

Partisan

Issue 1

Issue 1: Editorial Statement

We aren't fighting to get "back to normal" or to "build back better."

By The Editors

December 22, 2020



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OUR FIRST ISSUE IS BORN IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES: a global pandemic has taken over 300,000 U.S. lives, left millions unemployed, and tens of thousands evicted. The racist police continue to murder Black people with impunity, and capitalist-induced climate crisis disasters rage on. It is another election year blackmailed by fascism's creep as we head into a historically great global economic crash. In response, mainstream media outlets and our employers (if we still have them) try their hardest to trudge on projecting increasingly murky and paradoxical bourgeois "common sense." It is for all of these reasons that we have taken this moment, in spite of its chaos, to make our own publication.

The mid-pandemic US is even more sharply characterized by the ever-developing crisis of the two-party system and the serious need for an alternative political leadership for our working class becomes more apparent to the masses daily. The newest and largest regrouping of socialists in the country, The Democratic Socialists of America, is an embryonic organization that, while rapidly growing, still finds itself in a transitional situation. And while this publication explores our explicitly communist politics and praxis as the DSA's leftmost wing, it has a dual purpose of existing as a public forum as we attempt to deepen our flank's analysis in dialogue with one another, finding it preferable even that dissonance be aired than to exist regionally in vacuums, or insulated by more narrow tendencies.

Our first issue opens with a trenchant communist analysis of the role of prisons and police in the state's enforcement of capitalist social relations, which makes clear how important the abolition of capitalist policing and carceral systems is to our organizing efforts in the context of the ongoing mass uprising against police and racist violence. This issue offers multiple pieces on educational organizing as teachers and students across the country are put at risk by school reopening. Socialist feminist organizers invite us to join them in a broader vision for anti-violence organizing providing historical context for the #MeToo movement while analyzing the greater impact of the left and Democratic party

response to Tara Reade’s accusations against President-elect Joe Biden. Red Caucus member, Marcos, offers a personal account of his **radicalization that lays bare the toxicity of American militarism** and the military’s ways of preying on working-class and immigrant communities. And lastly, printed throughout the issue are visions of and insights into the present and future DSA, as many seek to position the organization to help foster and politically aid current struggles. These pieces offer analyses of present limitations in the **National DSA structure**; ideas for how to relate **Rank-and-File organizing to social movement unionism**; and an insider’s insights into the **NPC and the International Committee**, with an exciting vision for the development of **international connections** and solidarity.

Across this inaugural publication, we see calls to action, strategies for organization, and insights into the role we, as communists, can play in present and future struggles. We aren’t fighting to get “back to normal” or to “build back better.” Instead, our once little organization grows towards fighting for the right to our own lives in every sense—our right not to die for the DOW, or force kids, school staff, and teachers to continue to work in unsafe schools. We hope then that the first issue of our publication can help orient readers within these urgent fights, providing tools, insights, and analyses for those working, from a communist position, to set forth a strategic vision within DSA and beyond.

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Interview with a DSA National Insider

National Political Committee (NPC) member Austin G. discusses politics and International Committee reform with Emerge member

By Mike H.

December 22, 2020

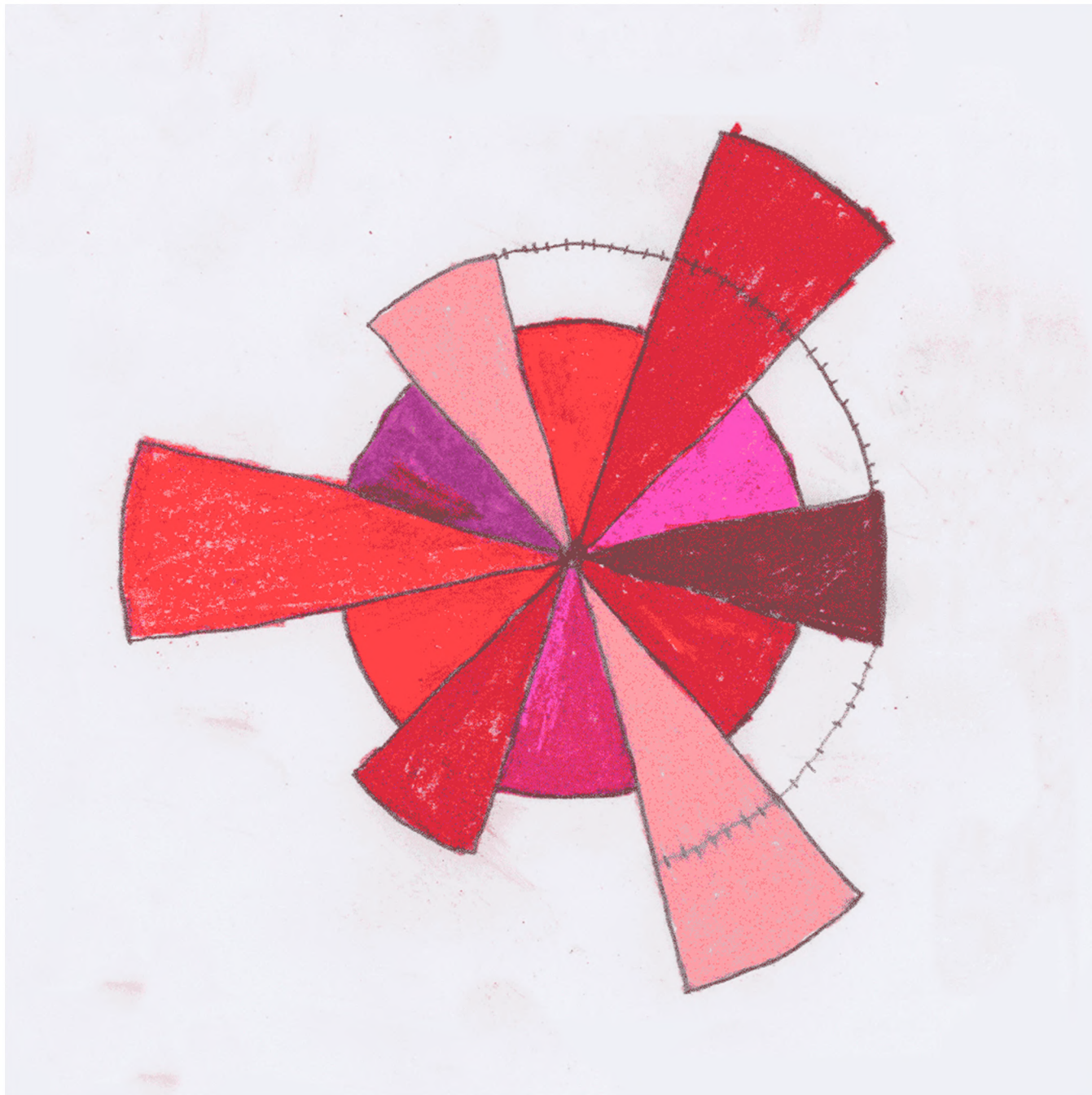


Illustration by James T.

My name is Mike H, and I'm a member of New York City DSA. In 2017 I helped start the Bronx/Upper Manhattan Branch, and in 2019 I participated in DSA's National Convention. A few weeks ago I sat down to interview National Political Committee (NPC) member Austin Gonzalez of Richmond, VA about his experience in the DSA on the NPC and on the DSA's International Committee (IC). I hope this conversation provides insight for the organization's wider membership, offers more information about what the NPC does, and shows how folks can get involved with DSA at the national level.

So to start, Austin- You want to talk a little bit about your personal background, where you grew up, how you joined DSA, and where you've been organizing?

Sure! I'm from Richmond, Virginia and have lived in Virginia my entire life. I am of Puerto Rican descent and my cultural heritage is very important to me. It's shaped a lot of my experiences living here. As I like to say, 'Being brown in a southern state will turn you into a leftist real fast.'

I've been doing activism in Virginia for ten years and have gone through a pipeline similar to a lot of people. For the past decade I've considered myself a socialist, but I never really saw viable organizations for real socialist change until I joined DSA in mid-2016. For me, this was finally (at least what I believe DSA is and can continue to be) the big left org that we needed.

One thing I noticed when I first joined was that there were no full chapters in the entire state of Virginia. There was one YDSA in like, a high school in northern Virginia, but aside from that there were no full chapters. Because of that, a few comrades and I came together to found the Richmond, Virginia chapter. It is in that chapter where I've done the majority of my organizing. We've helped grow other chapters throughout the state of Virginia in Tidewater, Charlottesville, and soon in southwest Virginia, Appalachia... Right now, I organize within the Fredericksburg branch of Richmond.

I know Richmond has organizers who've been pretty active for the last few months with Black Lives Matter. Where do you think DSA fits in the Richmond organizing landscape today?

We're asking ourselves that question and have grappled with it since the protests kicked off, not just in Richmond but at the national level and in most locals. How can DSA meaningfully be involved in what is the largest uprising that I've certainly seen in my life? And the answer we've come to in Richmond is, rather than trying to lead in any capacity as a predominantly white org (which is what the DSA is) we are taking direction from Black organizers doing work on the ground and uplifting their voices.

In Richmond, we've seen a lot of attempts from the political establishment to co-opt it. It's been daily in Richmond since Minneapolis burned their police station down. Every single day there've been people out protesting. Marcus David Peter Circle used to be Lee Circle, because there's a giant-ass Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond on Monument Avenue. That's been a site for a lot of the struggle in Richmond.

We had a black mayor in Richmond, which is a majority Black city. They came out and joined the protests after a big issue over the tear gas police used a few months back. "Oh, I'm marching with the people," he said! "Oh, I need to listen to the community!" But we know in DSA that this is just a bullshit attempt to co-opt the protests and get a photo-op. I know people have talked about it in Portland. "Tear Gas Ted" getting his photo-op? (Shoutout to the Portland comrades.)

I think on the national level we've done a good job of recognizing this to a certain extent. I was happy to see the NPC unanimously adopt both the "8 to Abolition" as well as the "No Cops in DSA" resolutions. Both unanimous! For myself and I believe you as well, Mike- we've been in DSA long enough to remember when these were contentious issues. And for some parts of DSA they still are, right? Which is why I was happy to see them pass unanimously, and this told us a little

bit about the moment that we're in. Once again, DSA's role fundamentally has to be uplifting those Black radical voices. These people, these kids out in the streets, they're not dumb. They know what the fuck they're marching for. Even in my small town of Fredericksburg, the kids I've seen out there are as young as high school age, and they have enough of a sophisticated analysis to call for the abolition of police. Not something I can say for everyone I've ever organized with, right? And I think that counts for something.

You were elected to join DSA's National Political Committee at the 2019 national convention roughly a year ago. How would you describe the NPC's role and responsibility in the organization?

The bylaws definition is the "highest decision-making body in DSA between conventions." So between conventions the National Political Committee makes endorsements and makes decisions that need to be made outside of convention years. We meet quarterly, and when we have our quarterly meetings we have political discussions. We'll always start off with a reading—readings are good to help get that solidarity. It's funny, I'd say one of the first things that I noticed going to my first NPC meeting is that NPC meetings, at least for me, are like mini DSA conventions. Emotional rollercoaster and all. You have moments where you're at your highest, where you're with your comrades, where you're basking in the socialist glory, right? Then you have moments where you're not at your highest. Where there's political disagreement, maybe there's some tension.

Now, with that said, I think everybody on the current NPC would agree things have progressed to a place where we can have actual political discussion, actual disagreement, and are able to work it out with each other. Is it perfect? Certainly not. I tell people after every meeting how difficult it can be to properly engage when the dynamics of the NPC are what they are. Let's say we have a reading. Nine times out of ten I can go into that conversation knowing exactly what everybody's gonna say. I think partly because of that, and partly because of the not-so-cordial nature of the last NPC (so I've been told, I wasn't in those rooms

but oh, I've been told,) I think people are more willing to let things be cordial than really engage in clear political disagreement. That's my perspective, I'm sure other people have different perspectives.

Now, that's just the meetings. What I do like about the NPC – dare I say, what I love about the NPC, and this might just be me – I genuinely enjoy working with my fellow NPC members within our committees. And this is the real day-to-day, week-to-week aspect of being on NPC. You have to be devoting at least ten to twenty hours a week if you want to do it properly. You can do it badly if you want, but I would not recommend that, and I'm happy to say that the people I work with haven't done that. Not throwing shade at anybody, right?

I particularly enjoy working in the committees and engaging with the membership. It's the main reason I ran for NPC: to be accessible and engage with the membership however possible.

You mentioned the role that ideological conflict plays in the NPC's work, or as you've framed it, doesn't play. Do you think the way the NPC handles ideological conflict has a positive impact for the NPC and the wider organization? Do you think it could be better or different?

There's a lot to unpack here. There's positives and negatives, I would say. First, I'd say the biggest reason conflict plays out, or lack thereof, goes back to the previous NPC because of how vitriolic things got. There's a bit of natural hesitancy and reticence to get into heated political debates. On the other end, I think the current NPC has done a good job of having open conversations together. Political conversations don't necessarily always happen, and maybe this is me being biased but that's less the NPC's fault and the people on it than the makeup of organization's caucuses. That's my belief. For some people that may be a hot take, but as someone who is caucus-less, I think the way a lot of the major caucuses in this organization and on the NPC are set up makes it tough to have real political conversation. And I know caucuses are set up the way they are

for political reasons. I think it would be much healthier for the organization's internal culture, political debate and overall organizational health, if caucuses were more forthright with their positions. I think you've seen some of that.

