

Pre-convention Bulletin #22 / February 11, 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.

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:** *The deadline for delegate information and guest requests was Sunday, February 9.*
2. **Childcare:** *The deadline for submitting childcare requests was Friday, February 7.*
2. **Housing with comrades:** *The deadline for requesting housing with Chicago comrades was Sunday, February 9.*
3. **Pre-convention documents and resolutions:** *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.

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.

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

Documents

Towards Better Contact Work

This document examines a fallout the Chicago district had with a contact and how to move towards a better practice in the recruitment of comrades of color.

BACKGROUND

Members of the Chicago Pilsen branch met Kourtnee (not the contact's real name) and developed a relationship with her through activity in the education justice movement. She is an independent activist, the daughter of a retired CTU member and an underemployed Black woman from the south side of Chicago. After months of developing a deep political relationship in which Kourtnee invited Anthony, a white ISO member and CTU teacher, to an internal CTU Black Caucus meeting, an explicit attempt was made at recruiting her to the ISO.

An initial contact meeting was set up in which Kourtnee articulated disgust at the amount of racism, poverty and violence in Chicago. She further expressed concern with President Obama's drone program, his out of touch speeches and neoliberal abandonment of the working class. We learned that she became active after her church group (Reverend Jeremiah Wright's church) discussed Michelle Alexander's *New Jim Crow* and her mom brought her to CORE meetings. After the initial contact meeting, Anthony and Kimberly then organized further political discussion around the "Where We Stand" packet. Through these discussions, it became evident that she was just putting together her thoughts about the type of world we needed to fight for and did not agree with everything we had say. She had questions about what a revolution would look like and had questions about why they ISO was not located in the Black communities where she lived. Even so, she attended a few branch meetings at the nearest branch, came to a public forum, attended a potluck, showed interest in learning more and accepted an invitation to Socialism 2013 as a guest of Kimberly.

JUNETEENTH FUNDRAISER FOR SOCIALISM

The "*Juneteenth Fundraiser for Socialism*" was announced publicly through a facebook page. In the announcement, there were references to a silent auction that would be used to fundraise for the Socialism conference. After seeing it shared on a few members' pages, Kourtnee wrote a comment on her Facebook page that made fun of white people celebrating Juneteenth. Her comments expressed incredulity at why whites felt they should celebrate it, hold a fundraiser and at the carnival-like atmosphere that would mark the celebration. After learning of the facebook comments, various ISO members from the Pilsen branch asked Kourtnee if they could talk to her about the issue of celebrating Juneteenth, if the ISO is a "white" organization and the Black community's view of socialism. Kourtnee said, "Sure," but neither the ISO Pilsen members nor Kourtnee set up a concrete date. Just before the weekend of the fundraiser, Kourtnee wrote another racially-motivated comment in which another ISO member at the time (she has since left the organization) retaliated by blasting her on Facebook as being a tool of the ruling class. The fallout was immediate.

Kimberly asked if Kourtnee would meet with her to discuss everything and a meeting was set up for the following evening. At the meeting, Kimberly and Kourtnee's discussion included the above-mentioned issues, further questions about socialism and other political questions. Although her attitude was friendly, she effectively distanced herself from the ISO and any arguments that a multi-racial struggle from below could happen.

COMRADELY BEHAVIOR

This experience revealed concern of our member's approach to another worker. Although Kourtnee was not a member and wrote some incendiary comments which some members perceived as an attack, no one should have berated her for holding ideas the organization disagrees with. Instead, the goal should be revolutionary patience through concerted, sustained action in order to win over allies to our worldview. Further, members within our organization have different interpretations of understanding that may be forming and changing, and we are at different places in our own learning curves. The consciousness of the organization is not static; it is evolving and must be shaped by experience and reflection.

The same consciousness is also shaped by dissent and dissonance. Organizations undergo the danger of protectionism and insularity when members feel that a party "line" is being insulted or violated, resulting sometimes in defensive attitudes toward those who don't understand what is being communicated. For example, it is possible that comrades were insulted by the reactive nature of Kourtnee's opinion that the Juneteenth celebration should not be celebrated by whites. It is normal to want to defend the ISO when we perceive an attack but poorly-mounted defense, however, opens the organization up to much wider criticism.

The other perceived offense was that the ISO would not be equipped to handle a reverent celebration of Juneteenth. The advertisement — e-mail or FB page — displayed all the signs of enthusiasm for the event, but communicated cultural insensitivity to the wider audience of Blacks who read it. Not only did the outsiders on the thread express dismay at the silent auction being held, but Kimberly, a black member, did

not like the idea. “Auction” at Juneteenth, the celebration of when Blacks in Texas found out that they were legally free, seems to mock the idea of the celebration.

Was there no other way of earning money, the writers on the thread asked? Couldn't it be called something else? Why not just have a *party* for Socialism 2013? Another person asked if the ISO would make a fundraiser of a Native American pow-wow? A few of the writers did not trust that any Black person had a hand in planning this event.

The slip-and-slide, while a seemingly harmless activity, was sarcastically used as a remembrance of hoses turned on black people during the 20th century. This confirmed to the outsiders, many of whom have anti-capitalist world views, that this was another lefty organization using a Black holiday as a tool for earning money for the cause. The subsequent entries by a different ex-ISO member, who is white, published a historical memory of similar instances at the Iowa City branch. When appeals were made through facebook, our critics shot it down, saying that there could be no claim of parity between actions because historically, white privilege prevents the actions from being similar.

