

Points of Unity of the Libertarian Socialist Caucus

As Adopted 2/16/2024

DSA Libertarian Socialist Caucus

2/16/2024

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Preamble

The Libertarian Socialist Caucus seeks to provide a political home within the Democratic Socialists of America for all socialists who are opposed to the state. We are a diverse body of libertarian socialists, libertarian Marxists, anarchists, left communists, and adherents to other schools of thought within the left wing of the socialist movement. We strive to build an equitable, democratic and open society, and we believe that such a goal cannot be achieved if our organization is hierarchical, bureaucratic, and opaque in its function. As such, we have come together within DSA with two overarching purposes: first, to preserve and advance those tendencies which harmonize with our vision of socialist means and ends, and second, to create a point of contact and organizing between our faction and the broader socialist movement.

Since as early as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, anarchist and libertarian socialist thought has stressed that enacting our vision of society requires us to first embody and exemplify that vision ourselves. In the words of the IWW, we must “build the new world in the shell of the old.” The points of unity below establish the basis for our program and platform as well as the goals, methods, and strategies by which we plan to achieve them.

Our vision of an effective, ideological, and strategically diverse big tent within DSA begins with our own ability to negotiate our differences and create a flexible, collaborative caucus that holds true to our values without forcing narrow or rigid ideological demands upon our members or allies. The following points of unity lay out our commitment to each other as caucus members and our approach to achieving our key objectives.

“...these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place[...] Whoever sets out on the high road and takes a wrong turning does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.” -Errico Malatesta

“The influence of movements by anarchism means seeking for them to have the characteristics that we stand for: force, class struggle perspective, combativeness, autonomy, direct action, direct democracy and revolutionary perspective.” -Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro

1. A stateless society must be anti-capitalist.

We are revolutionary socialists first and foremost. Our ultimate vision for society is incompatible with all forms of capitalism, markets, and economic exploitation. We reject false visions of liberation that seek to preserve private ownership of capital. These systems rely on social domination, and dictatorial interests will invariably manipulate them at every point to limit popular and democratic power. Community ownership of the means of production requires both worker control over the day-to-day conditions of their workplace, and democratic governance of our social and political systems. Libertarian socialists have experimented with different economic models, from syndicalism and cooperative economies, to municipalization and socialization. We recognize that democracy in production must be matched with democracy in all spheres of life, and structures of economic planning must be integrated with broader democratic political structures, from tenant unions to public assemblies to local and municipal government.

“All things are for all men, since all men have need of them, since all men have worked in the measure of their strength to produce them, and since it is not possible to evaluate every one’s part in the production of the world’s wealth.” -Pyotr Kropotkin

2. The state is fundamentally incapable of solving crises of its own creation.

The world is swiftly approaching the point of global ecological collapse as we face a simultaneous crisis of the liberal state and of capitalism itself. Social reproduction and survival continue to grow more difficult, yet corporate profits continue to grow, and the cascading collapse of world-wide ecosystems threatens even the basic ecological prerequisites the capitalist system requires for its self-perpetuation. The role of the growth imperative in accelerating the world’s descent into climate apocalypse requires a response beyond the ability of the state to recognize or enact.

The state’s failure to improve real working and living conditions, amid a spike in migration from political, ecological, and economic disruptions, has once again served to foment a global resurgence in fascism. These movements have developed nihilistic and conspiratorial programs that aim to preserve the psychological comforts of modernity and national domination, providing a simple response to a complex array of geopolitical and ecologically-driven cataclysms. As capitalist and liberal institutions drop their long-held pretense of democratic governance, violent and opportunistic fascist forces embrace hostility not only toward excluded groups, but toward the survival of life on Earth, regressing society toward colonialism and continued imperial exploitation.

Pursuing piecemeal reforms or even seizing power within a liberal state framework will not be sufficient to halt the rise of fascism or avert ecological collapse. The whole of the working class must be organized and brought consciously and deliberately into self-governance.

“Capitalism can no more be ‘persuaded’ to limit growth than a human being can be ‘persuaded’ to stop breathing. Attempts to ‘green’ capitalism, to make it ‘ecological’, are doomed by the very nature of the system as a system of endless growth.” -Murray Bookchin

3. DSA’s involvement in electoral politics should counter state hegemony and foster revolutionary opportunities for the working class.

