

# Pre-convention bulletin #7 / January 28, 2015 for members only

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## **Important convention information and deadlines**

### **Convention dates and times:**

Presidents' Day Weekend: Saturday, February 14 through Monday, February 16 in Chicago. [*Please note: the last ISO Notes incorrectly stated that the convention would begin on Friday.*] The meetings will take place from 10 am until 7 pm on Saturday and Sunday, and from 10 am until 3 pm on Monday.

### **Convention locations:**

**Saturday and Sunday: Northwestern University, Evanston (just a few stops north of Chicago on the Red Line "el").** [We will send out detailed meeting room information and all necessary directions in the "Convention Information Sheet" the week before the convention.]

**Monday: Grace Church of Logan square** (3325 West Wrightwood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647). This is a more central location in Chicago, which will make it quicker and easier for comrades to get to both airports afterward. [Full details and directions will be in the "Convention Information Sheet" the week before the convention.]

Thanks for your patience—Chicago comrades have put a lot of effort into securing a location. We are hoping to have a more convenient alternative to Northwestern by next year!

### **Organizational Deadlines:**

I. Below is a set of deadlines that will help us make sure that all comrades who are coming are preregistered, that comrades who need free housing are offered it, and that the pre-convention bulletins

contain as many resolutions and documents as necessary.

### **1. Delegates and guests:**

Convention delegates are elected by local branches at a ratio of one delegate for the first five dues-paying members, and one delegate for every eight dues-paying members thereafter.

Please send in the names of your branch's elected delegates along with requests for any guests you would like to attend. Twigs (groups of less than five members) are entitled to request a guest. Please send an email with the words "delegate" and/or "guest" in the subject line to [sharon@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:sharon@internationalsocialist.org). Your delegates will automatically be pre-registered. *Guest requests will be answered on the Monday following the day you send in your request.*

**The deadline for delegate information and guest requests is Sunday, February 8.**

### **2. Childcare:**

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

If your branch is sending any delegates needing childcare during the convention, please send an email with the word "childcare" in the subject line to [orgdept@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:orgdept@internationalsocialist.org).

**The deadline for submitting childcare requests is Friday, February 6.** This is a firm deadline, and we can't accept any requests after this date, as we will need enough time to arrange quality childcare.

### **3. Housing:**

#### **Housing with comrades:**

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

If you want to request housing with comrades, send an email with the word "housing" in the subject line to [orgdept@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:orgdept@internationalsocialist.org). Please make sure to let us know in your email if the comrades requesting housing have any pet allergies, etc.

**The deadline for requesting housing with Chicago comrades is Sunday, February 8.**

#### **Local hotels:**

#### **Hotels near Northwestern:**

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

**Our advice: Book as soon as possible, as Evanston hotels fill up quickly.**

1. The Best Western Hotel (1501 Sherman Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201-4416) in downtown Evanston \$ 113.96. Free wifi; free breakfast included. Free parking a couple of blocks west. Please note: We earlier wrote that the hotel offers free shuttle service to Northwestern—but we have found out that they only offer this service Monday-Friday. Nevertheless, this hotel is just a half-mile from the campus. Go to <http://www.bwuniversityplaza.com/>

2. The Orrington Hotel (1710 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201) in downtown Evanston: \$143 per night for rooms with two queen beds. Walking distance to university.  
<http://www.hotellorrington.com/>
3. There is one option worth considering for a larger group: The Homestead Evanston (1625 Hinman Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201). This hotel is located just two blocks from Northwestern University (closer than any other hotel). It has one-bedroom apartments with kitchens (which can save money on food—there is a Whole Foods in downtown Evanston). These apartments cost \$185 per night, but you can probably squeeze in 6-7 people to save costs. **When you register, however, you should only register as four guests, which is the maximum the hotel allows.** They advertise: Free breakfast; free local calls; free self-parking; Free Wi-Fi. Their website is <http://thehomestead.net/results.cfm>.
4. One of the cheaper options (a few stops away from Northwestern on the Red Line “e”) is the Super 8 hotel (7300 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60626). This hotel is pretty dingy but cheap. They are listing their rate for two queen beds at \$93.49 night (maximum of 4 guests) on Presidents’ Day weekend. Their website is <http://www.super8.com/>

**4. Pre-convention documents and resolutions:**

**Deadline for all pre-convention submissions:**

**All documents and resolutions need to be submitted by Wednesday, February 11 at midnight CST if they are to be included in a pre-convention bulletin (although we strongly urge you to submit them earlier if you want comrades to have time to read them before the convention).**

**We will produce as many bulletins as necessary to include all documents submitted by this deadline.** All comrades who submit documents or resolutions after that time will be required to make their own copies to be distributed at the convention. We will include all of these in the post-convention bulletin, which reports back to the entire membership.

Please submit your documents and/or resolutions to [bulletin@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:bulletin@internationalsocialist.org) and let us know ahead of time if you plan to submit a document and/or resolution, so we can plan bulletin production. Thanks.

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

**1. SW and dues:**

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

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

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

**2. Double dues payments for February.**

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

**Here is how to handle the double dues:**

If your branch delegates will be flying to the convention, use the double dues money to reimburse your delegates. **[All delegates are requested to obtain the cheapest available plane fares.]** 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.

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Thanks to all comrades for attending to these issues as soon as possible. We want to make sure that every branch is fully represented in the discussions and decisions that will take place. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [sharon@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:sharon@internationalsocialist.org).

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## **Assessing The Climate Justice Movement, Opportunities and Challenges With Our Work**

### **1) The Climate Crisis and Radicalization - Moment and Opportunities:**

The political radicalization around climate change has continued throughout 2014 as expressed by the size and energy of both the NYC People's Climate March and the Climate Convergence. The ISO had a massive, loud and proud contingent at the People's Climate March, and played a key role in shaping the Convergence through our work in System Change Not Climate Change, (who organized the event with the Global Climate Convergence) and also as a contributing organization with several key workshops aimed at building the left-wing of the movement.

While reporting from the march, Amy Goodman noted that, "*One of the signs and one of the mantras here is: "We need system change, not climate change."* Most socialist groups had the slogan featured on a banner, placard or newspaper as we all marched in the lengthy anti-capitalist segment, which was incomparably larger than the similar block at the 2013 Forward on Climate Rally in Washington, DC. Green NGOs still dominate the movement, but an emerging emphasis on capitalism as the cause of the multi-faceted ecological crisis is indisputable.

The failure of green capitalism is painfully obvious for anyone who isn't making money from it. While groups like the Environmental Defense Fund have pursued corporate partnerships and the promotion of worthless market-friendly solutions like cap and trade in exchange for financial support, global greenhouse gas emissions have reached record highs, rising 2.3% in 2013, despite some regional declines and increased use of renewable energy.

