



Democratic Socialists of America

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Detroit DSA's 2012 Electoral Project

By David Green

Elections matter. Many on the left eschew electoral work because they believe that both political parties serve as apologists for capitalism and its accompanying injustice. They believe that there is no substantial difference between Democrats and Republicans, and therefore, no good reason to engage in electoral politics.

Our recent history in Michigan argues against this proposition. When Democrats failed to vote in 2010, Republicans were able to capture the state house as well as the governor's mansion. This led to passage of the most reactionary legislative agenda our state has ever seen. The Republican majority passed Right-to-Work legislation—an existential threat to the labor movement in our state. They passed the Emergency Financial Manager law which undermines democracy at the local level. They canceled the state single business tax and compensated for the revenue

shortfall by substantially reducing state aid for K-12 and higher education and by taxing the pensions of senior citizens. They passed significant new restrictions on abortion rights for women. Absent the Republican takeover of the state house in 2010, none of this draconian legislation would have been possible, Elections matter.

That is why Detroit DSA pursued an aggressive electoral strategy in 2012. We worked in primaries where the efforts of a small but disciplined group can have the greatest impact. We held a fundraiser for Representative John Conyers, Jr. in May which raised over \$8200 from 84 donors to help him overcome the first significant primary challenge he had faced in years. We followed up by canvassing for Representative Conyers in Melvindale in 100 degree temperatures in July. Conyers won his primary by a 3 to 1 margin over the second place challenger. We also canvassed for three state house candidates—State Representative Jon Switalski of Warren (whose district had been merged with that of another Democratic incumbent), Sarah Roberts (St. Clair Shores/Eastpointe), and Rose Mary Robinson (Detroit). All three of these progressives won their primary campaigns and went on to win handily in the general election. Ms. Robinson, a socialist and one of only two White candidates in a field of ten vying for a seat in a predominantly Black district, won her primary by only 400 votes. DSA support was critical in her success.

Detroit DSA also endorsed one of our own, Michelle Fecteau, for the State Board of Education. We sent out e-mail blasts and did a statewide mailing on her behalf. She won easily, receiving the largest number of votes



DSA canvassers at Taj headquarters

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of any of the candidates for the two open positions on the state board (over 2 million votes). We also endorsed progressive attorney Mark Bernstein for the University of Michigan Board of Regents. As with Ms. Fecteau, we sent out e-mail blasts and did a statewide mailing on his behalf. He received the largest number of votes of any of the candidates for the two open positions on the Board of Regents.

We suffered two major disappointments in the 2012 election cycle. The first was the failure to pass Proposal 2, the ballot initiative which would have enshrined collective bargaining rights in the state constitution. Detroit DSA had collected petition signatures to place the proposal on the ballot and had then distributed literature in support of Proposal 2 during our canvassing dates.

The second disappointment was the result of the 11th district Congressional campaign. The new 11th Congressional District had been drawn as a safe Republican seat for incumbent Thaddeus McCotter. McCotter submitted a nominating petition containing a large number of fraudulent signatures. When this was discovered, he dropped out of the race and ultimately resigned his seat in Congress. This created an opportunity in the race for the 11th district seat. The only remaining candidate on the Republican primary ballot was Kerry Bentivolio, a Tea Party extremist whom even the Republican establishment disliked (They even encouraged former State Senator Nancy Cassis to launch an unsuccessful write-in campaign in the primary.). The Democratic candidate was Dr. Syed Taj, an immigrant physician who had previously won election to the Canton Township Board of Supervisors in a majority Republican district. DSA reached out to Dr. Taj, asking him if he would be interested in our endorsement. He

accepted an invitation to meet with our executive board. After a thorough questioning of his positions on a wide range of issues, our executive board endorsed Dr. Taj. We held a fundraiser for him which raised \$7500 from 58 donors. We canvassed for him repeatedly—bringing out 15-20 DSA members on each occasion. We reached out to our allies, Progressive Democrats of America (PDA) and National Nurses United (NNU), on Dr. Taj's behalf. PDA sent an organizer to assist the campaign and used its phone banking operation to generate thousands of phone calls to likely voters in the 11th district. NNU donated money to Dr. Taj at a critical time in the campaign. Despite our best efforts, Dr. Taj lost the race by seven points—though he did poll above the Democratic base in the district.

Overall, Detroit DSA performed well in the 2012 election cycle. It is critical that we expand our membership, particularly our core of activists (cadre), so that we may be even more effective in 2014. Only by reclaiming the state house and senate, and by winning the race for governor, can we overturn Right-to-Work and the other dreadful legislation passed by the recent lame duck legislature. Remember, elections matter.



*State Representative Vickie Barnett and
AFT-Michigan President David Hecker at Taj fundraiser.*

John Nichols Delights the Audience at Thirteenth Annual Douglass-Debs Dinner

By David Green



John Nichols delivers the keynote address at the Douglass-Debs Dinner

Over 180 people attended the thirteenth annual Frederick Douglass-Eugene V. Debs Dinner at UAW Local 600 in Dearborn on November 10th. Our honorees were Steve Babson/People Before Banks Coalition and Marjorie Mitchell, the Executive Director of the Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network. The dinner co-chairs were Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO President Chris Michalakakis and Tony Trupiano, host of “First Shift,” the morning talk show on WDTW. The Bill Meyer Group provided the entertainment.

