

Democratic Socialists of America: Strategy Document Draft September 15, 2015

This document is a draft statement of strategy for Democratic Socialists of America. It is a work in progress and will be brought to the convention in November 2015 after having gone through a few more rounds of edits. It is divided into three sections: (1) an analysis of the capitalist system, the particular challenges radicals face in the United States, and some speculation about new challenges in the 21st century; (2) our principles and vision of an achievable democratic socialist order; and (3) our strategy regarding organizing today and the transition to socialism.

DSA Strategy: Overview

Paragraph 1

DSA was founded in the early 1980s during a time of great optimism. In Chile, France, and Sweden, ruling parties were working toward a transition to democratic socialism. In other countries, left-wing parties had made advances. Thus, DSA's founding political statement focused on building a socialist wing within an anti-corporate coalition of labor, feminists, and activists of color whose political program would be to the left of U.S. liberalism (as opposed to European or Latin American liberalism, which was close to U.S. conservatism at that time). The strategy focused upon gaining democratic control of the economy. However, even as DSA members ratified the statement, President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had launched an assault on labor and the Left that would come to be known as "neoliberalism" and that would, by the late 1980s, dominate the globe.

Paragraph 2

Neoliberalism, which will be explored below, changed the political terrain as it sought to shrink the role of government and increase the power of the economic elites. At the same time, programs such as the "War on Drugs" massively increased repression in poor communities and caused the prison population to skyrocket. Not coincidentally, the high incarceration rate has kept the unemployment rate artificially low and has disenfranchised large numbers of ex-felons.

Paragraph 3

By the 1990s, the contours of this harsher reality were clearer. Many leftists had hoped that the fall of the Soviet Union would cause a democratic socialist surge in Eastern Europe. Instead, the backlash against Soviet-style communism propelled the development of unbridled capitalism. In addition, with the break-up of the former Soviet Union, ethnic warfare broke out in states that had lived under communist rule for decades.

Paragraph 4

Similarly, wars of liberation against colonial empires did not lead to democratic socialist governments in the former empires. Instead, sabotage from the former powers and the United States and internal rivalries created civil wars and misery throughout much of Latin America, Africa, and East Asia.

Paragraph 5

DSA members re-thought DSA's strategy, publishing "Where We Stand" in 1995. The new document placed less emphasis on working within the swiftly disappearing left wing of the Democratic Party and called for building more internationally focused socialist and labor movements.

Paragraph 6

Now, as insurgent movements appear across the globe, the time is right to reassess our strategy. Occupy, the Arab Spring, widespread anti-austerity movements, rising labor unrest in China, enthusiasm for the Bernie Sanders campaign for president, the emergence of new left political formations in Europe, etc. indicate that the Left is moving from *defense* of hard-won gains to *offense*, to a strategy of building anti-capitalist movements around "non-reformist" reforms that directly take on corporate power. Such reforms change power relationships rather than just ease the pain. Our strategy envisions reviving a militant and diverse anti-corporate coalition, while simultaneously building a stronger, visible, and militant socialist organizational presence in U.S. politics.

Part I: Analysis

A. How Capitalism Works

Paragraph 7

Capitalism is one of the most powerful forces ever unleashed by human civilization. It has brought much good to humanity, but its very nature requires it to grow or implode. It can never achieve a healthy equilibrium. The beast, so to speak, suffers from regular crises that it can overcome only by creating new needs and new forms of production. For instance, there is no need for twenty different brands of soap, but industries have been created to make consumers think they need them and then to fill those “needs.”

Paragraph 8

As a highly complex, interdependent economic form that depends upon the labor and creativity of billions, capitalism has brought together people from around the world into a single community. However, it is a community that is governed anti-democratically, so that this potentially cooperative system is distorted. The few are able to exploit the labor of the many and use their power to oppress all but the most privileged groups.

Paragraph 9

Capitalism requires that society always put the endless pursuit of profit ahead human needs. The economy *must grow*. Every other consideration – equality, freedom, ecology, and even life itself – must be thrown aside to clear the path toward limitless growth.

Paragraph 10

As a result, while work under capitalism is formally free, in practice it is forced. We do not have to work for anybody, but we have to work for somebody. Because we have to take whatever job is offered (or risk poverty), we accept wages that do not reflect the value (measured by what consumers pay for) of the goods and services we produce. This coerced “choice” allows economic elites to live handsomely off the backs of the workers they employ. In its most extreme form, capitalism produces the elimination of all classes but two--those who own and control capital (or wealth) and those who work for them or who have been cast aside as useless to the system.

Paragraph 11

Bosses themselves are not truly free. Even the most sympathetic employers must make layoffs, slash benefits, and outsource work in order to stay competitive. Profitability overrules every other consideration. Instead of the economy existing to serve humanity, all of humanity lives to serve the economy.

Paragraph 12

There is a fundamental conflict of interest between capitalists and the mass of working people in society, a conflict popularly known as the difference between the 1 percent and the 99 percent, with the 1 percent being those who control capital and the 99 percent being those in thrall to it. However, the members of the so-called 99 percent are divided in many ways – by skill, by whether or not they have some authority over others in the workplace, by whether they get paid for the labor they perform, by whether they currently have a job, by education, and by identities of race/ethnicity, gender, and nationality.

Paragraph 13

From its birth, capitalism depended on the exploitation of underpaid – often child and female – labor in factories and slaves to mine or produce the raw materials needed to expand capitalist industrialization in Europe. Colonial empires sent raw materials to the ruling country, which allowed for economic development. At the same time, African, Asian, and Latin American societies remained “underdeveloped” in that they were sending their wealth abroad. The United States, which began as a colony of an imperial power, waged a war of independence and then completely subdued the indigenous population to create an internal empire rich in raw materials and benefiting enormously from slave labor. Even after slavery was abolished, a brutal system of racial discrimination kept African-heritage Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos in the lowest strata of the labor market.

Paragraph 14

Similarly, since its birth, capitalism has relied on the free labor provided by women as wives, mothers, and caregivers to ensure that current workers are able to remain part of the labor force, to provide a constant supply of new workers into the labor force, and to care for old or disabled workers who are no longer productive for their employers. This gendered division of labor is perpetuated by a system of male dominance (patriarchy) that relegates women to inferior status and ensures compliance through the constant threat of violence.

Paragraph 15

Without the diverse forms of domestic and caregiving work women perform for no or low wages, capitalist growth would be severely limited. As more women have entered the paid work force, the low status of caregiving work has been transferred to those who are

paid to do it. Those working as caregivers or household workers are disproportionately highly exploited immigrants and women of color. At the same time, capitalist firms take advantage of all women's lower social status to exploit them in the workplace, paying them less than men and offering them jobs with fewer benefits and less security.

Paragraph 16

Male domination existed before capitalism and will continue unless confronted. Thus, even when men and women belong to the same social class, their experiences of being in that class are different. No broad-based movement for human emancipation can ignore identity and the ways that our identities affect our experience. We each have multiple identities of class, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and origin. Capitalism uses these identities to separate us and keep us from noticing our common interests.

Paragraph 17

Capitalism conquered the globe using the institutions of the *state* (that is, governments, laws, police, and militaries), and it is through the radical democratization of the state that socialists will overcome capitalism. Through state-organized violence and robbery, Europe's peasants were robbed of their land, and the Americas and Africa were subjugated and plundered for minerals and slaves. Capitalist states of Europe forced open Asian ports at gunpoint and eventually subjugated nearly the entire world. But the state itself became an arena of struggle for exploited and oppressed peoples, as in the fights for the right to vote, civil rights, and human rights. In order to combat current state-organized violence, we envision a combination of legislative victories and direct action by mass democratic movements.

B. Neoliberalism at Home and Abroad

Paragraph 18

Thinkers from Karl Marx to DSA's founding chair Michael Harrington have noted that any socialism in the United States will be unique to this country. We cannot import a model from abroad, though of course we can and should learn from socialist experiments around the world. As a result, we present an analysis of some of the unique political and economic conditions in the United States that create both obstacles and opportunities for left politics. In particular, we focus on the role of socialists in electoral politics and the role of systems of oppression based not on class but on race, gender, sexuality,

nationality, immigration status, and other *identities* in limiting the development of socialist politics in the United States.

1. Challenges Worldwide

a. Neoliberalism and the Decline of Social Democracy

Paragraph 19

In the roughly 30 years following the Second World War, as the shattered economies of Europe and Asia regained their strength, the United States, with no global competition, enjoyed a period of high growth. During this time, the United States could boast both a strong social safety net (or what is often referred to as the welfare state) and large profits. In the 1970s, this “golden age” ended, exacerbated by the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, the oil embargo of the 1970s, and the militancy of working people who were advancing more and more radical demands. Other economies, rebuilt with modern infrastructure, posed competition. The postwar order became unsustainable. The only question was whether the new economic model would take the path toward socialism or toward a new form of capitalism.

Paragraph 20

The answer was not long in coming. Although a few countries did try to move toward socialism (most notably, Chile, Sweden, and France), these efforts failed in varying degrees because of a combination of poor strategic planning and a massive offensive launched by the capitalist classes. Starting in the 1970s, in a movement that became known as neoliberalism, capitalists began to spend enormous amounts to lobby for lower taxes on corporations and the wealthy, pulverize labor protections and the power of unions, and slash public spending and defund the welfare state. They also mounted an intellectual public relations campaign against collective decision-making bodies of all kinds – from trade unions to democratic governments – as inefficient and a threat to the free choices of individuals. In the United States, neoliberals' attacks on poverty programs and unions were fueled by a vicious, racialized campaign to stigmatize the “undeserving” poor and were accompanied by a brutal politics of policing and incarceration to repress poor communities of color. Finally, neoliberals also shaped the rules of regional trade and investment through the North American Free Trade Agreement, the European Union, and

the World Trade Organization, placing severe restrictions on governments' abilities to maintain high labor and environmental standards that were in conflict with corporate interests.

