



Paul Krehbiel (top center) with Los Angeles Labor for Bernie.

## Build a Stewards Council From the Bottom Up

**Among many other gains they can win, they also help pave a road to socialism**

*Editor's Note: The following articles (#1-#6) were written by Paul Krehbiel and originally published in the monthly national newspaper, Labor Notes, in the later months of 2006. They describe how he helped build Stewards Councils at two Los Angeles County hospitals from 1998- 2006 and how they empowered workers and won victories on the job and in the community. They have been slightly edited here for clarity.*

*Stewards Councils are generally seen as an internal structure of union organization, comprised of Stewards from all work areas of accompany or institution. They are in daily contact with their co-workers, and are the backbone of the union. Their activism greatly strengthens union power. They could also be built in non-union workplaces; during a union organizing campaign for union recognition, the Organizing Committee often serves a similar purpose. It can also serve as the foundation of a Stewards Council after the union achieves recognition. Furthermore, an active Stewards Council can help mobilize and lead co-workers in labor-community coalitions.*

*A good Stewards Council is member-driven, democratic, activist, empowering, and embraces social justice unionism and community justice causes, which greatly strengthen the union. The seventh and final article, written in 2023, builds upon advances outlined in the previous articles, and argues that the best organized Stewards Councils form building blocks for socialism.*

***By Paul Krehbiel***

## **Stewards Councils #1**

Want a stronger union at work? Consider building a Stewards Council. I was a rank-and-file worker at a company with a good steward structure years ago, so I knew something about how it worked. After I began working as a union representative for Service Employees (SEIU) Local 660 in January 1998, I was assigned to Harbor- UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles. I saw immediately that the union there was weak. With only five stewards for 1,700 workers, demoralization was high. Many members complained that the union did nothing, and they wanted out.

The only solution was to build the union at the facility. I met with three interested Stewards and we came up with an assessment and a plan. We knew we couldn't handle every problem at once, so we decided to concentrate on one work area of about 20-30 workers at a time. We used three criteria to decide where to focus: First, there needed to be a problem that affected most workers in the area. Additionally, it needed to be a problem that people felt strongly about. Finally, we wanted to focus on areas where there was a leader or potential leader in the group.

### **Setting guidelines**

Once we found such a group, we had three goals: (1) organize an issue campaign that would involve a significant majority of workers in the targeted area, (2) try to win a victory, and (3) recruit at least one leader to become a steward. Our long-term goal was to have at least one steward in every work area, on every shift, in a ratio of at least one steward for every

20 workers. Once we had recruited at least 12 stewards who were representative of the workforce in the different areas, we would set up an interim Stewards Council. When we had 20, we would establish the permanent Stewards Council. The council would function as a democratic body—we would elect officers and write a simple constitution, bylaws, and mission statement that welcomed member input and mandated democratic practices.

All the while, we would need to keep recruiting. We received a call from two workers on the hospital's 4 West ward who complained that management had issued a memo stating that workers had to bring in a doctor's note if they were off one day sick in December. The usual policy required a doctor's note after three days. I went with one of the stewards to meet with the callers. We asked if everyone was strongly opposed to this change, and they said "yes." We decided that a petition could gauge the level of support while teaching petition circulators leadership skills. Within three days, 23 of 25 workers signed. We then developed a draft campaign outline: we would file a group grievance and have as many people come into the grievance meeting as possible. The lead workers mapped their work area by making a list of all the workers there, and got 12 workers to agree to come and speak at the grievance meeting. We could only get two workers released for the meeting, so the others came in on their breaks, two at a time, every 15 minutes, spread over an hour and a half. Work slowed down considerably.

Management was worried and backed off on enforcing the new rule. Workers were happy and one leader became a steward. We repeated this process in other work areas and within four months we formed the interim Stewards Council. Within eight months, we had built a permanent Stewards Council that had elected its own officers.

## **Leadership and education**

The council put out letters and leaflets, conducted larger campaigns at the facility, and was soon seen by workers and management as the union at the work site. As the full-time union rep, I worked most closely with the elected leaders of the coun-

cil. Working together, we developed plans and campaigns to further strengthen the union.

Early in the recruitment process we decided to hold steward training classes. We held them after work at the hospital, once a week, to make it easy for stewards to attend. Topics included “Rights and Responsibilities of Stewards,” “Communication and Informal Problem Solving,” and “Organizing Around Worksite Issues.” Most of the classes emphasized looking for group issues, because fighting for a group would strengthen the union much more than fighting for just one person. I involved the stewards in the classes as much as possible, including as presenters (when they felt comfortable).

We also set up a mentoring program. New stewards would go with more experienced ones or with me to meetings with management to see first-hand how issues were handled. As they gained knowledge, skills, and confidence, they began to participate more. Our goal was to get as many stewards as possible to run meetings with co-workers and management by themselves. This gave the union a big boost. We also publicized our activities, especially our victories.

## **Bringing people in**

Soon, word was out that the union was alive and growing. Workers in other areas asked to become stewards. We asked them to help on a project and then brought them aboard. Within a year and a half, we had 35 Stewards and the union was winning some victories. Things were far from perfect, but management knew that the union was there. I was then re-assigned to LAC-USC Medical Center, with over 3,500 workers. There was already a council there of about 40 stewards. Working with the leadership, we organized more issue campaigns and recruited many more stewards. The council put out a monthly newsletter with three regular articles: (1) a victory that the union had won at the facility, (2) a current campaign that we invited workers to join, and (3) an invitation to become a steward. Stewards Councils make a big difference. When workers have one, they feel that they are the union-and that they have power.

# Strong Stewards Council Wins Big for Patients

## Stewards Councils #2

*RN's Labor Notes*

I was assigned by Service Employees (SEIU) Local 660 to be one of two union representatives for over 3,500 workers at LAC-USC Medical Center in Los Angeles. One of the first things I did was to meet with the two co-chairs of the 45-member Stewards Council there and with the other rep, Mario, and to attend the monthly council meetings. All stewards are members of the council. I found the leaders and six to ten core activists to be quite experienced. Another third would help on some projects, and the rest weren't very active.

The council had negotiated an hour of "pre-meeting" time (right before a regular monthly meeting with management--on work time) that was attended by just the stewards and union reps so that we could prepare for the meeting with management. That "pre-meeting" also allowed us to take up other important issues. I spent most of my time with the co-chairs and the activist core, to plan how we could get the other stewards more active and how we could recruit more stewards. Our goal was to have one steward for every 15 workers, so we had a considerable way to go.

## Dealing with understaffing

One of the most pressing problems had been the many years of understaffing. It was particularly acute among nurses, and they were the group that protested the most. At this time, SEIU and other unions in California were trying to implement a new nurse-to-patient ratio law that they had been working for years to pass. In the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, where Local 660 represents almost 6,000 registered nurses, management had made no progress in reducing the number of patients assigned to nurses. The law mandated no more than six patients per nurse on most

wards. Nurses were routinely assigned 8, 10, 15, or sometimes 20 or more patients.

