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POST-ELECTION STATEMENT from the YOUNG DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS

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I. As young democratic socialists we are proud to have been part of the broad-based struggle to defeat Bush. That struggle, however, was not enough, and we now face the prospect of a demoralized progressive grassroots and a right-wing on the offensive. Whether Bush's win was due to illegal voter intimidation and vote-counting fraud, the GOP's skillful distortion of the facts and framing of the debate, an inept Kerry campaign, or a combination of many factors, we must assess our strategies and the shifting political terrain as we continue the fight for justice. The right-wing will press forward with an aggressive plan to destroy their most powerful opponents on the left —labor unions— and expand the “war on terror” as a cover to further dismantle social welfare programs and undermine democracy itself. The elitist and more conservative wing of the Democratic Party has already begun calling for the party to become even more “republican-lite” in order to win future elections. This we must resist. Opportunistic moves to the right close off space for those offering a bold alternative to the greed and intolerance of the Republicans.

The biggest lesson for progressive activists may be this: don't put all your eggs in the electoral basket. Instead, build a broad base, work to elect politicians when necessary, and always hold their feet to the fire, especially as a way to demonstrate our own independent, collective power as a movement.

Though we were ultimately unsuccessful at unseating Bush, during the 2004 elections we witnessed a shift in the landscape of U.S. politics. For the first time in recent memory, the American Left began to act and sound like it was building a coherent social movement around an electoral strategy. Organized labor, communities of color, feminist groups, the LGBTQ community, environmental activists, and —most relevant to YDS— a diverse range of students and youth organized an impressive anti-Bush grassroots mobilization. The infrastructure that developed out of this progressive coalition along with independent groups like America Coming Together and the League of Pissed Off Voters must be sustained and expanded. Now that the election is over, and despite the fact that many of our comrades are devastated by the thought of another Bush term and might dismiss our optimism, YDS affirms the possibilities of continuing and growing the progressive movement into the future.

II. There is hope in the fact that young voters were the only group to cast the majority of their votes against Bush. At 54 to 45 percent for Kerry, the percentage of eligible 18-29 year olds who voted was the highest its been since the voting age was lowered to 18. Some 21 million youth voted this time, and indeed, red state college campuses and metro areas harbor some of our most active YDS chapters. There are many issues that confront young people and motivated them to vote, get involved in their communities and become engaged in the political process. The ongoing crisis in Iraq, lack of health care coverage and decent job opportunities, spiraling tuition costs, and continued cutbacks in higher education funding have profoundly affected the livelihood of millions of students and young workers in this country. With the Republicans in control, the situation for Americas youth will likely worsen during the years to come. The silver-lining is that the distressing realities we face could potentially give rise to a new wave of activism. YDS will work to encourage such a coordinated response to the attacks on the rights and well-being of our generation.

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III. It is no accident that one of the primary organizing principles for coalitional work has been the Democratic Party. Indeed, some on the Left still hope for a radical breakthrough via revolutionary posturing and marginal Third Party initiatives. Democratic socialists, in contrast, have often found themselves in the unique position of both working within and critiquing structures (the Democratic Party, labor unions, etc.) that provide a mechanism for shifting social and economic power. Our goal is to build a politics of the possible. This means struggling alongside the communities that share our ideals and recognize the utility of working with Democrats when feasible and necessary. Holding this position requires balancing our pragmatic activism with a long-term commitment to an egalitarian socialist world.

IV. Today, with Republican control of the House, Senate, and Executive Branch, the right-wing is positioned to enact an Orwellian vision of the world: perpetual war, blatant manipulation of the public through the mass media, and a fundamental erosion of democracy. Now, more than ever, a socialist vision of an alternative world and a principled struggle to express that vision is called for. As we carry forward this struggle, we call upon our comrades to integrate the following strategies into their efforts to build a better world:

IV.a. Understand that the movement for social and economic justice has already won many friends, large numbers of whom were mobilized by the recent campaign to defeat Bush. They equally share many of our values and believe that a better world is possible. Yet most of these same people do not have a critique of capitalism nor self-identify as democratic socialists. YDS understands that these voters are the core from which we can grow a democratic and socially progressive majority. However, we are not overly optimistic about the ease with which we can function as socialists or advocates of a socialist ideal under current circumstances. The possibility of a world beyond capitalism is bleak in part because the American social and political movement to defeat right-wing candidates is lacking (1) a strong critique of capitalism (2) a concrete program for sustaining the pre-election intensity and (3) an understanding of how social movement activism and electoral politics can re-invigorate each other.

IV.b. Understand the values and beliefs of those whose interests lie in economic populism and a break with corporate domination. While encouraging working people to act in their economic self-interest, we must also maintain our absolute commitment to organizing for queer rights, reproductive freedom, and other causes the Right manipulates to win over sections of the electorate. Fighting for progressive social values is indispensable to the struggle for a more humane and egalitarian world. Our organizing must reflect this understanding.

IV.c. Focus our critique on the disastrous effects of the right-wing agenda for workers, immigrants, women, communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and youth. We must maintain a watchful eye and be prepared to respond to cutbacks in social spending, shifts of the tax burden even more onto the backs of the working and middle classes, destruction of the basic social safety net that is Social Security, anti-abortion Supreme Court appointments, roll-backs on civil liberties, pre-emptive war, challenges to workers rights, and a reactionary hostility to multiculturalism.

V. We are at an important historical moment. As democratic socialists, we understand that all of the struggles we are involved in are intimately linked. Our commitment to a profoundly feminist, anti-racist, and more cooperative, egalitarian world requires us to think and act strategically. Building a progressive majority in this country over the years to come is a necessary precondition for a future socialist society. The enduring principles of democracy, freedom, and social justice must guide us toward that ideal.

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