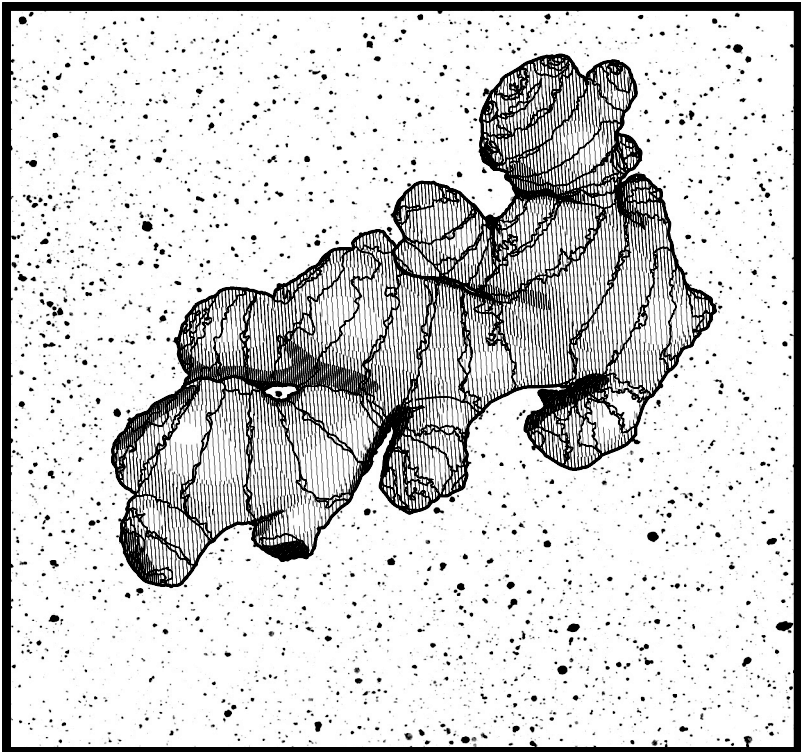
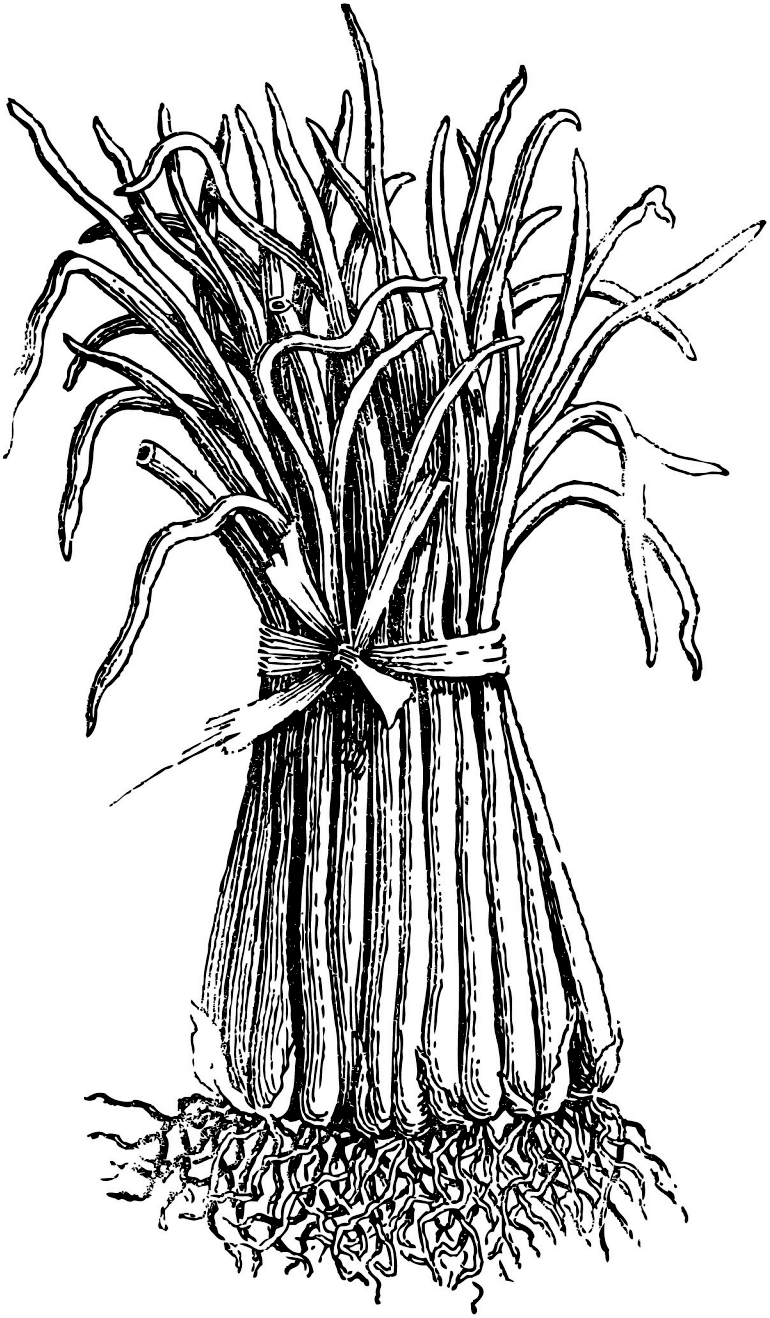

BUILD

Summer 2018

issue 01





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Introduction

We live in wild times.

Donald Trump is a symptom of the deeper malaise in American society that we all feel. We've seen an upsurge in civic participation, public protest, and strikes, as well as other efforts by everyday people to take back a measure of power over their daily lives. The explosive growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) into one of the largest socialist organizations this country has ever had has been one of these developments.

