

The Socialist

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Executive Editor

Mary Nickum

Editorial Board

Matei Alexandru

Eric Chester

JD Short

Ren Walstrom

The Socialist is the official magazine of the Socialist Party USA. It is published twice per year. The magazine discusses Socialism and the Socialist Party in the everyday lives of working-class readers, whether it be labor, civil rights, health care, or environmental movements.

The magazine seeks to be a forum for discussion of essential questions of Party-building, movement-building, economic theory, and revolutionary praxis by both Party members and the general public. We are committed to stimulating the intellectual and ideological vibrancy of SP-USA and the US socialist movement with provocative essays, articles, fiction, and even poetry. We produce *The Socialist* to promulgate socialist ideas and because we seek to develop ourselves and our movement through intellectual labor.

Submission guidelines can be found at the end of each magazine issue.

Correspondence should be directed to the Executive Editor, Mary Nickum editor@thesocialist.online

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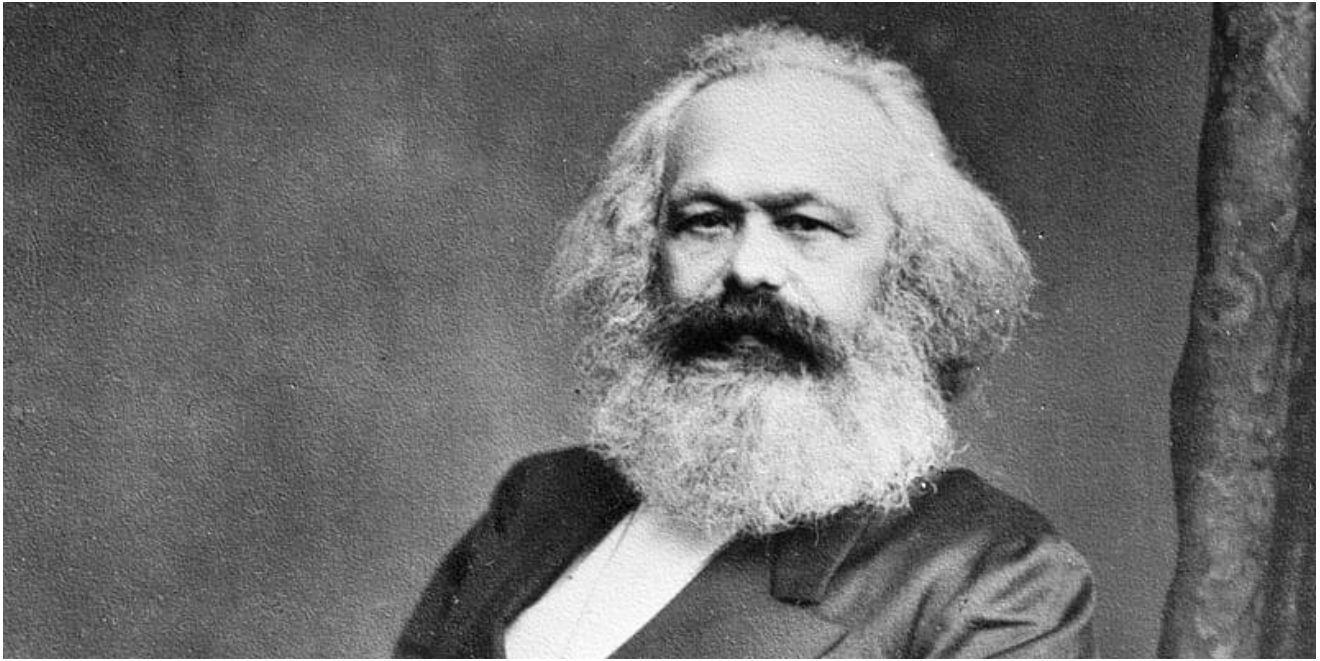
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Karl Marx (5 May 1818 – 14 March 1883)

“What the working man sells is not directly his Labor, but his Laboring Power, the temporary disposal of which he makes over to the capitalist. This is so much the case that I do not know whether by the English Law, but certainly by some Continental Laws, the maximum time is fixed for which a man is allowed to sell his laboring power. If allowed to do so for any indefinite period whatever, slavery would be immediately restored. Such a sale, if it comprised his lifetime, for example, would make him at once the lifelong slave of his employer.”

“To say that ‘the worker has an interest in the rapid growth of capital’, means only this: that the more speedily the worker augments the wealth of the capitalist, the larger will be the crumbs which fall to him, the greater will be the number of workers than can be called into existence, the more can the mass of slaves dependent upon capital be increased.”

— Karl Marx

ARTICLES



ANSWERS FROM THE CANDIDATES

WILLIAM “DOC” STODDEN AND STEPHANIE CHOLENSKY

1. How does holding a socialist feminist perspective affect how you would approach the issues that arise as candidates? Not just in your approach to issues immediately impacting women, such as abortion, but more generally in your vision of a socialist society.

Intersectional socialist feminism has always been at the core of my political philosophy as well as foundational to the Socialist Party USA. I'm delighted to see more people asking questions like this, as despite our party's history as a socialist feminist organization, we still face significant challenges in achieving gender equality and there is so much more the left can do to dismantle patriarchy. There are still those on the left, unfortunately, who acknowledge the contradictions and counter-productive nature of bourgeois feminism without fighting for socialist feminism. Liberal feminists will always take credit for the things grassroots

movements of far-left feminists fought for and won, while doing nothing to substantially build on these gains unless forced. Democrats will coerce those who care about these issues to vote for them by claiming (and ensuring) they are constantly under threat, and while we can't change the fact that liberals do this, I see no benefit in leftists ceding feminism to Liberals, much less letting this narrative go unchallenged.

One limitation of defining people solely in terms of their relationship to capital is the silent implication of 'worker' as an adult doing wage labor for an employer. While this does make a clear, and vital distinction between the working and owning classes, unless they have some form of class consciousness already, at best, most Americans won't see themselves as 'workers' until they're at least fourteen, and

this interpretation ignores the reality of those already most alienated by political struggle: people who exist at multiple intersections of oppression. For example, the disproportionate amount of unpaid work women are tasked with, including most domestic/caretaking work, is deemphasized, if not invisible- not to mention other forms of work outside over the table wage labor: sex work, prison labor, piecemeal or gig work, child labor, and other forms of exploitation that absolutely encompasses working class oppression, even if those who face it don't see themselves as workers.

The severe lack of class consciousness in the US is WHY we will never succeed without building a movement with an understanding of the intersectional nature of oppression under capitalism: because lack of class consciousness makes class solidarity impossible. Aside from those who only know oppression based on the fact that they are working class, most Americans view their oppression in terms of identities other than class. The other intersections of oppression are better understood, are more foundational to who they are and their lived

experiences, and they have known and practiced solidarity with the people closest to them who face the same struggles: whether it be because of their race, gender, immigration status, as these communities are much better defined and integral to their identity, something they've grappled with for their entire lives.

While all workers are exploited under capitalism, the way they are exploited is heavily dependent on other identities as well. The majority of working adults in the US are women, and women also do the majority of work, when all labor (paid and unpaid) is tallied. Women are exploited in unique ways under capitalism as well, and the right is quick to scapegoat women in the work place, rejection of traditional gender roles and acceptance of non-binary and trans gender identities to deflect from any criticism of capitalism itself, as leftists we need to counter this narrative at every turn in a way that acknowledges the wide variety of ways capitalism exploits and divides the working class.

This year I was part of a panel at the National Organizing conference that

described the need for intersectional socialist feminism, rather than the left allowing the owning class to warp feminism into an ideology that maintains, rather than challenges, the *status quo*. Americans, and even leftists have become accustomed to many anti-feminist arguments, so often based on lies, bigotry, and made in ignorance or bad faith. This has led to leftists who fully reject any analysis or struggle that isn't based on class, readily ceding the fight for gender equality and the word feminism itself to liberals, as if the problem with liberal feminism is the feminism, not the liberalism.

While the best liberals can offer is a world where women take an equal part in oppressing the working-class, fascists can't even begin to address the problems of patriarchy: as they are staunchly in support of it! Fascism can only build popular support for their disgusting ideas by presenting twisted versions of the left's answers to these important issues. Fascism seeks to replace class consciousness with ultra-nationalism, offering solutions, albeit contradictory ones based on bigotry, for the

contradictions of capitalism, and protecting the ruling class by keeping the working class divided. But they are not able to corrupt our dedication to liberation from white supremacy and patriarchy, as support of these hierarchies is foundational to fascism as we know it. Intersectional socialist feminism at the core of our party not only helps us build a diverse movement that truly represents the working class, it also makes it that much more cumbersome for the far right to steal and manipulate our arguments to fit their brand of far-right populism.

Feminism, for socialists, should be a source of strength, not shame. It is something that benefits all the working class, that addresses the ways gender stereotypes and gender oppression hurt all of us. Only intersectional socialist feminism offers real, class-conscious solutions and a path to liberation from white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism as well as a blueprint for a society free from these forms of ignorance and oppression.

To anyone who faces marginalization due to their gender identity and wants to learn more about intersectional socialist

feminism I encourage them to get active in the Women's Commission of the Socialist Party USA.

2. How do we bring the war in the Ukraine to an end? One of the issues underlying the conflict is the possibility of the Ukraine joining NATO, as well as the inclusion of former Soviet bloc countries into NATO. What is your stance on this issue? In general, what should be a socialist approach to NATO?

