

RED LETTER

A MONTHLY MISSIVE FROM THE DSA NATIONAL POLITICAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE (NPEC)

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EVENTS

02.18: Deadline for submissions to next edition of Red Letter

02.24 and 03.03: NPEC Night School Training Series

Red Letter Mission Statement

The purposes of political education are manifold. For socialists, our primary goals are to deepen our commitments to and capacities for effective organizing, to break free from capitalist society, and to transform the world. We do this by learning socialist history and its main conceptual frameworks, and debating our differences over them in our current time and conditions. Political education strengthens our organizing as we become adept at explaining why socialism is both relevant and necessary to the working class. We aim to support our comrades in that crucial task. **Continued on Page 2**

Matewan, the Con-spectare-cy by Michaela B

The "virtual film night" has never satisfied me, personally. I love films, alone or with others. But when I'm with other moviegoers, I really want to be *with* them. As others react with pleasure, surprise, or dismay, I want to sense it. I didn't even realize how much I missed it. Even at the multiplex, there's something vaguely unifying about everyone doing the same thing at the same time—when everyone jumps or laughs, it feels good. **Continued on Pages 2 and 3**

Labor for Palestine by Simon J, NPEC + BDS/Palestine Solidarity

Labor has a key role to play in the Palestinian self-determination. Local governments can adopt procurement or investment policies that bar contracts with or investments in companies that are complicit in human rights violations, including Israeli occupation and apartheid. Workers can also push for their unions to adopt resolutions supporting BDS and refuse to legitimize the Israeli government's violence. State violence, including occupation, relies on labor, and without that labor, the violence is interrupted. **Continued on Page 2**

NPEC 2021 Round Up

NPEC members Evan M, Sanjiv G, Daphna T, and Rashad X share their favorite political education events and content of 2021, and what they believe is going to be crucial to focus on this year.

Continued on Page 4 and 5

ICYMI: An Events Roundup

NPEC member Coleman L shares and summarizes NPEC's 2021 pre-convention events. **Continued on Page 5**

Submit to Red Letter!

Do you have a pitch or feedback for Red Letter? We are looking for lesson plans, reviews, and reportbacks on political education events from chapters and regional collaborations! Let us know what you're thinking. Email npeccomms@dsacommittees.org with "Red Letter" in the subject heading.

Red Letter Mission Statement (Continued from Page 1)

DSA's National Political Education Committee provides socialist educational materials for members across the country, and connects political educators in local chapters to share resources and experiences with each other. Our newsletter, *Red Letter*, intends to further this mission. *Red Letter* will feature items of interest to local political education leaders as well as rank-and-file members: recaps of and links to national educational calls, new lesson plans, editorials by NPEC members, and more.

Red Letter also encourages all DSA members in good standing to contribute. Submissions could include summaries of texts or other media your chapter has studied, with remarks; recordings, powerpoints, or outlines of local political education presentations, lectures or lessons; or short articles about the purpose of political education and how best to spread socialist ideas to the working-class and empower others with knowledge.

Labor for Palestine (Continued from Page 1)

We want to take a moment to call our attention to pro-Palestine resolutions and actions that took place over the summer, in Palestine and around the world.

- In a show of labor power, Palestinian workers led a general strike, the Strike for Dignity, demanding their liberation by withholding the labor upon which Israelis rely.
- Dockworkers in Italy refused to load a ship that was sending arms to Israel.
- In multiple port cities nationwide, people in solidarity with Palestine are calling on their elected officials to prohibit Israeli commerce ships from docking, as well as organizing mass grassroots action to block the boats themselves.
- In historic moves, multiple teachers' unions have endorsed BDS — the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement — The United Educators of San Francisco, AFT Local 1789 in Seattle, and the CUNY union.

Haymarket's *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*, edited by Sumaya Awad and Brian Bean, is full of essays about working class struggle and Palestinian liberation, including one from NPEC member Daphna Thier. It is available as a free ebook here: haymarketbooks.org/blogs/307-free-ebook-palestine-a-socialist-introduction

Matewan, the Con-spectare-cy (Continued from Page 1)

As the pandemic has become less severe in some places, I have started to go to films in public again. As we attempt to safely gather for in person or hybrid socialist socializing, we can create chapter viewings that serve a triple purpose: sensory pleasure, political education, and comradely presence. "Conspiracy" means to breathe together. So, what would a bunch of leftists watching a movie together be called? A con-spectare-cy?

