

Pre-convention Bulletin #19 / February 5, 2014

for members only

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Convention information and deadlines

Convention location: Northwestern University. We'll send out meeting room with other convention details for attendees in a Convention Information Sheet as the convention approaches.

Listed below are two sets of items that include information for branches and a set of deadlines that will help us streamline the convention process. These are broken up into two parts. Please read all the way to the end, with special attention to the deadlines listed here. Thanks.

I. Below is a set of deadlines that will help us make sure that all comrades who are coming are pre-registered, that comrades who need free housing are offered it, and that the pre-convention bulletins contain as many resolutions and documents as necessary.

1. Delegates and guests:

Please send in the names of your branch's elected delegates along with requests for any guests you would like to attend. Twigs (groups of less than five members) are entitled to request a guest.

Please send an email with the words “delegate” and/or “guest” in the subject line to sharon@internationalsocialist.org. Your delegates will automatically be pre-registered. Guest requests will be answered on the Monday following the day you send in your request.

The deadline for delegate information and guest requests is Sunday, February 9.

2. Childcare:

We are committed to providing childcare to all delegates who require it. The childcare will take place at the home of Chicago comrades.

If your branch is sending any delegates needing childcare during the convention, please send an email with the word “childcare” in the subject line to Cindy K. at

Ckchigo@gmail.com. The deadline for submitting childcare requests is Friday, February 7. This is a firm deadline, and we can't accept any requests after this date, as we will need enough time to arrange quality childcare.

3. Housing:

Housing with comrades:

Chicago comrades are happy to offer free housing to all comrades who need it. But we are only able to guarantee floor space, so we strongly recommend that you bring a sleeping bag and a pillow.

If you want to request housing with comrades, send an email with the word "housing" in the subject line to either Carlos E. (xwbax777@hotmail.com) or Rory F. (rory@haymarketbooks.org). Please make sure to let us know in your email if the comrades requesting housing have any pet allergies, etc.

The deadline for requesting housing with Chicago comrades is Sunday, February 9.

Local hotels:

Comrades who are able to afford it might prefer to pitch in together to stay in a hotel. Below are a couple of suggestions—but if you find a good deal somewhere, please let us know and we'll pass it on to other comrades.

Unfortunately, the Best Western Hotel and the Orrington in downtown Evanston are booked up for Presidents' Day weekend. The other Evanston Hotels are fairly pricy.

There is one option worth considering for a larger group: The Homestead Evanston (1625 Hinman Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201). This hotel is located just two blocks from Northwestern University (closer than any other hotel). It has one-bedroom apartments with kitchens (which can save money on food—there is a Whole Foods in downtown Evanston). **These apartments cost \$185 per night, but you can probably squeeze in 6-7 people to save costs. When you register, however, you should only register as four guests, which is the maximum the hotel allows.** Their website is <http://thehomestead.net/results.cfm>.

One of the cheaper options is the Super 8 hotel (7300 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60626). This hotel is close to the red line "el" and just a few stops away from Northwestern. Their website is <http://www.super8.com/>. They are listing their rate for two queen beds at \$124.99 per night, but *you can get a 15% discount on the rate if you book 7 days in advance.*

4. Pre-convention documents and resolutions:

Deadline for all pre-convention submissions:

All documents and resolutions need to be submitted by Wednesday, February 12 at midnight CST if they are to be included in a pre-convention bulletin (although we strongly urge you to submit them earlier if you want comrades to have time to read them before the convention). All comrades who submit documents or resolutions after that time will be required to make their own copies to be distributed at the convention. We will include all of these in the post-convention bulletin, which reports back to the entire membership.

Please submit your documents and/or resolutions to bulletin@internationalsocialist.org and cc Sharon at the national office (sharon@internationalsocialist.org) if you plan to submit a document and/or resolution, so we can plan bulletin production. Thanks.

II. The second set of items, listed below, is meant to ensure that all branches are able to seat their delegates, which requires branches to abide by the ISO rules and procedures.

1. SW and dues:

All branches must be paid up on dues and SW to seat their delegates.

If your branch owes money for dues and/or SW, ***please make sure to send it so that it arrives before the start of the convention:*** the mailing address is ISO, P.O. Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616.

If absolutely necessary, send outstanding payments along with your delegate. We discourage waiting until the convention to pay branch debts because it will interfere with the streamlined registration process, wasting time unnecessarily while other comrades are forced to wait.

2. Double dues payments for February.

The ISO rules require all members to pay double dues for the month of February. The extra month of dues is necessary to pay for delegates' plane fares to the convention. This is the most democratic way for us to ensure that comrades who live the farthest from Chicago (and therefore have the highest travel costs) are given adequate representation at the convention. Otherwise, those with the cheapest transportation would be over-represented and those with the most expensive travel costs would be under-represented.

Here is how to handle the double dues:

If your branch delegates will be flying to the convention, use the double dues money to reimburse your delegates. If you have any money left over, turn it in to the national office to help pay for other branches' delegates. If your branch's double dues are not enough to fully pay for your delegates' plane fares, the national office will make up the difference.

If your branch's delegates do not need to fly to the convention, you should turn over all your double dues to the national office to reimburse other branch's delegates.

Thanks to all comrades for attending to these issues as soon as possible. We expect this convention to be an important one, and we want to make sure that every branch is represented in the discussions and decisions that will take place.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact sharon@internationalsocialist.org.

Documents

Social Media Team Report: 2013

Goals

Our primary goal coming out of convention last year was to create a sustainable process to post articles from SW each day on SW's official Twitter and Facebook (FB) accounts. The ultimate point of this would be to expose users on those platforms to SW articles and drive traffic to the SW website[1].

A secondary goal we set was to find a way to increase the amount of moderators on the SW Facebook (FB) page and explore ways of adding content beyond SW articles. We also developed a "wish list": more use of images and video across all outlets and exploring new outlets (Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit).

Overall Conclusion

We are happy to report that we have achieved our primary and secondary goals, and exceeded them in some cases. We were also able to get to some of our wish list items but not others. Specifically, we did not explore Tumblr or Reddit, but plan to look closer at them soon. We are currently looking closely at Instagram but do not have any specifics nailed down yet.

One year later, we feel much more confident in our ability to project our politics through these social media outlets. For a number of years, many comrades hoped we would dig in to these new social media platforms and use them to try and build the ISO. It has been a challenge, but the Social Media Team feels we are making serious progress.

Our efforts to connect with people online should match our aggressiveness in the real world. There is no reason we shouldn't use the free services and platforms available to meet as many people as possible and expose them to our politics and organization. We should be contenting for influence wherever the battle of ideas is taking place, but with a clear and focused plan.

We are still laying the foundations of what should eventually be an aggressive social media strategy and we hope to build on this in the coming year. Expect to hear more from us in the Internal Bulletins as we continue to experiment with more platforms, more types of content and more interaction with our potential audience.

Below is a more detailed discussion of our efforts in 2013.

A list of things we did in 2013:

- We organized regular Twitter posts of conference speakers the lead up to the Socialism 2013 to better promote registration (@SocialismConf).
- The Steering Committee made a part-time resource available [2]to help with Social Media efforts.
- We increased the number of moderators on the SW FB page.
- We made it easier to post articles[3], initially involving a crew of volunteers to tweak the posts before publishing, and improved it somewhat [4]to end up with an efficient, sustainable process to get daily SW articles posted on FB and Twitter.

