

Pre-convention Bulletin #23 / February 12, 2014

for members only

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Convention information and deadlines

Convention location: Northwestern University. We have out sent out meeting room and other convention details for attendees in a Convention Information Sheet.

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. 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

Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago (WOCC) at Whole Foods Market

The purpose of this document is to inform comrades of the steps and strategies involved in organizing a union at Whole Foods Market in Chicago.

Whole Foods is an international high-end grocery retail corporation. In the US, its stores are divided into geographic regions, with each region exercising relative autonomy in regards to policy and management.

We have been organizing with the Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago (WOCC). WOCC is a legally recognized union of more than 2,000 low wage workers across roughly 70 shops in Chicago, including 21 major national brands. Most WOCC members are in fast food, some are in retail; Whole Foods workers are the only WOCC members who work in grocery retail.

For the purposes of this document, I have organized our activities into three descriptive categories: proto-organizing, strategy and campaign building and closed the document with an assessment of our work so far and our prospects for organizing in the coming year.

Proto-Organizing

Our period of proto-organizing lasted roughly 2 years from the time when we -- Trish K, Carlos E, and myself -- were first employed at Whole Foods in Chicago, to meeting for the first time as ISO comrades working for the same company, to when we joined WOCC in January of 2013. Carlos and I worked at a

store on the North Side of Chicago, while Trish works at the flagship store in the city. At our respective workplaces, our activities involved preliminary discussion building among co-workers both on and off the job, organizing reading groups on relevant Socialist Worker articles and Haymarket's pamphlet on the Woolworth sit down strikes, and mobilizing support and participation in Occupy and the Chicago Teachers Union strike. Of particular mention here are Trish's activities at her store where she and her co-workers covered company 'flair' (badges, pins, etc.) with white-out and wrote over them with messages of support for the Chicago Teachers Union. These efforts helped build a sense of community and solidarity within the stores distinctly separate from the corporate culture of the stores themselves. Thirdly, during this period, we developed relationships with the Chicago organized labor community by participating in panels and actions and maintaining liaisons with activists from the Occupy movement.

Strategy

At a strategy session with our WOCC organizers, we deduced that a company such as Whole Foods, with a long history of defeating union drives, is not susceptible to traditional organizing methods involving card checks, silent votes, arbitration, etc. Whole Foods is however extremely concerned with its public image as a worker-friendly, green conscious, retail environment. Rather than build consensus and organize majority actions at our stores, we turned traditional organizing on its head and engineered highly visible, minority wildcat strikes against company policies. The company, embarrassed for its public image, was forced to make public concessions to our campaign, further disseminating our message in order to avoid damage in the court of public opinion.

Our strikes have their legal foundation in a series of Unfair Labor Practices (ULPs) that we filed against the company for its anti-union activities and rhetoric in its employee handbook. Legally, workplace actions of two or more workers act protected by the Wagner Act as collective activity provided that a ULP against the company has been filed with the National Labor Relations Board. To be clear, the legal basis for our strike were the ULPs, but, as the messaging of the strike was left almost exclusively in our hands by WOCC, some of the demands and grievances voiced during the strike extended beyond the company's merely legal transgressions.

Our initial demand was to reform to the Midwest Region's attendance policy, known as the "Point System." The point system mandates that an employee may only accrue 6 points within a rolling six month period before termination without appeal. Points are not only assigned for called off shifts, but also tardiness by more than seven minutes, absences due to illness, injury on or off the job, medical emergencies, funerals etc. A running joke in our stores was that if you died Whole Foods gave you a point. Mirth aside, the severity of this program and the lack of job security under its application provided fertile opportunities for organizing -- for martialing dissent and directing it back against the corporation.

Campaign Building

WOCC has demonstrated its effectiveness as an 'across shop' organization of hundreds of Chicago workers. At Whole Foods we've built an organization of 87 members at three Whole Foods locations. Of this group, however, there is an active core of 14 people who have participated in one of what is now four strikes and four people who have participated in all four strikes.

Organizing along a minority model has meant that we have not made concerted efforts to win over large numbers of co-workers, but rather have focused on a handful of militants who are willing to publicly take the company to task. In one of the three stores we're organized in, we have set up store department captains who are responsible for recruitment, propaganda distribution (of union buttons, etc), and dissemination of information through phone banking and texting trees.

Results and Next Steps

A protracted period of proto-organizing allowed us to firmly represent ourselves as pro-union activists within the workplace by the time we were organizing openly with WOCC. Establishing relationships between ourselves and the greater activist and organized labor community in Chicago has also proved to be profoundly helpful, particularly in navigating the relationship between SEIU and UFCW -- two

heavyweights in the low wage arena, as well as organizing with and soliciting the support of CTU, Warehouse Workers for Justice, Our Wal-Mart and numerous neighborhood groups and grassroots campaigns.

The Midwest was the only region in Whole Foods' corporate structure that uses a point system. Publicly demonstrating against the attendance policy led to the company quickly pivoting off of enforcing this policy in an effort to avoid losing face to its customer base. At the same time our campaign gained an immediate victory that significantly affected the entire Midwest region. At one store, in addition to winning a revision of the attendance policy, we have also organized against and replaced unpopular managers, have won a remodeling of our break room (including internet access, couches, cable TV, a coffee maker and a water cooler), cashiers can now have beverages at their registers and most recently we won the right to take holidays off without retaliation from management. These victories represent a sampling of what we can achieve through collective action. They are the foundation upon which we will launch a full union drive in the future.

Due to the high turnover rate in retail, many of the people we initially started organizing with have since moved on to new employment, a few have been fired or in some cases have dropped out of the campaign altogether. An active core is still at work, but the challenge of how to build a self-sustaining worker activist group remains.

