

Syllabus and Calendar: Revolutionary Strategy

Summary: The *Revolutionary Strategy* Reading Group will begin on **Tuesday, October 7th** and be based in New York City. This group will cover the entirety of this 2008 book which is 10 chapters, around 100 pages.

Goal: The primary goal of this group is to discuss the political strategy of the DSA as a socialist organization in the United States in the twenty-first century. What does it mean to be a political party? When DSA members are elected to public office, what should be their orientation toward the Democratic Party? How much priority should they place on passing legislation? The UAW has put out calls for a general strike in 2028, what does this tactic hope to accomplish and what role can the DSA play? If the DSA wishes to be a mass party of the working class these are central questions. Through analyzing the strategies used by socialists in the 20th century, we can see what paths are available for our current political moment.

Members: DSA members and non-members are welcome!

Reading: [Revolutionary Strategy by Mike Macnair \(PDF\)](#) / [Audiobook](#)

Structure:

- The group will have one coordinator who will bear responsibility for administrative elements of the group and serve as a regular meeting facilitator. Alternative facilitators are welcome to assist in any session if they'd like, just let the coordinator know via email or the group chat!
- Supplemental materials and discussion questions are included in the schedule below.
 - You are not required to read/watch any of the supplementary materials. I provide them as a resource to give overviews of the history that the author sometimes glosses over to keep the book focussed.
 - Discussion questions are subject to change. You may also submit your own discussion questions at any time. Simply email them to the coordinator or put them in the group chat.
- At every session, the coordinator will give a short summary of the reading, answer any questions, and clear up any confusion before launching into the discussion.
 - Please feel free to come prepared with sections of the reading you'd like to discuss or contributions to the discussion questions

Timeline and Location: Sessions will be held Tuesdays 6-8pm. The last session will **tentatively** be held in-person at the [Brandworkers office in LIC](#) (w/ a Zoom option), and all other sessions are planned to be fully virtual.

The Zoom link will be the same for all meetings:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85733576180?pwd=TCn58XxvxaPeqMEEBT3cfR3QVwfj96.1>

Schedule:

Note:** The chapter and page breakdown below is for the PDF version of the book linked above. If you have a hard copy or different PDF version, **please go by the chapter titles.

<u>Reading Assignment</u>	<u>Discussion Questions</u>
<p>Week 1 (Tuesday, October 7th, 6-8pm) Zoom <u>Marxist Political Strategy:</u> <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>, pgs. 4 - 14 <i>Chapter 2: Marxism as a Political Strategy</i>, pgs. 15 - 22</p> <p>Supplemental Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splitting the left: The four internationals (video) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ An educational short video that connects the legacy of the four internationals • Imperialism vs Internationalism (text) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ McNair makes it clear in chapter 1 he does not intend to do a deep dive into imperialism. This is not because he considers it unimportant, and the article above is to illustrate his thoughts on imperialism and internationalism if you're curious. 	<p>Chapter 1 - Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the author, what is the current state of the Left globally? Do you agree with his assessment? • Do you see any of the strategic ideas Macnair is talking about expressed in DSA campaigns you've been involved with or seen? Do any of these ideas feel like they capture things you know? What, who, or why? <p>Chapter 2 - Marxism as a Political Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do Marx & Engels reject resolving the problems of the proletariat through the state? Why must the party of the proletariat be international? • Why does Macnair think the workers need a party? Why can't unions or movements play the same role?
<p>Week 2 (Tuesday, October 14th, 6-8pm) Zoom <u>Strategy of the Center:</u> <i>Chapter 3: Reform Coalition or Mass Strike?</i>, pgs. 23 - 30 & <i>Chapter 4: The Revolutionary Strategy of the Centre</i>, pgs. 31 - 39</p> <p>Supplemental Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The German Revolution Betrayed (video) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ This short documentary will help give context for the strategies of the left-center-right using the example of the German SPD in 	<p>Chapter 3: Reform coalition or mass strike?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the end results of the right and left's claims according to the author? • The author writes "...these issues, originally debated between the 1870s and 1900s, are live, unresolved questions in today's politics." Do you agree? Where can we see the questions play out in DSA or elsewhere? <p>Chapter 4: The revolutionary strategy of the center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the strategy of patience, how should the workers movement (or a party) engage with the government? How would this 'strategy of patience' relate to mass

