that “Bernie” Sanders, along with his man of the people image, sometimes styles himself a “democratic socialist.” In a country where the s-word is a no-no for politicians, this is a bit

of a novelty. But it boils down to shopworn calls to “tax the rich,” a dash of trust-busting rhetoric like that arch-imperialist “progressive” Theodore Roosevelt, an occasional shout-out to the thoroughly capitalist “Scandinavian model,” and a heavy dose of “anti-totalitarian” China-bashing.

Meanwhile, Sanders, the Democratic Party “socialist” and reputed antiwar candidate, has repeatedly voted for U.S. imperialist wars. He poses as a defender of civil liberties but has voted for laws extending and legalizing U.S. domestic spying on the citizenry. And this “independent” toes the Democratic Party line whenever it counts. But that hasn’t stopped various self-styled socialists, would-be radicals, former Occupy Wall Street activists and assorted other reformist left groups from jostling each other as they try to climb on the Bernie bandwagon. Challenged on Sanders’ “socialist” moniker a while back, former Vermont governor and then chairman of the national Democratic Party Howard Dean said on “Meet the Press” (22 May 2005):

“Bernie can call himself anything he wants. He is basically a liberal Democrat, and he is a Democrat that – he runs as an Independent because he doesn’t like the structure and the money that gets involved.... The bottom line is that Bernie Sanders votes with the Democrats 98 percent of the time.”

### **A “Critical” Voice for U.S. Imperialism**

The pretensions of Bernie Sanders to be a leftist, let alone a socialist, are a joke. His cheerleaders of the pseudo-left may present him as a friend of “working folks,” but the real record of the Vermont senator is no laughing matter. As a “critical” voice of support to U.S. imperialism, Sanders is an enemy of workers and the oppressed world-wide.

Let’s start with his reputation as an “antiwar” politician. This takes a lot of chutzpah. Yes, he declined to vote for the first Gulf War in 1991 under Republican George Bush the First, as did most Democrats in Congress. But he then supported the murderous “U.N.” sanctions against Iraq which according to the authoritative British medical journal *Lancet* led to up to a million deaths, including over 500,000 children. Once Democrat Bill Clinton was president, Sanders voted for U.S. intervention in Somalia (1993) and Clinton’s war on Yugoslavia (1999). In the wake of 9/11, Sanders voted for the open-ended Authorization for the Use of Military Force, and has repeatedly voted for military appropriations for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Co-sponsoring a 2007 resolution requiring congressional approval before military action against Iran, Sanders stated: “America’s reputation internationally has been severely damaged and critical military, diplomatic, and intelligence resources have been diverted from the war in Afghanistan – a war I supported, and a country this administration has increasingly neglected.”<sup>1</sup> Currently Sanders is calling on key U.S. ally Saudi Arabia (which has beheaded 85 people so far this year) to run the war against Islamic State. Last July, Sanders joined the other 99 senators in passing a resolution backing Israel’s murderous invasion of Gaza.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ontheissues.org/International/Bernie\\_Sanders\\_War\\_+\\_Peace.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/International/Bernie_Sanders_War_+_Peace.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See the video showing the senator yelling “shut up” at critics who protested this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf2cCdwwgoM>

Like his fellow senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sanders was involved in negotiations leading to the release of U.S. Agency for International Development “contractor” Alan Gross from imprisonment in Cuba last December, and met with him on the island. Gross was on a spy mission for Washington handing out communications devices to pro-U.S. “dissidents.” The release of Gross was part of an agreement to restore the diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, freeing the last of the Cuban Five who courageously infiltrated gusano terrorist groups in Miami. But while stating that he favors allowing travel to Cuba, Sanders voted in 2001 to maintain the travel ban until Cuba “has released all political prisoners, and extradited all individuals sought by the U.S. on charges of air piracy, drug trafficking and murder.” This is a direct threat to Assata Shakur and others who fled the U.S.’ war on black radicals in the 1970s.

Sanders has also repeatedly supported protectionist and other reactionary measures against China, in line with the Democrats’ saber-rattling campaign against the Chinese deformed workers state.

On the domestic front, an article in *Counterpunch* (27-29 June 2014) noted that while Sanders voted against the original U.S.A. PATRIOT Act legislation, in 2006 he voted for “legislation that made the remaining fourteen provisions of the Patriot Act permanent and extended the authority of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to conduct ‘roving wiretaps’ and access certain business records....” Similarly, “Sanders voted against the original legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security, but by 2006 he had joined the majority of Congress in passing continued funding of that agency.” In July 2014, Sanders was a co-sponsor of the USA FREEDOM Act, which “is being hyped as a prohibition of the N.S.A.’s controversial mass surveillance practices, but it actually extends the PATRIOT Act for years and opens up new avenues for more invasive forms of government spying” (*The Hill*, 21 May).

With Obama racking up new records for the number of people deported (2.5 million so far during his presidency), Sanders has repeatedly used populist demagoguery railing against immigrant workers. In an official statement congratulating the Senate Judiciary Committee on its anti-immigrant immigration “reform” bill of 2013, Sanders “supported provisions in the measure that would strengthen border enforcement, prevent unscrupulous employers from hiring illegal workers and give legal status to foreign workers needed to keep Vermont’s dairy farms and apple orchards in business. Sanders, however, expressed strong concern that large American corporations in the midst of very high unemployment were using immigration reform to lower wages and benefits for American workers.”

### **Pseudo-Socialist Left Debates the Best Way to Chase After “Bernie”**

Before Sanders officially threw his hat in the ring, Progressive Democrats of America set up a Facebook page called “Run Bernie Run! As a Democrat.” Soon “The People for Bernie Sanders” was set up by Occupy activists together with members of the “Left Labor Project,” CODEPINK and

others, who resurrected the tired lingo of class collaboration to appeal to “progressive forces to unite behind Sanders” in the 2016 campaign. *Jacobin* magazine (1 May) chimed in with a piece by its founding editor, Bhaskar Sunkara, urging: “We should welcome Bernie Sanders’ presidential run, while being aware of its limits.”

As for avowed socialists, with their ever-so-slightly-different formulas chasing after a hoped-for new “movement,” the social-democrats tailing after the Democratic Party “socialist” provide a snapshot of what is wrong with what passes for a left in this country. Two groups that are relatively prominent on the left – Socialist Alternative (SAlt) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) – stand out, although many other organizations share much the same outlook.

Feeling it had broken into big-time politics since the election of Kshama Sawant as a Seattle city council member, SAlt jumped to get a head start in the Bernie biz over a year ago. In an article hopefully titled “Bernie Sanders for President in 2016?” *Socialist Alternative* newspaper (16 April 2014) wrote that Sanders says that “he wants a dialogue with progressive activists before deciding on whether to run for president and whether he should stand as an independent or within the framework of the Democratic Party.” It helpfully urged Bernie to call a “national conference of progressive, community, and labor organizations” which, “we hope,” would generate enough “momentum” to “persuade Bernie Sanders to take the historic step of running as an independent left candidate for the presidency in 2016.”