Meanwhile, scientists like Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows-Larkin of the Tyndall Center for Climate Change Research note that to keep global warming within 2°C, global emissions must immediately decline by 8-10% year after year, which they feel is not possible with our current economic system's emphasis on continual market expansion. The scientific community is now thoroughly alarmed that our current trajectory is toward a 2-5°C temperature increase with calamitous implications.

While the US and Canada pay lip service to international climate negotiations like those in Lima, Peru, which accomplished little, the North American fossil fuel industry is in boom, led by hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas as well as tar sands extraction. Fracking accounts for 67 percent of current natural gas production in the US and 43 percent of oil production. Only 5 percent of new gas wells use traditional production methods.

This surge in US production driven by President Obama's fossil fuel extraction agenda has been a key facet of the economic restructuring of the US economy. Increased US production has driven down the international price of oil from \$107 in June to less than \$50 per barrel at present. This is sending oil-revenue dependent countries like Russia, Iran and Venezuela into near or full-blown crisis. The Ruble lost 50 percent of its value in 2014 and Iran is seeing \$1 billion revenue shortfalls every month, and Venezuela

a \$25 billion shortfall next year. (See <http://socialistworker.org/2015/01/08/global-oil-crash-winners-and-losers>)

This has strengthened the US at the expense of its adversaries with domestic gasoline prices below \$3 per gallon and a fourth quarter economic growth rate of 5 percent, showing that fossil fuels remain a key weapon and asset in the Grand Game. No country, certainly not the US, will forego fossil fuel extraction and reserves when it creates such leverage in the global economy, an inconvenient truth that Green NGOs cannot fully accept. To do so would be to admit their strategic bankruptcy, to leave them with no *raison d'être*.

At the same time, young new activists in the climate justice movement have radicalized around the fight to stop the Keystone XL pipeline. People have radicalized by the fact that they helped get Obama elected because he promised to do something to stop global warming, and instead he has escalated the fossil fuel extraction drive, with the collaboration of *both* Capitalist parties.

Naomi Klein's recently published *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* argues that the urgency of the climate crisis and the ineffectiveness of prior strategies necessitates moving beyond capitalism as the only way to save the planet. The successful sales of her book which names capitalism as the culprit highlights the deepening radicalization around climate change. It's a snapshot into the politics of the left-wing of the radicalization.

Klein—like ourselves, and others—saw Occupy as an important step forward for the Left in the US, because it brought about a renewed sense of the need for collective struggle and channeled anger at growing inequality in the US. Klein's book argues for a need to link struggles for social justice and inequality to ecological struggles. At the same time, the book lacks a discussion of class relations and the social force needed to stop a system of endless growth and accumulation for the 1%. Her detailed blame of the system, really what we would call the neoliberal phase of capitalism, is a welcome development; but as socialists we can't stop with the solutions and strategies that Klein puts forward.

As this radicalization matures, socialists must also be positioned to project a strategic reorientation towards class power and struggle — the connections between class exploitation, oppression and the destruction of the environment. Though this can feel abstract given where struggle is at this time, we still must offer a historical perspective on class struggle and the dynamic between reform and revolution that is virtually unknown among younger movement activists.

This is largely missing from Klein's book as she sees labor struggles on par with any other social struggles or tactics. For instance while saying we need something like a New Deal, Klein highlights "blockadia" as an important strategy versus the importance of strikes, or mass general strikes that actually brought about the New Deal and dramatic reforms.

We will discuss these political challenges, debates and what we should be arguing more in the next two sections.

## **2) What has our work looked like and what have we learned?**

The ISO's more sustained environmental work began after the failed 2009 international climate negotiations in Copenhagen and the publication of *Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis* by ISO member Chris Williams. Anti-nuclear work against Indian Point (north of NYC) and Vermont Yankee as well as other local efforts undertaken by a few branches were then transformed by the emergence of Occupy in 2011. ISO members played key roles in holding together Occupy environmental working groups in New York and Burlington, which led to deeper connections inside the movement and increasing coverage of environmental issues in Socialist Worker.

Chris W's proposal, passed by the 2011 Convention, called on the ISO to strategically and politically orient more towards the climate justice movement. Attempting to have a more systematic orientation around this

work has both led to a higher understanding of ideological questions around ecology and socialism, as well as more comrades participating in local struggles.

Hurricane Sandy struck NYC in the fall of 2012 and shined a national spotlight on the devastating and unequal impacts of climate change, as did the emergency response seen after Hurricane Katrina. Both superstorms also exposed the country to the effects of environmental racism—the racist practices in urban under-development in communities of color, and how class issues, like cuts to social services and attacks on public sector workers, connect austerity to climate change.

In early 2013, Solidarity approached the ISO about a panel and joint eco-socialist contingent at the Forward On Climate Rally called by 350.org and others. DC comrades helped organize a hugely successful panel with Jill Stein of the Green Party speaking with Chris W and a Solidarity member. During the rally and march, the eco-socialist contingent stood out as a small but politically sharper anti-capitalist and socialist voice and pole of attraction in a sea of mainstream liberalism. The contingent's success led to the Eco-socialist Conference in NYC a few months later and the founding of System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC) as a multi-group eco-socialist coalition with chapters in both the US and Canada.

Our most sustained national work over 2013-2014 has been in SCNCC, but the ISO has organized around a number of projects and struggles in branches regardless of whether we have had ongoing fractions:

Comrades involved in this work are encouraged to write assessment documents and much of this has been reported at *Socialist Worker* as well. We'll just list a few examples of the breadth of our work here:

- Many branches have mobilized for 350.org days of action against KXL and engaged in anti-fossil fuel work, including the biggest marches in DC.
- Some branches have been involved in anti-fracking campaigns like Denton, Texas (<http://socialistworker.org/2014/11/20/how-denton-beat-the-frackers>)
- Student members at UCB Berkeley & UC Madison have organizing with other students or coalitions to pressure their university to divest from fossil fuels. (<http://socialistworker.org/2014/04/02/cutting-the-ties-to-fossil-fuel>)
- Campaigns to shut down nuclear power plants: (<http://socialistworker.org/2015/01/12/good-riddance-to-vermont-yankee>)
- We have been involved in fights against environmental racism, from the fight against petcoke in Chicago (<http://socialistworker.org/2014/01/30/poisoning-south-chicago>) to building solidarity with the Idle No More movement and other indigenous struggles against the new plunder of native lands (<http://socialistworker.org/2014/02/26/blossoming-of-idle-no-more> & <http://socialistworker.org/2014/04/28/historic-alliance-rides-on-dc>)
- Comrades nationally continue to do important ideological work, including hosting public meetings on Ecology and Socialism, and doing study groups on Chris W's book as well as others
- Our national fraction, in collaboration with *Socialist Worker* and the *ISR*, is working on writing more analysis and polemics taking up the debates in the movement, as well as deeper theoretical questions around ecology, socialism and capitalism.
- Lastly, some of our trade union comrades have been working to connect the fight against ecological devastation with their union work. Up to this point we haven't centralized this work with the national climate justice fraction but we aim to do this more. [Eco/Labor work will be taken up in another document.]

