

**Democratic Socialists of America
National Political Committee
Minutes of Meeting of April 13-14, 2019
Approved: May 24, 2019**

The meeting was held at UAW Local 2110 Hall.

Present: Ravi Ahmad, Ajmal Alami (YDSA), Theresa Alt, Alex Birnel, Heidi Chua (staff), Allie Cohn (Saturday), Catherine Hoffman, Ella Mahony, Chris Maisano (Saturday), Christine Riddiough, Frances Rizo (Parliamentarian), Kristina Sepúlveda (Operations Director), Jack Suria Linares, Maria Svart (National Director). By phone: Alison Baldree (Development Director), Paula Brantner (Harassment and Grievance Officer), Carolyn Carter (Budget & Finance), Allie Cohn (Sunday), Marianela D'Aprile (Sunday), Zac Echola, Jeremy Gong, Natalie Midiri. Visiting: John Bogil, Patrick Shepherd, Devin McManus, Carrington Morris, Renée Paradis, Rebecca Vitale, Russell Weiss-Irwin.

Absent: Delé Balogun, Christian Bowe, Elliott Geary, Joseph Schwartz.

Parliamentarian Frances Rizo chaired throughout.

Saturday

Meeting began at 9:35am.

Appeals Process for Grievances

National Harassment and Grievance Officer Paul Brantner gave her report and proposed an appeals process. The appeals process is below

When I am contacted about filing a grievance, I will first ensure that it has already been handled by the relevant chapter if the chapter has over 100 members (although some smaller chapters and new chapters are voluntarily adding Resolution 33 language even though not required by the policy itself). Some wish to bypass their chapter due to the nature of the conflict, but I have and will continue to work to ensure chapter HGOs are the first level of reporting. It is critical that we build a culture of empowerment and capacity for this work in chapters if it is to be sustainable. Chapter HGOs can interview witnesses, understand relevant history and assess credibility better than I can to make a recommendation, and chapter steering committees can play a key role in adjudicating HGO recommendations and managing the culture and climate within their chapter if they are processing grievances.

I will then invite the member seeking to appeal to fill out the following grievance

form.

This allows me to assess whether the grievance meets Resolution 33 requirements, or is an attempt to appeal a non-Resolution 33 expulsion or discipline under the chapter's bylaws. Once I've received this form and supporting evidence, I or a member of my team will review what has been submitted to determine if there is any missing information needed. If there is not a written ruling from the chapter steering committee, we will make contact with the chapter HGOs and/or leadership to obtain information from them about the adjudication process below and any additional relevant information as to how and why the grievance was decided a particular way.

Then we will generate a summary report, which I typically anticipate will be 2-3 pages, with a recommendation for adjudication by the NPC.

When matters are adjudicated by the NPC, of course we all want to protect the integrity of the process to make final resolutions "timely, efficient, accurate, and discreet." We also want to prevent some of the weaponization of the process we have seen at the chapter level where some members attempt to use the grievance process to rid their chapter of their enemies: people with whom they disagree politically and/or with whom they have been engaged in conflict.

The reports will therefore not identify either the individuals involved or their chapter. While NPC members may have independent knowledge of the behavior and/or conflict at the heart of an individual grievance, you will be asked to verify that you will

- 1) Review the reports and recommendations fairly and impartially, as you would as a member of a jury;
- 2) Keep the process, any facts you learn, and any evidence you review confidential, not discussing them with individuals who are not NPC members. (Especially sensitive evidence will either be summarized in the report and only available upon request, or provided in physical rather than electronic form to minimize the potential for dissemination).
- 3) Review the reports and deliberate only in a confidential executive session, with the outcome to be shared only with the parties.
- 4) Respect the process and outcome, owning the final adjudication as a product of the NPC, even if you do not personally agree or are part of the majority.
- 5) Recuse yourself if you feel you may know any of the parties involved.