On the opposite end, I would rather people came out and said "No, I think the way we handle elections is bullshit. We shouldn't be endorsing ANY Democrat." Right? Instead of, "Oh okay we can well, maybe, blah blah blah..." I think it would be much healthier for the organization if we were able to have these sorts of conversations. I've been extremely encouraged by the impromptu panels that have been set up during the time of COVID. The Red Star/Emerge panel earlier today, that was awesome. The Red Caucus panel they held with all the different local caucuses was amazing, so important. Let's talk to each other, let's understand each other. Again, let's struggle together.

Going back to the NPC point and political disagreement, it's still there. It happens. To anybody who's a huge nerd and follows all the Loomio votes, you can see where the lines and divisions are drawn. People frame it in different ways. I'd argue people frame it however it suits them politically when they look at these divisions. Occasionally people refer to this as a left side and a right side of the organization. You'll occasionally see people refer to a decentralist and a centralist side of the organization. Whatever suits your political frame, that's what you're going to go with. Once again, there is still room for political disagreement.

What's one aspect of the NPC's structure or process you feel causes difficulty?

I think there's not a clear enough delineation of what staff's role is and how it relates to the NPC, since we're the highest elected body between conventions. I think there's things staff does that volunteers could do. I don't mean that in the sense of "oh, let's get rid of the staff." No, volunteers can help them because there are staff members working their asses off. I don't know how much staff info

I can divulge. I'm not gonna be talking about people's hours and shit, but people are working their asses off, and I think volunteers can help with that sort of work.

Let's talk about the International Committee a bit. When you joined the NPC, how did you feel about the IC?

When I joined the NPC—and when I was a rank and file member—I thought it was largely inaccessible to membership, a closed committee. You could only join if you knew the right people. The IC was one of the organization's older committees and some old heads were in there who'd had their position forever. I think the IC culture led to people wanting to work around it. Justifiably so, I'd argue. I was one of those people. I co-authored the decolonization convention resolution working around the IC. I know our Boycott Divestment Sanction comrades did similarly. They felt the need to work around the International Committee, and it's a shame that we had to feel that way! Justifiably so, because the IC had shown hostility to things like Cuba solidarity. Certain members of the IC, I should say. It had shown hostility to BDS in the past. And I think because of that, people tried to work around it.

Mike: *In the spirit of being up front: Do you think the IC's dominant politics made you feel like you had to work around it? Meaning not just the committee's closed nature, but also its politics?*

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think the Committee's politics weren't in line with the wider membership's politics. Those things feed into each other. Because it was a closed committee, it was very insular. These people, all with similar opinions, collected together on the IC and held onto their seats and people trying to oppose their opinions were conveniently not let inside the committee. Now again, that was not the entire Committee. There were good people on the International Committee. I'm not talking about the Committee from last year when they opened it up and let at least a decent amount of people in. It's still a closed committee but with a little bit of new blood in there. I'm talking about the

old Committee, the Committee that I knew when I was a local chair. Hell, I remember when the International Committee was a fuckin' myth, because nobody knew what it was or what it did.

Now I think it's more transparent. The politics were a big reason why people like myself worked around it, why BDS organizers felt the need to work around it, even after our organization passed BDS in 2017. There was still a desire to work around the IC and say, "cool, we'll make our own working group and have autonomy." Which I can't be mad at because I did the same thing.

So that was the previous version of the IC, essentially. Can you speak about how you worked with people to overhaul it, what it's like now, and what you've got planned?

Absolutely. This is where I'll sing the praises of my CPN comrades. I touched upon it earlier, but CPN sponsored convention Resolution 4, Building the International Committee. The IC set up an open application for a month where people applied to join a year ago. Some people were selected, some weren't, and that was the beginning of the IC starting to open up. It received a lot of scrutiny because people care deeply about foreign policy and international solidarity and issues of that nature.

Blanca Estevez of CPN and I were attached as liaisons to the IC at our first NPC meeting. One of the first conversations Blanca and I had with then-IC co-chairs Carrington Morris and Ethan Earle, who both deserve endless thanks and appreciation for the amount of work they put into this, was about the need for restructuring the IC and how this process was already in motion.

We worked through several drafts of a proposal to overhaul the IC... and I feel compelled to say because of concerns about this aspect of the proposal, that the proposal basically kills the IC and sets up three new bodies that work together. One is the International Secretariat, one is the International Steering

Committee, and another is the working groups which are split by continent.

Now the NPC appoints the leadership for all these. I've seen concerns about the NPC appointment aspect of this process, and I didn't like it either! I pushed an early proposal draft to include IC leadership being elected by the IC membership. Unfortunately, that didn't make the final proposal, but that's an example of how this is a transitional process. We're still perfecting it and it's something we're working towards. I hope to see that election process become part of the IC in the future. Not that the IC leadership being appointed by the NPC which is elected by the membership is necessarily that bad. It's a compromise I was willing to work with, and I'll own it. But in the future I hope it's something we can work towards.

With that out of the way, The core dilemma we faced was: How do we open this up to the membership, but not create a situation where we have a ten thousand person listserv and nothing gets done? I suppose you could say we have attempted to have it both ways, and we'll see how it works out. I'm optimistic.

Our International Secretariat is ten people. Our Steering Committee is ten people. All working groups have either one or two co-chairs. It is our working groups under our Steering Committee where members will soon be able to join and get involved according to their interest. But we still have the Secretariat, which we hope isn't going to wind up having too many cooks in the kitchen. Reason being, and an example I often use of the issue: Bolivian coup d'état. You'd think a statement for this could be relatively straightforward, right? Fuck the coup, right? And this is not me saying there were people in the Committee saying the coup was good—everybody knew it was bad, but everybody wanted to add a fact. "Oh, we need this, oh, we need that, but don't forget that, but this happened in 1960"—and it's like, Jesus! It's been two days already. Can we just release a statement saying the coup was bad? That's one of the main impetus for the Secretariat. A smaller body to write quick, snappy statements for international politics where things happen in a very quick fashion.

The Secretariat also develops foreign relations with other organizations worldwide. That's a lot of power for that small body, right? Still necessary I'd argue, and the Steering Committee and working groups are where international solidarity campaigns can happen. Hands off Venezuela, BDS, etc.

I envision an organization where we can fund brigades through our working groups. A brigade to Cuba, a brigade to Venezuela. I went to England last year. We should be sending our membership to England for elections. Send people to India during something. I want being a DSA member to mean something. Join DSA, join the IC, join a brigade. See the world! Wouldn't that be amazing? Hopefully, but you know with COVID maybe not. But I think that's a beautiful project we could be engaging in, and that's something I'm really excited to see. Brigades are just a flashy aspect of it. Real campaign work is what will be important and extremely rewarding. There's a lot of good people in IC leadership I'm extremely excited to work with to see what they can get done; what we can get done. Watch for the monthly DSA dispatch when we can open our working groups to the membership.

When I ran for the NPC, one of my platform planks was anti-imperialism. If I can leave the NPC with an International Committee that centers anti-imperialism, I'll be happy, and I think we're on the way. Like I said, it's a transitional process, but I'm very optimistic for the IC's future.

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Interview with a DSA National Insider

by Mike H.

partisanmag.com/interview-with-a-dsa-national-insider

Classroom Justice

Communist Caucus member, Lew, discusses their experiences organizing with teachers, students, and parents in East Bay public schools, to fight against charter schools, in-school cops, and cuts to funding for public education.

By Spencer A.

December 22, 2020



SEVERAL members of the DSA Communist Caucus in the East Bay have been working on a local chapter campaign called “Classroom Justice,” an effort to keep Oakland schools public and challenge the incursion of charter schools into the city as well as the imminent closure of currently operating public schools. The campaign has made significant inroads fighting for public school funding, halting closures, and connecting with parents and teachers across the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) through a range of organizing initiatives. These included the crafting and distribution of a coloring book for school children, now available in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Recently the Classroom Justice campaign provided support for the local Black Organizing Project (BOP) which worked to craft and secure the passage of an OUSD resolution to disband the school district police force. This was the culmination of years of BOP’s organizing to get cops out of Oakland schools. I talked to Lew L, a Communist Caucus member and one of the lead Classroom Justice organizers, who spoke about the kinds of organizing work that classroom justice campaigners have been doing, their efforts to aid BOP, and the challenges and contradictions of organizing among teachers, students, parents, and other organizers around issues of educational justice.

What is “Classroom Justice”? What is the campaign you’re working on about and responding to? What kinds of organizing does it entail, and how did it arise?

“Classroom Justice”... started around a year ago. This was following on the heels of the union strike of the Oakland Education Association. The local chapter was supporting the union strike by providing material support in terms of fundraising, doing solidarity school, and turning out for the picket line. During that time, we built a close relationship with the union. Our local chapter didn’t follow up on that relationship, so after the strike ended, all the work in the education area in terms of organizing stopped. Coming out of that, at the time, we were thinking that this was such a good area for organizing in terms of revealing the contradictions within society in general. The district was being put under a lot of

pressure due to the charter movement... it was closing all these schools as part of this “Blueprint Plan” that resulted from a lack of money, and their response to lack of money was to close down all these schools or merge them into existing schools, perhaps turning some of them into charters (see [the OEA’s response to the OUSD Blueprint Plan](#) for more information). At the school sites that get closed down, they might sell off some of the properties in order to recoup the losses. They were kind of running a school district, a public service, like a business. In response to that, we thought that we should be organizing in this area, especially if we have this previous relationship with the union.

And so, to follow up on that, in the last year or so, what kinds of things have you been most focused on doing, in terms of challenging the charter school movement or rebuilding relationships with the union?

When we first started, there was no follow up on the work we did with the strike and so there was not a continuation of this relationship. For the most part, we were not the same organizers as those who were working on the strike. We had to rebuild those relationships from the start, so when we first started, we were going to school board meetings every other week (as often as they had them)... We were going there not only to make ourselves known but also to build out relationships aside from the union, so like with the teachers, parents, students, and other activists [I’m just going to say activists because I don’t know if they’re socialists per se]... From there, we started building out relationships. Around this time, there was this group called Oakland Not for Sale – they were a group of Kaiser parents and some teachers as well. Kaiser was a school that was being closed down. Oakland Not for Sale started doing direct actions at school board meetings to gain attention for school closures and to stop schools from being closed... I don’t know if you remember the [video](#) of them trying to take over school board seats at the actual meeting, but the first time they did it they were able to shut it down, and the second time, the school board had police on hand and they formed a barricade. They had metal fences and actual officers on hand in the adjacent room, and all these police officers rushed out like a line. It was

kind of ridiculous and all these parents were arrested. Just talking about it, it seems so ridiculous, but they were like pushing parents onto the ground and arresting them and that made local news and I think a lot of people saw that. That was kind of the first major event that we were a part of. We weren't directly in this group, but some of us started attending their meetings and making connections with them. But yeah, it started from there and then in response to closures, OEA, the union, started having various town halls and then other groups started forming. And then the group of us going to these school board meetings were going to every single one of these meetings if possible and kind of just getting out there and meeting everyone and started to organize from there.

At some point, we wrote a resolution to bring this work to the local chapter and to form an actual official campaign within the East Bay [DSA] chapter and since then, we've been kind of navigating those relationships and contacts and the emergent events. From there, we transitioned to making bi-weekly coloring books. When we made the campaign, we were wondering how to make use of the relationships we built and work with the people we know in this space. We were thinking of coalescing a more unified front: as we were looking at it different groups were emerging, like Oakland Not for Sale but also other groups. A lot of groups popped in and out and everyone who we worked with broadly agreed on the schools not closing and not having the charter school system expand and take over the public school system, especially in terms of resources, so everybody was agreed on that, but often there was disagreement on the tactics. We [DSA] were working on trying to help cohere a more unified front. We were thinking of that and we were thinking of the upcoming elections also, because 4 of the 7 school board seats were up for election this November so there was a possibility we could retake the school board in terms of having a majority vote. When corona hit, there was that element of what is education going to look like in the future during the corona crisis and the continuation of that, and then with the murder of George Floyd and the protests going on, there was an element of defunding and getting rid of the police department within the district. The district is one of the only California school districts that still has its own police

department. There's a group called Black Organizing Project (BOP) that's been working on this in Oakland for 10 years, so how do we support them in doing that?

That was a very helpful overview. From this last comment, I was going to ask what has been accomplished or successful, what you see as a victory since the campaign started. I know the effort to disband the district police department was successful in the last month or so. Are there other victories that you would want to speak to?

I wouldn't call that directly DSA's – Black Organizing Project has been working on this for 10 years. I think they were instrumental in coalescing at least a public front on this. I think, in terms of the organizing work, Black Organizing Project was going to various unions and asking for a letter of support for the resolution that was going to appear at the next school board meeting and that resolution called for the complete elimination of the school district police department. So they were conducting a campaign of getting unions to write them letters of support and religious leaders in Oakland, and other groups. As a part of that, DSA, we were offering to use our own union contacts or the union contacts we had within DSA, we offered to ask for or write letters of support within our contacts and then also generally boost events that Black Organizing Project were planning. I think that's the more public side of defunding this police department. I think there was also an element of not so visible pressure from the various street actions...Throughout that part, we were trying to up the pressure on the school district as much as possible by holding protests in front of school board members' houses, some planned by Black Organizing Project, some planned by teachers. Some also just happened. For the elimination of the police department, they've passed the resolution but it's not been put into implementation yet, so it's hard to say it's a victory until we actually see those police officers go. I'm going to say that's an ongoing thing.