Paragraph 21

These efforts were very successful in the United States, Great Britain and Latin America, and to a lesser extent in Northern Europe. The labor movement and social democratic parties in Northern Europe do not have as vibrant a social base as they did in the 1970s, but thanks to publicly funded childcare and healthcare, strong worker protection and organizations, robust pensions, and other protections, Northern European societies remain more egalitarian than the United States. The historic gains these countries have made, however, are now threatened by the continued onslaught of capital and betrayal of a social democratic leadership – if not base – that has moved in a neoliberal direction, particularly in regards to deregulating financial markets.

Paragraph 22

Paradoxically, as workers had made significant gains in many areas, many lost the ability to see themselves as a class, with shared interests, and no longer acted as one. Government policies promoted the rise of suburbs and homeownership among workers. As their living standards rose and they were removed from urban areas, well-protected, unionized workers came to believe they shared the same interests as their employers. The vision of a post-capitalist society was replaced by a dream of low property taxes. Meanwhile, those workers at the bottom of the social ladder, mainly women and people of color, were forced to fight not for the abolition of the system of exploitation but for the ability to be exploited on equal footing with white, male workers.

Paragraph 23

A few countries had socialist parties that fought these tendencies by trying to make gains for all workers and to prohibit the obscene levels of economic inequality that exist between the captains of industry and the workers in those industries. Remnants of these “solidaristic” policies exist in Sweden and some other European countries, but in general, across the global North, wage earners' income and purchasing power have stagnated, while the wealth of the superrich has soared. Millions of well-paid and previously secure

jobs have disappeared. Those jobs not exported to lower-wage regions of the world are increasingly part-time, dead-end, low-paying, and non-union.

Paragraph 24

Advanced capitalist societies such as the United States no longer produce “things,” because production jobs have gone to low-wage countries. As a result, with the exception of a few high tech jobs, the jobs that remain are in the service and caregiving industries. These jobs do not provide steady hours, living wages, pension benefits, or a career path. They are precarious in nature, hence the use of the term “precariat” to describe such workers. Blatant anti-union repression makes union organizing in these sectors as difficult as it is crucial. These precarious jobs have also spread to the college-educated, as “independent contractors” replace full-time employees in white-collar work.

Paragraph 25

Under neoliberalism, Congress repealed the safeguards that had kept the United States from another Great Depression. New financial instruments that were clearly unstable and made to enrich a few drove the financial panic of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed. For a brief moment there was talk of curtailing the power of capitalists, but absent a strong socialist movement, the moment passed. If current trends continue, we can expect a deepening of the contradictions of capitalism and a return to the dramatic inequality we saw in the Gilded Age of the 19th century.

b. A Global Working Class

Paragraph 26

In the three decades from 1980 through 2010, the world’s working class increased by two-thirds, as more than 1.2 billion new workers were drawn into the market for labor. Most of these new working-class members are in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Most are poor and endure high levels of exploitation simply in order to survive. In industrialized Europe and North America, post-war welfare states and unions have been viciously attacked, and their peoples are feeling the whip of austerity formerly reserved for developing nations.

Paragraph 27

Labor unions from different regions increasingly cooperate through global union federations to organize and bargain with transnational companies. Mutual solidarity

efforts, though often more symbolic than immediately effective, have helped struggling unions survive and even grow under adversity. The campaign to organize fast food workers in the United States has been supported by fast food unions in other countries through the International Union of Food workers, and German works councils are trying to help the United Auto Workers organize Volkswagen and Mercedes factories in the South. Non-governmental organizations in Europe advocate for safer working conditions for textile workers in the global South. Students on American campuses have long tried to organize support for overseas workers through the anti-sweatshop movements.

Paragraph 28

A small and extremely wealthy group of capitalists now controls as much wealth as the lower half of the entire global population combined. More important for our future struggles, this elite increasingly sees itself as an international ruling class not limited by the ties and loyalties of national identity and interests. The World Economic Forum is the public face of this new elite. Corporate boardrooms, the offices of finance ministries, and closed-door negotiating sessions for “trade” agreements are where they make decisions that have grave public consequences for humanity.

Paragraph 29

Whether this international elite can truly rise above national interests is yet to be determined. What we do know is that the struggle against their wealth and power must transcend national boundaries.

c. Capitalism and the Climate Crisis

Paragraph 30

One of the most alarming trends produced by capitalism is the ever worsening disruption of the global climate. The “satanic mills” of early industrialization, which spewed filth into the air of Northern England, today choke populations around the world. As a result, the percentage of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is rising to a level incompatible with maintaining a sustainable environment on earth.

Paragraph 31

The rapid and drastic reduction in carbon emissions requires major public investments in renewable energies and infrastructures that are too unprofitable for capitalist market forces to develop. The underlying logic of capitalism requires bigger and bigger profits,

and requires more and more extraction of fossil fuels or else reliance on nuclear energy. Capitalism also produces a cultural mix of individualism and consumerism which helped produce the widespread belief that we can just innovate our way out of this crisis, a belief that misreads both the nature and the magnitude of the problem. Only extensive public planning coordinated at local, national, and global levels can contain the damages already inflicted on the planet.

Paragraph 32

Capitalists use their immense wealth to buy politicians' loyalty and fund think tanks and right-wing organizations that deny the reality of disruptive climate change, even as famine and drought lead to instability and war. The technologies we need will either be developed by governments acting in the public interest or not at all. "Market-based solutions" for this impending catastrophe is truly a contradiction in terms.

Paragraph 33

Despite increasing alarms sounded by a consensus of scientific opinion, governmental responses throughout the world have been too timid and uncertain to meet the developing global climate crisis. There is a growing consensus among religious groups and social activists that care for the environment is essential to struggles for economic and social justice.

d. Imperialism

Paragraph 34

Imperialism once referred to colonialism and direct political and administrative control of other nations; today, imperialism is expressed through indirect control of other countries by a political center. As the one super power left standing, the United States plays that role, although other economic powers would like to challenge it. Washington did not directly administer Vietnam after the French pulled out in 1954 or Chile after the CIA-backed coup overthrew a democratic socialist government 1973, for example, but U.S. military and economic power ensured that those countries supported U.S. foreign policy and U.S. corporations' economic interests.

Paragraph 35

Since the Monroe Doctrine and the racist settler-colonialist ideology of "Manifest Destiny," the U.S. government and U.S. capitalists have considered an ever-expanding

portion of the world – now basically the entire globe – to be theirs to exploit and dominate. U. S. influence is limited to some extent by the military and economic power of China and Russia, and our economic interests can, at times, conflict with capitalist Europe and Japan. But the U. S. security state endeavors to sustain a global order that benefits, primarily, U.S. interests.

Paragraph 36

Today, there are hundreds of U.S. military bases in thirty-eight countries and territories around the world employing more than 200,000 service personnel who protect not U.S. freedom but corporate profits and our government's strategic interests. Despite claims to "spread democracy" or "protect human rights," U.S. espionage, direct military invasion, and support for proxy states viciously repress the efforts of billions to be free of capitalist domination. The dramatic growth of the national security state--justified now by a so-called "war on terror"--seriously limits basic civil liberties at home. Such measures also fail to deter actual terrorist threats (which come more often from home-grown far-rightists than from foreign ideologues). These threats are best contained by intelligence cooperation among states that treat each other as equals.

Paragraph 37

Imperialism is a part of daily life for all poor and working people in the United States. With the armed services being a de facto jobs program, young people from rural areas and neighborhoods of color in big cities have disproportionately enlisted and been sent to die in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who return are wounded in body or mind and face difficulties finding jobs, housing, and adequate healthcare. For their communities, the lack of money for a strong welfare state is directly related to the trillions of dollars poured into war.

Paragraph 38

Too often, the people of the United States identify with the power and prestige that our government has won around the world. This dynamic can drive a wedge between U.S. workers and workers in other countries, between native-born U.S. workers and immigrants, and between U.S. workers and socialist ideas, which can be perceived as unpatriotic or traitorous. In building a movement for a democratic and non-imperialist

U.S. foreign policy, the Left will have to work to overcome these real barriers and challenges.

2. Challenges Specific to the United States

a. Electoral Politics

Paragraph 39

Socialists have often viewed the electoral system of the United States as a charade designed to create the illusion of meaningful competition. They have pointed out that although the two dominant parties differ on how to govern and regulate a capitalist economy, neither questions capitalism itself. Although this analysis is accurate, it has often led socialists to underemphasize the reasons why our two-party system has been so persistent (and in turn to underemphasize the implications this resilience has for a socialist electoral strategy). The reason why we have two dominant parties when all other non-English-speaking Western democracies have several stems from our particular constitutional structures and an array of restrictive state laws that make third-party national efforts extraordinarily difficult. Chief among these is the herculean effort needed for parties running presidential candidates to petition to get on the ballot in 50 separate states. In addition, membership in political parties is not controlled by the parties themselves, but by state voter registration laws. Thus, our two major political parties have little internal structure or life and are mostly ballot lines that ambitious politicians use to run for office.

Paragraph 40

Laws also make it difficult for third parties to win any standing in legislative bodies by requiring an outright win in an election, a problem many other countries avoid by using systems of *proportional representation* (in which the overall percentage of votes a given party receives is translated into an equivalent proportion of seats in the national legislature). In addition, in the United States, even when a new party wants to endorse an existing incumbent it may not be allowed to. Just eight states allow *fusion voting* (which allows the same candidate to be on the ballot for several different parties); the rest banned it to squash the insurgent Populist Party after its impressive showing in the 1896 elections. Both restrictive voting rights provisions – such as voter ID laws and felon

disenfranchisement – and the long-standing practice of gerrymandering districts (a practice through which a governing party can change the makeup of a given electoral district to ensure victory for its own candidates) make the work of leftist third parties much harder. Right-wing third parties, bankrolled by extremely wealthy people, have occasionally had mild electoral success. The absence of parliamentary government (in which the chief executive has much less power than in the U.S. presidential system) provides a further bias in favor of a two-party system, where each party tries to capture voters in the middle in order to achieve majority victories.

