

Building the Next Left

The Political Perspective of the Democratic Socialists of America

At the beginning of the 20th century, a young and vibrant socialist movement anticipated decades of great advances on the road to a world free from capitalist exploitation—a socialist society built on the enduring principles of equality, justice and solidarity among peoples. At the end of the 20th century, such hope and vision seem all but lost.

The unbridled power of transnational corporations, underwritten by the major capitalist nations, has created a world economy where the wealth and power of a few is coupled with insecurity and downward mobility for the vast majority of working people—in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. Traditional left prescriptions have failed on both sides of the Communist/socialist divide. Global economic integration has rendered obsolete both the social democratic solution of independent national economies sustaining a strong social welfare state and the Communist solution of state-owned national economies fostering social development.

The globalization of capital requires a renewed vision and tactics. But the essence of the socialist vision—that people can freely and democratically control their community and society—remains central to the movement for radical democracy. Those who see the collapse of communist regimes, for which the rhetoric of socialism became a cover for authoritarian rule, as proof that capitalism is the foundation of democracy, commit fraud on history. The struggle for mass democracy has always been led by the excluded—workers, minorities, and women. The wealthy almost never join in unless their own economic freedom appears at stake. The equation of capitalism with democracy cannot survive scrutiny in a world where untrammelled capitalism means unrelenting poverty, disease, and unemployment.

Today, powerful corporate and political elites tell us that environmental standards are too high, unemployment is too low, and workers earn too much for America to prosper in the next century. Their vision is too close for comfort: inequality of wealth

and income has grown worse in the last 15 years: one percent of America now owns 60 percent of our wealth, up from 50 percent before Ronald Reagan became president. Nearly three decades after the “War on Poverty” was declared and then quickly abandoned, one-fifth of our society subsists in poverty, living in substandard housing, attending underfunded, overcrowded schools, and receiving inadequate health care.

In the global capitalist economy, these injustices are magnified a thousand-fold. The poorest third of humanity earns two percent of the world’s income, while the richest fifth receives two-thirds of global income. And while every middle class household in the developed world aims to own a personal computer, millions elsewhere are forever hungry. Such injustice is not a force of nature, but the logical outcome of the economic dominance of transnational corporations backed by the dominant capitalist governments.

In this new economic order where sweatshops and child labor are on the rise and capital is freed from historic national constraints, American movements for social justice must of necessity adopt the internationalism of the socialist tradition. Just as Eugene Debs said, “While there is a soul in prison, I am not free” and Martin Luther King proclaimed that, “A threat to jus-

***Building the Next Left* represents DSA’s effort to share its worldview with the general public. It was approved by our national convention in 1995 after a five year discussion. Obviously it is now somewhat dated and does not take account of the acceleration of the trends outlined in the document or recent events such as the stolen election of 2000, 9/11 or the War in Iraq. Readers will gain, however, a clear understanding of the values and the politics we work to implement.**

tice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” we must pledge to forge a new international solidarity based on the spirit of the abolitionists and suffragists, the labor, peace, and civil rights movements, modern feminism and environmentalism.

In the United States, the rise of global capitalism has been accompanied by the increasing strength of conservative and corporate elites and the weakening of social movements and trade unions that have historically been the backbone of mass liberalism. As a result, many socialists and progressives have come to question the tactics and policies that have long comprised the political program of the Left.

DSA has been in the forefront of this necessary reevaluation of Left strategy and program. For five years, DSA has been engaged in a thoroughgoing discussion of a renewed mission and vision for today’s world. No old assumption has been too sacred to be scrutinized, and no new idea has been too provocative to be easily dismissed. Since DSA is a pluralist organization, no single document can adequately and equally reflect our diverse perspectives. But, at the end of our five-year evaluation, we have established a political center of gravity to ground these diverse views. **This is where we stand:**

We are socialists because we reject an international economic order sustained by private profit, alienated labor, race and gender discrimination, environmental destruction, and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo.

We are socialists because we share a vision of a humane international social order based both on democratic planning and market mechanisms to achieve equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships.

A democratic socialist politics for the 21st century must promote an international solidarity dedicated to raising living standards across the globe, rather than “leveling down” in the name of maximizing profits and economic efficiency. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people.

