

# DSA Perspectives....



March 13  
Everybody

This is the latest on the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), which roughly describes where the movement is at politically:

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-democratic-socialists-20170308-story.html>

The current DSA sounds a lot like the SDS of the 60s; almost complete local autonomy, very vague politics, even on long-time DSA positions, such as the Democratic Party. I think those who are interested might want to check out local meetings. It looks to me like it might be worth joining and looking at the potential to establish a distinct "revolutionary libertarian socialist" caucus, to be built around three positions: (1) for social revolution, not reforms; (2) against the Democratic Party; (3) for libertarian socialism, not state capitalism. I've heard that since the election, DSA meetings in New York have been attracting large numbers of people. Do Utopian people in New York have any interest in checking them out?

Ron

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March 13  
All,

I checked, and there is a Santa Fe chapter of the DSA. They claim 35 members; a picture from their most recent meeting (yesterday) showed 8 people. It looked like 4 were 50+ and 4 were under 40. Given size of Santa Fe, I think this probably supports Ron's overall impression of a certain vitality.

I agree with the political perspective on DSA that Ron outlined.

Will report more when I know more.

Rod

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March 14  
Hi Folks,

The NYC DSA is having a meeting this Wednesday, 3/15, in Harlem (though they're calling it "Uptown/Bronx DSA. Also I did notice a number of DSA folks at the women's march in Washington Square Park on 3/8.

Here's a link to the NYC DSA site on Facebook:  
[https://www.facebook.com/nycdsa/?hc\\_ref=SEARCH](https://www.facebook.com/nycdsa/?hc_ref=SEARCH)

I've also been to two meetings of the Indivisible group that's in the

NW Bronx & connected to folks in Yonkers. While they're completely imbedded with DP politics, they do attract some independent activists, so a few of us from BCJN may continue to check them out though I'm not optimistic.

Mary

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March 14

Hi Sandy and Ron,

Sally and I signed up for a DSA orientation for Los Angeles. The info to sign up is below if either of you want to join the call.

<http://www.dsausa.org/mar-22-2017-at 8pm 20170322>

Take care,

Roni

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March 14

The revolutionary pole in dsa. i do not know much about them...

<https://m.facebook.com/LibertarianSocialistCaucus/>

Much more learning to be done.

Shemon

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March 14

Shemon,

I am still looking through this to see if I can figure out the politics of the Libertarian Socialist Caucus. A comment on Facebook by one of its members, Khaver (I can't figure out how to copy it or link to it), seems promising: While there is an acceptance of Marxism, his overall proposition is: 1) socialism must be democratic; 2) socialism must be revolutionary; 3) socialism must be 'bottom-up.

Rod

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**WE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM OVER BARBARISM**



March 14

Mary,

I'm glad you're going. I won't because of a double conflict. Please give us a report. I've also been looking at DSA and considering checking it out. I also agree with Ron's perspective with the addition to being against both the DP and electoralism as a strategy (the Greens are no alternative, either).

As a N.Y. footnote, a near majority of the former local Black Rose branch was composed of union and non-profit staff people. Several of them joined DSA after the branch's demise.

Peace,

Bill

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March 16

For anyone who goes or has gone to a DSA meeting, is there any evidence of the "Libertarian Caucus" in actual existence?

Wayne

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March 16

Wayne,

If you look back at the recent emails to the list, you will see an email from Shemon that refers, and provides a link (if I remember correctly), to a group that calls itself either the "Revolutionary Libertarian Socialist Caucus," or the "Revolutionary Democratic Socialist Caucus." I suspect if you Google it, you might find it.

Ron

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March 16

I followed the link that Shemon provided. It's to a Facebook page that might represent more than one person, but might not.

Jack

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March 17

Shemon (& Mary),

It looks like you and I were at the same meeting. I had not planned to go because of two conflicting meetings, but since the first one didn't take place, I decided to go to the DSA event and arrived late as someone from the group was giving a recruiting speech. As you write, he mentioned 1700 members in N.Y. and 150 in the Uptown/Harlem/Bronx branch. However, it appeared there were only 80 people in the church sanctuary and, like you and I, not all were members of DSA. Still, I think this is substantial for what was only the branch's third meeting. (Note, however, at this meeting in the middle of Central Harlem, there were maybe at most 12 Black people). Also, there was mention of an upcoming conference to reorient the organization as a 'mass' one rather than a group of activists.

