



Boston Democratic Socialists of America

# the yankee radical

(617) 782-8787

[www.dsaboston.org](http://www.dsaboston.org)

February–March, 2016

## Feeling the Bern in Somerville:

# 2016 Political Revolution Tour

By Jared Abbott

**WHEN:** Sat., Feb. 20, 1-3 pm

**WHERE:** Crossfit Somerville  
35 Prospect St., Som.  
(between Webster and  
Somerville Avenue)

**SPONSOR:** Democratic Socialists of  
America

**CO-SPONSORS:** Somerville for  
Bernie &  
People for Bernie

As the rise in popularity of Bernie Sanders over the last six months has confirmed, American voters are excited about the possibility of a Sanders presidency. Despite the stigma once attached to his identification with Democratic Socialism, he continues to



Source: [twitter.com](https://twitter.com)

surge in the polls, raise record-breaking amounts of grassroots donations and draw tens of thousands to volunteer and attend events. Sanders is calling, explicitly, for a “political revolution.” But what does that mean? Join us as we

bring activists together to discuss the nature and limits of the U.S. political system, the power of democratic socialist ideas and how we can build a long-lasting political movement to fight for radical change. Somerville for Bernie will lead a canvass in Somerville directly following the discussion.

More information: [jaredscreenname@aol.com](mailto:jaredscreenname@aol.com); Phone: 703-919-6379.

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## Joan Meschino for Senate



Mass Alliance ([www.massalliance.org](http://www.massalliance.org)) is comprised of 28 groups including Boston DSA who support progressive candidates for our state legislature.

Of the two remaining Alliance-endorsed candidates in upcoming “Special Elections”, **Gerry Cassidy** in the 9<sup>th</sup> Plymouth House District has already won his primary, and faces no opposition in the March 1 general

election.

But former Hull Selectman **Joan Meschino** ([www.JoanforSenate.org](http://www.JoanforSenate.org)) does. She is running for Senate in the Plymouth & Norfolk District, has worked as an attorney in civil rights law and non-profit leadership, served as Executive Director of the MA Appleseed Center, been awarded by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, and currently serves on the board of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Her primary is April 12.

### Raise Up Training

By Carl Nilsson

On Thursday, February 25 Raise Up MA will have a legislative agenda training for our partner groups. With all our issues building momentum—Fight for \$15, Paid Family and Medical Leave, and the Constitutional Amendment—we need to get everyone on board for a unified strategy through 2016. **So please come! (February 25, 1-3 pm; 1199 SEIU, 150 Mt. Vernon Street, Dorchester, [www.raiseupma.org](http://www.raiseupma.org)).**

## SHORT TAKES

By Mike Pattberg

### Art Lipow

Long time member Arthur Lipow died January 6 at his home in Alameda, CA. Art joined the Independent Socialist League in the 1950s, then several ISL successor organizations before ending up in DSA. In the 1970s he moved to England to Direct the Michael Harrington Center at Birbeck College, joined the Labour Party and became active with European Nuclear Disarmament (END).

After returning to the United States he helped Hal Draper establish the Center for Socialist History and wrote or edited several books, including *Authoritarian Socialism: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (1982). This last was a takedown of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, the best-selling 1888 science-fiction novel that gave birth to a national movement—the Bellamy Clubs—which were especially big here in Boston where the novel takes place. Back then and even now the book is often portrayed as forecasting a future society of benign, middle class, utopian socialism—homegrown American, unlike those European Marxist imports.

But according to Arthur this utopia was more like a fascist/stalinist police state, with a regimented working class ruled over by all-knowing experts armed with oodles of happy talk; a model to flee from, not follow.

A few years ago he agreed to write up some reflections on this for the *yankee radical* but never quite got around to it, possibly because of illness. Another of his books, *Neither Capitalism Nor Socialism: Theories of Bureaucratic Collectivism* (co-edited with Ernest Haberkern), was a Marxist analysis of the Bolshevik revolution's descent into Stalinism, and the emergence of similar post-WWII Communist dictatorships.

### Hillary, Honduras & Haiti

*Here's two topics Hillary Clinton probably won't be asked about in upcoming debates, but should be.*

**Honduras Military Coup:** In 2009 elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was overthrown in a military coup. He had displeased the Honduran capitalist class and the U.S. State Department by raising the minimum wage and asserting an independent foreign policy. At first Obama seemed to oppose the coup, as did every elected

government in Latin America. Then long time Clinton associate Lanny Davis went to work. A paid Washington lobbyist for anti-Zelaya Honduran business firms, he and Hillary managed to change US coup policy from opposition to acceptance. Many reports now describe the Honduran government as a repressive dictatorship; right-wing death squads and criminal drug gangs are back in business, and “illegal immigrants” flee to the U.S.—just like the 1980s ([www.justforeignpolicy.org](http://www.justforeignpolicy.org)).