Democratic socialists are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unionists, environmentalists,

feminists, and people of color -that together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

In the United States, we must fight for humane public policies that will provide quality health care, education, and job training and that redirect public investment from the military to much-neglected urban housing and infrastructure. Such policies require the support of a majoritarian coalition of trade unionists, people of color, feminists, gays and lesbians and all other peoples committed to democratic change. Our greatest contribution as American socialists to global social justice is to build that coalition, which is key to transforming the power relations of global capitalism.

Democracy, Liberty and Solidarity

Our vision of socialism is a profoundly democratic one, rooted in the belief that individuals can only reach their full potential in a society that embodies the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity. Only through creating material and cultural bonds of solidarity across racial, gender, age, national, and class lines can true equality of opportunity be achieved.

Solidarity

Gender and sexuality. Our conception of socialism is also deeply feminist and anti-racist. We are committed to full equality for women in all spheres of life, in a world without prescribed sex roles that channel women into subordinate positions at home and at work. We seek a world that no longer oppresses women through under-valuation of their work, lack of political representation, the inability to control their own fertility, denial of their sexuality, or violence and abuse. Gender equality requires great changes in social attitudes, in economic and social structures, and in relationships between men and women and adults and children. The socialist society we seek to create will not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. It will value sexuality and all sexual relationships—gay, lesbian, heterosexual—based on mutual respect and the enhancement of human dignity.

Racial equality. Our concept of socialism is forthrightly anti-racist. After more than 350 years, racism is deeply ingrained in our country’s institutions, social patterns, consciousness, and even social movements. The postwar civil rights movement

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broke the back of segregation and renewed the struggle against its consequences, bringing to the left in America a new moral vision and a more developed understanding of the importance of community, institutional networks, and popular symbols in shaping a political movement. To be genuinely multiracial, a socialist movement must respect the particular goals of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and other communities of color. It must place a high priority on economic justice to eradicate the sources of inequality; on affirmative action and other compensatory programs to overcome ongoing discrimination and the legacy of inequality; and on social justice to change the behavior, attitudes, and ideas that foster racism.

Democratic community. Democratic socialists recognize that for individuals to flourish, a society must be grounded in the moral values and institutions of a democratic community that provides quality education and job training, social services, and meaningful work for all. Leaving the provision of such common needs to the private marketplace guarantees a starkly inegalitarian class system of access to opportunity.

Democratic socialists are committed to political institutions based on one voice, one vote, and to the elimination of the pernicious and corrupting influence of corporate money from public political deliberation. Socialist democracy fosters popular participation at every level of decision-making. In an age when global communications technologies are within the reach of hundreds of millions of people, such a commitment means equal access to information, increased democratic - and not corporate - control over public policy, and decentralized, democratic institutions wherever possible in workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools.

Liberty

A democratic commitment to a vibrant pluralist life assumes the need for a democratic, responsive, and representative government to regulate the market, protect the environment, and ensure a basic level of equality and equity for each citizen. In the 21st century, such regulation will increasingly occur through international, multilateral action. But while a democratic state can protect individuals from domination by inordinately powerful, undemocratic transnational corporations, people develop the social bonds that render life meaningful only through cooperative, voluntary relationships. Promoting such bonds is the responsibility of socialists and government alike. Democratic socialism is committed both to a freedom of speech that does not recoil from dissent and to the freedom to organize independent trade unions, women's groups, political parties, and other social movements. We are committed to a freedom of religion

and conscience that acknowledges the rights of those for whom spiritual concerns are central and the rights of those who reject organized religion. Control of economic, social, and cultural life by either government or corporate elites is hostile to the vision of democratic pluralism embraced by democratic socialism. The social welfare programs of government have been for the most part positive, if partial, responses to the genuine social needs of the great majority of Americans. The dismantling of such programs by conservative and corporate elites in the absence of any alternatives will be disastrous. Abandoning schools, health care, and housing, for example, to the control of an unregulated free market magnifies the existing harsh realities of inequality and injustice.

Democratic Control of Productive and Social Life

The Capitalist Marketplace

As democratic socialists we are committed to ensuring that any market is the servant of the public good and not its master. Liberty, equality, and solidarity will require not only democratic control over economic life, but also a progressively financed, decentralized, and quality public sector. Free markets or private charity cannot provide adequate public goods and services.

Transnational corporate domination does not result merely from the operation of a pure market, but from conscious government actions, from tax policy to deregulation, that structure the economy in the interest of corporate power. The capitalist market economy not only suppresses global living standards but also leads to chronic underfunding of socially necessary public goods, from research and development to preventive health care and job training.

