

# Pre-convention Bulletin #25 / February 14, 2014

for members only

---

	Page
<a href="#"><u>Convention information and deadlines</u></a>	<b>1</b>
 <a href="#"><u>Documents</u></a>	
<b>Two-part document:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>My personal experience with the ISO's disciplinary process</b> Meredith R, Portland	
<b>On the disciplinary process and the aftermath</b> Camille A, Portland	
<b>The 2010 Document “Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO”: A Reassessment of Our Response</b>	<b>5</b>
The NYC District Committee of 2010: Amy M., Brian J, Danny K, Hadas T, Jennifer R, Kyle B, Lee W, Leia P, Lichi D, Lucy H, Matt S, Megan B	
<b>Critique of Divestment Organizing Strategy &amp; Perspectives from the South</b>	<b>13</b>
Kels F, Morgan L, Denton, TX	
<b>Seattle Education Association (SEA) Update 2.10.14</b>	<b>15</b>
Dan T, Seattle	
<b>SC Report on ISO Technology Initiatives</b>	<b>17</b>
ISO Steering Committee	

---

## 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](mailto:sharon@internationalsocialist.org).

---

Documents

---

## **The document below is submitted by Meredith R. and Camille A.; Portland, OR**

### My personal experience with the ISO's disciplinary process

I don't know how to write this document. It's not something I ever imagined putting out there and it's something I almost never talk about, unless I have to.

For three years I was in an abusive relationship with, at that time, a longtime member of the ISO. Although the physical violence is the most shocking, people who have been through something like this will probably agree with me that it's the emotional abuse that takes the longest to heal. This is made more complex and challenging by the fact that he is no longer a member of the ISO **but he** continues to organize politically in Portland. This means that on a somewhat frequent basis I have to address questions from Portland activists of whether he was kicked out of the ISO and for what reasons.

**Since the Renewal Faction has started and because of other local movement work I have done**, these questions have come up more frequently. My aim in writing this document is to help other comrades in Portland respond to these specific questions (many of whom are not familiar with the situation), as well as add my own reflection into the mix when the convention discusses disciplinary procedures.

First, Comrade **X** and I dated for two years before he finally convinced me to come to an ISO event—in this case it was the Socialism Conference in 2007 and I was immediately hooked, having read all of his books already and engaged in lengthy discussions. Once I joined the ISO I threw myself into activism and political education.

Several times over that first year after having joined the ISO, I was aware of Comrade **X's** misogynist behavior—including class-baiting and reducing female comrades and contacts to tears. His excuse was always alcohol-related.

In the summer of 2008, the cops were called and I fled our apartment in fear for my safety. Shortly thereafter, saying that he felt badly about his actions, Comrade **X** seriously injured himself in front of me and was taken by ambulance to the hospital.

At this point I became afraid for my life, recognizing that Comrade X might actually kill me or himself. Days later I learned from another member that two women had come forward with complaints that Comrade X was intimidating and had pressured them sexually. This sequence of events scared and infuriated me enough that over the next several months, I left Comrade X and busied myself with political work, relating to the economic crisis. I did not share my experience with others.

Then in June 2009, almost a year since I had moved out of Comrade X's apartment, I began dating again—a new comrade who was in the same union as Comrade X. One night we stopped outside the bar Comrade X was frequenting—my boyfriend had to pick something up from him. The evening ended abruptly when Comrade X forced his way into my car, threatened me, and kicked out the windshield.

I did try to diminish it, I tried to bury it away, but my current boyfriend wouldn't have it. He pressed the issue with the branch committee and ultimately he encouraged me to share (in a special meeting with BC) what had really gone on in my relationship with Comrade X.

From there I have little knowledge about what happened formally or informally with regard to Comrade X's membership.

Reflecting back on it now I think that the leadership handled the situation as well as they could, considering I was not a very forthcoming complainant. I think with more experience, the issues of Comrade X's sexist behavior could have been handled more swiftly or more definitively, but truthfully I hold myself partly to blame for that blind spot, since I was on the branch committee much of the time in question, and my relationship with him provided him cover. Also, I think the significant changes in the ways our branch has been discussing gender, sexual relations, and oppression over the past two years has made the organization even less hospitable towards misogynists and more on guard for discriminatory or intimidating behavior than we were before. In preparing this document, the first written account of the whole traumatic ordeal, I have also come to realize that it took way too long for me to get out of a dangerous situation—and way too long for me to share it with others. It has been five years since I survived that relationship, and yet I still feel scared and upset at the sound of his name and I still feel weak, ashamed, and embarrassed all at once when I think about what I let him get away with.

I felt for a long time that discussing it might be some kind of detriment to the organization, or that this personal situation is too much of a distraction from our political work—and maybe it is—but these issues will come up again and again in our organizing, so I'm glad that it is being addressed head on. I will point out the most important aspect of seeking help for me, and that was having an advocate—someone who was not on the branch committee who could help navigate the process, even when I was too much of a mess to handle it.

I do not believe the ISO should be expected to be the social worker, mediator, counselor, attorney, judge, jury or anything else beyond having a fair process for determining questions around membership—but I also know that in practice, the personal and political support I have received from my comrades as well as national leadership probably saved my life.

**Meredith R.**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **On the disciplinary process and the aftermath**

In 2009, I informed Comrade X that he was suspended from the organization for one year, that he was never to be in a branch with Meredith again, and that he could not rejoin any branch until he contacted the Steering Committee, quit drinking, and had sought help for his issues with anger and misogyny. This decision to suspend this comrade came from the Steering Committee, the conditions of which were crafted by those closest to the situation. This was not the first time Comrade X had been asked to leave a branch since he had previously punched another member (in a different part of the country) in the face. For far too

long this story was passed around as if it was some hilarious anecdote, as if it was just some sort of mix up rather than a pattern of behavior.

To put this into perspective, the Portland branch at the time was at the MOST ten members. Comrade X was a union member and a very active comrade. The branch had only started just shy of three years prior to this with one (very) long standing member and no hardened cadre, experienced and capable of handling this situation. The average age of the branch was 23-26. This is just meant to further contextualize the situation; by no means is it any kind of excuse for the mistakes made surrounding this.