### Don't You Dare Come Back to Haiti!

Secretary Clinton wasn't responsible for the 2004 U.S. kidnapping and deportation (from his own country!) of another elected office holder: Haitian President Aristide. But she doubled down on it, demanding the South African government prevent him from returning home—advice that was ultimately rejected (see Wikileaks). Apparently the sins of both Zelaya and Aristide were enacting domestic economic policies more influenced by their own people than U.S. corporations or the “Washington Consensus”, and they paid the price.

# Global Solidarity Against FGM

By Susan McLucas

Healthy Tomorrow organized this rally in Harvard Square on February 6, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). We're a non-profit organization supporting activists in Mali who are lobbying for a ban against this practice. Healthy Tomorrow also works locally to educate people about FGM, while urging our state legislators to pass a law strengthening protections for girls here

in Massachusetts.

One woman standing with us (right) is an FGM survivor from Sierra Leone, who has testified at the State House about her personal ordeal.

If you'd like to get information about our project, go to [StopExcision.net](http://StopExcision.net) or call Susan McLucas at 617-776-6524.



# Just Cause Eviction: A Small Step in a Big Movement

By Darnell Johnson



Source: <http://righttothecity.org/boston-residents-call-for-just-cause-eviction-policy/>

Right to the City Boston (RTCB) is trying to help families remain in Boston's working class neighborhoods by strengthening the rights of tenants and homeowner occupants, making community planning decisions participatory and transparent, and preserving and developing affordable housing while increasing the share of it removed from the private real estate market.

Right 2 Remain (R2R) is a growing popular movement coming out of the work of RTCB and other grassroots organizations from low-income, POC/immigrant communities who are waging a fight against local displacement and gentrification. The "Three Pillars" we're fighting for include:

- Tenant Rights and Protections
- Community Control of Land/Development
- Making Speculators Pay

Our focus is on winning policy gains while challenging the accountability and engagement of policymakers and elected officials.

Last year saw the growth of Right 2 Remain with the formation of the R2R/Just Cause Eviction coalition. Anchored by RTCB in partnership with the Boston Tenant Coalition, this alliance has grown to over 40 Boston-based community groups, unions, and civic organizations.

Just Cause Eviction is one of several community-driven efforts toward overcoming forced displacement—including a home-rule petition seeking state authority to enact protections limiting how giant real estate corporations and banks can abuse the state's no-fault eviction law. Right now they need little reason at all.

No-fault evictions disproportionately affect people and communities of color, and tenants facing displacement have long sought protection at the Boston City Council. Mayor Menino proposed rent regulation in 2002; the Boston Tenant Coalition proposed community stabilization in 2004; City Life and others proposed collective bargaining for tenants in 2007. In each case, councilors of color agreed and the vast majority of white councilors didn't.

The Cleveland Federal Reserve says

that Boston is the City worst hit by gentrification in the entire country. A recent Brookings Institution report also puts us at the top of income inequality among the 100 largest U.S. cities.

What this means in practice is that tens of thousands of Boston families face forcible displacement. Unscrupulous investors and real estate companies are buying up property to clear out the inhabitants, or drastically raising rents; they use a state law allowing no fault evictions. Ever more reason for Just Cause Eviction protection!

What makes the situation even worse is that the residents who did the work to improve and revitalize neighborhoods are the ones getting kicked out. In effect, real estate operators privatize the social labor of thousands and the tax money of the public. Seizing the work of others, they make fortunes through displacement.

We must end gentrification to advance economic and racial equity. Just Cause Eviction is one small step in the effort to Remain, Reclaim, and Rebuild Boston.

*Darnell Johnson is the regional Coordinator of Right to the City Boston. For more information on the urban housing crisis or Just Cause Eviction, visit [www.righttothecity.org](http://www.righttothecity.org).*

## News from Maine

By Harlan Baker

One night after working at the Bernie Sanders campaign office, I stopped into Ruskies, my favorite bar in Portland. The bartender approached and instead of asking what I wanted to drink said, "I think you're the person who can answer this question for me: Where can I caucus for Bernie Sanders?" I can't remember any previous occasion when a bartender asked me how to vote for a socialist. I

also can't remember when, just by wearing a pin for a presidential candidate, I've had such positive reactions from total strangers on the street.

I was meeting over coffee recently with a prospective caucus precinct captain in the Public Market House when a young man at another table, seeing my Bernie pin, asked "Where can I get one?" As I was explaining where to find the

campaign office, a woman from behind me said, "I couldn't help overhearing your conversation--I'm for Bernie too!" In a few minutes she agreed to be a precinct captain in Bangor. Another woman broke in to ask how to get an absentee ballot for the caucus. This section of the coffee house soon became an ad hoc political meeting for Bernie

*(Cont'd on page 6)*

# Remembering Michael Harrington

By Maurice Isserman



*Michael Harrington (Bob Adelman)*

*Michael Harrington was one of the U.S.'s leading socialists and a founder of Democratic Socialists of America. On the anniversary of his birthday, Maurice Isserman reflects on his legacy.*

In a lifetime of political engagement, Michael Harrington must have given ten thousand speeches, and of those, probably a thousand in New York City, where he had made his home since his arrival in 1949, age 21. He gave his final speech in the city 40 years later, in May 1989. Suffering from the cancer of the esophagus that would end his life in less than three months, he spoke that day to reporters and editors from the city's union press.

