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BOOK

Who's Who in DSA: A Guide to DSA Caucuses

By Philip Locker and Roy Martinez ⌚ July 21, 2023

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By Roy Martinez and Philip Locker

In the Run-up to the 2023 National Convention We Created a Guide to Help You Navigate the World of DSA Caucuses.

DSA is a big–tent organization – there are all sorts of ideas on how to best advance the cause of socialism. As a democratic organization, members are free to organize together at the chapter and national level for the policies they believe in.

Yet many members are not clear on what all the different caucuses are and what they each stand for. That's why we put together this guide to provide an introduction to each caucus and our views about them. While we have tried to avoid inaccuracies, we include links to each caucus's website so that you can see their policies for yourself.

The guide is organized into two categories: moderate caucuses that are politically aligned with the current DSA leadership (the majority on the National Political Committee, or NPC) and caucuses that are part of the diverse left-wing of DSA.

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The politics that have defined the majority of the NPC since the 2021 convention have been Socialist Majority Caucus and the Green New Deal slate. They represent the more moderate, reformist wing of DSA that emphasizes being part of broad progressive coalitions to win reforms. In practice this has meant de–emphasizing DSA's independent profile and distinct socialist politics. They do not advocate a concrete path towards a break from the Democratic Party and have resisted holding DSA elected officials accountable to representing our democratically agreed–upon policies in fear of losing them their jobs.

Reform & Revolution is fighting for a fundamental change in DSA's politics by electing a left–wing majority to the NPC at this convention. While there are a variety of views within the left wing of DSA, they are broadly united by their commitment to:

- DSA operating like a political party and actively moving towards breaking from the Democratic Party
- Holding our elected officials accountable to represent DSA
- A rank and file strategy within the labor movement that is critical of the union leadership dominated by business unionism and labor liberalism
- Making DSA a more transparent and democratic organization, with membership and their elected leadership in control of decisions and staff. They argue that the SMC/GND leadership and aligned senior DSA staff have undermined democracy in DSA.

The Moderate Wing

Socialist Majority Caucus (SMC),*Twitter: @DSASocMaj*

SMC has been the backbone of the majority national leadership over the past four years. Many of their members have a lot of experience in running electoral campaigns. We have substantial disagreements with SMC's reformist politics. SMC has supported running electoral campaigns without a clear socialist message, and opposed attempts to bring more democratic accountability over DSA elected officials, such as the 1–2–3–4 resolution in NYC–DSA.

Rather than take meaningful steps to challenge DSA Congressmember Bowman's votes to cut the Israeli military, their NPC members voted to remove the DSA-AOC Working Group for publicly criticizing Bowman. They also failed to seriously address the vote by three DSA Congressmembers to ban the railway workers strike. Many SMC members were part of an effort in 2020 to oppose our dues and a broad coalition against the Republican Party.

Groundwork, *Twitter: @GroundworkDSA*

Groundwork is a slate of NPC candidates made up of supporters of the Green New Deal (GND) slate and former members of the Collective Power Network (CPN). The Green New Deal slate was closely aligned with SMC in leading the 2021 to 2023 NPC. While Groundwork's position sounds good, in practice their members have typically voted on the partyist wing of DSA, and have been one of DSA's Congressmembers voting to make the potential rail strike illegal.

Uniting To Win (UTW), *Twitter: @unitingtowin*

UTW is a new caucus in NYC–DSA that formed out of the work in the GND and Co–socialist Committees. UTW stands for a class–struggle strategy and building a party–surrogate model, but in practice they actually opposed the 1–2–3–4 resolution in NYC–DSA and defended the practice of NYC–DSA elected against the criticisms of the left–wing of NYC–DSA.

Mass, *Twitter: @dsa_mass*

Mass is a publication that emerged out of a wing of the former CPN. While it doesn't describe itself as a caucus, we see them as acting de facto as one. Mass is focused on opposing "sectarianism and ultra–leftism", as well as the dysfunctional culture in DSA. We agree. DSA's organizational culture is too often dysfunctional and DSA does at times suffer from sectarian and ultra–left tendencies. However, the opportunistic conclusions Mass draws from critiquing these problems are counterproductive. The existence of self–marginalizing practices in sections of DSA and the radical left is a penalty for the far larger problem of the opportunism of the labor and DSA leaders. Mass also argues for undemocratic centralist labor magnets to address political disagreements in DSA.

