

RED LETTER

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EVENTS

- 03.16: The State and Revolution(ary Reforms)
- 03.25: Deadline for submissions to next edition of Red Letter
- 03.26: The Socialist Program: Lessons and Prospects

Host a Screening of *Naila and the Uprising* by Simon J

Naila and the Uprising was produced by Just Vision, a production company that has also produced several other educational films about Palestine. The DSA BDS & Palestine Solidarity Working Group launched a film screening for *Naila and the Uprising* in commemoration of the First Intifada's 34th anniversary on December 8, 2021, and will continue to bring screenings to DSA chapters and other interested organizations until December 31, 2022. In addition to Palestine-specific political education, these events are a great way to demonstrate historical examples of community-led direct action and reach an audience that may not be reached by summer schools or seminars, but through media consumption and discussion. Contact dsanailafilm@gmail.com for more info or to schedule a screening.

What is the State? by Per D

What is the state? Is it just the "executive committee of the ruling class," as Marx wrote? Or is it a field of struggle that socialists should aim to control? [Continued on Page 2](#)

The Socialist Program: Lessons and Prospects by Alexander G

In accordance with the diversity of the long history of the international worker's movement, there have emerged different perspectives of the nature and purpose of the political program. After 1991, what lessons, pros, cons and principles should we extract from this rich history of the political program and strategy? How should socialists view the political program today? [Continued on Page 2](#)

NPEC 2021 Round Up

NPEC members Evan M, Sanjiv G, Daphna T, and Rashad X share what they believe is going to be crucial to focus on this year in DSA political education.

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Five Reasons We Need Political Education by Daphna T

As socialists, we are doers. We want to change the world, so we throw ourselves into activism and organizing. But in order to be effective we need all our chapters to be hubs for political education, and here are a few reasons why. [Continued on Page 4](#)

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.

What is the State? (Continued from Page 1)

The National Political Education Committee is exploring these questions, and more, in a new series of “The State and Revolution(ary Reforms).” Join for the first installment on **Wednesday, March 16th at 8:30 pm ET.**

Our first event’s panel is comprised of four excellent speakers who will help us deepen our understanding of the state. First, Ben Tarnoff will talk about what the state is, how socialists should engage with it, and in what ways our current state needs to be transformed in order to use it as tool for advancing socialism. Then, we will have Meagan Day introduce the concept of revolutionary reforms. What gains could socialist fights for right here and now, that may open up the way for a transition to socialism later on? We will also be joined by Tarun Banerjee and Kevin A. Young, authors of the book *Levers of Power*. They will discuss how capital, through the threat of capital flight and investment strikes, holds great power over the state, and to win any major reforms, socialists need to focus on hurting capital accumulation directly. We will then have a guided discussion about what all of this means when it comes to socialist organizing today.

The Socialist Program: Lessons and Prospects (Continued from Page 1)

Bhaskar Sunkara, Mike Macnair and Seth Ackerman, and Renée Paradis will discuss the prospects and lessons of the socialist program on **Saturday, March 26th at 4pm EST.**

With the adoption of DSA’s Political Platform at the 2021 convention, this event aims to encourage debate about our organization’s emerging views on our political program. It will also include discussion on the different practical applications of the historic political program within worker’s organizations and mass parties, such as the German, Russian, and Swedish Social Democratic Parties.

The speakers’ presentations will encompass historical questions and discuss their relationship to contemporary issues. Some questions that our guest speakers will include their presentations are:

- What are some of the implicit and explicit theories behind various socialist programs?
- What relevance do the transitional or minimum-maximum socialist programs, for example, hold today?
- Looking forward, how should we approach implementing a program in the American political context?
- How should longstanding issues of ballot access inform our approach, and how should we hold elected representatives accountable to our program?
- How does working class political independence relate to the need for effective outward-facing politics, and how should we measure effectiveness?
- What roles do mass campaigns such as M4A and other progressive campaigns play?
- Should we prioritize programmatic politics?

These questions will hopefully contribute to encouraging lively and fruitful discussion on the question of the socialist program.

Following a brief introduction, our panelists will speak for 15-20 minutes each about their views on the political program. Subsequently, panelists will be encouraged to respond to each other for about 30 minutes. Finally, we’ll have an audience Q&A, and written questions can be submitted for panelists to answer. The event will last for about two hours. Join us!

NPEC 2021 Round Up, Part Two (Continued from Page 1)

We asked NPEC members to share their thoughts on the following question: Looking forward to 2022, what is the ONE thing (method, text, issue, debate, etc) you believe is going to be crucial to focus on in political education (broadly defined) in DSA?