Dinah Leventhal, a 22-year-old activist, was in attendance. She was about to take on the job of youth organizer for Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the socialist group that Harrington helped found and led, and welcomed the chance to speak with him for a few minutes afterward. Mike reminisced about his own days as a young socialist organizer in the 1950s. "He said," she recalled, that "he had felt an incredible degree of freedom and learned so much in those years"

He said I should make the most of it, being an organizer and traveling around, getting to see the country and getting to know what the country was all about. He

really loved this country, and thought that you had to love the country to be a radical, to be a socialist, and to want to change it.

Over the years, Mike met and worked with many important and famous people, including Dr. Martin Luther King, United Auto Worker president Walter Reuther, *Ms. Magazine* founder Gloria Steinem, U.S. senator and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, and Prime Minister Olof Palme, leader of Sweden's ruling Socialist Party, to name but a few. The publication in 1962 of his landmark study of poverty, *The Other America*, helped spark the Johnson administration's War on Poverty. He had another best-seller in 1972 with the unlikely title of *Socialism*, which sold over 100,000 copies in paperback and influenced many readers with its argument that the "real Karl Marx" was a radical democrat, not a would-be dictator. His last book, *Socialism: Past and Future*, came out shortly before his death. He was an editor of *Dissent*, a commentator on National Public Radio, a frequent contributor to leading opinion magazines like the *Nation* and the *New*

*Republic*. As a public intellectual and a moral tribune, in the 1970s and 1980s, he had few equals on the left, or indeed across the political spectrum. Harrington, Senator Ted Kennedy would write, "has made more Americans more uncomfortable for more good reasons than any other person I know."

Perhaps Mike's greatest political impact was on several generations of young radicals coming of age between the 1950s and the 1980s. He spoke before all kinds of audiences, in churches and union halls, and won applause from listeners who had probably never heard a socialist before. But he was most in his element when speaking on college and university campuses. He liked young people; he knew how they thought; he could reach and inspire them. He was, he liked to joke as the decades turned and his hair grew grayer and then white, the nation's "oldest young socialist" and "a closet youth."

Born in 1928 in St. Louis, the only child of middle-class parents of sturdy Irish Catholic background and staunch Democratic sympathies, educated at Holy Cross (which he entered at age 16,

and graduated from at age 19), Yale Law School (acing his first year, and then dropping out when he decided the law wasn't for him), and the University of Chicago (earning a master's degree in English literature in 1949), he then moved to New York City to become a writer. Somewhere along the line he had developed vaguely leftist sympathies, but without joining any radical groups. But in 1951 he was drawn to Dorothy Day's anarchist-pacifist Catholic Worker movement, and moved into the group's "House of Hospitality" on Chrystie Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side. There, with other volunteers, he worked in the soup kitchen (which catered to the homeless alcoholics who crowded the nearby Bowery District), wrote for and helped edit the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, and joined sparsely attended picket lines protesting the Korean War, his unmistakably Irish face and name confounding the NYC police department's Red Squad, which monitored such events.

Mike remained indelibly Irish, but was about to shed his Catholicism (his religious faith wavering even before he joined the Catholic Worker). In 1952, he departed Chrystie Street, moved to Greenwich Village, and joined the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), youth affiliate of the battered remnant of the once-vibrant Socialist Party, founded by Eugene Debs at the turn of the century, and led for the past several decades by Norman Thomas. He was in select company: YPSL counted 134 members nationwide in 1952. And it was about to get smaller, because Mike joined a group that split away to form a new and even fringier youth group, the Young Socialist League (YSL), whose adult mentor was a former Trotskyist with a long history of radical factionalism named Max Shachtman, leader of the Independent Socialist League, formerly the Workers Party, formerly a split-off from the Socialist Workers Party, and so on. The "Shachtmanites," as they were called, were ferociously anti-Stalinist (not

entirely a bad thing), but also ferociously sectarian (an entirely bad thing). Despite occupying the leftier-than-thou margins of an already marginal socialist movement, Shachtman attracted some talented lieutenants (Irving Howe had been one until he left the ISL to found *Dissent* in the early 1950s); Mike was the latest, and perhaps most talented, catch.

In time, the Shachtmanites returned to the Socialist Party (and, in Mike's case, the Young People's Socialist League). As YPSL national organizer in the late 1950s he hitch-hiked back and forth across the country, visiting campuses from Brandeis to the University of California at Berkeley, building YPSL chapters, and, more important, detecting the stirrings of a movement he started to refer to as a "New Left." Tom Hayden and other young activists who were in the process of creating their own campus group (smaller than YPSL at its inception) called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were among those Harrington influenced. Mike famously wound up quarreling with Hayden and other SDSers at their founding convention in Port Huron, Michigan, in 1962 (not having put aside all the sectarian instincts of the early 1950s)—a rift he deeply regretted.