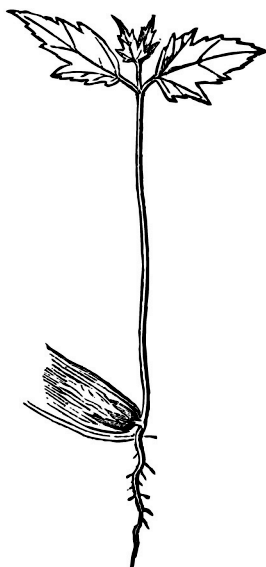
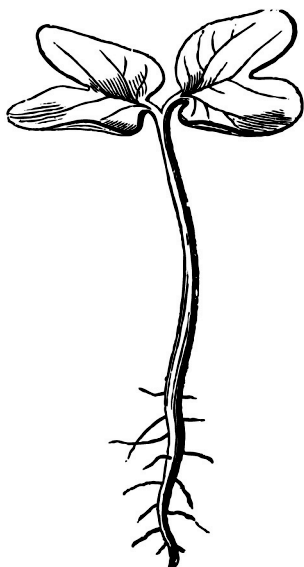
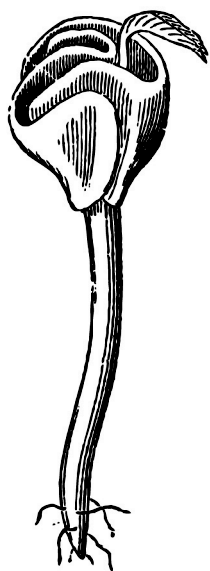
This pamphlet comes from a diverse group of DSA elected leaders and members across the country, and we're thrilled to share with you just some of the work that our chapters are doing. You'll find a series of chapter reflections on our work in the South, the Midwest, and the Northeast, as well as a report on healthcare campaigns on the West Coast and in Washington Heights, NYC. We're hoping to continue this series with additional campaign reports around both our national priorities—healthcare, electoral work and labor organizing—as well as the work DSA chapters and members are doing to tackle the nexus of mass incarceration, immigration detention, US foreign policy, and the housing crisis. We'll also cover the myriad ways in which we're developing our understanding of the systemic problems we face.

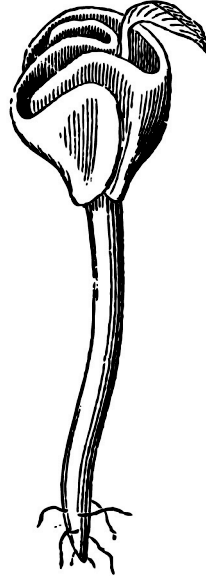
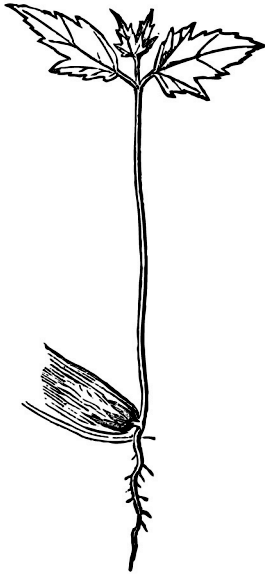
A final note on DSA itself: We describe ourselves as a big tent organization because—unlike most socialist organizations—we don't have a hard line and rigid set of positions, and we welcome diverse tendencies. You'll find everyone from folks who think they can make the Democratic Party less terrible to those who think it's dead but unfortunately not buried; from staff at unions and community organizations to people who never went to a march before the inauguration last year. We have chapters in place or in development in every state, and the bulk of our work happens in these local groups and you can find one here: <https://www.dsausa.org/chapters>. Above all, the vast majority of DSA members are new to socialism and we're all developing our understanding of the crises we face.

You may have picked this up from a table at a DSA event or seen the link in a tweet. Hell, you may have nabbed it from the local coffee shop. However you came to these stories, our hope is that they'll shine a light on the work socialists around the country are doing and help you find a place in the struggle.

Welcome to the first issue of Build. We're waiting for you!

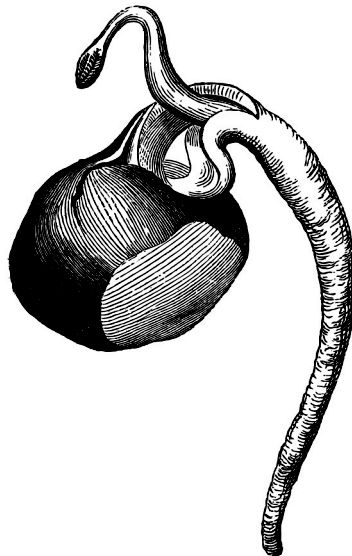
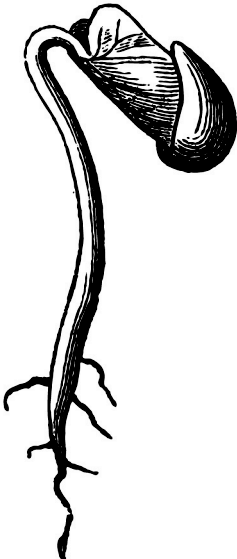


