

DSA LSC FAQ

DSA Libertarian Socialist Caucus

2019

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TL;DR What do you believe in?

A great place to start would be to read our statement *Dual Power: A Strategy to Build Socialism in Our Time*. In short, we believe by building directly-democratic institutions outside of the existing capitalist State, we can create a situation of dual power in which those institutions can engage in ever larger confrontations with the ruling class—and ultimately a contest for legitimacy against the institutions of capitalist society.

For more information about our values, the LSC Founding Statement from the 2017 DSA National Convention is a good resource. We operate on three shared principles we see as inseparable from libertarian socialism: Freedom, Solidarity, and Democracy.

Are you all anarchists?

No. The LSC is a caucus with a wide range of leftist tendencies and we consider ourselves a big tent within DSA's multi-tendency big tent. We are home to hard anarchists, anarcho-communists, syndicalists, municipalists, communalists as well as Marxists, situationists, general anti-authoritarians and more. We welcome anyone willing to work together now to create the world we wish to see.

Do you all hate electoral politics?

No. There are diverse positions on this within the caucus, and in fact, some LSC members have been or are currently involved in electoral work, including successful ballot initiatives and candidate campaigns. We do object to pushing of electoral work at the expense of everything else and the presumption that electoralism on its own is a viable path to socialism. Some of us are not personally interested in electoral work at all, but are still glad we're comrades with those who are and expect there will continue to be space for them to do this work within DSA.

The LSC did create an addendum for DSA's National Electoral Strategy in which we argue:

- Socialist electoral politics must prioritize direct, participatory democracy and encourage existing local neighborhood institutions to democratize or build new institutions where needed.
- These institutions can exercise a dual power, contesting the power of the capitalist State while simultaneously generating local, accountable leadership that can become candidates for local office with a solid base of support.
- Existing institutions such as block associations have large material impacts on the everyday lives of Americans. Successful socialist movements are built block-by-block, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, and are intimately tied to the communities they are organizing.
- Transferring power to the local community should be a top priority for a DSA local.

Why are you in DSA and not in another organization?

We are each in DSA for our own reasons. First, DSA is doing a variety of great work around the country to which we are proud to contribute our efforts. Also, we take DSA's multi-tendency commitment very seriously and wish to see it nurtured into the future. We cherish DSA's local chapter autonomy where many people can experiment with what works based on local conditions, organize around what they're passionate about, and build camaraderie with people of different political tendencies.

DSA is the largest socialist organization in the United States since the Communist Party of the 1930's and we believe there is a welcoming space in DSA for libertarian socialists—we truly believe in a socialism that is radically democratic. Individuals might be this tendency or that tendency, but in the end, **we are all socialists.**

A brief history of the LSC:

The LSC was founded at the 2017 DSA National Convention as a caucus of delegates and DSA members in attendance. At that convention, the LSC held its first general assembly, organized delegates for floor votes, fielded an informal slate for the NPC, and gathered around our shared values as established by our Founding Statement. One attendee noted that the LSC general assembly was the first session of the convention that she'd seen so well-organized that it covered all the topics attendees wanted to discuss, yet remained easy to follow and ended on time.

LSC members were essential in speaking from the floor against proposals that would counter our unofficial convention motto of "All Power To The Locals". Proposals that were successfully defeated included requiring DSA to plan an M4A March on Washington and allowing the NPC to take control of individual chapters. We also were proud to stand with the Disability Working Group getting language added into the Medicare-for-All proposal.

After the convention, the LSC continued to grow while taking part in a variety of local chapter work, beginning the process of regional networking, trainings for chapters around the country with DSA Medics, and bringing attention to issues such as the FOSTA/SESTA bills, strikes by prisoners and teachers, and anti-fascist organizing. We also worked to empower DSA members by creating organizing tools like our free Zoom account and Comrade Connector. Several times the LSC collectively wrote analysis of DSA policies with the intention of building the strongest, most democratic, and transparent DSA possible.

How does the LSC make decisions and work together?

The LSC operates according to our bylaws on a modified version of consensus. All LSC members can vote on proposals made to the group. First, a proposal is made by a member, and then it is seconded. After a second, we have a 7-day period of discussion and revision of the proposal. Then the final version of the proposal is given a 7-day voting period. We use the platform Loomio for our votes. If quorum is reached (defined in our bylaws) and the proposal get 75% approval, it is passed.

That is the process we use for all decisions, including public statements, affiliating with locals, organizing working groups, endorsing actions/protests, and more.

