

DENVER DSA NEW MEMBER HANDBOOK



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WELCOME!

WELCOME
FOR ALL
PEOPLE
NOW!

PEACE
FOR ALL

WHAT IS DENVER DSA?

Denver DSA is a local chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, the largest socialist organization in the United States. We seek to build a mass movement and transfer power from the ruling elite to the working class, thereby gaining freedom and democratic control over all aspects of our society. We are a democratically run, volunteer organization that is led entirely by members like you. While we do endorse candidates for office, we are not a formal political party. As of April 2020, we are over 1,000 members strong and growing.

As socialists, we work together to develop **concrete strategies for achieving a world free of exploitation and oppression**--in other words, we aim to facilitate a transition to democratic socialism in America.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

We believe that our government and our workplaces should be run democratically by workers like us to meet the needs of our community, not to enrich billionaires, millionaires, and those who do their bidding. We oppose all forms of oppression and believe everyone has a right to healthcare, housing, a living wage, and more. We know the rich and powerful manipulate politicians, the law, and the economy to their benefit, and that only an organized movement of millions of working class people can create a society that works for all of us. You can find our full political platform [here](#).

WHAT DO WE DO?

We believe that fundamental change comes only when people rise up together to demand it. We use a variety of strategies and tactics to build political power, win reforms, and improve the lives of working people right here in Denver. Our work includes but is not limited to labor and tenant organizing, electoral and legislative campaigns, public education events, and direct action. Join Denver DSA in making your community stronger, kinder, and more equitable for today and tomorrow. We cannot do it without your help.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

If we're going to build a movement that can take on the billionaire class and create a society that works for all of us, we need as many people as possible to get involved. Here are some easy ways to get started today:

1 **ATTEND A NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION**

Our chapter hosts new member orientations every single week, and we'd love to see you at one--you can find a list of all our new member orientations [here](#), as well as a list of all of our events [here](#).

2 **JOIN A COMMITTEE OR WORKING GROUP**

Most work done in Denver DSA is organized through our committees. To join a committee, simply reach out via email or slack and let the committee chair know you'd like to get involved--or just show up to that committee's next meeting. You can find a list of all of our committees and their email addresses [here](#), with meeting times listed [here](#).

3 **VOLUNTEER WITH A CHAPTER WIDE (OR NATIONWIDE) CAMPAIGN**

Both our local chapter and the national DSA sometimes organize bigger campaigns that everyone in the chapter gets involved in. For example, the national DSA is currently organizing a [campaign to pass the PRO Act](#), an important piece of pro-union legislation in congress.

4 **ASK YOUR FRIENDS TO JOIN DSA**



DSA is 100% member led, funded, and organized. Ask your friends to go to dsausa.org/join and become a member, and/or invite them to an event.

WHAT IF I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

You can post any question in the Denver DSA Slack New Member Channel, and someone will answer it. You can also shoot an email to membership.chair@denverdsa.org.

SO YOU'VE JOINED DSA... NOW WHAT?

Whether you have one hour or 20 hours to give, whether you've worked on organizing campaigns or are totally new--regardless of your level of experience: there's a space for you in the chapter. Here are a few great ways to get started:

- 1 ATTEND A PHONEBANK**

Our chapter hosts phone banks all the time to effect change and build power--these events are used to pressure elected officials to take action; urge Denver residents to get involved in campaigns; check in with our membership; and more.
- 2 STAPLING PAMPHLETS**

Some of the most essential work needed is the least glamorous--but it is absolutely necessary and an easy way to contribute.
- 3 SHOW UP TO A CANVASS**