Socialist Alternative was practically begging this bourgeois politician and de facto Democrat to run for president, as it earlier did with Ralph Nader. SAlt supporters pushed a Facebook page called “Bernie Sanders, Go Green” (as in Green Party), claiming that this could “radically alter American politics.” To be clear, the Green Party is a minor capitalist party that serves as a home for homeless liberal Democrats who feel that their party has abandoned them. If SAlt was disappointed in its hopes for a Green capitalist Sanders campaign, it nevertheless erupted in rhapsody when he announced his bid: “Bernie Sanders Calls for Political Revolution Against Billionaires,” it wrote (9 May), reveling in the “tremendous wave of enthusiasm” the announcement of his presidential campaign allegedly unleashed.

To cover its rear quarters, the *Socialist Alternative* article added: “Campaign Needs to Build Independent Political Power.” SAlt states that it considers it a “mistake” for Sanders to run in the Democratic primaries, adding that when he fails to win the Democratic nomination, “Sanders should continue running in the general election as an independent.” It waxes poetic about how this fantasy could generate “a huge impetus towards the building of a new political force to represent the 99%” – the populist catch-phrase of the short-lived Occupy “movement.” But it all depends on “how much pressure Sanders comes under from his own supporters.” It’s all about pressure, you see. Yet, Democrat or not, SAlt vows, “We will be campaigning with Sanders supporters against the corporate politicians....”

If donkeys could fly, pressure would transform the likes of Bernie Sanders into the opposite of what is: a capitalist Democratic politician. So these fake-leftists whip up enthusiasm for “Bernie” supposedly to pressure him to the left, as he helps corral votes for Hillary while ostensibly pressuring her to the left. This is the logic of a pressure group on the Democrats, always on the lookout for new opportunities to work with representatives of this party of capitalist oppression. And as a sop for the ranks, it peddles evergreen hopes of ever-bigger “success” through class collaboration. That is precisely how SAlt’s Sawant has functioned in Seattle. Generating illusions in the Democratic campaign of Bernie Sanders is just the most recent embodiment of the policy followed by generations of leftists in the United States who have helped channel discontent and disillusionment back into capitalist politics.

Among the fond hopes voiced by Socialist Alternative is that, if only he would follow their advice, “Sanders’ campaign could play a critical role in helping to lay the basis for a new political party, a third party.” SAlt’s fawning on “Bernie” has provided an opening for the International Socialist Organization, which was caught flat-footed by Sawant’s win in Seattle, an opportunity to pose as a “socialist” alternative to Socialist Alternative. The ISO argues that Sanders “could have set a very different example, with a far greater chance of success, if he ran for governor in Vermont against the Democratic Party’s incumbent.... In so doing, Sanders could have built momentum for a national third-party alternative to represent workers and the oppressed” (*Socialist Worker*, 5 May).

So for the ISO it’s momentum and more momentum, adding helpfully: “If Sanders had his heart set on national politics, he could have run for president like Ralph Nader as an independent, opposing both capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans.” Meanwhile, Ashley Smith, a leading ISOer, gushes about Sanders that “he’s really electrified a layer of newly-radicalizing activists and people on the left,” that “he’s really hitting on all the key notes, and I really identify with all the people who’ve been galvanized by his campaign,” but that “he’s making a mistake in running inside the Democratic party” (Real News Network, 26 May).

So the distinction between SAlt’s approach and that of the ISO amounts to very small potatoes indeed. After all, both fervently threw themselves into supporting the “independent” capitalist campaign of the anti-immigrant millionaire Ralph Nader (see “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers,” *Revolution* No. 2, October 2004). Both yearn for a “third party,” while presenting this as somehow innately radical. ISO leaders have repeatedly run on the Green ticket, from New York to California. While claiming to oppose the Democrats, the ISO celebrated Obama’s election in 2008 as a “watershed event,” emblazoning its journal with his campaign slogan “Yes We Can!” (*International Socialist Review*, January 2009).

Both SAlt and the ISO are in the business of tailing after whatever excites liberal Democrats, throwing in a little talk of “independence” to cover their fundamental allegiance to capitalist politics.

## What's Trotsky Got to Do With It?

Groups like Socialist Alternative and the ISO present themselves as standing in the tradition of Marx and even, when it suits them, of Lenin and Trotsky. Yet both groups teach their supporters to dismiss as “ultra-leftism” the most basic ideas of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, starting with the most fundamental of all: that Marxism stands for *class* politics. For those whose guiding light is “relating to people where they’re at” rather than telling the unvarnished truth to the masses, the very idea of a *class line* in politics is sneeringly derided as sectarian. Yet so long as working people are tied to the parties of the bourgeoisie, whether red, blue or green, they will be chained to the capitalist system of war, poverty and racism.

The question of third parties is a very old one in American politics. Long before “Bernie” came “Teddy” Roosevelt’s 1912 Progressive Party campaign, with a raft of other “third party” capitalist candidates before and since. For Marxists, the fundamental question is not how many parties there are, but what class they represent. While liberals and reformists measure a candidate on a sliding scale of “progressiveness,” *Marxists oppose support to any capitalist candidate or party*. The bottom line for revolutionary communists, as opposed to these social-democratic reformists, is the political independence of the working class.

Marx was emphatic: “Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its own policy,” he proclaimed in a September 1871 speech to the First International. The following year, he and Friedrich Engels wrote: “Against the collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes” (“Resolution on the Establishment of Working-Class Parties,” September 1872).

And Trotsky? The ISO has been playing around with talk of Trotsky and Trotskyism in recent years, though its political record and tradition stand entirely counterposed to what the founder of the Fourth International stood for. Meanwhile, those who diligently search SAIt literature can find the occasional reference to Trotsky there.<sup>3</sup> Leftists who actually want to be Trotskyists should check out what he had to say on “third parties” in the U.S. Early on in its degeneration, the

<sup>3</sup> The actual politics of both groups are thoroughly social-democratic. The politics of the International Socialist Organization are derived from the current led by the British ex-Trotskyist Tony Cliff, whose “state capitalist” theories served as a “left” cover for support to the anti-Soviet Cold War. Others among the ISO leadership came out of the current founded by Max Shachtman, who denounced Trotsky for defending the USSR in WWII and became a leading right-wing social democrat. Socialist Alternative was established by U.S. supporters of another British social-democratic current, the heirs of Ted Grant, which carried out decades-long “entrism” in Her Majesty’s British Labour Party, claims that police and prison guards are part of the workers movement, and proposed establishing socialism through an act of parliament.

U.S. Communist Party got sucked into a “Third Party Alliance” which paved the way for the “independent” Progressive Party presidential campaign of Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette in 1924. (For details on this episode, see Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* [2007].)

