

Build

The Socialist-Feminism Issue

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WE SHOULD ALL BE SOCIALIST FEMINISTS

Socialist feminist organizing is hard.

Of course, all of our organizing is hard—we're fighting for a complete societal overhaul in the most powerful capitalist, imperialist country in history, and, as is typical on the greater left and in feminist circles, we all have different ideas of how best to win that fight. But socialist feminist organizing is particularly hard. We face attacks from right wing misogynists, centrist liberal feminists, and leftist "allies" who condemn our organizing as liberal identity politics or bourgeois moralism. We face the suffocating patriarchal tendencies and misogyny that permeate our everyday lives and our organizing spaces. And even when we don't face those challenges, we're still struggling to identify our role within DSA's big tent and determine where we can be most effective in our movement.

The major difficulty of socialist feminist organizing in DSA today is that we must be everywhere at once, in both internal and external organizing, stretching ourselves thin, without losing sight of the projects that only feminists are advocating for. Every issue that we organize around as socialists, we must also organize around as feminists. Applying a feminist lens deepens our understanding of each problem affecting the everyday lives of the working class and is critical to our fight for just solutions.

Responding to an argument from some detractors on the left effectively illustrates this central problem. Some leftists, who view themselves as "universalists" but whose opponents usually term them "class

reductionists” or “class-first” socialists, argue that organizing around “identity politics”—including gender identity, race, sexuality, and disability, among other categories—is “particularist.” Thus, such organizing is not a worthy focus for socialists, who should strive to address “universal” issues that appeal to the entire working class. To them, identity-related categories are merely a way of turning the working class against one another and splitting it into smaller and smaller portions that are ineffective in organizing against capitalism.

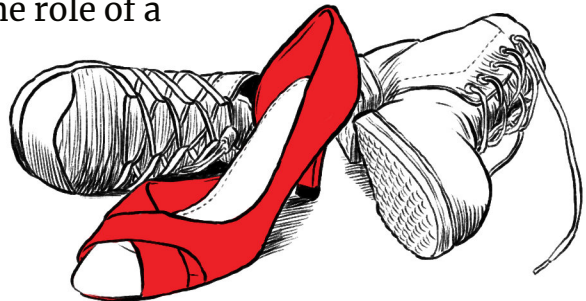
Leaving aside the obvious criticism (among many others) that the gender identity “woman” includes close to 50% of the working class population, this idea illustrates a major mistake made by critics of feminism: treating it as though it is a narrowly focused identity rather than using it for what it is: like Marxism, a form of analysis, a way of seeing and interpreting the world. In this sense, the difficulty at hand is that feminist organizing is not actually niche or particular at all. Rather, the feminist project is the exact size of the socialist project. There is not a single issue around which we organize as socialists to which a feminist lens cannot be applied in order to improve our analysis and aid our struggle.

Herein lies the major challenge: organizing around more “explicitly” feminist issues, while also integrating a feminist lens into every structure whether internal or external to DSA. Internally, socialist feminists educate our comrades about feminism and patriarchy. We combat unhealthy organizing spaces and sexual harassment and assault. We engage women and non-binary people and develop them into effective organizers with an eye to the ways that our organizing spaces can be exclusionary to non-cisgender and heterosexual men. We provide (or lobby our chapters to provide) child watch at meetings to make our chapters more accommodating to families. Overall, we strive to make DSA into a

welcoming, healthy feminist space, all while women often do more than their share of administrative work in their chapters and reproductive labor in their homes.

Externally, we provide political education to the public. We are pulled in all directions as we strive to share the labor and provide a feminist lens in every one of our chapter's projects, from electoral to housing to mutual aid. We develop our own projects around issues that matter to us as socialist feminists. Moreover, because society traditionally views these issues as "women's issues," it often falls to us to organize around projects related to, for example, abortion access, even though such projects could easily fall under the purview of healthcare organizing. A further difficulty here is that developing such projects within our socialist feminist groups (rather than within an issues-based group such as healthcare) means that we also run the risk of becoming siloed off from other groups in our chapters if we do not relate our work and our feminist lens back to the overarching issue of healthcare. Ultimately, we do a little bit of everything, and for this reason socialist feminist organizers in DSA face disproportionate levels of burnout as they overcommit themselves for the good of the movement.

These circumstances plague me as I strategize in my role as steering committee member of Chicago DSA's Socialist Feminist Working Group and interim steering committee member of DSA's Socialist Feminism Working Group nationally. I ask myself: What is the role of a distinct socialist feminist group in DSA when, by necessity, we are involved in everything? Can we, as the



problematic neoliberal refrain about the working woman says, “have it all?” If not, what dedicated purpose should we serve as organizers? Should we prioritize political education and internal organizing so we can make more socialist feminists in chapters that we have made safe, welcoming, and feminist? If we believe this internal work is essential, must that come at the expense of our developing our own unique external campaigns, thus running the risk that reproductive justice and other “typically” feminist projects fall by the wayside?

I don't have good answers yet, except that I refuse to sacrifice one for the other. But I do think it's important that we, as socialist feminist organizers, ask ourselves these questions.

Regardless of the difficulties, socialist feminist organizing in DSA holds a lot of promise. Socialist feminist spaces are uniquely welcoming and provide a supportive environment for comrades who are often marginalized in both their everyday lives and other organizing spaces. They also encourage democratic, comradely discussion and consensus-building in ways capitalist society discourages and chapter meetings might lack.

Day by day, feminists in DSA fight to strengthen our chapters and bring a feminist lens to all the work that we do as an organization. We do this to ensure that DSA advocates for those whom patriarchal, racist capitalism oppresses the most. But to do this effectively, we need every comrade in DSA to bring a feminist lens to their work and their lives, just as they bring a Marxist one, and to challenge the patriarchal, white supremacist aspects of capitalism as an integral part of the class struggle.

By Laura Colaneri

STIGMA ISN'T SEXY

Sex work is not new. In fact, it's been around since the start of recorded history. So why is promoting sex worker safety a relatively new political concern? The U.S. is one of the only fully industrialized countries that criminalizes and actively stigmatizes sex work(ers). As a working member of this industry, I have some thoughts.

Law enforcement and government officials have picked a war on sex work (SW) because their blood boils at the thought of our complete autonomy in using sex appeal as a profession and enjoying the full value of our labor. In April of 2018, these officials passed the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA/FOSTA) to take away that autonomy, misrepresenting the oppressive criminalization of sex work as a solution to sex trafficking. While many SWs knew neither political party was on our side, we were counting on the left to save us from this legislation. SESTA/FOSTA passed by a landslide, with only two opposing votes cast in the name of "internet privacy."

Since then, many SWs have had to return to pimps and street work, which is exactly what advocates of SESTA/FOSTA claimed it would prevent. At least 67 SWs have lost their lives since its passing, and many more remain missing. Countless people, but mainly sex workers, have screamed, are screaming, and will continue to scream about what would save our lives. Most people, including many who claim to advocate for our well-being, ignore us or silence us, often both. At a time when "believe women" has become a rallying cry, this disregard for the voices of SWs is all the more egregious and personally distressing.

It's no question that any labor movement claiming to be "large-scale" must include sex workers, but who would it be for and what would it look like? There are numerous exotic dancer unions around the U.S. and laws protecting employees at brothels in Nevada, but how do you unionize when your profession will get you incarcerated or killed? One potential model is Organización de Trabajadoras Sexuales (OTRAS), a union organized by Conxa Borrell, a sex worker in Spain in August of 2018. While sex work is decriminalized in Spain, there is substantial grey area that puts many SWs at risk for fines and imprisonment. After forming OTRAS, Borrell quietly got it approved by Spain's Labor Ministry, which requires no political oversight.

Abolitionists who believe sex work doesn't fit into their country's socialist ideals have attacked OTRAS, but SWs in Spain are largely immigrants, trans women, and lower income people, so it's safe to say their views on sex work are rooted in racism and classism. The Prime Minister, who is trying to introduce legislation banning prostitution, is heavily influenced these abolitionists, who threaten the progress made by OTRAS. Unionizing sex work in Spain gives SWs a fighting chance to demand basic workplace rights, healthcare, social security, and pensions. While it is an imperfect model, it's much more effective than the one we currently have in the U.S. Unionizing will be difficult and it will be dangerous, but sharing information publicly and promoting education about sex work is one of the first steps.

As an organizer who is



also an active sex worker, I have encountered positivity, but also just as much negativity. I started Sex Workers of San Antonio in June of 2018 to foster education and visibility in my community. We publicly debuted at Pride Parade 2018, and were surprisingly met with an overwhelming amount of love. Although I later stepped back actively organizing for a few months due to personal health issues, I remained confident in my theory that education is the key to our survival, and talked about sex workers' rights whenever and wherever I could.

In January of 2019, I was asked to speak at the San Antonio Women's March. Knowing that many people in the Women's March movement adamantly opposed sex work, I debated taking the opportunity with myself for a few days. Ashley Judd, a representative of the March, even called what I do "paid rape." Such Sex Work Exclusionary Feminists (SWERFs) have long used this language to try and silence us and make us feel inferior, and associating with such people weighed on me.

Ultimately, I decided that being silent was simply not an option. This represented an unmissable opportunity to educate my community, so I spoke. That day, I came out to my mom and to my community as a proud sex worker, and I was met with love. I spoke about SESTA/FOSTA enabling sex traffickers who prey on SWs of color, low income, and trans people. Most critically, I pleaded that SWs are begging for acceptance into groups like DSA or Women's March, and insisted that we shouldn't have to build our own table when there are plenty where we should already be seated.