#### Challenges Given NGO Dominance in the Movement:

The climate movement, as outlined above, has radicalized throughout 2013 and 2014. The overwhelming success of the Climate Convergence in NYC shows there is an opportunity to build a left-wing of the movement. This radicalization is in many ways more sustained than other touchstones of resistance. But the movement is at a low intensity due to the longer-term crescendo of the climate emergency, and—similarly to other movements we are involved in— we are challenged by a small grassroots left and a low level of class struggle. Although there are thousands of committed activists who have devoted themselves to saving

the planet, the environmental movement is still hamstrung by professional organizing methods, on one hand, and horizontalism (anti-leadership politics which lack an understanding of the state, its power, and the need for collective, strategic mass action), on the other.

NGO influence has retarded, but not yet contained the radicalization. In some cases it also reflects the left-wing shift in the movement. The emergence of 350.org over the last couple years, which has organized outward and mass mobilizations against KXL and fracking, is a positive development.

The role of NGOs in the movement needs to be critically assessed. How do they organize? What are their politics, their goals and vision for change and struggle?

The well-documented generational transformation of the environmental movement into a non-threatening professional clique started in the 1980s. Since then—although NGOs are found in many movements—nowhere have they grown as dominant as in environmental circles.

Not all NGOs can be painted with the same brush, yet many NGOs in the climate justice movement do tend to be accountable to their boards and grant funders rather than the movement. This creates very real challenges to developing grassroots, democratic organization. Democratic organizing, while messy and with its own challenges, is central to our understanding of change as socialists. Participating in coalitions, organizing and making decisions together through debates and discussions is key to developing ordinary people's confidence that they can and should have a say in how we change the world.

In contrast, many NGOs develop their activities around what will sound good in a grant pitch, versus what is strategically needed to build a mass movement. Events are timed to take place when their staff can attend, usually during the day instead of when working class people can come. Decisions around campaigns and projects are often made behind closed doors, by staffers, founding members, principals, and board members — a structure all too similar to businesses.

Even the best of NGOs don't talk about the need for systematic change, instead they tend to focus on "policy change" – organizing to enact certain bills or to put pressure on politicians. Most NGOs fear losing their seat at the table with the Democratic Party, so they don't raise issues around structural changes.

NGOs usually focus on single issues so that they can carve out their own niche and territory within which to organize. This comes into conflicts with organizing with other groups or even NGOs in the same field. All of this connects to the idea of "messaging" and "staying on point" which closes the door to connecting struggles more broadly, and instead has the effect of narrowing politics.

Some NGOs are more radical than others, especially because the left of previous decades, including many activists from third world liberation struggles, have entered into the NGO arena. Some anti-racist activists became demoralized or lost the confidence to build collective mass movements for change and came to see NGOs as a vehicle to do something. They have a strong focus on connecting the fight for climate justice and the fight against racism. But without a focus on class power and social relations, radical rhetoric can be limited to talk without action.

So while it is certainly a good thing that some smaller NGOs focus on social and environmental justice, given what we laid out above, some staffers in NGOs can use identity and "call out" politics to stop any real debate and shut down criticism. This ends up covering up real political disagreement around strategy and tactics as well as support for the Democratic Party. There needs to be more political debate, not less.

The growing presence of eco-socialism and progressive labor in the movement is encouraging but not automatic, given the world around us, and our small size. In order to more firmly establish left-wing politics and organization of the movement, we will have to simultaneously work with anarchist allies and liberal organizations and NGOs, while trying to win people to collective struggle, democracy and class politics.

Assessing Our Work in SCNCC:

The ISO has contributed to the movement both directly as an organization and through our co-founding and participation in System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC). The coalition has solidified into a consistent group of 20+ core activists plus a broader layer of chapter members and sympathizers, a steering committee, monthly calls, bylaws, a yearly convention, a web and social media presence and 1-2 conferences per year. More importantly, SCNCC has a few solid chapters in the US and English-speaking Canada where members meet monthly or bi-weekly, NYC being the strongest. The ISO plays a strong role in SCNCC but does not dominate. Independent eco-socialists write for the coalition, as well as help lead chapters and international work. ISO comrades work closely with members of Solidarity and the NY State Green Party as well as several prominent Canadian marxists in Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver. The Socialist Party, the IWW and a handful of smaller groups also participate in the national committee work while some Trotskyist groups simply monitor the listservs. In the Bay Area chapter, a range of Socialist organizations, Green Party members, and other radicals collaborate well together. They recently worked within a broader coalition with liberal forces like 350.org and the Sierra Club to host the Bay Area People's Climate Rally last fall.

The success of the September Climate Convergence in NYC during the weekend of the People's Climate March, which SCNCC organized in a tense collaboration with the Global Climate Convergence, has given SCNCC a higher profile within the environmental movement and signals the potential offered by this type of coalition. The politics of the coalition are certainly less defined than ours, but the views expressed on listservs and on the web are largely those of socialism from below with an eye towards labor and struggles beyond classic environmentalism. There are some anarchists and progressive liberals, but the group is collaborative and non-sectarian. Growth has not come easy, but given the limited resources of SCNCC, the coalition is healthy and resilient, punching above its weight.

There is far more to say about SCNCC than can be covered here, but the most relevant question for the ISO Convention is whether comrades should participate in the environmental movement through SCNCC or through other venues, or simply through ISO branches? The answer depends on local conditions and the size of the left in your area, but all ISO comrades doing environmental work can relate to and help shape SCNCC's educational components and national mobilizations if local branch work permits. For example, some SW articles mentioned in this document were quickly republished on the SCNCC site.

To date, SCNCC chapters are only viable where there are a range of left forces and/or individuals willing to collaborate under SCNCC's points of unity: NYC, the Bay Area, DC, and Dallas with potential in LA, Madison, Chicago, Denver, and Houston. Some ISO branches have experimented with starting a SCNCC chapter only to find it nothing more than an ISO branch environmental fraction. In such cases, we should conduct our work as the ISO and engage in a range of climate justice work connecting us to radicalizing activists. SCNCC is just one facet of our climate justice work.

