

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA
Resolutions adopted by the 2003 National Convention
Detroit, Michigan
November 16, 2003

PRIORITIES RESOLUTION

Preamble

DSA meets at its fall 2003 national convention at a time of right-wing dominance in United States domestic and foreign policy. The Bush administration's doctrine of "pre-emptive" wars involves unilateral United States intervention around the globe in an arrogant and violent manner not witnessed since the Vietnam War and the covert/proxy wars of the 70's and 80's. In addition, Bush's tax give-away to the rich and radical expansion of military spending has created a structural deficit that will place downward pressure on public spending for generations to come. The Bush administration has cynically used the 'war on terrorism' to justify an assault on already weakened civil rights and civil liberties, and to justify a massive increase in military spending and a gutting of funding for even its own public policy initiatives, such as "The Global War on AIDS" and "The Leave No Child Behind" educational act. There is no doubt that this is the most reactionary administration in at least a century, especially given its control of all three branches of government. Moreover right wing administrations are less constrained and more vicious during a second term than in their first since they no longer have to be concerned with reelection.

The danger posed by a second term is real. A re-election of the rogue Bush regime would further a unilateral foreign policy that threatens global peace and threaten the destruction of our already minimalist public sector, particularly Medicare, Social Security, and public education. But, the reelection of this President is not certain. There is wide spread popular concern about the economy and foreign policy that has surfaced in the polls and is evident in the strength of the anti-war candidates for the Democratic nomination. The Bush administration's foreign policy overreach has given rise to a quagmire in Iraq and its failure to aid state budgets has accentuated the costs of the economic downturn. The uneven economic 'recovery' has benefited only the affluent, while placing tremendous social welfare burdens on state and local governments.

Thus, the challenge facing the broad democratic left – which includes DSA – is to defeat the Bush administration in the 2004 elections, while also strengthening a coalition of progressive forces that would pressure whatever administration that replaces the Bush regime to implement more humane and democratic foreign and domestic policies. We have no illusion about the centrist character of most of the feasible alternatives to Bush; but politicians necessarily respond to popular pressure from below. How many social gains can be derived from Bush's defeat will depend on how much the labor, civil rights, environmental, and feminist movements strengthen themselves through this popular resistance to Bush. As socialists, our participation in an anti-Bush campaign will not be simply as builders of someone else's election. We will proceed with an eye to promoting campaign strategies that can help grow the many social movements we support.

The outcome of the 2004 elections will be the single biggest factor determining the shape of political work in the near future, but regardless of the outcome, we commit ourselves to continue our challenge to America's low-wage economy and its structural underpinnings.

In engaging in the political and organizational priorities, this convention reiterates the 2001 convention's commitment that all of DSA's politics will be guided by a demand for social and economic justice for all. In pursuit of justice, multi-racial coalition building and an anti-racist politics must be an ongoing, integral part of all our projects and activism. We must also consistently look for opportunities to work side-by-side with activists in communities of color.

To move forward towards the goals mentioned above, DSA adopts the following four main priorities at this convention:

- To participate actively in a Dump Bush movement. This includes:
 - 1) encouraging DSA members to participate actively in the primary campaign of the candidate of their choice;
 - 2) organizing DSA members who are delegates to the convention, providing testimony at platform hearings on our issues, organizing DSA events at the Democratic National Convention and elsewhere, and working to unify the efforts of progressive delegates at the convention;
 - 3) building a sufficiently strong left coalition that it can pressure the campaign to engage in genuine grass-roots mobilizations and put heat on any new administration to adopt the most progressive policies possible.
- To strengthen DSA's organizational capacities. DSA must engage in more internal and public education as to the relevance of democratic socialist vision and program for building a more humane world as an alternative to capitalism in the twenty-first century. In particular, the organization must reinvigorate its tradition of educating young people to this politics, particularly – but not exclusively – by rebuilding a DSA/YDS presence on college and university campuses.
- We must build upon the increased organizational focus and coordinated activism that the “Low Wage Justice” campaign, initiated at the 2001 DSA convention, has brought to the organization. The DSA NPC and national office will continue to provide resources and information to aid locals in living wage campaigns, immigrant justice activism, single payer advocacy, and labor support work.

The national leadership and staff will also work to bring together religious, labor, student, environmental and community activists to build a national campaign to achieve justice for Wal-Mart workers as well as reforms in Wal-Mart's business practices. We cannot envision victory in our efforts against the low-wage economy without achieving significant and lasting change at Wal-Mart.