While the feedback online and on news outlets wasn't kind, I was as inspired as ever to get the ball rolling. I've just been approved to lead a Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) chapter in San Antonio, which will give sex workers access to information about medical services, self-defense, and education about legislation

that may affect us and how to fight it. Because a huge part of safe sex work is our health, I've also been working with Planned Parenthood to give workshops on safe sex work and what that looks like for different people. While Planned Parenthood is SW friendly, they aren't vocal enough about it just yet, but I'm hoping to change that soon. I'm a proud sex worker and I wish I could scream it louder than I already do, but my organizing will do that for me.

I was introduced to DSA after the Women's March, when I was asked to run for a co-chair position with San Antonio DSA. Although I insisted that I wasn't smart enough and lacked the organizing skills that some members had, which I legitimately thought was true, several members insisted with equal certainty that I was up to the task. In January I was elected as the chapter's co-chair, and I have been working in the role for almost two months now.

Quickly I learned that if I wanted to create true change for sex workers, I had to start by advocating for us in political organizations. San Antonio DSA had endorsed Sex Workers of San Antonio and welcomed me into a space where my voice would be heard, but I consider those basic expectations. Being an unashamed absolute whore really gets you weird reactions in DSA, and I don't mean that in an entirely negative way. It's no surprise that women with known sex appeal who use it for monetary gain aren't usually taken seriously as a political organizer in a white male dominated space, but there's a first for everything. White men in DSA have dismissed me. Members have made me feel inferior and asked me inappropriate questions. Some are unable to stop looking at my body when I speak.

I've experienced all of this, and more. Internalized whorephobia doesn't just disappear when you claim to be socialist, and in fact it often allows people to mistakenly feel comfortable that they are incapable of such prejudice. Combating these patterns of behavior and mental frameworks requires that members stop

and actively check themselves. Is what you have to say more important than what they have to say? Why? A large part of taking on sex work as a political issue is seeing sex workers as knowledgeable political beings.

San Antonio DSA is relatively new to organizing for SWs rights, but we have extremely high hopes for bringing sex workers into our labor rights working group. We think it would be an informative topic to talk about at one of our Socialist Night School events, directly engaging those who haven't included SW in their socialism yet.

I've only been organizing for about 10 months, so I'm still learning from every meeting and every interaction with members. Having assumed that organizing was relatively simple and mostly direct action, I wasn't aware of all the networking and classroom style training that was involved. I had no clue that this was a more than full time commitment. I'm very grateful to have a chapter that is patient with me and is actively working to educate me on the logistics and nuances of organizing.

Nobody, including people in DSA, is perfect, and I don't hold grudges against those who have made me feel inferior at one time or another, but it's time to let whores into your organizing and invite them to lead the conversation. Invite local sex work chapters to your meetings and see how you can support each other. Hold a letter writing party for incarcerated sex workers (check out SWOP Behind Bars), donate some tasers or mace. Make sure your solidarity includes those whose humanity hasn't been fully recognized. Sex workers are organizing for our rights, and if you're ready to work with us, whether through DSA or not, we're ready to work with you.

To contact SWOP San Antonio, email sanantonio@swopusa.org. To learn more about San Antonio DSA, visit sanantioniodsa.org.

SOLIDARITY WITH OUR

*neurodivergent senior
trans rural incarcerated
young muslim jewish
immigrant latina
black indigenous local asian
urban working class
undocumented survivor
non-binary unemployed
queer global sex worker*

SISTERS

PRONOUNS AND PRAXIS

I'm a queer, nonbinary person. The word *nonbinary* is a synthesis that works for me, for now, to resolve the contradiction between my experience of gender and the gender I was assigned at birth. I wish I had a more affirmative word, something to contribute to the vocabulary of a future society that includes me, but all I have right now is the negation of a gender binary. To cope, I often remind myself that revolution is at the soul of queerness.

I use they/them pronouns. I appreciate when someone asks me my pronouns, and when others introduce themselves using their pronouns. But simply using my pronouns correctly doesn't necessarily make someone my comrade—for liberals who understand enough to gender me properly, it seems that respecting pronouns is close to the final frontier in their concept of queer liberation. And while my own concept of queer liberation will always be evolving through lived experience, it sometimes seems that comrades I trust deeply are worried that they will harm me by articulating a position or question about gender. That's why I've been working with comrades across geographical and ideological lines to develop the conversation around moving from pronoun politeness to solidarity across genders. I hope this account is helpful for other new organizers like me: I wanted to transform the conversation about pronouns, but had to transform myself before I could stand with comrades to do that work together.

Approaching gender education simply as a non-cis person in the room

My first meeting with local DSA members was in November 2017, the early Pre-Organizing-Committee days of Salem DSA. I was brand new to politics outside

liberalism. Almost a year later, meetings had started to run smoothly, we were making things happen in the community, and I had an informal leadership role in the not-yet-official chapter. In September 2018, I went to a Eugene DSA chapter meeting and co-facilitated a discussion on intersectionality and issues facing trans people. Then for the Salem meeting later that week, I changed the “Introductions” line on the agenda to “Introductions: Name and Pronouns.” Although I and others had given and asked for pronouns during introductions in the months prior to that meeting, this minor act of institutionalization felt like progress.

Because pronouns were getting more attention during introductions, there were a variety of reactions in addition to compliance. These usually ranged from ignoring the ask to nervous laughter. If anyone raised the question, “why are we doing this?” I would give a stumbling explanation of how my experience of gender was a radicalizing force in my life, and how using pronouns was a way of showing solidarity. Then the meeting would have to move on: I was usually facilitating, there was usually a lot to cover, and I usually wasn’t emotionally prepared to justify my existence.

Reflecting on those experiences helped me deal with that anxiety and consider comrades’ discomfort with pronouns in a different light. When I implicitly ask people to use my pronouns in the scenario of a quick roundtable series of introductions, what am I really asking for? Am I asking for an expression of surface-level liberal politeness, or an expression of deeply-rooted comradesly solidarity? Until queer feminist thinking becomes second nature for all comrades, to many, it probably seems I am asking for the former. I feel uncomfortable when I hear that nervous laughter, which I interpret in good faith as masking a fear of being ostracized for not knowing enough about gender and pronouns. But I also feel uncomfortable when asked to make or agree with a politicized statement if I don’t understand the politics behind the ask. Because

pronoun use is often wielded in service of shallow liberal politics, I expect that leaving behind this assumption may be one of the first steps a comrade takes in developing a socialist politics of queer liberation.

Approaching gender education with structure and intent

Salem DSA publishes a quarterly newsletter with articles in Spanish and English written by locals about local and national issues. In the January 2019 issue, I wrote an article addressing how gendered oppression intersects with other struggles. I argued that using pronouns can create more space for examining the contradiction between, for example, the socially-constructed gender binary and the existence of trans and nonbinary people. This idea drove me to do more research beyond my personal experience of gender. I did this research to prepare to facilitate a local discussion on solidarity across genders, as well as to write this article you are now reading.

My expectation was that I'd get closer to some One True Take about gender, and be able to write a satisfying guide to teaching about pronouns. I wanted to invite a deeper discussion among comrades and normalize queer feminist thinking. But what this process showed me was that I could take the longest and most enlightening personal journey through self-examination and literature review, and still fail as an organizer if I came back with only facts and figures to ask my comrades to memorize. Giving hurried, breathless tutorials on gender at the beginning of meetings with no room for discussion, and publishing that article in the newsletter, were both methods of positioning myself as the authority on gender. I needed to stop thinking of myself as the person in the room with the best opinions about gender, and cede my ground to make space for a mutual process of liberation from gendered oppression.

Following that insight, our socialist feminist working group is bringing this discussion out of the "I" space

and into the “We” space. We’re refining a plan to discuss solidarity across genders at our April general meeting. The major question we currently face is how to open a good-faith discussion where all our comrades can sit in the discomfort and vulnerability of not having all the answers about gender. It’s clear that many of our comrades are concerned about offending people with their lack of prior research, and many of us (myself included) still find it difficult to get past years of being told to be “polite.” We’ve been told not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, and therefore to expect that nobody should make us feel uncomfortable.

We plan to start this discussion by asking explicitly for suggestions about ground rules and seeking consensus on those rules, so as not to ignore the needs of comrades who feel gendered oppression acutely. We then plan to take a problem-posing approach to the discussion, starting with self-examination. For instance, we will ask: What makes you feel the most connected to your sense of gender? What do you think others expect of you because of your gender? Next, we want to build toward an analysis of gender as a social and historical construct. This broaches other questions: Do we need a predominant idea of gender that rewards or punishes people for their gender expression? How has colonialism impacted the expression of gender on this continent? To complement this approach, we are identifying brief text and video excerpts to help jumpstart the discussion. After we try this approach, we plan to publish an analysis of how these ideas worked out in practice (including that source list, which at time of writing is still very much in progress) to the DSA Discussion Forum. We hope to connect with other chapters and improve the activity for the next iteration. Wish us luck!

To learn more about Salem DSA’s work, contact them at salem.democratic.socialists@gmail.com. Follow them on Twitter [@salem_dsa](https://twitter.com/salem_dsa).

socialism taught me more
about my own

★ identity



than CAPITALISM
ever could

A BASIC HEM TO PREVENT FRAYING

When I first presented the idea of sewing lessons to the Queer Working Group of the Mid TN DSA I wanted to share my love and knowledge of sewing with my comrades who never had the opportunity to learn. Fixing something torn or frayed is empowering, it connects us to our labor and frees us from the financially draining and ecologically disastrous cycle of fast fashion.