While there will always be detractors of the ISO, and we will not please everyone, these responses should inform us as socialists and as humans. It is not sufficient enough to say that the ISO has thrown a Juneteenth celebration prior to this one, which included an educational component, was planned by a black member and raised funds that helped to pay for the most successful conference up to that date. *This year's Juneteenth celebration really was thrown together in a slap-dash manner, did not include any political education and belied the very accusations that were made on Facebook.* Kimberly and Anthony both agree that fundraising for the left is essential, that we envision a culture where every member celebrates the abolition of slavery and that political work should be towards those ends. Unfortunately, this year's fundraiser did not meet all of our revolutionary goals and our entire district must hold ourselves accountable. Moreover, This experience points out the need to take ourselves seriously in all endeavors whether it is a protest, a public forum or a fundraiser. Although many of us are not nor have the means to be professional revolutionaries, whenever we take on a task that publicly represents our organization, we must complete the task with a seriousness knowing the potential members, contacts, allies and the broader left are always watching.

THE COLOR OF THE ISO

Communication is a political problem. In an organization that at the moment is made up of mostly white members, we must be culturally sensitive while communicating Marxist ideas of liberation, especially to people of color aware of historical faults of the left/Communist Party. We can take steps to improve our presentation of ideas to those we wish to attract.

Secondly, we must take up the question of the ISO as a “white” organization? Some comrades took offense at this characterization. The conflict is a semantic one. When Kourtnee stated we are “a white organization,” some members perceived this as an attack on our anti-racist values. In no way was she attacking us as “White nationalist” party; rather, the writers meant the majority of the faces in the membership are white. The answer some comrades used was, “No, this organization is for everyone.” That's fine but the perception is that if the ISO is for everyone, the colors would reflect that. We are trying to move toward that appearance, although it is true that the ISO has attracted more white members than people of color, and to be international, keeping that appearance poses a problem. The working class is made up of all colors; so are socialists. We must have patience as we work towards a more multi-racial organization but not be defensive when we are observed as a “white” organization. There are historical and material reasons that make the building of a multi-racial revolutionary organization a hard long-term goal. We must not shy away from difficult conversations.

TOWARDS BETTER CONTACT WORK

As we have seen throughout the year, although Facebook can be used as a positive way to organize, it can also be a terrible forum to work out political disagreements. Words can ring hurtfully and hollowly. The record is permanent. No conversation that starts one place stays in that place, figuratively or literally. The

balance of any political communication is made through establishing relationships and communicating in many modes. Effective communication is personal and recursive.

The attitude behind the communication is important. Snarky, mean, unwelcomed, or flippant responses don't win more people to socialism. They don't win new members and they don't trump sound, patient arguments. Arguments delivered to people in such a way smack of arrogance and dismissiveness.

Lenin, in *The April Theses*, cautions revolutionaries about their approach in convincing the workers of the need to reject bourgeois forms of government and to create a communist one:

The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, and as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, *to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.*

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticizing and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers Deputies, so that people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

Excerpt from The April Theses, 1917, Fraternization, clause 4

We can learn from Lenin by comparison. While we don't have to abandon our criticisms or be silent about what we believe is incorrect, we must approach people with patience, and we must explain. We **can** explain our ideas and can critique other ideas—not the person—but with patience, recognizing where people are in the political movement.

Mistakes were made that revealed weaknesses in our way of operating. The mistakes also cost us valuable contact with someone who was absolutely an ally and might have grown closer to the ISO. Most importantly, the mistakes violated *de facto* rules of etiquette under which most of our comrades operate. We don't berate contacts, allies or members when we disagree with them.

Our organization's planning and presentation of the Juneteenth fundraiser was ill-conceived. Even so, we made mistakes *outside* of the poorly-planned Juneteenth event and its insensitive advertisement. We recognize that we should have set a concrete date and time to meet with Kourtnee. In absence of a political face-to-face discussion, we allowed misconceptions on both sides to take root. After Kourtnee's racially motivated comments, she was subsequently referenced by some as a contact with Black Nationalist tendencies. We think there is room for a larger discussion on the usefulness of labeling contacts with "identity politics," "lifestyle politics," "black nationalist politics," "privilege theory," or whatever thread of ideas they have. As members of the ISO, we have become accustomed to sharp political debate in which ideas are thoroughly discussed. This technique sometime carries over to contact work where a person gets labeled with "identity politics"/"black nationalist politics" and then our members feel the need to defend against those ideas and dispel every myth or misconception in one conversation.

Further, we recognize a bigger mistake in some of our initial conversations was not asking enough questions. We could have asked, "Where do you think racism comes from?" "How do you fight it" etc... Looking forward, we need to understand what a person is exactly thinking when they say things that might be characterized as "identity politics" or "black nationalist." *That* person might not even be aware that such statements are connected to a well thought-out ideology. Rather, the person might just be repeating things they have heard, experienced or felt on a gut level in opposition to the sexist, racist, homophobic society we inhabit. Again, we must have revolutionary patience in explaining and winning people to our ideas through the most professional manner.

Recruitment and the spreading of radical ideas remain a challenge for us as socialists. We need to exemplify patience, empathy and show a willingness to confront our own notions of who we think others are. In order to work out conflict between ideas and the cognitive dissonance that Vygotsky says is critical to learning, we must tamp our frustration about the length of the process, and we should water it in comradely support. If we want to win people to revolutionary Marxism, we must remember that those

people at different points in their political consciousness and trajectory will hold us to the high standard of how we treat just one.

