Watch What I Do, Not What I Say: A Primer on Caucuses in DSA Leadership, 2023-25

Jul 5 · Written by Vincent Urso

SMC Editorial Board Note: The piece is not an official caucus statement, but the opinion of the author.

At the first biennial DSA National Convention in August 2023, the election of the new leadership body was greeted with much fanfare and some confusion as a historic moment. A leader of the Rochester, New York, chapter enthusiastically stated the sentence to the chapter's new member orientation slides:

A small coalition of communist caucuses now hold the majority on the National Political Committee.

What is the "small coalition" that now holds the majority in the National Political Committee (NPC), DSA's national political leadership body and legal board of directors?

A couple of quotes in DSA caucuses are out there. They will be roughly what each group claims it's all about. That's useful, but I find it much more enlightening to look at the track record of the caucuses to understand who's who in DSA's national leadership.

The good news is that you don't have to look at the distributions and learn a lot of acronyms to gain a great sense of what's what. There are basically two tendencies in DSA.

The two tendencies

The **neo-politics tendency** envisions an organization with millions of members, which grows by recruiting democratic people and democratizing or practice and through collective struggle in the electoral arena, on the shop floor in labor unions, and beyond. The tendency's strategy is to build a mass, democratic, and multiracial working class. The tendency's resources success in terms of vast voting power, which empirically boosts a socialist future.

The **socialism tendency** brings its a pure and revolutionary socialist vanguard that will transition very soon into an ideologically cohesive, separate political party with elected officials who are delegates to the party's elected leaders (See Jacobin). Indeed, the tendency measures success in terms of DSA's appeal to already organized vanguard parties and prepares for a final crisis of capitalism to sweep in socialism's victory.

Indeed, since August, 2023, the NPC has had two quite firm blocs.

Acting as a single bloc, **Red Star** (CWR) members, including post-cross-major ICL **Bread and Roses** (Trotskyist), **Marxist Unity Group (MUG)** (Trotskyist), **Jacobin**, and **Luke R.** have implemented a joint agenda. Demand recently shattered a group, Socialist Revolution, and Luke has launched a caucus, Del Debsky Socialist). This is the socialism bloc.

Likewise acting as a bloc, **Groundwork** (5 members, including the other post-cross-chair, Karina S.) and **Socialist Majority** (3 members) have pursued a joint agenda. This is the mass politics bloc.

What have been the competing agendas of these blocs?

This guide will cover the following areas:

- **The Elephant in the Room:** Confronting Fascism
- **Are Socialists Our Enemies?** Endorsing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
- **A Change of Theory:** Considering a United Front
- **Concluding Remarks**

The Elephant in the Room

The epochal question in 2023-24 was whether Leftist would fully capture the American states.

A year before the presidential election, the NPC met to discuss potential outcomes and how DSA might organize up to and through the election. Some members of the secession bloc argued in the November 2023 NPC meeting that a second Biden term would be practically indistinguishable from a second Trump term. They thus saw no urgency in opposing Trump. Members of the mass politics bloc, on the other hand, warned that a second Trump term posed a very real fascist threat, in contrast to another neoliberal Biden term.

This contrast is most evident in a resolution **Groundwork** at the February 2024 meeting of the National Political Committee (NPC). The resolution, "Socialist Majority Proposal Regarding DSA Member Unity," pitted Red Star, Jacobin, and Luke R. against Groundwork, Socialist Majority, and Del Debsky Socialist. The resolution, which passed, "DSA commits to work to defeat Trump in the 2024 election, without endorsing the Democratic nominee." The resolution was defeated 9-7, the majority voting against. DSA representatives, voted no.

Socialist Majority brought forward a different proposal that the NPC eventually endorsed to use the Democratic primary (such as it was) to pressure Biden to stop the genocide in Palestine.

The "Uncommitted" campaign had emerged as a way to apply such pressure. Anti-Biden activist **Abdullah Hasan Abdullah** and **Layla Mohamed** at a large Michigan caucus to elect delegates to the Democratic National Convention who were "uncommitted" to Biden because of his support for Israel's genocide in Palestine. Hasan and Mohamed, a leader of Socialist Majority, then gave an impromptu speech to a crowd of about 1,000 with 40 percent of primary voters.

The movement began to other states. Socialist Majority member **Seth M.** assisted in organizing and field direction and NPC member Michael P. played a leading role as the movement's liaison. DSA had its support through infrastructure and organizing. More than 700,000 "uncommitted" votes were cast. In states that don't offer an "uncommitted" option in primaries, Hasan's Jacobin Rochester, N.Y. chapter ran a successful write-in campaign for the primaries in protest.

We can't call the campaign a success, since Biden and Harris continued to finance and incentivize a genocide. But it was an organizing win for DSA.

Paralysis

What now, after the primaries were over?

The secession majority of NPC remained content with DSA sitting on the sidelines during an extremely consequential political moment—an actually consequential against Trump.

The debate in the National Political Committee meeting of September 16, 2024, sheds light on why. I am grateful to Comrade Adam B. for the notes from that meeting.

