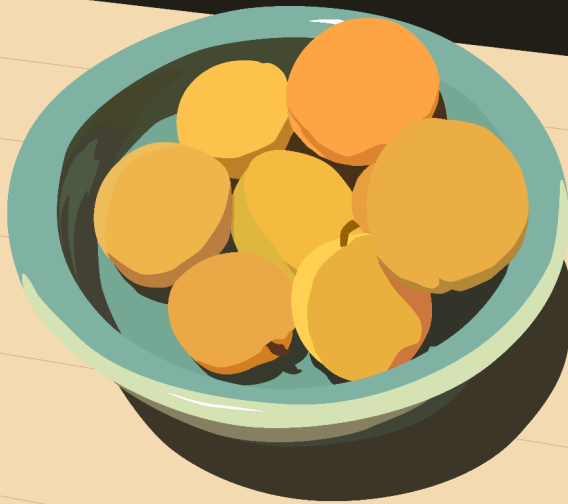


Build



Issue 8 • July 2019

“Embrace diversity.
Unite—
or be divided,
robbed,
ruled,
killed
by those who see you as prey.

Embrace diversity
or be destroyed.
There is no end
to what a living world
will demand of you.”

—Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower

Contents

- Introduction:** What is Build? ...**4**
- Birmingham:** Bailout Fund Telethon ...**9**
- Madison:** Electoral Strategy ...**13**
- Boston:** A People's History Walking Tour ...**20**
- Recipe:** Kaiser's Masala Chai ...**25**
- The Berkshires:** Chapter Report ...**27**
- Fort Worth:** Food Service Solidarity ...**33**
- Pittsburgh:** EcoSoc Food Pantry ...**37**
- Poem:** Human Resources ...**44**

What is Build?

Editor's Note: Knowing that this issue was going to come out right before Convention, our initial idea was to ask everyone on the Build team why they joined and what Build means to them, and then weave their input together into a single retrospective. But when I went through and read what everyone had written, I couldn't imagine coming up with anything more eloquent than what was already there. This issue, like all of our issues, has been a collaborative effort from start to finish. And so it seems very fitting that the introduction features a multiplicity of voices.

Nicole E – I joined Build because they helped my labor working group tell our story about the Marriott Strike. I've struggled meeting labor activists in other chapters because many of them strongly emphasize having a union job, which I don't have, as a prerequisite to labor organizing. But in Build I don't have to shout to be heard. When someone asks me what Build is, I tell them it's a project that started when people noticed the gaps in National's organization and started to work to fill in those gaps. Build is expanding in many different directions now, but it's important

to me that we started with and continue to focus on publishing stories about local organizing. My dream goal would be that we would be able to help acknowledge awesome local work from every local chapter and OC in DSA.

Dave B – The Highlander Center used a story circle method to help organizers figure out what to do next. It's simple. Everyone tells a brief story on a theme. No one responds, everybody listens to every story. Once everyone's spoken, then the group thinks together about similarities and differences. Next steps become very clear after everyone in the group listens to each other and thinks together. To me, that's what Build does for DSA. We facilitate a big national story circle where DSAers across regions and contexts tell their stories, hear each others', and think together about what to do next. But there's an adversarial tilt too. Build was born out of the 2017 convention's caucus warfare. We didn't choose the terrain we inherited. We've had to fight internally for the organization's right to listen to itself and figure out what to do next. When there are formations within DSA that don't want the story circle, we organize against them. This leads to a tension that sometimes comes up: is Build a caucus? We're the caucus-that-isn't-a-caucus. We want a multi-tendency democratic socialism and won't shy away from organizing to win that within the organization.

Mike H – Over the past year, Build has worked to help chapters and members share what they're

working on in different places around the country. We've done this because there's tremendous potential for members to learn from each other. It's also important for members to learn they're struggling together, not alone. This week while speaking with a member on the other side of the country, this member helped me finally answer the question we've asked every member of our team, a question I've answered differently probably a dozen times: What is Build? Build is an effort to align the interests of DSA with the interests of the broader movement to build power for socialism. DSA is a small part of the movement, and our organizing should aim to grow the organization in a way that strengthens the community of which we are a part.

Sauce – Build is a way for DSA members to share their triumphs, knowledge, and work that excites them. Build is a part of making the future. Let's do this thing, together.

Matt W – I joined Build for a simple reason. A comrade had picked up the phone, called me and asked if I would be interested in contributing to a project focused on helping the locals. At first, I was hesitant... I didn't want to contribute to the ongoing factional fighting seen throughout DSA... but it was clear through the outreach and the conversations that this project was about creating something better in DSA than that. The zines where so many people across the nation write about their local work help me understand how to be a better organizer. Hopefully with Build, I'll be

able to do my part and apply those lessons learned to help our locals as much as I can.

Ethan F – I joined Build because I realized that it takes the work of many hands and bodies working in asynchronistic harmony to pave the road to socialism in our time. Those hands need time to pause and reflect on the work, celebrate our greatest victories, and comfort one another in our most humbling moments of defeat. We have embarked upon a project that is at once collaborative and elaborative, constantly in flux, the whole becoming more than the sum of its parts, and it demands radical love, mutual aid, comradely compassion for sustenance. Sometimes I think of DSA like any living creature on Earth — if our bodies are nourished; if our minds are enriched; if our hearts and bellies are full, our entire organism can truly thrive. Build tills the soil and tends the garden, keeping the roses growing strong, and ever stronger.