In his fundamental work against Stalinist opportunism, *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Trotsky denounced how “the young and weak American Communist Party [was drawn into] the senseless and infamous adventure of creating a ‘Farmer-Labor party’ around La Follette.” There can be no two-class party, Trotsky insisted. “The misfortune lies precisely in the fact that the epigones of Bolshevik strategy extol maneuvers and flexibility... as the quintessence of this strategy, thereby tearing them away from their historical axis and principled foundation and turning them to unprincipled combinations which, only too often, resemble a squirrel whirling in its cage.” Indeed, “it was not flexibility that served (nor should it serve today) as the basic trait of Bolshevism,” Trotsky insisted, “but rather *granite hardness*” in the defense of basic class principles, beginning with the revolutionary political independence of the working class.

Trotsky’s 1928 document – smuggled out of Russia by veteran Communist James P. Cannon, which laid the basis for the establishment of the Trotskyist movement in this country – could have been describing SAIt, the ISO and others who justify each new unprincipled maneuver with the claim that it is justified by the need for tactical flexibility.

In 1948, the long-since Stalinized and thoroughly reformist CP backed the “independent” Progressive Party campaign of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s former Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. U.S. Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon was categorical:

“The Wallace party must be opposed and denounced by every class criterion.... Its differences with the Republican and Democratic parties are purely tactical. There is not a trace of a principled difference anywhere. And by principled difference I mean a class difference.... Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear.”

This is the program of authentic Trotskyism which the Internationalist Group stands on in fighting for a *revolutionary workers party*. If the revolutionary party must be “the memory of the working class,” opportunist pseudo-socialists bank on people having a short memory. The allegedly historic Bernie Sanders campaign will go down in history as yet another episode in ruling-class efforts to deceive and subjugate the workers and oppressed in the service of the Democratic Party. The response of the opportunist left is another chapter in its sorry record of doing the donkey work for such campaigns. The work of building a party dedicated to leading socialist revolution depends on sharp *class* demarcation from every form of bourgeois politics, even when dressed up in “socialist” colors. ■

# Revolutionary Workers Party Needed to Defeat Capitalism's Onslaught

## No, Bernie Sanders Is Not a Socialist

By Jacob and Abram

*The following article is reprinted from Revolution No. 12 (March 2016).*

Almost a hundred years have passed since Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin wrote that Karl Marx grasped the “essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when, in analyzing the experience of the [Paris] Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them” (*State and Revolution*, 1917).

In the United States this decision narrows down to which leader of the governmental “party of property” – Democrat or Republican – will become the CEO and commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. In 2008, large numbers of young people jumped on Barack Obama’s “Hope and Change” bandwagon. But soon they were kicked to the curb by growing inequality, unending economic hardship, racist repression and war. Disappointed Obama voters fueled the short-lived Occupy Movement in 2011. Some have since moved to the left, generally in still vaguely defined terms. For the Democrats, roping the millennial youth back into the fold is a priority.

The candidate long seen as a foregone conclusion prepackaged for coronation, Hillary Clinton, is viewed by many young people as a wholly owned subsidiary of Wall Street. This is true, as it was for Goldman Sachs’ chosen candidate Barack Obama eight years ago. So it’s hard to sell brand Hillary to many who pulled the lever for Barack one or two elections ago and can’t stomach more of the same. Meanwhile, visceral hatred of the very idea of a black man in the White House has pushed the Republican Party ever further into open racist demagoguery, misogyny and seemingly insane threats against immigrants, Muslims and other “enemies.” This road show of hate is now headed up by the luridly vile billionaire sicko Donald Trump.

But you can’t fight Trump with Democrats. In capitalism’s electoral circus, the two-headed beast of Democratic/Republican domination has rarely seemed so ravenous. It has never been more important to explain, patiently but urgently, that continuing to subordinate ourselves to the capitalist parties means defeat for the most fundamental needs and interests of working people, youth and the oppressed. The only way to defend ourselves against the onslaught of capitalist reaction is by fighting for the working class to free itself from capitalist politics, pursuing its own independent class politics through a revolutionary workers party.



**Bernie and the drones: Bernie Sanders, in his bid for the Democratic nomination for U.S. president, vowed to continue Obama’s policy of “targeted killing” by killer drones in the Middle East. Socialist? Not hardly.**

### Enter Bernie Sanders

As the revolutionary Marxists at the City University of New York, Internationalist Club activists are often asked “So what’s the deal with Bernie Sanders – isn’t he some kind of socialist?” The short answer is “No.” For starters, not only does Sanders not advocate, he *opposes* actual socialist policies like the expropriation of the means of production owned by the capitalist class, let alone the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class necessary to carry this out. His trademark slogan of a “political revolution” is ad-speak for: “By means of the existing rotten political structures of U.S. capitalism, make Bernie Sanders the candidate of the ruling,

Democratic Party.” And Bernie means business when it comes to backing capitalism. All you have to do is look at his actual record, which we’ll do in a minute.

But first, what about Sanders’ sallies of rhetoric against the “billionaire class”? In capitalist society, power is held by the class that owns capital – the *capitalist* class – which as a whole lives from the exploitation of the working class. This elementary socialist truth is worlds away from Sanders’ sound bites about a supposedly distinct “billionaire class” – which leaves a whole lot of millionaires, like Bernie’s colleagues in the Senate, as supposedly potential allies. Like “the 99% vs. the 1%” rhetoric popularized by Occupy, this populist lingo obscures what Marx and Engels rightly called the fundamental and irreconcilable class antagonisms between the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class).

“Well, what do you expect – Bernie is running to be the Democratic presidential candidate!” those “feeling the Bern” might respond. *Exactly*. Bernie Sanders is a capitalist politician who, while labeling himself “independent,” has been part of the Democratic caucus throughout his career in the U.S. Senate. In recent debates in which Sanders tried to court the African American vote (after his early debacles facing Black Lives Matter protesters), he vied with Hillary Clinton over who is most supportive of Obama’s legacy. This is only logical for a candidate running for nomination as Obama’s successor – as the presidential candidate of the current ruling party of U.S. imperialism, the Democrats.

### **Supporting Democrats Is the Opposite of Socialist Politics**

What, then, is this creature called the Democratic Party? Only the willfully blind and hopelessly naive, or those pretending to be, can see it is a formless container waiting to be filled with increasingly “progressive” content. Along such lines, an article in the *Independent* (March 2016) titled “Occupy the Party” claims the Democratic Party is “a terrain that the movement can occupy,” a “site of struggle over the horizons of U.S. politics.” Not a few former Occupy Wall Street activists emit this kind of vapid self-justification as they sign on as “Sandernistas,” retooling their “we are unstoppable, another world is possible” razzmatazz for the purpose.

