

Framing Document for GBDSA

This document was passed as the official mission, vision, and values of the GBDSA by vote of the General Body on 11/18/18, with amendments to add “Diversity of Tactics” as a Value, and correct any historical inaccuracies prior to publishing to the public. It will remain a living document, with the opportunity to further alter/change/amend by vote of the General Body.

Introduction

The Afrosocialists & Socialists of Color Caucus was enacted by vote at the national Convention of the Democratic Socialists of America in August 2017. The underlying purpose of the Caucus was to successfully build working class power, stating, *“We, of the Afro-Socialists & Socialists of Color Caucus, believe that DSA must ally with groups fighting for Black liberation... Without this effort we won’t actually empower the working class of today.”* The resolution establishing the Caucus further addressed the tendency, within DSA, to dismiss “identity politics,” reducing racial injustice to class-based paradigms. A warning was issued that, if we do not address the institutional semblances of white supremacy, within our internal configuration as an organization, *“we risk replicating structural injustices within our own revolutionary activities.”* In order to genuinely dismantle capitalism, we must acknowledge, as democratic socialists, that it is impossible to do so, in a comprehensive way, without confronting racist systems of oppression that fuel class-based disparities.

In October 2017, the Greater Baltimore chapter voted to create its own People of Color Caucus – locally affirming DSA’s intention to operate as an organization grounded in racial equity. This was an important stride in actualizing our commitment to dismantling white supremacy as socialists. However, to meaningfully conduct organizing in Baltimore City – a majority African-American metropolis (63%) – we must expand the scope of our commitment to racial justice beyond words, to concrete structural and cultural actions within GBDSA.

Baltimore harbors a profoundly rich, complex, and troubling history. For centuries, systemic racism has characterized our city’s sociological makeup – from the days of slavery, to birthing FHA-sponsored red-lining in the 1930s, cultivating a racialized dearth of employment in the wake of the closures of Bethlehem Steel and many other manufacturing plants, and igniting an Uprising to confront Freddie Gray’s extrajudicial death. Racial paradigms have consistently undergirded socio-economic disparities in Baltimore. Conversely, economic woes and social immobility are inseparable from racist policies and dynamics that continue to characterize Baltimore as an intrinsically segregated city.

If we are to be credible socialist organizers in Baltimore, devoted to dismantling white supremacy, along with capitalism, we must ensure that principles of racial equity infuse all committees, working groups, campaigns, and ongoing initiatives undertaken by GBDSA. Contained within this document is a Mission Statement, Values, and, Vision, encompassing a Framing Document for the Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America, that centers all of our work in race equity and intersectionality, to be reviewed by the collective authority vested in all chapter members. The proposals herein are ultimately subject to the purview and discretion of members gathered at a General Body Meeting.

The People of Color Caucus has taken the initiative of drafting a concrete mission statement and organizational vision for the Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America that will guide our future work and serve as a visible testament of our ideals as democratic socialists, for prospective and current members, potential partnering organizations, + and interested observers seeking information about the chapter. Absent the guidance of a mission statement and organizational vision, the effort of building working class power will be necessarily fractured, and inefficient in its use of resources +and labor toward a poorly understood goal.

Mission

Building working class political and economic power to end capitalism and white supremacy, for a socialist future in the Greater Baltimore region.

Values

Grassroots Socialism - We believe that the working class should have ownership over the levers of the economy and politics. Our analysis of “the working class” includes un/underemployed workers and workers in the informal economy, including unpaid domestic labor and sex work. We also believe that those who feel the impact of capitalism the hardest should hold the reins of the movements to undo it, and are committed to supporting existing struggles for liberation.

Racial Equity - We believe race and class are inextricably intertwined under capitalism. An anti-racist practice of non-discrimination does not go far enough. We must account for the specific mechanisms that fix people of color in an economic underclass, and work to undermine them, both in the work we do to advance socialism and in our internal operations. Our chapter is committed to supporting black-led and grassroots organizations engaged in building power with working class Baltimoreans, both in labor unions and work places in general.

Economic Equity - We believe that resources should be allocated according to community need, and not for the profit of a few. Intentional neighborhood disinvestment has led to a hyper-segregated city - that benefits “the white L” at the expense of “the black butterfly.” Communities should control budget allocation, through the expanse of participatory budgeting and worker co-operatives.

Humility - We recognize that ongoing grassroots activism and organizing efforts have defined Baltimore for decades. It is imperative for us, as DSA and GBDSA members, to check the manifestations of white privilege present in our local and national composition in order to credibly and effectively build power with working class Baltimore residents. Social justice activism has a rich history in Baltimore. Many of us are newcomers to joining this movement in our city and begin any campaigns, proposals, or initiatives for socialist organizing with a demeanor of humility, accompanied with an eagerness to learn from seasoned Baltimore activists and organizers.

