

build

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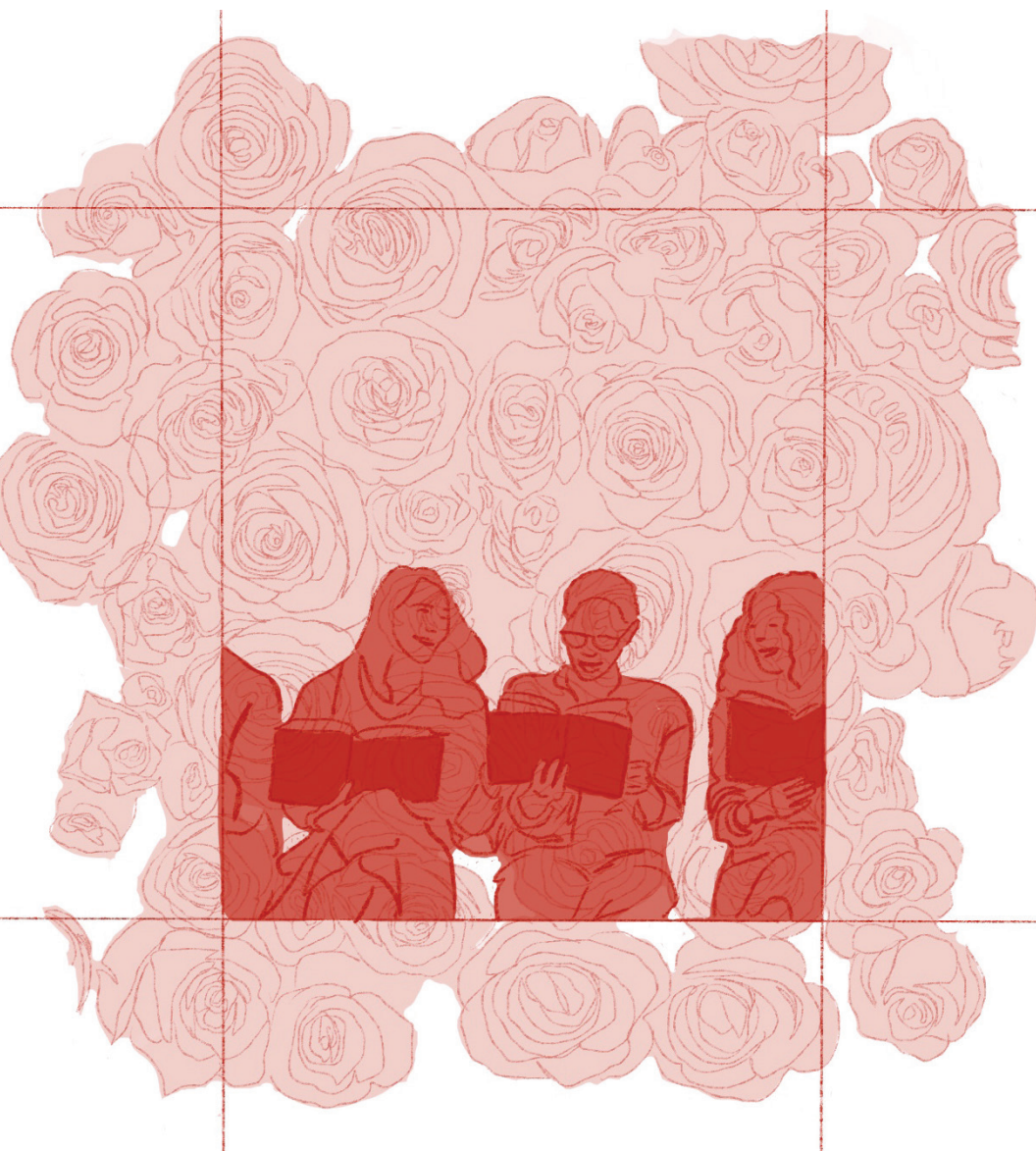


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Introduction

Marginalized and colonized comrades are often the target of passive-aggressive, and sometimes overtly aggressive, behavior rooted in toxic masculinity and white fragility within our local DSA chapters. In our Honolulu chapter, we decided that in order to address the lack of representation within our organizing ranks and leadership, and to truly align with leftist values and ideologies, we needed to make more space for marginalized and colonized people. Our bylaws now require a certain diversity quota to have a functioning chapter. I'm not sure how many chapters are already doing this, but I know that more and more are adopting similar bylaws.

However, with the rise of diversity quotas, the passive-aggressive behavior of white allies and colonized cis-men under the leadership of black women, women of color, and gender diverse people is becoming increasingly common. As in the broader society, we have seen that whether consciously or not, white allies and colonized cis-men sabotage diverse leadership by withdrawing their support and efforts. When engagement suddenly declines, when people volunteer less, when everyone says they are too busy to offer resources, it's not always happenstance. Being set up to fail is an all too common experience for the marginalized. We perform the invisible labor that allows so many others to succeed, but we don't have the same support when we step forward into leadership roles. Cis-men can continue to hold these positions based on their "individual" merits, ignoring all the ways society sets them up for success.

Being a marginalized person in a leftist organization is a balance between being considered a source of authority based on real life experiences, while also being invalidated when calling out said experiences. When we share our experiences with some allies, they will condemn those who

exhibit problematic behavior, and our voices are considered valid. But when we speak out about injustices we experience within our own ranks, our actions are perceived as hostile and unconstructive. When we actively and aggressively insist on addressing behavior rooted in toxic masculinity and white fragility in our own organizing spaces as we do in the larger world, we can end up being ostracized for it.

Too often, our allies are barely held accountable for their behavior; we're required to forgive them immediately so that there isn't a rift in the group, because they're still "decolonizing" and it's a "process" and they're "so grateful for us having the patience to work with them." Time and time again, we're forced to put ourselves aside for the adhesiveness of the chapter instead of white allies and colonized cis-men having to take real responsibility for their injustices. The only thing worse than white/cis-men saviors is white/cis-men guilt, because it still centers the oppressor and not the oppressed.

Part of what gives those of us on the margins of society the strength to constantly be working towards solidarity is that we truly believe that if we can educate people, we can include them in the fight against white supremacy and the patriarchy in America. But how can that be true if many our white allies and colonized cis-men comrades still display problematic behavior after these efforts? The most frightening thing for us is that, many of you have read the doctrine; you've read many texts authored by black women, women of color and gender diverse people; and you have even heard our real-life experiences when we've confided in you, but it wasn't enough to truly change your behavior. What does this mean for our future?

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Southwest Michigan DSA: Slow-Blooming Roses in the Rust Belt

Our story began in July of 2017. Members in Detroit DSA started a large email chain with every DSA member in Southwest Michigan. “We’re trying to connect you, good luck!” After that email, we met up several times, and people came and went, but eventually we had a base of people that became familiar faces. Over the next year, we worked to gain chapter recognition from National, build our movement locally, and work in solidarity with our community. Getting Southwest Michigan DSA to this point hasn’t been easy, but we’re glad to be where we are.

Southwest Michigan DSA covers the 6th Congressional district, which spans from Kalamazoo to the shores of Lake Michigan. In other words, a very large area! We chose to represent the entire region, rather than just Kalamazoo, for a couple of reasons. First, our core membership includes people from both rural and urban areas, and we love organizing together. Second, although we share some differences in urban/rural concerns, we also share connections to the area: a diverse, urban sprawl that developed as a collection of paper mills and pharmaceutical plants. Because of those industries, we have acute air and water concerns (like much of the Rust Belt), as well as a strong distrust of the wealthy and powerful. We also share the feeling that when given the chance, Michigan’s politicians prioritize the interests of those in the state’s eastern and bigger metro areas.

Our chapter’s spread-out nature isn’t the easiest landscape for organizing, and we’re still working to meet a lot of comrades who we know are out there. We’re also exploring the possibility of creating branches to cover our furthest members. Our membership represents a wide variety of backgrounds,

including retired union and veterans groups organizers, people working in education, food service, science and technology, and students starting a YDS chapter. This wide range of ages, experience levels with organizing, methods, approaches, and general ideas about what is needed, has been tremendously beneficial for our ability to develop new programs.

Our push for chapter status started immediately. We heard about organizing committee calls and jumped in on those to learn what to do. We filled out the forms and submitted them (sometimes multiple times), and spoke with our assigned contacts from National, who changed three times over the course of the journey. Finally, we were recognized as an Organizing Committee in July of 2018.

Over the summer in 2018, several of us attended the Rust Belt convention in Pittsburgh, where we learned that our frustrations weren't just our own. Other groups similarly felt dismissed by the focus on the coastal chapters and large projects, and it was good to feel solidarity with other chapters in a similar boat. Despite the obvious frustration, we knew we couldn't wait around for National to tell us what we needed to do. Without even having officers, we published a cookbook to raise some funds and organized several door-to-door canvassing sessions to discuss healthcare in our communities. We also began building coalitions with other radical groups through supporting their projects, such as ending our city/county's collaboration with I.C.E. and housing justice issues.