North Star, *Twitter @DSANorthStar*

North Star is a small reformist caucus mainly consisting of old–guard DSA members who support the ideas of Michael Harrington and endorsed to the capitalist Democratic Party. They wanted DSA to support Biden in 2020, defended AOC and Bowman's votes in the "Bowman Affair", and argue that the primary focus of socialists should be opposing the "two-party-state."

The Left Wing

Reform & Revolution (R&R), *Twitter: @DsaRandR*

That's us! We are a revolutionary Marxist caucus that aims to combine revolutionary principles with the necessary tactical flexibility to connect with mass movements of working–class and oppressed people. We're fighting for reforms today, building the broad workers movement, and trying to win people over to a Marxist politics – including the need for a revolutionary rupture with the capitalist order. Any figures we draw from in developing our politics include Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, and Leon Trotsky. If you want to learn more, check out our 2019 pamphlet What We Stand For – it's a little outdated, but still gives the best summary of our politics. You can also check out our articles on various topics on our website!

Bread & Roses (B&R), *Twitter: @breadandrosesDSA*

B&R is the largest organized caucus in DSA with around 350 members. They argue for a "democratic road to socialism" along the lines of Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas (in contrast to a revolutionary socialist understanding of the state which Reform & Revolution supports). They are some of the best builders of the organization and have played an important role fighting within DSA for class–centered politics, the rank–and–file strategy, fighting for a socialist message, bi–electoral campaigns, and a political culture of comradeship as opposed to configurative politics (politics to try set an example or to create models of socialism within the capitalist society).

However, B&R tend in an opportunistic direction, in the sense of politically adapting themselves to reformist working–class leaders, such as Bernie Sanders or left union leaders, as opposed to critically supporting them on the basis of an independent Marxist position. We also think they tend to oversimplify questions of oppression with economic answers.

Marxist Unity Group (MUG), *Twitter: @MarxistUnityDSA*

Originating from the founders of Communist, MUG is a growing caucus. They are inspired by the British *Weekly Worker* and have an "orthodox Marxist" orientation with a particular focus on the ideas of Karl Kautsky (before he became an apologist for the capitulation of the Social Democratic leaders during World War I). They are helping us in the fight for a working–class, militant, and "partyist" DSA, and are one of the most positive forms in DSA right now. Our caucuses collaborated in drafting the resolutions for this DSA convention.

MUG focuses on fighting for a new constitution. We agree that the US Constitution is fundamentally undemocratic and that socialists should "make the struggle for a democratic republic a central component of our strategy." But we think one of many formal expressions of the underlying power of the capitalist class. The key task of socialists is to organize the working class to break the power of the capitalists by taking the commanding heights of the economy into democratic public ownership and replacing their undemocratic state with a system of socialist democracy, internationally, not just in the US.

Fighting against the constitution is one field in this wider struggle but, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, our job is to "bring to the front, as the leading question in each [movement], the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time." Instead, our experience is that MUG generally brings to the forefront of each movement the question of a new constitution.

We also have important disagreements with their conception of the "revolutionary minimum–maximum program." Instead, we support a minimum–maximum one of linking the fight for immediate demands of the working class to the need for a socialist transformation of society.

Red Star, *Twitter: @redstarcaucus*

Red Star is a revolutionary Marxist caucus. While they used to be located in San Francisco, they've recently expanded. They stand for a workers' party, a workers' state, an international socialist perspective and internationalism. Red Star has been broadly on the same side as R&R in wanting DSA to oppose the sending of US weapons to the Ukrainian government.

However, in our view they often end up falling into the trap of "campism," the dominant politics of DSA's International Committee. This is an approach of uncritically supporting "anti–imperialist" governments or mass left parties since the main enemy is US imperialism. This can often lead to downplaying solidarity with workers who are struggling against the governments that the US opposes. For example, we believe US socialists should oppose US sanctions on Venezuela and support the left opposition to the Maduro government.

