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DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

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LAST YEAR WAS BUSY for Detroit DSA. When hotel workers at the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel went on strike in downtown Detroit, DSA members were there on the picket lines. We turned out over 30 members for the first public solidarity rally. Detroit DSA members joined the picket line throughout the strike, stopping in whenever they could—on lunch breaks and after work. The hotel workers were victorious, and ratified a new contract on November 3rd that raises wages by 20 percent over the next four years.

We recently published the first issue of our newspaper, The Detroit Socialist. The paper, which is both in print and online, includes a wide variety of articles on our recent activities. There are also great essays from Detroit DSA members about why they joined DSA. The paper includes a print-only kids page written by one of our younger comrades.

Our Medicare for All working group led canvassing efforts to drum up efforts to pressure our legislators to support Medicare for All. Hours after the November election, our Governor-Elect Gretchen Whitmer appointed Dan Loep, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield Michigan to her transition team. Detroit DSA has circulated a petition calling for his removal, our members have been calling the transition office and protesting in Lansing.

We've undertaken a number of efforts to educate our members about socialism. Our Socialist Night School has been a huge success, and has covered a number of topics including labor, electoral politics, and anti-racism. We also have a reading group that meets twice a month, which focuses on book-length readings. Recently, they have been reading Women and Socialism by Sharon Smith.

At our last meeting, we had a lively discussion about what role we as socialists should play in electoral politics. We were, of course, very excited to see our endorsed candidate (and DSA member!) Rashida Tlaib win in the 13th congressional district. Our members also worked for Padma Kuppa, who won in Michigan's 41st house district, which had previously been held by a Republican.

Our socialist feminist group continues with monthly clinic escorting, and they have started a drive to collect menstrual pads for homeless women. Earlier in 2018 we did our first bowl-a-thon for abortion access, which was hopefully the start of an annual tradition.

We held a brake light clinic on the first Saturday of November in Pontiac. Our members braved the cold and were able to change the brake lights on 14 vehicles. Our Medicare for All working group joined the effort and tabled at the clinic, talking to people about the need for universal healthcare.

Great things are happening in Detroit DSA, and we hope to do even more in 2019.

— Catherine Hoffman,
Detroit DSA

If you want to see more from Detroit DSA, you can read The Detroit Socialist at medium.com/dsa-detroit-newspaper

DSA stands up for choice

By Lauren Bianchi

The anti-choice movement must be stopped, no matter what

Each January, thousands of anti-abortion activists gather in Chicago's Federal Plaza for the largest anti-abortion event in Illinois, the March for Life Chicago. Wielding banners and yellow balloons, the annual event serves as the midwest extension of the massive national March for Life in Washington, D.C. March for Life organizers aim to "mark with deep sadness the great tragedy of the legalization of abortion in the United States." The event's timing is tied to the January 22 anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark 1973 ruling in Roe V. Wade, which made legal abortion the law of the land.

During the past four decades, the conservative anti-abortion movement has waged a tireless campaign to restrict abortion rights toward their ultimate goal of overturning Roe. Events such as March for Life are part of the right's strategy to turn Roe into a rallying cry for their side. As pro-choice Chicagoans, we refuse to allow Roe's legacy to be erased.

We are part of a coalition of pro-choice activists committed to defending abortion access. Since 2013, we have rallied each January in opposition to March for Life Chicago. Our yearly counter-demonstration calls on all women, all people who can become pregnant, and all parents to join together against the dangerous lies and substantial threat the anti-abortion right poses. We celebrate Roe's life-saving impact for so many thousands spared from back-alley abortions and march for an expansion of access to safe and affordable reproductive health care, gender-affirming care, and all the resources to raise healthy children for those who choose to have them.

Far from tragic, access to abortion is necessary for bodily autonomy. One's ability to choose if and when to become pregnant and carry to term is fundamental to our humanity and basic dignity. As the recent #MeToo movement reminds us, gender equality is not possible until women have full ownership of our own bodies.

The election of Donald Trump has further emboldened the anti-choice right. While Trump historically described himself as "very pro-choice," his views shifted dramatically to the right during his campaign. In a 2016 interview with MSNBC host Chris Matthews, Trump suggested that women who had abortions were deserving of "some form of punishment," a statement far surpassing the views of the conservative mainstream.

Trump's administration has quietly succeeded in stripping state funding for Planned Parenthood and banning allocation of federal funds to global aid groups that promote abortion. Both Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have made their anti-abortion commitments clear, with Pence calling Trump "the most pro-life president in American history."

Trump's attacks are only the latest setback in a decades long fight. Though overturning Roe remains their highest aspiration, the anti-choice movement has gained considerable ground by targeting abortion rights at the state level.

