

# Democratic Socialists of America Greater Detroit Local



January 2009

## Detroit DSAers Celebrate at 10th Annual Douglass-Debs Dinner

Over 125 DSA members, progressives, and trade unionists gathered to celebrate our recent electoral success at the 10th annual Frederick Douglass-Eugene V. Debs Dinner. The dinner was held at historic UAW Local 600 on Saturday, November 8th. Local 600 was the home local of the participants in the Hunger March of 1933 and is adjacent to the Miller Road Overpass (site of the Battle of the Overpass in 1937 at which UAW organizers were savagely beaten by Henry Ford's security personnel while attempting to distribute literature to workers at the Ford Rouge Complex). The dinner is the sole fundraising event each year for Detroit DSA.

The co-chairs for this year's Douglass-Debs Dinner were UAW Region 1A Director Rory Gamble and International Union of Operating Engineers Local 547 Business Manager Phillip Schloop. This year's Douglass-Debs Award winners were David and Judy Bonior and Judge Claudia Morcom. The keynote speaker was

## Detroit DSA Succeeds in 2008 Electoral Effort

Having been rebuffed in our offers of assistance to progressive Congressional candidates Gary Peters (9th district) and Mark Schauer (7th district)—both of whom were afraid of being red-baited—Detroit DSA focused instead on local and state races. Our strategy was simple: Given our limited resources and manpower, we concentrated on competitive races in which a progressive Democrat was running for an open seat. In such a setting, the efforts of a small, but disciplined, group such as ours might provide the margin of victory for the progressive Democrat. Furthermore, by helping to turn out the progressive vote in these state representative districts, we also helped to turn out the vote for Obama, and to a certain extent, for Gary Peters. After interviewing candidates to make sure their views on labor issues, health care, the environment, living wage, and progressive taxation ran parallel to ours, our membership voted to endorse four candidates for state representative: Sarah Roberts (St. Clair Shores-Harrison Township),

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*In These Times* senior editor David Moberg.

David Bonior served in Congress for 26 years rising through the leadership to become the Democratic Caucus Whip. During his tenure in Congress, Bonior fought to raise the minimum wage, protect pensions, support unions, and extend unemployment benefits. He led the fight to oppose NAFTA in 1993. He worked to prevent war in Central America in the 1980s and again to prevent the Iraq War in 2002. After leaving Congress, Bonior co-founded American Rights at Work, a labor advocacy and research organization, which has made passage of the Employee Free Choice Act its major legislative priority. Bonior was recently appointed to the Obama economic team.

Judy Bonior was the campus chair of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) at the University of Iowa in 1963. She then went to Mississippi to work on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. She later became a Congressional staffer working for such progressive legislators as Byron Dorgan and John Brademas before working for, and eventually marrying, David Bonior.

Judge Claudia Morcom was the first African American woman to work in an integrated law firm when she joined the firm of Goodman, Crockett, Eden, Robb, and Philo in the early 1960s. She was the Southern Regional Director of the National Lawyers Guild's Committee for Legal Assistance from 1964-1965. In 1966, she became the Director of the Wayne County Neighborhood Legal Services Program for the indigent. She became a Wayne County Circuit Court Judge in 1983. She served as a delegate to the United Nations Council on Human Rights.

In their remarks at the dinner, both David Bonior and David Moberg stressed the importance of building social movements to pressure the

new Obama administration for bold progressive changes such as single-payer national health insurance, significant public investment in infrastructure and green technology, fair trade, progressive taxation, massive cuts in the military budget, ending the war in Iraq, and passing the Employee Free Choice Act.

## David Moberg Keynote Address

*In These Times* Senior editor David Moberg delivered the following keynote address at the 2008 Frederick Douglass-Eugene V. Debs Dinner held at UAW Local 600 in Dearborn on November 8, 2008.

Thank you for the introduction, and thanks for inviting me to share in this tribute to the distinguished work of your honorees, Judge Claudia Morcom and David and Judy Bonior. They're all worthy heirs to the tradition of Eugene V. Debs and Frederick Douglass.