Submitted by Kimberly B., Anthony C., Chicago District (Pilsen Branch)

Recentering the International Socialist Review

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement...

...We shall have occasion further on to deal with the political and organizational duties which the task of emancipating the whole people from the yoke of autocracy imposes upon us. At this point, we wish to state only that the *role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.*

- V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement*

The *International Socialist Review (ISR)* was launched in 1997 with the aim of ‘arming a new generation of Marxists with the lessons of past struggles as well as the theoretical means to tackle new ones’. In many ways, though we are in very changed circumstances, the task remains essentially the same.

Comrades will know the *ISR* has been re-launched as a quarterly journal with the aim of taking up and developing the key theoretical and political questions of the day. The first issue in the journal format will give comrades a sense of the planned content and its future direction. For example, issue 91 features crucial Marxist contributions on women’s oppression by Sharon Smith and Tithi Bhattacharya; Neil Davidson’s contribution to an important debate on Political Marxism; and contributions on international questions from comrades in the International Workers Left (DEA) in Greece, British socialist Ian Birchall on France in May 1968 and Victor Toro on building the revolutionary left in Chile. Future issues will continue the debate and discussion of Political Marxism; take up analysis and debates on *The Making of Global Capitalism* by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin and Vivek Chibber’s *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*; and analysis of crucial international struggles in Egypt and the Middle East. And, of course, the *ISR* will continue to make advancing Marxist analysis of racism in the US a central focus with contributions such as “Race and class in the US foster system” by Don Lash in the current issue of the *ISR*.

From its initial launch the *ISR* has played a critical role in a number of interrelated ways. Firstly, the magazine provided a space for our own theoretical and political development. Until then, we relied heavily on the International Socialism Journal produced primarily for a British audience by the Socialist Workers Party. Secondly, the magazine’s utilization by comrades for discussions, study groups, preparation for meetings, for social movements and so on put it at the center of cadre and membership development. It was also an incredibly useful tool to develop a periphery interested in Marxism and revolutionary socialist organization. Finally, it created a means by which to project our political views and the international socialist tradition to a much broader audience in the US and internationally with growing sophistication. The quality of *ISR*’s theoretical and political analysis played a role in transforming how others on US and international left viewed our contributions, capacities and potential.

The *ISR* engaged with and published leading Marxist voices but also many other leading voices on the US and international left. These contributions strengthened the *ISR* as an educational tool but also laid the basis for deeper collaboration of the left. Respect for the role of the *ISR* can be measured by some of the greetings we have received for its re-launch:

"The *ISR* stuck it out when 'socialist' was still a dirty word in this country, and now that the Left is getting downright trendy, it's great to see it re-envisioned for a new generation of troublemakers."

—Sarah Jaffe, journalist at *In These Times* and the host of *Dissent* magazine's Belabored podcast

"To me, the inception or revitalization of any left publication is cause for celebration and warm enthusiasm.

And when, like with the *International Socialist Review*, its voices and perspectives are so rarely heard in the progressive media landscape, it's cause for not just enthusiasm but active support."

—Peter Rothberg, Associate Publisher for Special Projects, *The Nation*

"Greetings from New Delhi from where we are competing with New York in a race to the bottom to see how we can concentrate wealth in fewer and fewer hands and push millions of people into despair, debt and homelessness and continue to call ourselves a great democracy. I am delighted to celebrate and express my solidarity with the *International Socialist Review* in which my writing has been published over the past ten years. *ISR* continues to be an island of sanity in a world that is showing signs of psychosis. Long may it remain so. With my love. Arundhati."

—Arundhati Roy, author, *The God of Small Things* and many other works of political and social commentary

"*International Socialist Review* is a must read for insightful, well-researched and well-argued essays on current affairs and the most pressing issues facing the left. In this era, millions are now realizing that the intertwined economic, social and ecological crises can only be addressed by principled socialist ideas and movements, such as those represented by *ISR*. I offer my sincere congratulations and solidarity to *ISR*'s editors and writers for many years of outstanding work, and look forward to many more to come."

—Arun Gupta, contributor to *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, *Truthout* and *The Guardian*

"The *International Socialist Review* has long been a beacon of intelligent and polished, but utterly uncompromising socialist politics. Its relaunch will do much to help reinvigorate Marxist praxis in the 21st century."

—Bhaskar Sunkara, founding editor *Jacobin* magazine, senior editor *In These Times*

"The *ISR* has been a regular source of informed analysis and thoughtful commentary, invaluable to an activist left intent on changing the world. Its revival as a quarterly is a very welcome event in these troubled but auspicious times."

—Noam Chomsky

The *ISR*'s success depended on our entire collective effort. However, use of the *ISR* within the organization today is very uneven. Many comrades might not have subscriptions and branches may not have an established routine around using and selling the *ISR*. In fact, there are more non-members subscribed to the *ISR* today than there are ISO members! There are 900 current subscribers now which we hope to significantly increase in the coming months.

We believe the re-launched and re-conceptualized *ISR* can play a central role in developing Marxist cadre and, also, in engaging a broader audience interested in Marxism and the issues the journal takes up. Furthermore, the *ISR* can play a vital role in strengthening and broadening the appeal for Marxist ideas in general in the US and internationally. Our goal is to make the *ISR* an ongoing point of reference for debate, analysis and education for activists in the US and internationally. A widely read *ISR* will lay the basis for a larger revolutionary socialist organization and can orient many more who are already or who want to fight for an alternative on the social power of the working class. And, we hope many more comrades will consider contributing articles to the *ISR*.

