

Pre-convention Bulletin #23 / February 13, 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: The deadline for submitting documents and resolutions for pre-convention bulletins is past. **All comrades who submit new documents or resolutions 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 note the following reminders:

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 it must be received by the start of registration on Saturday. 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

Assessing the Bay Area District: Challenges and Opportunities

This document aims to clarify and contribute to ongoing debates within the Bay Area district. We believe these debates are not over WHETHER there is a radicalisation, but rather reflect the challenges we have had in recruitment, centralizing our movement work and establishing systematic party-building practices.

1) What's the nature of the radicalization in the Bay Area?

Over the last year, our district has engaged in a series of discussions aimed at starting to understand the political, social and economic developments of the Bay Area in order to set perspectives and strategies around our local work. The economic crisis, its recovery, and the project of austerity has hit the Bay Area in unique ways. In order to develop our cadres, we have to develop perspectives based on the specifics of our locality, in conjunction with what's happening nationally and internationally.

Political Economy of Bay Area: The political and social characteristics of the Bay Area are largely shaped by the economic developments over the past decades along with the history of working-class struggle in the area.

Three industries – Information Technology, Business Services, Healthcare – dominate the economic landscape of the Bay Area.

- These three industries compete on a national and international market, making the Bay Area a magnet for international capital as well as an international workforce.
- These industries require a highly skilled workforce, so education is a central component to the economy. Universities like Stanford, UCSF and UC Berkeley provide the research and development of technologies as well as the workforce that is necessary to keep these industries competitive.
- This workforce is highly stratified in terms of race, with very little representation of Blacks among higher-paid sections of the tech industry.
- San Francisco's unemployment rate is relatively low compared to the rest of the state, because of the growth of these industries (as a result of the restructuring of US capitalism post-crisis). The SF/Oakland/Fremont metro unemployment rate is 5.6%, compared with 8.3 % for California as a whole.
- San Francisco is home to tech companies like Twitter and has become a "bedroom community" for workers in Silicon Valley. Companies have chartered buses pick up workers in SF (at publicly funded bus tops).
- Thanks to developers and their friendly bipartisan politicians, San Francisco has become the [most](#)

[expensive city to rent in the United States](#), with median studio priced at \$2,295. Oakland and San Jose (also part of Bay Area) are in the top ten.

- Gentrification has transformed working class neighborhoods into “cloisters of affluence”.

All of these factors have spawned resistance to the changing social composition of the city, resulting in palpable class tensions. An example is the recent activism around “google buses” which has posed the question of public transportation vs. publicly subsidized private transport of tech workers. These actions have limitations in that developers and corporations are the ones who need to be confronted, not necessarily high paid, but hyper-exploited tech workers.

This process of gentrification and economic development has resulted in a massive social reorganization.

- Many people who work in SF can’t afford to live there, so they commute into the city for their jobs.
- This gentrification process has massively displaced African Americans from the city. This process started during the first dot-com boom and has accelerated rapidly since the housing crisis began.
- The Mission neighborhood has traditionally been home to the sizable Latino working class. But now many folks are being pushed out of this neighborhood by luxury apartments.
- San Francisco has long been a destination for homeless people due to the relatively superior mental health services and mild climate. The rising housing costs mean that families are finding themselves dependent on shelters, or doubling up with friends/family.
- This means that fights for affordable housing must take up questions of racism and the rights of the poor, as well as the attacks on the social safety net.
- This social reorganization has had a concrete effect on the composition of our district. 10 years ago, most of our membership resided in San Francisco, and now most of our membership lives outside of SF (including some members of the SF Mission branch).

How does this shape consciousness and struggle?

There is a real movement developing over the future of San Francisco, that will surely shape the rest of the Bay Area. The SF branch has agreed to focus the entire branch on housing work, in recognition that this is *the* key question in the city.

- The development of Tenants Rights Convention (last weekend turned out 600 people), google bus protests, and anti-eviction work all point to the opportunities for comrades to become implanted in struggles that can shape the balance of class forces and racial demographics of the city.
- Teachers within the branch will continue to relate to their union struggles and work sites, but housing work will be the umbrella focus for branch. In fact, we think there will be organic opportunities to relate the fight for public education, as the families with kids in public schools are also those facing eviction.

In Oakland, the issues of public education, access to social services and police brutality have dominated the mainstream press as well as social movements.

- In education there’s the question of charter schools and outsourcing of services, underfunding of Oakland Public Schools.
- Social Services are intimately connected to the issue of inequality and crime. Oakland is the burglary capital of the United States, the murder rate is extremely large for a city of its size (100 or so per year).
- Struggle of low-wage workers has become a central way to address inequality, racism, as well as unionization. Lift Up Oakland and Dan Siegel’s mayoral campaigns highlight these issues.

- The Oakland Police Department is among the most notorious in the country, following murders of Oscar Grant, Alan Blueford and countless others.

Campus work has been challenging at UC Berkeley (branch) and Stanford (twig).

- There is a general decline in student movements following Occupy. The exception to this is BDS, which has seen campaigns at Stanford and Berkeley.
- The freeze on tuition within UC system has meant that undergraduate student organizing has become more fractured and less unified.
- Despite these facts, young people continue to radicalize around issues of oppression across campuses in the Bay Area.
- One of the areas the Berkeley branch has agreed to focus on is the issue of system change not climate change. Our first meeting of the semester hosting Chris Williams, brought out 30 non-members, including one of the central organizers of Fossil Free Cal (the local divestment group on campus), work the branch started to relate to in the Fall.

There is a labor left in the Bay Area that we are poised to help shape.

- We have disproportionate number of teachers (K-12 and community college), many of whom have become leaders in their communities.
- Our union membership is about 1/3 of district.
- This work has become centralized through a district labor fraction and begun to organize labor salons (for broader grouping of radical union activists). People should read Dana B.'s document, "Strategies for Leading in the Labor Movement: Some Ideas" in Bulletin #12 for more information on our labor work.

2) Given this radicalization, why has it been so hard to recruit? What are our challenges?

Have we recruited?

First of all, it would be incorrect to say we haven't recruited new people in the last year. Out of the conference this summer, we had a half dozen folks join the district and a number of former members rejoin. They were all folks who had been attending ISO meetings, reading, and working alongside us for months leading up to the conference. Out of the low-wage organizing, we have started to recruit and build a periphery in Oakland.

But while we can say we have recruited some folks, it has been difficult to integrate new members into the political life of our organization. We have also struggled to win students to join on campuses and some folks who did join last year stepped back this semester.

These challenges have sparked a number debates in our district around whether or not "we have a project to recruit people to."

We understand the frustration at the lack of greater numeric growth in this political period. However, we think this is a narrow approach to understanding the difficulties of recruitment in this period.

1. It doesn't allow us to build on the experience and implantation over decades and moves away from focusing on political development of members (new and long-standing).
2. Discounting qualitative growth can make us feel like we have "stagnated" especially in community branches which tend to experience slower quantitative growth.
3. It can cause us to accommodate to the political confusion we face on the left. Some of our student comrades have argued that we've been "too aggressive" in our attempts to recruit, resulting in

people being turned off to our organization.