Twitter Posts of Conference Speakers

There isn't much to report on this other than for the second year, we have activated the @SocialismConf twitter account to attempt to promote the Socialism conference. We mainly tweeted things hyping the various talks and speakers, linking to their own Twitter account when possible. We also sent out reminders

of registration deadlines. There was some "live tweeting" during the conference, but this was limited and more of an ad-hoc thing. We haven't really had time or resources to analyze the effect this account has on conference attendance, but we figure it is a bare-minimum level of publicity and also a nice gesture to promote our featured speakers.

We are currently at around 942 "Followers", which isn't huge, but not terrible either. There are many unknowns about the effect of Twitter, in general which will be discussed later in this document.

We plan to continue this effort in the lead up to Socialism 2014 and continue to experiment with low-effort things like live-tweeting, posting videos and wearemany.org talk links. If you are on Twitter, please follow that account and re-tweet things as they are posted later on this spring.

SW Twitter:

Our SW Twitter account is @SocialistViews. Please follow it if you don't already. Our main goal this year for Twitter was to regularize the posting of articles and begin experimentation. The next point on SW FB covers most of what happened on the Twitter account. Everything that we did to the automated posts on FB applies to Twitter.

We succeeded in the first part of our goal, regularizing postings. However, it is still unclear to our team what our SW Twitter account should really be used to accomplish. We have focused resources on FB for reasons detailed below, so many of the discussions to sort this out haven't happened yet.

Twitter is getting the bare minimum of SW article posts each day, with more image posts since the workflow change (discussed below). We try to reference an author's twitter handle when it's possible and makes sense to do so. We also try to add hash tags but mostly, the posts go out with title, author, photo and link to SW. The account has a respectable 16,000 followers.

Just as with Facebook, the two main goals we set for Twitter in 2013 were to 1) drive traffic to the SW site; 2) to increase the amount of "Followers" that would read our daily tweets.

Driving Traffic to SW

Traffic is driven to the SW site both through clicking article links and through the link to SW Online on the @SocialistViews Twitter profile page.

The stats below are just a couple relevant measures:

Top 5 Articles Linked From Twitter* in 2013:

Rank	Article Title	Published	Unique Views
1	"New York cops see us as human prey"	06/17/2013	2,286
2	"Brazil says no to Israeli arms"	04/24/2013	1,014
3	"Condemned to valley fever"	07/17/2013	911
4	"Harvard helps the less fortunate"	02/25/2013	756
5	"Open season on Black fathers"	10/24/2013	670

* Articles that had a "source" (linked from) of Twitter ranked by how many different people viewed the article.

Top 5 ways users arrived at the SW Online homepage filtered by Social Network**:

Rank	Site/Social Network	Unique Views
1	Non-Social Network (direct, search engine, etc.)	328,297
2	Facebook	110,367
3	Twitter	5,284

4	Reddit	2,664
5	WordPress	2,603

*** Ranked by how many different people viewed the main page of SW Online and filtered to include only Social Network “sources.” The “Non-Social Network” category is included to give a sense of absolute scale.*

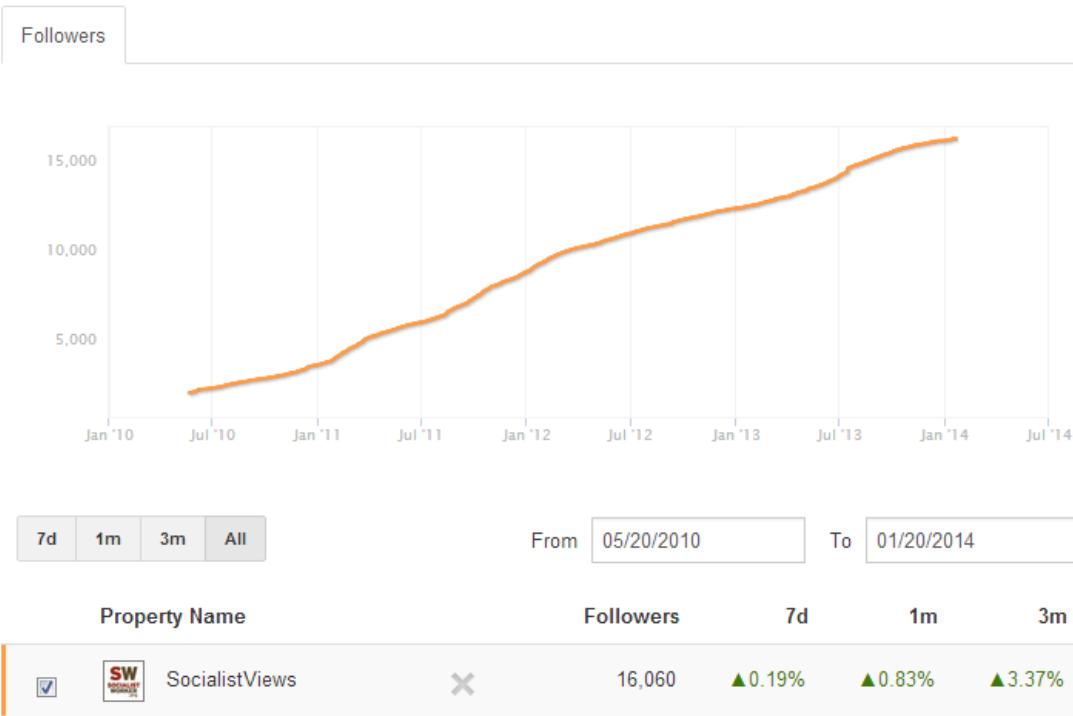
Essentially, the traffic statistics support the assertion that we are doing a passable job in using Twitter to promote articles, but still haven’t figured out how to break through into larger numbers of hits.

For example, FB drove 110,000 users to the SW main page as compared with just over 5,000 from Twitter (22 times less). The most linked article from Twitter drew 2,286 unique views. That isn’t bad, but it pales in comparison to the most linked from FB (23,663 unique views). It’s expected that traffic would be lower compared to FB because Twitter is less popular. However the numbers are so out of proportion that a better explanation might be that we simply haven’t figured out the best way to tap into our Twitter audience.

Followers and Influence on Twitter

To give a sense of its growth over time, @SocialistViews grew 41% (from 8,633 to 12,171 Followers) in 2012. It grew to 15,960 (31%) in all of 2013 and 6% since September.

Twitter



Line graph of growth in Twitter “followers” over the lifetime of the account.

Comparing the graph and the FB stats discussed below, it is clear to us that Twitter has different growth dynamics than FB account and should have a distinct strategy.

Conclusion

We just know less about what works on Twitter and how our audience would best connect with SW and our politics. Therefore, we haven't poured a lot of time and energy into it yet.

For the future, there is reason to believe that "live tweeting" important struggles would be a good use of that account. However, we have yet to establish a workflow and security procedure that would make such a process manageable and effective. We also think re-tweeting other popular bloggers and political people on a regular basis would be wise. Sharing articles by other media outlets might be a good idea too. Such efforts would require more devoted resources and we're still trying to figure out if it might be worth it given the constraints on our time. Twitter is definitely still a work in progress.

SW Facebook:

Most of our success and effort has been directed at the SW FB page. This is for several reasons. First, we already have resources devoted to this effort, so planning and execution are easier when you have people who already know what they're doing. Second, FB is still the most popular social media platform among our US audience. This is shifting with younger people, but so far, FB is still king and warrants these efforts. Third, it has the freest tools available to analyze and measure what works and what does not. Fourth, it has the potential to bridge the online gap between passive readership and participation through its "Events" feature. We have not utilized this connection with the FB SW yet, but it remains a topic of discussion and experimentation as we get the basics nailed down.