In the next year, after a review of his study of poverty, *The Other America*, catapulted the subject into policy-making circles, Mike became famous (and incredibly busy) as "the man who discovered poverty." He was less involved with the student movement (although still a frequent speaker on college and university campuses). In the later 1960s, as the war in Vietnam escalated and radicalized a generation, and as the organized New Left, particularly SDS, embraced confrontational tactics and revolutionary rhetoric, Mike found it increasingly difficult to connect with the young campus activists. But he tried. At a conference of socialist leaders in 1967, Mike cautioned against strident denunciations of the New Left: "They will make mistakes, but they are

the people—when things get better—that I'll have to work with."

In 1973, with the old SP in ruins, Mike and others created a new group, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), which soon developed a vibrant Youth Section. In 1982, DSOC merged with the New American Movement (NAM), which had been founded some years earlier by former New Leftists. The merged organization becoming Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), with its own Youth Section, eventually renamed the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS).

Mike religiously attended the winter and summer conferences sponsored by DSA's Youth Section. The last time he did so was in February 1989. In a speech to the students in attendance he acknowledged that some of them would pay their DSA dues for a year or so ("God bless you") then move on to other things, and "probably remain, at least, a good liberal." But to those who would wind up staying in the movement for the long term, he had special words of encouragement, drawing on nearly four decades of experience:

This movement should enrich you. This movement should allow you to lead a different kind of life. This is not a burden. At its best this is a movement of joy....

Like his predecessors Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas, Mike Harrington believed that to waken the conscience and change the consciousness of a nation, one had to be prepared to build an organization, start a publication, speak in a thousand halls to crowds of hundreds, or scores, or tens, if necessary, recruiting comrades from those converted by the sound of one's voice and the strength of one's arguments. It was, and remains, a heroic vision.

*Maurice Isserman, a charter member of DSA, is the author of The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington (2000), from which this essay is adapted.*

# American Socialism: A Critical Review



By Steve Barton

Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History*  
University of Nebraska Press, 2015

Jack Ross would like us to reconsider the old Socialist Party of America (1901–1972, with remnants lingering on to the present day, of which only DSA retains potential significance). Like that Socialist Party (SP), he supports unions and the interests of the working class. Also like the SP, he opposes war and the imperial American State that sends its military into endless conflicts around the world in the interests of multinational corporations.

Ross sees SP leaders like Eugene Victor Debs, Victor Berger, Morris Hillquit, Norman Thomas and many others as “prophets who warned of the folly in which the country and its leaders were setting out and who offered the alternative path of peace and justice.” He believes that if the Socialist Party had made somewhat different strategic decisions, they could have created an enduring and successful Labor Party with working-class oriented domestic policies and

isolationist foreign policies that, if implemented, would have kept the United States “a republic and not an empire”.

“The Socialist Party of America was the principle movement, in the half-century from the closing of the continental frontier to the triumph of the American colossus during and after the Second World War, that strove in vain for the United States to remain a republic and not an empire. That at the critical turning point within this period the Socialist Party was the most prominent opponent of U.S. participation in the First World War and was made to mercilessly suffer for it, alone gives it major significance in American and world history.”

This is an interesting and thought-provoking perspective, but there are deep flaws and internal contradictions in his argument and important issues are left out, despite 600 pages of text

and an additional 150 pages of notes, bibliography, index, and a listing of socialist leaders and elected officials.

The book is “a complete history” only in the chronological sense. It focuses on two main themes: a question of political strategy—whether to stay separate from other movements, or to join in the formation of a labor party or farmer-labor party—and the issue of war and peace, examining the Party’s efforts to keep America out of World Wars I and II. Ross gives little attention to the Socialist Party’s domestic political program, theoretical ideas or issues of race and sex. His focus on the national organization gives the reader little understanding of how the Party gained the enduring support of a large part of the voting population in a number of cities, most notably Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Reading, Pennsylvania and some areas of New York City, and why it failed to win over the workers in so many others.

*(Cont’d from page 3; News from Maine)*  
Sanders. There are many more strangers I’ve run into on the street, or who’ve walked into the office, or called on the phone, who enthusiastically volunteer for Bernie Sanders almost before I can “organize” them!

Maine is a caucus state, similar to Iowa except that absentee ballots are allowed. The Maine caucuses, a combination town meeting and political rally, will be held across the state on March 6. At stake are 30 delegates, including 3 non-elected super delegates.

But this is not only about delegates;

it’s also a contest within the Maine Democratic party where the left wing is waging a vigorous campaign to change direction. Many Young Democrats as well as long time party activists who support Sanders are frustrated with the current leadership which they see as complacent and ossified, and are pushing for a more progressive direction.

*DSA member Harlan Baker is a former state representative and a field organizer for the Sanders campaign in Maine.*

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## The Party of Labor

Ross is at his best dealing with the period from just before the founding of the Socialist Party in 1901 through WW I and its immediate aftermath. Here the Party was at maximum strength, with over 100,000 members in 1912, significant influence in the union movement, sometimes winning local elections, and arguing about strategy at a time when it really seemed to matter. He also has the Party opposing a war in which American participation was arguably unnecessary and where “victory” was followed by a disastrous temporary peace.