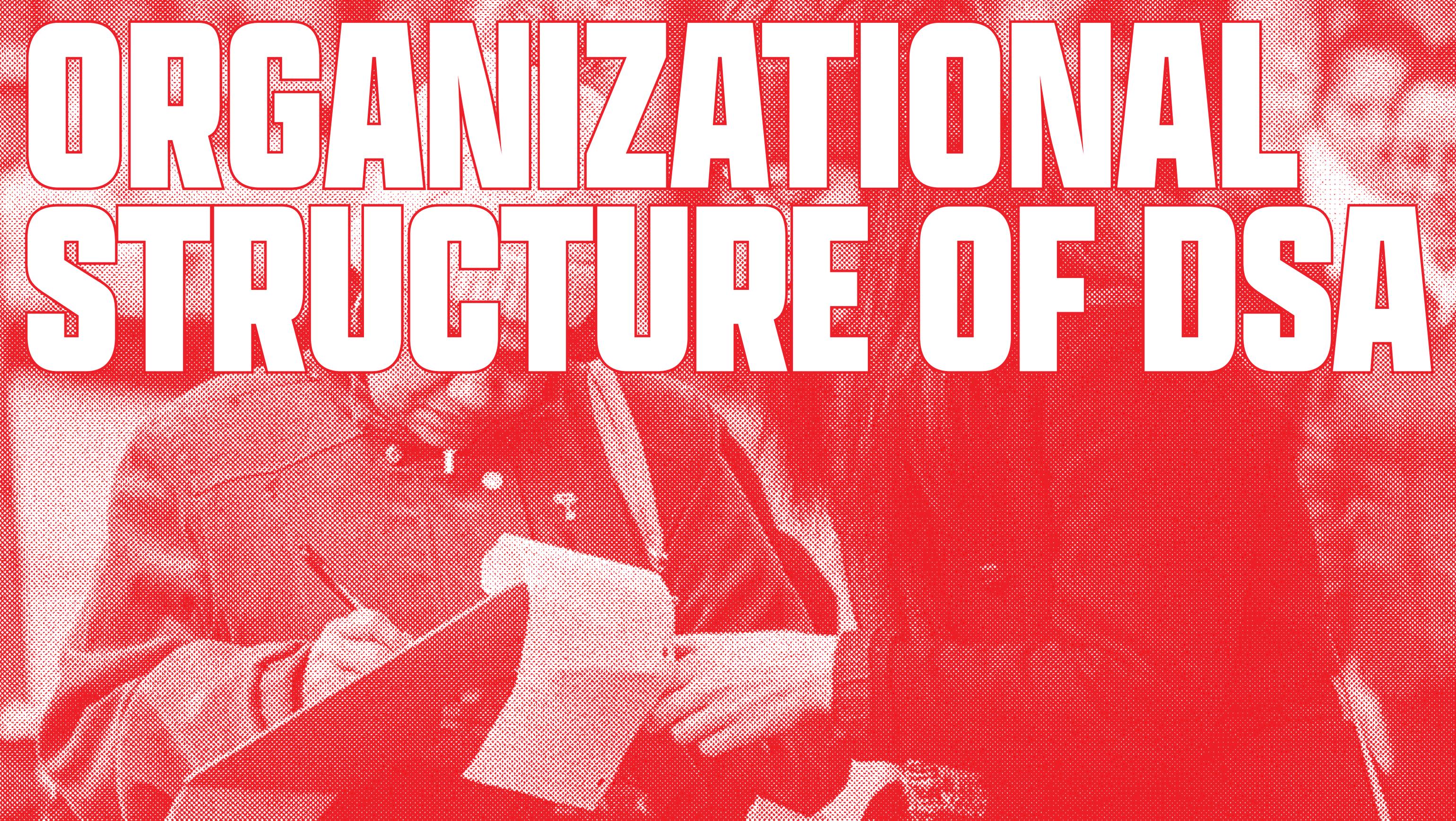
Denver DSA organizes canvassing to drive voter turnout, talk to people about issues, and foster more connectivity among the working class.
- 4 COME TO BOOKS AND BRUNCH**

One of the perks: Socialism includes socializing.
- 5 ATTEND A GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING**

See how things get done in the chapter and participate, if you'd like. The more members that attend our meetings, the more transparent and accountable our chapter is.
- 6 VOLUNTEER TO TAKE NOTES AT A MEETING**

Someone always takes the minutes at our meetings, keeping a record of what transpires, who volunteers for what, etc.--another easy way to contribute.
- 7 HELP WITH TURNOUT**

An indispensable and relatively painless way to participate is to make calls and send out texts to Denver DSA members to drive turnout for meetings, actions, canvassing, and more.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF DSA

HOW IS DSA STRUCTURED?

DSA is a national organization made up of local chapters. Below, we explain the structure of both our local chapter, and how all of the local DSA chapters come together to form the national organization.

DENVER DSA

For an extremely detailed overview of our chapter's structure, you can read our bylaws [here](#).

THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

Every single dues-paying member of Denver DSA makes up our general membership. As a democratic organization, our general membership's vote is the highest authority in Denver DSA. We meet once a month for general meetings, as well as once annually for our chapter convention.

WORKING GROUP

A working group consists of chapter members who come together to work on a short-term project, often in response to current events or a timely chapter need. Working groups have no formal leadership.

COMMITTEES

A committee is a working group that has sought formal recognition from the chapter to extend its work beyond a short-term basis and form a permanent committee within Denver DSA to focus on a particular area of interest. Each committee is led by a committee chair, who is nominated by the committee members and voted upon by the chapter as a whole. In addition to leading their committees, committee chairs also serve on the Organizing Council.