Over the course of the new year, we hope to be organized in four Chicago Whole Foods locations. Given Whole Foods' efficiency at defeating union drives, it will be necessary to launch a simultaneous drive in as many locations as possible to best achieve a positive outcome. To this end, we hope to have a store-wide newsletter published in order to propagate our message more efficaciously.

The sum total of our strategy has been this: to win concessions from the company first, and use these victories as the basis for a union drive second. The minority unionism model has allowed us to organize quickly and quietly to confront the company vocally and visibly.

Matt C., Chicago

The impact of the economic crisis and OWS on one nearby workplace

Running through this pre-Convention discussion is a debate about how to measure class consciousness and the potential for class struggle, and how we assesses the significance of the various dramatic but short lived struggles, like the Wisconsin Capitol occupation and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

I would like to share how the political period has affected one little pocket of the working class: my workplace. While this document is obviously anecdotal, I feel like my workplace is an interesting case study of the effect the economic crisis and outbursts of dramatic struggle can have on a group of workers. While the struggle it has produced is not of the nature that anyone on the outside could notice, it is a qualitative advance over what came before. I.e. there's "something going on" in my work place, which I believe is reflective and driven by the same factors as what's "going on" in the working class in general today.

I know that whatever I write can and will be used against me in the court of the internet, so I may be a little vague on some details. Fortunately for me, my employer already knows I'm a raging commie, so I don't have too much to worry about (I hope). I doubt most of our comrades have the same luxury, which speaks to some of the limits imposed upon us in term of having open discussions of our labor work.

So what's "going on"

First and foremost, the financial crisis and ongoing attack on working class living standards is the driving force for the current upsurge in union activism going on in my workplace.

Just for background, I work at a large, publicly funded non-profit organization that provides legal defense and other legal services to low-income New Yorkers. The institution is unionized and the clerical and

“support” staff make up a relatively small chapter of a very large and influential health care workers union in the city. It’s a very multiracial workplace, representative of the greater working class in this city. I have worked here for more than 15 years and have been involved in union activism (to various degrees) throughout that time.

We haven’t had a raise since 2007, in large part due to funding freezes from the city that mirror freezes in city workers pay. Because we also don’t have much in the way of “steps” or seniority raises, many of our members are making just about the same amount today as they did in 2007. This has put a pretty intense financial strain in on our membership. We did a survey that showed that many members have had to take 2nd jobs, move in with relatives, and make other sacrifices to make ends meet. Some people have left, but given the job market out there, the grass is not much greener anywhere else.

Anger at the lack of raises has of course been bubbling up for years. I remember very clearly around the summer of 2011 getting a call from my often-cynical co-worker, who at the time was trying to harangue me into getting back more involved in our union struggles. She just asked me how much longer I thought people could take it. The answer was not much longer.

Occupy Wall Street broke out that fall, putting class inequality back into the mainstream vocabulary. I really don’t think you can overestimate the effect of OWS on working class consciousness in NYC at the time, lumping all of us together into a common struggle against the 1%. It also re-legitimized struggle and protest. In my workplace it both revitalized long-term progressives/activists and gained the support and sympathy of the broad membership.

Perhaps coincidentally, that winter a union official who is particularly disliked by my membership pulled some undemocratic moves to push through a controversial temporary contract. Anger over stagnant wages turned into a rebellion over issues of democracy and rank and file control of our Chapter. This rebellion was helped along by a higher-up union official who lent an ear to our grievances and gave us an opening to push for more. This has opened a process of rank and file organizing and the development of a new rank and file leadership that is still unfolding today.

This is a messy, contradictory and frustrating process that may or may not be ultimately successful. We have brand new people coming forward to be delegates and negotiate contracts who have no experience in either. There is an intense learning and training experience going. However, for the first time in a long time, we have an active and fairly united rank and file leadership in our chapter that is looking to involve the membership in collective struggle for a raise. Through a coordinated campaign (involving stickers, flyers, testimonials and in-office mobilizations), were able to squeeze a small amount more from management than they had been originally prepared to give in this most recent contract and are set to up the ante for another contract deadline in 9 months.

What’s different now from past struggles

Union struggle within my workplace is not new. In the mid 2000s, we had a series of efforts to organize the membership to put collective pressure on the employer. In some ways those efforts lead more quantifiable result, including “no votes” on contracts in 3 successive rounds of negotiations (two of which lead to slightly better contracts). However, these efforts generally happened around and even in opposition to the official union leadership. Ultimately, people couldn’t get over the fact that our own union seemed to be holding us back and didn’t know how to overcome that hurdle.

What’s happening today has a somewhat different character. While previous struggles did involve large numbers of members and activists, this mobilization has much more of a mass, spontaneous feel to it. First of all, there are just more people actively involved and taking on real roles and responsibilities. We have conference calls, lunchtime meetings and after work meetings in a way I’ve never seen before. In addition, the folks driving this right now come from a broader spectrum racially, politically, and in term of years of experience in union activism. The leadership is also more rooted in the working class members who are here for the long haul (as opposed to more liberal arts educated folks who come through for a few years and then move on.)

In addition, there's a sense among a broader layer of people that if things are going to change, it's going to be up to us to do it. There's less of the wishing for a different organizer (or union) to come and help us, and more of a sense that we have to learn this shit for ourselves. There's also a much stronger sense that our struggle is connected to other workplace struggles in the City. This is really brought home by the fact the every city union in NYC ended the Bloomberg years without a contract.

The impact of OWS and other struggles

I'm using Occupy Wall Street as a little bit of short hand here for the many struggles – including Wisconsin, the Fight for 15, the CTU strike, and many smaller fights – that have re-legitimized the notion of fighting back in the last two years. I can't tell you how many times in the past I used to be told by union officials and coworkers alike that those ideas are from the past. Old timers would tell me that the 70's are over. Union officials would tell me class struggle doesn't work anymore.

