

# **DSA CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS**

(as amended by the 2001 National Convention)

## **CONSTITUTION**

### **Article I. Name**

The name of this organization shall be the Democratic Socialists of America, a not-for-profit corporation.

### **Article II. Purpose**

We are socialists because we reject an economic order based on private profit, alienated labor, gross inequalities of wealth and power, discrimination based on race and sex, and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo. We are socialists because we share a vision of a humane social order based on popular control of resources and production, economic planning, equitable distribution, feminism, racial equality and non-oppressive relationships. We are socialists because we are developing a concrete strategy for achieving that vision, for building a majority movement that will make democratic socialism a reality in America. We believe that such a strategy must acknowledge the class structure of American society and that this class structure means that there is a basic conflict of interest between those sectors with enormous economic power and the vast majority of the population.

### **Article III Members**

Section 1. Membership shall be open to every person who subscribes to the principles of the organization.

Section 2. Every applicant for membership shall sign an application, the contents of which shall be prescribed by the Bylaws. Application for membership shall be made to the Local or National Organization. Members are in good standing provided that they pay annual dues as prescribed in the Bylaws.

Section 3. Applicants who have been accepted by the Local organization shall, upon receipt of dues and approval of same, automatically become members of the National Organization. Applicants who have been accepted by the National Organization shall, unless otherwise requested by the applicant, become members of the Local organization in the area in which they reside. Members of the National Organization who are not members of a Local organization shall be members-at-large.

Section 4. Members may be expelled by either the National or Local organization. For a member to be expelled nationally, a two-thirds vote of the National Political Committee shall be necessary. Criteria for expulsion are prescribed in the Bylaws. Decisions on expulsion by either the Local or National Organization may be appealed to the National Convention.

Section 5. There shall be yearly dues, the amount of which shall be determined by the NPC prior to the commencement of each annual dues cycle.

### **Article IV. Local, State, Regional Organizations and Sections**

Section 1. Local organizations, called Locals, may be chartered by the National Political Committee upon application of 15 or more members. The NPC may charter Locals of 10 or more in special circumstances as defined in the Bylaws.

Section 2. The NPC may not charter more than one Local in a given city/metropolitan area. Locals may form subgroups as they deem necessary or appropriate.

Section 3. Upon petition of two or more Locals, the NPC shall consider the application for State organizations. Such charters shall be granted if they meet the criteria set forth in the Bylaws and standing rules and if a majority of the Locals within the proposed boundaries approve the establishment of the State organization. Members-at-large residing within the state shall be members of the State organization unless they request otherwise.

Section 4. Upon petition of three or more Locals, the NPC shall consider the application for Regional organizations. Such charters shall be granted if they meet the criteria for such organizations set forth in the Bylaws and the standing rules and if a majority of all Locals within the proposed boundaries approve the establishment of the Regional organization.

Section 5. Regional, State and Local charters granted by the NPC may be revoked by a majority vote of the NPC or the National Convention. Criteria for the revocation of charters are prescribed in the Bylaws.

Section 6. The National Convention or the NPC shall charter a Youth Section open to every person 30 years of age and under who is a member of the National Organization.

## Article V. National Conventions

Section 1. The National Convention shall be the highest decision-making body of the organization. All decisions of other bodies may be appealed to the Convention according to guidelines defined in the Bylaws. The Convention shall accept a detailed financial report.

Section 2. National Conventions shall be held at least biennially. Special National Conventions may be called by a three-fourths vote of the National Political Committee or by petition endorsed by Locals representing two-thirds of the membership or by one-half of the membership.

Section 3. Representation shall be based upon dues-paying membership of the organization as of four months prior to the Convention. Apportionment of delegates shall reflect the one-member, one-vote principle, as shall be ordered by the NPC within the guidelines set forth in the Bylaws. However, all Locals shall be entitled to at least one delegate.

Section 4. Locals shall conduct their own elections for delegates and the NPC shall conduct elections for at-large delegates according to the guidelines set forth in the Bylaws. Only members fully paid up in dues at the time of the election shall be permitted to vote or to be candidates for election.