As has been emphasized, the creation of and training of Marxist cadre is the key to a larger, more influential, more experienced and implanted revolutionary socialist organization. The role our comrades play today in the trade union movement, in the climate change movement, in multiple social struggles, on campuses, through theoretical and political contributions is because of the importance we have given to the training of Marxist cadre. The journal will have a renewed focus on taking up the most challenging theoretical, political and strategic questions we face today to equip our members with the ideas we need to be effective Marxists. Our ability to develop and train broader and wider layers of cadre is the most

important way to measure our growth and what we are capable of doing.

There is a much greater audience for radical ideas today than when the *ISR* was first launched. But, there isn't a political vacuum on the left. Vivek Chibber, in a contribution to *Socialist Register* 2014, captures the theoretical challenges we face:

“But the left’s weakness is not just political or organizational - it also extends to theory. The political defeats of the past decades have been accompanied by a dramatic churning on the intellectual front. It is not that there has been a flight away from radical theory or commitments to a radical intellectual agenda. Arguably, self-styled progressive or radical intellectuals are still very impressive in number at a good many universities, at least in North America. It is rather the meaning of radicalism has changed. Under the influence of post-structuralist thinking, the basic concepts of the socialist tradition are either considered suspect or rejected outright. To take but one example, the idea that capitalism has a *real* structure which imposes real compulsions on actors, that class is rooted in the real relations of exploitation, or that labour has a real interest in collective organization - all these ideas, which were the common sense of the left for almost two centuries, are taken to be hopelessly outdated.”

To explain the relaunch of the *ISR* Paul D’Amato develops this context further and points towards the role the journal can play:

“In the 1990s, the collapse of Stalinism led many on the international left to conclude that liberal democracy, or “social liberalism,” was the only political alternative. The mainstream labor and social democratic parties, which had once talked about “breaking with capitalism,” accommodated themselves to the neoliberal mantra of deregulation, flexible labor, and privatization. Communist parties either dissolved or transformed themselves into social liberal adjuncts to the “center-left.” In most countries, the center-left parties have proven themselves to be accomplices to the austerity-driven immiseration of the working class.

As a result, many activists who are being shaped today feel that the “old models” don’t work anymore. Political certainties of the postwar or even neoliberal eras have been upended. But a sense of a coherent alternative to capitalism, embodied politically and organizationally, and connecting growing networks of activists and militants, is still to be recreated.

Today’s challenges have thrown up many new questions. Should the Left embrace a strategy of building political parties to the left of traditional social democracy, such as SYRIZA in Greece? Can experiments with workers’ control of production, such as emerged in Argentina in the early 2000s, provide a model for transforming capitalism? Can socialist theory explain racism, the oppression of women and LGBT people, and inform practice towards the liberation of the oppressed? Do the organizational models that have dominated the revolutionary left since the 1917 Russian Revolution have relevance in the twenty-first century? How do we understand the world economy and the role of the US empire in it? Is the working class today the agent for social change that Marx and Engels anticipated? How do we construct a viable, sustainable world in the face of global climate change? These—and many more—are precisely the types of questions that our newly introduced journal wants to address.”

This is why projection of the *ISR* is so crucial right now. The *ISR* has a new website but the magazine can only properly be utilized to its full potential if we approach it collectively. Collectively we can ensure specifically revolutionary Marxist ideas are projected into the broader radical ideological milieu that’s developed since the 2008 global economic crisis. To do so, all members must become familiar with the arguments and debates presented in the *ISR* and be able to engage them, advance and defend them. All our members should feel confident that they can fight for our ideas; win more space for revolutionary Marxism; and win more individuals and groups to the need for revolutionary socialist organization. Towards this end, all districts, branches and twigs should begin the process of *recentering* the role of the *ISR*. The reorganization of the National Office will allow us to make sure is the *ISR* is much more politically

integrated and centralized into the life and work of the organization.

Here are some goals we should aim for:

- *All members should subscribe* and encourage contacts, supporters, allies, radicals and others to subscribe.
- Hold meetings organized around magazine content. There's a variety ways to do this: public meetings, discussion groups, day schools and potlucks, for example.
- Feature the magazine at branch meetings, tablings, Haymarket forums and other events.
- Publicize the *ISR* via emails and social media.

For this to happen a comrade will need to be assigned as the *ISR* organizer for the branch (or in smaller branch a literature organizer who is also charged with the *ISR*). The *ISR* organizer should know how many comrades in the branch are subscribed, how many issues the branch orders and sells and assist the branch in thinking through ways to use and project the journal. The *ISR* organizer should plan to report regularly to the entire branch and the National Office on the journal's use.

Dave, in Burlington, describes how the branch has been able to utilize the *ISR*:

1. A full-time *ISR* organizer has been essential. She/he can follow up with members (especially around the time of the fund drive) to make sure everyone has subs.
2. Folks commonly say that they will just buy it from the branch instead of getting a sub. The strategy we encourage (since the branch usually gets them before individuals receive subs) is: get one from the branch to read. It will get all marked up and tattered. Then you will get a nice new shiny one in the mail that you can sell to a coworker, family member, movement ally, etc. e.g. I gave my nice (sub) copy to my mom for xmas.
3. Traditionally we have organized monthly *ISR* discussions. These have taken place at a comrade's house, and have been fairly informal. About 1.5 hours to discuss two articles, followed by hanging out. usually food and drinks. These have been less regular over the last few months, but we are trying to figure out how to get them going again.
4. Political culture has been important. If you're hanging out at the bar after a branch meeting and everyone's talking about the hot article in the most recent *ISR*, it makes you want to read it too.

