

At DSA 2023 convention, delegates resolve to remain faction of Democratic Party

Eric London
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At the Democratic Socialists of America's August 4-6 convention in Chicago, delegates gathered in person to restate the organization's half-century commitment to promoting the imperialist Democratic Party.

By a vote of 704 to 184, the convention passed a resolution on its electoral work which declares: "It is not advisable for us to form an independent political party with its own ballot line at this moment."

On this basis, the delegates resolved "that DSA commits to making electoral politics a priority for the next two years," "that DSA will continue to pursue an approach of tactically contesting partisan elections on the Democratic ballot line," and that DSA will "allow for more volunteer involvement in national electoral work" to promote the Democratic Party in the 2024 national election.

The convention consistently rejected several amendments that would have held DSA elected officials to even the mildest political accountability, exposing that the DSA's claim to be "left" of the Democrats is merely for show.

Delegates rejected by a 60-40 percent margin a proposed amendment to the electoral resolution which would have added language "that it is DSA's expectation that socialists in elected office will vote and act in accordance with core principles of the socialist movement." Though this amendment also acknowledged that "a majority of DSA members do not believe it is possible at this time to form an independent political party with its own ballot line," delegates evidently still found it too extreme.

In rejecting the proposed amendment, the DSA has resolved to support Democratic Party politicians no matter how right-wing they are and has explicitly stated its hostility to socialism. The rejected amendment would have required the DSA hold its members "accountable" if they "vote for measures which expand or strengthen the police," "vote for any restrictions on the independent action of the working class, such as the right to strike," or "vote for military budgets, the imperial war machine, or military aid to US client states such as the apartheid state of Israel."

A further member-proposed resolution would have required the DSA political committee to "publicly communicate disapproval to endorsed candidates and elected DSA members"

who "explicitly or tacitly support centrist leaders of the Democratic Party," but this language was removed before the vote. The Socialist Majority Caucus, a group representing the most explicitly right-wing faction of the DSA, tweeted that its caucus is "excited" that the provision "that would force DSA to criticize socialist electeds who endorsing [sic] 'centrist' candidates" was eliminated.

The DSA leadership also blocked debate on several member-proposed resolutions that would have expressed hostility to US imperialism.

At the onset of the convention, DSA leadership put forward a proposed agenda that did not include debate on proposed resolutions calling for the DSA to oppose the US/NATO war against Russia and opposing DSA elected officials' support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine. While DSA leadership claimed there was no time for such discussion, the proposed agenda included ample time to debate a resolution making an image of a rose holding a "vote" sign the DSA's "official mascot."

This was so naked an attempt to suppress debate that it produced a certain level of dissatisfaction among the delegates. One DSA member wrote in a leaflet distributed to delegates that the leadership was "placing a handful of uncontroversial elements on the consent agenda" in order to ensure that "we will have precious few opportunities to debate the burning questions of our movement."

The leaflet continued, "If those who bemoaned the public spectacle of conflict that occurred in the [Jamaal] Bowman affair believe they can avoid it by suppressing important debate at the convention, they will find that suppressing the power of membership to shape our political strategy will only result in dozens more blowups of this kind."

When the membership voted by a narrow margin to reject the leadership's proposed agenda, the leadership updated the agenda, but not to include discussion on resolutions regarding the war in Ukraine or the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Instead, the leadership allowed for debate and discussion on a resolution calling for support for the rights of transgender people.

The resolution on Israel that members were not allowed to debate noted that "the founding merger that formed the DSA

was heavily predicated on ensuring that the new organization would uphold one of its predecessor's, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), position of supporting continuing American aid for Israel's Zionist colonial project."

The resolution cited "Harrington's warped, racist writings" and noted a "growing appetite from rank-and-file DSA members and chapters to hold elected officials accountable," specifically referencing DSA congressman Jamaal Bowman's 2021 vote to arm the Israeli military.

The resolution that was ultimately passed on the DSA's international work made no reference to the US/NATO war against Russia, which its entire congressional slate (save one) has voted to fund. The resolution lyingly claimed the DSA opposes "rising military spending," though the convention had just voted not to take action against its congressional members who voted for war against Russia. The resolution similarly states the DSA's opposition to "the rising dangers of nuclear conflict," which the DSA has helped advance, and its purported opposition to "military recruitment in schools," though Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez hosted a military recruiting event at a high school in the Bronx last year.

The convention also passed a resolution supporting the DSA's work promoting "reform" factions of the trade union bureaucracies. The resolution declares that "events in the UAW and IBT demonstrate the importance of a clear platform to promote union democracy," citing the "first democratic elections in the history of the United Auto Workers" as proof of the success of the DSA's "rank-and-file strategy."

These are attempts to whitewash the pro-corporate role of the bureaucracies. The UAW election of 2022-23 was not "democratic." It involved the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of members, who were never informed that an election was taking place. The election was only historic in the sense that 9 percent turnout is the lowest in a national union election in US history. During the UAW election, the DSA supported longtime bureaucrat Shawn Fain, although Fain publicly stated he is not a socialist, and did not support rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman's campaign. Lehman has sued the Labor Department demanding the election be re-run with actual notice to the entire membership.

The DSA's labor resolution states a "minimum set of democratic principles" which it claims are necessary "to guide DSA members when these issues arise." Among the principles are that "all members [are] to receive a copy of the CBA [Collective Bargaining Agreement], prior to any contract vote, a complete copy (not just 'highlights') of proposed changes to the CBA will be available to all members, with time to review."

The UAW, which the DSA upholds as an example of union democracy, has systematically violated this "minimum" principle, as evidence in the strike by 500 Clarios battery workers outside of Toledo, Ohio earlier this year. The UAW bureaucracy under Fain refused to give workers a copy of the

proposed collective bargaining agreement. It only provided lying highlights, and it did not give workers time to review or discuss the contract before voting. The "reform" faction leading the Teamsters is similarly attempting to ram through a sellout contract on 350,000 UPS workers whose contract expired July 31, also with the DSA's active support.

UAW Region 9A Regional Director Brandon Mancilla tweeted his support for the resolution on "union democracy," which of course did not condemn the fact that his Assistant Director, Vail Kohnert-Yount, was appointed to a \$175,000/year position after donating \$25,000 to Shawn Fain's campaign. Kohnert-Yount was also active on Twitter during the convention, promoting the DSA's labor resolution.

The DSA convention was held in person, despite the fact that over 400 DSA members signed on to a resolution that would require the DSA to hold the event remotely or in hybrid manner. COVID cases are increasing across the United States, and there are reports the DSA convention may have been a super-spreader event.

Many delegates were captured on video attending an indoor, crowded party in which none were wearing masks. As a result, one delegate tweeted Monday, "Hearing scattered reports of delegates that are feeling under the weather, especially those that went to a big party..." The same delegate had previously tweeted, "DSA could easily have offered hybrid, I know immunocompromised delegates that had to drop. COVID is on an uptick right now too."

The DSA leadership did not provide agenda space for the resolution on COVID safety, which would have also established contact-tracing measures to protect delegates and their loved ones returning from the convention. This, too, is in line with the DSA's support for the Democratic Party, which, like the Republicans, has abandoned any safety measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.

At its convention, the DSA continues to expose itself as a faction of the Democratic Party and supporter of imperialist war. Its purpose is to trap social opposition to capitalism and direct it into the two-party system where it can be suffocated. That is the role DSA has played since its founding and that is the role it will continue to play going forward.



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