

A Letter to the Libertarian Left

DSA Libertarian Socialist Caucus

8/8/2024

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“The idea is like grass. It craves light, likes crowds, thrives on crossbreeding, grows better for being stepped on.”

- The Dispossessed, Ursula K. Le Guin

We in the Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC) of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) recognize that our formation has dual obligations, both to the development of the socialist movement in the United States and to the broader libertarian socialist movement that exists outside of DSA. While much of our caucus’ focus thus far has been on DSA’s internal politics, we believe in cross-pollination with the broader libertarian left via an exchange of ideas and mutual support of organizational projects.

To accommodate this aspect of our vision, current and former members of LSC established the Horizon Federation, a network designed to bring libertarian socialists together, regardless of affiliation, in order to share knowledge, skills, and opportunities for cooperative praxis¹. This piece seeks to expand upon our vision for the anarchist movement in the aftermath of LSC’s post-2023 reorganization, explain how DSA-LSC and Horizon fit into that vision, and summarize our short and long-term goals toward strengthening the cause of libertarian socialism.

Social Anarchism, Social Insertion

Before describing our suggested means of intervention in the broader socialist movement, as well as within DSA specifically, it is worth defining the concepts of **organizational dualism** and **social insertion**. These concepts were developed at the end of the 20th century by South American anarchist movements whose particular theories form the backbone of what is now known as **especificismo**, a tendency of social anarchism which advocates for the creation of specifically anarchist organizations. These organizations serve as rendezvous points for anarchists to develop theory and coordinate effective strategies and tactics for popular struggle which both adhere to and propagate anarchist principles.

Organizational dualism is the idea that the struggle against capitalism occurs on two levels, the political and the social. There are two main kinds of organization through which this struggle occurs: **political organizations**, which operate under a specific political line with strategic and tactical unity, and **social organizations**, which are popular organizations, such as labor and tenant unions, social movements, and mass organizations.²

Between the political and social movements themselves, there are also two forms of political transmission that may occur: the flow of militants from the social to the political, which we call **political organization**, and the flow of anarchist praxis from the political to the social, which we call **social insertion**.³

Social insertion describes the relationship between anarchist organizations and social movements through which anarchism comes into contact with the popular movement. As anarchists, we take seriously Marx’s opening proclamation in the General Rules of the International Workingmen’s Association: “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the work-

¹ While today LSC comprises a majority within Horizon Federation, we would prefer to be a minority in a federation abundant with fellow travelers.

² Center for Especificismo Studies (CES), Social insertion vs. (political) entryism, section 3.3

³ Ibid., section 4.4.2

ing classes themselves.”⁴ It is on the social level, not the political, that the class-wide struggle against capitalism is predominantly fought, and we believe that the most thoroughly democratic principles of organization are necessary for the working class to win that struggle.⁵ These principles include direct democracy, subsidiarity, direct action, self-management, federalism, class independence, revolutionary perspective, and popular protagonism. When these principles are upheld and defended within social movements and organizations, we have social insertion.⁶

As stated by Carl Eugene Stroud, “it is anarchism that should be within the class struggle and not the class struggle that should be within anarchism.”⁷ Because means and ends are always intertwined, we believe that these principles of anarchism can only become widespread on the social level through democratic dialogue, not by dictating them. In *Social Anarchism and Organization* (SA&O), the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) describes this as an **ethics of horizontality**:

When in contact with the social level the specific anarchist organization acts with ethics and does not seek positions of privilege, it does not impose its will, does not dominate, does not deceive, does not alienate, it does not judge itself superior, it does not fight for social movements or in front of them. It struggles with social movements, not advancing even one step beyond what they intend to.

We understand that, from this ethical perspective of the political level, there is no fire that is not collectively lit; there is no going forward, illuminating the way of the people while the people themselves come behind in the dark. The objective of the active minority is, with ethics, to stimulate, to be shoulder-to-shoulder, giving solidarity when it is needed and requested. By this, unlike the vanguard, the active minority is legitimate.⁸

Social insertion is not entryism. It is not vanguardism, and it is not the mass line. Social insertion is a specifically anarchist method of engaging with and influencing mass movements to adopt anarchist organizational principles in a manner that flows from our most important strategic and ethical anarchist principle: the unity of means and ends.

