

# Cincinnati & NKY Socialist Agitator

a publication of Democratic Socialists of Metro Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky

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## Next Stop: Steel City

DSA Cincy & NKY hits the road for the first ever Rust Belt DSA Conference

by Daniel M.

On August 11th and 12th, DSA Metro Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky will attend the inaugural DSA Rust Belt Conference, with chapters from as far as Buffalo, Huron Valley, Columbus, and West Virginia congregating in Pittsburgh. A first for an organization that has coordinated mostly local or national campaigns, the Rust Belt Conference brings together members from across the region to begin strategizing for a socialist future. With a plan to support up to a hundred and fifty attendees, the local host DSA Pittsburgh has wasted no effort in supporting the ambitious goals underlying the conference.

Two months out, chapters are already beginning workshop preparations for the conference. Focused on the successful work that's been done at the local level, and on the power that chapters can collectively generate on a regional level, the conference offers an opportunity for DSA to confront the Rust Belt's unique challenges.

DSA Metro Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky is prepared to make the most out of this opportunity. We want this conference to be a space where DSA is not content to rest on its laurels, but forward-looking in its ambitions. No prior event has offered as great an impetus to establish DSA as a political force throughout the region, and the work that follows must meet that promise.

DSA Metro Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky has had conference proposals accepted both to discuss our past work and present struggles that the region as a whole could move forward. The Our Library, Our Decision! campaign has illustrated the importance of public space, not just for the working class at large, but even for the immediate needs of our local DSA chapter  
(cont'd. p. 4)



## Upcoming Events!

**8/15/18 LGBTQIA Caucus Meeting** (7-9pm, New Spirit Oasis, 4033 Hamilton Ave, Cincinnati)

**8/19/18 August General Meeting** (1:30-3:30pm, New Spirit Oasis, 4033 Hamilton Ave, Cincinnati)

**8/25/18 NKY Branch Meeting** (11am-1pm, Campbell County Public Library, 901 E 6th St, Newport KY)

**9/2/18 NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION!** RSVP to [dsacincy@gmail.com](mailto:dsacincy@gmail.com) and let us know if you can make it. (2-4pm, Cincinnati Main Library, Huenefeld Tower Room, 800 Vine St, Cincinnati)

**Fight for Socialism!**

**Join DSA!**

**[dsausa.org/join](http://dsausa.org/join)**

# Time to Talk Electoral Politics

statement by chapter co-chair Simon

*“...Socialists need to struggle for power using every tool available to us; the electoral field is too important to leave in the hands of our enemies. Electoral strategy has a key role to play in building a mass movement to bring the left to power; for us the question is no longer whether to engage in electoral work, but how and why. How can we use electoral work to build not just campaigns, but movements?”*

-from “The Electoral Option and The DSA consensus” in the DSA national electoral strategy.

The victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez over machine stalwart Joe Crowley in the Democratic Primary in New York's 14th congressional district delivered fresh and unprecedented attention to DSA that nobody within or outside the organization could have anticipated. Her win is only the latest in an exciting string of electoral victories for DSA-endorsed candidates, the result of certain chapters putting much of their energy behind these campaigns in a year that was always bound to be dominated by electoral politics. On May 15th, DSA members Summer Lee and Sara Innamorato won Democratic primary elections for the Pennsylvania state house. Both are expected to coast into office this November, having run in heavily blue districts where general elections are rarely competitive. These are the latest, and possibly the most widely covered wins for our organization yet, and as such, signal something of a new moment for DSA, requiring broad strategic evaluation.

The most interesting takeaway from the Pittsburgh victories is that they didn't come as much of a surprise. When news broke that Lee Carter had unseated the Republican majority whip in the Virginia state house last fall, many members (myself included) had never even

heard his name. Pittsburgh DSA, after seeing an incredible surge in membership in the past year and a half (formed around the same time as DSA Cincy/NKY), used their unique set of resources to build campaigns around their candidates that were more vibrant, and nationally visible, than those of any DSA backed candidate to date, with hundreds of thousands of dollars of donations and tens of thousands of doors knocked. Pittsburgh's wins didn't come across as some kind of fluke, rather they cemented the chapter's growth into a legitimate political force.