Nobody says that anymore. And I kinda mean, literally, not a single person.

OWS-type struggle also played a big role in a recent strike at a different legal service organization here in this city, a strike that many of our members actively supported and which is often referred to by members here. Some of lead activists in that strike were newer employees who had come out of some of the OWS milieu. Internal preparation for that strike dates back to the height of OWS and gained a big boost by it. The strike played strongly on the general anger about class inequality and resentment of the 1% (targeting their multi-millionaire board members). It also may have benefited from the post-OWS liberal shift in city politics, as City Council Speaker Chistine Quinn (then a falling star in the Democratic Party, being upstaged by Bill De Blasio's "Tale of two cities") seriously went to bat for them to try to hold on to what union support she had.

OWS also has led to ongoing networks of left labor activists, including a grouping called 99 Pickets, which has regular forums in the city. I was able to get 3 of my coworkers to a meeting on "creative workplace tactics" organized by 99 Pickets. The meeting ended up being more focused on low-wage worker organizing (and thus more on outside support actions as oppose to worker led job actions). Nonetheless, my coworkers, 2 of whom have no experience with the Left and progressive circles and are far from radicals, were really excited about the meeting and it served to broaden their perspective on the struggle.

The De Blasio campaign itself is also a product of the post OWS political atmosphere in NYC. And while De Blasio's election helps give our members some hope that we might be able to gain back some of financial footing, no one thinks we can just sit back and expect De Blasio to deliver raises for us.

There are also signs the broader health care union that we are a part of is undergoing some shifts and changes due again to both the ongoing class attacks and an increased combativeness amongst members who feel they have their backs against the wall (as seen in some small but dramatic outbreaks in struggle around hospital closings.) The union is also now actively preparing in a way I've never seen before for what would be their first city-wide strike in decades. This is a defensive battle and they very well may pull out a settlement at the last minute rather than striking, but I think even the act of actively preparing for a strike will have a big impact on consciousness. The ins and outs of this are beyond the scope of this document, but I raise it just to underline that the current political period is not static and is constantly being shaped by the class struggle from above and below, no matter how inadequate our side of that struggle may sometimes seem.

Conclusion

"Without a guiding organization, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam." Leon Trotsky History of the Russian Revolution

This document is not written to argue that the level of class struggle just inexorably on the rise. Nor is it an

argument for the ISO to further implant itself in workplace struggles. I have a lot of question still about the significance of what's going on in my workplace and how much time and energy I should be devoting to it. We are fairly insignificant section of a very big union, and not the most strategically positioned group of workers in the city. The organization we've built up is still quite fragile and could be easily disrupted by any number of events beyond our control.

In addition, in order to play a big role in this over the last 6 months, I came off of District Committee and stop playing a leading role in my branch. This at a time when our district and organization have been going through a critically important time of reassessment and when our district has been re-establishing our community branches.

Living in a large district, there are plenty of capable hands that could theoretically take over the roles I played before. However I am only one of many cadre who have pulled back from branch building and other central roles because of "implantation", leaving our district stretched quite thin. I believe this is actually not a sustainable situation if we are going to build the kind of organization we can and need to build right now.

But those are not the questions I'm attempting to address here. Rather, the role of this document is simply to make the case that in order to understand what's going on in the working class right now, you have to look at what's going on under the radar. I believe that below the radar the "steam" that Trotsky is talking about is rising. It's not the kind of steam the drives a revolution, but it is the kind of steam that can lead to new working class formations and the development of a new and broader vanguard. The attack on working class is the motor force of that steam, but the types of struggle we've seen in the last two years, no matter how episodic or isolated, had a crucial impact on consciousness as well. I base this not just on my workplace, but on the teacher fights going on around the country, the low-wage worker organizing, other labor documents that have been submitted and more.

Lucy H., NYC

SlutWalk NYC: A Case Study in Identity Politics¹

The aim of this document is to use the example of SlutWalk NYC to explore debates in the ISO around identity politics, privilege, and patriarchy theory² and argue for a unified approach to these questions.

Within all the discussion around our method in relation to questions of oppression, we would like to provide a concrete example of how we operated, what mistakes we made, and what we learned in this process. As an organization, we have rightly identified that for activists today, privilege is the default language on offer. This means that people mean different things when they say words like "privilege," "feminism" or "identity politics." We have made this shift, but it is important that we separate the question of tactics from the question of our theory around oppression politics. Although for some, the language of identity politics is not tied to a competing framework for understanding oppression, it would be wrong to conclude that this is the case across the board. How can we strengthen a Marxist theoretical understanding of our approach to oppression while continuing to work with allies who don't share our views? We believe that we must move past the question of how we respond and talk to individuals who use the language of privilege politics and begin to strengthen our theoretical grasp of these questions.

Background

To start, it's useful to describe the politics we encountered among activists involved in SlutWalk. Most of the activists we worked with had politicized through gender studies courses and internet forums. The

¹ We recognize that the term, "identity politics" does not refer to a cohesive set of politics, so we use that term loosely.

² We use the term patriarchy theory to refer to an analysis that the source of women's oppression is self-sustaining male dominance as opposed to the rise of class society.

feminism they spoke about was inherently intersectional, with a recognition that women experience sexism differently depending on intersecting identities and that sexism (or more often patriarchy or kyriarchy³) negatively impacts all people. These activists, for the most part, had a knee-jerk aversion to the politics of second-wave feminism for its lack of attention to intersectionality. The language of privilege was common, but varied in meaning from person to person or even from conversation to conversation. This amalgam of politics was positive in that it connected with people's lived experiences and gave them confidence to "call out" sexists, but ultimately destructive because, as we will explain later, it allowed adherents cover to pull out of activism under the guise of consciousness raising. Activists were almost entirely unfamiliar with a Marxist, class-based analysis of women's oppression, but many were open to our arguments to varying degrees and didn't see Marxism as in conflict with identity politics.