Finally, in January of 2019, we were recognized as a chapter by National. Throughout the process, there were times we felt neglected, especially as we watched bigger chapters bounce to recognition and apparent success right away. We could have used more support, guidance, and direction at times. At one point, not knowing who we were even supposed to contact anymore, we sent cold emails to Maria Svart asking for guidance about the application process.

It seemed too difficult. Some members got impatient waiting for recognition, and left to organize elsewhere, which was hard. We also debated just not becoming a chapter at all and forming our own socialist collective instead, but we knew we would be better off if we could get the support and resources from the national organization.

We've been busy and working hard. We really tried our hand at pure, bottom-up organizing, which built tons of comradery among us and kept people interested, but having more structure and guidance probably would have helped us. Unfortunately, we've faced significant burnout from members, including leaders who took on too much because of a lack of proper delegation and support within the chapter.

To improve how DSA functions across chapters, we recommend that bigger neighboring chapters (along with National) provide continued support and resources to smaller chapters. With our small number of members (and smaller amount of volunteer time), no matter how dedicated we are, it is difficult to administer our chapter while continuously reaching out to members and printing materials. Borrowing experience and resources from larger chapters would definitely benefit us and probably other small chapters as well.

Going forward, we're excited to have our official bylaws, officially delegate roles to newly-elected officers, and continue building our working groups centered around healthcare, environmental justice, and the solidarity economy/mutual aid. We plan to not only continue growing our membership, but also develop our organizing capacity and skill level. SW Michigan DSA has a lot of skills and talents already, coupled with a lot of heart.

To learn more about Southwest Michigan DSA's work, contact the chapter at DSAsouthwestMI@gmail.com.

Yes on Prop A: Austin DSA's Campaign to Win the Largest Housing Bond in Texas History

Laying the Groundwork – How to pressure city council into a historic public investment in housing

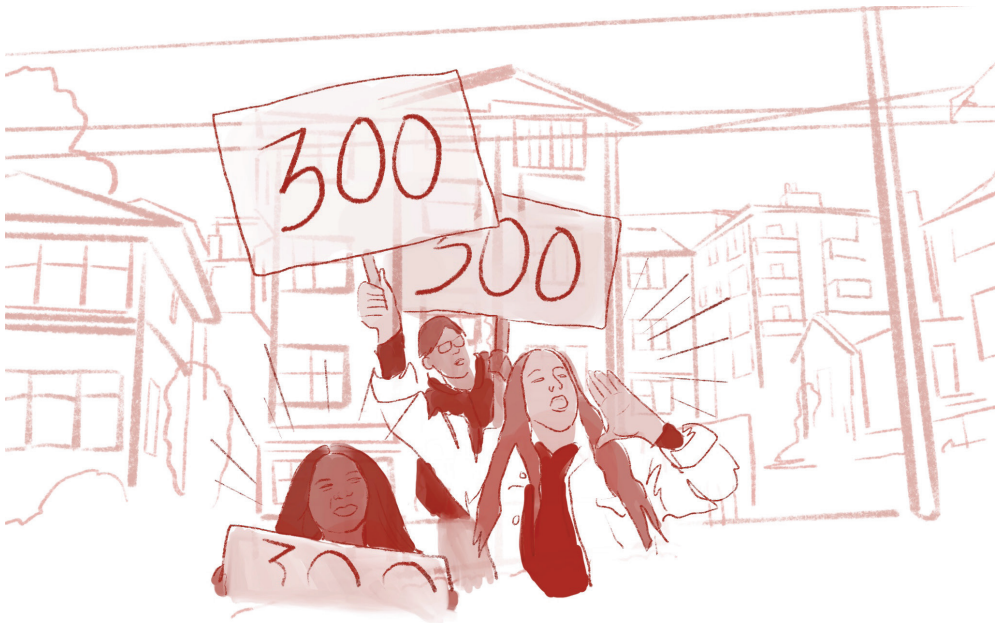
Marina Roberts, Housing Committee Co-Chair

A significant piece of this campaign relied on a DSA-sympathetic city councilperson working with our chapter. Replicating this campaign elsewhere will require initial research on the local history of housing bonds and identifying allies in local government, because without a councilmember to put this item on the agenda it would have been very difficult to target city council as a whole with a specific demand. We have an ongoing internal conversation about the Housing Committee's reliance on elected officials to move policy forward (plus in this case, the reliance on our organization to advance a particular city councilperson's agenda). Still, for now, the organization's size and capacity are limitations we have to reckon with. Although this campaign was largely winnable because we allied with an elected official, Austin DSA was instrumental in pushing the bond to a historically high amount.

We did this with a months-long campaign which involved mobilizing our members to contact their councilmembers to support a \$300 million housing bond. The next section details how DSA and external groups collaboratively determined the \$300m figure. In addition to mobilizing our members, we identified, met with, and mobilized members from over a dozen other housing and labor organizations in Austin to sign onto the \$300m bond number publicly. We also asked these organizations to have their members contact councilmembers, increasing the power of our demand.

When the housing bond was on the city council agenda, we mobilized dozens of folks from DSA and our ally organizations to testify. We brought signs that said “300” in large red letters and testified regarding the difficulties of finding housing when wages stay flat and rent goes up, the proliferation and experience of homelessness, the need to build housing under safe working conditions, watching rising housing costs force neighbors out of the city, and the impossible decision of choosing between rent and other necessities.

Behind the scenes, the councilperson we were working with compromised with another councilperson to lower the bond’s size to \$250m (still several times larger than any previous housing bond in Texas history). Ultimately this number was presented, and while the councilmembers chipped away at other parts of the budget, our organizing made further lowering the housing bond impossible. The \$250m housing bond passed, and thanks to public pressure, even councilmembers who doubted this number would win at the ballot box voted yes.



Bond Politics – Reviewing history to determine an ambitious bond amount

Mark M, Housing Committee

Our initial discussions around this project came from members aware of the history of these bonds in 2006, 2012, and 2013:

- In 2006, voters approved a \$55m AH bond, with 62% voting for it.
- In 2012, voters rejected a \$78m AH bond, with 49% voting for it.
- In 2013, voters approved a \$65m AH bond, with 60% voting for it.

We knew past bonds were far smaller than Austin could afford and that organized support from Keep Austin Affordable, a political action committee, was central to winning the 2013 vote after 2012's loss. Organizers knew pushing for a large bond amount was important, and winning the vote was essential. Before Austin's November 2018 vote, Portland and Los Angeles passed housing bonds of \$260m and \$1.2b, respectively. We felt this gave us strong precedent to pass something of a similar scale for a city of Austin's size.

In Austin, bonds proceed through three stages:

1. In March 2018, the Bond Election Advisory Task Force (BEATF) recommended bond amounts after receiving input from the community. The task force initially planned to recommend an \$80m affordable housing bond. Due to DSA's strong advocacy and the inclination of several BEATF members to support a radically larger amount, the task force ultimately recommended \$160m to the city council.
2. In May 2018, the city council took this recommendation and community input and decided what to put on the ballot, although they finalized their decision in August.
3. In November 2018, the bond amount went on the ballot for final voter approval.

Moving from \$80m to \$160m to \$250m at each stage was a tangible indicator that we were meaningfully affecting the process, which really raised morale. It was apparent that without organized effort, primarily from DSA but also from the many allies that joined us throughout the process, we could be looking at a much lower and less inspiring amount of housing built in Austin.

We wrote and passed our demands after the BEATF stage, but members were vocal about the \$300m figure even in front of BEATF. We were consistent throughout the process, and likely the first group to make the demand in a unified way.

Knowledge of both the history and process of bond elections was important in communicating to membership that we could win this fight and in motivating people to not only engage at city hall, but also go into the community to knock doors and ask their friends to join DSA to help us.

The full need identified in the Strategic Housing Blueprint adopted by council in 2017 was \$6b or 48k housing units. While the bond fell short of this figure, both the state and federal government should help fill this gap as well. It's not up to the city of Austin alone.

We knew the \$1b bond for Austin Independent School District in 2017 passed with 72% of the vote; public schools are broadly popular in Austin. Our task was making affordable housing as popular, and we succeeded: over 200 thousand people, 73%, voted to support affordable housing.

Building a Movement (Not Just Winning a Vote) – How we targeted working class renters

Mike Nachbar, Housing Committee

The Austin Tenants' Council published a list of all affordable or non-market-rate housing in Austin. We centered our efforts around this housing for 2 reasons. First, tenants whose housing had been paid for by previous housing bonds or other affordable housing programs understood how the bonds

worked, and we would not need to explain it. Second, Austin requires that affordable housing must be only available to lower income and working class people, who we know will be the base of any successful socialist movement.

We focused on affordable developments but supplemented them with market-rate apartments. We did not target any single family homes, both because apartment complexes allow canvassers to knock more doors in the same amount of time, and because our campaign's language spoke to the experience of renting. We used an algorithm suggested by another chapter where we looked at the percentage of a building's residents who voted in their first primary in 2016. To find this, we took the voter file and grouped by the first line of the address.