I feel if we stop arming Ukraine and stop trying to push NATO into Ukraine, it will force Ukraine to the negotiating table and will represent a credible commitment on the part of the west to general security, rather than security at Russia's expense. I am not in any sense of the word an apologist for Putin. That said, I can also understand how our insistence that Ukraine be a puppet state for the west and a full member of NATO would make Russia feel insecure. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not a result of Putin being a psychotic dictator, nor is it the response to something that just happened in like 2021. It is the result of a centuries' long threat that Russia has felt from the west, and is a relic of Soviet-era foreign policy, which

said that Russia needs a buffer state from aggression from the west. In moving into Ukraine, NATO more or less confirms for Russia everything it has feared, and so they invade to forestall that. We, in the US need to abandon the Neo-Liberal World Order, commit to dealing with Russia as it is, and stop constantly threatening Russia with hostile states on their borders. Then Russia might get to resolving its problems. A socialist approach to NATO would be to withdraw the US from NATO, as NATO is an offensive military alliance, and Socialists are opposed to those things which promote war.

3. We learned 2024 is the warmest year on record globally. The Paris Agreement states "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels." What realistic efforts do you propose to reach this Agreement during your 4-year administration?

Climate change is a global crisis, one that can only be fully addressed through a deliberate and cooperative global effort. It is also a challenge that capitalism is incapable

of addressing, and the Paris agreement is one of many failures of neoliberal capitalism to limit the damage of climate change, much less make progress in this regard.

There may be debate on policy specifics, but luckily there is little debate among experts on either the cause of or the best solutions to climate change: that is, capitalism has only escalated our environmental problems, and only Ecosocialism, not the false promises and outright scams of so-called 'green capitalism' which are ineffective, if not counterproductive.

The challenges we face are currently well within our power to change. There are many brilliant people better qualified than me to outline the best climate policies, and elected leaders who care about this issue should take their advice. For anyone interested in learning more about policy specifics, the SP-USA platform is a great place to start, and to those looking to learn more or to be involved in this conversation and climate action, I would suggest joining the Socialist Party USA's Ecosocialism Working Group.

For many years, I have said that once the effects of climate change become undeniable, we will see the narrative switch from one of denialism to one of inevitability. This may be the greatest obstacle for young people: in becoming aware of our powerlessness, we risk being pummeled into submission by hopelessness. While it is true one person working alone has little ability to halt the progress of climate change, it is important to remember we are NOT alone, and working together we CAN change things: in fact, it is how change benefiting the working class has always been accomplished. If you want to help work toward this change, joining the Socialist Party USA is a great place to start, no matter where you are in your journey.

The platform of the Socialist Party USA doesn't just offer a comprehensive plan for mitigating the worst aspects of climate change, protecting those who face the brunt of its effects, and liberation from all types of systemic oppression. It also represents one way to build a sustainable, peaceful future for all. What political ideology, other than socialism, can offer this? In the darkest of

times, it is even more important to have people working to keep this hope alive, fostering solidarity and peace rather than hatred and violence. Our current situation under late-stage capitalism in the heart of imperialism may seem bleak, both politically and in regards to climate change; but, depending on what we build in its place, it is the owning class, not the working class that need to mourn the passing of the status quo, and our future is entirely dependent on what we build in place of this failed system that does not and has never served working people. With or without us, these questions will continue to demand answers. Capitalism is unsustainable, the question is not when it will die, rather the question is if we will allow it to take us with it when it does.

4. Scientists say we must end our dependency on fossil fuels. How would your administration meet this challenge?

Current US policy focuses on ‘energy independence’, decreasing our reliance on imports of fossil fuels and expanding domestic capacity and production. This is

another example of the deception involved in the way our leaders speak about US policy, energy independence may sound appealing, especially when you consider our closeness with the government of Saudi Arabia. In reality, ‘energy independence’ is just a euphemism for a set of policies that protect the profits of fossil fuel companies at the expense of everything and everyone, polluting critical habitats and watersheds with fracking, drilling, mining, and oil pipelines.

It is possible to transition to renewable, sustainable energy sources in our lifetime. One way my personal politics differ from the parties is in nuclear power. I have a deep respect for anti-nuclear activists, and do not trust any for-profit system to safely manage and regulate nuclear power plants and the storage of nuclear waste. It is my personal belief that the urgency of our need to transition away from fossil fuels justifies the use of Thorium reactors, where other renewable sources of energy are not available, cost effective, dependable enough or feasible. However, as a representative of the Socialist Party USA I would not support

legislation or policy proposals that go against our platform, as I feel my duty to accurately and consistently represent the platform of the party far outweighs my opinion on this matter.

5. How would you use the powers of the presidency to empower the working class?

I'm answering this question under the assumption that the SP-USA has fairly won the presidential election, and thus has a major level of public support, though it is unlikely that the ruling class would allow such a presidential ticket to take power. Seizing the means of production, putting them under democratic control of the workers within them, nationalizing every major industry, including the financial sector and for-profit healthcare, agriculture, and housing industries is the best way to do this. The Supreme Court would be a focus for me, as it is obvious that far-right conservative groups have a strangle hold on the court and have been using it to pass incredibly unpopular legislation. To counter this, we must pack the court with Justices

that will rule fairly and without bias in a way that benefits the powerless over the powerful to the greatest extent they are able.

To be frank, we should ask ourselves why the working class would trust us with power if we have not yet shown what we'd be able to do with it? Campaigning on popular issues is one thing, enacting them is quite another. We will never vote socialism into being, at least not under our current system, which serves the purpose of manufacturing consent more than delegating power to true representatives of the people. This doesn't mean electoral politics are of no use to us as a tool. We can use campaigns to raise alternative viewpoints and issues never covered by the parties of capitalism, and elected positions to demonstrate the contradictions within our current political system. While it is possible to pass some reforms that benefit working-class people, engaging in electoralism without careful strategy tends to work in the service of the owning classes and those in positions of wealth and privilege, or to tamp down dissent, redirect revolutionary action into reform and/or inspire faith in a broken

system. Here in Minneapolis, a handful of elected SP-USA members were able to enact more change in their roles than the DFL (the Democratic party in MN) was able to achieve despite controlling the levers of political power for years. I don't doubt that there are some local DFL volunteers as well as candidates who are dedicated to public service and legitimately care about their communities; but the system itself is an obstacle to meaningful change, without corporate funding for their campaigns, a politician isn't likely to get their campaign off the ground or be re-elected. The current system of electoral politics under capitalism, including the presidency, is merely a tool to build class consciousness, not the way to achieve lasting change.

We cannot bring about real and lasting change with half measures, reforms, welfare programs that work within rather than against the wage slavery system: we need to seize power and give it directly to the working class. Obviously, this isn't something one politician, even a presidential ticket, can achieve alone. Our current system can't be reformed into an egalitarian one, we

must work to build institutions that don't have their foundations in maintaining capitalism, wage labor, white supremacy, patriarchy, and the division of the working class against itself.

Ultimately, it isn't up to me to say how this new world will look, I'm one small voice in determining and achieving this.

6. What are some ways in which the capitalist political establishment would attempt to undermine a socialist president?

Naturally, they would use their stooges in the Federal Government to resist a socialist President's efforts to help working people. A President can't pass his or her own laws—while they have some limited ability in how laws are executed, they usually have to wait for the legislature to write and pass a law before they can sign it. Given that the Legislature is completely captured by the capitalist political establishment, it is very easy for capitalists to dictate the law to the Congress. They can also use the courts who will always side with the propertied class to invalidate anything the Socialist actually does accomplish. Furthermore, the corporate

press would run constant and vicious propaganda to sway the population to oppose the efforts of a Socialist President. The capitalist political establishment uses election laws to prevent socialists from even running for office in most places. It would be naïve to assume that capitalists won't be able to easily buy off whole segments of the working class to actively work to undermine the progress of Socialism, attack other workers, and continue to sell out their own class interests because they identify with the interests of their masters over their own. Given all the structural hurdles, Socialism is impossible without revolution aimed at abolishing capitalism and the liberal political regime designed to protect capitalism, before we can even begin working on actually establishing socialism.

7. What are some things socialists can do to maintain political engagement after Election Day and organize effectively over the next four years?

First, we should address how so much anger has been misdirected to target the most marginalized, and work to reflect this anger back at those in power. In other words, we

need to direct attention away from the culture war that the parties of capitalism have fixated on and into a class war that holds those who have power accountable. It isn't that reproductive rights, immigration, and trans rights aren't critical issues: they certainly are. But working people have been duped into blaming the powerless for the actions of the powerful. The working class has been divided against itself by a form of liberal feminism that has no class consciousness and thus offers no hope for true liberation of all working people. We need to demonstrate that trans people and migrants having basic human rights isn't the reason working people are scraping by; capitalism and the wealth inequality it causes is.

Next, we need to address how so much of our political energy is twisted into serving the ruling class. This DNC we saw delegates plugging their ears as protesters read the names of Palestinian children killed using our tax dollars because of a US foreign policy passed and supported by their own party. We saw a complete failure to acknowledge, even in the most toothless of

ways, these crimes against humanity and any concern for the human rights of Palestinians.