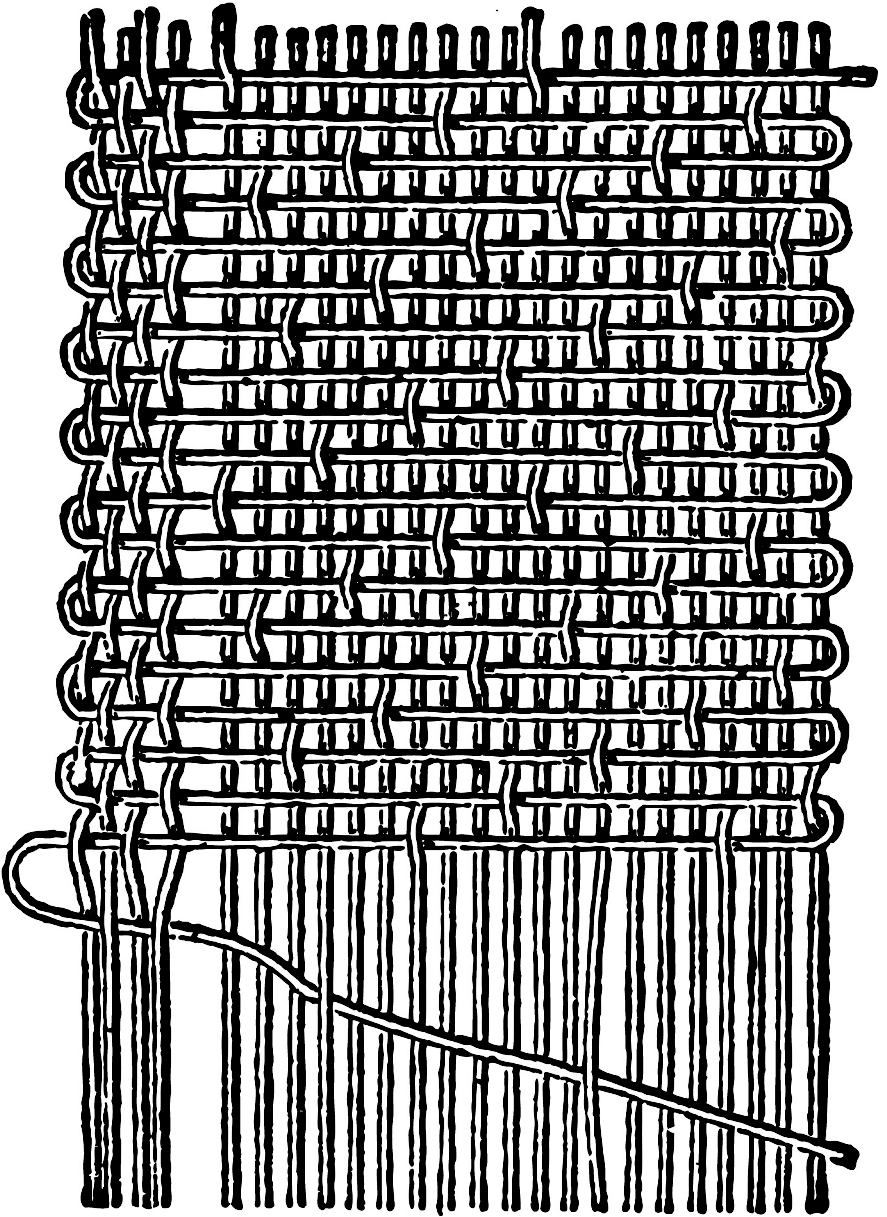




I. Campaigns

Wherein organizers present particular campaigns and tactics





Eugene, OR: Healthcare Town Halls

Eugene DSA has built power through developing bonds with other local organizations that share our values, and exerting pressure on local and state politicians. And because Oregon is a key state in the federal healthcare conversation, we have been fighting back against corporate interests and corrupt practices by legislators and dark money groups from around the country. We believe that we need not only legislative gains, we need to form organic, authentic bonds with people based on our guiding principles. We think our program has been doing just that.

On January 4, 2018, Eugene DSA held a town hall to support the passage of state Ballot Measure 101 (BM 101). BM 101 was a backhanded effort by opponents of the statewide ACA Medicare expansion (the Oregon Health Plan, or OHP) to eliminate vital program funding. To support this event, EDSA forged alliances with other activist organizations, who then served as co-sponsors along with our chapter.

The town hall was a significant success. It helped build our

capacity as an organization. It positioned us as a productive partner in the community, fostering relationships of trust and reciprocity with activist organizations and like-minded office holders. The lessons learned and relationships built from this effort will now serve as the foundation for a broader town hall campaign that seeks to build political will in support of universal healthcare while nurturing the growth of social capital in the larger activist community.



Measure 101 was placed on the ballot in the fall of 2017 and voted on in a special election January 27, 2018. The accelerated timing was not accidental, and intended to catch OHP supporters off guard. The folks behind BM 101 sought to eliminate OHP, with a “no” vote on BM101 triggering a budget deficit and threatening the healthcare of hundreds of thousands of Oregonians (including tens of thousands of children).

A quick informal sampling of activists in local organizations revealed general support and enthusiasm for a town hall to support BM101. However, we needed something concrete – an action focal point – to get a functioning alliance off the ground. We needed principals. Authoritative voices who could concisely speak to the importance of this vote and the implications should it fail. We needed a venue, and we needed a date.

A local state senator who supports universal healthcare seemed a logical place to start. We reached out to him and he quickly agreed, soon to be followed by a state representative specializing in healthcare policy. With the aid of their staffs we procured a venue and a date – the day we anticipated ballots would land in people’s

mailboxes¹. With the particulars in place we could build our coalition.

Often in organizing, there is a desire to do something that is “yours.” That is to say, folks often try to develop stand-alone actions or events, at the expense of collective endeavors, believing that this is the most direct path towards building an organization. Here we took a different route. We reflected on the geography of our community, because we believe that understanding how spaces and cultures are represented within the community is necessary to form the organic bonds between us – bonds which are stronger than those which come from a ready-made template. Through that work, we approached four organizations seeking to build an alliance of like-minded individuals².

We then formed a team comprised of one member from each organization, which met once a week (the TH was now four weeks away). The team then divided and delegated the remaining responsibilities: mobilization of memberships in each organization, social media advertising of the event to the broader public, media relations/communication (to promote earned media). Some organizations allied with yet more organizations to

¹ Using local office holders has its benefits and drawbacks. You have to give up some control. However, local politicians have access to venues, such as the senior center we used, (mitigating rental cost, insurance liabilities, and site logistical responsibilities). This was also an opportunity to build a working relationship with legislators who support universal healthcare.

² These organizations included: Health Care for All Oregon, Indivisible, National Organization of Women, Our Revolution. as well as members of the medical and healthcare community.

complete the work necessary³.

This took this “collective” approach for two reasons. First, we were working against the calendar and we needed to build support fast. Secondly, we believe there is a lack of social capital between activist organizations in the progressive community. We may have similar goals. We may be able to march together around a date and a cause, but there is not enough work being done between organizations to achieve common goals. This is a historic source of grass-roots power and meaningful change. Someone needs to “organize the organizers” – building the values and experiences that bind the community together in a shared vision, animating and propelling us forward to meet the challenges ahead. BM101 presented a tangible opportunity for EDSA to lead the way in building this collaboration, and we hope to build on the networks and norms that emerged from it.