Nurses were angry and wanted action. We had meetings with management and were assured that they were working hard to hire new nurses and needed more time. Months went by with no improvement. The staffing problem was discussed at Stewards Council meetings and the council supported the nurses. “Stewards went back to their work areas and talked about the importance of supporting the nurses campaign to their co-workers,” said Keenan Sheedy, co-chair of the Stewards Council and a patient financial services worker. “We especially wanted stewards on patient care wards to talk to the nurses and other workers there. I spoke to the patient financial workers, who go onto every ward of the hospital.”

## **Gathering information**

The Stewards Council set up a subcommittee to work on this campaign, made up of nurses, other stewards and union staff. “We began by researching the law,” said Fred Huicochea, a utilization review nurse and shop steward. “We found a law that mandated nurses to insure the safety of the patient. We told the nurses that they had the legal right under the Nurse Practice Act not to accept an unsafe patient assignment.” Stewards from the council, with the help of the union reps, then went to all 22 wards in the hospital, on all three shifts, to tell nurses about this safe patient care law and their rights, and ask them if they wanted to participate in a campaign to refuse unsafe assignments.

Audrey Nwankwo, another nurse steward, said “We made leaflets quoting the safe patient part of the law exactly as it was written and distributed the leaflets to the nurses.” When stewards and staff talked to the nurses on each ward, they kept notes, so that at the end of this process, we knew which wards were the strongest. We identified four strong wards where we would start the “safe patient care campaign.”

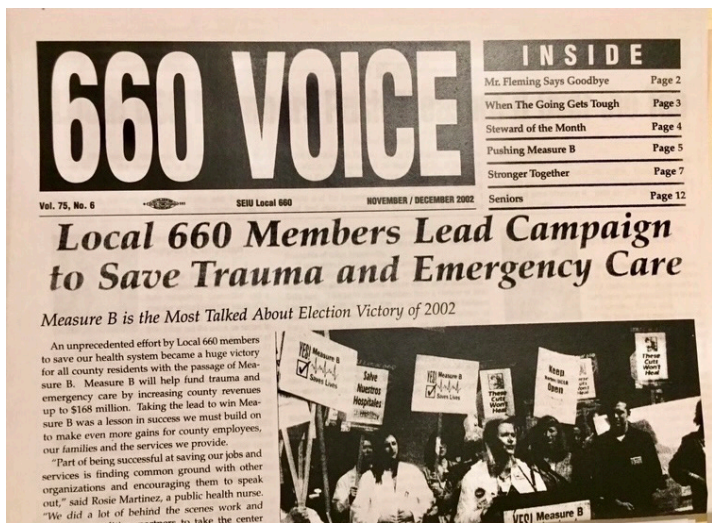
## **Refusing unsafe assignments**

On the day we started the campaign, management was furious and threatened the nurses, telling them they would be

insubordinate if they refused to take the number of patients being assigned to them. The nurses immediately called us to their wards and we all argued with the managers. Management called the police, who threatened to arrest us. We explained to the police that county management was in violation of both the new ratio law and the law that required nurses to insure patient safety, and showed them the laws. When a manager told a nurse to take another patient--in front of the police--I said the manager was breaking the law and that I wanted the manager arrested. The police were dumbfounded and called their headquarters for instructions. We stayed there for three hours until the hospital was in compliance. On some wards, management found additional nurses or called the nurse registry; on others they had to close beds and transfer the patients elsewhere.

## Spreading information

That first day was a big success. The next day, council members and staff handed out leaflets announcing the victories of the courageous nurses on the four wards to nurses and other workers entering for their morning shift. There was a buzz throughout the hospital. Nurses on other wards joined the campaign. Within five days the campaign had spread to 17 wards. Licensed Vocational Nurses, nursing attendants, and ward clerks spoke up, led by stewards from the council, saying that the additional patients assigned to the RNs caused them to have unsafe assignments too, since they had to help the RNs.



*Front page of the SEIU 660 newspaper announced the victory in the Measure B campaign to secure additional funding to protect the county's Trauma Network, save three county hospitals from closing, and save 8,000 Local 660's healthcare workers' jobs.*



Stewards from the council explained the laws to the nurses and what they should say to management. Management was stunned by the broad support for the campaign and the tenacity of the nurses not to back down in the face of repeated threats. The Stewards Council then put out an issue of its newsletter to all the workers in the hospital, explaining how the campaign was built and won. The council wanted to give other workers the idea that they could do the same thing to address problems in their areas. Nurses with 20 years or more said that this campaign did more to improve working conditions than anything that had ever happened at the hospital. Many nurses, clerks, and other workers signed up to become stewards and join the Stewards Council.

## **Stewards Council Beats Back Retaliation and Racism**

### **Stewards Councils #3**

#### *Labor Notes*

After Service Employees (SEIU) Local 660 members won the campaign around safe staffing levels for registered nurses (RN's) at LAC-USC Medical Center in Los Angeles, management was angry. So they retaliated. Rather than take on the RN's again, management especially targeted workers in classifications that they thought were weaker. The first wave was against licensed vocational nurses (LVN's), nursing attendants (NAs), and clerks, many of whom supported the RNs' campaign. Management increased weekend work for these groups to three or more weekends a month. RN's weren't affected because they had language in their contract giving them every other weekend off, and they had just demonstrated their strength.

The other classifications didn't have that language in their contracts. Sabrina Griffin, a LVN and co-chair of the LAC-USC Stewards Council, said: "When I heard about the plans to increase our weekend work, I was angry. We had been working hard to improve staffing to improve patient care, and it looked like management was trying to punish us by forcing us to work more weekends." Griffin brought the weekend work issue to the council for discussion and the council passed a resolution



demanding that LVNs, NAs, and clerks get back their regular weekends off. Then they began organizing a campaign.

## **Campaign kickoff**

The campaign started with a petition. Cynthia Molette, a transcriber typist and Stewards Council member, and Local 660 Board of Directors member, explained later that this would show management “just how many workers were opposed to the extra weekend work.” There was a high level of support. In a short time over 200 workers had signed the petitions and copies were made for every ward. Then, at an agreed-upon date and time, delegations of workers on each ward delivered the petitions to their ward managers, while a larger delegation, organized by the Stewards Council, delivered the original petitions to nursing administration. Ward managers called nursing administration to tell them about the ward delegation meetings.

Nursing administration was stunned. They didn’t expect the council to mobilize members on nearly all 22 wards of the hospital. They quickly gave in and reverted to the old weekend off schedule. But management didn’t give up. They next singled out a smaller group of workers that they saw as politically weaker, the NAs. Management did it by reducing the number of NAs on the wards and assigning them elsewhere, mostly to non-patient care assignments. This caused serious problems. There are normally two NAs on a ward of 22-24 patients. NAs’ duties include taking basic vital signs, changing bedsheets, cleaning up, giving baths, assisting RN’s and LVNs, and transporting patients. When management pulled one NA off each ward, doubling their workload, NAs immediately brought the issue before the Stewards Council.