In terms of other victories, it's hard to say, this is still an ongoing campaign. The successes we've had are mostly on intangible things so far. I'm thinking about the

success in terms of more people being engaged in this organizing within the Oakland community or people paying attention to what's going on.

To what extent has the campaign run up against barriers or resistance? What are the difficulties and limitations for classroom justice organizers?

In terms of working with other people, especially non-socialists broadly, I think there is a lot of an activism state of mind that's leftover from (or we are still in that era) the neoliberal era, kind of this mode of...neoliberal civic engagement that's an extension of the idea and the preoccupation with interests, power brokerage, and advocacy. A lot of people are stuck in that state of mind. There's also within DSA itself, I would say, an obsession with power. I've heard it explicitly said, "we should go after this because it's the most direct route to having power over the situation." I don't think organizing for that should be a number one organizing goal – logically that makes sense: "ok, we want to stop schools from closing down and who has power in this situation, oh yeah, the politicians in the school district and at the state level have power." I think that's not particularly helpful in the long term and as socialists, we should be more oriented towards organizing to obtain or perhaps exercise control over the means of production, and by extension, if you have a say in the means of production, then you have some power, a portion of the power. I don't know if directly organizing for power is a good frame.

Some of the other contradictions in this space I think arise because of the place in society different organizations are in, and not seeing that they're in that position because they hold a certain place within the economic system, and not being able to see beyond the place they're at. For example, I think the union bargains with the school district on working conditions for the teacher. But they hold a certain place: the union oftentimes or the union members don't see that that's a kind of a limited position. That's just one lane that they're in – oftentimes, they're not able to get beyond that narrow lane: "Oh yeah, our main purpose is to bargain with the district and represent the teachers." Oftentimes,

they're not able to see beyond that and organize in ways that might be broader than that and that would help them in the long term.

Looking at contradictions [more generally], I feel like most people have a lack of U.S. history, specifically I'm thinking, oftentimes parents or teachers or activists in this space would say 'oh yeah, we need more funding for immigrant families,' 'we need more this,' or maybe 'we need more support for students with disabilities,' but I think there is a lack of understanding of why we don't have support in these areas. I'm thinking of just the history of immigration in the country and the closing of the frontier and the racist immigration policies, maybe like the Chinese Exclusion Act or the Bracero program, this program that didn't allow migrational labor from Mexico into the U.S., kind of how U.S. immigration policy is almost always very racist and tied to demand for labor and very reactionary. Tying the history of that and the emergence of neoliberal politics from the 80s, and maybe also not just neoliberal policies but also a focus on technical decisions, as if the school district or the state of California 100% make these decisions based on technical considerations: 'We will fund schools at this level because this is the best level of funding for these schools. We will tax property owners at this level because these are the best level of taxes for this society.' Because there is a lack of an overall understanding of the history of how we make these policies, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that most policies that come out is just the best policy, and if something is a bad policy, like school closures, the mindset is we can just find the bad policy and fix it.

I think you've highlighted some of the difficulties or challenges with this work. With those in mind, what are the plans right now for the Classroom Justice campaign, specific events or longer-term organizing projects. What are your aims and how do you see something like the bi-weekly coloring books working within the plans you have?

In terms of the work, we're looking at the coloring book, and expanding from that and reaching out to an older section of the students, so like making a zine for the

teens. Some of our younger organizers, some of the zoomers in the campaign are making zines. The hope though is to get the teens in the school district to write it, or do most of the writing eventually. That's the hope in terms of the printed stuff. We have been handing thousands of them out every month. But we're also tabling with them – we're going to food distribution sites and talking with the parents there and the hope is to continue doing that and to build up better and more relationships with the parents. Now, there's starting to be more of a focus on the upcoming November election. That's still to be worked out – we don't know who the chapter's going to endorse yet. We've submitted some names but we're just keeping an eye on that. There are already some groups doing direct electoral work – we'll support where we can, but I think the focus is always to build relationships in the community and the base-building that comes with any work in the space. I am just one member in this campaign so most of these decisions we do by vote. This is where I think the overall orientation of where this has been going might go in the future.

If you were to give a 5 word answer as to a dream vision of something, whether a particular action or decision, that would happen as a result of a really awesome, built out base of parents, teachers, students, and organizers, what would you say?

Lew: Take back the district permanently.

Classroom Justice

by Spencer A.

partisanmag.com/classroom-justice

An Immigrant, Latinx, Veteran's Experience

Marcos, from Portland's Red Caucus, traces his radicalization through his experiences encountering the American military's toxicity, imperialism, and preying on working class and immigrant communities.

By Marcos Z.

December 22, 2020



“I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.”

– Major General Smedley Butler

MY name is Marcos. I use He/Him pronouns and I am a Chicano Veteran. Below is a short story about my radicalization following my service to the US military industrial complex, the tragedy of Vanessa Guillen, and how it relates to my identity now as a socialist and communist.

As a man in the military it was not unusual to find fellow military members and leadership who fit the description of being misogynist, anti-indigenous, and anti-Black. Many service members who identify as women, Native and Black would rather live with their trauma than deal with how Commands will ostracize them or lack the will to make it a concern. I've met service members who had their awards demoted from bronze stars to CertComs because they were branded as “Troublemakers” for filing reports. Sexual assault doesn't target just Female-presenting people, as we have seen demonstrated by the horrendous news story about Vanessa Guillen. Men and those who generally fall outside the prototypical hypermasculine white male spectrum had also avoided reporting for these same fears.

To give some background about Vanessa Guillen: on April 23 she was reported missing by her unit. Prior to her disappearance, she had reported being attacked and sexually harassed by two men in the military. She did not file a report- a trend that is shamefully all-too-common in the military- because she did not trust her unit to take sexual harassment seriously. Vanessa's remains were found on June 30th.

Vanessa Guillen described herself as a fighter, a hero, someone who was looking

to make something better out of her situation and be the person her family can count on. She joined the Army as a way to manifest those goals. She was also an older sibling and I found her story similar to my own, being the oldest in my family.

I am first-generation Chicano and both my parents came from Mexico at very young ages. I grew up in Los Angeles around my family culture of taking care of our families and the community. I remember our house blasting Selena, Ramon Ayala, Los Alacranes, and Mana. I had a noticeable Mexican accent up until I was made fun of in school for it. Ever since then I've been using my "white voice." I grew up watching movies of how the "white hero" would always save the day, get the girl, and eliminate the bad guy. I always found those with brown skin played the villains, thugs, and nobodies waiting for someone to save them. Over time, white supremacy started manifesting in my life, and one day as I was coloring myself in a drawing, I cried as I thought to myself that I had an ugly color. In high school, I attended Honors and AP classes, but could not dream of making it to college like the other students in my classes. That is when I started talking to the recruiters at my school. I had seen the billboards in my diverse working-class neighborhood. They promised me I'd get a GI bill and I'd be off to college in no time. I was also enamored in the idea of serving the country and by doing so I'd justify my parent's citizenship. I was effectively colonized.

I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps as 2841, Ground Radio Repairman. To be completely dismissive of military service is, I feel, misplaced and reductive as I learned a lot from the military, and I learned a lot about myself while I was enlisted. I learned how to overcome challenges I thought were impossible. I pushed my body to its limits and accomplished things I never knew I could do. I learned some skills that have helped me acquire jobs in the technical field. I made lifetime friendships. However, there were many things I identified in myself and in the military as deeply toxic. I found through training assimilation was key to survival and if you ever stood out you would be ostracized by your leadership and your fellow troop members. I also recognized the xenophobia, homophobia, and misogyny spewed out by my drill instructors and later, from leadership who

ironically gave power point presentations on these same issues. I recall hearing these instructors complain how “we can’t speak like the way we used to” or how “this generation is too sensitive” while giving classes with titles like “Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention” or what we called “SHARP.” I distinctly remember during one of our cultural sensitivity trainings, a Gunny mentioned that we should do the same thing the locals do and allow businesses to deny people from entering their establishments when headlines were covered with the Colorado Bakery. This is when a baker refused to make a cake for a same-sex couple and it went up to the supreme court. His message was pretty clear but no one spoke up against it that day.

Later on I was stationed on Okinawa, another land that has been historically colonized by the Japanese and US forces. I used to witness the local protests outside Futenma, the airbase that had hosted the Ospreys that crashed into their city. Our command told us the protesters were “outside agitators” and “were college students paid by China” and I foolishly believed them. I learned later on from a contractor friend that the Governor of Okinawa was elected on a platform of removing all military bases from their island. The “No more Osprey/Go home yankees” T-Shirts being sold in the city made much more sense.

Being PoC in the Military you hear a lot of interesting one-liners from leadership such as “there’s no such thing as Black or white, just light green or dark green.” I met Tejano Chicanxs who advocated for “deporting the illegals,” military members who would consider me as “one of the good Mexicans,” and Facebook pages like JTTOTS who regularly posted wook memes (a “wook” was a derogatory term to describe femme presenting service members.) I let another service member know my parents were undocumented, to which they replied with “I guess that means you shouldn’t be here.” Over time I internalized their comments as “Being a Marine.”

It wasn’t until around 2016 that I started prioritizing being a better person over being a better Marine. I had injured myself and my depression went from a

constant reminder to a full spiral descent. I would binge on alcohol and push myself to the point of vomiting and passing out as a means to cope. It took some time before I finally checked myself into counseling and made the commitment to do the introspection I had been avoiding. From this I gained more compassion for myself and the folks around me in my life. I started to see the toxic traits that were manifested in me as a result of my military service.

I started reading “two time medal of honor recipient” Smedely Butler’s “War is a Racket” and in his work I recognized that our lives were the replacement for currency in the military industrial complex. As an NCO, it was my responsibility to carry out the commands and place the mission above all else. Instead, I focused on taking care of my fellow junior Marines over the mission and this did not reflect well with my command. I was ostracized and treated poorly by a majority of my fellow NCOs, but I did not care so long as I made sure the junior Marines were taken care of. This led a lot of service members to express concerns to me, including sharing with me stories of personal abuse. I haven’t met a single femme presenting service member who had not experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault.

I experienced firsthand that military commanders will cover up for each other, and the commanders who do their best to look out for their troops get reprimanded. This was seen recently when the Navy relieved (or in other words, fired) Capt. Brett Crozier, who alerted the press about the COVID pandemic on his ship. We have seen in the news commanders covering up scandals from their fellow officers in an attempt to maintain “the public facing image.” It is no surprise that enlisted members have shown to have little to no trust in their commands. The rot doesn’t stop at the military command, but in the patriarchy expressed in our society.

To all Veterans wishing to see change in our culture, I ask that we offer the skill sets we learned to help create a better system for all. To be like the veterans before us, who helped organize and create change during the civil rights

movement. We've seen what we are capable of when we are pushed to our limits for the war machine. Let us wield that power back to our people and back to our communities! And our fight! Black Lives Matter! and Say HER NAME!

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An Immigrant, Latinx, Veteran's Experience

by Marcos Z.

partisanmag.com/an-immigrant-latinx-veterans-experience

Revolution in the Philippines

Red Caucus member Izzy F reviews this history of the Filipino Revolution and implores American comrades to take up its study.

By Izzy F.

December 22, 2020



RIGHT now, the Philippines is in the news and in the awareness of the American left mostly because of a particularly awful Trump-backed president and government that's descending into fascist dictatorship. But as the left in the US heeds the calls from Filipinos of many different political hues for solidarity, we have to develop an awareness of the communist-led civil war, the people's war, going on in the country.

After Filipinos overthrew over 300 years of Spanish military rule in 1898, Spain sold the Philippines to the US for \$20 million. Armed Filipino revolutionaries continued the fight for their freedom for the next sixteen years. 120,000 US troops were sent to the Philippines and up to 1.5 million Filipinos were killed to secure the islands as a US colony — The Commonwealth of the Philippines. The US has had an extensive presence ever since. The Philippines has abundant natural resources, a cheap, English speaking labor force, a large market for American products and is strategically located in Southeast Asia near China. After WWII, the US granted the Philippines independence but has maintained control through military and economic agreements that prevent the country's economy from developing. In the countryside, most of the peasants¹ work on is owned by landlord dynasties (many of the same families that ruled during Spanish times) and US aligned multinational corporations. In the cities, jobs are scarce and unstable.

In the 1960s, a time when enormous American military bases in the Philippines and even soldiers from the Philippine army were used to attack Vietnam, students began organizing with workers and peasants to revive what they considered the unfinished Philippine revolution, now with a socialist perspective. By the end of the decade, there were underground revolutionary forces to carry this out — including a new communist party, the Communist Party of the Philippines, and an armed mass organization under its leadership, the New People's Army.

In response to massive protests and civil unrest, on September 21st 1972,

President Marcos declared a state of martial law that lasted for 14 years. Even after the dictatorship was overthrown by the people, corrupt landlord families and allies of foreign business interests controlled the government.² In the 1980s, the armed revolution reached its highest level of prominence, but at the same time serious mistakes and abuses accumulated, up to and including war crimes on the part of certain elements. The response from the majority force of the revolutionary movement is what was called the “second great rectification movement” in the 1990s. Many (though not most) did not reaffirm previous principles and the revolution lost quite a bit of its following. It has been able to recover its strength over the ensuing years. It isn’t yet strong enough to the point where it can match the strength of the government’s military, however it has not faded into irrelevance.

