

METRO ATLANTA DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA
Minutes -- December 1, 2007

The meeting was called to order at the Friends Meeting House in Decatur, with 18 in attendance.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Austin-- Lots of activity due to the Douglas-Debs dinner. A bit under \$2,000 in the bank; full report after bank statement comes. The dinner cost \$6,816.85. We took in \$8,605, resulting in \$1,788 in profits – um, revenue.

Milt-- We paid for each Atlanta delegate and alternate's registration (except two who paid for themselves) and contributed \$1,200 to a national transportation pool. Without those expenditures we would have netted c. \$3,000 in revenue.

DOUGLAS-DEBS DINNER EVALUATION

Attendance (*Milt*)-- 240 tickets were purchased in advance and there were some walk-ins. 70 who had tickets were delegates, who paid cost. Because of the large turnout we paid for more catering staff and tipped \$20 each. In general, it was within our budget guidelines. We could have made more if we had charged more but we decided not to. National DSA paid for the hall.

Thirty-three of our 80 Atlanta area members attended the dinner. Another 20 on our mailing list also came. (The rest were labor and others.) So, we have a good core group, which seems to be growing. About 13-14 of our members worked on the dinner and/or attended the convention.

Three state senators attended (Fort, Orrock, Thomas) and Benefield sent a contribution.

The dinner was a huge success.

Feedback (*Milt*)-- Nan Orrock said it was a great evening. Alice said it was “incredible,” moving. Rev. McDonald said he received positive feedback later. Bobbie Paul, WAND director said that later when she heard Rev. Lowrey say on another occasion a few good people can make things happen she thought about the DSA dinner, which had such a diverse audience – age, race etc.

DSA delegates from out of town: One from NYC, an established chapter, asked how we did it. Others sent emails praising our effort. Chair of the Boston chapter, another strong one, said they couldn't do what we did.

Bernie Sanders attracted some people, but others had not heard of him. Union support was key. Charlie Flemming helped a lot, also the head of the GSU labor program. Some union locals bought program booklet ads because of Charlie. Alice, Rev. McDonald, Stu Ackoff and co-chairs also attracted people.

Some unions were reluctant to be involved because of the term “socialist.” Nancy Lenk, AFSCME official and former DSA member who chaired Saturday’s rally, was impressed that we were able to get the IBEW hall. Charlie caught some flack.

No one complained about the food! The leftovers were donated to an organization for homeless people. The Hamiltons were wonderful; the plaques were beautiful, thanks to Paul; even the table decorations drew compliments. We made some new contacts who will help us.

Barbara -- Radial Café’s catering staff applauded Sanders enthusiastically.
Jorge -- and we applauded the staff.

Milt expressed his appreciation for the chapter’s award to him.

Media -- Sending news releases and calling had no effect on the AJC or CL. Atlanta Progressive News sent out a good article. They merit our support. Adam had DSA folks on his WRFG program. He also recorded the Sanders and Fletcher speeches and will try to air them. Gary Washington of WRFG’s “Labor Forum” also hosted Milt and aired part of one of the speeches. WRFG needs support also. Sanders’ speech was videoed and should be up on the DSA web page at some point

What did we learn? -- *Milt*: A number of progressive groups we contacted did not attend the dinner, notably Project South; Jobs With Justice; ABLE (African American churches) except for their staff person and Rev. McDonald; Atlanta students; ACLU; Amnesty International. Why? Why isn’t there more dialogue in Atlanta between different communities? In the coming year, can we bring progressive groups together across racial and cultural lines to dialogue and do joint works? We need to attend other groups’ meetings.

Charles -- We need to attend demos that are central to the concerns of those groups. Too much talk, too little action.

BSegal – We got lots of help from other DSA folks, didn’t have to ask anyone, both local and national.

Bob C – Many members from GPJC, arts community, WAND attended.

Paul S – Did the different groups mingle or just sit at their own tables?

Milt – unions bought 7 tables, 56 people. Others sat in mixed groups. Consensus was that there was mingling, though long tables made it difficult. Round tables better.

Jorge -- The Spanish language flier was a good idea though we got it out very late. We have to court groups and refine the process. The Latino organizations welcome others.

Barbara L. -- There wasn't a good list at registration of who had paid.

Milt -- One reason was that many unexpected people showed up, and the unions didn't give names of people for their tables.

Austin -- There's a lot of cultural lag. We have to work at it, it will take a while.

Paul S -- Could we have a round table with other organizations to talk about how we can work together more?

Bob C -- Moderates the GPJC calendar. There's also the forums on the second Tuesday of each month at 1st Iconium. *Austin* -- We should join GPJC. Consensus agreed.

Milt -- Sent letter to all endorsers and supporters thanking them, reminding them about DSA and saying we will let them know if we do another (smaller) Douglas-Debs dinner next year.

General discussion -- Get a socialist speaker, like Cornell West or Barbara Ehrenreich. Decide what we offer, define ourselves better.

Milt said he was particularly touched by the award he was given by the chapter.

RALLY

Milt -- We were fortunate to have Nancy Lenk and Sandy Stimson etc. along with Bill Fletcher, but the program was pulled together at the last minute. The band appealed to the younger people, as requested. There was an important forum on Iran scheduled for the same night.

