

## **National Electoral Committee Report to the 2021 DSA National Convention**

### **Introduction**

Since its establishment in April 2017, the National Electoral Committee (NEC) has served as the focal point for DSA's electoral efforts. At the 2017 convention, DSA voted to expand its electoral capacity and have the NEC develop and expand the ability of local chapters to run candidates for office. Starting from electing 6 nationally endorsed candidates in 2017, DSA has grown its power to winning 29 nationally and 58 locally endorsed campaigns in 2020.

At the 2019 convention, DSA continued its commitment to its electoral strategy which was expanded by the Class Struggle Elections resolution. Following its democratic mandate, the NEC has focused on researching endorsements and making recommendations to NEC, providing trainings to members and chapters around the country, providing support to endorsed and elected candidates, and meeting with dozens of chapter electoral working groups.

In close communication with the National Political Committee (the NPC), the NEC published a new National Electoral Strategy laying out the best practices learned in DSA's recent experience as well as planning to keep building working class power. The new electoral strategy shifts our focus towards doing more candidate recruitment, prioritizing Black socialist candidates, and contesting state legislature elections.

The NEC regularly talked to chapters around their country about their successes and struggles. From NYC DSA's DSA for the Many campaign to Portland, Oregon's Universal Preschool ballot initiative, chapters around the country have won gains for the working class up and down the ballot. Tens of thousand of members have been brought into DSA through our electoral work. More and more, we see campaigns that are run by or through DSA chapters elect candidates who serve as organizers in office, rather than just picking the least bad candidate once every few years.

The 25 current members of the NEC were appointed by the NPC in early 2020. Supported by DSA's staff, including electoral organizer Eric W. and compliance manager Brandon H., we are incredibly proud of the work we have done over the past two years and are excited to see DSA's electoral efforts continue to build a new tomorrow from the ashes of the old..

# National Electoral Strategy

Below is a summary of DSA's National Electoral Strategy. Read the full strategy document [here](#).

## **Why Socialists Do Elections**

DSA engages in electoral organizing because elections are one of the primary avenues through which working people experience politics. Electoral campaigns provide a critical opportunity to articulate democratic socialist politics to millions of people, draw the lines of class struggle, build support for transformative reforms, and win material demands. Moreover, DSA uses electoral campaigns to build a durable political organization and grow the collective strength needed for our membership and elected officials to effectively wield political power.

## **The Organization DSA Is Building**

Winning the power necessary to reshape society into a more just and democratic vision will require the mass participation of working-class people acting in their own interests. While our ultimate goal is to build a democratic member-led working-class political party, in the meantime, we will build our chapters so that they can master all of the functions and responsibilities of a party independent of the influence of the Democratic Party establishment and capitalist class. The capacities we seek to develop include recruiting and running candidates on a unified political platform; training campaign organizers and legislative staffers; providing access to financial resources; crafting working-class policy to be introduced in government; and organizing members and voters to support not just candidates, but also fight for reforms around immediate material demands. We recognize that at this moment, we do not yet have the size, social base, or a militant labor movement that a major working class political party in the US would require. DSA's membership is disproportionately young, college educated, and located in major cities. While increasingly diverse, our membership is still whiter than the working class as a whole, and as an organization we do not have significant bases in Black, Latino, or immigrant communities. DSA's task is to create a working-class coalition where unions, churches, and other social institutions unite in a socialist politics and eventually into a mass organization that can speak for the whole working class.

## **The Role of DSA, Chapters, and the NEC**

Each part of DSA, including the national organization, local chapters, and the NEC, has a role in our electoral organizing. Local chapters know best the conditions on the ground in their communities and focus on recruiting and endorsing candidates and running an effective, volunteer-driven field program, with the goal of building capacity that extends beyond the election cycle. The NEC evaluates candidates for national endorsements and provides strategic

guidance and training to locals. Together with the NEC, the national organization will build a national fundraising program and engage with national media around current campaigns and recent victories. Money is the biggest obstacle to working-class people running for office, and a fundraising program has the potential to raise millions of dollars to support working-class socialists running for office. The NEC will coordinate the DSA In Office Network, which connects DSA electeds from across the country to build relationships, and maintain a library of legislation fought for by DSA members in office and chapters.

## **Our Campaigns**

DSA selects races and uses the platform of public office in the service of a transformative democratic socialist movement, not as an end in itself. Our campaigns fight not just for specific reforms, but advance class struggle, polarizing people against the capitalist interests that actively work to disempower them. Our candidates are socialist organizers with a relationship to a working-class base, not just individuals who run on “good ideas”. They could be DSA core organizers or other working-class organizers with an existing base of support. Chapters should also identify clear opportunities to win power, grow DSA, and organize the working class, not just make a statement or raise awareness around an issue. This means examining their or their coalition’s capacity with respect to the geographic extent, the number of votes, and the material resources required to win. This also means identifying races with a strategic opponent. Bad incumbents often make good targets: not only do they present barriers for progress in the state legislature, they are also easier to draw contrasts with than progressives who do not go far enough.