This strategy has yielded devastating results. Since 2010, states have passed over 400 laws restricting abortion. Mounting legal restrictions have eliminated abortion access for millions of women, particularly those living outside of major cities. In 2014, Guttmacher Institute found that an astounding 90 percent of all U.S. counties had no remaining abortion clinics. For most patients, financing an abortion now includes the cost of travel, housing, and unpaid work days in addition to the procedure itself.

More than 45 years after Roe, a majority of Americans say they support legal abortion, but this fact alone won't protect our rights. In terms of visibility, the anti-choice movement has dominated the narrative for too long. The vocal and well-funded forces of the anti-abortion movement cannot be ignored out of existence. To stop them, we must publicly and confidently oppose them wherever they go. This means mobilizing our communities for confident public protests in support of abortion access and against their lies and hate. Further, we must do more than merely protect the few rights we have left; we must insist that healthcare is a human right and that all healthcare, including abortion, should be available for free, on demand, and without apology.

To successfully defend legal abortion in this century, we'll have to reclaim the legacy of Roe and carry its lessons to a new generation of pro-choice activists. Roe was decided in the courts but could not have been won without the work of activists in the Women's Liberation Movement who boldly fought for free abortion on demand and the repeal of all abortion restrictions. The future of abortion access is up to us and the stakes could not be higher.

A version of this article appeared previously in Socialist Worker.

‘Parenthood in the age of fear’

By Lori Barrett

An interview with mother, author, activist Kim Brooks

Kim Brooks wrote a 2014 essay for Salon about leaving her then four-year-old son in a locked minivan while she went into a store for five minutes. Someone noticed her son and thought he was in danger. Instead of approaching Brooks, or waiting by the car until she returned, that person went to the authorities. Her shame, anger, and curiosity about what happened were visceral in that essay. In the years since, she’s spoken with other mothers who’ve been arrested for similar choices, and she’s researched the societal factors that make us see danger rather than independence for children left unattended, even for five or 10 minutes. She put what she’s learned into a new book, Small Animals: Parenthood in the Age of Fear. We sat down to talk with Brooks about her book and community in Chicago under Rahm Emanuel.

MWS: Your book originated from an incident where you left your son in the car for five minutes while you ran into the store to buy a single item. You knew the lay-out of the store: it was a Target. And somebody videotaped your child. Can you tell us about that?

KB: Someone called the police. I was originally charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, although my son was fine. There was no problem in terms of his safety. Over the course of two years while the legal repercussions were unfolding, I started questioning our culture of intensive, fearful hyperparenting. I questioned why things had changed so much in a generation or two in how safe we think it is for children to be unsupervised. That was the launching point, which I use to do reporting, research, and cultural criticism.

You found that parents who can are spending money to create a social life for their children, while at the same time we’re spending more time with our children.

Not long ago I read Robert Putnam’s book Bowling Alone. He argues that the most important factor in a child’s development and educational success is not income of parent or the educational level of parents. It’s not what I thought at all. It’s the amount of social capital in a child’s community, or their social connectedness. It’s the sense that there are other people besides their parents looking out for them, and it’s making connections across the community.

