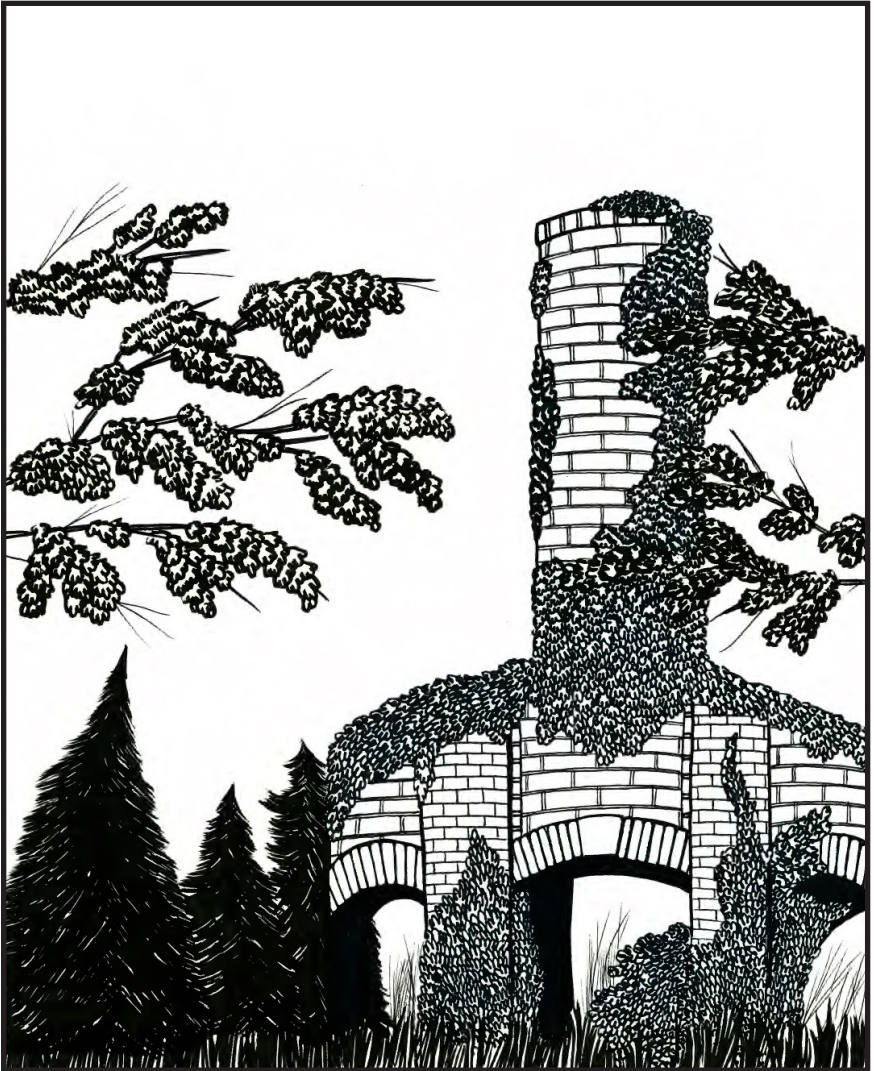
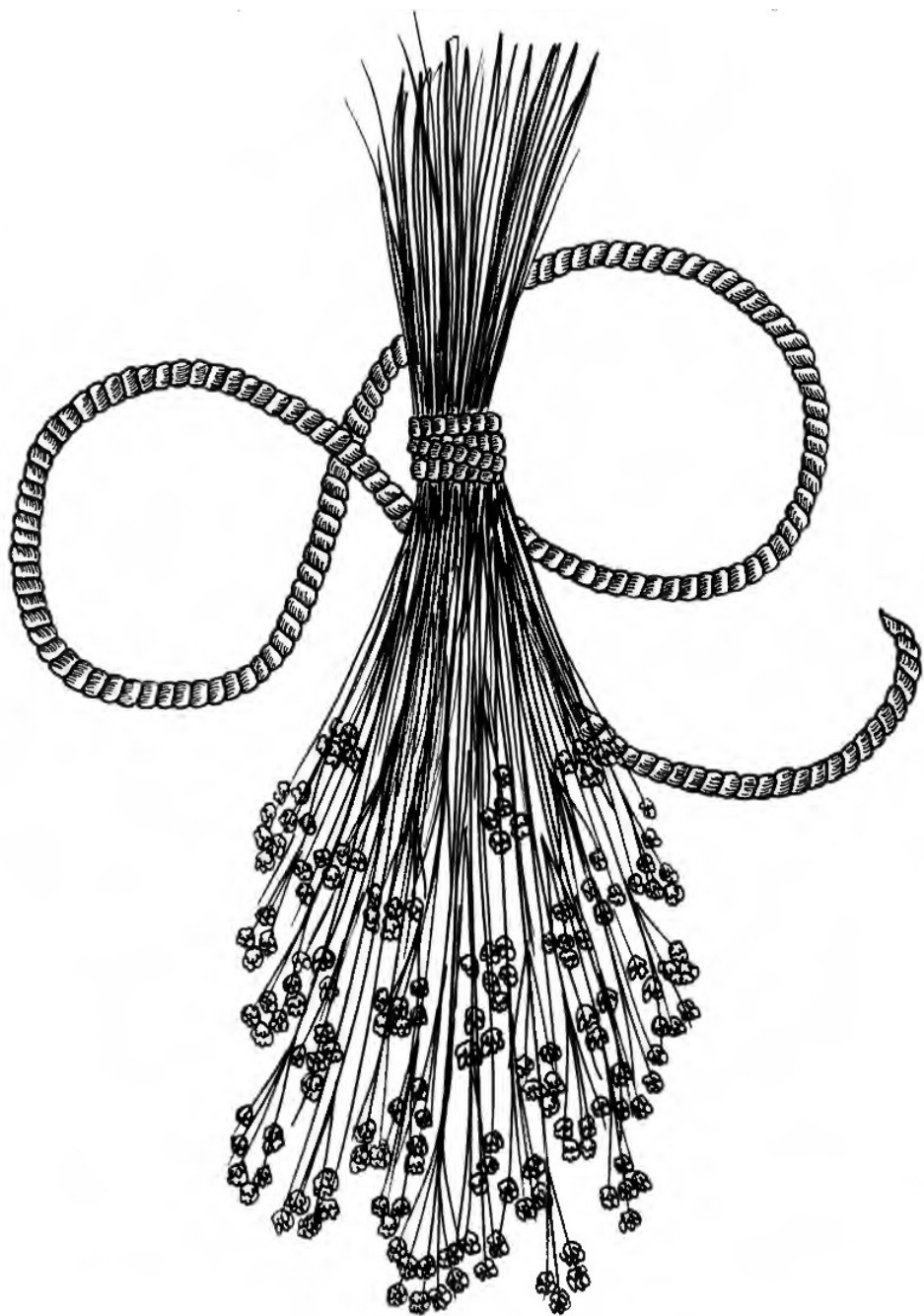


# Build

December, 2018

Issue 3





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**Introduction.....4**

## **Projects and Campaigns**

• **#HollywoodLabor.....11**

• **How We Did It: Harvey Relief  
Muck and Gut Project.....19**

## **Chapter Reports**

• **Socialist Organizing in the  
Middle of the Middle.....25**

• **Year One in Worcester, MA.....29**

## **#PrisonStrike**

• **North Texas.....36**

• **DSA Turns Out.....40**

## **The People's Hearth**

• **Zac's Bread Recipe.....46**

# Introduction

The constant and persistent voice of the radio, whether it was what we wanted to hear or not, was a familiar voice that grounded us in our community when I was growing up. The 1996 Telecommunications Act was an invisible but vital change to the background of our lives; it re-shaped how the media works by allowing for concentration of ownership and defanging what few standards the 'Fair Use Doctrine' gave us. Language, from cave paintings to oral and written histories, developed as a way for humans to describe the material, physical world to other humans, but private ownership of media distorts its purpose. Famously, "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." Our task now is to rebuild communication networks that are free grounded in the needs, stories and yearnings of our communities.

That influence is realized in often unnoticed ways. The media depict class structures in very different ways, using framing which constitutes a mental shortcut in thinking about class. Because the media often shapes people's perceptions of the world, these mental shortcuts become the framework through which people understand class, driving them to behaviors that benefit both the media itself and capital. The world is described in a limited way, so it is then interpreted in a limited way. It's self-referential. It's postmodern, completely divorced from reality, which is how even though we are of nature and more dependent on other humans than ever before,



we're atomized and isolated. There is strong incentive to maintain the status quo, as those in the dominant classes enjoy privileged roles in society and are loathe to rescind their comfort.

All of this is exacerbated by the increasing isolation of our day-to-day lives and atomization of societal structures. Our physical geography has shrunk, such that we are often left to fill our networks through our workplaces and through necessity, while we lose touch with the ways our community enriches our lives. We come to view those in other classes through the lenses of the media shortcuts that are easily provided to us, everywhere. And as our workplaces and daily lives demand more and more of our personal space and time, those media shortcuts become more and more central.

What can we do to bring a fulfilling local, physical sense of community back into our daily lives? How can we combat the imagery and systems that the people in power have forced upon us? We can start by problematizing these systems we have been relegated to work within. In turn, we will realize the shared power we have in our digital geography.

