

Cincinnati & NKY Socialist Agitator

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Three Lessons from Kentucky

by Dario

A spontaneous uprising in April led to every single Kentucky school district (except one) being shut down for several days, but this tremendous effort and momentum failed to trigger a more sustained strike. Kentucky teachers rejected the Kentucky Education Association's (KEA) woeful leadership only for Nema Brewer (the leader who seemed to arise organically in KEA's place) to push for a narrowly electoral line that excluded strike action. What should we even call this complex and ambiguous series of events? It was a "strike-that-wasn't"; more than a protest, yet not quite an uprising. What we can learn from the events of April to build a more effective movement going forward?

Combating Electoralism As if to put a confident spin on their apparent capitulation, KY120 United leaders adopted a simple slogan: "We will remember in November." Kentucky educators had made their voices heard, this logic went; now the most effective way for teachers to channel their energy would be to vote out any legislator who didn't oppose the pension cuts for Kentucky teachers.

For anyone with a layman's grasp of the history of social movements, or a memory of bipartisan attacks on public education over the last several decades, this emphasis on electoral politics (to the exclusion of all other tactics!) appears willfully oblivious. Yet precisely this line of reasoning has become prevalent in similar fights across the country. Michael Mochaidean, an organizer for the West Virginia teacher's strike notes that "we are seeing electoral strategies [touted as] the singular way that the working class can regain its rights. . ." and goes on to warn against the trap of popular struggles "becoming another Wisconsin 2011, where working class struggle was diverted by establishment politicians into establishment politics."

(cont'd. p. 4)



Socialist PRIDE!

June is LGBTQIA Pride Month
join us to celebrate and fight

June 10th, 1pm: Northern Kentucky Pride Parade, starting at Covington Landing.

June 14th, 6:30-9:30pm: LGBTQIA & Women's Branch Happy Hour (and snacks!) at Crazy Fox Saloon (901 Washington Ave. Newport, KY)

June 22nd, 7:30-9:30pm: Pride Movie Night at New Spirit Oasis, 4033 Hamilton Ave. Northside

June 23rd, 11am: Cincinnati Pride Parade, starting at 7th and Central

June 24th, 1:30-3:30pm: Discussion of *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* at New Spirit Oasis, 4033 Hamilton Ave. Northside

July 13th, 7-9pm: LGBTQIA Caucus Coffee Hour at New Spirit Oasis, 4033 Hamilton Ave. Northside

Fight for Socialism!

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Building a Radical Labor Movement



Dan K addresses the audience

transcript of speech given by Dan K at a 2018 May Day Forum co-hosted with Cincinnati Socialist Alternative

Hi everyone, happy May Day.

We're all here to talk about what we can do to create and further the goals of a vibrant labor movement in America and around the world. In order to do that we need to grapple with the challenges facing anyone wanting to organize workplaces. I'm currently a non-union electrical contractor (with the goal to join the union soon) and I see the effects of this country's long-stagnant labor movement first hand. The people I work with are underpaid, overworked, not given the proper tools or information to do their jobs as effectively as possible, and unable to adequately train apprentices due to these pressures. Every man is an island in his mind and there is no great sense of solidarity among workers despite the awareness most of us have of the gulf between our standard of living and that of our employers.

I also see the way there is not only little to no solidarity within my company, but a lack of comradeship among the entire infrastructure of the building trades. We are encouraged to see the people fulfilling different functions on job sites as the impediment to our ability to perform our jobs adequately. When this is paired with the pretty evident reality of the way different companies and

different trades hire along racial lines, it creates a toxic environment more or less designed to keep workers disconnected from one another and given convenient scapegoats for their subpar working conditions.

You could say a lot of the same things about different jobs I have worked in different industries, as I'm sure you could say about the jobs many people in this room have. But as we have all seen in the past few months, there is definitely an energy waiting to be organized in a productive, even revolutionary way. Strikes among teachers and other workers have taken place in many different states, most notably the teachers' strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona. As activists and organizers it is contingent upon us to act in an effective way to ensure to the best of our ability that strikes like these result in the forging of a vibrant labor movement even stronger than those seen in the early 1900s. It will take addressing the dialectical nature of labor's role in American society and a fundamental understanding of why simply making labor conditions under capitalism better is insufficient.