Because the NPC only meets quarterly, I recommend that the Steering Committee of the NPC be empowered to handle grievances and vote on their outcome. If there is a significant division or difficulty reaching a resolution, it would be possible to refer the matter to the entire NPC, but in most cases, that would further delay the adjudication for weeks or months.

While I will make what I consider to be sound recommendations backed by the evidence that exists, Resolution 33 provides that “The ultimate disposition of each report will be made by the chapter’s Steering Committee or, in the case of DSA National, the NPC, after that body reviews the written report and recommendation of the HGO(s).” While this section refers to grievances and not appeals, given that there is a right of appeal, I am assuming that having the NPC make the ultimate disposition after reviewing my recommendation is similarly the appropriate method of disposition. Therefore, I will be communicating to all parties that while I will make recommendations, the decision of the NPC is the final one that will bind the parties, which will allow me to do my work without undue interference or retaliation.

Once a resolution has been reached, I will then communicate with the parties about the outcome, protecting you from further interference or retaliation from those unhappy with the results. The member appealing will be informed about their DSA membership status and any other limitations, such as recommendations about training, duration of suspension, or any conditions placed upon reinstatement. The chapter steering committee will be informed if the member has taken at-large member status or has been expelled from National DSA membership, and any other relevant conditions to the member’s future DSA involvement. (As I have mentioned before, there will most likely be a need to develop criteria for a “do not fly” list so that a member does not move to a different chapter or potentially cause harm in other DSA spaces.) I will also coordinate with the DSA National staff the member’s post-appeal membership status, so that, for example, monthly dues deductions can be halted if necessary.

This was discussed, with emphasis on the need for confidentiality. The process is currently limited to situations described in Resolution 33, but along with the new process the National Director developed with a labor attorney and Paula's advice, and the NPC passed in January, Paula is working on code of conflict and conflict resolution resources.

Chris Riddiough moved the appeals process; it was seconded and adopted unanimously.

National Director's Report

National Director Maria Svart reported that staff spent the spring almost entirely focused on the regional preconvention conferences and the YDSA outreach conference in February. This required tradeoffs in the form of delaying other projects, but it was a good use of staff time because it ensured members from all chapters had access to convention information, helped members build face to face relationships between chapters, and promoted healthy debate about the direction of the organization.

Maria reported on her trip to Brussels for a meeting of European leftists, explaining that they look to Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and DSA and new groups associated with the left wing of the Democratic Party, as the key hope for the future. Lessons learned are that the far-right is coordinating and disciplined in their messaging, working together across their own differences politically, and is relentlessly anti-immigrant as a central talking point. They also use language framing themselves the right as pro-democracy.

Finally, she reported that the Bernie survey to members took significant operations staff time and that a high priority for the spring include recruiting, hiring and orienting a large cohort of new staff including both operations and organizing staff to open up capacity, instituting additional operational efficiencies in the national office, having field organizers providing support to chapters and organizing committees in the field, and preparing for the convention. There was extensive discussion of the report.

Maria noted that we were asked to sign a statement in defense of Ilhan Omar. Ravi Ahmad moved that we both sign on and write our own statement. This passed unanimously.

Maria presented a proposal from the Socialism 2019 conference that DSA endorse it. Ella Mahony moved it. The motion was adopted with two dissenting votes.

Chris Riddiough then moved that the Convention Planning Committee propose guidelines for any group tabling at the DSA Convention. This was seconded and carried unanimously.

Budget and Finance Report

Theresa Alt moved that the NPC rescind the 2011 reserves policy and adopt a bequests policy and a new reserves policy:

BEQUESTS/Major Gifts to Democratic Socialists of America

Anyone is free to make a bequest/major gift to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) without consulting its National Political Committee. Members and supporters will be encouraged to remember DSA in their wills and living trusts or other testamentary documents.