It's also a pleasure to share in yet another celebration of the victory on Tuesday of Barack Obama. I can't count the number of times this week that I've heard people say, "Did you ever think it would happen?" Progressives have had too few reasons to celebrate breakthrough accomplishments in recent years. So let's whoop it up as long as possible. At least it helps numb the pain from the competing news of rising unemployment and a collapsing auto industry.

Obama's election is in its own way part of the Debs and Douglass tradition of American politics--including the labor, civil rights and other progressive movements, even if Obama--contrary to conservative claims--is not a socialist. It also reflects both the achievement of a singularly gifted and political leader and a change in America, underscored by the big margin for Obama among young people.

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But like most sober-minded progressives, I can't let a moment of joy go by without pointing at some dark cloud in the sky over yonder. So I'm going to argue that we need to do two things at once--savor the moment and prepare to make sure it brings lasting fruits.

Because even though Obama won the long fight for the presidency, a new battle is underway to define what his victory means and what his administration will do. The moment is full of opportunity for Obama to be one of this nation's great presidents, transforming the landscape of people's lives.

But both Republicans who opposed him and many Democrats have been flooding the president-elect with advice that he must not be too ambitious, that he must govern from the center--whatever that shifting will o' the wisp might be, that he must embrace Republicans and stand up to the liberals and left in the Democratic party.

Not surprisingly, I think that such advice is wrong both as a matter of politics and policy. Obama needs to fix a badly broken economic and political system, which nearly 90 percent of Americans see as headed in the wrong direction. And the best solutions require not only bold government action but also democratization of the substance of government action, shifting the balance of power away from corporations and the wealthy to the majority of working people.

Politically, Obama needs not to seek out a center but to redefine the center by moving the nation's political spectrum towards the pragmatic left, where most people now would be with the kind of leadership Obama can provide. He needs an expanded majority for progressive ideas, not a compromise or watering down of progressive ideas with a failed conservative ideology.

I want to make three points.

First, contemporary conservatism has reached a dead end--on economic policy, foreign policy and politics.

Second, the solution to the crisis of the politics of the right requires a break with their underlying principles and enactment of a new progressive alternative, not just tinkering at the edges.

Third, Obama is not likely to win, or perhaps even push for, such an alternative without active support--and often pressure or even friendly criticism--from a popular movement.

I will just briefly mention foreign policy and politics, before concentrating on the economic failure.

The Iraq war, most Americans now recognize, was a colossal \$3 trillion failure of dishonest and neo-conservative foreign policy. Now at least there's momentum for U.S. withdrawal. Obama needs to accelerate the pace in Iraq, but also to shift gears dramatically in Afghanistan away from military escalation and toward a more political strategy. The world anxiously awaits not only a new face in the White House but also a non-imperial U.S. foreign policy.

The Republican politics of racial division and wedge issues also ran aground this time. The southern strategy isn't dead; it still seems to work in much of the South, but the votes in states like North Carolina and Virginia are a reminder the South is changing--just as the Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada votes remind us of the growing importance of Latinos in consolidating a progressive majority.

Let me start the discussion of the failure of economic policy with a quotation from Alan Greenspan, the long-time Federal Reserve

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chairman and one of the premier architects of the collapsing economic order. Greenspan recently admitted to a Congressional committee that he had been wrong all along about his basic premises. “I made a mistake,” he said, “in presuming that the self-interests of organizations, specifically banks and others, were such as that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the system.”

More simply, he should have said, “I screwed up royally. I believed that individuals driven by greed and fear would produce the best of all possible economic outcomes, but I now recognize that self-regulation of the market doesn’t work. The government has to regulate markets to make sure they work for the public good.”

As NY Times columnist Paul Krugman recently noted, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s words from the Great Depression never rang truer: “We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals,” FDR said. “We know now that it is bad economics.”

But the problem isn’t just the deregulation of financial markets, in which huge sums of borrowed money were gambled on bets that many of the bettors didn’t even understand. The economic orthodoxy of the past 35 years has argued that government should get out of the way and let markets rule.