The algorithm provided some apartments with working class residents, but it also provided some newer, more upscale buildings that catered to transplants who may have only voted in their first Texas primary in 2016. Many of these upscale buildings contained nice liberals who supported the campaign but did not engage our canvassers deeply or personally. In a few cases, security asked canvassers to leave. In a subsequent campaign we were more successful finding buildings with more working class residents using the Zillow API to get the costs and ages of buildings.

In the affordable complexes and some of the market rate complexes, the conversations tended to go deeper. Most people we spoke with already understood Austin's affordable housing program, and while they often had issues with their specific property manager, they supported the program and recognized the need to fund more affordable housing. Because we did not need to explain how affordable housing works or convince them of its merits, we could focus on discussing their specific experiences, their ideas for solving the housing crisis, and the possibility of a world without landlords.

While many people we spoke with expressed interest in socialism and a desire to get involved either with the bond

campaign or DSA in general, we got a disappointingly low response rate when we followed up by phone, text, and email. In future campaigns, we plan to visit people who express interest in getting involved a second and third time to deepen their familiarity with DSA and show our commitment to working with them.

Making Radical Literature – The beginning-to-end process of creating our own lit

Rachel Tepper, Housing Committee

Designing the literature for the DSA Prop A campaign was a group effort. We decided to create our own literature because Keep Austin Affordable’s literature did not embody our socialist values. To start discussing ideas, we created a “housingbondlit” slack channel. To build momentum and spread the word that DSA supports Prop A, we created a logo and Facebook frame to share with members.

We initially drafted the text using Google docs and refined it as a group. For our first few canvasses, we created a foldable leaflet we could easily print in black and white. After a few canvasses we realized the literature was overly technical and powerful phrases like “Homes for People not for Profit” resonated more with people than the charts and graphs. We significantly rewrote the text to cut the word count in half and simplify the language.

After finalizing the text, we translated it into Spanish and formatted it on a door hanger with English on one side and Spanish on the other. We ordered 10,000 door hangers at SonicPrint, a union print shop. We overestimated the number of door hangers and ended up with a surplus, which we just hung on doors without canvassing in the last weeks before election day. We also ordered 5,000 business cards with links to our website. While we mostly distributed the door hangers during our canvasses, the business cards were useful to pass out on the street and buses, and at parks and public events.

Answering the Right Questions – Refining a housing justice message that speaks to renters

Marina Roberts, Housing Committee Co-Chair

While we discussed the campaign’s messaging at length while working on the literature and handouts, turning that messaging into canvassing conversations with renters required a different approach. To begin, we brainstormed key things we wanted people to know about the bond, focusing less on details and more on broad ideas. In other words, whereas the *lit* broke down specific programs the bond would fund, the canvassing *message* told people the bond would create thousands of affordable homes in Austin. But our focus was not just passing a bond, but also sharing a message about housing justice, so the greater challenge was deciding how to take the discussion both places.

We used a “deep canvassing” approach, meaning our goal was having deeper conversations with people about housing to understand their perspectives and better speak to their concerns. Our campaign started with a three-day canvassing blitz on Labor Day weekend, which we used to gather feedback about what worked and what didn’t. We drafted a script which included questions to ask renters to get conversations going, such as:

- How long have you lived in Austin? Have you seen the rent go up in that time?/Since you’re new to town, what was your experience like finding housing here?
- Do you know anyone who has moved out of town because they couldn’t afford to live here?
- Have you ever had a bad experience with a landlord, or do you know anyone else who has?

Some questions worked, but some didn’t. Through the initial three-day canvassing blitz and running trainings at the beginning of every canvass, we collected insights, refined our message, and taught canvassers the most effective messaging, eventually without really relying on a script. That said, the

trainings at the beginning of every canvass were critically important. We had to pair experienced canvassers with new folks and answer a lot of questions before getting started, so canvassers could get comfortable speaking about the housing bond even if they showed up not knowing much about it.

Some feedback during the campaign surprised us. For example, our messaging initially emphasized explaining how bond money worked. We assumed people would have a lot of questions about how the city was funding the bond, whose taxes would rise, and how we could afford to spend \$250 million on affordable housing. But it turned out most folks weren't really concerned with the money. In fact, when we asked the right questions and then explained that people could vote on a proposition that would generate money for affordable housing, the overwhelming majority of the time the support was already there. Clearly, a lot of renters, who represent just over half of Austin, have an uncomplicated desire to find and stay in affordable and habitable housing.

The best lesson I learned from this part of the campaign was that canvassers do best when we are nimble, meaning when we have the flexibility to quickly adapt in the moment to the person we are talking with. Sometimes people have questions about specifics and want to get technical, sometimes people are deeply empathetic and have stories to tell, sometimes people connect our conversation to other issues. When we can speak to the questions people actually have, create the space for folks to share their stories, and provide an opportunity for them to engage with other issues like health justice or labor rights, we can really connect with people. Those connections bring others into the fight, or help pull them from indifference toward support for our movement.

One Big Picture View of the Campaign

Madeline Detelich, Housing Committee Co-Chair (June 2018 – December 2018)

I have tried processing the campaign through a critical lens since it ended. The campaign largely consisted of weekly

canvassing and weekly working group meetings. We worked very hard, but I don't think we took enough time for strategizing or analysis, so it is easy to feel like we unnecessarily overextended ourselves. Early in the campaign, polling showed the bond was very likely to pass by a wide margin. Regardless, we embarked on our canvassing with the goal of knocking on as many renters' doors as possible. We focused a lot on volume.

Despite this criticism, I simultaneously approve of our canvassing initiative. We were aware that an affordable housing bond was not a solution to the oppressive and common experience of housing insecurity in our neoliberal world, and it was important to us to take the opportunity to talk with people about the broader issue of housing under capitalism. It's hard to beat the experience of going door-to-door for getting a sense of the concerns and issues working class people face, which our choice to focus on apartment complexes and affordable housing developments guaranteed. Given how our society's structure ensures people rarely interact with others outside their class, there is intrinsic value in knocking on strangers' doors to talk about issues that are universal to all but the wealthiest.

On one of our canvasses, I knocked on doors at a public housing complex for seniors. Many residents shared their stories of being at the mercy of negligent management companies who acted as if their low-income tenants should be grateful for any attention, no matter how slow or ineffectual the action to resolve their problems. There were weeks during the hottest months with no AC and chronically unreliable elevators. Here we were, trying to secure votes for an affordable housing bond from residents whose experiences living in affordable housing had been negative. In spite of this, many of them did not actually need persuading to vote for more affordable housing. Still, I felt the need to relay our hopes that the increase in affordable housing options in the city might give tenants like them more leverage against their negligent property managers.

I guess I often felt the need to justify to myself what the housing bond would be good for, and maybe this persistent feeling is why I am taking a more critical tone in my reflection. The term affordable housing can elicit skepticism. Accessing regulated affordable housing feels so out of reach, and there's a general sense that even that would not necessarily be financially comfortable for people making minimum wage or just a bit higher or for people with precarious sources of income. If you're a socialist, you may think housing should be decommodified or free or at least cost so little that it does not eat up a significant portion of your income every month or leave so many so vulnerable to eviction.

Leaving the objections over "affordable" aside, I know the housing bond will increase the amount of affordable housing in this city by more than we would have gotten without DSA's involvement. That will take pressure off the market and even shift the power balance a little bit away from landlords to the working class. Perhaps fewer residents will be forced to accept deteriorating buildings and faltering AC units.

Perhaps I have become unable to believe we will survive long enough to see the benefits of anything that looks like incremental change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been around since 1988. They even shared the Nobel Prize with Al Gore in 2007, but it wasn't until their most recent report and the 12 years countdown that came out of it, that the IPCC emerged into the forefront of the collective consciousness. It's hard to find any writing these days that doesn't mention the "IPCC report." More people than ever now know our world must change immediately to have any chance of dodging total climate disaster. The money from this housing bond will be disbursed over time, spent on a variety of projects, many of which will not be finished in the 12 years we have to cut emissions.

There is no doubt our current housing paradigm must end. I recently drove to go hiking, and leaving Austin in this particular direction is always a study in extravagant climate denial. What

used to be hills of ash juniper and limestone are now seas of McMansions. The price of their little slice of paradise is hours of driving each day, but here in Texas, a long commute doesn't persuade many people to trade in their trucks and SUVs. Yes, I'm panicking a bit about the relentless river of CO2 emissions gushing into our atmosphere from highways that connect rapidly multiplying sprawl to urban centers that are adapting too slowly to our ever-hotter reality.

In one respect, the housing bond was good because it was a grain upon which a conversation about social housing in Austin could precipitate. We designed our literature and canvassing training to encourage a broader analysis. Housing justice in Austin primarily centers around the skyrocketing rental and home prices in neighborhoods that were recently populated by black and brown residents because of explicitly racist codes. There were people who opposed the bond on the grounds that it would not exclusively benefit these long-term Austin residents and could even harm those who owned property, as bond money is raised through property taxes. In fact, the awkward question of the impact of increases in property taxes on low-income homeowners was often raised. I, for one, don't want to halt all growth in our city, but I am sensitive to the pain this unmanaged growth selectively inflicts on working class and black and brown Austin residents.

