

Rules Bulletin #1 / October 2013

for members only

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ISO rules commission introduction

The February 2013 National Convention of the ISO authorized the National Committee to choose a rules commission to examine the existing ISO rules and make proposals regarding rule changes at the 2014 convention. That commission consists of Nicole Colson, Paul D’Amato, Bill Roberts, Eric Ruder, Lee Wengraf, and David Whitehouse. The proposal to create the rules commission indicated that though the ISO at the 2013 convention had approved changes in the ISO’s disciplinary procedures, that the 2014 convention would consider all the rules of the ISO open to discussion and change.

In addition to making proposals for changes in the ISO rules, the commission also took upon itself, in the spirit of the discussions that had taken place at the 2013 convention, to develop a short membership “code of conduct,” which we also present here for consideration as a connected but separate item to the ISO rules.

In order that the current disciplinary committee and appeals committee were able to begin functioning, the ISO steering committee developed interim procedures for these bodies. The rules commission has taken these written procedures and, based on consultation with others and the experience of these committees so far, devised a proposed Disciplinary and Appeals process document that we will include in a future ISO convention internal bulletin.

The rules and code of conduct proposals included here are annotated with brief explanations of the proposed changes.

These are proposals intended as the starting point for a full discussion in the organization during the preconvention period. We expect that there may be other proposals and amendments. **We are asking that any proposed changes to the rules and procedures, the member code of conduct, and the disciplinary procedural guidelines be submitted no later than January 15, 2014, one month before the start of the convention.** There are two reasons for this. One, we want to give branches and delegates sufficient time to consider the proposals in detail before the convention itself, and two, we want to give the rules commission sufficient time to organize the submitted amendments and alternative proposals for discussion and voting on the convention floor. Given the potential complexity of this task, this lead-time will be essential to make sure that delegates at the convention will be able to engage in as full and efficient debate as possible prior to voting.

Documents and proposals about the rules will be gathered into separate convention documents specifically about the rules, so as to help facilitate the discussion. **Please send documents and proposals to rules@internationalsocialist.org.**

A note about our method

At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (1903), Lenin, in a report on his draft rules proposal, said the following:

The paragraphs in the Rules which govern the relations between the Central Committee and the local committees, and define the Central Committee’s competence cannot and should not enumerate all the points within that competence. Such an enumeration is inconvenient and impossible, for it is incon-

ceivable that all possible cases should be foreseen, and, moreover, points unprovided for might appear to be outside the competence of the Central Committee.

This point of Lenin’s—that rules cannot and should not enumerate all cases, but should provide general guidelines—is the spirit in which we approached the reshaping of the rules. Too much specificity implies that those cases not enumerated in the rules are not covered by them. We have been tasked with updating the rules regarding our disciplinary procedures as well as issues such as factions (for which there was no language in previous versions of our rules), caucuses, and other areas, all of which makes the rules somewhat longer than they were before. Nevertheless, we have strived to keep the rules as simple as possible. It is in this spirit that we have, for example, left the specification of guidelines for the procedures of a disciplinary body, or the means by which the convention elects its bodies, outside the formal rules of the organization.

We likewise think that while the rules stipulate that a condition of membership is paying dues, the dues structure itself should be detached from the rules and be considered separately by the ISO convention as needed.

Submitted by the ISO rules commission, October 2013

Draft language is in black.

Boxed type provides details of how this new draft would change current rules.

Motivations and explanations for rules, and for changes to the rules, appear as footnotes to the text.

ISO rules and procedures

Preface¹

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is an organization of socialists in the United States that is dedicated to the project of creating a revolutionary workers’ party as part of a worldwide movement for socialism. Its basic principles are embodied in the organization’s *Where We Stand*.

The ISO stands in and develops the revolutionary tradition of socialism from below. Standing as it does in this tradition, the ISO believes that the working class is the key social force in bringing about the abolition of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society. Therefore, it strives to construct a revolutionary party composed in its majority of workers. A revolutionary party is the instrument of the revolutionary struggle of the working class and bends its every effort to support and sustain that struggle.