Socialists should hold no illusions that the levers of state power can simply be put to work for socialist ends. We recognize, however, that strategic engagement with the state, including electoral politics, can help create revolutionary opportunities for the working class. But we understand that socialists who operate within the capitalist state are working behind enemy lines, and we organize with this fundamental reality in mind. DSA’s participation in bourgeois democracy poses the constant risk of co-optation and recuperation.

As libertarian socialists, we believe in delegation, not representation. We owe obligations to each other as participants in a collective movement. Individuals entrusted with reflecting our

values within bourgeois democratic systems should carry out the democratic will of DSA's members, rather than their own independent desires. We must ensure that DSA's endorsed elected officials are committed to using their positions to build DSA and other structures of independent working-class power. They must be deeply embedded in our organizing, in constant and transparent coordination with DSA's elected leadership, and held subject to the oversight of DSA's general membership. If DSA's relationship with an elected official cannot meet these standards, or if undue influence by an elected official associated with DSA threatens to undermine the will of DSA's membership, those ties should be severed. Socialists in office must act as a fifth column within the capitalist state, not as instruments of the state against revolutionary socialism.

"Neither total rejection nor complete recognition of the state is useful for the democratic efforts of civil society. The overcoming of the state, particularly the nation-state, is a long-term process." -Abdullah Öcalan

4. We strive for socialism without class reductionism.

We oppose all systems of exploitation. Capitalism uses hierarchies of social division such as heteropatriarchy and white supremacy to fracture the unity of the masses and further consolidate power into the hands of the few. Our goal is the liberation of all people, which means we see all struggles against oppression as part of our own. At the same time, we cannot reduce all forms of struggle to class struggle alone, and we recognize the need for careful and specific understanding of how these systems of exploitation interact. We most effectively organize the working class, history shows, by embracing the specificity of groups, whether racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or otherwise, across lines of difference. Regardless of how we act, our class enemies will continue to attempt to weaponize identity as a means of dividing members of the working class. Such action can only be remedied through direct attention to the needs and experiences of targeted minority groups rather than ignoring their plight to uphold a mirage of uncomplicated unity. Building a socialist future that liberates everyone will require us to dismantle more systems of social oppression than capitalism alone.

"We demand our right to be culturally and politically different and further demand that white Anarchists/radicals respect our right to disagree on political questions... most Black-White coalitions have been organized with the whites truly dominating because of their access to superior resources and by having more political access." -Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

5. There is no democracy without accountability and autonomy.

Democracy is the means through which popular control is enacted, but it is not reducible to a specific given set of procedures or organizational structures. Its particular features and means must reflect material and social conditions. We support systems that develop strong, active rank-and-file participation, and reject systems that entrench and silo power, within DSA and outside it. We advocate for direct member assemblies, direct referenda and recall, transparency in leadership, proportional representation in elected leadership, and membership oversight over national bodies.

However, effective oversight should not imply a narrow strategy. We believe DSA is strongest when members are empowered to carry out work on a variety of terrains. People come to DSA for many reasons, and members should be permitted to pursue and maintain those political projects which are most meaningful to them. Although the collective resources of the organization are rightfully directed by the broadest relevant membership body, the autonomy and initiative of working groups, committees, and individual members should be cultivated, not discouraged.

“While all societies make their own imaginaries (institutions, laws, traditions, beliefs and behaviors), autonomous societies are those that their members are aware of this fact, and explicitly self-institute.” -Cornelius Castoriadis

6. Achieving socialism requires humility and solidarity.

We value an organization that welcomes a wide range of theoretical and practical approaches. DSA provides a unique and historically significant forum to build a body that supports intra-left cooperation. We recognize that LSC’s vision is not hegemonic within the organization and is unlikely to become so in the immediate future. While we agitate for a DSA which sees the state as an enemy and hostile terrain for socialists, we emphasize open dialogue between all socialist tendencies as an indispensable investigative method in the class struggle. This commitment creates a far stronger foundation to develop a revolutionary mass movement. Unity, in vision or in action, must be forged through conversation, persuasion, and the experience of shared struggle, not forced through parliamentary procedure. This commitment to work across our differences creates a strong foundation for developing a revolutionary mass movement, rather than splintering into a fractured milieu of competing sects and NGOs.