Social democrats like the late Tony Judt know you can't precisely slice up the population based on need, design public programs only benefiting the neediest tranches, and expect the rest of society, where most power is concentrated, to be content with this allocation of funding. We know how this strategy works when we listen to current residents of our long-failing public housing system describe their housing situation as something they wish they could escape. As socialists, we know public housing should be high quality, desirable, and even beautiful, not only because it is how it can work, but because it is the way towards a less-alienated existence. We know we must have abundant mixed-income, public housing that people feel

proud to call home. And if we listen to climate scientists, we know we need housing to allow more people to live on public transit routes and in walking distance of their work, school, and lives. The path to get there is less clear, and the muddiness is strongly felt when advocating for a measure like this affordable housing bond, the largest in Austin's history, larger than it would have been without our involvement, but still only 2.7% of the projected need to address the housing crisis in Austin.

It is not counterproductive or a waste of time to force more cities across the country to allocate larger portions of their tax revenue to building more housing the working class can afford. Seeing our members testify at City Hall, with an appeal for "300 or bust" to begin to address the housing crisis that is so deeply felt here in Austin, motivated me, personally, to commit a lot of my free time to the campaign, which strengthened my ties to our chapter and gave me valuable organizing skills. I'd like to think this experience is shared, and that our presence in city politics can at least serve to galvanize new members, waiting in the wings for the right campaign or action.

Still, DSA organizers must be open about the limitations to localized salves against housing injustice. It can be difficult, and even paralyzing, to concentrate on the large-scale changes necessary to overhaul housing in America and treat it like a right instead of an increasingly out-of-reach privilege. Through campaigning for this bond, we thought deeply about the tangled roots of housing injustice, learned from people feeling its effects, and collectively dreamt of a better world. Because of this, I'm proud of my involvement. Our weekly canvasses and weekly planning meetings had us going at an exhausting pace for two full months, and I think that stymied a lot of valuable analysis and strategizing. Hopefully future campaigns will be conducted with less of an emphasis on maximizing volume of door knocks to make space for more intentional socialist organizing.

For more information about this campaign, please contact Austin DSA's Housing Committee at housing@austindsa.org.

Baldur's Gate DSA – Building Solidarity, One Dragon at a Time



The garish sun fell down upon the bustling market in the small hamlet of Steidir. A person screams for help from down the road. A wizard, a vagabond, a monk, and a sleepy gnome rush towards the cry. Olga Brightwood's children have been kidnapped! A band of cloaked thieves stole her children and rushed them away to the north. The vagabond quickly asked if Olga had, "any reward for my trouble?" The monk hurried over to the market to trade some knives to gain some food and fire starter. The gnome heads to the inn to get a beer, or seven.

Thus began BuxMont DSA's inaugural Dungeons & Dragons campaign. Over the next few weeks, a few members of Philly DSA's suburban branch gathered at a private home to fight magical creatures, discover pirates' treasure, and climb a massive mountain range. The quest is ongoing, but the experience has been embraced by BuxMont DSA as a great way to get to know each other, solve problems outside of organizing a Medicare For All canvass, and to build comradery while slaying dragons.

We set forth on our quest to create a Dungeons & Dragons DSA campaign when we at BuxMont realized many of our members were under the drinking age, but still wanted to attend non-organizing DSA events. Many folks who were not underage did not associate alcohol with fun! We already hosted monthly happy hours at local breweries and bars (some with food!), but we decided to create some sort of game night. Early on in our Slack and at our meetings we planned to sojourn on a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, mainly as a joke. Only a few of us had played a tabletop RPG; most were only familiar with RPGs in the video game form, such as *Skyrim*, *Final Fantasy* or *World of Warcraft*. Luckily, our DM (Dungeon Master/Gamemaster) was very forgiving of wrong choices and clumsy questions. My character was only stuck in the first town for three game sessions — a bit excessive.

We highly recommend to other small chapters to embark on a quest of your own, maybe not with Dungeons & Dragons, but perhaps Settlers of Catan, or Magic: The Gathering. If board games are not your chapter's thing, create a kickball team — like our comrades in the Socialist Kickball Club in North Carolina. Non-drinking events are essential to work with your local YDSA organizers; putting them in touch with the chapter or branch and building an accessible environment for friendship and solidarity. Dungeons & Dragons is also physically accessible to a wide range of people and is augmentable for most needs. Finally, most people have never played the game and almost everyone is a 'noob'.

In some ways beating the final boss in Dungeons & Dragons, usually a dragon or floating eyeball, is like fighting capitalism. It seems impossible; you may have to overcome countless smaller obstacles. Someone, the Dungeon Master, knows more than you do. But, when we work together, build solidarity, and 'level up' our organizing, the dragon may be closer to defeat than we think.

To learn more about BuxMont DSA's work, contact the chapter at buxmontsoc@gmail.com. You can also follow them on Twitter @BuxMontDSA.



Creating Political Education Retreats

Introduction

The purpose of this article is twofold: First, to discuss the goals and strategies of the Rust Belt Political Education Retreat hosted by the DSA Steel Valley organizing committee. Second, to provide high-level guidance on how other regional chapters can design and implement similar curriculums for members and in community political education.

Political education is good praxis for all comrades: applying core Marxist concepts to a region's historical and current events demonstrates the ongoing importance and relevance of socialist principles. Making educational resources available and accessible to *all* members (and non-members alike), and ensuring the resources are engaging and relevant, creates a shared knowledge base within the socialist community.

Part 1: Retreat Goals / Resources

The Rust Belt Political Education Retreat was hosted by the Steel Valley DSA in Aliquippa, PA, a steel mill town approximately 19 miles from Pittsburgh. The weekend retreat was centered on a one-day intensive with two goals: to educate regional members about the history and political economy of the Rust Belt, and to use feedback to develop a curriculum for adopting at different chapters. Members from across the Rust Belt attended: Akron, Cleveland, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, and Centre County were represented.

The retreat weekend was spearheaded by the Political Education Retreat Coordination Collective, a cross-chapter committee to organize the event. Rebecca Tarlau, co-chair of

Centre County DSA, facilitated discussion and documented each session's feedback. Rebecca's expertise in critical pedagogy and teaching were foundational to building an educational curriculum accessible to *all* members. Each section's contents were presented by Carl Davidson, DSA Steel Valley member and co-chair of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism. Carl is well familiar with the unique history and industry of the Rust Belt and the contemporary issues faced by a post-industrial mill town.

Informing the curriculum was the book *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia* by Steven Stoll. Attendees were encouraged to read Stoll's book, and a small selection of articles, in anticipation of the weekend.

Retreat Contents / Schedule

For the one-day intensive, the History and Political Economy of the Rust Belt was split into three presentations, followed by a 45-minute small-group breakout and a 45-minute large-group feedback discussion. The three presentations comprising the curriculum were:

Part 1: Natives, Settlers, Slaves; Core Class Categories

Part 2: Modes of Production: From Householders to Proletarians

Part 3: Capitalism's Creations and Destruction: From Coal and Steel to Rust and Precarity

Sections were arranged chronologically, from pre-settlement through the 21st century. Each slide (and section) used historical events and social history to frame concepts like systematic injustice, the social construction of race, and regionalism. Photographs, maps, paintings, and documents were added to each slide and were contextualized against historic events.

The small-group breakout sessions teased out core concepts of the presentation section. For instance, from Part 1: Natives, Settlers, Slaves: Core Class Categories, the following theoretical

concepts were identified as essential frameworks to the content:

Indigenous histories, private property, white supremacy, primitive accumulation, settler vs. extractive colonialism, conflicted consciousness, patriarchy, economic functions of slavery, household mode of production, exchange vs. use value.

The large-group discussions provided direct feedback on content, length, layout, and the mechanics presentation process: in effect, a brainstorming session to improve and hone the curriculum.

Post-Retreat Follow-Ups

One of the immediate points of feedback was to split the final presentation section into two parts, subsequently creating four parts in the curriculum.

After the retreat, attendees continued collaborating on curriculum development: biweekly, one-hour meetings revisited each section slide-by-slide. Notes and slides were kept on Google Docs and Slides so participants could follow along and contribute.

Part 2: Creating a Learning Curriculum

Pedagogy

Information content alone isn't enough to create a great curriculum: the curriculum has to be interesting, engaging, and relevant to participants to capture their attention. Different learning modalities encourage individual participation and understanding. Besides a lecture-style presentation, chapters can supplement learning with:

- Primary sources: letters, articles, photographs, artwork, propaganda
- Roleplay activities: boss vs. striking steelworkers, life in a company town
- Rich media: music and videos, including strike songs (plus,

singing together is good praxis!)

- Small group breakouts to discuss and debate concepts: primitive accumulation, social reproduction theory, etc.

Distribution & Presentation

After developing a relevant curriculum, chapters can segment and distribute its contents in a variety of ways. Potential audiences extend outside DSA membership and could include local colleges and university students and community members. Possibilities include:

- Socialist Day School: full-day intensive
- General meeting: multiple sessions
- Socialist Night Club: 1-2 hour evening sessions (especially suitable for college and university settings. Maryland's YDSA chapter regularly runs Socialist Night Club for current and interested members, and can be referenced for a successful model)

When considering venues for presentations, attention should be paid to accessibility and accommodation. Consider co-hosting or collaboration at a local library, community center, leftist bookstore, or university.