It was widely known that Comrade X had a terrible drinking problem, on which he leaned heavily to excuse his grossly misogynist behavior. In fact, before I ever even moved to Portland from the Bay Area in 2008, I had heard several stories of his “antics,” such as showing up to a branch meeting wasted, yelling at people in bars, and drunkenly hitting on contacts and comrades. Later it came out that he sexually assaulted an ally (who wishes to remain anonymous) as well as harassed a close friend of mine (no longer a member) telling her that she “wasn’t a real revolutionary” because she was in a monogamous relationship and didn’t want to fuck him. Yet, it was only when Meredith’s partner pushed the issue that Branch Committee saw fit to deal with the situation, despite having previously received an email from a contact describing his sexist, abusive behavior. Unfortunately, we had all assumed that someone else had responded to her allegations. No one had.

Due to his repeated abusive behavior towards women generally, many of the women in leadership felt unequipped to challenge him. I think his behavior was harder for male comrades to piece together since Comrade X, like the true abuser he is, isolated women, making sure that no one was around to hear. He used class-baiting as a tactic, telling women supposedly more privileged than him that they were just being snobby and classist for calling him out or not wanting to sleep with him.

Most of this was all brought into the light during the Branch Committee meeting that Meredith has recounted. We discussed the issue, admitted that many, many, mistakes had been made in the lead up to this situation and contacted the Steering Committee for advice on how to handle the situation. Comrade X already had a reputation for being inflammatory and even shit-talking the ISO while he was still a member. We feared that any kind of move on the part of the local leadership body would be fuel to a fire that was inevitably coming.

The Branch convener and I sat down with Comrade X at a coffee shop to inform him of the Steering Committee’s decision to suspend his activity within the organization. He became visibly upset and attempted to argue, but I repeated what I had already said and again informed him that he would have to contact the Steering Committee if he wanted to appeal their decision.

Sure enough, Comrade X kicked the rumor mill telling labor allies and anyone who would listen that he had been “kicked out” of the ISO. He never contacted the Steering Committee, as far as I know, and within a year began developing a plan to start a chapter of the Internationalist Group, **a spin off of the Spartacus League**, in Portland with another former member. Comrade X was/is incapable of owning up to his actions, instead burying his head in the sectarian sand and attempting to delegitimize the work we do as an organization by spreading lies.

Looking back on the situation, it seems to me we were incredibly naive leading up to the actual suspension of this member, especially in not dealing with the contact’s email or addressing the not-so-funny-in-hindsight stories about Comrade X and his generally manipulative/abusive behavior. I am hoping that comrades can learn from what we are sharing to look out for signs of abusive behavior and misogyny no matter how small your branch is. I am absolutely sure that we lost and never recruited a number of women due to this man’s behavior.

**Camille A.**

---

## **The 2010 Document “Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO”: A Reassessment of Our Response**

In the fall of 2013, the NYC district re-opened a discussion of an exchange of documents that had originally taken place in the spring of 2010. This exchange had involved questions related to the recruitment and development of comrades of color. We now believe that the approach taken by the NYC district committee in this discussion was wrong. We don't think that every mistake that individual comrades or the organization makes needs to be formally evaluated, but we do think those made by the NYC district committee in 2010 were significant enough to warrant such an assessment. While we don't believe that the district committee response accurately expressed the politics of the ISO, it is necessary to assess how we could have gotten it so wrong.

We are writing this for the convention and our membership in the hope that this assessment can contribute to developing more fruitful discussion on complicated questions as we develop as an organization. We are attaching here both of the original 2010 documents. We understand that there are those outside of the organization who would like to use this discussion to discredit us. However, we think that it is more important that our own members have an opportunity to acknowledge and learn from our mistakes.

The original document, “Recruiting, Retaining and Developing Comrades of Color”, argued that the ISO should make its goals for recruiting and training members of color more explicit, devote more resources to developing members of color as organizational leaders, educate members of color specifically in the politics of their own oppression, and implement an affirmative action system for delegates and guests to the annual Convention. Unfortunately, the district committee's response was defensive and un-comradely.

Instead of engaging directly with the issues raised, we wrote a response that was structured as a polemic against identity politics and that argued that "Recruiting, Retaining..." was non-Marxist. This was both a wrong characterization of the initial document as well as a charge that serves to dismiss concerns that we should welcome. Furthermore, our polemic led us to make a number of crude arguments that do not adequately express our understanding of the Marxist approach to oppression. While comrades can read and assess our document for themselves, we will point out a few of the most obvious problems with our response.

Our argument that there are no such things as communities of color mischaracterized the original authors' point and put us in the absurd position of picking an argument over a colloquial expression. Moreover, explaining that oppressed groups are themselves divided by class is true but is only one aspect of the question. The ISO has also always argued that racism, sexism and other forms of oppression affect oppressed people of all classes, and that revolutionaries must be, in Lenin's words, "trained to respond to all instances of oppression no matter what class it affects". We falsely counter-posed the development of comrades of color as fully developed Marxists on all questions to the suggestion that comrades of color have a particular role to play in building a more multi-racial organization. In fact, we've always understood that the development of a multi-racial cadre is critical to the building of a multi-racial organization in the US. Finally, we wrongly interpreted the authors' assertion that no organization is color-blind as an accusation that the ISO itself was racist.

The entire thrust of our response was defensive. While this was not at all our intention, the impact was to send a signal that the kinds of questions and suggestions raised in "Recruiting, retaining..." were not welcome. For revolutionaries committed to building multi-racial organization this is the opposite of the atmosphere we would like to create.

While some of us may have felt uneasy about how we had handled things or how events had unfolded, none of us had gone back and re-read the exchange until 2013. The decision to re-open this discussion was prompted by two members of color on our current district committee who privately, and separately, raised the issue with some of us who had been part of the 2010 district committee.

Since 2010, our district had undertaken several initiatives to both deepen our politics around black liberation and to try to advance our development of comrades of color. In the fall of 2010, we held a day school on Black Liberation and Socialism for which we read widely on the development of racism in the US and the history of the revolutionary approach to this question. The following year, as part of a national initiative, we held an intensive summer study series on the same topic. We also began to meet with more success (though still extremely modest) in recruiting and developing more members of color.

To be clear, our district (like the organization as a whole) has always put the fight against racism at its center. We maintained an active chapter of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, with the help of experienced cadre, for close to 15 years. We have been active in virtually every fight around police brutality in the city over the last two decades and made the fight against racist school closures central to our public education work, and anti-racist work has also been central to our campus branches over these same years.

But in the last 4 years it seems clear that our district and organization have matured and deepened our politics and activity in this area. A national focus on re-educating comrades around the centrality of the fight against racism (and especially anti-black racism) in US history and politics has helped to develop our district. These developments helped make possible the re-evaluation of the 2010 documents this past summer.