DSA is an organization made of members in chapters who share a physical geography. They work together to build community where they live. Each member and chapter is bound to one another through our shared values, but we also live together in a shared digital geography. Because our communication networks have been built by us for us, we do not have to accept the ways in which the media typically portray us. We will build it for ourselves.

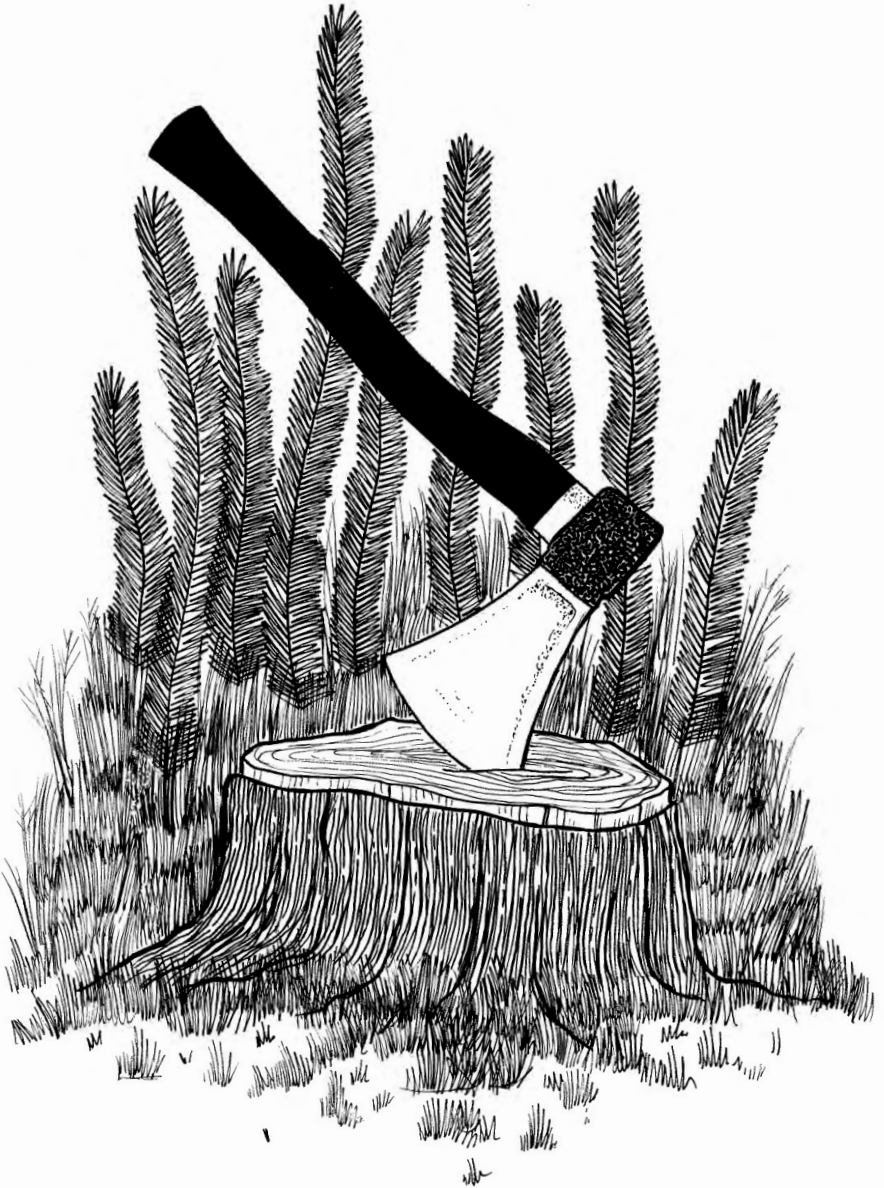
This work is not easy and does not come quickly. This is in part because education in the United States teaches us fundamentally different definitions for the concept of work, depending on class. Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work, Jean Anyon's attempt to qualitatively assess primary and secondary schools along social class lines, shows that differences in educational methods and evaluations between social classes create a "hidden curriculum." This unseen curriculum prepares students to relate to authority and the process of production in a particular way, based on their social class. Frameworks around fundamental concepts such as the very definition of work and the relationship between the individual and the fruits of their work change depending on the social class of the students.

Each social class analysis begins in the same way: defining "work." For the working-class, work is following the steps of a procedure. For the middle-class, work is getting the right answer. Affluent professional scholars (e.g., Horace Mann) teach that work is a creative activity carried out independently. For elite executive schools (e.g., Phillips Exeter Academy), work is developing one's analytical and intellectual powers. It is clear in Anyon's analysis that each social class has very distinct educational methods, which align on a spectrum of ideological extremes. Working-class schools are more authoritarian and unilateral, in contrast with the elite executive schools which provide students with freedom of movement and personal autonomy.

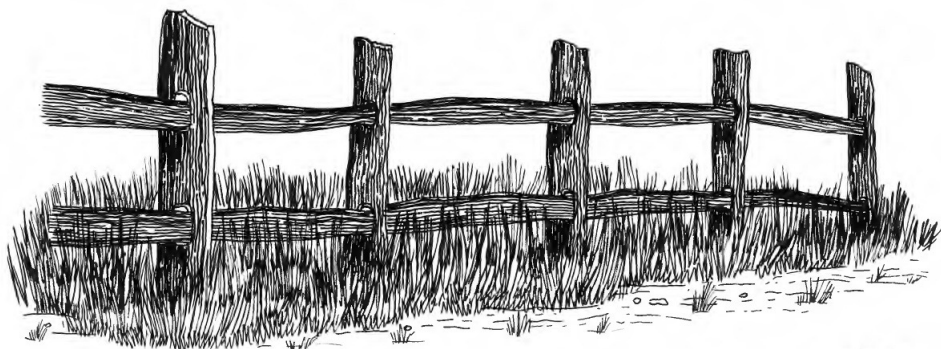
One way to describe the result of her analysis is in terms of the questions "Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why?" In working-class schools, students are only encouraged to ask what – as in, "What do

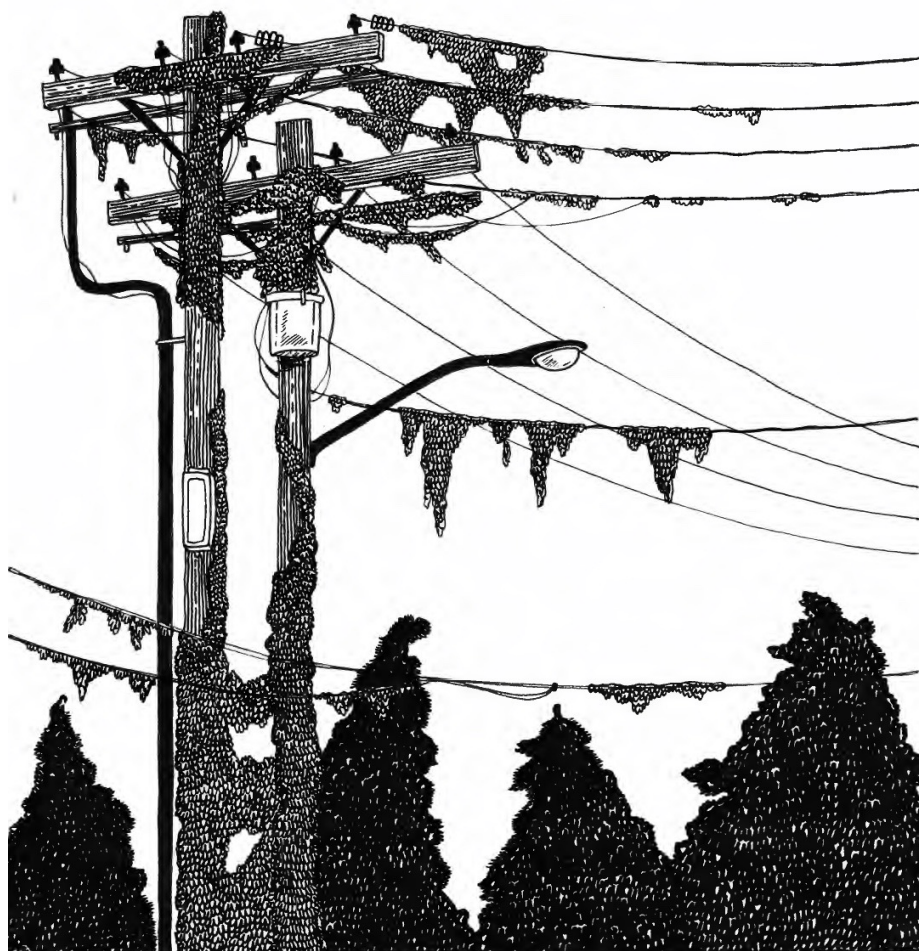
I do?” or “What did you say?” – never encouraging individual thought. Middle-class schools introduce who and when and where: basic questions to gain basic information about a subject. In affluent professional schools, where inquisitiveness is encouraged, where students ask how. Only in elite executive schools, where the “primary goal of thought is to conceptualize rules by which elements may fit together in systems and then to apply these rules in solving a problem,” are students challenged to ask why. If DSA hopes to dismantle the oppressive structures empowering imperialist forces and patriarchal white supremacy, we must similarly examine the media’s frameworks around class, asking why these frameworks persist, and how we can replace them with frameworks that enable true liberation for all.





