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USA

DSA's 2025 National Convention: A New Chapter Opens Up for the Socialist Movement

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Last weekend over 1,200 elected delegates gathered at the biannual DSA national Convention. The Democratic Socialists of America's highest decision-making body represented more than 80,000 members – up from 64,000 in October of last year. Delegates were optimistic about the potential to grow DSA in both numbers and influence, and to build toward a mass working-class party.

The size, energy, and confidence at the Convention were all indications of a new chapter opening up for DSA and the socialist movement in the US. A wave of radicalization is bubbling up across the country. This reflects a growing resistance against Trump and the genocide in Palestine, along with a surge forward in socialist electoral campaigns highlighted by the Zohran Mamdani breakthrough. This was also visible at the Convention with a shift to the left in DSA's positions and the election of a more left-wing national leadership.

Crucially, the left-wing of these emerging struggles are finding an organized expression in DSA. This shows the strength of DSA as a broad based democratic membership organization that fights for socialism in the electoral arena and through grassroots campaigning.

The potential clearly exists for DSA to develop into a much more visible socialist force, surpassing 100,000 members in the coming months, and beginning to sink real roots in the working class. However, this is not automatic. To seize this opportunity will require deliberate efforts not only to align with the sentiments of activists but also to help them turn towards winning over labor, social movements, and broader segments of the working class to break with the Democratic Party, fight for Palestinian liberation, and connect our movements to the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

To advance along these lines, the new left-wing leadership of DSA will need to look to create unifying national campaigns and take conscious steps towards political independence from the Democrats while building a mass base of support for a working class political alternative. Another essential step will be organizing educational and broad-based discussions to develop a new political platform for DSA that can be a tool to popularize key fighting demands while helping to move the membership toward a more developed understanding of socialism as a break with capitalism.

At the same time the dynamics of the Convention and the preceding months also point to the dangers of DSA being more rooted in an online radical sub-culture rather than in working-class communities or the realities of mass struggle. The new left-wing DSA leadership is at risk of bending DSA's politics and profile to reflect the outlook and pressures of radical activists who often lack the necessary politics and orientation to successfully carry out mass work within the working class.

Unfortunately the convention agenda seemed to be stuck in a business-as-usual routine. Rather than a focus on the biggest issues and debates facing DSA and the working class, the resolutions and amendments on the agenda, especially on the first day, concentrated on the nitty-gritty aspects of DSA's internal organizing and structures. There was also a notable lack of discussions on climate change, socialist feminism, and relatively limited exchange on strategies for fighting racism (beyond the issue of immigration).

Rashida Tlaib: “A Weapon Is a Weapon”

Palestine was the most dominant topic at the Convention.

Keynote speaker Congressmember Rashida Tlaib addressed the Convention with a powerful and emotional speech that highlighted the war on Palestine. She linked the votes in Congress that fund the genocide with the lack of funding for reforms such as Medicare for All and clean water. Tlaib condemned “the establishment of both parties” for their role in financing the genocide, pointing out that both the Republicans and Democrats are funded by billionaires.

In a clear contrast and apparent criticism of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), Tlaib stated, “A weapon is a weapon.” AOC had voted in July in favor of US funding for Israel's Iron Dome, justifying it by saying there is a difference between supplying “defensive weapons” and “offensive weapons” to Israel. In contrast, Tlaib and Ilhan Omar correctly voted against this. (AOC later voted against the military funding bill as a whole.)

Tlaib spoke out against “capitalistic systems of exploitation” and emphasized, “the working masses are hungry for revolutionary change... That’s why DSA is so important. We are able to honestly and truthfully diagnose the problems facing working-class Americans.” She urged DSA – referring to the organization as “we” – to use language that is understandable to working-class people, those who corporate Democrats and Republicans have abandoned, in order to explain “what democratic socialism can mean for their lives.” Tlaib urged DSA to orient our work toward the broad mass of the working class and bring more people of color into our organization by convincing them of democratic socialist ideas – very necessary tasks for DSA.

