



Democratic Socialists of America

Greater Detroit Newsletter

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March 2015

Volume 16, Issue 1

DSA Hosts Book Signing Event for Bonior Memoir

By David Green

Over 40 people attended a book signing event for former Representative David Bonior's new memoir East Side Kid at the Ferndale Public Library on Saturday, February 28th. Co-sponsors of the event included the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice, and the Ferndale Public Library. Speakers included Metro Detroit AFL-CIO President Rick Blocker, Kae Halonen of Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice, and Macomb County Commissioner Fred Miller who introduced Rep. Bonior.

Rep. Bonior read several passages from his book. He described growing up in an immigrant community in Hamtramck and later in East Detroit (now Eastpointe). He talked about the values he was taught as a boy which would later guide his work in Congress. He explained how the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements shaped his thinking. After speaking for approximately 45 minutes, Rep. Bonior graciously stayed to sign copies of his new book for those in attendance.

David Bonior served in Congress from 1976-2002 rising in the leadership to become the Democratic Whip. During his time in Congress, he championed raising the

federal minimum wage. He was a co-sponsor of Single Payer National Health Insurance legislation. He was an ardent opponent of NAFTA. He ran unsuccessfully for Governor in 2002 (with the endorsement of Detroit DSA). After leaving Congress, Rep. Bonior formed American Rights at Work, a labor advocacy organization which promoted the Employee Free Choice Act (legislation which would have made it easier for workers to organize). He served on President-elect Obama's Economic Advisory team during the Great Recession. In that capacity, he argued in favor of the government bailout of the auto industry, increased government regulation of the financial industry, and a larger fiscal stimulus for the economy.

Rep. Bonior and his wife Judy are longtime DSA members. They received the Douglass-Debs Award from Detroit DSA in 2003. Rep. Bonior was a co-host for DSA-PAC's successful fundraiser for Bernie Sanders in 2006. It was a pleasure for Detroit DSA to welcome David Bonior home for this event.



Former Rep. David Bonior with Detroit DSA Executive Board members Selma Goode, Gillian Talwar, and Catherine Hoffman.

Democratic Socialists of America Greater Detroit

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Human Rights

The recent failed attempt by the Arizona legislature to legalize discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in the name of religious freedom made headlines across the country. However, what many people do not realize is that discrimination against LGBT people is already legal in most places here in Michigan. Michigan's Elliott-Larson Civil Rights Act does not offer any protections to people who are discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or their gender identity. In other words, it is legal throughout most of Michigan to refuse to hire LGBT people, to fire someone for being LGBT, and to deny housing to LGBT people. It is also legal for restaurants and other businesses to refuse to serve LGBT people.

This legalized discrimination hurts Michigan in many ways. In 2013, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights issued an extensive report on the impact of discrimination against LGBT people. The report found that anti-LGBT discrimination hurts Michigan's economy. Workers who face discrimination tend to be less productive than workers who are protected from discrimination. The report noted that some people have chosen to leave Michigan in order to move to other states which are more friendly to LGBT people. Anti-LGBT discrimination also takes a heavy toll on the families and friends of LGBT people, especially when people are forced to move to another location in order to avoid discrimination. As a gay person, I have learned firsthand how the workplace is not always safe people like me. I have worked for employers who were not friendly to LGBT people and I have felt the need to remain in the closet while at work. When discrimination is allowed to persist, it sends to us the message that we are

not welcome. When we can not be open about who we at work, it becomes harder to form close friendships with our co-workers.

A number of individual municipalities have recognized that anti-LGBT discrimination is a problem and they have responded by passing human rights ordinances. These ordinances prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Currently, over 30 municipalities in Michigan protect LGBT people from discrimination. In the fall of 2012, voters in Royal Oak approved a human rights ordinance protecting LGBT people. Currently, the city of Saginaw is considering a similar human rights ordinance. Activists hope that as more cities adopt these protections, there will be enough momentum to force change at the state level by amending the Elliott-Larson Act to include protections for LGBT people. As a local, we are looking to partner with groups such as Equality Michigan to push for the passage human rights ordinances in Farmington Hills and other cities where we believe such campaigns could be winnable.