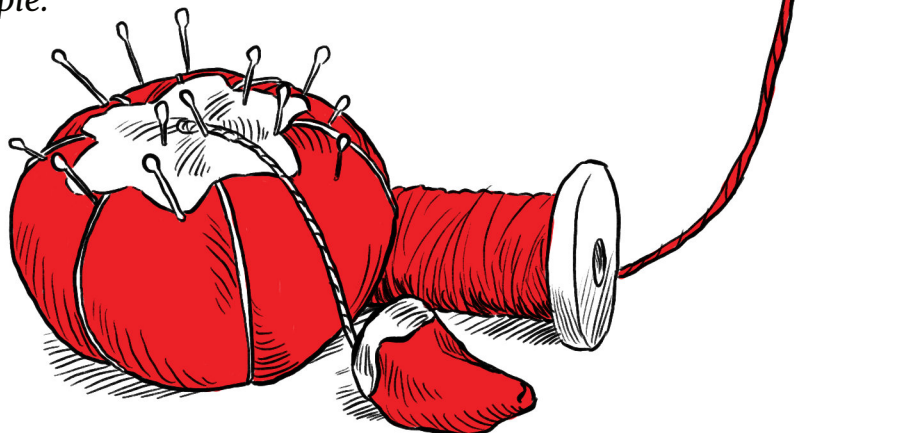
1. Select your needle and thread

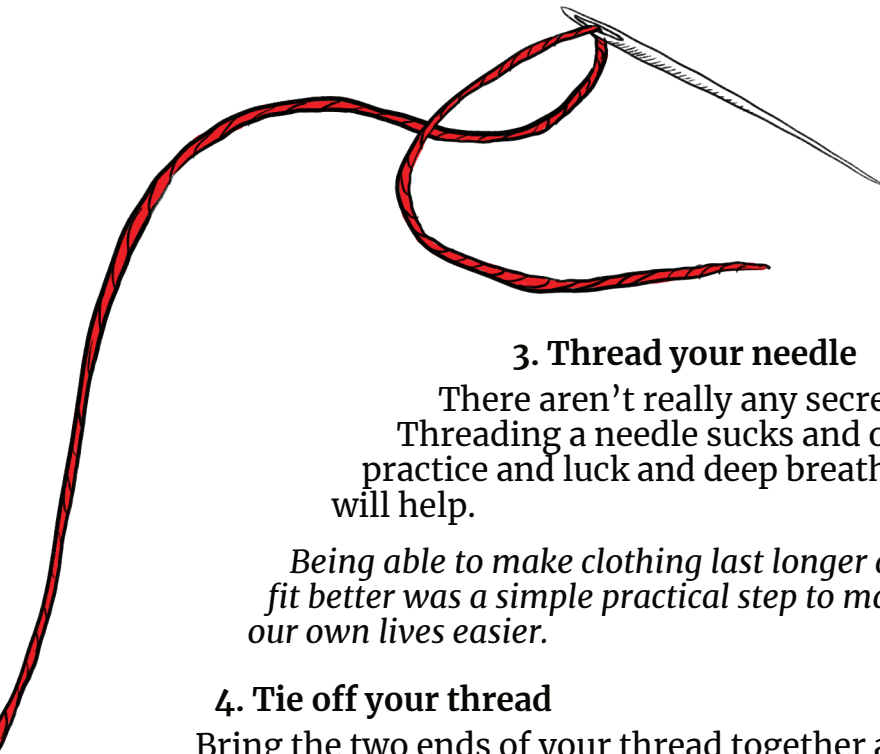
Put your needle through your shirt to keep it handy and safe.

2. Measure out your thread

From your hand to your heart with an outstretched arm is about a yard and is a good thread length.

As we discussed the idea we quickly made the connection between the way clothing is designed for fast cheap construction (and strict gender roles) and our daily struggles as queer people.





3. Thread your needle

There aren't really any secrets. Threading a needle sucks and only practice and luck and deep breaths will help.

Being able to make clothing last longer and fit better was a simple practical step to make our own lives easier.

4. Tie off your thread

Bring the two ends of your thread together and slide your needle to the center. Treat the two threads as one and tie a knot near the end furthest from the needle.

We started to brainstorm lessons, which quickly turned into planning more projects as the wide range of possibilities started to reveal itself.

5. Fold your hem

Fold the raw edge of your fabric up so that it is hidden on the inside or back of your project. The width of your thumbnail is a good repeatable amount to fold.

We could do more than fix and tailor clothes. We could make cloth napkins and reduce our reliance on paper towels. We could make reusable pocket warmers and heating pads and menstrual pads. We could make grocery bags. We could even make pride flags and bandanas.

6. Stabilize

You could use an iron or a series of pins if you were setting a long or finicky hem but pressing your fold with your fingertips should often be enough.

And we could make things for others too – like blankets and sleeping mats and pillows and dolls.

7. Set your first stitch

You can rely on the knot at the end of your thread but for extra hold after you set your first stitch slip your needle through the loop created by your knot, trapping your thread.

We were truly giddy with power. We could do all these things with just a few lessons, some cheap supplies, and a little bit of coordination.

8. Stitch

Set your stitches perpendicular and across your raw edge. Keep your stitch height, width, and tension standard and equal. Making pretty even stitches takes more time but symmetry is strong.

Front/Outside: ||||
Back/Inside: ////

9. Tie off

Start a stitch but don't pull tight. Slip your needle into the loop three times and pull tight. Set one more stitch and trim your thread, releasing your needle. Tug your hem to test for weak spots or to smooth out any puckering. Bask in your success and teach a friend.

We could do this together. We could create an all ages queer space based around creation and not consumption. We could empower each other and ourselves to make the world a little nicer. And we did.

You can follow Mid TN DSA on Twitter [@MidTNSA](#).

CENTRAL IOWA DSA EXPOSE CPC CAMPAIGN

In November 2018, Central Iowa DSA's socialist feminist working group started laying the groundwork for our campaign to expose crisis pregnancy centers in the Des Moines metro area. The work of comrades in Pittsburgh and Los Angeles inspired us to take action. The increasingly successful efforts of the Iowa State Legislature to shame and control pregnant people motivated us to begin this work.

In the winter of 2018, the Iowa House and Senate passed a fetal heartbeat bill. Although the Iowa supreme court ruled the bill as unconstitutional in Jan 2019, further attacks are gaining support in the legislature, such as the personhood bill that the Iowa state senate introduced in March 2019. As frightening and often demoralizing as these laws are, we as socialist feminists know that the struggle for reproductive justice is not limited to lobbying and rallying annually at the capitol building. We must expose the oppressive, patriarchal institutions that exist within our community unchecked.

Crisis pregnancy centers have existed in the Des Moines metro for decades. They're such an unassuming part of the city that most people don't even know what they are when they drive past them. Branded as a safe, non-judgmental spaces for young people experiencing pregnancy fears or crisis, CPCs such as Birthright are regularly invited into local schools to share misinformation about pregnancy, reinforce gender roles, and foster sexual shame. We've heard from several members of the community that the local catholic high school invites Birthright to speak at assemblies every year about the dangers of

abortion and the sin of premarital sex, handing out small plastic fetus figurines to students in their skin tone.

A newer addition to the list of CPCs in Des Moines is InnerVisions Healthcare, which runs a high-spirited ad on local hip hop radio stations that makes their fake clinic sound like a fun place to hang out and chill. While tabling at an event last month, one woman heard about our campaign to expose fake clinics and said that when she taught in high schools the kids loved the crisis pregnancy centers because they would give them free clothes, gift-giving being another way they entice young, vulnerable people to come in their doors. Because CPCs target teens, we've decided to focus a good part of our organizing energies on talking with and organizing high school students in the Des Moines area.

As a first step to spread the word about our campaign and CPCs in general, in January members of our socialist feminist working group developed an Expose Fake Clinics Zine. We included information about what CPCs are, why exposing them is a socialist feminist issue, a list of local CPCs and a list of places pregnant people can receive actual healthcare and support. We also developed posters modeled after Pittsburgh DSA's soc fem campaign posters, and we plan on posting those in the next few weeks in highly trafficked areas around CPCs. Included on the posters is contact info for the campaign, for which we developed a new gmail and google voice account so that folks who see our signs can call and share their stories.

This method for hearing from the community has been somewhat successful for our chapter's housing justice work, and we hope that it will help us connect with people who want to talk about their experience at CPCs. This groundwork organizing will lead to public canvass sessions outside a crisis pregnancy center on one of the city's busiest streets. In April we'll be tabling at a local high school's annual Femi Fest, an

event organized by the school's feminist club, to share the Expose Fake Clinics Zine and to invite students to join us in organizing, postering, and canvassing about CPCs. We will unite the teens for reproductive justice!

Another angle to Central Iowa DSA's campaign to expose fake clinics is to push the narrative that abortion is healthcare, and that all pregnant people regardless of gender identity have a right to healthcare. Although our chapter is not currently involved in Medicare for All work, we see an opportunity to use our fight to expose crisis pregnancy centers to advocate for M4A as the only way to preserve pregnant people's right to prenatal care, abortion care, or postpartum care.

Until now, these fake clinics have met with virtually no push back from the community and operate freely, in some cases receiving funding from the Iowa GOP's family planning bill. As Iowa Republicans are regrouping and planning their next legislative attack on pregnant people, we're working to connect with people outside of explicitly political institutions right here in our community. We know that regardless of what laws are passed, the rights of pregnant people have always been and always will be under attack unless we organize.

The religious right has won the abortion narrative, claiming to be on the side of "life" and "love", by being incredibly well organized. It's time for those on the Left to face the enemies of pregnant people by publicly exposing them in ways they don't anticipate and by organizing with those who are most vulnerable.

To learn more about Central Iowa's Expose CPC Campaign work, contact the chapter at centraliowademsocialists@gmail.com. You can follow them on twitter [@DSM_DSA](https://twitter.com/DSM_DSA).



