

# **DSA Jewish Solidarity Caucus**

## **Mission:**

The DSA Jewish Solidarity Caucus is a hub for organizing as Jews in the struggle against capitalism and for the freedom and dignity of all. We seek to renew the Jewish socialist tradition, to combat antisemitism, and to forge solidarity between Jews and other oppressed people. Jews have complex individual and communal identities and backgrounds, and it is clear that Jewish liberation is bound to that of all oppressed people. We are an unofficial caucus that does not claim to represent all Jewish members of DSA.

We seek to create the conditions under which barriers to being truly Jewish no longer exist: a society abolished of class; where synagogue membership costs are not exorbitant; where focus and funding does not overemphasize Zionism and Hebrew at the cost of other Jewish political traditions and languages; where the priorities of Jewish institutions are not beholden to a small group of wealthy funders. Jewish life as it currently exists under capitalism is not freedom, and Jewish collective efforts to realize the prophetic vision of a just world will only be fully realized through socialism.

We further aim to:

- a. Provide a community for socialist Jews of all backgrounds to stand in solidarity with others in the fight against capitalism as socialists and as Jews.
- b. Build a strong autonomous Jewish identity not based in nationalism.
- c. Ground the struggle against antisemitism in a materialist analysis.
- d. Build a new generation of leaders in the Jewish community who can organize its members to defend the interests of the working class and other groups oppressed by capitalist society, rather than the interests of an established wealthy elite.
- e. Provide a specifically Jewish perspective on socialism informed by our lived experiences as Jews, our historical memory, and our philosophical traditions.

## **Current Conditions**

1. Neoliberalism has enabled a right wing populist tide, resulting in the election of Donald Trump to the highest office in the United States and producing a wave of disenchantment with the status quo. While conservatives have seized the moment to begin enacting a reactionary agenda, liberals have failed to organize an effective oppositional force or ideology.
2. Although US society has come to generally view open antisemitism unfavorably, such antisemitism continues to animate a large amount of political activity, and the election of the current administration has emboldened those holding such views.

- a. This text is written at a moment in which we observe an attack on our collective memory and Jewish institutions executed on an ever-expanding scale. Every toppled gravestone is reminder that *even the dead* are not safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.<sup>1</sup>
3. Jews have a long history of engagement with socialism. Unfortunately, this has waned in the past decades. The tremendous growth of DSA and the popularity of Bernie Sanders, himself Jewish, has created an opportunity for Jews to reconcile our socialist past with our present condition.

### **Guiding Principles**

These principles are not intended to be dogma, but rather a starting point for a vision of what Jewish Socialist politics could be. While we feel the issues we set forth are of vital importance for the American Jewish community and the Jewish left to grapple with, at the same time we recognize that the right to dissent is both of paramount importance to the democratic socialist vision of liberation as well as an integral part of Jewish tradition. An atmosphere in which disagreement is welcome and compatible with camaraderie is essential to maintaining a community committed to a potentially life-long struggle for liberation.

1. Capitalism empowers antisemitism. Only the redistribution of wealth will dismantle the means by which differences of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality are exploited to perpetuate individual and structural oppression.
  - a. Under capitalism Jews cannot enjoy cultural autonomy. Only a socialist, classless society can provide the moral and material conditions necessary to build truly free Jewish communities. We seek liberation not only as individuals, but as a class that has often been compelled to give up ethnic identity in order to assimilate into white supremacy and capitalist success.
  - b. We are united as socialist Jews from all backgrounds to democratize the American Jewish community. Across the country, Jews who own and manage capital sit on the boards of our institutions — including newspapers, charities, political organizations, museums, federations, community centers and synagogues — where they set priorities often at odds with the values of most of the community, despite asserting to represent us. This establishment centers white, upper-middle class Jewishness and alienates Jews, both from full participation in its narrow vision of Jewish communal life, and from each other. This establishment cannot govern or represent us without our assent. The struggle against capitalism and its attendant social norms cannot take place solely outside our community, but within it, because only socialism can represent everyone's interests equitably.
  - c. Antisemitic narratives around class, money and race have made it difficult for Jews to reckon with the role of capitalism in our community and our community's

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<sup>1</sup> See Walter Benjamin, [\*Theses on the Philosophy of History\*](#)

role in a capitalist, white supremacist society. The terms upon which Jews have been conditionally permitted to assimilate into American society — as a middle class, white, religious minority — have left our community callous and blind to the needs, and even the existence, of Jews who cannot meet those terms, such as Jews of color, LGBTQ Jews, or disabled and working class Jews. Socialism is the means by which we must confront the hatred of those parts of ourselves we have internalized in order to attain to capitalist, white supremacist success and the systemic violence into which that success has pressed us.

