

Democratic Socialists of America
National Political Committee
Minutes of Meeting of October 13-15, 2017
Approved December 11, 2017

The National Political Committee (NPC) met in Chicago at the Headquarters of the Western UE.

Present: *NPC Attendees:* Ravi Ahmad - *New York City*, Theresa Alt (Secretary-Treasurer) - *Ithaca*, Dele Balogun - *Chicago*, Christian Bowe - *Central New Jersey* - Allie Cohn - *Knoxville*, Leslie Driskill - *Oklahoma City*, Zac Echola - *Red River Valley*, Jeremy Gong - *East Bay*, Catherine Hoffman - *Detroit*, Ella Mahony - *New York City* - Chris Maisano - *New York City*, Natalie Midiri - *Philadelphia*, Christine Riddiough - *Washington, DC*, Joseph Schwartz - *Philadelphia*, R.L. Stephens - *Houston*, Ajmal Alami - *YDSA Co-Chair*, Michelle Fisher - *YDSA Co-Chair*. *Guest:* Jared Abbott, as former Steering Committee chair and current member of NPC committees. *Staff:* Maria Svart, National Director; David Duhalde, Deputy Director; Ryan Mosgrove, Campus Organizer; and Hannah Allison, National Traveling Organizer. *Excused:* none.

Friday, October 13, 2017

Carl Rosen, UE Western Region President, welcomed us to the historic building. Clara Alcott, Chicago DSA Co-Chair, welcomed us to Chicago. The local had provided excellent refreshments.

The morning was devoted to exercises aimed at getting us to know one another.

In the afternoon, Maria Svart, David Duhalde and Joseph Schwartz told us about what is expected of us as NPC members. We should make a request to the Steering Committee a month in advance to get the item on the NPC agenda. The traditional deadline for reports and proposals to an NPC meeting is the Monday night before the meeting. It is better not to take on too many responsibilities in your local, if you are on the NPC, but you should report back to your local or even the region on what the NPC is doing. Remember that you are ambassadors for the whole organization.

We looked at some scenarios of problem behavior and how to handle it. Then we signed NPC member agreements. Maria will send us copies.

Friday midafternoon

Chris Riddiough chaired.

National Director's Report

Maria Svart talked about opportunity and danger, emphasized that we are close to 30,000 members and need to unite to build the organization. She recapped her written report, which emphasizes what the various staff members do. She pointed out that even with 9 FTE staff, NPC members are needed to support staff, in addition to their job of developing the organization's strategic plan. NPC members could send Maria their resumés so that she can better see how we

can help. Maria or David will update the staff list to include the new administrative and office coordinator.

Deputy Director's Report

David Duhalde recapped his written report and drew attention to his Convention Planning Debrief. He suggested that we return to November conventions and maybe hire a planning consultant. We should set a lower target for number of delegates (700 was too high). We will no longer be allowed to merge the DSA convention with the YDSA summer conference. He reviewed outstanding resolutions remaining from the Convention. Some, such as *The Socialist Forum*, would be handled by the NPC and the top priority to be implemented is Resolution #33: The Grievance and Harassment Policy.

Charlottesville

David noted the need for urgent action on the Richmond DSA proposal sent to the NPC for DSA to manage in-house but mainly by local chapters and organizing committees the funds collected by crowdfunding for victims of the August 12, 2017 Charlottesville violence. After discussion and suggestions, Ravi Ahmad moved to refer the proposal to the Steering Committee. R.L. Stephens added a friendly amendment that David Duhalde was to inform Richmond of the decision. This was seconded and passed. The Interim Steering Committee (ISC) was to meet that evening. In the evening, the ISC voted to give the funds to the National Compassion Fund, as they were better equipped than DSA to handle the money properly.

National Traveling Organizer's Report

Hannah Allison recapped her written report about the work she had been doing including travel to chapters and organizing committees, convention planning, conflict resolution, and training. Discussion focused on the state of 79 chapters, 60 organizing committees, and 97 pre-OCs. Hannah said we need more organizing staff, and more mentors to develop new leaders. R.L. Stephens noted the problem of transitioning from an internet culture to a real world one. Ravi Ahmad observed that chapters that don't do coalition work seem to know that they are missing something. Joe pointed out the need for power-mapping training. Catherine Hoffman noted that in Michigan Detroit is helping chapters around the state.