Marlon – I was drawn to Build initially because I saw comrades growing the real work of rebuilding organized class power - the vital struggle of our time, humanity's best hope for its own self-liberation from the increasingly rapacious capitalist-ecological crisis. I stayed because they really mean it. We walk toward emancipation together, each day, and when we stumble there's no one better to catch your fall than a comrade.

Erika P – Build is exciting because we're doing

work that's desperately needed in DSA that, for various reasons, National is failing to do. We're sharing stories of local work across the organization, holding bi-weekly Zoom trainings with 50+ participants, hosting collaborative and member-driven conferences, bolstering our internal organizing networks, and asking big questions about DSA's structure and future. And we're doing all of this work across political perspectives, geography and regional divides. For me, Build is DSA at its best.



Birmingham

One of the greatest things about DSA is the variety of tactics different chapters implement on the ground. In Birmingham, Alabama our own humble contribution to this tradition is the Black Mama's Day Bailout telethon.

On May 4, about a week before Mother's Day, we hosted a nine-hour telethon featuring local rock, R&B, hip-hop and stand up acts— as well as interviews with local activists and organizers about topics related to the prison system. Our goal was to raise money as part of the National Bail Out campaign on behalf of our local Southerners On New Ground (SONG) chapter.

SONG describes itself as a regional Queer Liberation organization, made up of Black people, PoC, immigrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, and other members of the working class in small and rural towns. Within the last year, Birmingham got its own SONG chapter, and we have supported them on other campaigns, such as an End Money Bail canvassing effort last year.

This was actually our second go at having a telethon to support the Black Mama's Bailout - we also did one in 2017 in partnership with the local Black Lives Matter chapter during the first national Mother's Day bailout. We had been

working with BLM for a few months at that point, and one of their organizers approached us with an ask to assist with SONG's Black Mama's Day Bailout event. It aligned very strongly with our mission since it gave us an opportunity to do direct work and improve the lives of marginalized people. We jumped at the chance to make it happen, even though we didn't have much time to put it together.

It ended up being extremely successful, due mostly to getting lucky with some high-profile names signal-boosting the telethon to a larger nationwide audience through Twitter. All told that year we raised about \$10,000. This time our goals were more modest, and we raised around \$800 during the telethon. With additional support from national SONG bailout campaign funds, the local organizers we are supporting hope to bail out five mamas and caregivers.

The Black Mama's Bailout is part of a larger effort by the National Bail Out collective, a black-led coalition of groups like SONG and Color of Chance who have the shared goal of ending the institution of money bail. Birmingham DSA sees work like this as a vital component of the eventual end-goal of prison abolition, which DSA voted to support during the 2017 national convention. Several chapters are doing important work with supporting the recent prison strikes and contributing to bailout efforts, and the telethon is Birmingham's way to contribute to this important

struggle. Our local effort was just a small part of the national campaign: all told, over \$1 million was raised across the country, and around 100 black mothers and caregivers were freed in time for Mother's Day. In the three years since the start of the campaign, more than 400 have been freed.

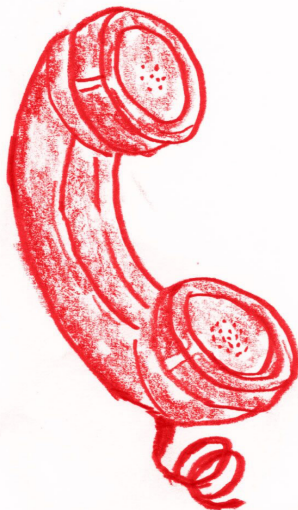
So where do we go from here? It is important to understand that the prison-industrial complex is one of the cruelest manifestations of our capitalist system, and the cash bail system is one of its central components—a system that punishes people and keeps them confined to jail for the crime of being too poor to pay their bond. It is difficult to pin down exact numbers, but, according to estimates by criminal justice reform groups, anywhere from just under half a million to about 700,000 people are sitting in jail right now solely because they can't afford bail.

In this struggle, we need to support the efforts of black and brown-led organizations. As in every aspect of the so-called criminal justice system, black and brown bodies suffer disproportionately. Black women are particularly oppressed by the bail system, with 72 percent of incarcerated women making less than \$22,000 annually prior to arrest, compared to 51 percent of men. The median income of Black women prior to arrest was \$12,725 in 2014. It also hits houseless, trans, and queer people hard, given the other barriers these groups face in seeking employment and income. Even when offered bail in the first place, undocumented people

are often handed over to ICE after posting their bond.

The prison industrial complex represents one of the most impactful manifestations of the systematic injustices of capitalism. If you or your chapter are interested in getting involved in projects like the End Money Bail campaign or other abolition efforts, you should see what organizations in your area are already doing. Oftentimes groups dedicated to that work are in desperate need of people to make phone calls to lawyers, bailbondsmen, and otherwise organize resources to help get people out of jail and provide infrastructure for them once they have been freed.

To learn more about Birmingham DSA's work, follow them on Twitter @BhamDSA.