Ross criticizes previous historians for romanticizing the left wing of the Socialist Party and the IWW, and failing to acknowledge the leaders of its electoral and union work who had major successes. He gives well-deserved credit to Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit, founding SP leaders who are overshadowed in historical memory by Eugene Victor Debs, the Party’s perennial and near-legendary Presidential candidate. Berger was the SP leader in Milwaukee, where Socialists won the majority of Mayoral elections between 1910 and 1960, and was himself elected to Congress six times between 1910 and 1928. He pioneered “constructive socialism”, a practical approach to gradual change at the local level that delivered real improvements in services to the working class. “Sewer socialism” was far from a joke when the infant mortality rate in American cities was sky-high due to inadequate sanitation, like Flint today.

Hillquit was a garment worker and union activist who put himself through law school, became the leader of New York City’s Socialists and wrote several books on the history and theory of socialism. His firmly democratic views drew such hostility from the Communist Party (CP) that his name was memorialized in a song satirizing the CP and its attacks on the

socialists. Below is the song:

### *The Cloakmakers Union*

*The Cloakmakers Union is a no good union;  
It's a company union by the bosses.  
The right-wing Cloakmakers and  
the Socialist fakers  
'Are making by the workers double-crosses.'  
Oh, the Hillquits, Dubinskys, and the  
Thomasases,  
Are making by the workers false promises.  
They preach Socialism but they practice  
Fascism  
To preserve capitalism by the bosses.*

Ross argues that the Party would have been more successful if it had shown a greater willingness to participate in creation of a labor party, even if that party was not explicitly socialist. But he fails to confront a major contradiction between his desire for a Labor Party that might have become a major political influence and his celebration of the consistent anti-war positions of the Socialist Party. In America, as in Europe, organized labor made initial calls for peace, then swung firmly behind the war effort as soon as the national government called for it. The Socialist Party of America was able to take a position of principled opposition precisely because it was not closely tied to the unions. There is little evidence to support the idea that the anti-war tradition would have continued to be dominant in a genuine Labor Party.

Ross argues that the onset of the Great Depression in 1930 created major opportunities, but shows that the crisis also intensified internal factional conflicts that paralyzed the Party until way too late. Membership doubled to over 20,000 but began to fall after 1935 when the New Deal moved in a more progressive direction and passed Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act and other worker-friendly measures.

Ross dismisses the possibility that the SP might have made greater inroads if it had followed the example of Upton Sinclair and worked within

the Democratic Party. Sinclair won the Democratic nomination for California Governor in 1934 on a platform of “production for use”, a way of describing socialism. He lost the general election, but received almost as many votes as Norman Thomas did running for President in his 1932 campaign and far more than Thomas did again in 1936.

## Racism and Empire

Ross draws support for his Labor Party thesis from Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (2000). They found that a major reason for the failure to create an effective social democratic party was the failure to gain support from the union movement, or at least a large fraction of it, and that left sectarianism was a significant reason why. Unfortunately, Ross ignores their other finding that ethnic, racial and religious divisions in the American working class were another significant problem the SP had in developing this alliance.

Ross wishes that the United States could have “remain(ed) a republic and not an empire”, but it was always both and until recently it was what Alexander Saxton aptly called a “white republic”. There was never a time before the SP’s founding when the U.S. was not an empire in the process of expansion: Wiping out native peoples or herding them onto reservations, importing slaves from Africa to America and then from the upper South to the lower, invading and incorporating upper Mexico, and taking up “the white man’s burden” in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War.

The major exception to this pattern of racist empire-building was the Civil War, in which the Northern states defeated an effort by the South to create a slave-based nation with its own imperial aspirations to incorporate Cuba and other parts of the

Caribbean and Central America. Preservation of the Union, the abolition of slavery and the use of Federal troops to protect freed slaves from being immediately reduced to serfdom all served as moral validation during and immediately after the Civil War for increased Federal powers that were later used to support the rise of corporate capitalism and imperialism. Since Ross wants to deny legitimacy to this later use of Federal powers, he takes the unnecessary step of denying that the Civil War was either just or an exercise of governmental power for a good cause. Instead, he endorses the now-discredited revisionist view that the War was nothing more than a conflict among different factions of capitalism over tariffs and railroad subsidies.

Ross also makes the wildly exaggerated claim that “the emerging industrial working class put up massive resistance to taking up arms ... if one accepts that conscription is slavery, ever a cardinal principle of the Socialist Party of America, it cannot be denied that the Draft Riots were a greater insurrection against slavery than any that took place in the South during the war.” This is a disgraceful slur against the slaves of the South. Well over a hundred thousand Black slaves joined the Union army and fought for their freedom at the risk of massacre if captured by Confederate forces.