The result has been a massive redistribution of income and wealth from working people to the very rich. Over that period average real hourly compensation has remained virtually stagnant, while productivity has grown. The richest Americans have captured nearly all the growth in the nation’s income. From 1989 to 2006 the bottom 90 percent of American families received about 9 percent of national income growth. The top 10 percent captured 91 percent

of income growth, which was even more concentrated still: the top one-tenth of one percent collected 36 percent of all new income produced by the ingenuity and hard work of all Americans.

The Economic Policy Institute calculates that profits in the years 2005-7 grew so much at the expense of wages, compared to profit rates in the late 1970s, that \$206 billion was transferred from labor to capital incomes. As a result, each worker lost \$1,500. Joe the Plumber should have been complaining not about taxes but about what Joe the Banker was getting at his expense.

What does this lead to? Growing inequality. Declining opportunity for kids to do better than their parents did. Twice as much financial insecurity for the average family. Huge personal debt increases as most Americans maxed out credit cards and bank loans to try to maintain their living standards. An economy bouncing from one unsustainable asset bubble to the next. And just as in the 1920s, the last time income inequality was as high and financial speculation was as rampant, this weakness of workers’ income--or buying power as consumers--is one of the main obstacles to economic progress. The economy can’t thrive sustainably on growing personal debt or on asset bubbles--stocks, houses, commodities or whatever.

In order to solve these problems--my second point, the new administration needs to break with the ideology of this failed conservative regime. Reagan coined its mantra: government isn’t the solution; it’s the problem. Now, it’s clear, government is the solution to many problems. We need a new New Deal.

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But there are two problems. First, these right-wing ideologues have deliberately made government far less competent, as Tom Frank argues in *The Wrecking Crew*, and they have turned government even more into a tool of the rich and big corporations, creating what economist James Galbraith calls *The Predator State*. As a result, Americans express little trust in government in the abstract, even though polls show a growing majority of Democrats and independents want government to solve the nation’s problems.

What can government do about the central economic issue of the redistribution upwards of America’s income and wealth? To quote a newly famous political figure, it can spread the wealth around. As an old populist saying goes, “money is like manure; spread it around and crops grow; let it pile up, and it begins to stink.” And now we’re smelling the consequences of several decades of free market fundamentalism.

Other industrial countries do quite well economically, especially for their working and middle class citizens, with much less inequality than in the United States. And the economy of the United States actually performed better during the decades after World War II when the country was becoming economically more egalitarian than it has during the time of growing inequality since the early 1970s.

How do you spread the wealth around? First, you need a large short-term stimulus plan that is heavy on public spending--infrastructure, state and municipal government aid, extended unemployment compensation--rather than tax cuts. That way less of the stimulus leaks out to imports and there’s more direct job creation. And the country needs a plan for homeowners and renters threatened by foreclosures to give them an opportunity to remain in their homes, either as renters or with refinanced mortgages.

Then, with a longer-range perspective, here are six steps, just for starters.

First, make it easier to join unions. Obama supports the Employee Free Choice Act, but it will still be a tough fight to pass it, and he will have to be encouraged to spend political capital to bring it to his desk.

Second, regulate financial markets--including hedge funds, private equity funds, and others--to reduce the ways in which they can be used to drain income from what we think of as the real economy. And as we bail out the financial system, let’s do it in a way that puts the public interest first--both in repaying citizens whose money is being used and in exercising the powers of public ownership to prevent excess salaries and unjustified further concentration of ownership and to guarantee that banks make credit available for the real economy.

Third, design universal programs providing health care, university or technical education, early childhood care and education, more generous retirement benefits with both progressive benefits in many cases and certainly funded with more progressive taxation.

Fourth, stimulate new technology through both research and government investment to trigger a long wave of economic growth and creation of high-wage jobs, certainly in the area of energy efficiency, new transportation, and sustainable alternative technologies. Government financial help for the auto industry is justified, whether as loans or an investment in ownership, but only if it comes with guarantees that the auto industry will really concentrate on highly efficient vehicles and make saving and expanding good jobs in the United States a top priority.