The Democratic Party is and has always been a machine for subjugating the working people and oppressed to the capitalist class, going back to the party’s origins as the party of slavery, then Jim Crow. Its crimes include boundless oppression against the peoples of Latin America, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, imperialism’s genocidal war against the people of Vietnam... In more recent years, Hillary’s husband Bill Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, which destroyed the livelihood of millions of rural and urban poor people in Mexico (while shuttering factories in the U.S.). That same year he signed the Violent Crime Control Act, expanding prisons and ramping up police forces. In 1996 “Bill and Hill” pushed through the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act,” which threw millions of women off public assistance in line with their vow to “end welfare as we know it.”

Two decades later, Obama has kept true to the Democratic tradition. His legacy is endless, and endlessly multiplying, wars abroad, unending racist police repression, economic hardship and deepening inequality “at home.” “Friend of labor”? In 2012 he sent the Coast Guard to escort ships loading grain from a scab terminal in Longview, Washington. In 2014, Obama signed an executive order forcing Philadelphia mass transit workers back to work as they walked out against pay cuts deriving from the Obamacare tax on union health plans. Under the aegis of President Obama, the U.S. has also deported [more than 5] million immigrants, an all-time record. He also plans to increase the deployment of killer drones overseas by 50% in the next four years.

And Sanders? He’s all for the drones. To be sure, some of the economic measures Sanders calls for are not at all to Wall Street’s taste, but they go no further than standard-issue populism. Denmark and other Scandinavian countries he praises have always been thoroughly capitalist, with some more “welfare state” measures thrown in due to the strength of the labor movement there, together with historical efforts to ward off the appeal of the Russian Revolution. Though he succeeded in seducing much of the “left” with claims to stand against war and government surveillance, the duplicity is obvious. Sanders claims to champion civil liberties, yet he co-sponsored the USA Freedom Act, which restored several provisions of the then-expiring USA PATRIOT Act.

Sanders has also backed U.S. military interventions in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, voted to fund the Iraq war, and vociferously supports Obama’s policies in the Middle East, while backing Israel’s murderous aggression against the people of Gaza. In contrast, Marxists call for the *defeat* of U.S. imperialism and its predatory wars. (See “Democrat Sanders Aboard the ‘War on Terror’ Bandwagon,” *The Internationalist* No. 42, January-February 2016.) Sanders calls on U.S. client state Saudi Arabia, which beheaded an average of one person every two days last year, to head the war against Islamic State.

So what, we are often asked, does it mean when Sanders calls himself a “democratic socialist”? Sanders’ sometime label does not even mean “social democrat” like mass reformist parties in Europe historically based on the labor movement. Those arose through a break from the openly capitalist parties, but for the last hundred years have upheld the rule of capital. Social-democratic reformism historically claimed you could segue into socialism from existing capitalist politico-legal structures. Sanders’ moniker boils down to Democrat with a big D using more leftish-tinged words in the quest to get disillusioned youth and workers to support the party of Clinton and big business. Former Vermont governor and then chairman of the national Democratic Party Howard Dean said it like this back in 2005:

“Bernie can call himself anything he wants. He is basically a liberal Democrat, and he is a Democrat that – he runs as an Independent because he doesn’t like the structure and the money that gets involved.... The bottom line is that Bernie Sanders votes with the Democrats 98 percent of the time.”

“OK, so maybe Bernie isn’t much of a socialist,” some admit, “but why do you have to criticize him so much?” Because

anyone who actually fights for socialism must oppose capitalist politicians down the line. This goes back to Karl Marx, who insisted: “our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy” (“Apropos of Working-Class Political Action,” September 1871). Supporting Democratic politicians is the *opposite* of socialist politics, the most basic principle of which is the political independence of the working class.

### **ISO: Sanders = “Socialism in the Air”**

This brings us to those “tagtails” who chase after the Democrats. Outside the main entrance to Hunter College in February, students were approached by newspaper sellers hawking a paper with a red-white-and-blue cover, adorned with election-style ribbons sporting little fists. “Socialism In the Air,” it blared. Inside, an article titled “The frantic push to smear the socialist.” Welcome to the land of “socialist” opportunism – it’s *Socialist Worker* (February 2016), newspaper of the International Socialist Organization! One guess who the “socialist” is in this rosy patriotic scenario. That’s right – Bernie Sanders.

One of the most cynical things about this all is that the ISO claims it does not support Sanders, indignantly chastising those supposed “ultra-leftists” who point out that this claim is rather akin to Sanders’ claims not to be a Democrat. They play the game, but want to keep a smidgeon of distance from the name.

Faux-radical organizations such as the ISO and Socialist Alternative (SAlt) have welcomed Sanders’ campaign as “a breath of fresh air,” and a “political revolution” that can shake “the foundation of [the] corporate controlled two party system,” respectively. Why? Because they want to snap up some left-leaning youth who, desperately looking for respite from reactionary Republicans and the Wall Street candidates of the Democratic Party, have been drawn to the Sanders campaign. These two groups (who actually are social-democratic reformists) do so in slightly different ways, providing further object lessons in what socialism is not. (See “Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left,” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.)

In the name of allegedly smart and ever more flexible tactics, SAlt has sunk deeper and deeper into the morass of Bernie fandom. There is a certain inexorable logic here: if you think you’re going to hit the big time by enthusing about a candidate for the Democratic nomination, seeming less than whole-hearted about it can only be perceived as an obstacle to getting the job done. As for Sanders’ support for U.S. imperialism, SAlt’s newspaper headlined that “Sanders’ Foreign Policy Falls Short: Socialism Means Internationalism,” yet while his “mistaken” foreign policy “reveals his political limitations,” they wrote, this supposedly “does not negate the enormously progressive aspects of his campaign.”

The ISO, too, has written up blandishments about Sanders, but judges it inopportune to *openly* support his campaign. They want to have their cake and eat it too, claiming him as

a fellow “socialist” and basking in the warm sensation that his campaign means “socialism is in the air” while keeping an escape clause open to deny they could ever support a Democrat. Instead, they suggested that he should have “run for president like Ralph Nader as an independent” (*Socialist Worker*, 5 May 2015). Like SAlt, the ISO backed Ralph Nader, an anti-immigrant capitalist politician, in 2000 and 2004. It has also repeatedly run on the ticket of the Greens, a minor party but no less bourgeois than a multitude of “third parties” that have come and gone throughout the history of capitalist politics in the United States.

Following the opportunist logic of seeking a cut of today’s popularity, at the expense of basic socialist principles they pretend to uphold, these “‘Feel the Bern’ socialists” penned paeans to Obama too, back in the day – before young people felt burned by the realities of his presidency. The ISO celebrated Obama’s election in 2008 and plastered Hunter College with posters with his signature slogan, saying “yes we can.” That year and the next they repeatedly referred to him as “a breath of fresh air” (see “ISO: ‘Fresh Air Fiends’ of Class Collaboration,” December 2015). SAlt joined the ISO in hailing Obama’s 2009 budget – including the biggest-ever U.S. military budget – calling it “a break from the political policies of the last 30 years” (*Socialist Alternative*, 11 March 2009). For the leaders of such organizations, for whom anything goes in the latest political get-rich-quick scheme, it is always too late to learn.