Steve Babson and People Before Banks were honored for their work on eviction defense over the last two years. With the help of other organizations such as Jobs with Justice, UAW Local 600, Occupy Detroit, and DSA, they were able to block the evictions of numerous families in metropolitan Detroit. They engaged in acts of civil disobedience by blocking streets so that dumpsters could not be placed in front of the homes whose occupants had been scheduled for eviction. They demonstrated outside of the banks which had refused to renegotiate loans with homeowners. They appeared in court to support homeowners at eviction hearings. They flooded the phone lines at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to demand justice for homeowners who were “underwater” on their mortgages.

Marjorie Mitchell has been a leader in the fight for universal health care for over twenty years, first as President and then as Executive Director of the Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network (MichUHCAN). She has traveled the state to educate and advocate for the Affordable Care Act. She has had the vision to recognize the social determinants of health (e.g., poverty, racism, and pollution) and to link the fight for universal health care with other social justice struggles.

The highlight of the evening was John Nichols’ keynote speech. The theme of his speech was that socialism is not a bizarre European ideology, incompatible with the American experience. Rather, socialism has been an intrinsic part of American politics since the founding of the nation. Nichols pointed out that Thomas Paine (the author of Common Sense) wrote a pamphlet arguing for land redistribution to prevent extreme income inequality which he viewed as detrimental to American democracy. Nichols noted that many of the founders of the Republican Party were socialists. He mentioned that Abraham Lincoln read Karl Marx’s pieces in the New York Herald Tribune. He quoted from Lincoln’s first State of the Union address in which the sixteenth President stated that “Labor is superior to capital.” This led to passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 which redistributed federal land in the west. For those interested, Nichols’ full speech was videotaped and can be found on our website at www.detroitdsa.com/.

Spread the word! DSA!

The Impact of Gerrymandering on Democracy

By Dick Olson

John Boehner has no mandate. Across the country American voters rejected continued Republican control of the U.S. House of Representatives by almost 1.2 million votes: 59,318,160 for Democratic candidates and 58,143,273 for Republicans.

Yet through the alchemy of redistricting, Republicans will have a 231-201 majority in the House of Representatives, and presumably John Boehner will continue to wield the gavel as Speaker of the House.

This is the first time in 60 years that one party has won a majority of the votes nationwide for Congress yet not had the majority of Representatives.

Michigan is a poster child for what can go wrong with partisan redistricting. After the 2010 election, Republicans controlled the legislature, governorship and Supreme Court. That in turn led to a totally Republican-dominated redistricting process where Democratic voters were packed into five districts and Republicans created nine safe districts for themselves. How did this story end up?

In November, Michigan voters cast 2,327,985 votes for Democratic candidates for Congress and 2,086,804 for Republican candidates: a 51% to 46% margin for Democrats. Yet the Michigan delegation to Congress will have five Democrats and nine Republicans, including Kerry Bentivolio, a joke by anyone's standards.

A similar distortion occurred in Pennsylvania where Democrats won a majority of the statewide votes for Congress yet only five of Pennsylvania's 18 Congressional seats will go to Democrats.

Aside from John Boehner running Congress, the partisan gerrymandering has one other serious consequence. Under the U.S. constitution, if no candidate for president received a majority of votes, the election would be decided by the U.S. House of Representatives with each state casting one vote.

If this had happened in 2012, Michigan voters could have voted for Barack Obama (as we did), cast a majority of their votes for Democratic candidates for Congress (as we did). Yet the Michigan House delegation could have cast Michigan's sole vote for President for Mitt Romney.

Even more ominous: several states including Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia are considering allotting their electoral votes by Congressional districts rather than by statewide vote. If that system had been in place this past election, Mitt Romney would be headed for the White House despite losing by 4.7 million votes.

So what can be done besides pointing out that John Boehner has no mandate and Barack Obama does? Iowa tasks an independent panel with the job of drawing lines without using any political data. And the final product must be approved by the governor and legislature.

In 2000 Arizona voters took matters into their own hands and created an independent bipartisan commission to draw the lines.

There is no reason Michigan could not have a fairer redistricting process.

Calendar of Events

JANUARY

Monday, January 21—Interfaith Council on Racial Justice Martin Luther King Dinner from 6:30-8:30 PM at Royalty House, 8201 Old Thirteen Mile Road in Warren. DSA has a table for this event. Contact David Green (Cell Phone Number 248-761-4203) if you are interested in attending.

Sunday, January 27th—DSA Executive Board Meeting from 10 AM until noon at the home of David and Teena Green (28292 Harwich Drive, Farmington Hills).

FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 23 — Michigan Democratic Party Convention from 8 AM until 6 PM at Cobo Hall in Detroit. Constituent caucuses will be held from 8 AM until noon. Congressional district caucuses will be held from 1-2:30 PM. The plenary session will be held from 3-6 PM.

MARCH

Saturday, March 2—DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais Avenue—near the intersection of Thirteen Mile and Crooks Roads)