Section 5. No election for delegates to the National Convention shall be held more than four months, or less than forty-five days, prior to the opening of the National Convention. No election for delegates shall be conducted before the apportionment of delegates according to Section 3 of this Article. All Local elections of delegates shall be by secret ballot. Election of delegates may be by proportional representation within the conditions prescribed in the Bylaws.

Section 6. Locals shall be entitled to as many votes as the number of delegates they are apportioned. If a Local cannot send a full delegation, the delegates of the Local who are attending the Convention may, if authorized by the Local, vote the apportioned strength of the delegation. However, no delegate may cast more than three votes unless authorized to do so by the Convention. No voting at National Conventions shall be secret.

Section 7. Calls to the National Convention shall be issued by the NPC at least 100 days prior to the opening date of the Convention. Calls to Special Conventions shall be issued by the petition calling such Convention, providing that the date is set between 30 and 60 days from the issuing of the call.

## Article VI. Officers and Staff

Section 1. The officers of this organization shall be the directors, the honorary chairs, and the vice-chairs. There shall be one or two directors who shall be full time staff members as defined in Article IX of the DSA By-laws. There shall be five to ten honorary chairs half of whom shall be women and at least two of whom shall be members of racial or national minorities. The exact number of Honorary Chairs shall be set by the National Convention. There shall also be a number of National Vice-Chairs, half of whom shall be women and at least two of whom shall be members of racial or national minorities. The exact number of National Vice-Chairs shall be set by the National Convention. Half of the Vice-Chairs shall be women and half shall be men, and a minimum of two Vice-Chairs shall be racial or national minorities. There shall also be a Secretary-Treasurer. All of these officers shall perform the duties prescribed by this Constitution, the Bylaws and the standing rules.

Section 2. The Director(s) shall be hired by the NPC according to the procedures set out in the DSA Bylaws. The Honorary Chairs and Vice-Chairs shall be elected by the National Convention to serve for two-year terms or until their successors are elected, and their terms shall begin at the close of the National Convention at which they are elected. Should any of the above offices fall vacant due to death, resignation or removal under Article VI, Section 5 of this Constitution, the NPC may elect, by two-thirds vote of all members of that body voting in person or by proxy, a successor to fill the unexpired term. The Secretary-Treasurer shall be elected annually by a majority of the NPC and shall serve until a successor has been chosen. If at least one racial or national minorities person is not elected Honorary Chair at the Convention because of the failure of nomination, the NPC will elect at least one minority candidate as if a vacancy has occurred.

Section 3. Any member of the organization is eligible to hold any office.

Section 4. The duties of the officers shall include the following:

a) The Director(s) shall be members of the full-time staff and shall be the official spokesperson(s) of the organization.

b) The Honorary Chairs shall be the official spokespersons for the organization when so requested by the staff or the NPC and shall carry out other duties as specified in the Bylaws.

c) The National Vice-Chairs shall be spokespersons for the organization when so requested by the staff or the NPC and shall carry out other duties as specified in the Bylaws.

d) The Secretary-Treasurer shall present a detailed financial report at the first plenary session on the first full day of each Convention and perform such duties as outlined in the Bylaws and prescribed by the NPC.

Section 5. Any officer may be recalled for nonfeasance or malfeasance by a two-thirds vote of all members of the NPC voting in person or by proxy.

Section 6. A National Chair or two National Co-Chairs may be elected by the National Convention to serve for two-year terms or until a successor is elected. The term shall begin at the close of the National Convention at which they are elected. To be nominated or to be elected, a candidate for National Chair or Co-Chair must be a member in good standing of DSA for at least one year prior to the National Convention where the election takes place. The National Chair(s) shall be the primary spokesperson(s) for the organization, reporting directly to the National Political Committee. Following the National Convention where this Section is adopted or if the position of National Chair or Co-Chair becomes vacant between conventions, a National Chair or Co-Chairs may be selected by a 2/3 vote of the National Political Committee.

## **Article VII. National Activist Conference**

Section 1. A National Activist Conference shall be held at least once between Conventions in the year in which a Convention is not held.

Section 2. The National Activist Conference shall include the officers of the National organization, the members of the National Political Committee, Chairs of Commissions, the Honorary Chairs and Vice-Chairs, two delegates selected by each Local, and any additional DSA members who want to attend.

Section 3. The Conference Planning Committee for the National Activist Conference shall include members of the NPC, chairs of Commissions and a Youth Section representative.