For the SW FB page, we started 2013 with two goals.

1. Drive Traffic to SW website.
2. Increase Presence of SW FB page itself within the FB universe.

Goal #1: Drive Traffic to the SW Site

One way assess whether FB is driving people to the SW Online website is to look at how many people arrived at the SW site homepage from FB.

As you can see in the "*Top 5 ways users arrived at the SW Online homepage filtered by Social Network*" table shown earlier, FB drove 110,367 unique page views, which is about 24% of all unique page views (453,064). This stat alone is reason enough to keep resources devoted to it.

However, this stat doesn't say anything about whether people are clicking on the articles we are posting, since those users would not arrive at the homepage.

One approach to measure this would be to compare the most viewed articles from the website with the most viewed posts on FB.

Most Viewed SW Online articles of 2013 as measured by "Unique Views":

Rank	Article Title	Published	Unique Views
1	The most racist city in the U.S.?	10/31/2013	36,664
2	Blacks and the Great Depression	06/28/2012	35,091
3	Islamophobia on the red carpet	02/27/2013	28,184
4	Why CounterPunch owes women an apology	05/16/2013	19,531
5	The roots of racism***	11/22/2002	19,243

*** A discussion and analysis of the SW Site traffic will be presented in another document but check out when that article was published!

The Top 5 most popular posts as measured by how many FB users saw the post:

Rank	FB Post Text	Post Type	Published	Unique Views
1	Super interesting interview with Karl Marx that first appeared on January 5, 1879, in the Chicago Tribune--one of the most conservative newspapers of the time, which regularly attacked socialism and trade unions.	Link	05/17/2013	13,660
2	Will Mubarak go free? Eric Ruder shines a spotlight on the twisted logic of Egypt's military dictators.	Link	08/21/2013	7,988
3	This morning in Detroit! Fast food workers walk off the job for a better wage.	Photo (with Link)	05/10/2013	7,532
4	When the Chicago teachers rose up	Photo (with Link)	09/12/2013	6,624
5	Athletes can--and should--have a major role in challenging Russia's bigoted anti-gay laws.	Link	08/26/2013	6,112

If we want to understand whether users actually clicked the stories they saw, we need to look at a different measurement, user interaction.

The Top 5 most popular posts as measured by user interaction (likes, shares, comments, or clicks of any kind):

Rank	FB Post Text	Post Type	Published	Interactions
1	Super interesting interview with Karl Marx that first appeared on January 5, 1879, in the Chicago Tribune--one of the most conservative newspapers of the time, which regularly attacked socialism and trade unions.	Link	05/17/2013	285
2	Brian Kelly wonders why someone who killed 10 million Africans hasn't gone down in history alongside Adolf Hitler--in an article for his blog Diary of a Walking Butterfly	Link	12/12/2013	247
3	Sharon Smith responds to the storm of abuse leveled at her for challenging sexist language and attitudes in an article and promotions from the Counterpunch website	Link	5/24/2013	222
4	This morning in Detroit! Fast food workers walk off the job for a better wage.	Photo (with Link)	05/10/2013	211
5	(no text, photo of Chicago ISO "close prisons not schools" banner presumably taken at the March on Washington)	Photo	08/26/2013	6,112

What do we make of this data?

It helps to look at the top FB post of the year. Our most popular post on FB in 2013 was a post on May 17th that linked to an interview with Karl Marx in the Chicago Tribune in 1879. (SW

link: <http://socialistworker.org/2013/05/17/speaking-with-karl-marx>) Further breakdown: 74 shares, 89 likes, and 10 comments.

It led both user interaction and views according to FB's metrics. This article shows up at #110 on the "most popular" list as measured by the SW Online site statistics (2,882 unique page views). 2,011 of those views came from FB.

How were 285 people measured to have "clicked" on the article by FB, but 2,011 supposedly arrived on the article page from FB as measured by the website?

If this is confusing to you, it is to us as well. The real point of this example is to illustrate how difficult it is even to measure the most basic of user interactions online: clicking a link that takes you somewhere else. We have great tools, but sometimes the data is contradictory and figuring out what is really going on is a challenge.

This problem is worth considering when we inevitably talk about devoting time and energy to particular online platforms.

What we CAN say about all this site and FB data is that:

1. FB is doing a great job driving traffic to the SW Online homepage.
2. A post being visible doesn't necessarily mean users will click on it. If you take the Marx interview example, you see a 15% "conversion rate" (unique views on the webpage / views on FB).
3. FB users are obviously being directed to the SW Online articles in some way, but it's not clear how this is actually happening.

Before moving on to the next section, here are several more interesting points that we gleaned from the data:

- We posted 1,302 times in 2013. We posted 574 Links, 355 Photos, 363 Status Updates, and 6 Videos. Status Updates could be photos, video, links or just text.
- The 6 videos did not get much attention. One made the top 50 (#47) as measured by user interaction, but was #257 when measured by how many people saw it. However, this only means that they didn't go "viral" immediately and is not an argument against putting more video content up, in our opinion.
- So far, photos are shared, liked and clicked just as much as links, but we have only just begun to use images on a regular basis, so this conclusion is tentative. As described in the next point, there is also reason to believe Image posts are picked up by FB's algorithms more often than link posts and will end up spreading easier through FB.

Goal #2: Increase Presence of SW FB page itself within the FB universe.

About "Likes"

When measuring success in our goal to increase the online presence of SW's FB page, "Likes" are one of the primary measures. A "Like" simply means someone found the SW FB page in some manner and clicked "Like" to indicate their support. To be clear, it is one of the smallest and easiest possible ways someone could indicate support for Socialist Worker or perhaps Socialism in general. It is akin to someone passing us on a paper sale and giving us a thumbs-up. No more, no less.

There is a second aspect to the "Likes" on FB worth considering. If you have been on a paper sale, you probably notice that it is much easier to engage people and sell papers when you show up with a crew of 10 people compared to when only two of you are braving the cold (shout out to the northern branches!!). This

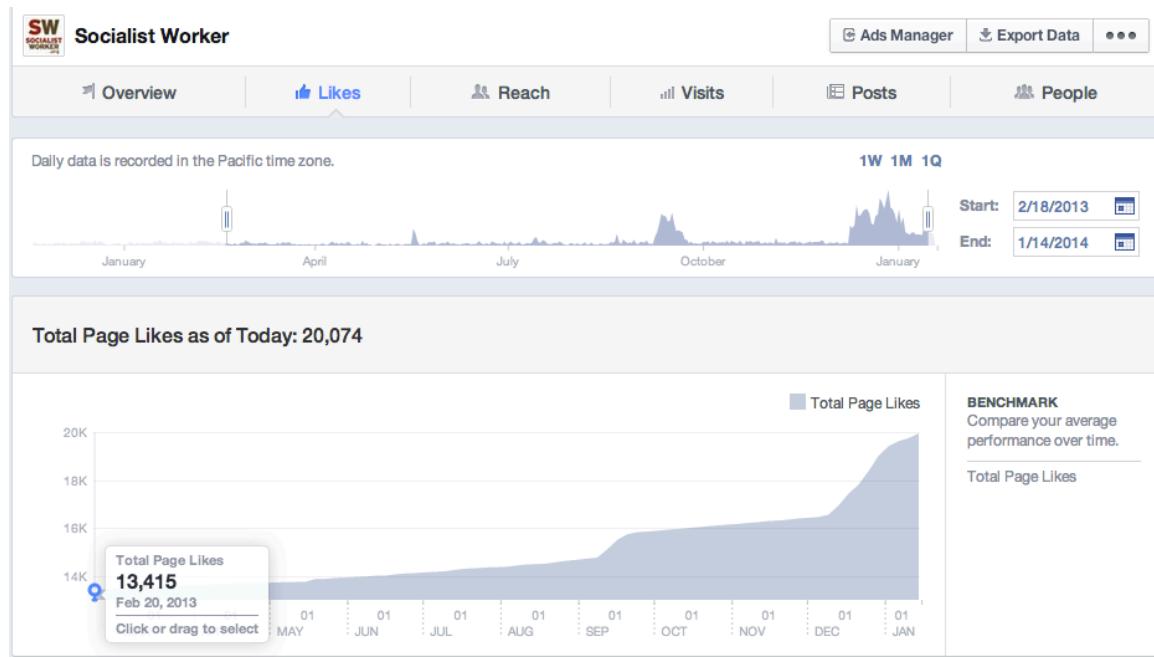
phenomenon is clearer when it comes to demonstrations. It's a catch-22, but the more "popular" you appear, the easier it is to become more "popular." We can argue how much this popularity matters, or how deep it is, but nonetheless, it has a definite bearing on people's first impressions of an organization.