The ISO is a disciplined, activist, democratic centralist organization. It is democratic in reaching its decisions and cen-

¹ The only significant change in the Preface is the deletion of references to Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky and to Stalin. We felt that the reference to Stalinism has lost its relevance, and our traditions are stated clearly in the *Where We Stand*. Therefore we considered the phrase “socialism from below” in this context to be sufficient.

tralist in carrying them out. The lower bodies of the organization are subordinated to the higher bodies, and all are subordinated to the delegated convention. ISO rules are binding on all members of the organization.

Changes “The International Socialist Organization is an organization of revolutionary socialists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism internationally and the construction of a world socialist system.” **to** “The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is an organization of socialists in the United States that is dedicated to the project of creating a revolutionary workers’ party as part of a worldwide movement for socialism. Its basic principles are embodied in the organization’s Where We Stand.”

Changes “the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky as opposed to the social democratic and Stalinist traditions.” **to** “the revolutionary tradition of socialism from below.”

Changes “The ISO stands for democratic centralism because the revolutionary party must be a disciplined, activist combat organization.” **to** “The ISO is a disciplined, activist, democratic centralist organization.”

Changes “...is the only force capable of building socialism in the world.” **to** “...is the key social force in bringing about the abolition of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society.”

Deletes “overwhelming” **from** “Therefore, it strives to construct a revolutionary party composed in its overwhelming majority of workers.”

Rules

I. Name

The name of the organization is the International Socialist Organization (hereafter referred to as “the ISO”).

II. Membership

A. A member is one who accepts the principles of the ISO (as outlined in “Where We Stand”), accepts its rules and procedures, pays dues, and works within and under the direction of the appropriate bodies of the organization. Where possible, all members shall be members of an appropriate trade union. Every member must take and sell *Socialist Worker*.

Changes “...one who agrees with the politics of the ISO...” **to** “one who accepts the principles of the ISO...”²

Changes “...accepts its constitution...” **to** “...accepts its rules and procedures...”³

B. Applicants for membership must sign a membership form. A membership card will be issued to each member. Membership must be renewed each year.

C. The basic unit of the ISO is the branch. Branches must be recognized by the ISO’s Steering Committee.⁴ A branch shall

² Replacing the word “agrees” with “accepts” is a small but important change. Requiring agreement with all principles would make it impossible for people to join the ISO who disagree about one or another political principle, even if they are willing to set aside that difference in order to work under the direction of the ISO.

³ The ISO has never had a constitution, so this is a wording change.

consist of not less than five (5) members who reside close enough to each other to meet regularly to carry out political activity.

Adds “Branches must be recognized by the ISO’s Steering Committee.”

D. Whenever possible, every member will belong to a duly constituted branch of the ISO. In areas where no branch exists, the Steering Committee will admit applicants as members-at-large.

Adds “Whenever possible...”

E. Each member must pay monthly dues according to the dues structure set by the National Convention. Members-at-large will pay dues directly to the national center.

F. Any member more than four (4) months in arrears in dues is no longer considered a member of the ISO. To re-establish membership, those in arrears must establish a plan to stay current with their branch treasurer (or in the case of members at large, with the national treasurer).

Changes “...more than six (6) months in arrears...” **to** “more than four (4) months in arrears...”

Adds: “To re-establish membership, those in arrears must establish a plan to stay current with their branch treasurer (or in the case of members at large, with the national treasurer)”.

G. Members of groups that face special oppression or systematic discrimination may form caucuses⁵ to discuss common concerns and to formulate common positions for consideration by the broader ISO membership.

Replaces II.H: “Any member or group of members has the right to call a caucus.”

Currently existing clause II.G (on discipline) is moved to its own section (III).

H. Members who wish to promote a particular set of positions or perspective in the organization have the right to form or join a faction. A faction consists of a group of members who coordinate to advance their views to the national organization (or a local branch). In the interest of open dialogue and debate, a faction must make its existence known to the national organization (or the local branch in question). During its existence, the faction may publish materials in the ISO Internal Bulletin and present its views at the National Convention (and/or appropriate branch venues).