Madison

Throughout 2017 and early 2018, the Madison Area Democratic Socialists of America (MADSA) in Wisconsin experienced explosive membership growth. In the summer of 2018, we formed our official Electoral Politics Working Group (EPWG), taking inspiration from the success of other chapters in electoral organizing. Following DSA National's electoral strategy, we decided to focus on local elections in Madison.

From there, we developed a policy platform describing our vision for the city. We used the platform as a launching point to begin discussions with candidates who we could potentially endorse. This led to formal candidate interviews, and we then recommended candidates whose values aligned with our platform to MADSA's general membership for endorsement. Then the campaign began. Having almost zero electoral experience beforehand, we learned many lessons along the way. Still, the initial process outline we drew up served us very well and culminated in a DSA member being elected to Madison's school board.

Back when we started meeting to discuss doing electoral work, we talked a lot about our strategy for building socialism and how electoralism would fit into that strategy. Madison has a reputation as a liberal bastion (one Republican congressional representative once called it a "communist

community,” if only!) but like many such cities, it is fundamentally under the control of real estate developers, businesses, and property owners. As a result of this liberal capitalist hegemony, many local races go uncontested (only 5 of 20 alder seats were competitive in 2017). When a race is contested, there is often little substantive difference between the candidates, who run mostly on their “experience”, personality traits, and the endorsements they secure.

Looking at this dynamic, we saw an opportunity to make local races actually about something. Not only that, if we could develop an alternative vision for the city of Madison, it would be an excellent chance to demonstrate the differences between socialism and the status quo.

So, the EPWG set about writing a policy platform. This ended up being a very difficult but extremely valuable task. What’s the right balance between specific demands that could actually be won via electoralism and laying out a long term vision of socialism? Focus too much on the near term and you risk being easily co-opted by progressive liberals. Focus too much on the long term and people won’t believe it’s achievable. Every group will land on a different balance here.

Another issue is that trying to come up with a platform that addresses all of capitalism’s problems is impossible. Most of our chapter’s canvassing experience came from doing Medicare for All work and we really liked that model. With the

M4A canvass, the idea is to get the person talking about their own experiences with the healthcare system and to use that as a bridge to discuss possible solutions with them. Our idea was to do something similar with our policy platform, so we tried to whittle things down by thinking about issues that would allow us to have those sorts of conversations with people at their doors.

You can see the platform we ended up with on our website, so we won't go into all the specifics here, but one big thing to point out is the importance of understanding the current issues in your city and speaking to them in your platform. For us, one of these big issues was ending a contract between the city and the school district where the latter pays hundreds of thousands of dollars for police officers patrolling the hallways of our high schools, and instead using that money to hire counselors.

We were by no means on the forefront of this issue. A local community group, Freedom Inc., had worked (and still is working) tirelessly to organize people against cops in schools, bringing the issue to prominence. As socialists we know how the police function to preserve white supremacy and we wanted to show solidarity with those fighting against it. At the time we had no idea how important it would end up being for our upcoming work. Counselors not Cops (as it is called) proved to be the defining issue of every phase of our endorsement process. So find your city's equivalent and make sure it's part of your platform.

Once the EPWG had written up a draft platform, it was time to discuss it at a general membership meeting and get approval to use as a basis for interviewing candidates. We dedicated one of our monthly general meetings to the task. This was an invaluable part of the process: we got a lot of great input from people who weren't necessarily interested in coming to an EPWG meeting.

One thing we would like to do differently next time is to have separate meetings for discussion and voting so that we can allow people more time to process what we talked about. Throughout the process, we were dogged by the fact that we didn't get started early enough. In order to complete our endorsement by the actual election, we had to rush some things that deserved more time.

Now that we had a policy platform approved by our membership, it was time to reach out to candidates. We got the contact info for all the candidates that we thought might possibly be interested in working with us, and sent them our policy platform, asking if they would like to meet with three of our working group members for an hour-long discussion.

Lots of political organizations mail out questionnaires and just ask the candidates to fill them out. For us, having a face to face meeting was very important. Not only was it easier to get a sense of how interested in our platform the candidate really was that way, but it also helped us build out our relationships with people who were

politically active in our community. In our in-person meeting, not only were we learning about them, but they were learning about us. This is an excellent way to expand your organizing network, even with people who you don't necessarily end up endorsing.

During this phase, we had weekly group meetings to discuss recommending the candidates that we'd interviewed for an endorsement. We didn't want to waste our chapter's time by putting forward someone who was unlikely to be endorsed, but we also were aware that we were just a small subset of MADSA and we didn't want to decide close calls without a chapter wide debate. Here is where having a concrete issue that's really going to push people out of their comfort zones was helpful, as a lot of candidates were on board for most of our platform, but not prepared to advocate for Counselors Not Cops. After this phase, we put forward two candidates to be endorsed by the general membership.

It was at this point that time was really not on our side. We only had one general meeting scheduled before the primary, which means we had to debate and vote in the same meeting. This was not ideal. In order to give people more time to process, we sent out emails and posted messages on our chapter's internal Facebook group to get the discussion rolling in advance. This also allowed us to go back to the candidates with some questions that our members had before our general meeting. Ideally the candidates would have attended the

general meeting, but again the short time frame was an issue, and both had prior commitments that evening. We were able to record some videos with one of the candidates clarifying her stance on some of the issues, though, which was a helpful substitute.