What the hell happened?

So when we helped initiate an organizing body in NYC to build on the momentum of the SlutWalk protests internationally, we did not walk into the room condemning people for calling themselves feminists or for using a language of privilege. In fact, we did quite the opposite: we listened, we tried to develop relationships based first and foremost on a desire to fight sexism and all forms of oppression. We identified that when the activists we were surrounded with used the words "feminism," "privilege," etc they meant a range of things. Sentences that began with "we need to fight male privilege" would be finished with "and that's why we all need to unite and organize against the system." A mish-mash of political ideas existed side by side, and we rightly realized it couldn't all be lumped together.

However, being open and collaborative proved only the first step, and this in and of itself did not prepare us for the political challenges ahead. What was much more difficult was to argue a perspective of building an outward, fighting movement once debates around the trajectory of the organization began to surface. At our very first meeting, we had a discussion about continuing with the name "SlutWalk:." Would using the term do more harm than good? Would it turn off some of the women we most want to be at the center of the movement? We came to agreement that it was the high profile name that people had heard about (whether they liked it or hated it) and that, to anyone willing to engage, the intention would be made clear with our mission statement. We also agreed that extra focus had to be paid on getting Black women and other women of color involved. I believe that the highpoint of what we achieved as a group came before the actual SlutWalk march itself, when we protested in defense of Nafissatou Diallo, a Guinean hotel maid who was raped by Dominique Strauss-Kahn (former president of the IMF). We organized a solidarity protest outside the courtroom which became a hub for those outraged by the miscarriage of justice that took place that day. We also protested the acquittal of two police officers who had raped a woman in the lower east side. We argued at every turn to show in practice that the organizers of this protest were going to fight sexism, racism and exploitation at all of their intersections. And this was exciting and everyone was getting along great.

But on the eve of the SlutWalk march, an open letter was released condemning the movement as racist. To quote a part of this letter: "We know the SlutWalk is a call to action and we have heard you. Yet we struggle with the decision to answer this call by joining with or supporting something that even in name exemplifies the ways in which mainstream women's movements have repeatedly excluded Black women even in spaces where our participation is most critical."

It has to be acknowledged that the historical legacy of sexual violence is fundamentally different for Black women than white women in the U.S. Both major Women's movements of the 20th century were plagued by racism and were unable to come to terms with the fact that racism shaped the experience of Black women in this country in ways that were profoundly worse than for white women. However, the organization that several dozens of activists put time and spirit into here in NYC was not a part of the mainstream women's movement. It was new and grassroots, conceived on the basis of solidarity--and yet, once called out, activists felt completely powerless and guilty even though the name of "SlutWalk" was not the one we would have chosen. The vibrant weekly meetings we once looked forward to were transformed

³ Similar to patriarchy, kyriarchy describes intersecting and hierarchical, but independent systems of oppression. Like patriarchy, kyriarchy ignores the role of class or simply lists classism in a list of equally problematic oppressions.

into deeply internal back and forths where a hard argument was made that members spend their political time taking stock of our privileges. The argument was: we must STOP and reflect and do segregated trainings before we can risk doing anything else out in the world. It became a regular occurrence for individuals to reference their identities in order to give weight to their arguments. We tried everything we could to argue that we should not implode. Among the ideas we put out there were to reach out and build an event in collaboration with Black women's groups, and to go support the Boathouse workers strike where an immigrant workforce walked out of their restaurant in response to rampant sexual harassment. We were unable to win organizers to the need for a united movement that rejects the idea that individual bad ideas are not what shapes sexism and racism, but rather a rigged set of institutions that serve a bigger function in society at large.

What did we learn?

1. Who are our allies?

One of the biggest mistakes we made was to overlook the fact that some of those who we considered our closest allies were actually hardened adherents of privilege politics. In retrospect this seems absurd. But because we entered the organizing with such an open mind, we were confused about the politics that activists adhered to. We therefore oriented on the most confident, experienced organizers--who also happened to be those most adamant about an ID politics framework. There were many people who were somewhere in between and were trying to figure out what they thought--these were the people who we should have spent our time trying to win.

2. Identity politics is not just about language

Ultimately we were unable to politically win our perspective with the people in the middle. Even when we strip our previous method and language problems aside, our politics are still not widely accepted. Our theoretical understanding of oppression is NOT a common sense set of politics and in fact it runs against the instincts that people receive in a highly individualized country where we have not seen a sustained movement against oppression in over a generation. Winning others to our perspective that movement and protest is what changes consciousness (not privilege trainings) will not be done by listening better or using certain words. It will take a serious political fight and a stronger grasp of the theoretical underpinnings of Marxism and oppression.

How can we sharpen our Marxism?

Over the last year or so, there has been a real opening up of how our members approach questions of oppression. Some members seem to be arguing that we should be engaging much more with patriarchy theory or privilege theory in order to merge those with Marxism.⁴ On the other hand, some folks seem wary of reading theory from outside our tradition for fear that our members will become disoriented⁵. We have a more nuanced approach that we believe combines a strong Marxist foundation and stay in touch with the seeds of a developing feminist movement. ISO members should consider core Marxist texts a foundation of our political education, not just as entry level readings, but also as texts to return to over and over again. We may find that our understanding of these texts changes depending on different experiences, conversations, and readings, and that is all the more reason to continue to return to them. We believe that Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class*, Kimberly Crenshaw, *Martha Gimenez* and other texts that help us reach a better understanding of the ways in which sexism and racism developed specifically in the U.S. should be considered part of our foundations for training and developing our members on these questions.

