

EDITORIAL

United States (Left): DSA's Palestine problem - Why the right wing attempted a purge

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The Tempest Collective Steering Committee lays the recent actions of the leadership of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) at the feet of the organization's pro-Democratic Party right-wing, which seeks to split the organization and must be opposed. This leadership has shown itself to be wholly committed to converting DSA back into being an uncritical and reliable partner of the pro-Zionist and irredeemably imperialist Democratic Party. Our ability to strengthen the movements for BDS and the liberation of Palestine, the anti-imperialist movement, and a democratic, socialist movement as a whole, is at stake.

The decision by DSA leadership (NPC) to de-charter the BDS and Palestine Solidarity Working Group (BDS WG) and to suspend its leadership is outrageous and must be opposed. For those who need a blow-by-blow, Andy Sernatinger has [reported in detail](#) about the events of the last month. The current crisis reflects ongoing disagreements over how the organization should respond to DSA member, Congressman Jamaal Bowman's support for Israel and opposition to BDS, in light of DSA's formal positions on Palestine.

Having failed to create healthy democratic spaces to debate and decide on the issues, the NPC's recent actions effectively amount to an attempt to split the organization, destroy its big-tent character, and undermine the democratic rights of those members challenging the current direction of DSA. Even though the decision has been rescinded—in part—by the NPC, the cat is out of the bag. To this end, the Tempest Collective [follows the BDS WG](#) in declaring no confidence in the NPC, along with [other DSA members and chapters](#) dissenting from the decision. The organization should condemn the initial decision to de-charter the BDS WG, restore the leadership of the WG to good standing, and reaffirm the essential character of Palestinian solidarity work in DSA. To do so means also recommitting to building a more democratic socialist organization capable of addressing the irrefutable crisis facing the group.

Ironically, the NPC has attempted to use the veneer of “defending democracy in the organization” to cover-up its actions. They claim that the BDS WG refused to comply with social media standards, but it is the majority of the leadership who chose to use bureaucratic measures as a cudgel against dissent.

It is no coincidence that these actions come at a time of acute geopolitical tension when the Democratic Party is loudly reasserting its long-held commitment to American militarism and imperialism. Over the past month DSA has come under attack from various liberal outlets for diverging from the Democratic Party line and criticizing NATO. [For DSA's right wing to meet its goals of partnering with the Democratic Party](#) (with not so much as a peep about a break anymore), they must prove themselves reliable partners and willing apologists for imperialism and Zionism when necessary. Consequently, instead of disciplining an elected official who uses his congressional

powers to support Israel's colonial project, they decided to suppress internal dissent by disbanding the BDS WG.

Note the difference in how Bowman was treated by the NPC—an elected representative associated with DSA nationally, who fails to consistently uphold the organization's positions on BDS, and who recently [doubled-down](#) on his commitment to military support of Israel—compared to the treatment of the BDS WG for disagreeing with Bowman. This betrays a double standard: if you are an elected official, DSA will bend over backwards to make sure that no accountability is enforced; if you are a regular member, particularly one fighting for liberatory international politics, you're on the chopping block. Again, this is wholly unacceptable.

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Since the 2021 National Convention, *Tempest* has argued the importance of [democratizing](#) the [structures](#) of [the organization](#). Members currently have very few channels, besides public letters and twitter, to impact DSA in between conventions, and there is no process for recall of leadership or structures of accountability. What appeared as abstract issues at the time of the convention, have taken on real meaning. There is a battle around these questions unfolding in DSA because of the overstep taken by the NPC. But behind it all is a battle over principled politics and the proper strategy for the socialist movement—debates we must find ways to have.

We reassert the importance of strategic discussions and disagreement as a core tenet of a multi-tendency organization. The move to decharter the BDS WG is not only an attack on Palestinian solidarity organizing, but is an attempt to take the offensive on recrafting the acceptable political lines of DSA in favor of baldly reformist electoral politics, at a time when "socialists in office" are being pulled further to the right under a Biden presidency. In light of this dechartering, many Palestinian organizations are [rightly calling into question](#) whether DSA is a group they can work with, or [one that will throw them under the bus](#) when a conflict of interest presents itself. These groups are right to question DSA's commitment Palestine solidarity. And yet it is also clear that despite the NPC's position and actions, [more DSA members support BDS than the NPC](#) at this time.

The fight for BDS is among the central struggles of our time. Especially on an issue of such critical importance to building the Left in the U.S., Palestinian solidarity is a bare-minimum political line that socialists should not compromise on. But this is not about just defending the principle of anti-imperialist politics, it's about the fact that we need more BDS organizing in DSA and this activity has been undermined and put on the back burner by the national leadership. The BDS WG and other Palestinian organizers both inside and outside DSA are leading critical fights, central to the broader struggle for socialism, and DSA would do well to uplift and support their work—not impede it.

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Every organization goes through ups and downs that must be navigated. And for the haters out there, we say definitively: we want there to be a healthy, democratically functioning, multi-tendency organization where tens of thousands of socialists of different stripes can work together around agreed areas of urgent political work. But it is clear that what worked in 2016 is no longer working in 2022 and that the way the organization has routinely positioned itself in relation to electeds who

are not accountable to the organization means that we have set ourselves up to follow the lead of the Squad into Pelosi's wing, rather than charting an independent socialist position.

We know many will disagree with our take, and we look forward to comradely discussion. But regardless of where one falls on these questions, it is formally the responsibility of the NPC to see us through a process of addressing the decline in morale, membership and purpose. On all accounts, the NPC has not only failed at this task, they have made the crisis worse every step of the way through their intransigence and their attempt to circumvent the debate. It is clear we need a special convention. The NPC has made it abundantly obvious that they cannot be trusted to navigate the deep disagreements in the organization. Left to their own devices, they will dig in their heels and push more comrades and working groups out. A special convention is one of the *only* mechanisms through which members can participate in decisions in between conventions - a unique space where we as a membership might take stock of the crossroads we face and where to go next. Without this we allow the votes of increasingly unaccountable members of the NPC to decide on our behalf that DSA sides with Bowman over Palestine activists, and sides with the Democratic Party over principled politics.

We must build—with those inside and outside of DSA— both a stronger movement for BDS and for Palestinian liberation, as part of the fight to rebuild the socialist movement, and more powerful opposition to all pro-imperialist, anti-democratic attacks, whether they come from the ruling class, or the leadership of our own organizations.

Tempest Collective Steering Committee

What you can do

- Read the BDS WG's [most recent statement](#): they reject the legitimacy of the NPC's motion and call for a reversal of the decision.
- [Sign on](#) to it as an individual or a group. See this [template resolution](#) as a model dissent language for your DSA Chapter or WG.
- Participate in the BDS WG's [letter writing campaign](#) to pressure the NPC to reverse discipline and reinstate the BDS WG leadership.
- Attend the BDS WG's [emergency forum](#) this Sunday, March 27 at 3pm EDT to determine next steps collectively.

P.S.

- TEMPEST. POSTED MARCH 26, 2022:
<https://www.tempestmag.org/2022/03/democracy-isnt-optional/>