Evan M, Mid-Hudson Valley DSA

Often, and especially in the pandemic, political education can lose its connection to material change. It can fall to critique in place of action, and become a tool wielded in the service of—instead of directly connected to—ongoing organizing work. In 2022, political educators in DSA should seek out ways to integrate their work into active campaigns in their respective chapters. Educators should be agitators and organizers both, acting as a glue that binds DSA projects into a broader vision of the socialist horizon. Rather than leaving it up to the audience to determine what they'll do with the education provided, a socialist education should make clear how theory connects to practice, and what paths to action already exist, or can be carved out. Rather than remaining an independent and distinct part of DSA work, political education should weave itself into the fabric of organizing. Every event and action is an opportunity to learn from and advance the socialist cause!

Sanjiv G, River Valley DSA

To increase our BIPOC membership and our multiracial organizing—one of the highest priorities identified in our convention—DSA's political education has to go beyond truisms like "racism divides the working class" and "people of color are disproportionately harmed by capitalism." We have to figure out how to deal with the social fact that in the U.S., your race at birth is, all by itself, a primary determinant of your occupation, income, education, wealth, type of residence, health or any other conventional dimension of class. Race is a relation of production. This is hard, not least because there are legitimate, serious differences among socialists about the relationship between race and class. But at minimum we need to confront those differences in our political education. Socialist history is littered with examples of parties, organizations and even governments who acted as if socialism is, by definition, anti-racist. Our education needs to be frank about this history, and about the analytical and political complexities of the relationship between race and class.

Daphna T, NYC-DSA

We need to educate about THE STATE: the role of the state, and how we organize within and outside of it. As a national organization, we can connect working class and labor organizing to political aims within the state. And we can theorize and strategize around how we defend the state against the most appalling attacks on democracy and democratic rights—in particular, the rights of people of color.

Rashad X, At-large member

Our committee will be putting on events centered around race and class this year, so it is crucial that our focus is not only on the impacts of US racism on the working class and the socialist movement in the United States. Bringing in an international lens could mean exploring the impact of US racism on the nature of US imperialism; the lives of working-class people and politics abroad; the development of socialism abroad. In doing this work, bringing in voices from those directly affected abroad by imperialism will be a must. In addition, we will need to make sure we have the appropriate language accessibility accommodations to bring working-class people whose dominant language isn't English. These efforts will also help us with building deeper relationships abroad, as well as growing our multiracial membership.

Read NPEC Round Up, Part One in previous issue (January 31, 2022) of Red Letter.

Five Reasons We Need Political Education (Continued from Page 1)

Adapted from a talk given at the 2021 DSA National Convention, lightly edited for publication.

1) We don't get **class politics** in school.

That's why we have to educate ourselves with our own socialist politics. We're actually taught a very distorted version of history, of society and the economy, of gender and race. We're not even taught the words "working class." Rather, in the US, everyone is "middle class" or "poor." Those are terms that obscure our power as a class. We use political education to educate and empower our own ranks, and the ranks of the broader working class. And we use education so we stay alert—constantly learning and analyzing the conditions of the world around us.

2) Political education builds **democracy** within the organization.

We are building a grassroots movement with rank-and-file leadership, so *everyone* has to be able to think about the big picture. This is critical for democratic participation. If we don't have a membership that is highly educated, we have less participation in high-stakes discussions and decision-making. Education and the development of our members means the greatest number of people can shape the direction of the organization.

3) We use political education to **define our politics**.

Political education is about developing shared language, understanding, and a vision around definable politics, as well as understanding the distinctions that where we disagree. When we don't define what we do and don't agree on, the waters are muddied, and the political culture is unclear. Our organization risks being shaped by interpersonal relationships, and less by a vision that we share, that we decide on together. And, we don't have to agree on *everything*. In fact, we are unlikely to ever agree on everything. But when we don't agree and we don't discuss our disagreements in comradely discussions, we run the risk of toxic debates in unhelpful spaces.

4) Political education is where we learn to argue our politics and **convince others** to join us.

The more you feel confident in your politics, your knowledge of history, and your analysis, the more you can engage in high-level discussions. But you are also able to distill an idea to its simplest form. This is one of the most important roles of socialists: to make our political vision accessible and compelling to workers around us.

5) Political education helps build our **campaigns**.

Education builds the confidence and knowledge of people around specific campaigns. It allows us to analyze our campaigns, assess their challenges, and learn from them. It helps bring non-DSA members into political discussions with socialists, and is an excellent way to involve new members in campaigns and organizing. Many members who attend political education sessions first learn about a particular topic, and then get involved in it.

Above all else: political education makes us better organizers.