Is this what harm reduction looks like: endorsing and defending an ethnic cleansing committed by an apartheid state in both word and deed? Brutally punishing those who protest for peace? A joint session of US Congress giving Netanyahu fifty-eight standing ovations? Sending thoughts and prayers to Gaza alongside our bombs and bullets? Pointing the finger at corporate greed in a platform written by corporate lobbyists in a campaign funded by corporate donations? Bragging about all the bipartisan agreements Democrats have forged in cooperation with the GOP, the same GOP they claim is the biggest threat to liberal democracy in America, a threat they insist only the Democrats can defeat? Condemning the ‘divisiveness’ of the left yet supporting decades of privatization and austerity and pandering to the right to the point that the Overton window has shifted far enough that Christian Nationalism is now a mainstream position?

The parties of capitalism offer no hope of lasting change that helps working

people. No doubt they will continue to promise it, all while serving their corporate masters; but ‘fascism tomorrow, not today’ isn’t a political message that is going to inspire massive amounts of people to the polls and, unless the far-right populism that has seized control of so much America has a legitimate foil in the far left, we will continue to drift to the right.

Lastly, we have to be honest about the threat of political apathy and people losing faith in the role democracy, real democracy, has in building a better world. The dissatisfaction of Americans with their political system is clear and justified; but there is a real danger, much like climate defeatism and we will lose if we succumb to political defeatism. A working-class person claiming ‘democracy doesn’t work’ is music to the ears of the fascist; we must show that it is possible to build a truly democratic political system that represents working-class people, rather than ceding power to tyrants. We must be clear that our current system is not true democracy and that a better future is possible, but this can only be

achieved by the working-class seizing power, not ceding all power to autocrats.

8. How would the foreign policy of a socialist administration look?

Socialist foreign policy is aimed at peace. How do we do this? Well, first of all, we forego a leading role in international relations. In the US, we start by cutting the defense budget by ninety percent. This involves closing bases, cashing in most of the standing military, cancelling weapons contracts and ending all contracts with the Private Sector. With the peace dividend, we make a serious commitment to veterans' affairs, including healthcare, job training, and crisis intervention and then return the rest of the money to the general fund. In international institutions, we join agreements that allow us to cooperate with the nations of the world in constructive peace and human advancement efforts, leave NATO and leave the UN Security Council. We stop supporting regimes that are conducting human rights violations and environmental destruction, and we end all support for undemocratic governments

around the world, without regard to their ideology. We immediately and unilaterally decommission our nuclear weapons capabilities, our CIA and the WTO and IMF. In short, a Peace oriented policy places the US next to other countries in the world, as an equal, rather than as a super power. We end our support for war makers, we abandon intervention as a foreign policy option, and we deny ourselves the tools we have previously abused to pressure other nations to come to heel. We do not compromise on this commitment to peace, not for any reason.

9. What does a successful socialist political campaign require?

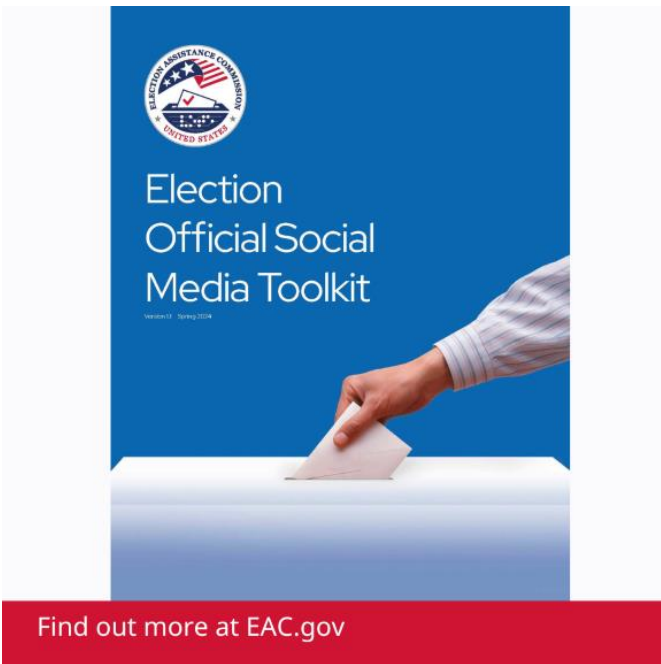
A successful socialist political campaign requires the active support of the membership of the party; however that bears itself out. While I can say we did have committed volunteers on our campaign, it was not enough. Many times, we asked for help from Party members, and few were willing to participate. In some cases, Party members actively worked against the

campaign, because they did not personally agree with the idea of having a campaign. Other times, some would have wanted to help but never did because they were too busy with life. We ourselves were trying to juggle work, family, and campaign, because, unlike the better funded parties, we couldn't afford to take a year off to run for office—we are workers and we are parents and we are humans and paying the rent is far more imperative than flying to another city when there may or may not be anything waiting for us there when we get there. Getting additional volunteers for specific events, like petitioning, was always a challenge. While some Comrades donated significant sums of money to the campaign, we need more money to be able to hire local coordinators and petition collectors. All limitations aside, we always said a successful campaign would help build the Party, get the message about socialism out to more people, and get people active in their communities. All things considered, I would say we can judge ourselves to be successful as a campaign, and we even got onto the ballot in this country.

10. How can we use this election to grow the Socialist Party USA?

Part of our effort has been to tell people what the Socialist Party USA stands for. Our campaign's platform was based on the SPUSA's platform—all statements we made as a campaign referred to the SP's platform, and whenever we have appeared in interviews and podcasts, we talked about the SP's platform. We have constantly striven to talk about the Party's principles, and tie those principles into the struggles that people are working on in our society. We have always encouraged people to join the Party to continue this fight for socialism. The election is a perfect opportunity to find people who are paying attention, and to find new folks who are now thinking about their options, to encourage them to consider looking at and joining our Party. We have that advantage during election years that does not exist between elections.





SOCIALIST PARTY VS. LABOR PARTY

ERIC CHESTER

Independent political action has always been a fundamental principle held by socialists. The working class needs its own party, which is independent of the corporate parties totally and advances a socialist perspective through its program.

Although there is general agreement on this as a strategic goal, some socialists believe the formation of a progressive party with ties to the established unions would mark a major step toward this goal. This position has been revived repeatedly in the United States since the creation of the British Labour Party in 1900. Some have gone a step further by arguing socialists should work within the fringes of the mainstream parties while pushing for a break and the initiation of a progressive party.

History demonstrates the labor party perspective is bound to fail. Rather than a step toward a genuinely independent politics, the labor party perspective provides a safe way back into mainstream corporate politics.

The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party of America (SP) remains the most successful effort to establish an independent political party at the national level in US history. A mass party with more than 100,000 members at its zenith in 1912, the SP included a wide range of factions and perspectives. Nevertheless, a key point of unity

was an agreement that the working class needed to form its own party, one that was independent of both corporate parties, completely.

From its origins in 1901, the Socialist Party grew rapidly, establishing a solid base of support within the working class in localities around the country, as well as within certain unions. Still, the Party remained on the margins at the national and state levels. In spite of this record of success, influential members of its social democratic wing began to view the British Labour Party as a model. The Labour Party had been formed as an organizational venue in which the reformist socialists of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) could cooperate with mainstream union officials based on a program explicitly not socialist. Within a few years after its formation, the Labour Party had become an important factor in Parliament, acting as a pressure group on the Liberal Party government. Furthermore, a secret agreement between the leaders of the Labour Party and the Liberal Party avoided a split in the left of center vote in key constituencies.

The success of the British Labour Party dazzled many of the moderate leaders of the Socialist Party of America. When their tentative effort to initiate the formation of a labor party became widely known, the project was dropped and those behind the move publicly declared they remained committed to furthering the growth of the Socialist Party.

The evidence is clear the idea of a labor party had begun to percolate within the social democratic wing of the Socialist Party in the years prior to World War I. Those who held this perspective were convinced when such a progressive party was formed, socialists would be able to work within it to transform it into a genuinely socialist party.

The Nonpartisan League

The consensus among socialists on the need to remain outside of the two party system was shattered by the formation of the Nonpartisan League (NPL) in the spring of 1915. Initially organized in North Dakota, it rapidly became a major force in that state's politics. With the state government under NPL control, legislation was enacted to create a state owned grain mill and a state owned bank to provide low interest loans to farmers; both

measures were designed to aid small farmers in countering the power of large corporations.

The League focused its electoral efforts at the state level. Its members in a specific legislative district would endorse a single candidate pledged to the implementation of the organization's program. The candidate then would stand in the primary election of the mainstream party that had garnered the majority of the vote in that district. Because the NPL was an organization of small farmers residing in rural areas, most of its candidates were elected on the Republican Party ticket. Thus, the League's electoral strategy remained firmly within the confines of the two party system. Nevertheless, it had no loyalty to either of the mainstream parties; instead, it sought to mobilize the progressive vote within both the Republican and Democratic parties.

The League soon expanded beyond its initial base in North Dakota and became a substantial force throughout the entire region. Indeed, at its peak the Nonpartisan League enrolled 245,000 members in thirteen states. The organization's

headquarters was soon moved to St. Paul, but Minnesota was a very different state than North Dakota. Powerful corporate interests fought the League bitterly, mobilizing vigilante violence and the state courts to crush it. To counter these attacks, the NPL forged alliances with industrial unions based in the Twin Cities, unions that were often led by Socialist Party members.

Arthur Townley, the autocratic leader of the League, believed the organization could become a key component in a broad coalition of progressive forces that could make a major alteration in the political landscape at the national level. Townley envisioned this coalition working within the constraints of the two-party system.