Chicago and New York have hosted two very successful *ISR* launch events featuring *ISR* editorial board members, *ISR* contributors and supporters. Other cities should consider holding one or plan a future event with an *ISR* author.

Cindy K. and Shaun H. for the *ISR* editorial board

For a rank and file strategy

"I am not a Labor Leader; I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I led you in, some one else would lead you out. You must use your heads as well as your hands, and get yourself out of your present condition." Eugene Debs

This document is written to add to a discussion on workplace organizing as well as long term implantation started by various comrades in several documents. My intention is to emphasize the importance and key role of the rank and file strategy. For clarity's sake I define the "rank and file strategy" as a method of organizing that has the self-emancipation of the working class at its heart. In other words, the means of

organizing worker self-activity moves us towards the ultimate ends of a revolutionary transformation of society.

1) Running for office as a tactic

Where tactics are defined as actions or methods of a specific part in the class struggle and strategy is defined as the combination of tactics in the overall conquest of workers power, I view running for elected office in your union as a tactical question, meaning it must fit into an overall strategy of rank and file activity.

Some comrades suggest we should “rethink” the rank and file strategy as well as the criteria when considering running for union office. The main question in my mind is: will running and being elected to office advance the activity of your co-workers?

Regarding running for office, it is worth reviewing the case of the CTU, where the comrade who ran for office had been a union activist for a decade beforehand. During those ten years, along with co-workers, he had led many struggles in his school, including one against a militarization campaign which included members of the community. The activists who make up the core of CORE have similar resumes, leading fights in their schools, building along side fellow teachers within their school, and making links to the community that the schools served. Those who came together and formed CORE collectively had many decades of struggle and experience under their belt

Building rank and file activity cannot be separated from leadership, whether in elected form or not. If you are not building rank and file activity, then what and who exactly are you leading? Running for elected office can be part of the process of the rank and file strategy, especially if the incumbents are in the way of of the union moving towards an active membership strategy, and there is a layer of active militants who want to take the union in a different direction.

I believe the main danger in the tactic of running for office is in seeing it as a shortcut to greater rank and file activity. While being against shortcuts isn't really controversial or even that political, and few would openly argue for leapfrogging over existing conditions, I think when confronted with the sad state of the labor movement overall, it is understandable that we want to try “new things,” but we need to be clear on what such new things are, and if they are even really new.

2) What are the key tasks in the current context?

From my limited standpoint, amongst most comrades who are involved in workplace organizing, *the key question confronting them is not whether they should run for elected union office, but how can they get their co-workers to fight back?* How do we initiate workplace struggles or insert ourselves into existing ones seems to be a more common problem. Starting to fight back can often logically lead to an electoral challenge, although this shouldn't be a hard and fast rule either way.

If we look at the question of workers fighting back in a broad historical sense, one constant is the involvement of self conscious radicals. There were many more such radicals in the two previous periods (1930's and 1970's), which was a product of the political periods immediately preceding them. In the case of the 1930's it was decades of militant workplace struggle beforehand along with the presence of organized socialists and radicals that produced historical struggle. The political struggles of the civil rights, women's rights, anti-war, etc. fed into the workplace fightbacks of the 1970's.

At present and broadly stated, we don't have a large base of self-conscious radicals in workplaces (or anywhere else), we don't have widespread militant workplace struggles, and we are not coming off the heels of large social movements that have forced people to question the status quo. This isn't to say we should give up and go home either. There are pockets and individual radicals in some workplaces, there are sporadic labor struggles (some involving thousands), and months long social movements which draw significant numbers of people in.

As was the case in the previous uprisings, we certainly have an aggressive and confident bosses class attempting to solve economic crisis on the backs of workers. Because the current political party in power is Democratic, this has only further hampered fightback as unions are politically tied to this party of capital.

3) Potential exists for organizing

While the success of Sawant demonstrates the desire for a political alternative, and Boeing workers cheered when she said “the workers should take over the factories, and shut down Boeing's profit-making machine,” unfortunately two months later, a slim majority of IAM 751 voted to extend their contract with Boeing for 8 years, instituting a two-tier pay system and severe pension cuts. Certainly this fight is far from over for the significant layer of activists within District 751 who were organizing to vote the contract down and are now organizing as part of a new caucus.

Real work remains in front of us in closing the gap between an elected socialist calling for workers to take over factories and workers actually taking over factories. That Boeing workers cheered the idea of a factory takeover shows that desire exists at least amongst some of them, the question is what is the next step towards making that a reality. I believe that almost all workers have multiple grievances regarding various working conditions, and that most would be interested in doing something about those conditions.

The experience of a two comrades working at Whole Foods is a case and point. They don't have a union contract, and they haven't organized the majority of their co-workers either, but have at one of the stores been able to push management on some specific workplace issues such as being able to take Thanksgiving off, mobilizing dozens of other workers into activity.

I have also had some success at organizing an overtime ban in a busy urban emergency room in response to management proposals at the bargaining table to change how overtime is calculated. Over 130 workers over three shifts, the vast majority of whom are registered nurses, overcame racial and ethnic divisions and refused to sign up for overtime. We took advantage of the law in that we aren't required to work overtime, and the fact that management depends on overtime to run their operation.