Put simply, when it comes to FB, the more "Likes" we have, the more "legit" we will seem to the random internet user who stumbles across our page. People that "Like" the page are much more likely to interact with the post (like, comment, read). Therefore, any effort to get people to "Like" the page is a step in the right direction.

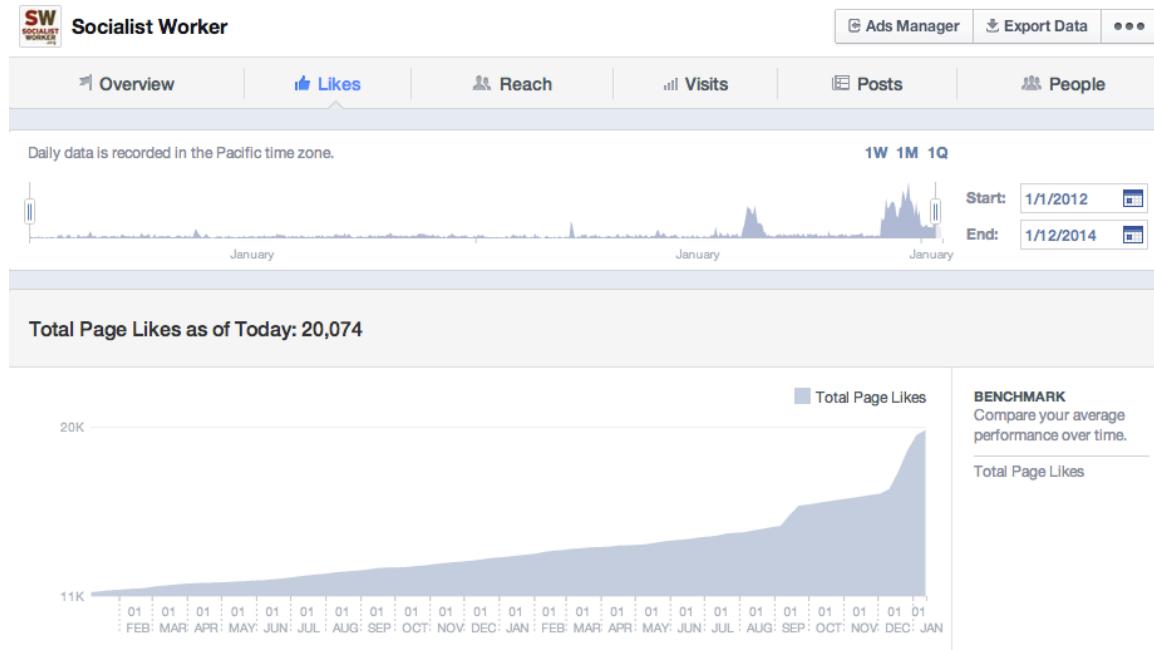
Again, this is still an incredibly shallow and passive interaction, but it is another piece of our effort to inject socialist politics into mainstream political consciousness or at the very least, the consciousness of those seeking out radical politics online. Comrades should consider these points carefully if using this data to support other arguments about perspectives, popular consciousness, etc.

The Data

Since convention time last year, the SW FB page has gone from roughly 13,400 Likes to over 20,000 as of mid-January.



Graph 1: Here you can see two graphs. The one on top shows the daily occurrence of "Likes" over the time span indicated on the top right. The one on bottom shows the absolute number of likes over the same time span.



Graph 2: This graph shows you the same two graphs, but over a 2 year time span to present a larger context

Following convention 2013, the social media team gathered a group of volunteers to monitor an automated process that pulled new articles from SW into a queue, where they would have to be manually scheduled by the volunteers to post at specific times during the day. At this time, the volunteers would also make the posts look less automated and make more sense to users. This workflow was used until September 11th, 2013.

No doubt, the efforts by the volunteers over this period contributed to the growth of "Likes" from 13,400 to 14,800 (an 11% increase). However, this increase was consistent with the growth rate of the same period in 2012 (9%). This can be seen in the relatively flat line upward in "Graph 2".

Given all the complexities of world politics and how that might affect our ability to attract new FB followers, the only thing we can really conclude from this is that the new workflow did not hurt our rate of growth in terms of "Likes". However, we think it's fair to speculate that some of the extra growth (9% compared to 11%) was due to a more consistent routine of posting articles as compared to the previous year.

What should really interest us are the spikes at the far right of both graphs.

The first spike in "Likes" correlates almost exactly with the conversion to our new workflow. The workflow implemented following the convention was successful, but after a few months number of problems became clear. The main one was a reliance on a group of 5-6 volunteers who were not employed by the ISO (ie. had other full time jobs), lived in different time zones, and had varying experience with the technologies involved.

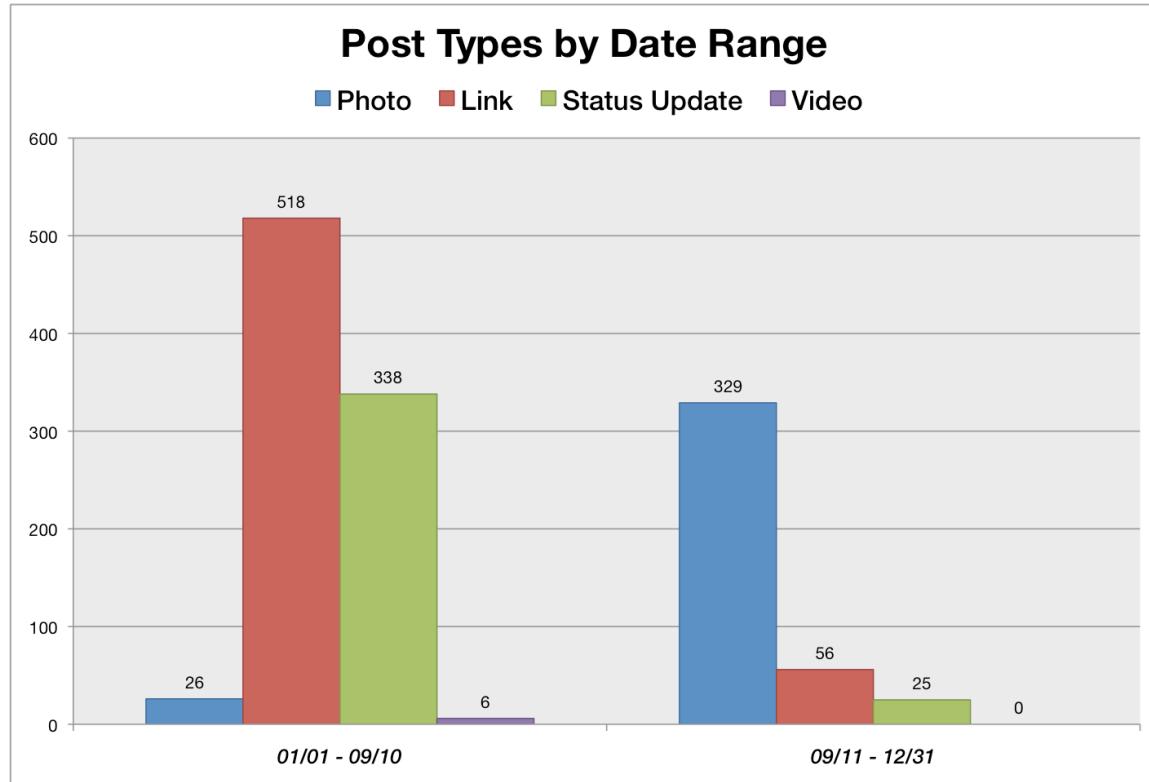
The process was relatively simple, but not simple enough it turns out. The queue system was also prone to bugs that would interrupt the filling of the queue. Volunteers would also forget to schedule things, leading to some ugly looking posts. However, because they were volunteers, the only recourse was a system of reminding people and that defeated the purpose of decentralizing the work in the first place.