In an otherwise internally focused Convention with many bureaucratic-sounding resolutions and amendments, Tlaib's comments inspired the delegates who roared with huge applause and loud chants of “Free Palestine!”

While Tlaib's sharp criticism of corporate Democrats was very welcome, her votes to elect Hakeem Jeffries as leader of the House Democrats are not consistent with this message. Tlaib's outstanding role in the opposition to the slaughter in Gaza unfortunately stands in contrast to her votes to expand NATO and fund the US involvement in the war in Ukraine.

Tlaib's speech highlighted the role of Democratic Socialists as crucial in the struggle for a better world. This excellent point needs to be matched by her and other DSA candidates running for office with a prominent socialist profile and by actively using their campaigns to promote DSA and build independent political organizations of working people.

Internationalism

A big part of the discussion on Palestine was the deliberations on an anti-Zionist resolution (R22). This was a continuation of discussions at the 2023 Convention where a similar resolution had been narrowly defeated. This time the Convention passed the resolution, mandating that candidates are ineligible for an DSA endorsement – both nationally and locally – if they fail to meet certain standards for supporting BDS and the Palestinian struggle and establishes that DSA members can be expelled for certain actions or beliefs contrary to DSA's positions on Palestine.

This would not have allowed DSA to endorse Bernie Sanders – and with that build an organization clearly criticizing Sanders for his short-comings on the question of Zionism. It will, if applied, not allow DSA to critically endorse for example a candidacy of left-wing UAW leader Shawn Fein for president in 2028, as he is almost as weak on international questions (as can be seen with his position on tariffs) as Bernie Sanders. This will not strengthen but weaken the anti-Zionist and socialist impact of DSA on the left-wing moving base of such politicians.

However, it will be up to the new National Political Committee (NPC, the national leadership elected by the Convention) to interpret this resolution and the emphasis even of the people moving the resolution was that DSA would remain flexible in its implementation.

An amendment to this resolution, which aimed to remove language about the expulsion of members who act in support of Zionism and automatic exclusion of endorsements of candidates failing to meet the defined standards, was unsuccessful but still garnered 46% support.

The unamended resolution passed with 56% to 44%.

The ongoing debate in DSA between supporters of a “campist” position and an anti-campist internationalism was expressed around an amendment to the International Committee’s consensus resolution (CR02-A02). “Campism” is the view that the enemies of Western imperialism are our allies, regardless of their politics or how they treat “their own” working class.

The summary of the anti-campist amendment read:

DSA should build relationships with a diverse array of left parties and movements in other countries, including those in and out of government. DSA should learn from and stand in solidarity with movements in the Global South fighting for democracy and socialism against all governments that engage in the repression of democratic rights and side with capital over workers. Finally, DSA should re-affirm that the NPC is the highest decision-making body of the organization between Conventions.

The clarification about the NPC being the highest decision-making body was added given previous conflicts between the elected leadership of DSA (the NPC) and the leadership of the International Committee. This amendment failed with 43% for and 56% against it.

Electoral Work

The motto of the Convention was “Rebirth and Beyond: Reflecting on a decade of DSA’s growth and preparing for a decade of party building.” However, the road ahead – how to build toward a mass workers’ party – is highly contested.

The Convention's focus was less on the party question itself and more on how DSA-endorsed candidates will campaign and perform their duties in office. Given the frustration of many DSA members about the moderation of many DSA endorsed elected officials, this year’s consensus resolution presented by the National Electoral Committee focused on running candidates who represent DSA and come from the ranks of DSA. The Convention voted in favor of this resolution, demanding that endorsed candidates “openly and proudly identify with DSA and Socialism, including by: Expressly encouraging people to join DSA” and “identifying publicly as a ‘Socialist’ or ‘Democratic Socialist.’” It urges chapters to demand from candidates to show “a commitment to building a socialist slate and political independence.”

