



# Democratic Socialist Labor Commission

## Democratic Socialist Labor Commission 2021 Report

The following is a summary of the DSLC Steering Committee's work since early 2020 and major developments within the Labor Commission. The 2019 report can be viewed [here](#).

### Elections

A new Steering Committee (SC) was elected and took leadership in February 2020. Expanded to twelve seats from the previous nine, the new SC members were Damiana Dendy (Metro DC), Daniel Dominguez (Los Angeles), Jake Douglas (Denver), Anthony Downing (Lehigh Valley), Michael Ifeoma Esealuka (New Orleans), Laura Gabby (NYC), Rebecca Garelli (Phoenix), Mindy Isser (Philly), JP Kaderbek (Chicago), Peter Olney (SF), Zack Pattin (Tacoma), and Ashley Payne (East Bay).

In addition to the elected seats, the SC was joined by YDSA representatives Oren Schweitzer and Kristen Cervero (each sharing a single vote), as well as Amy Zachmeyer on staff and Dave Pinkham and Keon Liberato on the NPC (all three non-voting). In December 2020, Michael resigned from DSA and the DSLC SC. After soliciting applications from members in Southern chapters, the vacancy was filled by Morgan Stewart (Richmond).

The SC meets twice a month on the second and fourth Sundays. Initially operating by rotating chairs and notetakers each meeting, the SC moved to a co-chair model in September 2020 with Zack and Ashley serving as co-chairs since. Topics for discussion can be submitted by any member of the organization here: [dslc@dsacommittees.org](mailto:dslc@dsacommittees.org).

### Mapping & Outreach

One of the first efforts of the new SC was to connect with local labor formations (LLFs). In addition to establishing relationships with LLFs and their chairs, we sought to better understand the various focuses of local groups: minimum wage campaigns and other labor legislation, strike support, coalition politics with local unions and central labor councils (CLCs), pro-democracy reform efforts, new worker organizing, etc.

Initially, we hoped to drive up turnout for the 2020 Labor Notes Conference before the event was cancelled due to the pandemic. Initial survey questions also included how LLFs and chapters were responding to COVID, like supporting walkouts or mutual aid efforts. The SC divided this

work geographically and in some regions began to host regional labor calls. These were sustained for some time in the Southwest and Midwest but held more sporadically elsewhere. California continues to meet through statewide calls and organized around Prop 15.

On the whole, conceptualizing the DSLC in terms of a local-national relationship (such as local affiliates to a national union) has not been successful. This has been the assumed model since the DSLC's establishment in 2017. We made good contacts with our initial round of outreach, many of which resulted in new labor activity and SC members serving as mentors to newer activists in small chapters, but these connections have largely only been successful in interpersonal terms, not institutional.

The overwhelming majority of DSA chapters do not have a local labor formation and LLFs still do not have meaningful direct relationships to the DLSC. The commission's overall structure in general is still unclear and requires further development. Recent conversations among the SC have addressed this, including ideas around expanding and better establishing industry networks as a possibility for the primary units that make up the DSLC.

Additionally in the last year, the DSLC has made extensive efforts to map union membership within DSA. This data has historically not been systematically collected or formatted and what we have is entirely based on self-reporting (through joining the DSLC, Action Network and other events, and, as of 2020, by joining through the national website.) Working with staff and volunteers, the SC worked to better arrange this data, attempting to standardize national and local union names, acronyms, and other information.

This data is now included on membership lists for local chapters. In November 2020, the DSLC made available a [guide](#) to local chapters to best use this newly available information. The guide explains union structures and naming conventions, a brief summary of the data, and some basic steps to start doing labor work at the chapter level.