Once this discussion was started, it became clear that our document was still being discussed both inside and outside of the organization. Individuals who were hostile to the ISO had circulated our document online in 2010. In NYC, many of our members of color were presented with the document, which was used in an attempt to discredit them for being members of a "white organization". Our members were put in an impossible situation of either having to defend our indefensible document or feeling unequipped to answer the charges against us. It also became clear that the initial debate in 2010 and the hostile way in which we responded to "Recruiting, retaining..." made members less confident to raise similar questions.

As a result, we've concluded that it is a problem that this document has been circulated as our position without any formal repudiation from us. Our concern is not with the opinions of those already hostile to us. Our concern is that our members and allies understand that the arguments put forward in our document do not accurately reflect the politics of the ISO or our understanding of Marxism. Nor do they meet the standards of comradely debate that we should strive for.

This then obviously raises the question of how we could have made such a mistake. Our experience trying to come to terms with this mistake highlights some of the challenge of retrospectively assessing things we got wrong in contexts that are very different from today. There were a whole set of reasons why we responded as we did - some of which have relevance and that we can learn from and some that are highly contextual.

First, there were highly specific dynamics internal to our district at the time that led to an already polarized atmosphere when the discussion first emerged. While these are not particularly useful to review four years later for a national audience, they can't be underestimated in shaping our response.

Second, we were in fact actually defensive. As stated earlier, our district has had a very strong orientation around anti-racist organizing and politics - work that has required a lot of hard effort and did not, in most cases, immediately translate into growth for the ISO. At the same time, our racial composition was not what we want it to be. When comrades raised suggestions for how we could improve and systematize our recruitment and development efforts, we took it as an attack rather than a constructive attempt to help build the organization.

Finally, given the prevalence of identity politics on the left, we were predisposed to view this discussion through that lens. For much of the ISO's history, identity politics were a fragmenting force in social movements and represented a full-scale retreat from class politics. Many of us had seen movements organized solely around identity (e.g., Queer Nation, Lesbian Avengers, Women's Action Coalition) rise and fall rapidly. Thus, we saw identity politics as playing a primarily negative role and winning people

away from these politics and to Marxism as a central priority. This does not mean, as it's sometimes caricatured, that we simply polemicized with people every time they used the words feminism, benefit or privilege. However, we did see these politics as a major challenge to Marxism and were particularly attuned to the their influence within the organization.

In the context of a rightward drift in black politics and the increasing hold of the Democratic Party among political and community leaders in the 1980s and 1990s, our racial composition was often used as a pretext for what was actually hostility to our radical politics. This history meant that we were used to having to fight for space for our ideas in anti-racist struggles, which meant that we often dismissed critiques of our racial composition because we understood them as critiques of our politics overall.

Thus, most of our experience was one of swimming against the stream and having to fight to defend our organization and politics. While that posture may have allowed us to survive a difficult period, as well as contribute to emerging anti-racist struggles, we can now see how it may also have shaped a mistaken approach towards our own comrades raising genuine questions about our racial composition.

By the late 2000's, these dynamics were shifting. While identity politics remained (and still remain) influential, a growing radicalization around class inequality meant that there was also an opening to class politics. This contradictory situation actually requires a higher level of politics to enable us to both recognize the ways in which people are moving in our direction while also arguing for the centrality of Marxist politics, which have a unique understanding of the relationship between exploitation and oppression. As this year's pre-convention discussion demonstrates, this is a question that we are still deepening our understanding of today.

All of which brings us back to today. We began an evaluation of this discussion in our district in order to acknowledge that we were wrong in our original approach and to consciously re-open the discussion that comrades raised initially about how to build a multi-racial organization and leadership. This document does not take a position on the questions and proposals raised by "Recruiting, Retaining..." In fact, it is likely that there are disagreements among us about how best to accomplish our shared goals.

But we don't think any of the ideas that were raised should be treated in any way as a challenge to Marxism. Furthermore, we believe that this discussion should be marked by frank, open debate and we would like to take responsibility for our role in creating an environment that inhibited that. These discussions may involve sharp arguments but those should assume a basic level of agreement with our commitment to Marxism and the building of a multi-racial revolutionary organization.

In many ways, our response in 2010 reflected a leadership that was less confident and politically sophisticated than we would wish. There were likely many important discussions and debates that we could have had about the issues raised in the document. These include: the relative weight of objective and subjective factors in influencing our ability to recruit members of color; what type of special measures we might need to take to prioritize the development of comrades of color; what it means to have an affirmative action policy for political development and leadership roles in the context of a small revolutionary organization.

These are questions that a revolutionary organization should be able to discuss and on which it is possible for Marxists to have a range of opinions. The discussion also highlights the need for us to continue to understand and assimilate the experience and lessons of the revolutionary Marxist tradition in its approach to oppression. We hope that assessing our mistaken approach in 2010 can contribute to a process of collectively taking on, both theoretically and practically, the challenges and opportunities in our future.

**The NYC District Committee of 2010: Amy M., Brian J, Danny K, Hadas T, Jennifer R, Kyle B, Lee W, Leia P, Lichi D, Lucy H, Matt S, Megan B**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Addendum A:**

**Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO  
(Pre-Convention Bulletin #9, March 11, 2010)**

The goal of this document is to begin an organization-wide conversation about racial and ethnic diversity in the ISO and our efforts and strategies to recruit, develop, and retain more members of color into it. It must first be acknowledged however, that our knowledge of the history of how this topic has been addressed in the organization is limited in this document since we are relatively new members who joined around 2004-06. Thus, we have tried to gather information on the subject of diversity from other comrades who have been in the organization longer than we have. It must be clear that although we are specifically speaking of racial and ethnic diversity in this document, we understand that similar questions can be asked about the recruitment of other people of oppressed identities.

It is our hope that our document is not dismissed as one coming from a framework of identity politics, but rather as an honest attempt to begin discussing the efforts we have made and are making to diversify our organization. We understand this discussion to be important because as members of color in a principled antiracist organization, we see a strong relationship between a racially diverse organization and our fight against racism under capitalism.

Organizationally, the ISO argues that it is only through the unification of the working class across racial lines (along with other “lines”) that we can defeat capitalism. As such, it’s crucial that the ISO builds a cadre organization of Marxists that reflects this diverse collaboration needed within the working class. Further, a diverse organization will make it easier to build a larger periphery of color and to recruit from this periphery. Finally, having more comrades, and importantly cadre of color will facilitate our participation in struggles in minority communities and subsequently, recruitment from these struggles. In this document we will assess the efforts being made to increase diversity in our local branches and then make some recommendations on a few steps we can take to address this need to diversify.