### **Workers Revolution Is What We’re Fighting For**

Those who have been led, falsely, to believe that the effects of capitalist class rule can be voted away may imagine that if Bernie Sanders were elected to administer the capitalist state, it could or would come to represent the “people.” Yet the political function of Bernie Sanders’ campaign is not to sharpen the struggle against capitalist reaction but to blur consciousness and lead those increasingly fed up with the status quo back into supporting the Democratic Party of war, racism and police terror. The self-proclaimed “socialists” hailing him are culpable for helping promote the con.

As Friedrich Engels wrote in *The Origin of Family, Property and the State*, the capitalist state is the “means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class,” an “instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital.” Though these words were written in 1884, they ring just as true today. The “democratic socialists” can mander through their utopian paracosm (fantasy world), and hold hands with the bourgeoisie for as long as they like; but here in the real world, power does not voluntarily diminish itself, and the working class must confront its antithesis, the capitalist class.

Engels and his comrade Karl Marx warned that the politics of class reconciliation were deadly for the interests of the exploited and oppressed. Gains, or even the defense of those previously won, can only come about through sharp struggle against the bourgeois rulers, all of them. For the founders of modern socialism – communism – this meant revolutionary struggle by the working class. Today in the United States and internationally, workers revolution is what we’re fighting for. ■



# The League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons

## Yesterday's "Obama Socialists," Today's Bernie Boosters

**Build a Revolutionary  
Workers Party!**

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Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has nothing to do with winning people to socialism. It's all about getting disaffected "progressives" and youth to vote Democratic in 2016, and at most to nudge this pillar of American capitalism in a slightly more liberal direction. Sanders is well aware of his role. In 2008, Barack Obama won by feigning an antiwar stance in a country sick of the Iraq War, and by exciting large numbers of youth and African Americans with the prospect of the first black president of this country founded on slavery. Today after eight years of Obama's administration, governing on behalf of Wall Street while continuing and escalating the U.S.' endless war in the Middle East, that brand is well past its sell-by date. Sanders has noted that Republicans win when there is low voter turnout, and in 2014 midterm elections 80% of youth didn't vote. So he seeks to "reinvigorate democracy" by pushing a liberal populist program spiced up with some "socialist" rhetoric and talk of a "political revolution" to attract them.

Some of Sanders' earliest backers are leftovers from the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, with its populist jibes at "the 1%." (He goes them one better, attacking "the 1/10th of 1%.") This includes the hip Marxoid *Jacobin* Magazine, whose initiators came out of Cold War social democracy. On the other hand, the Vermont senator's "color-blind" economic populism has *not* attracted the tens and hundreds of thousands of young people and others who marched against racist police terror in 2014.<sup>1</sup> What Sanders *has* done is place much of the socialist left in a quandary, as reformists and opportunists dream of having an audience in big-time bourgeois politics. Some still want to maintain a pretense of independence from the Democratic Party of war, poverty and racism. Others want to go all the way with "Bernie," hoping to pick up disappointed Sanderistas when

<sup>1</sup> See "Capitalism's Racist Electoral Circus Is Back," *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.



Jim Cole/AP

**Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton yuk it up at December 2015 Democratic candidates debate. Opportunist leftists snuggle up to self-described democratic socialist Sanders. Buyer beware: vote "progressive" Bernie and you'll get warmonger Hillary. But then, Sanders also supports imperialist "war on terror."**

he endorses "Hillary" after the charade of primary elections. Genuine revolutionary Marxists and communists, in contrast, warn against the Sanders swindle.

The pseudo-socialists have had some practice at this con game already. Almost all of today's Bernie Boosters were, in one way or another, "Obama Socialists" in 2008. In the "all-in for Bernie" corner we have the Communist (in name only) Party (CPUSA) and the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA). These star-spangled social patriots almost always back the Democratic presidential nominee no matter who it is. The CPUSA, which in 2008 proclaimed "A New Era Begins" over Obama's election, now headlines: "Feeling the Bern: Bernie Sanders is hot in Los Angeles" (*People's World*, 11 August). In turn, a DSA vice chairman was quoted in a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* (11 December) hailing Sanders, who has spoken at DSA conventions, as "a gift from the gods." The organ of finance capital quoted Sanders saying in an interview that he supports "the strong entrepreneurial spirit that we have in this country," that he is *not* for government ownership of the means of production, and only wants "to make certain that the wealth is much more equitably distributed than is currently the case."

Of the social democrats who simulate a degree of

separation from the Democratic Party (the DSA doesn't even pretend), the most prominent are the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAIt). The DSA is a continuator of the "State Department socialists" whose chief ideologist was Max Shachtman, who split from Trotskyism refusing to defend the Soviet Union in World War II claiming it was "bureaucratic collectivist" (and who later became a propagandist for U.S. imperialism). The ISO is an heir of Tony Cliff, who broke with Trotskyism refusing to defend the USSR in the post-WWII Cold War, labeling it "state capitalist." SAIt is an offshoot of the Militant tendency of Ted Grant, who along with Cliffites and Shachtmanites (and most of the left) condemned Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In contrast, authentic Trotskyists *hailed* the Soviet army in Afghanistan and, while calling for political revolution to oust the sellout Kremlin bureaucracy, intransigently defended the USSR and Soviet bloc deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution.

We have already commented on the pseudo-debate between SAIt and the ISO over how to sidle up to the populist Democratic candidate ("Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left," *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015). While SAIt has plunged ever deeper into the Sanders campaign, the ISO continues to piously wish that Sanders, the long-serving imperialist bourgeois politician, were "independent." This hasn't stopped these Cliffite social democrats from gushing with enthusiasm over his campaign, with article after article praising Sanders as a "breath of fresh air," "a welcome departure from the mainstream," saying everyone "should welcome Sanders' praise for 'democratic socialism' and his frequent appeals to the virtues of Scandinavian social democracy," that "Bernie Sanders' call for political revolution is welcome," etc. We've seen this "breath of fresh air" stuff before from the ISO ... over Barack Obama.

When Obama, then a senator from Illinois, started making waves with his high-flown liberal rhetoric and denunciation of

Bush's "dumb war" in Iraq, the ISO quickly sensed an opportunity. It showed up at a February 2007 Obama rally in Chicago with a banner reading "Obama: Stand Up! Cut the funding!" As past masters in opportunism, they were soon repeating the Democratic candidate's campaign slogans, plastering "Yes We Can" and "The Politics of Change or Politics as Usual" (along with a flattering photo of Obama) on the cover of its magazine, the *International Socialist Review* (see "The 'Obama Socialists'," *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009). Then, after Obama took office and presented his first federal budget the ISO proclaimed: "After 30 years of Republican ascendance in Washington and the retreat of liberalism at every turn, Obama's willingness to draw the line and promise a fight for his priorities is a welcome blast of fresh air." Obama's priorities included the biggest U.S. military budget since World War II.