So what now? In early July, a tweet went viral within the DSA social media-verse. From a member: “Me to comrades who share stuff about Ocasio-Cortez: while her victory is worth celebrating, we have to keep a clear head about the purpose of electoral work and not fall into the trap of social democracy. Me to liberal friends who do: YEAH, RAD AS HELL RIGHT? JOIN DSA!!”



Rosa Astra  
@morganastraa

Follow

Me to comrades who share stuff about Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez: while her victory is worth celebrating, we have to keep a clear head about the purpose of electoral work and not fall into the trap of social democracy

Me to liberal friends who do: YEAH, RAD AS HELL RIGHT? JOIN DSA!!

7:49 PM - 1 Jul 2018

What our comrade on Twitter here has given us is a pretty concise nod to the need for a healthy, mutually reinforcing, and dialectically examined relationship between electoral work and initiative/ movement building. This is rooted in a soft consensus among much of the new generation members that DSA has moved beyond the old and insufficient inside-outside  
(cont'd. p. 4)

# Protect our Water!

DSA Stands against Corporate Greed and for a Clean OH River!

by Eira & the Environmental Justice Committee

The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO) is an interstate compact of 8 member states (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia). The compact was formed in 1948 to establish pollution control standards for the Ohio River, more than 20 years before the creation of the modern EPA. Pollution had been a problem along the Ohio River since the early 1900s, as communities both drew from the River for water supplies, and also discharged their own sewage into the River. Congress passed legislation authorizing states to form a compact in the 1930s, and it was officially signed in 1948.

The federal Clean Water Act was passed in 1972 under the jurisdiction of the newly-established federal EPA. The CWA was an update of a law previously passed in 1948 known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. The Clean Water Act authorized the EPA to establish “pollution control programs such as setting wastewater standards for industry” and “national water quality criteria recommendations for pollutants in surface waters.”

Enforcement of the Clean Water Act is carried out under a system known as “cooperative federalism,” where the federal EPA authorizes state environmental agencies to issue permits for a certain amount of allowable pollution which theoretically keeps pollution thresholds of water bodies within safe levels.

The Federal EPA sets baseline pollutant levels for many chemicals and heavy metals. In the absence of any guidance on a particular chemical/heavy metal, ORSANCO can and does issue its own pollution guidelines. The last pollution standards were issued in 2015, and ORSANCO is currently working through its 2018 proposals. ORSANCO is considering 5 “alternative options” to its current approach to Pollution Control Standards. A majority of

ORSANCO decision-makers favor “alternative 2,” which would eliminate the Pollution Control Standards. A minority of the commission favors retaining the Pollution Control Standards, and recommends alternatives 3 & 4. Alternative 3 calls for ORSANCO to establish cost-effective and numerical water quality standards that would be effective across every compact state. Alternative 4 calls for ORSANCO to better coordinate each state’s water quality standards. Industry largely favors alternative 2, environmental advocacy groups and water utilities generally favor 3 & 4.



ORSANCO is charged with setting pollution standards for the OH river; proposed changes would eliminate standards for many dangerous chemicals

ORSANCO’s argument for abandoning its pollution control standards is that it is largely duplicative of existing federal Clean Water Act standards, and its time would be better spent monitoring river conditions. However, the argument that the federal Clean Water Act is sufficient to protect the Ohio River is simply false. According to Inside Climate News, “There were, as of 2015, 188 instances in which ORSANCO had set a standard for a pollutant that neither a member state nor EPA had set a standard for. And there were 252 instances in which ORSANCO standards were at least 10 percent more stringent than those of the member states or the EPA, including for arsenic, which can be found in waste from the burning of coal and is known to cause cancer.”

The Ohio River is consistently ranked as the most polluted river in the United States. This pollution has been caused by corporations who have long disregarded the health and safety of all those who  
(cont'd p. 5)

cont'd. from p. 1 **Rust Belt** (like the north building's Makerspace, which we use frequently). Also, the Environmental Justice committee has imagined what a regional health initiative connected to the Ohio River might look like. Despite the major role it plays in the lives of people throughout the region, the river has itself received little attention in socialist organizing efforts. Finally, the Conduct Committee will lead a discussion on the grievance policies & codes of conduct found in the Rust Belt chapters of DSA, asking how to address harassment, abuse & interpersonal conflict in a socialist organization.

August will set the foundation for regional grassroots coordination between the disparate chapters of DSA, establishing dialogue and building capacity for future action. If the work we've seen in the locals is any indication, Rust Belt politics are poised for a transformation after this conference is finished!

