MIDWEST SOCIALIST

midwestsocialist.com | FALL 2018

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

MIDWEST SOCIALIST is published four times per year by the Chicago chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, for its membership and contributing branches. Chicago DSA can be reached at:

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ST. LOUIS RECHARTERED its local DSA chapter in early 2017, and in the year since we've been actively engaged in a number of different statewide and St. Louis-specific campaigns. In all of these, we strive to uphold the goals and values of our local chapter and the DSA organization: delivering meaningful material improvements that help build our organizing capacity, fighting back against corporate dominance, and building coalitions of the working class.

In August we scored a major victory with the repeal of Missouri's Right to Work law. Experience teaches us that states which enact Right to Work see marked declines in salaries, benefits, and the ability to organize; this repeal reverses a serious threat to workers' rights. In the lead-up to the repeal initiative, St. Louis DSA hosted a voter registration drive and a rally with local union, community, and political leaders speaking on the dangers of Right to Work laws. We had members canvassing and phonebanking to ensure Right to Work was soundly defeated at the polls.

Looking forward, there are two other statewide initiatives we have been supporting since their early stages. The CLEAN Act is a state constitutional amendment that includes much-needed campaign finance, election, and lobbying reforms. In addition to bringing candidate donation limits more in line with federal standards (there is no limit under current Missouri law), it radically limits lobbyist donations, closes loopholes that allow big money donors to hide in shell corporations, and moves congressional redistricting authority to a non-partisan board in an attempt to reduce gerrymandering. There is also an initiative to increase the statewide minimum wage to $12 an hour—important not only for the thousands of workers across Missouri, but also as pushback against a state legislature that has overturned municipal attempts to set their own minimum wage.

On the local level, we are engaged in a two-pronged effort to fight our city's increasing trends toward neoliberalization and gentrification. First, we are involved in the organizing coalition behind the STL: Not For Sale campaign that is combatting local attempts to privatize our airport. Instead of letting a small group of developer-friendly politicians decide the fate of our municipal assets, our strategy is to let the voters determine the future of our shared public resources. While the airport is the first staging ground, our hope is to build a strong coalition able to resist future attempts to gut other utilities, such as water, sanitation, or parking. Finally, in conjunction with local community organizations and other leftist organizers—and under the umbrella of the national Homes for All coalition—we have started working with tenants and residents to stand up and fight against predatory landlords, developers, and outside investors that are working to shape our communities without our input.

There is an adage that "action is the oxygen of an organization." While we agree that practice is important for any meaningful socialist organizing, we also recognize the importance of making sure our values are articulated clearly in all of our work. This mutual relationship between actions and values is the strongest basis for building a socialist future.

— Lauren Pyatt and Christopher Ottolino,
St. Louis DSA

Socialism shall overcome

By Dylan Parker

A speech by the alderman from Rock Island, Dylan Parker

The following is a transcript of a speech given by Rock Island alderman and DSA member Dylan Parker at Chicago DSA's Debs-Parsons-Randolph Dinner fundraiser on May 18, 2018. This speech has been edited for length and clarity.

In April of last year, I became one of a handful of DSA members that are privileged to represent our communities with elected office.

Let me offer a little backstory for the 2017 Rock Island municipal elections. For several years prior to the election, the previous council and city staff, recognizing the need for more retail sales tax revenue to support city functions, engaged in a multi-year $25 million dollar bonding campaign to bulldoze a derelict strip mall in an economically depressed part of town in hopes to secure a new Walmart. It was massively unpopular with residents and when Walmart finally rescinded their proposal to build in Rock Island, the city was left holding the multi-million-dollar debt bag. Money that historically had been used for street repair was shuffled to finance debt payments and we still, to this day, have a massive empty lot waiting for development. Understanding this climate, it didn't take ardent socialists to respond to my campaign mailers renouncing "corporate welfare." However, what was most incredible, upon being sworn in as alderman, was the council's complete lack of ideas for what to do next.

So, I pounced on the opportunity and used the citizen backlash against city-funded speculative development agreements to fuel support for programs that benefit ordinary residents: neighborhood empowerment, open government, urban gardens, and welcoming policies for immigrants and refugees. I'm confident that we'll pass policies that clamp down on landlords and vacant property owners, increase our city's commitment to environmental sustainability, and explore ideas like participatory budgeting.