- With our international connections we will work to develop a project around a public dialogue between progressive elected officials in the United States and other countries. The dialogue would attempt to develop several points.
 - 1) The importance of a genuine multilateral approach to international crises and the need for international leadership on human rights and peace issues from outside the United States.
 - 2) Opposition to American jingoism, anti-Europe bashing, simplistic unilateralist or phony multilateral foreign policy programs, and contempt for international law. Educating the public as to the superior structure of the economic and social welfare systems of other advanced industrial nations.
 - 3) International solidarity to meet human needs and further popular aspirations while opposing corporate-driven globalization.

This convention commits the national staff and NPC to:

Strengthening the relationship between YDS and DSA

- The locals and the national will endeavor to provide whatever aid will help YDS re-establish a presence on college campuses (and high schools) around the nation.

Improving the effectiveness of our communication and outreach

- We must continue to improve the editorial quality and timeliness of Democratic Left, the DSA web site, and the organization's listserv.
- Regular coverage of local activities shall continue to be part of the mission of Democratic Left and the website.
- We must continue to implement the 2001 Convention Resolution on Internet Enabling DSA, including providing an internet discussion list and making minutes available. We should routinely collect email addresses. [A copy of the full text of the 2001 resolution is attached as an appendix to this report.]
- In order to expand the pool of members, activists, and contributors (and thus increase our staff and resource capacity), DSA will attempt to return to its practice of mailing 50-100,000 pieces of direct mail recruitment letters each year.

Conferences

- This convention also endorses continuing the practice of substituting regional activist conferences for a single, non-convention-year, national activist conference.
- Regional conferences and National Conventions should devote more time to democratic discussion and decision-making.

Development Committees

- To enhance the relationship between the national office and leadership and our local activists, the NPC will appoint a Local Development Committee consisting of NPC and non-NPC members. This committee will maintain regular communication between locals and organizing committees and the national organization; revise and update a Local Development Plan and work on carrying it out; make recommendations to the national organization in the interest of the health of locals; stimulate discussion about the concerns expressed by locals and the regional activist conferences; and research best practices of DSA locals and how they might learn to do better, and disseminate this information.
- Similarly, the NPC will, if possible, appoint an At-Large Development Committee concerned with at-large members.

RESOLUTION ON THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ

The prosecution of the War in Iraq and the subsequent occupation of Iraq completely validate the objections raised by those who opposed this war. Only the speedy restoration of Iraqi sovereignty to an independent and legitimate Iraqi government can end this quagmire.

To facilitate this, Democratic Socialists of America calls for the immediate withdrawal of the U.S.-British "coalition" forces from Iraq and simultaneous transfer of administration of Iraq to the United Nations, including the appointment of a UN High Commissioner. A UN-controlled peacekeeping force should maintain security during the period of UN administration while an Iraqi force is being developed and sovereignty is restored.

The Bush administration has failed to provide for even the most minimal needs of the Iraqi population. While corporations such as Halliburton and Bechtel are profiteering from no-bid contracts, U.S. citizens are paying for an old-fashioned colonial occupation in which U.S. troops—assigned to state-building duties for which they have no training—are being routinely killed. Iraqi civilians, too, are being killed in armed attacks by U.S. soldiers, by insurgents, and by common criminals taking advantage of the breakdown in social order. The Iraqi people are also suffering and dying due to their lack of sufficient clean water, electricity, and medical care. Its infrastructure destroyed, Iraq is being ravaged, and ethno-nationalist and reactionary Islamist forces are on the rise. DSA condemns the wholesale privatization of the Iraqi economy carried out unilaterally by the U.S. occupying forces. Only a sovereign and democratic Iraqi government can implement legitimate structural and economic reforms. DSA supports the efforts of organizations such as U.S. Labor Against the War that seek to protect workers' rights and support an independent trade union movement in Iraq.

The Bush administration called for the creation of a UN-endorsed multilateral military force to join the U.S. occupation force in Iraq, to be commanded by an American and accountable to the Pentagon's strategic control. As Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies noted, the plan did "not envision Washington even sharing authority and decision-making with the UN itself or with the governments sending international contingents, let alone ending its occupation and turning over full authority to the UN to oversee a rapid return to Iraqi independence." We reject the administration's arrogance.

We further demand that the U.S. and British meet their moral and legal responsibilities under international law by providing for the humanitarian costs of their unilateral intervention. Washington and London must pay the continuing costs of Iraq's reconstruction, including much of the cost of UN humanitarian and peacekeeping deployments. The Bush administration must immediately make public a realistic estimate for the cost of reconstruction in Iraq and turn over funds to UN authority, beginning with the \$87 billion dollars allegedly appropriated for reconstruction (but the majority of which is aimed at supporting the military costs of United States occupation). Reconstruction funds would be far cheaper than the costs incurred by continuing the inhumane and counter-productive United States unilateral occupation of Iraq.