**"August will set the foundation for regional grassroots coordination between the disparate chapters of DSA, establishing dialogue and building capacity for future action."**

cont'd. from p. 2 **Electoral Politics** strategy. Our chapters must be capable of absorbing and giving political guidance to bursts of membership that are still sorting out what exactly it means to move left of liberal ideology. Unfortunately, while much of membership senses that this is the case there is no real mechanism or set of guidelines within the organization to ensure that this delicate and necessarily flexible framework remains stable.

DSA Cincy & NKY has yet to endorse any candidate or engage with one in any formal way. The chapter has chosen instead to focus on local initiatives, coalition work, capacity building, and internal development, all of which have aimed to escalate, agitate, and sow seeds into broader movements that may include electoral campaigns somewhere down the road. Other chapters have taken a reverse strategy, demanding little of endorsed candidates while allowing too many of their thin resources to be expended on doing

work in support of them. It can be argued that perhaps we missed an opportunity to enter candidates this year, that successes elsewhere indicate fertile ground for somebody with radical politics to have a legitimate run in our region. Either way, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky has grown into a chapter well equipped to hold any candidate accountable when the time comes.

Electoral wins in the absence of a broader strategy threaten to fragment and impede the potential of the organization. A common element in articles written about DSA is the inclusion, usually after talk of elections, near the middle or end of an piece, of something about the "issue"-related work that DSA is "also" doing in addition to endorsing or running candidates. These things are not disconnected. As stated in the DSA electoral strategy: "We also understand that for many people open to radical politics their first political experiences come through electoral politics." This is absolutely true and should always be considered but the energy and intoxication of electoral wins must be routed into health justice, labor, political education, tenants' rights, defense of public space, and other day to day work that occupies the majority of time and focus for rank-and-file membership, with the goal being as clear as possible that, at every level, socialists are serious about building an alternative to oppressive institutional power structures.

If her connections with DSA were questioned, [PA State House Candidate Summer] Lee said, her response would be simple, too. "I would ask, 'How did capitalism work for you?'" Lee told CNN, "Because I can tell you in my community it's not working. Capitalism works on the back of my community and communities of color and poor communities across this country. It was built that way and it is working exactly the way it is supposed to."

This exciting, uncompromising language demonstrates how far we've come since the Sanders campaign of 2016. It's time for chapters to acknowledge that yes, the electoral field is too important to leave in the hands of our enemies. (cont'd. p. 5)

## Breaking Through



**"It's time to put socialists in office, but that's only one tool in the box. You'll need every tool in there to build a more equitable world."**

cont'd. from p. 4 **Electoral Politics** At a time when prestige publications are publishing pieces about the need to rehabilitate Marx, when people are growing increasingly comfortable diagnosing capitalism as the problem, the primary focus of any socialist or socialist organization should be building power within, and alongside, the working class while growing movements. It's time to put socialists in office, but that's only one tool in the box. You'll need every tool in there to build a more equitable world.

cont'd. from p. 3 **ORSANCO** depend on the river. Clearly the current EPA and ORSANCO standards are not yet going far enough. So we must ask - why is ORSANCO more interested in protecting the ability of a handful of polluting industries to treat our river as a toxic dumping ground than in protecting the water supplies of the millions of people who depend on the Ohio River for their drinking water?

ORSANCO's proposal to eliminate its role in pollution control standards is an abdication of its authority and responsibility to protect the health of the Ohio River, and therefore our own health. It is a moral failure and a scientific fraud that will be perpetrated on the public.

Over 75 people turned out for an ORSANCO public hearing. More than 40 individuals spoke out unanimously against the proposed deregulation, which would gut regional pollution standards. Many commenters came from several hours away to share testimony, highlighting the fact that one public comment meeting for a multistate region of 5 million people is not enough. The ties of many commissioners to polluting industry means that this process is tainted by serious conflicts of interest. DSA remains opposed to any gutting of standards that would favor corporate interests over the health and safety of our water supply.

The ORSANCO commission could make a decision as early as its October meeting in West Virginia. DSA Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky will continue to monitor the situation.