INTERVIEW WITH AUSTIN DSA: FEMINIST ACTION COMMITTEE

In recent years, the Texas legislature has become a testing ground for anti-abortion legislation. Increasingly onerous requirements have drastically limited abortion access, harming women in the process. For the past three years, Austin DSA has been running Bowl-a-thons to raise funds for low-income women who could otherwise not afford an abortion, as part of the National Network of Abortion Funds' larger program. (website: <https://bowlathon.nnaf.org/>)

Megan Glenn from Build spoke with Alice Embree, one of the co-chairs of Austin DSA's Feminist Action Committee, and one of the founding members of the chapter's Bowl-a-thon program. Alice has been a socialist feminist for decades. She's a veteran of many fights, working with women who pushed forward the *Roe v. Wade* case.

MG: How did you get started with the Bowl-a-thon?

AE: My friend, who was in DSA from 1982 on, said, "Let's start a Feminist Action Committee and do a Bowl-a-thon." I didn't know anything about it. That was my intro to DSA's socialist feminism work. In 2016, we raised about \$3,000, in 2017 we raised twice that, and in 2018 we raised about \$9,000 locally. And DSA all together raised \$90,000 all over the country last year, which is awesome.

MG: What does Austin DSA's Bowl-a-thon work look like for this year?

AE: This year we are working on about six simultaneous fundraisers for the Bowl-a-thon, and we have four teams. We're trying to engage the

chapter generally, that's one of the things that's strategically different this year. Some of our events had brought in the Socialist Feminist Committee and friends, but hadn't gone deep into the chapter in previous years. So this year we're doing bake sales, plant sales, poster sales, button sales, parties, a chili cook-off, and we are trying to work with a theater to screen a movie.

Right now we're caught up completely in the Bowl-a-thon, but we also have names for a rapid response team that can oppose hideous bills being considered by the Texas legislature, which is always coming up with new ways to screw people out of any rights, including reproductive rights.

MG: What is an example of your legislative work?

AE: So there's going to be a focus on stopping a fetal heartbeat law, it's an abortion ban passing as fetal heartbeat legislation, we'll get active on that. There's a lot of talk in Texas about what happens in a post-*Roe v. Wade* world, and I'm one of the few people that can go, "I remember that, I remember it quite well." I have a friend who received an abortion in a motel and nearly died from it. So I am seriously aware of where they want to take women back to.

I think one of the ways we need to talk about abortion is as healthcare, so that de-stigmatizes abortion. But we also have to emphasize the whole gamut of reproductive needs, whether you can have a child and actually raise the child, and have healthcare when you have the child, and have healthcare for yourself and the child, it's all connected. Texas has a very low insured population, and terrible stats on maternal healthcare and infant mortality, so we'll be working on the full gamut of reproductive justice, not just on the access to affordable abortions.

MG: What are some ways reproductive justice overlaps with other issues?

AE: We want to work with other DSA committees. We'll try to work with the Austin city budget on childcare accessibility and on city funded efforts for childcare. We want to work with the city council to make childcare available during city council meetings. There's a big bond that passed for affordable housing, and we may be able to inject child care issues into that, so that there is accessible childcare near the new affordable housing.

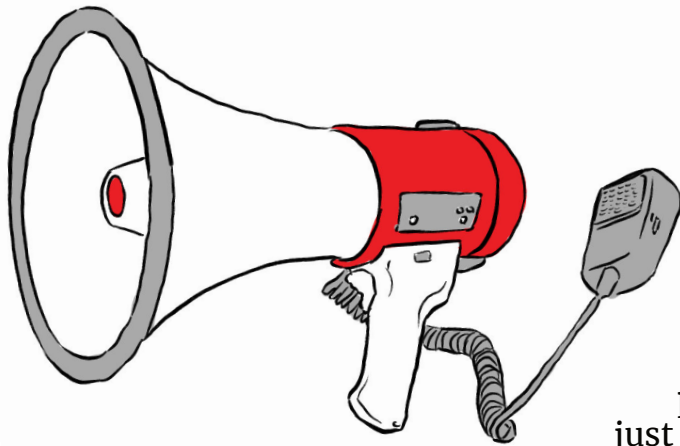
MG: So what does that mean when it comes to the Feminist Action Committee and how it relates to the rest of the chapter?

AE: The FAC proposed a Reproductive Justice priority and it passed as one of five chapter priorities. It is very broad, addressing abortion, sex education, parental leave, prenatal care, child care, and free period products. For example, with prenatal health, there's ways to work with the health justice committee. We can do some good outreach to our housing committee on childcare needs. We can work with our Labor committee on parental leave.

We're doing a socialist night school on socialist feminism where we're reading Audre Lorde, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Tithi Bhattacharya. I think the night school is a good door in for people that aren't familiar with DSA. It will be a great opportunity to connect our work on the Bowl-a-thon to socialist theory. Theory is an area where we hear lots of men's voices so this is a place of struggle for us as well.

At February's general body meeting, we introduced our reproductive justice priority to the general membership. At the beginning of the year, Austin DSA passed five priorities for the chapter, and reproductive justice was one of them.

So we'll get 20 people in our committee meetings, and then at the general body meetings you've got to figure out how the committee will relate to them, and how you're going to share your priorities. Because some



people just come to these general meetings and sit in a room with 150 people, and then they leave. We need to get people engaged, which is the whole point, not just paying dues.

MG: So how did you present your topics at the general meeting?

AE: We did this great thing at the beginning: “What is the cost of having a uterus?” like *The Price is Right*. They got four guys up there and asked them, “What is the cost of 18 tampons?” and they were like, “It’s \$1.” And then, “What is the cost of a first trimester abortion?” “What is the cost of childcare?” And the answers were almost always incorrect. It was a great learning device for people to understand this as an economic issue. There were breakouts on sex education, the Bowl-a-thon, childcare, and other priorities, so it was very interactive and not just somebody talking at the beginning of the meeting.

Last year, we did some great events, and we spread the work on the Bowl-a-ton, and I would look around and go, ok, I know there’s a bunch of people in Austin DSA, and we could have filled up this movie theater and we haven’t. So this year while we didn’t really name it as a strategy, we’re working on engaging with the membership better. I think that’s a very important

feature, don't have your committee work off to the side if you're doing this. Figure out how to present it and engage your entire membership.

MG: So what role do you think the Feminist Action Committee plays in the chapter?

AE: Well, now the former chairs of the Feminist Action Committee are chapter co-chairs. So that's an interesting development. I think it changes the tenor and discussion of debates. As I watched women who were in the committee, I felt I could see their ability to lead a meeting and their skill sets grow, their leadership capability grow, their voices grow. They project more. I feel the committee is a place of learning where they can inject skills learned in the FAC into the general body.

From my experience in the 1970s, I would not have learned to use my voice or to use my leadership skills in the way I have without a women's movement that allowed me to do it. I come out of this organization from the 1960s, Students for a Democratic Society, and I joke sometimes, "Damn if we had had progressive stack or a rule that you should let others speak before you speak again, our meetings would have been 15 minutes."

I joke about it, but it's really true that the male voices dominated, and the women did not speak up, and the women typically typed, did research, did a lot of the organizing work of keeping the chapter together. But they didn't have a prominent role, and their efforts were generally ignored. And that set the stage, really, for women's liberation in the '70s.

MG: What are some other things you've noticed about earlier feminist movements compared to socialist feminism within DSA?

AE: For me with DSA, I get to see just a tremendous amounts of energy. The thing that blows my mind about DSA is how much work people will gladly,

eagerly and with great enthusiasm take on. I go, “Good lord, where has this energy been for two decades?” It’s very encouraging for me to see that kind of ability to go out and do door-to-door campaigns.

I will say very few of these young women have kids, and as feminists, the other thing to inject in DSA is to really be kid-friendly and parent-friendly. Because when you have all those responsibilities, people better understand that you have them, and you need help, and that you often need to drop back. At least when I had young kids I didn’t operate at the same pace of insanity.

People also need to understand it’s a marathon, not a sprint. You hopefully develop a lifelong set of values and skills in activism, and a bunch of comrades that will be there for your life. And for people that are just coming in, they don’t know that. I’ve seen it, “We’ll just have a general strike and the revolution will happen tomorrow.” I thought that in 1968 and it wasn’t true. This is a long build-out and lifelong dedication.

You’ve got to take care of yourself, because we’ve got a lot to do. That’s something feminists need to bring in to this, I think we have a good attitudinal way of looking at it.

To contact the Feminist Action Committee, email feminist@austindsa.org. To learn more about Austin DSA, visit austindsa.org.



The DSA Dog Caucus is 100% wholesome, 100% unofficial, and 100% committed to protecting abortion access. The canine comrades are on their second year of bowl-a-thon fundraising and have almost raised more than \$12,000 for three local abortion funds. We picked the three funds by working with the National Network of Abortion Funds to identify funds in states with repressive laws, few clinics, and a dire need for a helping paw. Follow the work of the DSA Dog Caucus on Twitter at [@DSADogCaucus](https://twitter.com/DSADogCaucus).

PLANTING SEEDS — NYC-DSA'S RED SPROUTS CHILDCARE COLLECTIVE TAKES ROOT

What were you doing as a 7-year-old from 7-9pm on a Wednesday night? Probably eating dinner and getting ready for bed, maybe watching TV—most likely not listening to your parents talk about bylaws at a DSA branch meeting.

There are many reasons why DSA is not welcoming to parents, but weeknight meetings and lack of childcare stand out as the most obvious. Getting a sitter on a potential work night is difficult, and anticipating one's schedule in order to request childcare in advance is often impossible. This is why we need free childcare at every single DSA event, regardless of whether or not it is requested.