Founder Jose Maria Sison says, and I paraphrase, that if the NPA were a military force, it would have been defeated long ago. The NPA is tasked with assisting peasant communities to self-organize (in other words, building organs of political power) and wage political and economic campaigns for land and livelihood (i.e. wage an agrarian revolution). The revolutionary armed struggle has the support of the peasant farmers because it is a tool of their own class struggle for land, self-determination, and socialism. The revolution isn’t about winning a war for its own sake; it’s about leading the masses to those goals, and the revolutionaries in the Philippines believe an armed struggle is required to reach that point.

The CPP declared itself to have 70,000 members at its 50th anniversary celebration in 2016, and the NPA likely has rifles and Red Fighters somewhere in the low tens of thousands. You would think that these numbers would point to isolation in a country of over 100 million (more if you count Filipinos living overseas). In fact the opposite is true: they’re well integrated. In one of their few internal documents made publicly available, the CPP state: “The effective leadership of a proletarian party can be gleaned from the effectiveness of its mass work.”³ The revolution has over 50 years of successful, systematic mass

work under its belt.

In the “base areas” of the revolution, encompassing a decent amount of the rural area of the mountainous archipelago, the presence and influence of the NPA is a multigenerational fact of life. People in these areas have different experiences and opinions about the revolution, but it’s a fact of daily life that there is an alternative to the corrupt and abusive government and its forces. This is particularly significant where indigenous communities are being driven off of their land by the armed forces of the Philippines and paramilitaries in order for their land to be sold to mining companies.⁴

The revolution’s work can also be seen in the strength of the political movement it influences. “National democratic” groups also have a socialist perspective and study many of the same texts as those in underground formations.⁵ There, people are organized in the hundreds of thousands and millions— particularly workers⁶, urban poor⁷, and peasant farmers. Electorally, this movement holds half a dozen seats in congress (representing a bit less than five million votes and 10% of the electorate in the 2019 election), making them the strongest electoral left force.⁸

When activists and journalists talk about the Philippines being one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental activists, peasant and indigenous land defenders, trade union organizers, and others, those being targeted, in many if not most cases, are involved with or around the national democratic movement. It’s not in the scope of this essay to do more than touch on the sheer breadth of violence that is directed at the activists and peasants in the Philippines. Briefly, it encompasses assassinations, threats, bombings of civilian communities, unlawful attacks on NPA, the practice of fake surrenders, fake encounters, false and trumped up charges, red-tagging and terror-tagging, indoctrination in schools, psyops, and a growing McCarthyist infrastructure.⁹

As one example, in 2018 the Armed Forces of the Philippines massacred the “Antique 7,” communists who were just sleeping in a house, under circumstances

that echo the murder of Fred Hampton in the US. One of those killed was Maya Daniels, a writer of beautiful revolutionary poetry.¹⁰ Many left-leaning Filipinos would point out that these kinds of action by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police violate principles of international humanitarian law that legally regulates armed conflicts. For nearly as long as there's been civil war in the Philippines, there's been attempts to de-escalate the government's abuses and work to address the roots of the armed conflict through peace negotiations. As much as reactionaries see peace negotiations (when they choose to or are forced to participate at all) as a way to try to force the capitulation of the Left and its integration into the ruling system, progressives see a way of advancing the cause of peace and social justice. They have pushed for agreements on the protection of negotiators, joint monitoring of committees to address human rights complaints addressed to either side, international humanitarian law, and social and economic reforms.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Many of us heard all the criticisms and the stories from the bad times. We're quite aware that the leaders of the Philippine revolution, unlike DSA, take sides in ideological debates – favoring Marxism - Leninism and Marxism - Leninism - Maoism, for dual power and state power, for national liberation, and against US imperialism as the main but not only imperialist power. However, we are persuaded to engage and support it not because of ideological affinity but because of its multigenerational and enduring praxis. We believe this movement is serving the people, is principled, and is going to accomplish what it aims to do.

The Philippine revolution is something people are already talking about worldwide. There's a mass movement arguably bigger than any socialist movement that has existed in the US. Are there lessons for us, good and bad, to be taken from this movement? I think so. One thing is certain: the revolution and the questions it poses are already part of the broad Philippines solidarity movement today. Duterte's empty promises amid the worsening conditions of

Philippine society are uniting people against him. Filipinos in the US are getting involved in the politics of their motherland and interpreting their family's histories through the lens of forced migration, the labor export policy, and US imperialism. Debates around the Philippine revolution are happening here and now on social media, in socialist circles, and even in traditional media. As individual communists and groups of communists, who are already involved in work around things like the Philippine Human Rights Act, we should join the conversations with our perspectives.

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1. While the word "peasant" may seem strange to American readers, it is recognized as a class in the Philippines and is their translation of the word "magsasaka."
2. This very short history taken from [youtube.com/watch?v=3eD_1g7POgE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eD_1g7POgE)
3. massline.info/Philippines/masswork.html
4. See the book Wars of Extinction: Discrimination and the Lumad Struggle in Mindanao by Arnold P Alamon, or an article by the author
5. For instance, bannedthought.net/Philippines/CPP/1970s/PhilippineSocietyAndRevolution-4ed.pdf
6. The union federation Kilusang Mayo Uno, or May First Movement, has somewhere in the neighborhood of a million members.
7. A notable urban poor struggle lead by the organization Kadamay was an occupation by tens of thousands of people of idle government-built housing.
8. In summer 2019, the National Democratic movement participated in house party-list elections as the Makabayan Bloc, and in the senate it lead the Labor Win, a coalition including most other labor and left-leaning electoral movements.
9. [rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-final-gambit-task-force-against-communists](https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-final-gambit-task-force-against-communists)
10. [bulatlat.com/2018/08/18/ndf-panay-antique-7-proudest-acknowledge-claim](https://www.bulatlat.com/2018/08/18/ndf-panay-antique-7-proudest-acknowledge-claim)

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Revolution in the Philippines

by Izzy F.

partisanmag.com/revolution-in-the-philippines

Agents of Repression

Cops aren't workers, so they don't deserve unions

By Cinzia Arruzza

December 22, 2020



LET us begin with a small thought experiment. Imagine the typical situation of a high school in a coming-of-age movie or TV show. There are the bullies, who, in addition to tormenting those perceived to be weaker in general, have a special taste for targeting racial minorities, girls, and queer people. Then there are the nerds, the queer students, the racial minority students, the “loser” types, and so on. Imagine that in a sudden flurry of activities, various groups decide to organize caucuses and clubs: the nerds want to have better libraries and resources and organize a book club for this purpose and present demands to the school administration; girls and queer people fed up with sexism at school decide to form a caucus to change the culture of the school; racial minority students decide to organize in order to protect themselves from racial discrimination and challenge racist programs at school.

Then imagine that the bullies, too, decide to come together and to form a “Bullies’ Union”: like everybody else, they claim that they too have the right to organize to protect their interests—for example, from retaliation from the administration or from other students after one of their bullying actions. Moreover, imagine that they reach out to the other caucuses, collectives, and groups, claiming that, indeed, they would like to be charter members in a federation with them, given that, after all, they are all students and share the same social condition.

Does this sound absurd enough? Yet, this thought experiment is not so far from the reality of what a police union is: a union of bullies who come together in order to continue their bullying undisturbed. In case of doubts about an all too easy equivalence between police officers and bullies, it may help to have a look at what your average **police officer thinks** about matters such as accountability, racism, and, yes, Trump.

In my thought experiment, the high school caucuses and collectives would recognize that it is not in their interest to federate with the Bullies’ Union. They would tell them to get lost and probably would prepare for self-defense in case

the Bullies' Union decided to take action. But reality is often more absurd than thought experiments based on rational interest oriented choices. It so happened, then, that in 1979 the International Union of Police Associations, which represents over 100,000 law enforcement employees and emergency medical personnel, chartered with the largest union federation in the United States, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL - CIO). They are still there, for the AFL - CIO has so far refused to expel them, in spite of repeated requests, including from its rank-and-file members—especially following the Black Lives Matter movement of 2014 - 2015.

But confusion about this matter does not concern organized labor alone. During Occupy, many were tempted to include policemen among the 99%, and so we heard chants addressed to policemen to invite them to join the struggle against the 1%: the same policemen who were routinely brutalizing Black and Brown people during stop-and-frisk programs, and who would soon start beating and evicting occupiers across the country.

Less than three years ago, Danny Fetonte, a staffer of Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas from 2009–2014, was elected to the DSA National Political Committee (NPC). When racialized activists within the organization got hold of information about Fetonte's past involvement with law enforcement, which he had not disclosed prior to his election, they reasonably demanded Fetonte be removed from the NPC. This should have been a no-brainer, for as these activists also discovered, "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." Yet, the majority of the NPC repeatedly refused to take this action, the purported rationale being

that the DSA support unions and that police unions can be a democratizing tool against police brutality.

At the basis of these kinds of positions lies a fundamental analytical mistake: policemen and their union staffers are not “workers in uniform,” but part and parcel of the repressive state apparatus. The fundamental role of the police is the protection of property relations, a key function of the capitalist state: this role is freely chosen by policemen and, as a rule, it is chosen as a profession for life. Becoming a cop is usually not an expedient, determined by necessity, to have access, for example, to higher education or healthcare benefits; rather, it is a commitment to a profession. Whether one is already a bully before joining law enforcement is often irrelevant, for becoming a bully is the profession’s requirement: those who end up refusing this role are usually pushed out of the police force altogether. And so, the fact that cops live on wages—just as Amazon employees do—does not have any impact whatsoever on the social and political role they objectively play. For all our illusions to the contrary, they are not Amazon employees.

Besides this rather obvious point, there is also overwhelming empirical evidence concerning the absolutely negative role played by cop unions in stopping any attempt at even mild reform and in making police departments unaccountable. Based on data from 2016, there are around 18,000 police agencies across the country, which employ more than 1.1 million people, 750,000 of whom are sworn officers. In a country where only 12% of the workforce is unionized, police officers have one of the highest unionization rates, in line with the unionization rate of public employees. In addition to ILPA, for example, there is the Fraternal Order of Police, with 340,000 members (which endorsed Trump in 2016), the National Association of Police Organizations, and then a myriad of locals and associations at city level. On a formal level, cop unions understand their role as equivalent to the role of labor unions: protecting the interests of their members from the management and from hierarchical excesses within the police administration. But given the particular social and political role of police in the

repressive state apparatus, this unavoidably translates into protecting police officers from accountability, hence, enabling them to kill and brutalize at will. This is the case, again, because policemen are not workers: receiving a wage is a grossly insufficient marker of class belonging.

Police union contracts tend to contain a number of provisions that make transparency and accountability a mirage: provisions that slow down misconduct investigations, prevent public access to complaints and disciplinary records, offer special procedural protections for officers during interrogations, restrictions on which complaints will be investigated, limit civilian oversight, and so on. As recently documented by the *New York Times*, moreover, cop unions have actively and successfully lobbied lawmakers to stop or slow down proposed legislation and concrete actions for police reform, even though most of these proposed reforms were rather mild and a matter of cosmetics more than substance.

What this means concretely can be better expressed through **numbers**. Between 2005 and 2015, only 110 law enforcement officers have been charged with murder or manslaughter in an on-duty shooting, and only five were convicted of murder, in spite of the fact that around 1,000 people are fatally shot by police annually. Of these, only forty-two officers were convicted, while fifty were acquitted and 18 cases are still pending.

Following Ferguson in 2014, police unions in many cities, from NYC to Chicago, issued public statements in defence of police officers accused of police brutality. They also criticized the adoption of body cameras promoted by Obama, which, by the way, turned out to be worse than useless. They did not react that differently to the social uprising following the horrifying murder of George Floyd. And yet, Chauvin the Strangler is a poster child for the kind of policeman this corporatist self-defense produces. He had already been cited several times for use of **excessive force** and had been involved in two other police shootings (including the shooting a Black woman in 2008), but without paying any

consequence whatsoever. How surprising is it that he ended up killing George Floyd in cold blood in front of the cameras?

As argued by Tim Kelly in an article in the New Republic, the AFL-CIO should immediately expel ILPA, and we should demand the abolition of cop unions as part of the process toward police abolition. And, at the very least, let's immediately stop calling them "unions": they are no better than mafioso gangs, protecting their own at the expense of everybody else.

This piece was originally printed in [Spectre 2020](#)

Agents of Repression

by Cinzia Arruzza

partisanmag.com/agents-of-repression

Towards Restructuring the DSA

Serendipity may have originally brought thousands of people into DSA, but it is incumbent on those now steering the ship to transform it into a mass organization.

By Keith G.

December 22, 2020



Illustration by Rosa P.

DSA could have a much more effective national mobilization than it currently does in the important struggles taking place in cities and towns across the country today. The biggest hindrance to this isn't a lack of militancy or of willingness from its membership to organize, but rather its existing organizational structure. As currently constituted, DSA is the inherited form of the organization as a nonprofit advocacy group rather than being oriented by the intentions of its present membership. The current model was its organizational form for most of its existence, when its national membership — even on paper — never exceeded 8,000 people.