We did some research and found a new queue system that is more reliable and automated things to such a degree that only 2 people were needed instead of six. Our new, part-time social media person took up

watching FB and another volunteer took up watching Twitter. This eliminated the need for that dispersed set of volunteers and the queue reliability problem in one swipe. It also opened another door.

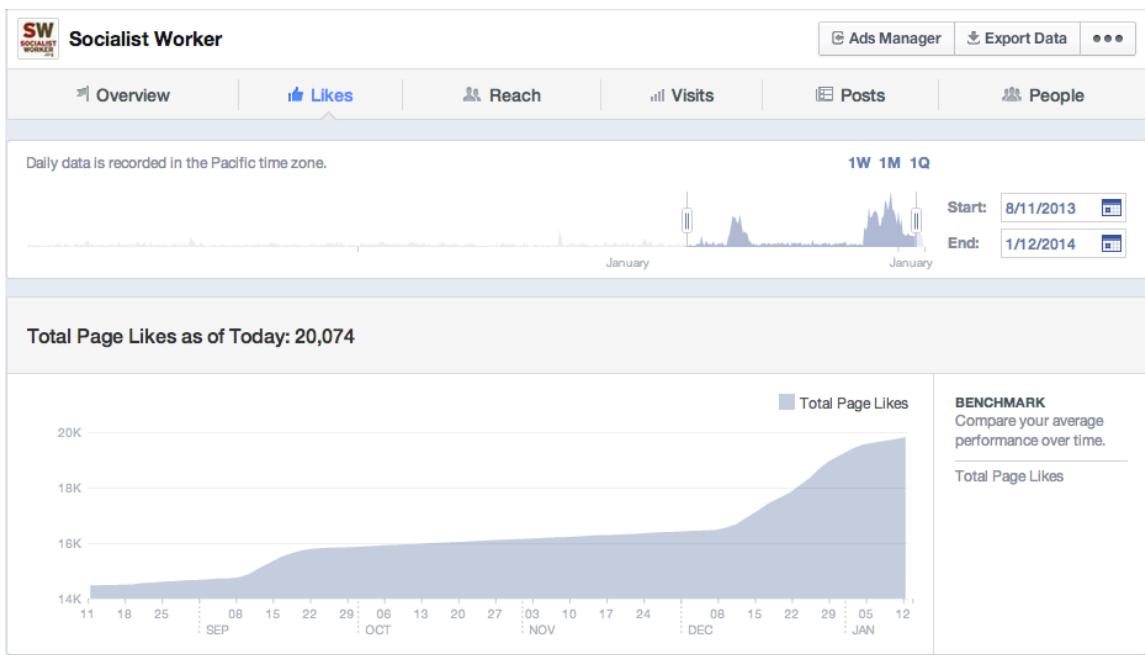
The new queue system allowed us to make image posts to FB and Twitter, pulling the image already included in the SW article. A combination of some research and anecdotal experience led us to speculate that using big images might increase the appeal of our posts. We implemented this new workflow on September 11th, 2013.

The shift to Image "post types" is clear in the following graph:



Graph 3: This grouped bar graph shows the breakdown of "Post Types" in two separate time periods, before and after the newest workflow changes in 2013.

How have our "Like" stats changed during the same period?



Graph 4: Same graphs as above, this time with a time span from 09/11/2013 through 12/31/2013

Over that period (09/11/2013 - 12/31/2013), our followers increased from 15,103 to 19,200, a 27% increase. As of Jan 20th, we are over 20,100 "Likes", an increase of 50% since convention 2013.

What can we conclude from this? If you really care about what is going on, keep reading; otherwise skip to the "Conclusion" following this section.

Data Breakdown

First, there are some confounding factors to consider. The September launch coincided with the launch of college campuses, which is a particularly active time for ISO branches. It also coincided with the Congressional Debt Ceiling debacle, which might peak political interest generally. You can see an even more dramatic spike in "Likes" towards the middle and end of December. That coincides with school and work schedules not being as busy and lots of vacation time that might cause people to spend more time on FB than normal. We say all that just to point out that we can't immediately jump to conclusions or imply causation with this data.

However, we can dig slightly deeper and say a couple things. For one, the same period last year (campuses starting), we did not see a similar spike. Also, 2012 saw some explosive struggles: the tail end of Occupy, the Trayvon Martin rallies, and the CTU strike. We saw no similar spike in any of 2012 surrounding those and we feel there is no reason to see the Debt Ceiling fiasco as significantly more likely to politicize people than the 2012 events and cause them to "Like" our page. The vacation time seems plausible, but again, no similar spike was seen in 2012.

Looking at the source of the "Likes" reveals more interesting information.