DSA is bigger than we've ever been. These growing numbers are exciting, but they require us to build infrastructure to keep up. We need to welcome people who rely on childcare in order to attend meetings, and we need that labor to be equitably distributed among our membership. As we work to become better organizers, childcare should be a skill that we all develop.

Organizing a childcare collective in DSA will advance our efforts to build a base for socialist politics in New York City in several ways. For starters, it will aid in building a more inclusive organization and community that welcomes all of the very many people who would like to organize with us, but aren't able to due to childcare obligations. This will exponentially

broaden and deepen our reach.

Second, we will be able to encourage socialist values among the children we are caring for. We hope to someday treat childcare like Socialist Sunday School—a chance for kids to learn a version of what their adults are talking about in a meeting, but in a fun, engaging, and accessible manner.

Last but not least, our collective can aid in building capacity and developing leadership among newer or less engaged members by providing them with a fulfilling activity through which to engage in DSA's work and community. We've received a lot of interest from new DSA members who are looking for ways to contribute to the larger organization.

There were a few concerns that we ran into right off the bat. Luckily, we've had nearly six months of meeting as a collective to debate, discuss, and figure out how best to tackle them:

Isn't this a huge liability? Shouldn't we be using professional childcare services?

Under our current capitalist system, liability often dominates the way that caregivers are trained. As a political organization, rather than a school or company, DSA is positioned to push back against the professionalization of childcare. Anyone who grew up in a big family can tell you that providing childcare is often just another shared community duty, not requiring professional training or certification. We thus view providing volunteer childcare in DSA events, meetings, and reading groups as a form of mutual aid, as it has been in working class communities for a long time. Red Sprouts is inspired by a long history of radical childcare collectives on the left.

We do want to make sure that we protect our volunteers, or “gardeners” as we call them, so we created a waiver that parents will sign before dropping off their kids (if you'd like a copy of this, or any of our

materials, please contact us!). And, of course, to ensure that the sprouts are receiving excellent care, we developed a training based on conversations with current and former childcare professionals on our organizing team, that all caregivers will be required to complete before signing up for childcare shifts. We also made a commitment to always provide childcare in pairs, as is the practice in many afterschool programs and summer camps.

None of this means that we shouldn't use professional childcare services when necessary. For example, when the organizers of the No Amazon Town Hall reached out to us about providing childcare for a massive event, which was a collaboration with several other organizations, we referred them to a co-op of childcare workers. However, we believe that for many internal DSA events, meetings, and reading groups, caring for our comrades' children presents a more viable and accessible option.

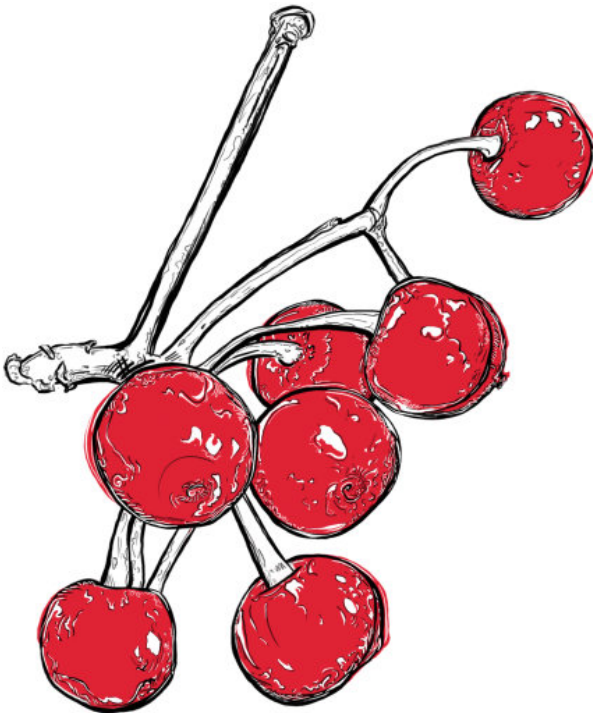
Care work is systemically devalued under capitalism. As Socialist Feminists, shouldn't we be paying people for their labor?

Much of the nitty gritty work that we do as organizers is feminized labor—whether it's taking notes, coordinating food for a potluck, or administrative tasks such as sending out Doodle polls and frantically hunting for affordable meeting spaces (which in New York City is quite a nightmare—ask any branch OC member). We all do this work, not because we're expecting compensation, but because it's a part of being a good organizer. How is care work any different?

How do we avoid this project becoming SocFem members providing childcare for the rest of DSA?

We've been especially attuned to the gendered nature of childcare from the beginning. The people excited about providing childcare were, naturally, the ones with pre-existing experience. And since care work is

an overwhelmingly non-male field, we were worried that our volunteers would be made up of folks who were already doing a great deal of the feminized labor, such as notetaking or administrative work, for the organization. This is why we've been targeting cis men specifically. In our pitches at branch meetings and in emails, we've called on cis men who are looking for a way to become more deeply involved in DSA's organizing work to do so by becoming childcare providers, which we think is an especially fun and rewarding organizing activity!



But I'm a cis dude, and I'm really not good with kids...

Back to the admin labor analogy—most of your fellow organizers are not going to have a lot of sympathy if you tell them that you're "really just terrible at sending out Doodle polls!" Childcare, like scheduling, is a skill that people learn and develop, with guidance from more experienced comrades (of course, caring for a child is a much more difficult and higher stakes endeavor than creating a poll, as any parent can attest). We reject biological determinism in all forms, but particularly the idea that some people are "naturally" better with kids. Some folks have had more experience because they became the de facto unpaid babysitters in their families, were encouraged to apply for after-school care jobs, taught Sunday School—the list goes on. We encourage our comrades who feel intimidated by childcare to examine that fear, and then face it head on!

It's urgent that our cis male comrades develop and hone these skills, because in order for our movement to be successful, we need women and nonbinary folks in positions of leadership, which can be difficult if we're also doing the lion's share of socially reproductive labor. It's no coincidence that some of the most successful workplace struggles of the past year, such as the LA Teachers' Strikes, or last summer's Nurses' Strike in Vermont, were in the realm of social reproduction. Winning movements are led by caregivers and care workers, and we want to give them a chance to lead.

How do we get started?

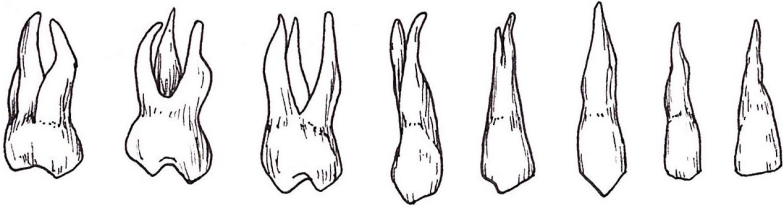
Thus far, we have been working as a group of about a dozen core organizers, developing training materials and logistical frameworks for providing childcare. We began by soliciting interest from potential caregivers through an online form, while holding meetings with our core organizing team every few weeks.

Two decisions were crucial in our early development.

First, we decided to take our time in developing our systems, as not to extend beyond our capacity. It would have been easy to feel like providing childcare was too important to wait, and we did receive some requests from large events before we were ready. In those cases, we recommended professional childcare services. The second strong decision we made early on, mostly on instinct, was to divide into two separate subcollectives: one for developing training, and the other for logistics. Dividing work like this allowed us to multitask, and led to greater leadership development. We plan on adding more divisions of labor, and perhaps forming a subcollective devoted specifically to long term projects like a Socialist Summer Camp or a DSA babysitting network for parents.

In January we reached out to our large list of over a hundred interested gardeners to enroll people in a training. We got about forty people to attend a two and a half hour training, after which we received very positive feedback! We've started taking childcare requests from several working groups and branches. Ultimately, we want to provide care at every DSA event, regardless of whether or not it is requested in advance. Our long-term goal is to make childcare skills widely held in the organization, so that volunteering to provide childcare at your working group or branch meeting is akin to taking notes or bringing food. At that point, a specialized childcare collective will no longer be necessary for day-to-day childcare, and we will have the opportunity to move on to larger projects.

To learn more about the NYC Red Sprouts work, contact them at redsprouts.nycdsa@gmail.com.



The grasp you have haunts me
looking at your eyes, I am trapped,
immobile.

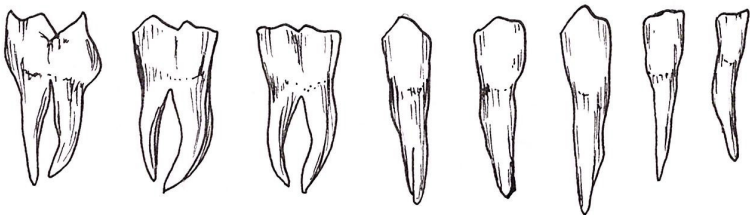
And yet I am moving closer to you
Limbs pinned at my side

I wriggle & writhe
When you bare your teeth, you
call it a smile but I know
better

You are a predator & I am your prey
You flash your toothy grin
with a possessive cunning only you
could pull off.

Fool the others.
I close my eyes + wait for
your teeth to sink in
Get it over with

By Laura Kerrigan



LESSONS OF THE OAKLAND TEACHER'S STRIKE: CHILDCARE ISN'T NICE, IT IS STRATEGIC.

Our country is experiencing a reawakening of the organized left. From Oklahoma to LA, thousands of public school teachers (a historically feminized field) are reminding us what it means to build collective power. More importantly, teachers are also redefining where their strikes are fought and what resources we need as socialists to fight with them.