National Campus Organizer Report

Campus Organizer Ryan Mosgrove and Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) Co-Chairs Michelle Fisher and Ajmal Alami commented on their written report. They noted growth in the number of chapters but problems with the Activist and social media. Discussion followed. A goal is to develop YDSA leaders who can become DSA leaders. Holding the YDSA conference simultaneously with the DSA national convention did not work. Intergenerational contact could be at the national activist conference or at a retreat before the YDSA conference. The YDSAers prioritize first socialist education, second sanctuary and campus antifascist work. We need to develop relationships between DSA locals and campus chapters.

The campus organizer requests a second fulltime staffer devoted to YDSA.

Interim Budget and Finance Committee Report

Theresa Alt presented highlights of the written financial report: surprisingly high income of \$1,615,000 by end of August this year, ahead of budget for the whole year. Net assets stood at a healthy \$999,871 despite still-undetermined Convention cost overruns. Future trends are completely uncertain. Discussion brought up many considerations but focused on the need for an NPC fundraising committee.

The secretary-treasurer will be elected in January.

Saturday, October 14, 2017 morning

Maria led the exercises.

SWOT

We did a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and brainstormed long lists of internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities and external threats.

SMART

David explained SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound) goals and Maria gave examples.

Chris Riddiough then took over chairing for the rest of the meeting.

Medicare for All

Jeremy Gong had submitted a detailed proposal for a Medicare for All priority project, then a revised version. DSA would start nationally by forming a committee with a broader mandate and a political subcommittee of people from other working groups and committees; we would launch support for mass organizing and create a campaign in a box. There would be political education and a design element. Discussion was extensive.

Jeremy moved to vote on sections of the proposal separately. Motion seconded and passed unanimously.

RL Stephens moved to amend to include “an NPC discussion” of the definition of “socialist healthcare principles” in section 1 before formally passing the proposal. Motion seconded and failed 7 to 8 with Chris Riddiough abstaining.

Jeremy moved to vote on section 1.

- (1) BE IT RESOLVED that the National Political Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America adopt a Medicare for All campaign approach that emphasizes socialist healthcare principles and prioritizes mass organizing and mass tactics in the pursuit of developing a broad Medicare for All political constituency.

Motion seconded and it passed 10 to 6.

RL Stephens moved to vote on sections 2, 3, 7, 8, 13 and 14 as a block instead of as individual resolutions. Motion seconded and it passed 14 to 1 with 1 abstention.

Jeremy Gong moved sections 2, 3, 7, 8, 13 and 14.

2) BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NPC will recruit/appoint members of the [Medicare for All Campaign Committee](#) and all relevant subcommittees and empower this working group to carry out the steering tasks of the campaign while overseeing and advising the committee on any strategic and political decisions. The NPC will have final approval power of any budgetary or national level strategic decisions.

3) BE IT RESOLVED that the NPC authorizes the Publications and Political Education Committee to investigate and build programs on Medicare for All at the level of ideology, politics and policy.

7) BE IT RESOLVED that the National Political Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America adopt a canvassing program complete with a distributed regional organizing strategy and regular video and in person trainings.

8) BE IT RESOLVED that the National Political Committee will empower the Medicare for All Working Group to develop and distribute materials that aid in organizing Teach-ins, Town-Hall interventions, Medicare/Medicaid sign-up drives and targeted phone banking.

13) BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that DSA will empower the Medicare for All Working Group to work with the National Tech Team to develop a stand-alone website for the Medicare for All campaign that will serve as a central digital location for campaign information and materials.

14) BE IT RESOLVED that the National Political Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America will empower, oversee and advise the National Design Committee on the campaign visual identity.

Motion seconded and it passed 12 to 4.

Saturday afternoon

Labor Work

Chris Maisano reported that the Democratic Socialist Labor Commission is organizing itself, with an election to be scheduled in January 2018. The interim group has been recruiting members around the country, doing education for new members with little familiarity with unions, coordinating DSA support for strikes nationwide, producing resources for members interested in getting involved with labor unions and guiding young people into careers where they can be union workers. Discussion followed with questions about tensions and the suggestion of finding a salt program.

Electoral Work

David referred to the Electoral Priorities Report on numerous races. There was discussion of Federal and state reporting and the need to better vet candidates. David suggested a two-part committee that separates research from campaigning.

Mentoring, Political Education and Training

Maria introduced the discussion. We have had an outdated Organizing Manual and webinars, some on skills and some political education. But there have not been enough people doing either education or mentoring. Hannah told of the new series of organizing trainings.