The wish to move away from endorsements that leave us without much influence on elected officials also was

reflected in the resolution arguing against “paper endorsements” in general. The resolution also conflates endorsing non-DSA candidates with “paper endorsements.”

While the resolution correctly takes steps to build our strength to run politically stronger DSA candidates, the opposition to “paper endorsements” threatens to cut DSA off from engaging in campaigns where socialists can benefit by aligning themselves with radical left-wing candidates who are not part of DSA. DSA’s endorsement of Bernie Sanders for president in 2020 was the largest campaign in DSA history (far from a “paper endorsement”) yet Sanders was not a DSA member and did not represent the politics of DSA. DSA was absolutely correct to endorse Sanders, despite his political weaknesses, as his campaigns represented on the whole a major step forward and an opportunity to build support for socialism. DSA’s mistake was how it uncritically supported Sanders and failed to openly and clearly challenge his political weaknesses, not that it endorsed and helped to build the campaign.

Some movers of the motion still claimed that DSA would retain its flexibility to endorse such candidates.

With the 2028 presidential election coming up and the call by the UAW and other unions for a mass strike on May 1, 2028, an important resolution debated at the Convention was Resolution 33, which stated:

DSA should aspire to build a broad left-labor coalition, composed of labor unions and other mass organizations, which can draft a platform; recruit candidates for federal, state, and local office for the 2026 and 2028 elections; and draft a socialist candidate for the 2028 presidential election. In order to gain real traction and look more like Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaigns than past third-party campaigns, DSA should back a viable candidate in the Democratic presidential primary, such as a nationally known elected official, labor leader, or public figure, who will primarily publicly identify with and promote DSA, socialism, and/or a left-labor coalition rather than the Democratic Party. DSA will advocate for such a coalition to endorse independent and nonpartisan down-ballot candidates as well as candidates running in Democratic primaries.

It passed by 59% to 41%.

Labor

Despite the importance of DSA’s work in labor, there was limited discussion on this topic. An amendment (CR10-A01) to the main resolution on labor presented by the National Labor Commission (CR10), aimed to clarify the political role of socialists in the labor movement, directing the National Labor Commission to “lead and coordinate DSA members in the labor movement to organize against the Democratic Party, against the Republican Party and the authoritarian right wing, and for socialist politics.” This amendment also aimed to raise the bar for democratic bargaining processes from just demanding a “right of members to vote on all collective bargaining agreements” to the “right of members to have democratic control of collective bargaining and the strategy around it.” The amendment lost narrowly with 48% in favor, 52% against.

One Member, One Vote?

The Groundwork caucus proposed a resolution (CB02) to elect the national leadership through an online vote by all

members, a position supported by the Socialist Majority Caucus. The proposal sparked a lot of debate leading up to the Convention. While it was presented as a means to enhance democracy, opponents argued that it would result in less deliberation among elected delegates, who come together to debate, persuade comrades of their positions, and facilitate a more informed decision-making process.

Behind the technicalities of this question – of which system would be better for making decisions – lies the unacknowledged reality that the activists (and therefore the delegates) in DSA are clearly to the left of the vast majority of members. Groundwork and Socialist Majority, the two moderate caucuses supporting “1M1V,” aimed to leverage this to push the organization, relatively speaking, to the right. Unfortunately, the left did not use their majority on the NPC for the last two years to take significant initiatives to activate and educate the broad membership (through dynamic campaigns and meaningful debate that engages the broad membership on key questions).

1M1V was rejected by 60% (736 votes) of the delegates, while 40% (487) voted for it.