Socialist Alternative likewise hailed Obama's war budget as "a sharp break from political policies during the last 30 years" (*Justice*, March-April 2009). Nowadays, SAIt is all Bernie, all the time. Its other, implicitly pro-Democratic Party campaigns like \$15 Now which proposed to win a \$15/hr. minimum wage by legislative and ballot initiatives, have fallen by the wayside as it pushes the populist Democrat. After an initial pro-forma call to "persuade" Sanders to run for president as an independent, which he had already rejected, and saying it was a "mistake" for him to run in the Democratic primaries, SAIt dropped any pretended scruples and has been busily participating in "People for Bernie," "Labor for Bernie" and similar efforts, while mounting the Million Student March as a pro-Sanders event. Now, in time-honored opportunist fashion, it has formed a new front group for the campaign. If the DSA has #WeNeedBernie, SAIt has set up #Movement4Bernie as its own wholly owned subsidiary to recruit out of.

A statement on the website of #M4B calls to "Join the political revolution against the billionaire class," in order to "help Bernie win in 2016, stop the right-wing Republicans and counter the Wall Street dominated Democratic Party establish-

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ment.” Similarly, it calls to “Challenge Clinton” but “Stop the Republican Right.” It even has a shout-out to “Many people [who] are excited about the prospect of having our first woman President.” So just as Sanders carefully avoids labeling Clinton the candidate of Wall Street, although she practically invited it in the first Democratic debate, Socialist “Alternative” goes out of its way to *not* attack the Democratic Party as such, and certainly not to denounce it or call to break from this capitalist party. With its deliberate silences and weasly formulations about “countering” and “challenging” the Democratic “establishment,” SAlt is participating in Sanders’ campaign in the Democratic primaries while cynically slithering around to avoid saying so openly.

If anyone had any doubt on that score, the first initiative of this new “movement” was to publicize a letter from SAlt’s “socialist” Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant defending Sanders in a flap inside the Democratic Party over his campaign sneaking a look at a Hillary Clinton campaign voter database. The #Movement4Bernie is a get-rich-quick scheme, and SAlt has to move in a hurry, to make headway among Sanders’ supporters before the Bernie bandwagon runs out of gas a few months from now, at the latest by the Democratic convention when Sanders throws his support behind Clinton. It’s hardly a new tactic, but it marks the formal entry of SAlt into the Democratic Party. From having its supporters participate in Sanders’ campaign, it has graduated to building that campaign as an organization. Whether M4B says it in so many words or not, that fact is that the necessary first step to “help Bernie win in 2016” is getting people to vote for him in the upcoming Democratic primaries.

Socialist Alternative has class collaboration written in its DNA, it’s at the heart of reformist social democracy. An outfit that considers cops to be workers, SAlt is willfully blind to the class line separating the working class and the capitalist class, pitting the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Its entry into Democratic Party politics is a fundamental betrayal of any fight for working-class independence, the cornerstone of Marxist politics. As Karl Marx underscored in his 21 September 1871 address to the International Working Men’s Association, “Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy.” In the Sanders campaign, SAlt is going beyond its usual tailing after the capitalist Democrats to direct participation. In doing so, it is feeding and even creating illusions that the cause of “socialism,” or at least its caricature of it, can be advanced through struggle within this bourgeois-imperialist party.

Various other denizens of the social-democratic swamp want a little more distance between Democrat Sanders and



**Social democrats of all denominations unite to hail “political revolution” of Democrat Bernie Sanders. Above: Democratic Socialists of America. Below: Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative City Council member in Seattle.**

themselves, but despite some soft criticisms, none take him on frontally. And no wonder, since the program he is running on differs little from the reformist pablum they routinely dish out. An article by David Freedlander on the Bloomberg Politics web site (13 October) quotes Steve Durham of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) saying of Sanders, “He isn’t an anti-capitalist! He is for reforming capitalism” (“Bernie Sanders Isn’t Socialist Enough for Many Socialists,” 13 October). The FSP criticizes Socialist Alternative for its Berniemanism, but writes that “If he chose to, Sanders has the momentum and the numbers of supporters to break free from the Democrats and contribute toward launching a formidable anti-capitalist party” (*Freedom Socialist*, October 2015). Yet if Sanders were running as an “independent,” he would still be a bourgeois politician, defending capitalism and imperialism.

The FSP proposes that various “socialist groups ... increase their impact in the electoral arena by joining together with a common platform.” But the reformist common ground these social democrats share with each other (and with Sanders) is precisely the illusion of reforming capitalism, as the bourgeois populist SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) party proposed to do in Greece. It was an utter fiasco, for which Greek working people paid a heavy price. Socialist Action (SA), for its part, counsels leftists to sidestep the Sanders campaign and keep on with antiwar, anti-racist (Black Lives Matter), environmental and women’s rights protests, with the aim of building a “labor party” (“Bernie Sanders & the Labor Movement,” *Socialist Action*, 5 September 2015). Yet to avoid the common fate of such movements of being co-opted, sucked into the Democratic Party and defeated, it is crucial to directly oppose the Democrats and to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats in a struggle to build a *revolutionary* workers party.

The DSA, ISO, SAlt, FSP and SA are virtually indistinguishable varieties of what they call “democratic socialism” (the adjective being a promise to the bourgeoisie, liberals in particular, that they are *definitely not communists*). Another neck of the reformist marshland is populated by a Stalinoid strain, heirs of the late Sam Marcy, who broke with Trotskyism to embrace Chinese Maoism. Following a 2004 split over non-programmatic issues, the Marcyites are divided into the Workers World Party (WWP) and its offshoot, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL). PSL vice presidential candidate Gloria La Riva told Bloomberg Politics, “I don’t think he [Sanders] is a socialist. He ignores socialist countries,” by which she means the Stalinist-ruled bureaucratically deformed workers states. But it seems that they’re “feeling the Bern” anyway. An extensive article by PSL leader Brian Becker responds to “confusion” on

the left about how to deal with “the sudden popularity of the self-proclaimed democratic-socialist Bernie Sanders.”

In contrast to “some radical socialists” who have emphasized “how ‘bad’ Sanders is on some issues, or that he is not a ‘real socialist,’” Becker argues to focus on “the vast opportunity created by the explosive growth and surprising popularity of the Sanders campaign.” He writes that, “even the most moderate socialists have been forced to swim in a very small pond” for the past seven decades since anti-communism became the U.S.’ “unofficial religion.” “Now the pond has suddenly got bigger.” Becker goes on:

“Does it make any tactical sense, if you want to truly popularize socialism with the millions of new Sanders supporters who are supporting him precisely because they want change and see a ‘socialist’ candidate as the vehicle for change, that they are just really wasting their time or worse?