I recently had a conversation with our mayor, who is likely the most opposite from me regarding the political spectrum, about our city's problem of local small businesses failing to have succession plans. When the owner is ready to retire, they simply close shop, resulting in job loss and tax revenue loss for the city. I recently proposed that our city create a worker-buyout program to assist workers to collectively buy their places of work from their ready-to-retire bosses. It's 100 percent within the motto of socialism's "workers owning the means of production," but it's also a realistic proposal to resolve an issue we have in our business community.

So, where do we go from here? In the words of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., what is the "real and genuine alternative providing the same living standards and opportunities which were swept away by a force called progress?" All of us in this room know the answer: democratic socialism.

The threat of automation is not a threat of liberating the working class from repetitive menial labor, but rather a threat of further ownership consolidation by the capitalists. As socialists, we should advocate for replacing human-machines with mechanical-machines. As humans, our days should be spent in recreation or the humanities—outdoorsmanship, music, family, or creative ambitions—not tied to an assembly line for hours on end.

No, the threat of automation is the same threat of capitalism: that the individual with private property rights to the means of production deserves all wealth generated from said system. The private property rights that allowed man to enslave man, king to conscript serf, and boss to employ child are corrupt, arbitrary, and immoral. So, too, is a system that "snuffs out the hopes and lives of the people by whom the industry was built."

Therefore, we offer an alternative to massive unemployment or meritocratic job-readiness training programs: that each cabbie replaced by an autonomous vehicle be part-owner of their replacement; That social safety nets are sufficient to alleviate the suffering of unemployment; That the basic necessities of life be ripped from commodification and privatization and rather offered to and provided by all.

This is our charge—from the smallest of cities to the largest of metropolises, from rural farmland to concrete jungles—the needs of all shall not be subservient to the desires of a few.

The crimes against our communities by the Walmarts of the world are becoming more and more apparent. The truth of wealth inequality, racial inequality, sex inequality, class inequality, and all the other ways in which humanity subverts the autonomy of another is rising. The truth of liberty, justice and equality is still climbing the scaffold. With your help, it shall be overcome.

What is Late Capitalism?

By Ramsin Canon

An explanation of capitalism's 'extra innings'

Capitalism developed in stages, and "late capitalism" is capitalism's overtime—its extra innings. Find a troubling story about some boss's creative way to take advantage of workers or about some desperate family go-funding money to pay for basic human needs and you can find a comment underneath it: "Late capitalism."

The way you hear "late capitalism" used, it's basically interchangeable with "nasty social rot." That's basically right, but it's useful to understand what exactly "late capitalism" refers to in its Marxist sense.

"Late capitalism," both in its original meaning when the idea was developed in the 1960s and '70s and as it is used today describes capitalism that is "late" in the sense that it is spilling over its time. It's capitalism that has begun to cannibalize itself in order to survive. It is a social system that has fully "industrialized" and "commodified" human life, so that everything has become "pay to play," and so we are all more in debt and more insecure than is sustainable. To put it another way, late capitalism cannot survive because it cannot reproduce itself, since it is consuming itself. This is why stories about "late capitalism" are grotesque stories of needless suffering next to grotesque stories of obscene wealth; stories of dazzling technology next to stories of crumbling basic human needs.

It's capitalism that has begun to cannibalize itself in order to survive. It is a social system that has fully "industrialized" and "commodified" human life, so that everything has become "pay to play," and so we are all more in debt and more insecure than is sustainable.

Capitalism is usually discussed as having developed in stages. For a capitalist society to develop, there has to be capital—there has to be an immense excess of value that can be reinvested in productive enterprises. For capital to come into being, there have to be large enough numbers of workers who produce things—commodities—and large enough numbers of people to purchase them. That obviously can't happen all at once. A phase of "primitive accumulation," when capital first begins to organize, and creates a working class through the destruction of old ways of production is necessary first. This gives way to a phase of intense competition between small and mid-sized firms, that is relatively "free," meaning workers and the state haven't developed the systems to regulate capital yet. The nature of capitalist competition weeds out the smaller firms over time, and the need for new markets and ever-cheaper labor and resources then results in monopoly capitalism, when international firms arise and entire industries come to be dominated by fewer and fewer firms—and competition for colonial possessions and imperial domination of developing societies becomes more intense.