The fortuitous membership surge that came out of Trump's election was in no small part a matter of happenstance. Bernie Sanders called himself a Democratic Socialist during his 2016 campaign and, tens of thousands of internet searches later, the DSA was effectively co-opted by an influx of newly radicalized leftists and progressives, predominantly made up of middle class college educated former liberals. This scenario then encouraged thousands of more longtime radical leftists — excited by this newfound, mainstream left pole of attraction — to jump on the DSA bandwagon and become members as well. This new membership formulation then found itself at the helm of a ship it had no part in building.

Two National Conventions later we still have not succeeded in restructuring DSA in any meaningful way to meet the more ambitious aspirations of DSA's larger and more radical rank and file membership. One could argue that the hesitancy for restructuring has been partially due to how amenable the inherited non-profit advocacy model is to an organizational emphasis on electoralism, which has been National DSA's primary strategic focus since its political reemergence in 2017.

But even these electoral ambitions haven't shown to be better served by holding on to the current national structure. Many of us have observed the results of National DSA's strategic focus on Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign over

the last two years. When compared to the focus and resources exhausted, the actual electoral influence gained has been marginal. It has become apparent that, even in the electoral arena, the current structure of National DSA has arguably been only minimally beneficial logistically in helping achieve local election victories, and that this success could be more attributed to the tenacity of the specific chapters involved rather than the national organization's influence and material assistance. For example, the Portland, Oregon, chapter endorsed two internal member candidates in the most recent campaign cycle, Paige Kreisman for State House Representative and Albert Lee for Congressional House Representative, and it received no substantial material or logistical assistance from National in these efforts. The experience for many individual chapters has been similar: when it comes to national priorities, what is emphasized on paper doesn't necessarily translate to tangible support for those goals on the ground. The organization simply isn't set up to effectively channel national resources into improved capacity and coordination for local chapters.

In the wake of Sanders receding as a national political focus and the growing economic and social precarity of this moment of uprisings and mass protest, we have, as the largest socialist organization in the nation, an exceptional opportunity to actually help strengthen all sectors of the working class struggle in the United States. But first we must soberly assess whether DSA is sustainable or politically effective as it is currently constituted. I would argue that the current structure is more than flawed; it is materially unable to meet our short- and long-term goals.

DSA has a national top-down structure typical of other membership-driven 501(c)3 and (c)4 non-profits: an elected executive board that oversees a national staff. Structurally, DSA could be described as sitting somewhere between the NRA, which doesn't have chapters, and the Sierra Club, where a council of representatives from each chapter advises their member - elected Board of Directors. Needless to say, radical democratic processes are not currently on display in our national procedures. Outside of the bi-annual

convention when chapter and at-large delegates vote on resolutions and bylaws amendments and elect the National Political Committee, the national organization currently operates with minimal to no formal direction, oversight, or input from individual chapters and their members on national strategy, tactics or basic organizing activities.

This lack of coordination on the ground fosters a reality for most rank and file members where their local chapter and the national body can effectively be perceived as two separate organizations. In my own local chapter, there are numerous examples of people who are actively involved in national work such as communications, design, and writing but are completely uninvolved in the local chapter, and vice-versa. This is all to say that the current national structure can appear to many members, especially newer ones, as disjointed and strategically unfocused while being steered by an organizational model that fails to adequately embody socialist values of organizational democracy and political militancy. We can and must fix this.

There are numerous ways we could do this. One option could be to put routine national decision making and strategy under the purview of a congress of chapter or regional representatives. In addition, we could create and enforce better standards on how the activities of our national working groups and bodies report back on their efforts and receive feedback and direction from the membership. We could institute more transparent national oversight mechanisms and bolster better communications between chapters, so when discussing national issues and strategies, we could more cohesively work through the more contentious debates productively. And rather than rank and file members having to wait two years every time they want the opportunity to influence national priorities or propose logistical changes, we could better utilize existing technology to foster more frequent and direct democratic input from the national membership. Ultimately, we should be looking at the examples provided by the different socialist experiments undertaken across the globe and examine what has worked and what hasn't and why.

Regardless of whatever type of change we eventually agree to endorse and pursue, those of us who understand how crucial this topic is for the organization's future should be actively instigating these important conversations throughout the organization wherever and whenever we can. As anyone who was present for the failed restructuring attempts made at the 2019 national convention already knows, we need a minimal consensus on at least the need for some kind of restructuring if we want to succeed in seeing it happen. We must ensure that DSA not only remains relevant, but also grows and thrives as a consequential force on the radical left in the coming years and decades.

Serendipity may have brought tens of thousands of people into the ranks of DSA in recent years, but it is incumbent on those now steering the ship to transform it into the mass organizing vehicle we need. Before we can hope to change the world outside of DSA, we must consider what extent we need to make change inside it first.

Towards Restructuring the DSA

by Keith G.

partisanmag.com/we-must-restructure-national-dsa

Social Movement Unionism and the Rank and File Strategy

Why the DSA needs the rank-and-file strategy and why it needs to go beyond it.

By Marvin G.

December 22, 2020

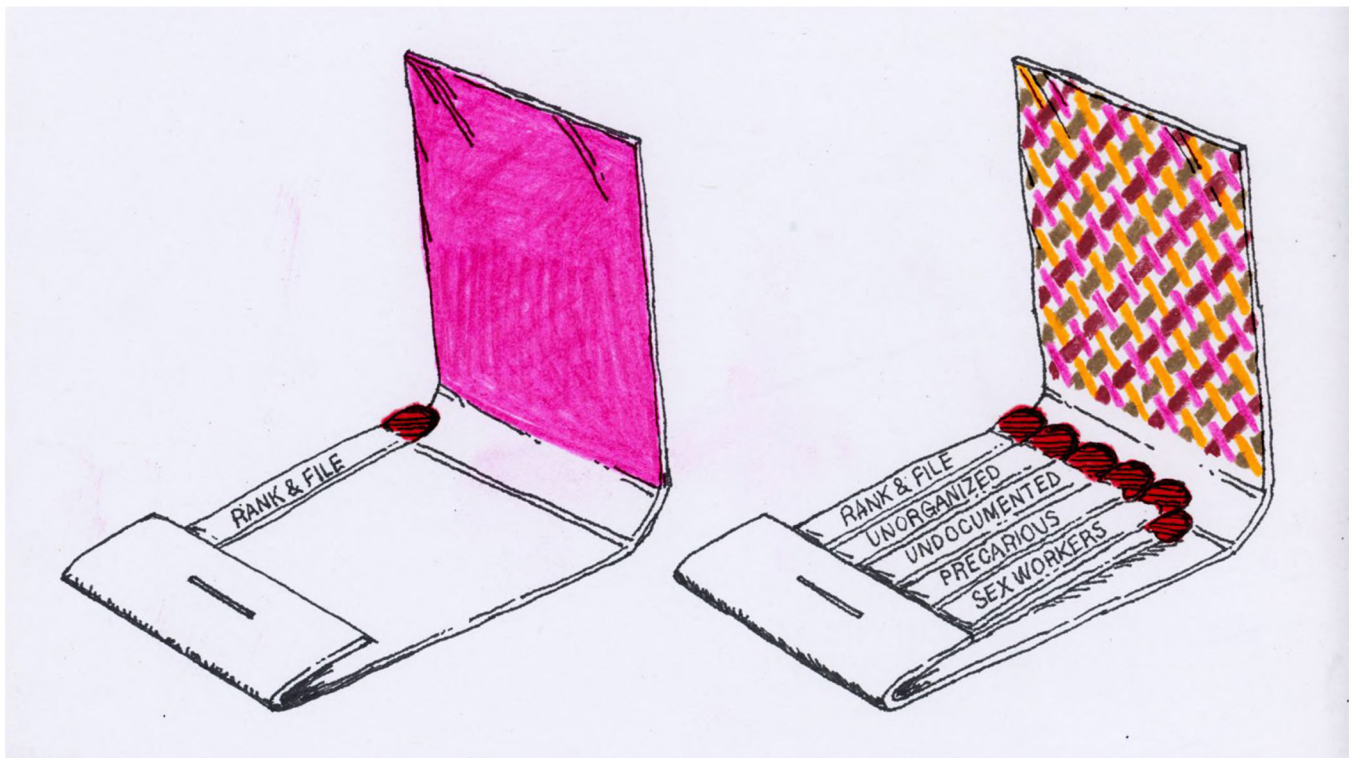


Illustration by James T.

SOCIALISTS should build workers' movements that model the society we aspire to win. As utopian as that might sound, these movements not only play a critical role in actual class struggle insofar as they maneuver and subvert control away from the owners of production, but also demonstrate in their design democratic worker-controlled socialism. This demonstration paves a significant path towards a communist horizon.

Emerge, a big tent communist caucus local to the NYC chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) of which I am a member, has a Point of Unity on labor ([For Vibrant Labor Movements](#)) that reads:

“We cannot build the future we want without a militant labor movement: a movement of workers as workers — waged and unwaged, professionalized and precarious — committed to class struggle both in the workplace and outside of it. Over the past half-century, American labor has been rendered largely toothless, thanks not only to the efforts of the reactionary right but also to anti-democratic “leaders” more interested in compromising with the ruling class than widening the field of struggle. Union bureaucrats who deflect the energy of the militant rank-and-file must be swept aside.

While established unions are key terrains for struggle, our fight should not be limited to them. If we are to rebuild a stronger, more vital labor movement in New York City, we must recognize the great swathes of our class who have no legal right to unionize at all. Farm and domestic workers are excluded from American labor law while undocumented and sex workers' very existence are criminalized. Other low wage workers, like those in food service, are often ignored. Their organization is crucial to the revitalization of the labor movement as a whole — whether through traditional unions, workers' centers, or other forms of self-organization not yet imagined.”

This point of unity clearly outlines many of the problems facing militant unionists, but what strategy does it commit us to? In my own opinion, I believe

it's a commitment to a strategy of Social Movement Unionism (SMU). SMU sees the encounter between unionism and social movements as a potentially powerful and pivotal moment that interrupts the traditional trajectory of bureaucratic labor politics. It engenders an opportunity for labor militants to engage in community and social justice-oriented politics that map onto workers' struggles. It is a strategy that addresses the desperate need to build the bridge between the economic and the political if we are to begin constructing socialism in earnest. These are precisely the types of campaigns in which the NYC-DSA chapter has previously participated in coalition with community groups, political groups, labor unions, and workers centers (e.g. [B&H Strike Support](#), [The Tomcat Boycott](#), [International Women's Strike](#), the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Campaign for Fair Food](#)).

SMU situates the weakness of both the American left and American labor movement in their separation. As labor scholar [Sam Gindin notes](#), workers involved in Communist "deep organizing" of the 1930s:

"...didn't label their organizing strategy "social movement unionism." They simply took it for granted that the workplace and the community overlapped and that employers' ferocious resistance to the new unionism made worker-community alliances a necessity. Workers sat down in their workplaces, prevented banks from evicting people who were behind on their mortgages, and marched with the unemployed."

By diagnosing the failures of both the American left and American labor movements in relation to each other, this strategy begins to advance a political answer to what the labor movement's role in building socialism should be.

Embracing SMU doesn't require us to reject other strategies and tactics. In fact, SMU is a versatile strategy that can incorporate a variety of subordinate tactics and strategies, including:

- A Rank-and-File Strategy
- Connecting workplaces struggle to social movements, building community unions that form alliances between unions and non-labor groups to affect change in the workplace and beyond.
- Building a workers' movement across class fractures (waged, unwaged, professional, and precarious)
- Organizing the unorganized.
- Solidarity with workers whose self-organization must necessarily take different forms (farm, domestic, sex workers)

Perhaps the most prominent of these strategies is the Rank-and-File Strategy (R&FS) which the DSA adopted at its 2019 National Convention (though, significantly, a resolution to organize the unorganized was also adopted, among others). Kim Moody, a key architect of the R&FS, makes clear in his [original pamphlet](#) that contact with other organizational forms such as workers' centers, community groups, and activist organizations are instrumental to the R&FS precisely because they further develop the militancy of rank-and-file leaders by exposing them to capitalist contradictions not often confronted by trade unions.

We would do well to remind ourselves exactly what the R&FS is for: the transformation of bureaucratic and undemocratic unions into class-conscious fighting unions. This effort is something we should of course be deeply committed to. However, as the socialist movement grows, it must confront what Moody names the 'missing tasks' of the R&FS. The original strategy was written at a low-tide of socialist activity, when the practical horizon of socialist activity was socialist regroupment, to transcend the micro-sect form. As DSA has largely accomplished this task, we need to move beyond this original horizon and ask: what is the specific intervention that a socialist organization like DSA, an embryonic mass organization, can contribute to labor militancy? And what does labor militancy contribute to socialist construction? These questions require a strategy built around labor's role in the construction of socialism and not just a strategy to restore fighting unions.

Besides its silence on socialist construction there are certain structural problems that constrain the R&FS's effectiveness in organizing, especially across disjointed working class elements. Where SMU emphasizes the mutually transformative nature of the encounter between unionism and social movements, the R&FS emphasizes a stageist vision of class and socialist construction (build the militant minority, then build the class, then build the party, then build socialism). However, the fact of imminent global environmental catastrophe makes a stageist approach less viable. According to Gindin, "To make social movement unionism a reality, we need an organization that can strengthen working-class capacities and propose long-term strategies for winning and exercising power." He is here talking about a party, which I think skips over certain critical questions regarding organizational forms at the intersection of union-party-movement. However, I do want to highlight his rejection, which we should share, of stageism, as this is an implicit invitation to build such an organization concurrently with social and labor movements.