If a will or trust is in effect at the time the person dies, and DSA is named as beneficiary with specific restrictions on allocation of the monies, the contribution will be distributed in accordance with the wishes of the donor. □

A prospective donor is encouraged to consult his or her own attorney and/or tax advisor.

RESERVES POLICY

DSA will try to keep six months of its staffing and fixed expenses in reserve, except in case of emergencies.

The target amount will be calculated annually when budgeting. Expenses budgeted for the year should allow for leaving six month's planned expenses from the Staff Wages, Staff Benefits, Other Staff Fringe, Occupancy, Insurance, Equipment Leases, Equipment Purchases, Supplies, Telephone/internet, Shipping & postage, Printing & copying, Software, and Financial fees lines in reserve.

OR

The target amount will be calculated annually on the basis of the two previous years' actual expenses, calculated or estimated at the end of those years, so as to be available for the budget for the coming year.

Whichever calculation is higher will be used as the target for reserves.

All three passed unanimously.

Theresa moved to add Kristina Sepúlveda to the list of authorized bank signatories. This passed unanimously.

Theresa then introduced the Budget and Finance Committee report, and Carolyn Carter presented it. In essence first quarter income has been significantly below budget but so has spending, so that there is a small surplus. Spending and hiring may go forward as originally planned, but will be reviewed at the end of the second quarter.

Development

Alison Baldree presented fundraising plans. Each regional pre-convention conference included a training on grassroots fundraising, and for the month of May she is scheduling personalized coaching sessions open for any chapter treasurer or fundraiser to schedule with her. In January, we begin our rolling membership renewal process, which asks members to renew more quickly than previously and with more touches. In March, we ran a socialist feminist sticker campaign, the first of our quarterly online sticker campaigns.

Alison has been fundraising since the fall for a solidarity fund to help members attend the National Convention and other national and regional gatherings. She asked whether to be cautious or ambitious, to send postal mail to 1000 members or so, or a larger universe of tens of thousands that make sense given where they are in the renewal cycle.

Chris Riddiough moved to do the largest member mailing, and this carried unanimously.

Chapter Pipeline Committee Report

Catherine Hoffman reported that 39 new chapters had been approved since the last NPC meeting. There are 6 organizing committees and 5 prospective chapters to be approved and the committee will work to improve the administrative documents of the committee.

Personnel Committee

After a report in executive session no action was taken.

Proposal to Change Bylaws

Zac Ecola sought NPC endorsement of a Bylaws Change to require the national organization to give every chapter at least \$100/month. After discussion the motion failed.

National Electoral Committee

Allie Cohn requested that the NPC authorize the NEC to appoint four replacement members. Natalie Midiri moved a substitute motion to let the NEC choose new members and the NPC vote by Loomio to approve. This passed unanimously.

Allie moved the NEC proposal for a DSA in Office conference of DSA elected officials concurrent with the National Convention. There was discussion of what should be on the program. Budgeted cost would be \$41,470.

Natalie Midiri offered an amendment that DSA will provide full housing costs for the officials if they don't have the funds, but will note in the invitation that if they pay their costs it frees up funds for DSA members to attend the convention.

The amendment passed. Natalie then moved the main motion.

Based on 40 elected officials attending with food, travel, and hotel rooms paid for, and a separate venue (or space in the same venue).

Purchase	Cost Per Item	Quantity	Total Cost
Travel Subsidies	\$230 per flight	40	\$9,200
Food	\$25 per meal	240	\$6,000

Venue	\$2,500 per day	2	\$5,000
Materials			\$1,000
Child Care			\$500
Housing	\$200 per hotel night	80	\$16,000
Override cushion			\$3,770
Total			\$41,470

The main motion passed with one dissenting vote.

A discussion of the national endorsements process with NEC members Renée Paradis and Devin McManus followed.

Medicare for All

Jeremy Gong referred to the committee’s newsletters, Bernie Sanders’ new bill and the Michael Lighty speaking tour.