Zac Echola moved for the Steering Committee to organize a stakeholder call with the chairs of relevant committees (e.g., Training, Political Education, and New Member Orientation/Mentorship, and Chapter/OC Processing) plus Peg Strobel, Allie Cohn, and Natalie

Midiri for new Organizing Committees and Chapters. An amendment was added to do this within in a month and half.

Motion seconded and passed unanimously.

NPC Committees

Chris Riddiough introduced the list of NPC committees. NPCers were invited to put on paper their top three committee choices and other major tasks and interests.

Renewals and Monthly Dues

Ravi and Natalie introduced a proposal to involve locals in a campaign to get members to renew as monthly dues payers and share the dues with the locals. After discussion, Jeremy moved:

RESOLVED, DSA will work to renew memberships on a rolling basis beginning in ~~November 2017~~ with no delay for end-of-year fundraising;

RESOLVED, DSA's goals during the November-March period are 60% renewal (7,280 memberships) by ~~March 2018~~, with at least half of these renewals through monthly dues at a rate of \$10 or more monthly by ~~Q1 2018~~;

RESOLVED, the NPC will create a National Dues Drive Team, co-chaired by 2 NPC members, populated by up to 35 additional DSA members from the general membership, including members with experience in union drives, event planning, and chapter mentors, to train and coordinate locals in dues drive best practices by ~~mid-December 2017~~;

RESOLVED, the NPC will collect information on renewal strategies already in effect in chapters during October stakeholders calls and use what information may be relevant to create a training guide for the Dues Drive Captains; the training guide will be subject to finale approval by the Steering Committee prior to training the Captains;

RESOLVED, the DSA Staff and National Tech Team will coordinate to complete the data migration from NationBuilder to ActionKit by the end of ~~October 2017~~ to prepare for list-sharing during the renewal drive; Dues Drive Captains will be included in the ActionKit on-boarding process to learn skills necessary for cutting turf;

RESOLVED, the Dues Drive Team will lead regional training calls through ~~December 2017~~ train locals on targeting members for renewal, assembling a local dues drive team, monthly dues talking points, etc.;

RESOLVED, the NPC budgets \$5,500 for drive merchandise and shipping costs, such as for a limited edition 2018 membership lapel pin to incentivize monthly dues;

RESOLVED, the "Join" page of DSA's website will be updated by the end of ~~October 2017~~ to better reflect the shift towards monthly dues;

RESOLVED, the NPC will approve a list of 5-10 spokespeople (taking into account gender/sexual, racial, ability, and geographic diversity) to speak in short promotional videos for social media explaining why DSA membership/national dues are important;

RESOLVED, at the January NPC meeting, the NPC will select committee chairs for the new Website Visual Content Design Team, review initial renewal data, review projected renewal outcomes down to chapter level, and assign next steps in the renewal drive.

By friendly amendment dates were stricken, since nothing can begin until the new CRM is in place. The resolution was seconded and passed unanimously.

By consensus the passage:

RESOLVED, no paper renewal mailings will be sent to “new” members, those members who joined within the last 18 months;

was referred to the Steering Committee.

Nonpriority Convention Mandates: Grievance Policy

Convention Resolution #33 came close to giving DSA a grievance policy, but further work on it has not been done. After some discussion Natalie moved that we have a Grievance Committee tasked with getting back to the authors of Resolution #33 and sending a report to the Steering Committee by its first meeting in November. This carried unanimously.

National Paid Labor and Infrastructure

Maria outlined the many jobs that staff now do and responded to questions.

Ravi Ahmad moved Christian Bowe and Leslie Driskill work with the tech team and Lawrence Dreyfuss, Program Associate, to develop a proposal for January on automating/improving infrastructure for swag, plus a swag budget proposal.

Christian Bowe seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Natalie Midiri moved to have the Personnel Committee draft clearer guidelines between responsibilities and decisions between staff and elected leaders. Jared Abbott proposed an amendment to make it the Steering Committee, not the Personnel Committee. Natalie Midiri said the amendment was friendly.

Motion seconded and passed 15 for, one against.

Discussion continued about stakeholder calls and what locals think of them, setting up the NPC meeting, fundraising training, the New Members Facebook group, and outsourcing fundraising letters.