We think there are multiple reasons, both objective and subjective, that have made it difficult to recruit and integrate members:

1. We are still learning to recruit people with a firmer theoretical understanding of marxism and the need for revolutionary organization. (Seeing the trees but missing the forest: Fixing our flawed approach toward recruitment Sharon S., Chicago first published October 1, 2007 was helpful reminder of the shifts we're still making).
2. The counter-revolution in Egypt and the SWP crisis have affected our closest, most serious periphery. They are less clear of why they should join a Leninist organization given the low level of working class struggle, the crisis of the left, and the setbacks we have faced.
3. Movements where people are radicalizing (low-wage struggles, environmental justice) have not been the focus of our implantation work until recently. Most of our longer-term implantation work has been in labor and teacher unions. Developing a political periphery within workplace/unions require consistent effort over time and success cannot be judged solely by recruitment.
4. Recruitment must be a collective project of the branches and the district. Many comrades are focused exclusively on movement work and implantation, which can take them away from this collective project. We need to do better at taking advantage of the ideological opening in order to reach out to radicalizing people who are not involved in activism yet.
5. While we have made some inroads to organizing more systematic district education through regular cadre study groups and day schools, we haven't dedicated enough resources to general membership and cadre development.
6. We think that it requires greater political clarity and confidence to recruit people to the project of revolutionary socialism, even though people are moving toward more radical conclusions about society.

Challenges we've faced given the lack of generalized struggle:

We have been involved in many areas of work (too many to include in this document) - from fighting police terrorism, organizing solidarity with transit worker BART strikes, to organizing with OurWalmart workers. We have learned from these experiences, developed important relationships on the left and built the confidence of many members. However, we have felt scattered and resource-strapped for many years.

Over the last few months our district has grappled with questions and debates about what to do next, and whether we have become more or less relevant during the last 5 years since the economic crisis.

We think one of the reasons it's been difficult to clarify our collective project is because our work has been spread over a dozen seemingly disconnected movements and struggles. The backdrop is a general malaise of the post-Occupy left.

In the Bay Area district, having only a couple people involved in an area of work is challenging.

1. It can multiply the effects of feeling scattered and isolated.
2. It becomes harder to develop a perspective, and be a pole of attraction.
3. Without large, ongoing movements it has been harder for us to show our periphery how we put socialist politics into action, and how the smaller struggles connect to long-term goals of the building the Left, a fighting working class, and plant seeds for a revolutionary party.
4. This scatter has made it difficult to organize SW tablings and figure out what public meetings should look like.
5. It has made it harder for us to connect to the broader radicalization.

Our district labor work has been the exception to the rule. Centralizing that work with regular district meetings and labor salons has given union comrades a long-term perspective of how their work and the ISO is contributing to building social justice unionism.

As a district we want to maintain the relationships and long-term implantation as we develop district-wide priorities for movement work: FF15 / low wage organizing in Oakland, housing justice / anti-eviction / anti-gentrification in San Francisco and environmental work in Berkeley. Not everyone will be involved in all these areas of work but it will be a focus for the district. We will continue to find ways to project the profile of ISO through speaker tours, special events and collaborations with other left forces.

3) Why developing cadre matters.

There has been some debate within our district about the emphasis on “back to basics.” Sid P’s document (“We’ve tried this before” from Bulletin #16) is the clearest example, but within our pre-convention discussion there have been concerns over our “lack of strategy” and a desire to look outside our “cannon” for political development of our membership.

We want to assert that “back to basics” should be understood more *as advancing our foundation* in historical materialism NOT that we do things the same as we have done before. At the same time, we believe that many of the routines and practices that we used to do consistently (SW tablins, contact work, using ISR, etc.) have broken down to the detriment of our district.

The authors of this document feel that our district is held back by the lack of greater cadres and believes that the tremendous talent in our district could be further enhanced with a greater theoretical and historical foundation. We have members who have had experience in movements, but who are not necessarily confident to make arguments around why we need socialist revolution. We want ALL of our comrades to feel that having a historical materialist approach to politics and struggle strengthens our ability to build movements and build our organization.

We also want to dismiss the false dichotomy that “back to basics” or strengthening organizational practices is counterpoised to being creative.

Here are some ways we have actually been shifting our “routines” as a district to meet the needs of our branches:

- Socialist Worker - comrades in Oakland table at First Friday, a hip/art street fair once a month with books, fliers and ISO materials. In SF, the branch has started Saturday tablins at Alemany Farmers market which has been more enjoyable and effective than other community sales.
- Cadre development - We appreciated and agreed with what was laid out in Leia P and Natalia T’s document “In with the old? Developing Cadre in the ISO today” (Bulletin #17). We also believe we need to have a dynamic and systematic approach to cadre development. Locally, along with day schools, we have started to organize cadre potlucks - the first one discussed the state of the international Left taking up what’s happened in Greece, Egypt, France and Britain. Over the summer, we organized a district committee retreat to discuss the social, political and economic situation in the Bay Area. We have also been organizing higher-level study groups around women’s oppression and social reproduction theory. Our district “Pivot to Asia” fraction has been a way to develop our members and think through how to project Marxist politics and analysis in the API Bay Area left.
- Buddy systems: Three members of the Berkeley branch have set up study groups based on new member education series. The Oakland BC has organized “buddy” groups of threes to do Marxist education and discussions around pre-convention.
- Branch meetings: The Oakland branch has done a similar rotation as NYC comrades to

accommodate for longer fraction meetings every other week, so comrades can set perspectives and bring that work back into the branches. The SF branch has done a three-week rotation where on the fourth week fractions meet and bring that work back into the branch for reports at the end of the evening.

Areas that require greater attention:

- Finances: Our DC will be focusing on how to put our organization on better financial footing. We have treasurers in the branches but these roles need to be politicized as they look at fundraising for the national organization.
- Use of ISR/Haymarket: We have not been utilizing these amazing resources as well as we should. We appreciate Cindy K & Shaun H's document (Bulletin #22), which provides ideas about how to make ISR more central to membership development.
- Utilizing Cadre Experience: We have many long-standing comrades who have a lot to contribute to the development of our district. We want to find ways (like the cadre potlucks) for our experienced members to collaborate with developing cadre and help raise the theoretical level of our membership. The DC plans to have a "History of the ISO" meeting to allow comrades to share their experience over decades of work and give newer comrades a better sense of our project.
- Student Development: Campuses like Berkeley have many left/socialist groups and our student members interact with activists from a variety of backgrounds. We think it is important for student members to understand various socialist/radical tendencies in order to better collaborate on the left.

We hope that this document is a helpful contribution to the convention (or afterwards, due to the tardiness of our submission). We think that the experiences of the Bay Area district may help other branches and districts who are dealing with similar questions around recruitment and cadre development.

Jessica H-W & Ragina J, Bay Area

History, politics, and current experiences in defending reproductive rights

Reproductive liberty is under attack. For decades, the rightwing has waged a consistent, organized offensive while the largest liberal organizations involved in providing and defending reproductive health care have adopted more and more concessionary tactics. Now even the legal basis of Roe V Wade risks being functionally undone where TRAP laws shutter clinics—and possibly overturned through legal challenges to provocative state-level bills banning termination of pregnancies after fewer than 24 weeks.

Alongside a record number of bills over the last three years that limited access to abortion, politicians have sought to pass so-called "personhood" measures that assert greater legal rights for fetuses than for pregnant women. Even though these efforts have failed, they have altered the ideological terrain with devastating results. Hundreds of pregnant women—almost all low-income or women of color—have been subjected to incarceration or unwanted medical interventions, usually initiated by individual staff at hospitals or doctors' offices and too often sanctioned by courts.