# Projects and Campaigns





# #Hollywood Labor

*#HollywoodLabor is a project of DSA Los Angeles that played a key role in a successful campaign to expand union membership for entertainment workers in Los Angeles and helped with the campaign to boycott LA Weekly after it was purchased by a conservative investment group. C.M. Lewis interviewed Jon, a rank-and-file member of DSA Los Angeles and an unorganized entertainment industry worker, on the project's origins, the role for Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the labor movement, and what the project offers for other chapters.*

## **CM: How did you first get involved in DSA?**

**Jon:** I grew up with parents who were involved in the Left. My mom was in the Socialist Workers' Party in the 60s and 70s and my dad was in Students for a Democratic Society in North Carolina, so I've always been kind of radically inclined, but I joined DSA right after Trump got elected.

Like a lot of people, I saw it on Twitter. I was semi-familiar with the organization from when I was in high school. I knew a couple of people that had joined back in D.C., but I certainly hadn't really been a part of an explicitly socialist organization before. I'd organized anti-war events in college during the Iraq War and organized stuff around human rights issues in high school, but this was the first socialist organization I'd ever joined.



**CM: *What are your unofficial/official roles in Los Angeles DSA?***

Jon: I joined DSA around December 2016 or January 2017. I've spent a lot of time in #HollywoodLabor and the Labor Committee. I've also done a bit of work with Agitprop directing some videos and helping produce some others. I helped start the Mutual Aid Committee back in July or August of 2017, and I've been involved in the Anti-Oppression Committee.

I feel it's very important to do admin work and quality of life projects. I helped organize our childwatch program at the beginning, and I did a lot of childwatch for a very long time. Coming from D.C., I was exposed to an anarchist perspective and I'm very big on horizontal organizing and projects that strengthen social bonds between members.

**CM: *#HollywoodLabor was one of DSA Los Angeles's first big campaigns. How'd it start?***

**Jon:** I was in a Labor Committee meeting (I say "I" just because I'm telling it from my perspective) and I'd been laid off about a month earlier from a job for a new media digital company that made short-form video content. I was writing and directing for them. The conditions were very, very terrible: before it went out of business the production got shut down by the city for not having the correct permits, the company used scab labor on another project, and then got protested by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). I was in the Labor Committee expressing these frustrations, and we and some other folks in the industry expressed similar frustrations.

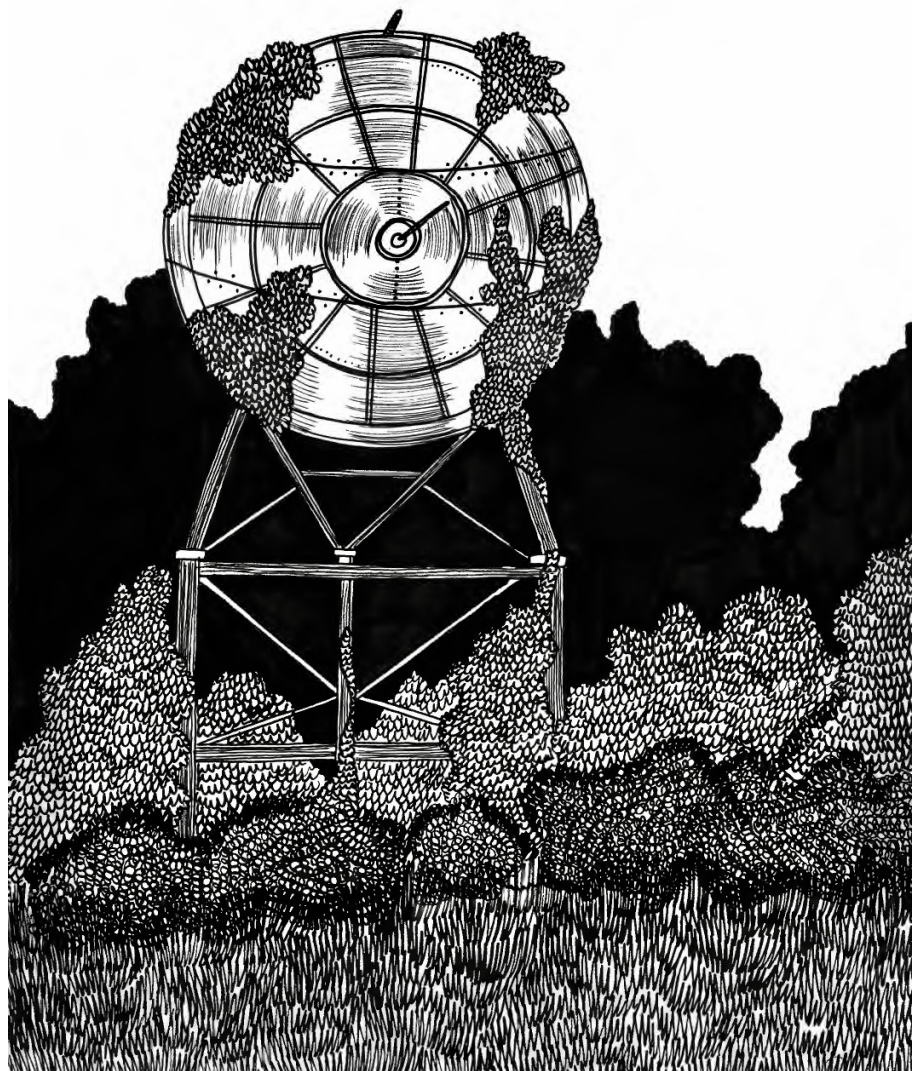
Francisco, who was one of the heads of the Labor Committee at that point, said "You know, I'm seeing a lot of folks in our meetings who are in the film

industry”—and he’s an organizer for a teachers’ union, so he’d never really known any Hollywood folks. He kind of recognized there was a need for this project, that DSA Los Angeles (for a couple of different reasons) was going to attract folks in the entertainment industry, and that there was an avenue there for organizing. There are a lot of folks in the entertainment industry whose needs aren’t being served. Many of the digital and new media companies aren’t union, so there’s a whole growing segment of the entertainment workforce that isn’t unionized.

The way unions operate in the entertainment industry is unique. They’re based on the craft union model—they’re engineered in a very specific and unique way to ensure the protection of their members. But the folks on the outside don’t have someone speaking for them as well. I think Francisco saw, in that moment, an opportunity, and it was a really good organizing lesson for me, in that you don’t build a project from the top-down. You build the project from the bottom-up. You see who’s there, who’s showing up, who has a need, and you build the project that way, in a kind of organic bottom-up way.

**CM:** *What were your first steps as a group?*

**Jon:** The first thing was that the people interested in the project came together and we spoke, voiced our frustrations. We’re a fairly diverse group labor-wise. For example, Rachel is an actor, Isabella, Clare, and Brenden are writers and writers assistants, and Andrew is a DP and assistant camera person. So we got together, and we thought about what we could offer, because some of us are union, some of us are not, and well—let me use a story of how the union situation is.



When I was laid off, I had to apply for unemployment. When I went to the unemployment office they said, “Well, okay, you’re a writer. Have you tried joining the Writers Guild?” And I said, “I wish I could,” but that’s just not how it works. There’s a segment of the Hollywood workforce in Los Angeles that not only doesn’t have the protection, but doesn’t have the knowledge around labor protections and how unions work.

Sort of where we landed is that we could raise workers’ consciousness; not in those explicit terms, but I think that was the intent. Our first event was writer’s assistants and script coordinators were in the process of trying to unionize with IATSE. One of the main things we did at our first event was we invited script coordinators and writer’s assistants to come and see a presentation from an organizer at IATSE, we did some breakout groups so we could share stories, and we came back together and talked about how we all have similar problems, and how union organizing can address those problems. Then the people that were writer’s assistants and script coordinators could sign their union cards, so it was a way to help that effort while at the same raising workers’ consciousness.

**CM: *What are some challenges you see in labor organizing?***

**Jon:** One of the toughest things about organizing in America in 2018 is that there’s a real lack of workers’ consciousness. People literally do not identify as workers, because they’re trained to see themselves like, “I work at a desk all day in an office, I’m not working on a factory floor,” right? So much of the perception of unionism is tied up in this outmoded idea that unions are for coal miners. But what it really comes down to is: if you don’t control the means of production, and you’re not extracting profit off someone else, then you’re a worker.

People get caught up in these ideas of upper class, and lower class, and middle class—and those are all really kind of bullshit. It’s about who controls the means of production, and most of us don’t. Putting that kind of discourse back into labor organizing is an important first step, and to tell people “Hey, you don’t have to take this,” right? Because a lot of what it means to work in Hollywood is to be told “Be grateful.” And we want to shatter that myth that you should be grateful for your job.

We don’t want to attack and we’re very explicitly not in opposition to those craft unions, but we do recognize that there’s a lack of solidarity between workers in different unions, and that it could be better. If someone’s being exploited on a production, everyone should be mad.

One of our best events was when we had some non-cisgender male comrades on a panel talking about experiencing sexual harassment in the industry and how to use unionizing and labor organizing tactics to combat that. So there was something really tangible people could walk away with after that meeting. And we did that right as the Harvey Weinstein stuff was breaking. We learned all these practical applications of organizing tactics to fight workplace harassment.