Because historically the period of monopoly capitalism happened at the same time as the rise of socialist revolution and socialist economies, some Marxists beginning in the 1940s and '50s speculated that capitalism was in a phase of contradiction it couldn't escape. But, after the Second World War, despite strong trade unions, mixed economies with state planning all throughout the West, and comparatively heavy regulation of the economy, capitalism didn't collapse. In fact, it seemed to get more entrenched.

After the Second World War, even the most capitalistic of societies—the U.S., the United Kingdom, Western Europe and Japan—gave up on pre-war "liberal" capitalism and pursued "planning," what later came to be known as "mixed economies." "Planning" referred to heavy state intervention in the economy—massive public spending financed by high taxes to make sure national economies stayed competitive and employment and wages stayed high enough that the social decay that led to the Second World War wouldn't be repeated. In what is now considered the "Golden Age" of capitalism, from 1945 to 1970, economic planning and heavy intervention in the economy,

once considered a sinister invention of the socialist countries, became widely accepted as necessary to maintain social order.

At first, Marxists thought that this level of planning and intervention spelled eventual doom for capitalism, because the capitalist class was losing their grip on the political order as economic planning became institutionalized and that planning proved capable of creating an immense amount of wealth. The capitalist class began suffering from an increasing "profit squeeze" as workers and the public captured more and more of the value they produced, both through wages and public spending. Capital found it harder and harder to reproduce itself at the same time as immense wealth was being created—enough wealth in fact that the needs of much humanity could be met through simple redistribution. If capital could not reproduce itself through capturing profits, capitalism would simply cease to be. The end, it seemed, was nigh.

By the 1970s, foreign competition became more intense as countries finally fully emerged from the effects of the Second World War and anti-colonial struggles. The U.S. was no longer able to underpin the world financial system with its gold reserves, and the result was inflation. U.S. workers, buoyed by large-scale collective bargaining agreements (union contracts) in major industries and an immense level of public sector employment, kept their wage and benefit demands high despite creeping unemployment. The maturation of developing countries raised the cost of raw materials, and in the case of the international oil cartel OPEC, caused severe price shock. The political necessity of keeping unemployment low and for increasing social spending to address roiling demands to end social inequality and environmental degradation simply made it impossible for capitalists to capture enough profit to reproduce themselves.

So beginning in the late 1960s and accelerating in the 1970s, capital waged a counter-offensive to save private profit and private control of production. Instead of collapsing in an orderly fashion, capitalism went into overtime by assaulting worker self-organization, privatizing what had been publicly controlled, and undoing the social policies that ate into profits—those programs funded by direct taxation and regulations that cost firms money to implement, like environmental safeguards. Critically, because big companies can more easily amass profits than small ones, antitrust laws were gutted to allow for massive levels of concentration in industries, often with profits guaranteed by public subsidies. To buy itself time, in other words, capitalism began trying to suck profit out of every possible area of human existence, funding it at the expense of the public, while undercutting the social fabric that encouraged collective action.

This is why the social rot caused by "late capitalism" (or "neoliberalism") often seem so vicious. Late capitalism addressed the "profit squeeze" by transferring wealth and power from the people to private individuals, especially large firms, which, again, are best adapted to ensure large profits. The process of "wealth transfer" isn't just transactional—it's violent. The only way to wrench what someone has and give it to someone else is through the use of power, and in late capitalism, it requires using power against the less powerful on behalf of the powerful.

Where once someone could choose a career "path" with a relatively predictable course, job tenure has become ever shorter, as people lost job protections and a safety net that gave them bargaining power, and firms became more likely to be bought out or to collapse. Advancement and security became less a matter of being consistently productive, and more a matter of becoming a valuable, flexible "package" (or "brand") of a person. Social insurance such as welfare, health care for all, reliable transit, and social housing were designed to provide some basic predictability in the worst-case scenarios. With the disappearance of social programs, our ability to survive in society hinges on being "employable" and "flexible." In other words, in order to survive, individuals in late capitalism have to completely transform into commodities themselves.

Human life in capitalism's extra innings depends completely on our value to an ever-smaller number of capitalists in pursuit of ever-greater profit, which is the only way for capitalism to survive into the future.