That general meeting was huge for MADSA. Debating whether to make an endorsement really forced a lot of important discussion around big questions like what electoralism means to us, how it fits into our broader strategy, and what it even means to actually endorse a candidate. This wasn't the first time we'd had these discussions, but the looming decision made the discussion much deeper than usual. At the end of the night, we made history as one of the candidates secured a supermajority vote to become the first candidate endorsed by our chapter.

We had decided very early on that, if we endorsed a candidate, we would put a lot of effort behind it. So as the endorsement process concluded, we understood that the work was only just beginning. Organizing a successful campaign is a subject for another article; long story short, we are very proud to say that we now have a socialist (and current DSA member!) on our school board.

But even if our candidate hadn't won, we learned so much through the process—about organizing, about who we are as a chapter, about what's important to the people of our city—that it would

have still been worth it. If you've never done this before and are nervous about starting, don't be afraid to make mistakes, focus on what you can learn by doing. And start early: everything took a lot longer than we thought it would. Hopefully you can use what we did to help build socialism in your city!

To learn more about DSA Madison's work, contact them at dsamadison@gmail.com or follow them on Twitter @DSAMadison.



Boston

As Howard Zinn said, “If you don't know history it is as if you were born yesterday. And if you were born yesterday, anybody up there in a position of power can tell you anything, and you have no way of checking up on it.” Studying history from a radical lens is critical for understanding political context: why are these particular issues of importance now? Why is this coalition of class forces together in this way? We should never forget that the work we do in our chapters is part of an unbroken chain of struggle, protests, strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and more that goes back generations.

The U.S. has one of the more radical labor histories in the world, with literal land, air, and sea wars fought between the forces of capital and labor. Schools and the media have put a lot of effort into suppressing this history from below; it's past time for us to reclaim it.

With this mission in mind, Boston DSA offered a “people's history” walking tour of the city--a DSA spin on the Boston tourist industry Revolutionary War walking tours. While these mainstream tours hit all of the locations taught in 6th grade history (Boston Tea Party and the like), they ignore other important parts of Boston's history like the sit-ins against urban displacement, Occupy Boston, or the Sacco and Venzetti Defence Committee offices.

We started offering this walking tour during the summer of 2018 with a few main goals; 1) help root DSA members in the local radical history of the city they organize in, 2) throw a fun public-facing event that a large number of non-DSA community members would attend, 3) and mix up the formatting of DSA public educational events. Too often these take the form of reading groups, panel discussions, or movie screenings. These are all important, but there's often a need to shake things up and try something new.

Our first main task was research. Reclaiming hidden histories takes a lot of time and work! We scoured local history books and guides to find any passing mention of strikes and protests, and reached out to local historical societies. Luckily there's a wealth of knowledge within DSA and the wider Boston activist community about the radical history of Boston, so we ended up with many leads. We then followed up on each event we learned about, pinpointing its present location. Many important buildings or squares had long since been demolished, so we had to figure out approximations of their location using old tax assessment records, archival photos, and a lot of fiddling with internet maps.

At the end of this process we developed a map of Boston's radical history locations found utilizing pathfinding apps and websites. We ended up having to remove a number of high profile locations due to their distance from the main clustering downtown (most notably Malcolm X's

home), while we had to remove others because they would have added too much distance to the route. After a few test walks where we identified potential hazards and most efficient crosswalks, we ended up with a length of 90 minutes, including breaks and stops. An earlier version of the idea would have involved a biking tour instead to shorten the length, but we soon realized the safety concerns were too great.

Once we had finalized the map and script, we set a date and distributed specially-designed fliers across the metro area. The fliers contained links to an Eventbrite registration page. Our he initial goal was 30 people, about the max that one guide could handle. We ended up having to increase the Eventbrite limit no less than 5 times--our final count was over 130 pre-registered attendees. We had to scramble to train 3 additional volunteer tour guides.

Here's the format we settled on: each of the 4 final tour groups were led by a guide armed with a script, a red flag on a stick to make sure people didn't lose sight of them, and a very large pair of lungs. Each tour group also had an additional security person whose job was to avoid losing stragglers and stay in text contact with the other groups in case anything came up. Every attendee got a custom designed map of the route. They left the start in 10 minute intervals, each walking the same route. In retrospect, we should have spaced them out farther--bunching up turned out to be an issue at times.

Accessibility was also a concern. Our somewhat inadequate solution was to encourage any folks with movement issues to stay up front with the tour guide to ensure that they would be setting the pace for the walk. In practice it didn't actually come up, but this is a question other chapters should plan for. The nature of a "walking tour" is going to be alienating for many people with accessibility issues.

In all, the walking tour was a huge success and one of Boston DSA's larger public events to date. We had between 80 and 100 attendees, spread across 4 walking groups, traveling a roughly 3 mile route that covered pivotal moments in Boston and US history. Famous housing struggles, fights for LGBT and reproductive rights, environmental justice issues, anti-racism, and the history of the native peoples whose land we occupied were all covered. There's strong demand for another one, this time covering different neighborhoods in the metro area.