LSC statements and proposals are highly collaborative. Our statements most often come out of discussions that arrived at organically until a member suggests the proposal or statement. A collaborative document is created (i.e. Google Docs) and members work together on crafting the statement, making comments and discussing along the way. In this way, we often have far fewer meetings than otherwise would be necessary; members feel empowered to collaborate in a way that's most comfortable for them, and we remain transparent and accountable to ourselves and each other.

How do I get involved?

Please fill out our intake form and we'll get you plugged in to LSC as quickly as we can! Membership in LSC is open to all current and former DSA members.

What is the DSA National Political Committee / Steering Committee?

The National Political Committee (NPC) is DSA's "collective leadership and the highest decision-making body of the organization between meetings of the Convention" according to the DSA bylaws, article VIII. The NPC currently has 16 members, with a requirement that at least half are women and at least five members must be people of color.

The Steering Committee (SC) is a smaller committee of five NPC members, chosen by the NPC, who are "responsible for decision-making between meetings of the NPC and for the supervision of all offices and staff of the organization" according to the DSA bylaws, article VIII section 3.

As stated in the LSC convention platform *Democratize Everything*, we believe that:

- The role of the NPC should be to enact the will of the membership. To this end, we propose that the NPC publish the agenda of their regular meetings in advance, solicit suggestions and input around problems earlier in the process, hold electronic town halls with members to facilitate discussion around upcoming decisions, and subordinate itself to the decisions of Conventions and referenda.
- The NPC and SC must be transparent to members. Minutes of meetings must be released promptly, with a set timeframe prescribed in the bylaws, and should include roll call for all votes. Executive Session, in which proceedings are kept secret, must be tightly regulated.
- The SC must be democratized. It should be an administrative body that does not make political decisions, and the positions should either rotate or be elected at Convention. Otherwise, as it currently has too much power for an unelected body, it should be abolished.
- Expand the NPC and add regional representation requirements.

What is a caucus?

A caucus is an informal, voluntary group of DSA members with a common interest, identity, praxis, or ideological commitment. Caucuses may be exclusively in a single chapter, regional, or

national in scope depending on priorities. Caucuses may also form impromptu for events such as regional conferences and conventions, dissolving thereafter.

There are several DSA national caucuses currently in existence, which are:

Representational Caucuses:

- **Afrosocialist and Socialists of Color Caucus:** A caucus that is currently the only official DSA sanctioned caucus.
- **Poor Peoples Caucus:** A caucus for DSA members who are poor and/or living in poverty.
- **Rural, Suburban, and Small City DSA:** A caucus for DSA members outside of major cities.

Ideological/Praxis Caucuses:

- **Libertarian Socialist Caucus:** That's us!
- **Spring Caucus (aka Momentum):** A social democratic caucus of DSA with six current members of the NPC and ties to Jacobin Magazine and Chapo Trap House. Priorities include Medicare for All campaigning and Bernie 2020. Generally against mutual aid and other base-building projects. They publish The Call, a blog focused on DSA organizing.
- **Communist Caucus:** A left communist caucus based in the East Bay DSA chapter. Priorities include base-building activities and organizing tenant's unions.
- **North Star Caucus:** A social democratic caucus of DSA primarily made up of pre-bump DSA members and Bernie campaigners.
- **Socialist Majority Caucus:** A recently formed social democratic caucus of DSA.
- **Refoundation** (defunct nationally): A Marxist caucus of DSA that is now defunct on a national level but several locals still exist. Primarily concerned with building an independent socialist party.

What are libertarians? Are you like those libertarians?

The word libertarian was originally coined in the 19th century as a term to refer to anarchists and other anti-authoritarian leftists after the word anarchist was made illegal in France. Even today, outside of the English-speaking world, libertarian refers to the anti-authoritarian left.

In the 1960's, right-wing capitalists appropriated the word, on purpose, for its propaganda value. A leading theoretician of this right-wing tendency was Murray Rothbard, a founding member of the Cato Institute, who wrote: "One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence is that, for the first time in my memory, we, 'our side,' had captured a crucial word from the enemy . . . 'Libertarians' . . . had long been simply a polite word for left-wing anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over.."

We are libertarian socialists because we believe in liberty and socialism. Not the so-called liberty to own the commons, or to exploit workers for private profit, but the liberty of each

individual's self-determination. Capitalism is incompatible with true liberty. According to Noam Chomsky, "libertarian socialism, furthermore, does not limit its aims to democratic control by producers over production, but seeks to abolish all forms of domination and hierarchy in every aspect of social and personal life – an unending struggle, since progress in achieving a more just society will lead to new insight and understanding of forms of oppression that may be concealed in traditional practice and consciousness."