DSA Cincinnati and NKY recently worked to take part in a potential Kentucky teachers strike by providing whatever support we could to teachers who appeared ready to strike in response to budget cuts imposed by Governor Bevin. I would say the results of this effort were not wholly positive, despite some significant takeaways from the experience that we hope can make us and anyone we work in coalition with more prepared to contend with pitfalls we encountered.

Probably one of the biggest distinctions we were able to make was that a platform is not a movement. It was incredibly heartening to see so many teachers engaged in what looked like solidly radical organizing on Facebook and other social media in the lead-up to the first school shut down. There was some talk tenuously in favor of a constant work stoppage and other murmurs of radical action. (cont'd p. 5)

Opinion: 3CDC, Go To Hell

by Paul K

(warning: this column contains salty language)

Recently some fuckhead from 3CDC was interviewed by the not venerable Cincinnati Business Courier and said fuckhead openly admitted that they still plan on prying the North Building of the Downtown Library out of our pockets. This brazen truth-telling goes against all the library board's two-faced efforts to not say that exact thing in public for the last year, since it lays bare exactly how much sway the company has over every goddamn decision the city makes in regard to public resources. It's a shame the malevolent consortium doesn't talk on the record more often, because when they do it is very illuminating how little regard they have for the city and it's citizens. Nothing is civic-minded to them, it's all about money and whitewashing everything into another Hyde Park suburb.

3CDC has ties and connections to everything in Cincinnati. You can't do a damn thing in this city without running into them. They control our local government. They own all the land downtown. They can do whatever they want here. And what they want isn't what the people want. If they had their way the only people that could afford to live in Cincy would be the ones they smoke cigars with at the club. Everyone else is irrelevant and unnecessary.

If you want to look into some of the unsavory recent developments around town you're going to end up running into 3CDC every time. FC Cincy strong-arming the West End has ties to 3CDC. Privatizing Burnet Woods is 3CDC. Selling off the North Building of the Library is definitely 3CDC. Ziegler Park. Vine St. in OTR. Pendleton. Washington Park. What is the common thread with all of those? They turn something that was for everyone into something that isn't, which is the unofficial motto of 3CDC.

If you look on their extensive gentrification project list, they list their 4 core values. One of them is some corporate goodwill bullshit about elevating public spaces and promoting diverse neighborhoods. Elevating is an interesting term for this because yes, they do elevate public spaces in the sense that they put them in a high place out of

reach of working class people. And promoting diverse neighborhoods is a tried and true euphemism for gentrification.

The first paragraph from Dan La Botz's extremely depressing study *Who Rules Cincinnati?* says all it needs to say about how 3CDC is responsible for a violently hostile living environment for minorities in Cincinnati. "This investigation into Cincinnati's power structure finds that a handful of national and multinational corporations dominate the economic, social and cultural life of the city. Wealthy individuals who own, manage and sit on the boards of these companies play an inordinate role in the social institutions and the political life of Cincinnati. Decades of corporate control have led to a distorted development and to grotesque contrasts between rich and poor like those we associate with Third World countries. This distorted development has had a particularly damaging impact on the African American population."



The Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) has been behind nefarious cronyism in Cincinnati since 2003

As the rich get richer, the rest, and especially minorities in our city, get fucked. We are a deeply racist place, and I think a lot of people have a warped sense of it. Instead of nakedly racist policies like we used to have now people can feel less guilty behind a guise of money and capitalism. They think what a group like 3CDC does isn't inherently racist, it's just a part of economic progress or capitalism. Capitalism unfortunately doesn't take into account that there are humans on the other end of the equation. And the more vulnerable the human, the more it will be manipulated by capitalism. It's all very shitty and 3CDC is at the center of it in Cincinnati. If you want to take it a step further, they are Cincinnati at this point. They decide what direction the city is going. The divides in our people are because of things they do. We are inextricably tied to their group. (cont'd p. 6)

cont'd. from p. 1 **Three Lessons** The prevalence of “electoralism” must be understood less in terms of its face-value persuasiveness, and more as a last-ditch effort to circumvent radical collective action. The way to ultimately defeat this fallacious viewpoint is for workers to see their political power not as an extension of elites but as something they can leverage together, for each other. That change must come through in-depth dialogue and engagement, but also through workers building up the organizational capacity to wield such collective power themselves.