There is a hunger for a unified left and calls for knitting together the many threads of the environmental movement. While SCNCC isn't in a position to unite the whole of environmental radicals, it is a useful vehicle to bring together outward sections of a fragmented left, and draw in newer activists. It can also then be a basis for united fronts between SCNCC, the ISO and broader liberal forces. SCNCC can thus serve as a hub for national mobilizations like the Climate Convergence and the People's Climate March. And given the success of the Climate Convergence, it is now in a position to collaborate further with broader forces like Trade Unions for Energy Democracy and leading figures like Naomi Klein or John Bellamy Foster.

While the coalition began as a left unity project, the small size of the left means that SCNCC has limited prospects if it intends to remain a collection of revolutionary socialists. To grow beyond this initial conception, SCNCC must act more as a clearinghouse for ecosocialist theory and history (in collaboration with [ClimateandCapitalism.com](http://ClimateandCapitalism.com)) as well as a network of activists who meet once or twice a month to educate themselves and help build local climate struggles to connect with broader layers of radicalizing activists. Similar to our participation in other single issue movements, participating in a larger coalition (when possible) allows us to work alongside of other activists who may be radicalizing around this particular issue, but are not yet ready to join a revolutionary socialist organization. Where appropriate, ISO



members can play a part in building SCNCC and help spread Marxist ideas (often through Haymarket, the *ISR* and *SW*) to a larger audience.

Perhaps the best model of this so far is the NYC chapter, which consists of ISO members, Green Party members, young and independent activists with a Marxist bent, anarchists, new activists, and occasional participation from Solidarity and DSA members. The chapter discusses books and articles (currently Klein's book) as well as strategizes about where/how to support local struggles. The active core of the chapter has grown from 5-10 to 12-20 since the march and convergence, and at larger events can draw around dozens more. The group's profile has also increased dramatically among the environmental left.

### **3) What should we be arguing and what has class got to do with fighting for ecological justice?**

In 2010, CW argued in his document on this work:

*“Given the resistance to change from the US ruling class for fear of losing even more ground to competitors, embedded within a global crisis of overproduction, even modest reforms to national energy, transportation and climate policy are precluded without a mass movement for social and ecological change. Such a movement needs to be resolute in its independence and principles and to be effective will have to incorporate for the first time since the late '60's tens of thousands of working class people. Again, the ISO has an analysis to offer as to how this can be achieved. Five key points need to be argued:*

- 1. a strong, effective and reinvigorated environmental movement must campaign as much about social justice as it does about ecological justice: we cannot have one without the other*
- 2. that this is not about sacrifice; rather it is about fighting for a much higher standard of living and quality of life*
- 3. that the problem is the system itself; therefore the solution is structural and systemic, not individual, technical or market-based*
- 4. that the movement must maintain and make absolute its independence from the Democrats*
- 5. that we need to fight for some intermediate, achievable goals while maintaining a vision of fundamental social change and a completely different, ecologically rational society based on cooperation, worker participation and real democracy”*

What is outlined above still holds true today, with the added component of the deepening radicalization. We still have a left that is tied to the Democratic Party, and we still see a low level of class struggle.

Our theoretical shift towards eco socialism over the last few years equips us with an understanding of the climate crisis as caused by capitalism's drive towards endless profit, growth and waste. It's a vital addition to the socialist case for getting rid of the capitalist mode of production and distribution, private ownership, and class society, if we ever hope to have an ecological and sustainable world for humans and the planet. Marxism links the exploitation of human beings and our labor to the exploitation of the earth's resources.

But the role of working class today as a key agent and motor force to stop climate change and what is needed to build a more powerful and effective movement is missing from most analyses. Within ecosocialist writing you will find arguments about the role of labor being key to transitioning and democratizing production and distribution during a revolutionary process, but how do we get from here to there is key. It doesn't emerge out of thin air.

For instance, there is not enough written about the fact that if we don't have a labor movement that fights for 100% renewable energy, by shutting down and taking control of production in their workplaces in the energy sector, we will not have the force necessary for this type of transition. You can't sidestep this by chaining yourself to oil pipelines or trains carrying crude oil. It has to be done by the workers in this industry.

Many ecological and climate struggles have a central class component even though NGOs and big Green groups don't talk about it. The fight for access to water, or the demand for clean air, that working class neighborhoods should not be polluted or dumping grounds for poisonous waste, are all class demands.

We also need to make the argument that working conditions are our living conditions. This connection was historically made by miners in the coal industry 1960 and 70's:

<http://socialistworker.org/2014/06/24/miners-fighting-for-the-planet>. Currently, nurses unions in the US, have been linking class issues with organizing against KXL. There have also been developments internationally we can look to like National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa's call for a class struggle approach to climate change: <http://climateandcapitalism.com/2012/10/15/for-a-class-struggle-approach-to-climate-change-and-energy-transition/>. And in Britain there is the 1 Million Climate Jobs campaign that takes on renewable energy transition with the creation of jobs: <http://www.climate-change-jobs.org/>

#### In Conclusion:

We have both medium-term and long-term goals as socialists within the environmental movement. Long-term, fighting for politics that understand and harness social power along class lines is what can make an ecological movement a revolutionary one, capable of uprooting a system that has us on a collision course with the planet. Medium-term, the main arguments that will strengthen the movement, and begin to open up discussions of social power and class include: 1) The need for a focus on environmental racism at the center of the movement. 2) The need for grassroots vs. NGO methods of organizing, and 3) Putting forward concrete "transitional" demands that can help unite the left-wing of the movement towards more radical solutions than the ones being pursued by the movement's mainstream. These arguments can be put forward in collaboration with others on the radical wing of the movement, while at the same time creating space for socialist analysis.

To strengthen this work, our national fraction should be equipping ourselves and our comrades with an understanding of the politics, debates and opportunities to link class demands with climate justice. We also need to learn historical lessons, which can concretize the arguments given the low level of class struggle. We should write about this more in the *ISR* and in *SW*, and take up other polemics and debates in the movement. This will also keep us from adapting to the politics of the movement.

Lastly, our climate change work is connected to our perspectives around rebuilding our political infrastructure as an organization. Building a strong foundation increases our ability to engage and participate in more struggles. Our fantastic contingent at the climate march in NYC, where we were able to sell hundreds of copies of *SW* with articles taking on key questions of the movement, was an important example of this. Rebuilding our base at campuses could allow us to do more effective fossil free work campaigns while bringing younger activists around ecosocialist politics and winning them to revolutionary socialism. Likewise sharpening and developing our understanding of black politics, racism and oppression helps deepen our understanding of how systematic and structural oppression connects to fights around ecological degradation, pollution, healthcare, job protections, etc. Lastly, centralizing our labor work allows us to think through the political work our comrades are doing in unions, like connecting the fight for climate justice with workers rights.

We've come a long way as an organization over the last couple of years, since prioritizing this work. We have a lot more opportunities, and a lot more to learn in the coming year.