What is dual power?

Dual power is a strategy that builds liberated spaces and creates institutions grounded in direct democracy. Together these spaces and institutions expand into the ever widening formation of a new world "in the shell of the old." As the movement grows more powerful, it can engage in ever larger confrontations with the ruling class—and ultimately a contest for legitimacy against the institutions of capitalist society.

In our view, dual power is comprised of two component parts: (1.) building counter-institutions that serve as alternatives to the institutions currently governing production, investment, and social life under capitalism, and (2.) organizing through and confederating these institutions to build up a base of grassroots counter-power which can eventually challenge the existing power of capitalists and the State head-on. Counter-institutions can include, but are not limited to: community councils, popular neighborhood assemblies, worker's councils, syndicalist unions, rank-and-file trade unions, worker-owned cooperatives, locally and regionally networked redistributive solidarity economies, participatory budgeting initiatives, and time banks. They also include collectives committed to the provision of mutual aid and disaster relief, tenant unions, community land trusts, cooperative housing, communal agriculture and food distribution systems, community-owned energy, horizontal education models, childcare collectives, and community-run health clinics, to name a few.

The concept of dual power was first briefly elucidated by Vladimir Lenin in *State and Revolution* to describe the situation in Russia after the February Revolution. One power, the Provisional Government, held the State while another power, that of the soviet workers and peasants councils, organized outside of and in opposition to the State. In the October Revolution, those councils dislodged the Provisional Government and became the governing political structure of Russia.

For more information, we'd encourage you to read our policy document *Dual Power: A Strategy to Build Socialism in Our Time*.

What is horizontalism?

Horizontalism is a political concept that gained popularity after social upheavals in Argentina in the early 21st century. Marina Sitrin, writer of the book *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*, stated: "Horizontalism is a social relationship that implies, as it sounds, a flat plane upon which to communicate. Horizontalism requires the use of direct democracy and implies non-hierarchy and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating, but a break that is also an opening."

In the United States, horizontalism is often associated with the Occupy Wall Street protests and its use of general assemblies, consensus decision-making, and non-hierarchical structures.

Many of us in the LSC participated in those protests around the country, bringing that experience and the lessons-learned to our work now.

Have you read *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*?

Yes. Yes we have. All of it. In conjunction with references to horizontalism, the essay *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* by Jo Freeman is often mentioned. The essay is part of our inspiration for why we believe DSA and all social institutions must be held to the highest levels of transparency, accountability, and direct democracy including recallable delegation. Many useful critiques are contained in the essay, but we also refer to the last paragraphs of the essay which state:

“Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of “structurelessness,” it is free to develop those forms of organization best suited to its healthy functioning. **This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organization. But neither should we blindly reject them all.** Some of the traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should and should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, **we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations...** But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, **we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself – only its excess use.**

...When these principles are applied, they insure that whatever structures are developed by different movement groups will be **controlled by and responsible to the group**. The group of people in positions of authority will be **diffuse, flexible, open, and temporary**. They will not be in such an easy position to institutionalize their power because **ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large**. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.”

When forming the LSC, we spent a great deal of time on our bylaws and always kept critiques from the essay in mind. We are not “unstructured” as our detailed bylaws for operating and making decisions can attest. At their best, structures can provide opportunities for creating great socialist organizers and campaigns. At their worst, structures can stifle creativity, centralize power, and limit the horizons of newly activated socialists.

What is prefigurative politics?

We believe our current projects and pursuits must mirror—and, in mirroring, become—the world we want to emerge from the ashes of capitalism. In short, our method consists of embodying the world we dare to dream. That is the essence of prefigurative politics. We organize in a radically democratic fashion because we want a radically democratic world.

Important LSC docs:

- *Democratize Everything*
- *Dual Power*
- LSC Bylaws
- Addendum to DSA Electoral Strategy

Podcast interviews:

- It's Going Down (10/1/2018), Topic: What is the LSC?
- It's Going Down (2/3/2019), Topic: Mutual Aid during Chicago cold blast with Chicago LSC
- The Robin (12/12/2018), Topic: Dual Power
- Symptomatic Redness - Zero Books (3/22/2018), Topic: History of DSA
- Friendly Anarchism (8/19/2017), Topic: What is the LSC?

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