Nor does Ross mention that the anti-draft riots he celebrates were also a classic racist pogrom against free Blacks who lived in nearby neighborhoods. Fortunately, far more of the Northern working class came to the defense of the Union than participated in the anti-draft riots of 1863. They believed that in fighting to preserve what was then the world’s only democracy, for all its limitations, they were also fighting to preserve the future of democracy in the world. They also believed, correctly, that they were fighting to prevent the spread of

slavery.

If there was ever a “republic” in the Southern states, it existed mostly for the period after the Union victory in which multi-racial democracy was protected by Federal troops. After their withdrawal in 1877 Confederate veterans, organized in groups like the Ku Klux Klan, took over local and state governments, deprived freed Blacks of the right to vote or serve on juries, and subjected them to a fascist regime where share-croppers were held in debt-peonage while living at the mercy of local sheriffs and violent paramilitaries. Federal troops holding off armed white terrorists at gunpoint in order to bring a few years of democracy to the South suggests that the nature of state power necessary to sustain a “republic” is more complex than Ross’ “golden age” appeal to nostalgia for an earlier era.

Ross does give the SP full credit for the anti-racist work done by its members, such as those who helped found the NAACP in 1909 and A. Phillip Randolph, whose threat of a march on Washington pressured Franklin D. Roosevelt to open up employment in war industries to Blacks, but he fails to present the full complexity of the Party’s role.

While Eugene Debs was exemplary in his personal views on race, Victor Berger and many other leading white Socialists, admirable though they were in many respects, accepted the racist beliefs of the larger American society. Some Socialists argued that it was necessary in the short run to sacrifice the interests of non-whites in order to maintain good relations with the union movement. In California the unions had a long history of efforts to prevent Asians from coming to America and from competing with white workers once they were here. In 1913 the California Socialist Party’s newly elected state legislator, C. J. Kingsley, opposed bills to segregate Blacks in the state school system but supported

union-backed bills to prevent Japanese from owning farm land.

Probably the most important Socialist Party contribution to overcoming racism was their strong support for industrial unionism, which was essential to incorporation of non-whites into the union movement but gets little attention from Ross.

### **Opposition to World War II**

Under the leadership of Norman Thomas, a former Presbyterian minister and near-pacifist, the Socialist Party tried to keep America out of World War II. When Thomas joined in 1918, motivated in large part by its opposition to American entry into World War I, he wrote, “I have a profound fear of the undue exaltation of the state and a profound faith that the new world we desire must depend upon freedom and fellowship rather than any form of coercion whatsoever”. Thomas believed, based on his observation of the repression that accompanied World War I, that if America went to war again it would result in the replacement of democracy with fascism.

A reasonable person can believe both that engaging in war is harmful to democracy and that sometimes war is necessary. Ross, however, supports Thomas’ view that Roosevelt not only could have but should have kept America out of the war. He approvingly describes Thomas’ concern that war with Japan would provide Roosevelt with a “back door to war” with Germany, and informs us that documents released in 1941 showed “the deliberate provocation of Japan by an oil embargo”, implying that America should have continued to sell oil to Japan and that, in return, Japan would not have attacked the U.S. Ross makes no mention of the fact that Imperial Japan was then in the fourth year of a brutal war of conquest against China and needed oil to continue. Nor does he mention the nationwide campaign calling for the



U.S. to boycott trade with Japan in an effort to force its government to stop and make peace. In describing the oil embargo as a provocation, Ross contradicts his own stated principles. Surely an anti-imperialist isolationist would favor non-cooperation with the imperialism of other nations?

Ross is the reverse image of the “hawks” who believed the lessons of the 1938 Munich treaty meant America should fight in Vietnam in 1964, reading the lessons of Vietnam and Iraq back into World War II instead. Roosevelt feared that if America stayed out of the war Hitler would conquer Europe, Japan would conquer Asia, and North America would become an island of democracy under siege from totalitarian regimes. He believed that the U.S. needed to provide military aid to protect democratic Great Britain from invasion by Nazi Germany and worked to persuade the American public that democracy in America was threatened by the Nazi German and Imperial Japanese regimes.

Ross dismisses this concern, asserting that “the real purpose of Lend-Lease was a power-grab by the Roosevelt administration, the beginning of the decade-long march toward virtually unchallenged presidential war-making powers in the postwar era”. Like the Civil War, World War II provided moral legitimacy to Federal powers that were later used to support unjust wars and so, as he did with the Civil War, Ross feels compelled to deny legitimacy to World War II.

Norman Thomas and anyone else who read a newspaper at the time knew that the Nazis had destroyed every continental democracy in Europe with the exception of neutral Sweden and Switzerland, knew that they had imprisoned, tortured, and killed most socialist and union leaders who had not made it into exile, and knew about their vicious treatment of the Jews, which at the time was only just short of the mass

extermination that was soon to come. A large part of the support for the weakened Socialist Party of the 1920s and 1930s came from working class Jews and their leaders in the garment workers unions, fraternal organizations and ethnic newspapers. They were acutely aware of what was happening to the relatives and communities they had left behind in Europe. Most agreed with Roosevelt and could not accept Thomas’ opposition to U.S. involvement. When they left the Socialist Party, it lost its last significant base in the working class it purported to fight for. Ross gives scarcely a nod towards those Socialists who had a more realistic understanding of the situation and supports Thomas to the end. Thomas’ isolationism reduced the Socialist Party to little more than 1,000 members by 1941 and it would never again be a serious political force in America.