-HT, MW, & RJ

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## **Labor and the Fight for Climate Justice in 2014-2015**

### Political Moment:

Due to the imperatives of the profit motive and competition, and the consequent necessity of unending

economic growth for global capitalism, as socialists, we understand that the only way to ultimately stop climate change is to completely uproot this economic system. We look to the working class as the means to that end because of our unique ability to collectively control and therefore alter the forms of production that produce climate change. Unfortunately, due to a myopic, business union approach towards job creation, as well as the self-imposed limitation of having the Democratic Party defining labor's political horizons, most of the US labor movement has not only been silent on the question, but actually politically allied with the fossil fuel industry itself.

That being said, 2014 marked a shift to the left for the US labor movement around environmental questions in general and climate change in particular. Prior to this past year, a minority of unions within the AFL-CIO have played a vanguard role over the last several years in beginning to take a stand against climate change. These unions chose to break from the AFL-CIO's alliance with the fossil fuel industry in supporting the further development of major fossil fuel infrastructure, most ominously the Keystone XL pipeline. This included international unions like the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and National Nurses United (NNU), as well as the statewide union the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA). NNU organized a march of a couple thousand in the spring of 2013 across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco in opposition to the pipeline, specifically citing the health impacts of climate change. ATU and NNU both participated in a demonstration for a financial transaction tax in Washington, DC around the same time, where climate change issues were a key focus, including opposition to Keystone XL. In the lead-up to the People's Climate March (PCM), a mega local of SEIU and the largest union in NYC, 1199 United Healthcare Workers East finally took a stance against the pipeline.

But it was the organizing for the PCM itself that characterized labor's shift in 2014 and opens up new and important possibilities. What started as a smaller grouping of NYC-based local unions loosely organized through the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) ballooned into over 60 unions ultimately endorsing the march resulting in a labor contingent of close to 10,000. The first two labor endorsements of the march and the key unions that developed the political vision for how to organize for the march were SEIU Local 32BJ, which represents 120,000 building service workers in NYC, and the New York State Nurses Association, a union of 37,000 nurses across NY state. While 32BJ had an ongoing "Green Super" training program, NYSNA developed workshops for rank-and-file members to help organize for the PCM. They were held at 4 different public hospitals and attended by over 200 nurses that connected climate change, public health, and the need to reorganize our economy. There are now other unions in NYC and regionally who are trying to figure out how to replicate this model.

The labor committee of the PCM, headed by a full-time staff person funded by [350.org](http://350.org) and ALIGN (NYC's Jobs with Justice affiliate), held several meetings which shared these experiences and lessons, helped coordinate regional mobilizations, and organized the speakers for the labor rally prior to the start of the march, one of the few platforms for political discussion and demands during the march itself. Some unions that were previously unilaterally opposed to organizing around environmental questions, such as IBEW Local 3, endorsed the march. Even though the AFL-CIO refused to endorse the march, the main organization responsible for their environmental work, the Blue-Green Alliance, worked with march organizers to build labor support. The NYC Central Labor Council followed the same approach toward building the march and afterward helped sponsor, along with NYC's Environmental Justice Alliance a report/policy platform authored by ALIGN that raises a series of significant demands for climate jobs and emission reduction in NYC. Overall, through the ongoing work of TUED, some national healthcare and transportation unions, and a number of significant local unions are using the momentum of the PCM to expand union organizing around environmental issues. Ultimately, mobilizing for the PCM resulted in educating and mobilizing tens of thousands of new union members in 2014 around an issue that raises fundamental questions about our political and economic system and impresses an urgency to the need for sweeping change.

Other glimmers of hope of a changing landscape came this December 2014, when ATU and NNU participated in the United Nations Climate Change Summit 20th Conference of the Parties (COP 20) in Lima, Peru and were able to force the AFL-CIO to table its resolution to the UN in favor of the fossil fuel industry. This had an impact on the international unions present that U.S. unions actually do oppose climate

change and are not fully complicit with big oil, gas and coal. NNU also participated to highlight the impact of climate change on public health, participating in the People's Climate Summit outside the U.N. meeting, on panels on public ownership of energy resources and on an international ban on fracking.

For NNU and NYSNA, the emphasis on public health has created a path for more solid alliances around local environmental justice/environmental racism struggles. Due to incredible response at the PCM, NNU nationally has established an environmental justice working group (EJWG) with a full-time organizer involving rank-and-file nurses to centralize already existing local climate change work. Local struggles involving EJWG members include the fracking ban referendum in Denton, TX, the Chevron plant expansion battle in Richmond, CA, and significantly, the community fightback against petcoke in Chicago, where this byproduct of tar sands creates large plumes of black dust. Nurses in clinics near to the petcoke sites have testified at public hearings about the incredible increase in asthma, bronchitis and other upper respiratory illness related to the dust. Involvement by NNU within the local anti-petcoke community groups was facilitated by ISO members in the union. For NYSNA, the PCM organizing has helped develop relationships with EJ organizations and NYSNA is currently trying to figure out which campaigns it should encourage nurses to become involved in and actively support, such as the campaign to stop Fresh Direct from building an asthma worsening refueling depot in the South Bronx.

Currently, Jobs With Justice has launched a national campaign called Jobs to Move America. It focuses on bringing train and bus manufacturing jobs back to the US to be developed in economically blighted areas in un- and underemployed communities. The campaign consists of bringing together a broad-base of union, business, community and environmental organizations to research and develop business plans for building these types of manufacturing plants. This also includes organizing existing companies like the Nippon Sharyo plant in Rochelle, IL.

Also, there are large international unions and federations affiliated with TUED, which has grown in numbers and profile, including large unions within the energy sector, such as the South African National Union of Mine Workers, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa and, and Unifor in Canada, which represents Keystone XL workers. TUED's main project is to cohere a section of the international union movement around the fight for "energy democracy" which is a broad term, but mainly means the fight to municipalize/nationalize the energy sector. Participation in TUED is uneven among its member constituents, and it's capacity to move beyond it's current role as a body for strategic development and research is unclear. Within the past month, TUED has moved to being institutionally housed within the Murphy Institute in NYC which has provided additional resources for the project. It is not currently a group that has the capacity to organize collectively in any ongoing way because it can't speak decisively for all member unions, although it does play a role in helping to channel forces towards national and international mobilizations and intervening politically in some of these spaces. Therefore, the space for the left to shape the direction of TUED remains confined to official union roles within the relatively small group. There will probably be little to no space for non-elected rank-and-file activists to participate directly in TUED initiatives, but rank-and-file activists can use TUED strategy documents and education materials to organize for change within their unions.