Social Media Organizing: A Movement Led by Content Creators

The Kentucky teacher protests in April were largely organized online. These were massively attended events and demonstrated how successfully social media can be used to mobilize a large number of people in a very short period of time. Yet we can also see, from the events in April, how inadequate and problematic social media is as an organizing tool. There are many illustrative examples of why this was so. One that came into sharp focus this past month was how social media selects the leaders of a movement and shapes their relationship to it.

Nema Brewer did not become de facto head of the Kentucky teachers’ movement because she was a longtime Kentucky organizer, or even a well-known community leader. Instead, she became the movement’s face primarily because she created the KY120 United Facebook group. This speaks to the Kentucky educators’ lack of preexisting teacher leadership and organizing infrastructure, but it also illustrates why online organizing is not shortcut for movement building.

Nema and the other moderators of regional KY120 Facebook groups actively used their administrative power to tamp down open discussion -- particularly over the question of whether or not to strike. This silencing first began with Nema making the main KY120 Facebook group secret, making the group impossible to find if you weren’t already a member. The moderators for each regional group also screened comments, choosing which ones did and did not appear on each forum. It’s not clear that they actively censored viewpoints they disagreed with, but such screening does reveal how easily online platforms can simply become a political community shaped and curated by the platforms’ administrators.

Eventually, these forums became little more than bully pulpits for Nema and her fellow group administrators to drive and control their message, insisting that a strike had no chance of success and that the best thing teachers could do with their political power was to focus on electing Democrats in November.

Organizing Requires Engagement, Not Just Support When Kentucky teachers held their first rally at the capitol in Frankfort, our Cincy/NKY DSA chapter mobilized an impressive array of resources in a very short period of time. That Monday, three of our cars drove to Frankfort packed with food, cases of water, fuel cards, and DSA members ready to stand in solidarity with striking Kentucky teachers. And our presence was well-received. Educators and parents came up to our table in droves, gratefully accepted the food and drink we offered them, thanked us for our support, and many also signed up for our email list.

Yet in terms of the actual conversations that we had with Kentucky educators, their premise seemed to assume that a more sustained strike had already begun. After all, West Virginia teachers had just shut their state down with a nine-day mass strike that resulted in an impressive victory. How could Kentucky educators not pursue a similar path, given such a clear and recent precedent for its success? Many Kentucky educators did, of course, articulate precisely this logic – in face-to-face conversations we had with them in Frankfort, and in subsequent days on KY120 United Facebook groups. But for many other Kentucky educators a strike seemed dangerous and scary. Some believed that their communities would turn against them if they struck, others felt that the GOP-controlled legislature would crush it, and some even convinced themselves that the act of striking was somehow immoral. All of these fears, regardless of their merit, are human and understandable. As an organization, DSA should have gone down to that first Frankfort rally better prepared engage with these fears and address them.

What would this have involved? For starters, it would have required us think about ourselves not just as supporters, but also as organizers. It would have involved asking questions that got teachers strategizing about what they planned to do in the coming days and thinking more about where their power actually came from. It would have required engagement, not just support. This could be a scary prospect. As Jane McAlevey notes in *No Shortcuts*, it’s (cont’d. p. 5)

cont'd. from p. 4 **Three Lessons** common wisdom among organizers that "every good organizing conversation makes everyone at least a little uncomfortable." It's hard to start political conversations with people you don't know, and even harder to ask people who are exploited and scared and overworked to consider their lives as part of a broader struggle. Yet this lesson goes beyond Kentucky. We must find ways to actively use support actions to establish meaningful communications with those we want to see organized and empowered.

"The concerns and interests of the working class don't end at the end of the shift. They extend outward into communities in struggles for affordable housing, healthcare, transportation, food, and clean water."

cont'd. from p. 2 **Radical Labor Movement** However, the nature of online social media platforms meant that none of these conversations were necessarily seen by enough people, nor was there any guarantee that everyone who should be included in any potential organization could be on these platforms.

As such, there was very little democracy in any potential organization that took place. Official union leaders were unwilling to step up and make radical demands, tamping down expectations for their rank and file. Both they and other self-appointed leaders were able to quickly funnel any organizing energy into mere calls for mobilization, via large rallies that were significant in terms of turnout but offered no path for a structured movement that could strategize and make demands for the future, and via a call to rely on electoral politics as a panacea for the struggle facing these teachers. Overall, we in DSA saw firsthand that organization of a broad labor movement must involve the cultivation of a culture where organizers and rank and file members of unions are able to speak openly, in person, over an extended period of time and come to a place where clear political demands can be focused on. Not only should a focus be placed on the kind of labor organization one usually thinks of, i.e. strikes for higher wages and workplace accommodations. But unions with a vibrant and un-alienated culture can also provide an apparatus organize politically for environmental rights, anti-war causes, rights for

marginalized people, worker-owned co-ops, and any number of leftist causes. We need to make it clear that the goal of unions is to provide an empowered rank and file, not merely a hierarchical leadership structure.