Paragraph 41

Today the voting bases of the two parties are distinct, with the Republicans receiving more than 90 percent of their vote from whites and the Democrats having a base among communities of color and trade union activists. Republicans – who currently control all branches of government in nearly 30 states – are openly aggressive in pushing anti-labor legislation (such as “right-to-work” laws), restrictions on women’s reproductive rights, cuts to essential social services for poor and working people, legislation to criminalize immigrants and communities of color, and voting restrictions against communities of color. The Democrats are divided between their dominant, pro-corporate national leadership and a significant anti-corporate wing, supported by its black, Latino, trade union, and white progressive base. This means that Democrats tend to be less hostile (and often friendly) to legislation in defense organized labor, a woman’s right to choose, immigrants and communities of color. They also tend to be less aggressive in their attempts to slash social services. As a result, it is clear that a lot is at stake in elections between Democrats and Republicans, which is why nearly all socialists view the Democratic Party, and particularly its progressive wing, as the “lesser evil” of these two corporate parties. However, when the Left poses no threat to moderate Democrats, the party leadership takes the votes of progressive constituencies for granted and presses forward with policies that serve their corporate backers. This dilemma has led socialists to disagree about the best approach to electoral work. Should we fight to elect centrist Democrats against viciously reactionary Republicans, support truly left-wing Democrats against neoliberals in primaries, and/or build an independent electoral base for explicit socialists?

Paragraph 42

This is, at the heart of it, a *tactical* question, not a philosophical one, although it has split many sections of the Left. The last time a third party achieved state power was before the Civil War. The anti-slavery Republican Party was formed by former Whigs and Free Soil Democrats. It challenged Whigs and Democrats to win with Abraham Lincoln in 1860. The Whigs disappeared as a political party. Although the names of the two major parties have remained the same, there have been realignments within them when powerful social movements working both inside and outside succeeded in reorienting American politics. For instance, the “Solid South” was once Democratic and was the party of racism. Today, the situation is reversed. We should rule out neither insider nor outsider tactics on principle but look instead to the lessons of history to guide us.

Paragraph 43

Radical change in U.S. politics has occurred when political elites or power brokers of both parties failed to respond to social crises that gave rise to mass social movements for radical change. Such periods – the Progressive era, the Great Depression, and the civil rights movement – produced both to policy reforms and a shift in the composition of the of the major parties. Protest movements such as Occupy and Black Lives Matter reflect a shattering of confidence in the capitalist system, particularly among young people who confront higher education costs, massive student debt, and a future of precarious work.

Paragraph 44

Thus, in recent polls, 49 percent of respondents under the age of 29 had a favorable image of socialism, whereas only 47 percent did of capitalism. Both Senator Bernie Sanders’s presidential campaign and several independent socialist campaigns for local office have been fueled by growing popular awareness that our democracy is being transformed into a *plutocracy* (a government dominated by a small group of economic elites).

b. Race, Gender, and the Welfare State

Paragraph 45

White racist elites’ control of the Democratic Party in the South from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 through 1965 meant that people of color were largely excluded

from the benefits of the New Deal in the 1930s and of the post-World War II G.I. Bill that provided educational benefits and home mortgages to veterans.

Paragraph 46

Social Security – itself a major step toward the public (i.e., government) provision of retirement income – was designed to benefit industrial workers in urban areas and exclude rural blacks, farm workers, domestic workers, and federal employees. The result was a two-tiered welfare system, putting into law a primary and secondary labor force, a status that has divided working people ever since. Full-time white male workers, with a steady history of employment, garnered the benefits of Social Security, the labor protections of the New Deal, and unemployment benefits. To this day, these top-tier welfare benefits are viewed as “earned,” because almost all workers pay into them, even though not all workers benefit. On the other hand, women, agricultural, and domestic workers were not only largely excluded from these programs, they could only access anti-poverty programs based on economic need. Programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and Medicaid, often cruelly administered by racist state governments and seen by taxpayers as “unearned.” Again, these were programs into which every worker paid, but they were not presented as “universal.”

Paragraph 47

In the 1960s, powerful social movements called for civil rights, power for marginalized groups, and a cultural transformation in gender relationships. African American resistance inspired other communities of color to demand an end to discrimination, the honoring of treaties with native tribes, better treatment of migrant and immigrant labor, and political power. Women saw a parallel between racism and what came to be identified as *sexism* or systemic, structural inequality between men and women. (It is called structural because it is a kind of inequality that does not depend on specific acts of sexism between individuals, but instead has been built into institutions and the fabric of our culture). Lesbians and gay men first demanded rights to equal treatment. Today, although discrimination against LGBTQ people is still legal in more than half the states, the LGBTQ community and feminists also confront the question of the nature of gender itself. In other words, they question the ways in which U.S. society divides people into

categories of men and women that allow only limited and rigidly defined roles and behaviors.

Paragraph 48

People with disabilities challenged their lack of access and the assumptions that defined them as deficient. These movements and others were based on *identity*--the notion that people see themselves through experiences of, for example, gender, nationality, race/ethnicity, dis/ability, or religious affiliation, and so on. Identity-based social movements raised important questions of unequal distribution of power within both our wider society and movements for change. For example, Native Americans have organized to force the U.S. government to honor treaties in the face of widespread neglect of these obligations. The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s was triggered in part by women who found themselves disproportionately doing drudge work rather than exercising leadership in movements against the war in Southeast Asia and for liberation.

Paragraph 49

At the same time, economic elites used (and continue to use) identity-based arguments to divide the rest of us, pitting one identity-based constituency against another. Conservatives, and even many liberals, also obscure how class oppression intersects with other forms of oppression – but ones that cannot be reduced to class domination alone. This divide-and-conquer technique produced a particularly limited and vulnerable expansion of the welfare state during the 1960s. Tragically, the anti-poverty programs of the Great Society were based on need. Only families with incomes below the poverty line could access Medicaid, Food Stamps, and an expanded AFDC program. When the Left failed to win truly universal healthcare and childcare support programs, the Right created a backlash by playing on the understandable resentment felt by people who could not benefit from these programs because their incomes were just above the threshold necessary to qualify. The Right turned this anger against poor women of color and children in a consciously racist and gendered way. President Ronald Reagan’s attack on alleged “welfare queens” stands as a low point in this history. President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Party, rather than defending poor people – and the expansion of these child support programs for all – enacted “welfare reform” legislation in 1996 that has hurt millions of single mothers with infant children. This “welfare reform,” motivated by the

desire of moderate Democrats to take these “race” issues away from Republicans, led to greater barriers for poor people to access anti-poverty programs. Clinton also made penalties for federal drug law infractions much stiffer, thus accelerating the pace of mass incarceration.

Paragraph 50

Today, the United States has yet to achieve the goals of the Second Reconstruction (the civil rights movement), namely equality of citizenship and the abolition of discrimination in housing, education, and the job market. Only by overcoming a system that excludes masses of people of color from mainstream society can the Left win the battle for democracy. Twelve percent of African American men are denied the vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws, and right-wing restrictive voter ID laws threaten to disenfranchise millions of low-income voters. The government uses mass incarceration and brutal policing to control and contain the millions excluded from mainstream society by unemployment and underfunded schools. In addition, more than eight million undocumented working people (and their dependents) who do crucial caregiving and service work in our society are denied a path to citizenship and are vulnerable to exploitation.

Paragraph 51

The civil rights movement never achieved its primary aims of breaking down housing and labor segregation, although enough people of color made such gains that the white majority believes we live in a post-racialized society. To achieve those goals, we need not only massive public investment and job creation in our inner cities, but also a radical increase in publicly financed affordable housing in the more economically prosperous suburbs. Today, in most of the United States, schools and neighborhoods are as segregated as they were before the civil rights era. Only by truly racially and economically integrating the United States can we defeat the New Jim Crow. To achieve this, socialists must work to create multi-racial coalitions committed to defeating racial/ethnic, gender and class oppression.

C. Beyond Neoliberalism?

Paragraph 52

Technological change is already reducing the number of tasks done by human beings. Technology holds a promise of more leisure time and more resources for everyone, but instead is treated as a way to increase profits. If capitalist class power remains supreme, increased automation and efficiency may well swell the numbers of the permanently unemployed. In this scenario there would be no need to seek even lower paid workers if factory workers can be completely replaced by robots.

Paragraph 53

Intellectual property law, whereby a few control the rights to innovation, could become an increasingly important tool in maintaining the artificial scarcity necessary to charge fees for abundant goods. If this process continues, the gap between rich and poor will widen further. In order to protect themselves from public fury, economic elites could retreat to gated communities guarded by private security forces, while the masses would be confined to immense walled-off ghettos under the steadily more despotic control of militarized police and weaponized drone security forces. The incarcerated population would explode, and even free life would come to resemble a prison camp for the growing masses of property-less poor.

Paragraph 54

The 21st century could be very bleak indeed. But the game is not over. We still have an immense amount of power to change the course of human civilization. We have the largest working class in history. Organizing it for the Left requires, to paraphrase Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, optimism of the will, pessimism of the mind, and dedication over the long haul. Whereas the socialists of the 19th century could speak only about the workers of Europe and North America, in the 21st century the task is truly to unite the workers of the world.

Paragraph 55

There is some reason for optimism of the will. Mainstream political discussions in the United States have shifted noticeably to the left on economic issues since the financial crisis of 2008. Influenced by stagnating wages, unprecedented levels of structural un/underemployment, cruel cuts in public services, Occupy Wall Street, Syriza, los Indignados, Thomas Piketty's work on inequality, and other factors, many, particularly younger people who see that their future life prospects will not be as good as their

parents', are increasingly open to alternatives. Further, now that Soviet Communism is a distant or non-existent memory for most younger Americans, socialism no longer carries the stigma it did during and immediately following the Cold War. Finally, younger Americans with little or no direct experience of the power of social movements are seeing examples of collective action, both in the United States and around the world, as viable alternatives to individualistic solutions to their economic and social problems. The social and political climate of our country is changing, and this change opens up major opportunities for socialist politics that haven't existed in the United States since the 1960s.