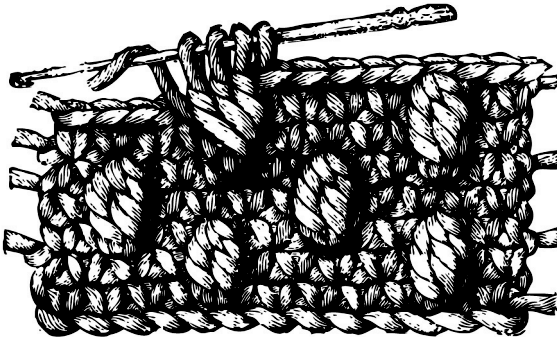


The goal for our town halls moving forward is similarly twofold. First, we look to forge a collective voice – which expresses the values and commitments the community believes our healthcare system should embody and clarifies what we expect of our political leaders to achieve it – building political will for universal healthcare along the way. Second, we plan to maximize healthcare issues and reform as tools to build our organizing capacity and social capital.

³ Further details (on relationship building between organizations, event planning and promotional efforts, timelines, etc) is available upon request.

By excluding the wealthy, healthcare reform can reach across social and political boundaries, serving as a common intersection in ways few other issues can. Beyond growing our coalition and strengthening our capacity, in the process of holding town halls, we will be working to expand our reach and base into communities that have historically recoiled from such socialist policies. We will also translate the town hall concept to introduce citizen lobbying and emphasize its importance in a healthy democracy.

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New York City, NY: A Socialist Case for Saving Allen Psych

When one of the largest landowners in New York City replaces beds for the poor with services for the rich, what do you call it? You call it gentrification.

When NYC's largest inpatient psychiatric facility is the jail on Rikers Island, where 90% of inmates are black or Latinx, what do you call it? You call it racism.

And when New York-Presbyterian expands its lucrative spine center by eliminating psychiatric beds at the Allen Pavilion – a community hospital in Upper Manhattan – what do you call it?

You call it a miscarriage of health justice, but you also call it a miscarriage of housing justice, a miscarriage of racial justice. These struggles are intertwined, and NYC-DSA's campaign to Save Allen Psych lives at their nexus.

About Allen Psych

The Allen psychiatric unit provides acute care to people with severe mental illnesses and substance use problems,

servicing about 600 patients per year. Most are black and brown. Most come from the immediate community. Many speak Spanish as their primary language, and most are uninsured or on Medicaid.

Meanwhile, the Daniel and Jane Och Spine Hospital, recently renamed after a \$25 million gift from a corrupt hedge fund billionaire, is a world-class center for expensive spine surgery and rehabilitation housed in the same building as the Allen. It primarily serves patients with private insurance and rich people who could travel anywhere in the world for their care.

The New York-Presbyterian hospital system plans to expand the spine center by closing the Allen psych unit. They want to eliminate vital services for our most vulnerable neighbors in order to cater to the rich.

About the Campaign

The Save Allen Psych campaign started in February, when the New York State Nurses Association, DSA, and students at Columbia University Medical Center showed up to a local community board meeting. We spoke in favor of a resolution to keep the unit open. The resolution passed 34-0.

In April, Columbia students started a campaign to send postcards to the state's Commissioner for Mental Health, who has the power to recommend the unit stay open. In May, DSA started canvassing with these postcards at subway stops and the farmers market near the hospital. The Bronx/Upper Manhattan branch of DSA and the Socialist Feminist Working Group have provided most of the volunteer and financial support for this effort.

We've now sent around 1,000 postcards. Our 35

volunteers include nurses, medical students, social workers, people who have been inpatients in psychiatric units, and socialists who care about their neighbors. We've trained ten volunteers to lead canvasses. A number of canvassers speak Spanish and we recently redesigned our materials to be bilingual.

Street canvassing can be tough—you get used to people walking by and ignoring you. But with this campaign, people turn around and walk back once they hear what we have to say. The postcards give us a chance to talk to our neighbors about mental health in the community. People want to have these conversations!

What We're Fighting For

People in our neighborhood already know that the psychiatric unit serves the most vulnerable people in our society. And they know that without proper care, even more people with mental illness will end up in jail. We help them connect the dots: by cutting psychiatric beds across the city, our nonprofit hospital systems have helped make Rikers Island the biggest psychiatric facility in New York State. Our neighbors already know, sometimes intimately, the toll that kind of "care" takes.

People in New York have seen hospitals downtown close their doors and turn into luxury housing. They've watched a few big hospital systems take over healthcare for the rich and push our poorest, sickest neighbors into overburdened public hospitals. Private hospitals have cut citizens out of the decision-making process. We're trying to change that.

When we first started this campaign, people said things like, "sure, I'll sign a postcard, but it won't make any difference." But due to public scrutiny, New York

Presbyterian delayed the Allen psych unit's closure from June 2018 to June 2019. Now we know that our voices matter and our actions have an effect.

Even so, New York Presbyterian is laying off staff to reduce the unit's capacity. By the end of August, the 30-bed unit will effectively have only 18 beds. It's clear to everyone that this fight is not over.

What's Next

Now is our chance to think strategically. We want not only to save Allen Psych, but to build the power we'll need to hold private health systems accountable to our community.

By situating health justice in an urgent, local confrontation with capital, the Save Allen Psych campaign lays the groundwork for building that kind of community power.

Yet it's up to us to build on that foundation. We must set our sights beyond a vision that asks individuals to fight for health justice by petitioning the powerful, enmeshed as they are in a system designed for capitalists, by capitalists.

Without a doubt, appeals to lawmakers are crucial in our fight for single-payer healthcare. And we need single-payer to level the playing field for less-profitable specialties like psychiatric and primary care, incentivizing healthcare systems to keep those services in rural and urban areas alike.