### Challenges

The labor movement as a whole, while shifting to the left, continues to be significantly divided, polarized, and somewhat schizophrenic in its approach towards the fossil fuel industry. For a number of reasons, the building trades have an outsized influence within the AFL-CIO right now and therefore have been able to shape labor's overall "line" on climate change. Many unions, such as the IBEW and LIUNA continue to condemn any restriction on fossil fuel expansion like Keystone XL or fracking. It's not that unions aren't aware of the consequences of climate change, it's that their current approach is to first and foremost defend their members' existing jobs. The PCM helped push unions into activism and exposed union members to the connection between climate change, increasing danger to worker's lives, the racial and class dynamics of climate change, and the need to restructure our economy. But, because of the intentional absence of positions on key questions like KXL, coal regulations, fracking, etc., the march also allowed some unions to greenwash their pro-fossil fuel politics.

For unions with member's jobs directly connected to the energy sector, there is the omnipresent trapdoor of

business unionism, with many unions falling back on politically siding with the fossil fuel industry in order to secure sporadic and short-term employment. This “bird in the hand is better than two in bush” approach has exposed the key contradiction in labor’s climate justice work, and has thus far been papered over in recent organizing. So you can have a union like IBEW, whose NY-based Local 3, which is not primarily based in the energy sector, is a member of TUED and a key organizer of the PCM. But a month prior to the march, IBEW was marching alongside other building-trade unions in Pittsburgh against the EPA’s new coal regulations, which are at best a very weak restriction on fossil fuel production in the US.

Unions like the idea of green jobs, but with unionization rates below 11%, they fear losing the existing jobs (and membership) which would be phased out by the reduction/elimination of fossil fuel-based jobs. This is especially true given that many of these jobs are high paying. Then considering the amount of job training programs and government investment that would be required to compensate for the job losses and how effective Congress has been in implementing any of these programs in the past, it’s not surprising unions have little hope in retaining membership in any transition from a fossil fuel based economy.

The AFL-CIO holds both positions. Case in point, on July 12, 2012, AFL-CIO Pres. Rich Trumka said “... some will ask, why should investors or working people focus on climate risk when we have so many economic problems across the world? The labor movement has a clear answer: Addressing climate risk is not a distraction from solving our economic problems. My friends, addressing climate risk means retooling our world—it means that every factory and power plant, every home and office, every rail line and highway, every vehicle, locomotive and plane, every school and hospital, must be modernized, upgraded, renovated or replaced with something cleaner, more efficient, less wasteful. Taking on the threat of climate change means putting investment capital to work creating jobs. It means building a road to a healthier world and a healthier world economy--one less dependent on volatile energy prices, one where many more of us have the things that modern energy makes possible.” Contrast that statement with the Laborer’s International Union of North America (LIUNA) who quit the Blue Green Alliance that same year over the question of Keystone XL stating “We’re repulsed by some of our supposed brothers and sisters lining up with job killers like the Sierra Club and the Natural Resource Defence Council to destroy the lives of working men and women.” Two years later following in a June 2, 2014 statement in response to the New EPA Power Plant Emission Rules, Trumka revised his earlier position and claimed the need “to maintain the reliability of the nation’s electrical system” while at the same time “enhance fuel diversity and make continued significant investments in an all-of-the-above technology portfolio, including nuclear power and carbon capture and storage.” He added later in his speech, “The immediate focus for the labor movement will be what happens right here at home: Will our efforts to fight climate change be another excuse to beat down working Americans, or will we use this opportunity to lift employment standards, to create good jobs in places that need them, to make sure that the promise of a decent retirement after decades of dangerous, difficult work is honored?”

Labor needs to propose its own climate strategy, but because of its links to the Democratic Party and illusions in market-based solutions, it can’t see a way forward given what they understand to be the current political realities, since both business and government aren’t willing to make the kind of investment necessary in renewable energy, let alone restructuring the energy sector to address the depth of the climate crisis. Labor’s ties to the Democratic Party not only shapes positions on the fossil fuel industry specifically, but shades mainstream labor’s entire posture to any challenge to the Obama administration and other Democrat-run municipalities, such as Jerry Brown in California and Andrew Cuomo and Bill DeBlasio in New York. This has resulted in some unions delaying taking positions on KXL, not getting involved in certain environmental justice fights, and refusing to directly challenge politicians who are either active obstacles to necessary reforms or whose main contribution has been lofty rhetoric and anemic proposals. Labor, of course, invests heavily in this abusive relationship with the Democratic Party. In the 2014 elections, labor gave \$127,668,125 to political campaigns, of which 88.9% went to the Democrats.

Finally, the vast majority of labor’s involvement in the climate justice movement has been at the official level. This mirrors the knee-jerk top down approach to organizing that permeates almost the entirety of the US labor movement. With the exception of some efforts by NNU, ATU and local unions like SEIU 32BJ, NYSNA, and a few others, very little effort has been made to educate and provide venues for active participation of rank-and-file members in climate justice work. Organizing for the PCM has provided some

opportunities for this to shift, but it remains to be seen how much progress will be made along these lines.

What has our work looked like?

In terms of labor of climate justice, we currently have two NNU members actively involved the union's national environmental justice working group, with monthly conference calls, as well as local union work involving rank and file members in opposition to petcoke in Southeast Chicago. We have a member of NYSNA who is the point person for that union's work in climate justice, and played a significant role in developing labor participation in the PCM, and is also NYSNA's representative within TUED. Importantly, we also have a member of IBEW who is active in various ways staking out a left-wing position on climate change in this challenging but crucial union. Our primary focus has been learning as much as we can about this particular political terrain, helping to advance our union's official positions on key questions, and, most importantly, arguing for and/or working within rank-and-file committees and workshops to organize fellow union members around climate justice. All of us began this process within the past 15 months and have played significant roles in moving these various areas of work forward. Our members have spoken on climate justice panels at Labor Notes, the Left Forum, and the NYC Climate Convergence and in these capacities have made a significant contribution to the left's understanding of the political connections and the actual on the ground organizing within labor/climate justice work.

Next steps, what should we argue?

Labor needs to be a key part of any equation when it comes to any solution to stop climate change. Especially those workers in the energy and transportation sectors and those jobs otherwise affected by climate change like agriculture and the healthcare system. If they joined forces, they could wield their power to bring the fossil fuel industry to its knees.

For workers in the energy/building trades sector, the key task is winning workers away from their boss's and their union's approach to job creation in favor of the more realistic job creation strategy of energy democracy. A rank-and-file approach is especially necessary in these unions as their leadership will otherwise follow the path of least resistance, which is currently signing off on fossil fuel projects. As sections of the labor movement develop concrete proposals (such as the Climate Works for All platform in NYC and a possible 1,000,000 Climate Jobs project in the U.S.) that can accomplish both mass job creation and reduction in emissions, this will help provide the basis to win this argument among rank-and-file members. Through this work, we should also hope to meet and cohere the most left-wing and radicalizing workers around this issue and win them to socialist politics.