One view was that for people to embrace socialism, they have to see hope in socialist organizations. Comrade **Kristen** argued that DSA should do more ways to encourage pessimism. Comrade **Colleen J.** critiqued this view as a right-wing framing, not only because we should never ask abolitionists suffering on workers but also because socialists need and seek power.

Members perceived a surge of energy when Biden dropped out. Did that "energy" represent a yearning for the status quo (in which case it would not be surprising that DSA's or a yearning for change (in which case it would)? A member from Groundwork argued that the surge came from a fear of Trump, which would be a good thing for DSA, because DSA has been reluctant to put out a full-throated independent critique of Trump.

The salient fact here is that the NPC, with its secession majority, was still not prepared actively to oppose fascism in mid-September 2024.

Campaigning to Defeat Kamala Harris

The NPC in November went on to consider a proposal put forward by the Internal Unity Group. (See NPC minutes for September 15, 2024.) The proposal would call on the public "to withhold their votes from Kamala Harris unless she recognizes and engages in a genuine and an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the genocide against the people of Palestine."

One of the NPC members from MUG said this is the best opportunity to build a cohesive opposition to the Democratic Party. He claimed that supporting Harris would cause Biden supporters to lose confidence in the Democratic Party. Instead, the proposal would move the Democratic Party to the Left.

Renée of Socialist Majority said the resolution would commit us to an unwinnable position and would be a disaster for our work in the Left. Comrade **Kristen** said the resolution would be ending our complicity in it seems as easy as not voting. She said that Biden's policies hurt have it worse. We have to continue engaging and organizing.

Seth S. of Socialist Majority said he sympathized. He was at the Democratic National Convention and it sucked because we let the limits of the "Uncommitted" strategy. However, sometimes that's the best we can do. The reality is we don't have the power to enforce a ceasefire and we have to figure out how we build forward that power. So we left it the same place as the seven unions who supported an endorsement for Biden. All opposite Trump, only he wants to swing states, and frame issues contrary. Like AMC, don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We need a transitional demand. Saying Biden, Harris, the point was we need an ending on the presidential elections.

The difference in the blocs can be viewed as the difference between the secessionist Traditional Socialist party and organizing for power in the mass politics sense to say, "Don't blame me / vote for Claudia de la Cruz"? Or do we focus, like the mass politics bloc, on organizing for power under conditions not of our choosing?

Are Socialists Our Enemies?

In the 2024 primary elections, four DSA members were defending their seats in the US House of Representatives: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman.

Comrades Tlaib and Bush were endorsed by national DSA. Their chapters gave them wholehearted campaigning support and national DSA backed up their support with communications and phonebanks—insofar as possible with a skeleton staff. (See Fig. 1)

*Fig. 1. A large from Groundwork on March 3, 2024 captioned: The moment the NPC voted to initiate the process to lay off 40% of DSA workers. 65.4 of Active National Committee members **Joanna W.** (Bread and Roses) chose "Solidarity Forever" as a farewell song. Joanna, who was laid off, said, "I'm so proud of the work we did as a committee across the board phonebanking and thanks to Jacobin, Democratic Socialists of DSA members, by Mike Harris, the Growth and Development Committee, led by **Colleen J.** (Socialist Majority) had raised enough funds to "protect DSA's organizing capacity and make the layoffs unnecessary. (The NPC nonetheless laid off staff.)*

Comrade Bowman had been the focus of the campaign that brought socialism to power in DSA in the first place. He had voted in favor of $1 billion in supplemental military assistance to Israel in 2023 and gave a crucial speech supporting it. (Sheel a liberal pro-Israel Mikey group. The National Political Committee in 2023 condemned his actions but declined to expel him DSA, noting that six must engage and others were free to move them. Events proved the previous NPC right. Bowman became one of the most vociferous pro-Israel Democrats in the House. He was a leader in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). The CBC chapter said at a fundraising for him.

What of our highest profile and most popular member, AOC?

While NYC-DSA eagerly supported the candidacy of AOC, the sectarians on NPC hesitated to renew her national endorsement. Targeting Bowman had worked for her, they argued to try that hard with AOC.

They said, "we know what members think." But they pointedly voted down a proposal from the mass politics bloc for a formal post. Indeed, NPC members Michael P. and Seth S. had to convince the sectarians to let them post a "Socialist Majority" proposal to endorse AOC. (Groundwork. Discussing it in a Zoom, Seth S. DSA in 25 years never had a member with a definitive "Yes" (1 in 3 percent extreme "Yes"). 8 in 3 percent were neutral. 18 in 3 percent leaned "No" and 14 in 3 percent responded with a definitive "No.")

At long last, the weakest before the primary in which AOC would crush her opponents, the sectarians went against the express wishes of a supermajority of DSA members and Internal Appeal to an unprecedented and symbolic "conditional" endorsement. In response, NYC-DSA primarily athletes its request to endorse a conditional. But the sectarians had a point to make, and released a poorly written and inescapable ultimatum. The NPC voted 9-7 to endorse AOC. Nonetheless, the majority of DSA had underestimated AOC, and had done so because she was against antisemitism.