The potential to win material victories through our electoral organizing is an opportunity to bring labor unions and community organizations into political alignment with DSA. We are not the sole representatives of the working class, and we cannot build a democratic socialist majority alone. We must demonstrate that class struggle can deliver real returns for working people. Every community is different, but a key role for socialists everywhere is to seek out organizations where working people are already independently self-organizing and create the political conditions that will allow those organizations to align with the socialist movement.

## **Strategic Recommendations for 2021-2022**

The mass protests in the wake of the public execution of George Floyd were the largest in American history – representing a mass, multi-racial, black led movement against white supremacy that has the potential to transform US politics. The NEC recommends that where possible DSA chapters work with Black Lives Matter organizers to advance racial justice demands through elections, and that DSA chapters make efforts to recruit and support Black socialist candidates.

In 2021, chapters should engage in districted legislative races and ballot initiatives at the municipal and state level if scheduled. While local races are an opportunity to build the organizing infrastructure and political base needed to tackle larger races up ballot, municipal governments have limited power to enact transformative reforms, as they can be overruled by state governments. If there are no compelling races, chapters should focus on researching and strategizing for races in 2022, including candidate recruitment where possible.

In 2022, chapters should focus on state legislative races, which have been some of DSA's biggest successes to date. State legislatures wield an enormous amount of power in the US and are fertile grounds for advancing transformative reforms including healthcare for all, raising the minimum wage, and rent control. In blue states, unseating reactionary Democratic incumbents can drastically alter the dynamics of a legislature, while in more red states, democratic socialists in office can help popularize key demands and provide a positive alternative to conservative politics that would materially benefit working people. Chapters should approach federal races with caution, only engaging if a strong on-the-ground coalition or base exists before the election. In the absence of such a coalition, chapters should work to build one through state legislative electoral campaigns and issue-based organizing with an eye toward 2024.

## Results

In 2020 and so far into 2021, we have nationally endorsed 69 candidates and won 32 of those elections. At the federal level, members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib defended themselves against well-funded challengers and Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush were exciting wins and have gone on to contribute to DSA campaigns. DSA backed federal candidates Heidi Sloan, Rebecca Parson, Anthony Clark, Samelys Lopez and McKayla Wilkes lost.

At the state level DSA had more success, with a slate of socialists in New York City going 5 for 5 in 2020. In addition David Morales in Rhode Island, 3 socialists in Philadelphia, Danny Tenenbaum in Montana and Jen McEwen in Minnesota won state house or senate races. Many more candidates were competitive and came close to winning.

Even more wins were seen at the city level, highlighted by India Walton winning a Democratic Primary for Buffalo mayor as an open socialist. Dean Preston, Jovanka Beckles, Konstantine Anthony, Nithya Raman, Janeese Lewis George, Greg Casar, Tiffany Cabán and Alexa Avilés won city elections, and many more candidates were competitive.

There were a number of hugely successful ballot initiatives. Florida won \$15 minimum wage, Boulder won Eviction Without Representation, Metro DC defeated a cap on tax revenue, and Portland, OR won Universal Preschool. Portland, ME went 4 for 5 on a slate of ballot measures, winning a \$15 minimum wage, tenant protections, a local Green New Deal and a ban on facial recognition technology by law enforcement. This slate of ballot initiatives was tremendous for

defining a socialist politics to working class people in Portland, and is something we encourage all chapters to explore.

The general trends were that DSA had more success down ballot, especially when running our own candidates and not as part of a larger coalition. While many types of DSA candidates won in many types of districts, candidates of color running at the state or local level in working class districts were especially successful. We encourage more chapters to identify races that fit this description, as well as looking into ballot initiatives.

As we go forward, the NEC has co-authored and unanimously endorsed the Convention Resolution, "Towards a Mass Party." This resolution calls for a continued investment in electoral work, with an encouragement for chapters to run home grown candidates in down-ballot races. The resolution calls for national to take a greater role in developing chapters in taking these steps, and for national to do more to fundraise for our endorsed candidates. In 2021 as of July 21, our national Actblue page has raised over \$50,000 for our nationally endorsed candidates, and helped them compete against well-funded capitalist opponents. We hope to raise even more in 2022 to support chapters in winning elections.

Electoral work has proven to organize the working class, raise expectations, win power, and grow our movement. While it is one piece of a larger socialist strategy, it is a crucial piece, and we hope DSA will invest in growing our electoral capacity.