DSA Cincy & NKY and Cincinnati Socialist Alternative marched together in the Northside 4th of July Parade 5

## Why we Fight for Health Justice

by Brendan

The May issue of Democratic Left, DSA's national publication, focused entirely on our nationwide Medicare-for-All (M4A) campaign--the extension of Medicare, or a program like it, to every person in the country, regardless of income or background. The articles focused on how lack of healthcare affects various groups of people, such as women, people with disabilities, rural Americans and non-white communities. While these things are important, and some sort of M4A or single payer program would help both the population at large and specific groups like these, the vision in this issue did not go far enough.

In October of last year DSA Metro Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky invited traveling healthcare expert and socialist firebrand Tim Faust to speak at New Spirit Oasis Church in Northside. Faust delivered a barnstormer of a speech about something called "health justice." We recorded it and it is still up on the DSA Cincy/NKY Facebook page and is worth watching if you were not there that night.

The concept of health justice is a simple one. If the United States government takes on the responsibility of providing healthcare to its citizens, be it via Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, or a true single payer system, then it also must address the causes of health issues. Otherwise, the government is funneling money into a black hole, constantly treating the symptoms but never looking at the root source of the problem. You can't cure sepsis with band-aids: eventually the rot will ooze through.

What sort of rot are we talking about here? A good example would be food deserts, neighborhoods with no local grocery stores. For people with limited incomes, living in a food desert is a substantial burden. If they have a car they must spend more on gas to get to a store in an adjacent neighborhood. Without a car they must sacrifice time to travel by bus, time they might not have due to childcare or job related burdens. Many may choose to go to local

corner stores instead, where there is often a steeper markup on prices as well as limited access to healthy food. In short, any neighborhood without a grocery store suffers from added healthcare problems and grocery companies have no interest in building one in every neighborhood if it's not profitable to do so. Currently, this sort of problem is not addressed by any healthcare plan in the country. That has to change.



members of the Health Justice Committee  
ready to canvass

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**"How can any healthcare system keep people healthy if there's lead in their water, if healthy food is unaffordable and inaccessible to them, and if the local medical hucksters are getting them hooked on painkillers?"**

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Food deserts are hardly the only example of a healthcare problem that Medicare for All does not address. Inadequate or unsafe housing, lack of mental health treatment, the opioid epidemic, all may not seem directly related to healthcare but all have an enormous effect on it. It's a hydra with ever-multiplying heads, as neglected communities often deal with several of these challenges and each one compounds the others. How can any healthcare system keep people healthy if there's lead in their water, if healthy food is unaffordable and inaccessible to them, and if the local medical hucksters are getting them hooked on painkillers?

DSA Cincy/NKY has joined in the (cont'd. p. 7)

*cont'd. from p. 6 Health Justice* national DSA push for a M4A program, but we also advocate something more. Our Environmental Justice Committee is looking at the threat that lead poisoning poses to our communities. Our Northern Kentucky Branch is fighting for an improved syringe exchange in Newport after our initial success getting an exchange approved and launched to help address the opioid epidemic. We see stark reminders regularly that these issues are all interconnected. To truly deal with these issues we need more than just Medicare-for-All or single payer. We need health justice.

For now, the Health Justice committee of DSA Cincy/NKY is focused on getting the word out, traveling to a variety on neighborhoods in the area and canvassing for M4A. We want people to know that change is an option, and that there are horizons beyond the Affordable Care Act. But we are also asking people about their

current health concerns and personal environmental struggles. We want to connect these concerns to the broader cause of health justice, so when the pollsters, political party canvassers, and pundits start descending en masse, both in the upcoming election and those in the future, they will hear more people advocating for M4A and health justice as something they want. The critical mass of politicians have not shown the willingness to make the large scale decisions that need to be made. That will not change until enough people make politicians' lives hell, whether via the ballot box or direct action, for their refusal to act.

Many of the people we've canvassed so far have expressed interest in learning more about and maybe even joining DSA. In time, perhaps, they will do more than just tell the powers-that-be they want health justice. Perhaps they will come out with us and fight for it.



DSA Members make Health Justice swag in the downtown library Makerspace

EDUCATE YOURSELF, BECAUSE WE WILL NEED ALL YOUR INTELLIGENCE. BE EXCITED BECAUSE WE WILL NEED ALL YOUR ENTHUSIASM. ORGANIZE BECAUSE WE WILL NEED ALL YOUR STRENGTH.

- Ordine Nuovo, issue 1



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