As you mentioned, there are working groups, mostly focused on legislative work. They are: Racial Justice, Immigration, Environmental Justice, Socialist-Feminist, Political Education, Housing, and Electoral. In addition, one of the speakers mentioned mobilization trainings designed to create rapid response networks where such may be needed. This looked interesting, but I was unable to stick around to ask questions. Did you?

The featured speaker was Kazembe Balagun, who I have known for a number of years in my dealings with the Brecht Forum. He was introduced as, among other things, a member of Malcolm X Grassroots and the New Hope Church in the Bronx. I left part way through his talk for my other meeting, but the beginning seemed a decent overview of the relationship of slavery and the beginnings of

capitalism. (Another note here: the person introducing Kazembe acknowledged that some of what he may say might make some people uncomfortable. If that happens, he asked that people please submit questions to people who will be making rounds with index cards on which to write them-- no questions or comments to be taken directly from the floor. In addition to the implicit acknowledgement of racism, this procedure fits well with your description of stage-management in Brooklyn).



Finally, another note illustrating the disconnection between the organizers and the area. The bar that was recommended for post-meeting refreshments is in fact a neighborhood nuisance and part of the gentrification of Harlem. Since its opening two years ago by white management flying an out-of-place U.S. flag in a storefront more in keeping with a suburban strip mall than Central Harlem, it has shown itself to be a place of great noise and rowdiness and, it's reported, the site of two fatal shootings.

Despite all this, I think the group is worth checking out further.  
Peace,  
Bill

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March 18  
Hi

So I have been thinking about this DSA stuff.

First, I have been to a couple of combined DSA-Jacobin-ISO events in Brooklyn. These events have been large with 200-300 people attending. They are fairly stage-managed events. ISO speakers and

Q&As are saturated with ISO cadre asking leading questions or stumping a speech. To the outside observer it looks like great, but anyone who has been around can quickly see the strings being pulled. You can imagine the political content--hardly inspiring or radical.

Second, I went to my first DSA meeting. (I have NOT joined DSA). Some facts from DSA organizers themselves: DSA nationally has a little less than 20,000 members. The NYC branch has 1,700 members. The Harlem branch has around 150 members. It is clear the DSA is surprised by the growth. They are having a citywide convention this May to deal with the growth and change the organizational constitution to deal with a mass organization.

From my vantage point, one of the problems of New York City it seems that NGOs and older political tendencies really overdetermine the political thought and possibilities. Any new ideas or organizing strategies are crowded out by a field of standard NGOs, anarchists, Maoists, Trots, etc. The easiest example to point to is gentrification. Every battle has been lost in this city and people keep doing EXACTLY the same thing. Amazing.

The most can be learned about DSA through their 8 working groups. If I had to guess the 8 working groups reveal a lot about DSA. These working groups are concrete organizing campaigns.

A big push was made at the meeting regarding universal healthcare for the state of New York. The key I was told was flipping 5 senators in the state senate and that would unlock the floodgates of free healthcare. I asked more questions about this and no one knew any more.

The Racial Justice Working Group wants to put "pressure on District Attorneys to stop persecuting broken windows violations" as one example. To be fair not all of their working groups explicitly mention orienting towards elected officials, but my sense is that it all ends up there at the end of the day.

This is where the rubber meets the road and it is difficult seeing anything meaningful coming out of this. Changing the course of any one of these campaigns would be difficult, not just because DSA is a social dem organization, but that the pressures in NYC to conform

to the NGO scene or whatever the established progressive-left has been doing is immense.



I hung out with 5 random DSA people at a bar. Unclear how new they are to politics. But they fit the stereotype we all hold of DSA people. They hate the Dems but can't make a break from them. This ultimately means a lot of the politics revolves around Dems. Talking and listening felt like getting the Saul Alinsky plan of organizing. I threw some softball questions and tried to get out of the logic of orienting towards elections and democrats, but the discussion stayed within a very, very narrow framework.

It is hard to see a meaningful intervention. Especially since the working groups seem to be set in place. Anything I might say would be like being a bull in a china shop. It seems working outside the DSA and building our own revolutionary stuff is still the way to go. At least in NYC.

Shemon

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