RESOLUTION REGARDING DSA ORGANIZING AROUND THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

Whereas the Democratic Party will be holding its 2004 Presidential nominating convention in Boston, and,

Whereas we as socialists seek to support our allies in the labor, racial and ethnic minority, feminist and peace movements within the Democratic Party, and,

Whereas it is important that socialists seek to influence the debate within the Democratic Party and articulate a democratic socialist vision for American politics, and,

Whereas it is vital that Democratic Socialists of America increase its visibility and provide public forums for socialist ideas, and,

Whereas the Boston local is one of the largest local organizations in DSA,

Therefore be it resolved that the national organization of DSA and the Boston local shall jointly organize a public socialist event at or concurrent with the Democratic Party's national convention in Boston in July of 2004.

RESOLUTION ON MISSION STATEMENT

The NPC shall initiate an organization-wide discussion aimed at the development of a mission statement. Until such time as wider discussions within the organization – including at the planned regional activist conferences – may result in a better formulation, the following shall serve as DSA’s working mission statement:

Democratic socialists fight for a world in which all people participate democratically in the governing of the economic, political and cultural institutions and relationships that shape their lives. In the near term, this means that democratic socialists struggle for reforms that shift power and resources away from corporate elites and put them in the hands of ordinary people. The mission of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is to participate in establishing democratic socialism as a political force in the United States and the world by training and mobilizing socialist activists; by educating the public about the democratic socialist values of equality, liberty and solidarity; and by helping to build progressive coalitions to win victories that move the United States towards greater democracy.

RESOLUTION ON POLITICS

WHEREAS, DSA does not automatically assume that a Democratic President, even with a Democratic House and Senate, or any lesser Democratic officeholder at any level, will automatically be a progressive, or move in a progressive direction;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that DSA recognizes that left pressure will still need to be applied when Democrats are elected or re-elected at any level; and

THEREFORE, DSA will actively work to apply such pressure through itself and through left and progressive coalitions, at the national, state and local level, through all agencies available – progressive and grassroots organizations, trade unions and Jobs with Justice chapters, organizations of women and minorities, educational forums, and, just as important, through demonstrations and protests in the streets.

RESOLUTION ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

BE IT RESOLVED, That the National DSA, under a process and timetable to be established by the NPC, take as a major focus in the next period a thorough reassessment of (1) its basic strategy, (2) the realistic opportunities for the existing DSA to participate in the building of a progressive political force in the next few years, and (3) the appropriate organizational structures, processes, and tools for reaching its goals;

That everything be “on the table” except our commitment to socialist values and democratic procedures;

That the process begin with a realistic and unsentimental evaluation of (1) the size and diversity of the present activist core, (2) the viability of existing locals and commissions, (3) the contacts DSA has in other organizations and movements, and (4) our access to highly skilled analysts and high-profile spokespeople;

That the goal of the process be the development of one or more projects which can realistically be carried out by a group with the present size and characteristics of the DSA which will assist existing and potential progressive forces to form a political entity capable of offering an effective challenge to corporate power and free-market globalization.

RESOLUTION ON CORPORATIONS

The pernicious doctrine designating corporations as artificial persons has given them a degree of power exceeding that of natural persons. We should examine and pursue, in coalition with groups such as Programs on Corporations, Law and Democracy (POCLAD) and Alliance for Democracy, ways to reduce and eventually limit this power by defining persons only as living individuals.

RESOLUTION ON RADICAL YOUTH

WHEREAS, today's activist youth constitute a bright hope for a reconstituted broad progressive movement, and an opening for the clear espousal of socialism within such movements;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that DSA nationally shall work actively and in a comradely manner with these radical youth.

RESOLUTION ON ENDORSEMENTS

DSA endorses the march on Washington for women's right [April 25] to choose and the December 10 55th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, with specific focus on the right to organize.

RESOLUTION ON ELECTORAL REFORM

DSA reaffirms its support for constitutional and electoral reforms to create a more democratic and representative political system in the United States, including:

- Public funding for electoral campaigns.
- Equitable access of candidates to mass media and the elimination of privately purchased campaign ads.

- Limits on the size of individual campaign contributions and on total campaign spending.
- The abolition of corporate PACs.
- Same-day voter registration, and 24-hour voting on weekends or a national holiday for Election Day.
- The elimination of the undemocratic Electoral College.
- Experiments with proportional representation, electoral "fusion," and single-transferable ballot and "instant runoff" voting, so that people may vote for what they believe in without fearing that their votes will be wasted.
- Equitable financing and provision of crucial public goods: not only standardized, high-quality machinery but also a voter-verifiable permanent audit trail. Any voting technology should allow preferential voting, including instant runoff and proportional representation.
- Restoration of full voting rights to convicted felons.

DSA supports efforts to defend the right to vote, and we condemn the racist programs of the Republican Party and others to deny ballot access to minority voters, such as in Florida in 2000.