First, we understand that there are certain political explanations for why diversity is low in the ISO that is out of the organization’s control. For example, we are aware of the difficulties faced by our organization during this period of the late Cold War and the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. Further, the legacy of Maoist influence on the left during the 60s & 70s, the racist ruling class backlash against the civil rights and black power movements after the 70’s, as well as the cooptation of remnants of black civil rights activist into the democratic party can be factored into the lack of an organized left altogether and the lack of diversity within the revolutionary left.

Despite the ups and downs of struggles during the transitional period in the last three decades, we have done a great job building our organization and diversifying it through organizing around the CEDP, anti-police brutality/racial profiling, immigrant rights, antiapartheid, anti-islamaphobia, Palestine solidarity, Jena 6, Haiti solidarity etc. Also, our Haymarket publications has provided us the historical and theoretical tools to organize against racism. Although such growth is significant, we still have ways to go in increasing the diversity of our organization.

As members in the New York City district, we are aware of numerous efforts that have been made to engage in anti-racist struggles and recruit from these. For example, the Queens branch was launched specifically to pursue work in the Latino community around immigrant rights as well as LGBT work. We also do CEDP work in Harlem, a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood and help found the Grassroots education movement (GEM) that is oriented towards school closings and other public school issues that mainly affect minority communities.

These are important efforts for us to engage and have proved worthwhile in terms of the impact we are having in these areas. While we are conscious of these efforts targeting diversity, we ask ourselves why the NYC district (and other areas in our organization) still has such low numbers of members of color.

After reflecting on our own experiences in numerous branches, we have concluded that there should be an organization-wide consciousness in our efforts to recruit, train and retain diversity in the ISO and this

should be discussed in branch perspectives and fractions as well. The following are some recommended steps:

1) The explicit mention of recruiting and developing members of color as a serious project in our organizational perspectives. We realize that many organizational leaders (ie, members of branch, district, national, and steering committees) discuss this among themselves but we think this discussion needs to expand beyond those entities and should be included in our national and local perspectives. Although we are an organization of principled anti-racists, we cannot assume this project of diversifying the organization is obvious to everyone, particularly members of color. By discussing it in our perspectives, we can take steps to ensure that it is prioritized uniformly across the organization and that it is clear the seriousness in which we take this task.

2) Development of a systematic approach to membership development, with conscious efforts made towards members of color. While doing this, we should take into consideration how branch size can affect the efficiency of these efforts. From our experiences in New York, it has become apparent that in large branches (of 15 or more, sometimes 35, members), it is extremely difficult for a membership coordinator to meet with each member to follow-up with them on their development. We need to figure out ways to address this issue since it does impact, in this case, the development and retention of members of color. Further, membership coordinators should not shy away from engaging in a dialogue with members of color about their thoughts on diversifying the organization, which currently is not much in practice at least in our local branches.

3) An educational plan that develops our understanding of the socialist arguments on racism and capitalism so that all comrades are confident in leading in antiracist fights and are confident in making our arguments around racism with contacts of color. This process can be facilitated if as an organization we develop a conscious strategy to train comrades of color to have commanding knowledge on specific questions, for example Chicano comrades on questions of ethnic nationalism or Native American comrades on questions of self determination or a Marxist approach to tribal nationalism etc. This of course, should not be seen as an effort to compartmentalize knowledge of certain issues to certain comrades. This education should be motivated on an organization-wide level. However, we do believe that comrades of color provide an important link between their communities and revolutionary Marxism, therefore special attention should be paid in our educational efforts to develop them. However, this approach also recognizes the responsibility of members of color to educate ourselves and to become leaders within our own organization.

4) Affirmative action type approaches to invite developing cadre of color to convention—a period when the highest decision making body of our organization meets to discuss, debate, and vote on political and organizational perspectives. Right now it seems that our main criteria (at least in NYC) for inviting guests is to automatically invite the branch committee, leading cadre, and those who are leading in specific movement work. While this method does make sense, we think it is imperative that developing cadre of color who might not fall into any of these categories have an opportunity to engage in this process.

All these steps can be taken in a way that doesn't tokenize members of color but rather create an environment where it is clear that diversifying organization is a priority and a crucial task in our project. We believe that initiatives like these are necessary because our organization does not exist in an egalitarian socialist vacuum and because there is no such thing as colorblindness. Just like we expect other institutions/organization (many of which we protest) to include diversity development statements in their guiding principles and make structural changes to reflect those principles, we shouldn't expect any less of our organization.

As mentioned above, we hope that this document can serve to open this discussion to the whole organization. We believe that the ISO is at a very important crossroads in our development as a serious force on the left and that developing our membership of color is very important for the future of the organization.

**Hector A. and Emmanuel S., Uptown/City College, NYC, Akua G., Columbia University**

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Addendum B:**

### **Response to “Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO” (2010)**

Comrades who submitted “Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO” stated as their goal: to “begin an organization-wide conversation about racial and ethnic diversity in the ISO and our efforts and strategies to recruit, develop, and retain more members of color into it.” Putting aside for the moment the implication that this discussion has not “begun” in the more than 30 years of the life of the organization, the politics of the document are problematic and non-Marxist.

Despite the authors’ hopes that the document is not “dismissed as one coming from a framework of identity politics,” the politics of the document are in fact based in -- or at *best*, influenced by -- liberal ideas of “diversity” as well as identity politics, “the idea that only those experiencing a particular form of oppression can either define it or fight against it.” (Smith 2008)

A Marxist approach to racism is based on an understanding that it is necessary to build a multi-racial organization and multi-racial working-class struggle because that is the *only way* that either capitalism or oppression can be fought. And a multi-racial struggle needs Marxism and the politics of class solidarity to succeed. As the Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin, put it: “Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected.”

The need for a multi-racial organization and fight-back is not a secondary issue to be discussed (or raised by comrades of color within the organization), but is actually the whole purpose of our project. The question of oppression cannot be separated from an analysis of class exploitation and vice-versa. This is especially the case in the United States, where the historic role of slavery, white supremacy, and Jim Crow segregation have ensured that racism (and particularly racism against African-Americans) has become the key division used and manipulated by the American ruling class.

Of course we are not yet where we want to be in achieving our goal (whether that be regarding the racial composition of the group, our size, or our implementation in the working class), but unless we are dreaming up wish-lists for where we *want* to be, a serious approach to the question would require a concrete assessment of our work, objective challenges, and specific next steps.