It came to light in July that inside California state prisons, doctors performed 150 sterilizations of incarcerated women without required state approvals. Black women comprise the fastest-growing segment of the US prison population. The reality that in many states incarcerated pregnant women are forced to undergo childbirth in shackles, while in other states sterilization is made readily available, continues a long and brutal pattern of systematic repression of Black motherhood.

The scale of these attacks in the midst of austerity, privatization, and a wide-ranging sexist backlash is in part only possible due to a very low level of organized resistance. Yet responses to the Steubenville rape case and the uptick in feminist social media reflect a significant radicalization surrounding women and

gender.

Many of those radicalizing against gender-based and other oppressions have found little opportunity to use their ideas to mobilize and sustain struggles. As a result, ideas and terminology can become larger than life, making it seem more urgent to call out backward elements of pop culture or problematic views among feminists than to seek out political and practical bases for uniting in immediate activist work. At the same time, funding and personnel have become concentrated in NGOs, service provision and political organizations that have actively distanced themselves from public protest and bottom-up organizing. We hope the history, politics, and recent experiences in this document are helpful as we consider how the ISO can contribute to rebuilding a fighting movement to defend reproductive justice for everyone.

This document aims to address: the political framework through which the ISO relates to existing reproductive rights forces; the history of our organization in putting these politics into practice; and some of our most recent organizing experiences in Seattle and Texas.

The Reproductive Justice Framework:

In the spirit of opening discussion around engaging theories outside the Marxist tradition, we thought it would be useful to provide some background to the use of the term “reproductive justice” (RJ) as it relates to our politics in the ISO. RJ is used fairly commonly today, in place of “pro-choice.” Though many comrades and allies rightly identify as being in favor of RJ, a more inclusive and radical sounding term than “pro-choice,” the history of this framework is less well known. We think it would be useful for comrades to be familiar with the basic history of RJ in order to prepare us to better build lasting, serious, multiracial movements for RJ.

RJ emerged from the left wing of the abortion rights movement. That movement’s more conservative section mobilized for the legalization of abortion and in many ways lost direction in the aftermath of Roe, whereas the left of the movement recognized that legality alone would not guarantee women *access* to abortion. A defining moment that would expose the difference in class (and racial) orientation of those two segments of the movement was the 1977 Hyde Amendment. As chronicled in Silliman, Fried, Ross, and Gutierrez’s text *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*, the pro-choice movement’s failure to “confront the overt white supremacy of the Right’s agenda and its own internal racism” by not making overturning Hyde a national priority, exposed that “the pro-choice movement was not concerned with” the rights of women of color (WOC) (31).

WOC at the National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas in 1977 thus coined the term RJ, which has since become an “organizing principle in the United States for women who are most disadvantaged by white supremacy” (Silliman et al. 3). RJ embraces “resisting population control while simultaneously claiming the right [of women of color] to bodily self-determination and abortion or the right to have children” (Silliman et al. 7). It also intentionally powerfully challenges neoliberal conceptions of individual choice, which “obscures the social context in which individuals make choices, and discounts the ways in which the state regulates populations, disciplines individual bodies, and exercises control over sexuality, gender, and reproduction” (Silliman, quoted in Silliman, et al. 5).

While the more conservative wings of the movement turned their focus to adapting to the growing conservatism of the Reagan era and began using a privacy defense of the “choice” to have an abortion, what became the RJ movement sought to connect the struggle for abortion rights with the movement against sterilization abuse and more (Silliman et al. 32). According to the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, (2014) “Women of color developed the RJ framework to speak to the lived experiences of women of color who did not believe that the privacy-based pro-choice movement captured our challenges and opportunities in achieving self-determination for ourselves and our communities.”

The RJ framework offers a broad conception of reproductive rights that understands that for gender equity or women’s liberation, people who can get pregnant must be able to control their own reproductive lives. While Marxism arrives at this conclusion from a basis that gender equality is essential for the development of socialism, or classless society, RJ derives its theory by expanding on the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights (Silliman et al. 17). While this is broader than the pro-choice lens based in Constitutionalism and to some extent libertarian notions of individual freedom (Silliman et al. 17), it does not exist decidedly outside of a class analysis. Therefore, RJ is not a Marxist theory but does create an opening for a revolutionary Marxist current within the movement. For instance, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice puts forward this revolutionary approach to RJ:

Reproductive Justice exists when all people have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our gender, bodies and sexuality for ourselves, our families, and our communities. Achieving this goal requires changes at all levels and ending all forms of oppression ... including forces that deprive us of self-determination and control over our bodies, and limit our reproductive choices. (Quoted in Gerber Fried, 2)

Though the ISO was not part of the forces that crafted the RJ framework, our legacy and current practice of unapologetic defense of abortion rights/access and fighting sterilization abuse demonstrates that our work is very much in line with that done by our comrades in the RJ movement. Though we in the ISO have perhaps identified as “pro-choice” over the years, we would argue that our practice has consistently been intersectional and demonstrative of a commitment to RJ. We believe that RJ, like Black feminism and intersectionality, is complementary to Marxist theory and practice, but does not replace it. We come from a different tradition than that which gave birth to the RJ movement, but we have and continue to demonstrate in practice our common interests with demands for RJ. Furthermore, we aim to be one day more integrated with those forces that advocate RJ, in particular as we know that a multiracial, working class wing of the women’s movement will be critical to turning back the tide of anti-woman, anti-poor, and racist attacks of the last 40 years.

The current usage of “RJ” can vary widely – from embracing activist strategies and supporting labor struggles and defense of the social safety net, to more conservative approaches such as lobbying and political campaigning for representatives. Thus, not everyone who says they support RJ will necessarily share our vision for grassroots or broad and mass movements as the way to achieve RJ. Additionally, due to a long legacy of racism among mainstream, mostly white, “pro-choice” activism, many WOC activists and RJ fighters may be reluctant to see organizations like the ISO as natural allies for RJ. The ISO has consistently demonstrated commitment to RJ, and at the same time, we encourage our members to learn more about the rich history of WOC organizing for RJ, as this complements our investigations into Black feminism and intersectionality and can only strengthen our theoretical and practical work around reproductive rights today.

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History of the ISO’s reproductive rights activism

Commitment to reproductive rights has been an integral part of the ISO’s theory and practice since it formed in 1977. By the time of the ISO’s founding, the women’s movement had already become largely divided between mainstream and left-wing feminism, but the level of activism around a variety of women’s issues (from the ERA to reproductive rights) remained quite high compared with recent decades.

Anti-abortion forces had begun gathering steam as soon as the Supreme Court’s *Roe v Wade* ruling in 1973 made abortion legal. Congress passed the Hyde Amendment in 1977 banning federal Medicaid funding for abortions, while continuing to pay for sterilizations. The racist intentions of the Hyde Amendment were

obvious, pressuring poor women, especially women of color, to become sterilized simply because they could not access abortions.

All feminist organizations opposed the Hyde Amendment, but socialist-feminists, other left-wing feminists, feminists of color and Marxists led much of the grassroots activism against it. One of the most significant organizations was the New York City-based Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), founded in 1977, which then played a key role in founding the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) in 1978, as a national coalition of women's rights groups who wanted to collaborate on opposing the Hyde Amendment and other reproductive rights issues.