A strong coalition of teachers, parents, community members, and students themselves built the power of the Oakland teachers' strike. One of the key takeaways the EBDSA Socialist Feminist caucus found is that people don't organize in spite of having kids. 2019 is seeing the rapid radicalization of thousands of people across the country precisely BECAUSE of the crisis of care created by capitalism, and how it disproportionately affects those people (parents or teachers) who care for kids. Our job as socialists is to make sure they have what they need to organize with us.

Although a stunning 95% of teachers voted YES for strike authorization, a high participation strike required equal levels of family support. To paraphrase Pastor Jenkins (who organized the main West Oakland Solidarity School and Bread for Ed food hub at Taylor Memorial Church) "empty schools win teacher strikes."

Building the support necessary to win required recognizing the role that public schools play in people's lives beyond education, and filling the gaps that shutting those schools would create. In the case of Oakland, this kind of social reproduction framework helped the OEA predict the two key challenges to solidarity between parents and teachers: food and childcare.

After months of canvassing and turning out DSA members to rallies in support of the union, the OEA trusted the chapter with the project of coordinating the teacher solidarity efforts. Oakland unified has 37,000 kids, and 70% of them depend on free or reduced school lunches to fulfill their nutritional needs. This program is the direct legacy of the Oakland born Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program. In other words: EBDSA had really big shoes to fill.

Bread for Ed was a massive lesson in coalition building, which forced our chapter to create fast alliances with an diverse number of parent, community and faith organizations. The goal was to feed thousand of kids throughout the city, to make sure food insecurity didn't force parents to cross the picket line. Through these coalitions and a large number of PTA meetings, teachers were also able to encourage community organizations and parents to set up "solidarity schools": places where working families could drop their kids off to continue going to work.

Even though most families didn't cross the picket line, only the parents in most need utilized solidarity schools from the get-go. For the most part, parents self organized in different ways. Some people rotated shifts taking care of their kid's friend groups on different days of the week. Other parents took turns utilizing their sick days to keep their kids at home. Attendance at solidarity schools grew with each day of the strike, particularly in POC neighborhoods such as West Oakland and Chinatown. A common thing to hear

from parents bringing their kids to solidarity schools by the end of day seven was: “We are running out of sick days” or “I won’t have access to childcare next week”

By the end of day seven, the bargaining team reached a tentative contract. As teachers prepared to vote on a contract that didn’t fully address their demands, keeping strong lines was not the only question on many union members’ minds. Members wrote long social media posts speculating whether parents would begin to cross the picket line, undermining the community support they had managed to build. Teachers decided to ratify the tentative agreement with a narrow majority before that possibility became a reality.

For the last two years, the East Bay DSA SocFem caucus has engaged in a slow base-building strategy. So far we have not pursued steering committee seats within our chapter. Instead we’ve focused on creating spaces for raising consciousness on socialist feminist issues, and for holding separate organizing meetings where we put those lessons to practice. We also encourage our members to join official committees within the organization. This allows our members to bring the socialist feminist framework we are building into official DSA conversations.

In April 2018, Maura McMichael (one of the co-chairs of the EBDSA Socialist Feminist caucus) joined the Meetings Committee after the caucus identified childcare as a core issue we wanted to address. The chapter had offered childcare for the first time at its 2018 convention, and members we didn’t even know were parents showed up with their kids. This highlighted the fact that every time a parent shows to our meetings without their kids, someone else is not engaging with socialism to take care of them. The next step we took after this eye-opening event was to push

for childcare at all of our general meetings.

As much as parents may like the idea of strike solidarity schools and free childcare, they are not likely to trust you with their kids on the first day. “What we have learned is that after seeing you for a few meetings, parents will trust you with their four year-old; two months later, they will bring the two year-old; a couple months later, they will bring the infant” said Maura. “Next thing you know, mom is showing up to the meetings.” In many ways, providing consistent and reliable childcare without request has allowed for some of the invisible gendered labor behind our membership to be redistributed. By actively disrupting the systemic perpetuation of inequality within our own organization, we have also created the resources for our chapter to get to know our membership better.

In March 2019, our steering committee approved a Childcare Resolution submitted by the Meetings Committee with strong involvement of the SocFem caucus. This resolution expands the childcare program beyond the general meetings. Starting next month, all official chapter committees will be required to offer childcare at their events. The meetings committee will now provide committees with resources, training and leadership development opportunities for those members who volunteer to do childcare. Most importantly, it will help us identify parents as soon as they enter the organization, and connect them with public education organizing. Maura was the main author of the resolution, and has been key to building our childcare program. Building the support and consensus for this resolution began almost a year prior to the resolution passing, and its convergence with the teacher strike proved fruitful to both our chapter and our strike efforts.

As EBDSA SocFem, we believe that providing childcare and more actively engaging with the parents in our membership before they request childcare would have

allowed for us to have a more robust and targeted socialist parent network to activate during the teacher strike. As we move forward with our childcare program, we are acknowledging as a chapter that the active engagement and support of our DSA families will strengthen both our chapter in general and our capacity to fight for public education specifically.

The research it took to build our childcare resolution also proved useful to the solidarity schools during the strike. Maura wrote the liability forms utilized at solidarity schools. The same language approved by the OEA will become part of our childcare program starting this month. Models of intergenerational engagement, such as the ones built by Pittsburgh DSA through Socialist Sprouts, allowed for us to encourage high-school students to volunteer at solidarity schools and Bread for Ed hubs.

This strike was an invaluable lesson for DSA members on the strategic importance of care work to building working class solidarity across racial and class lines. Even though the strike ended, the fight for Oakland's public education is far from over, and the efforts of our chapter have not gone unnoticed. "If we are going to continue doing base-building work with teachers, parents and students" said Maura, "it is crucial for our organization to create the supportive spaces necessary to engage them in the ongoing struggle for public education."

Building the capacity to support working parents takes resources, and time, but it is crucial to forging the kind of unbreakable solidarity that wins strikes. At the end of the day, when the working class trusts you with their kids, they trust you with their future.

To learn more about the EBDSA Socialist Feminist Caucus, contact the chapter at ebdsasocfem@gmail.com. You can follow the caucus on Twitter at [@EBDSASocFem](https://twitter.com/EBDSASocFem).

PERIOD PACKS FOR THE UNHOUSED

Build: Introduce yourself – How long have you been in DSA San Francisco?

Tiffany C: My name is Tiffany, and I've been a member of DSA SF since November 2017. I'm the current Vice Chair of the Homelessness Working Group, which is committed to fighting systemic violence against the most marginalized members of our community. Over the last couple years, we've worked directly with unhoused folks and advocacy organizations to raise awareness of the struggles of homelessness, and alleviate those struggles where possible.

B: What is the homeless situation like in SF?

TC: It's one of the worst, if not THE worst, crises facing our city. The last point-in-time count in 2017 reported around 7,500 homeless people in San Francisco. That likely underestimates the real figure because the way we determine that number is volunteers going out on foot or by car on one night every two years and counting every person they see that "looks" unhoused. It's not exactly a scientific method. The waiting list for a shelter bed is over 1,400 people long as of today.

"Dire" is an understatement. Not only are folks exposed to the elements and the physical dangers of being unsheltered, police constantly harass them to "move along" in what we call sweeps. The city frequently confiscates their personal belongings and bare means of shelter (e.g. tents, sleeping bags). Homelessness takes an enormous physical and mental toll on those experiencing it.

B: What's in the period packs that you distribute?

TC: Pads, tampons, wet wipes, tissue packs, hand sanitizer, ibuprofen, nail clippers, socks, lotion, water and snacks, and a "Know Your Rights" pamphlet created by the Coalition on Homelessness containing information on what to do if belongings are confiscated by SF Police or the Department of Public Works. I wanted to help return a bit of normalcy and dignity to people on the street who can't just walk into a store and grab some tampons, or lay in bed with a heat pack like I do when I'm on my period. Everything routine for a housed person is infinitely more of an uphill battle for a unhoused person; this is just one example out of so, so many.

B: How did you start the project?

TC: We'd done service events in the past like providing food. Actually, one of the first activities I participated in as a DSA member was helping cook a big pot of chili and distributing cups of it in the Mission neighborhood right before New Years 2018. During one working group meeting, someone floated the idea of collaborating with the Socialist Feminist Working Group to hand out menstrual supplies, and it took off from there. This was our first Period Packs event in March of 2018. SocFem put together a list of items to include in the packs, based on input from incarcerated students.

We set up a GoFundMe page and put the word out on social media. Within a day we hit our initial goal of \$500, which blew me away! We ended up surpassing that and ordering around \$800 worth of supplies online from bulk warehouse stores (not Amazon!). Around 20 volunteers consisting of DSA members and "DSA curious" got together on March 3rd, 2018 to assemble and distribute the packs. It was a great, low-barrier way to get folks plugged into our chapter and our work. We went out in small groups to distribute the packs in neighborhoods known to have more unhoused folks: the Tenderloin, Bayview-Hunters

Point, and SoMa. We also contacted the Coalition on Homelessness for pointers on finding encampments, as folks are often “swept” by SFPD and forced to move constantly, which makes it harder for us to reach them.



B: What has the unhoused community’s reaction been like? The community generally? Local government?

TC: The reception from the unhoused community has been very positive. For Period Packs in particular, there wasn’t a lot of publicizing outside the chapter, so we didn’t hear feedback from the wider community or the local government. We got decent press coverage for our Survival Gear Distribution event of tents, tarps, ponchos, and sleeping bags during the bad rainstorms in early January/February, and for our smoke mask distribution during the wildfires¹. We actually ended up distributing more masks than the city itself.