Instead, “Recruiting, Developing..” offers a confusing set of broad generalizations regarding objective difficulties, a two sentence throw-away regarding the tremendous anti-racist work of the organization over the years, and vague recommendations which mostly outline the work that the organization already does. Yet implicit in the idea that we need to be “systematic” in our approach to recruiting, developing, and retaining members of color in the ISO, is the assertion that we currently do not. Despite this very serious implication, there is no honest or concrete assessment of our current work anywhere in the document.

A quick look at even the last month in NYC alone would demonstrate the opposite—a city wide tour of Brian Jones speaking on civil rights sit-in movement brought out a multi-racial periphery (and a high proportion of African American contacts in particular) at every stop; a city-wide meeting on Haiti that drew 150 people, chaired by a new member; a Campaign to End the Death Penalty anti-lynching tour; an event at NYU about Marxism, Nationalism, and the Third World; teacher members organizing against school closings in predominantly African-American and Latino neighborhoods; and as always a commitment to develop comrades, and particularly comrades of color, as meeting chairs, speakers, and most of all as Marxists.

### **Liberalism and Identity Politics**

But more problematic than the generally non-concrete, non-serious assessment of our work, the document reads as a liberal appeal to consciousness and the “will” to build a multi-racial organization, as though this

can be achieved by exhorting ourselves to do so, or by developing a more savvy/sophisticated approach. This was also argued by one of the document's authors at convention, who said we need a "more complex" approach to Chicano politics.

In fact, the term "diversity" is itself a liberal term that sees combining as many different kinds of experiences and backgrounds as possible as an end *in of itself*, rather than a means to lead the working class to victory over exploitation and oppression.

The identity politics framework of the document is exposed when the document's authors argue: "We do believe that comrades of color provide an important link between their communities and revolutionary Marxism." This both assumes that Marxism is foreign to the fight against racism (and therefore requires special conduits) and that there are such things as "communities" based on racial identity. In fact, any racial or ethnic group is broken down into its various class components. Working class Blacks are no more a part of Barack Obama's "community" as working class women are part of Hilary Clinton's or gays a part of Barney Frank's.

As Sharon Smith wrote in a 2008 ISR article on identity politics: "There is no such thing as a common, fundamental interest shared by all people who face the same form of oppression. Oppression isn't caused by the race, gender, or sexuality of particular individuals who run the system, but is generated by the very system itself—no matter who's running it."

She argues further, "*Oppression is something that even most white male workers suffer to some degree.* If one were to compare the self-confidence of the vast majority of white male workers to that of the arrogant Hillary Clinton or Condoleezza Rice, it would be clear that something more than personal politics is a determining factor in oppression. The problem is systemic."

Of course possessing a personal "identity," or awareness of oneself as a member of an oppressed group, is an important and legitimate response to experiencing oppression. Smith explains:

No white person can ever understand what it is like to experience racism. No straight person can understand what it is like to experience homophobia. And even among people who are oppressed by racism, every type of experience is different. A Black person and a Native American person, for example, experience racism differently—as does a person from Mexico versus a person from Puerto Rico. A gay man and a lesbian have quite different experiences." **But Personal experience is not the same political strategy, which for Marxists is rooted in an understanding of the systemic nature of oppression under capitalism, and the shared interest of the working class across race, sex, and national borders.** (Emphasis added)

### **Holding the ISO accountable?**

Further, the document argues for affirmative action within the ISO, "because our organization does not exist in an egalitarian socialist vacuum and because there is no such thing as colorblindness. Just like we expect other institutions/organizations (many of which we protest) to include diversity development statements in their guiding principles and make structural changes to reflect those principles, we shouldn't expect any less of our organization."

Here the document's authors compare the ISO to institutions under capitalism that need to be held accountable (and that we in fact protest)! In arguing that "there is no such thing as colorblindness" the comrades that wrote the document seem to be saying that the ISO suffers from racism within our organization. If this is in fact true, it is a grave accusation that needs to be explained.

Of course as individuals who live in an oppressive society, we all carry the internal baggage of that society, or as Marx put it, "the muck of ages." A conscious attempt has to be made to develop women, people of color, working-class people who have been told our whole lives that we are not good enough or smart enough to speak our ideas, let alone lead others.

Yet despite the fact that we don't operate in an "egalitarian vacuum" the fact is that a socialist organization, because of its very nature and goals, has a different material interest than capitalist institutions. It is made up of a self-selecting group of individuals who voluntarily commit our lives to the emancipation of the working-class and liberation of all oppressed groups. As Lenin put it, our vision of revolution is a "festival of the oppressed and exploited." We are bound together by that common purpose and a self-interest in making an organization fitted for that task.

An old debate within the Russian socialist movement helps shed light on this question. The 1903 congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) took up as its first agenda item the Jewish Labor Bund's demand that it be recognized as the representative of Jewish workers living in Russia (to be a conduit, one could say). Jews at that time were of the most oppressed in Russia, living under harsh legal restrictions and terrorized by violent pogroms. The Jewish Bund was a genuine revolutionary organization who adamantly rejected Zionism.

Yet their demand to represent the Jewish working class showed a fundamental distrust of the RSDLP and its handling of oppression against Jews. "The Jewish proletariat," a leader of the Bund argued, "is very much more strongly interested in the struggle against the exceptional restrictions that are imposed on it than the rest of the proletariat is, and for this reason it is also a more active fighter against this oppression."

Leon Trotsky, a leading Russian revolutionary, and himself a Jew, responded:

If the Bund, lacking in confidence in the Party, is...demanding safeguards, that we can understand. But how can we put our signatures to this demand? ... To accept such conditions would mean that we acknowledged our own moral and political bankruptcy...

Lenin argued:

Is it not, in fact, the duty of our entire Party to fight for *full* equality of rights and even for the *recognition* of the right of nations to self-determination? Consequently, if any section of our Party were to fail in this duty, it would undoubtedly be liable to censure, by virtue of our principles: it would undoubtedly be liable to *correction* by the central institutions of the Party. And if that duty was being neglected consciously and deliberately, despite full opportunity to perform it, then this neglect of duty would be *treachery*.

That is to say, if we cannot trust our own revolutionary organization, committed to the full liberation of the human race, through its *own* self-interest to take seriously and systematically the building of a multi-racial organization and cadre, then our organization is not worth very much at all.