Representative Ocasio-Cortez had endorsed Biden for reelection early on, and endorsed Harris prompt after Biden dropped out. At the Democratic Convention she said during her primetime speaking slot that Harris was "looking forward to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and bringing hostages home." This was a tactical choice on pride with the tactical choice DSA had made in the "Uncommitted" movement: she was supporting Harris's candidacy even as "Uncommitted" delegates in the convention had were insisting on concessions on Palestine.

The two political parties bore in DSA. Tactical differences with elected officials are inevitable. DSA must address such differences and proceed by building popular support for our ideas and our candidates. But the sectarians, who have a tendency to treat tactical differences as fundamental, and have formed an actual a bloc of politics in DSA to attempt to make policy and elected officials do as they tore, is a step...

What made this sectarian tendency—indeed, attacking—was that DSA, under democratic leadership, was spending more energy, by far, issuing statements critical of a well-known socialist than was fighting against Donald Trump, a national, for-profit, and proto-fascist.

It is worth noting that AOC remains a valued member of NYC-DSA. She hosts a chapter call to recruit for NYC-DSA on Dec. 3, 2024. On January 29 and 30, 2025, she will be a keynote speaker at the Bernie and Democrats and on June 5, 2025, she will keynote Detroit Socialists, or her top choice for the NYC mayoral election.

A Change of Theory

The far right has exploded to base and seized federal power. It is carrying out its agenda of austerity, repression, and consolidation of power deliberately and unflinchingly. It would be a big mistake to consider this an aberration that will soonish have to end in four years.

How are the two blocs in DSA leadership responding to this situation?

With the victory of fascism in Germany, the Soviet Union, which had encouraged sectarian fighting within the left, United Fronts. It now called for a nonsectarian, united front against fascism, the defense of bourgeois democratic norms, and solidarity with the middle class and organizing. Stopping fascism was the priority.

So far, the sectarians have resisted coalitions with anti-Nikki forces that have been developing in hundreds of thousands of people demanding Trump's actions. They even resist working with socialists. An event in Colorado offers a graphic illustration of the two blocs' differences in strategy.

On March 21, 2025, Bernie Sanders and AOC held a rally in Denver. With 34,000 supporters in attendance, Bernie observed, "Is the migrant rally that I have ever had."

Our comrades in the mass movement caucus of Denver DSA Colo chapter attended the rally and canvassed participants to join DSA. In a striking flyer (See Fig. 2 below), DSA. "Like what they are fighting for? Join your local DSA chapter." they reiterated some of the things we are fighting for:

- Direct socialists like AOC and Bernie
- Tax the rich
- Universal, single workplace
- Medicare for all
- Demand a free Palestine
- Stand up for immigrants, women, and trans people

Fig. 2. Our comrades in the mass movement caucus of Denver DSA Chapter sought to organize attendees in the Denver stop of the "Fighting Oligarchy" tour.

Meanwhile, some Denver chapter members had their own flyer, from an excerpt written by NPC member **Kimberly R.**, who took the opportunity of the AOC/Bernie rally to criticize AOC and Bernie. (See Fig. 3 below).

The flyer, titled, "Build movements, not heroes," attacks Bernie and AOC as "politicians seeking fleeting popularity over moral clarity." and argues that "we have outgrown the celebrity politicians who just a few years ago were criticizing of radicalization."

Concluding Remarks

The argument, "We have outgrown Bernie," is one often made by sectarians in DSA.

If it is an argument about maturity ("Look mo, no hands!") then the sectarian majority on the NPC should have something to show for itself after two years in leadership. It does not.

We have certainly grown since Bernie announced his first presidential candidacy ten years ago. DSA was an organization of five thousand, with an average age of 34. In the ensuing decade, our numbers reached almost 100,000 and our average age is 30.5.

Have we grown enough?

I suggest a simple test: when a DSA chapter can call a socialist rally and draw 34,000 people without any "celebrity politicians" in sight, then perhaps we will have outgrown Bernie.

This is not an unreasonable suggestion. The sectarian force says our power is rooted in "working class organizations like unions and in mass organizing." Since Since DSA is not a union, the test of maturity, of adequate growth, should be whether we have the ability to mobilize a mass uprising in the streets.

Until then, we must avoid the moment.

Whether it is AOC and Bernie continuing their tour of the country, or Former Secretary Hillary Clinton, fans, or members of our chapter holding at a community event, we can appreciate efforts to build mass support against oligarchy and fascism and for socialism. We can draw people into DSA.

Some of these new members will be celebrated into secessionism, most will become militant organizers who struggle to build a socialist majority in the United States.

Whether DSA does it first depends the moment depends very much on the outcome of DSA Convention 2025 in August.

Footnote 1: The approach has the advantage of having been trial-after in the US with. It was tried in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the mass politics bloc versus the NPCR camp. The socialist majority forty (40% voted), the socialist leaders thirty (30% voted), and Socialist Party USA (SPUSA) twenty. The Republican Party over 70,000,000 votes and the Democratic Party over 70,000,000. Socialists in DSA may one day, we hope, run on one of these ongoing experiments instead of seeking to transform DSA into yet another one.

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