- d. Antisemitism empowers capitalism and white supremacy. So long as the Jew is imagined anywhere as the ultimate insider or elite, greasing the wheels of capital, controlling the media and subverting the mechanisms of the state, the oppressive structures of power shaping our lives are insulated from the righteous anger that might tear them down. The Jew continues to play a key role in white nationalist ideology, as the supposed economic and political orchestrator of the “degeneration” of American society in the form of greater enfranchisement for racial minorities, women and LGBTQ people, and the destruction of “traditional” moral and aesthetic values through mass media. Antisemitism more subtly drives resistance to even the most moderate reformist politics where it is tied to the desires of coastal elites disconnected from the lives of “real,” that is white and gentile, Americans. Antisemitism undermines our efforts for collective liberation and co-opts antisemites into defending white supremacist capitalism. Dismantling antisemitism is a key component in achieving liberation for all people.<sup>2</sup>
2. Zionism cannot vanquish antisemitism. In the traditions of the Bund or the myriad forms of international socialism espoused by diasporic Jews from Greece to Iraq to Palestine and the UK, it is clear that all people deserve equal rights no matter where they live. Zionism represents a failure to envision a world in which antisemitism has been extinguished. Socialist Jews can uproot antisemitism, and defend and secure our rights anywhere. As Fred Hampton sought to fight racism with socialism, we will fight antisemitic fascism not with Zionism, but with solidarity. We will not fight capitalism with Jewish liberalism, but with socialism.
  - a. As Jews we are uniquely positioned to challenge the nationalism that appears in our community as Zionism, and as socialists we detest all exclusivist nationalisms. The inconsistency of liberal North American Jews in opposing white nationalism at home without material opposition to nationalism in Israel undermines our ability to forge solidarity with the oppressed everywhere.
  - b. We reject the categorization of legitimate criticism of Israel as antisemitic, and we bear witness to the *nakba*, or tragedy, that the creation of Israel came at the expense of 700,000 refugee Palestinians, many of whom still cannot return to their homes.

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<sup>2</sup> See Eric Ward, [Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism](#) and [Antisemitism and the \(Modern\) Critique of Capitalism](#)

- c. We recognize Socialist Zionist aspirations for the liberation of working class Jews in Israel, but we believe the Bund's prediction that the Kibbutzniks were "agents of bourgeois Zionism" has ultimately proven itself true, and that Socialist Zionism has become part of a state apparatus that oppresses Palestinians and upholds the occupation.
  - d. We recognize that Israel has proven to be a haven for Jewish refugees, including many who fled Arab countries, when other states have refused us entry. As Jewish socialists, however, we maintain that this is a short-term solution to the fundamental problem of antisemitism. Furthermore, these same Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews are often the most economically exploited within Israeli society.
  - e. We reject attempts by the right to use "support for Israel" as a ward against criticism of their antisemitic behaviors. We see clearly that the right's "support for Israel" is itself the antisemitic instrumentalization of our community, as well as a deliberate strategy to undermine solidarity between Jewish communities and other communities targeted by the right. "Support for Israel" does not solve or excuse antisemitism, which must be confronted in full.
  - f. We call for an end to the occupation and a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians in which all inhabitants of the land currently controlled by the state of Israel may live with freedom and dignity.
3. States cannot defend us against antisemitism, as injustices transcend borders.
- a. Antisemitism functions on a structural level to isolate Jews from complete enfranchisement in any national body that is not explicitly Jewish. In a world of nation states, Jews will always be dogged by suspicions of dual loyalties and blocked from full enfranchisement.
  - b. In Israel, where the state is explicitly Jewish, the seizure of the state's apparatus by a coalition of right wing Zionists has cemented the disenfranchisement of Jews who do not fit the state-sanctioned identity. It has cemented the occupation, which has created a cycle of nationalist violence that makes Israel more dangerous for Jews than any other place in the world and causes the needless death of thousands of Palestinians. Politically much stronger than Jewish communities outside its borders, the state of Israel causes other states to prioritize its needs over the safety of their resident Jewish communities.
  - c. We maintain that massive military budgets and foreign interference that define US imperialism create circumstances under which antisemitism can arise around the world. As American Jewish socialists, we are disgusted that our country employs Israel to further its imperial goals, in the form of billions of dollars per year in guaranteed military contracts and diplomatic support for maintaining the occupation of Palestinian land. We call for an end to military aid to Israel; arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other state sponsors of terror and the murder of civilians; and the defunding of the bloated American military, so that money wasted on weapons can be used to improve the lives of civilians instead.
  - d. The expense and bureaucratic challenge of legally crossing borders is handled easily by the wealthy and is, in effect, only a barrier to the poorest and most

vulnerable. However, inevitable capitalist crises ensure that there will always be people willing to risk the dehumanizing and dangerous process of crossing militarized borders to gain asylum, to acquire visas and residence status or to enter a state “illegally.” Desperate, often without the protection of legal status, refugees and immigrants are particularly vulnerable to brutal exploitation by capital. Capital depends on borders to ensure access to this readily exploited pool of labor, which serves also as a tool to threaten the wages of workers with citizenship, dividing workers based on nationality (often defined racially), undermining the collective bargaining power of all workers. Particularly in Europe and in regions colonized by Europeans, the fragile status of Jews’ membership in gentile nations has historically left us stateless and intensified the exploitation and atrocities we have faced.

