



A Brief History of Democratic Socialists of America (1971-2017):

Posted on 07.25.17

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Bringing Socialism from the Margins to the Mainstream

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—and its two predecessor organizations, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM)—had their origins in the early 1970s, at the beginning of a long-term rightward shift of U.S. and global politics. This shift to the right—symbolized by the triumph in the 1980s of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—somewhat overshadowed the central role these organizations played in the movements of resistance to corporate domination, as well as in today's ongoing project: organizing an ideological and organizational socialist presence among trade union, community, feminist and people of color and other activists.

DSA made an ethical contribution to the broader American Left by being one of the few radical organizations born out of a merger rather than a split. DSA also helped popularize the vision of an ecumenical, multi-tendency socialist organization, an ethos that enabled it to recently incorporate many thousands of new members, mostly out of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. If you are committed to a pluralist, democratic conception of a just society then you can join DSA's collective project, regardless of your position (or lack thereof) on some arcane split in socialist history, or even whether you believe in the possibility of independent electoral work inside or outside the Democratic Party ballot line.

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