R2N2's membership eventually grew to about 50 organizations—including many local grassroots reproductive rights groups from across the U.S. Its mission was to make reproductive rights accessible to all women, and its agenda included opposition to the Hyde Amendment, opposition to sterilization abuse, fighting for safe and affordable abortions for poor women and women of color, and the right of same-sex couples to adopt and raise children. R2N2 accomplished important work during its existence, but it dissolved itself in 1984 after a series of internal disputes among some of its leading members (which was unfortunately a fairly common occurrence among left-wing women's organizations in that era).

The ISO was involved in R2N2 through numerous local feminist organizations our members were part of. Some but not all of these local groups continued after R2N2 dissolved. But the 1980s was a time when the Christian Right was on the ascendancy and the left was in decline. While we helped to organize larger protests on occasion, much of ISO members' local organizing was centered on defending abortion clinics from attack by the rising anti-choice movement.

Organizing clinic defenses was a key part of the ISO's activity during this period. Even when there was no local pro-choice organization locally, members of the ISO would encourage our contacts to join us at local abortion clinics that had been targeted by anti-abortion extremists. We held signs clearly demonstrating our support for abortion rights and attempted to shield patients from harassment by anti-abortion zealots.

Unfortunately, mainstream feminists often opposed our peaceful pro-choice protests. Instead, they organized clinic "escorts"—a very mild form of protection for the women who had to pass through hordes of shouting anti-abortion protesters. Mainstream feminists (through discussions with clinic owners) often succeeded at *forcing pro-choice protesters to stay across the street—even as the anti-choice protesters exercised their right to remain immediately outside the clinic.*

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, anti-choice protesters in organizations such as Operation Rescue had become significantly larger and more "militant"—including mass mobilizations at clinics, in which its members chained themselves to clinic doors and engaged in other acts of civil disobedience to disrupt the functioning of clinics.

In this atmosphere (and with a Republican in the White House), mainstream feminist organizations took a renewed interest in organizing mass protests for abortion rights. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court was also considering a case, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, which threatened to overturn the right to legal abortion in the U.S. [In that case, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor provided the single vote that broke a tie on the Court, thereby preserving the right to abortion—and demonstrating how close we had come to losing the right to choose.]

The sense of urgency around the fight for abortion was therefore shared by all feminist organizations, while thousands of activists began joining clinic defenses around the country. In August 1991, hundreds of Operation Rescue activists descended on Wichita, Kansas to physically blockade abortion clinics. When the organization declared its next target would be Buffalo, NY in April 1992, pro-choice activists began organizing a massive defense of Buffalo's abortion clinics.

Unfortunately, the National Organization for Women (NOW) actively discouraged its own members from mobilizing to Buffalo. Nevertheless, the months of grassroots organizing paid off. When Operation Rescue arrived in Buffalo, expecting a repeat of their success in Wichita, they were *outnumbered* by angry pro-choice activists committed to keeping the clinics open. Instead of blockading clinics, Operation Rescue was

only able to hold peaceful “prayers” across the street from clinics, while abortion rights supporters chanted “Operation Failure! Ha Ha Ha!” at them.

When Bill Clinton was campaigning for president in 1992, he promised pro-choice activists that he would pass a “Freedom of Choice Act” guaranteeing women the right to choose. After his election, he never mentioned it again. [Barack Obama made the identical promise while campaigning in 2008, while also never mentioning it again.]

Nevertheless, the mainstream feminist movement, content to have a Democrat back in the White House after 12 years of Reaganism, grew more loyal to the Democratic Party than ever before. Despite the fact that more restrictions on abortion rights were passed during Clinton’s reign than at any previous time, mainstream feminists did not organize any major protests during Clinton’s two terms. The result was not only the continued erosion of abortion rights, but the acceleration of mainstream feminism’s conservative drift.

This is the history which has resulted in the situation the ISO faces today: large-scale anger among new generations of women with few existing organizations willing to engage in the ongoing defense of women’s rights. New organizations will have to be built from scratch—but they can only be built through the organic growth of a movement from below that is large enough to sustain the level of organization that will be required for success.

Conservatization of the Movement:

The early ‘90s also saw an escalation of violence against abortion providers and clinic staff, including fatal shootings of clinic staff in Pensacola, Florida and Boston. One of the last late-term abortion providers in the country, Dr. George Tiller, was murdered in 2008. These murders had a massive impact on abortion rights organizing, with more conservative feminist forces arguing for caution and away from militant protests. There was also an argument from groups like Planned Parenthood to find “common ground” with more moderate anti-choice groups as a means to thwart the violent extremists in the movement. This failed strategy in practice meant ceding significant ground to anti-choicers, who as a result have been able to set the framework for the debate. “Meeting in the middle” has meant shifting to the Right.

In the midst of a massive attack on basic access to abortion rights, for example, many of the groups and activists who articulate the most radical set of politics around reproductive justice ultimately argue for direct-service work as an immediate and necessary solution—clinic escorting, working at an abortion clinic, volunteering to drive women to clinics, or becoming an abortion provider are all portrayed as “the movement.” While we should support these actions and engage with them on a case-by-case basis, we also need to argue for a set of politics that go beyond the immediate circumstances and wage a long-term fight-back.

This is clear at the annual Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP) reproductive justice conference, which exhibits a mix of radical ideas about prison abolition, for example, but focuses on getting young activists signed up to intern for reproductive justice NGO’s. There is simultaneously an interest in discussing oppression as “structural issues,” and an intense and narrowing focus on interpersonal interactions and a rejection of broader political analysis (for ex. at the CLPP conference abortion speak-out, participants are asked to not include political statements in their stories.) This “anarcho-liberalism” shows that, on the positive side, there is a radicalization around issues of gender and sexuality and an interest in connecting different struggles for liberation. But it also shows the serious limitations to the NGO strategy and accompanying liberal feminist politics, and explains how activists we organize with who may have a radical analysis around reproductive justice can also draw some of the most conservative organizational and political conclusions in practice.

Recent ISO organizing:

Seattle Clinic Defense Work:

Seattle Clinic Defense, its model, and its philosophy for organizing can be used as a case study in the successes and challenges of building a radical reproductive justice organization.

In the three years of its existence, SCD has seen a shift in the focus of the burgeoning women's rights movement from abortion access in 2011 to broadening anger around rape culture. Seattle Clinic Defense has been especially successful in recruiting members who are radicalizing, and come to us with a knowledge of the failures of liberal women's rights organizations and are critical of the Democratic party.

While SCD defends our local Planned Parenthood clinic monthly, the ISO members embedded in the work recognize that a sense of stagnation that has developed, in part, because of the organization's focus on the act of clinic defense alone.

While wildly successful in the first two years of its existence, comrades engaged in the work, as well as the other organizers, are pushing to broaden the work of SCD outside of the narrow focus of clinic defense and abortion access in order to reach a broader swath of activists throughout the city.

In reorienting our political aims, it is evident that if an organization takes up clinic defense, it must do so in conjunction with a broad framework and understanding that while clinic defense is a helpful tool, the current political climate also allows easier connections and intersections to be made.

In the Seattle left, it is clear that many have a framework of intersectionality and most of the activists that we have come into contact with have a sense of moving towards reproductive justice. Taking these concepts forward, our focus will be one that engages in various issues such as transfolks' struggles within reproductive justice movements, the fight for a \$15 and hour minimum wage, and pay equity in the city of Seattle.