- i. The confiscation of property and expulsion of Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews by states across the Middle East and North Africa, in concert with a process of absorption in the state of Israel which left Mizrahi and Sephardi refugees systematically underserved by the state, has resulted in the creation of an intensely exploited Jewish working class in Israel. The brutalized pool of Palestinian reserve labor is used to weaken the bargaining power of Jewish labor, deepening the exploitation of the Jewish working class and, by inflaming nationalist resentment, creating the justification for expanding the dispossession of the Palestinian people.
  - ii. The Holocaust could not have consumed the lives of so many Jews had the borders of countries not controlled or annexed by Nazis and their allies not been shut to us. States such as the US, in which we have found refuge, have rhetorically used their roles as “safe havens” to justify their authority while simultaneously turning a blind eye to our exploitation by capital within their borders. The relative safety and peace we enjoy in the United States today delivers no justice for the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, the lynching of Leo Frank, or other atrocities, but is contingent upon assimilation into the white middle class – an option not available to all Jews.
4. Antisemitism does not derive from any single political position. Antisemitism is deeply embedded in the west’s intellectual history, and therefore seeps into the thoughts and behaviors of anyone drawing on that history, often unconsciously. We are not immune to reproducing antisemitism as Jews. Our allies are no less immune.
  - a. This caucus does not exist to supply itself as a rhetorical prop should our gentile comrades desire a shield against accusations of antisemitism. The merit or lack thereof of charges of antisemitism must be judged on a case-by-case basis.
  - b. This caucus does not exist to perform our politics in accordance with gentile expectations of what Jewish politics should consist of. We will be judged as socialists.

- c. We recognize that anti-Zionism can be used to justify antisemitism. Charges of antisemitism where it appears with anti-Zionism must be weighed with as much care as when antisemitism is expressed elsewhere.
  - d. We are honest about antisemitism on the left because we believe in the socialist vision of liberation. That liberation cannot occur if leftists are unwilling to exorcise their own bigotries and are unwilling to recognize and work against their own position in our society's power structure. Love and the certainty that together we will all be liberated motivate us.
5. The oppression of women is inherent to a capitalist society, and thus the abolition of patriarchy is essential to Jewish autonomy and to the freedom of Jewish women and people of all genders. Jewish women have long been at the forefront of radical struggle, and none other than Rose Schneiderman coined the phrase "bread and roses" that would bequeath DSA its logo. Jewish feminist activism has also played a crucial role within liberal movements, ensuring the passing of reforms and legislation.
- a. Misogyny and antisemitism combine to uniquely oppress Jewish women, simultaneously fetishizing the ethnic characteristics of Jewish women as exotic, and degrading these same characteristics to the point of requiring invasive surgical alteration. Assimilation into America's white supremacist society has produced in Jewish men a particular hatred of Jewish women who have historically been unable to perform normative white womanhood.
  - b. Post-Holocaust anxieties about the destruction of world Jewry and the shrinking number of people affiliating with Jewish congregations combine with misogyny to compel women to marry inside the community and bear children while compelling Jewish men to treat gentile partners as disposable.
  - c. Today, we are fighting not only against a right wing, religious government in Israel that won't allow egalitarian prayer at some of the holiest sites of Judaism; but an economic fight in the US: the non-profit industry plays a crucial role in our community, and employs Jewish women in high numbers, but with salaries that are significantly lower than those of male peers. Progressives will never effectively fight the gender pay gap, in non-profits or elsewhere, if they do not challenge capitalism.
  - d. States justify their power by rhetorically exploiting the protection of the rights of women, LGBTQ people and other oppressed people. While states can and must protect the rights of oppressed people under existing law, they are incapable of providing liberation; the bourgeois state exists to protect the hierarchy of power which produces that oppression in the first place. The abolition of patriarchy and the liberation of women and all people oppressed for their gender or sexuality therefore requires the abolition of the state.
    - i. The role of the state in protecting the rights of women and LGBTQ people in Israel plays out in a paternal dynamic between the "West" and "East" in which the state allegedly serves a haven for the people oppressed for their gender or sexuality in a Middle East that is cast as backwards, unenlightened, and inherently sexist. This rhetorical exploitation

reinforces orientalist ideas of an “uncivilized” Middle East that have been used to justify colonialism for centuries, and excuses the oppression of Mizrahi, Sephardi, Beta Israeli and Palestinian women and LGBTQ people in the state of Israel.

6. Jewish liberation is bound to that of all oppressed people. The injustices we face may differ in specifics and scale, but they are no less enmeshed in the same dominating structure. If we are to possess our past in its fullness, we must take up the struggle for a better and more beautiful world fought for by our forebears in sweatshops and factories alongside and in solidarity with other oppressed people. We cannot be free while others are in chains and capitalism alienates us from our neighbors. An attack against any oppressed group is an attack on all. We must build a world in which all people live in freedom and dignity.

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