### Irrelevance

The final third of the book is a detailed history of the Socialist Party during its period of nearly complete irrelevance from 1942 until its final disintegration in 1972, followed by a history of its fragments up to 2005. With only a few hundred members remaining by the late 1950s, the Party was taken over by a group led by ex-Trotskyist Max Shachtman, then fell apart in the early 1970s. Various fragments continued on, trying to uphold its legacy in one way or another. Shachtman himself went with the Social Democrats U.S.A., whose members supported the war in Vietnam and embedded themselves in the pro-war AFL-CIO under George Meany. Some of them created “neo-conservatism” and ended up as Republicans. Ross notes their skill at forming “Leninist front groups with no rear behind the front”.

The main anti-Vietnam war group was led by Michael Harrington, then America’s best known socialist due to his authorship of *The Other America* (1962), widely credited with helping spark renewed concern with poverty. In 1973 he formed the Democratic Socialist

Organizing Committee, which in 1982 merged with the New American Movement, a group of veterans of Students for a Democratic Society, to form Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Its main strategy of working to support progressives within the Democratic Party appeared to reach a dead end with the ascension of the “New Democrats” during the Presidency of Bill Clinton, but is gaining new life with the Bernie Sanders campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Ross also discusses the tiny Socialist Party USA, and is deeply critical of Michael Harrington for what Ross considers incorrect tactical decisions, as if, in the context of a major international revival of free market fundamentalism, better tactics might have somehow revived the socialist movement. Ross spends almost as much time on the factional fights of a Socialist Party with a few hundred members, and on criticisms of its fragments, as he spends on the conflicts within the Party when it had tens of thousands of members.

The history of the United States is full of both systematic injustices and expansion of democracy; heroic yet flawed struggles that sometimes lead to progress; and backsliding into new forms of injustice. Over the course of its life, the Socialist Party of America carried the hopes of millions of Americans for a more just, democratic and peaceful society. I regret to say that Ross has not given us the history American socialism deserves.

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# Solidarity with Chinese Labor Activists

*Passed by DSA National Political Committee, December 12, 2015*

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) advocates fundamental human rights throughout the world, and offers its support in solidarity to all those who are deprived of those rights. Among those fundamental human rights are freedoms of association to create a labor union and to engage in collective bargaining.

Local political authorities in the Guangdong Province of China have launched a wave of repression against worker centers, their staff, and activists. These small non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in assisting internal migrant workers to exercise their basic rights, to fight for wages and social benefits to which they are legally entitled. For example, the Panyu Migrant Workers Service Center in an industrial district of the city of Guangzhou assisted workers at the Taiwanese-owned Lide shoe factory to receive the compensation and social insurance in arrears they were owed when their factory was relocated. The Panyu Center also assisted forty local sanitation workers obtain legally required severance pay from their former cleaning contractor and to sign new contracts with the new contractor.

Now the director of the Panyu Center, Zeng Feiyang, and one of its key worker activists Zhu Xiaomei have been arrested and placed under criminal detention on charges of “disrupting public order.” Zhu Xiaomei, who played a leading role in assisting the Lide Shoe and sanitation workers, has even been separated from the one-year-old daughter that she was breastfeeding. Several other staff and activists from four worker centers remain in detention, held incommunicado and refused their right to see lawyers.

We believe this savage repression is motivated by the panic of local government authorities occasioned by the growth of unofficial protests and strikes by migrant workers in the Guangdong province who are suffering from the closures or relocations of their workplaces. Rather than addressing the underlying problems, the authorities appear to be trying to deprive workers of their right to any kind of support or representation by jailing those who have offered them legal support and advice.

We join the protests of the numerous labor unions and worker rights activists based in Hong Kong who have been organizing a campaign of protest in support of their colleagues on the Mainland.

As an organization supporting universal human and labor rights, Democratic Socialists of America calls on the Chinese government to:

1. Immediately release all the detained labor activists.
2. Stop suppressing labor activists, labor organizations and civil society organizations.
3. Respect and protect the development and freedom of civil society as prescribed by China’s Constitution.

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# DSA Statement on Gloria Steinem

*Passed by National Political Committee, February 10, 2016*

Gloria Steinem, who supports former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination, recently made controversial statements (or misstatements) in which she suggested that young women who support Bernie Sanders are doing so not out of well-considered political judgment but because they are thinking “Where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie.”