## **Racism: dividing to conquer**

Many stewards felt that management targeted the NAs because they perceived them as the most vulnerable. NAs are overwhelmingly women and people of color--Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and others. Many of them are immigrants, and they are also generally poor because of their low pay. Also, reducing the number of NAs would have put pressure on the RNs to do

NA work. There was already a long historical divide between NAs and RNs, and these staffing cuts would pit the workers against each other. Finally, management may have thought that the Stewards Council was too weak, especially among the NAs, to respond.

Management was wrong. With input and leadership from the NAs, the Stewards Council made a petition demanding that all patient care wards have two NAs. The petition also had a column for workers to put their job classification, so we could show broad support for the NAs, especially from the RNs, LVNs, and ward clerks. Soon over 200 signatures were collected, and the council organized a delegation of ten workers to meet with management that included NAs, RNs, LVNs, and clerks. Explained Barbara Thomas, a NA and steward who was on the delegation, “One NA can’t take care of 23 patients alone.” Joel Solis, a RN steward leader on the delegation, told the nursing director, “We all support the NAs. For the first time, the RNs, LVNs, NAs, and clerks are supporting each other. This helps us all and insures the best care for our patients.” Management saw that the workers were getting stronger and more united, and they didn’t want to see a repeat of the militant type of campaign the RNs conducted, so they agreed to put 26 new NAs back on the wards. The council announced the victory in their newsletter, and more workers contacted us to become stewards. From RNs to NAs, it was clear to everyone that having a strong, permanent Stewards Council was the best safeguard against retaliation.

## **Education Empowers Stewards and Stewards Council**

### **Stewards Councils #4**

*Labor Notes*

Internal education is essential for a strong, well-functioning Stewards Council. The council at LAC+USC Medical Center in Los Angeles put together an educational program that operated on two levels. One was to conduct regular steward’s training classes that covered the nuts and bolts of daily trade union action-grievances, communications, problem solving, and others.

The second was to conduct education on specific issues, such as the trainings we did with nurses to prepare them to fight for safe staffing (see *Labor Notes*, August 2006). Education was essential in creating the Stewards Council at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center when I was the union representative there.

## **Survey the members**

At LAC+USC, the major educational activity that the Stewards Council organized was the stewards training classes. After discussion at a council meeting, the members agreed that each steward would talk to their co-workers and make a written list of what kinds of information they thought would be most useful to better resolve the problems they faced in their work area, and report back at the next council meeting. We had a written draft of topics that the stewards compiled at the council meeting based on what the stewards wanted in the classes, and we had each steward take that list to their co-workers in their own work areas. We asked them to explain to their co-workers that the council was planning to have classes for stewards, which were open to any member that wanted to attend. We asked the stewards to show their co-workers the ideas the stewards came up with, but that we also wanted the member's input.

"It doesn't make sense to hold classes on just those things that we stewards think are important if they aren't the things the members think are important," one steward said. "The classes must also be on the things that the members think are important." When the stewards came back with their lists of issues to cover in the classes, we looked over all the lists to see what issues were the most important to the largest number of members. What came through clearly was that what the members wanted most were the tools to deal with daily problems in their work area.

## **Grievance focus**

Most of the feedback we got showed that members wanted classes dealing with grievances: how to investigate a grievance, how to write one, how to interview witnesses, how to prepare your case, and how to present your case at a grievance meet-

ing with management. A number of workers also asked if there was a way to solve problems without filing a formal grievance, and this allowed us to introduce ideas of collective action into the classes early, such as in the big gains made at key times in labor history through mass marches, strikes and other collective action. But today, when most members thought about the union helping them, it usually took the form of filing an individual grievance. This was the model of unionism that they had seen for many years. Since that was their level of union consciousness, we felt that we had to begin there and assure them that we had the necessary skills to investigate and effectively argue a grievance. Also, the skills learned in investigating and arguing a grievance would be needed in planning and conducting an organizing campaign.

## **Six-week training**

Based upon this input from members and stewards and our analysis that collective action was the most effective way to win significant gains, we developed the following six-week steward training course with the idea of moving the stewards through a series of steps that would end up in increasing their union consciousness. Here are the classes titles and class descriptions:

- Class 1: Rights & Responsibilities of Stewards. This class covered a brief history of the labor movement, basic union concepts, basic labor law, economics for workers, the rights and responsibilities of union members and union stewards and leaders.
- Class 2: Communication and Informal Problem Solving. This class covered successful methods to improve member's communication skills between management and workers, and between co-workers, as well as a variety of informal problem-solving skills.
- Class 3. The Contract: Grievance Procedure and other Key Articles. This class went over key articles of a basic union contract, including grievance procedure, health and safety, work assignments, and others.
- Class 4. Grievance Investigation and Writing. This class covered how to investigate and write grievances.
- Class 5. Preparing Your Case and Presenting it. This class

covered how to prepare your case and present it to management.

- Class 6. Organizing Around Worksite Issues. This class covered a variety of tools available to organize co-workers to resolve problems at the worksite and to proactively make worksite improvements. We cited the campaigns among RN's, LVN/s and NA's as examples.

Since we also gave examples of how individual grievances with great merit were routinely denied by management in the fifth class, this then lead naturally to the last class on organizing. Once we had put together the structure and content of the classes, we worked out the scheduling.

## **Understanding union consciousness: knowing where your co-workers are at can help**

### **Stewards Councils #5**

#### *Labor Notes*

During union-building campaigns, labor activists sometimes get demoralized because so many of their co-workers are unresponsive. Many workers don't seem to understand much about the union, don't seem to care, and don't get involved. At times, it seems like there are only two types of members: those who care about the union and those who don't. If you're someone who cares, it's easy to feel like you're part of a small minority carrying the weight of the union on your shoulders.

Thankfully, however, things are usually more complex. Beneath the apparent apathy there is often a lot of potential. In my experience, workers in most workplaces are at many different levels of union consciousness (see separate article, Levels of Union Consciousness). Understanding how they think about the union can help us work with them to help increase their level of union consciousness.

## Strike preparations

During preparations for a strike in Los Angeles County several years ago, one of our shop stewards was frustrated because she was struggling to get co-workers to understand our concept of a Contract Action Team (CAT). The teams were networks of workers (at least one in every work area) who would commit to sharing information and mobilizing member support for our bargaining proposals during negotiations. I told the frustrated steward that we were promoting a concept (becoming a CAT activist) that was beyond most workers' level of union consciousness and that's why we were struggling. Most of our stewards were around level five--they understood that the union is a group of employees working together on the job to empower themselves to solve problems and protect and advance their interests. Many members, however, were at level one or two: they saw the union as something outside of them, like a third party, only to be contacted when they had a problem or were in a desperate situation.