The intent behind these service events is to make up, in whatever small way we can, the city’s shortcomings. It’s bittersweet. I feel such a rush of inspiration and affection for my comrades when they organize to distribute masks or tents within a manner of hours, but I’m incredibly disappointed by the utter

1. SF Weekly: Democratic Socialists Distribute More N95 Masks Than the City (11.19.18); SF Examiner: On Guard: SF rolled out 25 extra mats for 4,200 homeless people during storm (01.18.19); SF Weekly: SFPD Confiscated Tents Hours Before Major Weekend Storm (02.04.19)

lack of urgency toward the crisis from those who have the most power and resources. All of our events are powered purely by volunteer effort and individual donations. How much more could be accomplished with the Mayor and Board of Supervisors on board?

B: Do you have any anecdotes from handing out the period packs?

TC: One common theme we heard over and over when we went out was about police harassment and being swept. One person I talked with mentioned having their HIV medication confiscated.

B: How many packs have you provided to people?

TC: In March we handed out around 80 big ziploc bag packs, and in August we did around 120 in nicer fabric tote bags.

B: Do you plan on continuing the project?

TC: Yes! I'm aiming to do another Period Packs event by this summer. We've also discussed not just putting essentials in packs, but fun things too, like nail polish, makeup, and face masks. Just a little something, again, to restore some normalcy in people's lives.

B: If you could request one "ask" from the city or state government, what would you ask for?

TC: My ask would be permanent housing, first and foremost. My biggest wish, however weird it may sound, is that we never have to organize another service event again because every person has their basic needs met. The dichotomy of housed and unhoused people, the haves and have-nots, should not exist. I often wrestle with the question of Period Packs being charity or mutual aid, but no matter what the answer is, I know that we are building solidarity with our unhoused neighbors and comrades.

To contact the Homelessness Working Group in DSA SF, contact homelessness@dsasf.org.

Liberation under capitalism?



Sounds fake but ok

BRINGING SOCIALIST FEMMES AND QUEERS TOGETHER

I came to Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) through feminist organizing. I've also been a member of Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) for several years. Through this network, I've had the opportunity to be in lots of rooms where the only people present are women. This usually means a group of five to thirty women gathering in a circle. Rather than the typical "stand and deliver" method of facilitating, everyone is equal. Each voice is critical to the conversation. Everyone is there to listen, and no one is trying to control the room.

These experiences have transformed me. They strengthened my self-confidence, and helped me build relationships that have pushed me to expand my awareness of social justice.

When I joined Central Iowa DSA, I was one of the few women and one of few queer people in the chapter. I recognized that the safe spaces WFAN created could potentially bring more women and queer people into DSA. We obviously needed it, as many women and queer people across chapters shared their frustrations with misogyny and patriarchy in DSA, but were unsure how to combat it.

We held several Socialist Feminist Working Group meetings at the end of 2017 and throughout 2018. Based on my experiences bringing together groups of women, we asked that cisgendered male comrades not attend. Our comrades respected this request, for which I am grateful. Since bringing this SFWG organizing approach to other chapters I have found more pushback from cisgendered male members.

The first SFWG meeting was purely social and the second meeting was a discussion about emotional labor. I immediately noticed that women who I knew identified as leftists or socialists in Des Moines, but never come to DSA meetings, attended the SFWG. They explicitly told me they came because they wanted to be in a space without leftist cisgendered men.

This is how I began to understand that socialist feminist organizing is critical for base building in DSA.

Other chapters across Iowa were interested in our work. We decided to bring together women from all of the chapters for Iowa's first Socialist Feminist Convergence in March 2018 in Iowa City, Iowa. The first planning call was myself and...one male comrade. I learned that if we wanted to hold the Convergence at the public library, we would not be able to exclude men. Despite my extensive experience bringing together groups of only women, this was the first time I had encountered this issue.

We allowed men to join the Convergence, but asked that women and gender non-conforming members of the group who wanted to form their own small groups to discuss readings do so. One group of only women and gender non-conforming members read *Why I Became a Feminist Socialist* by Hillary Wainwright, while other groups that included cisgendered men read *What is Socialist Feminism* by Barbara Ehrenreich and *Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness* by bell hooks. We asked the reading groups to share what they learned with everyone. Before breaking into small groups we came to community agreements, which included running the meeting with progressive stack. The space was meant to prioritize the voices of women and gender non-conforming members, however cisgendered male comrades did feel the need to contribute their thoughts and opinions throughout the day.

Over lunch we encouraged open-ended conversation

and brought a craft project, embroidering a DSA logo onto a small patch. We also held a menstrual product drive and made donations to a women's shelter. In the afternoon we had two facilitated conversations on socialist feminism and housing and socialist feminism and healthcare.

During the last hour and a half the cisgendered men agreed to leave so the women and gender non-conforming members of the group could have their own space. During that time the remaining attendees sat in a circle and shared about themselves and their experiences living as socialist feminists in Iowa. This mimicked the spaces I'd been part of in WFAN and in our Central Iowa SFWG. The vast majority of the women attending wrote that the space without cisgendered men was the most profound part of the day. Many attendees had never been in an organizing space without cisgendered men, and they said there was a fundamental shift in their comfort level and ability to speak up.

Many of the women and gender non-conforming members connected via social media after the Convergence and worked together to provide readings and advice for starting SFWGs in their own chapters. As a result of this Convergence, we held two learning circles on socialist feminism at the Iowa Socialist Summit, including one specifically for women and gender non-conforming members. This also opened the door for more cross-chapter collaboration. Later that same year, the Central Iowa DSA SFWG planned a spaghetti dinner to raise funds for the Eastern Iowa Community Bond Project, which brought together women and gender non-conforming members from at least three chapters, and served as a service project for our men's Anti-Patriarchy Working Group.

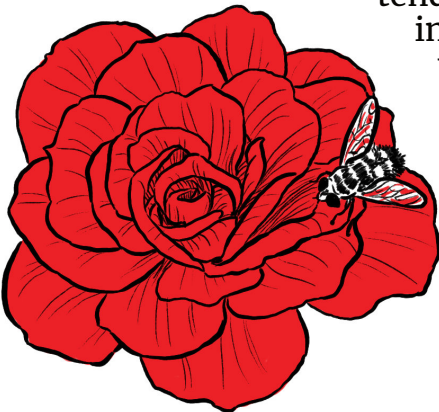
Centrist Democrats and Republicans are easy to find in most communities. Whether you live in a deep red, blue, or purple district, holding socialist views can be very isolating. The reality is that many DSA chapters

are primarily comprised of straight white cisgendered males, and even if the men present identify as good feminist allies, being a woman or queer person in these spaces can be even more isolating. We must still overcome persistent social and cultural barriers.

In general meetings, women, even the most outspoken women, must overcome gendered teaching styles we've all been exposed to. This impacts everyone, not just women, negatively. In "You Just Don't Understand," which covers differences in communication styles between men and women, Deborah Tannen tells a story of a woman student doctor who was very bright but asked a lot of questions. Administrators passed her over for advancement, and asked why, they said it was because "she didn't know much" because she was asking a lot of questions.

Tannen's research shows that the goal of conversation for men is negotiating for status in the social hierarchy. They do this by "exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking or imparting information." They see asking questions as an indication of low intelligence or lack of understanding. Because women have learned how to navigate conversations and educational spaces dominated by these patriarchal influences, we tend to downplay our

intelligence. For example, we might preface a question with a phrase like: "Well I might be stupid but I have to ask..." In reality, several people might have the question, but the woman student is the only one willing to risk asking.



Even if we as organizers don't see DSA as an educational environment, many people joining DSA are new to organizing and consciousness-raising. It is a learning space for them.

I would go even further than saying women-only and queer-only spaces still matter. Spaces explicitly focused on discussing feminism and the role of patriarchy in all of our lives matter. Spaces for people of all gender identities to discuss the role of dismantling patriarchy matter. Within months of Central Iowa DSA's SFWG beginning, we noticed that some of our cisgendered male comrades also wanted a space to discuss feminism, so they started their own anti-patriarchy working group to facilitate safe spaces for vulnerable conversation.

By creating this space to focus on discussing feminism, we are clarifying that feminism is a critical component of our organizing, not simply an afterthought. We're creating space where members of various gender identities have room to learn and grow from where they are at.

As members of all gender identities spend time and expand their understanding of feminism in these spaces, we will build a stronger organization where we can all grow as feminists and act on what we learn in every organizing space. Our success in becoming a truly socialist feminist organization will determine our success in bringing about socialism in this country period, and we are doing the work to make this transformation happen.

To learn more about the Central Iowa Socialist Feminist Working Group, contact the chapter at centrاليowademsocialists@gmail.com. You can follow them on twitter [@DSM_DSA](https://twitter.com/DSM_DSA).

READING COMMENTARY: *THE FIFTH SEASON*

N.K. Jemisin's 2010 debut novel, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, swept that year's Sci-Fi/Fantasy genre awards and positioned Jemisin, in the ahistorical rhetoric particular to American arts and letters, as an overnight sensation. (Never mind that "overnight sensations" almost invariably have behind them decades of unrecognized work; never mind that Jemisin spoke and speaks candidly about the struggle of writing while holding a full-time day job for access to health insurance and subsisting in a large American city.)

It's Jemisin's second book this socialist feminist recommends to you now. It's also a book that smashed the typically impenetrable boundaries between "genre fiction" and "serious literature" established by, and so profitable to, institutional publishing. *The Fifth Season* is the first book in the Broken Earth trilogy, and the dedication reads, "For all those who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question." Like Ursula and Octavia before her, Jemisin did not come to the fantastical to play nice. Escape is not on the agenda.