Collective Action- We understand that the problems inherent in capitalism are not individual in nature, and will not be solved through individual action. Collective solutions are imperative to build a socialist

future, and a focused and strategic organizing discipline, rooted in relationship-building, is essential to galvanizing a critical mass of organized and engaged residents with the institutional leverage required to shift power away from the clutches of organized money.

Participatory Democracy - We believe that our political system should benefit the working class, and not corporate interests. People should collectively determine their own fates and control how resources are allocated and policies are applied in social and economic contexts.

Working Class Self-Determination - Our economy should operate in pursuit of the common good. Development can never be synonymous with gentrification or forced displacement. Workers should control the means, production, and fruit of their own labor. A living wage should be an economic reality that guarantees the human dignity of all workforce members. We believe that the ability of workers to organize for collective benefit is the most robust safeguard against occupational exploitation. People and communities have the right to determine how economic development unfolds in their lives.

Intersectionality - We understand that capitalist exploitation does not affect all communities equally, and that we must account for the compounded impact on marginalized identities including, but not limited to, race, class, sexuality, age, country of origin, or ability. We commit to ensuring that our movement building and internal policies and practices take into account these inequities and work to eradicate them.

Political Education - We recognize that in order to dismantle the systems of capitalism and white supremacy we need to understand the mechanisms that allow them to flourish. We commit to fostering a culture of learning with and from working class communities to develop a shared analysis of capitalism, political economy, theories of organizing, and history of working class struggle in Baltimore and elsewhere.

Leadership Development - If we are to promote democratic participation, we must maximize the leadership potential of our chapter and the broader community. We believe in the capacity of everyone to be a leader in our movement for socialism, and are committed to emboldening individuals to take initiative in building working class power.

Global Solidarity - As capital and labor cross borders, the effects of capitalism transcend national boundaries. Capitalism fundamentally drives colonialism and imperialism. We stand in solidarity with populations who are exploited by capitalist schemes of domination and see ourselves as part of an international human rights movement for the liberation of oppressed people. Immigrants and refugees are unconditionally welcomed as vital members of the working class in their pursuit of livelihood and dignity.

Environmental Justice - The common good of humanity is bound to our planet's viability. Environmental factors such as climate change and pollution disproportionately impact vulnerable and working people. As socialists, we believe that the profound environmental crisis today is an inevitable consequence of irrational and disparate economic growth under capitalism, and can only be addressed by a radical shift to a more democratic mode of economic development.

Diversity of Tactics - We understand that capitalist exploitation touches our lives in myriad ways, and its undoing will require more than one-size-fits-all solutions. In order to be as effective and dynamic as

possible in confronting capital and building a socialist alternative we commit to using a variety of tactics including base-building, survival programs, direct actions, site-of-struggle organizing, electoral interventions, arts & media, mass mobilizations, and political education.

Vision

We envision a society in which residents have control over the political process, share in the fruits of the economy, and social and economic justice are a vibrant reality for every person. This entails creating racially equitable and communally-approved solutions for our city in the most prominent areas of housing, education, employment, transit, infrastructure, banking and food security, and a clean and liveable environment and climate. We affirm healthcare as a fundamental human right and vigorously promote a system where people are valued over the profits and financial interests of pharmaceutical and private health insurance companies. Local community development must highlight the concerns of residents, rather than the illusory promise of gentrification.

Labor exploitation is an essential feature of capitalism, rather than an aberration. Social and economic justice cannot be fully realized within it. Race and class are inextricably linked under capitalism. Solutions focused on either alone will fail to adequately address the full socio-economic impact of white supremacy. GBDSA envisions a Baltimore, and world at large, in which one's race does not predict person's economic future.

Our chapter advocates for racial equity to become synonymous with due process, through the pursuit of restorative justice, ending the New Jim Crow paradigm of mass incarceration in Baltimore. We espouse community control of law enforcement, and accountability for all residents who endure police terror, and the resulting impunity from these incidents. We reject the suspension of democracy for what few survivors return to our communities following their condemnation to institutional rehabilitation for felony convictions.

As democratic socialists, we envision a government operated by the working class and all people oppressed under capitalism. GBDSA pledges to confront political issues and concerns through activist efforts and concerted electoral strategies. We support grassroots initiatives to build collective solidarity with the working poor and disenfranchised, in Baltimore and throughout the world.