Not signing up for overtime shut down a third of one of the busiest EDs in the country and 20 elective surgeries had to be cancelled because OR RNs did the same thing. Upper management's first response was to try and ignore it, and the second in command of the system wrote an email to middle management that they wouldn't be forced into meeting with RNs because we had not gone through the “proper channels.” Two hours later I got a call at home that they changed their mind and wanted to meet to discuss the situation. They agreed to expedite hiring, and meet again in one month to assess progress.

In the end they still haven't hired enough to meet the needs, but the most important thing that came out of the struggle was the sense of power through unity that we had achieved. Word of the action spread through the hospital, and if it needs to be done again, it has the potential of being replicated system wide.

While both examples had the resources of a union behind them, the first took place in a non-union shop and the second had the protection of a union contract - what they have in common is the presence of a couple of socialists who were able to organize something endlessly produced at most jobs: pissed off workers. This is by no means the simple equation: socialists + angry workers = organized fightback, there actually has to be some planning and thought put into it.

4) A progressive union leadership doesn't guarantee rank and file activity

The strength of whatever workplace you are part of, whether there is a union or not, is dependent upon the level of organization of the workers there. If you are a member of a union, just because it has a great leader or a militant history, the union is worthless if the members are not organized. The strength of the union starts with the ability of those militants to organize the rest of the workers into collective action. In the case of the “minority union” model being utilized by Walmart workers or Fight for Fifteen, the thing to figure out is how to go from 2 workers to expanding and bringing other workers into activity. It isn't completely dissimilar from rebuilding in a passive union environment.

While my union, National Nurses United, takes many progressive stances against fracking and for single-payer health care, this doesn't guarantee their ability to produce rank and file activity. From a political standpoint, they are more similar to most unions than different. At the last national gathering, the key note speakers were Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsom, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of California.

While the California Nurses Association (a founding member of NNU) is not afraid to do limited strike actions at Sutter and Kaiser, CNA's aligning with Sal Rosselli's NUHW to fight SEIU at Kaiser got almost the same results as the first round that SEIU won. At the very least, and this is a guess from afar, CNA's model of unionism combined with NUHW's wasn't in itself overwhelming enough to convince workers to change unions, especially in the midst of economic uncertainty.

This is not to say I am vehemently disagreeing with Sean's characterization of NNU as the "closest thing to a class struggle union that the US Labor movement has to offer," but only that the competitive field of nationwide unions is pretty sad. In Chicago, NNU has mostly succeeded at decertifying 3 already organized hospitals from the Illinois Nursing Association. In almost 10 years they have only had one successful organizing campaign at a non-union hospital that employs 140 RNs.

I am a proud member of this union, and dedicate many hours every week towards its success. The point is that having a progressive leadership (which actively supports member initiatives) doesn't in itself lead to more rank and file activity - this has to be consciously built, nurtured and expanded by the workers themselves - it cannot be declared from above. Far from only focusing on being a "socialist pole of attraction" in NNU as Sean writes, I feel the majority of our time is spent building the union.

5) Some tactics to consider when organizing at work

I agree with Sean when he writes that we don't have had a "one size fits all" perspective around our workplace activity as Dana seems to characterize it, since every comrade who is active is in a different situation. I do believe that the rank and file strategy, since it encompasses many tactics, does need to inform such tactics. Here are some examples of tactics I have found useful (if not particularly new):

a) Sometimes your activity can *increase* the passivity of your co-workers by doing things for them. My co-workers often hear me say "god helps those who help themselves," when they ask me to solve a problem for them. As a union steward, I make it clear that I will stand alongside you and fight for your rights to the best of my abilities, the key word being "alongside." If they come to me with a problem, my first goal is to help develop a plan to solve it themselves. If co-workers never develop the confidence to ask their boss to change their shift, how will they ever demand to run society for themselves? If you only do things on your own, you will forever be doing things on your own, and shouldn't be surprised or complain about no-one else doing anything.

b) Don't waste an opportunity to demonstrate in front of others what it looks like to ask the boss to fix problems. Even regarding little things that bother everyone, but never seem to change, bring it up at a work meeting or to the boss in front of others to see if something can be done about it. You don't have to be nasty about it, you don't have to swear or bang a desk, but calmly state that something is a problem and that something should be done about it. Workers often complain to each other about issues, but are not enough in the practice of complaining to the people who have the power to change things. Encourage others to do the same.

c) Enforce your contract. They are meaningless words on paper if the boss isn't held to them. It undercuts confidence of members in their union if they don't see what they've won on paper enforced in practice. The easiest battles to win are when it's written down. If your grievance procedure is a waste of time and a bureaucratic mess, take as many co-workers as you can to the boss or to HR and say you want to meet to talk about a contract violation. Maybe it isn't flashy or exciting, but they can be easy wins which build confidence in the union.

d) It is important that you find an organizing issue that is broad enough to appeal to the greatest number of

workers. If the issue has the potential to divide people along the kind of job they do, it could backfire and cause resentment and further existing divisions. The point is to organize the greatest number of people, so it may not be the most revolutionary demand - it may even be a very simple demand. Furthermore, it should be a demand that you believe can be won, because it will build confidence for the next fight down the road. Pick battles where you know the boss is weak, where they have no excuses, and where it makes them look bad. When you do win, gloat about it and make sure everyone knows that the union was responsible.