**CM: *What are some lessons for other chapters?***

**Jon:** I don’t know if it’s controversial or not, but I’ll speak to the fact that I think organizing efforts for DSA Los Angeles and DSA National should really consider what it means to organize the unorganized. The majority of the workforce isn’t organized, and the majority of the workforce doesn’t have a developed workers’ consciousness. And I don’t say that like #HollywoodLabor and other organizations exist to, in that very old school sense, inspire the masses.

We're here to collaborate with fellow workers, we're here to agitate them, we're here to remind them, "You're being exploited and it doesn't have to be like that."

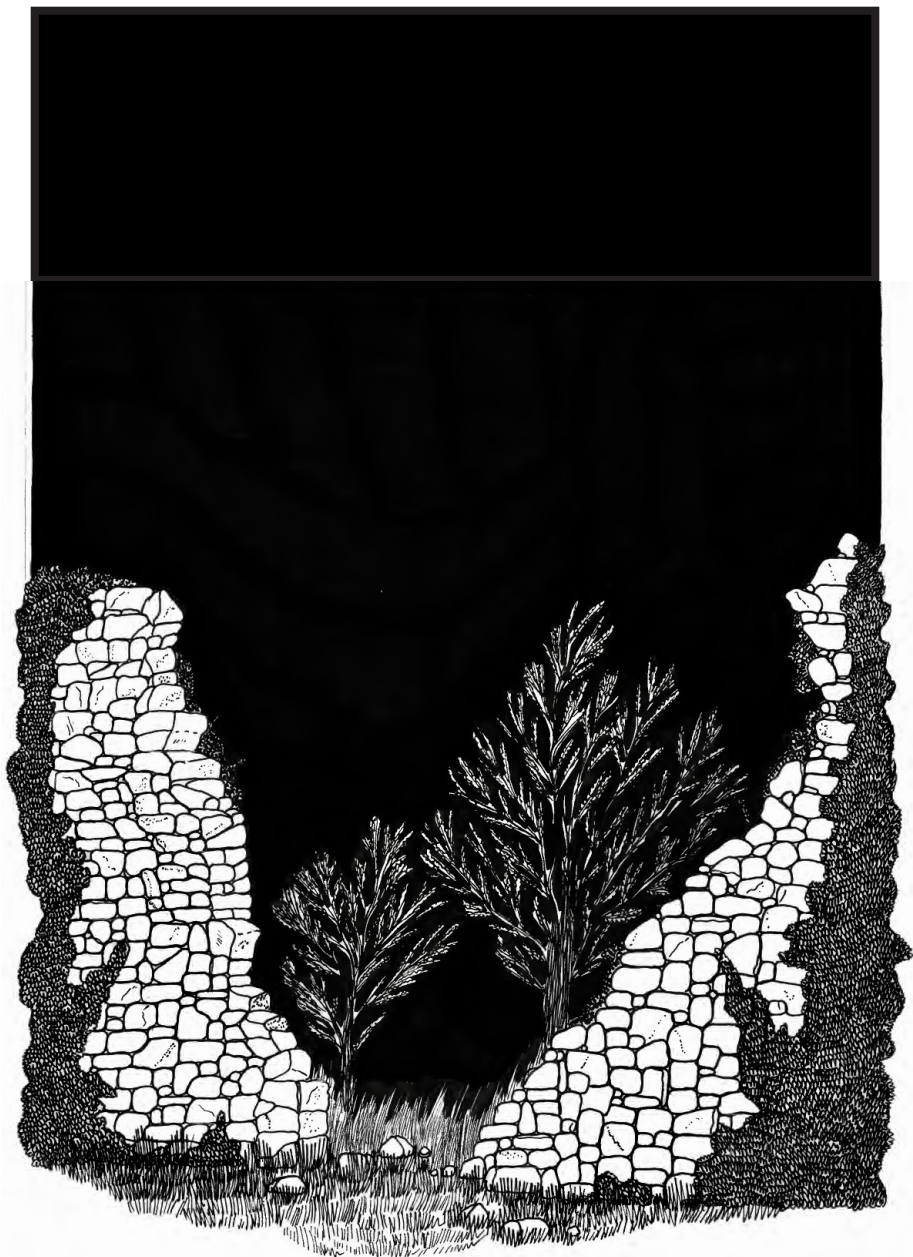
I think there's something very radical about getting a group of people that aren't in a union together, and getting them to realize what it means to have the power of an organized force, when it's not just you, and you have the same problems as everyone else—but now you know what those problems are. Telling each other salaries, sharing stories of workplace sexual, gender, or racial exploitation—I think there's something very powerful and radical in that.

When we have our meetings, we have them very intentionally. We ask people not to take pictures or use names outside of the room, and we very specifically curate them so people feel safe. People can come, and share, and have conversations that they may not be able to have anywhere else.

I think that what's needed now, and granted, I'm not in a union, I'm not a union steward, and my experience in labor organizing is about two years old now, is a new and exciting vision for what it means to organize in a world where a lot of people work at McDonald's, and a lot of people work at a desk.

I think there's room for folks in non-unionized industries to have those conversations, and I think DSA can be a part of that because we're all workers, and even if you live in an area where union density is super low, you can still ask people "Hey, does work suck? Do you want to come talk about it?"







# How We Did It: Harvey Relief Muck & Gut Project

As a record 52 inches of rain fell on Houston during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, members of Houston DSA were online in our Mattermost prepping for the aftermath. By soliciting donations online through a GoFundMe, we raised over \$120,000 in relief funds. After raising the funds, we immediately incorporated as a 501c4 and opened an account at a local credit union to hold the money. We also learned that a comrade in Oklahoma City DSA was a disaster relief specialist, so we spoke with him by phone to learn the best ways for us to help. He told us that in the aftermath of a flood, the two most impactful ways we could help would be putting cash in people's hands and assistance with muck and gutting.

At the outset of our muck and gut operation, we created a spreadsheet to solicit volunteers and ask who needed help and where they were. These would have worked better as different spreadsheets, and translated spreadsheets in Spanish would also have also been useful.

We borrowed tools at our local tool bank, and rented work vans to haul in all of our equipment. After several weekends of spending hundreds on rentals, we sent out an ask to our community for a cheap truck and secured a Ford Ranger for a few thousand dollars. Houston DSA hopes to eventually donate it to a family when the relief work is finished.

Respirators and similar supplies were difficult to find because the entire region had mobilized to do repair after the disaster. We created an Amazon wishlist for these supplies, other consumables like Concrobium (a mold killer to spray on the studs of a home), and tools. Given that the tool bank rentals would need to be returned eventually, having our own tools would become a necessity.

We sent out asks in our community through social media for space to store our tools and onboard volunteers each weekend. Bohemeos, a truly amazing coffeeshop and hangout in Houston's East End, provided both. As of this writing, we still have about half of their coffee warehouse for tools and other equipment. They also provided us with keys to the shop to make coffee for volunteers every weekend and space on their outdoor patio for feeding volunteers breakfast. Breakfast tacos and kolaches, y'all!

We found most of the homes that we muck and gutted through Houston DSA co-chair Amy Zachmeyer's connections with unions to locate union members in need, and were then asked by neighbors to assist on their homes next door or the homes of their friends. Eventually, we connected with West Street Recovery and Living Paradigm, similarly-minded groups who had links to the same community we were serving, additional volunteer resources, and time to blockwalk.

Initially, we worked two full eight-hour days on Saturday and Sunday, handling one or two houses per day. Now, the muck and gut crew only goes out on Saturdays to alleviate burnout and give crew members time off. We think an ideal situation would be having two alternating crews with overlapping leads, so that Crew A is out on Day One and Crew B is out on Day Two, with at least one continuous crew lead to connect the work.

At the beginning of the week, we would call homeowners to firm up our schedule and get an idea of the work we would be doing, so we could decide if we had time for more than one house.\*

Initially, we sent one or two teams out to homes in Houston, and another team on the two-hour drive to Beaumont to help homeowners we learned of through our co-chair's union there. Eventually, however, our operation became a single Houston team.

At the outset of each day in Houston, we met at Bohemeos at 8 a.m. for breakfast tacos and coffee, introductions, and a basic safety talk with the volunteers (e.g., only walk where you can see the floor; masks on at all times inside; shut off electricity before tearing down walls in kitchens and utility rooms). Everyone helped load the truck at the warehouse, and new volunteers were fitted with personal protective equipment (PPE) and learn how to use it. After carpooling to the homes (parking is sparse on debris-laden streets), crew leads would tour the home with the owner, size up the damage, and make recommendations. Initially our crew leads were Houston DSA members who worked as contractors, but they trained up other volunteers to take their places.

We worked room by room, cleaning as we went, and always had people doing both tear down and debris-running to simultaneously ensure everyone's safety and provide enough room to move about. We made sure people took frequent breaks for water and respirator-free outside-air, with the added bonus that this offered time for people to make connections across groups, communities, and DSA chapters. When a home was done, we would walk it with the owner, and make sure they received a \$200 Visa gift card. Often we often also replaced other items people

had lost in the flood (e.g., car seats, water heaters). An entire other piece could and should be written by someone from our financial aid team on this side of the operation.