National Volunteer Labor and Infrastructure

Ravi had submitted a proposal about the chapter, OC and WG application process. Working groups were dropped from the proposal, because they are different and approval is optional. The NPC must address chapters and organizing committees. Ravi moved to table this resolution until the end of October so that the NPC can comment on it by email, and the Steering Committee can vote by the end of the month.

This passed 15 – 1.

International Solidarity

R.L had submitted a proposal for doing preparatory political education and supporting members of color, LGBTQ and genderqueer membership, low income members and other historically marginalized membership to be part of delegations to Latin America as well as bringing Latin Americans here. Christian, Theresa, Ajmal and R.L. will explore it further.

Sunday, October 15, 2017

Needs of Working Groups

Natalie moved that by the first Steering Committee meeting of November someone from the SC create a list of the Working Group asks from all reports, and that the SC create a list of sign-ups to be liaisons. This passed unanimously.

Next Meeting Date

The NPC voted to meet on the weekend of January 26th-28th (with January 19-21 as backup). We are leaning towards meeting in Dallas, TX. Allie Cohn, Christian Bowe and Leslie Driskill will plan the meeting.

We hope to do four meetings in the year, the rest to be scheduled in January.

Democratic Left and Socialist Forum

Chris Maisano moved his [Democratic Left and Socialist Forum proposal](#) to dissolve the current *DL* Editorial Board at the end of the January 2018 NPC meeting, in the meantime to empower Maxine Phillips to begin to coordinate reconstitution of the board, to redesign *DL* including a new website, and to revive *Socialist Forum* on the same website. Proposal amended to include the dissolution of the *Democratic Left* Blog Committee (a separate entity from the *Democratic Left* magazine Editorial Board) and form it as a subcommittee.

Motion seconded and passed unanimously.

Committee Assignments

Seven members of the NPC ran for the five-person Steering Committee. They were Ravi Ahmad, Zac Echola, Jeremy Gong, Cathy Hoffman, Natalie Midiri, Joseph Schwartz, and Christine Riddiough.

Echola, Midiri, Schwartz and Riddiough won on the first vote. The body voted to have a runoff election because Gong and Ahmad tied for the fifth seat. Gong won the runoff.

The Steering Committee will be:

- Zac Echola
- Jeremy Gong
- Natalie Midiri
- Joseph Schwartz
- Christine Riddiough
- Michelle Fisher (YDSA)
- Ajmal Alami (YDSA)

NPC members for other committees were proposed. After a few adjustments, the NPC Committees are as follows:

- Personnel
 - Natalie Midiri
 - Chris Riddiough

- Jared Abbott (non-NPC)
 - Maxine Phillips (non-NPC)
- Budget and Finance
 - Theresa Alt
 - Leslie Driskill
 - Joseph Schwartz
- *Democratic Left*
 - Chris Maisano
 - R.L. Stephens
- Political Education
 - Joseph Schwartz
 - Jared Abbott (non-NPC)
 - R.L. Stephens
- Training
 - Ravi Ahmad
 - Ella Mahony
- Mentorship/Chapter/OC/WG
 - Allie Cohn
 - Cathy Hoffman
 - Jeremy Gong
 - Peg Strobel (non-NPC)
 - Leslie Driskill
- Convention planning
 - Zac Echola
 - Ella Mahony
 - Natalie Midiri
- Grievance
 - Michelle Fisher
 - Leslie Driskill
 - Cathy Hoffman
- Medicare For All
 - Zac Echola
 - Chris Riddiough
 - Jeremy Gong
- Electoral
 - Dele Balogun
 - Christian Bowe
 - Chris Riddiough
 - Allie Cohn
- Development/Fundraising
 - Christian Bowe
 - Leslie Driskill
 - Ravi Ahmad
 - Natalie Midiri
- International
 - Chris Maisano

- Christian Bowe
- Dele Balogun
- Social Media
 - Christian Bowe
 - Cathy Hoffman
- Labor
 - R.L. Stephens
 - Chris Maisano

SMART Goals for the Committees

Jeremy moved to mandate that each committee meet to write up SMART goals from now until the January meeting and send a draft of those goals to the NPC within two weeks. This passed unanimously.

Steering Committee Functioning

There was discussion about how the Steering Committee should operate to build trust with the rest of the NPC yet not burden everyone with the need to constantly read and respond to emails. Agendas in advance of SC meetings and an opportunity for all to put items on those agendas would help.

Executive Session – Union Bargaining

The NPC went into executive session to learn about bargaining with the staff union and approve the Personnel Committee's decisions.

Then the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by Theresa Alt