The market and its ideology are rife with internal contradictions. While capitalists abhor public planning as inefficient and counterproductive, transnational corporations make decisions with tremendous social consequences, including automation, plant shutdowns and relocations, mergers and acquisitions, new investment and disinvestment—all without democratic input. They also engage in unrelenting efforts to control the market, even through illegal means such as price fixing, antitrust violations, and other forms of collusion.

In the workplace, capitalism eschews democracy. Individual employees do not negotiate the terms of their employment, except in rare circumstances when their labor is very highly skilled. Without unions, employees are hired and fired at will. Corporations govern through hierarchical power relations more characteristic of monopolies than of free markets. Simply put, the domination of the economy by privately owned corporation is not

the most rational and equitable way to govern our economic life.

Vision of a Socialist Economy

The operation of a democratic socialist economy is the subject of continuing debate within DSA. First it must mirror democratic socialism's commitment to institutional and social pluralism. Democratic, representative control over fiscal, monetary, and trade policy would enable citizens to have a voice in setting the basic framework of economic policy—what social investment is needed, who should own or control basic industries, and how they might be governed.

While broad investment decisions and fiscal and monetary policies are best made by democratic processes, many argue that the market best coordinates supply with demand for goods, services, and labor. Regulated markets can guarantee efficiency, consumer choice and labor mobility. However, democratic socialists recognize that market mechanisms do generate inequalities of wealth and income. But, the social ownership characteristic of a socialist society will greatly limit inequality. In fact, widespread worker and public ownership will greatly lessen the corrosive effect of capitalists markets on people's lives. Social need will outrank narrow profitability as the measure of success for our economic life.

Interactions of Economy and Society

Democratic socialists are committed to the development of social movements dedicated to ending any and all forms of non-economic domination. As activists within these movements, with a visible socialist identity, we bring an analysis of how the globalization of capital influences racism, sexism, homophobia, and environmental degradation.

Economic democracy alone cannot end the domination of some over others, but it is a prerequisite, especially given how global capital uses racial, national, and gender divisions to divide the world's work force. Yet traditional assumptions about the universal nature of the working class no longer adequately describe who will fight for a radical democracy. People identify with the fight for social justice in many ways. As socialists within the social movements, we bring a vision and politics that argues for the democratic control of transnational corporate power as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for racial, gender, and economic justice.

Racism, sexism, xenophobia, and resentment of the poor are exacerbated by economic insecurity. Those threatened by economic restructuring and decline may view less privileged people as competitors or even enemies. For example, some have caricatured affirmative action as a system of strict racial quotas

and preferences, ensuring jobs for the non-qualified, rather than as a largely successful effort to open up the job market to women and people of color excluded by existing, often prejudicial, methods of recruitment and hiring. Racism, sexism, and homophobia are not the only forms of oppression that both predate capitalism and are continually transformed by it. The persistence of anti-Semitism, for example, has no single explanation. Discrimination based on age is prevalent and affects both young and old. Discrimination occurs in a myriad of forms, and a socialist society must eradicate all of them.

Ending environmental degradation and building a sustainable world—meeting today's needs without jeopardizing future generations—require new ways of thinking about socialism as well. The depletion of nonrenewable resources and the pollution of our air and water argue for both regulatory protection and reforming market incentives in order to reverse corporate and individual behavior. The victims of pollution are most often people of color and lower income communities. Environmental protection and environmental justice must be part of a democratic socialist agenda.

Social movements have helped democratic socialists to shape a broader perspective of socialism—one that recognizes that economic change is a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for justice. They have guided us toward a deeper pluralist vision of socialism as the humanizing of relationships between men and women, between whites and people of color, and between all of us and the environment.

The Global Economy, Global Politics and the State

The last decade has witnessed massive shifts in global politics and the global economy. These changes have shaped and been shaped by technological change, a new awareness of humanity's connection to our environment, an increasing recognition of the intersection between economics, environment and gender equality; changes in the role of the state and of capital; and much more. Yet the outcome—increasing accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few, despoliation of the environment, and individual isolation and alienation, versus enhanced quality of life, sustainable development and strengthened communities—remains to be seen.

The Global Economy

In the emerging global capitalist economy, the controlling economic institutions—the transnational corporations—have integrated financing, production, distribution and consumption on a vast scale. They now have the capacity to function as

“stateless” institutions, relatively independent of any particular national economy.