Final Thoughts

All of the presented processes and ideas in this article should be considered a starting point. Take what's useful, discard what's useless, and appropriate the structure to the unique needs of each chapter.

Regional history and political economy are conceptually rich, relevant ways to speak to membership's personal relationships with an area: education helps with chapter base-building, and creates solidarity between members.

To learn more about Steel Valley DSA's work, check out their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/steelvalleydsa.

Parenting in DSA

I am sitting at a cafe and play area, writing this article and making calls to facilitators for the Dallas pre-convention conference. My child is a few yards away, dancing and playing with one of her “DSA uncles,” so I can get some work done.

Parenting in a capitalist society is isolating, especially as a stay-at-home parent. Society largely overlooks the amount of labor that goes into raising and caring for a child, and without the budget to regularly bring her to expensive toddler programs and play areas, making other parent friends is difficult. Instead of society pulling together to share the labor of raising all of our children, parents are expected to manage it on their own in their own homes. This isn't great for the kids, as they miss out on vital interaction with people of all ages and backgrounds. Even in school and daycare, children tend to only interact with children their same age and background, in addition to a limited number of adults. It also isn't great for parents, who are overworked and forced to be experts in every aspect of raising a child, without the support systems we so desperately need.

DSA can provide another option for raising our next generation. An option focused on supporting parents and children, that pools resources and teaches children what a compassionate, cohesive community looks like. In exercising this option, parents would receive the space they need to organize against a neoliberal regime which has shifted the burden of raising children onto individual working families. We also have the opportunity to raise children in an inclusive community free from some of the pressures of capitalism that can be so toxic and limiting to young humans.

While I experience many of the difficulties inherent to organizing in a space with largely childless men, I also get the opportunity to get a glimpse of what “it takes a village” really means and how beautiful it can be. I joined DSA while

heavily pregnant, so my child has been part of our chapter her entire life. Initially, there were some struggles understanding and accepting me and my family, such as meeting times late at night, socials and events consistently held at bars, and some resistance to having kids around. At times, I was accused of being selfish for fighting for more inclusive spaces for families and children. However, over time, the chapter came to understand what being more inclusive towards children meant and became very welcoming towards her. She comes to meetings and events when it makes sense, and everyone understands when I can't make an action because of her. We host meetings and socials quite a bit, which allows my husband and I to both participate without having to leave at her bedtime.

Even more than that, my toddler has become a part of a larger family. Members take the time to help me care for her. They watch her so I can take a shower or catch up on laundry and DSA work while my husband is at work. They come with us to the park and to run errands, since it can be difficult and exhausting to go out with her alone. They are not parents themselves, but they love my child and recognize the importance of supporting children and their parents.

Unfortunately, such an informal system is quite fragile. While the entire chapter is supportive, it depends largely on the irregular work schedules of the DSA uncles who help us out so much. If that changes, things might get more difficult for us. With more formal structures in place, a DSA support system for families would be more durable and able to support more and more families in growing and fighting capitalism.

Families, including children, are an important part of the working class and should not be invited to events as mere afterthoughts, but actively encouraged to attend events (with an understanding that certain actions are not safe for children). Hold chapter events specifically designed for children, such as Radical Storytime, an outing to a museum with relevant exhibits, or a child-led hike through native ecosystems. This

will show parents and children that you want them to be a part of the organization and are willing to put effort into making them welcome, while also providing a safe space for parents to connect with one another and share support systems. Perhaps just as importantly, socials like these help non-parents experience what it is like to interact with young people who haven't been so thoroughly beaten down by capitalism or internalized the alienation inherent to our society.

If you aren't sure how to best accommodate or support parents and children within your local, ask parents who do not regularly attend events what you can do. Listen and examine where the most effective changes can be made. Often, meeting times clash with bedtime or socials take place at bars or other establishments that are not particularly child-friendly. Offer support during official DSA events, but also at other times as well. If your chapter is large enough or has enough interested members, form a childcare collective or formal childcare program. Most of all, recognize that children are fully human people with their own perspectives and intrinsic value, and their parents are working night and day to raise our next generation of socialists who will hopefully carry on our work in building a safe and democratic version of humanity.

If you are a parent, please do not feel as though you can't go to DSA meetings or be an active member. If your chapter doesn't offer childcare or make some of their events family friendly, ask them to. Your comrades should recognize your children as comrades too and accommodate them. This should be our most basic expectation of our fellow organizers and socialists. We will take care of each other and value our comrades regardless of their age or family type.

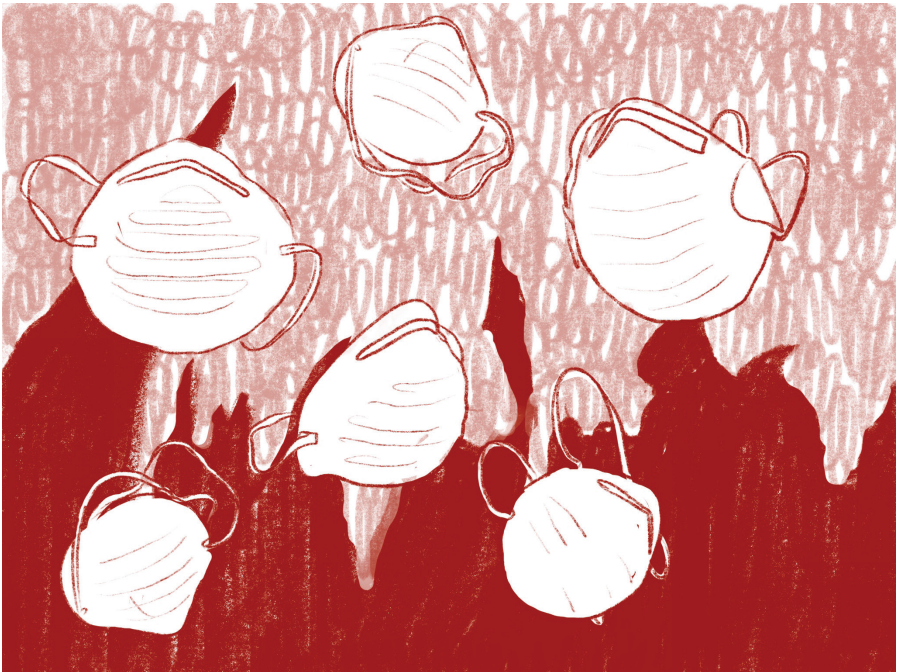
To learn more about Orlando DSA's work, contact the chapter at DSAoforlando@gmail.com. You can also follow them on Twitter @Orlando_DSA.

Fighting for Public Utilities Across California

In November 2018, San Francisco was orange. Frantic DSA SF members drove out to the suburbs, scouting warehouses. The only goal: find anywhere, at all, selling N95 masks. As with everything that follows — we couldn't do it alone.

The Camp Fire that destroyed Paradise was only growing. Most of Northern California was covered in smoke: for nearly a week, we had the worst air quality in the world. The rich fled San Francisco and the middle class huddled next to \$300 HEPA filters. The homeless could do neither. Despite prior fires, San Francisco city government was caught unprepared.

We couldn't get supplies by ourselves. Local hardware stores had run out, and nothing could be bought. Instead, we worked with another grassroots initiative: Mask Oakland. They had



figured out both the supply chain and distribution to interested groups. Ultimately, they would provide over 85,000 masks in San Francisco, the Bay Area, Chico and Sacramento.

For the next few days, DSA San Francisco tried to take care of a city in crisis.

Masks were dropped off at homeless navigation centers, SROs, and encampments. Comrades delivered masks to the striking Marriott workers. The table in front of City Hall went through 200 masks in an hour, including children's sizes. DSA SF circulated a zine with instructions on how to make an air filter using \$10 worth of supplies — and how to put the N95 mask on correctly. In our office, members kept office hours and handed free masks out to the general public.

DSA SF had distributed over 6,500 N95 masks. The city government of San Francisco handed out only 1,600. It was the eve of Thanksgiving. The fight had just started.

On November 25th, 2018, the Camp Fire was finally out. It had burnt 240 square miles; displaced over 50,000 people and killed 85. It was the deadliest wildfire in California's history.

The culprit: Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), headquartered in San Francisco, and traded on the NY Stock Exchange. The courts had also ruled the utility responsible for deadly fires in 2017, which left 47 people dead. In the CA legislature, bill "SB901" allowed PG&E to avoid responsibility by forcing ratepayers to absorb the cost. PG&E was destroying our state and forcing us to pay extra for the damage. Meanwhile, the executives collected millions of dollars in bonuses.

Now, PG&E was trying to get off the hook — again.

On November 29th, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) anticipated a calm hearing. Ignorable statements from the public followed by a classic extension of SB901, another



public bailout and a return to normal. But at the end of the comment session, the audience didn't back down.