Still, there were others within the leading circles of the League who had another scenario in mind. Townley recruited organizers from within the Socialist Party frequently, some of whom came to play important roles in the League. Most of those recruited from the SP were disdainful of both mainstream parties. They were convinced the NPL should be joining with other progressives in forming a broad third party that brought together small farmers and industrial workers. Former members of the Socialist Party, who were in the leadership of

the League developed a new twist to the original labor party perspective. Operating as a left-wing within an organization enmeshed within the two-party system, they urged the NPL to move toward independent politics by participating in the creation of a broadly based progressive party. When this first step was consolidated, socialists then would work within the third party to persuade it to take another step by adopting a socialist program.

The Nonpartisan League disintegrated in the post-war period. The harsh repression experienced by the organizers of the League during the war was a key underlying factor. These attacks intensified the underlying split within the leadership of the NPL, dividing those who were content to work within the two-party system and those who looked to the formation of an independent party. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party (FLP), a third party based in a single state, would emerge from the disintegration of the League.

The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party

For more than twenty years, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party maintained its position as one of the two major parties in that state. It first formed as a stable political formation during the 1922 election. The new party brought together progressive Republicans who had been members of the Nonpartisan League with liberal Democrats and those in the Socialist Party who were looking for a more pragmatic alternative. This was a broad coalition with substantial support throughout the state. Socialists who had been active in the Nonpartisan League were instrumental in bringing farmers into the new party.

The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party remained a pressure group on the outskirts of power throughout the 1920s, but the Great Depression of 1929 changed this balance of power dramatically. For the first time, the FLP was able to elect one of its nominees, Floyd Olson, as governor. In 1930, Olson negotiated a secret agreement with the Democratic National Committee representative for Minnesota, Joseph Wolf. Under this agreement, the Democrats agreed to nominate a candidate who was not well known for governor. In return, the FLP would nominate a relative unknown for the US Senate.

The agreement helped Olson to be elected as governor, although it was not implemented fully in the contest for senator. Through this secret agreement, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party initiated a working relationship with the Democratic Party at its national level, even before the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932.

Olson proved to be an effective politician who could mobilize popular opinion in support of a program of social reforms. As a result, several of his proposed measures were enacted with the support of liberal Democrats in the state senate. Banks were blocked from foreclosing on farms and a modest program of work relief was also established for the unemployed. Olson's legislative program complemented the New Deal program of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Indeed, Olson was closely tied to the president. Roosevelt consulted with Olson and made patronage appointments to Democrats sympathetic to the Farmer-Labor Party. In 1936, Roosevelt made sure that the Democrats did not nominate candidates for governor and the US Senate,

leaving the field open for the candidates of the FLP to win overwhelming victories.

Olson's choice to succeed him, Elmer Benson, was not a skillful politician and his relationship with the state legislature became adversarial. In 1938, Benson was defeated for re-election and control of the FLP in state politics came to an end. As World War II unfolded, the FLP lost its momentum and fused with the Democratic Party in 1944.

The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party never moved beyond the limits set by the agenda of liberal reformism. As an experiment in progressive politics, the FLP achieved limited success. As a model of socialist politics, it was a total failure. The FLP always remained a satellite of the national Democratic Party and the Roosevelt administration. It was never a genuinely independent party and its absorption back into the two-party system was a logical endpoint in its evolution.

DSA and the Labor Party Question

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is the largest socialist organization in the United States, currently. Although it operates within the Democratic Party, DSA encompasses a wide range of political tendencies.

One tendency within DSA adheres to a version of the labor party perspective. Those within it support the candidates of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, while also calling for the formation of a broad-based third party. Such a progressive third party would bring together the Sanders wing of the Democratic Party with community activists and shop floor militants based on a program that would be very similar to the one being advocated currently by liberal elected officials within the Democratic Party.

Those advancing this argument see this step by step approach as the only way forward given the existing situation in the United States. The argument assumes that a break with the Democratic Party would, in itself, be sufficient to propel further steps toward a socialist politics. This overlooks the tight interlinking between the acceptance of a program of liberal reforms and an adaptation to mainstream politics.

The liberal agenda begins with the belief that the capitalist system needs merely to be tweaked, rather than challenged in its fundamental structures. A tactical approach to the two-party system

follows as a logical consequence. Socialists need to question both the idea of working within the Democratic Party and the argument that capitalism can be reformed and they need to do this simultaneously. There is little reason to expect that a broad left party will move toward a socialist politics. On the contrary, it is far more likely that it will soon return to the Democratic Party as did the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party.

Although the systematic argument of the DSA Left is presented as a new one that arises from the specific circumstances currently confronting the Left; in fact, the perspective is quite similar to the one formulated by socialists who held leadership positions within the Nonpartisan League. Still, despite the similarity in political perspective, the objective situation is quite different now than a hundred years ago. Senator Bernie Sanders is locked into the Democratic Party, while the League remained on the edge of the two-party system. The NPL led the way to the formation of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, but it is highly unlikely that the current divisions within the Democratic Party will lead to the formation of a third party.

Instead of viewing the British Labour Party or the Nonpartisan League/Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party as historical models to be

emulated, contemporary socialists should look toward Eugene Debs and the left-wing of the Socialist Party, with its close ties to the IWW and radical trade unionists. The labor party perspective heads down a path to nowhere.

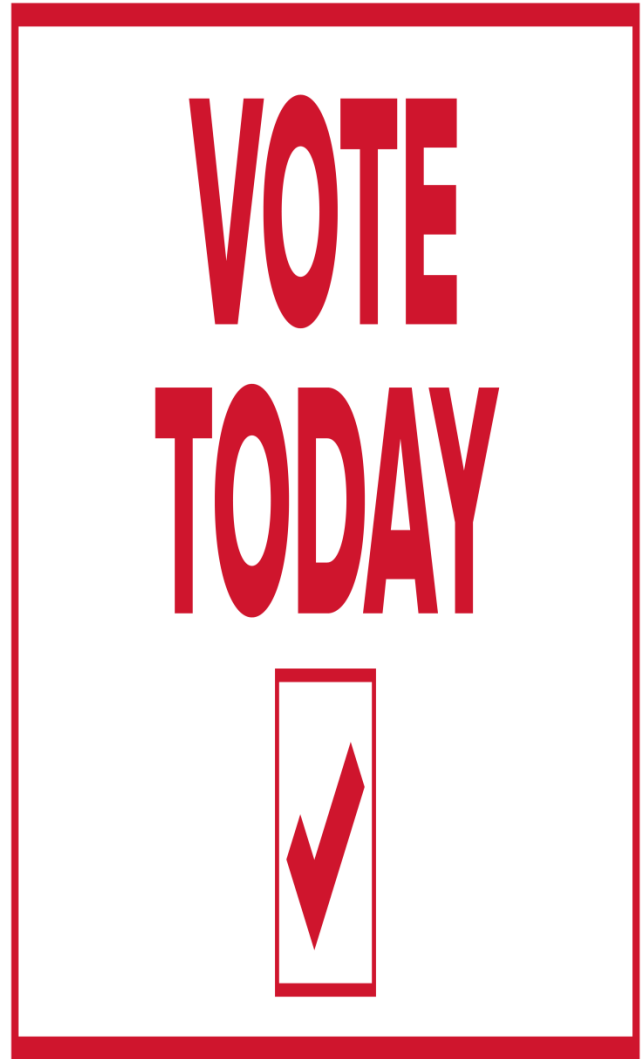
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THE VALUE AND LIMITS OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

MATEI ALEXANDRU

The question of evaluating the use or importance of elections is conditioned by perspective. Here we contrast the revolutionary socialist and non-revolutionary liberal perspectives.

The tasks of a liberal political party and a socialist political party are different. A liberal party's task is to win more seats in a legislature so it may advance its agenda. A socialist party's task is to persuade the working class to take up a revolutionary movement that will replace the rule of the capitalist class by the rule of the working class, similarly, to pursue its class agenda.

Obviously, the undoing of capitalist dictatorship is beyond voting. Armed with a materialist understanding of the state, we know the vote is only the surface appearance of capitalist society's political power. The true political power in capitalist society is

the same as any historically constituted state: armed bodies set in motion by the propertied classes against the classes without property. So self-respecting socialists have understood the tendency of class dictatorship toward violence makes a revolution by ballot impossible unless by miracles. This does not mean electoral organizing is not useful or not properly socialist. It means we must approach the question with a clear recognition of our socialist perspective.

How does electoral politics relate to mass movements?

At present, elections represent one of the only times where most of the population is politically engaged. During an election, we have the widest access to a working class audience to whom we can offer our critique of capitalism and the liberal republic; but we must keep in mind our socialist perspective on the question. Socialists don't want to repeat this cycle, we want to graduate beyond it and while the working class wants to graduate beyond the stalemates and inefficiencies of the liberal republic, they have not yet decided it is worth overthrowing or have not yet committed to this conclusion. Having gained access to this audience, what do we do with it? What is the upper limit of the value of that access? How do we steer our audience to a breaking of the existing institutional cycle?

In Marxist terms: there is a contradiction between a radical socialist movement for whom bourgeois elections are irrelevant and a non-radicalized working class for whom bourgeois politics remain immediately relevant.

So let's restate the boundaries of our perspective:

If we are students of Lenin, we accept the real goal of any social movement is the seizure of state power (Lenin 1917). We also accept the institution, which is to replace the liberal republic and usher in socialism as the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, put simply, a workers' republic.

If we are students of revolutionism and not reformism, to draw from Rosa Luxemburg (1900), then we understand, on one hand, we stand an incredibly small chance of winning an election at the local, state, or national level and we also accept, even if we win, we will be surrounded by class enemies conspiring to deprive us of our revolutionary intentions—to reduce elected socialists to bourgeois agents.