Paragraph 56

We've also seen progressive forces win significant concrete gains since the financial crisis of 2008. Unions focus more on anti-austerity politics: struggles of low-wage service sector workers have intensified; fights to raise the minimum wage to a living wage have exploded throughout the United States, and explicit socialists are succeeding electorally at the local level. The rise of anticapitalist governments in South America, as well as newer left parties such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain has opened a new front in the fight for a different future. But only a revival of the Left in Northern, as well as Southern Europe, can achieve the social and economic policies that would equitably share the costs and benefits of economic recovery.

Paragraph 57

The Left in the United States confronts an even more conservative and racialized political terrain than the rest of the global Left. But we may have greater room for maneuver, as we constitute 25 percent of the global economy. We control the world's leading currency. If the rich and corporations paid their fair share of taxes, and we could redirect money now spent on our imperial "defense" budget, we could easily rebuild our infrastructure, provide jobs and healthcare, and finance an expansion of social programs. But to achieve these goals the Left must rebuild the organized power of working people.

Paragraph 58

If we continue to build on this organizing, we can transform our society. Now is the time to be explicit and confident socialists, to push beyond mainstream progressive political discourses and practices, and begin to rebuild the U.S. Left. The future is ours to decide.

Part II: Vision

Paragraph 59

As democratic socialists we are part of a venerable U.S. tradition of visionaries – religious, utopian, Marxist – who have been on the frontlines of struggles for justice. We are the torchbearers who carry this legacy and seek to create a future based on it.

A. Why Democratic Socialism: Our Core Principles

Paragraph 60

The fight for democratic socialism is the fight for radical democracy, which we understand as the freedom of all people to determine the course of their own lives to the greatest extent possible. Such self-determination means the radical democratization of all areas of life, not least of which is the economy.

Paragraph 61

Under capitalism, we are supposed to accept as natural the idea that a small, largely unaccountable group of directors and corporate executives should make all fundamental decisions about how an economic enterprise made up of thousands of people should be run; that unelected corporate managers should have the power to determine how most of us spend the majority of our waking hours; and that these managers should be able to fire someone from a job for virtually any reason. In a glaring contradiction of what we say we believe, we want our political institutions to be controlled democratically but believe that economic institutions can be run as dictatorships. This contradiction can be overcome in a socialist society that gives people a say not only over who represents them in government but over all other significant decisions that affect their lives.

Paragraph 62

As democratic socialists, we believe that economic exploitation cuts across all other forms of oppression, and therefore that economic democracy would dramatically enhance most people's capacity to determine the course of their own lives (self-determination). However, we do not believe racial/ethnic, gender, sexual, and other forms of oppression would disappear if economic exploitation ended. Our project is greater than challenging economic exploitation. It aims to address a wide range of other limits in politics, culture, and society that narrow people's capacity for self-determination.

Paragraph 63

Democracy is by nature an unstable system that does not and cannot produce total social harmony. Navigating between the competing claims of different groups in society will persist even in the most successful democratic socialist society, so we should always be wary of attempts by even the most well-meaning radicals to speak in the name of others or to exclude a segment of the population from the rights enjoyed by the rest of society on the basis of their political beliefs.

Paragraph 64

Our analysis of capitalism sets us apart from liberals and social democrats. Liberals conceive of political and civil rights (including the right to vote, and freedom of speech and assembly) as being distinct from economic and social rights (such as the right to a decent education, good healthcare, and democracy in the workplace). We believe, to the contrary, that civil and political rights are only as good as the ability of individuals to exercise these rights, which depends on the economic and social rights they enjoy. Too many social democrats believe that a compromise between the capitalist class and the masses of exploited and oppressed people can be sustained in the long term. We believe, in contrast, that capitalism destroys meaningful social relations and that genuine democratic control over society's resources is the only way to guarantee freedom for all. Both liberals and social democrats generally accept a conception of a profit-driven economy that is fundamentally incompatible with a sustainable vision of "liberty and justice for all."

Paragraph 65

In the sections below, we lay out a sketch of DSA's vision of socialism, from the economy to politics, from culture to law. This section is tentative, and should not be considered a blueprint for a socialist society. That society will be democratically determined by those who live in it. Not every DSAer will agree with the vision we describe. Read it as a possibility not a plan.

Paragraph 66

Even though the vision is not complete, it is important to sketch it here. First, having a fuller picture of future political and economic possibilities is an essential part of the struggle to expand people's imaginations and overcome the often overwhelming logic of "there is no alternative." There is *always* an alternative. In fact, much of what appears

radical today (such as a progressive tax structure) was accepted as status quo 30 or 40 years ago. Second, the terror of communist regimes and the failures of social-democratic parties to defend their gains have left many people with distorted ideas of what democratic socialism is. We must clarify how our vision of socialism differs from the popular misconceptions. Last, and perhaps most important, without a clear sense of how our long-term objectives differ from those of liberals and progressives, we stand little chance of sparking the passion and imagination of potential members of DSA. We must convince them that committing their time to socialist activism is preferable to working primarily with other organizations whose resources and political influence vastly exceed our own.

B. Socialist Economy in the United States

Paragraph 67

The democratic socialist economy of the future would acknowledge and build on the many positive achievements of social democratic governments and uphold the gains social democrats have made in such areas as labor rights, labor law, gender equality, and healthcare, among others. However, democratic socialism will also go beyond these important economic and social gains to include much more fundamental democratization of economic life.

Paragraph 68

A democratic socialist economic system would take the economy out of the hands of capitalists and government bureaucrats and place it under democratic control. In a democratic socialist society, the basic necessities of life would be considered economic rights. The work of caregiving, which under capitalism falls disproportionately on women, would be publicly supported through paid family leave, universal day care and elder care, and other programs; all genders would be encouraged to engage in it and would be paid decent wages. Vital services such as healthcare, education, shelter, and transportation would be publicly provided to everyone on demand, free of charge. Everyone would receive a universal basic income (that is, a base salary for every member of society, regardless of the person's employment status) as well, and this would be accompanied by the gradual reduction of the work week, expanded vacation time and family leave, the extension of formal schooling to include free higher education for all,

and the lowering of the retirement age. As technological innovation eliminates the need for many forms of unpleasant work, these reforms would ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the opportunity for greater leisure time.

Paragraph 69

It's impossible to imagine robots and new technologies replacing all necessary labor. For that reason socialists must pay close attention to the reorganization of work, with a focus on maximizing the rights and participation of workers while overcoming the crisis-prone and wasteful operation of the capitalist market. Key to this project will be workplace democracy. Workplace democracy means replacing the hierarchical structure of today's corporations with management teams elected by and responsible to employees themselves.

Paragraph 70

The relationship of worker-managed firms to each other is a matter of debate within DSA. Some believe that a system of participatory democratic planning (in which the distribution of goods and services in society would be determined by various elected bodies who would work in close contact with community representatives) could one day fully replace markets. Others believe that a form of market socialism in which a range of consumer goods are bought and sold will always be necessary.

Paragraph 71

Most in DSA agree that in the early years of a democratic socialist society it would be possible to develop a "core" sector subject to democratic planning outside the market. This core sector would include housing, utilities, and heavy industry, alongside a subordinate market sector for the production and distribution of goods such as consumer goods, entertainment, and media. In the market sector, firms would most likely be worker-run cooperatives. Because various subsections of workers in a firm may disagree on certain issues, independent labor unions would exist to ensure that every worker's voice would be heard. To protect the greater social good, worker-run firms would be subject to regulation, oversight, and intervention by democratically elected authorities. Over time, small family-owned businesses could also be converted into cooperatives, giving their employees a voice, too.

Paragraph 72

In the core sector, fully socialized firms would be run by boards consisting of representatives of all the groups affected by their activities: not just a firm's workers, but also customers and suppliers, other enterprises, the community in which a firm is located, and groups concerned with equal opportunities and environmental issues. The internal operation of each firm, within the guidelines set by the governing board, would be based on worker self-management. Corporations today already use intranets and planning software to manage their operations, but they do so undemocratically. The outline of a democratic socialist society is incomplete, of course, but the goal of such a society is to maximize the public good through effective planning and central coordination while creating ample room for local autonomy and initiative.

Paragraph 73

Maximizing the public good will replace the profit motive in directing investments into new technologies and enterprises. Democratic planning authorities would have a mandate to guarantee full employment, and they would prioritize developing renewable energy and efficient technologies to guarantee ecological stability. Socialists would invest heavily in public transportation and develop technologies and practices that can produce more food with less land in a healthy and sustainable manner. With investment in the hands of the democratic community, we would organize ever more of our economy according to the slogan "people, not profit."

C. Socialist Political System in the United States

Paragraph 74

In a democratic socialist society, the political system of the United States would be reformed to protect a much stronger set of individual rights, shrink unaccountable bureaucracies and military and police forces, and dramatically expand the ability of ordinary citizens to shape government policies. Just as the proposal for a democratic socialist economy is a sketch, so too is our vision of a democratic socialist political system. Its guiding principle, however, is to move toward a system in which a re-formed representative democracy, coupled with healthy new forms of direct democracy, move us much closer to the ideal of government by, for, and of the people.

Paragraph 75

Today, many of the individual civil and political rights promised by the U.S. Constitution are violated routinely, including freedom of assembly, press, speech, and the right to a speedy trial. To truly guarantee civil and political rights, democratic socialists must fight for a set of fundamental changes. For example, under democratic socialism, security institutions such as the National Security Administration, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation would either be dramatically downsized, dismantled, or consolidated. Surveillance would be done only with rigorous safeguards and for good reasons.

Paragraph 76

We would work toward a truly worldwide society, in which the benefits of citizenship would be available to everyone living within a country's borders, regardless of legal status. Both democratic politics and a well-functioning socialist economic system rely on the work of a genuinely free press, and therefore a certain portion of public resources would need to be dedicated to supporting independent journalism and news outlets that encourage free debate and dissent.