August 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain, the bloodiest and most decisive of a collection of labor skirmishes known as "The Coal Wars" of West Virginia. The Wars pitted coal workers trying to organize with the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) against local and state police and the goon squad—the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency—hired by powerful coal bosses. At Blair Mountain, 100 miners were killed over five days, and the carnage only ceased when US Army troops and WV Army National Guardsmen numbering close to 30,000 were called in. Nearly 1,000 miners were arrested for fighting for their lives and rights, many under charges of treason and murder. (*Continued on Page 3*)

Matewan, the Con-spectare-cy (Continued from Page 2)

The year prior to the Battle of Blair Mountain, there was the Matewan massacre, a much smaller but catalyzing fight between Baldwin-Felts agents and striking miners in the town of Matewan, WV. The 1987 film *Matewan*, directed by John Sayles, tells a fictionalized but broadly accurate version of the events leading up to the massacre, which left more agents dead than miners but resulted in a martial crackdown and intensified worker abuses, paving the way to the fateful five days in the following August.

Our chapter's political education committee put on a members-and-family-only screening of *Matewan* on Juneteenth last year, after running a poll of five films that focus on multiracial labor struggles and Black liberation. Before we pressed play on *Matewan*, a Political Education committee member gave a brief summary of the historical context, discussed why the film was appropriate for Juneteenth, and raised a few questions for comrades to consider while they watched. All that was required were comrades willing to volunteer spare space, a little bit of time, and portable home entertainment equipment—and an adequate stream of the film. With more planning, we might have sprung for a DVD.

While *Matewan* is broadly about the striking workers fight to beat the bosses, in the film, their prospective organizational success is complicated by their struggle to overcome anti-Black and anti-migrant bias. *Matewan* balances touching, hopeful portrayals of uneven but still growing cross-ethnic and multiracial solidarity with the unsentimental realism of casual and not-so-casual racism and parochial mistrust, systematically fomented by the company that oppresses and controls the entire town, but also clearly and rigidly normalized within that community. The IWW organizer tasked with getting the union off the ground, played by Chris Cooper, sees the massive hurdle racism presents and does his best to explain why it's a failed proposition to the unionizing white miners, who, suspicious also of this “outsider,” listen first with skepticism.

As they, Black and Italian workers and their families slowly warm to each other through social interaction and work for their common survival, there remains a sense of tragic frustration as the pressure from the bosses increases and white miners falter in their drive to “one big union.” The film is not a straightforward moral lesson, however, and the valences are intersecting and multiple, perfect for a good post-screening discussion. The excellent ensemble cast, including Mary McDonnell, James Earl Jones, and David Strathairn (and a very young and charismatic Will Oldham), create a textured narrative that shows, with great sympathy, the power and the failings of human beings, and both the desire and the need for collective, democratic ways of living.

There are many directions a political education session around *Matewan* could go. For instance, the scenes from the strike camp and the boarding house are wonderful object lessons of social reproduction theory. The “red-blooded Americans” answering the ambiguously worded employment ads for the murderous Baldwin-Felts agency are young men who would otherwise be jobless or mining coal—and here, the socialist pacifist arguments brought up by Cooper's character faintly but clearly resonate. “All I saw were workers killing other workers, and there wasn't any point in it...If them two years [in jail] kept me from killing some poor stiff who got pushed out onto a battlefield by rich folks and politicians, then they were worth it.”

Besides the recent centennial of the Coal Wars, there's another reason a viewing of *Matewan* right now is appropriate for DSA members. UMWA, the United Mine Workers of America, has been on strike in Alabama since April 2021, fighting for a fair contract from Warrior Coal. Find out more about the strike here: thenation.com/article/activism/alabama-miners-strike-warrior-met

NPEC 2021 Round Up (Continued from Page 1)

What follows are the thoughts of a few members of the National Political Education Committee about their favorite political education events and content of 2021.

Evan Moravansky, co-chair of Member Education (Mid-Hudson Valley) and NPEC

At the end of 2021, MHVDSA hosted a labor education event featuring a panel of regionally-based union members and organizers. Not only was this event among the highest attended in the chapter's recent history, but it was successful in building up our relationship with organized labor in the Hudson Valley. It took many meetings and much deliberation, but the end result was much more valuable than the work it took to pull together. Attendees learned from first-hand experience how they can organize a workplace or support the labor movement, event organizers developed critical organizing skills, and participating labor organizers cultivated new and pre-existing relationships. This event required months-long planning, effective communication, and creative approaches that often aren't applied to run-of-the-mill political education. It is not a precise model to be applied to all socialist organizing, but it demonstrates the potential for political education to better support and elevate working class consciousness by grounding itself firmly in the forces of material change and class struggle.