National governments, even in Western Europe and North America, have ever more difficulty controlling capital, currency flows, and investment while defending the living standards of working people. The result is that the majority of wage and income earners in the advanced capitalist nations are now experiencing a long-term leveling down of wages and living conditions tantamount to a gradual impoverishment of this vast working class. The extent of impoverishment is in dispute, but many economists now believe that only one-fifth of the population is rising in affluence, while the rest are suffering a gradual or abrupt erosion of their living standards.

Through globalization, capital eludes governmental regulation. The movement of capital across borders, unlike the movement of labor, is all but unrestricted. Indeed, under the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement, laws protecting the rights of workers can be deemed a barrier to free trade.

Global Environment

Transnational corporations avoid environmental regulations as well as worker protections. The maquiladoras, or tax-free production zones on the US-Mexican border, are prime examples. Border communities in both countries are feeling the effects of corporate pollution by companies that left the US for Mexico, where environmental enforcement is weaker. As with labor rights, NAFTA and the World Trade Organization can restrict enforcement of a nation’s environmental laws if they are ruled a barrier to free trade. So as transnational corporations raid the resources of less developed countries and pollute the environment of the North and the South, no international agency has the authority to protect the earth.

Trade is only one aspect of the global economy. Development fostered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has encouraged strategies modeled on the North—resource and capital-intensive—with little regard for indigenous communities or environments. The end result has too often been enrichment of a wealthy few and increased poverty and environmental hazards for many. Emphasis on industrial agriculture and cash crops for example, has resulted in the destruction of rain forests and in desertification in some regions.

International development efforts usually ignore indigenous small-scale farming and community development as nonproductive because they fail to generate large amounts of cash, even as they improve living standards. Since such activity is usually the province of women, its displacement has also led to a decline in

women’s position.

Today advocates of sustainable and just development recognize the important connection of environmental protection, eradication of poverty, and gender equity.

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Global Politics

US dominance of the global economy is buttressed by its political power and military might. Indeed, the United States is engaged in a long-term policy of imperial overreach in a period in which global instability will probably increase. Elements of this instability include national, ethnic and religious conflicts; economic decline and stagnation of subordinate capitalist nations; trade rivalries among advanced capitalist nations; and environmental degradation imperiling the quality of life.

Fifty years of world leadership have taken their toll on the US. The links among heavy military spending, fiscal imbalance, and a weakening economy are too clear to ignore. Domestically, the United States faces social and structural economic problems of a magnitude unknown to other advanced capitalist states. The resources needed to sustain US dominance are a drain on the national economy, particularly the most neglected and underdeveloped sectors. Nowhere is a struggle against militarism more pressing than in the United States, where the military budget bleeds the public sector of much needed funds for social programs.

No country, even a superpower like the United States, can guarantee peace and stability, never mind justice. Only a genuinely multinational armed force can intervene in violent conflicts to enforce generally accepted standards of human rights and democratic practices.

Such peacekeeping is one important function that must be strengthened within a new global governance. Enforcement of international standards is another. Treaties on human rights, international labor standards, women’s rights, and environmental protection have all been ratified by many nations (albeit generally not by the US). Enforcement remains problematic. New international regulatory bodies must ensure that the interests of all the world’s people are protected with the power to tax

transnational corporations that can now escape national taxes.

A Strategy for the Next Left

Socialists have historically supported public ownership and control of the major economic institutions of society—the large corporations—in order to eliminate the injustice and inequality of a class-based society, and have depended on the organization of a working class party to gain state power to achieve such ends. In the United States, socialists joined with others on the Left to build a broad-based, anti-corporate coalition, with the unions at the center, to address the needs of the majority by opposing the excesses of private enterprise. Many socialists have seen the Democratic Party, since at least the New Deal, as the key political arena in which to consolidate this coalition, because the Democratic Party held the allegiance of our natural allies. Through control of the government by the Democratic Party coalition, led by anti-corporate forces, a progressive program regulating the corporations, redistributing income, fostering economic growth and expanding social programs could be realized.

With the end of the post-World War II economic boom and the rise of global economic competitors in East Asia and Europe in the 1970s came the demise of the brief majoritarian moment of this progressive coalition that promised—but did not deliver—economic and social justice for all. A vicious corporate assault on the trade union movement and a right-wing racist, populist appeal to downwardly mobile, disgruntled white blue-collar workers contributed to the disintegration of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in the 1970s and 1980s.