This clause is all new.⁶

⁴ Any group of five people or more can’t simply claim to speak as a branch of the ISO, but must be recognized as such by the organization’s elected leadership.

⁵ The previous wording did not specify what a caucus is (which can mean different things in different contexts). The meaning stated here is what has been understood in far left tradition by a caucus. We would add that this is a statement of rights and not a prescriptive rule that mandates the creation of caucuses in the organization.

⁶ ISO members have always had the right to form or join factions, even though this wasn’t enumerated in prior versions of our rules. A faction grants the right to members with a minority point of view to

III. Disciplinary guidelines⁷

Note: This section (III) on discipline completely replaces the text of II.G, which was passed by Convention in February 2013. The February 2013 text is given verbatim at the end of this proposed redraft of the section.]

For a longer description of proper procedures for the handling of disciplinary cases and appeals, please consult the ISO Members' Code of Conduct and the ISO Disciplinary Procedures, both published separately.

A. All ISO members are expected to adhere to principles of non-discrimination and to abide by ISO rules. The ISO is an organization of people committed to fighting collectively toward a project of socialism. Members are committed to fighting class exploitation and all forms of oppression. The ISO expects its members to comport themselves in a manner fitting of that commitment—that is, refraining from all discriminatory actions and/or language toward members and others.

B. Whenever possible, disciplinary infractions should be handled with the aim of changing a member's improper behavior, rather than resorting to formal disciplinary measures. Nevertheless, in some cases formal disciplinary proceedings will be necessary.

Disciplinary measures can be taken by branches, the National Committee, or the Steering Committee if a member (or members) has not adhered to ISO rules or has engaged in conduct unbecoming a member (for example, violence or sexual harassment). When a member is subjected to formal disciplinary measures, this must be reported to the Steering Committee.⁸

Discriminatory harassment is prohibited. A member may be expelled, suspended, removed from a position, or censured for harassment of members of an oppressed group.

A member may be disciplined for making false statements to obtain membership or engaging in financial improprieties. Any member who acts as a strikebreaker, a provocateur, or an informer may be expelled from the organization.⁹

coordinate their efforts in order to win over the rest of the organization to the faction's position. Forming a faction also comes with the responsibility to make the faction's existence known to the national organization and/or the branch as appropriate. This openness is critical for full democratic participation by all members in the debate about whatever point of view the faction is organized around. Resolution of a factional debate typically results in the dissolution of the faction, but the timeframe and terms of such a dissolution should be determined as a matter of political judgment rather than by the organization's rules so that the specific circumstances surrounding the debate can be taken into account.

⁷ This section is offered with an eye toward specifying the ISO's project — and the expected behavior of members as a result.

⁸ It is important for the national leadership to be made aware of serious disciplinary infractions in order to follow up on their outcome, including when a member is expelled.

⁹ This language is intended to clarify some types of disciplinary infractions. Strikebreakers, provocateurs and informers are given special consideration because of the harm they can bring to a socialist organization.

All members facing disciplinary procedures have a right to a hearing by the appropriate body. Members must be informed of any disciplinary action being taken against them.

C. Grievances and disciplinary measures should be handled at a branch level or may be referred to the Steering Committee. In those rare situations where branch committees, the Steering Committee, or individuals bringing a complaint feel that circumstances would prevent it from being properly heard, cases may be brought to the national Disciplinary Committee by either a branch committee, the Steering Committee, or an individual. The Disciplinary Committee has the right to refuse to hear cases it rules to be without merit.

D. The Disciplinary Committee will consist of five people: one Steering Committee member to be chosen by the Steering Committee, and four ISO members elected by the National Convention. Four alternates for the committee will also be elected by the National Convention to serve in the event that a member of the committee recuses her/himself or is unable to serve.¹⁰

E. Members subject to disciplinary measures may appeal decisions to an Appeals Committee composed of five members: one Steering Committee member to be chosen by the Steering Committee, and four ISO members elected by the National Convention. Four alternates for the committee will also be elected by the National Convention to serve in the event that member(s) of the committee recuses her/himself or is unable to serve.¹¹

F. Members of the Disciplinary Committee and Appeals Committee may not simultaneously sit on both committees.

G. The disciplined member/s, aside from those expelled for being informers and provocateurs,¹² has/have the right to respond to charges once in an internal bulletin. The Disciplinary Committee and Appeals Committee will report to the National Convention.