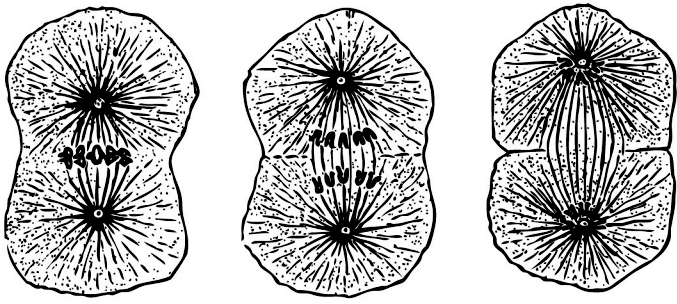
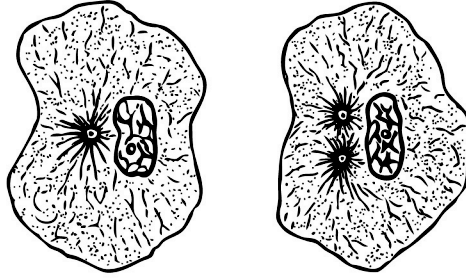
But if our understanding of health justice is as expansive and intersectional as it ought to be, then a top-down approach led by lawmakers is insufficient. We can't merely change the incentive structure for profit-driven healthcare systems. We must change the power structure and put the

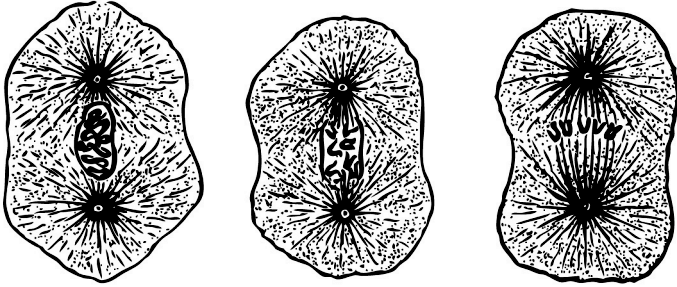
people in charge.

Organizing around hospital closures offers a bottom-up complement to single-payer advocacy: a way to build power in our communities to demand a truly democratic healthcare system.

*Members of the Save Allen Psych Campaign
Bronx/Upper Manhattan Branch, NYC-DSA
saveallenpsych@gmail.com*

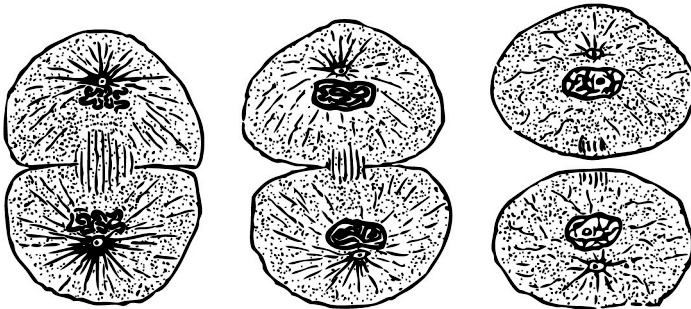


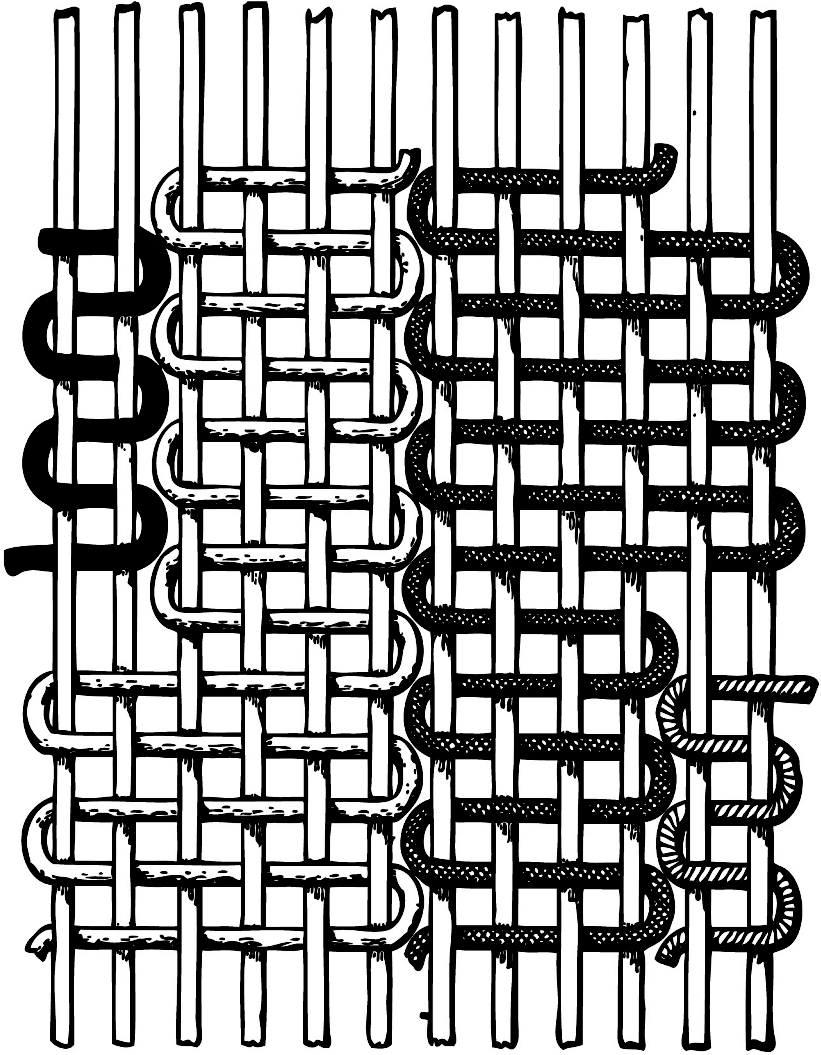




II. Chapters and committees

*Wherein chapters and committees
talk about how they work and what
they work on.*





New Orleans

How do we build a mass, working class organization? Socialists have wrestled with this question for over 100 years.

The SPD of the early 20th century made itself relevant to working people's lives through its educational programs, sports clubs, and libraries. They ran welfare clinics, published newspapers, and hosted social events.