MHVDSA labor education event: [youtube.com/watch?v=G6KStkTC7Fk&t=1358s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6KStkTC7Fk&t=1358s)

Sanjiv Gupta, member of River Valley DSA (Western MA) and Steering Committee, NPEC

NPEC had a series of pre-convention panels, and one hosted the authors of the People of Color's History of DSA (Sacramento DSA). We focused on the convention resolutions that commit DSA to substantially increasing BIPOC membership and multiracial organizing. At the panel, I learned that BIPOC members like Manning Marable, Dolores Delgado-Campbell and Lydia Tom played an outsized role in organizing from DSA's founding. However, unlike Michael Harrington, they are not mentioned either in DSA's official "short history," nor in typical chapter orientations or educational events. BIPOC members continue to be some of the hardest working and most influential organizers at every level of DSA, yet our numbers remain low. The panel helped me understand some reasons for this. It also motivated me to take a hard look at how our political education reflects and reinforces this deficiency. As educators, we need to do our part in helping DSA meet our stated goals with regard to BIPOC membership and multiracial organizing. Crucially, we need many more BIPOC educators to correct this longstanding problem.

POC history of DSA: sacdsa.org/blog/2019/08/13/a-people-of-color-s-history-of-dsa-part-1-socialism-race-and-the-formation-of-dsa

Daphna Thier, NYC-DSA and Steering Committee, NPEC

The pre-convention panel put on by the National Political Education team on electoral work hosted Richie Floyd, Fainan Lakha and Robin Peterson, and did a fascinating deeper dive into DSA's electoral strategy and how we concretely use it to build working class organization.

Rashad X, at-large member, NPEC (Events and Speakers Subcommittee)

I read *The Pedagogy of The Oppressed* by Paulo Freire over the summer and in an attempt to apply the theory to our education praxis, it has inspired me to ask three questions of our work.

1. How do we ensure political education events are co-intentional, where the facilitators and speakers, and the participants and attendees, are all teachers and learners?
2. How do we create the space for participants and attendees to grow and practice their critical thinking skills, rather than just acquire information—what Freire calls "the banking model" of education?
3. What opportunities do we have to integrate active problem-solving into our educational experiences?

These questions stem from a broader desire to ensure our educational experiences are not only a rejuvenating break from the oppressive education experiences most of us have undergone, but are revolutionary prefigurations of how we want *all* learning to occur—not just political education.

ICYMI: An Events Roundup (Continued from Page 1)

NPEC held three “Convention Talks” leading up to this year’s convention. You can check them out here in case you weren’t able to make it. If your chapter has been engaging in any post-convention discussion around strategy and implementation, these might come in handy!

Socialism and Electoral Politics

This call features members of the National Electoral Committee who present on DSA’s electoral successes and challenges in the last few years, as well as our official electoral strategy. Multiple resolutions about electoral politics were submitted to be debated at this summer’s convention. This call provides an overview of DSA’s electoral work, why elections matter, and how to use them.

DSA’s Labor Strategy: Organizing Worker Power for a Socialist Future

A deep dive into our labor strategy, focused on strategic, multiracial workplace organizing and rebuilding the labor movement in every red, blue, and purple corner of the country. We’ll be talking with labor militants and union organizers on the importance of building rank-and-file power among Black and Latino workers and in the South, fostering solidarity across industries, and strengthening democratic unions that can fight—and win.

How can we make DSA Anti-racist and Multiracial?

A conversation connecting issues faced by people of color during DSA’s origins and today, between the authors of “A people of color’s history of DSA” (2019), Alyssa de la Rosa and David Roddy of Sacramento DSA, and authors of two convention resolutions, #27 (Beyond 100K) and #31 (Making DSA a Multiracial and Anti-racist Organization). De La Rosa and Roddy conducted archival research and talked with founders of the people of color caucuses in the original DSA/NAM. They presented a short summary of their findings, followed by a moderated conversation with authors of resolutions #27 and #31.

There’s more where that came from! Check out NPEC’s previous national events, as well as the events above, at youtube.com/c/DemocraticSocialistsofAmericaDSA

- DSA, BDS, and Palestine Solidarity: A Panel Discussion
- Indigenous Resistance in a World On Fire with Nick Estes and more
- Election 2020: What Should Socialists Be Doing?
- Covid-19: A Man-Made Crisis with Mike Davis
- The End of Policing with Alex Vitale
- Building a Left that Can Fight and Win
- When We Take Power with Leo Panitch & Sam Gindin
- From Austerity to Pandemic with Vijay Prashad
- Covid-19 and the Working Class w/ Gregg Gonsalves & Marty Bennett