“No, it does not make sense. Perhaps it is a psychological fear by small fish who have been comfortably swimming in small ponds for so long that they fear the scary waves and powerful currents of larger bodies of water or simply being swallowed up by the bigger fish. Or, in the case of some very militant and radical young people who are unfamiliar with the crushing suppression of the socialist and communist left in the U.S., they are understandably turned off by and not seeing past Sanders’ liberalism....

“We should argue that Bernie Sanders’ program for guaranteed health care, college education and other major reforms is what’s important and if Sanders is truly serious about winning these reforms, he should run as an independent.... If Sanders ran as an independent candidate for president, as a ‘democratic socialist,’ he would receive the votes of millions of people. That would be something really significant in creating a new political dynamic in the United States.”  
–“Socialist tactics and the Bernie Sanders campaign” (*Liberation*, 19 October 2015)

The article praises Sanders’ reform proposals, not surprising since it overlaps with the electoral reformist program the PSL runs on. And, given the “surprising popularity” of his campaign, Becker lectures those “very militant and radical young people” (including PSL youth, perhaps?) to make nice with Sanders supporters and pressure them to pressure him to run as an independent – the same line as the social democrats.

But the power of positive thinking won’t turn Sanders into his opposite: in addition to being a capitalist politician and supporting imperialist war, what he stands for is counterposed to socialism. Instead of pandering to his popularity, these are some of the hard truths that must be told to those with illusions in the Democratic Party “socialist.”

In 2008, *Workers World* trumpeted “Millions in streets seal Obama victory” while the PSL’s *Liberation* declared Obama’s election “an occasion of historic significance,” helpfully offering the new CEO of American capitalism “a clear program focused on what the new administration should do to meet the needs of the working people; to fulfill the expectations its campaign has created.” Not wanting to spoil the party and turn people off, all criticisms were relegated to the inside pages (see “The ‘Obama Socialists’”). Today the WWP is taking a somewhat

harder stance toward Sanders, no doubt partly for factional advantage against its PSL rival. A lead article titled “Sanders campaign has people asking: What is socialism?” commented that many workers “are confused because his ideas do not seem fundamentally different from those of others in the Democratic Party” (*Workers World*, 5 November). A couple of weeks later, an article on “Bernie Sanders and Cuban socialism” (titled more sharply on the WWP website “Why Bernie Sanders isn’t socialist: In defense of revolutionary socialism”) says:

“Sanders isn’t a socialist. Socialism must be defended from the misleading confines of the capitalist elections....

“Sanders has been useful to the ruling capitalist class, even though they don’t reward him for this. His campaign hooked the growing number of disaffected workers back into the Democratic Party with his commentary on issues such as the lack of affordable health care and the predominance of low-wage work....

“The task at hand is to distinguish revolutionary socialism from Sanders’ politics so the two are never confused.”

Indeed. So what is socialism?

### **Making “Socialism” Respectable Is Not Preparing Socialist Revolution**

The WWP and PSL Marcyites identify socialism with Stalinist regimes like Fidel Castro’s Cuba. Genuine revolutionary Marxists (Trotskyists) defend those bureaucratically deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution. At the same time we insist that they cannot lead to genuine socialism without a proletarian political revolution to oust the narrow nationalist bureaucracy, establish soviet democracy and extend the revolution internationally to the imperialist centers. The ISO, SAlt and sundry other social democrats, on the other hand, see socialism as a “welfare state” writ large, with more extensive nationalizations than in Sanders’ favored Scandinavian model, but without socialist revolution to smash the capitalist ruling class and its state. Neither Stalinism nor social democracy (and much less Sanders’ New Deal liberalism) represent socialism as envisioned by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky who fought for international socialist revolution to prepare the way to a communist society.

The basic argument of the pseudo-socialist “Bernie boosters” of every denomination is that Sanders’ candidacy, even though running in the Democratic Party – that elephant’s graveyard “where social movements go to die,” as one DSAer, of all people, accurately described it – opens a “discussion on what socialism is” and “popularizes socialism.” Besides, the platform he’s actually running on coincides pretty much with their own reformist minimum programs. Yet *what Sanders is advocating is precisely what socialism isn’t*. And what he’s doing in the concrete is trying to rope people, particularly young people, into voting for the Democratic Party of racist police terror and imperialist war, which is presiding over the obscene enrichment of the capitalist class at the expense of poor and working people, which is deporting millions of immigrants, the party whose hold over labor and minorities must be shattered on the road to socialist revolution.

Is Sanders “popularizing socialism”? Not really. There *has* been a notable change in popular attitudes toward socialism in

## James P. Cannon on “Third Parties”

In 1948, a discussion took place inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) over how to respond to capitalist “third parties” when the Communist Party launched the Progressive Party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, who had been Franklin D. Roosevelt’s vice president. Some in the SWP wanted to support Wallace, a longtime liberal Democratic politician. Before Sam Marcy split from the SWP in the late 1950s to embrace Mao Zedong and prior to his support for the Kremlin crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising, an incipient political revolution, the 1953 founding document of Marcy’s proto-Stalinist tendency argued for “critical support” to Wallace on the grounds that it was a “progressive-radical movement.” But James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, speaking for the SWP majority in the 1948 discussion, warned against the danger of “lesser-evil” politics and laid out the reasons why Wallace and any candidate of a capitalist “third party” had to be emphatically opposed while fighting for a workers party:

“The traditional two-party system in the United States has been very well suited for normal times. The ruling capitalists couldn’t ask for anything better than this system which absorbs shocks and grievances by shifting people from one bourgeois party to another. But that system can blow up in time of crisis. The aggravation of the crisis which we all see ahead can shake up the whole American political situation, so that the old two-party system will

no longer suffice to serve the needs of the American bourgeoisie.

“The less it becomes possible to mobilize the workers’ votes for one or the other of these two old bourgeois parties, the more impelling and powerful will become the urge of the workers to found a party of their own or to seek a substitute for it. That mood of the workers will create a condition wherein American capitalism will objectively require a pseudo-radical party to divert the workers from a party of their own....

“Next time, the role played by [Democratic president Franklin D.] Roosevelt—which was a role of salvation for American capitalism—will most likely require a new party. In the essence of the matter that is what Wallace’s party is. Wallace is the, as yet, unacknowledged, candidate for the role of diverting the workers’ movement for independent political action into the channel of bourgeois politics dressed up with radical demagoguery which costs nothing. That is what we have to say, and that’s what we have to fight—vigorously and openly, and with no qualifications at all. We have to be 100% anti-Wallaceites. We have to stir up the workers against this imposter, and explain to them that they will never get a party of their own by accepting substitutes.”