Additionally, we should consider the specific class composition of the reinvigorated socialist movement itself. It is largely concentrated in one class fracture, downwardly-mobile middle-class white millennials. A lot has been written about class fractures and their political effects, much of which I'd like to completely avoid. What I'd like to focus on instead is how this concentration affects the R&FS specifically: is any socialist organization situated in this milieu well-suited to launch a multi-faceted R&FS, or will their membership concentrate in one or two, highly credentialed, industries (as we are seeing with teaching and nursing in NYC-DSA)? If this is the case, then we need to ensure the simultaneous use of different strategies such as community unionism, direct recruitment of members from underrepresented unions, and, importantly, organizing the unorganized alongside the R&FS, to reach a large swath of working class fractures.

Historically only labor organizations have had resources to organize the unorganized, but as our movement grows this may no longer be the case. We are

We are already starting to see glimpses of this in organizing drives in San Francisco ([Anchor Steam unionization with ILWU](#)). Rank-and-file organizing and organizing the unorganized can be mutually reinforcing tactics. Democratic rank-and-file control of labor organizations buoyed by shop-floor militancy and engaging in class struggle against capitalists better positions emerging organizing projects. New democratic organizing projects create a leftwing pole in the struggle against undemocratic unions and their labor bureaucracy.

That all being said, we must ardently defend the R&FS strategy as an important subordinate strategy to our larger vision of socialist construction from both its critics as well as reductive and opportunistic interpretations of it. The specifics of the R&FS are far from uncontested- even Moody has revised some of his initial arguments. The strategy of ‘bore-from-within’ to ‘vibrant rank-and-file democracy’ is not yet entirely formulated, nor could it be, as only the struggle itself can furnish it with concreteness. However, just because it’s a contested strategy doesn’t mean we should shy away from putting forward what we believe to be the correct vision for rank-and-file organizing:

1. The working class can only become an agent of societal transformation through *active struggle against the capitalist class and its state*.
2. Workplaces and specifically unions are the most immediately obvious sites of such confrontation because 1) the workplace often puts one in direct confrontation with members of the capitalist class and their functionaries and 2) the labor union organizational form allows workers to wage class struggle in a manner that can develop its future capacity. *Importantly*, however, they are not *the only* or even *the most important of such sites of struggle*.
3. Socialists should enter industries to identify and develop *a layer* of the rank-and-file cadre that can serve as organic leaders. Whenever possible, Socialists should look into entering strategic capital choke-points (e.g. logistics, transportation, health, etc). However, coordinating socialists in such strategic sites *is not* the R&F strategy itself. The rank-and-file strategy can be carried out in any workplace or sector.

4. It is *this layer* that is, in fact, the crux of the rank-and-file strategy and not necessarily the socialists who come into these industries or even the socialist demands they put forward.

5. Because of low-levels of worker engagement in union activity (due to grappling with bare survival as well as depoliticization) collective action depends on the day-to-day organizing of this layer, or what is often called the *'Militant Minority'*: those who understand, are experienced in, and radicalized by class struggle (though who may not necessarily identify with an ideological project such as socialism or communism).

We must not confuse the struggle of a union caucus against an entrenched bureaucracy as the rank-and-file struggle itself. A caucus is only a vehicle for working class struggle, as is a labor union and as are political formations such as DSA. We must constantly prioritize the training, education, and empowerment of working and oppressed people. We must develop ways to incorporate the masses of workers into that struggle in ways that are not immediately self-evident or mapped.

SMU and the R&FS share a radical vision of deep and complex transformations of not only unions but unionism itself:

“The chief obstacle to real social movement unionism is resistance within unions to the all-encompassing changes it would require. Social movement unionism is not about labor supplementing what it is already doing (for example, with better policy proposals or new departments) or establishing “external” alliances with other movements. Rather, it’s about sparking a revolution inside unions — above all, by infusing them with class politics.”
(Gindin)

Additionally, Moody has argued that worker struggles can be “rehearsals for revolution.” If that is the case, these rehearsals must take on the democratic, radical forms that we hope to see in our struggle against capital. Where labor

bureaucrats have developed interests that run counter to class struggle, and often fight against it in favor of class collaboration, a communist workers' movement should see formal organization — whether it's a union, workers' center, or some other formation — as nothing more than a vehicle for workers' struggle, as instruments to help us occupy, and transform the terrain of struggle. Communists can and must once again resume organizing workers' movements and orient such movements beyond mere short term economic interests by mobilizing past wage demands. They must now fight for militant, democratic, and revolutionary labor organizations.

The shared aim of the R&FS and SMU is to infuse class politics into trade-unionism as a means of developing the working class into a political force that can fight for direct workers' democracy (“democratically administered social services” by public workers and democratic planning of our economy). However, this infusion of class politics and how this transmission is accomplished is itself problematic and requires strategic intervention. In other words, where these strategies largely differ is how they envision this transmission of class politics, the spark that transforms work-place demands into anti-capitalist politics.

**The author would like to acknowledge that this article was written in conversation with the work of sociologist [Kate Doyle Griffiths](#) and a draft of what would become “[The Rank and File Strategy On New Terrain](#)”, published by [Spectre Journal](#).*

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Social Movement Unionism and the Rank and File Strategy

by Marvin G.

partisanmag.com/social-movement-unionism-and-the-rank-and-file-strategy

Grist for the Mill: School Reopening During the Pandemic

Schools reopenings during the pandemic have and will continue to lay bare the capitalist logics at work in the contemporary classroom. Socialist teachers must bring militancy and trenchant political analysis into their unions.

By Eugene Violet

December 22, 2020

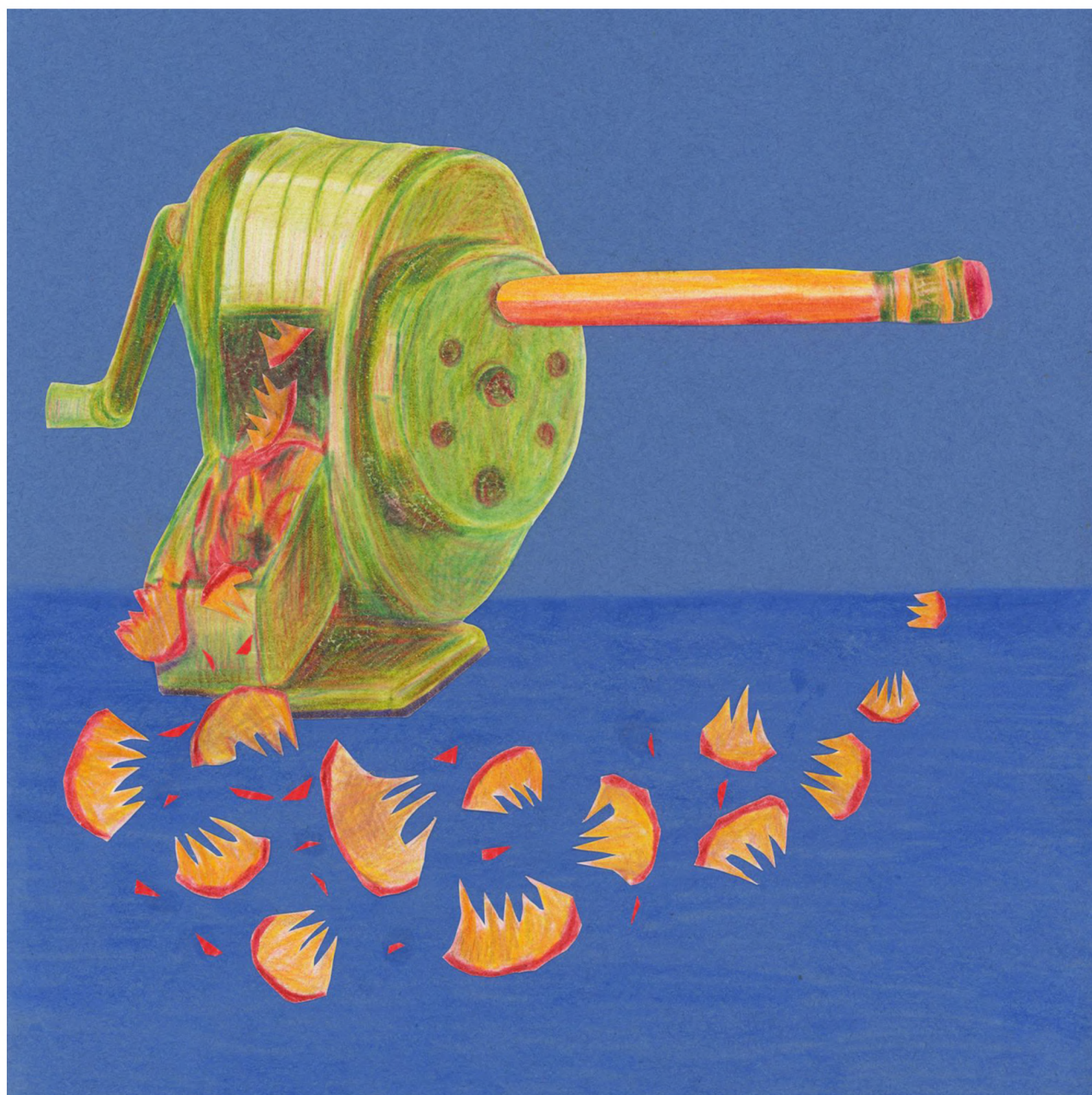


Illustration by Rosa P.

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

“Dulce et Decorum est”, Wilfred Owen, 1920

IT is fitting that Wilfred Owen ends his famous anti-war poem, penned less than a year prior to his own demise in the very war he was railing against, in a classroom. As educators, we are asked to regurgitate the same propaganda to our students, with all the assumptions, lies, and rationalizations that come with it. Whatever our intentions, teachers’ function in society is conceived of as preparing our students to be grist for the capitalist mill, one way or the other—to die gloriously for the economy.

Most of the time, this is a long game; however, during this pandemic we’ve seen in real time the devaluation of life that occurs with capitalism in crisis. This mindset must be confronted and beaten back with solidarity and socialism. The time for playing defense and holding on to what we have has come and gone. It is time to strike, organize, and win.

Death Drive of Capital Laid Bare

“These kids have got to get back to school. They’re at the lowest risk possible. And if they do get COVID-19, which they will — and they will when they go to school — they’re not going to the hospitals. They’re not going to have to sit in doctor’s offices. They’re going to go home and they’re going to get over it.”
-Missouri Governor Mike Parson.

What’s missing from Parson’s quote, aside from any understanding of how the novel coronavirus works or the disturbing new trend of serious **complications** in young people, is the risk to educators. When there is an outbreak in a

school—like this extreme example from May in [Israel](#)—it gets bad fast. Such an outcome is inevitable if the push to reopen schools succeeds, and this push has now become a central plank in an increasingly frantic campaign. The Trump administration's erratic response has taken on an even darker character now as a patchwork shutdown and reopening process across the country has disintegrated into a proxy war for November's election. Blue-state governors, battling their own chambers of commerce and big donors, face off against a federal government intent on weaponizing every agency against them.

The Department of Education is leading the charge, threatening to cut school funding if reopenings are delayed. These efforts are part of a fatal class war being waged by our federal and state governments. Republicans and Democrats talk about acceptable deaths knowing full well that it is the poor who will be compelled to risk their lives and die. Working class kids need to be parked somewhere while their parents are sacrificed to the economy, while the wealthy work from home and hire private tutors.

Liberal Complicity

The CDC also [released their guidance](#), aiming to appease both liberals and conservatives:

Death rates among school-aged children are much lower than among adults. At the same time, the harms attributed to closed schools on the social, emotional, and behavioral health, economic well-being, and academic achievement of children, in both the short- and long-term, are well-known and significant. Further, the lack of in-person educational options disproportionately harms low-income and minority children and those living with disabilities. These students are far less likely to have access to private instruction and care and far more likely to rely on key school-supported resources like food programs, special education services, counseling, and after-school programs to meet basic developmental needs.

-CDC, 7/23/2020

This language echoes pressure coming from certain parent groups, and even some self-described leftists, who uncritically parrot these lines about the value of schooling in development without mentioning the psychological impact of mass death. This discourse will allow anything but an actual solution. We must lift up a central organizing demand: pay people to stay home and improve the health care they receive.

This argument from the CDC also speaks to an intentional “failure” of capitalism. Schools are now the sole providers of social services for poor students. Health care, counseling, food, and childcare are building blocks of a good life and an effective education. These services are almost solely provided—even in the bluest of blue cities like San Francisco—by the school system.

School workers wear many hats that, in a just society, would be worn by a variety of workers, including nurses, counselors, social workers, coaches, mentors, psychologists, and more. Instead, these roles are often filled by school workers who have received training in few, if any, of these roles. The profession counts on teachers to not be able to say “no” to duties they may be unprepared to perform when they know a child’s wellbeing is at stake. If not you, then who?