Paragraph 77

A right of free association, coupled with increased leisure time, would allow more people to participate in a wide range of genuinely independent social and political organizations outside of government institutions. Such organizations offer a check on concentrated power and open up spaces for a wide diversity of opinions and identities. They would be the foundation for real direct democracy. These organizations can take many different forms depending on the size of the community. General assemblies at the neighborhood level similar to New England town meetings, citizen boards for various government services, program councils made up of those who receive services, and municipal and state assemblies offer avenues for direct and representational democracy. In addition, referenda around key political issues would be used at the local, state, and federal level (without current distortions of the process by wealthy individuals) as another means of direct citizen participation in political decision making. Taken together, these measures would guarantee everyone a role in directly shaping our laws.

Paragraph 78

While direct democracy would be greatly expanded in socialist politics, representative democracy would still be important. Despite having much more leisure time, many people might choose to prioritize other endeavors over regular participation in direct-democratic political institutions. For true democracy to exist, citizens must have a less time-consuming and demanding way to register their political preferences. That said, elections for representative institutions should take a different form in democratic socialist politics than they do now. Citizens should have the power to recall elected officials before the end of their terms, and a new voting system should be introduced that would grant parties seats in the legislature proportional to their share of the vote, allowing for more than two parties to be represented.

Paragraph 79

In a democratic socialist state, the power of legislatures (at all levels of government) would be expanded relative to the power of mayors, governors, and judges. In lieu of our two-chamber Congress, we could have a radically reformed, single chamber legislature, ensuring that everyone is represented equally.

Paragraph 80

Further, in a democratic socialist political system, all citizens would have equal political rights, in contrast to the current situation of millions of U.S. citizens, such as the residents of the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, our overseas territories, and Native American tribes that do not have the ability to elect their own congressional representatives. Residents of these territories and nations (in the case of many Native American tribes) would also be afforded the opportunity to collectively determine whether they preferred statehood, independence from the United States or some other form of self-governance.

D. Democratic Socialist Legal System

Paragraph 81

While maintaining (and strengthening) the best institutions of our current legal system – such as the right to a fair trial with representation and an independent judiciary – a democratic socialist legal system would also entail some important innovations. For example, citizen review boards of both the police and court systems would be developed and vested with significant authority. In addition, the use of prisons to regulate behavior would be replaced in most cases with a system that combined full services to victims with

restorative justice, mental health care, and various forms of counseling to help people find constructive ways to move forward after committing serious crimes. Additionally, as many so-called non-violent crimes that disproportionately penalize vulnerable populations are decriminalized, the need for prisons would decline.

E. Democratic Socialist Society and Culture

Paragraph 82

Although many of the economic factors that allow racial and ethnic oppression to flourish will be absent in a democratic socialist society, old habits die hard. There will still be a need for antidiscrimination policies in the workplace and in social organizations until the revolution in social equality has taken hold. The beliefs and practices that allow the privileges of white skin would be dismantled, and institutions of culture in the United States would be transformed to include everyone. History books would include the story of the United States as seen from the perspective of those who challenged oppression, rather than just from the perspective of those who protected it. We would prioritize the flourishing of a diversity of cultures, including creating a genuinely multilingual society. Full racial, ethnic, and cultural equality while safeguarding individual rights is an uncompromising commitment of democratic socialist politics.

Paragraph 83

Further, the democratic socialist revolution must be a sexual and gender revolution. Economic security must be guaranteed to all individuals independent of their social relationships. Each individual's gender and sexual development would become a matter of their own free choice. As social conventions change, any manner of dress, any line of work, and any reproductive choices that do not involve exploitation of another person would be opened up to anyone. A wide variety of gender and sexual identities would be embraced and celebrated as part of an increasingly free and open society.

Paragraph 84

With such policies as paid family leave, all genders would be able to care for children, the elderly, and ill family members. Care work would no longer be the domain of one gender.

Paragraph 85

Race- and gender-based identities, though they may have developed under conditions of oppression, can and do play a positive role in peoples' lives in a free and equal society. We all have multiple identities. Once the economic factors that reinforce and strengthen non-class-based forms of oppression have disappeared, we can make the transition from a world of oppression based on imposed identities to one of diverse, freely chosen identities limited only by principles of mutual respect and the absence of exploitation.

Paragraph 86

A shorter workweek would free up time, which could be spent engaging with family and friends; engaging in politics; pursuing higher education; experimenting in new lifestyles; and applying our creativity to the world of art, music, and culture. Beyond that, art and cultural production in a democratic socialist society would be decommodified (or taken out of the market): artists, musicians, writers, and performers would receive resources to pursue their work, and a new era of cultural renaissance and human flourishing would begin.

Paragraph 87

A democratic socialist society would be one in which humanity's relationship to nature would be dramatically altered. Instead of viewing the natural world as a servant to be exploited, we would see ourselves as part of the natural world. We would develop new modes of living that allow us to integrate human society more organically into the rest of our global environment. Our cities would be filled with parks and trees, and much of our rural land would be returned to wilderness, both for the sake of cultivating a healthy ecosystem and for our enjoyment of wildlife and the beauty of nature.

F. Socialist World

Paragraph 88

While democratic socialist society envisioned above has dealt specifically with the United States alone, our vision is not limited by national boundaries. A globalized capitalism must be replaced by an international democratic socialism. While the unique position of the United States in the global economy might allow us to sustain democratic socialism here alone for a time, the ultimate success of such a project can only be secured by the expansion of democratic socialism to other parts the world. The political and economic institutions created at the national level must be paired with democratic

organization at the global level. World democratic socialism would mean a level of international cooperation and integration impossible under the imperialist drives of capitalism. This would greatly reduce the devastating wars and militarism that have helped erode our political and civil liberties, diverted huge amounts of public resources away from the satisfaction of human needs, exacerbated the effects of climate change, etc.

Paragraph 89

Institutions of democratic planning would be created at the regional and global level, coordinating and directing the cooperative energies of many interdependent economies as a whole. Demilitarization would free up a tremendous amount of resources across the globe that could be redirected toward building infrastructure, curbing climate change, improving living standards, and exploring outer space. As one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States, which until now has not contributed its fair share to world well-being, would take a major role in distributing resources to developing regions. In addition to ending poverty and equalizing development, one of the main goals of this international system should be the reversal of global warming through the development of renewable energy sources and safe and efficient technologies for regulating the earth's atmosphere and ecosystems.

Paragraph 90

Instead of war, we could have peace; instead of competition, cooperation; instead of exploitation, equality; instead of pollution, sustainability; and instead of domination, freedom. Life would still have sorrows as well as joys. There would still be failed projects and unrequited love. But with democratic socialism, there would no longer be suffering imposed upon us by institutions over which we have no control.

Part III: Socialist Strategy for the 21stst Century

Introduction

Paragraph 91

Today the possibility of a transition to democratic socialism – especially in the United States – appears remote. The socialist Left has never fully recovered from the persecution

it suffered during World War I and the McCarthy witch hunts of the 1950s. The broader progressive Left has suffered decades of defeats by reactionary forces. Nonetheless, there are signs that the winds are changing. Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter serve as just two prominent examples of revived enthusiasm for radical alternatives to the status quo. Indeed, there is good reason to be hopeful about the prospects of positive social change in the decades ahead. But positive social change is not inevitable. Larger forces can only set the stage for revolution; we, the people, need to make it happen.

Paragraph 92

We believe that democratic socialists have an important role to play in turning the current political tide in a leftward direction. Democratic socialism is the only true alternative to capitalism. But we must think carefully about how to translate our socialist ideals and values into a viable political strategy, given our very meager resources. Because we lack our opponents' primary asset – money – we have little more to give than our own time and energy, and these are in high demand. In addition to self-care and maintaining our relationships with friends and family, most of us also face the harsh constraint of economic necessity, having to work longer and longer shifts at a steadily more grueling pace. Our numbers are few, and the time and energy we can commit to socialist organizing is often quite limited. Compare this limited capacity with our ultimate goal, which is nothing less than *to overturn the global capitalist system* and construct world democratic socialism. We need to choose very carefully how to deploy our resources.

Paragraph 93

The fundamental social relationship in capitalism is that between the worker and the capitalist (employee and employer), and the exploitation of workers by capitalists is the primary source of profitability within the capitalist system. As a result, an organized working class has tremendous power. The self-organization of working people is thus an essential weapon in anti-capitalist struggle, and the basic form of this self-organization is the labor union. Therefore the trade union movement must always be front and center in our priorities. This is especially true now that worker organization is at a historic low, after decades of relentless corporate attacks.

Paragraph 94

Because the structure of modern work does not fit the traditional model of the single 9-5 job, DSA's strategy must also focus on community organizing in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities. Central to the fight to take back our communities is the movement for free, universal higher education for all, and students will be among the most important groups in the fight for radical change. Further, because capitalist exploitation does not exist in a vacuum, but interacts in perverse ways with other forms of oppression, the struggle for socialism is also a struggle against the nationalistic, racist, sexist, and heteronormative (biased against LGBTQ people) institutions that terrorize and constrain so many of us.

Paragraph 95

Achieving our goals will require grassroots organizing and "street heat," but it will also require a critical mass of political office holders to implement them. We therefore cannot ignore electoral politics. The more progressive candidates we have in office, the better; but no matter how far off, our true goal is to elect explicit democratic socialists and, eventually, to propel an explicitly democratic socialist political party into electoral prominence across the country. As daunting as these challenges sound, however, we must set our sights yet higher, beyond the scope of the nation.

Paragraph 96

We must work to end our government's military adventures in foreign lands and allow the populations of those lands to work for their own goals. We must demand radical reform of international political and economic institutions that keep so many countries in economic bondage. We must demand immediate and dramatic measures to address global climate change, as well as disaster relief and infrastructure projects for the poor nations that bear the brunt of rising sea levels and growing environmental catastrophes.

Paragraph 97

Above all, however, our task is to build socialism as an organized force in U.S. politics, and that means growing DSA. In all our activities, we must ensure that we are visible as explicit socialists. There are major progressive forces in the United States today, but they do not identify as socialists. Our task, therefore, is build our own organization; this is the task upon which all of our other objectives rest. In what follows we lay out a long-term

strategy for socialist transformation that will be achieved by shorter term work. Irving Howe, one of the founders of DSA, referred to this strategy as the “near and the far.”