Leadership Elections

DSA is a big tent, multi-tendency organization which has a lively internal culture with a wide range of political caucuses. Broadly speaking DSA is divided into three wings:

1. A moderate wing that emphasizes mass work, aims for DSA to connect with a broader working-class audience, and adopts an opportunistic approach toward DSA's elected officials, the Democratic Party (accepting a [dirty stay](#)), and labor leaders. This includes [Groundwork](#) and [Socialist Majority Caucus](#) (SMC).
2. A far-left wing that reflects the sentiments of left activists within the Palestine movement and advocates for a campist “anti-imperialism,” willing to align even with ultra-religious and conservative forces like Hamas and the Houthis as long as they are opposing the US empire. This includes [Red Star](#) and [Springs of Revolution](#). (The danger of self-marginalizing approaches of the far-left were visible in the last term of the NPC, especially on international questions.)
3. A Marxist center that seeks to merge an orientation towards the mass of working-class people with a strategy aimed at building an independent socialist party, while promoting class struggle and socialist politics within labor and social movements. This includes [Bread & Roses](#).

Examining these categories, [Marxist Unity Group](#) (MUG) has frequently aligned with Red Star over the past two years. The majority of [Reform & Revolution](#) (R&R) has also shifted over the past two years more in that direction and away from the earlier politics of the caucus (although R&R also broke with others on the left on certain Convention votes). In the lead-up to the Convention, R&R expressed a reluctance to collaborate with the moderate forces within DSA, which could present significant challenges for the future of the organization.

Conversely, MUG and R&R have also been emphasizing, at least in rhetoric, the importance of principled socialist mass work. If this approach from MUG and R&R prevails, we could see:

- A more engaging and dynamic leadership within DSA, moving toward holding elected officials accountable through robust public engagement that seeks to educate DSA members and the left-wing base of electeds about the need for principled socialist politics.

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- Significant progress toward DSA functioning like a party, promoting the need for a mass workers party, and actively working to lay the basis for a break with the Democratic Party (what is known in DSA as a “dirty break”).
- A revival of a more vigorous rank-and-file strategy focused on building labor from the bottom up, employing a class-struggle approach, and engaging in union reform caucuses with a socialist strategy.
- National outward facing campaigns by DSA that honor the big-tent nature of the organization while uniting activists in a collective effort to fight for our shared goals.
- An inclusive process to develop a new program for DSA that facilitates a full and democratic discussion on key issues, such as our stance toward the capitalist state (e.g., how should Mayor Mamdani interact with the police? How does this align with our overarching goals?).

The Convention saw a shift away from the moderate wing and towards the left-wing. The elections of the co-chairs saw the two previous chairs re-elected. Megan Romer from the Red Star caucus (part of the far-left wing) came in first with 483 votes. She was followed closely by Ashik Siddique from Groundwork caucus (part of the moderate wing), with 458 votes. Alex Pellitteri of the Bread & Roses caucus came third (295 votes), thereby failing to win a co-chair position.

The political composition of the newly elected NPC shifted to the left. In a simplified presentation, the main groupings on the new NPC are:

- 10 moderate members (four from SMC, five from Groundwork, and one from Carnation),
- Eight from the center (three from B&R, two from R&R, and three from MUG), and
- Nine from its far-left wing (one independent politically sympathetic to Red Star, three from Red Star, four from SoR, and one from the [Libertarian Socialist Caucus](#))

On the 2023-25 NPC, Bread & Roses members were the swing vote between the moderate and left wings. With the shift to the left on the new NPC it appears that the Reform & Revolution NPC members may now find themselves in that role.

The challenge for revolutionary Marxists is to build a Marxist center of DSA that can lead in the direction of principled mass work and national visibility of DSA in broader movements against Trump, in labor, and in social movements. Comrades in B&R, MUG, and R&R should urge their three caucuses to politically lead this fight, charting a path independent of opportunism and sectarianism.

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*This article will also be published on **Jacobin América Latina**. For a more indepth report on the DSA convention see this [longer, earlier version of this article](#) by Stephan Kimmerle. Philip Locker and Stephan Kimmerle both attended the convention as delegates elected by the Seattle chapter of DSA. Both are co-editors (along with Brandon Madsen) of a new book, A User's Guide to DSA: 5 Debates That Define the Democratic Socialists. The book first appeared at the Convention, with all 130 copies selling out! The book can be ordered at [labor-power.org](#).*

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