ORGANIZING COUNCIL (OC)

The Organizing Council is made up of the chairs of each of the committees. They meet quarterly to discuss the organizing work of each committee, chapter priorities, and chapter campaigns. The Organizing Council is concerned with the active organizing labor of the chapter.

STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)

The Steering Committee is the elected leadership of Denver DSA, which works to oversee the chapter's day-to-day operations and support the work of our members. It consists of: Two Chapter Co-chairs / Chapter Secretary / Chapter Treasurer / Chapter Coordination Chair / Chapter Communications Chair / Chapter Membership Chair / Chapter Fundraising Chair

HARASSMENT AND GRIEVANCE OFFICERS

Harassment and grievance officers help make sure the chapter is meeting national guidelines to ensure that everyone is able to organize without fear of harassment, abuse, or harm. They are not members of the Steering Committee, and they don't hold any other elected position in the chapter. In their position, they process all complaints or grievances filed by members of the local chapter and help resolve and mediate conflicts.

NATIONAL DSA

THE NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL (NPC)

Every two years, local chapters elect delegates to send to our national convention. Those delegates debate and vote on proposals, and elect a 16-person body known as the National Political Council (NPC). Once elected, the NPC serves as the organization's national leadership for two years, working to support local chapters and to enact the proposals that are approved at the national convention.

COMMITTEES + WORKING GROUPS

Much like our local DSA chapter, National DSA also has working groups and committees, which are made up of interested members from around the country, and help to coordinate work between chapters focused around specific issues at the national level.

STAFF

DSA also boasts a small but dedicated staff, but to stay true to our democratic principles, the staff do not make any political or strategic decisions on behalf of the organization. Rather, they work at the direction of the NPC to help build and execute campaigns and carry out the will of the membership.



**WHERE IS
EVERYTHING?**

WHERE IS EVERYTHING?

WEBSITE

<https://www.denverdsa.org>

RESOURCES

<https://denverdsa.org/resources>

SLACK

The Denver DSA Slack channel is where most communication occurs between members, working groups, and committees. Members can subscribe to the threads that pertain to the areas in which they want to work and keep tabs on campaigns and actions that interest them. To gain access to the DDSA Slack workspace, one must register with DSA national as a dues-paying member (<https://act.dsausa.org/donate/membership2020/>). When you register as a member, you'll get an email from Maria Svart. Forward this email to the DDSA email (info@denverdsa.org) and ask to join our Slack. You'll then get an email with an invitation to join.

EVENTS CALENDAR

Located on the front page of the Denver DSA website, the Events Calendar is a quick and easy way to keep tabs on and gain access to the chapter's actions, campaigns, and events. <https://www.denverdsa.org/events>

THE GOOGLE DRIVE

Denver DSA uses Google Drive to facilitate the drafting and editing of various documents, from action plans to legislative proposals to various communiqués. We rely on the communal nature of this medium to provide transparency, accountability, and inclusion.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

In this section, you'll find definitions and examples of words that you might hear while talking to fellow socialists, DSA or otherwise.

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BYLAWS

The body of rules that DSA operates under.

MEANS OF PRODUCTION

The physical facilities and resources used to create and transport goods and services. This is how we produce food, clothes, homes, medicine, refined ore, everything—if you can think of it, it was made by the means of production. Who owns the means of production, and how they use them, characterizes economic systems.

CLASS

The social position one occupies in relation to labor and the means of production. A class is made up of people who share common economic interests, are conscious of those interests, and engage in collective action that advances those interests. Note that wealth does not determine your class but is a feature of class.

THE STATE

A political entity with sovereignty over the use of force in a given geographic area. The state uses this sovereign power to enforce the current economic and political relations and mediate problems among members of the ruling class (if this last part doesn't make sense, think about the federal government drafting laws that are done on behalf of businesses, not your average working citizen).

CAPITALISM

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled and privatized by the capitalist class for profit, rather than by the state. The profit-motive, or search for ever more profits, lends itself to an upward trend in economic growth and the expansion of markets into new areas—both geographically and in aspects of our lives. There are only two (legal) classes in this economic mode—the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, although slavery has existed in it (and, in prisons and illicit cases, it still does).