On March 13, as Coronavirus was already ravaging the city, New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio **remarked**, “We are going to do our damndest to keep the schools open.” New York Governor Andrew Cuomo made similar remarks: “For many families, school is childcare. There are school districts in wealthier states where one parent can stay home or hire caregivers, but then there’s everyone else.” Unsurprisingly, this led to a disproportionate amount of deaths in low income communities, predominantly communities of color. The Intercept **confirmed what we all suspected**: the rich can afford to stay home and isolate, while the poor cannot.

As San Francisco debates a school reopening plan that includes **in person classes for our most vulnerable students**, we will continue to see these disparities in disease and death. We on the left must not cede ground to twisted capitalist logic that compels the poor to risk death for basic services. Instead, we must use the little power we have to make the broad, class-based demands our survival depends on.

The Coming Wave of Privatization

Education represents one of the last remaining unionized groups, accounting for around $\frac{1}{3}$ of all public sector workers. The classrooms are in many ways the last battleground in destroying the public sector. Recently, wealthy, influential — and largely white — parents have leaned into resegregating schools. New York City is one of the most segregated districts in the country, where a combination of extreme gentrification, de facto redlining, and school choice have resulted in **$\frac{2}{3}$ of all elementary schools being completely unrepresentative** of the neighborhoods they serve. When COVID hit, it hit these schools hard.

As Naomi Klein described in *The Shock Doctrine*, crises like Coronavirus are great opportunities for the privatizers. Automation of education is the ultimate goal of these privatizers: eliminate the worker. The road to that horizon is paved with union-busting, time-tracking, banked curriculum, and more. A workforce that returns to work via distance learning without any strikes, stoppages, or mass coordination is doomed. Distance learning must be temporary, workers must be protected, and the economy must be held hostage to the needs of the many. We can and must crush the privatizers before it's too late. We must refuse to be grist for their mill.

Subverting Worker Power

As it stands, our teachers unions are not prepared for the battle we face. The approach to austerity from the progressive left has decimated union power:

withholding labor is never an option, and instead we're asked to endure the "tough times." Of course, such "temporary" cuts always seem to end up permanent even when times get good again.

This is why educators in Oklahoma and Arizona had to organize wildcat strikes, and why blue state teachers' strikes in Oakland, LA, and Chicago ended prematurely. This is why San Francisco teachers haven't struck in over four decades. Teachers don't yet have the guiding politics to lead them into real confrontations with capital. We are dying in the shadow of the Democratic Party which, by default, has become the party of the teachers unions.

Union leadership, in concert with the Democratic Party, continues to blunt any working class effort to gain power and subvert it into incremental "gains." Until there is a concerted push to separate from the Democratic Party and remake these unions, we will continue to face cruel austerity, political incoherence, and a lack of solidarity between school workers and the communities in which they work.

What is to Be Done

The road ahead requires radicalizing our unions, pushing them leftward and into confrontation with both Democrats and Republicans. That means building solidarity based on shared principles and class position with the families and communities we work alongside. It means expanding work slowdowns, stoppages, and strikes when they face resistance, not capitulating and grabbing at the first concession. It means embracing the principles of class warfare, of joining the class war already in progress—the one we are losing. This means being unafraid to call ourselves socialists and apply Marxist analysis in our workplaces and our unions. We must reach out to revolutionary currents within our communities and join forces, take risks and pick each other up when we face harm.

As socialist teachers, we have cast a wide net looking for potential comrades: the people who stepped up when their fellow educators were in need, who took the time to talk to teachers new to the classroom or the community. We have led struggles against overreaching administrations attempting to pick off “troublesome” staff members. We have faced termination from those same overreaching administrators. But we stood strong, and our co-workers rallied to our defense. They appreciated their fellow workers willing to show solidarity and bring the struggle for social justice into the building, and while they haven’t yet all signed on to our socialist programs for our schools, we’ve shown to them that winning through collective struggle is possible.

We’ve faced both wins and losses in our organizing, but the impact of clearly articulating revolutionary demands in the workplace cannot be overstated. This is organizing: doing the mundane work, making the connections, showing up for your colleagues, all the while never compromising your politics for the sake of temporary power. This work can be replicated and improved upon in your school site and community.

Coronavirus is not the crisis. It is the latest in a series of crises which will continue to accelerate as Capitalism faces an end to its gospel of growth and the ruling class squabble over what is left in the face of rising seas and climate refugees. We will only win united, fighting and organizing on the principle of solidarity. We must assert our right to exist, survive, and thrive. We proclaim: “We won’t die for your capitalist economy. If we are to die, we will die fighting for a better tomorrow.”

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Grist for the Mill: School Reopening During the Pandemic

by Eugene Violet

partisanmag.com/grist-for-the-mill-school-reopening-during-the-pandemic

A Socialist Vision for Feminist Anti-Violence Organizing

#MeToo is the latest anti-violence movement to be compromised by liberal feminists and the carceral state. It's time for socialists to develop a distinct vision for the movement.

By Alexandra W. and Elizabeth F.

December 22, 2020



Illustration by Rosa P.

SEXUAL violence is endemic in the United States, and the highest levels of our government are no exception. The current president and two sitting members of the Supreme Court have been credibly accused of a range of predatory sexual behavior, from workplace harassment to rape. Donald Trump was elected shortly after being exposed as an admitted sexual predator in the Access Hollywood tapes. The #MeToo movement, sparked by investigative reporting and built off of decades of feminist organizing, exposed the ubiquity of harassment and violence in the workplace, from the rarefied environments of the entertainment and media industries to the more prosaic stories ordinary women told on social media and in person in the fall of 2017. This November, voters chose between two rapists, one whom the Democratic establishment has castigated and the other whose victim they have chosen to quietly ignore. Many of #MeToo's most prominent and vocal supporters turned a blind eye to Tara Reade's accusations against Democratic president elect Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential campaign, to the detriment of anti-violence organizing in the United States.

We agree with many of the points laid out in our Democratic Socialists of America comrade Natalia Tylim's article, "[When Your Assaulter is the Lesser Evil](#)," particularly with her observation that the mainstream #MeToo movement's support for Dr. Blasey Ford during the Kavanaugh hearings was nowhere to be found when Tara Reade came forward with her accusations against Joe Biden. As Tylim states, "it's evident that feminists have failed the test of being able to stand up to the Democratic Party when sexual assault rears its head at an inopportune moment." However, we disagree with this characterization of #MeToo as a radical movement "on the brink of co-optation by the liberal establishment." The process of cooptation began long before Alyssa Milano ever tweeted #MeToo, because cooptation was interwoven with the development of the movements against sexual violence that preceeded it. We offer this history of anti-violence movement cooptation in the spirit of comradely disagreement, that we might all sharpen our analyses of the obstacles we face as socialists who wish to oppose sexual violence everywhere.

The #MeToo movement was not the work of any single organizer, but rather had multiple mothers. One of these mothers was Tarana Burke, an anti-violence organizer, and survivor who coined the metoo slogan while working with young Black women in the American South. Other foremothers include the Battered Women's Movement and Anti-Rape movements of the 1970s and 1990s, as well as the campus sexual assault activist wave that began in the early 2010s and immediately preceded #MeToo. The Women's March of January 2017 was another mother of the movement; its most enduring symbol, the pink pussy hat criticized by some trans feminists for its gender essentialism, was intended as a sharp rejoinder to Donald Trump crowing about his ability to assault women with impunity. Working women's movements like the Fight for Fifteen and organizing among farmworker women by the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas also contributed to the ferment around sexual violence in the years leading up to October 2017. When reporting from the New York Times and New Yorker on the sexual abuse of dozens of women and several famous actresses by Harvey Weinstein inspired Alyssa Milano to tweet the hashtag #MeToo, sparking an outpouring of personal testimony from millions of ordinary women about their experiences with harassment, sexual violence, and abuse, we should understand that moment as overdetermined.

#MeToo caught fire not because it was novel, but because it drew on decades of preceding organizing. Much of that organizing, however, was deeply entangled with the Democratic Party as well as capitalist and carceral state institutions. We cannot understand how the #MeToo movement failed to support Tara Reade without understanding the history of feminist anti-violence organizing in general. In the 1970s, women inspired by radical and revolutionary currents within the feminist movement founded rape crisis centers and women's shelters which provided direct services to victims of violence through peer support and mutual aid. At the same time, **anti-racist and feminist coalitions organized prisoner defenses of incarcerated survivors of violence** like Joan Little in North Carolina, Dessie Woods in Georgia, and Inez Garcia in California. The feminists who organized prisoner defenses critiqued not only the interpersonal violence

that had led to these survivors' incarceration but also the racist state violence that kept them behind bars.

Yet not all participants in the feminist movement shared this critique of the carceral state: Susan Brownmiller's landmark book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, which challenged prevailing rape myths and described rape as a fundamental tool of patriarchal domination, called for more aggressive prosecution and stiffer sentences for perpetrators of sexual violence. Angela Davis noted in [her critique of the book](#) that Brownmiller's text contributed to the "resuscitation of the old racist myth of the black rapist," going so far as to portray the brutally murdered fourteen-year old Emmett Till as a "guilty sexist" due to his alleged whistle at a white woman. The early push to bureaucratize the anti-violence movement and to collaborate with police and the courts was critiqued in 1977 by Santa Cruz Women Against Rape in their seminal "[Letter to the Anti-Rape Movement](#)." The authors stress the need for an international, revolutionary movement against rape and domination of all forms, and urge the mainstream anti-violence movement to join them.

Instead, in 1994 the institutionalization of the once radical feminist anti-violence movement was cemented with the passage of the Violence Against Women Act, a part of the omnibus Crime Bill from that year. The Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA, directed federal funds both towards the provision of services for survivors of violence, such as shelters and rape crisis centers, as well as toward the prosecution of accused rapists and batterers. At the same time, the Crime Bill as a whole intensified policing and stiffened penalties for a whole host of crimes. Anti-violence organizing in the decades to follow was at once professionalized and depoliticized by the flood of funding that accompanied the passage of VAWA. Joe Biden was a key architect of both VAWA and the Crime Bill, and has repeatedly made reference to VAWA's passage and reauthorization in attempts to win over women voters. Biden cited the passage of VAWA as a triumphant accomplishment in a [May 1st statement](#), while simultaneously using it as a shield against Tara Reade's accusations. If we want

to understand why the diffuse network of non-profit staffers, media personalities, activists, and Democratic Party politicians who might lay claim to the feminist mantle in the age of #MeToo was so singularly unwilling to oppose Joe Biden's nomination after Tara Reade came forward, the history of the anti-violence movement's institutionalization is vital.

The radical and liberatory elements of #MeToo have been in tension with this legacy of cooptation from the beginning. #MeToo's focus on the violence of wealthy and powerful men in politics and media was both a product of the movement's particular attention on privileged women but also contained within it the seeds of deeper anti-capitalist sentiment. Watching media titans like Harvey Weinstein and Matt Lauer and sitting Senators like Al Franken lose wealth, power, and status was genuinely thrilling. Yet the backlash for #MeToo came nearly immediately, not just from right-wing media figures and Republican politicians but from within the Democratic Party establishment as well. When Senator Kirsten Gillibrand called on Al Franken to resign after multiple allegations of sexual harassment, she was **swiftly punished by donors** who withdrew financial support. For Democrats, the writing was on the wall: going forward, #MeToo could attempt to topple Republican politicians like Brett Kavanaugh or Trump himself, but Democratic politicians were to be left alone.

Thus, while we disagree with our comrade Natalia Tylim's analysis of when and how #MeToo was coopted by the Democratic Party, we wholeheartedly agree with her assessment that the Democratic Socialists of America should champion the #MeToo movement in light of betrayals by the leadership of the Democratic Party. If feminist anti-violence activists are to have any hopes of holding Democratic politicians accountable or avoiding complicity with the carceral state, they will need a pole for their organizing capable of challenging the Democratic Party, whose current ticket features an author of the 1994 Crime Bill and a former DA who helped enforce the meteoric rise of mass incarceration in California. Feminists committed to anti-violence work need a left-wing movement which will resist the carceral state and fight for the abolition of

prisons and policing. This movement must also commit to transformative justice within its ranks, rather than attempting to quash accountability in the service of partisan advantage. Across the world, from Chile to Mexico to Poland, socialist feminists fighting against sexual violence and for bodily autonomy have been key leaders of broad-based left-wing movements. As our Emerge Caucus comrades **have argued**, the Democratic Socialists of America is the likeliest current formation in which to build “a party-like organization based in the working class,” and this organization could provide a political home for anti-violence organizing.

Unfortunately, at present the Democratic Socialists of America is not a natural home for this work. The reasons for this are twofold. First, DSA has not sought to be that home. While many socialist feminist members of DSA protested against Kavanaugh’s nomination in 2018, ongoing socialist feminist organizing in many large DSA chapters has not focused on sexual violence. Socialist feminists are part of many political projects in DSA with more or less feminist emphases, but explicit feminist organizing has concentrated around abortion access and reproductive justice (worthy causes!), not #MeToo and sexual violence. Second, DSA has experienced a number of scandals around both sexual misconduct and leadership missteps in addressing sexual misconduct in both the membership in general and in leadership. These scandals have shaken member trust in DSA, have caused dedicated socialist feminist organizers to leave DSA, and have caused loss of trust in DSA as an organization by unorganized socialist and anti-capitalist feminists who might have considered joining the organization otherwise.