As democratic socialists, we must stand in solidarity with people who are fighting for equality and fighting against discrimination. No one should have to fear that they will be fired or evicted because of who they love or because of their gender identity. There are no good reasons to allow such discrimination to continue. Not only giving our support to movements for LGBT equality the right thing to do, these campaigns are winnable. In recent years, polls have consistently shown that a majority of Michigan voters believe that LGBT people should be protected from discrimination.

Metro Detroit DSA - Charter School Organizing Update

By Brandon Moss, President Michigan ACTS, Local #6482

It has been over two years of collective bargaining by the steadfast Cesar Chavez Academy Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff (CCA ACTS), but this union of teachers and school staff successfully reached their first bargaining agreement on June 5th, 2014. Working late into that evening, this new union set a historic precedent in Michigan by reaching the first collective bargaining agreement with not only the CCA board of directors, but also with the Leona Group; LLC, a for-profit management corporation that runs the day-to-day operations of Cesar Chavez Academy, which is among one of the largest charter schools in Michigan, with over two thousand students over five campuses throughout Detroit.

The Leona Group is a non-profit, Michigan and Arizona-based management company that operates over 50 schools over five states. The company launched in 1989 as a partnership between Alfred Taubman, the shopping mall magnate, and Judith Lanier, a former dean of Michigan State University's School of Education, to create publicly funded academies that operate under minimal regulations but, in turn, would commit to meet higher performance measures. Unfortunately, as recent history has shown, results have been lackluster in establishing higher academic progress, while opening the door for corporations to broaden their view of Michigan's educational institutions as fertile grounds to rake in record profits.

Despite the unjust and arbitrary firings of labor-organizing teachers and staff, creating a clear climate of fear, CCA ACTS, still won overwhelmingly. The fired labor-organizing staff have since returned to work as per a finalized settlement ruled by the National Labor Relations Board in early April.

Although the process was unfortunately over two years in length, the contract itself was a huge step forward for CCA ACTS, as well as all other teachers at charter schools who can now follow a model. CCA ACTS worked tirelessly to create a contract that established fair and transparent systems, increased teacher salaries, improved job security, and clear district procedures that strengthened the democratic voice of teachers and staff who have been too long denied a voice in their workplace. CCA ACTS is now part of the Michigan Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff (Michigan ACTS, local # 6482), which is an affiliate of American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Michigan, and the Michigan AFL-CIO.

Further adding to the accomplishments, less than a week later, the teachers and staff at Voyageur Academy, another Leona Group charter school in Southwest Detroit, voted overwhelmingly (24 to 3) to form a union and collectively bargain their conditions of employment. The union at Voyageur Academy will also affiliate itself with Michigan ACTS and AFT Michigan. It is a fitting tribute to the spirit of Cesar Chavez that the staff at a school that bears his name, organized themselves to accomplish amazing things by working together with parents, students and their community to reclaim their school.

Spread the word!
DSA!

Tuition Equality Campaign

By Gillian Talwar

Q. What happens when six people of English, South Asian, Euro American, Palestinian, Iraqi and African American origin walk into a Community College Board meeting?

A. They team up with some young Dreamers and CHANGE happens!

Last summer, with very little discussion and no publicity, Oakland Community College decided to raise its Out-State tuition rates by a whopping 73% from \$175.80 per credit hour to \$304 per credit hour, making it one of the highest in the State. By way of comparison, the average Out-State tuition rate across the other Southeast Michigan community colleges is \$171.67 per credit hour. In-District tuition is \$71.40. Faculty members protested, arguing that enrollment of international students would surely be affected. They were ignored.

One faculty member reached out to me as Chair of the Oakland ACLU Lawyers' Committee. When I looked into the issue further, I realized that this fee hike would affect other groups of students besides international students. There are students who are Oakland County residents, they live here, graduate from high school here and yet were not treated by the college as residents because of their immigration status. Instead, they had to pay the rate for international students. For undocumented students in particular, ineligible for financial aid, \$304 per credit hour would be prohibitive and would make a college education out of reach.