For members in healthcare unions already very active in climate change, the key task will be helping to build the work of any rank-and-file committees. Strategically, we should argue to expand the prevalence of climate justice workshops and committees throughout our respective unions, with an eye towards connecting education about broader issues with ongoing local/national climate justice organizing, be it a neighborhood environmental fight or a national mobilization. We should aim to meet radicalizing nurses and win them to the ISO. We should also watch for ways in which connections with Democratic Party politicians unnecessarily limit the scope of this area of work and work with other nurses in the committees to challenge these compromises when necessary.

With the direction of the broader movement post-PCM very much up in the air, our focus should remain on building and expanding rank-and-file committees within our unions, with goal of continuing to organize around national mobilizations as well as local climate justice initiatives. There may be opportunities for our members to play a role in shaping certain unions political positions or participate in union delegations to national and international climate change events, up to and including the December 15 UN climate meeting in Paris. Our approach within these formations should be thoroughly discussed with the national fraction and other appropriate national leadership bodies.

**-CR, EL, SP**

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## Lessons from Building the Core in BFT

### **Introduction and Background: *Union demographics and structures:***

I have been an active union member for the last 8 years in Berkeley Federation of Teachers. BFT has almost 900 members, one full time president and one half-time vice president who also teaches at our high school. We are a small and progressive local and many of our members are active in the union and in other local social justice struggles. I have been a member of the executive board (which is comprised of elected site representatives) for four years, including this year, and have been a member of the organizing team for two years. This year I am getting 40% release time from grant money to work as an organizer in the BFT office. Because I am both a classroom teacher at a site and paid to work part-time in the union office the lessons outlined below may not fit with many people's actual union capacity. I felt, however, that they were useful enough to share since they have helped me to see some of the real challenges we face in our labor work even when we have a lot of resources at our disposal.

### **Contract campaigns:**

We have had a series of one-year contracts through the years of the California budget crisis and have seen moderate raises, no furloughs and only a few layoffs over the last five years. However, the cost of living in the bay area continues to rapidly outpace any compensation increases we have received and our members are hungry for a substantial raise in our upcoming 2015 contract. Our hard cap on health insurance with the district has meant that our members' contribution for health care has continued to rise with the latest increase in January 2015 being about 38% for most members.

### **Who is the core?**

When I am discussing the core of leaders in this document I am for the most part referencing our union organizing team. This is a group of rank and file members (myself, another K-5 teacher, a middle school teacher and two high school teachers) who meet twice a month after school. One of our goals as an organizing team this year was to build up organizational, rank-and-file capacity at the site level. Lessons from this work are the main focus of this document.

The contradiction inherent in the project is that it is the organizing team (a form of union leadership one could argue) has been trying to get more members involved and build better organized school sites while there has been a lack of push from our actual rank-and-file members. Trying to get the balance right between helping sites get more organized and not being too "top down" or substituting ourselves for authentic member activity has been a real challenge.

### **Key Lessons from the Past Year:**

***Education, especially reading and discussing books and articles collectively, is critical for establishing a common political framework. Don't assume people, even great union activists, know a lot about our own history and current debates in education and the labor movement. A consistent education plan can help build members confidence to talk about critical struggles and issues.***

For the past two years our organizing team (myself and four other rank and file members plus our vice president) have been trying to create a real strategic plan for our work and transform our union from a service model to a more class struggle/organizing model of unionism. The biggest lesson we have learned in this process is that we need to educate ourselves and our members on the larger struggles in educational justice and the union movement. As part of this work we have read several books together as an organizing team: Education and Capitalism, The Struggle for Our Schools and we are currently part of a larger study group lead by one of our middle school teachers for More than a Score. In addition to reading books together we have read a number of articles about the history of unions, corporate education reform, racism in schools, and how to organize effectively. Reading these key books together and sharing articles on our team has given us a common framework to use to shape our work as union activists and helped identify key political debates. Some of these debates centered around whether or not we should ever support the Democratic, how much time we should spend organizing around larger social justice and corporate education issues and if those larger political fights are actually linked to things like winning a better contract. The biggest thing I have learned from this process is the need for education help people see the long term fight we are in: I may not be able to win a specific case about voting for a certain Democrat but I

can help people see the history of betrayals from the Democrat party with regards to labor and public education.

In addition to educating the core (our organizing team members and a few other self-selected progressives in our union) it is critical to bring the most important ideas from these books and articles to all our members. One big step forward we have made this year is to collectively create ready-to-use materials (Powerpoints, Prezis, fact sheets etc.) about critical issues facing education and debates in our negotiations process. If we want people to feel confident about arguing with members at their site and others people like parents, community members etc. about issues in public education and our contract campaign we need to give them materials to help them have these conversations.

Another great example of education with our members was having all our site reps read and discuss the Harold Myerson article “If Labor Dies: What’s Next?” (<http://prospect.org/article/if-labor-dies-whats-next>) which is a condensed history of the labor movement over the last 50 years and why we are in the state we are now. It was a great starting place for people who were newer to union work and it led to some excellent political discussions about how we see our union as part of rebuilding a progressive labor movement.

***Strategic planning is important. The core needs to be able to lead politically and organizationally. We need to be able to articulate a longer term vision and connect it to short term work we are doing.***

In addition to building common understanding through member education the core group of leaders in a union needs to be able to translate that vision into a strategic plan. To this end it has been helpful for our organizing team to think about where we want our union to be in 6 months or a year and then backwards map from there. It is also critical that we continually situate ourselves in a larger political perspective. For example, one of the biggest issues with public education in California can be traced back to a gutting of revenue in our state budget. Tax breaks for the wealthy and big corporations have starved our state of much needed money that could be spent on social services and public schools. It is also the case that the state does have plenty of money it just chooses not to spend it where it is needed most—electing to pay off debts and build prisons rather than fund social services. Being part of larger campaigns around taxing the rich, re-prioritizing the state budget and fighting for single-payer health care must be part of a long terms strategy to win good contracts in the future. It also situates all our work as union activists in connection to larger political struggles which is critical in being able to weather all the ups and downs of our work. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t build the fiercest, most militant contract struggle this spring to get all the money we can get but that looking at the larger political period we are in is essential to shaping our vision of how we need to organize and who are our real allies.

Even with the best strategic plan you need to be flexible and be able to respond when fights come up around issues that rank-and-file members are fired up about. One example from this fall that illustrates this point was a grassroots push to create a balanced district recess restriction policy that respected the professionalism of teachers and retained their right to be able to make decisions about how to best support their students. Another example is an upcoming action planned targeting our district benefits office which has made a number of serious errors in over-deducting money from people’s paychecks and has been remiss in fixing them in timely manner. Both of these activities were generated and organized from the site level to the union leadership level. The recess restriction fight actually came from my site because of an over-zealous parent who basically bashed teachers at a PTA meeting and resulted in over 20 teachers from my school writing letters and coming out to speak at school board meetings. People felt empowered when the board adopted policy had teacher-friendly rather than teacher-bashing language and retained our rights to create our own positive discipline structures.