—James P. Cannon, “On the 1948 Wallace Campaign” (February 1948)

recent years, before most people had ever heard of Bernie Sanders. This is borne out even in rigged opinion surveys. When his candidacy was picking up steam, the Gallup polling organization added a question about whether respondents would vote for a socialist if their party ran one. The media duly reported that socialist was the most unpopular of all categories, that less people would vote for a socialist than for a Catholic, a woman, a black, a Hispanic, a Jew, a gay or lesbian, a Muslim or even an atheist. But when you look at the stats, what it showed was that 47% would vote for a socialist, and among young people ages 18 to 29, nearly seven in ten would vote for a socialist. A 2010 poll Gallup poll reported that 36% of Americans viewed socialism favorably, and a 2011 Pew poll found young people favored socialism over capitalism by 49% to 43%.

So things have changed somewhat from the past when calling someone a socialist was a drop dead swear word. This is primarily the result of the economic crisis of 2007-08 and the ongoing depression, with its mass unemployment – disguised by official statistics but acutely felt by youth who can’t find a job, no matter what. Less and less people believe in the bogus “American Dream” of getting ahead by working hard, since workers today make less than what they earned four and a half decades ago. It may also have to do with a reaction against a right wing which incessantly labels Obama a socialist (as well as a Kenyan, Muslim, etc.). What Sanders’ candidacy is doing is not making “socialism” more popular, but making it more respectable in polite bourgeois circles. But those who really

fight for socialist revolution and for communism are never going to be respectable in bourgeois society. The ruling class and their media will treat genuine communists and revolutionary socialists as their implacable enemies, which we are.

Karl Marx in his writings on the 1871 Paris Commune and his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and V.I. Lenin in *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of, and as preparation for, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, insisted that socialism is a society without classes, the lower stage of communism, in which the state had “withered away.” This requires an abundance of material goods available to all, which presupposes the development of socialized production at the highest technical levels. To achieve that, a series of revolutions are necessary, in at least several advanced capitalist countries such as the United States. This would establish workers rule, the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” to replace what we have now behind the façade of democracy, the dictatorship of capital.<sup>2</sup> As Marx

<sup>2</sup> This was dramatically demonstrated by recent events in Greece. Despite the January 2015 election victory of a bourgeois populist party, SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left), on a program of opposition to austerity, and a July 5 referendum in which over 60% voted against the vicious austerity demands of the European central bankers and the International Monetary Fund, it was the bankers who prevailed. See “Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

“Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Social democrats would have you believe that by enacting a number of social reforms (free education, free health care, throw in free public transportation and rent control), nationalizing banks, utilities, major industry and commerce (call it “public ownership” to make it more palatable), add a dash of “participatory democracy” and – presto! – you have “socialism.” Simple, and wrong. Won’t happen, the capitalists will see to it. Look at Greece. The Stalinists identify socialism with existing bureaucratic regimes, claiming it is possible to have socialism in a single country. Wrong again. Not only does that contradict the Bolshevik program, its falsity was tragically proven by the counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet degenerated workers state, and is underscored by the mounting counterrevolutionary threat in Cuba and China. As Trotsky warned in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) as he dissected the anti-Marxist dogma of building “socialism in one country”:

“If a bourgeoisie cannot peacefully grow into a socialist democracy, it is likewise true that a socialist state cannot peacefully merge with a world capitalist system. On the historic order of the day stands not the peaceful socialist development of ‘one country,’ but a long series of world disturbances: wars and revolutions.”

So how do we get from here to there, from today when political power is monopolized by the two partner parties of American capitalism to the direct fight for revolution? The key is to develop the class consciousness and political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie. The response of reformist pretend socialists is instead to promote “third parties,” minor bourgeois parties like the Greens today, the Progressive parties in the 1910s and ’20s, and Farmer-Labor parties in the ’20s and ’30s. Such parties act as pressure groups on the major capitalist parties, mainly the Democrats, and most disappear after having served their purpose as an escape valve to blow off the steam of popular discontent. This is what the left-wing Bernie boosters are aiming at when they beg him to go “independent.” That will do nothing to develop class consciousness and would in fact be a roadblock to revolution, just as campaigning inside the Democratic Party for dissident “progressives” is.

As mentioned earlier, “socialist” groups building political support and even organizational vehicles to campaign for dissident liberal and populist bourgeois politicians is nothing new. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Stalinist CP-led People’s Coalition for Peace and Justice antiwar group supported a number of Democratic Party “dove” candidates. In 1984, the Marcyite WWP-led All-Peoples Congress backed the presidential bid of black Democrat Jesse Jackson, and continued to organize rallies for him long afterwards. In 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 Ralph Nader ran as an “independent” under different party labels and was supported by several of the groups chasing after

Bernie Sanders today. As we wrote in an article on “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers” (*Revolution* No. 2, October 2004):

“The ISO and other reformists are fond of talking about an ‘alternative,’ appealing to those who would like a more ‘progressive’ leadership of the Democratic Party. Their role is to sucker young people back into the shell game of capitalist electoral politics. For Marxists, it is not a matter of picking between ruling-class ‘lesser evils,’ but building a revolutionary party that tells the truth. The truth is that all bourgeois politicians are our enemies....

“Because of the class they represent, ruling-class politicians of every stripe are the enemies of full citizenship rights for immigrants, of a genuine fight for black liberation and women’s emancipation, of the struggle to defeat U.S. imperialism. For this reason they are the enemies of young people who want to change the world instead of trying to find a place in the capitalist electoral circus as illusion-peddlers for the bourgeoisie.”

Chasing after “progressive” capitalist politicians: it’s what opportunist pseudo-socialists do. And they do it time after time, because it leads nowhere, and certainly not to revolution. If they do ever manage to get together on a common reformist program, it could be called (paraphrasing Trotsky’s label for another unprincipled lash-up) as the League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons. It shouldn’t be all that hard to oppose a somewhat-popular bourgeois presidential candidate. Relative to other tests that face those who would be proletarian revolutionaries, class opposition to the Democrat Bernie ought to be a no-brainer. Class-conscious workers and defenders of the oppressed won’t forget which “socialists” buckled under the featherweight pressure of the Sanders fad: such people are not serious. They rounded up votes for the party of war in Iraq and Syria, for the party whose mayors are the bosses of the racist killer cops from coast to coast. They can’t be trusted, who knows where they will turn in their next maneuver.

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, has an opposite program. Our goal is workers revolution to clear the way for socialism. This puts us in irreconcilable opposition to Sanders the Democrat, and to Sanders the “independent” “socialist” who exists in the wishful thinking of the leftist Bernie boosters. As internationalist communists we call for a workers party that fights on the program of class struggle against all forms of class collaboration. And what we have to say to working people, African American, Latino, Asian, immigrant and other oppressed minorities, to women and radicalizing youth is the same as the Trotskyist James P. Cannon said in 1948 (see box, above): *accept no substitutes*. We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and build a party on the program of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks. Anything less is a diversion that will only prolong the bloody rule of capital. ■

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