The US Communist Party organized tenants' associations and councils of the unemployed during the depths of the Great Depression, empowering working people to fight back against oppressive systems while articulating demands for radical change.

The Black Panther Party emphasized community defense and mutual aid, highlighting the importance of working people organizing together to meet our own needs where capitalism and the bourgeois state refuse to.

To become a force that can fight for working people in government, the workplace, the community, and the streets, DSA should follow these precedents and build a movement as wide and deep as the working class itself.

How this works in NOLA

For DSA New Orleans, we know how important it is to grow our base of support through long-term organizing alongside our neighbors and co-workers.

For us, this means focusing on a few key areas. We organize to support militant labor activity, develop robust mutual aid projects, establish a strong socialist education program, and fight for transformative reforms like Medicare for All.

Our Labor Standing Committee (LSC) is a place for militant workers – both union and non-union – to come together to network, share skills and discuss workplace issues. The LSC meets twice a month to discuss Labor Notes' *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* and to debate important topics like organizing after Janus, grad student unions, the gig economy, and universal jobs guarantee. The LSC has supported one member's campaign for president of his local. They also provide support to a new group, Young and Emerging Labor Leaders (YELL), which seeks to activate young workers through education and community-building. YELL was formed under the local AFL-CIO by LSC members and is organized in collaboration with other worker-organizers.

The Healthcare-For-All Committee (HC) holds monthly Medicare-For-All canvases. Every other month, the HC organizes health fairs and medical debt clinics where they provide free health services and information about affordable healthcare resources while helping people renegotiate and lower their medical debt. The HC also mobilized against (and helped defeat!) proposed legislation that would have imposed a 20-hour work requirement on all Medicaid recipients in Louisiana.

The Direct Service Committee (DSC) organizes monthly brake light clinics at a park near the chapter's regular meeting place. Every month the DSC also holds organizer trainings to teach people how to fix brake lights, how to politicize the project, and how to have effective organizing conversations with clinic attendees. August 2018 marks our one year anniversary of running this program. The brake light clinics have increased DSA's visibility in New Orleans, attracted new members and helped us cultivate organizing skills.

The Political Education Committee (PEC) organizes strategy sessions. Every other month the chapter convenes to debate strategy and define positions on issues like electoral organizing and Medicare-for-All. Inspired by the work of DSA chapters in Central Brooklyn, Philadelphia and East Bay, PEC is working hard to get the first semester of our Socialist Night School ready by the fall. We understand the importance of political education - our movement will live or die based on our ability to think strategically and analyze both victories and losses.

We are one of a handful of DSA chapters with a Socialists of Color Caucus. This caucus aims to create a shared sense of community for black and brown leftists as we support one another in learning the history and thought of socialists of color. In addition to hosting happy hours, potlucks and political education forums, the caucus works to develop black and brown organizers in our chapter.

Struggle

Like many DSA chapters, we struggle in certain areas. Although we are a working class organization, the racial and gender composition of our chapter is not yet representative of New Orleans' working class. Our chapter is majority white in a majority black city. While

we have many women leaders, our organization is majority male. To rectify these issues we must be focused and intentional as we grow the chapter.

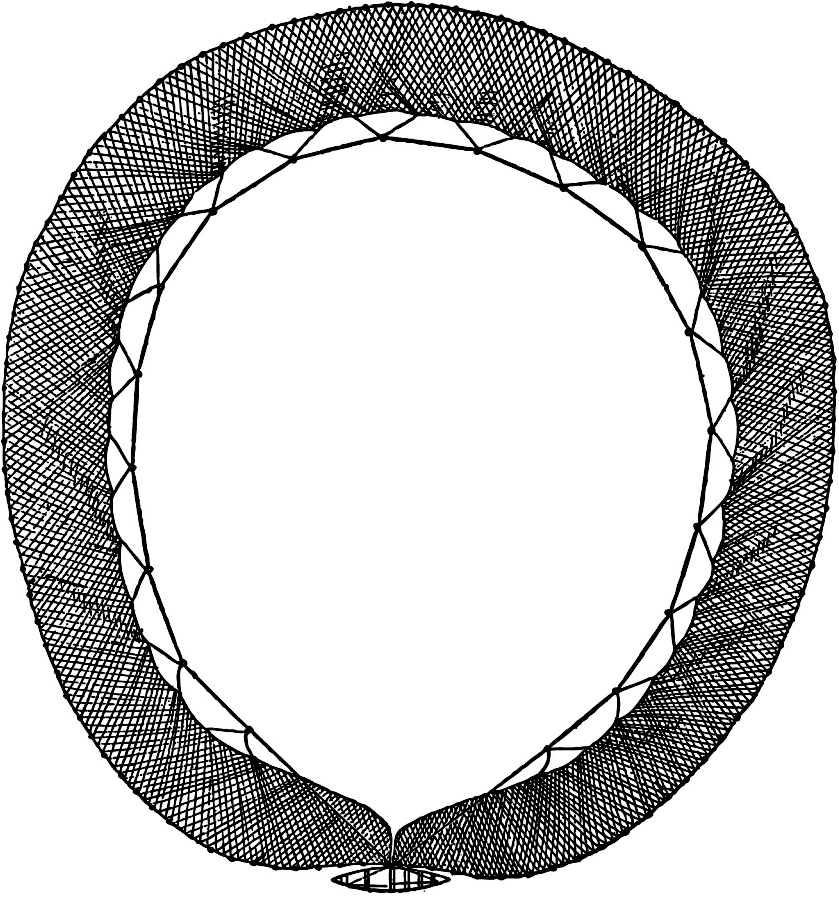
We are blessed to have many leaders dedicated to different but essential areas of focus for our movement, but we must strive to better integrate our committees' various projects. Committees should be interconnected and working together to achieve the stated goals of the entire local organization. We are beginning to discuss developing a chapter-wide, long-term strategic program, a process that will be challenging but crucial to the future of our work.

As the chapter expands, we've got to grow in a way that ensures we're not just a social club or pressure group. To begin to build real power for working people, our organization must study the terrain of municipal politics and how to best leverage our strengths in local political and labor struggles.