The whole section above replaces all of the following (III.G):

"G. All ISO members are expected to adhere to principles of non-discrimination and to abide by ISO rules.

"Disciplinary measures can be taken by branches, the National Committee or the Steering Committee if a member (or members) has not adhered to ISO rules or has engaged in conduct unbecoming a member (for example, violence or sexual har-

¹⁰ The Rules Commission is proposing that the Disciplinary Committee be a total number of five people — with four members-at-large to be elected by National Convention (instead of the previous six), plus one Steering Committee member to be chosen for each case. We feel the slightly smaller size will help the committee's functioning.

The new proposal also increases the number of alternates to four (from the previous two), which will allow for more alternates to serve if needed.

¹¹ The number of alternates for the Appeals Committee would be increased to four (from the previous two), which will allow for more alternates to serve if needed.

¹² Given the seriousness of the charges and the harm to the socialist project, those who are found to be provocateurs or informers should not have the right to access ISO internal bulletins because of the potential further harm they might attempt.

assment). These include suspension, censure, expulsion or other appropriate measures. When a member is expelled, this must be reported to the Steering Committee to prevent them rejoining another branch]

“Grievances and disciplinary measures should be handled at a branch level or may be referred to the Steering Committee. In those rare situations where branch committees, the Steering Committee, or individuals bringing a complaint feel that circumstances would prevent it from being properly heard, cases may be brought to the national Disciplinary Committee by either a branch committee, the Steering Committee, or an individual. The Disciplinary Committee has the right to refuse to hear cases it rules to be without merit.

“The Disciplinary Committee will consist of seven people: one Steering Committee member to be chosen by the Steering Committee and six ISO members elected by the National Convention. Two alternates for the committee will also be elected by the National Convention to serve in the event that a member of the committee recuses her/himself or is unable to serve.

“Members subject to disciplinary measures may appeal decisions to an Appeals Committee composed of five numbers: one Steering Committee member to be chosen by the Steering Committee, and four ISO members elected by the National Convention. Two alternates for the committee will also be elected by the National Convention to serve in the event that a member of the committee recuses her/himself or is unable to serve.

“Members of the Disciplinary Committee and Appeals Committee may not simultaneously sit on both committees.

“The disciplined member/s has/have the right to respond to charges once in an internal bulletin. The Disciplinary Committee and Appeals Committee will report to the National Convention.”

IV. Leading bodies—National Convention

Heading replaces “III. National convention.”

A. The National Convention is the highest governing body of the organization. It shall be held once per year. The Convention sets policy for the ISO, and its decisions shall be binding on the entire membership.

Worded as original, but elections of Steering Committee, National Committee, etc. are moved to clause E below.

B. The National Convention is composed of branch delegates elected by majority vote in each branch. Representation at the Convention shall be proportionally based upon the dues-paying membership in good standing at the time of the Convention. The ratio of representation is set by the National Committee. The current delegate ratio is as follows: one delegate for the first five (5) dues paying members, and one delegate for every eight (8) members thereafter. Stated numerically, branches would receive one delegate for 5–12 dues-paying members, two delegates for 13–20 dues-paying members, three delegates for 21–28 dues-paying members, four delegates for 29–36 dues-paying members.

C. The National Committee shall issue the call for the Convention at least sixty (60) days prior to the date of the Convention for discussion of convention topics in branches and among

members-at-large. Internal bulletins shall be issued as needed during this preconvention discussion. Steering Committee documents shall begin appearing no later than two (2) weeks prior to the Convention. The Steering Committee has the right to invite nonvoting observers to the Convention.

Replaces “An internal bulletin shall be issued...” **with** “Internal bulletins shall be issued as needed...”

Adds: “The steering committee has the right to invite nonvoting observers to the convention.”¹³

D. The Convention will select a convention steering committee to seat delegates and to handle questions of procedure during the course of Convention. All resolutions and elections at the Convention will be settled by majority vote. Abstaining and absent delegates are not counted when determining a majority. The national Steering Committee will report convention decisions and votes to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the Convention ends.