e) Ask people to get involved in ways that are within their comfort zones, if that is putting up a flier, passing out a petition, or taking a poll. Don't ask people to do things you know they won't do, you need to find out what they are willing to do, but haven't done before. Coming into a workplace as a socialist puts you at an advantage in that you likely know how to make an argument, produce a flier, give a speech, or stand up to the boss. Unless you help others learn to do these things, or give them confidence to do things you know they know how to do, you will be an easy target by management for firing. By training other people as you were trained yourself, you build up a network of activists.

f) Work out a plan of escalation where you take things up the chain of management command. Give the lower boss the opportunity to fix the problem, and when they don't, go to their boss. Lower bosses like to only give good news to the upper bosses, and they don't like it when they are made to look like they aren't giving the complete picture on an issue. This sometimes makes them fight with each other and throw each other under the bus, which can strengthen your position when they are divided amongst themselves. It also serves as an important lesson about the hierarchy of capitalism and how disconnected the top bosses are from the daily operation, where all they care about is the bottom line, not the human cost.

g) Being an open socialist at work is key. There is no point to being a troublemaker at work if it isn't linked to a set of politics which explains why you do what you do. As Malcolm X said, "make it plain." Most people are not impressed with complicated jargon and esoteric references, and many will even find it off putting and weird. Socialist politics is not differential calculus and if you are having trouble explaining Marxist concepts in terms that most people can relate to and understand, ask for some help from your comrades.

h) Invite co-workers to political events, branch meetings, rallies - you might be surprised who shows up. Sell copies of SW and email articles based upon the political discussions you have with them. Ask for help from fellow branch members to help you organize public forums that address questions at work, participate in contact meetings, and organize SW sales at your union meetings or workplace. Recruit them to socialist organization, the best kind of ally you can develop at work is a fellow revolutionary.

6) A political commitment to organizing workplaces

My main argument is that we attempt a more systematic and coordinated effort at building activity in our workplaces and see what it produces. Part of this process is that in branches and districts where comrades are able to do workplace organizing (regardless if you are in a union or not), that it be consciously planned, assessed, and generalized across the group.

I would also encourage people who have interest in organizing at their present workplace or going into an industry with the intent to organize to consider it in a serious manner. Shortly after I became a socialist, I sought various jobs with just such an intention, although I was impeded by my lack of experience. In hindsight, moving from job to job, on an endless pilgrimage for some mecca of radical workers was not effective - because no such mecca exists.

Before jumping into workplace activity with both feet, one should politically commit oneself to the project and stick with it, as it may take years to develop. You'll need to come to work on time and do your job, you can't call in sick on Mondays and Fridays, don't become part of a work clique, and never rat out your co-workers to the boss for anything. Becoming a workplace activist is not a decision to be taken lightly - your credibility and the organizations you represent will be damaged if you stir things up only leave that job some months later - your co-worker with two kids will likely not have the same ability to just walk away when the going gets tough.

Trust, leadership, and organization is not built up by publicly declaring yourself a revolutionary fighter the day after you make probation, but is built up over time and requires patient daily work. It is necessary work, however, and the more that we engage in it, the more we will learn how to effectively do it, and therefore be able to further impact the overall struggles.

Dennis K, Chicago

Higher Education Union Organizing and the ISO

For the first time in the ISO's history, we have several members who work as organizers for higher ed unions. At least five that we know of work at faculty unions affiliated with the AFT at large state universities. These comrades are distinguished here from those members who teach or do research and may be members of faculty unions. By contrast, we are not members but union staffers. One of us is a national rep for the AFT, which means the comrade is deployed to different campaigns seen as key targets nationally.

Once we realized we had a handful of members doing similar work in different regions of the country (3 in the Midwest, 1 in the South, 1 in the Northeast), we decided to hold conference calls to share experiences, ideas, initiatives and perspectives. So far, we have only had 2 calls and 2 of us are quite new to this work, so comments here are preliminary and aimed at alerting the organization to our existence so that others doing this work can join us to collaborate. If you are a higher ed union organizer or have one in your branch, please contact Sherry at sherrywolf2000@gmail.com.

The first thing to note, given the extreme levels of reconnaissance the AFT does nationally on its employees, is that open revolutionary socialists—including those with easily googleable profiles—have been hired without any outward controversy. While we have no way of knowing the particulars, it does appear that in an era when neoliberal cuts to higher ed mean rapid growth of contingent faculty (adjuncts, those not on the tenure track), our experience as left-wing organizers is viewed as an advantage. With more than 1.5 million teaching and research faculty in the nation, 70 percent of whom (at least) are contingent, expanding the ranks of organized higher ed workers and mobilizing for decent contracts are viewed as rising priorities for unions traditionally known best for organizing K-12 teachers. We suspect that there may be growing opportunities for more comrades, in particular those with higher ed experience as grad student organizers, to get jobs as staffers.

Second, higher ed union organizers often face 2 challenges not conventionally encountered by other unions. One, members in their bargaining units often have standards of living that range from near-poverty (\$20K or less a year, no office, several teaching gigs on multiple campuses, etc.) to comfortable upper-middle-class conditions (\$140K-plus a year, much leisure time for research, tenure and therefore some job security, etc.). Second, like teachers—only far more extreme—the notions of individualism due to many years spent hard at work earning a PhD, winning grants, and negotiating perks and higher salaries with deans can be extreme. Individualism runs rampant in US society and is hardly unique to professors and research scientists, but when individuals have succeeded beyond a huge majority of the population due to what are perceived personal traits, and the attitude is often enforced by the individual nature of most academic work, individualism can be reaffirmed by conditions.