BOURGEOISIE

The ruling class of capitalism. Also known as the capitalist class, this class privatizes property, such as the means of production, and through this exploits the proletariat in order to create profits. They control what gets produced, how much of it is produced, when it is produced, and how it gets distributed. The bourgeoisie is the small business owner that owns the coffee shop on your block and they're also big business owners, like Musk, Bezos, and Gates. Businesses exploit workers by not paying them the full wealth of their labor via depressed wages, denying benefits, and wage theft. Landlords are also members of the bourgeoisie, earning their profits by renting living spaces to the proletariat.

PROLETARIAT

The exploited class of capitalism, aka the working class. The proletariat, by and large, makes the majority of its living through selling its labor to the bourgeoisie for wages. As the working class, we do not control the means of production, however we work them and create wealth through their use—workers make the world run. The proletariat makes up the vast majority of the world's population, so it's highly likely that, if you're reading this, you are part of the proletariat (and no, owning a few stocks does not make you a member of the bourgeoisie). The proletariat, because of their exploited status and general exclusion from the means of production, are in an antagonistic relationship with the bourgeoisie, with this antagonism is often referred to as "class struggle" or "class warfare."

ALIENATION

One of the "innovations" of capitalism is how quickly it can produce things on a large scale by atomizing each step of production into discrete roles. There are huge downsides to this, however, especially when you factor in profits and long work weeks. One of those downsides is alienation, a series of disconnections. You're disconnected from your creative and social needs because you're too tired to engage in them after a long day of working, or because you put your career above all else. You're disconnected from workers outside your own workplace when you act as if how much they make will suppress your own wages—this is an especially prominent attitude toward "burger flippers" and immigrants. You're disconnected from the product of your work, because you get neither the full value produced by this, nor do you have free access to what is produced—we often find it absurd that restaurant workers don't get free meals from where they work, for example. You're also disconnected from control of the means of production—they run on someone else's schedule at all times. If we ran them, a green economy and single payer healthcare would most likely exist by now. All of this has a psychological impact where we can feel like life is empty and lacking significance.

IMPERIALISM

Capitalism's profit motive typically leads to expansion of markets into new areas, literal and figurative, in order to make even more profits. Imperialism is a policy or ideology of extending influence over other people and countries to further political and economic access and enhance power and control. This is achieved through employing hard power, especially military force, but also soft power, as corporations often weaponize capital in other countries in order to control their economies. While related to the concepts of colonialism and empire, imperialism is a distinct concept that can apply to other forms of expansion and many forms of government. Imperialist powers get away with this by hiding this super exploitation from those of us back home, keeping progressive labor laws in place domestically while getting filthy rich off super exploitation abroad, and when the propaganda back home, like in the USA, tells everyone that we "intervene" in order to "bring democracy to countries run by dictators."

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LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a very broad political philosophy that arose in the 1600s and 1700s in response to the shortcomings of feudalism, becoming the dominant ideology in the 1800s and 1900s. As it predominantly arose through the emergence of the bourgeoisie as an economic force in feudal Europe, much of the philosophy was developed by bourgeois intellectuals and those connected to them as an ideology meant to legitimize the establishment of what would become capitalism. Liberalism often espouses the necessity of political and civil liberties, freedom of property, and republicanism as a means of determining and maintaining the legitimacy of the institutions that uphold it, such as the state.

SOCIALISM

Socialism is an umbrella term for an economic mode characterized by democratic control over the means of production. In short, it is an end to the exploitation of labor. Socialists, unlike Liberals, believe that true liberation can only be achieved through this paradigm shift in economic relationships. The proletariat, the exploited class, are the only class that can bring about this change, because we are the only class who has an interest in this—the bourgeoisie are fundamentally opposed to this, since classes would no longer exist.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Democratic Socialism seeks democratization of production as an end goal like every other socialist tendency. However, its proposed means of achieving this are through popular demand and an electoral effort with the power of labor behind it. Regardless of your tendency, bringing about socialism requires large-scale and organized, direct action, mutual aid, and solidarity, and completely freeing the means of production from the private hands of the bourgeoisie.

ORGANIZING

Organizing, in the case of socialism, is the act of bringing together a wide array and large number of people to work for a common political goal. It places the decision making power of a movement in the hands of the ordinary people in it. Democratic decision making builds agency and trust amongst members. It also forces people into contact with one another, allowing them to see their experiences reflected in the stories of their peers. This leads to a shared sense of identity and purpose—in a word, solidarity, which ultimately empowers ordinary people to take risks they would never consider taking on their own.

ADVOCACY

A model of political change that relies on a small group of paid professionals (lawyers, pollsters, non-profit staff) to “advocate” on behalf of oppressed or downtrodden peoples. These “advocates” work behind the scenes with elites to convince the elites to make small, incremental reforms. This model of change is often described as “realistic,” because it does not meaningfully challenge elite power, nor the idea that elites should hold power over ordinary people, and therefore does not upset elites and provoke (as much) resistance from them. Advocacy practitioners see politics as a game of making the system of exploitation more humane and bearable, but never as a struggle to end the system altogether.