## **Article VIII. National Political Committee**

Section 1. The National Political Committee (NPC) shall be the collective leadership and the highest decision-making body of the organization between meetings of the Convention. It shall meet at least four times a year.

Section 2. The members of the NPC shall be one representative of the Youth Section and 16 delegates elected at the national convention. Of the elected members, at least eight shall be women and at least four shall be racial or national minority members of DSA. In the event that these minority positions are not filled at the Convention, the position(s) shall be filled by the NPC, except that only minority members of DSA may be elected to fill such vacancies. In case of other such vacancies, except a vacancy of the Youth Section Representative, the NPC shall appoint a member of the organization in good standing to serve until the next Convention. No person shall serve simultaneously on the National Staff and the NPC.

Section 3. The National Political Committee shall elect a Steering Committee (SC). It shall be constituted as follows:

a) It shall be composed of the five people who shall be elected by the NPC from among its at-large members, and the Youth Section representative to the NPC. It shall include at least two women and one person of color. The National Director and the Youth Section Organizer shall be ex officio members, without vote, of the SC.

b) The SC shall be responsible for decision-making between meetings of the NPC and for the supervision of all offices and staff of the organization. It shall be responsible for planning meetings and agendas for the NPC and for coordinating the work of the committees of the NPC.

c) A quorum of the SC shall be half of its voting members. It shall meet at least bimonthly, in person or by conference call.

d) In person meetings of the SC shall be open to all members of the organization. However, the SC may hold executive sessions if 60% of its members vote to do so in order to discuss personnel and related financial matters.

Section 4. The at-large members of the NPC shall act as liaisons to the Commissions and the Regional, State and Local organizations as prescribed by the Bylaws. The NPC shall have responsibility for staff, finances, publications, and education.

Section 5. A quorum of the NPC shall be more than half of its members. The NPC shall assume office immediately upon its election to serve a two-year term or until its successors are elected.

Section 6. Meetings of the NPC shall be open to all members of the organization. However, the NPC may hold executive sessions if 60% of its members vote to do so in order to discuss personnel and related financial matters.

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Section 7. An NPC member may be removed for malfeasance or nonfeasance by a two-thirds vote of the NPC, with nonfeasance defined to include unexcused absences from two or more consecutive meetings.

Section 8. The NPC shall be responsible for hiring and discharging staff as necessary.

## Article IX. National Advisory Committee

Section 1. Members of the National Advisory Committee shall be available to consult with the NPC and the officers of the organization. It shall, however, have no decision-making authority.

Section 2. Members of the National Advisory Committee shall be chosen by the NPC and must be members of the Democratic Socialists of America. In electing members to the NAC, the NPC shall act so as to ensure fair representation of women and minorities.

## Article X. Commissions

Section 1. Commissions may be chartered by the NPC as prescribed in the Bylaws.

Section 2. Requirements for membership and for the election of leadership of each Commission shall be determined by the NPC.

## Article XI. Dissolution

In the event of the dissolution of the Democratic Socialists of America, all remaining funds and assets are to be released to such other organizations that are organized exclusively for the promotion of social welfare and that will operate to further the common good and general welfare of the community.

## Article XII. Parliamentary Authority

The rules contained in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall govern the organization in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with this Constitution or the Bylaws or standing rules of the organization.

## Article XIII. Amendments

This Constitution may be amended at a National Convention by a two-thirds vote of the delegates voting and present provided that written notice of such amendments has been given to members one month prior to the Convention.

## Article I. Membership

Section 1. Applicants for membership in the organization shall agree with the principles of the organization and pay dues.

Section 2. Members will receive the organizational outreach publication. Members are encouraged to participate in political activities and education. New members will receive a membership card, and renewing members shall receive such a card upon request. Members will receive information on National policy from the National Office. A member is in good standing only if his/her payment of dues is current. Only members in good standing are eligible to hold office in the organization. Membership in the organization may be maintained by persons who are up to one year arrears in dues. Such members may cure their arrearage and place themselves in good standing by paying their dues.