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Fifth, create a broader safety net of long-term, higher-benefit unemployment insurance tied to extensive education for all displaced workers. And both raise and enforce higher minimum wages and labor standards.

Sixth, rewrite the rules of the global economy to restore to nations a wider range of policy options, to promote economic and financial stability, and to raise living standards and expand rights, such as the right to organize, for all workers. The global economy as much as our national economy needs its own new New Deal.

There are more options, but that should keep an Obama administration busy for the first 100 days. Ambitious as this list may seem, it's really little more than what already exists in most industrial countries. And polling over the past two years indicates that by large majorities--larger than the margin of Obama's victory, Americans say they support such government action. With a deepening crisis, support is likely to grow.

But it will only grow--and this is my third and final point--if there is a popular movement pushing on both Obama and Congress as well as educating and mobilizing the potential support, as the polls seem to indicate, for a large center-left majority for this progressive agenda. Obama's victory was solid, but not overwhelming. He ran a campaign of inspiring rhetoric and moderately progressive programs. For example, his health care plan falls far short of what's needed, let alone what most of us want.

It's the start of a mandate. But he will need to use his leadership skills not simply to get everyone in a room and reach a compromise with people who otherwise oppose everything he says he believes in. He needs to use those skills to build his mandate. And each legislative success can build it more firmly.

But Democrats are going to have to abandon their obsession with balanced budgets. Large deficits in a downturn are good, and borrowing is justified for investments that yield long-term productivity increases, like research, infrastructure and education.

And they're going to have to break with the conservative obsession with cutting taxes or granting tax credits as the solution to every problem. Certainly we need to make the tax system far more progressive, but if government delivers what people want and need, then they will be more tolerant of the tax price they pay.

It's not clear where Obama will go. Now people are reading appointments like tea leaves. His appointment of Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff tilts somewhat right. But his inclusion of people like David Bonior in his economic policy council is a welcome tilt to the left. Ultimately, I bet dire circumstances will push the administration towards much more progressive, bold policies than we saw with Clinton, clearly, but also bolder than Obama now seems inclined to propose.

We can be certain the self-designated mainstream and conservatives will do everything they can to restrain or even obstruct a progressive agenda. That would be a tragedy. Beyond celebrating, we need to remember that Obama needs an energized left as a counterbalance to help him do the right thing, both for his sake and more important, for the sake of the American people.

"2008 Electoral Vote," continued from page 1

Vickie Barnett (Farmington-Farmington Hills), Lisa Brown (West Bloomfield- Commerce Township), and Jon Switalski (Warren-Sterling Heights).

As part of our endorsement, Detroit DSA held a fundraising house party for the four candidates in early September. This was critical because the Obama campaign and the Peters and Schauer Congressional campaigns had largely exhausted the pool of potential progressive donors. Our house party raised \$6500 which provided the seed money for the state representative campaigns.

Almost every weekend from late summer through the election, DSA volunteers canvassed, prepared literature, or phone banked on behalf of one of these four state representative candidates. All four candidates won—two by razor thin margins.

Our endorsement became an issue in two of the races. The Detroit Free Press accused Lisa Brown of being largely funded by outside radical organizations such as The Democratic Socialists of America. Vickie Barnett's opponent commissioned robo calls to undecided voters during the last two weeks of the campaign accusing Vickie of being a socialist. Both candidates won, perhaps putting to rest the McCarthy-era tactic of red-baiting.

Detroit DSA also did statewide mailings and e-mail blasts to our members urging them to vote for lesser known candidates on the ballot: Diane Hathaway for Michigan Supreme Court, Diann Woodard for the Michigan State University Board of Trustees, and Paul Massaron (whose wife is a DSA member) for Wayne State University Board of Governors. All three of these candidates won. Finally, in the last three weeks of the campaign, we were approached by Oakland County Commission candidate Steven

Schwartz who needed money for one last mailing to the voters in his district. Steve promised to work on behalf of a countywide living wage ordinance if elected to the commission (Oakland County is the fourth wealthiest county in the U.S. and holds hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts with local businesses.). We did an internet fundraiser for him which collected \$500 in the space of one week. He won by a narrow margin.