A. Immediate Tasks

1. Labor Organizing

Paragraph 98

As democratic socialists, we see democratic unionism as an extension of democratic rights into the workplace and the beginning of the kind of cooperative work that should characterize all of society. Workers are a crucial social group for two reasons: their experience of the capitalist labor market brings them into conflict with the capitalist and managerial classes; and their position at the center of the capitalist system grants them extraordinary power, exercised in the form of the strike. Unfortunately, our unions have for the most part stagnated or declined sharply since their heyday in the mid-20th century. In other words, we have a lot of organizing to do.

Paragraph 99

Labor organizing gives DSAers a chance not only to work toward a revived workers’ movement, but also to build DSA. U.S. history has shown that the best recruits for socialism are experienced and radicalized workers, and, similarly, that the best workplace organizers are socialists. The U.S. working class today is much more heavily composed of women and people of color than it was in the 1950s. Expanding the socialist presence in the labor movement means expanding the presence of women and people of color in the socialist movement.

Paragraph 100

The most important DSA involvement in the labor movement in the coming years will be in our individual capacities as unionists. We cannot – and should not – direct our members to find employment in certain sectors of the economy in order to work as rank and file organizers (as undemocratic socialist organizations have done in the past). We can, however, encourage and support our members who become rank-and-file activists, as well as shop stewards and local union officers. Unions need good staff and paid organizers, but a revival of the labor movement will depend above all else on militancy among rank-and-file workers themselves. Particularly fertile areas of the economy for

union organizing are the public sector – where organizing efforts are less likely to be impeded by employer resistance – and sectors in which jobs cannot be sent elsewhere, for example healthcare, communications and retail.

Paragraph 101

Particularly in light of the many recent vicious attacks on unions and the right to organize and collectively bargain, organizing along these lines within the AFL-CIO and Change to Win has great potential to build more democratic rank and file movements within established unions. The insurgents who won election in the Chicago Teachers Union and led one of the most successful teachers' strikes in recent memory is one of several models pointing the way to revitalizing the labor movement. The National Nurses United led by California Nurses Association is another important model of militant unionism to organize and defend collective bargaining rights for RNs that also embraces coalition building around issues like climate change (XL pipeline), corporate health care (Medicare for All) and austerity (Robin Hood Tax) to build a broad anti- corporate movement.

Paragraph 102

The role of public sector unions will be key to expanding a more democratic voice at work in the many unorganized areas of the public sector such as higher education, cities, counties, state government, as well as parts of the federal government whose union rights have been stripped by anti- union administrations. Joining the fight against the right wing attacks on worker's rights to organize and bargain collectively will be essential to revitalizing the growth of the labor movement. Building unions which unite workers of both professional and blue collar or other job classifications is also important to breaking down the divisions that have been used to divide workers by management. DSA activists will support the expansion of organizing models like the AFT and the NEA in right to work states, where teachers, bus drivers, clerks, teaching aides and foodservice workers unite in one local to advance workers' rights for all.

Paragraph 103

DSA will also increase our support of different forms of labor organizing outside of the model of collective bargaining put in place by the National Labor Relations Act (which essentially entails at least a majority of workers in a given company deciding to form a union and coming to a formal agreement with their employer over wages, benefits,

working conditions, etc. for a specified period of time). These alternate forms of organization would include campaigns around the minimum wage, minority unions (voluntary union formations that negotiate with management on behalf of all workers in a given workplace, even absent the membership of a majority of the workers), worker centers, and in the immigrant rights movement. In campaigns such as these, and as rank-and-file union activists, we have considerable opportunities to focus on our socialist politics and to maintain some independence from other progressive organizations. This independence is crucial for developing the ability not only to be a critical voice within larger progressive movements but also to strengthen the socialist movement.

Paragraph 104

We will also focus on building the socialist presence within labor organizations in the South. Given that today it is one of the core industrial zones of the US economy, the South is an area of great strategic importance for the labor movement. Unfortunately, however, it is also the least organized region in the country. Consequently, failure to develop a more powerful labor movement in the South will likely have a strongly negative effect on the fate of labor in the rest of the country.

Paragraph 105

Aside from the goal of building unions and strengthening workers' rights, we see the changing conditions of 21st-century capitalism as requiring a threefold strategy for political reform of working life. Activists would focus **first** on raising the minimum wage and pegging it to a reasonable cost of living; **second**, on ensuring full employment, which could include government employment for projects in the public interest; and **third**, on reduction of the workweek and a universal basic income. This latter would narrow the gap that currently exists between employed people and the chronically under/unemployed poor. These policies will not only ensure the general welfare but are essential for building the kind of broad-based solidarity and support for a transition to socialism.

Paragraph 106

In the nearer term, we will push for more rank-and-file involvement within unions and demand an overhaul of labor law, particularly. We must protect the rights to organize and strike. Toward these ends, we will establish a DSA labor working group to connect our

members within the labor movement and to develop and implement our strategy toward organized labor.

2. *Community Organizing*

Paragraph 107

Traditionally, community organizing means just that – organizing people who live near each other to act in shared self-interest. This can mean pushing for a stop sign at a dangerous intersection or ending utility-bill gouging. Although many community organizers are radicals, they rarely identify themselves as socialists and always seek the shared self-interest within a group.

Paragraph 108

Although organizing in the workplace is still essential, smaller workplaces, less-stable employment, and the anti-social tendencies of neoliberalism point toward the importance of community organizing as a crucial complement to labor organizing. Most DSA locals have been organized on the basis of a metropolitan area. Nothing should stop DSAers from organizing on a neighborhood basis as well. DSAers should talk to their neighbors, determine which issues most urgently face the community (for example, tenants' rights, police brutality, or shoddy public services), and organize strategically around those issues. Community organizing is a particularly effective means of developing strong and lasting ties with communities, which has often been a shortcoming of DSA locals. Such work could also help our activists connect to people of diverse backgrounds and thereby incorporate a broader range of views and create an organization more representative of the working people of this country.

Paragraph 109

It is essential, however, that we do community organizing as *socialists* building *socialist organizations*. Many socialist organizations have tried, and continue to try, to find a way to maintain a commitment to explicit socialist politics while devoting most of their time to community organizing, but this is a circle that is not easily squared. Consequently, DSA locals focused on this model of organizing must think creatively about how to overcome this tension. The solution should involve careful selection of issues. An ideal campaign would be one that cuts across different social identities, such as class and race;

that can get a lot of attention in the media and in broader society; and one that relates clearly to our *socialist* politics.

3. Anti-Oppression Coalition Building

Paragraph 110

DSA's analysis of the connections among many different forms of oppression under capitalism suggests that the only democratic socialist strategy capable of effective resistance to capitalist exploitation is one that links together anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQ and anti-ableist (as well as other) movements by "connecting the dots" between these movements. Success in one of these struggles constitutes an advance for the other struggles. In order to develop these links it is essential that a disproportionately straight, white, male, middle-class socialist organization like DSA organize actively within these struggles, that we do so with humility and that we take our lead from the expressed needs of the communities with which we are working.

Paragraph 111

For instance, DSA is committed to struggles against sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. (Transgender individuals include those who do not identify with conventional gender categories who identify with a gender other than that assigned to them. Transphobia is fear of and discrimination against such individuals.). These attitudes have played and continue to play critical roles in continuing the existence of gender, sexual, racial, and class oppressions. In the coming period we will participate in the fight for public provision of childcare and universal health care, the movement to provide quality reproductive health services for all, and struggles against gender/sex discrimination and gender/sex motivated forms of violence. Poor women and women of color are most likely to lack childcare, healthcare and reproductive health services. These women (particularly trans-women) face some of the most brutal forms of discrimination and violence in our society. Hence, each of these struggles cuts across gender, race, and class, and provides DSA an opportunity to both participate in activism that allows us to build connections with activists from a range of other struggles and to engage in activism that explicitly highlights our class analysis of contemporary society.

Paragraph 112

Neoliberal policies have resulted in spiraling, heavily racialized inequality and structural under/unemployment (structural in the sense that it is a permanent feature of our economic system, rather than a passing trend that will go away in time). In addition, neoliberals have used a skyrocketing incarceration rate among people of color and an ever-intensifying militarization of communities of color to control “surplus” (so-called because they are thought by neoliberals to be of little economic value) communities. Thus, in the coming period DSA will also put particular emphasis on activism that works to build alternatives to poverty and mass incarceration. Examples would be struggles against unjust police violence; against the death penalty; against neighborhood, educational, and workforce segregation; for greater community oversight of police activity; for quality public education; and for full employment through publicly funded jobs, job training programs, an increased minimum wage, and a reduction of the retirement age and workweek.

Paragraph 113

These are struggles that, like the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom, explicitly tie together our analysis of capitalist exploitation with our analysis of the insidious nature of structural racism (and in many cases also of institutionalized forms of male domination).

Paragraph 114

European socialists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries often gained their greatest legitimacy by championing basic civil and political rights. In addition to the fact that civil and political rights are denied disproportionately to people of color, DSA believes that the fight of undocumented workers (primarily though not exclusively Latino) should be of central importance to our work. In addition to being the single largest group of people denied basic civil and political rights in our country, undocumented workers are potential democratic socialist allies. If this huge group of workers, many of whom come from countries where there are socialist parties, were to achieve the right to vote, it could have dramatic consequences on the electoral landscape of the United States and greatly shift the political terrain in favor of social transformation.

Paragraph 115

There are many other important intersectional struggles (that is, struggles that cut across various forms of oppression) that we have not listed here, which are of great importance,

and in which many DSAers will undoubtedly participate. However, we are an organization with limited resources, and as such we must think strategically. That is, we must identify where our participation would move us as far as possible toward our medium and long-term organizational objectives. This means that, faced with three or four equally worthy causes, we would choose a struggle that

- is likely to be critical in our society in the coming period
- that engages as wide a range of forms of oppression as possible
- in which those involved would be most likely to be open to democratic socialist politics

Paragraph 116

Within these coalitions DSA is committed to participating *as explicit socialists*; to drawing links between different economic, political, and social phenomena that liberals and progressives do not; and to working to identify and reach out to potential democratic socialists within these coalitions. Additionally, we are committed to setting aside a certain part of our organizing efforts to develop DSA-led educational programming and activist projects around the issues discussed above.