Collecting this data is an ongoing effort and what we do have is likely underreported. With the information we have, we've gained a couple key insights about union membership and DSA:

- Of our roughly 95,000 members, about 10% belong to a union. This tracks with the national average. These union members are presumably concentrated in education, public sector, and entertainment work. However, our data only tracks union affiliation, not industry or employer\* and includes rank and filers, officers, staff, and retirees, without specifying which exactly. (*Many union locals represent workers at multiple shops across industries. A single Teamsters local, for example, may represent both bus drivers and UPS drivers; even though the work is similar, this cuts across education and logistics in industrial terms. As such, a specific union or local alone can't always tell us about a member's job, industry, or employer without further inquiry.*)

- From the collected data, it's clear that the unions with the most DSA members generally align with the unions that are also largest, some of these unions having over a million members. DSA union member density skews towards public sector workers, but we have strong representation in many industries. In the US, union density is much higher in the public sector (34.8%) than the private sector (6.3%) and the overall number of unionized workers in both sectors is about the same: 7.2 million and 7.1 million, respectively.
- Analyzing the collected data also confirms something we long suspected, that the unions with the highest percentage of DSA members trend towards "office" jobs and only a couple of the unions with higher density are the "traditionally" blue collar unions on our list, particularly in the entertainment industry.

Drawing any solid conclusions about the data we have requires further detail and analysis; that is, where is DSA among the working class? Within what industries and major employers are our members concentrated? With emphasis on encouraging members to take jobs in education, healthcare, and logistics, how effective are we toward these efforts? What kinds of workers are attracted to DSA and why? These are questions beyond the scope of this report and difficult to answer with incomplete data, but need to be addressed by the organization.

That said, there are already significant concentrations of DSA members within key industries, especially education, public sector work, and entertainment. These are ripe for establishing robust industry networks that can and should form the backbone of DSA's labor work. Furthermore, with only 10% of DSA's membership belonging to a union, even as the largest socialist organization in the country, we don't yet have a critical mass within organized labor, despite punching well above our weight class in key campaigns, such as around the PRO Act.

It is imperative for the success of our work that we encourage more and more members to take rank-and-file jobs, salt and organize in key industries, and build unions where we presently work. Lastly, as part of our DSA 100K drive and other ongoing recruitment efforts, DSA needs to double down and make a concerted effort to recruit union members into DSA.

Furthermore, logistics (air, rail, truck, warehouse, maritime), construction, and manufacturing unions are among the largest and most powerful in the country, but these workers are under-represented within DSA's membership. These and other industries should be of particular focus for climate organizing and a Green New Deal, as initiated in particular by the PRO Act campaign. Even with healthcare as a major priority for DSA, our numbers suggest we are not as strong among healthcare workers (at least those workers in a union) as we need to be for worker-focused and worker-driven campaigns for single-payer.

Of the strategic sectors most often discussed in DSA, our members are currently only significantly concentrated in education. Conversely, sectors that do not receive as much attention, such as entertainment, are where we see some of our highest densities.

## Education & Training

In early 2021, the DSLC reconstituted an Education & Training Subcommittee with a broader scope than its previous iteration. Many members who had been involved in the past returned and the SC invited several more members to join the expanded subcommittee.

The bulk of workplace organizing trainings and other workshops have been housed under EWOC and the PRO Act campaign, as well as within respective industry networks such as ROP. The DSLC is currently working with volunteers from across the country to develop a more general workplace organizing 101 curriculum, based on the success of local efforts in Baltimore, San Francisco, and other chapters with similar established programs.

This past year, the DSLC hosted a multi-part series called "Socialists on the Job." Featuring a range of experiences and industries, these cross-generation conversations featured panels of older workers who "industrialized" in the 1960s and 70s after college. Members were able to ask these comrades questions about their work on the job and in their unions, and many of these now-retired members have since gotten more active in DSA as mentors to young workers just now becoming active in the labor movement.

The DSLC also launched a DSA Labor Book Club, starting with Toni Gilpin's *The Long Deep Grudge*, a history of the militant Farm Equipment Workers (FE) and hosted a related panel on UE's new *Them and Us Unionism* with Toni alongside UE and ILWU activists to discuss the shared history and perspectives on these left-wing unions. The subcommittee also finished a pamphlet about the Rank-and-File Strategy as a follow-up to *Why Socialists Should Become Teachers*. Printing is still in the works and the pamphlet should be available to chapters soon.