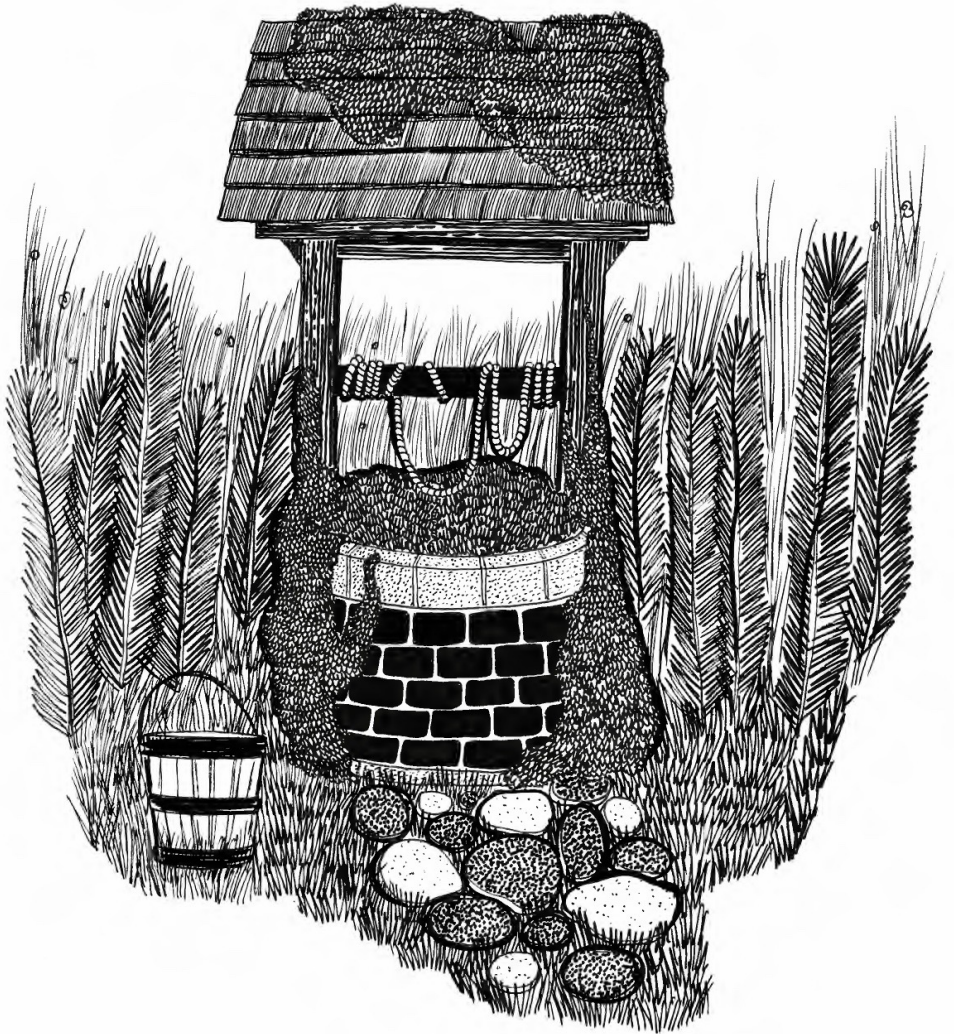
At the end of each day, we returned to the warehouse to wash our tools and gloves in a bleach solution, and disinfect respirators with Lysol cloths. After we were done, we would circle up on the Bohemeos' patio, debrief, and relax. This was vital to building camaraderie and maintaining morale because it gave us a chance to talk through what we had seen, what was nagging at us, and build trust and friendship among our core team.

Finally, we want to note that anyone planning a program like this must think critically about the long haul. While I (Tawny) am now in New York, Colleen is still connecting with homeowners to muck houses over a year after the storm. This work will literally take years, and it is likely that we will get hit with new storms during that time. Think ahead about your limited resources (e.g., money, respirator cartridges, time), how you can make durable connections in the community or governance (for example, if you attend United Way meetings in Houston, you can get hooked into their drywall donation network), and how to maintain a volunteer base without burning everyone out. These large and thorny questions are beyond the scope of this article, but they must be confronted if we hope to continue improving the work DSA does.

*\*\*Houston DSA did not work with renters because we had a policy against doing free work for landlords. We did, however, connect the few renters we encountered with pro bono legal representation when possible.*

# Chapter Reports







# Socialist Organizing in the Middle of the Middle

*“Whether it was from management, a coworker, or a customer, when was the last time you faced sexual harassment at work?”*

*“I don’t know if this is rhetorical, but: a customer – today. Every day.”*

This was the start of a conversation in a Facebook group dedicated to organizing restaurant workers in Columbia, Missouri, a college town of about 120,000 people. In this online space, restaurant and other service workers discuss different aspects of their working conditions (e.g., “When was the last time you worked sick?” “Does your employer make you cover the cost of a dine and dash?”), and compare notes on how workers are treated across the community. Workers also discuss ideas on how to improve conditions. An in-person meeting is planned for November, where these initial conversations will be a catalyst to organizing a class of workers that most unions would consider impossible to organize.

The restaurant workers campaign is the first project of Mid-Missouri DSA’s Labor Working Group, one of several DSA working groups pursuing community organizing goals in Columbia and nearby Jefferson City. The Electoral Working Group has focused on



education regarding the slate of ballot propositions in Missouri's November elections, while the Queer Socialists Working Group has researched recent state-level legislation impacting the lives of queer people in Missouri. Behind the scenes, a dedicated group of volunteers reserves venues, sends emails, and communicates with DSA National to get official organizing committee status.

Oh yes – Mid-Missouri DSA isn't technically an official organizing committee yet, having only recently had the chance to initiate that process with DSA National. Regardless, the nascent chapter is moving full-steam ahead to build an organization that advocates socialist principles and policies in the middle of the Midwest.

Over the past twenty years, Missouri's national image has steadily moved to the right, to the point that it is now regularly considered a "red state." At first glance there is ample evidence to support this: the GOP currently has supermajority control of the state legislature and Trump won Missouri by 18 points. While it would be easy for the Left to write off Missouri as a lost cause outside of the urban strongholds of St. Louis and Kansas City, recent events show the state's politics are more complicated than the pundits suggest.

The Republican supermajority, with aid from Eric Greitens, the since-deposed and disgraced governor, passed Right-to-Work (RTW) legislation immediately after coming into session in 2017. In response, using an obscure state law provision, organized labor blocked RTW by collecting over 300,000 signatures to send RTW to the ballot. Despite the GOP's attempt to depress turnout by moving the RTW election from November to August, two-thirds of Missouri voters (a great many of whom otherwise voted in the Republican primary) voted to overturn RTW. In other words, the people of Missouri did not just reject RTW, they crushed it.

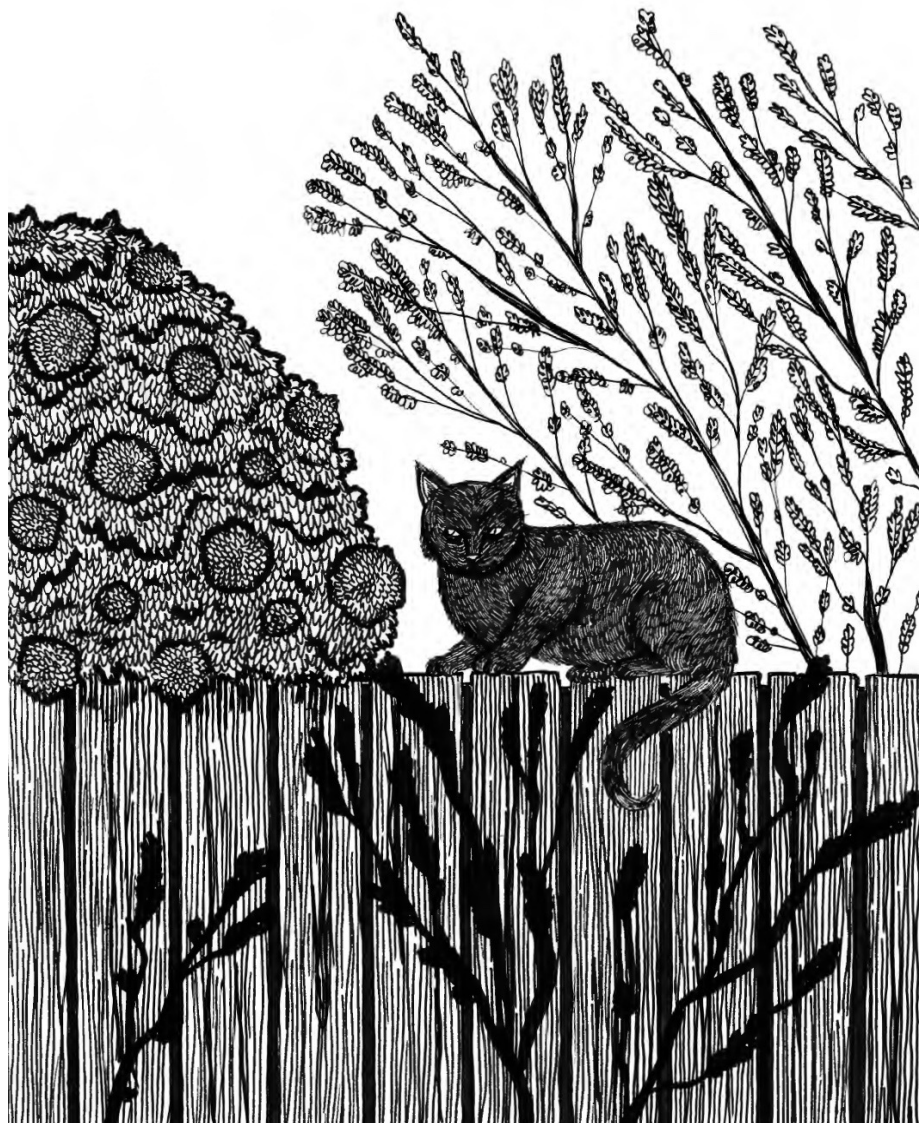
Looking forward, on the November ballot, there are propositions for wide-ranging ethics and gerrymandering reform, a minimum-wage increase, and the legalization of medical marijuana. All of these measures, which came from citizen organizing efforts outside the Democratic Party, stand a good chance of passing. Even with the GOP's stranglehold on the legislature, there is clearly room for politics that put activism and organizing at the forefront to achieve leftist aims.