Protestors unfurled large red banners. Comrades wore N95 masks, an iconic symbol of the smoke apocalypse. DSA SF was joined in the action by Mask Oakland, Local Clean Energy Alliance, East Bay Clean Power Alliance, Communities for a Better Environment and Diablo Rising Tide.

This was a primal outcry of disgust and anger, but initial chants were slow to take off. Many people did not have experience with direct action. Finally, an experienced organizer remembered an old classic — “Shut It Down!” The meeting ground to a halt. Eventually, the cops went in, and dragged Craig, one of DSA SF's comrades, out of the meeting.

“The fastest way to learn is by doing,” Craig says about the experience.

So, comrades learned about direct action — quickly. Scenarios were played out, tactics and allies discussed in detail. Chants were eventually refined into “PG&E, no more greed, we should own our energy” and “Shame!”. At every CPUC meeting, activists read the names of the dead.

Three CPUC meetings were disrupted in San Francisco. Activists blocked the entrance to PG&E headquarters. Through this, DSA SF began to form relationships with more organizations, including Food & Water Watch, and the Sunrise movement. To tackle this regional issue, SF joined forces with other DSA chapters. When CPUC met in Sacramento, they were greeted by a group including comrades from YDSA UC Davis, and DSA chapters from Sacramento, Chico, East Bay, Fresno, and Silicon Valley.

Together, we formed the No PG&E Bailout Coalition and started a movement.

By mid-January, it became clear to the CPUC that a public bailout was no longer feasible. California residents were not going to pay the bill for PG&E’s negligence, unwilling to fund the fires that burned down their own homes. Commissioners began circulating memos about public control of PG&E. National mainstream newspapers wrote about it. DSA LA got the Coalition in touch with Democracy Collaborative, a research institute advocating for a public takeover of PG&E. State legislators met with the Coalition’s representatives to discuss options.

On January 21st, the CPUC called for an “emergency meeting” to let PG&E declare bankruptcy, and get a bailout from banks. On less than 24 hours notice, the Commission didn’t expect resistance — but activists drove record turnout. Chants of “Wall Street Bailout? We say NO!” and “Shame!” echoed through the building. Unfortunately, that bailout passed.

We lost the fight, but not the war. What’s next?

On April 2nd, a federal judge prohibited PG&E from issuing dividends until anti-wildfire safety measures are implemented. The CEO of PG&E left the company (albeit with an extra \$2.5 million). It seems unlikely, however, that new, profit-motivated investors will take care of the victims, or encourage long term precautions.

On May 15th, state investigators officially found the fault of the Camp Fire with PG&E electrical transmission lines. This was not unexpected, but it opens PG&E up to more legal actions for their negligence.

No PG&E Bailout Coalition continues to fight. The April 19th rally in demand of a “California Green New Deal” was well attended, and more events are in the works. Capitalism might not prevent forest fires, but we can work together to defeat it.

To learn more about San Francisco DSA's work, please visit their website at dsasf.org. To learn more about the No PG&E Bailout Coalition, visit their website at actionnetwork.org/petitions/no-pge-bailout.



Open Leftism in Northern Nevada

“We don’t want vacation homes and a garage for every car. You’ve planted seeds in the desert, you stole your water from afar. Now, Southern California, stay where you are.”

– Cobra Skullifornia, Cobra Skulls

The Context

I was humbled when we were asked to write about our experience building a chapter in Northern Nevada. I’m a longtime leftist, long searching for a supportive community where I could work against the destructive systems of capitalism and ableism. Though I’m aligned with anarchist ideologies, the message of building a left front for a democratic and participatory socialism resonates with me. Since our organizing committee’s inception, I’ve worked alongside so many great organizers to create our chapter, and I’m keen to speak about leftism in Northern Nevada.

It’s unfortunate that mentioning “Nevada” to many conjures images of casinos and neon in Las Vegas. People rarely think of our staggering snow-capped mountains shining blue against painted sunsets, our wild horses and Basque heritage, or our communities in the Great Basin. Still, socialism in Northern Nevada must take on that local spirit and speak to our local conditions.

The most notable of these conditions is the intimacy of communities. Reno may be known as the “biggest little city,” but the nickname doesn’t just describe the city itself. In much of Northern Nevada, knowing one person often means you’re only a few degrees of connection from someone else. For organizing, this intimacy enables us to develop connections and mobilize people for events through a small social network. It becomes easier to answer a call from a friend of a friend who is a comrade.



We also have a strong history of activism in our community: from the IWW unionization and push for labor agitation in Goldfield, to our own counterculture movements with the sixties. Our home is also one of the birthplaces of straight edge punk and a center of alternative art and burning man. We had our own occupy movements and the activist community which came out of that. In short, there's fertile ground for left organizing here.

Despite this intimacy and history of political realization, we've also had fewer successful left movements cohere. This weakness stems from our culture of socialization.

While I would pour my heart into seeing the desert blossom into a self-providing community, I also recognize that Reno's intimacy is owed to its long history of cliques and in-groups. Even well-meaning and earnest socialists have fallen for the trap of building around their preferred popularity groups. This not only builds exclusionary movements but also carries a more dangerous undertone – toxicity.

This accommodation of predators, misogynists, racists, and abusers was especially manifest with our local Occupy movement. The clique structure provided more secure and

limited access for too many who were already known to be toxic, eventually pushing too many allies, too many voices, too many potential blooms in this desert out of left organizing spaces. Minding this history, we are resolutely organizing to avoid repeating past mistakes and recognize the beauty in our shared culture here in Northern Nevada. We are adamant about including the rural voices, otherised voices, disabled voices, women's voices, nonbinary voices, LGBTQIA+ voices, and BIPoC voices so often marginalized in left spaces. And this is really where we begin to build ourselves.

Coming Together

Like many, I was terrified with Trump's election. Certainly the imperialist and capitalist engines of our electoral system would never allow ethical governance, but Trump's presidency empowered and amplified white nationalism and an accompanying aura of fear. Our systems that were already designed to break down marginalized communities crystalized into a sense of dread hanging on every breath. While Bush and Obama constructed a mass deportation machine, Trump could now turn the force of this machine loose on communities without even the pretense of legal restraint limiting their terror.

Though long alienated from local socialist groups, I felt compelled to build a shared politics that might combat this empowered fascism. To that end, and motivated by a very dear friend, I met with a former member of Reno's Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) branch, who I'll call "the Wob" to avoid too many details. A kind and wickedly smart trade unionist, we discussed how we could work together in solidarity. This meeting turned out to be quite fortunate, as the Wob had a myriad of connections in Reno and Sparks. They also had substantial experience with many left movements in American history, including the original incarnation of DSA, which motivated them to contact the national organization about finding other members in the area. After we decided to begin outreach to form something, we could begin building a

core group of organizers. As part of this outreach, we contacted another member, E, who later proved critical to our efforts.

I should also note we weren't the first DSA group to begin organizing locally. Our local YDS chapter at the University of Nevada, Reno cohered quickly in the fall of 2017, well before our group started coming together.

Through our myriad connections, we assembled an assortment of committed and radical folk to discuss what should be done. Reno is a smaller town, so we had that connection of intimacy and every ability to punch above our weight even with a smaller group. Surely we could actually do something wonderful!

The Wob largely rallied to set times and discussion for us, patching in E, myself, the YDS group, and a few other committed activists. At our first meetings (at a café in the spirit of every true leftist movement), we discussed how best to approach this. Do we build something new? Do we start a nonprofit? Do we stage a mass protest like Occupy?

We considered several options. Reforming the local IWW branch was a good idea, but we felt it would be too focused on a mission of unionizing, which would exclude some who could not participate. We also discussed the Democratic party, but members pointed out their frustrations with the democratic party as the "graveyard of mass movements." E informed us that they were in touch with national DSA regarding forming a chapter, and shared the information they had received. The appeal of a mass organization with a stronger national current while still empowering local chapters to push for a democratic and inclusive message resonated with us.

With some enamored with the idea of being part of a mass organization, and others seeing the practicality of building within a national movement already successfully growing its membership, we agreed to pursue membership with National DSA. Our goal was to build an organization and culture capable

of providing an answer to fascism and creating community where we could find something new and powerful.

Getting Going

This is where I really came into being able to be part of something. As someone with developmental disabilities, I am usually shy (my moments of mutism and persistent stutter don't help), and I often fail to find the exact bits of social coding that allow me to be part of something. Yet, I could still be organizationally-inclined. I took thorough notes, which I highly recommend to anyone wondering if they can be involved in building something! Take minutes! It's helpful and will let you get involved! I pushed through my own speech issues to affirm not only the importance of our working with a broad-tent synthesis leftism, but also how we must open ourselves as leftists, unconcerned with the optics.

Having decided to form a chapter, we needed to draft our bylaws and submit them to national. These bylaws needed to be useful as a guiding model for building our movement. With my lack of experience as a professional organizer, I felt vastly out of my depth surrounded by so many who had made themselves vital community organizers. Still, I'd drafted charters and bylaws for fun before, and surely I could do this task without it taking anything from me.