## Membership Meetings

The DSLC is continuing with quarterly membership meetings to keep members informed of SC decisions, ongoing projects, ways to get involved, and to provide a space for members to connect with one another. Meetings usually have time for political discussion and a featured speaker on the most recent pressing issues (such as Bessemer or the PRO Act.)

We initially hoped to hold in-person, regional labor meet-ups but any chance of that was cancelled with the pandemic. Likewise, the previous SC hosted a DSA meet-up at Labor Notes 2018 that we were unable to hold again in 2020. The next conference is scheduled for March 25-27, 2022 in Chicago.

## Communications

The DSLC is making ongoing efforts to build a bench of volunteers to assist with social and more conventional media both, with the hopes of establishing a blog about labor news and shopfloor experiences from DSA worker-organizers. The website has been entirely overhauled with the help of our tech and design volunteers.

## Campaigns & Projects

The overwhelming majority of DSA's labor work happens at the local level. The DSLC works to promote and support these efforts as well as provide mentorship for members and chapters who request it. The following are some of the national and long term priorities of the DSLC:

- **#DSA4USPS:** Our USPS committee has been holding monthly webinars about issues related to the postal service: postal banking, the importance of Black postal workers, greening the postal service and more. The recordings of those webinars can be found [here](#). The next webinar is about Louis DeJoy and the campaign to remove him as the Postmaster General. Relatedly, #DSA4USPS is involved in the Dump DeJoy campaign, and was part of a successful action in New Orleans – the “cookout to get the Crook out” – outside a member of the Board of Governor’s home. This member, Lee Moak, initiated a meeting with us, which we had with a group of retired and current postal workers. #DSA4USPS is working on having a second meeting with him and also on building relationships with other members of the Board of Governors. The committee includes postal workers and other activists concerned with the future of the Postal Service, and is particularly interested in recruiting more current and retired postal workers.
- The **Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC)** was founded in March 2020 in response to an outcry for help in the workplace under the COVID crisis. A joint effort by DSA and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE), the project uses (and partly grew out of) the distributed organizing model as practiced by the Sanders campaign with a mass volunteer base to provide organizing support and training to non-union workers organizing in their workplaces. Since its establishment, EWOC has supported hundreds of workers to organize and win increased safety protocols at work and trained a new layer of worker-organizers in DSA. A more detailed report by EWOC can be found [here](#).
- **PRO Act:** The largest and most significant effort of the DSLC in 2021 has been the PRO Act campaign. Coordinated in partnership with the Green New Deal Campaign Committee (GNDCC), this joint effort came from a shared goal to unite the labor and climate movements, based on the premise that it will take a strong and well-organized working class to win a Green New Deal. We agreed that uniting around the PRO Act would 1. Reform existing labor law to be more favorable toward workings trying to organize and join unions and thus build labor’s power, including capacity to fight for GND and other progressive reforms, and 2. Win or lose, such a campaign would serve as an organizing opportunity to bring labor and climate groups into coalition with one another. A recommendation to the NPC helped make the PRO Act “the organization’s highest external priority” from February through May Day and the campaign officially launched on March 7 under the slogan “Workers and the World, Unite!” A steering committee was formed with equal representation from the DSLC and GNDCC and a campaign Slack

channel established for volunteers and organizers. In our first week of action, the campaign made over 500,000 calls to constituents of the five senators who did not yet support the bill in Arizona, Maine, Virginia, and West Virginia. The campaign has flipped two of these holdouts and established several state-wide DSA efforts across the country targeting the rest, including expanding our focus toward at least one Republican senator from Alaska. DSA is now part of a coalition led by IUPAT with CWA, Sunrise, and WFP, with Sydney Ghazarian (GNDCC) representing DSA. Our work around the PRO Act has significantly raised the profile of DSA, with extensive media coverage and recognition even from the AFL-CIO. More than 100 chapters have committed to PRO Act efforts, with 85 holding an action on May Day. Over 4000 total volunteers made more than a million calls with 30,000 conversations with target constituents. More than 100 workers were referred to EWOC and the DSLC is currently discussing how to move non-union PRO Act activists toward continued labor work, such as getting a union job or organizing a new one. The campaign has recently shifted toward a focus on the infrastructure bill, which includes the PRO Act. A more detailed report from the GNDCC can be found [here](#).