4. Organizing in Higher Education

Paragraph 117

Every year, state legislatures slash funding to public colleges and universities, resulting in dramatic increases in tuition and class size. University administrators have replaced state workers with privatized, exploited workers in food and housekeeping. At the same time, they have replaced full-time, tenured, and tenure-track faculty with a low-paid, no-benefits army of adjunct professors (professors without job-security and usually without benefits) and graduate students to provide instruction. Students graduate with large amounts of debt; their degrees are less and less likely to secure them adequate post-college employment.

Paragraph 118

This crisis in higher education will result either in the death of an affordable, democratic system of higher education in the United States or in a powerful movement of students, staff, faculty, and communities capable of taking back the system. We believe the latter

option is likely and that DSA can play an important role in fostering its development. Free public higher education is a key example of what we might call a “transformative” reform that helps to popularize the idea of socialism and make further, more dramatic reforms possible in the future. Free public higher education would mean taking what should be a universal public good out of the marketplace, putting it under democratic control, and guaranteeing it as a right to all citizens. Beyond its inherent benefits, such a campaign would also show people that socialist policies are both desirable and achievable. Gaining free public higher education could serve as a crucial step in making democratic socialist politics more attractive to a wider cross-section of the U.S. public.

Paragraph 119

The campaign for free public higher education has the added benefit of being an issue that is gaining public acceptance and that could be achieved within the framework of the U.S. government’s current budget. Furthermore, the fact that lack of access to a high-quality college education and high student-loan default rates disproportionately affect communities of color suggests that this is an issue that could have broad appeal across race and class. Therefore, DSA will work to cultivate campus chapters with the capacity to organize effectively around this issue and in turn to take advantage of the potential it has to serve as a positive introduction to democratic socialism for many in this country.

5. Student Organizing

Paragraph 120

Students are often particularly open to socialism. More and more students are becoming radicalized as they make the connections between capitalist greed and their increased student debt. We will continue to prioritize organizing on both high school and college campuses through our youth section, the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), to provide an anti-capitalist analysis and socialist alternatives that are absent from other progressive student activism. Such organizing prepares the future leaders of DSA and the democratic socialist movement more generally. DSA has in the past had difficulty with keeping YDS members involved after they graduate and leave their school’s chapter. In order to help young members make the transition, we will integrate more closely the activities of YDS and DSA and encourage student participation in DSA’s off-campus organizations and activities.

6. Electoral Politics

Paragraph 121

Although elections in and of themselves will not bring about major political, economic, or social reforms – let alone establish a pathway to socialism – it is difficult to imagine how we could achieve any of our objectives in the United States without taking part in the electoral process. In the short term, we need to engage in electoral activity for several important reasons: to defend existing rights; to put forth new demands for social and economic justice that could change public conversations and thereby create openings for more fundamental structural reforms down the road; to attract new members to DSA and thereby build our capacity as an organization; and to build and sustain non-electoral activism.

Paragraph 122

Participating in electoral campaigns as democratic socialists will take several forms. **First**, it may well be defensive, in that we will work to support less-than-ideal centrist candidates against attacks by the Far Right. But, where possible, we will engage in campaigns in which progressive Democrats, independents, or third-party candidates are focused on important reforms that we can use to explain to voters how these reforms help move us toward greater economic and social democracy, and why more radical reforms would be preferable in the future. (The fight for a \$15 minimum wage or single-payer healthcare are examples.)

Paragraph 123

Second, like our community organizing work and coalition work, our electoral work should always be oriented at least in part toward the identification and recruitment of sympathetic campaign co-workers and members of the general public to DSA. We should, except in rare cases, always do our electoral work *as explicit socialists*, and where possible undertake our own electoral activities within larger campaigns in order to maximize our visibility as socialists. Examples of this kind of work include DSA-specific tabling, canvassing or phone-banking; holding DSA-sponsored fundraisers and educational events; and doing DSA-specific voter registration.

Paragraph 124

Finally, socialist participation in elections means focusing on issues and using them as vehicles to help build mutual support among different communities: those confronting racial/ethnic, and gender injustice; those organizing around climate change, housing, health care, labor, pensions, and education. It means connecting electoral activism with labor and community activism. Although DSA achieved much in prior years along these lines, one of the weaknesses of past electoral work by DSA is that there was a lot going on right up to election day, and little thereafter (win or lose). In addition, out of fear of losing some allies or coalition partners, we failed to include others. The primary reasons for these weaknesses were too little connection between local and national campaigns and a tendency for local initiatives to be isolated from each other.

Paragraph 125

What we need instead is to help build forms of electoral activism that maintain themselves year round both by creating links to other forms of organizing and by building coalitions of mutual support in which constituencies support one another's particular demands. Moreover, by focusing on issues, we can remain as allies with people even when our members or when the other groups with which we work are divided over which candidate to support. The key is that left politics must be rooted in the life and activism of the communities where we live and are engaged in order to overcome the divide between electoral and non-electoral activism, if our efforts are to contribute to a change in our country's political landscape.

Paragraph 126

A related aspect of our short-to-medium-term work in the electoral arena will be organizing to end various structural barriers to voting (such as voter ID laws and gerrymandering procedures) that disproportionately affect the elderly, the poor and communities of color, as well as to override judicial rulings such as Citizens United that have made a mockery of the principle of one person, one vote.

Paragraph 127

In the short-to-medium term most of our electoral work will, of necessity, be undertaken within the Democratic Party – particular within various state and local progressive organizations, fusion parties, and other similar groupings, as well as with national formations such as the Congressional Progressive Caucus. At the same time, however,

given that our eventual goal is the construction of a mass *socialist party* (most likely formed in a merger of elements of the Democratic Party and independent socialist and progressive social forces), our electoral work should by no means be limited to or defined by the Democratic Party. Rather, we should welcome and engage with a range of independent and third party initiatives (particularly at the local -level) that have a broad base and are working to build sustainable forms of popular unity outside the Democratic Party. This work is particularly important in the current period, during which we have seen a significant increase in public openness to the idea of socialism, as well as a modest but significant electoral expression of socialist politics across the country. In the medium-to-long-term we will work to build the organizational capacity necessary to run candidates of our own (as one of DSA's predecessor organizations, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and DSA itself were able to do in the 1970s and 1980s), to forge larger socialist electoral coalitions both within and outside of the Democratic Party, and ultimately to create a majoritarian electoral coalition in support of socialist political and economic reforms.

7. Organizing in the International Arena

Paragraph 128

Although we will inevitably focus most of our attention on domestic politics, a socialist strategy for the 21st century must of necessity take the global context into account. Capitalism, after all, is now a genuinely global system, and our fate is inextricably bound with that of all humanity. We no longer compete only with other U.S. citizens for our jobs; truly *global* labor markets have increasingly thrown each individual into competition with every other member of the species across the planet. With easy international capital mobility companies scour the earth for cheaper labor and lower taxes, shamelessly abandoning any territory that attempts to raise its standards of living through political means. The battlefield between capital and labor has long since expanded beyond the scope of national borders; more than ever, we have no choice but to be whole-hearted internationalists.

Paragraph 129

As democratic socialists, we stand in solidarity with and will build deeper ties to organizations and movements around the world that are fighting against the neoliberal

agenda. This includes leftist political parties and left tendencies within social-democratic parties who stand up to the neoliberal consensus in their countries; unions and organizations of highly exploited workers who fight against the anti-democratic governments and multinational corporations that dominate them; and oppressed nationalities struggling for self-determination, such as the Palestinians, the Kurds, and the Uyghurs, among others. In many cases such solidarity will first and foremost require struggling against our own government's foreign policies. DSA must take a strong stance against authoritarian international institutions (including pro-corporate "free trade" agreements), U.S. military intervention in foreign countries, and all military and financial aid for despotic regimes. For many of our locals, anti-imperialist organizing will primarily take the form of campaigns for institutional divestment – most typically, on college campuses – from companies doing business with authoritarian governments.

Paragraph 130

As a medium-term goal we must struggle with poor and working people from around the world to democratize international financial organizations and redirect them to promote economic and social policies that benefit those who suffer the costs of global capitalism. Such policies would include increased public spending on healthcare, worker retraining, adequate pensions, and so on. An international financial transaction tax is one specific reform for which we could fight in the international arena. Proceeds from such a tax on the trading of stocks, currencies and derivatives could be used for long-term investments in education and health care in poor countries. DSA would benefit from activism of this kind, not only because we would be helping to put the brakes on the motors of global austerity, but also because we would build relationships with key socialist and labor allies from around the world that would help to both solidify the international socialist movement and provide a space for mutual learning and strategic dialogue.

8. Environmental Organizing

Paragraph 131

We will also participate in the climate justice movement against the devastation wreaked by global capitalism on the most vulnerable people and cultures on the globe. We support the struggles of indigenous peoples against the plundering of their fossil fuel and forest resources, against the life-destroying pollution of our air and water, and the negligent

attitude shown by the global North towards black and brown communities around the world who are impacted by the violent storms, floods and famines caused by global warming. Our mutual struggle against the neoliberal capitalist system that is destroying the lives and livelihoods of peoples all over the planet is at the same time an investment in the viable future of our own society, itself threatened by the consequences of fossil-fueled global warming.

Paragraph 132

On the concrete level, environmental organizing for DSA locals will mainly take the form of campaigns for institutional divestment from fossil fuel capital, protests and other forms of organized dissent against domestic policies and international agreements that undermine environmental protections, and local campaigns against fracking and other environmentally devastating corporate practices. Doing such organizing as open socialists gives DSA a great opportunity not only to do some essential organizing, but to organize around widely supported (“green”) causes under the banner of the anticapitalist (“red”) movement. A healthy environment and a balanced ecology are goals that are good for humanity, but goals which fundamentally challenge the logic that governs capitalism’s relationship with our material environment. The green movement can only achieve its ends when it’s combined with a red movement; and DSA can in turn use this activism, which is generally popular, particularly amongst the Millennial generation, to grow our ranks.