## Conclusion

Lastly, the document argues that comrades of color should be specially trained and developed in the politics of their own identities, "Chicano comrades on questions of ethnic nationalism," etc. But the best way to train our *entire* organization to effectively build the movement against oppression and the system which produces oppression is to develop a strong Marxist core. The most effective means to develop comrades of color as cadre is to develop strong Marxists. And while having comrades of color that are confident and well-versed in our politics certainly helps win others within our multi-racial periphery, ultimately it is our *politics* not our identities that win people. That is why, for example, leading white members of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty in NYC carry so much weight and credibility within the work that they do.

Could there have been a document that effectively assessed our work in building a multi-racial, revolutionary organization rooted in the working class? Yes, and in fact convention documents that took up our work in particular struggles around the criminal justice system, housing, etc., provided a useful and concrete assessment of some of our work. Another useful contribution would be to assess the objective terrain, challenges and opportunities (for instance, the state of Black politics) that we face in building a multi-racial organization.

Unfortunately, “Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO” made no serious attempt to do so. It implies that we do not take seriously, or make systematic, our work in building a multi-racial organization, essentially race-baiting the ISO. And it provides neither a Marxist framework nor next steps in the achieving that goal.

### NYC District Committee

---

## Critique of Divestment Organizing Strategy & Perspectives from the South

We want to thank Nurit and Alex on their contributions to the ISO’s conversations about climate change in this convention period. Both are great conversations to be had and should be expanded upon by all branches when talking about SCNCC, and by all branches in general when addressing climate change.

First what should be acknowledged is the lack of response the Denton, Tx branch has had to the calls from SCNCC. Our environmental faction has weakened due to lack of members versus enormity of work, and has kept us from being active in the project. We have also struggled to orient ourselves around two major environmental struggles concerning the branch: natural gas drilling and divestment.

### Our History

Texas has suffered from oil and gas for over four decades. Our houses, our farms and our cities have all been impacted in some way: by rigs being put up, pipes going under homes, earthquakes, streams having chemicals duped in them, it's all happened here. So has resistance.

Beyond Coal started in 2010 at the University of North Texas after the book assigned to all incoming freshman spoke to mountaintop removal and pollution due to the coal industry (*Big Coal: the Dirty Secret behind America's Energy Future* by Jeff Goodell). They focused on getting the campus off coal energy, creating the campus’ Office of Sustainability and pushed for a feasibility study to get the university 100% on renewable energy. Their big meetings brought in over 100 students, but actions were usually 5-6 people. The actions taken by Beyond Coal were non-threatening things such as putting pinwheels around the university president’s car and delivering over 5,000 petitions to the president’s office. These tactics weren’t bad per-say, but did not have the same energy as the campus Rising Tide chapter, which started around the same time and had overlapping members.

Rising Tide North Texas made national news when it shut down Range Resources for the day under threat of protest. When the Keystone XL pipeline started up in Texas members from that group joined in a coalition with others to form Tar Sands Blockade. They worked with landowners who had been fighting the pipeline in private to physically block and stall as much the construction of the pipeline as possible. Members of the ISO in Denton went to the first action camp and participated in green and orange zone supporting roles, doing things from making banners and signs to more direct support in other areas.

However, from the beginning, fracking has always been a large focus of the environmental movement here. Community members and students have regularly gone toe to toe with city council and the gas industry to push for a ban on fracking in our city and then move further to a statewide ban. Support has gone in waves, from winning a moratorium that lasted a year and a half, to a lull of nothing, then back to having local and international media reporting people’s demands for the attack on people to stop.

### Why We Put Fracking First:

We have a history of a fight against gas drilling. Since it was started by a small neighborhood who just didn’t want a gas well next to a hospital and a park, we have discovered the horrors that come with living on the Barnett Shale, one of the largest natural gas deposits in the country, the largest in the South. With Texas’ loose environmental regulations, natural gas drilling has increased exponentially in the wake of the argument “energy independence,” and technological advance. Put in progressive terms, we are considered

a sacrifice zone because of the large amounts of people of color, immigrants and poor people. Our disenfranchisement is taken advantage of, and we are expected to willingly sacrifice for industrial growth. Texas is no exception, in fact it is the leader in environmental deregulation. Many industrial headquarters are housed in Texas; we are consistently the top of the list of the worst environmental degradation including water, air, and soil pollution. We have one of the largest coal plants in the nation. This has led to a broader working class climate change movement that involves all communities working together to tackle as many aspects of the industry hydra here. In Denton, as one of the most fracked places in Texas, and on the Barnett Shale, our fight against climate change has naturally been shaped to a fight against fracking. Specific to our area, Denton has an extensive and powerful legacy of environmental resistance. Created by those in the community and those near the University of North Texas and Texas Woman's campus, we have galvanized to take down fracking in our area. This is not an issue to be thrown away for the ISO's call for divestment. Such a move would be illogical given the current and historic circumstances, not to mention, from these comrades perspectives, there is still more to be won in Denton's fight against natural gas drilling.

### **What Went Wrong with Divestment:**

While the numbers were large in learning about the issues at hand, we also encountered many students on campus who had their educations paid for by oil and gas, so they were less likely to advocate things like divestment or renewables. UNT is considered one of the greenest campuses in the nation, and while that may be sad if true (far from it, it's also a hard idea to fight against and tries to push apathy onto the student population. Students were also lulled into a sense of security because the greenwashing on our campus was so successful. The Board of Regents at our university is comprised predominantly of executives from the oil and gas industry as appointed at a state level by the Governor of Texas. The President of the University of North Texas has very little power to say what does and does not go on at the university itself, he's mostly a figurehead to enact the wishes of the Board of Regents. Any actions taken by students to be truly effective in this fossil fuel heavy environment would have to be at a state level and taken up with the governor himself. In order to make an effective change, divestment would have to be launched with a majority of the other universities in Texas, which includes universities like Texas A&M who's geology department is predominantly funded by natural gas, and TCU who has entire buildings given to them by oil and gas companies, and UT Austin who had a recent study on fracking rescinded when it was discovered the money for the study was given by a natural gas company. Given the energy needed to make those changes, it would be more reasonable to take on the industry itself and not by way of the higher education system.

There are distinct limitations we've seen working with the Sierra Club (who sponsored Beyond Coal) and 350 . They offer a place where people can learn skills to organize, but organizations that foster a dependency on a select few people to organize events as opposed to building everyone as organizers. Because they rely so heavily on core student involvement, when the inevitable happens and people leave or graduate, it becomes another disaster to find a new core group of people to take over what the last did, and the path to leadership is not based on who has the best ideas but who was the closest with the last core group and has any experience with the movement. This refresh of people means the history is rarely passed down, and often leads to the same mistakes being repeated time and time again as each group cycles.