Advancement and security [in the work place] became less a matter of being consistently productive, and more a matter of becoming a valuable, flexible "package" (or "brand") of a person.

The complex legacy of Act 10

By Karl Locher

2011's Act 10 has far-reaching implications even now

Wisconsin's Act 10 of 2011 is often remembered as the law that ended collective bargaining for public sector employees in the state. Yet its scope was far greater than collective bargaining, and in many ways far more beneficial for the capitalist class. Notably, collective bargaining is not entirely eliminated through Act 10, but rather restricted to bargaining over base wages and cost-of-living adjustments that are tied to the consumer price index. The bill did not target all public-sector unions and instead focused on teachers and caregivers while exempting police, firefighters, and the state patrol. The result of this was to target women in Wisconsin's public-sector workforce, who disproportionately comprise the labor of teaching and caregiving in this state.

Strategic thinking on these matters is crucial for future socialist organizing, as Act 10 was not a blind attack on unions but a calculated effort to divide and injure the working class.

By allowing for collective bargaining of base wages, Act 10 serves to reinforce a foundational tenet of capitalist ideology, which is that if an individual works hard, that person shall be appropriately rewarded. It is a policy that creates an illusion of equity in a fundamentally exploitative labor market for public employees. Thus, the post-Act 10 scheme perpetuates the myth of individual merit, an idea that hides many capitalism's sins, from the supposed justice of free-market economics to white privilege. This myth is central to the conservative narrative that speaks to the working class and also identifies the source of working class turmoil in unions and market regulations.

Buried beneath the restrictions on collective bargaining were massive pay decreases for public sector employees across Wisconsin. The bill requires state employees to share 50 percent of the cost of their contributions to the Wisconsin Retirement System—previously paid by the employer—amounting to 5.8 percent of individual salaries as of 2011. Further, employees were required to increase their share of healthcare premium payments from 6 percent to 12.6 percent, while the state was simultaneously directed to explore "health insurance cost containment strategies." The result was a pay cut of massive proportions for Wisconsin's state employees. By 2014, Governor Walker estimated that about $3 billion had been cut from employee compensation.

Walker's combination of massive pay cuts and collective bargaining restrictions set a rhetorical trap for union leadership. AFSCME had refused to accede to terms similar to Act 10 during contract negotiations only a few months earlier. By later offering to accept the egregious pay cuts in exchange for the protection of collective bargaining, Governor Walker was able to paint public sector unions as only interested in their self-preservation through collective bargaining, rather than the welfare of their members. Although AFSCME and other unions offered concessions as a tactic to appear "reasonable," the result was a massive failure both for the unions as organizations and for the welfare of the working class. The essential thrust of Act 10, which is to extract more labor from the working class for less money, is the hallmark of the Walker era. As Wisconsin reaches historically low unemployment, we are also experiencing increased poverty and low wages.

The "budget repair bill" goes on to strip Limited Term Employees of access to health and retirement benefits, allocate $22 million to the Department of Corrections and the adult prison system, and authorize the sale of Wisconsin's heating plants to private ownership.

Just as the collective bargaining regulations were gendered, Act 10 also allocated $37 million in Temporary Aid for Needy Families revenue to the Earned Income Tax Credit program. Walker sought to buy goodwill from the white working class—the primary beneficiaries of EITC—with the stolen money of black workers who disproportionately rely on TANF.

The aftermath of Act 10 underscores the need for a coherent politics founded in a critical analysis of capitalism. The consequences of Act 10 are that the working class is making less money while working hard than ever. Meanwhile, the material needs of survival—healthcare, housing, education, water—were either made more expensive or simply unavailable as a direct result of the 2011 legislative session. All of this occurred as the Republican legislative agenda sought to alienate workers from one another along lines of race, gender, and economic privilege. As we look forward to the future of class struggles, our focus must be on the needs of the working class, not simply the institutions of liberal political economy to which we have become accustomed.