Texas Fightback:

During the summer months of 2013, Texas saw an upsurge in activism to defend access to reproductive healthcare and abortion. Thousands of people swarmed the Capitol building in Austin to demand that the anti-abortion legislation, SB5 and then HB2, not be passed. With the people's filibuster of SB5, our side was emboldened and ready to fight. However, when HB2 came to the floor, our forces were not strong enough to compete against Wendy Davis's Democratic cooption of the movement, NGO/liberal feminist groups, a weak memory of historical fight backs, a low level of organization, the decades old right-wing backlash, or the legislative body and the State Police who beat and arrested many people, primarily women, who were protesting on the night that HB2 passed.

Since this past summer, these weaknesses have led to what we would argue is a relatively low-level of fight back against HB2. The fight-back that does exist is also largely dominated by liberal feminist groups who are pushing to get Wendy Davis elected as governor. A few new grassroots groups have formed in response to HB2, like the Radical Alliance for Gender Equality (RAGE) in Lubbock (which ISO and RAGE members in Denton helped to get off the ground).

In Denton, we have been consistently engaged in fighting for reproductive justice and LGBTQ rights since the branch's founding in late 2008. In the beginning, the Denton ISO organized counter-protests against anti-abortion rallies. We helped to organize and participated in Walk for Choice rallies and Slut Walks. We also held forums and study groups on women and socialism.

In 2010, we began systematically participating in a liberal feminist group called the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA) which exists nationally under the group Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) because we had long organizational ties, and we were looking for an outlet for reproductive justice activism and were hoping this group could provide us with one. As participants in the group, we were constantly sidelined and red-baited. At the point we began participating in FMLA, they were not active within reproductive activism and the leadership began to display, that as a whole, they had no interest in seriously engaging in activism.

In 2011, when FMLA as a group did not want to organize against 40 Days for Life, members of the ISO, FMLA, and other activists recognizing a need for a response, began organizing in separate meetings against 40 Days for Life. After 40 Days for Life ended, the group organizing against it became an official group: Radical Alliance for Gender Equality (RAGE). Since then, we have been involved in clinic defense for an extended period of time over a couple of years, protests against 40 Days for Life and Justice for All, building a campaign against sexual assault on campus, LGBTQ rallies (specifically demanding justice for Konyale, a transgender woman who was murdered on a date in Denton county), and most recently, we have launched a campaign against Mark Crutcher (a national leader in the anti-choice campaign who is based in Denton). The Fight for 15 is noticeably absent in our area, but we are wanting to connect our struggles with the fight for justice for Rhiannon who was fired from Whole Foods in Chicago for taking a day off to care for her special-needs child when school was cancelled during an ice storm.

The question of how to continue clinic defense has become an acute one for us locally. In the past, we have had a healthy working relationship with a local clinic that has allowed us to engage in clinic defense outside of its clinic. With the rightward shift in abortion politics throughout the 1980s, the NGOization of many organizations, and the privatized nature of healthcare, this kind of relationship is generally not the case between clinics and activists. However, with the passing of HB2, the clinic has taken a much more conservative approach, trying to distance itself from any grassroots' movement building, taking instead a purely court-based and Democratic electoral approach.

We are assessing how to continue clinic defense in this environment and win RAGE's group membership to a unified approach. We are also working with other groups and are discussing how to move forward with them in relationship to clinic defense. It was not the staff inside the clinic who decided to forego clinic defense, but the bureaucrats who run the clinic. For the past two weeks, we have been doing clinic escorting, even though it is a very passive form of "protest" (we wouldn't really call it that, but for lack of a better term) that cannot effectively build a movement. Continuing this in the short-term allows us to have sustained contact with those working inside the clinic who are much more open to clinic defense. In the short term, we are discussing beginning clinic defense outside of Planned Parenthood who have never been open to us doing clinic defense.

Within both the ISO and RAGE, we have critically engaged with theory relating to Marxism and women's liberation, social reproduction theory, reproductive justice, intersectionality, as well as other aspects of feminist movements historically. Since the passing of HB2, we have had many opportunities to debate out social reproduction theory, reproductive justice, intersectionality, and Marxism as those who are being the most impacted by the passing of HB2 are poor women, working class women, women of color (especially immigrants), and rural women. Our training as Marxists has proved invaluable in the struggle for reproductive justice, both in a theoretical and practical sense, and has also helped us to build our branch locally. We need to continue to collaborate organizationally on how to best move forward in our theoretical development as well as on how we are responding in practice to the attacks on women's lives.

-Madeline B (Boston), Elizabeth C (Denton), Rachel C (Chicago), Michelle F (Seattle), Sharon S (Chicago), Corrie W (Chicago), Mattie W (Denton)

Continued Mis-Characterizations by the Renewal Faction

The Boston District has become national news within and outside of the ISO for seemingly exemplifying "crisis" within the organization, especially as it relates to various allegations around the "Ordeal of Shaun Joseph" (<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/10/a-response-to-our-socialist-worker-critics/>). This case in particular seems to have become a rallying point for a group of people that initially operated informally like a faction mainly in Boston and Providence, and later declared themselves so publicly. The details of certain particular internal Boston matters have been publicized via the now-formed Renewal Faction on two public mediums: On Shaun J's blog, and on Counterpunch. The latter was submitted via former ISO members all of whom are in the Bay Area, ostensibly as a response to a letter in Socialist Worker directed at them ('When Hindsight Isn't 20/20', Socialist Worker, Nov. 15, 2013). They have published details of a meeting

that took place Saturday, Nov. 16 in Boston with Ahmed S. from the Steering Committee, a meeting that took place 3000 miles away from the Bay Area, in an attempt to bolster arguments about their own experiences in the Bay Area. Some ISO members from different parts of the country seem to have developed opinions about our branch without engagement with it. We request comrades read this account below to gain a clearer picture of the Boston ISO.

As Boston District members who were also present at this November, 2013 meeting we wanted to address some clear falsehoods and mis-characterizations of that meeting listed in the letter from Amanda HG, Neil P, Sarah B (who has since quit the ISO) and Yuval S. The details of that letter pertain to a meeting with Ahmed S that sought clarity on the question of Shaun J's ability to be re-instated into membership in the ISO by two members of our District, despite a national petition detailing conditions, and despite the desires by the Boston District for further discussion. We will focus this document on refuting specific aspects detailed in the above publications from one of the internal Boston letters from now-members of the Renewal Faction. We will also outline a problematic approach by now-members of the Renewal Faction as they have sought to ram through their political approach in undemocratic form.

November 16 meeting with Ahmed S

At the outset, we do want to say that we find it curious why Yuval S, who did not attend the meeting with Ahmed S on November 16th, has signed on to a letter that discusses that meeting at length. Unfortunately, we see this problematic practice in keeping with the initiation of a national petition (IB #3, "Appeal for Shaun J") that detailed statements about a local ISO District, signed by various people from around the country who have never been in our District or branch.

First, some background: The meeting on Saturday, Nov. 16th was initiated by Alpana M after the Cambridge BC (Sarah B. and Amanda HG) brought former member Shaun J. to a Pre-Convention discussion of the Boston District scheduled for Nov. 14th. Shaun had resigned from the ISO on August 29th, so his sudden appearance at the meeting surprised everyone, especially considering that there was disagreement on the question of his attending that meeting within the two-person District Committee comprised of Alpana and Amanda. Alpana was only informed that Shaun had been invited to that District meeting a few hours in advance, to which she objected. Despite the objections from half the District Committee Amanda HG refused to un-invite Shaun J. An email detailing that conversation is included below (**ADDENDUM A**).