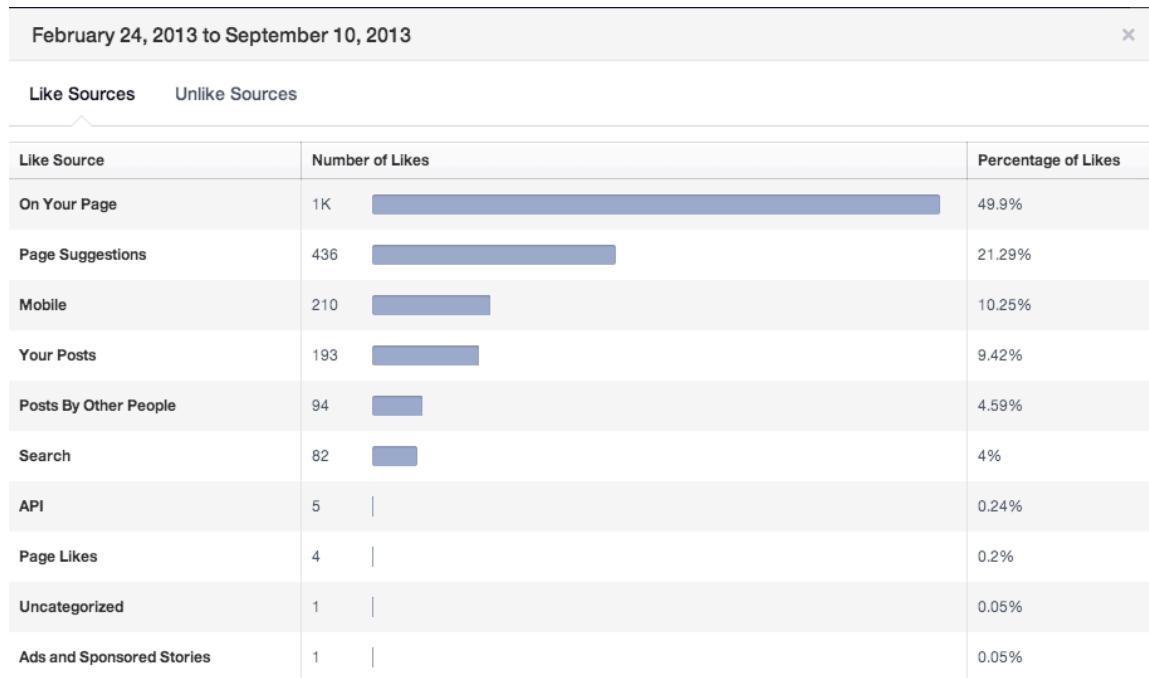


Chart 1: This chart shows the sources of "Likes" to the SW FB page during the time span indicated in the title of the chart.

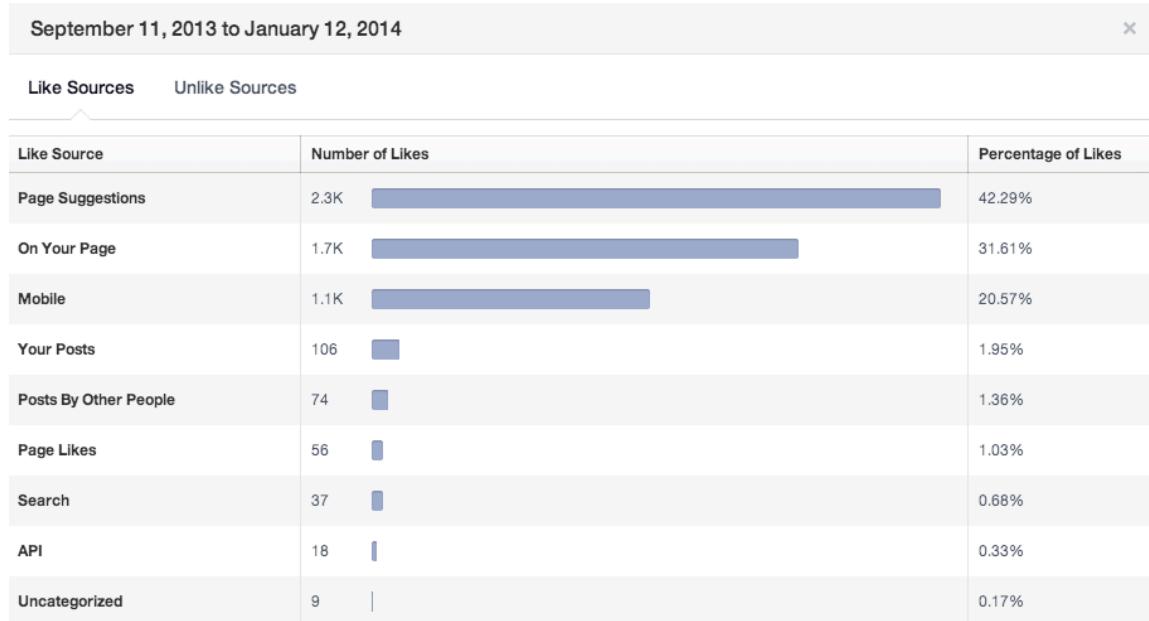


Chart 2: This chart shows the sources of "Likes" to the SW FB page during the time span indicated in the title of the chart.

From February to September, most of our "Likes" came from people looking at our page and clicking "Like." From September to December, 42% of our "Likes" came from something called "Page Suggestions", up from 20% in the previous period and the largest single source. The "mobile" category also jumped significantly from 10% to 20% of the total. This tells us that something significant changed

and is causing users to "Like" our page from those other sources, rather than "Liking" us after discovering the page first. As far as we can tell, FB has not introduced new "Suggestions" features during that time that might cause a jump in usage. The growth of mobile IS understandable and fits in with larger trends in the smart phone market. What do we make of this information?

Conclusion

Our tentative conclusion is that both increasing the reliability of posts AND focusing the attention on images has significantly contributed to the increase in the rate of "Likes." We suspect based on industry gossip, that FB's algorithms are seeing more image content vs. "Link" content, thus ranking us higher than pages that are more link "heavy."

We also speculate that our members on FB began using the "Page Suggestion" feature much more in the past 4 months. Perhaps the start of campuses lead to those student members and non-students in those branches to promote the ISO in lots of increased ways, including the "Page Suggestions" feature which was revamped by FB in late 2012 and now is becoming easier to use.

What does having 20,000 "Likes" mean for the ISO? We don't really know.

What we do know is that being popular on FB is not a bad thing. We know that the more popular your page is, the more FB's algorithms will suggest your page and posts to other, non-fans. We know that our posts will appear on more FB walls and increase the chance that their network of friends will see, interact and possibly read those articles. We will have to measure the SW page hit statistics throughout this spring to gain more insight into this theory.

We also feel that having a large base of people who will see our posts will be a great starting point to promote events that might bring us in contact with some of these people if (and when) we begin promoting FB events for various actions in the future.

Final Thoughts

We want to thank all of our volunteers that spent valuable time and effort to post articles during the year. We haven't had the best communication or the clearest plan at times. However, we managed to come up with a much better process that seems to be paying off. We also want to thank the members of the SW staff that have for their time and patience as we sorted this out.

We also think members should revisit "How can the ISO and our membership better utilize the Internet?" from Pre-Convention Bulletin #5, 2013. We feel those recommendations continue to be true and are solid ideas to continue growing the ISO using some online tools.

Brian L. from the Social Media Team

Documents with resolutions

Addressing Allegations of Sexual Misconduct Made Against Members of the ISO

Key for Acronyms:

ISODC = ISO Disciplinary Committee

ISOSC = ISO Steering Committee

XVBC = XVVX Branch Committee

XVIC = XVVX Investigation Committee

What would you do if someone approached you and accused an ISO comrade of sexual assault or rape? What if that comrade was a long-standing, well-respected activist and a member of the Branch Committee,

and one of your closest friends? For most of us, this would be a shock at the very least. Our comrades are dedicated to the fight against sexism and for the liberation of women and all oppressed peoples. It is almost beyond comprehension to imagine that this person, whom you probably look up to, and likely trust implicitly, could behave in such an oppressive manner. *The accuser was probably lying or exaggerating, you might instinctively think to yourself. If it was so serious, you imagine, the BC would handle it.* Or maybe you would find yourself putting off dealing with it at all, because there's just so much organizing work to focus on right now.

Members are not trained in how to deal with something like this, and while many reading are probably certain that they would respond in a prompt and principled manner (no matter the personal ties to the accused), the experience of the XVVX branch over the past two years demonstrates that the most dedicated anti-sexist revolutionaries, even a whole branch of them, can get it wrong. None of us, no matter how steadfastly anti-sexist, are completely immune to living in the deeply sexist culture of American capitalism. We are programmed with an instinct that says allegations like this made against comrades must be false or exaggerated. But our instincts betray us, because the number of false accusations is almost zero compared to the number of abuses which are either never reported, or dismissed out of hand.