Steinem serves as one of eight Honorary Chairs of Democratic Socialists of America (along with Cornel West, Barbara Ehrenreich, Frances Fox Piven and others) based on her work for DSA in the 1980s and ‘90s and one of its predecessor organizations, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. While we appreciate Steinem’s pioneering work in the feminist movement and view her as a major figure in the history of feminism, we were very disappointed by her disparaging comments about female Bernie supporters, many of whom are active DSA members. Her views do not reflect those of DSA leadership.

The National Political Committee of Democratic Socialists of America views Steinem’s remarks as demeaning toward the many dedicated female activists (young and old) who are active in the Sanders campaign because they recognize that Senator Sanders’ political program supports feminist and democratic aims more than the platform of Hillary Clinton.

DSA members individually may and will vote as they choose, but DSA as an organization is actively supporting the Sanders movement. Senator Sanders is fully committed to publicly funded childcare, paid parental leave and a truly universal health care system. Senator Clinton has rejected these feminist policies. She also backed her husband’s welfare reform legislation, which had extremely negative effects on the lives of millions of low-income women and children. We find these facts to run counter to the argument that she is the only feminist choice.

Steinem now claims that her remarks were “misinterpreted,” but it is disturbing that these remarks, along with other recent complaints raised by Clinton supporters about women who back Sanders, emerge just as polls show that Senator Sanders is the choice of a majority of young women voters. Young women—as well as people of all ages—are supporting the Sanders campaign because they believe in the politics it represents, and we share the anger of those whose motives were questioned by Steinem’s ill-considered remarks.

# END ALL U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF SAUDI ARABIA

## Statement by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy

*January 15, 2016*



President Barack Obama visited with King Salman bin Abdulaziz in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh in January 2015.  
(Photo: Reuters/J. Bourg)

We call on the Obama administration to end the U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia and to stop providing the Saudi regime with military and diplomatic support. The execution in January of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, an opponent of both Sunni and Shiite sectarianism and an advocate of a non-violent strategy, is only the most recent example of the barbarity of the Saudi dictatorship; the government carried out at least 157 executions in 2015, many of them by grisly beheadings. Saudi Arabia's outrageous oppression of women is well known and, as Amnesty International has documented, the regime systematically represses dissent with flogging and other forms of torture, equates criticism of the government and other peaceful activities with terrorism, and continues to discriminate against the country's Shia minority. Washington has issued only pro-forma expressions of "concern" about these human rights violations, while in practice maintaining solid support for the Saudi regime.

The Saudi Kingdom has long played a reactionary role across the Middle East with such actions as supporting Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak to the bitter end and then supporting the repressive Sisi regime that came to power in a coup. When the Arab Spring spread to Bahrain, the Saudi government sent troops into that country to buttress the brutal repression of protesters. In Yemen, the Saudis are engaging in indiscriminate bombings resulting in the death of thousands of innocent civilians. Notwithstanding Saudi Arabia's reactionary domestic and regional policies, the Obama administration has approved new arms sales agreements with the regime, amounting to \$50 billion, while American companies train thousands of Saudi military personnel. And Washington supports Saudi Arabia's deadly war in Yemen, supplying bombs (including deadly cluster bombs), refueling, and logistical assistance.

Washington justifies its alliance with the Saudis and other dictators in the name of defeating ISIS and preserving regional "stability." But the effect of U.S. policy is the opposite. Authoritarian regimes, both secular and sectarian, that have been consistently or intermittently supported by Washington—like those in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Iran under the Shah, and Iraq both before and after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein—have fueled the rise of Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other murderous theocratic movements. The only way such groups can be decisively and

sustainably defeated is by the victory of grassroots movements for democracy and social justice across the region—from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to Iran, Syria and beyond.

The United States and other Western powers bear responsibility for enabling the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda not only because of their support for repressive regimes, but also because of their disastrous military interventions. In addition, the West has pressured countries throughout the Middle East to adopt harsh neoliberal policies that have cut social programs and reduced the already miserable living standards of ordinary people. When most of the mass movements of the Arab Spring for democracy and basic economic rights were crushed, jihadism gained in appeal. Moreover, Israel's denial of the basic rights of the Palestinian people—a policy that receives massive support from Washington—has produced legitimate anger across the region, anger that has often been hijacked by authoritarian fundamentalists in the absence of a progressive solution.

To be sure, the United States and the other Western countries are not solely responsible for the rise of groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Other regional powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran share responsibility, and Russia, by backing Assad's brutal dictatorship, has made its own catastrophic contribution. However, a new democratic, peaceful and just U.S. foreign policy could start to reverse the horrific downward spiral of politics in the Middle East. An important element of such a policy would be for the United States to end all forms of support for the Saudi government. At the same time, we offer our solidarity and support to the brave Saudi women and men—many of them behind bars—who are working for democratic change, as we offer support to all movements in the Middle East that struggle for democracy and challenge inequality and repression. They are our hope.

*On March 5 & 6 in Washington, DC, the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, The Nation Magazine, The Institute for Policy Studies, Code Pink, Peace Action and others are sponsoring a two-day Summit on Saudi Arabia. For details and costs visit <http://www.cpdweb.org>.*

## *the yankee radical*

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