In a 15 minute section that was voted on to discuss whether Shaun should be allowed to participate in a Pre-Convention discussion, Shaun declared that he was now an ISO member, having been accepted to membership by the Cambridge branch, and that there was nothing more to discuss. Being a member, no one could now bar him from Pre-Convention discussions. This 15 minute section on this matter was extended to a two-and-a-half hour discussion on the question of Shaun's pronouncement of membership. The planned Perspectives discussion was utterly derailed because District members refused to continue to allow another undemocratic maneuver by now-faction members to go unchallenged (we have written elsewhere in response to the "Appeal for Shaun", a petition also sprung on us that had led to an emergency meeting in the District).

Since Ahmed S would happen to be in town that weekend due to meetings with Gilbert Achcar and had time to meet with us, it was a good opportunity to clarify the Center's position on Shaun's membership. Invited by Alpana to the Nov. 16th meeting with Ahmed were the Dorchester Branch Committee (BC) - Alpana M, Akunna E, Ann C (who could not attend due to work); Khury PS, former District Coordinator; the Cambridge/Harvard BC - Amanda HG and Sarah B, along with Neil P from their branch. According to the Amanda's description of the Cambridge Branch meeting that Shaun referred to as "accepting his application for membership," there was a 30 minute discussion on whether people felt that Shaun should begin a process of re-joining. She said that comrades in the Cambridge branch agreed that there should be a process by which Shaun re-integrates into the ISO. No vote on Shaun's membership was taken at this meeting, and branch members not in the faction did not come away from the meeting considering that Shaun had re-joined. Rather, according to Amanda, she "checked for general consensus" on there being a

process for Shaun's re-integration. Based on Amanda's account of what took place at their branch meeting that night, the Cambridge/Harvard BC accepted Shaun's membership "application" without real discussion with the rest of the Cambridge branch, just a check-in for consensus on Shaun's "re-integration." The next day, at the District Pre-convention discussion, Shaun, backed up by Amanda HG, Sarah, Neil, and Yuval, argued there should be nothing further to discuss on the matter of Shaun's membership. At the meeting with Ahmed, when asked why comrades considered it necessary for ANY discussion to take place, and if a discussion was necessary, why it should happen only with 6 members of the Harvard/Cambridge branch, there was no response nor has there been one since.

Their letter of November 23rd states: "The SC references in the letter a meeting that several of us had with Ahmed last weekend. We think it is important to describe the tenor of that meeting. Overall, we are appalled by the way in which Ahmed conducted himself in the meeting. Ahmed began the meeting by asking why Shaun was even there. Apparently Alpana, who set up the meeting, had not conveyed to Ahmed that she herself had invited Shaun to the meeting. Since half of the district committee and the Cambridge branch committee considered Shaun a member, and we were meeting to discuss Shaun's membership, we agreed with Alpana that it seemed obvious that Shaun should have been part of that meeting." We call attention to an email chain below that shows their statements to be untrue **(ADDENDUM B)**. As you can plainly see, Amanda HG requested Shaun be at the meeting, something that Alpana neither initiated, nor barred from happening. As to why the comrades would, again, deliberately allude to something false, we will leave to the judgment of others.

Their letter goes on to state: "Ahmed refused to answer our political questions about the SC being involved in the question of Shaun's membership, and he characterized Amanda HG and Sarah B as being "led into a cul-de-sac which would lead them out of the organization" by Shaun. In response, Sarah B asked him to clarify his meaning, and also voiced her concern that this was an insulting claim, insinuating that the two female branch members were being brainwashed or otherwise manipulated by Shaun. In response to Sarah's question, Ahmed became enraged. What resulted can only be described as a 3 minute long, incomprehensible tirade directed primarily at Sarah."

Their statement that Ahmed S. made an argument that insinuated that it was female members who "were being brainwashed or otherwise manipulated by Shaun" is political opportunism at best. It is opportunism because the comrades are taking advantage of a discussion in our organization about oppressive behavior within the ISO, and suspicion of a heavy-handed leadership, to claim that Ahmed's behavior is sexist. In doing so, they conveniently ignore that Neil P was also at this meeting and was addressed in the same way and at the same time as Amanda and Sarah. In making this charge, they are also ignoring the content of what Ahmed actually said, dismissing it as an "incomprehensible tirade."

In fact, what happened was this: Towards the end of our nearly 2 hour discussion, Ahmed once again repeated that Shaun J could not simply be accepted to membership in the method that he and the Cambridge BC had stated that he was and that Shaun was not now considered a member by the Steering Committee. Any process for his rejoining must be a process that goes through the entire district, and begins with a conversation with Ahmed. Shaun interrupted Ahmed S. during this and demanded to know if Ahmed S. was expelling him. At this point, Ahmed directly responded to Shaun again explaining that Shaun was not being expelled because he was not considered a member and that there needs to be a process including the Boston District and Steering Committee. He went on to say that Shaun was leading people into a cul-de-sac that would lead them out of the organization. Sarah, in keeping with the straw-man argumentation of their side, demanded to know if Ahmed was calling them brainwashed. Again, we note that the Saturday meeting was attended by Amanda, Sarah B and Neil (who is conveniently not listed in their argument, and also identifies as male) - 3 supporters for Shaun who have signed documents and statements together, as a team for months. For the comrades to now separate Neil out of the equation in order to gain sympathy for their side by charging Ahmed with sexism is the lowest form of discourse and clear obfuscation. Ahmed responded to Sarah by arguing against their approach of going around the District to bring Shaun back into the organization and their defense of their actions based on their legalistic sense of the rules of membership (I added this because I think people should know what he argued which they have purposely ignored). As was argued in their letter, Neil, Sarah, and Amanda repeatedly made the

point that "Individuals apply for membership to branches [their emphasis]. This is not a bureaucratic maneuver--these are the rules. If the national leadership decides that there should be extra conditions for Shaun's membership, that needs to be explicitly stated and should be politically motivated." While there is much to say on this, we want to simply state here that we disagree with this federalized approach to building a revolutionary organization. First, Shaun is not just a contact we met on a paper sale, but was a long-term member with a fractious relationship to the district who left in a public way and, in the words of the his supporters has an "ongoing engagement" with former members of the ISO who are attacking our organization, not simply raising critiques. Added to this is the simple reality - one that we put to the Cambridge/Harvard members at the Nov. 16th meeting to which they had no response - that ISO members are actually not individual members of branches. Rather, our membership is considered as such when we pay national dues, adhere to a nationally agreed upon set of political principles, consider our leadership as that which is voted on by the organization and by local branches and districts; and sell a national newspaper. The comrades had no response to these political arguments on Nov. 16th, and in fact have never produced anything but bureaucratic maneuvers in place of political discussion.

The Role of Now-Faction Members in the Boston District

We think it's important to highlight the crisis mongering and undemocratic approach now-faction members have taken in Boston. It is egregious to us that Amanda, Sarah, Neil and Yuval in their letter state that "The intervention of the regional organizer, and now the Steering Committee, has made the crisis worse [their emphasis] and militated against a political [their emphasis] solution, effectively scapegoating Shaun for all the problems--and legitimating the way that Shaun was run out of the group." The fact is that on November 21st, the Cambridge Branch Committee (Amanda HG and Sarah B), along with Neil P and Yuval S boycotted a voted on rescheduled District Pre-Convention meeting, effectively side-stepping any political solution or open, democratic discussion at all. We urge those comrades to stop being selective in how they view democracy and crises, and see their own role in continuing to exacerbate a situation that the majority of members in the District want to discuss collectively.