Third, we have found that our training as socialists allows us to develop an effective ground game. For example, we tend to read and analyze quite a bit, a benefit when working with intellectuals. We are trained to talk and listen to people about big ideas as well as concrete tactics, which is crucial if a downwardly mobile professoriate are to get actively involved in shaping campaigns. And we share a sense of necessity about building an activist cadre, invaluable if faculty are to succeed at pushing back and leading their own colleagues who number in the thousands at institutions with a tiny handful of organizers. Our comrades report that as organizers of higher ed public sector unions undergoing drastic cuts and attacks on even the right to unionize, we have been more successful than many of our peers at winning faculty to join their unions and convincing a critical mass to get actively involved.

Fourth, higher education—especially at public universities—has been undergoing total corporate restructuring for decades, which now amounts to the Walmartization of education for the children of middle- and working-class Americans who attend these institutions. That means faculty, including the minority with tenure and relatively high pay, have higher coarseloads, more administrative work, and have experienced the gutting of traditional collegiality. That is, being a professor with advanced degrees is not only no longer a route to a "cushy" academic life, but even those who've achieved tenure are increasingly miserable and precarious in their jobs.

In sum, members of our small, new national fraction of higher ed union organizers face enormous challenges, not the least of which are state-funding cuts that render most state schools public in name, but essentially private in funding. (Rutgers, for example, gets only 18% of its funding from the state of NJ, which is actually higher than funding for Wisconsin and Illinois.) Personally, I have found these calls extremely useful in learning what works (and doesn't) elsewhere and we are starting to share info on how to approach certain national faculty groups and initiatives as a collective.

Finally, Haymarket's new publication by an internationally recognized expert in higher ed, **Henry Giroux's *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education***, is an excellent book and can be used as an organizing tool for faculty and higher ed union organizers. A review of it appears in *ISR* Issue 92, out in March, and bulk orders can be purchased by unions at a big discount from Haymarket Books.

Sherry W, Brooklyn, NY

Regarding Dues and Accessibility

Questions of financial accessibility need to be answered fully for all members, including those we have not yet recruited. With an eye on growth and sustainability, we must consider the multitude of financial situations of current and future members. I am not aware of the incomes of my comrades throughout the country, nor do I want to be. However, I am keenly aware of the financial circumstances of many of the people who could be recruited to our project but may be turned off by the monetary commitment, and I am also aware of the financial circumstances of current comrades who are struggling to pay dues and/or feel alienated by the current dues structure. We know that there are huge income disparities between and among these groups, and we know that in order to sustain the organization we need a large number of dues paying members (despite our anti-capitalist stance, we still work within the framework of a capitalist society, as outlined in the previous dues document submitted by Alan P., Bulletin #4, Dues Document and Resolution). The more progressive and accessible our dues structure is, the more progressive and accessible our organization can be to everyone we want to recruit to the socialist project.

We all know that finances are often a taboo subject; at the same time that we know that the ISO and branch treasurers are not the IRS – nor the local Jobs and Family Services department. The Steering Committee and local branches should not require verification of a member's finances. We should trust our members to be honest about their ability to pay dues and their ability to choose the dues rate that best applies to their financial situation. Creating a more progressive dues structure, as the one proposed by Alan P., would come a long way in decreasing the barriers to participation. Including differences in housing costs (as proposed by Gary L., Bulletin #5, A Proposal Regarding Dues) and the cost of living for children and other dependents would also reduce obstacles for many members. The question of accessibility also needs to be answered with regard to housing and living costs, including increased costs to members with children or other dependents. We should also be more accessible to: members with disabilities, members who are undocumented citizens, sex workers, low-wage workers, adjunct academic workers, student members and others with part-time employment, unpaid internships, or no employment or income, members who are unemployed or underemployed, members committed to service through volunteer service years such as AmeriCorps, Franciscan Volunteer Ministries, Episcopal Service Corps, etc., and other members with other extenuating circumstances that affect their finances. This list is not comprehensive, but it is meant to give you a taste of the circumstances to which I am referring. Many of these current (and potential) comrades are as much, if not more, victims of capitalism as those in less precarious economic situations.

In addition to these resolutions, I propose that members making less than \$500/mo should speak with their branch treasurer to determine how the member can demonstrate their political commitment. This will also clarify the question of whether or not a member who does not pay dues due to their monthly income or other circumstances are still members in good standing, voting members, or members eligible to act as delegates, branch committee members, or other positions of leadership or representation. For those who can, a smaller financial contribution may be more feasible, due to lower costs of living or other situations, and this may mean “pay what you can.” We know that \$1, \$2, \$5, \$6, or \$10 can make a difference in sustaining the organization and demonstrate a political commitment. Some branches have been operating under a hitherto unwritten rule that if a member is paying in cash each month, another member deposits the dues and sends in a Dues Check Off in the name of the cash-paying member attached to the other member’s bank account. This practice should continue, and the details written down.

The above proposals for contributions of time or “pay what you can” dues should also apply to members who are temporarily unemployed or under other financial stress. Alternative or modified dues arrangements for such members should be evaluated every four to six months to determine if the current arrangement is being fulfilled and if it should be altered to reflect new circumstances for the member and/or the branch. Where possible, branches should fundraise to cover the costs of members who cannot pay.

I may be reiterating some procedures that are already on the books, but in conversations with other comrades in Columbus and Toledo, we believed these to be unwritten, or entirely new, concepts. Regardless, the dues structure is under debate in this Pre-Convention period and I urge comrades to keep the question of accessibility at the forefront of the conversation as we also consider internal organization and external growth.

Emily S., Columbus