Section 3. Members can be expelled if they are found to be in substantial disagreement with the principles or policies of the organization or if they consistently engage in undemocratic, disruptive behavior or if they are under the discipline of any self-defined democratic-centralist organization. Members facing expulsion must receive written notice of charges against them and must be given the opportunity to be heard before the NPC or a subcommittee thereof, appointed for the purpose of considering expulsion.

## Article II. Dues

Section 1. Annual dues for membership shall be determined by the NPC prior to the commencement of each annual dues cycle.

Section 2. Dues may be reduced or waived upon application by a member showing just cause for such reduction or waiver. Just cause shall include low-income and/or large number of dependents.

Section 3. Members may become sustainers of the organization nationally by paying dues in excess of regular dues. A National pledge system may be set up whereby members can pledge to make regular donations in excess of National dues on a monthly, quarterly or other basis.

Section 4. The NPC shall establish a 'low-income' category of dues. Members paying low-income dues shall have full membership rights.

Section 5. Locals may set up pledge systems for their members, whereby members can pledge to make regular donations to the Local in excess of National dues on a monthly, quarterly or other basis.

Section 6. The National Convention, or should it not choose to act on this matter, the NPC, shall determine procedures for the collection of dues and contributions and the sharing of same between the Local and National Organizations.

### **Article III. Locals**

Section 1. Charters may be granted to Locals upon submission of an application which contains a statement of agreement with the principles and policies of the organization, a description of the geographic area to be served by the Local, a proposed Constitution for the Local and the signatures of 15 or more people who are members of the organization and who wish to be members of the Local, except that in special circumstances, charters may be granted to Locals submitting applications with 10 to 14 signatures. Special circumstances are defined to include the establishment of Locals in areas of low population.

Section 2. Each Local shall, as stated in Section 1 of this Article, submit to the National Office a file copy of their Constitution (and any subsequent changes therein). Such Constitution shall contain provisions which call for at least two meetings per year of the Local. It shall contain provisions for the election of officers of the Local. It shall contain provisions for informing all members of meetings and procedures for the election of officers and delegates to National, Regional and State bodies and of decisions of the Local. Each Local shall submit to the National Office information about the financial status of the Local.

Section 3. Groups of five or more members in a geographic area may become Organizing Committees upon approval of the NPC. Such Committees may become Locals upon attainment of the requirements described in Section 1 of this Article. Such Organizing Committees shall receive from the National Office information relevant to the formation of a Local, including criteria for chartering, a model Constitution and such guidelines for Local work and policy as are adopted by the NPC.

Section 4. Charters for Locals may be revoked by the NPC or the Convention if the majority of members of a Local are found to be in substantial disagreement with the principles, practices and policies of the organization, or if a majority of members of the Local are under the discipline of any self-defined democratic-centralist organization or if the membership in the Local falls below 15 (except in spe-

cial cases), or if the Local does not function for an extended period of time. A new Local for the geographic area may be granted a Charter following the revocation of a previous Charter upon application as described in Section 1 of this Article.

### **Article IV. State and Regional Organizations**

Section 1. Charters may be granted to State Organizations upon submission of an application which contains a proposed Constitution for the State Organization and the signatures of the officers of at least two Locals already chartered within the state boundaries. Upon receipt of such application, all Locals with the state shall be polled regarding the establishment of said State Organization.

Section 2. The Constitution for the State Organization shall include provisions for holding at least one state-wide meeting annually and for the election of Local representatives to the State Organization and for the election of officers. Model Constitutions shall be available from the National Office. State Organizations shall submit changes in the Constitution and financial information to the National Office on a regular basis.

Section 3. Charters shall be granted to Regional Organizations upon submission of an application which contains a proposed Constitution for the Region, a description of the geographic boundaries of the Region, and the signatures of the officers of at least three Locals already chartered within the proposed boundaries of the Region. Upon receipt of the application, all Local and State Organizations with the Region shall be polled regarding the establishment of said Regional Organization.

Section 4. The Constitution for the Regional Organization shall include provisions for the holding of at least one Regional meeting annually, for the potential establishment of subregions within the Regions, and for the election of officers and for the election of State and Local representatives to the State Organization. Model Constitutions shall be available from the National Office. Regions shall submit changes in the Constitution and financial information to the National Office on a regular basis.