- **Industry Networks:** These internal groupings are beginning to emerge as the core institutions of the DSLC. We currently have three established networks – Democratic Socialist Teachers & School Staff Network, Health Workers Collective, Restaurant Organizing Project – with three more currently in development: Building Trades, Gig Workers, and Entertainment. HWC came out of Doctors for Bernie and the work heavily overlaps the national M4A campaign as well. The #DSA4USPS campaign also exists as a semi-industry network. Our goal is to establish these networks throughout all major industries including both organized and unorganized workers in order to carry out reform, legislative, new organizing, strike support, and other endeavors, as well as provide mentorship and support to DSA members new to organizing or their industry.
  - **Restaurant Organizing Project:** Restaurant workers in DSA launched the Restaurant Organizing Project (ROP) in spring 2020. Activists recognized the crisis facing this notoriously difficult to unionize industry and the opportunity that was opening up for new organizing. The national group focuses on a chapter model, building locally based networks of service industry workers that can strategize collectively and do emergency solidarity support for workplace organizing. In addition to encouraging city-based organizing, ROP holds national bi-weekly calls for restaurant workers from around the country to come together for discussions, trainings, and educational events. With hundreds of food service workers attending national meetings, ROP has contacts in more than a dozen cities; has created pamphlets and a national monthly newsletter ([dishrag.org](https://dishrag.org)); and receives regular mainstream news coverage. DSA restaurant workers led the largest single day of action by unemployed people in the United States during the pandemic on September 1, 2020 with demonstrations in dozens of cities in collaboration with UNITE HERE, IATSE, and CPD's Unemployed Action project.

ROP efforts have led to durable partnerships with union locals in several cities and sustained organizing efforts in food and related industries.

- **YDSA:** In the last ten months, YDSA has begun building a rank-and-file pipeline to help facilitate YDSAers getting jobs in strategic industries after graduation, as well as providing political education and training related to labor. These efforts include mass calls about how student socialists relate to the labor movement; what life is like as a rank-and-file union organizer; and undergraduate labor organizing; as well as jobs fairs where students were able to talk to socialist healthcare workers, educators, and logistics workers about their jobs. YDSA has held two semesters of Rank-and-File School where YDSAers came together to learn about the rank-and-file strategy; strategic industries; workplace organizing; labor and politics; and more with speakers including workers, labor journalists, scholars, and DSA leadership. YDSA has mapped its membership and identified dozens of young socialists committed to pursuing rank-and-file strategy after graduation with many more interested, but not yet committed. YDSA is now also organizing with Amazonians United to direct interested YDSAers toward “rooting” (ie. *salting*) and careers in logistics, laying the groundwork to build a mentorship program for these young socialists as well as a speakers bureau.
- **Other ongoing efforts:** In addition, the DSLC has supported important reform efforts in the labor movement, such as hosting calls to support CIR SEIU activists and connecting UAW members through Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD). DSA educators worked with reform caucuses in CTU and UTLA as part of a “Demand Safe Schools” campaign to ensure a safe return for students, teachers, and school staff, that also took up defund and BLM demands for police-free schools.

## Next Steps

Following convention, the DSLC Steering Committee is planning a series of meetings to continue discussions on our internal structures, increasing member participation and leadership development, how to expand our efforts to further map our membership, and moving more DSA members toward workplace organizing as part of our overall political framework and strategy.

In solidarity,  
DSLCL Steering Committee