Red Star has focused on organizational changes in DSA at this convention, but in our view, the key problems in DSA are political. DSA's decline since Biden came to office is far more a product of a lack of political clarity on our role in this period and a failure of political leadership by the NPC than disorganization. The organizational ineffectiveness of DSA is very real, but this was even worse in the Trump-era when DSA saw dramatic growth.

Emerge, *Twitter: @DSAEmerge*

Emerge is a multi–tendency communist caucus in NYC–DSA. They focus mainly on base–building, but are supporters of independent class politics in DSA (for example, they supported the 1–2–3–4 plan in NYC–DSA). They have recently been in turmoil with a failed vote to dissolve the caucus that led to members, including NPC member Justin Charles, leaving and joining the Communist Caucus.

Communist Caucus (CC), *Twitter: @DSACommunists*

CC focuses on base–building and on "building working–class nationalism," such as tenant unions. While they were mostly located in East Bay DSA in the past, they have expanded to become a national caucus recently.

Winter Caucus, Twitter: @winter-caucus

Winter is a Marxist caucus mostly situated in Buffalo and Providence that emerged from a split in the Class Unity caucus. They are focused on class independence, breaking from the Democratic Party and organizational democracy, and for a rank and file labor strategy.

Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC), *Twitter: @dsa_lsc*

LSC is a caucus of libertarian socialists and anarchists. LSC is a lot smaller this year after most of their members left DSA to form Horizon, a broader network of anarchists. The refounded LSC is focused on fighting for abolition, anti–imperialism, democracy in DSA, and accountability over elected officials. While we share many of the same priorities and agreements with their approach of focusing on mutual aid, prefigurative politics, and base–building, we are working together to build a left alternative to the SMC–Groundwork leadership in DSA.

Red Labor, *Twitter: @RedLaborCaucus*

Red Labor is a Marxist caucus mainly located in Idaho. They argue for a clean break from the Democrats, programmatic unity in DSA, and a workers' government. Our views on a "clean" vs "dirty" break are best summarized here: tinyurl.com/dirty-break.

Philip Locker
1 year

Philip Locker, he/him, recently was co-chair of Seattle DSA and was a candidate for DSA's NPC. He was the spokesperson for Socialist Alternative's (SA) 2021 campaign for Seattle City Council and was the spokesperson for Yi New, which played a leading role in making Seattle the first major city to adopt a $15 minimum wage.

Roy Martinez
1 year

Roy Martinez, he/him, helped found Harvard YDSA in 2020 and has been in DSA since 2016. He is on the Steering Committee of Reform & Revolution.

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Reform & Revolution is a revolutionary Marxist caucus in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). We are fighting to transform DSA into a mass socialist party rooted in the struggles of the multiracial working class, and we organize to end economic inequality, racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression, and to overthrow the capitalist state!

Our members are active in chapters across DSA, organizing our fellow workers on the shop floor, spearheading mass campaigns and protest movements, and fighting the capitalist class on all fronts. We aim to help build DSA and its revolutionary left–wing through contributing to theoretical and strategic discussions and simultaneously demonstrating the impact of our politics in struggle. We trace our politics to the Bolshevik Tradition, and aim to dynamically apply the analysis of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg to the conditions and challenges of the 21st Century.

Learn more about What We Stand For, **subscribe** to our magazine, **sign-up** for our email list, and apply to join to **become a member** of Reform & Revolution Caucus and organize with us! If you're not a member of DSA already, join here!

Tweets by @uRandR

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- We are Marxists and Scientific Socialists
- We are for a Mass Socialist Party
- Towards a Revolutionary Program through the Transitional Method
- We Work for a Socialist Labor Movement
- Merge the Class Struggle and Anti–Oppression Movements
- We Fight for Black Liberation and the Overthrow of White Supremacy
- We Are Socialist Feminists
- We are Anti–Imperialists and Proletarian Internationalists
- We Develop the Democratic and Political Culture of DSA

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