“The theory of the gradual introduction of Socialism proposes a progressive reform of capitalist property and the capitalist State in the direction of Socialism; but in consequence of the objective laws of existing society, one and the other develop in an exact opposite direction. The process of production is socialized increasingly, and State intervention, the control of the State over the

process of production, is extended. At the same time, however, private property becomes more and more the form of open capitalist exploitation of the labor of others, and State control is penetrated with the exclusive interest of the ruling class. The State, that is to say the *political* organization of capitalism and the property relations, in other words, the *juridical* organization of capitalism becomes more *capitalist* and not more Socialist, in opposition to the theory of the progressive introduction of Socialism, two insurmountable difficulties.” (Luxemburg 1900)

So with all of this taken together, we arrive at this conclusion: on one hand, socialists must have their eyes fixed on the goal of seizing state power; on the other hand, we must reckon with a general public, a non-radical working class, that still places great relevance on bourgeois elections. Even those who pass on elections out of apathy are more convinced to do that than to invest themselves in a movement for a workers’ republic seizing state power.

Socialists must engage with bourgeois elections to be in step with where most

political attention of the working class is focused. At the same time, socialists must not adopt a liberal set of goals hoping to gain legislative advantage and reduce themselves to reformists. We must engage the politically active and not be frustrated with the argument that the stalemates and inefficiencies are baked into the system and cannot be overcome from within it. We must also engage with the apathetic and retreated to persuade them their retreat is a reaction and they serve themselves better taking part in a revolutionary movement for socialism.

The practical question remains: if we know our goal is not to win a socialist majority in a liberal republican legislature, and we know even to win such an election barely moves the needle on accomplishing a socialist agenda, what should our electoral energies seek to accomplish? In the simplest terms possible: new organizers and new supporters.

What can we gain from elections?

We cannot gain seats, or legislative leverage as a bloc of legislators. Both theory and lived experience have liquidated the

position of accomplishing, or even meaningfully advancing socialism through liberal republican institutions, rules, and processes.

In our extensive interactions with this politically attuned audience, we stand to gain new organizers and supporters. Keeping a socialist perspective is the most realistic and healthiest expectation one can have.

New organizers can become trained revolutionaries and new generations of leadership in socialist parties. Their addition grows and strengthens the party's capabilities to expand the scope of its activity and better tune its internal organization. New supporters can be mobilized at other points in the present campaign and in future efforts. They can also help to amplify the reach of the message of the party beyond its true size. This accumulation of people makes a gravitational center of a political party whose growing size is bound to catch others in its orbit. New faces, growing bodies of organizers and supporters—these are the

true marks of electoral campaign success for a socialist party.

In other terms, greater organizational capacity and expanded reach should be the campaign's goal. To strive for more risks, the descent into reformism on one hand, or spectacle and self-sabotage on the other, is the inevitable outcome. We need to participate in elections but we do not need to rely on them. They are useful, and even important but not vital. To be sure of this, let's ground ourselves in the reality that an election season is only every four years. It would be absurd of us to think that the bulk of what socialists can accomplish can only be done during the election years of the liberal republic.

After the elections, between the elections, and beyond the elections, what do we do?

Most years are not election years. Most of the time, we do not have this readily available, politically attuned audience. During election years, we get to focus on the agitation and education aspects of our work; but, between those years, we must reemphasize the importance of organization.

That is why it is so important to treat new organizers and supporters as the highest reward for our electoral efforts.

Between elections, where most of our organizing happens, we need to be able to rely on greater numbers to create more connections between our parties and working people. We need growing pools of supporters who can carry a party's message further than its own direct reach.

Parties must put primary importance on the act of organizing but that is not to say they must be activist organizations. Many of the organizations involved in day-to-day work are just grassroots level activist groups being sure to **not** be parties, and **not** to be seen as parties. They seek to influence liberal parties' policies often not realizing that socialists will be friendlier to their positions and more faithful allies fighting for them.

Between elections, we have to grapple with many active political forces that should be friendly to socialist parties and supportive of them but are not deeply connected to them or under any level of influence from them.

The answer to this is not entirely the negative action of critique. Criticism of their tactics is certainly valid but, without gaining credibility with those we would seek to help through criticism, we would be a force having no impact. We need our parties and non-party organizations to be working more close together. Parties need to understand the importance of non-party organizations and the need to gain credibility with them and win them over as supporters. Most importantly, parties need to understand their role in building the mass movement for socialism—the role of the Great Orientator. If we are students of Lenin, we will recall that Lenin pointed out a party is the highest form of political organization but it is not the only one.

“The Party is the organized detachment of the working class but it is not the only organization of the working class. The proletariat has also a number of other organizations, without which, it cannot wage a successful struggle against capital...” (Stalin 1924).

Many single-issue, grassroots campaigns are engaged in work that is

friendly, or even foundational, to the socialist mission—higher minimum wage, union organizing, climate activism, racial equality activism, anti-war activism, student and campus groups, and more. All of these groups are doing work that is part of the socialist mission. Groups are organizing in these fields but for their own sakes: climate activism for the sake of the climate, union activism for the sake of stronger, growing unions. The flaw in their thinking is not what they support but how they appraise the political forces surrounding them, how they evaluate allies versus opponents, and how they evaluate institutional obstacles obstructing their goals.

Socialist parties do not need to remake these groups and do what they do but more ‘socialist-ly’. Socialist parties need to have connections to these wider fields of struggle, gain credibility there, and persuade these organizations to conduct their work in the wider context of a struggle for socialism. Only a socialist party can make socialism a relevant political question. Only a socialist party can orient a torrent of roughly aligned political forces and set them in a single

direction—the fight for socialism, and the struggle to win state power in the form of a workers’ republic.

The task of liberal political parties is to win elections. The task of socialist political parties is to make socialist revolution possible. Bonding socialist parties and socialist-friendly non-party organizations in cooperative relationships is the first step toward developing working class institutions, which can acquire state-like character. Succeeding in that, socialists need to convince the working class that a new republic must take the place of the old and win the consent of the working class for an emergent network of institutions, a state-in-waiting, to exist as a legitimate government.

This year is an election year. Socialists will not win but we may grow our cadres and our bodies of supporters such that we can build the institutions which can effect a revolutionary displacement of power into the hands of the working class.

A liberal republic today, a workers’ republic tomorrow! Build the workers’ republic!

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WHY VOTE SOCIALIST IN A RIGGED ELECTION?

ROSE COLQUHOUN

You might be looking at this with disbelief in your heart saying to yourself, “What, is she some kind of MAGA fanatic hawking conspiracy theories?” I, good reader, am a sociologist and can assure you these ramblings are based on verifiable truth. The elections are rigged, but in different ways, than many MAGA Republicans might be thinking.

Me, a socialist,
talking to Trump fans like:



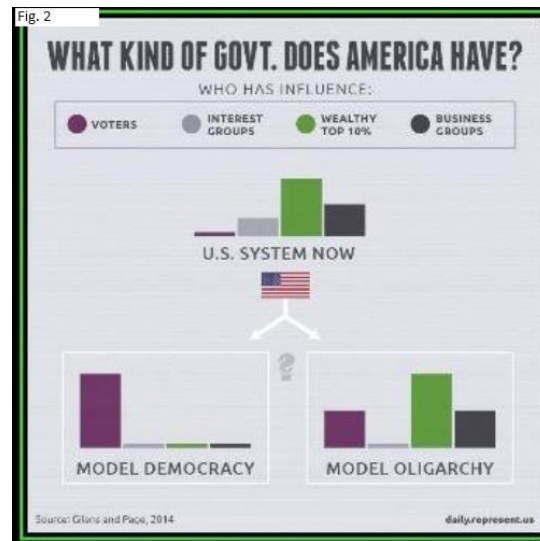
fig.1

I was trained to study society with a sociological perspective and am here to inform you the US is not the democratic republic the US propaganda and most k-12 classes would have you believe, instead, it is a Kleptocratic Plutocratic Oligarchy. Back in 2014, Princeton University Prof Martin Gilens and Northwestern University Prof Benjamin I. Page (2014) published their comprehensive study *Testing Theories of*

American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens, arguing the US is, in fact, an oligarchy and not a democratic republic. What they found was “A proposed policy change with low support among economically elite Americans (one-out-of-five in favor) is adopted only about eighteen percent of the time... while a proposed change with high support (four-out-of-five in favor) is adopted about 45 percent of the time”; however, “When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong *status quo* bias built into the US political system, even when a fairly large majority of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.”

“...Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association and a widespread (if still contested) franchise; but we believe if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans then America’s

claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.”



I’m here to say, the US is “dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans.” As Gilens and Page (2014) pointed out, “It is well established that organized groups regularly lobby and fraternize with public officials; move through revolving doors between public and private employment; provide self-serving information to officials; draft legislation; and spend a great deal of money on election campaigns.” No part of this situation is indicative of promoting or maintaining democracy.

Still don't believe me?

Let's look at some indicators showing we lack a democratic republic. Here are some well-known examples. Remember that the Democrat party both uses super delegates to mitigate any chance of the people's voice being counted as is, and as reported in the Observer article "DNC Lawyers Argue DNC Has Right to Pick Candidates in Back Rooms" the Democratic National Convention's lawyers made the argument that the Democrat Party can legally rig elections by "[going] into back rooms like they used to and smoke cigars and pick the candidate that way" if they wanted to, in court during the DNC Election Fraud case and won:



Fig. 3

Not very democratic of them now was it?