Entryism is a strategy in which members of a political organization seek out positions of leadership in order to impose their line or recruit for their organization, thereby co-opting them to adhere to the line of the insurgent group or tendency. Entryism gives the appearance of political change without directly engaging the base, eventually acting as a parasite on these movements as the base progressively disengages from an organization that they inevitably feel politically disconnected with. Social insertion, on the other hand, advocates for developing the already existing anarchic tendencies of social movements *in order to build them up and push them as far as they can go*.⁹ Rather than directly seizing the decision-making institutions of an organization to assert our control, we must engage the membership directly to encourage development of a desire to seize democratic control for themselves. This can only be done through **social work** in

⁴ The International Workingmen’s Association, General Rules

⁵ Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ), *Social Anarchism and Organization*, p. 52

⁶ CES op. it., section 2.2

⁷ Ibid., section 5.3

⁸ FARJ op. it., pp. 63-64

⁹ CES op. it., section 9.3

which anarchists join many different social movements and operate within them. To build the class struggle, we must push its democratic, horizontal character to the highest degree. To build democracy and horizontalism within the class struggle, we must be present and working within the mass organizations as anarchists and libertarian socialists in order to advance democracy and horizontalism, bringing anarchism from our caucuses and organizations to every front in the struggle against capitalism.

A United Front Toward Popular Power

When it comes to applying the strategy of social insertion to the context of organizing within DSA, a caveat must be made. DSA is a “big tent” organization – meaning it is open to a variety of socialist tendencies, from Trotskyism to Orthodox Marxism to anarchism and many more, all united under the banner of **democratic socialism**.¹⁰ This entails a basic unity around the commitment to both democracy and socialism, with a diversity of views regarding the means of achieving socialism. If we analyze DSA through the lens of organizational dualism, we quickly realize that DSA is neither strictly a social organization nor a political organization; it is in some sense both – an intermediate organization, also known in SA&O as a **grouping of tendency**:

The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organization, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions. [...] This form of organization aims to solve a very common problem that we find in activism. For example, when we know very dedicated activists; revolutionaries that advocate self-management, autonomy, grassroots democracy, direct democracy, etc. and with whom we do not act because they are not anarchists. These activists could work with the anarchists in the groupings of tendency and defend their positions in the social movements together.¹¹

Within DSA, we find a myriad of comrades organizing on every front of the class struggle in the United States – from labor organizing, to tenant organizing, to mutual aid and beyond. Many of them concur with us on a number of practical questions: the necessity of revolution, popular protagonism, self-management, militancy, class independence, and anti-vanguardism. While the particular affinities we have with comrades from each of the internal caucuses within DSA varies widely, the assemblage of caucuses with which we have the greatest affinity comprises what is colloquially referred to as the “left wing” of DSA, with LSC at its left edge.

This coalition, albeit loose and informal, has fought and continues to fight for an anti-capitalist, class-independent, militant and revolutionary DSA. We believe that DSA has the potential to be such a grouping of tendency wherein comrades from every sector of the anti-capitalist struggle come together to create a united force exponentially more powerful than the sum of its parts. In fact, we believe it is already acting as such, albeit only partially.

Beyond merely being a grouping of tendency, DSA has the potential to be an organization which can unite the socialist tendency of the entire struggle and produce a force great enough to

¹⁰ An Introduction to the Internal Politics of DSA

¹¹ FARJ op. it., section 9.3

topple capitalism – what Black Rose Anarchist Federation describes as the **front of dominated classes**:

This **Front of Dominated Classes** seeks to unite the broad base of the dominated classes in all their diversity, in all their organizational expressions and demands. While the organized working class remains a critical component of this front, our fundamental task is to build bridges between the full range of organized social forces fighting against the system of domination—from undocumented immigrants struggling against deportation, detention, and discrimination, to fights over housing, healthcare, gendered violence, war, policing, ecology, and more. Isolated from each other, there are concrete limits to what these movements can achieve. Only through a Front of Dominated Classes will we be able to bring about a revolutionary rupture with the system of domination and replace it with libertarian socialism.¹²