Adds: “...during the course of Convention”

Adds: “Abstaining and absent delegates are not counted when determining a majority.”¹⁴

E. The Convention elects the Steering Committee, the National Committee, and the at-large¹⁵ and alternate members of the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees. The Convention determines the manner by which it elects members of these bodies.¹⁶

Consolidates language on elections from the current III-A with those in the current IV-C (on electing the NC).

Adds: “...and the at-large and alternate members of the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees.”

Deletes reference to the Convention determining size of the NC.¹⁷

Adds: “The Convention determines the manner by which it elects members of these bodies.”

F. A special convention may be called by a majority of the membership polled at branch meetings or by the annual National Convention itself. The Steering Committee, National Committee, or a single branch may begin the process by voting to call for a special convention. The Steering Committee shall report this vote, along with a brief motivation, to the member-

¹³ This provision explicitly authorizes recent practice.

¹⁴ This provision is part of Robert’s Rules of Order, the procedural guidelines that past conventions have followed. It is stated here to clarify things for those who are unfamiliar with Robert’s Rules.

¹⁵ In this context, “at-large” signifies those members of the committees elected from the floor of the Convention (in contrast to those chosen by the Steering Committee).

¹⁶ The appropriate manner of elections, including the question of slate vs. individual voting, may vary according to circumstances. This clause affirms that the convention, as the ISO’s highest body, is free to judge the best ways to elect the lower bodies.

¹⁷ The Convention’s power to choose the NC’s size (as well as the SC’s) is implicit in its power to determine the manner of electing these bodies, a power which is given in the (new proposed) second sentence of this clause.

ship in a timely manner. If 20 percent of the ISO’s branches vote to call for the poll within 30 days of the Steering Committee’s initial report, then a poll of the full membership to decide whether to call a special convention is mandated. Polling in the branches shall take place after the membership discusses the issues of the convention. If more than 50 percent of the members polled vote to call a special convention, the National Committee (NC) shall set an appropriate time and place to meet and shall also set the ratio of representation. Special conventions have all the powers of a regular convention.

Replaces: “Special conventions may be called by a majority of the membership polled at branch meetings after the issues of such a convention are discussed.”¹⁸

G. The number of delegates to which each branch is entitled for its representation to a national meeting is based upon the number of its dues-paying members as of 30 days before the national meeting is to take place. Payment must continue in the month of the national meeting for the branch to be considered in good standing.

H. Any branch that fails to pay its share of assessments for delegates’ travel expenses to a national meeting will be considered a branch not in good standing, and its delegates will not be seated at the next national meeting. In order to ensure timely payment for delegates’ plane fares to national meetings, travel assessments are due to the national center prior to the national meeting. Thus, if a national meeting takes place on October 25, travel assessments should be included with October dues, to be paid by October 15. If the national meeting takes place on August 3, assessments should be paid along with July 2, to be paid by July 15.

G and H are absorbed from the section formerly known as “IV. Administrative.”

H replaces “Any branch that fails to pay share of travel assessments for delegates plane fare...” **with** “Any branch that fails to its pay its share of assessments for delegates’ travel expenses...”

V. Leading bodies—

Steering Committee and National Committee

Replaces section called “IV. Administrative”

¹⁸ The existing rule does not specify how to initiate the process of calling a special convention.

The new wording clarifies how the general membership becomes aware that other members want to hold a special convention (the Steering Committee makes a report when a branch votes to call such a convention).

Other branches are given time (but not unlimited time — 30 days) to decide whether to support the call for a national poll of members. The threshold for moving on to a national poll is substantial (20 percent of branches) but not prohibitive.

The final decision to call a special convention is made by a majority of those ISO members who participate in the national poll, but not until the issues of the convention have been discussed.

Special conventions have all the powers of regular conventions, including the power to set policy and perspectives and to elect leading bodies.

A. Between National Conventions, the authority of the Convention is vested in the Steering Committee and in the National Committee (NC). The National Committee serves as a leadership body drawn from around the country. The Steering Committee functions as the ISO’s ongoing national leadership.