<p>the early 20th century. McNair repeatedly uses them as an example, so this should help shed light on his opinions.</p>	<p>social movements like the Black Lives Matter or Anti-ICE uprisings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What errors did the center make when using the strategy of patience? How can we avoid those errors?
<p>Week 3 (Tuesday, October 21st, 6-8pm) Zoom <u>Unity in Diversity:</u> <i>Chapter 6: Communist Strategy and the Party Form</i>, pgs. 51 - 59 & <i>Chapter 7: Unity in Diversity</i>, pgs. 60 - 68</p> <p>Supplemental Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bite sized introduction to DSA factions (text) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Previous supplemental materials have looked at historical examples. This short article gives a quick overview of DSA's current unity in diversity in the context of the recent 2025 DSA national convention. If you're looking to learn more about the diversity of thought within DSA, this is the perfect way to familiarize yourself. • A Guide to DSA Politics (video) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A very similar review of DSA politics to give a slightly different perspective from the article. 	<p>Chapter 6: Communist Strategy and the Party Form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some examples the author gives for justified and unjustified splits in parties/internationals? How do we determine if a split is justified or not? • What are the 3 critical elements to the "party of a new type"? Why did the Bolsheviks fail despite seemingly creating the party of a new type? • Do you see any examples of the 3 critical elements being applied in modern socialist parties? Are these modern parties avoiding or repeating the errors of the past in your opinion? <p>Chapter 7: Unity in Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was a united front deemed necessary in the first place? How was this different from 'left unity' or other types of fudged unity? • Why are autonomy and independence important conditions for socialists/communists entering into a united front policy? What happens if those conditions are not met? • What are some of the contradictions inherent in unity and how can those contradictions be resolved?
<p>Week 4 (Tuesday, October 28th, 6-8pm) Zoom <u>Minimum-Maximum Program+The Role of the International(s):</u> <i>Chapter 8: The 'Workers' Government Slogan</i>, pgs. 69 - 78 & <i>Chapter 9: Political Consciousness and International Unity</i>, pgs. 79 - 94</p> <p>Supplemental Materials</p>	<p>Chapter 8 questions - The 'Workers' Government Slogan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you agree with the author's conception of 'party-states'? Is the US a party-state? • What are your thoughts on Mike's proposed beginnings of a minimum program? What else would be important for a minimum program? • If a party is unified around a minimum program, how does it bring about the minimum program? Must it be brought

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Russian Revolution After October (video) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This video will help give a background on the history of the Bolsheviks after the revolution, the period that McNair focuses on and analyzes in this book. • State and Revolution (text) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ McNair mentions this work by Lenin in chapter 8. Very helpful for understanding the theory of a party-state as well as giving insight into Bolshevik thought in the time directly after the revolution. 	<p>about all at once?</p> <p>Chapter 9 questions - Political consciousness and international unity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the issue with ‘Doing what the Bolsheviks did’? Why did the strategy work for a time? • Do you think the author’s analysis of the international situation is accurate? Is it impossible for states to break from the international capitalist order?
<p>Week 5 (Tuesday, November 4th, 6-8pm) In-person w/ Zoom option <i>Revolutionary Defeatism+Democratic Republic:</i> Chapter 5: <i>War and Revolutionary Strategy</i>, pgs. 40 - 50 & Chapter 10: <i>Republican Democracy and Revolutionary Patience</i>, pgs. 95 - 103</p> <p>Supplemental Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxism and the Democratic Republic (text) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is an in-depth article by a DSA member describing the features and importance of a democratic republic. 	<p>Chapter 5 questions - War and revolutionary strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would it look like for us to ‘prepare for a crisis of state power’? Does it make sense to arm the working class in the ways McNair describes? • How should DSA approach the many imperialist wars waged by the US? What should be our attitude in regards to proxy wars? <p>Chapter 10 questions - Republican democracy and revolutionary practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does McNair describe the democratic republic? Why does he believe this is the only form for the working class to take power? • What does democratic republicanism look like in a party structure? Has DSA begun to look democratic- republican in its organizational character and if so in what ways?

Interesting supplemental reading context:

Revolutionary Strategy is a short book that covers a lot of historical ground and makes reference to various socialist groups and events that readers may or may not be familiar with. While having wide

background knowledge is not required to enjoy and engage with the book, it is useful to have a brief understanding of the first three “Internationals.” Macnair frequently references the Second International and the Comintern, or Third International.

[Overview of the Internationals](#)

[The First International \(International Workingmen’s Association\) 1864 - 1873](#)

[Socialist International \(Second International; social-democracy\) 1889 - 1915](#)

[The Communist International \(Third international; Comintern\) 1919 - 1943](#)

If you’re interested in learning more about the history of the mass party strategy in America, I recommend [The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912](#). It’s a long book but includes a plethora of primary sources from the era that showcase the successes and failures of the [Socialist Party of America](#), arguably the largest socialist/communist party in US history.