

# Amendment #23: Nobody's Too Poor for DSA: Redefining Member in Good Standing

## Why Is Build Endorsing C/B #23?

- *Nobody is too poor for DSA.*
  - It is often said within DSA that nobody gets turned away for lack of money, but our bylaws and constitution do not reflect that.
  - We must recognize poor people as full members with full rights who need not justify their inability to pay or be granted exceptions.
  - Making our organization accessible to all requires breaking down financial barriers to participation.
  - Also! This amendment replaces the only gendered pronouns in the Bylaws and Constitution with they/them pronouns.
- *We should encourage everyone to pitch in what they can.*
  - We can ask our comrades who can afford to sponsor comrades, while still not requiring sponsorship, exception, or explanation for comrades who can't afford dues.
  - We can trust our comrades to give more if they can, and if we ask people to give extra to sponsor comrades who can't afford dues, we will see that comrades who can afford to are willing to pass the hat.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**CONCERN:** Dues are important because they establish a greater commitment, and people need to have some skin in the game.

**ANSWER:** Dues don't make members have skin in the game. Organizing to help more of our members to understand that our liberation is bound up together and that none of us will be free until all of us are free is what ensures we all have skin in the game.

**ANOTHER ANSWER:** The massive rise in membership over the past few years resulted in tens of thousands who joined and then never came to a meeting or are no longer members in good standing. Requiring paying money to join did not automatically transfer into all of those members being engaged at a deeper level than having had paid dues. Without chapter infrastructure that facilitates good, solid organization, members join online but don't get plugged into the work. Simply put: just paying dues doesn't mean you're an active member, and we should focus on making sure chapters are supported and able to organize new members.

**ANOTHER ANSWER:** We currently accept members who give money and do literally no work, why is that viewed as more valuable than people willing to contribute in other ways, but have no money? We believe dues are not the most important or only valuable way members can contribute to the organization.

**CONCERN:** Doesn't this make the barrier to membership too low? Doesn't membership need to mean something, to be a choice people make?

**ANSWER:** Currently, what tells people that joining DSA is a bigger commitment than just joining an email list or signing a petition is the fact that it requires money. It is important that becoming a member requires somewhat more of a choice than people make when they join an email list or sign a petition, but this is not the only way!

**ANOTHER ANSWER:** The authors' addition to help address that is in Article I Section 1 of the Bylaws, that the membership form should require making a commitment to the principles of the organization. In practice this could mean adding a required checkbox saying something along the lines of "YES! I'm ready to be a socialist organizer with DSA, and commit to the [principles](#) of the organization." For both people who pay dues or those

who declare an inability to do so, and however it gets actually built out if this passes, this helps make the membership form mean slightly more to those filling it out.

**CONCERN:** Aren't you underestimating what poor people are willing to contribute to by deciding for them?

**ANSWER:** This amendment was written by people who collectively are deeply familiar with labor organizing, with organizing in dues-based-membership models, with funding the work of our DSA organizing, and with being poor.

**ANOTHER ANSWER:** We understand where this is coming from. We have learned well how workers will step up when asked, and how you can be holding people back from their revolution if you're not willing to ask. We're not saying people shouldn't be asked to give what they can. We're saying people need an option to say they can't give money but they still want to join, because they still matter.

**ANOTHER:** Moreover, we have to recognize that DSA simply is not a labor union, and it is not nearly as directly and immediately tied to improving the material realities of people's jobs. More importantly, labor unions tend to be asking people who have jobs to contribute, and we are not only organizing people with jobs. We are here to organize everyone.

**CONCERN:** What if we still require that every member gets funded and just track the memberships that need to be funded because they couldn't pay? Why is this proposal better than dues sponsorship?

**ANSWER:** There's nothing in here to prevent DSA from creating a way for tracking, internally or publicly, how the balance of people declaring inability to pay dues compares to sponsored memberships, and it'd probably be useful for encouraging people who can contribute more to do so. However, nobody who cannot pay should need to wait for someone else to contribute money in order to be a member in good standing.

**CONCERN:** What's to stop a chapter from tabling an event and signing up a lot of people at an event as members under this new definition (as opposed to just collecting contact info as they might currently do) and thus boosting their representation without necessarily increasing their truly active membership?

**ANSWER:** We would be surprised if Locals could get a bunch of people to join DSA to boost representation, but wouldn't for the purposes of organizing people.

**CONCERN:** Are you changing this to make it so people can join DSA directly through the Locals rather than joining through the National organization?

**ANSWER:** No. This amendment doesn't touch that already existing language in the Bylaws and Constitution. We understand the compendium's cost analysis claims this would add cost of staff having to check with Locals to see if people joined, and we're not sure what to tell you except that we don't know why people analyzing Constitution and Bylaw amendments don't know what's already in the Constitution and Bylaws, or why they didn't update the compendium when corrected on this multiple times. This amendment is genuinely taking no stance whatsoever on that language or practice, which has existed and is currently being used by Locals like Metro DC.

**CONCERN:** Won't this create a free-rider problem?

**ANSWER:** The idea of a free rider problem is an issue unions deal with because they are legally required to represent everyone, in everything from bargaining to grievances. When people in a bargaining unit opt out of paying dues, the union is still obligated to representational activity for that person, which can cost money. Free riders don't apply to organizations like DSA where there's no collective bargaining on our behalf and no benefits to speak of, like in a union. The marginal cost of each additional member is extremely low, basically the cost of one additional Democratic Left to print and ship four times each year.

**CONCERN:** Won't this open us up for abuses in the membership system?

**ANSWER:** While we absolutely understand the concerns of bad actors joining just to have access to members-only information, we don't think that the answer to those concerns is raising the barrier to entry. Instead, we believe that anti-doxxing and operational security trainings should be held to focus on making sure that membership all around is safe, which would create a safe environment for chapters to operate in.

**ANOTHER ANSWER:** Money-based membership doesn't prevent anyone from getting a bunch of people to join a Local to push their agenda. It just ensures only people with money have a greater ability to do unscrupulous stuff.