The following is an account of our collective experience in dealing with such an accusation, and any names referenced have been changed. We hope that generalizing our experience nationally will help to align the ISO's practice on intimate violence and gendered oppression with our anti-sexist politics, reflecting the lived experience of those subject to that oppression.

"Daniel" was a member of the XVVX branch for many years, by all accounts a leading member and dedicated activist, and was a member of the Branch Committee (XVBC). In July of 2013, an activist, who is a member of a different socialist organization and extremely hostile to the ISO, took to Facebook, calling "Daniel" an "attempted rapist". In the comment thread that ensued, they accused the ISO, at both a local and a national level, of a cover-up. There were no details of the incident presented, the poster was not the victim, and did not name her (it was clear from the accusation that the victim was female). It was also clear that the poster did not have the victim's consent to make this accusation publicly.

One of our comrades knew who the victim likely was, and right away decided to reach out to her to get a first hand account of what had happened. The victim described the incident in full. She stated that while she did not want "Daniel" to be expelled from the ISO, she also thought it was wrong for him to speak about women's rights. That same day, an emergency XVBC meeting was called.

The XVBC at the time was made up of four members. Aside from "Daniel", one member recused themselves due to close friendship with "Daniel", one member had been accused of cover-up by the Facebook poster, and the one remaining XVBC member (who was relatively inexperienced, and had been elected only the week before) decided to invite other veteran branch members to the meeting to advise. Those members invited other members, and what resulted was an informal branch meeting to which not all members were invited--about half of the branch.

"Daniel" was present at the beginning, and stated that he would not contradict the account of the incident made by the victim, and would accept any disciplinary action decided on by the ISO without resistance. He resigned from the XVBC pending the end of the investigation, and left the meeting.

It became clear during that meeting that the incident had occurred a year prior, in July 2012, and that at least some members of the branch had been aware, through accusations made by people close to the victim (but not the victim herself), or by rumor. In 2012, no formal investigation had been made.

By the end of the meeting in July 2013, an investigation committee (XVIC) was formed, and the committee members were chosen based on the comfort of the victim, the objectivity of the members regarding the accused, and the knowledge & training of members in intimate violence and gendered oppression. This two-member committee was charged with working in consultation with the XVBC to collect evidence on

the incident, communicate with the complainant and the accused, research intimate violence, and make recommendations on actions to take.

After the meeting concluded, the XVIC and the two remaining XVBC members (1 had recused) stayed to discuss the notes from the victim's verbal account of the incident. The impression of all members present was that the behavior she described included clearly violating consent. The majority did not think the described behavior amounted to attempted rape.

During the investigation, it was revealed that two members of the current (2013) XVBC had known a year prior that an accusation had been made, one of whom was also on the XVBC with "Daniel" at the time of the incident (July 2012). As of July 2013, no one had spoken to the victim, no disciplinary action had been taken against "Daniel," no fewer than five XVBC comrades knew that there was an accusation, including two members of the (2012) XVBC, and the ISOSC was also aware.* The accusation was not investigated further in 2012, in part due to the way it was brought (also on Facebook), and the person bringing it (also hostile to the ISO). People didn't want to bother the alleged victim about it.

None of the authors of this document spoke to the ISOSC about the allegation in 2012. When questioned about conversations between the XVBC and an ISOSC member in 2012, the ISOSC member responded:

"I was told in September 2012 that the issue *had already been resolved* because [the victim] wanted to move on with her life and didn't want to press charges."

XVBC member(s) who spoke to the ISOSC member in 2012 thought that the actions described did not amount to attempted rape, as the third-party accuser had characterized it, nor did they think that there was a violation of consent.

The primary failure in this situation was that no ISO member suggested or took the initiative to contact the victim directly to get her account of what had happened. This mistake was made by every member who was in some way aware that an accusation had been made, regardless of their position in leadership or their dedication to fighting sexism. We are *not* claiming that any ISO members acted in bad faith, but that is precisely the point: Even with the best of intentions, our established procedure produces huge failures.

By the time the investigation had started in July 2013, the victim had made life changes that made her harder to reach. The XVIC communicated with her by phone and email, and met once in person. They shared the ISO draft disciplinary guidelines with both the victim and "Daniel", and explained that if a first-party written complaint was submitted to the Disciplinary Committee (ISODC), "Daniel" would be suspended pending the end of the investigation. Otherwise, no action could be taken by the national organization. This was our understanding at the time; we recently learned that the branch could have suspended or expelled him at any point. The victim expressed that she intended to submit a written complaint, but that she did not want "Daniel" to be expelled from the ISO.

"Daniel" had been voluntarily absent from the branch for a number of weeks, and upon his return, he contacted the XVBC with his account of the incident, which he asked to remain confidential. He stated that while his behavior the night of the incident was childish and mean, he had done nothing to warrant actions be taken against him by the ISO. He believed that he did not need further education on women's oppression as a result of this incident, and he demanded that the investigation be resolved immediately in his favor. When asked why he was reversing his position, he said that he had felt ganged up on at the emergency meeting. He was told by the XVBC that the investigation was still ongoing and that he would need to remain patient.

As time progressed, the victim became less responsive to communication. No written complaint had materialized, and both the XVIC and the XVBC agreed that the investigation may need to be resolved in absence of a written complaint, and that the notes from the victim's verbal account were sufficient evidence for action to be taken. The XVBC emailed the ISODC asking for advice. A member of the ISOSC responded that if the accusation amounted to sexual assault, "Daniel" should be suspended immediately,

without assumption of guilt, pending the resolution of the investigation. In the space of a few days, "Daniel" was suspended, but resigned from the ISO before the investigation was completed.

During the investigation, and in the weeks after "Daniel"'s resignation, a rift had formed in the branch. Members close to the investigation met informally to discuss issues around the branch's response (or lack thereof) to the accusations in 2012, the current leadership of the branch around women's oppression, and the ISO draft guidelines. This group developed into what amounted to an un-announced faction. Members not close to the investigation felt excluded and underinformed, not trusted by members close to the investigation, and were concerned they were being unfairly accused of being, or at least being treated as, sexists. This division was highlighted by a pending XVBC election.

The rift became so large that an emergency meeting was called in the Fall by a member not on the XVBC, at which the entire branch was briefed on the details of the victim's account. This process, which continued in two more internal branch meetings, opened up debate and cleared up misunderstandings. Constructive discussion overtook rumors, and the previously contentious XVBC election process resolved with relative unity -- there was only one slate, which was largely worked out before the election.

The branch agreed that "Daniel"'s status needed to be resolved, in the case that he might decide to return (even if years from now). The pre-election XVBC (which was at that point reduced to one member because the other two had recused themselves) had urged the ISODC to take up the case:

"The accused was one of the longest standing [...] and well-respected members of the Xvvx branch [...]. Because of these realities, every Xvvx comrade has developed working and personal relationships with ["Daniel"], sometimes over many years, such that it is anywhere from very difficult to impossible for any of us to be objective in determining what, if any, disciplinary action be taken -- it took us six weeks and a directive from the Center to *temporarily* suspend him."

"The process of this investigation, because of the inexperience of the members involved and the amount of improvising that was necessary, created a huge amount of tension in the branch, to a level that multiple senior members say has never happened before. We have, through three closed branch meetings, managed to heal and reunify [...] however, I think any determination made by myself, or any group of Xvvx comrades, would inevitably lead to more strain on the branch, which is unnecessary and would be destructive."