All the practical considerations we took - individual maps for each attendee, a security assistant for each guide, the guides having flags to easily spot them, having a predetermined break area along the route, etc - turned out to be useful. Other features we plan to incorporate next time: scheduling groups to leave every 30 minutes, rather than 10, to avoid bunching; and having more water and sunscreen on hand.

In conclusion, let me end with Utah Phillips on the importance of studying and giving new life to our radical histories: "The long memory is the most radical idea in this country. It is the loss of that long memory which deprives our people of that connective flow of thoughts and events that clarifies our vision, not of where we're going, but where we want to go."

To learn more about Boston DSA's Education Working Group, contact them at education@bostondsa.org or follow their blog at bostonpewg.org.

Masala Chai

Masala chai at its core is just spiced tea, but there's no limit to its variations. Each region and family has their own. This is my personal recipe. It's a little on the sweeter side, and though a bit complex, it's still forgiving if you don't have all of the spices involved.

The amounts here are for 1 to 2 people. For 4 to 6 people, use 2 times the amount of spices and sweeteners; for 8 to 10 people, use 3 times.

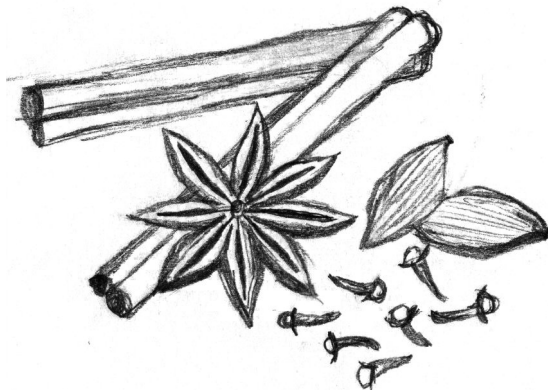
Ingredients:

1 two-inch cinnamon stick
2 star anise pods
3 green cardamom pods
¼ tbsp ground coriander
5 whole cloves
6 whole black peppercorns
7 fresh mint leaves
A pinch of ginger
½ tbsp vanilla extract (or imitation vanilla)
½ tbsp honey
1 tbsp sugar
2 tsp black tea (Assam or Ceylon works best) per person
12oz filtered water per person
3oz whole milk (or almond milk) per person

Steps:

1. Grind cardamom (remove the husk), peppercorn, and coriander.
2. Put water on high heat until steaming (about 2 minutes).

3. Add all spices and sweeteners (everything except the tea and milk) to the water, bring down to medium-high heat until it comes to a boil (about 4 minutes).
4. Add tea leaves, bring down to a medium heat, and stir regularly for about 5 minutes.
5. Turn off heat, let water sit for about 5 minutes.
6. Heat up milk in microwave for 45 seconds or use a separate saucepan to heat milk to steaming. Don't let it boil. (Optional: Remove the cinnamon stick from the water and place in the milk before heating it up.)
7. Pour brewed tea through a wire mesh into cups to serve, and add milk. (Note: About a third of the water will have boiled off, so this should leave you with about 9oz of brewed tea plus 3oz of milk per serving.)



The Berkshires

This is a story of small, rural chapter organizing. Hopefully this short history of our chapter and our organizing activities in our formative years will be useful to other nascent chapters in similar situations.

The Berkshires DSA is the local in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, a thousand square miles at the far western end of the state, bordering upstate New York. Although it's the second largest county in Massachusetts, many people in the eastern part of the state (including the state legislature) think "Western Massachusetts" stops about an hour and a half drive east of here. It also has the highest income inequality in the state, mainly due to a sizable population of wealthy second home owners.

The population is spread out across a collection of small towns separated by long drives through rolling, forested hills, with two small cities—Pittsfield and North Adams – that are excellent examples of the failure of capitalism. North Adams was a typical mill town that went downhill when the mills shut down and left rampant unemployment behind; Pittsfield was once a major manufacturing hub for General Electric, which poisoned the land and the rivers with PCBs and then left the city, taking 30,000 jobs with it. Before leaving, however, as a way to dispose of some of

the PCB-laced earth, GE offered tons of it for free as “fill” for residential and school lawns. Forty years later, GE is still fighting to avoid having to pay for cleaning up the river and surrounding lands.

With the departure of large-scale manufacturing, tourism has become the major source of money in the region, with attendant problems of gentrification and less availability of affordable housing. The primary sources of employment in the county are the service and healthcare sectors.

Politically, Berkshire County is very center-left, with no shortage of Bernie (and Hillary) supporters; however it’s an area where “socialist” is still a problematic label. A number of our chapter comrades prefer not to have their names used in press releases, etc., for fear of losing their jobs. It’s an ongoing issue, and we’ve had occasion to make it clear that shaming a comrade for reluctance to wear their socialist ideology publicly is not acceptable.

A few of us started meeting informally in the spring of 2017 to talk about starting a chapter. Generally three or four people would show up to these meetings, and not always the same three or four. The feeling that we were just spinning our wheels was frustrating.

Our breakthrough came when two of us decided that we needed better outreach. We paid the \$30 for a table at a summer street fair in Pittsfield and

stood there answering questions, handing out literature, and taking contact information for four hours on a hot summer afternoon. Our next regularly scheduled meeting had twelve people in attendance.