MOBILIZING

A model of change that attempts to bring a large number of people into the fight for justice, mobilizing still relies on a core group of activists to guide and steer the work, and often only turns out the same small group of committed, self-identified activists—and thus ultimately still relies on the good will of elites. Often organizations, staffed by a small number of paid professionals, build up a big email list of people who they know care about an issue—say, climate change or gun control—and when, for example, a particularly bad bill comes through congress, they send a mass message asking people to make calls to their legislators or show up at protests.

COMRADE/COMRADELY

A comrade is someone you have solidarity with and organize with. If you're a member of DSA, then you're our comrade. If you're a member of an organization we work alongside, you're probably our comrade, too. Being comradely means recognizing that we all have skin in the game and are here to win together, not fall apart through infighting. Don't be a jerk to people you organize with if you want this to actually work! We have to work together in solidarity, locally, nationally, and internationally, without throwing fellow revolutionaries under the bus over personal disagreements. Being a comrade also means recognizing that necessary—even extremely difficult—conflict is bound to occur in our organizations, but that we can constructively overcome these situations for the sake of all our comrades and make our organizations truly fight for all workers.

DIRECT ACTION

Direct action is the act of a group of people using their own power to directly demand legal or economic changes and create the pressure necessary to achieve these demands. This is different from appealing to authorities, like politicians or bosses, to change things on behalf of those making demands. Direct action isn't politely asking for things to get better; it's a demand with political force behind it. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, BLM protests, NoDAPL sit-in protests, and labor strikes are examples of direct action.

SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is people with common social and economic interests providing support for each other either during 1) times when one group is fighting against its own oppression or 2) when both are fighting against a shared oppression. Solidarity is necessary for any movement aiming for social and economic changes, because this power in numbers and shared resources provides the means for these groups to be successful in their struggle. You're there for them when they need you, and in turn, they're there for you when you need them. This includes, but is not limited to, direct action and mutual aid. Examples: the Rainbow Coalition, general strikes, boycotts.

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MUTUAL AID

Mutual aid is financial and material support (food, clothes, etc.) given to community members by fellow community members. It is an end in itself, but also a crucial means of building solidarity and sustaining a movement and community's health. It is usually made up of networks in our immediate communities where we can get and give help when we need it and when we are able. Mutual aid is solidarity, not charity; it empowers communities to meet their own needs.

UNION

A union is a collective organization of workers in a trade--or array of similar trades--with the goal of fighting against exploitation in the workplace. Unions fight for gains and rights such as (but not limited to): higher wages, shorter hours for the same pay, a schedule for future raises, better healthcare, more paid and sick leave, and safer/better working conditions. Unions get their power through the number of workers that are under their umbrella, union dues, and from direct actions--such as strikes, boycotts, and picketing--that they take against management at a workplace if management refuses to bargain with them.

BOOTLICKER

Do you defend cops and corporations from the legitimate criticisms levelled against them? Do you tell people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps? Do you think "I just wish the protestors would be peaceful and not interrupt my commute"? If you do these things, you just might be a bootlicker. It's a pejorative that says you suck up to the people who oppress us and you, and make excuses for them. The boot is the array of entities that oppress the masses, and, well... you can probably figure out the "licker" part. Don't lick the boot. Note: some people think "the boot" only refers to cops and the military. This is not true. It also refers to business owners and government officials/institutions.

USEFUL IDIOT

A member of an organization who, while around people that could want to harm their org, talks too freely about the inner workings, members, and goals of their org, or too readily believes people whose interests are in opposition to the org. This information or propagandizing can then be used to undermine the org. Do NOT be one of these people! Always exercise caution talking to people you don't know, even if they're in the same org as you, even if it's at an event being put on by your org! This also applies to talking to cops—under NO circumstances should you EVER talk to the cops about ANYTHING your org does, DSA or otherwise, no matter how innocuous the work you're doing is!



**WHO DO WE
WORK WITH?**

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

ABOLISH ICE

@abolishicedenver

BLM5280

blacklivesmatter5280.com
@blm5280

CO FREEDOM FUND

blackbailout.org

DENVER FREEDOM SKOOL

@denverfreedomskool

DHOL

denverhomelessoutloud.org
@denverhomelessoutloudofficial

NLG

nlg.org

RMMAN

rmman.org
@rmmututalaid