The fee hike was not a legal question, but a political one. The ACLU had been active in supporting struggles of undocumented students in achieving In-State tuition at University of Michigan and Wayne State University, but they did not feel it was appropriate to challenge the actual tuition rates set. I wanted to challenge both.

I first reached out to County Commissioner Gershenson who talked to some of the Trustees and told me that it would be very difficult to reverse the fee decision.

In March, I wrote a letter to the local press entitled "Immigrants not Welcome at Oakland Community College." The letter addressed issues of discrimination, fairness, and the value of diversity, and also pointed to the efforts of both State and County governments to attract

international businesses, immigrants and international students. I urged people to email the College Trustees. I forwarded the letter to all my email contacts and created a Facebook event. Detroit DSA got behind the campaign. I have no idea how many people contacted the College, but we certainly got their attention! Six of us planned to address the next Board of Trustees meeting in public comment. The day before the Board meeting, the Vice Chancellor, (who had tracked me down on Linked In), called me and told me they were planning on setting up a task force to look into the tuition hike and residency policy. We still spoke at the Trustees meeting.

The task force was composed of faculty members and administrators, myself and invited representatives from interested groups. The College was keen to demonstrate its commitment to diversity. Meanwhile, Michigan United contacted me and brought in a group of courageous young undocumented students to join the task force. Including them in the conversation made all the difference; they were able to tell their stories and explain their hardships both in the task force and at the next Trustees' meeting.

After three meetings, the task force finalized its recommendations. The first recommendation was to reverse the Out-State tuition hike and substitute an increase in line with the other fee rates. They said the original decision had been made with 'incomplete information'. The second recommendation was to revise the residency policy to allow all immigrant students with work visas and undocumented students with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status to pay the In-District tuition rate.

The third recommendation was to set up a new task force to continue to monitor the needs of international and immigrant students. We had argued strenuously that immigration status should not be relevant to residency at all and that all undocumented students should be able to get In-District tuition rates, but the College Administration dug their heels in. The students on the task force decided to support the recommendations because they did represent significant progress and would make an immediate difference to DACA students as well as other immigrant populations.

At the May Board of Trustees' meeting, the Dreamers organized more than thirty supporters with signs

demanding tuition equality. There were a dozen speakers at public comment time urging support for the recommendations. The Trustees unanimously adopted the recommendations. In only three months, by joining together and showing the College how their financial decisions affected real students, we were able to have a real impact, reverse a decision already made and achieve a more inclusive tuition policy.

The impact has not stopped at Oakland Community College. Out of that campaign the Coalition for Tuition Equality was formed to work on changing the residency and tuition policies of other community colleges. Henry Ford Community College quickly followed Oakland and changed their residency policy. The Coalition then met with Macomb Community College and lobbied hard for a truly inclusive policy. This effort was successful and Macomb Community College just passed amendments to its policies disregarding immigration status altogether. From next year, tuition rates will be based on actual residency only. We now have a great model to use as an example for other colleges and hope this will become the norm rather than the exception.

While the President's recent executive order expanding the eligibility for DACA status will enable a larger group of undocumented young people to work and go to college, it still does not cover everyone. Moreover, the executive orders creating and extending the DACA status can be revoked and have limited duration. This is why it is important to press for tuition equality for all undocumented students.

Gillian Talwar

Calendar of Events

MARCH

Saturday, March 7th—DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3500 Marais Avenue, Royal Oak

APRIL

Sunday, April 12th—DSA Executive Board meeting from 10 AM until noon at the home of David and Teena Green, 28292 Harwich Drive, Farmington Hills

Tuesday, April 14th—Socialist Reading Circle from 7:00-8:30 PM at the Ferndale Public Library, 222 East Nine Mile Rd., Ferndale

MAY

Saturday, May 2nd—DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3500 Marais Avenue, Royal Oak

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Join Us at our Next Meeting

Saturday May 2, 2015

Royal Oak Senior/Community Center