## Identifying activists

As we continued with the campaign, I shared the "Levels of Union Consciousness" list with our Stewards Council. We decided that our first job was to identify the more advanced workers who were already at level four or five and explain our CAT team concept to them. Next, we would find other workers who were at levels two, three, and four and try to move them to level five. As more workers moved towards level five, we started seeing a significant change in the union. For example, one day I was talking to a medical technologist who complained that the union didn't do much. He knew the union had tried to deal with a couple of problems in his work area, but without success, and then "they" (the union) just dropped it. "That's their job," he said, "and they didn't accomplish anything."

I figured he was a number one or two on the levels of union consciousness. I didn't ask him to become a CAT member, but instead asked him to sign a petition related to another problem. I didn't think he would jump to a number four or five, but I wanted to see if I could move him to number three. "What's the

point?” he asked. “It won’t do any good.” I agreed with him that the petition might not yield immediate results but explained that it was part of a long-term campaign. “Our goal is to get a lot of signatures,” I explained. “When only one or two people complain, management can easily ignore them. If management doesn’t fix the problem then, which they probably won’t, then we are going to attach the petition to a group grievance.” I told him that when we set up the grievance meeting, we would get as many people as we could to attend. If a lot of people attended and spoke up, it would put more pressure on management. If that didn’t work, we would apply pressure in other ways. “So,” I said, “the first step is to get everyone to sign this petition. Can we get your signature?” I handed him the petition and the pen. He signed.

## **Following up**

We continued to collect signatures, got 70 percent of the workers to sign, made a copy of the petition, and submitted the originals to management. Management still refused to fix the problem. So we made another copy of the petition, attached it to a group grievance, and filed it with management. We told the workers what had happened so far, and that when we had a date for the grievance meeting we would ask people to attend.

I saw this medical technologist again and repeated the update. Now he seemed more interested in what we were doing. He told me of a complaint he and some other workers had on another issue, and then asked if the grievance meeting had been set yet. Since he told me about another complaint that he and other workers had, I saw him as being concerned about problems on the job and about some of his co-workers. He was now a three and I wondered if he was ready to move toward becoming a four.

## **Learning through action**

Union activity was still pretty new to him, and he was feeling his way, but his consciousness was increasing. Union activity was helping him grow. This list helped stewards see that if workers weren’t at level five today, all was not lost. It also showed that we are responsible for more than just mobilizing



around contracts and workplace issues. We are also responsible for developing workers as leaders and educating members about the union.

We don't have to wait until everyone is at level five to act. In fact, a well-organized group at level five can often move the majority of workers to collective action. This list helps us understand what role each worker might play in a given campaign, and how a given worker might take greater responsibility for the union. Our goal is to strengthen the union to protect and advance workers' interests. When stewards at our hospital understood this, they became less frustrated and less critical of co-workers who had a lower union consciousness. Now they had a strategy to build the union and a set of guidelines to measure their progress.

## Levels of Union Consciousness

- 0. Union? What union? I don't care about unions.
- 1. Unions are OK, but ours doesn't do much for us.
- 2. The union is OK. I had a problem and they tried to help. (The union is seen as a third party.)
- 3. The union is OK. When there's a problem I go to the steward and ask him to fix it. Sometimes I help a little. Once I signed a petition.
- 4. The union is good. I filed a grievance when I had a problem, and I helped a co-worker.
- 5. The union is good. When we have a problem, we get together with the steward and we try to figure out how to solve it.
- 6. The union is good. When we have a problem, we have to work collectively to develop a plan to involve our co-workers. When everyone works together, we can pressure management to fix the problem.
- 7. The union is good. We have to pitch our organizing to the level that others are on so we can reach them, and move them to get involved, one step at a time.
- 8. The union is essential. We have to build a strong internal union structure at the workplace working together in a Stewards Council, contract action team, or other member-to-member network.
- 9. The union is essential. The member council or action

team, with input from the membership, must develop a pro-active plan of how we want things to be at work.

- 10. The union is essential. We must build alliances with members in other workplaces, unions, and organizations to advance our interests, not only at work, but in other areas of life as well.

Note: This list is not intended as a scale to “grade” or judge a co-worker. It is designed to help us understand what role each worker might play in a given campaign and how a given worker might take greater responsibility for the union.

**Saving healthcare, stopping war**

## **Stewards Councils, Community Organizing, and Political Action**

### **Stewards Councils #6**

*Labor Notes*

Some problems are so big that it takes more than a good Stewards Council to solve them. Budget shortfalls, outsourcing work and jobs, business closings, organizing the unorganized, political action, crisis in education and health care, building international labor solidarity, and peace are some of them. It takes a strong, progressive union and often a labor-community coalition to organize the clout to take on these fights and win.

A strong Stewards Council provides a solid foundation to help strengthen our unions and provides a good model to build these coalitions. Building all of these strong organizations are essential in both the private and public sectors. While there are some differences in the strategy and tactics used in the private sector compared with those used in the public sector, many strategies and tactics in both sectors are similar, and the organizing skills are the same. I will give examples of several campaigns we organized in the public sector in Los Angeles County to grapple with some big issues.

For many years there has been a budget crisis in Los Angeles County, as well as other counties, and at all levels of government all over the country. The reason is because private sector businesses, the major financial contributors to political candidates, get their elected officials to cut taxes on business and business owners so they can maximize their profits and accumulate more wealth and power. The result is reduced budgets for public services. In the early 1940's private businesses paid approximately 40 cents of every one dollar collected in taxes to the federal government, and slightly less to state governments. Today (2002) private businesses pay less than 10 cents on every dollar collected in taxes to government. This huge shortfall is either made up by increasing the taxes on everyone else, or cutting services, or both.

That is what has happened. The result is that taxes have gone up for the rest of the public, and services have been cut back. It is not a question of there not being enough money in our economy. There are tons of money. Trillions of dollars are generated in the wealthiest economy ever in the entire history of the world. The problem is that it has been shifted more and more from the pockets of working people and into the pockets of the very wealthy. In order to stop this fleecing of the public, we must build powerful labor-community coalitions. Labor, even at its strongest, cannot do it alone.

## **Stewards play key role**

In 2002, the budget crisis in Los Angeles County reached a breaking point. The County Board of Supervisors announced that due to the big budget shortfall -- \$700 million in the Department of Health Services alone, they were going to close all 28 county health clinics, and shut down the emergency rooms of three major county hospitals. This would cripple the Los Angeles County Trauma system, and close two county hospitals, and possibly a third out of six, and layoff 8,000 county health workers.