On August 29, a few days after our branch returned from the national March on Washington, Shaun J resigned from the Boston branch. The current narrative is that an attack on Shaun's character from the elected leadership of his branch (particularly from Khury PS and Alpana M) led to the resignation. We addressed this in Bulletin #7. However, we want to address Renewal Faction members who have formed a faction mainly around the "ordeal" they believe Shaun J has suffered. Shaun's behavior had been addressed with him repeatedly over the years in less public settings. His public scorn at members of his own branch especially in the days and weeks around August 29th baited an already fed-up membership that were further outraged by the derision of another member by Shaun, comrade Sofia A, that led to her taking a leave of absence earlier that week on August 26. Earlier that month Shaun attacked Sofia, a pet target of his, on Facebook. She defended herself as did others but we know that that public attack was one in a long series of personal antagonisms against someone who was vocal in their disagreements with Shaun. On August 29, Shaun attacked comrade Keith R on Facebook, leading to public confrontation about Shaun's behavior. We charge that it was because Shaun was now being held publicly accountable that he resigned. He knew that his usual method was no longer being tolerated.

Once Shaun resigned the people that now constitute the Renewal Faction began laying the groundwork by which Shaun could return and simultaneously duck any accountability within the branch. Those now-faction members argued for a separate branch in Harvard/Cambridge in part, as they later said in individual meetings with Khury and Alpana, as well as with Ahmed, to ease the way for Shaun to rejoin. Our expectation was that that process would be part of a discussion with the entire district, but the faction has rejected this democratic process

At an October 11th district meeting, Alpana M. and Khury PS argued that despite many lingering questions, a national petition that clearly showed an undemocratic method amongst now-faction members, and regular and open flouting of district democracy, our district should try and move forward by continuing to maintain 2 branches (Cambridge/Harvard and Dorchester) while we continued to debate out perspectives. Alpana argued firmly for Amanda HG to be brought on to the District Committee as an elected BC member and

Branch Organizer for the Cambridge/Harvard branch, in keeping with actual democratic norms. The goal of this approach was to help move both branches forward, particularly using the National Committee resolutions on re-centering SW routines and the NC Education plan as central to branch and party building. A branch report by Alpana assessing the important steps forward that Dorchester had taken were indicative that we were moving forward, while at the same time continuing to figure out how to address continuous questions and disagreements within the District. We make this point to caution against any knee jerk acceptance of the narrative of "ongoing crisis" and attacks on "dissent" that the faction argues exists. The flagrant disregard of forward momentum at its beginning stages by comrades who are now in the faction, especially by inviting Shaun J to a Pre-Convention meeting with zero discussion with the rest of the District Committee and with an utter disregard for the thoughts and wishes of the entire Dorchester branch, is hardly in keeping with any democratic norms.

At a District Meeting on December 7 attended by Keeanga-Yamahtta T and Ahmed, Neil P in his speech for the faction, stated that the faction had formed to protect itself from bureaucratic maneuvers by the ISO leadership. We find this non-political reasoning behind the creation of a faction in opposition to the seriousness of the task we undertake as revolutionaries.

Despite verbally committing to a democratic process within the District around a variety of questions including those related to Shaun's membership, these members instead carried out various problematic and utterly undemocratic maneuvers that have poisoned the waters. We believe that their approach was not accidental, but rather one that they used to maintain a situation of "crisis" when district meetings attempted to chart a way forward in order to create a platform for their political method. This method has repeatedly been rejected by most of our district. According to their own faction rules, the faction is beholden to itself, rather than to any democratic decisions made by either the district they belong to, or the organization. We hope comrades reject the Renewal Faction as an illegitimate and parasitic body within our organization that has not created more discourse, but rather scurried from it.

Akunna E, Alpana M, Khury PS

ADDENDUM A

On Nov 14, 2013, 4:23 PM, Amanda HG wrote:

Hi Comrades,

My apology for the delayed response--I've been in meetings for most of the day. I emailed both Keith and Shaun right after I emailed the two of you, inviting them to the meeting. Both of them were in good standing when they left and have expressed the desire to rejoin, which the branch has discussed and is in support of, as was Ahmed when we last spoke.

Last night, several members suggested that they both come to the district meeting. We think that would be the best place to have conversations about "reconciliation" moving forward. I think this process is best facilitated within the organization. I don't think either of them rejoining means that any of the conversations we've been having are over--far from it. But I think that future conversations can and will be best had within the district and branches with both of them as members of the organization. My understanding of the rules is that membership is the province of individual branches, barring disciplinary action. When I last spoke with Shaun, he said that Ahmed communicated to him what he had communicated to Neil, Sarah, and myself--that he thought Shaun should be rejoin before convention and that he should be reintegrated through the Cambridge branch.

Solidarity,

Amanda

On Thu, Nov 14, 2013 at 1:03 PM, Khury PS wrote:

hey comrades

I'm not playing any formal role in the district right now, so this is just my two cents.

I would also put the question of Shaun's membership in a different category than Keith's, both because of the context in which he left and what has happened since. Among other things, the question of him rejoining is now, it seems to me, one that goes beyond Boston. That is, it is something that the National Office would have to be involved with. This is both because a document regarding Shaun's membership was signed by comrades in multiple cities and published in the national internal organ, and because there has been an ongoing set of conversations between Shaun and the National Office. These are now factors in Shaun's relationship to the ISO locally.

Also, putting aside the question of whether/how he should rejoin for a second, I think that it would be the wrong call to have him attend the meeting tonight. Given that there are very much unresolved questions, debates, and assessments regarding Shaun's membership in the district, I believe that his coming tonight would become a matter unto itself, distracting from the goals of the meeting.

solidarity

khury

On Thu, Nov 14, 2013 at 11:36 AM, Alpana M wrote:

Hi - I think a different orientation is warranted around Shaun and we should figure out a plan for meeting with him. I don't support Shaun coming to the District meeting tonight.

On Thu, Nov 14, 2013 at 11:33 AM, Amanda HG wrote:

Hey Comrades,

Both Shaun, and more recently, Keith, have reached out about rejoining. We wanted to make time in the branch to discuss member reintegration, which we were able to do last night. The conversation was quite productive, and everyone supported them both rejoining. Given that conversation, I think it makes sense for them both to be at the meeting tonight. Sarah and I are also planning to meet with Keith either this weekend or early next week to talk about his role in the branch.

Thanks,

Amanda

On Thu, Nov 14, 2013 at 10:14 AM, Alpana M wrote:

That's great news on Keith. I think this sounds fine.

On Wed, Nov 13, 2013 at 6:44 PM, Khury PS wrote:

hey comrades

Keith texted me to say that he's ready to get back re-engaged with the ISO, which is a fantastic and exciting development! Amanda, he told me that he connected with you about it. He asked if there was anything I suggest he do to plug back in. The immediate thing that came to mind is tomorrow night's district meeting, which I think it would be great if he attended. But I wanted to check in with you both before inviting him. I did tell Keith that I'm no longer part of the formal leadership.