Today, the mildly redistributive welfare state liberalism of the 1960s, which accepted the corporate dominance of economic decision-making, can no longer be the programmatic basis for a majoritarian progressive politics. New Deal and Great Society liberalism depended upon redistribution at the margins of an ever-expanding economic pie. But today corporations no longer aspire to expand production and consumption by raising global living standards; rather, global capital engages in a race to increase profits by “downsizing” and lowering wages.

With the collapse of the political economy of corporate liberalism came the atrophy of the very institutions upon which the progressive politics of the New Deal and Great Society had been constructed. No longer do the social bases for a majoritarian democratic politics—strong trade unions, social movements and urban, Democratic political machines—simply await mobilization by a proper electoral appeal. Rather, a next left must be built from the grassroots up.

Given the globalization of economic power, such grassroots movements will increasingly focus upon building a countervailing power to that of the transnational corporations. A number of positive signs of this democratic and grassroots realignment have emerged. New labor leadership has pledged to organize a workforce increasingly constituted by women, people of color, and immigrant workers. Inner-city grassroots community organizations are placing reinvestment, job creation, and economic democracy at the heart of their organizing. The women’s movement increasingly argues that only by restructuring work and childcare can true gender equality be realized. And the fight for national health care—a modest reform long provided by all other industrial democracies—united a broad coalition of activists and constituencies.

But such movements cannot be solely national in scope. Rather, today’s social movements must be as global as the corporate power they confront; they must cooperate across national boundaries and promote democratic regulation of transnational capital.

If socialism cannot be achieved primarily from above, through a democratic government that owns, control and regulates the major corporations, then it must emerge from below, through a democratic transformation of the institutions of civil society, particularly those in the economic sphere—in other words, a program for economic democracy.

As inequalities of wealth and income increase and the wages and living standards of most are stagnant or falling, social needs expand. Only a revitalized public sector can universally and democratically meet those needs.

Economic Democracy. Economic democracy can empower wage and income earners through building cooperative and public institutions that own and control local economic resources. Economic democracy means, in the most general terms, the direct ownership and/or control of much of the economic resources of society by the great majority of wage and income earners. Such a transformation of worklife directly embodies and presages the practices and principles of a socialist society.

Alternative economic institutions, such as cooperatives and consumer, community, and worker-owned facilities are central to economic democracy. Equally important is the assertion of democratic control over private resources such as insurance and credit, making them available for socially responsible investment as well as over land, raw materials, and manufacturing infrastructure. Such democratic control must also encompass existing financial institutions, whose funds can be used to invest in places abandoned or bypassed by transnational capital, such as urban and rural areas, and in sectors of the population that have

been historically denied control and ownership of significant economic resources. Such a program will recognize the economic value of childrearing and home care by family members as unpaid labor, and account for this work in all considerations of benefits.

Key to economic democracy is a democratic labor movement that plays a central role in the struggle for a democratic workplace, whether worker or privately owned. In workplaces that the employees do not own—traditional corporations, family businesses, government, and private nonprofits—only independent, democratically run unions can protect workers.

The importance of economic democracy extends beyond the ownership and control of economic resources. It is the only way to fulfill the democratic aspirations of the vast majority of Americans. The democratic ideal today has been drastically narrowed in scope and substance to reduce its threat to established power and privilege. The current assault on the welfare state led by corporate and conservative elites is also an attack on political democracy.

Democratic socialists must reinvest democracy with its political and economic content to give full voice to popular democratic aspirations.

Finally, economic democracy is also the only way to mediate and overcome divisions based upon race, gender, religion, and ethnicity that undercut universal social justice.

Global Justice. A program of global justice can unite opponents of transnational corporations across national boundaries around a common program to transform existing international institutions and invent new global organizations designed to ensure that wages, working conditions, environmental standards and social rights are “leveled up” worldwide. The basis of cooperation for fighting the transnationals must be forged across borders from its inception. Economic nationalism and other forms of chauvinism will doom any expanded anti-corporate agenda. The international financial institutions serving the interests of transnational capital are important arenas of struggle for a global social and environmental agenda. Elements of this agenda include efforts to advance social charters in free trade agreements; to propose alternative investment strategies for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; to strengthen the enforcement of existing treaties on the environment, labor stan-

dards, social policies, etc.; and to promote international standards that put social justice before corporate profit. Stronger international ties among trade unions and joint actions across borders in defense of wage standards, working conditions and social rights are critical.