The lack of ability for the community outside the university to get involved means there's a limited number of people who can steadily build a campaign if it doesn't bring the results desired in a few years. By working in the higher education system, it pertains it solely to the people in the higher education system, it is difficult to relate it to the other working class people who are not working in or currently enrolled in higher education, while its effects are felt the hardest by those outside the university system.

### **Where to Go from Here**

What we would like to see out of our movements is to grow, and in environmentalism it is. It's growing here at a rapid, quickly shifting rate that at times is hard to keep up. A state known for oil and gas has its people starting to learn how to fight back. That said, we are hesitant about the idea of divestment being more than a stepping stone into community involvement to environmentalism.

The ideas of diversity in movements, and strengthening points where environmental racism and sexism often are left out and when these concepts aren't talked about and worked through, it can lead to a group of mostly white men whose radicalization has been fostered with little more than cursory glances to other oppressions and women who feel like they have no space or take the burden of organizing while men take spokesperson positions and positions of authority. The structure of the movement must allow for flexibility as well as accountability or ideas of horizontalism will take root when the top-down structure fails. There's a reason anarchists have run the environmental movement for so long, and there's a reason it's stalled and been unattainable by most people. Frequently, in ultra-left organizing, positions given the most respect are those that come with the most risk, usually involving the ones who are most able to risk arrest and injury - mostly able-bodied white men. Women, people of color and disabled individuals are often not given access to the same amount of power and decision making, making them less regarded participants in the action. This has been our experience with ultra-left organizing against climate change in Texas. Such organizing is not palatable to working class conditions. A single mother woman of color cannot take the time off of work in order to lock down to a pipeline to protect her community's health. The glamorization of being arrested is not a viable option to people of similar backgrounds, and so must be treated with hesitancy as a tactic, though not outright dismissal. This is one of the many reasons we cannot work solely with the ultra-left as a means of achieving our goals with climate justice.

Though critical, we should as an organization analyze these tactics to see where they were successful. Even though the fight for climate justice has been dominated by anarchists, there are ways in which their model of organizing has been effective. Direct action, for example, should not be thrown away over all, and has won many key battles here in Texas, changing the face of the climate justice movement as a whole (the fight against the KXL Pipeline) We should take the lessons from those in the ultra-left, learn from their successes and failures and create them into a perspective from which socialists can build stronger movements.

As comrades contributing to a national strategy on how to organize around climate justice, we cannot flesh out a strategy of how to organize the working class. This is due to our organization's fledgling approach to the issue and lack of experience organizing within it. What we can offer is our experience of what has and has not worked. Therefore our perspective of what is to be done is more of what is not to be done. This is not due to a pessimistic perspective but more from the observation stated above.

One thing that we can offer as comrades fighting for climate justice in the South is a more region- or topic-centered discussion of climate change. While we recognize the climate is a broad topic, we feel talking in sections keeps us grounded to movement work and not lost to abstract discussions of possible directions. We also recognize this is an objective of SCNCC and express our willingness to participate. With that being said, we demand as Southern organizers our experiences to be viewed with respect.\*

These comrades respect the organizing that has already taken place on the issue of climate change, and want nothing more than to see the ISO's successful participation in the climate justice movement.

**In solidarity, Kels F, Morgan L, Denton**

\*It has been our experience that other comrades in the organization have the opinion that the South is a sacrifice zone or a lost cause and the majority of organizing has been futile and/or treated with lack of respect. This opinion has been felt and heard at past Socialism conferences and conventions. It is an issue that would better be addressed in an entirely separate document but one we hope will be brought up at this year's convention.

---

## **Seattle Education Association (SEA) Update 2.10.14**

**SEE in a nutshell:** Social Equality Educators (SEE) got started up in late 08 when 3 ISO members moved from momentum built up during a school closure fight we led to form a rank&file group in the teachers union, Seattle Education Association (SEA). Since forming we have led struggles inside the union and outside around cuts to education, against Teach for America, linking Occupy and Ed work and most

recently the MAP test boycott. We are now in a position where we have the most support for a militant struggle against ed reform inside the union that we've ever had.

**SEA Elections:** In the past SEE ran members for delegates to the state WEA rep assembly. We've often done well. All SEE members and allies got in the top 50 spots out of 90 and Jesse and I got in the top 10. In the last SEA elections for governance (running the local), Jesse and I were not keen on running for the local elections. We were of the opinion that SEE was not in a position to have mass support. Only a small section of the union even knew who we were, let alone what we stood for. If we had won it would be simply out of frustration with the current union leadership, and we wouldn't have a strong base of support to effectively challenge the school districts attempts to cut and privatize our schools. Today we are in a wholly different position. The wild success of the MAP test boycott has spread our influence farther than even Seattle. Our recognition in the union is much more widespread and support for our program much deeper now. Furthermore, the over 40% no vote on our last contract this past September shows a deep level of anger at the state of our working conditions and student learning conditions. This is THE driving force pushing people to oppose the leadership and desire a more militant approach to bargaining- to one degree or another.

The time to run is here and Jesse and I will run for two of the top spots in the SEA. This election campaign has already begun to rally a bunch of new people to SEE. We've set out some pretty lofty goals around an election campaign. We aim to get literature into every single mailbox of SEA members in 100% of the schools as well as school visits by at least one of the three officer candidates to nearly half of all the buildings. And perhaps most importantly, we want to recruit to SEE. Our kickoff meeting on Jan 29th, where we celebrated the anniversary of the MAP test boycott, we built as a broad event to attract both teachers and community activists. It was very successful, drawing in about 150 people and raising over \$1,000. We've already produced a platform, a general full color, union printed brochure and pretty swank campaign buttons. We've started to organize teacher happy hours where candidates can meet and talk more informally with other educators and have another big fundraiser set to take place right before the election starts in late April. Our platform in a brief form is as follows (w/a more detailed version to be up on our site soon: [www.socialequalityeducators.org](http://www.socialequalityeducators.org)):

**The RESPECT ticket:**

We need courageous union leadership that listens to the members, represents the members, and respects the members. We need a union that will:

- invite us to be involved in a truly member-driven union;
- fight for a strong contract;
- fight for fair and meaningful student assessments;
- stand for fair and sustainable teacher evaluation;
- demand and fight for full funding of education;
- protect our right to teach culturally relevant curriculum;
- engage families and community;
- empower the union membership to be an active voice!