Peace
Khury

ADDENDUM B

On Nov 15, 2013 10:40 PM, Neil P wrote: This meeting time works for me as well. -Neil

On Nov 15, 2013 10:27 PM, "Amanda HG" wrote: Border sounds good to me, as does an agenda. I'll reach out to Shaun. Amanda

On Fri, Nov 15, 2013 at 10:20 PM, Sarah wrote: Hi Comrades, I am available then, and also think it makes sense to have Shaun be part if the conversation. Either place is fine with me - I've never been to Dosa, so can't speak to the seating. Having to relocate would be a pain, so playing it safe with a reservation at Border seems like a good call. Should we have an agenda? Solidarity, Sarah

On Nov 15, 2013, at 9:53 PM, Alpana M wrote: Since there will be a large number of us, what about meeting at Border Cafe in Harvard Square? I can make a reservation. That's fine for Shaun to be there if you feel he should be. Can you communicate with him on that? I had already said to him that I would try and figure out a meeting with him and Ahmed, so I know he's free at our meeting time. Just let us know. See you at 12:30. - Alpana

On Nov 15, 2013 9:27 PM, "Amanda HG" wrote: Hey Comrades, A meeting tomorrow at Dosa Factory sounds good. I think it would be useful for Shaun to join us for the meeting tomorrow, which I know was discussed on Thursday. Has anyone reached out to/invited him? Amanda

On Fri, Nov 15, 2013 at 6:37 PM, Khury PS wrote:

Hello all, This sounds like a good plan. What if we meet at Dosa Factory in Central? -Khury

On Fri, Nov 15, 2013 at 3:29 PM, Alpana M wrote: Hi Comrades, Given that Ahmed is in town this weekend and available to meet Saturday afternoon, I want to propose that the current branch leadership bodies, along with Neil (who I think is not on the BC, yes?) and Khury, meet with him tomorrow. Given the arguments raised at last night's meeting about Shaun's membership, what Ahmed may have said to Cambridge comrades on that issue, along with questions about the role of the National Office and Steering Committee regarding that process, I think it would be good for us all to meet and clarify what that process might look like with Ahmed there. Can folks meet at 12:30pm? With that many people, where should we meet? Perhaps a room at Harvard? My house is available also if people want. In Solidarity, Alpana

Proposal for a National Reproductive Justice Working Group

The purpose of this document is to propose the formation of a national reproductive justice working group within the ISO that can collaborate and contribute to the development of our theory and approach to the question of Marxism and women's liberation specifically in relationship to reproductive justice organizing.

In this age of neoliberal austerity, the lives of women workers and the entire working class are being attacked both at the point of production as well as in the sphere of reproduction. The attacks on the public sector and low income communities impact women and women of color the most. These austerity attacks come down the heaviest in areas like public education because these jobs are part of reproductive labor and do not produce a profit for the capitalists, and because of women's reproductive role within capitalism, women occupy many of these jobs. Attacks on teachers and their unions, attacks on public education of course negatively impact those directly employed in the field, but they also negatively impact working class women with children and working class families more broadly. As a result, the labor movement as a whole is being weakened. As Marxists, we understand that these attacks on women members of the working class come in the reproductive sphere in addition to the productive sphere. Part of this is to shift as much as possible the costs for social reproduction onto individual workers in an attempt to restore profitability to the capitalist system; it is also the case that these attacks weaken the ability of the working class as a whole to fight back at the point of production.

Attacks in the reproductive sphere are intensifying nationally and have been accelerating over the past few years. As a left, for historical reasons, we have been unable to pose a sustained fight-back against these attacks. However, the massive protests and the temporary victory in Texas and the fight-backs that have been sparking nationally from Walk for Choice to Slut Walk to various states where people have been fighting back at a grassroots' level demonstrates the potential and willingness of oppressed people to fight back against these attacks in the reproductive sphere.

At last year's convention in 2013, we voted as an organization to "devote resources in the coming year, based on decisions of branches and districts, to further developing members' understanding of the politics of Marxism, feminism and women's liberation. Branches and districts will seek to apply this discussion to practical activity, including the struggle around abortion and reproductive rights, against sexual violence and rape, and other anti-sexist activity." As a branch and as an organization we have stuck to this commitment and as a result we have seen much political maturation of the organization on these questions. However, in our current political moment, there is even more potential for growth on these questions-growth that the formation of a national reproductive justice working group could help to facilitate in a more systematic and centralized manner.

Members of the ISO throughout the nation are involved in the process of developing our politics of Marxism, feminisms, and women's liberation and to varying degrees with the struggle to defend and expand reproductive rights. In addition to that, there are many locations nationally where members would like to be more involved with this type of organizing and practical activity.

In the absence of a national movement, there is still much activism that can be done that can strengthen the reproductive justice fight-back, build grassroots' feminist organizations, develop theory, build activists' and ISO members' confidence, and recruit members to the ISO. Some may argue that the level of struggle is too low or that we should wait to form a working group until we test the waters more, but I think the formation of a working group will allow us as an organization to better respond to these attacks.

The purpose of such a working group would be to further develop our politics and activities around reproductive justice. I am calling for the formation of a national list-serv to be utilized by organizers involved in reproductive justice work, and a bi-monthly (or as needed) conference call. My resolution is below, and if found necessary and appropriate, I can help set-up and run a national list-serv.

The formation of such a list-serv would allow organizers to share articles related to the history of feminist movements, the role of socialists in the fight against women's oppression, and the articles related to our current moment. The formation of such a working group would allow us to gain a better understanding of many key questions and help our strategical development on these questions both now and in the long run. The development of a tool like a national reproductive justice list-serv is not meant to replace any of our organization's publications, but could actually help facilitate contributions to them. In addition to expanding the number of women we have writing for our publications on theoretical issues, we also need to expand our habit of reporting back to the organization on meetings, fundraisers, and events. Through such a working group, we will be able to collaborate in a more organized way for publication in the ISR, SW, and internal bulletin.

Through my own involvement within a local women's liberation fraction, my confidence and willingness to speak has developed by leaps and bounds. The development of a reproductive justice working group on a national scale would help facilitate the development of women (and men) cadre on a larger scale. My experience locally has also demonstrated that a long-term approach of implantation in women's justice organizing has helped to build our periphery, our reputation as an organization, and has recruited many of our best women, LGBTQ, and people of color in the branch. It also put us in a better position in North Texas to respond quickly and with a greater force when the anti-abortion legislation HB2 was being proposed and passed in Texas because we already had an organization built through local struggles and responses to national and international struggles. The formation of such an organization has also put us in a better position within North Texas to fight for and engage in a grassroots struggle for reproductive justice.

I am calling for a national working group with a focus on reproductive justice specifically because I think that it would help to provide a focus around which we are organizing. However, I do not see this working group in the long-term as excluding issues more directly related to labor at the point of production (like unequal pay).

It is beyond the scope of this document, but I also think we should begin to consider the formation of a national women's and transgender caucus. From what I have witnessed and learned within the organization and through reading some pre-convention documents from this year's pre-convention period, many members throughout the country have experienced sexism or other forms of discrimination within the organization. I do not think we are at a crisis point within the organization, but I do think the development of such a caucus would be healthy for the organization as a whole.

RESOLUTION:

I am proposing the formation of a national reproductive justice working group within the ISO. If passed, in order to ensure that this working group can begin to function, I am proposing that the Steering Committee be entrusted to appoint someone who is willing within 30 days of the end of the convention to form and facilitate a national list-serv for the sharing of articles and approaches to reproductive justice organizing among members who are involved or want to be involved with reproductive justice organizing. Furthermore, I am proposing that the Steering Committee work with members of said working group to organize bi-monthly or as needed conference calls related to reproductive justice organizing.

Submitted by Elizabeth C., Denton, TX