2020 Presidential Exploratory Committee Report

Jeremy Gong referred to the written report about the website launch, compliance resources, organizing subcommittee and a policy committee, and said news organizations are paying attention to our endorsement and campaign.

Anti-Racism Training Followup

After a broad discussion of the complexity of opposing racism, Chris Riddiough moved the proposal of the Afro-Socialist Caucus for a conference.

Jack Suria Linares moved an amendment to add focusing on the role of immigration in US politics to the proposal. The amendment was unanimously adopted.

The AfroSoc National Gathering Planning Committee is proposing a National gathering to take place June 7th-9th, 2019 in New Orleans, Louisiana at Loyola University. [The] intention is to convene in order to collaborate on how [they] can be intentional in creating a culture within DSA that is supportive, welcoming, and elevates our comrades of color.

[They] aim to have approximately 126 comrades of color gather together from existing chapters to delve into deeper questions on topics such as reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans in the US, chapter racial dynamics, gendered work, conflict resolution, building a truly multiracial working class, the role of immigration in US politics and other areas that have been of great concern.

The tentative planning committee:

Bianca Cunningham NYC-DSA, Alyssah Portland-DSA, Kristian Hernandez

NTX-DSA, Suzanne Juliet Mobley New Orleans, Sumathy Kumar NYC-DSA, Maikiko James LA-DSA, Beth Huang-Boston-DSA, Marian Jones-NYC-DSA, Ashley Payne East Bay-DSA, Sasha Hammad-DSA national staff.

Chris further moved the \$22,800 budget for the conference.

The main motions were adopted unanimously.

Sunday

Young Democratic Socialists of America

Ajmal Alami recapped the report. YDSA has been busy with the Winter Conference, more key members, expanding political subcommittees including Bernie, passing chapter applications and planning for the Summer Convention. There will be a socialist summer school – ten weeks of webinars.

Discussion about why chapters get rejected and a shift toward public universities and high schools followed. Ajmal explained that chapters are typically rejected for incomplete applications and are called by the YDSA organizer and offered the chance to reapply.

Political Education Committee

Ella Mahony said the Committee has been focused on *The Stacks* but have cut it back to once in two months and are working on readers, annotated syllabi. They want to publish the Reparations and Movement for Black Lives curriculum. Discussion followed with new ideas for sources of historical information and the suggestion to add ecosocialism to the curriculum.

Immigrant Rights Working Group

Jack Suria Linares recapped a report about the interim steering committee still working on their election for a permanent steering committee, San Diego border support work, Sacramento know-your-rights guide, and Los Angeles support for immigrant families and for HR 1004 to reject war in Venezuela. Discussion touched on immigration between Venezuela and Colombia and the European far right narrative.

International Committee

Jack talked about their work progressing from just issuing statements to organizing events and developing relationships with people abroad. He discussed the role of the committee as different than national working groups because they promote official relationships with parties abroad. Carrington Morris discussed inviting international guests to the National Convention. The conclusion was that names should be run by the NPC and invitations come from the national organization.

Ecosocialist Statement

Zac Echola moved that the NPC endorse the seven guiding principles of the Ecosocialist Working Group.

1. Decarbonize the economy fully by 2030.
2. Democratize control over major energy systems and resources.
3. Center the working class in a just transition.
4. Decommodify survival.
5. Reinvent our communities to serve people and planet, not profit.
6. Demilitarize, decolonize, and strive for a future of international solidarity and cooperation.
7. Redistribute resources from the worst polluters.

It carried unanimously.

Convention Planning

Natalie Midiri presented the report of the Convention Planning Committee in detail, adding the correction that Jack Suria Linares is a member of the Platform Drafting Subcommittee and noting where there had been changes from previous documents. Comments and questions followed.

She moved that the NPC adopt the recommendations of the Convention Planning Committee.