This is the environment into which Mid-Missouri DSA has entered. Our first meeting was scheduled for a room with a capacity of 20 people. By the time the meeting actually happened, we had changed venues twice, and more than 75 people attended. There is an undeniable demand for democratic socialist politics here, and especially for a socialism that prioritizes community organizing.

That's not to say that everything has gone smoothly. Some working groups which attracted strong initial interest, including Anti-Racism and Education, have failed to lead to viable plans for action. Working out the organization's actual logistics has also been an issue, in particular keeping lines of communication open and ensuring tasks are accomplished without bylaws to enumerate a defined organizational structure.

That said, those growing pains speak to Mid-Missouri DSA's potential to make real change in the community. There is a tremendous opportunity, right here in the middle of "red state America." It is up to our chapter to seize it.

One member of the Labor Working Group, who is a restaurant worker himself, explained why he felt joining DSA was the right call. "I was tired of feeling unrepresented," he said. "And then I heard about this, and I had hope."



# Year One in Worcester, MA

Worcester DSA is a small chapter based in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts, but with members spread throughout Worcester County. Like many DSA chapters, Worcester DSA was founded by people with minimal organizing experience in early 2017 following the election of Donald Trump. In the below interview conducted in October 2018, Patrick, a newer member of the chapter, spoke with Nick, one of the founders of Worcester DSA and its primary organizer until Summer 2018.

Patrick is a college student in Worcester studying economics and mathematics. He joined DSA in the Summer of 2018 after hearing that students at his school founded a YDSA chapter. Since then, he has organized locally with Worcester DSA, as well as nationally with the Tech Committee and the Ecosocialist Working Group.

## INTRODUCTIONS

**Patrick:** *So I suppose we should begin with your name and profession?*

**Nick:** Sure. My name is Nick. I'm a college professor and academic researcher.... I suppose you could call me a geographer?

**P:** *And you've been around since the founding of Worcester DSA?*

N: Yes, so I've been with it for about two years.

**P: *Has this been your first time organizing?***

**N:** Oh, absolutely. There was a lot of learning by doing in the first few months, so the first few months were more like taking a crash course than what might be considered ‘organizing.’

**P: *What kind of stuff were you learning in those first few months?***

**N:** How to run a meeting, how to talk to people about politics, planning and implementing actions. A lot of the basic logistics and communications that are really necessary for a chapter to thrive.

**P: *And how was that? Was the learning process tough?***

**N:** Sure. It certainly took a lot of practice for the nuts and bolts stuff. But on the whole, it also took a definitive choice to carve out a chunk of time to devote to organizing, which was a bit of a leap. I had always had a political identity, but it does take effort to back the sentiment up with action.

## **HISTORY**

**P: *How about we dive into what was happening before and during the foundation of Worcester DSA?***

**N:** I was first involved with an already existing DSA chapter in Rhode Island right after the 2016 presidential election. I had heard about it a few weeks before the election, but it wasn’t a place where I saw myself getting involved. That certainly changed. But since I live in Worcester, it was a pain to travel to Providence to attend meetings.

A few months later, Paul, an organizer from Boston DSA, reached out to me to organize an action at city hall in conjunction with the airport protests around the Muslim ban. He then put me in contact with John, who had previously tried to start a Worcester chapter. After chatting for a bit we just decided that we would meet at a cafe in Worcester and make it a public event. It was very much on a whim. We only posted about it the night before, so we weren't expecting much.

But that said, about ten people showed up. It was very casual. A lot of airing of grievances, especially in the wake of the election and all that had happened up until that point. At the end of the meeting, we decided we'd begin to meet monthly. By the next meeting, we had an organizing committee. Unfortunately, that sort of rapid growth didn't continue for a combination of reasons.

***P: What were some of those reasons for relatively stagnant membership do you think?***

**N:** I think it could be, to some extent, because there wasn't any real attempt to motivate people to come to meetings or actions past the mass emails. Since we began doing that, there's been a good turnout for meetings and actions.

## **ORGANIZING AND MUTUAL AID**

***P: What would you say our major activities as a chapter are?***

**N:** Since we don't necessarily have the numbers to run a large amount of our own programming, we do a lot of work in tandem with other organizations like the Worcester Anti-Foreclosure Team and local unions. We're also beginning to collaborate with City Life/Vida Urbana on tenant organizing in Worcester.

***P: Do you think a focus on this sort of collaboration with other organizations could be a good model for small chapters?***

**N:** Certainly. Collaboration is always worth looking at since it's very often the case that other people can just do something better. It's really not worth reinventing the wheel and I'm more inclined to trust the expertise of these older organizations. It makes sense to get involved where we can and provide assistance where there's already a movement, with eyes toward doing our own programming once we have the capacity.

***P: Has the chapter begun any independent mutual aid projects?***

**N:** We recently began doing brake light clinics, which has gotten great reactions from those passing by or coming in to get one fixed.

***P: What have you found especially challenging about organizing these clinics?***

**N:** Finding a location was certainly difficult. Everyone I approached approved of the idea in theory, but since we're asking for free use of their property, the conversation was usually pretty one-sided. The other challenging piece was really just putting ourselves out there. It's pretty challenging to host an event for the first time, running the risk that no one will come. But since then, it's been smooth sailing.

## **LESSONS LEARNED AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

***P: Have there been any regrets you've had or areas of improvement that you're focusing on?***

**N:** Personally, I worry that I discouraged involvement from others when we first began since I was so willing

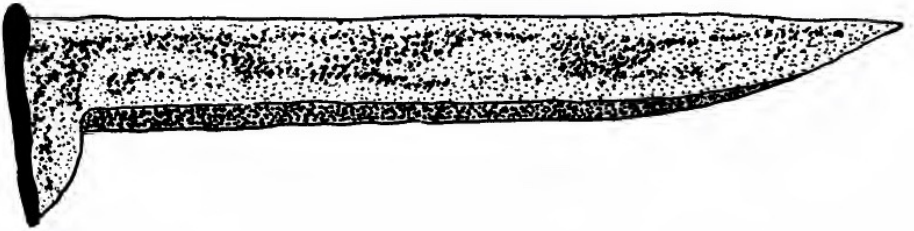


to do everything. Since then, there's been a lot more delegation. Especially asking particular people. I make sure to avoid sending out impersonal requests like "can anyone do this?" I think it's important to ask people directly.

As for the chapter as a whole, I think the next few months will be mainly focused on setting up solid working groups to start to encourage member development within a particular area of interest so we can prevent people being stretched too thin.

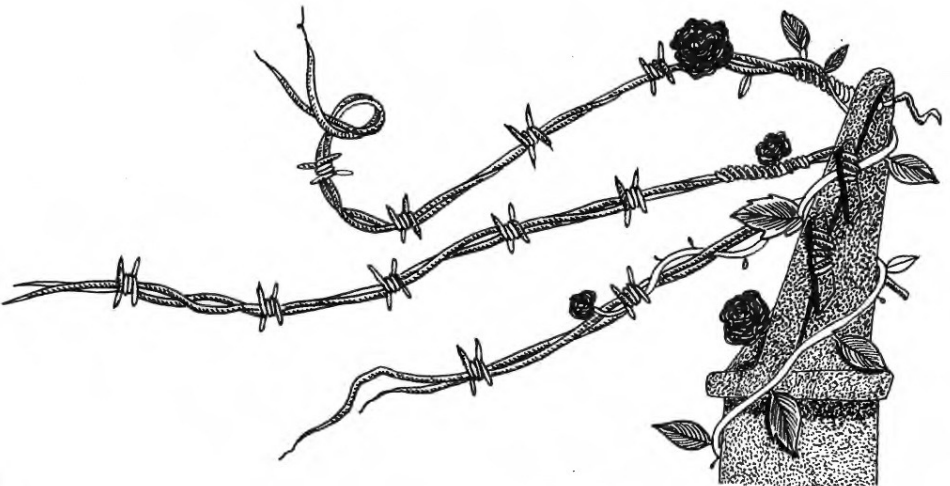
**P: *And finally, with what you've learned, what would you tell the novice organizers out there?***

**N:** Be ambitious. And be ambitious even in terms of just allowing yourself to delegate. Don't sell yourself short. It takes some effort to carve out the time to devote to organizing, but it's been a wonderful experience.