Finally, we must better support other DSA chapters and organizing committees, to expand the socialist project throughout Louisiana and across the Gulf Coast.

DSA New Orleans has existed for just over a year and has grown from 70 to 170 dues paying members. While still small, we're laying the foundations of a strong, working class organization that will continue to struggle for socialism in the years ahead.

Local Council, DSA New Orleans
hello@dsaneworleans.org





Central Iowa

The rural Midwest is far from conservative. Central Iowa DSA has been busy with a myriad of projects in efforts to organize workers, educate lowans, and build socialist power. Whether it be *Capital* reading groups, affordable living campaigns, or pro-abortion demonstrations, we are challenging the state's ruling classes.

Our chapter does a lot, but a few activities stand out as particularly crucial in our fight against capital.

1. The Socialist Feminist Working Group: Led by Chair Ash Bruxvoort, the Socialist Feminist Working Group was created to provide a space strictly for women and nonbinary comrades. Our SFWC focuses primarily on internal work, discussing the feminism throughout the socialist movement in general by collectively exploring the experiences of woman and non-binary folk in socialist organizations. But our SFWC focuses on our chapter as well. The working group ensures the dynamics of interpersonal power within our chapter do not gravitate towards the patriarchal status quo. Additionally, this past March, the working group was integral in organizing a statewide meetup that brought enthusiastic socialist feminists from all over Iowa together to learn, bond, and share more strategies to confront the reactionary forces of the Hawkeye State.

2. June General Dynamics/Anti-ICE Protest: Earlier this summer, Central Iowa DSA comrades discovered that General Dynamics, a border concentration camp profiteer had an office located in West Des Moines. Their unobtrusive local operation was an for our chapter opportunity to inform residents that what seems to be regular office is actually making money off the exploitation and oppression of Latinx migrants. With a succinct, but well-publicized, morning rally, Central Iowa DSA members called public attention to the heinous business dealings of General Dynamics. The event was reported on by many regional news networks as it coincided with the morning workday rush. This “weekday morning rally” tactic disseminated our message to a larger number of people, hopefully swaying more Des Moinesians to our cause.

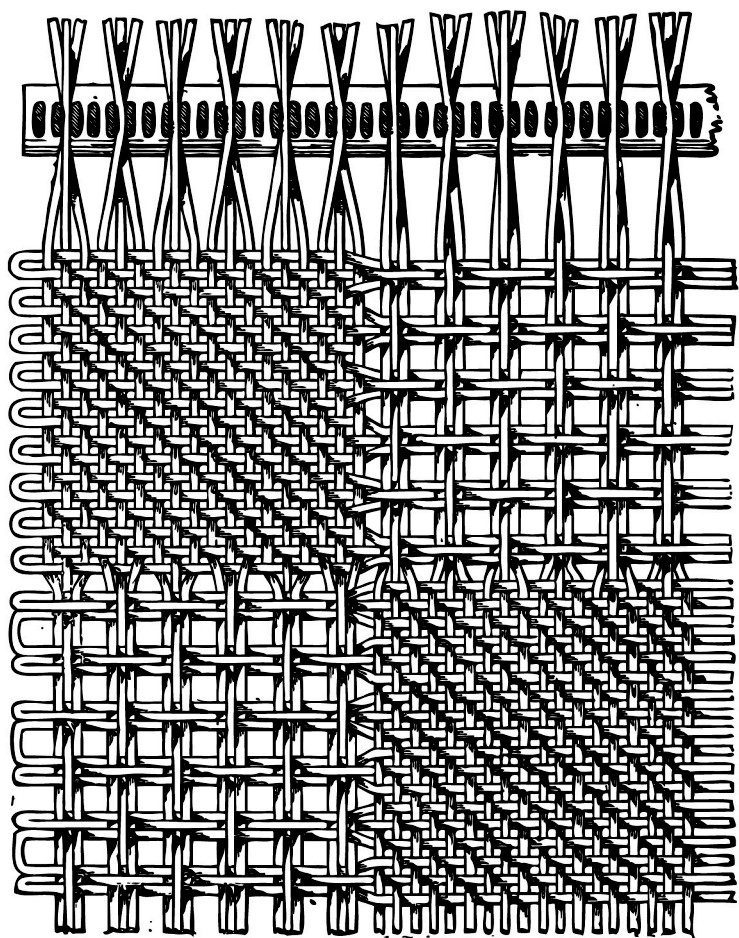
3. Prison Abolition Letter Writing Campaign: Recently, our Prison Abolition Working Group Chair Jade Suganuma has spearheaded a prisoner solidarity project.. Often the incarcerated are neglected, but we know that prison labor means they are workers too. As socialists, we need to make connections with incarcerated. After compiling a database of prisoner information, the Prison Abolition Working Group wrote letters to express solidarity with imprisoned workers i, become aware of their various situations, and specifically inquire about ways in which the Central Iowa DSA could be of help during the upcoming National Prison Strike. This campaign is ongoing and DSA members are working hard to move it forward.

Disgusted by the bourgeois stagnancies and cruelties of the Iowa Democratic and Republican parties, socialists from across Des Moines and its outlying areas have come together to oppose the capitalist class and construct a better world. Central Iowa DSA is just over a year old, but

we've hit the ground running.

Jenkin Benson
centraliowademsocialists@gmail.com





Philadelphia

LILAC: A committee for local work

The Local Initiative/Local Action Committee of Philadelphia DSA (LILAC) engages in socialist organizing that collaborates with local movements, developing a range of projects that earn the buy-in of our membership and engage us in the struggles of our working class city. We wrote our committee's resolution last December with this vision in mind.

LILAC's organizing philosophy is that an engaged organization, one in which each member develops and utilizes their skills to the fullest, makes us a more powerful and effective socialist organization.

To that end, LILAC has created a nourishing committee culture, focused on coalitional organizing and participatory democracy.