These cuts would threaten the health care of the three million people who use the County health system. The leaders of SEIU Local 660 told staff and union stewards that the problem was so large that nothing could be done to stop the massive

cuts. The Stewards Councils at the major county hospitals, and the United Union Representatives of Los Angeles (UURLA) - the union representing labor representatives working for SEIU Local 660, held meetings among their respective members to come up with ideas to stop the proposed cuts. They arrived at a proposal to raise the needed money by slightly increasing taxes on the very wealthy, to a level previously paid. The leaders of SEIU Local 660 deliberated and came up with a variation of this proposal. They argued that the wealthy would mount fierce opposition, claiming they were being singled out to cover the shortfall.

So, the union decided to put a proposition on the November ballot, before Los Angeles County residents, to raise the money by slightly increasing property taxes. Stewards and UURLA said that would be a regressive tax and counseled against it, but the union leaders stood firm with their proposal. The proposition was titled Measure B, and it would raise \$168 million a year, enough to save the county hospital emergency rooms and the county Trauma System, of which the county hospitals were an integral part.

This was a good first step. SEIU Local 660, with support from the stewards and UURLA, spearheaded the formation of a large labor-community coalition called the Coalition for Healthy Communities. Mass meetings were held at county health facilities, and stewards signed up hundreds of health care workers to work on the campaign. Many large community meetings were held in churches, schools, and community centers throughout the county. Ministers spoke to tens of thousands of parishioners.

One Stewards Council member was the leader of youth groups in many Black churches and organized them to go door-to-door in their neighborhoods. Scores of City Councils within Los Angeles County endorsed Measure B and got the word out in their cities. This grassroots outreach, education, and organizing was spear-headed by Local 660 Stewards and UURLA members. Money was raised for television and radio commercials. Thousands of people walked precincts to get out the vote. A powerful TV ad showed an ambulance medical tech calling a hospital to bring a seriously injured child to its Trauma Center, only to be told it had been closed.

## Hospitals saved

Labor-initiated community councils proposed On November 5, 2002, Measure B passed with a 73% yes vote. Both hospitals slated for closing were saved, as were the 8,000 threatened county jobs - held by Local 660 members. Unfortunately, many of the neighborhood health clinics had been closed before the Measure B campaign got underway. But the union's Stewards played a critical role in Measure B's success by mobilizing their co-workers and community leaders to do massive outreach to voters. Political scientists wrote that the victory of Measure B was the first rejection of the pro-corporate neo-liberalism that had successfully demanded and received tax cuts for big corporations for decades. (A longer account of this campaign is in *A Troublemakers Handbook 2*, page 166-67, published by Labor Notes.)

Keenan Sheedy, a co-chair of the 60-member Stewards Council at the largest county hospital, LAC+USC, developed a proposal to build permanent labor-community neighborhood organizations based on the many union families we met doing door-to-door canvassing for Measure B. On some blocks we might talk with a member of SEIU, the Teachers union, Longshore workers union, Teamsters, and Carpenters Union.

Keenan's thinking was to re-contact these union members on one or two blocks and see if they would be interested in being the core group to set up a larger neighborhood block club on their block. The union members would talk to others on their block who were pro-worker, interested in improving the local public schools, and other social services. Keenan spoke to other members of the Stewards Council and me, as one of the SEIU Representative at LAC-USC. I and others thought it was a very good idea. When we canvassed door-to-door in many neighborhoods we found this pattern of four, five or more union members living on one block.

This pattern went on for many blocks, up to a half a mile or more in many working class communities. My thought was that we might be able to set these groups up like the Stewards Councils at work, a permanent organization ready to tackle important issues in their neighborhood and beyond. This would

be building working class power in their communities. The proposal was presented to the leadership of Local 660. It wasn't rejected, but it wasn't acted upon either. It was a missed opportunity given all the great ground work accomplished by the Measure B campaign.

In early 2003, there was some improvement in the economy and that generated more income for LA County. But a continuing budget shortfall led the Board of Supervisors to announce that they would close a smaller county hospital, Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center. Rancho is a world-renowned rehabilitation hospital. The Stewards Council at Rancho and UURLA staff took the lead in putting together a campaign to save Rancho. They set up a tent city on the front lawn of the hospital and invited the community to join in daily protests. Outreach was done to organizations that work with people needing rehabilitation, including people suffering from gunshot wounds, and a lawsuit was filed to bar closure of the medical center.

Throughout January and February 2003, Republican President George Bush increased his threat to wage war against Iraq, on disproved allegations of possessing "weapons of mass destruction." Many union members and members of the general public saw this as a pretext to serve US oil companies operating in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. Local 660 stewards wrote a resolution opposing a war against Iraq that the Local 660 Board of Directors passed. The Stewards Councils and UURLA staff played a key role in building opposition among union members and in the community to Bush's war.

On February 15, SEIU Local 660 joined others in a huge demonstration in Los Angeles against the war, under the banner, "Healthcare, Not Warfare." Massive anti-war demonstrations of tens of millions of people were held in thousands of cities and communities across the country and world that day. The New York Times writer Patrick Tyler claimed that there were two superpowers on earth, the United States, and worldwide public opinion.

President Bush, with the backing of the US petroleum industry, ignored this storm of opposition and launched the war on Iraq with a massive bombing campaign on February 20, 2003 that

killed and maimed tens of thousands. More demonstrations took place in LA and other cities on March 15th and 30th - - with over 100,000 marching in LA. Other unions in LA were brought into the anti-war movement through the work of the Coalition for World Peace, where I was a member. At the March 30th rally, Patricia Margaret, a Registered Nurse with 28 years with the county, was a Local 660 Steward and the chief organizer of the campaign to save Rancho that featured a Tent City on the hospital's front lawn, spoke at the anti-war rally: The war on Iraq and the crisis

In Los Angeles County are related she said. Money is cut from health services, threatening the destruction of the health care system, and billions of dollars are shifted to the military to wage an illegal and immoral war on Iraq. One B-2 bomber costs \$2 billion. That would cover the entire budget for Los Angeles County. We say keep Rancho open, and end the war now! These facts were published in Local 660 leaflets and distributed widely. Disability groups demonstrated at Rancho to demand that the rehabilitation center remain open, and many patients in wheelchairs clogged the Board of Supervisors auditorium to demand action.

## **Union, lawsuit, peace, and public opinion save rancho**

Union stewards and patients at Rancho worked tirelessly to strengthen public support keep Rancho open, putting pressure on politicians and sources of money. We pointed out in speeches and leaflets the irony of proposing to close a hospital that specialized in treating people with serious gunshot wounds, head trauma, paralysis, and amputees at the very time when US soldiers will be coming back from Iraq with exactly these injuries. As part of our weekly protests at our Tent City in front of Rancho Hospital, we organized two days of protests under the slogan, "Healthcare, Not Warfare". We organized a group of about 50 health care workers and patients in wheelchairs and on gurneys to gather on the sidewalk by the street with signs that said, "Save Rancho, Stop the War." Passing cars honked and waved to us showing their support.