The question was how best to create a synthesis movement, while keeping ourselves aligned with the ideals of the Democratic Socialists and presenting something which would establish a culture of newer and inclusive politics. I pulled from my own experiences exploring the ideas of progressive stack, what I myself needed to find a voice as someone disabled, what other chapters pursued, what previous left movements had done, and what national had suggested for building a strong organization. The result stressed a participatory and empowering structure of accountability and openness to provide a space for all voices.

Beyond our own desire to empower disparate ideologies, much of the current animus towards synthesis leftism derives from the electoral experience of the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign. Nevada has a duly earned reputation as a battleground state, our primary system makes it a flashpoint for any electoralist endeavor. This galvanized so many towards the camp of Bernie Sanders, which had not only destigmatized the world “socialist,” but also demonstrated the viability of an openly left-politics and the failures of the Democratic party’s machine politics.

Acting on this, we felt we could rally people to genuine socialism and show that, especially in fighting fascism, the Democratic party’s typical approach was not the only way. People could find an answer in what democratic socialism could provide, especially with their own conceptions from the election. We just had to be sure to build something that included, with equal validity, all ideological voices. Now was the time to come together and thrive, not squabble.

Encountering Challenges

One of our most difficult challenges at the start was locating a consistent space. Everywhere we sought required payment, renting rooms, or barred children. We rotated where and when we met so frequently that people would forget meetings or go to the wrong location at the wrong time. Eventually, we established a regular meeting space and time at our local LGBTQIA+ community center, which has been incredible in giving us space to meet. This has allowed us to really be able to grow our membership. In addition, moving away from organizing through the university culture has allowed us to orient ourselves more towards the local working class.

Another issue has been the difficulty of breaking down the deep pervasiveness of traditional capitalist conceptions of politics and moving beyond mere appeals for left unity. Building democratic socialism from the ground up means building an organization which doesn’t operate as a socialist imitation

of capitalist politics. Such imitations demand members bring something to the organization, looking at who can do political work in a way that ignores the tremendous emotional work of friends and favors those who can give more in spite of a system already demanding so much. Building such a genuinely liberating culture and a community to empower that culture wasn't enough. Though the most critical part of our organization, it lacked the tangible experience required to make our movement feel capable of accomplishing anything. Because breaking down this political culture was taking long, and we already had an amazing activist community in Reno, we examined what we could do that wasn't already being done.

To begin addressing the profound alienation experienced in the Great Basin, we took a hard look at our problems. We have rampant housing insecurity and treat those neighbors as invisible and worthless. We have miserable education standards, ranking 49th out of 50 states. We have abysmal labor rights, even prior to *AFSCME v. Janus*. We have massive gentrification and housing concerns that have pushed people into unhealthy and exploitative situations just to stay housed. How could we even begin to address and also build something from the ground up?

Though we're educating our community and members on intersectional outreach, organizing labor, conceptualizing and expressing their own left politics, and providing a space for the community to unite, we have faced difficulties. Our lack of funding and our membership's experiences as disabled, working class, LGBTQIA+, or otherwise marginalized people have prevented us from rallying toward significant effective work.

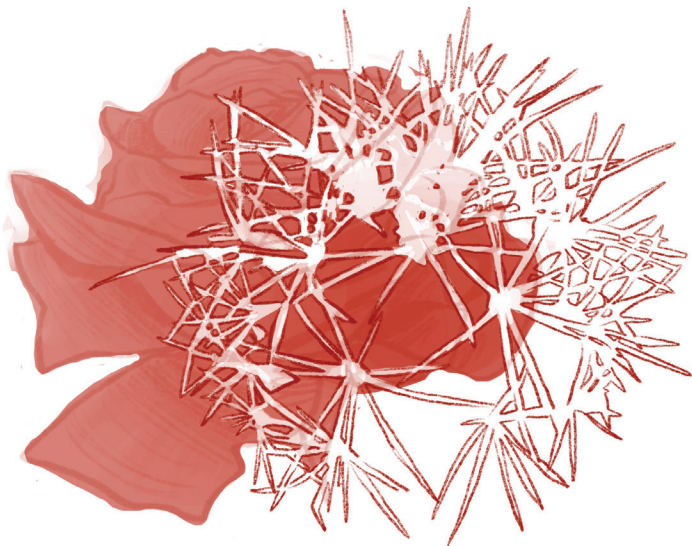
Looking Forward

Moving forward, I'm so happy to say that we've broken through the political culture of enough members to create a coherent internal organization. We have enough empowered folk and voices that we can begin to build something amazing. Our membership has some great plans that I hope we can assist them in developing.

The last thing I must discuss is the difficulty I have faced confronting the issues of ableism that pervade our society, including much of the left. So much of how other organizations and systems operate prevents us as disabled folk to participate. When we are accommodated, it is to allow us to be “abled,” rather recognize our validity as disabled voices. I would have never had the opportunity to meaningfully participate if I were unable to be myself among my comrades. Things such as providing space for us to freely unwind from stress, normalizing disabled movements, providing systems of support and care for a variety of needs, and recognizing the importance of that support and care are critical for the success of the socialist movement.

With luck, the national organization will soon recognize us, and we will begin receiving the funds necessary to significantly influence our community. Rather than focus on those who can lead us, we hope to lift up all voices and inspire our members with the knowledge that an open leftism is not only viable but perhaps the only answer to barbarism.

To learn more about Northern Nevada DSA's work, contact the chapter at NorthernNevadaDSA@gmail.com. You can also follow them on Twitter [@N_NevadaDSA](https://twitter.com/N_NevadaDSA).



It Started With a Little Socialist Library...

Education is vital to any socialist movement, and especially vital in an organization like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Within DSA's big tent, we agree that socialism is the answer to society's woes and the ills of capitalism. Not as obvious to our tens of thousands of members, however, is what form that socialism takes, *how* socialism can be the aforementioned answer, and what socialist movements of the past have tried, succeeded, and failed to do.

Education is how we address this problem. It's how to find out what pages we're all on and which pages we can be on together, and that's vital for building a successful movement.

This is why, in the spring of 2018, I brought forward a motion to develop a (non-physical) socialist library in my local chapter, Southern Maine DSA. I was searching for a way to be useful to comrades. I had plenty of socialist and socialist-adjacent books, and was convinced other members did, too. We all just needed to get those books together and share them with anyone in the chapter interested in reading them. The membership could thereby learn about socialism and its history in a way our monthly meeting structure just did not allow.



The temporary library committee that sprung from this motion eventually became the more permanent Education Committee. Our Education Committee created a Socialism 101 reading list for members. We house that list on bookmarks, and those bookmarks come with us when we table so we can help point prospective members in the right direction. We've found that folks who aren't entirely sure what DSA is about have appreciated some of the clarity this reading list gives, and the fact those books are available to borrow at no cost helps, too. It also gives our tablers an easy go-to if they aren't yet comfortable talking to strangers about socialism. This, in turn, has helped give them the confidence to be more effective (and chattier) tablers.

While the library and bookmarks have been a success, it's our monthly book club that has done the most for educating members and drawing in new ones. We've read, discussed, and dissected the work of Angela Y. Davis (*Freedom is a Constant Struggle; Are Prisons Obsolete?*), Howard Zinn (*Disobedience and Democracy*), V.I. Lenin (*State and Revolution*), Naomi Klein (*Battle for Paradise*), and many others. We've created a space outside of general meetings for those who want to talk more about what socialism is, what it means, and how socialists can, to use an industry term, do socialism.

We want other committees to use the Education Committee as well, like Prison Abolition or Climate and Eco Justice. When membership needs to know *why* an event or cause is crucial and requires organizing, we try to lend a hand both to educate and improve capacity. Book club attendees have also told the Education Committee what they want to learn more about, like Maine's history with its indigenous people and how we, as Maine socialists, can organize with them in their present-day struggles against the state. This back-and-forth can do more than just educate, as it also helps guide what kind of work SMDSA does.

Our chapter's meetings are a place where important work is done, but the education that prepares members for those meetings and the work to be done outside of them can't necessarily occur at them. The book club, among other events, is meant to be that educational space. There are the workshops we've put on, from union organizing how-tos to worker co-operative talks, to a breakdown of the Russian Revolution and its present-day meaning. We host a monthly movie night, "Solidarity Cinema," where we show socialist and socialist-adjacent films like *Pride* and *Malcolm X*. We're beginning work on a welcome packet for new members that explains what the chapter does and what committees there are to join. We're brainstorming a series that will focus on socialists and socialism in pop culture, as a reminder that socialism is much, much more than just some dead white guys from the 19th century, no matter what your high school history textbooks might have told you.

We've recently begun a series of structured, public debates, the first of which questioned if the Democratic Party was a viable vehicle for the left. Teams of two take each side of a motion and get their time to argue and counter-argue, while the audience votes their stance both before and after the debate in order for us to see whether the discussion moved the needle. In a meeting, in the rush before a vote takes place, it can be difficult to get all of these thoughts out in a manner that's both fair and educational. On the side, though, through the Education Committee's efforts, a more engaged, prepared, and productive membership is possible.