9. Building DSA and the Socialist Left

Paragraph 133

DSA’s role in building progressive social movements is essential to our work; regardless of what we gain as an organization from this work, it is an end in itself. Additionally, through our coalition work and community organizing we learn invaluable organizing skills and discover countless ways to improve the work that we do. However, in order to be effective in this work, as well as to build independent socialist organizations that we hope will grow over time into a powerful political force, we need to dramatically increase the ranks of the socialist movement in the United States. While we have expanded significantly since 2010, there is still tremendous room for growth. In order to take

advantage of this potential, DSA chapters will incorporate the following broad tactics into their work.

Paragraph 134

First, we will emphasize DSA's critical analysis of capitalism and positive vision of democratic socialism in our coalition and community organizing work. Given that our socialist analysis cuts across forms of oppression that are often balkanized into separate domains of struggle that rarely interact with one another, we are in a unique position to provide the connective theoretical tissue that can help link together a wide range of social movement struggles. Our overarching, integrative analysis, in turn, can help us both to forge stronger ties with a wider range of communities as well as strengthen the legitimacy and appeal of socialist politics within the broader progressive community. Further, putting forward a direct critique of capitalism and positive vision of socialism can play an important role in expanding the terms of acceptable political discourse, thereby shifting the terms of public debate to the left and opening up new possibilities for socialist politics. Finally, by putting forward a positive vision of a future society, we provide our organizers with a strong political identity that gives them the inspiration to be long-distance runners in socialist politics.

Paragraph 135

Second, we will actively build up the ranks of the explicit democratic-socialist Left by nurturing stronger and more committed leaders and recruiting new members. We will build our leadership capacity through internal political education and focused, one-on-one leadership development. Everyone has the capacity to be a leader, if we take the time to develop them. Every local will regularly identify new potential leaders and develop plans to offer new leaders increasing amounts of organizational responsibility as they demonstrate their interest and capacity to carry out leadership tasks. The national leadership of DSA will also work to identify new potential leaders to serve on national committees and to serve as traveling speakers for DSA, but will be mindful of the danger of draining locals by asking talented local leaders to focus more of their time on national-level activities.

Paragraph 136

Third, we must recruit at all times. We may be the largest democratic socialist organization in the country, but we are still woefully small. To recruit, we must work *as DSA* and, where possible, develop our own activist and educational projects: if we can't talk to people about DSA and why they should think about joining, we have no chance of growing. We must create as many spaces as possible in our activist and educational work where we can focus explicitly on our socialist politics. Our primary methods of recruitment (in addition to mailings and Internet recruitment) will be well-planned and engaging public educational events, tabling, petitioning, consistent phone and email follow-up with new contacts, and the personal relationships we build with other activists. We will work to ensure that each local's internal culture is as welcoming as possible to new people from a range of backgrounds. In order to retain new recruits we will place greater emphasis on internal political education by organizing reading groups, educational forums, speaking tours, and conferences, and by developing more systematic socialist educational materials for new members.

Paragraph 137

Fourth, we believe that the struggle for socialism requires us to participate in building new cultural projects that project a democratic socialist message to all social groups. Where resources allow, we hope to eventually open socialist bookstores, bars, coffee shops, and community spaces. We will also participate in debates about ideas and strategies inside and outside of colleges and universities, publish and articulate our ideas in every possible forum and write and speak for specifically socialist newspapers, websites, magazines, and theoretical journals.

Paragraph 138

We encourage locals to set goals in these areas and meet regularly to assess progress in all the areas. Only by constantly analyzing and questioning our processes can we determine what works. Even though DSA is a largely volunteer-run organization, it must develop a culture of professionalism and accountability. Without goal-setting and self-assessment we have little chance of successfully carrying out even a portion of the goals established in this document.

B. Transition to Democratic Socialism

Paragraph 139

The transition to democratic socialism in our interdependent, complex global economy will not occur in one dramatic moment when the wealth of societies is instantly transferred from capitalists to the mass of poor and working people in society. Rather, the fight for democratic control of the economy, cultural life, free social goods such as health care and higher education, and so on will be the result of campaigns over several decades both before and after democratic socialists gain political power. To achieve such a transition, socialists will have to devise a strategy to build democratic social movements, socialist political parties, democratic worker-owned and worker-operated firms, and democratically controlled trade unions powerful enough to wrest and retain control of society from capitalist oligarchs.

Paragraph 140

We have discussed the short-term goals above, all of which would lead to more openness to democratic socialism. At the same time, we want to expand the presence of participatory budgeting assemblies (in which assemblies of ordinary citizens participate directly in decision making about government spending), public banks, and worker-owned and worker-operated cooperatives, which serve both to democratize spaces within capitalist society and to give people a clearer picture of what the radically democratic socialist society we seek would look like. More generally, in the short-to-medium term, socialists must work to contest the “common sense” of capitalist culture. These “common sense” ideas tell us that consumers make decisions about what will be produced, that we are all free to choose where to work or live or send our children to school. For example, instead of a well-funded public school system, we are encouraged to support small “choice” schools that can choose to reject children who will not do well there and that choose to be non-union. In contrast to the competitive, individualist notion of capitalist freedom, which uses the idea of merit to justify the rule of an elite few, socialists offer a cultural vision of democratic freedom in which individuals fulfill their unique potential by participating in a free and democratic community.

Paragraph 141

Once socialist parties either gain legislative majorities on their own or become powerful enough within larger progressive coalitions to press for more radical reforms, they will propose reforms to *transform* the capitalist economy into a socialist one. These measures

are sometimes referred to as “non-reformist reforms” or “transformative reforms.” They could include nationalizing key industries such as utilities or automobile manufacturing or railroads so that they are affordable to all. Such reforms might mean using taxpayer money or government bonds to buy out private firms and hand control of them to the workers who run them, and other transformations outlined in the previous section.

However, in the current economic climate, each structural reform would mean less profit for the capitalists, who can be expected to strike back forcefully as they have done in the past.

Paragraph 142

As mentioned in part I, in the 1970s through the early 1980s governments controlled by socialist or labor parties, in Sweden, Chile, and France, for example, sought to do just what we propose. They tried to radically expand labor rights and provide for basic needs as well as to nationalize key industries and create worker-controlled investment funds that would eventually buy out capitalist stakes in companies. Capitalists reacted quickly and viciously, usually by means of a capital strike (in which companies refuse to invest in a given country’s economy) that induced an economic downturn, which in turn produced a deep crisis for each of these democratic-socialist governments. In some cases, socialist governments were either voted out of office or moved away from these radical reforms in an effort to remain in power. In other cases, capitalists allied themselves with military and foreign powers such as the United States to topple the socialist government by force. In none of these cases were democratic-socialist governments able to sustain reforms that would move their countries toward a democratic-socialist society.

Paragraph 143

What tactics might future democratic-socialist governments use to overcome the daunting challenge of deepening a socialist transformation in the face of such severe obstacles? At the point when capitalists use their considerable economic leverage in society to try and put an end to socialist reforms, democratic socialist governments have essentially two options: they can either stay the course or give in, and if they stay the course, they have to do so in a way that maintains their commitment to democratic decision-making, which means at least having the support of a majority of the population. Without majority support from the people, the only way to forge ahead would be to institute a period of

revolutionary dictatorship (in which a small governing elite rules by decree, free from any forms of accountability or checks on their authority). To do so would not only be a betrayal of our fundamental commitment to democracy, but, as history has shown, would be disastrous for the people and for the democratic socialist project. The only solution for democratic socialists is to find a way to sustain broad-based support that would remain strong even in the face of short-term economic sacrifices brought on by capitalist attempts to sabotage the process of socialist transition.

Paragraph 144

Such broad-based support can be achieved through democratic education, participation, and debate, by which a majority of the population comes to see socialist transformation as the only route to democracy, equality, and freedom. We must develop forms of organization and achieve structural reforms that unite, rather than divide the mass of people in society who do not benefit from the capitalist system. Sweden's solidaristic wage policy in which workers in various sectors receive similar wages should serve as a model for equalizing the wages, benefits, and conditions of workers across industries and levels of skill. Reforms such as better housing, transportation, and health care relieve anxiety about earning more than the neighbors and allow for such solidaristic policies.

Paragraph 145

Additionally, we must be vigilant in maintaining an organizational culture of bottom-up internal democracy within our unions, political organizations and parties. It is essential to the health of the movement and the long-term possibility of a transition to democratic socialism that we see democracy in action in our own institutions. This can only be done by maintaining rank-and-file control over our unions and organizations. Democracy is not only the end of the socialist movement; but also its most crucial means.

Paragraph 146

Finally, even with solid majority support and an internal democratic culture capable socialists would still face the challenge of overcoming anti-socialist violence from abroad or within. We will have to face that challenge without betraying our democratic principles. There is no easy solution to this problem, but building rank-and-file support within the police and armed forces, as well as forging strong alliances with rising democratic socialist forces abroad will be essential in any socialist transition.

Paragraph 147

The analysis in the section is intended to provide, if not a road map then an outline that will allow DSA to frame our short-to-medium-term work within the context of a long-term vision of socialist transformation. Although many of the proposals in this document seem so far off as to be impossible, we must consider them. It is never too early to think carefully about how we would overcome the profound challenges socialists have faced – and have largely been unable to overcome – in the past.

Paragraph 148

And, in this moment, we need a clear vision of our long-term objectives and a credible account of how we might achieve those objectives. If we ourselves are not clear about where we are heading, we risk both losing track of the importance of our socialist identity and making strategic errors for the sake of short-term tactical gains. For the foreseeable future our primary focus will be on how to build a vibrant, independent democratic socialist movement and how to contribute most effectively to building a progressive coalition capable of fundamentally shifting the terrain of political power in the United States and around the world.