However, per the ISO's draft disciplinary guidelines, the ISODC would not take up the case without a first-party written complaint. Additionally, the ISOSC informed the branch that "Daniel" could not return without its approval, which would necessarily involve resolving any pending disciplinary charges. So, the newly elected XVBC was charged with making a determination on "Daniel"'s status. The non-recused members of the XVBC created a plan with a transformative justice framework, to be voted on by the whole branch. Ultimately, the XVBC felt it could not support such a plan, and "Daniel"'s status is still undecided. *There have been four internal full branch meetings dealing with this issue.*

The branch has lost at least one member (besides "Daniel"), due in part to the way the accusation was handled by the branch, from the first time it was brought to us in July 2012, through the formal investigation and rift in the branch in the fall of 2013.

Since the authoring of this document, many in the branch have begun to argue for "Daniel"'s formal expulsion.

* In March 2013, a member of the Xvvx branch contacted a member of the ISOSC to report the fact that a third party had accused "Daniel" of attempted rape. The ISOSC member said that they assumed the accusations were false and did not connect the Xvvx member with the ISODC. In the meantime, the Xvvx member spoke to the accuser, who said that he would ask the victim if she wanted to talk to an ISO member about the issue. The ISOSC member communicated that they brought the issue to the ISOSC,

that the ISOSC discussed it and deemed it a local issue.

So, we ask again, what would you do? Here are some lessons we learned.

Political context:

- False accusations of sexual abuse made by people who face gendered oppression are incredibly rare. It is, however, disturbingly common for assaults to remain unreported or be unjustly dismissed. We must therefore approach every accusation as though it is almost certainly true.
- No one, including the most militant anti-sexists, are immune to living in this deeply sexist culture.
- Education is needed for ISO members on consent, intimate violence, and other interpersonal expressions of gendered oppression (or any oppression for that matter).
- When the ability of the BC to function is compromised, the only substitute is the full branch.

When an accusation is made:

- Make every effort to get a firsthand account as soon as possible.
- Ask for endorsement of the account from the accuser if notes are taken by a third party.
- Even in the absence of a formal complaint, the allegations must still be dealt with by the branch.
- If the accused departs the ISO during an investigation, the organization must still resolve the investigation to make a determination about the member's status.

During the investigation:

- Every accusation must be taken seriously, regardless of how it was brought, or who is making it. Taking allegations seriously should never be met with hostility by any member.
- Those who may bring an allegation forward in a way that can be seen as problematic, unserious, sectarian, emotional, etc. should not be attacked for doing so.
- Members close to an accused comrade should be especially conscious of reflexive defensiveness by themselves and the accused toward those taking allegations seriously.
- Do not form unannounced factions, and be aware of informal discussions that could amount to that.
- Disagreements will arise among members in a situation like this. Bringing them up early to the branch as a whole is the best way to diffuse tension. It is the responsibility of the BC to make space to discuss the progress of a case like this early and often.
- Be aware of the tendency to form cliques. Informal networks should not be the basis to develop political currents in the branch.
- Even when an allegation is made in a public forum in a way that's meant to harm the ISO, members should respond prudently and thoughtfully. We should be aware that we can be held publicly accountable for anything we say, even in private or online.

The ISO as an organization, and all ISO comrades as individuals, are committed to fighting for a better world free from exploitation and oppression. We are also committed to practicing our fight on the terms of the oppressed. Not only is this the right thing to do morally, but we consider it fundamental that the overthrow of capitalism will require the confrontation of oppression by the oppressed themselves. We must therefore do everything we can so that victims of oppression can feel safe in the ISO and with ISO comrades, in order that they can fully participate in the struggle.

We struggle inside a world run by capitalism, a violent system of oppression driven by violent, oppressive ideologies and social relations; among these are sexism, misogyny, and widespread sexual harassment and sexual violence. Much--probably most--of this violence is intimate violence, between acquaintances, friends, family, and partners. The system is merciless in its victim-blaming and doubt of accusers, and generous with its forgiveness and granting "benefit of the doubt" for perpetrators. The actual number of false accusations is infinitesimally small compared to the number of abusers never held to account. No one, including revolutionaries who earnestly fight against this culture of rape, is immune to its effects. While we actively seek to extricate oppressive attitudes and behaviors from our revolutionary organization, the ISO is not an island free of gendered oppression in an ocean of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual

violence. And it will never be so long as capitalism exists.

This is the context we must always remember when an allegation of sexual misconduct is made against a member of the ISO.

Resolutions:

Proposal # 1

The draft General Disciplinary Procedures shall be amended as follows prior to a vote at Convention (additions in italics):

1. Procedures involved in a Sexual Misconduct Disciplinary Complaint

A. Filing a Sexual Misconduct Complaint

To file a disciplinary complaint against an ISO member, the complainant must submit a ~~written~~ statement detailing the allegations of the Sexual Misconduct. This statement is the first opportunity for the complainant to describe the allegations against the respondent. The statement should communicate the complainant's full account of the event and its context, as well as the complainant's reflections. To facilitate the process, the complainant should:

- Tell the story in full. Relate in full the facts of the incident as you recall them.
- Take care to distinguish between what you saw, heard, or experienced first-hand from what you may have learned later from others.
- Describe the context. It is important for you to give your perception of the respondent's conduct and the context in which the incident occurred, including its location, and any witnesses to it.
- Reflect on the event. It is helpful for you to provide any conclusions you have drawn about the incident, stating clearly why you believe the respondent's actions may have constituted sexual misconduct.

The complainant's Statement should include the name of the accused ISO member, the date and location of the alleged Sexual Misconduct and the actions of the alleged misconduct. This statement should provide as much detail as possible about the facts surrounding the alleged Sexual Misconduct.

A descriptive list of all sources of information (e.g., witnesses, correspondence, records, etc.) should be included in the complainant's Statement. This list should include information that the complainant believes should be considered in deciding this disciplinary complaint, along with a brief explanation of why this information would be relevant and helpful to the process. The Investigator(s) will solicit any relevant statements or documents referenced through this process.

The complainant's Statement is one of the most important documents to be considered in the Sexual Misconduct investigative/hearing Process. Once submitted, the complainant's Statement may not be amended. The statement must be *either in writing and written signed by the complainant, an audio recording of the complainant's verbal account of events (made with the complainant's consent), or*

~~both. The complainant will be required to sign a statement verifying that he/she wrote the complainant's Statement.~~

Motivation: We feel that the requirement in the current draft General Disciplinary Procedures that there must be a written first party complaint is too burdensome on the victim. Even the bourgeois legal system, not known for its compassion for victims, accepts endorsed statements written by a third party or audio recordings as evidence.

Proposal # 2

The following protocol on how to handle accusations of sexual misconduct shall be added to the New Members Toolkit and be included as part of training new members. Branches should also actively train existing members in the protocol:

If an individual ISO member makes or hears about an accusation of sexual misconduct, they should make every effort, with the help of other ISO comrades as necessary, to contact the alleged victim and obtain a formal statement, if they wish to give one. The statement should then be forwarded to the ISODC and the local BC.

If the alleged victim does not wish to give a formal statement, the member should take the accusation to the BC. If the member is concerned that the BC is compromised, such as when the accused is a member of the BC or is closely tied to a majority of the BC, the member should bring the accusation to the whole branch.

Inaction is not an option.

Motivation: Currently, members are ill-equipped to handle allegations of sexual misconduct. We think that having a clear protocol and training new and existing members in it will help avoid some of the mistakes we made while improvising. This protocol was structured to prioritize the needs of the victim while still addressing the accusation, understanding that they may wish for knowledge of their ordeal to not be spread unnecessarily to people who know them personally.

Names redacted XVX branch