Some of our new comrades were people who had never been to a DSA meeting before, but there were also a few DSA members who had moved to the area and had no idea a nascent local was forming. Their experience turned out to be really valuable as we began the process of working toward becoming a chapter. Two of the four on the Organizing Committee that formed at the next meeting were people we had met through our tabling experiment.

For the next year, we focused mostly internally, writing bylaws and preparing to apply for formal chapterhood, as well as continuing our outreach to attract new members. We increased our social media activity, and presented films and speakers at our meetings to attract more attendance.

But as socialists, of course our real work is in the community at large. We're a small group (we have about 70 people on our mailing list, of whom about 50 are dues-paying members), so it made sense to us to reach out and form coalitions with congruent groups in the community, including Indivisible, Progressive Democrats, and Manos Unidas. We've taken part in public forums with them, marched in the streets for environmental justice, and confronted our legislators in concert with them.

We've also joined with local labor activists. In the fall of 2018, Ballot Question 1 came before voters, mandating safe patient limits for understaffed nurses in Massachusetts hospitals. We invited a representative from the nurses' union to speak to our members, and he put us in touch with a local organizer so that we could join their canvassing efforts. In the end, the millions of dollars pouring in from health industry lobbyists around the country, blanketing the media with scare tactics about hospital closings, defeated our efforts. But we did make valuable connections with local labor organizers and got some good canvassing experience out of it.

Recently, Stop & Shop workers throughout New England voted to strike, with 31,000 workers walking off the job simultaneously. One of the organizers in our chapter also happened to be a shop steward in the UFCW, so we invited him to talk at a general meeting about ways to support the strike.

For our local population of union members, he said, the best idea was to keep a low profile. If picketers asked about our affiliation, it would be fine to talk about our DSA values, but in general we shouldn't arrive with our flags waving, taking actions on our own initiative. The picket line leaders from the union would be the ones to determine the best tactics, and we were there to support them in whatever way worked best for them. As DSA members, we want to show, not tell by becoming known as helpful allies first. Once

we've established that as our primary presence, if someone wants to know more about our values, we can open that book.

The union won the strike, including concessions from the company that met all their demands, setting a great precedent for non-unionized grocery employees throughout the country, as well as other unions; it was inspiring to play our small part in supporting that victory.

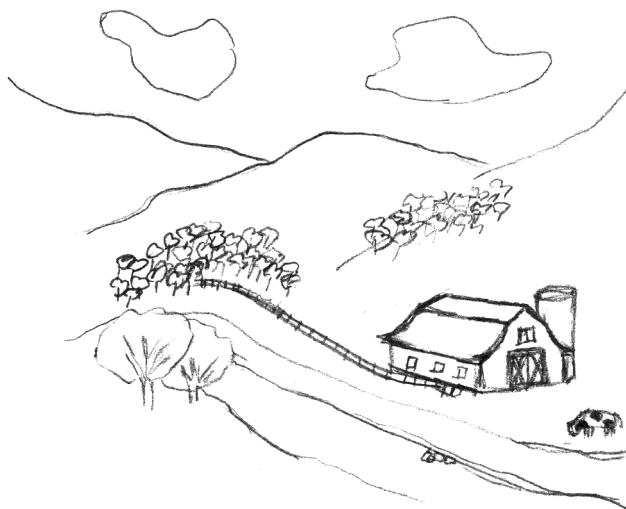
Our membership has been growing steadily, in part through collective actions, but also through an active presence on social media. We have a Communications Coordinator on our Executive Committee, and her activity on social media has been extremely valuable in raising awareness of our presence in the county, both through posting announcements of our public events and reposting political commentary from other sources.

We've also begun doing a better job of gathering data about our chapter. We've phone banked to call every person on our mailing list. We also now have a shared spreadsheet that includes not only names and contact information for our members, but also data on whether they participate in meetings, if we've reached out to them through phone or email, what their interests are, their skills and/or occupation, what other political organizations or activist groups they're part of, etc.

As a small, rural chapter, we share the issue that

has been raised by others in our situation: we have very little access to funding. We're working on affiliating with a Boston DSA group that's providing 501c(4) fiscal sponsorship for chapters in Massachusetts (which is a great idea for other states that have a large urban chapter); but even when we have a bank account, our small number of members means that our dues sharing will be small change. As such, we're in favor of the initiatives that have been raised to provide a regular fund for small chapters; even \$100 a month would make a huge difference in our ability to pay for things like printing, t-shirts, and a regular meeting space.

We're always interested in sharing experiences with other small chapters! **Please feel free to reach out to us if you'd like to ask questions or share info at berkshiresdsa@gmail.com.**



Fort Worth

Like many others across the country, Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) had a pending contract with Sodexo—a “facilities management” company that is one of the world’s largest multinationals—to outsource food service for school lunches. The contract included 1,000 food service workers becoming employed by the private corporation instead of the public school district. Under these conditions, the likelihood of stable jobs with the same pay, benefits, and schedules were low.

When we were contacted about the contract, we had a few days to sign up to make public comments and connect with local labor organizers and people with insight about where each of the trustees were leaning on the issue.