Don't take that to mean that I or any members of the committee have all of the answers, because we certainly do not. We're learning as we go, just as anyone who attends our events is learning, just as anyone who is out in the world base-building or interacting with the working class and marginalized groups is learning as they go. There is no one right way to educate socialists, but creating spaces where members are empowered to speak and participate, where we try to broaden perspectives and

teach ourselves and each other, has worked well for us in Maine.

We've had some failures. Ironically, the library that helped start all of this in SMDSA is rarely used for much besides book club entries. There are bumps in usage when we run a themed reading list, as the Education Committee did for the October Revolution, Black History Month, and Women's History Month, but overall, the library hasn't done much more than I could do on my own bothering comrades to borrow a book of mine. And that's just fine, especially since the work of "building" the library is already done, and we are focused on other projects that have seen far more success. We're figuring this out as we go, but we now feel empowered to do so, in a space we built ourselves.

To learn more about Southern Maine DSA's library, visit <http://southernmainedsa.org/library/>. To contact the chapter about their work, email them at DSA.SouthernMaine@gmail.com You can also follow them on Twitter @DSA_SouthernME.



Reading Commentary

***Making Spaces Safer: A Guide to Giving Harassment the Boot Wherever You Work, Play and Gather* by Shawna Potter (2019)**

Making Spaces Safer: A Guide to Giving Harassment the Boot Wherever You Work, Play, and Gather is a new book written by Shawna Potter. Shawna is the lead singer of hardcore feminist punk band War on Women as well as an activist, educator, and writer. *Making Spaces Safer* is divided into 6 chapters: Obvious Intentions, Appropriate Responses, Accountability, How to Flirt Without Being a Creep, What to Do If You're Being Harassed, and This is What Justice Looks Like. Potter covers all of these topics from her experiences as an anti-harassment activist and punk musician. She has also offered Safer Space Workshops for several years and wrote a short "handguide" version of *Making Spaces Safer* prior to writing this book.

Potter explains that using the term "safer space" rather than "safe space" acknowledges that no one can control any environment all of the time. We cannot control other people's actions and behaviors. But what we can do, as the people with a stake in these spaces, is make them safer by intentionally reducing trauma and harm. The book serves as a guide to anti-harassment organizing whether you experience harassment, witness harassment, or run a space where harassment occurs, which, is most spaces. Shawna's background in music gives her a unique perspective of existing in male-dominated spaces. The riot grrrl movement addressed how unsafe DIY spaces have always been for women. Kathleen Hanna's infamous slogan "Girls to the Front" exemplified that harm caused in those spaces will only improve with recognition of the problem and intentional solutions.

One of the endorsements for the book, written by Spencer Ackerman of *The Daily Beast*, says "Punk made a promise

of a freer, fairer, and saner world, but never fulfilled it.” But DIY is not the only three letter acronym starting with a D that has a problem with harassment. If we let our socialist spaces, such as DSA, fail to provide freedom, fairness, and safety to marginalized folks, we fail to create a brighter future. Our process for filing a grievance is arduous and places the majority of the onus on the victim(s) to prove that we have been harmed, whilst the abuser goes on continuing to cause harm. Due to how stressful of a process this can be, it is common, in my experience, to choose to stop going to meetings rather than expend undue energy on begging people to believe you and be on your side. How can we feel hopeful about building a new world with each other when we cannot even keep systemic oppression and hierarchies out of our organizing spaces?

It should not come as a surprise that the system in place is not good; as leftists we understand that following whatever system or process already exists is often not the best tactic. Potter writes, “Appropriate responses to harassment must be victim-centered. That means we must prioritize the desires, safety, and well-being of the person suffering harassment in every aspect of our response.” But this is not how many grievance processes operate. It is unlikely that anything will come of the report without a “smoking gun” of evidence. But the reality is that in many cases there is no “smoking gun;” it is a continued and intentional wearing down of the victim. Meanwhile, the harassers know that it is unlikely they will face consequences. They know they can continue the same harmful behaviors while they go on into positions of power, whether that be in the organization, or even on the supreme court. This entire process is extremely stressful to the victim. The initial harassment is already very stressful and then there is the added stress of needing to prove that it happened.

One of the more important things Shawna talks about in the book is supporting the victim with validation and belief. It does not feel like people are believing the victim when there are so many hoops to jump through when filing a grievance. The

most important step, especially for bystanders, is supporting the victim. This means checking in with them after harassment occurs, letting them vent about it without trying to “problem solve” right away, not asking questions such as “that REALLY happened?!” which while it may be well intended can feel like gaslighting. It is important not to make the victim feel like they are being investigated, but rather that they are believed and cared about.

We need to build a network for support that keeps harassers out instead of their victims. When chapters, members, leaders, and other bystanders choose to be silent or noncommittal in a situation of harassment, they are choosing the side of the harasser. They are choosing to keep the abuser unaccountable while making the victim feel unwelcome and unsupported. It is a choice to protect the comfort of the harasser, while the victim has been made incredibly uncomfortable throughout the entire process. As leftists, we should understand that choosing to remain neutral is choosing the side of the oppressor.

When we had Shawna Potter on my podcast, *Season of the Bitch*, to talk about her book, she asked about our personal tactics for handling harassment. In response to my saying that I often do not know how to deal with my own situations of harassment and then get too overwhelmed to do anything, she said, “I guarantee if they are making you uncomfortable, they are making other people uncomfortable too.” That does not mean it is my, or anyone else’s, responsibility to be the one who “handles” it for the sake of everyone else. But it means that we never have to be alone in handling it. Potter explained there is no perfect answer or advice she could give, as there is no glaringly obvious perfect thing to do. But we have the control to come up with solutions tailored to each individual experience and give them a try.

The final chapter of the book is called “This is What Justice Looks Like.” As Potter explained, justice looks like a community of people taking part, making it clear that this behavior will

not be tolerated. It is hard work, and it is often unpleasant, but caring about other people and what they are going through is the foundation of being leftists. Justice does not rely on state or federal sponsored authority figures. It does not rely on the carceral state. It does not rely on arduous processes created by the oppressors to deter the victims from speaking out. Dealing with harassment is not a distraction or deterrence from the revolution, it is an essential piece of the revolution.

“To some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality.”

- Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” (1984)

Recipe:

Black-Eyed Peas

Although I'm from the South and grew up eating black-eyed peas on New Year's for good luck, I have to admit I never really enjoyed them. I felt culturally obliged to partake, and tried many times to make them myself with different recipes, but if I'm honest, I always choked them down. It wasn't until I was really struggling financially, living in South Carolina, that I finally stumbled on the right way to make them by experimenting on my own. Black-eyed peas and collards are dirt cheap, so once you figure out how you like 'em, you can make a big delicious, healthy pot full that will help get you through tough times. And, if you're like me, you'll like it so much you start eating black-eyed peas year-round, not just on New Year's!

This is a very simple, forgiving recipe that replaces the typical ham hock with apple cider vinegar, cinnamon, and sriracha for a sharper flavor that breaks down the earthiness of the black-eyed peas. The proportions are flexible and should be adjusted to taste. This dish is enjoyed best with grits or cornbread, and a beer.

Equipment

Four-quart saucepan	Wooden spoon
Cutting board	Ladle
Chef's knife	Stove

Ingredients

16 oz pack of dried black eyed peas	2-3 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar
1/2 bunch of collard greens	1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon
one tablespoon of olive oil	1 teaspoon of cayenne pepper
1 onion	2 bay leaves
3-4 stalks of celery with leaves	Salt
3-4 cloves of garlic	Pepper
32 oz of vegetable stock	Sriracha
1 bunch of green onions	

Directions

1. Soak your dried black-eyed peas per the directions on the package, usually at least eight hours. It's important to use dried, not canned black-eyed peas, as they have a much better, firmer texture.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large pot on medium high. Dice your onions, garlic, and celery. Sauté the onions until they are clear, then add the garlic and celery and sauté them for a minute.
3. Drain the black-eyed peas, rinse them and drain them again. Add them to your pot with the stock. Heat on high until the pot boils, then reduce to a simmer.
4. Add your apple cider vinegar, cinnamon, cayenne powder, bay leaves, salt, and pepper. Throw in some chopped parsley if you've got it.
5. Cut the ribs out of the collards and discard them, then shred the leafy green part into strips about 1 inch thick and 2 inches long.
6. Wash the strips thoroughly and throw 'em in the pot. Cover and allow all of that to simmer for at least 30 more minutes or until the black-eyed peas are tender (but the longer the better).
7. Chop your green onions into small slices. Pour the soup into a bowl and top with green onions and sriracha (to taste).

If you have leftovers, this soup will taste better each day until you finish it!

Introducing An Upcoming Horizon Issue: Propaganda

This issue will focus on analyzing how propaganda operates as a source of agitation on the Left, along with investigating how socialist politics is articulated and expressed through various visual mediums.

We hope that this issue will celebrate traditions of Marxist analysis and foster greater interest in this area of intellectual inquiry, but we also want to publish pieces by DSA comrades who are not necessarily subject matter experts in this field.

If you want to pitch us an idea for an article that you want to write, please reach out to us at buildthedsa@gmail.com.



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