⁴ It is difficult to gauge the extent to which members agree with aspects of patriarchy theory or privilege theory because discussions are sometimes nebulous. One example of support is found in letters to Socialist Worker defending Peggy McIntosh's *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack*. There is not room here for a complete analysis of this text except to say that it is a classic example of an understanding of oppression that is devoid of class analysis or materialism.

⁵ This has not appeared in print, but is a concern we've heard in response to the debates in Socialist Worker and elsewhere.

When addressing some of the mistakes we have made as an organization, we should remember that the history of the Marxist tradition is full of examples of an intersectional approach to oppression. There is nothing fundamentally reductionist or rigid in Marxism--though it has been interpreted in a number of ways that were reductionist and rigid.

At the same time, we should make a point to read texts outside our tradition that are popular among our periphery through a solidly Marxist lens in order understand their politics. Only by seriously engaging with other activists' politics can we argue and bring folks closer to us. It would be a mistake to adapt to privilege theory or patriarchy theory because of their popularity, given that these theories overwhelmingly underplay the role of class in shaping oppression and undermine the potential for a class-wide fightback. At the same time, it is not enough to simply ignore competing theories of oppression as this makes it nearly impossible to engage with people in our periphery who don't yet share our politics, but could be won.

Sometimes good ideas do come from outside our tradition. It's important that over the last year we have made serious efforts as an organization to understand intersectionality and domestic labor theory. This is different from members who argue in a more nebulous way that the ISO should consider adopting aspects of patriarchy theory. Members who find merits in patriarchy theory should specify what it is they like and make an argument for the organization to consider, rather than leave the question open and agree to disagree.

Conclusion

We live in a highly atomized world where the default understanding of how to organize against oppression is to root out bad interpersonal practices. Our experience in the SlutWalk organizing in NYC has shown us that there is a generation of young women trying to make sense of the world they experience everyday. Our task is to be able to bridge the traumatic experiences of oppression with a larger understanding of how those relate to a system. To do so, we must be less rigid in our approach to other activists but we must also be sharp in our theoretical understanding and approach. A lot has changed in the last several years, the radicalization and the openness to socialist politics is palpable and you could begin to see the role that the ISO could play in being a part of ongoing movements. And yet we are still swimming against the stream when it comes to an understanding of the roots of oppression. Our challenge is to be able to be a political pole that can raise the scopes beyond individual outrage and moralism. We want to play a role in building movements that thrive and flourish instead of tear people apart. To do this, we've got to up our Marxism.

Natalia T., NYC and Stephanie S., Oakland

Some Problems Regarding 'Addressing Allegations of Sexual Misconduct Made Against Members of the ISO', by seven San Diego branch members, in Pre-convention Bulletin #19

Contacting a victim of sexual assault and asking for the type of detailed information outlined in the San Diego members' proposal seems not terribly sensitive to that victim's experience, particularly when it's used only for the purposes of benefiting the organization and not to offer any support to the victim. According to this document, the only thing that the victim in this case asked for was that the perpetrator not be dismissed from the ISO, and going against her wish was the only action that was taken. I can appreciate the organization's need to confirm any accusations and to discipline fucked up behaviors by its members, but what in the world makes ISO members think that a victim of sexual assault would want to talk or write through in detail her experiences for the benefit of the perpetrator's comrades? In some cases, sure, if the victim wants to come forward and to find a form of justice different from the measly possibilities offered by cops and judges, it makes sense to follow this -- but if the victim isn't interested in coming forward with her story, how is having strangers emailing and calling her about it okay?

I also hate to say this in a case where people are clearly earnestly struggling to figure out the right way to proceed, but doesn't this whole account strike you as a bit over-bureaucratized? I mean, how many committees does it take to make one intelligent decision! What's sad to me is not that the language of

policies is not already tinkered with to perfection, but that the people involved were so bad at improvising that the policies aided in inaction and general bunglement. Clearly training in how to deal with sexual misconduct in the group is necessary -- but shouldn't we maybe also be trained in improvising as well, to look at situations dialectically rather than to try to find rules that will apply to every possible future problem, because no rule *should* relieve us of our responsibility to think through each new context and decide accordingly? Like, for instance, *Don't contact victims of sexual abuse for selfish organizational reasons/without support to offer & a willingness to respect their wishes* I think would be an important rule, but if the victim considers disciplinary action against the perpetrator to be a form of support, then even that rule *should be bent* in that context. See what I mean?

I get the importance of investigating allegations, but we're not investigators -- that's not what we signed up for and it's not what we're trained to do. Setting up this level of red tape, well-meaning as it is, seems to reproduce some unsavory features of government without any corresponding power. Maybe I'm jaded here, but what difference does it make if a serious investigation can only result in a rapist's suspension from a political group? If it goes no further than that, what good is that investigation or the political group leading it in the victim's life?

Anyway, just some thoughts. I think having such policies could be useful and important, particularly in cases where the victim is also a member of the organization, as disciplining and expelling the perpetrator would have a direct impact on the victim's wellbeing; but I think we also need to be careful about putting too much faith in policy; and I really think we need to think deeply about what we want the organization's role to be, e.g. internal investigators, internal jury, internal judge, but not external support for victims? There's a lot going on in situations like this that makes me think that this really shouldn't be a strictly ISO internal affair. Unless of course the victim prefers it to be, in which case, fair enough.

Michael T., NYC

Two Points on Sexual Misconduct

1) Factual update from San Diego:

On 2/6/2014, the branch voted to expel (in absentia) the member accused of oppressive behavior.