“We are nothing if we walk alone; we are everything when we walk together in step with other dignified feet.” -Subcomandante Marcos

7. We embrace care and good faith in DSA.

The socialist movement is strengthened when we work consciously against the atomization imposed by capital. In the words of Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, care is “the labor through which life maintains and thrives”. Capitalism undermines care as it seeks to commodify every aspect of human life, including our fundamental needs, grinding all health and life to dust to maintain its dominion. The resulting alienation not only harms the most vulnerable, it undermines our ability to act collectively and secure even the most modest progressive goals. As part and parcel of our struggle against capitalism, we reject all commodified visions of human existence and advocate for a holistic model of care that emphasizes building and strengthening community ties, cooperation, and solidarity. We especially value care work in our organization, and encourage DSA members to see each other as part of a social as well as political community. This extends to our modes of internal conflict, which must recognize our shared commitment to the socialist political project as we navigate our differences in theory and strategy.

“Dependence on care has been pathologized, rather than recognized as part of our human condition.” -The Care Collective

“Before we can forgive one another, we have to understand one another.” -Emma Goldman

8. Socialists should organize openly for a democratic, worker-led labor movement.

Connecting the labor movement to a larger revolutionary project rests at the core of our long-term efforts as socialists. As libertarian socialists, we believe workplaces should be organized according to the same directly democratic principles we advocate elsewhere. The state’s campaign to curtail organized labor has intentionally, and successfully, worked to sever unions from the revolutionary politics of their forebears. We aim to re-politicize the labor movement towards a true force for working class autonomy and independent economic and political power, and to strengthen organized labor at points of strategic importance. Further, we support direct and concerted action that coordinates work both inside and outside the labor movement as a means of developing broader solidarity and power.

We believe DSA members should not hide their affiliation with the socialist movement during the course of their work within unions, nor should they allow their politics to passively fall by the wayside. Socialist labor organizers should openly identify themselves as such and advocate earnestly for democratic, militant unions, but we must be careful not to subordinate union activity to DSA’s other political priorities, or take a hostile or sectarian approach toward existing reform movements. Socialists outside the labor movement must also take an active role in aiding labor struggles through mutual aid and direct action. We must distinguish ourselves not by separating ourselves from our coworkers or from sections of labor that may not identify as socialist, but through our contributions to workplace struggles and our commitment to democracy, working-class militancy, open dialogue, and solidarity.

“[T]he workingman[...] is compelled to sell his labor cheap, or to starve. The price paid him is always far below the real value. He acts under compulsion, and they call it a free contract. This infernal state of affairs keeps him poor and ignorant; an easy prey for exploitation.” -Michael Schwab

“Let the masses understand that these robbers hold this property (which is so much unpaid labor) under the plea of the laws which they themselves have made, and by the sanction of the very men they have locked out to starve.” -Lucy Parsons

9. We seek the unconditional abolition of policing and incarceration.

We call for the dismantling of all structures of incarceration, including prisons, jails, and detention centers, as well as for the dissolution of all levels of law enforcement. The history of the United States is also the history of the police state. Whether it be slave patrols, Haymarket, or Bloody Sunday, police have always been on the front lines of reaction against the revolutionary demands of the working class. As such, we see no world in which policing can coexist with democracy or socialism.

We understand policing to constitute the ideological and organizational core of modern American fascism. Under the cloak of preserving “public safety,” the police have militarized and use violence to protect capital, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Local and national police forces increasingly wield violence in service of fascist and authoritarian aims, even when those aims directly undermine the legitimacy of the state from which the police derive their mandate, and use their unions to avoid any accountability or public control. The defeat of state and capital requires the dismantling of policing and the carceral system.

We hold that neither prisons nor the police keep us safe. We keep us safe. Systemic violence is self-perpetuating; the police state will never uproot the conditions of violence when police thrive in the same oppressive, hierarchical power structures that fuel it. The carceral approach ignores the violence of the oppressor until it is too late and often leads to disproportionately poor and marginalized abuse survivors being locked up for acting in self-defense. To build truly safe communities, we must learn the skills to address interpersonal violence ourselves. We must practice proactive mediation to resolve conflict before it turns into harm, and transformative justice to create community accountability mechanisms and uproot the oppressive conditions in our communities which foster violence and abuse. Supporting survivors’ healing, listening to them, pursuing rehabilitation through accountability – whenever possible and desirable – and healing our communities are central to building a world without prisons, police, or violence.

“Abolition is a movement to end systemic violence, including the interpersonal vulnerabilities and displacements that keep the system going. In other words, the goal is to change how we interact with each other and the planet by putting people before profits, welfare before warfare, and life over death.” -Ruth Wilson Gilmore

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