Section 5. Charters for State or Regional Organizations may be revoked by the NPC if the State or Regional Organization is found to have substantial disagreement with the principles, practices and policies of the organization or if fewer than two Locals are chartered within a state or fewer than three Locals are chartered within a Region. A Regional Charter may also be revoked upon petition of a majority of Locals within a Region. Such petition shall include the rea-

sons for revocation. New State or Regional Organizations may be chartered following revocation of a previous Charter upon application as described in Article IV of these Bylaws.

## **Article V. Youth Section**

Section 1. A Youth Section shall be chartered by the National Convention. Such a Charter shall be granted upon the submission of an application which contains a proposed Constitution for the Section, a description of the membership and work of the Section and the signatures of 50 members of the organization who wish to be members of the Section.

Section 2. The Constitution of the Youth Section shall contain provisions for the holding of meetings, for the election of officers of the Section and for the election of representatives to the NPC. Changes in the Constitution and information on the financial status of the Youth Section shall be submitted on a regular basis to the National Office.

Section 3. The Youth Section shall be organized to provide a forum for communication and to promote the interests and concerns of members of the organization who are less than 31 years of age or who are full-time students.

Section 4. The Charter of the Youth Section may be revoked by the NPC if the majority of members of the Section are found to be in substantial disagreement with the principles, practices or policies of the National Organization or if a majority of members are under the discipline of any self-defined democratic-centralist organization or if the membership falls below 50. A new Section may be chartered following the revocation of the previous Section Charter upon application as described in Section 1 of this Article.

## **Article VI. National Conventions**

Section 1. Delegates to the National Convention shall be apportioned based on the dues-paying membership of the organization (including all members up to one year arrears in dues). Delegate to member ratios shall be set by the NPC at least 6 months before the Convention, except in the case of Special Conventions, where such ratios shall be set by the NPC as soon as possible after the Convention is called.

Section 2. Elections for at-large delegates shall be conducted by the NPC. A call for candidates for at-large delegates shall be sent to all at-large members not less than three months and not more than five months prior to the

opening date of the Convention. Two months prior to the Convention a ballot containing the names of the delegate candidates shall be sent to at-large members. This ballot shall contain instructions regarding the number of delegates to be elected, voting procedures and date for the counting of ballots. Ballots shall be counted at the National Office one month prior to the Convention. One-half of the available positions for at-large delegates must be reserved for women and one-fifth of the available positions (both men and women) must be reserved for national and racial minorities. Those candidates who have been elected shall be immediately informed of their election by the National Office.

Section 3. Elections of at-large delegates to the Convention shall be held under procedures established by the NPC, except that a motion for the use of the Hare system of proportional representation supported by 15% of those NPC members present and voting will require the use of the Hare system in at-large elections of Convention delegates. Locals may determine their own method of election of delegates to the Convention except that a petition from 10% of a Local's membership or a motion supported by 15% of those present and voting at the Local meeting which determines the method of election will require the use of the Hare system in that Local's election of delegates to the National Convention.

Section 4. The NPC may establish committees to serve prior to and during the Convention. These committees shall include at least one member of the NPC in addition to the officers of the organization who shall be ex officio members of the committees except as indicated. These committees may include a Pre-Convention Planning Committee, a Credentials Committee, a Rules Committee, a Resolutions Committee and a Personnel/Nominating Committee. When a committee continues to serve during the Convention, the delegate body must ratify its membership. Membership in committees established to consider resolutions at the convention will be open to all delegates who are not already members of another such committee.

Section 5. National Conventions shall be held in different areas and regions of the country each time.

## **Article VII. Officers**

Section 1. The National Political Committee may nominate candidates for National Chair or National Co-Chair. Candidates may also be nominated by petition of at least three locals. Written notice of nominations for National Chair or National Co-Chairs must get to the membership at least one month prior to the National Convention where

the election takes place.

Section 2. In addition to duties described in the Constitution, one of the officers of the organization shall preside as temporary chair at the National Convention and NPC meetings until permanent chairs are chosen. One of the officers shall represent the organization at meetings of other organizations. Additional duties may be prescribed by the NPC.

## **Article VIII. Offices**

Section 1. The NPC shall establish one or more National Offices, at locations to be established by a majority vote of the NPC.

Section 2. The NPC may, in consultation with Regional Organizations, establish Regional Offices. These offices may be assigned National responsibilities.