In *The Fifth Season* and its sequels, we are in a speculative future, long past the damages done to our known world by climate change. "This is how the world ends—for the last time." In this world, beyond any conception of known political economies, structures of inequality persist, and those most exploited are those least informed. Fulfilling the best of the promise of Le Guin and Butler, Jemisin's "fantasy" is in imagining not merely the dystopian futurist injustices but the anti-hierarchical,

democratic, and communal points of resistance. In any world, our greatest conjurers of possibility tell us, life is only *life* when social relationships are valued above individual power.

Which is not to suggest conflictless utopia: Jemisin's extraordinary narrative achievement is revealing the rifts in one's one communities, the tensions innate in people, messy and impulsive and primal as we are, attempting to survive together. What matters, for that imperative pursuit beyond survival and into *life*, is how those tensions are acknowledged, responded to by the community. When violence—physical, political, sociological, diagnostical—is the motive for social organization, no community will ever know equality, but communities can overcome structural violence by recognizing and truthfully confronting those impulses. Difficult, perhaps even impossible, work— but therein lies the revolution.

Haleh Roshan is an Iranian-American writer and DSA member in New York City. Hang out with/commission her @halehroshan.



BIG WITCH ENERGY

I don't know how to charge crystals in the moonlight
or which talismans will ward against harm.

I've never collected herbs in the wilderness, cast bones,
or read the leaves. But when your heart beats, my heart beats.

I have spent a lifetime collecting the wisdom of mothers. I
have sought sisterhood longer than I have drawn breath.

I don't know which invocation will connect me to
the earth. What is my place in this choir?

The moon is bright and the wind is fierce. The ocean
roils. I am made of fire, wind, and ocean.

I deserve the space I occupy. Hold my hand. We
bring light and life to the world.

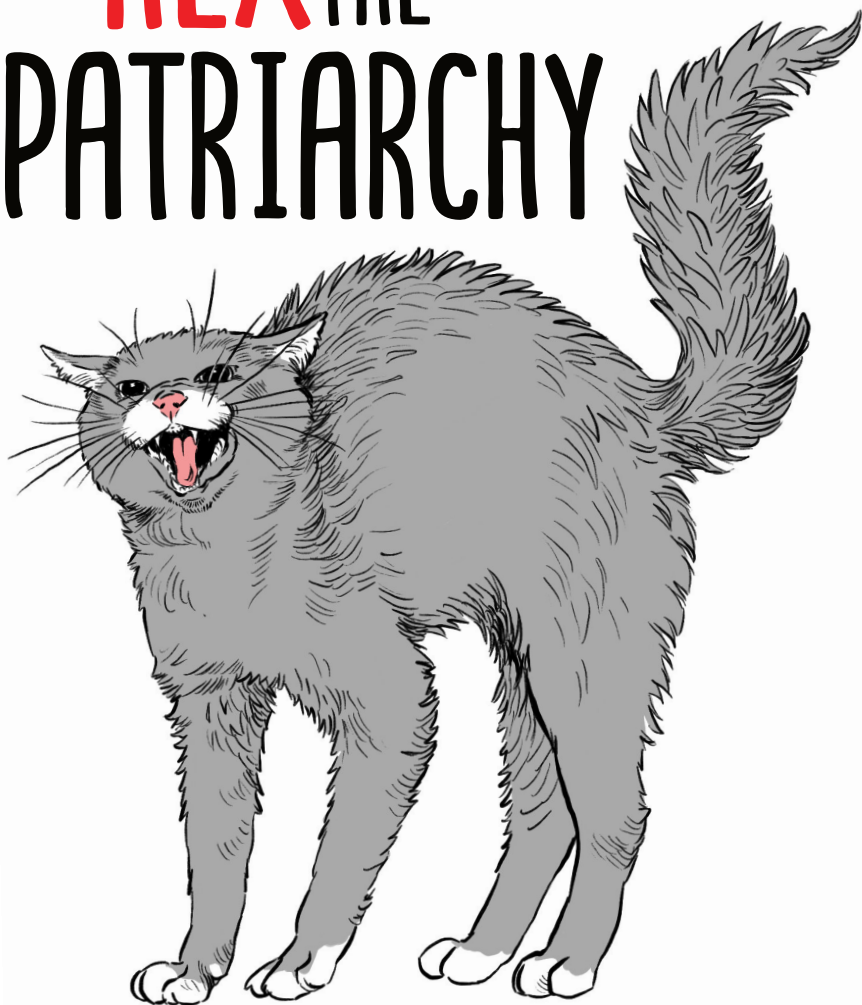
Our bodies are made of fury. I will sacrifice my
body for my sisters, if needed. I will become smoke.

If spellcraft is a matter of intention, know this: all of
my fire, all of my wind, all of my ocean is ready for war.

Know this: a circle neither begins nor ends. I will
draw circles and sing until there are no more songs to sing.

By JD Hegarty

HEX THE PATRIARCHY



HORIZON TEASER

Build is launching a new platform for theory and longer pieces to publish online. Introducing Horizon! Enclosed is a preview of the articles. The full articles are online at dsabuild.org/horizon.

Socialist Feminism and Social Reproduction Theory: Horizon Interview with Sue Ferguson

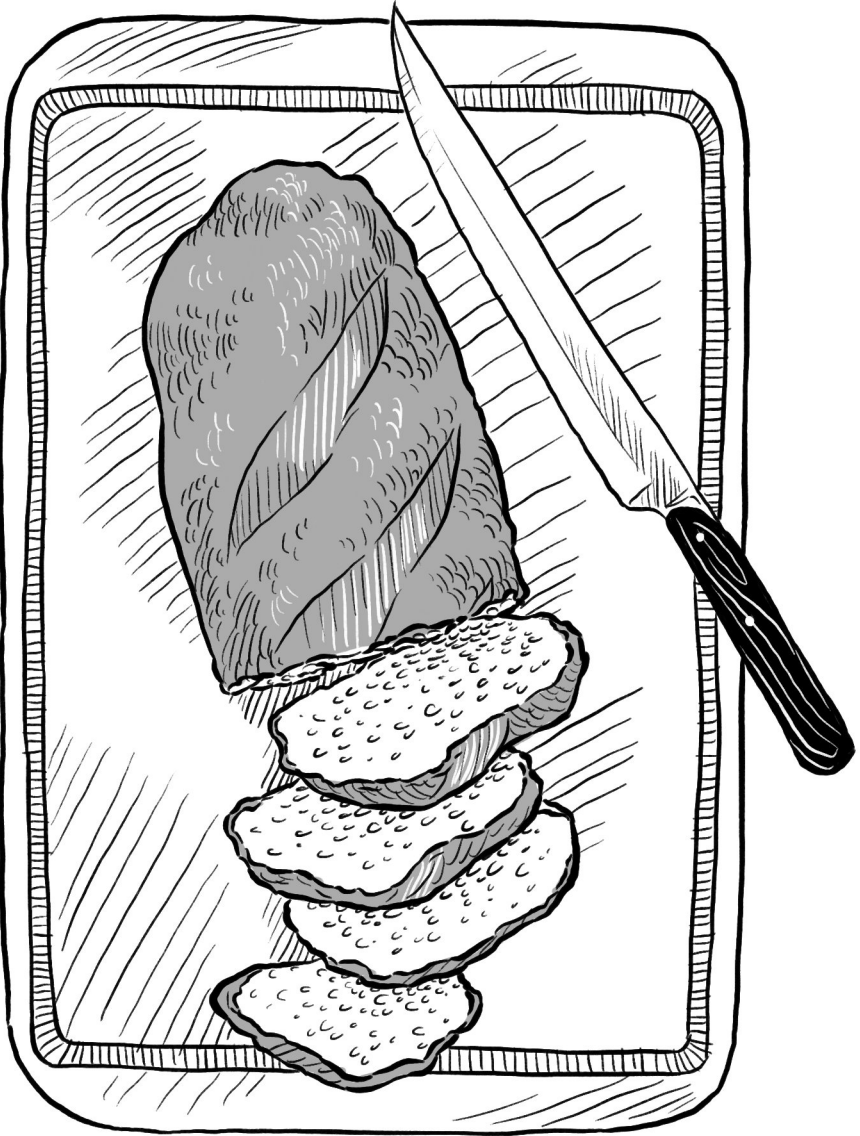
Sue Ferguson is an expert on Social Reproduction Theory and has decades of experience in socialist feminist organizing. Build team member David Backer interviewed Sue to discuss the intersection of socialism and feminism along with the intersection of theory and activism.

DB: What's your own personal history with socialist feminism? What campaigns or groups have you organized with?

SF: I began thinking of myself as a socialist feminist in the late 1980s when I was a grad student in Toronto. I was reading a lot of feminist theory, both for school and just to try to figure things out politically. I joined the International Socialists (IS), which was a group of about 30 socialists in Toronto (and 120 or so nationwide). The IS put out a weekly paper, held educational meetings, and supported activist campaigns in the city.

Political Education as a Driving Agent for New York's Soc Fem Working Group

It all started with a syllabus – an Intro to Socialist Feminism. We were sick of people telling us socialism was all “Bernie Bros” and “Brocialism.” We were feminists and socialists, and we wanted to be given the chance to speak, to be heard, and to listen in return. Finally, a chance to spread our voices and those voices with whom we agreed. I started my first reading group, Reproductive Justice, a year ago, and I could see our leaders struggle to keep the excitement contained. The political education committee quickly became official, and followed with new reading groups on Radical Black Feminism, Early Marxist Thinkers, and a group read of Sylvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch*. With each reading group, or Political Education group, our base of thoughtful, strong, feminists grew.



"One of the things that has to be faced is the process of waiting to change the system, how much we have got to do to find out who we are, where we have come from and where we are going."

– Ella Baker

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