Adds: “The National Committee serves as a leadership body drawn from around the country. The Steering Committee functions as the ISO’s ongoing national leadership.”¹⁹

B. The National Committee shall make decisions on immediate questions and on questions tabled to it by the Convention. The Steering Committee shall report NC decisions to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the NC Meeting.

This clause is moved up from the bottom of the section.²⁰

Deletes “The National Committee’s decisions are binding on the organization as a whole.”²¹

Deletes “Between Conventions” **from** “Between Conventions, the National Committee shall make decisions on immediate questions...”²²

Changes “can make decisions” **to** “shall make decisions.”

Changes “The Steering Committee will report NC decisions and votes to the membership...” **to** “The Steering Committee shall report NC decisions to the membership...”

C. The Steering Committee directs the ISO’s work, functioning as the national authority of the ISO between Conventions and NC meetings. The Steering Committee is responsible for implementing the ISO’s perspectives and initiatives as decided by the Convention and the NC. The SC is responsible for organizing a national office, for overseeing the production of ISO literature, and for staffing the organization.

Re-orders sentences within the clause.²³

¹⁹ The first sentence of this clause indicates that the functions of the NC and the SC overlap. The next two sentences (both new) specify an important difference in the ways the two bodies function. Because the NC is intended to include ISO leaders regardless of where they live, the NC is able to convene only intermittently. The SC is composed of leaders who are able to function as an ongoing leadership group.

This clause does not rule out drawing SC members from outside the national center (currently Chicago) as long as they can make an ongoing contribution to the functioning of the committee.

²⁰ The clause is relocated higher up in the section to reflect the formal priority of the National Committee over the Steering Committee. Of the two bodies, the NC provides the broader sampling of the ISO’s leadership.

Nevertheless, a simple statement that the NC is a higher body than the SC does not express the complementary relationship that is supposed to exist between them. The NC, for example, sets policy and perspectives between Conventions, but the SC must be able to make adjustments, or even major changes, between NC meetings.

More generally, the different situations of the NC and SC give them different outlooks on the ISO’s work, which can create a productive tension between the two bodies. Some conflicts would thus express the *proper* relation between the NC and SC — and would best be resolved through discussion, not simply by invoking the NC’s status as the higher body.

²¹ This provision is deleted because Clause A (immediately above) already specifies that the convention’s authority is vested in the NC.

²² The provision is deleted because it’s already covered in Clause A.

Adds “and the NC” to “The Steering Committee is responsible for implementing the ISO’s perspectives and initiatives as decided by the Convention.”²⁴

V. Amendments

Amendments shall be made to these rules by majority vote of the National Convention.

VI. Press

All ISO publications—print and electronic—are subject to the direction of the organization and of the Steering Committee.

The final section of the current rules contains the structure of members’ dues. The rules commission is proposing to remove that section from the rules and to make the dues structure into a separate question for the Convention to decide.

[end of rules proposal]

ISO members’ code of conduct

Code of conduct motivation

The Rules Commission is proposing that, for the first time, the ISO formally adopt a members’ code of conduct to set out certain norms of comradely behavior and expectations for members.

The intention behind this proposed Code of Conduct is not to set out an expansive list of “dos and don’ts” for members. Rather, it intends to set out in broad strokes key expectations for the behavior of members in an organization committed both to fighting all forms of oppression and to building solidarity as a matter of principle.

Building the kind of organization necessary for such a fight is not easy—it requires a personal commitment from every member that extends into the way members represent the ISO publicly and conduct themselves personally. Given the seriousness of this project, much of the proposed Code is focused on questions of discrimination, harassment and other forms of misconduct that are inherently destructive to the kind of project we are engaged in building.

The intention of the Code of Conduct is also not to suggest that every infraction rises to the level of a formal disciplinary action—quite the contrary. Anyone living in a capitalist society is shaped by that society—including those attracted to socialist ideas. This means that sometimes even dedicated activists might engage in questionable behavior or hold various backward ideas. The aim, wherever possible, should be to argue against instances of such behavior with the overall aim of winning members and building the ISO on the strongest possible basis.