YOU are the union. We need your involvement. We need to hear you and work with you to build the school district Seattle's students deserve. Let's fight to do the work we became educators to do, and make an education system that allows us and empowers us to educate, unfettered by over-testing and unsustainable evaluation systems.

**We are SEA. We are ready to stand up with respect.**

**Vote RESPECT**

**Campaign against Racial Equity in SPS:** In the last election campaign, we made very clear to SEE members that we cannot subordinate grassroots struggle to an election. That year was when we launched a campaign to oppose the cuts to education and went down to arrest the legislature. This was really crucial to

maintaining rank&file pressure on the union and raising SEE's profile (not to mention setting the stage for a seriously militant Garfield led testing boycott). This time is no different and we voted earlier in the school year to focus on efforts to address racial inequities given the feds investigation that found Seattle Public Schools (SPS) having a disproportionate rate of discipline for students of color 14 times higher than the national avg. When struggles began to emerge around Africa Town it seemed that we could get actively involved, even though that proved to be difficult at first. A recent school board meeting revealed an explosive atmosphere around racial equity in the schools. From Africa Town to Indian Heritage to the World School, closures seemed imminent. After some outreach to Africa Town we decided to launch an effort and hold a meeting to bring all these struggles together. Unfortunately, despite getting contacts from each of these areas, none showed to the meeting (likely due to most of the programs being spared from closure and Africa Town being totally evicted at gun point and dealing with legal battles). On the plus side a bunch of SEE people came out. We've decided to try to hold a panel at some point in the new year drawing all these struggles together. However, even this somewhat scaled back goal has had to be put on hold as it has continued to prove difficult to get the affected parties in the room together.

**ISO Seattle Branch Role:** It's hard to express how important this work is. Jesse and I have sunk deep roots in this area of work both within the union and with parent activists. We've made serious connections such as the one with Sue Peters who recently won a school board seat and who came around ed activism through the school closure fights we led. It is those types of connections that we can mobilize after elected to run the union to not only change SPS, but also help reinvigorate the labor movement and activism in Seattle. In large part Occupy and the Sawant victory have started this process, but people's resolve to take the struggle to the next level can change in a pitched labor battle (which would be likely to follow the year after SEA elections when negotiations begin afresh). We will need the Seattle branch of the ISO to be thoroughly knowledgeable about ed issues and what's happening in the city around those issues. We have formed a committee of comrades that are working closely with us to support the campaign. They are working closely with other militants in SEE as well. This is the kind of position in which recruitment of educators can more easily occur. We are already leading in this area of work, the point now is to spread what is a growing struggle in education to other communities and areas of activism and capitalize off that momentum. The potential to do so around the 15 Now campaign for a \$15 minimum wage in Seattle is really strong as the SEA just voted to give \$3,000 to the campaign and get active around it. Of course broadening this campaign out and recruiting more educators to the branch will be crucial to building the ISO and supporting Jesse and I if and when we win and are faced with the daunting task of running the local.

**Dan T, Seattle**

---

## **SC Report on ISO Technology Initiatives**

### **Introduction**

This report is intended to address the resolution passed by the 2013 ISO Convention: "By the next convention, the Steering Committee will issue a report on the state of our technology initiatives."

The resolution was passed before the Snowden revelations. The issue of security and the Internet is important and also needs to be addressed, but we consider that outside the scope of this document, whose intent is to address how the ISO is using the Internet as an organizing tool. (It's worth noting, however, that all comrades should assume that the State has a copy of **every** email, text message and other electronic transmission we make.).

### **The current situation**

There are three main prongs to our online presence. One, our centralized social media efforts; two, our centralized websites ([socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org), [internationalsocialist.org](http://internationalsocialist.org), [socialismconference.org](http://socialismconference.org)); and three, individual branch and districts web pages. A quick note on each:

1. Our social media efforts have made several important improvements over the last year, and we plan on continuing to push on that front. There is a separate document from the Social Media team outlining this work.
2. As to centrally maintained websites: In the case of [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org), we have fantastic content but a website whose feature set has not changed substantially since it launched on May Day 2008. Standard web practices have changed significantly since then (to take one example, mobile device viewers now account for 25 percent of all web visitors, a number that will only grow), but we have lagged behind those changes. There is a separate report reviewing a number of key [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org) analytics. Our [internationalsocialist.org](http://internationalsocialist.org) website has fallen into disrepair—or rather, we have not been able to muster the resources necessary to improve the site. We believe that the reorganization of the National Office will help make improvements possible, though the critical obstacle to surmount remains getting the necessary technical skills. The [socialismconference.org](http://socialismconference.org) website was rewritten for the 2013 conference, in conjunction with CERSC, a co-sponsor of the conference.
3. The state of individual branch and district websites varies. They rely on volunteer labor and whether there are individuals with the requisite skills in a particular locale (so naturally, districts tend to have more impressive web presences, as their odds of having the necessary labor power on hand is proportionally higher). Sites often serve at least two purposes--coordinating among comrades and an entry point for some branch contacts.

#### **The challenges for new initiatives**

Over the years, there have been many plans and proposals for Internet efforts, but they have ultimately faced this central dilemma: who will do the work?

Developing, operating and maintaining a website requires specialized, highly skilled labor. Each site needs an ongoing commitment of resources, primarily to create content, but also for the operation and maintenance of the website. To date, we have relied almost exclusively on volunteer labor, which has been immensely helpful, but sporadically available (as the comrades do have to do paid labor and other political tasks). Our list of plans and desires far outstrips what is possible with this approach.

#### **A new strategy**

In an effort to overcome this obstacle, we are going to appoint a comrade in the National Office to head up a new approach. They will work with part-time, paid, dedicated labor (from people not necessarily located in Chicago) to tackle a series of projects. As we go, we will assess the efficacy of this strategy. We are still working out the details, but the tentative plan is to first revamp [internationalsocialist.org](http://internationalsocialist.org), and then move on to updating [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org). Based on the outcome of these projects, we will either continue with (and possibly expand) this strategy, or regroup, taking the lessons from this experiment to guide next actions.

Either way, we will keep the organization apprised of progress throughout the year, and the National Office, in conjunction with those working hands-on with the websites, can report to the next convention on what we hope will be a substantially improved situation.

(If you are a software developer with experience shipping web-based applications, please contact us if you are interested in part time or volunteer work. We are lining up several sources of funding for our projects and can discuss terms with those with the required skill set. Please write to [techwork@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:techwork@internationalsocialist.org))

#### **ISO Steering Committee**

---