Adam -- Agnes Scott students were one of the most effective parts. We need to follow up when we attend events. There's mistrust and "either-or-ism" on the left.

Gunther -- Grady coalition didn't attract as many people as it should either, and environmental movement could be more united. We need to think about why we aren't more attractive and what we need to do differently, and to what degree we want to work together. American individualism may be a factor. Why can't we mobilize more people? Can we invite someone who knows about the process? I also believe the term "socialist" is forbidden to some and they don't know what it means, they associate it with communism. Need a short, reassuring definition.

Jorge -- From the outside people want to know "who are you and what can you do for me?" to help them decide their priorities. Are you self-appointed convenors? I'm

impressed by the civility and opportunity to think things through and apparent lack of knee-jerk political rhetoric, willingness to be a leavening agent. We need to ask outsider questions.

Norm – What we bring to the table is education about systemic problems, that capitalism is the problem. That will be the reason why people stay around.

CONVENTION

Barbara S. – Recruiting and continuing education started a discussion but not enough time. Difficulty of telling people what socialism is.

Bob – That was the question everyone asked and people at the dinner mentioned it too. Any of us can join one of the DSA online discussion groups. They talked about developing some materials on socialism. People associate it with socialism. We talked about programs we could have: a socialist “university” or reading group at a bookstore.

Adam – Would want a couple of month in advance to get books read. One thing I came to is that maybe we need to reinvent socialism, look at definitions that go beyond the usual. Have internal discussion before we try to communicate with others.

Kempton – Henry’s on single-payer health was wonderful, and one on creating locals also. Time too short but energy was great.

Barbara S. – It’s good to be visible, wear a T-shirt, to start conversations.

Milt – with Austin, we attended the one on building locals. I presented our experience, the importance of a treasury, regular meeting places, and people who enjoy each other’s company. Informal film showings, etc. and the tone make a big difference. The discussion raised the issue of burnout, which we need to be aware of. Everyone talked about it. There have to be breaks, sense of solidarity, support. Saddest thing is allowing an organization to drift. If a local doesn’t work then put a hold on it, make a conscious decision. We need to be honest and direct in dealing with those kind of issues.

Austin – Members of our groups were making a lot of notes, it seemed to be meaningful for them.

Bob – DSA prepared a powerpoint on the economic justice document, It’s on the website.

Barbara J. – We need to think about how or if we can use the economic justice document in our work in Atlanta. We had a good informal discussion of it before the convention.

Norm – For a possible book club, “Introduction to Political Economy” would be a good start, for discussion of systemic issues. Sackrey, Schneider and Knodler (DollarsandSense.org).

Adam – Logistics: A couple times when delegates left and there was no system for letting the alternates know what to do.

Milt – Adam spoke on Norm's resolution and played an active role that made a difference.

Jorge – I learned a lot from the immigration workshop, for ex. the relation of the issue to globalization, NAFTA etc. For defining ourselves I try to bring in ethics, values and choices -- like when you buy a car. It's not just about supply and demand, it's about the results of your choices. Ask why are there increasing numbers of poor and uninsured people in a country so rich?

Norm -- Charles did a one-page paper on what we stand for which includes a brief summary of the economic justice document.

Barbara J. -- It should be sent to the membership, requesting feedback.

Consensus that Charles' paper should be discussed, refined, and maybe sent to the national organization for their use.

GA PROG SUMMIT

GPS2008.org. Jan. 11-13 at Clark-Atlanta University. Registration is \$50.

Important because it brings progressives and activists together. This year collaboration is encouraged. Milt has asked Charlie Fleming to join DSA in a workshop on the Employee Free Choice Act. Last year our members did four workshops. Henry may be doing another workshop on single-payer health care. Proposals may still be submitted. A collaborating organization is required.

Sponsorship costs are \$125 with one free registration or \$275 with two free registrations and a guaranteed table. Kempton moved \$275; passed by consensus. We need volunteers to staff the table. Contact Milt. We will have copies of the economic agenda document.

Adam – If we have a table let's talk about relevant issues to people.

Norm – Let's do a workshop on the economic justice document.

Milt will find out more about workshop proposal at this Monday's meeting. Norm will explore a joint workshop with WAND on federal budget and economic justice issues.

MEETINGS etc: GPS this Monday. Healthcare in America – Social Action Comm. of 1st Iconium Baptist Church, Tues. Dec. 11. ABLE breakfast meeting at CWA Dec. 15th 9 am.

A Powerpoint presentation is available on growing USA economic inequality, from AFL-CIO.

Newsletter – Barbara S. is working on the newsletter, with Barbara J and others.

Steering committee will meet Sat. Jan. 19 at 11:30.

Jan. 26 is a “People’s Assembly” as part of the National Day of Action called by the World Social Forum, in conjunction with Georgia’s annual Poor People’s Day at the Capitol.

Discussion of date and speaker for next meeting. Feb. 2 with speaker on Venezuela may not work because of GA presidential primary coming up. Other meeting dates suggested. Steering committee will make the decision after further research.

Meeting ended at 1:20.