Nourishing Culture

LILAC uses a "buddy system" for facilitation. Two committee members facilitate each meeting. At the next meeting, one facilitator stays on as lead facilitator and a new member comes on as a second facilitator. The second facilitation then becomes lead at the next meeting.

Facilitators, in consultation with a coordinator, solicit agenda items from members via email. A draft agendas is sent out for member feedback and approved by online vote.

In addition to two facilitators at each meeting, three elected coordinators who coordinate administrative tasks, and a treasurer and secretary, LILAC has multiple rotating leadership tasks at meetings so that we have a “leaderful” committee (scheduler, spacefinder, snackperson, stacktaker, timekeeper, notetaker, opening reader, activity leader). A less hierarchical, more horizontal structure draws members in by showing how essential everyone’s contribution is to the functioning of the committee.

Meetings begin with a reading selected by the person who volunteered for the task that day (these have included poetry, short stories, songs, and passages from Karl Marx and Paulo Freire). Meetings end with an optional group activity (these have included singing “Solidarity Forever” and painting a LILAC banner). Each meeting has time for a Resolution Incubator, in which members can receive feedback on campaign resolutions before submitting them to our chapter’s general meetings.

LILAC provides food and childcare at all meetings and events. LILAC members are organizing a Childcare Brigade, recruiting male-identifying members of Philly DSA to provide childcare at meetings (since childcare is labor that typically falls to women). LILAC enthusiastically turned out members to canvass for Philly DSA-supported candidates for State Representative, Elizabeth Fiedler and Kristin Seale.

At LILAC’s first meeting in January, 35 members sat in a circle and brainstormed local issues large and small that we might work on. There were nearly 80 ideas, which

the meeting facilitators helped combine into ten overall issues. Members then ranked the issues they would be most committed to working on. The top four were: criminal justice, education justice, housing justice, and racial justice. Members broke out into four groups based on each issue and planned meetings to discuss the issue.

In the past six months, LILAC has met monthly at Philly Improv Theater and Asian Arts Initiative. Committee meeting attendance ranges from 20-40 people. Our four interest groups have developed several campaign resolutions, three of which have passed at our chapter's general meetings.

Coalitional Organizing

The housing justice group wrote a resolution for Philly DSA to support Good Cause legislation in Philadelphia City Council, protecting Philly renters from evictions without "good cause." Additionally, the group developed a proposal for a panel on socialist responses to the potential impact of Amazon on Philadelphia housing (voted down by the chapter's Political Education Committee). The group is now developing a campaign to take on the eviction courts in Philadelphia. The criminal justice group has researched states that have eliminated cash bail. Members have also engaged in bail watch, and discovered just how hard it is to actually eliminate cash bail in practice.

The education justice group wrote a resolution supporting the Our City Our Schools coalition (OCOS), which passed at the most recent Philly DSA general meeting. OCOS is a powerful coalition of labor groups, unions, parents, students, and activists.

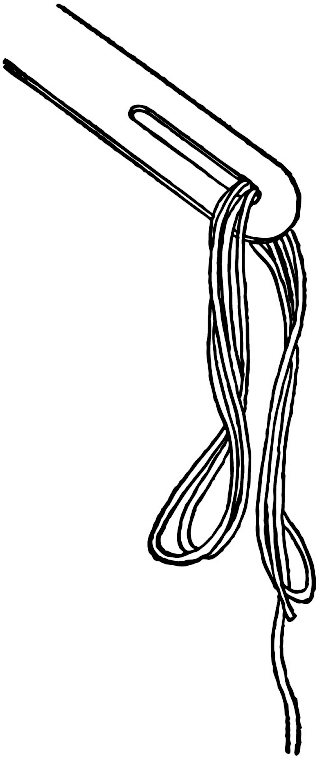
As stated in the Philly DSA resolution that created the Local Initiative/Local Action Committee back in December,

LILAC will develop “members’ skills and knowledge through direct involvement in discussing, voting on, researching, planning, and participating in locally-focused campaigns.” To help develop these skills, the racial justice group hosted a Socialists of Color training facilitated by NYC-DSA members in DSA’s Afrosocialists Caucus. The group also wrote a resolution for Philly DSA to be involved in the Poor People’s Campaign in Pennsylvania (following the DSA NPC’s endorsement of the Poor People’s Campaign nationally). For this work, the racial justice group undertook the first mass phone bank of the entire chapter membership, completing nearly 700 phone calls. Over 60 members expressed interest in participating in the Poor People’s Campaign, many of whom have not previously been active members in the chapter.

The immigration justice interest group was a key part of an unprecedented coalition between socialist groups and progressive immigration groups that occupied the entrance to an ICE facility, pressuring Mayor Jim Kenney to end the city’s data-sharing agreement between the police department and ICE.

Alongside the chapter’s exciting Medicare for All work, Philly DSA’s Local Initiative/Local Action Committee is blooming. We believe in using a diversity of tactics for organizing, building power, and winning victories with Philadelphia’s working class. By creating a nourishing committee culture and fighting for housing, education, criminal justice, immigration justice, and racial justice we are working with our comrades to grow democratic socialism in Philadelphia.

Brittany Griebing, Dave Backer, and Greg Laynor
lilac.phillydsa@gmail.com



Utopia lies at the horizon.
When I draw nearer by two steps,
it retreats two steps.
If I proceed ten steps forward, it
swiftly slips ten steps ahead.
No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.
What, then, is the purpose of utopia?
It is to cause us to advance.

- Eduardo Galeano

Brought to you by DSA members:

Ravi Ahmad (NYC-B/UM), Dave Backer (Philadelphia),
Antonio BH (East Bay), Justin Charles (NYC-NBK), Allie Cohn
(Knoxville), @Czernobro (SF), Zac Echola (Red River Valley),
Ted Glomski (Madison), Austin Gonzalez (Richmond), Thomas
Gonzalez (Fredericksburg), Dara Levy-Bernstein (Pittsburgh),
C.M. Lewis (Centre County), Jen McKinney (Eugene), Johannes
Münzel (Silicon Valley), Caroline Schoonover (Central Iowa).

Designed by Steven Zambrano Cascante
(labor donated)

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