That brings me to the next instance of US oligarchy: our elections are rigged to favor capitalist-controlled opposition candidates for President and if a candidate isn't funded and owned by the oligarchy-owned/controlled capitalist parties, they are systematically oppressed by the system and cannot be elected president. When someone is stupid or naive enough to try to democratically change the non-democratic misnomer known as the Democrat Party from within, they will find the task impossible and their rise in the party suppressed unless they toe the line of enabling corruption. If you run against the Oligarchy's duopoly for president as a third party the six major (oligarchy-controlled/owned) US media conglomerates (Comcast, Walt Disney, AT&T, Paramount Global, Sony, and Fox) that are estimated to be about ninety percent of all our media as of 2023, will downplay or ignore the non-oligarchy-owned candidates in the US media and refuse to let them in the presidential debates. Considering that the more the public sees a presidential candidate in the media, the higher the probability of that

candidate being elected, the unequal coverage in the mainstream mass media impedes many third party candidates' ability to become a viable threat to the oligarchy electorally.

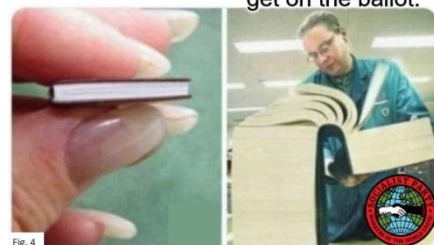
The mainstream media and presidential debates weren't always this blatantly rigged. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) used to require that all candidates get equal airtime on radio and TV with something called the "equal-time doctrine" (*aka* the fairness doctrine), but that rule was abandoned in 1987. The League of Women Voters used to run open and equal presidential debates that asked candidates the tough questions and excluded no parties. Well, on October 3, 1988, The League of Women Voters "...[withdrew] its sponsorship of the presidential debate scheduled for mid-October because the demands of the two campaign organizations would perpetrate a fraud on the American voter,' [said then] League President Nancy M. Neuman" (League of Women Voters 1988).

"Why did she say that?" you might ask. It was because the duopoly demanded the debates be transformed into misleading spectacles devoid of substance and hard questions. Since then, mainstream "reporting" on the candidates, and the presidential debates themselves have devolved into the deliberately propagandist farces of a dead democracy.

Another way the system is undemocratically rigged against ethical non-oligarchy-controlled candidates/parties is the proliferation of legal impediments that third parties face to get on the ballots in various states; the duopoly candidates, in general, are exempt from these requirements.

Signatures needed
for Capitalist
Duopoly candidates
to get on the ballot.

Signatures
needed for
Socialist Party USA
candidates to
get on the ballot.



The most obvious disparity is third parties have to collect thousands of signatures to get on the ballots on which the duopoly is automatically included. I talked to Matt Erard, the lawyer helping our SPUSA presidential and vice president candidates get on ballots and he pointed out, “Assuming the candidate isn’t nominated by a ballot-qualified party [the duopoly parties of course], the worst is definitely California, which requires 219,403 valid signatures. Easiest would arguably be Tennessee at 275 signatures or Louisiana with a \$500 fee. Though both have onerous requirements for presidential electors.”

On top of that, you have duopoly-aligned gatekeepers doing what they can to sabotage third parties. For example, Cornel West’s campaign secured all the signatures required to be on the North Carolina ballot for presidential candidates in the 2024 election, but the officials are blocking his ability to get on the ballot regardless citing questions about the legitimacy of how those signatures were collected to keep him off the ballot. Making Cornel West’s campaign face the question of whether or not to engage in a

costly court battle to achieve the ballot access they are legally due, or to use those limited funds on petitioning and gathering signatures [non-volunteer petitioners are frequently paid \$2 to \$10 a signature, and that adds up quickly] to get on the ballot in other states.

Even if a third party candidate manages to meet the horrendous “matching funds” requirements to get federal funding, the duopoly has systematically drained those funds. To extrapolate upon that, let’s first dive into what the Presidential Election Campaign Fund is and then look at how it’s been gutted to help silence third parties. To quote Shawn Griffiths (2024) of Independent Voter News, titled “Green Party Leaders Say Major Parties Gutted Presidential Campaign Fund to ‘Silence Opposition’.”

“In 1966, Congress passed the Presidential Election Campaign Act. The law began an era of public funding for presidential campaigns and relied only on a voluntary contribution from taxpayers of \$1 at the time. The maximum contribution was soon raised to \$3. According to the Federal

Election Commission (FEC), the fund was designed to use taxpayer money to ‘match the first \$250 of each contribution from individuals that an eligible presidential candidate receives during the primary.’ ‘Fund the major party nominees’ general election campaigns and assist eligible minor party nominees’.”

The catch for the candidate is they have to adhere to certain campaign finance qualifications and restrictions to qualify and receive funds. For example, a candidate seeking primary matching funds has to show broad public support by raising more than \$5,000 in at least twenty states, and they must receive this from at least twenty contributors because only the first \$250 is counted toward the matching program [a

lofty task when one can’t get equal media coverage]. Further, the candidate would have to limit their spending in primary elections, both in terms of total spending and spending per state. In 2024, the national spending limit is \$61.79 million, according to the FEC.

Candidates who seek general election funds receive a grant if they qualify and must limit spending to the amount of the grant. In 1976, each major party nominee received \$21.8 million. In 2008, the last time a major party candidate accepted a grant, the amount had grown to \$84.1 million and would be \$123.5 million in 2024.

In the presidential campaign environment of today, these amounts pale in comparison to the billions raised and spent by the parties, PACs, and major party campaigns. It is no surprise, especially with how campaign finance laws have changed, that major parties opt out of matching funding.

“...The FEC says the public funding program is not only meant to fund major party campaigns but help qualifying third-party campaigns as well. Third party leaders, candidates, and activists say gutting the Presidential Election Campaign Fund serves to only strengthen the duopoly.”

Green Party of California Co-Founder Michael Feinstein (2021) wrote about the issue in 2021 in the wake of HR1, touted as

a better elections bill, which third party advocates said would make it all but impossible for their candidates to qualify for matching campaign funds.

Feinstein says there is “a strong correlation between the amounts [candidates who qualified for matching funds] raised and the number of additional ballot lines they gained, beyond those the Green Party already had going into that cycle.”

Put simply, the Presidential Election Campaign Fund helps third party presidential candidates achieve ballot access in more states.

He specifically looked at the three times that the seven historical Green Party nominees qualified for and received matching funds. “Dr. Jill Stein, the current party nominee, qualified and received these funds in 2012 and 2016.”

“...The Democratic National Committee (DNC) reportedly is building a team and strategy that will specifically ‘go to war’ with third party and independent candidates.” It has already tried to convince voters they have no other choice if they

value democracy but to vote the way the DNC wants.

This irony should not be lost on anyone.

Jason Call, campaign manager for Dr. Stein said he doesn’t know how the Democratic Party can run on a platform of saving democracy when it is actively trying to kick or keep candidates off the ballot.

“The Democrats appear willing to kill democracy in order to ‘save it’,” he said. He noted that both parties are not beholden to the interests of voters or the democratic process, but rather the corporate interests that fund them.

Members of the Green Party say raiding the Presidential Election Campaign Fund is just the latest attack by the major parties on outside competition.

Feinstein tweeted: To eliminate competition to the [#duopoly](#), [#Democrats](#) and [#Republicans](#) have secretly gutted the Federal presidential primary matching funds program that

historically has helped the Green Party make it on the ballot across the nation.

It has not been confirmed who added the Presidential Election Campaign Fund provision in the government funding package signed by President Biden but it is clearly something that has bipartisan support (Griffiths 2024).

On top of that, in 1976 the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* “struck down a provision of the Federal Election Act of 1971 mandating public financing for presidential elections” (NCSL 2023). Without fair and equal funding of presidential campaigns from the government, “winning” elections have become more about who has the most money (and media time) to push their candidates than who has the best policies for the working class. Of course, corrupt capitalist candidates get both the most money and the most media coverage, compliments of the US oligarchs’ contributions.

As one can see, this is no democratic republic.

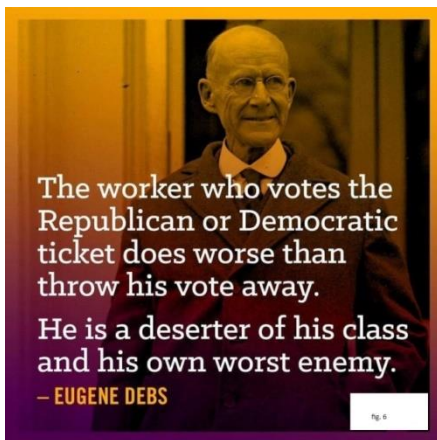
This charade of an election serves only to pacify the masses with the false consciousness they can democratically change this undemocratic mess of Late-Stage Capitalism for the better. As long as this illusion is maintained, the possibility of revolt is suppressed.

So why vote for president when it has no sway on our governance? Easy. We should vote, and vote Socialist, to record our dissent, to record our rejection of the crimes against humanity, for which both the capitalist duopoly parties stand. We should vote for William Stodden this election to protest genocide, apartheid, austerity against the working class, and capitalism in general, which the duopoly is pushing.

Why bother voting for the anti-genocide anti-apartheid socialist candidate, William Stodden, when he can't win the presidential election?



The fact of the matter is that the working class will never win in this oligarchy-rigged “election”. Democracy is not a horse race; we should be picking who we think will represent us best, not who we think will “win”.



