

Metro Atlanta DSA – Minutes: April 26, 2008

The meeting was called to order at the Friends Meeting House in Decatur, with introductions; 15 in attendance.

Treasurer's report: \$2,410.94 remains in the account.

Web page: Bob and Norm are working on this, with their talented progeny. Cost: \$600 to register domain name, initial setup, software, hosting services, then it drops to about \$300/yr for maintenance. Domain name? Tabled name choice for decision by email and steering committee but agreed to approve cost and go forward.

Retreat: Planned for 9 am – 3 pm Sat. May 31 at Friends' Meeting House, to share our political/personal histories, views, values, etc., get to know each other better. Austin will check on availability of the room. Backup: Norm's club room.

Education committee: Next meeting of Socialist Education Circle will be 7 pm, Sunday May 4 at Norm's club room. Discussion will be based on all of Michael Harrington's book *Socialism, Past and Future*, with Charles' commentary. Decisions on next book and frequency of meetings will follow. Turnout at last meeting was good, about 14 people.

Douglas-Debs Dinner: Milt reviewed the award recipients (State Sens. Nan Orrock and Vincent Fort; Helen Butler, director of Coalition for a People's Agenda), co-chairs (Rev. Tim McDonald; Nancy Lenk, Dep. Dir. AFSCME 1644; Charlie Flemming, Pres. Atlanta-N.GA Labor Council; Walter Andrews, Pres. CWA 3204; Richard Ray, Pres. GA State AFL-CIO), and speakers (Bill Lucy, Secy Treas. AFSCME and Pres., Coalition of Black Trade Unionists). Rev. Lowery still considering being a co-chair. At a meeting Monday on health care at the Labor Council Milt invited some people to serve on the dinner committee (they contribute \$100 and lend their names). We'll be starting very soon to add names, so we can raise seed money without being pressed at the last minute. Need to decide on music and some other details. Date: Sat. Nov. 8, 2008. Reception 6 pm, dinner 7 pm.

Announcements:

- Grady Coalition will hold a retreat on May 3, 9 am – 1 pm at Iconium Baptist Church.
- April 29, 5 pm Jobs With Justice will hold a press conference on their regional transportation plan.
- Joe Parko reminds us that the San Francisco longshoremen will hold a work stoppage for 8 hours May 1 to protest the war.

Economic Justice Agenda discussion:

Barbara J. reviewed the history of the EJA and identified the points that were added at the November national convention.

Milt: We are starting to discuss it internally and then we'll decide how to present it to others. Two points: Doesn't mention Iraq, though DSA has a clear position for terminating the war ASAP. The introduction describes current conditions accurately: Neoliberalism, government withdrawing from addressing inequalities, cost of our empire, undermining social and economic democracy, public sector devalued etc. Need to assure greater equality, halt race to bottom, protect environment, greater oversight of corporate behavior, support labor rights etc.

Milt: Presented a one-page summary (attached). For our internal discussion, he broke out the main points of the agenda into two categories: Structural reforms and radical reforms and observed that with the new points, radical reforms predominate.

Jeff: This document doesn't give a theoretical analysis but could provide goals and policies, help us define and build the organization v. other organizations. I'm disappointed because it's as conservative as you can get and still be socialist. Doesn't challenge the ownership of organizations now dominated by capitalists. For ex. energy industry, finance industry. Need to demand public representatives as a majority on the board of directors before we bail the banks out with public funds. Also, new immigration section perpetuates the idea that immigrants working for low wages hurt African-Americans; the fact is, this hurts previous immigrants more and women (and high-tech workers). Need to stress unity more so groups are not pitted against each other.

Charles: (See attachment for full statement.) The document proposes reforms to build and expand the U.S. welfare state. It gives a valid analysis and proposes worthy reforms, but its analysis of causes of negative effects of capitalism are basically wrong. Adopts standpoint of liberal defenders of capitalism. Targets neoliberal policies, not the system, which is the real problem. Lets capitalism off the hook. Problem is not that it advocates for progressive programs, but that it argues for such programs as ends in themselves. For ex., single-payer health care. Promotes the fallacy that elected governments under capitalism are essentially democratic. Abandons struggles for human rights violations, such as reproductive rights, support for state of Israel, etc. Not compatible with socialist principles.

Norm: (See attachments) Presented a handout for general audiences. Led those present in singing the International.

Discussion. Barbara L. facilitated. Jeff said we can best influence mass organizations rather than elected officials. Purpose is too narrow. Let's go for the reforms but not kid ourselves. Jorge: We have to look at stages toward our end. This is a first step. Austin: Agree. Don't see conflict between our end (public ownership) and where we are now. Have to work in the situation where even former communist states, Russia and China, are moving to capitalism. We're swimming upstream challenging capitalist privilege. Jeff: Not steps, but parallel streams. Take hard cop, soft cop strategy. Mix street theater with a reformist approach. Norm: This is a preliminary run for taking the EJA to the community.

Further discussion of the document's purpose, and whether we want to promote it. Charles would not feel comfortable doing that. Some others would. Kempton pointed out that it's a compromise. Norm says our function is to educate and unite. The document isn't unique to our organization. How can we bring a socialist world view to the working class and its allies? Jeff reminded us that it's a central document of our organization. Instead of presenting the whole document, use the four pillars of a just economic policy as minimum beliefs to unite, and extract bullet points on policies. Propose as our minimum standards for alliances; an "honest popular front." Paul asked how would other groups support the EJA, or is it like a calling card? What are other DSA locals doing? (Barbara J. will ask.) Bob: We could be seen as a stealth operation – people could ask are you socialists or not? We can present it as an interim program, as a tactic. Charles said we need to organize ourselves around an analysis we agree on. We need to support people's actions in ongoing struggles. Jorge supports Norm's lighter tone and use of music rather than presenting ideology. But we need to have a true sense of solidarity and be able to explain what we mean. Listening and accompanying, supporting actions, not just selling. Ref. Nation article re black church tradition to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable; beloved community; liberation theology's option for the poor. Tone is important.

Discussion to be continued, due to the wide range of responses to the document and questions about its application.