Argument and debate is part of that process—and part of the process of figuring out how to move the organization forward in general. Such debates should be conducted in a comradely manner, without personal attacks. They should also be carried out openly, without hearsay or rumors standing in for political argument.

We are not interested in policing members’ Internet habits and did not include prohibitions on Internet behavior in the propose Code of Conduct. However, members are encouraged to not say anything in an online debate that they would not be willing to say in a face-to-face situation, and to remember that even seemingly innocuous comments live forever on the Internet. This applies both when it comes to potential security issues or to debating other comrades. It should be remembered that our ultimate aim is to work together collaboratively and productively.

We are not interested in policing members’ private personal lives or habits, including members’ sexual habits or use of alcohol or narcotics. However, we live in a society rife with sexism and in which sexual assault is common. The issue of sexism and sexual assault has obviously taken on renewed importance for the left with the ongoing crisis in the British Socialist Workers Party.

Given that, we would urge members to carefully consider the issue of consent as it pertains to sexual encounters—and how the use of alcohol or narcotics can complicate the question of consent. We encourage members to consider a practice of “affirmative consent,” in which the presence of consent involves explicit communication and mutual approval for acts in which the parties are/were involved.

Members should also consider how certain personal actions, including at social events, might impact on the organization and other members—including other members who might be at increased risk from the state (those who are undocumented or under correctional control, for example).

Again, the spirit of the proposed Code of Conduct is not to put onerous conditions on members, but to help members work together collaboratively as part of building the kind of socialist organization and cadres that we believe is essential in building the fight for a better world.

Code of conduct

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is an organization of people committed to fighting collectively toward a project of working-class liberation and socialism. We oppose class exploitation and all forms of oppression, including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, LGBT oppression and discrimination based on national identity. The ISO expects its members to comport themselves in a manner consistent with that commitment.

Rigorous debate is one of the hallmarks of any socialist organization. Such debate elicits the fullest political commitment and input from each member in order to develop a unified national perspective. We expect debates to be conducted

²³ The Steering Committee’s broadest function now appears at the top of the clause.

²⁴ This clarifies the relation between the NC and the SC.

with civility and respect, as comrades committed to the same struggle.

Members are expected to not only abide by rules of membership (as spelled out in Section II, "Membership," of the ISO rules) but should also abide by principles of non-discrimination and norms of comradely behavior. Members are accountable for actions that bring serious harm to other members or to the organization.

Harassment is prohibited and includes conduct, verbal or physical, that has the intent or effect, because of its severity and/or persistence, to be intimidating, hostile, or offensive.

Discriminatory harassment is prohibited. Discriminatory harassment is harassment on the basis of a particular oppression. Harassment of an individual in connection with a stereotyped group characteristic, or because of that person's identification with a particular group, is not permitted.

Discriminatory harassment can include actions and/or language including: epithets or slurs; negative stereotyping; denigrating jokes; and the display or circulation of written or graphic material of a harassing or discriminatory nature.

Sexual and gender-based misconduct constitutes a form of discriminatory harassment. Gender-based harassment may include acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility, even if those acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, stalking, and sexual assault are all prohibited.

All sexual encounters must be consensual, whether with another ISO member or non-member. A sexual encounter is considered consensual when individuals willingly and knowingly engage in sexual activity. The use of coercion in instances of sexual assault can involve the use of implied or explicit threats, substances, and/or force. The absence of "No" is not necessarily a "Yes."

Wherever possible, personal conflicts should be resolved on an individual basis or with the help of local members' branch leadership. Given that the aim of building a socialist organization includes building a shared sense of solidarity, disciplinary infractions should be handled with the aim of changing a member's improper behavior, rather than resorting to formal disciplinary procedures.

Nevertheless, in some cases formal disciplinary proceedings will be necessary. These should be handled at a branch level wherever possible. When resolution at a branch level is not possible due to a conflict of interest or other serious concern, a national Disciplinary Committee is in place to hear such complaints (refer to Section II, Paragraphs G-M, of the ISO Rules).