

MINUTES – Metro Atlanta DSA membership meeting, 01/16.10

The meeting opened at the Georgia Hill building conference room with 18 in attendance.

SPEAKER: DAVE CLARK

Dave Clark, a DSA member and Lawrenceville lawyer who has served with distinction as a Gwinnett County magistrate judge and is executive director of the Georgia chapter of the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), spoke on “The War on Drugs: A Socialist Perspective.” His powerpoint presentation opened with a large DSA rose and hand logo. He recommended FDR’s Economic Bill of Rights as a good definition of our demands as democratic socialists. “We’re actually winning, but it’s a secret.” Those demands were incorporated into the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the US.

He declared the so-called drug war a failure and defined it as aggressive law enforcement and intervention in other countries. “Just a phrase. . . a nomenclature designed to justify oppression.” He quoted one commentator who called it “A strategy that doesn’t work, against a threat that doesn’t exist, using money we don’t have.”

He briefly reviewed the history of drug use in America (with a nod to Coca Cola) and laws against drug use, ending with a graph showing marijuana (MJ) arrests now at a historic high. At the same time as the dramatic increase in arrests, states have been adopting laws legalizing medical MJ. Obama’s “drug czar” is sending mixed messages.

Why should socialists care? Clark’s answer: because we care about human rights and public health. We want treatment for addicts. *The End of America*, by Naomi Wolf lists the stages all fascist countries have gone through in what she calls the closing of society, most of which have happened in our country: Domestic police power used to advance a political agenda (see immigration law enforcement in Gwinnett County); suppressing dissent; enfranchising voters; harassing undocumented workers. The Patriot Act allows “sneek and peek” invasions which are actually used only for drug enforcement, not terrorists. The drug laws justify racial discrimination in sentencing, racial profiling, immigration abuses, hugely overpopulated prisons. Former felons can’t vote in some states, or only after going through red tape. People jailed for drugs and people who have been disenfranchised are disproportionately black and Hispanic. Police have too much power and are inadequately trained.

International issues: Narco-colonialism, actually enabled by our current drug policy, and drug profits used to fund unauthorized CIA military operations. Drug trade is lucrative because drugs are illegal in the US. Drug war is used to suppress movements towards socialism in Latin America (for ex. Colombia), but some governments are resisting.

Mexico has asked US to legalize MJ as a solution to their drug violence problems, citing the history of alcohol prohibition. Portugal legalized in 2001 with no ill effects, substituting treatment and harm reduction; also Amsterdam. European Union in 1996

recommended a minimum of repression. Canada is pursuing same path. Treatment is also the most economic response. Latin American Commission on Drugs came to same conclusion. CA legislature will be debating legalization.

Socialism would bring mental health care for all; equal education for all; an end to imperialism; end to discrimination; end to police brutality; fewer prisons; dignified work for all. This would go far toward solving the problem. However, government spending priorities have gone in the opposite direction – and drug availability has not decreased.

A thoughtful discussion about this complex problem followed the presentation.

## BUSINESS MEETING

**Treasurer's report:** We have about \$5600 in the bank, though with some bills yet to pay. Working on a budget. One big bill is for printing and mailing our excellent newsletter. We spend a lot on the dinner, but it also brings in money.

**Newsletter** was distributed and will be mailed to other members shortly.

**NPC report:** Barbara J. will attend the first 2010 National Political Committee meeting in NYC at the end of January. See our newsletter (coming soon to your mailbox) for an Atlanta-centric version of her coverage of November's national convention. The original version appears in the latest Democratic Left (see dsausa.org if you haven't received a copy in the mail). The convention was excellent. A larger, younger NPC was one outcome. National DSA is enjoying its biggest growth period since the death of Michael Harrington in 1989, but still needs you to recruit more dues-paying members and contribute. Latest NPC action was to call for local members to join the AFL-CIO's call-in day re health care reform, as announced through News from DSA.

Anyone not receiving News from DSA is strongly urged to sign up NOW - so much is happening nationally that you don't want to miss these concise and timely bulletins. Go to dsausa.org, click on second icon down on the right side of the home page. It's easy! And, if you would like to receive the dsamember discussion group postings (more to read, but members share some interesting info) ask Frank in the national office to sign you in: FLlewellyn@dsa.org

**Jess:** He remarked that it's good to be in a multi-issue organization. He enjoyed the national convention. He is working on getting a YDS presence in Atlanta and more members. More news on this to come. Contact Jess if you want to help.

**Mayday event:** Bob W. reported on a plan recently circulated by email. Emphasis is on education and dialogue among activists, focusing on four issues people are taking action on both locally and nationally: Health care (reform legislation, Grady); housing/homelessness; immigration; labor. One or two more could be added. Panels on two of the topics followed by Q&A will be held simultaneously in the morning and the other two in the afternoon. Box lunch in between. Joe Schwartz, a political scientist who

is chair of national DSA's steering committee, and Carl Davidson of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism will give both opening and closing remarks. Look for ongoing info as this develops, and email your input or questions to Norm. Volunteers will be needed!

**Socialist Education Circle:** The next SEC will take place on Feb. 21 at 3-5 pm at Norm's clubroom in Decatur, either on selections from *Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Cuba Reader* or Joe Schwartz' book *The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America*. (UPDATE: February will be chapters 5-8 of Schwartz's book and selections from the Cuba anthology will be discussed later. More info will follow. - BJ)

**Milt's year-end report:**

- \* The DD Dinner raised about \$5,000 and attendance was very good.
- \* We now have a mailing list of 225 members and friends.
- \* We are established in the progressive community, and we have a small office in the WAND suite in the GA Hill bldg where you can pick up literature any day.
- \* We have broadened our executive committee by adding four members.
- \* We pulled together the foreclosure coalition. (See benefit Jan. 22.) We are targeting other banks in addition to Wells Fargo. National AFL-CIO will hold a major action on foreclosures here in Atlanta, probably in April. Milt and Barbara J. are on the coalition steering committee.

**MLK march:** DSA contingent will meet at the Equitable Bldg Starbucks. You can go to the CWA hall on Logan St. after 4 for refreshments and socializing.

**Poor People's Day:** See newsletter for Carol's report. We are a sponsor, and the foreclosure coalition will participate on education day Feb. 10. Minnie is contributing a flatbed truck and driver, for DSA to use in the parade.

**Foreclosure Coalition results:** Barbara S. reported that Atlanta Legal Aid Society says they are now making a lot more progress settling their foreclosure cases to help poor victims of predatory lending keep their homes, and attribute it to the coalition's help in pressuring the banks.

**GSU student movement:** Barbara J. reported on the nascent student movement at GSU that recently demonstrated outside the Board of Regents' meeting against hikes in student fees. Expect to hear more.

**Columbus organizes:** Berrian Zettler, a DSA member from Columbus, GA reported on efforts in Columbus by a spin-off of the progressive discussion group "One Columbus" to start an action program vs. foreclosures

**Haiti relief:** Bob W. proposed that we send \$150 from our treasury to Partners in Health for Haitian relief, which passed unanimously. Individuals are encouraged to contribute as well.