2) To the question of what should count as a preponderance of evidence:

A firsthand complaint of sexual misconduct, made by a named individual who is a member of a gender-oppressed group against a named individual should always be considered sufficient evidence to discipline the accused, unless there is strong and compelling evidence (not merely denial of the accusation by the accused) that the accusation is false.

Reflecting on our situation in San Diego, had we sought and accepted the victim's firsthand account as soon as we became aware of an accusation, the matter could have been settled more quickly and with less harm to the movement, the organization, and everyone involved, and it would have been more in line with what comrade Holly L. of Austin described correctly as our "political commitment to believe women."

Bo E. and Zakiya K., San Diego

Moving ahead with the paper

A document in the first pre-convention bulletin proposed "Putting *Socialist Worker* back at the center," based partly on a discussion at the September National Committee about adjusting the ISO's perspectives. The NC passed a resolution calling "on all branches to hold branch meeting sessions on the use of the paper, based on past documents, and re-establish a routine around regular sales of SW..." This proposal was meant to be the first step toward making SW and branches' routines around SW a central tool again, after a

time during which sales and use had become very uneven, with the experiences between NC and now to be the basis for a further discussion.

Many branches did hold discussions and the outcome was positive in terms of giving members an understanding of why we consider SW, in both its print and online form, to be a central tool. But we have not, by and large, been able to re-establish routines around the use of SW, partly because of the onset of winter and partly because the attentions of the pre-convention discussion have been focused on particularly intense debates that crowded out the possibilities for making a real push on SW.

So we are proposing to the convention that branches and districts take the next three months to re-establish a routine around the paper edition of SW and selling it. We also need to take steps to use the daily online SocialistWorker.org more effectively in the coming months, but this document will focus specifically on the paper edition.

There is no need to repeat the motivations from the first document for making this a priority, but we will expand on some of the points. Probably the biggest source of confusion about SW and its use is the continuing transformation of the shape of the media because of the Internet. Print newspapers have been in long-term decline, resulting in some major media outlets—the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Detroit Free Press*—curtailing their print publishing schedule in favor of an enhanced web presence.

The print newspaper may be increasingly obsolete for commercial media purposes, and this will have an ongoing impact on our audience as people become less used to reading physical newspapers. But we believe that as *a vehicle for conveying political ideas*, the physical newspaper is still understood and welcomed by a smaller audience of people who comprise the people that the ISO most wants to talk to.

At the high point of Occupy, not only did we see a surge in the use of our paper, but there was a flowering of new newspapers published. During the upsurge of anti-racist activist following Trayvon Martin's murder, our paper—thanks, significantly, to a beautiful cover that month—was taken up by many people at the protests as the banner that spoke for their anger and determination to protest.

At these points, we could see the potential for SW to maintain strong sales. For instance, when Occupy Wall Street began, members sold out of the October issue of *SW* (with a print run of 5,400) by the middle of the month—even though it didn't yet have an article about Occupy in it. We had to reprint 2,000 more in order to make it through the rest of the month.

Over the past year, though, the use of the paper has dropped. Over 2013, the print run fluctuated during the year from 5,000 to as low as 3,800, on the higher end during the spring and fall and lower during the slower summer months (with the exception of the March on Washington) and the colder winter months. While the impact of weather and the tempo of the school year explains a lot of the fluctuation, of course there's definitely room for improvement.

The rest of this document will talk about different kinds of SW sales, which roughly break down to these categories: public street sales, campus sales, workplace sales, demonstrations and political events, and Five-for-Me personal sales.

Sales to a specific audience (demonstrations, Five-for-Mes)

To judge from the Occupy and Trayvon movement experiences noted above, the sales at protests and political events seem to be the least affected by the general shift away from print papers. It is however the case that not all new members are as accustomed to circulating the paper at demonstrations, which means they need to be trained by more experience members. It is also the case that more longstanding members are losing the routine of sales as a means to reach out to our audience at these kinds of protests.

During the 50th Anniversary March on Washington in August, it was possible to relate to any number of people who traveled to the march from across the country—many of them trade unionists, an overwhelming majority of them African American, many of them radicalizing as a result of the Trayvon

Martin verdict—by circulating through the crowd with *SW*. Members who did this gained invaluable experience finding out what this group of people was thinking.

We should note a built-in problem here: the paper editions of *SW* are produced monthly, and sometimes political events overtake what we can fit in the paper. This is an unavoidable problem—it would be better to produce the paper edition at a faster pace, but the paper staff is extremely stretched as it is. That said, we plan each paper edition carefully based on what we *do* know will be central to ISO activity in the coming month. Thus, the February paper leads with education because of the looming Portland teachers' struggle, and unless something VERY important happens, we'll have an ecology lead in April so the paper can be used to build the Global Climate Convergence. We also try to have in each issue at least some coverage of all the different areas that are political priorities for the ISO.

The importance of using *SW* in the context of ongoing activism and political activity has been stressed before—in terms of introducing people new to the ISO not only to individuals but a range of our politics, and in tangibly connecting ISO members in movement activities as a united organization rather than a collection of individuals. Those factors need to be emphasized in branches as the basis on which to make our use of *SW* in movement activities more systematic and effective.

It's also worth pointing out that we can meet people interested in socialist politics with sales at political events, such as when a well-known left-wing speaker is in town or at a left-wing movie screening.