# #Prison Strike



# North Texas

*"I appreciate you treating me like a human despite my incarceration. Yes, I've made some mistakes in my past, but that doesn't mean I'm necessarily a bad person...it just means I'm human indeed!"*

- Ezzial Williams, organizer currently incarcerated at Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida

North Texas DSA's Racial Justice Working Group proudly joined other chapters in supporting the nationwide prison strike that took place from August 21st to September 9th. Although the strike has ended, we continue to support the strike demands that call for swift improvements to the conditions of prisons; an immediate end to work without wages; a rescindment of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Truth in Sentencing Act, and the Sentencing Reform Act; an end to the over-charging and over-sentencing of black and brown people and racist gang enhancement laws; prioritized state funding and access to rehabilitation programs for all; and voting rights for all confined citizens.

We endorsed the strike because our members are working toward a future of total prison abolition. This means the eradication of all forms of the carceral state, including policing, detention centers, and public and private prisons. As socialists, we recognize prison labor as slavery: as is explicitly allowed by the law under the 13th Amendment. Given that all slavery is categorically unacceptable, regardless of its nominally legal status, we call for an end to the largest detention center in the world. Although we

recognize that the above demands of the strike could be viewed as reforms constituting a compromise of our support for total prison abolition, we instead argue that these changes are necessary for two primary reasons. First, the sheer scale of the physical and mental suffering which the system currently inflicts on those incarcerated demands immediate alleviation. Second, these changes represent a necessary step toward positioning the strike's organizers to move for the full abolition of the carceral state. We remain committed to working toward building alternatives to policing and mass incarceration that are rooted in a fair and equitable society, with the emphasis that liberation demands housing, health care, food, rehabilitation, mental health care, and the protection of our vulnerable communities. We must collectively work toward a future of true liberation, where justice is restorative and not punitive, and where we unequivocally recognize the humanity of all.

One way we buttressed the work of organizers on the inside was writing letters to those facing retaliation for bravely coordinating prisoners to fight for their rights. Ezzial, the comrade quoted above, is currently serving 18 months of close management for his efforts. In Florida, close management entails sitting for 23 hours every day in a 9x7 cell no bigger than the average parking space. And still, his letters radiate gratitude. He wrote that our letters "lifted his spirits to heights undreamt---a very welcome change from where they had been for so long." Our hope is that we will be able to continue correspondence and supply organizers like Ezzial with both words of comfort and support, as well as literature to keep their spirits strong for the fight ahead. Many of the other letters we received contained zines and recollections of their struggles. This correspondence is useful in building an understanding that our mistakes do not automatically mean we forgo our humanity, and that our humanity is incomplete without liberation.

We aim to ensure their voices ring out beyond the unforgiving cells that currently house them.

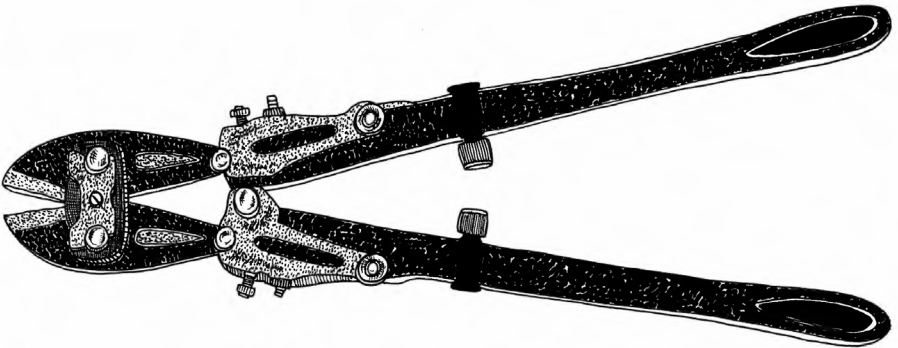
In addition to letter writing, another prison organizer in Louisiana contacted us to request that we make his words into flyers for distribution. Their continuing work with Decarcerate Louisiana strives to connect organizers both inside and outside the prison system in order to, collectively, undermine the prison industrial complex, while also ensuring that incarcerated people gain and maintain some control of their lives. These flyers serve that same purpose: retaining and strengthening the bonds between prisoners and their communities.

Furthermore, these exchanges can assist in demystifying the very idea of prison itself. For most, their understanding of what it means to be incarcerated and navigating the system comes from television. It's easy to reduce prisoners to racist tropes and inherently amoral individuals, rather than face the reality of the predatory and unforgiving nature of the prison industrial complex. As we engaged in this work, we strengthened our political education on the issue by reading "Are Prisons Obsolete" by the great Angela Davis. Her words regarding the very nature of prisons and what they mean on a grander scale are particularly poignant in highlighting the public's eagerness to build and populate new prisons. She creates a resounding reason for the acceptance and normalization of a place which she deems the ultimate harbor of human division. Davis writes, "The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs - it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by



racism and, increasingly, global capitalism.” As capitalism kills our creativity, and thus, our ability to imagine solutions for our community that don’t involve isolation or separation, society will continue to populate places like prisons with those who fall victim to systems that require constant feeding to survive.

In order to effectively push for a better world that heals, rather than fosters potentially profitable division, it is vital that we paint a clear and undeniable picture of this system’s ongoing violation of human rights, and the public’s complicity in it. As an incarcerated comrade from Decarcerate Louisiana pointed out in one of his emails, “Today, enslavers have multiplied to become a complex system of representatives, senators, mayors, governors, sheriffs, political action committees, the police, surveillance state, prosecutors, judges, wardens, and a billion dollar prison enterprise.” It is imperative that our work illustrates this system’s complexity and highlights pressure points where collective action can not only undermine, but obliterate, these positions of power. This is how we will work together to end mass incarceration and create an alternative rooted in genuine restoration and justice, not confinement, punishment, and the degradation of our very humanity.





# DSA Turns Out

When analyzing the law, there is a phrase that occasionally arises: “the exception that swallows the rule.” Essentially, it describes when an exception to a law becomes so large in practice or so morally egregious that it effectively nullifies the law.

If you open a typical history textbook to the section covering the Civil War and read the description of the Thirteenth Amendment, it will likely read something like, “The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery.” This is false. The Thirteenth Amendment does generally prohibit slavery, but it includes an important exception: “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” In a country that imprisons more people than any other and demands their uncompensated labor at the barrel of a gun, the Thirteenth Amendment is a law swallowed by the overwhelming blood and cruelty of its exception.

In response to this ongoing atrocity and the lives it has stolen, on August 21, 2018, incarcerated people at prisons in the United States initiated a nationwide strike. The participants, organizing with the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, made ten demands:

- 1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.*
- 2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.*

- 3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.*
- 4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.*
- 5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.*
- 6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans.*
- 7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.*
- 8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.*
- 9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories.*
- 10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called “ex-felons” must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count.*

On August 20th, DSA announced its national endorsement of the strike, using social media and meetings to encourage members to take part in events in support of its organizers and participants. Methods of support for the strike included phone zaps to prisons, donations to a national strike fund, and writing letters of solidarity to prisoners who faced retaliation for their participation in the strike.

In addition to the national organization's endorsement, individual chapters around the country also endorsed the strike and showed support through a variety of means. Chapters and working groups in at least 28 states endorsed the strike and released statements of solidarity, including: Alabama, California, Connecticut, DC, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. These statements, exemplified by those from the Birmingham, Quiet Corner (CT), Boise, New Orleans, and Portland, almost uniformly centered the strike participants and organizers as the focus of attention by including their stated demands and justifications.

Members from these chapters, as well as many others which did not officially endorse the strike, also showed solidarity by joining and coordinating events in support. Chapters in North Texas, Philadelphia, Broward County, and San Francisco participated in phone zaps to prisons to voice support for prisoners such as Heriberto Garcia, who held a hunger strike at New Folsom Prison in California. Members in Suffolk County similarly provided court support for organizer Stephen Figurasmith.