In conclusion, voting for Trump/Harris is recording your support for genocide, apartheid, austerity against the working class, and capitalism: all things we oppose as socialists. As socialists, we

support things the capitalist parties will never get behind in honesty: socialized universal healthcare services, outlawing for-profit healthcare, 100 percent Federally funded pre-school through post-secondary education, nationalizing all utilities, nationalizing the Fortune 500, nationalizing public transit, such as trains and buses, while expanding and updating those services, a Federal Job Guarantee with thriving wages, housing as a human right, a maximum wage (billionaires should not exist or be allowed to continue hoarding resources), ending all aid to the genocidal occupiers of Historic Palestine known as Israel, and making our elections truly democratic by outlawing super PACs, and, among other things, making all campaigns 100 percent Federally funded and getting rid of all private contribution to elections, opening the debate and leveling the requirements to get on the ballots to be fair and equitable for ALL candidates. As Eugene V. Debs once stated, “I’d rather vote for something I want and not get it than vote for something I don’t want and get it.”

Notes

interesting article for a possible sidebar

(was not quoted here):

<https://popularresistance.org/the-corporate-news-media-at-work/>

Acknowledgments

A big thank you to Wayne Turner for his helpful comments when reviewing this contribution before publication, and Mary Nickum for her guidance on formatting and editing.

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ESSAY*



Eugene V. Debs
November 5, 1855 – October 20, 1926

*Essays are written from the author's perspective.

STAGNANT OR MORIBUND?

NICHOLAS PARTYKA

Elections, especially Presidential ones are, at the present time and likely for the foreseeable future, an inefficient misallocation of our Party's meager resources both human and financial. The truth is, we are simply not equipped organizationally to field successful candidates. The capacity of our organizational infrastructure is not sufficient to support efforts at a truly national scale, such as these. Our time and resources would be better directed toward rebuilding our organizational capacity and reach. We should focus on building locals and welding them together such that we as a Party become more than the sum of our parts. In our present condition, I, on occasion wonder if we are even the sum of our parts.

Comrades I apologize if you find the above, or what is to come to be a shock. I speak bluntly because euphemisms, allusions, and other forms of polite dissimulation do not serve us. I want to specify this is not an essay about the

philosophical question of reform vs. revolution, or about the utility of elections as a vehicle for taking power in a capitalist regime. This is an essay about us, our Party and our future. The question I have is: Are we merely stagnant or are we moribund? The difference here makes all the difference; but, neither portends anything auspicious for our Party. In the balance between these two

is not only the matter of whether we have a future, but, also, if we do have one, what kind then? Ultimately the answer will come from us, the Party's members.

Let's begin with a question, Why are we seemingly the only major socialist organization to *lose* members since 2016? My local comrades and I joined this Party that fall. When we joined the ballpark figure for Party membership nationally was 1,100 to 1,200. At present, we hover between 500 and 600. That is straightforwardly a 50 percent loss in membership. The Socialist Rifle Association, another multi-tendency organization, for one example, did not even exist at that time and now boasts a membership more than ten times as large as our Party. This is to say nothing of the margins by which a *petit-bourgeois* accommodationist group, such as DSA outstrips us. What accounts for this? How do we explain this to ourselves? How many Party members even realize this is the current state of our affairs?

Looking at the financial status, the Party is treading water, merely. That is, we have just about enough consistent revenue to

meet our extremely limited financial obligations. Confirmation of this can be found in the National Treasurer's report, which is delivered at every National Convention; the minutes of which are available to all Party members. We benefit tremendously from the patronage of the AJ Muste Institute and their largesse. Let me say it plainly. We, a national political party, cannot afford to have our own national office. We, a socialist organization, cannot even afford to pay our National Secretary, our one and only employee, a living wage. We had to cease printing *The Socialist*, our Party's official magazine, several years ago because we could not afford the printing or the postage. At least in my time in this Party, it has done little to no fundraising and has relied almost entirely on membership dues as its revenue base and, as that membership has shrunk so to have our revenues; as a result, we have had ever diminishing organizational capacity.

Taking stock organizationally from the bottom up, the Party has *less* than a dozen chartered locals, nationally. At least during my tenure, there has never been more

than two dozen, and only occasionally did we approach twenty. We do not even necessarily have individual members in every state. Our reach and capacity as an organization is clearly quite limited geographically. Our National Convention is attended by *circa* twenty-five delegates, and is now entirely online. Many at-large Party members have never met another member in-person. Needless to say, it is difficult to build the kind of durable bonds of solidarity and comradeship between people required in a revolutionary socialist political party when they lack organic social interactions.

From top down, however, for long periods, essential and quite basic organizational tasks often go undone, and important roles unfilled. This is not a criticism of the National Secretary, as I refer to things not within the purview of that role. So-called national campaigns and initiatives, predictably at this point, come to nothing through a general lack of participation by Party members and locals. We do not function, mostly, as one organization and typically struggle mightily to achieve coordinated collective action. The National

Committee is a largely ceremonial body the quality and capacity of which varies tremendously from term to term. This is in the main because election to the National Committee is basically a matter of simply showing up to the National Convention. As is typical, the National Committee is twelve to sixteen people including alternates. When on average *circa* twenty-five to thirty-five delegates attend the National Convention, each delegate walks in the door with a roughly fifty percent chance of being elected to the National Committee. This is despite whether or not they ever intended to seek election to that body in the first place, or are suited to it.

To me, at least, this all clearly presents the image of an organization in a period of crisis. I surmised this reality was reflected in the agonized debates at the 2023 National Convention about whether to run a Presidential campaign. As a delegate at that Convention, I can inform that the discussion lasted several hours and mainly because the body made and reversed its decision more than once. There was clearly no

overwhelming support for running a candidate, nor for the specific candidate; and this is being borne out in the general lack of support the campaign has received from the Party membership. These debates were forestalled in 2021 because Howie Hawkins' Green/Socialist Unity campaign provided that Convention with an easy way to skirt the larger issues and save face. The 2023 Convention, unable to really contemplate not running a candidate, in time relented and approved what amounts to a vanity project to "do something".

We do not have the funds to support a Presidential campaign that truly operates nationally. We cannot afford to print and distribute in any great quantity items, such as signs, stickers, t-shirts and more that is the usual accouterments of electoral campaigns. This is to say nothing of paying for our candidate's travel, rallies, advertising and media. We do not have the organizational capacity to mobilize the proverbial boots on the ground in sufficient numbers needed to achieve a reasonable outcome, such as ballot access. We do not have the developed organizational structures and culture in place

such that we can act in a coordinated way as a united Party in support of our nominee's campaign. We lack the financial and human resources to really do a creditable job of contesting the election in a serious way. The only apparent plan—though perhaps it is more a hope than a plan—is to continue to try to leverage social media to punch above our weight, so to speak.

Rather than investing a portion of the limited resources we have available in campaigns that promise little return, we should direct them toward asking some of the questions raised here and, as a group, soberly and seriously trying to answer them. In our present circumstances, Presidential campaigns do more to divert attention from the Party's real problems than actively help to build our organization. Our Party has come to an important crossroads. Our choices now will set it on one path or another. We can continue to put one foot in front of the other, continue with business as usual and amble forward blithely, as if all were well; or, we can begin the process of rebuilding and renewal by addressing the structural deficiencies in our organization

and ideology. The former option is much easier the latter option will be difficult. The former is the path of a moribund organization. The latter is the path of an organization still having belief in itself.

In terms of the 2024 election, the ship has sailed and the campaign is already well underway. What is done is done and there is little use in crying over spilt milk. Perhaps some large wave of new members will join the Party later this fall as a result of our Presidential campaign then I will be proven wrong about its utility and the wisdom of directing scarce resources toward support of it. If not, if this wave does not materialize and we find ourselves in largely the same situation after the wave of political enthusiasm that comes with the crescendo of each election cycle fades, at that time, I hope more members will begin to recognize more clearly the situation and hopefully start to engage seriously with the questions and problems raised here.

All is not lost comrades. If you are reading this, you are a Party member and

your voice, your actions, your spirit can animate this organization, can revivify it. Our socialist Party will thrive or wither according to our collective determination or lack thereof. This Party has, at hand, the resources needed to rebuild it; but, to chart a course forward; we must embrace change, organizationally and philosophically. Organizationally, the biggest need is for structures of accountability and the investment of many more labor-hours into essential Party work. Philosophically, it is imperative to shed, at last, the remaining vestiges of antiquated and misinformed Cold War anti-communism, as well the associated crutch of the attachment to “democratic socialism”. Without an ideological realignment, we will remain eclipsed completely in DSA’s shadow. If we don’t reform our organizational practices and culture then even accomplishing the needed realignment won’t make a difference.

The next chapter in the history of our Party is ours to write. How will it read? Will the theme be continued stagnation or one of regeneration?



Book Review

Third Parties, Outsiders, and Renegades



*Modern Challenges to the Two-Party
System in Presidential Elections*

MELISSA M. SMITH

Smith, Melissa M. 2022. *Third Parties, Outsiders, and Renegades, Modern Challenges to the Two-Party System in Presidential Elections*. Lexington Books, New York, NY. 248 pages. \$39.99

Third Parties, Outsiders, and Renegades analyzes ten third-party,

outsider, or renegade presidential candidates and explores each one's impact on the political process. The list of modern outsider candidates who have attracted the public's attention is fairly long, but most of the time the candidates never garner enough support to become elected or they self-destruct somewhere along the way. A few, however, have taken votes away from more mainstream candidates and changed the course of political parties or election outcomes.