We also distributed a fact sheet that explained how Bush lied to the American people about the war, and how there was no



connection between Iraq and the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Despite initial support for the war, due to Bush's lies and false scare stories, the nation was initially divided, but then support dropped after the horrifying slaughter of human life came to light. Growing numbers of people in LA and elsewhere began to see the connection between the budget shortfall



*Union Stewards elected to the SEIU Local 660 Board of Directors worked to pass a resolution opposing President Bush's war on Iraq under the heading "Healthcare, NOT Warfare!" and participated in large anti-war demonstrations in Los Angeles.*

and the threat to our hospital and its patients, and the huge cost of the war to taxpayers.

The cost of the war on Iraq was ultimately \$1.1 trillion, according to a Brown University study, *Cost of War*, published years later, money that could have covered Rancho's budget and the budgets of many other hospitals threatened with closure all across the country. This connection strengthened both the healthcare and peace movements, and along with similar campaigns nationwide resulted in voters rejecting President Bush and the Republican Party in search of better solutions. Many unions strengthened their organizations, the Rancho lawsuit was won, new sources of money were identified and were committed to Rancho, social justice organizations grew, and new ones were born. Rancho Los Amigo's Rehabilitation Center was saved in 2003. Republicans were voted out of office in 2008, in large part over the war. That year Democrat Barack Obama, our first Black president, was elected to the White House and started withdrawing American troops from Iraq which concluded in 2011.

# Union Stewards Councils: Building Blocks for Socialism

*By Paul Krehbiel*

*June 2024*

Strong progressive and activist unions, especially those with democratic member-driven Stewards Councils, empower workers, and protect and advance the interests of workers and the community. We saw that in a number of examples in the previous sections of this article, from winning safe staffing, stopping racist discrimination, to saving hospitals and workers' jobs. In all these examples, workers stopped an assault on patient care, themselves, their co-workers', and vital public services. They also advanced their need for a secure, fair, and supportive work environment. Equally important, workers involved in these campaigns experienced self-empowerment, and collective empowerment with their co-workers. Their Stewards Council played the leading role in launching these campaigns by reaching out to co-workers, helping shape a plan of action, and provided leadership in carrying it out.

These Stewards and union members were not just recipients of improvements, but actors in shaping their own future, in taking some control over their lives. These practices are components of socialism. While these examples are drawn from the activism of stewards and Stewards Councils in one large SEIU local union in Los Angeles, other unions also have active Stewards Councils, including United Electrical workers (UE); American Federation of State, Counties and Municipal Employees; Teachers; American Federation of Government Employees; National Union of Healthcare Workers; Washington Federation of State Employees; Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (U of Oregon) and others.

These campaigns also resulted in a power shift away from management, and to workers. That shift in power is another step in moving toward socialism. Experiences like these build cooperative relationships based on solidarity, with each worker looking out for the welfare of co-workers. Unions that function like this are schools of socialism. As these behaviors and ex-

periences take on a permanent existence and become a part of the thought processes, beliefs, and practices of workers, they become building blocks of socialism. Other social justice organizations and movements do the same thing, from the movements for civil rights, women's rights, peace and international solidarity, climate justice, health care, education, housing, and many more. While these are important building blocks, by themselves or collectively, they will not guarantee moving to a fully socialist society. Something more is needed: the predominance of political and economic power by a progressive and social justice minded working-class and its allies. That requires a determined class struggle.

## Socialism

While socialist society may be down the road, it's natural that elements of socialism will emerge within capitalist society in response to capitalism's exploitation, wealth theft, injustices, discrimination, unmet needs, dehumanizing abuses, terrible crimes and murders. These socialistic actions appear as antidotes to capitalism's inherent drive to maximize profits in countless institutions, agencies, enterprises, and practices throughout society. Many socialistic reforms have been made over many generations, and new ones are being created today. Many coexist and are intermingled with capitalist institutions and practices.

Both sides in this struggle survive in a precarious balance, with one side dominating some aspects of the whole, and the other side dominating other elements. But to solidify the victory of socialism, Karl Marx and Frederic Engels taught that the working-class and its allies must become highly organized, win over the working-class majority of society, become educated and tested in order to develop a winning plan and strategy to overtake and supplant the capitalist class, and thereby become the dominant force in all key arenas of society: the economy, politics, and the social, educational and culture spheres. Practically socialists of all stripes agree that the core elements of a socialist economy are:

- 1. Public ownership or control of the means of production, both material products and services.
- 2. Production for use, to meet the needs of all people over

production for private profit. Production for private profit is the essence of capitalist society.

These must be joined by racial and gender equality, and meaningful democracy and democratic rights, that can defend itself in order to be a thriving, stable and well developed socialism. Here is a list of federal agencies that meet some of these socialistic criteria. Not surprisingly, they are among the most popular among the US public. Next to the agency or practice is the degree of support among the public. (This data was taken from *Pew Research*, March 30, 2023, unless otherwise noted). Socialistic programs and degree of popularity:

- Government owned National Parks (81%),
- US Postal Service (77%),
- Democracy (74% - McCourtney Poll, Nov. 2022),
- NASA (74%),
- Social Security (61%),
- Centers for Disease Control (56%),
- Veterans Affairs (56%),
- Environmental Protection Agency (55%),
- Health and Human Services (55%).

Other popular socialistic government paid-for and not-for-profit institutions include public hospitals, public libraries, public education, fire departments, paved streets, clean water, indoor plumbing and sewage treatment plants, publicly owned power plants, government inspected and approved safe food and medicines, and many more.

I am not arguing that introducing and strengthening new elements of socialism into these and other enterprises and practices will automatically lead to the transformation from capitalist- dominated institutions and practices into socialist dominated institutions and practices on their own. History is replete with examples of capitalism and its right-wing allies fighting tooth-and- nail to stop, roll back and destroy every advance and reform that the working-class and general public makes. Sometimes they find success. Other times they do not.

Where we can strengthen the democratic content and the elements of socialism regarding working-class economic influence

and serving the needs of workers and the community, the better chance we have of protecting and strengthening these institutions and practices. Here's an example. In the early 2,000's Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, the second largest in the country, faced new problems involving changes in healthcare delivery, an increasing uninsured population, declining levels of reimbursement, and failure to change inefficient policies and procedures, all of which threatened safety-net healthcare programs. Most of these problems occurred due to the natural function of the larger capitalist system, that put profit-making ahead of meeting peoples' healthcare needs. The County's efforts to correct these problems were inadequate; and worse yet included proposals to reduce services and lay off healthcare workers. SEIU Local 660 got involved to help solve the problems. Joint labor-management Re-engineering Committees were formed to study the problems and propose solutions.

### **Can workers run the enterprise?**

Many progressive unionists are leery of such "joint" committees because too often they were and are set up structurally, but secretly, under management control. When the "joint committee" made proposals to cut services and workers jobs, the union took a lot of criticism from its members. In LA County, Local 660 had a history of standing up for its rights, and demanded that management and the union had equal power in the Re-engineering Committees. That meant having an equal number of management and union members on every committee and sub-committee, and equal authority in making proposals.