All in all, not a bad autumn's work for a local with fewer than 250 members.

## Detroit DSA Celebrates Obama Victory

Detroit DSA celebrates the election of an African-American President. This election represents real progress in the history of the United States. As DSA Vice-Chair Harold Meyerson wrote in his column in the Washington Post on November 7th, "The victory of Barak Obama... inspires that sense of awe that comes when we realize we are in the presence of a momentous historical transformation."

~Helen Samberg

Member: Detroit DSA Executive Committee

## Human Rights Day Celebrations

International Human Rights Day commemorates the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. Americans Eleanore Roosevelt, Ralph Bunche and Mary McLeod Bethune made major contributions to the drafting of this document. Detroit DSA members participated in two activities to mark this special occasion.

Detroit DSA Executive Board member Selma Goode participated in a press conference in Lansing regarding the Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice (IWJ) SweatFree Campaign. This campaign seeks to pressure the State of Michigan to purchase all of its uniforms (e.g., for police, prison guards, prisoners) from non-sweatshop manufacturers. At the press conference, participants presented 800 postcards demanding that the state purchase sweat-free uniforms to a representative from Governor Granholm's office. The delegation's spokespeople were State Representative Fred Miller (chair of the House Labor Committee), Father Norman Thomas (chair of the SweatFree Committee for the Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice), and Dia Pierce (Political Director for UNITE-HERE in Michigan). The delegation also met with representatives from the Michigan Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The OMB representatives were interested in the methods by which similar legislation has already been implemented in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The national organizer of the SweatFree Campaign was pleased by the cooperative response from the OMB. DSA collected signatures on the postcards at our recent Douglass-Debs Dinner and is proud to be part of the SweatFree Campaign.

On the evening of December 10th, DSA members Helen Samberg, Earl Mandel, and David Green staffed a table at the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights (MCHR) celebration of Human Rights Day at the Hope United Methodist Church in Southfield. They distributed copies

of DSA's Economic Justice Agenda, Democratic Left (DSA's quarterly national magazine), and the Detroit DSA newsletter. They also gathered signatures on DSA's Renegotiate NAFTA petition. This petition demands that President-elect Obama keep his campaign pledge to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement to include enforceable labor and environmental provisions. Other peace and justice organizations also rented tables at the Human Rights Day celebration. Reverend Wendell Anthony, President of the Detroit NAACP, delivered the keynote address at this event.

### Agenda for January 3rd DSA General Membership Meeting

1. Treasury Report
2. Report on Douglass-Debs Dinner
3. Report on Michigan Alliance to Strengthen Social Security and Medicare (MASSM)
4. Report on the Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network (MichUHCAN)
5. Report on Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice (JWJ)
6. Report on Detroit Area Peace with Justice Network (DAPJN)
7. Strategic Plan for 2009
8. Speaker: Bill Bryce on the Employee Free Choice Act

### Calendar of Events

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| Saturday, January 3rd                           | DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3500 Marais Avenue, Royal Oak.            |
| Thursday, January 15th                          | Jobs with Justice Executive Board Meeting from 1-3 PM at the Communication Workers of America Hall, 17233 West Ten Mile Rd., Southfield. |
| Sunday, February 1st                            | DSA Executive Board meeting from 10 AM until noon at the home of Helen Samberg (30785 Hunters Drive, Apartment 23, Farmington Hills).    |
| Thursday, February 26th                         | MichUHCAN Legislative Luncheon from 11:30 AM until 1:30 PM at the Capitol in Lansing.  |
| Saturday, March 7th                             | DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3500 Marais Avenue, Royal Oak.            |
| Friday, November 13th-<br>Sunday, November 15th | DSA National Convention at the Best Western University Plaza in Evanston, Illinois (adjacent to Northwestern University).                |