The idea of the Five-for-Me routine, for those who aren't familiar with it, is that members buy five copies of the monthly paper when it comes out, one for themselves, and four to sell to individuals they relate to politically. Some of these individuals will be people comrades are meeting for the first time, but we also hope that Five-for-Mes can be used as a tool to maintain and organize a relationship with people who are around the ISO, but not immediately drawn into its activities. For example, we want people we met at an important strike, or at the height of an eviction struggle during Occupy, but who may not be in regular contact with us anymore, to continue to be engaged with us, politically and organizationally. Selling the paper to them on a monthly basis is a good way to do that.

It has always been a challenge to make sure Five-for-Me sales take place, and that the papers are used. Branches need to make Five-for-Mes a regular topic of discussion in order to make sure the papers get sold and that comrades are getting in discussions. But the payoff from Five-for-Mes being used effectively is worth the effort if we can bring new people not involved in regular activism around us, and keep politically engaged with a periphery of people who know and respect the ISO. The content of the paper edition is specifically tailored to being useful for relating to this audience. What we publish on the daily website can be far-ranging, but we only have so much room in a paper edition, and so we select the articles that we think will be most useful for members and the people closest to us to discuss.

Many of the *SW* organizers who returned the survey we sent out said that their Five-for-Me routines were hit or miss, and that they found it hard to track how members were using them. They did, however, a few examples of members who were using these papers regularly, one of them a teacher who sells it to other teachers in their reform caucus and another member involved in the Fight for 15 who sells the paper regularly to co-workers.

Sales to a more general audience (street sales)

Probably the sales that have been most disappointing over time are public street sales on a Saturday. These used to be a central routine of ISO branches, involving a large proportion of the membership every week, when selling a weekly or biweekly paper. For most branches, they seem to have declined in size and importance over time, if not disappeared altogether—as a consequence of declining sales that are connected to the decline of print newspapers in general.

In a few branches, members have begun experimenting with new street sales and had some successes. In Seattle, members did 6-8 street sales in January, selling 85 papers on the street (this is the heart of “techlandia.”) In Brooklyn, members building for a meeting on gentrification had an *SW* sale with about eight comrades on the sale, including three members who'd never done a paper sale before. They were in

conversations the entire time, mostly with working-class people of color. They got about four contacts. Afterward, in a wrap-up, they were able to centralize and generalize our experiences.

The answer to re-motivating these sales will be to concentrate on why they are important politically. We would like to sell a lot of papers at Saturday sales, of course, but the role that the paper SW plays for us at the routines of tabling and sales on Saturdays is more important and therefore should be emphasized. This means:

1) Recognizing what we can learn from this form of contact with a broader audience. In contrast to many branch activities that bring us into contact with ourselves and people who are already on the left or activists in some way, SW sales allow us to gauge what a wider layer of people think about politics by seeing their reaction to subjects in the paper, petitions we use, conversations we have with them etc. This can yield not only important ideas for future activity (if we find out about a political issue or struggle in the community that we didn't know about), but a better sense of the shape of broader political consciousness.

2) Recognizing that while we have a number of members selling in (hopefully) a high traffic area, we are still aiming to find that minority of the people who pass us who is politicized and interested in engaging with the ISO. We may come across only a small number of these people, and the tabling/sale will still be a success for a branch.

3) Recognizing the importance of these sales for the internal life and functioning of the ISO. This is especially true given the centrifugal forces that pull members into various activities and fractions that only they and a few comrades participate in. Saturday sales and tablings—along with the routine that comes with them, such as pre- and post-sale SW discussions and using the sale to organize future activities—can cut against this inevitable and necessary fracturing of the branch.

Re-establishing a routine will require a conscious campaign around Saturday sales. So we are proposing an effort over the next three months for “Second Saturday” public sales. The outline below is tentative and will be refined by the National Office in the coming weeks, but it would consist of the following:

- Every branch will—barring conflicts with important demonstrations, etc., in which case the sale would be postponed for a week—hold a major public sale on the second Saturday of the month.
- This would allow time for the branch to hold a discussion of the content of the paper at a branch meeting prior to the sale, including the editorial and featured articles connected to the cover.
- The sales should be prepared for by a team of comrades, so they consist not only of paper selling, but lit tables, petitioning on appropriate question (possibly with petitions produced centrally by the National Office), and materials for upcoming events and how to get involved. The best public sales have always been those that are seen as public events, with posters, tables, etc., to draw people into discussions. There should be a theme, probably related to the cover features of each issue, for the signs, petitions, etc.
- Branches should take the time to divide up tasks at the sale, and make sure that comrades who are new to selling the paper are paired up with comrades who are more experienced at this.
- Hold a post-sale SW discussion for all ISO members who were at the sale, and to which people we talked to are invited. The discussions could have two themes: One possibility is a political discussion about the issue that was the theme of the sale or some other. Alternatively, a more modest and less formal discussion could be organized around assessing the sale and what it told us about the community we are organizing in, what political issues are central, etc.—in other words, more of an internally focused discussion. Branches should experiment with both kinds of post-sale discussions.
- Use the public tablings and sales to build for upcoming activities, especially the large public meetings that were motivated in the Organizational Perspectives document. There will be people we meet on these sales who don't immediately get into discussions with us, but who will want to come to our next big event.

Tablings and sales should be geared to getting out the word about these meetings, and the post-sale discussions can be an organizing hub for flyering for the upcoming meeting.

-- Integrate individual sales of Five-for-Mes into the public tablings/sales. After the post-sale discussion, comrades can be encouraged to begin or continue their “paper rounds” to those in our periphery who we want to be regular buyers of Five-for-Mes. For this to take place, the team that organizes the tablings/sales needs to be focused on this as well, and emphasize its importance before and after the sale.

-- Hold a discussion at the next branch meeting to assess the sale and decide on plans for the next month.