Since workers knew the details of the jobs in their department, they saw how to improve efficiency and save money without cutting services or laying off their co-workers. Other union members in the finance department found ways to cut expenses without cutting services or jobs. The Re-engineering project made improvements in healthcare delivery, cut costs, and saved every job. This big success led to high praise and new prestige for the SEIU Local 660.

Equally important was that workers proved that they could run the Los Angeles Department of Health Services, a necessary

building block in the creation of a future socialist society. This does not sweep under the rug the horrible crimes committed by early European settlers when they colonized North America by driving Native People's off the land and committed genocide against them. Nor the bringing of Africans on ships to these European colonies in the Americas and forcing them to work as slaves on plantations in what would become the southern states of the United States. Many books have been written about these terrible crimes and abuses against Africans and indigenous people, all to propel the United States in its race to become the a major capitalist power in the world.

Counterposed to this US capitalist drive to gain hegemony, was an armed resistance by the Native People's, slave revolts and escapes by enslaved Africans, Mexico's armed but failed resistance to stop the theft of the northern third of its country which was incorporated into the southwest US, bitter struggles of workers of all races and nationalities for jobs, unions and economic security, and equal rights for women, the LBGQT community, and immigrants which have historically made up a huge portion of our working class and population growth.

## **Elections: Defeat Trump and fascism**

Today, we face the worst threats to our country since the Civil War. That threat is led by Donald Trump, the fascistic Heritage Foundation and its "Project 2025." Program. While Trump's mantra since 2015 is to "Make America Great Again," which means rolling back the clock 150 years when completely unregulated capitalism exploited, brutalized, impoverished, maimed and killed millions of workers and their communities. When racism and the Klan terrorized and murdered Black people, denied Blacks, women, and other people of color the right to vote and other rights gained over many decades of struggles.

*"Project 2025"* is a 1,000-page book with scores of policy proposals to be implemented under Trump as soon as he assumes power. "Project 2025" lays out how Trump can create a dictatorship. Here's how. By-pass the normal Senate hearings and confirmation process and appoint loyalists to head every major government department and agency. Then fire up to 50,000 civil servant experts that currently run the day-to-day opera-

tions of these agencies if they do not prove complete loyalty to Trump. This will also be an attack on the labor movement as most of these 50,000 workers are members of unions. Under the Trump-Heritage Foundation plan, these workers would be re-classified as “at will” workers, subject to being fired without just cause.

Trump plans to put into detention camps and deport millions of so-called “illegal immigrants,” including families who have been here for decades. Undoubtedly, many legal migrants will be swept up in these raids. Trump has also said he will unleash “retribution” against his “enemies,” including putting his political opponents into detention camps as well. Trump’s approach to other countries is political isolation combined with ramped up economic exploitation. Trump has said that countries which resist will feel his wrath.

Early in Trump’s first term as president his exchange of heated verbal threats with North Korea almost led Trump to launch a nuclear first strike against North Korea until a professional high-ranking Trump Administration official, acting behind the scenes, prevented it. (See Michael Schmidt’s book, *“Donald Trump v the United States,”* pages 424-30.) If Trump takes the presidency in 2024, whether through elections or physical force, there will be no professional statesmen on his inner staff to stop his rash impulses. We can’t risk Trump with his hand anywhere near the nuclear button; a massive nuclear exchange could quickly escalate into a massive nuclear war, causing a nuclear winter, which would destroy most life on the planet earth.

The 2024 election is a choice between Democracy versus Fascism. That doesn’t mean sidelining important issues across the board. But, if Trump takes power again, all other important causes will be much harder to fight for. The fight to defeat Trump and his MAGA supporters is also a fight to protect democracy, our constitution, all the gains we’ve made over 250 years, and life itself. It also means protecting elections, the Bill of Rights, workers’ rights, unions, all social justice organizations, and the rights of Blacks and other people of color, women, the LGBTQ community, and the right to organize and protest injustices, free from retaliation, intimidation, false imprisonment, and other forms of repression.



The only way to defeat Trump and other Trumpster political candidates is to re-elect President Biden and Democrats up and down the ticket. This has nothing to do with liking or not liking Biden, or the Democratic Party, or agreeing with everything Biden has done. It is about stopping fascism, and re-electing Biden and more Democrats is the only path to do this. We must work tirelessly until election day to get out the vote for Biden and other Democratic candidates, talking to family and co-workers, door-knocking voters, making phone calls - especially to voters in battleground states, holding and attending public rallies and marches, and using all forms of media.

This outreach to voters can be facilitated by working with organizations that are supporting Biden, unions, social justice organizations, community organizations, religious organizations, the Democratic Party, and those on the political left. In fact, the left in all these organizations will play a leading role in many of these initiatives and help build socialistic building blocks in the process. You don't have to be a member of a union, for example, to work with them. They will welcome help from people of all walks of life.

The voter outreach should have two components. One is to point to the good things Biden has done. The second is to point out the bad things Trump has done and the many worse things he's promised to do if re-elected. President Biden has a very good record of domestic achievements, despite repeated Republican roadblocks. Biden's campaign should also be interacted with to correct problems, some very serious ones like stopping the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and doubling down to help expediate negotiations for a viable, long-term solution.

## **Where does socialism fit in?**

While the top priority is stopping fascism, success here opens the possibility for us to continue to work on all progressive social justice issues, while linking those initiatives with educating people about socialism and exploring pathways to socialism. I will talk briefly about one avenue to do this work, the electoral process. I'll start with Bernie Sanders' campaigns for president in 2016 and 2020. Those two campaigns were a huge catalyst.

Bernie Sanders, an independent socialist and US Senator from Vermont, and his quest for the presidency, brought socialism out into the broad daylight after three-quarters of a century of being relegated to the shadows of US society by the capitalist ruling class.

Socialism's last upsurge in the public eye came with the birth of the hugely successful leftist Congress of Industrial Organizations labor movement, and the remarkable growth and influence of the Communist Party (CP), and their mutually beneficial relationship in the 1930's and 1940's. Bernie Sanders opened his presidential campaign by exposing the huge and growing income gap between the vast majority of people and a tiny elite class of multi-millionaires and billionaires. Many were owners of giant corporations and banks.

"The top one-tenth of 1% own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%," Sanders said in 2015 at the beginning of his campaign for president. "We live in a country which has more income and more wealth inequality than any other major Country." Sanders advocated closing tax loopholes for big corporations and banks, and raising taxes on the "billionaire class," as Sanders called the very rich, He also called for an expansion of labor's rights with his "Workplace Democracy Plan" which would allow workers to gain union recognition when a majority sign union cards, end misclassification of workers as independent contractors which would make them ineligible to join a union, make sure every public sector union has the right to negotiate, deny federal contracts to companies that pay poverty wages and or sends jobs overseas, and set in place a fair transition to Medicare for All to prevent private insurance companies from profit-gouging and denying services.