Fighting against deportations

By Laura Colaneri

Chicago DSA comes out in force to support immigrants

On July 6, a crowd of about 100 people gathered to protest the continued use of the Gary Jet Center in Gary, Indiana, to deport thousands of immigrants. One speaker at the event, Ryan Farrar, a Democratic candidate for Indiana's state senate, briefly mentioned what he saw as a mischaracterization of Democratic policies by Republicans. They say Democrats want open borders, but Democrats aren't saying that, he claimed. This solicited a perhaps unexpected reaction from the crowd: "Open borders, open borders," many chanted approvingly. This moment was reflective of the overall mood at the Stop Gary Deportations Protest: a sense that the status quo is no longer acceptable, that prevailing liberal norms must be pushed farther left if we are to change our world for the better.

The purpose of the event, organized by Northwest Indiana Resistance, was to protest the Gary Jet Center's contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to deport undocumented immigrants that are detained throughout Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Kentucky. Nearly every Friday, immigrants are shackled and shuttled in buses and vans with the windows blacked out from the Kankakee County Jail and loaded onto planes, then sent elsewhere in the U.S. before being deported to their final destinations. By June 28, 2017, over 12,000 people had been deported out of the Gary airport, according to the Post-Tribune, although a FOIA request obtained by Ruth Needleman, co-organizer of the rally, put the number at 19,501 people as of April 2017.

The July 6 protest built upon the recent national outrage over family separations at the border, and several groups rallied in support, including forty or so members of Chicago Democratic Socialists of America, who arrived on a bus provided by Jobs with Justice and Service Employees International Union.

It was easy to see at the rally that exposure to a variety of radical voices helped the groups in attendance to become better informed about the issues surrounding immigrant rights and the long-standing history of racism and anti-immigrant policies in the United States. The inclusion of speakers associated with Organized Communities Against Deportations, Black Lives Matter Northwest Indiana-Gary, and local labor unions and religious groups also served to articulate the intersecting elements at play.

Many, including clergy and leaders of several religious groups in attendance, pointed out the humanitarian and moral crisis of tearing families apart. Miguel Molina, an Indiana university student and DACA recipient, hasn't seen his sister in over five years. His mother has been prevented from seeing several family members before their deaths or attending their funerals because of the border that separates them.

Others, like Lorrell, an activist with Black Lives Matter, highlighted the racism that unites the fight for immigrant rights with the struggles of the black community. She linked the state violence and mass deportations suffered by immigrants to the police violence suffered by black citizens in Gary and the overall system of mass incarceration. Barbara Suarez Galeano, a member of OCAD and the Detention Watch Network, called the crowd to remember that the impacted communities have been fighting for their own liberation for a long time and that we must recognize their leadership and join the call to abolish ICE, an institution "based in racist violence" that cannot be reformed.

Labor activists also weighed in. Gustavo Orellana, a member of SEIU Healthcare Indiana, pointed out that the United States economy overwhelming relies upon immigrant labor. "If they really wanted to deport 12 million people, this economy would crash," he said. Needleman, the event's co-organizer with NWI Resistance, connected immigration with the massive displacement of refugees directly caused by global capitalism and U.S. imperialism. The U.S. government is willing to exploit their labor and resources, she pointed out, but has always persecuted people of color themselves.

The co-chairs of Chicago DSA's anti-racism working group, Marvin Benjamin and Ed Hirsch, coordinated Chicago DSA's attendance at the event. Benjamin and Hirsch are hopeful that democratic socialists in Chicago can play a role in supporting and furthering the work already being done by experienced groups. By supporting actions like the July 6 rally and organizing to bus members to the weekly Friday protests, Chicago DSA can both draw attention to the issue and have a direct impact.

And as for Ruth Needleman, when asked for her advice for Chicagoans coming down to Indiana to help: "Keep coming."

Abby Agriesti contributed additional reporting to this story.

EUGENE V. DEBS announced that he had become a socialist in 1897, when he was 42. Debs had already spent his lifetime as an active trade unionist and political activist in his home city of Terre Haute, Indiana. He had served six months in jail as a result of his forceful leadership during the great Pullman Strike of 1894. Many AFL unions can trace their beginnings to Eugene Debs' early career. After 1897, his devotion to American socialism and socialist idealism placed him at the center of many of the political and labor struggles of the early part of the century, including the founding of the IWW. He ran for President as the Socialist Party candidate five times, the last time from his jail cell where he was serving a sentence for encouraging Americans to resist induction into the Army during World War One. Debs' socialism was not based on theory or on academic stricture. His was an honest idealism emanating from his indignation at the political, economic and social repression of working people.