This front, like DSA, lies at the intersection of the political and the social, presenting a broad coalition of forces united in the struggle to end capitalism and the state. The front of dominated classes is the seed of **popular power**, the ultimate strategic aim of *especificismo* during the pre-revolutionary period, and the necessary condition for social revolution:

When the *especificistas* claim that it is necessary to “build popular power”, what is defended is nothing more than the construction of a popular social force capable of promoting a social revolution and, with that, establishing a relationship of power against the ruling classes and great agents of domination in general. Obviously, it is not about the construction of any power, but about a self-managed power, which implies the direct combat of the relations of domination, and that points to a society without classes and other forms of domination. Therefore, our conception of popular power is a conception of self-managed power.¹³

Despite our belief in the potential of DSA, we are under no illusions that DSA is ready at this moment to be a front of the dominated classes. DSA is in serious danger of losing itself to the traps of reformism and electoralism, leading comrades down a political dead end via opportunism and cooptation.

We must also note, however, that DSA is the largest socialist organization in the United States. If we ignore the role that DSA plays in the American socialist movement we risk losing out on the gains made in left-wing politics over the past decade. We believe that all socialists need to recognize the opportunity that DSA’s genuinely democratic organizing model provides us. It is an organization with the potential to be a major catalyst in the formation of a genuine **popular power**, rather than merely siphoning off the existing power of the state by cozying up to politicians or appointing a clique of “enlightened” leaders to govern on behalf of all.

Building the Libertarian Left Beyond DSA

One of the outcomes of our caucus’ reorganization has been a renewed emphasis on direct ideological expectations upon one another. The Points of Unity we drafted and approved near

¹² Black Rose Anarchist Organization, *Turning the Tide: An Anarchist Program for Popular Power*, General Strategy

¹³ Felipe Corrêa, *Elements of Anarchist Theory and Strategy*

the start of 2024 committed us to an overall ideological platform that simply did not exist in the previous iteration of LSC.¹⁴ As one member of our caucus described in their piece “LSC Does Not Belong to DSA: We Caucus Wherever We Are,”¹⁵ we do not see our work as having to exist within DSA or even within LSC. Our commitment is, above all, toward the revolutionary cause. If there is a need to discard our own identity as a formation, we are willing to do so, especially if it would allow for the unification of the libertarian socialist movement in shared struggle.

To this end, we not only tolerate dual-carding with other libertarian socialist organizations but honor our members’ diverse movement backgrounds. We respect the prerogative of our comrades to freely associate at their discretion. And, we are thrilled to welcome Cooperation Milwaukee to Horizon Federation. To our siblings on the libertarian left, we invite you to connect with us to further shared goals. Regardless of your relationship to DSA, we know there exists countless organizing projects in the communities we share, and we endeavor to aid your work and build mutual trust and power.

Finally, we recognize that if the libertarian socialist movement is to unify in our means and ends, it does not benefit us to remain disorganized while the working class continues to have no place to turn for liberation. Our goal is not to demand that a plethora of libertarian socialist and anarchist organizations immediately unify and cast aside their independent identities and ideological distinctions. Rather, it is by engaging one another that we will better learn to engage with the American and global working classes and empower them to fight for their freedom.

To those watching from the sidelines and not currently active in struggle: multiple comrades in our caucus became radicalized as libertarian socialists during, or even because of, their time in DSA. Whether our work happens within DSA or outside it, we must continue to support each other amidst the atomization of our capitalist society. If you wish to fight for freedom, solidarity, and democracy, we’re building the libertarian socialist left here and now, and we need all the help we can get.

Reach out to us at dsa-lsc.org/horizon, dsa-lsc.org/join, or contact us by email at lsc.dsa.lux@gmail.com, and let’s get to work.

Solidarity Forever,
Libertarian Socialist Caucus

¹⁴ Points of Unity of the Libertarian Socialist Caucus

¹⁵ LSC Does Not Belong to DSA: We Caucus Wherever We Are

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