Sanders also advocated restoration of the Voting Rights Act, establish automatic voter registration for every American over 18, end structural racism by ending gerrymandering and voter suppression of people of color, re-enfranchise the 1 in 3 African-Americans and other people of color disenfranchised after serving their time for a felony conviction, end wage and benefit discrimination based on race, gender and for the LBGTQ community, make education free through university at public colleges, support a women's right to choose, set and meet

goals to end climate change, end gun violence, and relations with foreign countries based on cooperation, mutual respect, negotiations, and peace. Bernie also talked about his vision of a democratic socialist society while on the campaign trail. A centerpiece for him was to create a society that greatly reduced income inequality, and provided the material goods and services that people needed to live full and happy lives. All of these ideas, organizations, and movements ideas promoted cooperation for the common good, a cornerstone of socialism. So, each became another building block for socialism.

## **Los Angeles Labor for Bernie**

I contacted union activists in many unions in Los Angeles, many of whom were Stewards, some were members of Stewards Councils, some were elected union leaders, and some were retirees still active with their union, and called a meeting to establish an independent volunteer coalition organization, Los Angeles Labor for Bernie. We affiliated with a national organization, Labor for Bernie, which had similar coalition organizations in many cities and states across the country.

At our first meeting we agreed upon some basic goals for our organization: be representative of the unions in our area, build an organization and movement that was multi-racial, multi-national, native born and immigrants, gender inclusive, people of all ages, representative of union workers in all industries both the private and public sectors, and work with other social justice organizations and movements. All of these activities and relationships contained elements of socialism, features we will want in a future socialist society.

Our plan was to do education, outreach and organization with unions through their elected leaders, Stewards, rank-and-file union activists, our own organization, and other social justice organizations and movements in southern California to build labor support for Bernie Sanders. With 14 million union members nationally, California had the largest number with 2.5 million, followed by New York with 1.7 million. Los Angeles and southern California had the largest concentration of union members in California with approximately 1.5 million.

Similar local Labor for Bernie committees were built in the San Francisco Bay area and other cities around the state. In southern California we built Labor for Bernie Committees at various union workplaces, spoke at union meetings, sought and received union endorsements for Bernie, participated in large public events like the LA Labor Day Parade and Picnic and the giant annual Women's Day marches that began the day after Trump assumed office on January 21, 2017. We put out leaflets



*Los Angeles Labor for Bernie joined the huge Women's March in LA to promote Bernie Sanders's bid for the presidency, and to protest the inhumane policies of the Trump Administration.*

at scores of workplaces around Los Angeles - many given by Stewards to their co-workers, published an on-line newsletter, and did phone-banking of union members to generate more activities and to get out the vote for the California Democratic Primary, held June 7, 2016, and March 3, 2020.

Bernie Sanders did very well in the 2016 Democratic Party Primary when he and liberal- centrist Hillary Clinton were the only two candidates competing. In 2020, despite the crowded Democratic field with 25 candidates, Bernie Sanders set the tone for the primary. Several candidates adopted some or many of Bernie's positions, or were already close to many of them, such as Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren. This made it harder for Bernie to achieve the numbers he did in 2016, as liberal and progressive voters split their votes between Bernie and Elizabeth Warren. Even moderates, like Maryland Senator Joe Biden, moved to the left after trailing badly in the early going, while Sanders was seen as the front runner after tying South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg in Iowa, winning a narrow victory in New Hampshire, and winning Nevada. He lost South Carolina to Biden, thanks to Biden receiving a ringing endorsement from elder civil rights activist and South Carolina Representative Jim Clyburn.

But Sanders won California solidly with over 2 million votes to 1.5 million to second place finisher, Joe Biden. The corporate

media stepped up its attacks on Sanders, worrying that he was headed for the Democratic Party nomination, saying he would be a disaster for the country. No other candidate was disparaged by the mass media like Bernie Sanders. Chris Mathews, a host on the liberal *MSNBC*, ranted without a shred of evidence, that if the socialist Bernie Sanders was elected president there would be “executions in Central Park.” A storm of protest forced *MSNBC* to drop Mathews. But liberal candidates dropped out of the race, including Warren and Buttigieg, and immediately threw their support to Biden. This gave a boost to Biden, who went on to win the nomination.

Yet, to his credit, Biden saw the breadth of support that Sanders had, and the two campaigns merged their staff in special issues committees to hammer out a more progressive for Biden. Sanders’ campaigns gave rise to or a big boost to progressive and leftist organizations like Our Revolution, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Progressive Democrats of America, Justice Democrats, sections of the Democratic Party; hundreds of progressive-socialist elected representatives like Alexandria Ortiz-Cortez and scores of others at all levels of government and in most states; and leftist and socialist organizations, such as Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) which grew from 7,000 to over 70,000 from 2016-2020.

Additionally, many progressives and socialists are playing important roles in unions, racial justice organizations, the women’s movement, immigrant rights, LGBTQ rights, improved Medicare for All, free education and cutting student debt, affordable and safe housing, environmental justice, stopping gun violence and more. All of these activities help create building blocks for socialism. Polls show over one-third of US adults view socialism positively, though a significant majority of the entire population don’t see that many of their most cherished programs are cherished precisely because of the socialistic elements within them.

Socialists must do more to help people make these connections. Among Democrats, 65% say they have a positive view of socialism, up from 53% in 2012. Among Generation Z youth (born between 1997-2012), in 2022 nearly half (49%) view socialism positively, up from 40% in 2019. (Gallup Polls, and Pew

Research Center). Interestingly, a number of people who view socialism positively also view capitalism positively. In most cases, that's small businesses, but not so much large corporations and banks. We agree. Most socialists make a distinction, seeing large monopoly corporations and banks, and their inherent drive for greater profits and their dominant control over our economy, politics and social life, as the major cause of misery for millions of people.

Bernie Sanders' most recent book (2023), *"It's OK to be Angry About Capitalism,"* details much of this. That's why it's important to build organizations on the left that have a clear understanding of this dynamic. Even smaller socialist organizations are playing an important role, many well beyond their size, in many organizations and movements across the country. One of many examples is Los Angeles Labor for Bernie. The number of leading activists were evenly com-



*Paul Krehbiel, of Los Angeles Labor for Bernie, introduces Bernie Sanders at a mass rally at the Pasadena Convention Center, May 31, 2019.*

prised of independent progressives and socialists on one hand, and members of DSA, CCDS, and the CP on the other. Many of these activists were or had been stewards in their unions, and some in Stewards Councils and elective union leadership. This is a good example of how a relatively small number of socialist and progressive activists working together played an important role in helping build a movement that involved hundreds of thousands of voters in metro Los Angeles in support of a very progressive socialist candidate and political program.

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