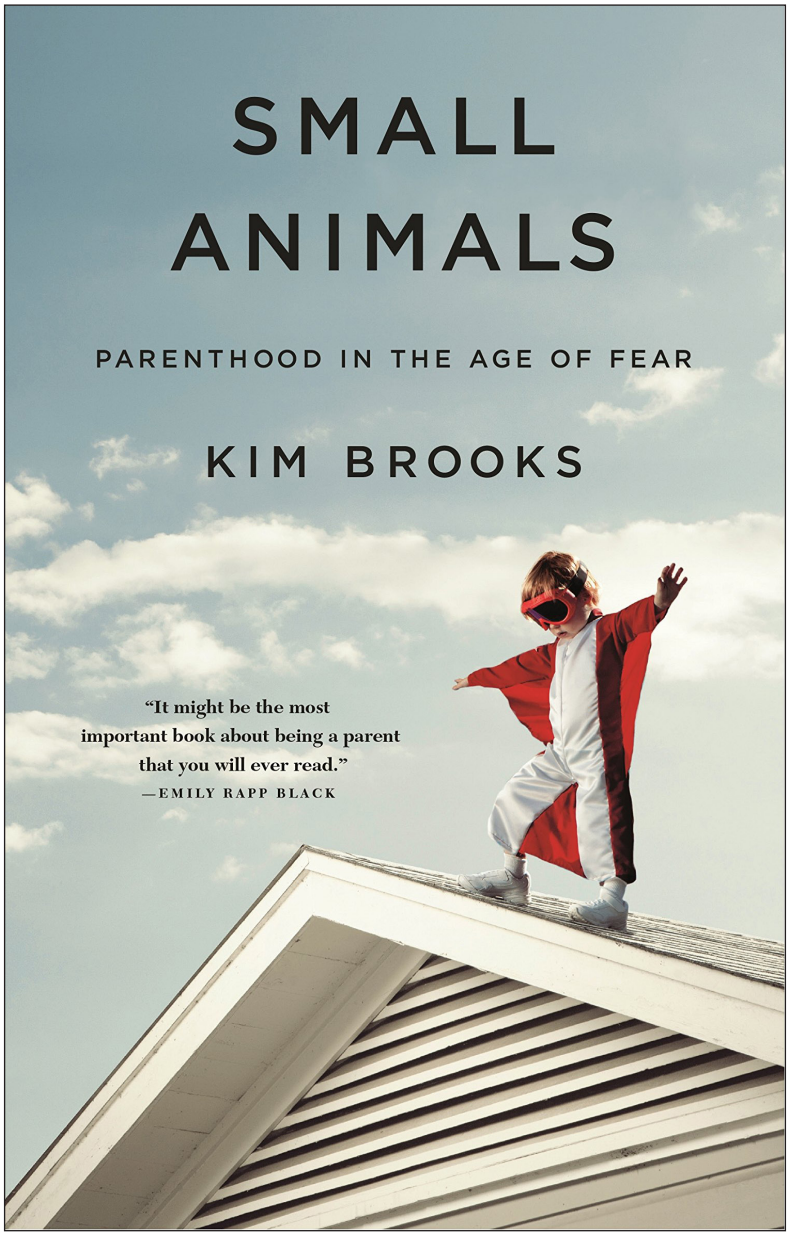
When I read that I was all the more disturbed in thinking about the ways community has changed over the last 30 years. When I was young or my parents were young, a lot of the things that children needed were socialized or came from community. Education—most children went to public schools. Also recreation—sports leagues and clubs were done through schools, public libraries, community organizations. Putnam writes about the deterioration of these social organizations that brought people together. As they’ve been attacked by hostile policies, parents have had to pick up the slack. If you want to provide children with a good education, friends, enrichment activities, you have to pay for it. So we see an exacerbation in inequalities, because if people can’t pay for it, their kids don’t get it and they fall further behind. The wealthy insure their children a place among the affluent. And the people in the middle scramble to create that social capital with their own private resources.

We’re meeting at a time when women’s rage is palpable. Let’s talk about about harassment and mothers. You write that: “We hate poor, lazy mothers. We hate rich selfish mothers. We hate mothers who have no choice but to work, but also mothers who don’t need to work and want to do so. It isn’t hard to see the common denominator.” Then a friend steers you to a word other than hate.

Contempt. That was an interesting conversation. We were thinking about the difference between hatred and contempt, and we came up with the theory that contempt comes from someone getting out of the place they’ve been assigned. We’re contemptuous of people who try to be something different or more than we think they should be.

I think it’s accurate to say we have a lot of contempt for women in general, but especially mothers. There’s a deep ambivalence and at times even hostility toward women who are mothers and who also try to do or be anything else, to participate in public life or be full members of society. If you don’t believe this ambivalence exists, just look at our policies or lack of policies, and the institutions that

support working mothers and families. We're the only industrialized country in the world that has no support system in place to help women and parents work while also caring for children. We've completely privatized the cost of raising children. Women are the ones who have borne the brunt of that privatization. Rather than make the policy changes necessary to support women and allow them to take part in public life, we make it impossible for them. We say you can do everything you want; you can work; you can have children. But you've got to figure out how to make that work. And not just make it work in terms of loving and feeding and sheltering your children, but also in terms of meeting impossible standards of round-the-clock supervision. And if you fail to meet those, at best you'll be shamed or stigmatized. At worst, you can even be arrested. So, I think it's fair to say there's a lot of contempt toward mothers.



Kim Brooks released *Small Animals: Parenthood in the age of Fear* in August 2018.

You also say that this privatization has led to a fracturing of community, and that's why the person who filmed your son in the car didn't approach you.

There's not a sense of people looking out for children. We've shifted away from that. You look out for your own children and that's it. You don't bear any responsibility for other people's kids or the kids in your community. It breeds this parenting as a competitive sport rather than a communal responsibility.

You describe how after your run-in with the law and child protective services, your reading around parenthood shifted from how-to books to books that were more about anthropology and sociology. And you cite a lot of research about economics, policy, and anthropology. Was there one book or scholar or theory that surprised you the most?