Sales to an audience that’s in between (campus and workplace sales)

Many of the same points made about public sales apply to these kinds of sales as well, only with the recognition that the traffic at the sale won’t be quite as general and undifferentiated. We are still aiming to draw in a minority of people who we can relate to as the ISO, but there is a further potential for projecting the profile of the ISO at a campus or workplace.

In our campus work, we have always emphasized the importance of ISO members making themselves an organizing and political center on campus that can attract those on the left, both people who will want to come around ISO activities and those who will be our allies in campus and other struggles. Paper sales on campus can be a tangible way of creating a political center. In the best experiences of these, a regular sale and lit table can become the place where the left gathers on campus to discuss and debate politics and to plan for future events. We can use SW both to meet new people and raise the profile of the socialists on campus, and as a vehicle for organizing discussions among members and others on the left on campus—for example, encouraging all the activists we know to read a particular article in the paper edition (which we sold to them, of course!) and then having a discussion about it during a lit table or after a paper sale.

Few branches at this time have workplace sales. It has been many years since many branches have had a regular workplace to relate to, but at different times in the ISO’s history, we have emphasized this. When UPS workers were about to strike in 1997, branches around the country organized workplace sales at UPS hubs, learned about the issues, and talked to workers about what they were thinking. It was important link in chain in preparation for the strike, as many places developed relationships with the workers before they hit the picket line.

While the situation is different today—we aren’t preparing for a national strike—there value of selling at a workplace and relating to a set of workers today. In some cities, there are workplaces where there have been recent struggles that it may makes sense to sell at (or individual workers we already know that we should make sure get the paper). For instance, in Philadelphia, they are planning a sale for SEPTA (mass transit) workers as their contract is up in March. Their Saturday tabling is near a bus stop where the drivers take a break, and over the months, they’ve sold some SWs and four copies of *Black Liberation and Socialism* to bus drivers. In Chicago, members regularly sell at the teachers’ union delegates’ meeting and have begun selling at a Teamster member’s monthly union meetings, with some success.

There are also national workplaces that might be worth considering that have fights ahead, such as the Post Office and UPS. It may take some experimentation over time to find a location and time, but it could be an important part of building relationship with workers at a workplace.

Alan M. and Elizabeth S., Chicago

Documents with resolutions

Proposal to publish all future bulletins

As recent events have shown, and has been shown in previous years, there can be no reasonable expectation that documents marked "internal" be kept within the organization. While I don't sympathize with the politics or intent of the various outlets that these documents have been published in, I do not think we

should continue to act as if the leaks have not occurred or that they will not occur in the future. It is virtually impossible to control data sent over email, widely understood to be the least secure form of digital communication, and once made public, it is definitely impossible to contain. Anyone who has been reading the papers, including our own Socialist Worker, knows that we can expect no privacy from state surveillance. Indeed, there are now not-insignificant political movements centered around the liberation of data, for better or for worse, regardless of the content. As wikileaks and, more recently, Glenn Greenwald and Edward Snowden have demonstrated, pieces of information that have even the hint of sensitivity are a dime a dozen on the web.

As we have seen this year especially, members who have left the organization have made a habit of releasing data as they see fit. We are fooling ourselves if we think this could be controlled. Even removing malcontent from the picture, it only takes one member practicing insecure web habits to open the flood gates. Even a two-tiered system, where some bulletins are marked "internal" and others "external," as some members have argued for, is not sufficient. Nor would the use of "secure" systems like tor, sftp, https, etc. suffice. In the past, convincing arguments have been used in opposition to proposals around the creation of organizational web forums and the publishing of the names of the leaders of the organization. I recall members arguing on the convention floor that there can be no expectation of privacy or secure data online long before the extent of the NSA programs (or our convention documents from the last several years) became public. As someone who was raised with computers, has a degree in computer science, has had training on cryptography and network security and works daily on computers and web servers, let me put it plainly: data has a way of getting out. Who among us have not shared scholarly articles from firewalled online repositories? Who among us has not listened to unauthorized copies of music? I fully expect the document containing this proposal to be available on the web in the next few weeks if not days. Short of doing away with electronic dissemination, there is no fix. (And even if we were to do away with electronic dissemination, relying on the state postal service or private couriers, for example, has very obvious drawbacks.)

This is as much (and, in some ways, more) of a practical question as it is a political one. I do not submit this proposal lightly, but seeing no alternative, I think the only option is to operate as if documents will be released anyway and to do it ourselves.

To speak for a minute on the "political" side of this, I understand this essentially opens up debates which have traditionally been conducted within our organization to the public, but the current system is such that these documents generally only get made public by those with negative intentions and are interacted with almost solely by those with attitudes or ideologies completely in opposition to our own (no judgement on the renewal faction is intended). A positive side effect of this would be that much of the basis of accusations of a cloistered organization (both internal and external) would no longer have a footing. Additionally, there are many who wish to engage us in a comradely way, as brilliant sessions at Socialism and developments elsewhere on the web have made clear. This shift allows inter-organizational discussions to be had with more complete information around our ideas, analysis and proposals for the left. There are certainly still avenues for internal debate, including conference calls, regional convention discussions, the national convention and other regional or national convergences.

Proposal: Starting after the 2014 convention, all future pre-convention, post-convention and internal bulletins should be made publicly available on our website or on a section of Socialist Worker Online (whichever is easier). Members (including ISO leadership) should take care to protect the identities of themselves, other members and members of the public wherever such measures are deemed necessary. Whenever possible, there should be consent from all parties whose names are invoked in a document, and this should be noted in the documents. Alternatively, pseudonyms should be used at the request of referenced individuals or if consent cannot be ascertained. Reports concerning the results of elections and other documents where identities can not be spared should not be published, instead this information should be brought back to branches via convention delegates and also reported on the first national branch committee call following the election.

Ben S, Cincinnati