Social Redistribution. Social redistribution—the shift of wealth and resources from the rich to the rest of society—will require:

- massive redistribution of income from corporations and the wealthy to wage earners and the poor and the public sector, in order to provide the main source of new funds for social programs, income maintenance and in infrastructure rehabilitation, and
- a massive shift of public resources from the military (the main user of existing discretionary funds) to civilian uses.

Although such reforms will be very difficult to achieve on a national scale in the short term, their urgency increases as income inequality intensifies. Over time, income redistribution and social programs will be critical not only to the poor but to the great majority of working people. The defense and expansion of government programs that promote social justice, equal education for all children, universal health care, environmental protection and guaranteed minimum income and social well-being is critical for the next Left.

At the same time, the military Keynesianism that has dominated federal expenditures, constricting the capacity of governments at all levels to respond adequately to social needs, must end. Much of the current distortion in government spending and taxation has its roots in the massive military and national security build-up in the 1980s, combined with the massive tax cuts for the wealthy. The great run-up in national debt is due directly to military-led deficit financing. Reduced military expenditures and more equitable taxation represent the only sources of funds on the scale needed to provide the social programs required to ameliorate declining living standards.

Together, economic democracy, global justice, and social redistribution are the linchpins of abroad-based anti-corporate left that is international in character and local in its reliance on popular control of economic resources and decision-making.

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The Role of Electoral Politics

Democratic socialists reject an either-or approach to electoral coalition building, focused solely on a new party or on realignment within the Democratic Party. The growth of PAC-driven, candidate-based, entrepreneurial politics in the last 25 years leaves little hope for an immediate, principled electoral response to the rightward, pro-corporate drift in American politics. The fundamental task of democratic socialists is to build anti-corporate social movements capable of winning reforms that empower people. Since such social movements seek to influence state policy, they will intervene in electoral politics, whether through Democratic primaries, non-partisan local elections, or third party efforts. Our electoral work aims at building majoritarian coalitions capable of not only electing public officials on the anti-corporate program of these movements but also of holding officials accountable after they are elected.

The US electoral system makes third parties difficult to build at both the national and state level. Winner-take-all districts; the absence of proportional representation; open primaries; executive-run governments that make coalition governments impossible; state legislative control over ballot access and election laws all combine to impede third parties. Much of progressive, independent political action will continue to occur in Democratic Party primaries in support of candidates who represent a broad progressive coalition. In such instances, democratic socialists will support coalitional campaigns based on labor, women, people of color and other potentially anti-corporate elements.

Electoral tactics are only a means for democratic socialists; the building of a powerful anti-corporate coalition is the end. Where third party or non-partisan candidates mobilize such coalitions, democratic socialists will build such organizations and candidacies. However, to democratize U.S. electoral politics—whatever its party form—requires serious campaign finance reform both within and without the Democratic Party.

The Role of Democratic Socialists

This document is, in a fundamental way, a reworking of the strategy and program laid out in DSA's founding statement, *Where We Stand*. Any differences are due to changing conditions, and not changing principles. The continuities are unmistakable. The same spirit animates both documents. In fact, the most important difference between the documents is neither strategy nor program, mission nor vision, but rather expectation. The founding document called for carrying out a strategy and prominent points in an toward the founding of a new progressive movement—a next Left. That is because the political momentum of mass liberalism is depleted. If we once positioned ourselves

as the left wing of the possible, there is now no “possible” to be the left wing of. Of course, considerable opposition has arisen in response to the program of the conservative and corporate elites. But, that opposition confronts a profound crisis of leadership, particularly at the national level.

Increasingly, many of our fellow citizens recognize that the American dream is becoming a chimera. We as democratic socialists believe that it can be made real. No laws of nature or “free markets” dictate that we must destroy our environment, worsen global inequality, squander funds on useless deadly weapons, and continue to relegate women and people of color to second-class citizenship. But if the American dream is indeed ever more elusive, we seek much more than to simply revive it as an aspiration. For in one respect the right-wing would-be prophets are correct: The success of global capitalism demands that traditional democratic standards of justice, equality, and decency be undermined. For the simple dream of a comfortable standard of living, of community, and of equity to be realized, radical political, economic, and social changes in the established order are required.

The belief is widespread that we stand at the beginning of a new political era—that the Left must create a new vision and a new mission rooted in a new sense of purpose. Democratic socialists have an historic opportunity and responsibility to play a central role in the founding of a next Left, and DSA is prepared to meet this challenge. We invite you to join us in this effort worthy of a lifetime of commitment.

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