We in DSA think that organized labor is an integral part of the path to a socialist future. The potential power workers can wield at the point of production is vast. But to realize that power, the movement must learn from mistakes of the past and correct those of the present. Sectionalism, and a bureaucratic, legalistic, apolitical labor culture have helped get us where we are today. While we applaud progress made nationally and locally by groups like the Chicago Teachers Union, United Steelworkers, National Nurses United, and Teamsters for a Democratic Union, we still have a very long way to go. What are our most pressing concerns? At the top of the agenda must be building rank and file member investment, knowledge and power. We must integrate all trade unions across racial boundaries; and we must fight actively for the rights of labor in all countries, rather than retreating into the narrow nationalist protectionism given lip service by the Trump administration. Labor must remember its radical solidaristic roots and engage in broad political struggles to benefit the working class as a whole. The concerns and interests of the working class don't end at the end of the shift. They extend outward into communities in struggles for affordable housing, healthcare, transportation, food, and clean water. We as socialists and workers should take this opportunity, on International Workers Day 2018, to renew our commitment to building this radical movement on the ground in our workplaces and communities. **Solidarity forever!**



Gimme a Brake (Light)!

by Kevin and Amanda

On May 12 DSA Cincy & NKY put on our first brake-light clinic and public dinner. For the unfamiliar, a brake-light clinic is a community service event where people's brake lights are fixed for free. In addition to the brake-lights, there was delicious food on hand thanks to Klint & Molly. All told, we fixed 12 brake lights and served food to approximately 20-25 people.

Replacing brake lights helps keep the community safe from harassment by cops: with less than \$5 and a little bit of training, a brake light is easily fixed. However, if caught with a brake light out, the ticket can be up to \$100, with court costs of \$143. The median income in Newport is \$33,000, with 23% of Newport households making less than \$15,000 annually. Fines totaling \$243 would prove to be a significant burden for many Newport families. In this circumstance, people are faced with a terrible choice: pay the fine, maybe at the expense of not buying groceries or medicine that week, or put it off. In the most extreme cases, people who have put off paying fines end up in jail and risk losing their job and housing while incarcerated. The punishment could be even more severe for an undocumented person, as any interaction with the police could end in detainment and deportation. In a neoliberal capitalist state, one function of police is to generate revenue that, in other circumstances, would have been raised by taxing the wealthy. Faced with this task, the police prey on the politically disempowered, in this case poor, working class, and undocumented folks. By providing free brake light replacement, DSA aims to protect these vulnerable communities from the confiscatory actions of the police, as well as the perverse logic of jailing someone because they can't afford to pay a fine, essentially creating new debtor's prisons. Additionally, by assisting undocumented people, we can help them avoid deportation and separation from family, opposing the inhumane logic of state-sanctioned white supremacy and the heartless

calculations of for-profit detention centers.

DSA's goal isn't just to protect Newport residents. We're building community in a working-class neighborhood, with the goal of organizing the community to tackle the challenges it faces. A number of the people who came to enjoy the public dinner spoke with us about their concerns and hopes for their community. As socialists we are committed to organizing alongside members of this and other oppressed communities to achieve the future we want.



DSA member Patrick replaces a brakelight while a child enjoys complimentary pastry

"By providing free brake light replacement, DSA aims to protect these vulnerable communities from the confiscatory actions of the police"

cont'd. from p. 3 3CDC No one should have as much power as 3CDC has in our city. They don't make people's lives better. They displace people. They bar people from entry. They put up walls. They tear down communities. They divide our city into the haves and have nots. It's despicable.

If there is any lesson to be learned from this, it's that big powerful companies never have your best interests at heart. They don't give fuck about you or your community. We can't give them another inch of our city. Because we're getting close to having nothing left that they don't have a finger on. If it's a 3CDC project, fight it from happening. Oppose it. Raise a ruckus. They have operated with impunity for far too long.