Probably the thing that made the greatest impression on me was this cognitive scientist named Barbara Sarnecka at UC Irvine, who did a study to see how the moral judgements we make impact risk assessment. She found that if we see a parent doing something with their child that we think is risky, we morally judge that parent. She also found the reverse can be true. When we judge a mother, whatever that mother is doing, we assess it as risky. This was important to me because I couldn't figure out why people thought I had done something very wrong, or why people think women shouldn't take their eyes off their children. That viewpoint seems sticky—it seems so immune to reason and statistics and logical arguments about child safety. It showed me that you're not really dealing with rational analysis, you're dealing with moral judgement of women and mothers. That kind of religious or moral thinking is much harder to sway.

Was it her study that showed the dad who left his kid in the car was seen as less guilty?

Not exactly. She manipulated the supposed reasons the parent leaves the child. She found that if a mother leaves her child because she's struck by a car and knocked unconscious for a few minutes, we view that differently than if she runs to meet her lover. When the person was a father leaving the child because he had to run into work, it

was viewed as something he couldn't help. It was viewed the way it would be if he'd been struck by a car. When a mother leaves a child to run into work, it's viewed the way it would be if she were running to get a manicure or meeting her lover. It gets back to the first point.

That there's contempt?

Right. A mother who works is seen as doing something indulgent or disruptive to the social order, whereas a father who's working and makes sacrifices with childcare because of work is seen as fulfilling his responsibility.

You also point out in the book that the anxiety surrounding parenting is very much a middle-class phenomenon, partly because we have so much choice in how to approach parenting or which school our kids should attend or which afterschool activities to pursue. But for families, or especially mothers, who don't have the time or the financial resources to make choices, it's very different. Can you talk about that?

It's not that I don't think working-class mothers don't have anxiety. I think the anxieties are different. The anxiety there is trying to survive, trying to keep a roof over your head, keep your child fed, get your child to school safely. Because of growing class stratification and the pressures on middle-class families, there's this sense of parenting as class insurance. People think, if I give my kid every opportunity and I do everything right, my kid won't be a mere worker; my kid won't fall into the working class. It's hard to blame parents for this when you think about how we treat workers in this country.

There's a great line in William Deresiewicz's book Excellent Sheep, where he says in a winner-take-all society you're going to want your children to be winners. It's easy to vilify middle-class parents and their Chinese lessons and trying to get their kid into a good college. But I don't think that's entirely fair. Parents want their children to be okay, to have health care, to be able to afford a place to live, and to have a basic standard of living. Because fewer and fewer Americans can achieve that, it makes sense that middle-class parents would be extremely anxious.

When I saw you read at Women and Children First, you talked a little about how the proliferation of playgrounds has contributed to a deterioration in community. That came from Jane Jacobs?

Yes. I like her book The Death and Life of Great American Cities a lot. She has a chapter on children and city life that I found fascinating. A couple of generations ago in American cities, children were integrated into city life, so it wasn't uncommon to see children on sidewalks, playing jump rope or tag or whatever they used to play. That was part of city life. If the parents weren't watching their individual kids, there was a sense that someone was watching. The movement to get kids off of the sidewalks to make room for cars ended up hurting children and communal life. Now children are segregated. They're in places where there aren't adult eyes on them. It's part of the deterioration of public spaces.

Something else you write in Small Animals is: "Every day there is less we can control about our kids' future. The schools are failing, the middle class is vanishing ... The political landscape is unstable. ... Guns are everywhere." This could be describing Chicago, couldn't it?

Yes. I have two kids. They're 11 and 8 now. It's hard because I love Chicago. I love living in a city. I have no desire to live in the suburbs. And yet, like a lot of parents, I really struggle with the cost of having them in a good school, having recreation for them. It becomes hard to live in the city if you're not a wealthy person. I know so many people who left the city for no other reason than that they couldn't afford to live in a neighborhood where the schools will meet their needs.

I was just having coffee with a friend. She said she wanted so badly to send her kids to public school. She's a big public-school proponent. She went to public school. Her husband went to public school. They sent their daughter to kindergarten, where there are 35 or 38 kids in the class. Five-year olds. Her daughter was wetting her pants at school because there was so much chaos and so many kids. She couldn't get the teacher's attention to go to the bathroom. If you have any choice, it's hard to see your child suffer and not meet their full potential.

My kids have grown up in the public schools. Since Rahm came to town, I've seen every year the schools lose teachers, counselors, art, libraries, clean bathrooms. It's been infuriating to live in the city under Rahm.

That's interesting. You've seen it get worse?

Yes. My daughter needed some special-education services and I had to talk to lawyers. It took months and months of fighting.