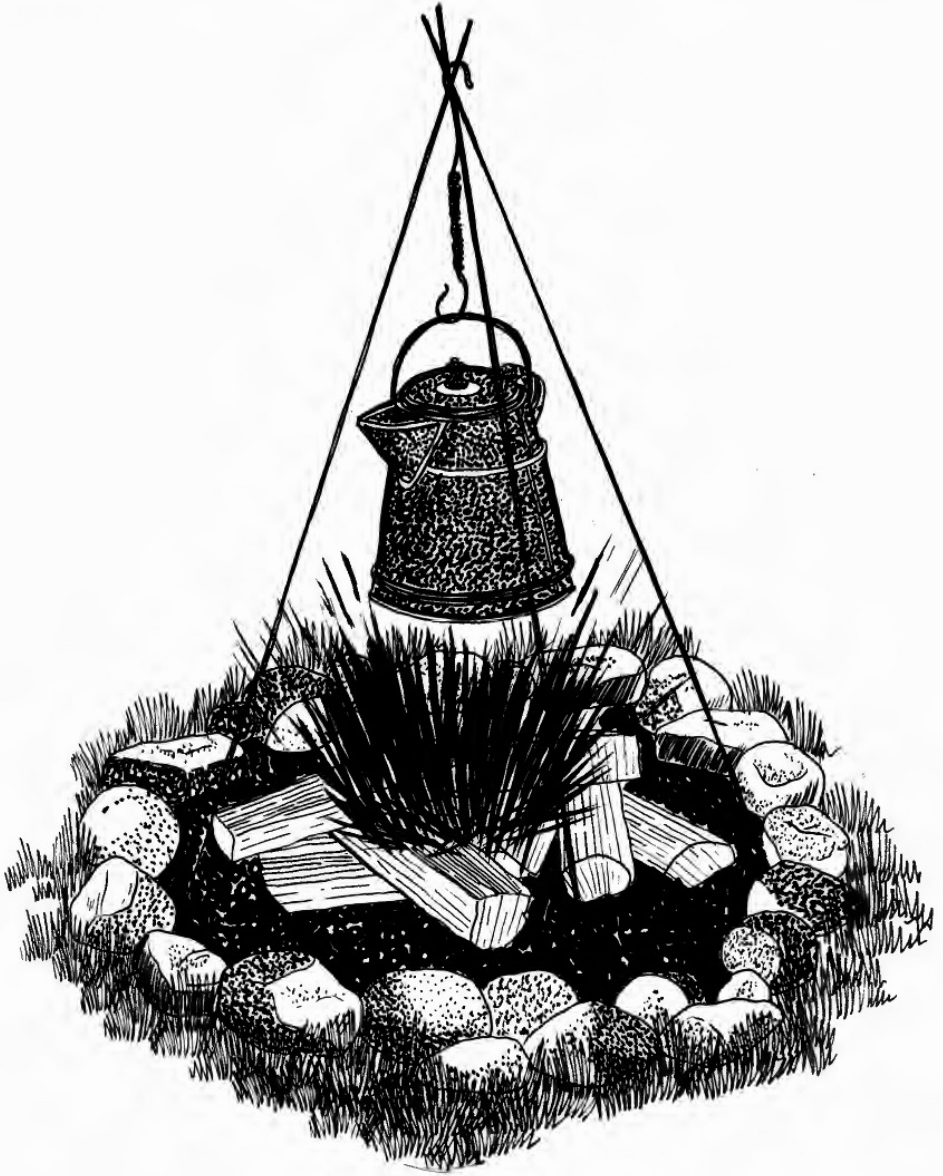
As members in Albuquerque, Middle Tennessee, and San Mateo County marched, chapters in Palm Beach County, Pittsburgh, Fort Worth, and Milwaukee held letter writing events. In Des Moines, Central Iowa DSA presented the strike's demands and demonstrated at the offices of Iowa Prison Industries, while Kansas City's Prison Abolition Reading Group discussed the grand jury report on the inspection of Jackson County Detention Center. Connecting the struggles forcing the strike to the need for democratic representation,

Central Arkansas DSA worked to help former prisoners restore their right to vote and created instructions on how they could do so on their own.

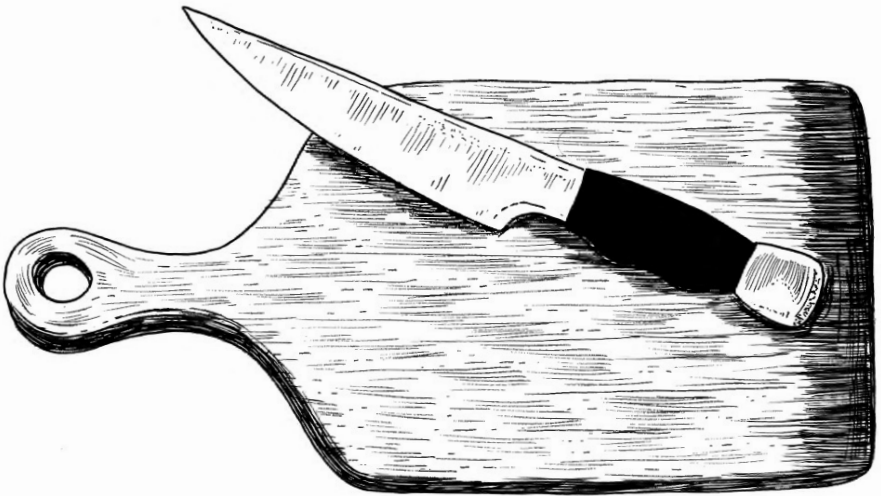
Arguably no chapter illustrated DSA's embrace of a diversity of organizing tactics better, however, than Sacramento. Although the chapter did not officially endorse the strike, it held an information session at a general membership meeting, in addition to publishing an article on its website in which a member detailed the reasons why socialists must support the action and how they could do so. Members also presented the strike's demands to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, distributed demand flyers at a brake light clinic, organized a phone zap, and held a letter writing night. Finally, the chapter hosted a screening of *13th*, a documentary on the prison-industrial complex directed by Ava DuVernay, as part of an education night on the prison-industrial complex.

*Although the strike ended officially on September 9th, the conditions which inspired it persist, demanding continued organizing. In the words of incarcerated organizer Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, "This movement needs not just public awareness but public support, not just allies, but comrades on the outside." Write to:*

*Kevin "Rashid" Johnson  
#1007485  
Sussex 1  
24414 Musselwhite Drive  
Waverly, VA 23891-1111*



# The People's Hearth



# Zac's Bread Recipe

Bread is a staple food in much of the world that is essential to human activity. Its cultural significance is as wide as it is varied. Juvenal satirized the public as only caring about bread and circuses. The Bolsheviks promised peace, land and bread. “If the people have no bread, let them eat cake” has been attributed to various oblivious French princesses. “The worker must have bread,” Rose Schneiderman spoke, inspiring the poem, “but she must have roses, too.” “Bread” and “dough” both mean money in English slang.

The domestication and cultivation of grain is a human endeavor that directly connects our labor to the land. Bread is sustenance. It is nature transformed by human labor. Breadmaking is simple, and learning to do it well, to understand its science and art, can deeply reconnect us to nature.

Below is a recipe for a “rustic” sourdough boule.

## **Equipment**

Kitchen scale

Nonreactive container, such as stainless-steel, glass or food-grade plastic

Large bowl

Stand-up mixer (optional)

Sharp knife



**Starter**

100 grams whole wheat flour per feeding

100 grams cool or lukewarm water per feeding

**Day 1:**

Combine the flour and water in a container large enough to hold the starter as it grows over the next few days. Loosely cover and store at room temperature, away from disruption.

**Day 2:**

To feed your starter, discard half by weight and combine another 100 grams of whole wheat flour and 100 grams of water.

**Day 3:**

Your starter should begin to bubble. Feed twice today by discarding half and adding 100 grams of flour and 100 grams of water.

**Day 4:**

Your starter should be ready today or tomorrow. It will have a tangy aroma that is acidic and alcoholic but not overwhelming. If your starter has not approximately doubled since you started, or isn't showing signs of bubbling, keep feeding as above, twice daily, until it does.

**Day 5+:**

You may keep the starter covered in the fridge. Feed it weekly, as above, or naturally as you bake bread once a week.

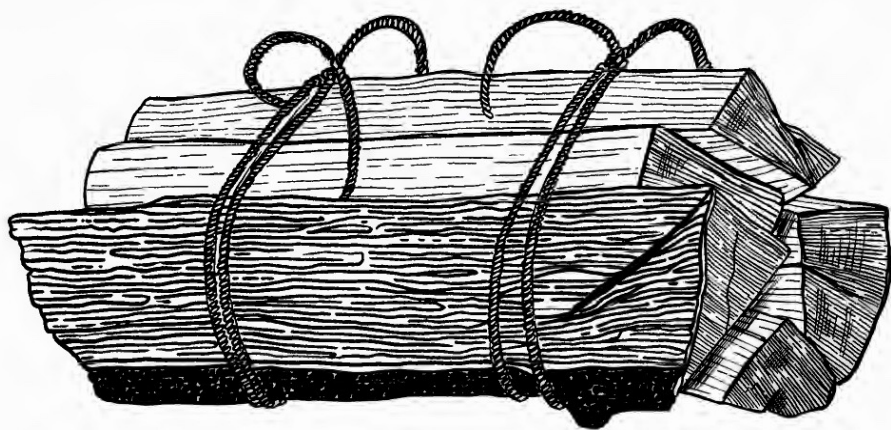
## **Recipe**

400 grams all-purpose flour  
60 grams whole wheat flour  
30 grams rye flour  
260 grams starter  
292 grams water  
13 grams salt  
1 tablespoon active dry yeast  
A few tablespoons oil, as necessary  
1 egg white

1. Combine ingredients in a standup mixer or by hand until thoroughly mixed into a sticky ball.
2. Knead by hand on a lightly floured surface until a soft, stretchy dough ball is formed. Add water or flour in very small amounts as needed.
3. Cover the bowl and set aside in a warm area to rise for 1 to 1.5 hours, until doubled in volume.
4. Place the round on a greased baking sheet and cover for another 1 to 1.5 hours. Near the end of the rise, preheat oven to 425°F.
5. Before baking, score the bread with a sharp knife, making a couple long slashes across the top of the loaf, forming a cross. Brush with egg white. Bake on a stone or baking sheet for 40 minutes to a bit less than an hour, depending, until it is golden brown on the outside.
6. Remove and let rest, cooling on a rack.



ALL  
POWER  
TO  
THE  
PEOPLE!



# Build

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