When we arrived at the school board meeting, we were met by more than 50 already-organized food service workers in scrubs with signs, supervisors who would be making statements against privatization, and labor organizers.

The trustees were leaning five votes to four for privatization when the United Educators Association and other labor organizations met with the trustees to amend the contract in real-time and vote on an updated contract with many reforms. The new contract included 900 out of

1,000 food service workers remaining employed by the district, with only temporary, seasonal management and nutritionist positions being filled by Sodexo. The contract was also amended to include that any vacancies would continue to be filled with the district, and not with Sodexo. Employees were given the option to become employed by Sodexo if they preferred.

Here's what we learned:

Bring contact cards to make connections at any action. We didn't—and it was a missed opportunity. After hearing our public comments against privatization, the group demonstrating together wanted to connect and we didn't have a solid way to make communication easy from that point forward.

These fights are worth taking on. The outcome from DSA's participation, in this case, was a meaningful show of solidarity for workers self-organizing. Our presence had an impact on how they felt supported by the community in fighting for a better contract.

Stories are important. Our members spoke to the board as parents, as teachers, and as community members who care about the quality of food and the quality of jobs in our city's public schools. Sharing stories that relate to the issue at hand can overpower political rhetoric and is more likely to be received as valid, without political bias.

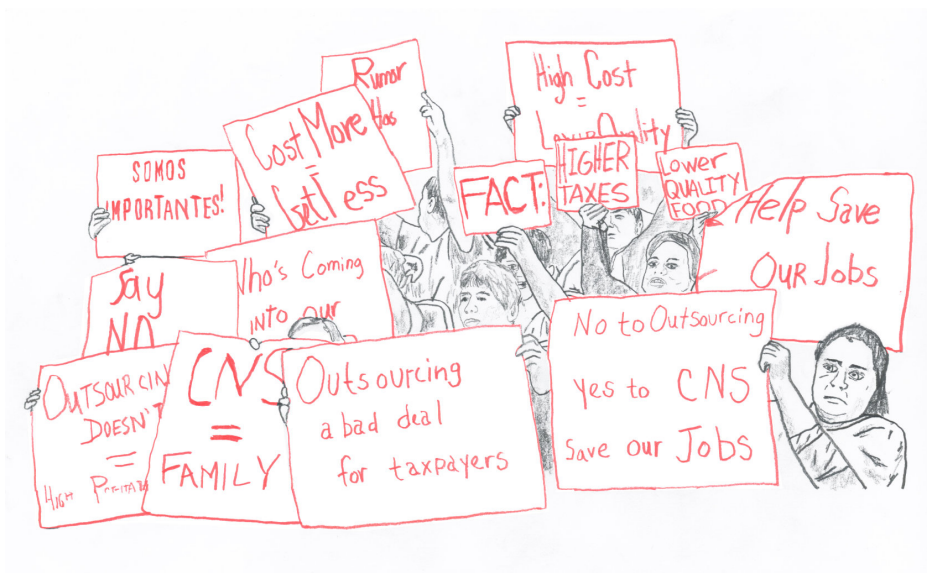
The fight is never over. Even though 900 school district employees won key amendments to this contract in our city, the fact that the trustees were willing to vote yes before the amendment was telling about their intentions to solve a \$1 billion (and rising) deficit in the district. Fort Worth is one of the top districts in Texas for paying six-figure salaries to administrators and cutting the bottom line. Slashing pay, benefits, and stability for workers who make some of the lowest wages in the district will continue to be attractive for trustees who want to appear “fiscally responsible” at the expense of workers in the community. This contract could deteriorate, but up next on the agenda to privatize are custodial and other vital services that the district’s schools rely on. We have to remain active and keep up with what’s going on at our local school board.

Don’t let a multinational’s sticky fingers get into one of the last remaining public coffers to reduce pay, benefits, and stability for workers in your city! These contracts are popular. Despite mounting evidence that they don’t reduce costs or improve nutrition long-term, districts that find themselves in debt from decreased funding and poor management of funds can find an attractive, easy out in outsourcing food service programs. However, when school districts lose the ability to manage these services, they lose power to negotiate future contracts with private corporations.

These contracts can come without fanfare or warning, but winning critical amendments is possible, as well as overruling pending contracts on the board.

Wherever workers are fighting for better conditions, DSA should be there showing support and solidarity. United we bargain, divided we beg.

To learn more about DSA Fort Worth's work, contact them at dsafortworth@gmail.com or follow them on Twitter @DSAFortWorth.



Pittsburgh

More than a year ago, in a meeting of the Pittsburgh DSA Socialist Feminist Committee, my comrade Emma proposed the idea of building a Little Free Pantry for mutual aid in her community.

During a breakout planning session at that same meeting, we started to draw up a plan. Being anarcho-communists by nature, we then kind of just went out and did it, surprising the rest of the SocFem Committee with a fully operational pantry at the next meeting when all they expected was a status report. The resource we used for the actual building plans was Little Free Pantry.org, and we built it with about \$60 in supplies and labor donated by some other comrades. Emma found its first home, and we started asking friends and comrades for donations to stock it with food.