I said this in the essay in the New York Times: We claim to want to protect children, but we live in a country that's at war with children. I feel that more and more every day. Look at the mayor. When you take money from public schools, you're stealing from children. We steal from the most vulnerable, powerless members of our society to help the strongest and wealthiest members get stronger and wealthier.

A new kind of Red State

By Anthony Engebretson

A report from the 2018 Red State Leftist Conference

Last summer, socialists converging on Lincoln, Nebraska were met with warm air and stifling sun. The oppressive atmosphere was befitting. Like the rest of the country, Nebraska's marginalized and working class communities are under assault by reactionary forces—attacks on healthcare, education, and women; ICE raids terrorizing communities and tearing apart families; and last year, for the first time in 20 years and steered by the barbaric whims of its millionaire governor, the state executed a man.

Despite these grim circumstances and the sweltering atmosphere, over 100 people gathered on a Saturday in the cool confines of Lincoln's Unitarian Church: leftist thinkers, activists, organizers, and newcomers from all over the region. Together, they began creating a new vision of what it means to be a "red state."

The first annual "Red State" Leftist Conference was the state's largest explicit gathering of leftists in many decades. Nebraska DSA, Nebraska Left Coalition, Lincoln ISO, and the Black Cat House sponsored the one-day event.

The purpose was to nurture unity and share ideas and strategies, all toward building a working-class movement that seeks to dismantle capitalism and other oppressive structures and shift power to the people.

The day kicked off with the panel "What is the Red State?" Organizers Zac Echola, Jewel Rodgers, Reed Underwood, and Rose Welch discussed the challenges and opportunities of organizing in the Midwest. Discussions ranged from tackling the town and country divide to organizing conversations and models for campaigns.

When contrasting organizing in the Midwest to the coasts, Welch took what she acknowledged to be a controversial stance: "It's a lot easier here." She argued that here people actually show up. "There is a lot of opportunity here."

Between panels, attendees came together in breakout workshops. Topics included post-Marxist thought, intersectionality, accountability and self-assessment, starting a radical space, one-on-one conversations, printmaking, and more. The scope and depth of the workshops reflected the breadth and diversity of the working class. It also reminded us how often capitalism limits our ability to express ourselves, even when we are with our comrades. Rarely are there settings where educators practice having a one-on-one with a steelworker. In one instance, in a workshop on Theatre of the Oppressed—a form of theatre designed to promote social and political change—attendees paired up and engaged in an exercise called "Columbian Hypnosis." In this exercise, pairs took turns following the hand of their partner as closely as possible with their head. While a fun exercise, it also became a simple demonstration of how class conditions and power relations function.

The second panel of the day was "Where Does the Red State Go from Here?" Three prominent organizers in the region—Hannah Allison, Amanda Huckins, and Brett O'Shea—discussed the future of building leftist power in the Midwest. The discussion included building a strong anti-fascist infrastructure, building dual power, left plurality, and sharing spaces.

"We have access to power," Huckins told the crowd when explaining her housing work. "But we're not using that power." On a similar note, O'Shea explained the importance of leftists reaching out to the working class beyond their political bubble, namely the "depoliticized and the apolitical." Occasionally the panelists disagreed, particularly along the question of electoral politics. But overall, it ended with an atmosphere of respect and unity, keeping in line with the purpose of the conference.

As the sun began to set and our part of the world slowly cooled, the attendees dispersed. But we had formed relationships, developed new ideas, and strengthened our collective resolve. One thing was certain: Nebraska is not beyond saving. On the contrary, it is just one spark away from a prairie fire.

The Red State conference began, as all things do, as little more than an idea. It was made not only possible, but monumentally successful, through the hard work and planning of many individuals and organizations.

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH was a socialist, union organizer, and civil-rights leader whose career spanned half a century, starting after Randolph dropped out college, joined the Socialist Party of America, and co-founded the black radical monthly The Messenger with Chandler Owen in 1917. In 1918 Randolph was charged by the Department of Justice under the Espionage Act for speaking out against the ongoing war effort. The charges were dropped by a judge who didn't think Randolph was smart enough to have actually written what he had published, assuming he was a puppet for white socialists agitators who were the real culprits. In the 1920s, he began organizing with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—the first African-American-led labor organization to to receive a charter in the AFL—and after nearly a decade was able to get the Pullman Company to agree to a contract with higher wages, a shorter work week, and better overtime pay. Randolph originated the idea for the 1963 March on Washington, and his advocacy of non-violent direct action played a pivotal role in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. He directly inspired and worked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the struggle for desegregation and the expansion of economic and voting rights for African Americans.