## **Article IX. Staff**

Section 1. The NPC shall hire no more than two National Directors, who shall be responsible for the functioning of the National Office(s) and staff, shall report on staff activities to the National Convention and shall have specific duties as prescribed by the NPC. An announcement of any open directorship shall be published. Application shall be made to a Personnel Committee of the NPC. This committee shall make recommendations to the NPC, which shall have final approval for hiring.

Section 2. The Director(s) may hire additional staff in order to aid the functioning of the National Office(s). Announcements of open staff positions will be published. The NPC shall have final approval of hiring.

Section 3. The NPC shall be able to discharge any staff person for nonfeasance or malfeasance of office with proper notice as provided for in any contract.

Section 4. In the case of staff which is primarily responsible for Regional work, the Personnel Committee shall have a majority of its members from the Region involved.

## **Article X. National Political Committee**

Section 1. The at-large members of the NPC shall be liaisons to the Commissions, Regions, State and Local Organizations. They shall facilitate the relationship between the National Organization and those groups. They shall work with the appropriate staff persons in carrying out these responsibilities.

Section 2. The agendas for the NPC meetings will be proposed by the SC. These shall include, on a regular basis, discussion and supervision of staff, finances, publications, education, general political direction and coalition work.

Section 3. The NPC may appoint committees to supervise specific work; these shall report to the NPC. They will include:

a) A Finance and Budget Committee which will regularly review with the Director(s) the financial situation of the organization. It will prepare an annual budget; such preparation may be delegated to staff persons in consultation with the chair of the committee. It will direct a fund-raising program. The Secretary-Treasurer shall serve as an ex officio member of the committee.

b) A Personnel Committee which will periodically review staff performance, and fulfill other responsibilities assigned by the NPC.

c) Editorial Boards for the general publications of the organization which will supervise and edit these publications.

d) At the first meeting following their appointment, NPC committees shall elect from among their number a chair who shall be responsible for the organization of the committee, that is, for calling meetings, for notifying members of the meetings, for preparing agendas, for producing and distributing minutes to members, and for informing the NPC of the committee's work.

Section 4. The NPC will meet in varying areas of the country as is financially feasible.

Section 5. Election of at-large members of the NPC shall take place at the National Convention under procedures set forth by the Nominating/Personnel Committee except that preferential voting will be used to elect at-large members of the NPC.

## **Article XI. Commissions**

Section 1. Commissions may be chartered by the NPC upon a motion by a member of the NPC or by petition of 10 members of the organization. Commissions shall have responsibility for proposing and implementing organizational programs within an area defined by the motion or petition. Membership and structure of Commissions shall be included in the authorizing motion.

Section 2. Commissions shall function within guidelines developed by the NPC and shall be subject to the regular review of the SC and NPC.

Section 3. Chairs of Commissions must be approved by the NPC.

## **Article XII. Publications**

Section 1. There shall be two general and regular publications of the organization. These shall be an outreach publication and a discussion bulletin. Members shall receive the outreach publication and may receive the discussion bulletin for a fee above dues set by the NPC, which fee shall be lower for members paying low-income dues set by the NPC than for members paying regular dues. Subscriptions may be available to non-members for a fee set by the NPC. Commissions may publish other bulletins as approved by the NPC. Other literature, including pamphlets and brochures, may be published as directed by the NPC.

Section 2. The NPC, in consultation with the Managing Editor and the Editorial Board, may appoint one or more editors-in-chief of the general outreach publication. The NPC will be responsible for the editorial supervision of all publications. Editorial responsibility for the general outreach publication and the discussion bulletin shall be determined by the NPC as described in Article X, Section 3 of the Bylaws.

Section 3. Funding for publications shall be provided in the organizational budget.

## **Article XIII. Polls**

Polls of the members on specific issues may be held upon petition of one-half of the Locals or one-third of the members. Such polls shall be advisory and not binding.

## **Article XIV. Amendments**

These Bylaws may be amended at a National Convention by a three-fifths vote of the delegates voting and present provided that written notice of such amendments has been given to members one month prior to the Convention. The Bylaws may also be amended by majority at a National Convention if the amendments in question have been discussed at an NPC meeting at least three months prior to the Convention.