This problem is not unique to DSA by any means, as failure to address sexual violence within movement spaces is a persistent threat to the left. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) dissolved in the first months of 2019 after its members lost faith in leadership, primarily but not only because of that leadership’s participation in covering up a rape committed by one of its members. The classic essay “**Why Misogynists Make Great Informants**” by Courtney Desiree Morris describes how tolerance of sexual violence within

movement spaces by leftist leaders, dating back to the Black Panther Party, does the work of COINTELPRO for the state. In the midst of uprisings around Black liberation and police brutality, several groups on the abolitionist left were publicly called out for harboring a serial abuser. Anecdotally, the authors can attest that similar problems have erupted both in DSA chapters across the country and in other socialist organizations on the US left.

Like our comrade Natalia Tylim, we were also [signatories to a letter to the National Political Committee of DSA](#) calling on DSA to make a statement in support of Tara Reade and against Joe Biden's candidacy (Biden was then the presumptive, not actual, Democratic nominee). The NPC ultimately made no such statement. As socialists, we recognize that if we have failed to persuade the national organization of the need to publicly stand in solidarity with survivors, it indicates a general weakness in socialist feminist organizing and development throughout DSA that can best be addressed by becoming better organized. We are pleased to announce the reformation of the national Socialist Feminist Working Group and hope that interested members who wish to build a mass movement against sexual violence will join or form local socialist feminist formations through their DSA chapters and engage in organizing in the national working group. In our next article, we will explore how the Democratic Socialists of America might address the persistent problem of sexual harassment and violence within its ranks while also building a socialist anti-violence movement that could serve as an alternative to the liberal and carceral feminist tendencies that have come to dominate anti-violence organizing in the United States.

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A Socialist Vision for Feminist Anti-Violence Organizing

by Alexandra W. and Elizabeth F.

partisanmag.com/a-socialist-vision-for-feminist-anti-violence-organizing

Prisons, Capitalism, and the State (and Revolution)

Emerge caucus member Yuri argues that one of the chief functions of policing and imprisonment is the management and disciplining of a reserve army of labor.

By Yuri K.

December 22, 2020

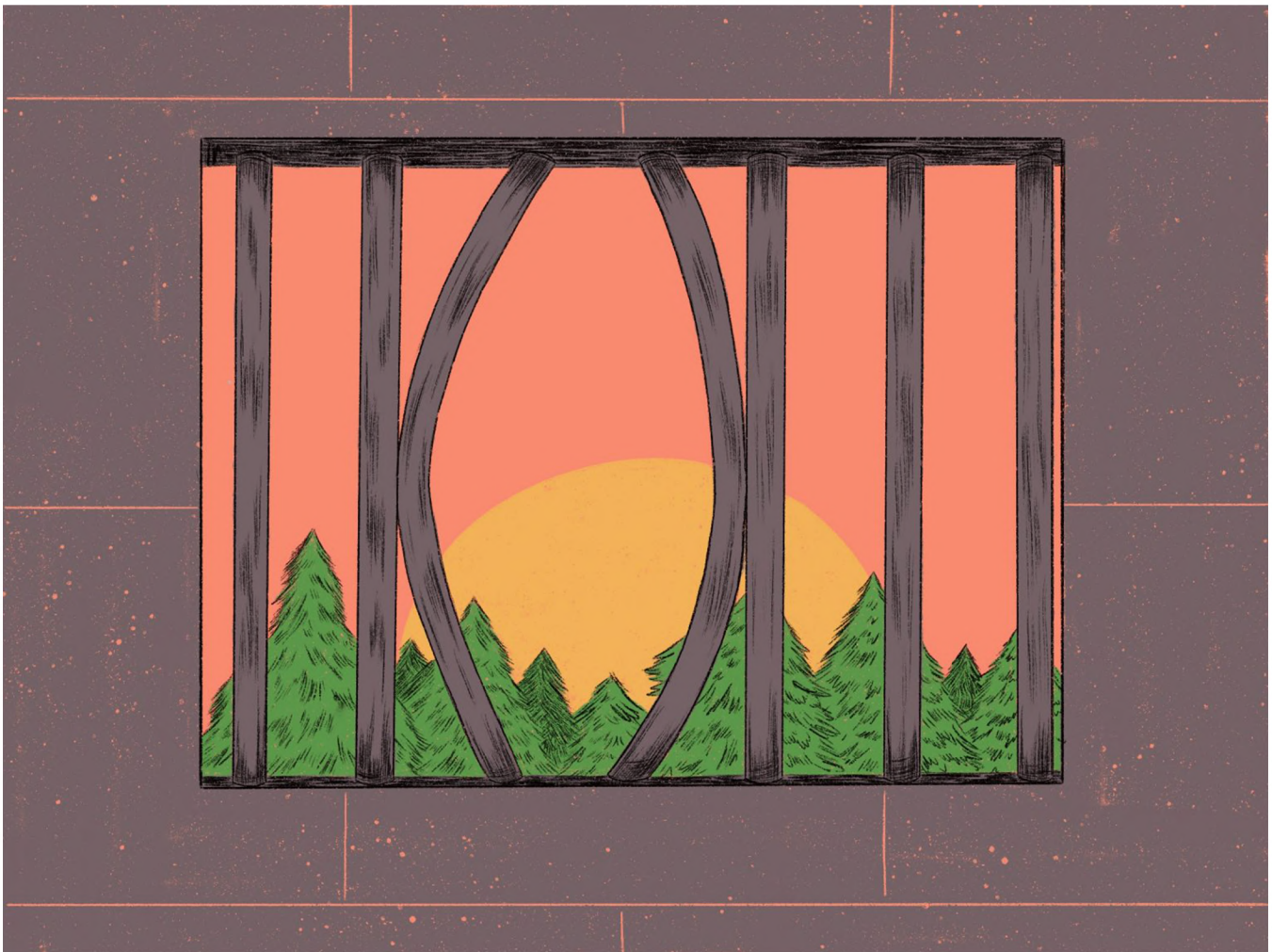


Illustration by Stephanie M.

AT this point, the idea that cops and prisons make us safer has very little credibility. Incarceration rates **don't meaningfully affect crime rates**, rates of police violence **don't track with rates of violent crime**, police largely **don't solve crimes**, and wage theft **consumes more money than all other kinds of theft combined** but largely **goes unpunished**. But if the carceral state isn't actually stopping theft or interpersonal violence, what is it for? What do the police actually protect? An obvious answer here is "profits," but it's worth delving into the mechanics, because much of the immediate profit generated by prisons isn't actually central to their function.

For instance, it's increasingly common knowledge that the United States uses its prisons as a source of slave labor. An incarcerated person might be paid pennies or nothing at all to **fight wildfires**, **repackage hand sanitizer**, or **serve in a governor's mansion**, replacing a worker from the outside who at least stands a chance of receiving the local minimum wage. Prison labor isn't actually free, however – in the US, it costs **an average of \$31,000** to lock someone up for a year, which is about double what it would cost to simply pay someone the current \$7.25 federal minimum wage to do a full-time job. Of course, prison labor can still be a means of channeling public money into private hands, but it largely isn't: **most prison labor serves other government departments**. It's more accurate to say that prison labor is a strategy to claw back a portion of the enormous cost of caging people than it is a motive to cage people in itself. Beyond this, most prisons are government-run: **only 9% of prisoners are actually held in private prisons**. So, how does the carceral system relate to capitalist profits?

In order to function, capitalism needs at least two classes of person. First, a small population of people who own basically everything: the land, the factories, the food, whatever. Second, an enormous population of people who own, if they're lucky, the clothes on their backs. (**How did things get this way?** Pay that no mind, says the first group.) This second class, the proletariat, is "**free in the double sense**"—on one hand, they're free to enter into whatever contracts they like with anyone of their choosing. On the other hand, they're free of all means of

subsistence, and have no way to keep themselves alive except by selling their labor to the bourgeoisie, the tiny group of people with all the property. So long as the proletariat sells each day's labor in exchange for just enough resources to stay alive another day, the bourgeoisie can continue to reap profits.

A problem will immediately present itself to the astute reader: why does the proletariat, the larger class, not simply eat the other one? To answer that, I turn to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. Drawing on Marx and Engels, Lenin wrote that in order to dominate another class, a would-be ruling class needs a state. A state, here, means a whole complex of relationships and institutions designed to mediate the irreconcilable conflict between the classes. Hundreds of years ago, the feudal state kept the aristocracy in charge of the peasantry; now, the capitalist state keeps the proletariat under the thumb of the bourgeoisie.

A state protects the ruling class in all sorts of ways. It has teachers, journalists, and entertainers to convince people that existing arrangements are just and natural. It has politicians, administrators, and bureaucrats to manage the flow of resources and set up gentlemen's agreements that mitigate the consequences of internal conflict—the bourgeoisie have to be protected from each other and prevented from consuming the working class so quickly there's nobody left to exploit, though this second restriction has much more to do with labor's ability to fight back than with capital's ability to plan ahead. Finally, it has **special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc.** to enforce the ruling class's decisions and protect that class from overthrow. These comprise the military and carceral infrastructure used to crack down on threats to power, whether internal or external: knights and praetorians in times before, soldiers and cops today. They're the state's last line of defense, and the implicit threat behind any command given by the ruling class or its representatives.

There's a subtler issue of sustainability in the scenario sketched out a few paragraphs ago. Not only must the proletariat work to survive, but *not every proletarian can work*. If there were full employment, **workers would have**

incredible bargaining power. To be properly at their master's mercy, workers have to be replaceable. There needs to be a **"reserve army of labor"**, a mass of unemployed and underemployed people who can be swapped in as existing workers flame out or wear down, and who can be relegated to the most dangerous and poorly-compensated jobs. Excluding people from the legal economy is, of course, much easier when there's pre-existing bigotry to draw on, whether founded on appearance, ancestry, gender, health, religion, or ability. Capitalism didn't invent male chauvinism or regional stereotypes, but it seized upon them as excuses for the division of labor, and maintains them because they increase profits. **Capitalism did invent race**, and at the same time **used race to invent itself**; the two are inseparable, as racism forms the basis for both rapacious looting of the global periphery and brutal repression within the imperial core.

A key function of the carceral system is to manage and discipline the reserve army of labor, as **when California's prison population ballooned in response to increased unemployment.** Another is to maintain the social disparities that create that army in the first place. Police violence doesn't happen to more marginalized people just because more of them happen to be unemployed—cops must actively hunt down the marginalized to maintain and reinforce marginalization, because racism, sexism, and other bigotry are crucial elements of the capitalist economy. When American police murder a Black civilian, poor or otherwise, they are faithfully doing their jobs, because the state they serve is built on the repression, enslavement, and exploitation of Black people.

A materialist perspective allows us to understand the carceral system first and foremost as a terror weapon. Police mete out violence not because their training has failed but because their training is working. Prisons torture and immiserate not to rehabilitate but to cause torment and misery. The cruelty is the point! Cops protect private property, not people, because capitalism sees people as replaceable but private property as sacrosanct. If we could simply take what we needed to survive from a common pool instead of having to jump through hoops

for the people who own it, the bourgeoisie couldn't force us to work and couldn't profit off our labor. They need prisons and cops to contain and coerce us.

From the Marxist perspective, prison abolition isn't like replacing a coal furnace with a solar panel; it's like wresting a gun from an assailant's hand. It's no surprise that Lenin **defined a revolutionary's job** as "the art of combating the political police"; we can't remove cops but keep capitalism, or remove capitalism but keep cops, because the cops are part of capitalism's last line of defense. To fight one is necessarily to fight both, and we have no choice but to win.

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Prisons, Capitalism, and the State (and Revolution)

by Yuri K.

partisanmag.com/prisons-capitalism-and-the-state-and-revolution

About

Partisan assembles members from four caucuses in the Democratic Socialists of America: the **Communist Caucus**, the **Red Caucus** in Portland, Oregon, **Emerge** in New York City, New York, and **Red Star** in San Francisco, California. Our aim is to establish a forum for communist discussion and organizing that unites us and others who share our vision for DSA. We share a belief that social change is only possible if the working class is organized and ready to make that change. Our vision for organizing centers the development of strong working-class institutions, an emphasis on the myriad facets of oppression under capitalism intertwined with class, and meaningful international solidarity and analysis.

We recognize that our political work is strengthened when channeled through all that DSA offers as a place to build projects and organize. DSA has come a long way over the past several years, often completing excellent and vital work. But we are only just beginning to build meaningful power for the working class and, by extension, the socialist movement. Continuing to expand DSA's work will require learning from our victories and defeats, then using that knowledge to improve our efforts as we move forward.

This publication will analyze and discuss our vision through the projects our caucuses have undertaken. We will draw on the experiences and insights of comrades around the world to reflect on strengths and weaknesses, and hash out strategies for future organizing. In addition, we will also offer critical analysis into the structure and operations of the DSA as we see it now. We hope to outline a vision of coordinated efforts within the organization we believe are necessary to build genuine working-class power.

We hope this publication serves as a resource for organizers of all types within DSA, including those within our caucuses, those not yet sure how they or the work they're doing fit into DSA's current projects, and those looking to improve DSA's work. We will offer tools for organizing externally and internally, and forge a dialogue with those interested in discussing our work.

As active DSA organizers, we are committed with an unshakable resolve to the communist horizon. It is in this spirit that we present Partisan: not to interpret the world, but to change it.

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