Accepting the nomination of new members to the Planning Committee:

Subcommittee	Committee Lead	Members
Credentials	Zac Echola	Laura Gabby, Andrej Markovcic, Bryan Lavergne
Elections	Marianela D'Aprile	Chris Maisano, Sam Lewis, Aaron Marks
Program & Logistics	Allie Cohn	Kristin Schall, Jack McShane, Sam Miemczewski, Russell Rawlings
Resolutions & Amendments	Natalie Midiri	Beth Huang, Graham Denevan, Theresa Alt
Rules	Theresa Alt	Natalie Midiri, Renée Paradis, Will Bloom
Districts & Regions	Delé Balogun	Jeremy Gong, Ryan Mosgrove, Arielle Cohen
Platform Drafting	Jeremy Gong	Ravi Ahmad, Ella Mahony, Jack Suria Linares, Lillian Osborne

Ratifying the extension of the deadline for NPC nominations from June 2nd to June 16th;

Allocating 30-35 observer spots to members who provide skills and necessary labor at the Convention, including 8-10 marshals & mic runners, 6 registration desk support, 3 live-streaming & A/V support, 5 child-watch, 2 interpreters, 5 floating observers, with Metro-Atlanta members being offered first opportunity to apply;

Adopting the updated but still unfinished Convention Rules;

Adopting revised tentative registration and housing fee structures:

Registration Rates for 2019 Convention				
Rate	Low-Income	Low-Income EB	Early Bird	Standard
Cost	\$100	\$65	\$215	\$263
% of Cost Subsidized by DSA National	60%	75%	20%	Unsubsidized

Housing				
Single Room Rates – 3 Nights				
	Low-Income	Low-Income EB	Early Bird	Standard
Cost	\$260	\$215	\$335	\$478
% of Cost Subsidized by DSA National	45%	55%	30%	0%
Double Room Rates – 3 Nights				
Cost	\$130	\$105	\$170	\$240
% of Cost Subsidized by DSA National	45%	55%	30%	0%
Quad Room Rates – 3 Nights				
	Low-Income	Low-Income EB	Early Bird	Standard
Cost	\$65	\$50	\$85	\$120
% of Cost Subsidized by DSA National	45%	55%	30%	0%

Provisionally adopting a timeline that staff may need to adjust, with approval by NPC Steering Committee:

May 30: Registration opens

June 28: Early Bird rate closes

July 7: Registration closes (July 8 is hotel room cut-off);

Tasking the NPC Steering Committee with organizing a virtual NPC meeting in the last week of May 2019 to review and vote on additional Convention proposals.

The motion carried unanimously.

Platform Process

Jeremy Gong moved that

The NPC will not submit a resolution containing a proposed political platform to the 2019 Convention. Instead, the NPC will submit a resolution to the 2019 convention calling for the formation of a Platform Committee at their first meeting after the 2019 Convention. The Platform Committee will then organize a

process of discussion, education, and debate from 2019 to 2021 culminating in a political platform document to be adopted at the 2021 convention. The goal of this process will be to incorporate as much member input into the document as possible while bringing together the membership in a process of collective political education and strategic thinking.

The aforementioned resolution to be submitted by the NPC to the 2019 Convention will be proposed by the current Platform Subcommittee of the Convention Committee to the NPC prior to the June 2nd resolutions deadline.

This was seconded and adopted unanimously.

Alex Birnel moved that the NPC draft an explicit statement to be sent to the general membership explaining that the NPC will no longer present a political platform at the 2019 Convention. This was seconded and passed unanimously.

Jack moved that the NPC submit a priorities resolution to the Convention and the Convention Planning Committee form a subcommittee to draft it. The motion failed.

Jack moved a resolution to formally invite LeftRoots, AFIRM and other socialist organizations to the Convention. It was seconded. Natalie moved to postpone it to the May virtual meeting. The vote was unanimous to postpone.

Evaluations and Adjournment

We shared evaluations of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 pm.

Submitted by Theresa Alt