This book provides readers with an analysis of how their rhetoric, political tactics, and issues have challenged the political *status quo* and affected later campaigns. The future viability of outsider candidates is discussed in light of current political polarization and the legacy of Donald J. Trump, the first elected outsider president, and considers how outsider candidates might be able to compete in upcoming elections given the current political divisions within the nation.

Dr. Smith has arranged the book, after the Introduction, as Part II – **Outsider**

Candidates are defined as those candidates who approach politics from outside the establishment-oriented field of Washington Politics. These candidates hold views on economic, social, or legislative issues that are considered outside the main stream beliefs of Americans at the time. This also includes those candidates who are viewed outside the main stream because of gender or ethnicity. She has selected four candidates, each receiving a chapter to analyze their candidacy.

Part III – **Third Party Candidates** are candidates who represent a party outside the two main parties in American politics. The Socialist Party would fall into this group. In this section, the campaigns of three notable candidates are examined find out at how their discourse, campaign tactics, and issues were received at the time of their campaigns, and their possible impact on later elections. Three candidates were chosen for Third Party candidate analysis.

Part IV – **Renegade Candidates.** Smith defines these candidates as presidential political candidates who began within a party's establishment but then

moved outside that establishment. These candidates reject the establishment views on economic, social or political issues and adopt discourse or tactics that position them beyond the boundaries of acceptable establishment beliefs and behavior. Three Renegade candidates were analyzed in this section.

The author spends the last part, Part V, on Trump and the 2020 election, populism, pandemic, and post-election violence. She states Donald J. Trump accomplished what was considered the impossible—an Outsider won the Presidency in 2016. He ran as a populist and an Outsider, and he employed some of the most divisive and jarring rhetoric ever heard from a major party's presidential candidate. Although by 2020, the magic had dimmed and Trump lost the election to Biden. Dr. Smith closes the book by considering the impact of Trump's legacy on the future of Outsider candidates.

This book is highly recommended for members of all parties, whether main stream or third party. Certainly all candidates or those considering a candidacy should have

read it before making a decision to “test the waters”. Beyond the political parties, scholars and students of communication, political science, and rhetoric will find this book particularly interesting.



WRITING FOR *THE SOCIALIST*



***The Socialist* Author Guidelines**

The Socialist is the official magazine of the Socialist Party USA. It is published twice per year. The magazine discusses Socialism and the Socialist Party in the everyday lives of working-class readers, whether it be labor, civil rights, health care, or environmental movements. The magazine publishes two types of general articles – Feature and Short, which differ in content and length. Feature articles are 2,500 to 5,000 words (about 10 to 20 pages) in length and address multiple aspects of a broad topic area. Short articles are 1,500 to 2,500 words (about 6 to 10 pages) in length and focus on a specific topic. Both are written in the same style and format and can include photographs and/or sidebars.

The Socialist seeks to be a forum for discussion of essential questions of Party-building, movement-building, economic theory, and revolutionary praxis by both Party members and the general public. We are committed to stimulating the intellectual and ideological vibrancy of SP-USA and the US socialist movement with provocative essays, articles, fiction, and even poetry. We produce ***The Socialist*** to promulgate socialist ideas and because we seek to develop ourselves and our movement through intellectual labor.

Writing Style

Articles published in ***The Socialist*** must be written in plain English, with the intent to convey information to a generalist readership with basic knowledge of Socialism. Therefore, the article must be written in the everyday language familiar to readers of news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek* or *People*.

We prefer there be no more than three (3) authors for articles. Authorship acknowledges only those who ***write*** the article. Those who support the preparation of the article in other ways, such as reviewing or other writing assistance must be listed in an Acknowledgments section.

The text must be submitted in electronic format as a Word document, attached to an e-mail message, or through a file transfer service such as Dropbox.

Manuscript

Prepare your paper double-spaced in Word to the best of your ability. Be sure your ideas are presented in a logical form: Introduction; description of the problem or idea, proposed solution to the problem or useful purpose of the idea; Conclusion.

Acknowledgments

This section immediately follows the text of your paper. It contains all recognition of special assistance and/or others associated with your paper.

Sources

List sources you used to develop the paper, immediately following the Acknowledgments section, by citing them in this format:

- For magazines: authors (surname, first name), year of publication, title, volume number, issue number, pages.

Example for a magazine :

Lane, Thomas. 2023. Climate change is here. *Time* 257(12):57-65.

- For books: authors (surname, first name), year of publication, title, publisher, city, state.

Example for a book:

Kane, George and Terrance Blake.

2020. Socialism for today.

Random House, New York, NY.

Photos:

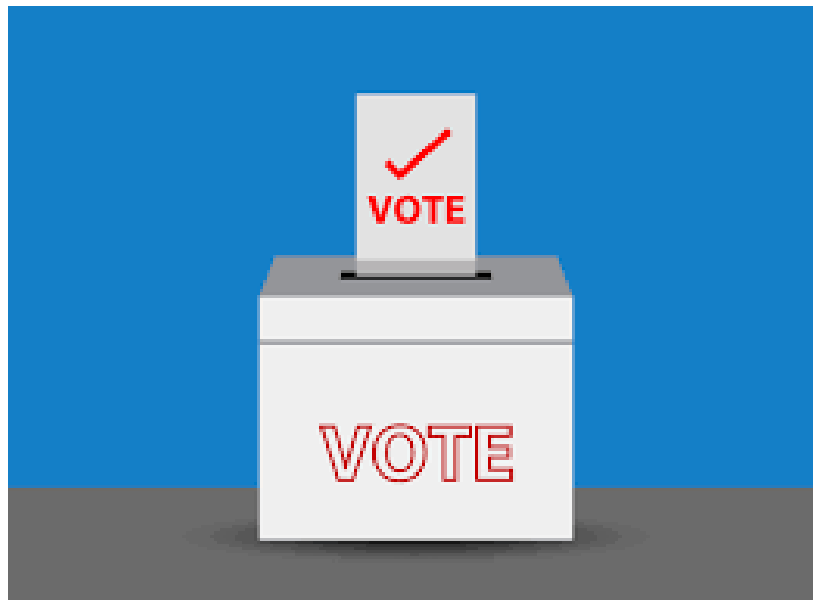
If the subject of your paper requires photos or other graphics, please note in your paper where they are discussed, for example: (Figure 1 Flooding). Submit the photos or other graphics in a separate file. All photos must have short captions and be submitted as .jpg at a resolution of 100+.

Submission

Submit all electronic files associated with your article to:

Mary Nickum, Editor

editor@thesocialist.online



The Socialist Party USA

WORKING GROUPS

Labor Working Group – brings together Socialist Party USA members to organize around labor issues, the labor movement and labor unions, providing members guidance in building a militant working class movement doing such actions as strike support, working with unions and working with other working groups in the SP USA.

Ecosocialist Working Group – is a group of Party members concerned with the environment and the future of life on this planet. We set to investigate the causes of climate change and its effect on the lives of people. Based on the best scientific information available, we seek to educate people *via* a webinar series available on YouTube.

The Anti-War/Anti-Imperialism Working Group – has been established to aid the Party in organizing and educating against Imperialism, war, and oppression in all of its forms. Being in the heart of the Imperial core, we have an obligation to fight US Imperialism at home and abroad, from Gentrification to Genocide. “Peace

is not the absence of war, but the presence of justice.” - Rosa Luxemburg

COMMISSIONS

Women’s Commission is a place where members in good standing who face marginalization and systemic oppression due to their gender can organize, discuss, and reach consensus on all things specific to our emancipation from patriarchy. Comrades who are women (cis and trans), non-binary, agender, two- spirit and other queer and/or nonbinary comrades are welcome and encouraged to join! Contact Stephanie at cholensky.s@gmail.com

People of Color Commission – aims to enhance the representation of ethnic communities within the SP-USA and combat racism within all levels of society. We advocate for non-violent direct action and serve as an educational resource for SP-USA regarding people of color communities.



Join the Socialist Party USA

I, the undersigned, desiring to bring about, by democratic means, a new society based upon socialism, hereby apply for membership in the SOCIALIST PARTY USA, and subscribe to its principles.

Name: _____ Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____ Today's Date: _____

Gender Identity (not required): _____ DOB: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

E-mail: _____ Tel# _____

Other political organizations to which I belong: _____

Union to which I belong (if any): _____

If a student, what school do you attend? _____

I'm interested in the following Working Groups:

Ecosocialism Labor Anti-War

Commissions:

People of Color Women's

Other interests _____

Socialist Party USA Annual Dues Rates

Tier 1: \$50 a year for annual incomes under \$25,000 (monthly not available)

Tier 2: \$10 a month or \$120 a year - for annual incomes from \$25,001 to \$35,000

Tier 3: \$15 a month or \$180 a year - for annual incomes from \$35,001 to \$50,000

Tier 4: \$20 a month or \$240 a year - annual incomes from \$50,001 to \$65,000

Tier 5: More than \$20 a month or more than \$240 a year - incomes over \$65,000

Monthly dues will only be available through setting up a regular credit or debit card payment. If a member's credit or debit card is declined, they will be notified by the National Secretary and will immediately enter into the 30 grace period.

Make checks payable to: Socialist Party USA. If paying using monthly installments, please set those up at <https://www.socialistpartyusa.net/join-the-party>

Return to: Socialist Party USA PO Box 3478 Memorial Station Montclair, NJ 07043