This was actually the birth of the Pittsburgh DSA Ecosocialist Committee. We see food justice as being intimately tied to larger ecological concerns. Wendell Berry says that we must save the land and the people—we cannot save one without saving the other. As Marx made clear, capitalism treats the natural world as a “free gift”: an infinite source of raw materials for the production of commodities and the generation of surplus value. Fields of industrially farmed corn and warehouses of mechanistically tortured pigs deplete the soil,

saturate it with toxic chemicals, poison the water with runoff, fill the air with greenhouse gasses, and produce food mostly devoid of nutrients—all while exploiting and marginalizing labor and stripping communities of agency to feed themselves. At the intersection of capitalist exploitation and white supremacy, it is particularly the most impoverished and communities of color that suffer.

We must destroy capitalism if we are ever to achieve even a semblance of ecological balance and universal, healthful food security. But in the meantime, we believe that mutual aid can at least help to alleviate some of its pressures on our communities. And so from each according to their ability, to each according to their need! Our free pantry is available 24 hours a day to anyone who needs it, stocked with donations from those who can sometimes afford to help their neighbors. One of the most gratifying things about maintaining the pantry is checking it and discovering food in it that we didn't put there; the community has become part of the mutual aid process our chapter started.

It hasn't necessarily been easy. The first acute difficulty was securing a home for the pantry. We needed a spot that was publicly accessible 24 hours a day in a community that needed this kind of aid, and where the owners would allow a socialist pantry. Our pantry is actually now in its third

location, having been ejected from its first two for political reasons; if you want to replicate our project, plan to talk to a lot of people and attend a lot of meetings. At our second location, we were told we could leave the pantry if we were willing to take the DSA name off of it. We refused: our project isn't just feeding people, it's spreading socialist principles of mutual aid through direct action in the community, and the pantry is meant to serve as an invitation to come to our chapter.

The second challenge of the pantry project is keeping it reliably stocked. We use a few methods: one, we are constantly reminding our membership, prior to meetings, to consider bringing a contribution along with them, either in the form of nonperishable groceries, hygiene products, pet food, or money. We also have collection boxes in sympathetic local businesses; I check in on two in my neighborhood. Finally, I take donations through a Venmo account, and reply with pictures of receipts, which I also post to our chapter's Slack account; I chiefly reach people who contribute this way through Twitter. So you need to have a good system of communication within the chapter and on social media.

Another consideration is that you have to be ready to store groceries somewhere—Pittsburgh DSA is fortunate now to have permanent office space, but before that, supplies were stacked up in comrades' living rooms. That's not necessarily ideal. Additionally, you have to plan to handle money in a transparent way: understandably, many people

would rather give monetary donations than haul soup cans around to meetings, so you need to have a system of reasonable accountability. And of course, you need comrades willing to do the work of regularly shopping for and stocking the pantry.

You also have to keep an eye on the weather. The pantry must be pretty watertight, and heat and cold become important considerations; even canned goods can begin to spoil in too-intense heat, and freezing temperatures break safety seals and shatter glass. In the wintertime we had to shift towards dry goods and be careful not to put any glass jars in the pantry, although we can leave some hardy fresh items there, like onions and potatoes and apples. In the summertime, anything fresh will spoil, and it's a good idea to make sure the pantry's transparent door is well shaded. (We put an extra-long roof overhang on ours.)

Another issue we've faced is vandalism. We've found no good solution to this problem—installing security cameras or calling the cops violates our principles—so we've just turned the other cheek and persisted with the work. One thing I will advise: make a good sturdy door! That seems to be the easiest part of the pantry to wreck, and the one we've had to repair and eventually replace most frequently.

Our next steps are working on community engagement -- we're preparing a survey to place in the pantry to get better community feedback-- and enlarging our food justice project by growing

vegetables in a local community garden. Our hope is that come summer, we'll be able to share fresh vegetables and herbs periodically at the pantry's site, and provide healthier, fresher food as part of its offerings.

If anyone would like to talk more, please feel free to reach out to Pittsburgh DSA.

Save the Land and People!

To learn more about Pittsburgh DSA's work, contact the chapter at info@pghdsa.org. You can also follow them on Twitter @pghDSA.



Production Notes

Build – Issue 8 (July 2019)

Design and Illustrations: Kate L. (Silicon Valley), James T. (NYC), Aelia P. (San Francisco)

Coordination and Copy Editing: Aelia P. (San Francisco), Nicole E. (Silicon Valley)

Brought to you by DSA members and contributors:

Mark L. (Birmingham), Dan Backes (MADSA), Ben M. (Boston), Kaiser (DC/VA), John P. (Berkshires), Lizzie (Fort Worth), Sabrina R. (Pittsburgh), JD H. (Twin Cities)

Questions, comments, pitches:
buildthedsa@gmail.com

Made with solidarity and donated labor.

Human Resources

We have a bad working relationship.
That is: we have
a bad relationship with work.

What is left after we
unspool ourselves all day,
rewind and recoil?
Recollect all that is spent.

When do we get to stop
preparing to live and just live?
Is there anything left over of
the sunlight?

I am made of clay and water
shaped around a sunflower.
We are made of work and splintered hands.
We are so hungry.
We are alive out of hunger.
We are alive to build
something more beautiful than this.

By JD Hegarty



*"There's nothing new under the sun, but
there are new suns."*

—Octavia Butler