***You need to be connected to your ISO branch and district and be building the ISO in your workplace.***

***There needs to be regular communication between ISO members in unions and not in unions. There also needs to be space for ISO union members to meet/talk regularly with each other. (National labor fractions, district labor fractions)***

The biggest lesson related to this is that just because opportunities for official leadership positions are offered doesn’t mean we should always take them. We have to be humble enough in assessing our work as individuals to know that we need comrades to help us figure out some of these big questions. This can only happen if we centralize all our work through the organization, including these kinds of discussions which



can be very tough because they feel very personal at times. Unfortunately, I cannot disclose more details in this document because of the possibility of internal conversations being made public. I hope to be able to have more frank conversation with comrades in person at the convention discussion around our labor work and running for office as I know we have learned many lessons regarding those experiences over the past few years of experimentation.

In Preconvention Bulletin #3 S from the BA makes a reference to the discussion of running for office in his document about the need for more democratic centralism. While I agree with many of his points I also think with regards to our union work there is a balance that needs to be addressed. The push to have more political centralization of our labor work locally (through district labor fractions) and nationally through the creation of formations like the ISO National Teachers' Fraction, has been really important. Much of what we are facing as socialists in the labor movement is more similar than we may have admitted in the past. The period we are in is incredibly difficult and we need to have a space to collectively navigate it as socialists. The syndicalist approach to our labor work has been a real problem. The idea that every local situation had to be considered totally on its own and the air of exceptionalism that colored our work made it hard for branches and national leadership bodies to help set leads in our labor work.

I believe we have taken steps to address this lack of centralization coming out of convention last year. In the bay area our district labor fraction is a place for real assessment and debate to occur for all our comrades who are in separate unions. Regular written reports to the branch and district and whenever possible branch labor discussions have also been an important way to integrate this work into the organization as a whole. Could we write more and have more discussion about our work: for sure. However, there is also something about labor work that does make it different than other kinds of movement work. For comrades who are alone in their locals it can be a very isolating situation. It is critical that wherever possible union members in branches and districts find time to meet to discuss our work together.

The experiences of union work can be hard to translate sometimes to people outside of it--like non-union members in our branches. In a given week I make dozens of political decisions related to my union work and could literally write a 5 page report every week. That is not helpful so figuring out what is most critical to share and what to get input on is harder than it may seem, even for people who have been doing this for a while. Also there is the fact that writing openly about our experiences and then having those leaked to the public could jeopardize not only our political work but even our jobs. All of these things combine to make it a real challenge to communicate everything we need to communicate on a consistent basis to the rest of the ISO. This is not to make excuses but rather to be totally honest about the challenges we face. It is not just that we are too busy to do it, however that is sometimes simply the truth, it is also that there are real barriers to linking up our labor work, especially our individual labor work, to the life of our branches. I do not think that labor comrades *"believe there isn't much value in doing so – that it won't bring much clarity or value to the organization as a whole or to their particular area of work. Or maybe it will, but just not enough to prioritize it over the series of other tasks on their list."* (quoted from S's document in Bulletin #3.)

The starting point for recentralizing our labor work is to have open, honest conversations that begin from a position of respect for each other as comrades. This means not having a single union member feel like they are being "grilled" about their work or insinuating they are trying to keep something from the branch. Conversely, union members cannot get frustrated by the many questions that may come up because elements of this work are not familiar to everyone. We also cannot be defensive when asked to talk more about how we are operating as socialists within our unions, an outside perspective as I have learned this year especially, is critical in keeping us from being buried in the details of our work and lets us pull back and recalibrate our project with other members.

I think the launch of the National Teachers Fraction is a big step forward in centralizing our work around key questions we are facing as unionized teachers. Though our situations are different and range from singleton members in a local to handfuls of members building a common caucus there are shared lessons and political debates we can all benefit from discussing. I believe having these conference calls every six weeks or so around larger political questions and having teachers write and present reports assessing their work will help all of us have a clearer picture of what we are doing.

In terms of building the ISO in our union work this is a constant struggle, especially in this period. There are no shortcuts to this work and recruitment feels like a long term project even with some of our best allies. Being part of collective assessment and decision-making about labor work through local and national ISO structures is the only way our dual project of rebuilding a left core in the labor movement and recruiting the best leaders of that struggle to revolutionary socialist politics can even possibly succeed.

**-DB**

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## **Recruiting Anti-Capitalists**

We have talked for years about a "radicalizing minority" that is deeply questioning the current system and looking for solutions. This minority is largest among young people and a key area of concentration is on college campuses. Activists influenced by anarchist ideas are a big part of our audience—though hard core anarchists are not except in rare cases..

Another section of the radicalizing minority are incipient/developing Marxists, who have moved toward Marxism on their own in response especially to the capitalist crisis from 2007 onward.

There appears to be a new large current among new activists and the radicalizing minority generally which more explicitly opposes or is at least highly critical of capitalism. It is a new developing "common sense" among many activists. Examples:

- 1) The wide response to Naomi Klein's book "This Changes Everything..". Her book is anti-capitalist but confused about what capitalism is and what it actually means to oppose capitalism. This accords well with this developing current.
- 2) At the John Carlos Panel in Seattle on Jan. 23 of 600 people, the applause for direct criticisms of capitalism was quite widespread. This was repeated to a smaller extent at the Teach In on January 23 at "Ferguson and Beyond: Race, State Violence and Activist Agendas for Social Justice .." at University of Washington, which had perhaps 300 or more people over the course of the day.
- 3) Comments and support for anti-capitalist comments at Black Lives Matter events.

What does this mean for us? Political development in the U.S. is low generally and among activists. The premium is on clear and developed Marxist politics, which we are in a prime position to offer. Developing ourselves politically to answer questions as well as to learn from the movements is crucial. Education and cadre building is central.

There are key questions we need to discuss with this newly developing anti-capitalist layer: the Marxist approach to oppression; What is class? ; Why the working class?; What is capitalism?

Most important are questions are around revolutionary organization, including what it means to be a revolutionary today; the relation of reform and revolution; and the role of revolutionary organizations in reform struggle

Of course we need to explain Leninism including the necessity of the Party during the revolution. But just as importantly, we need to be very concrete in explaining our perspectives: How does our organization's activities lay the basis for more successful struggle now and for the needed Party in the long run?

Many of the new anti-capitalist activists take opposition to capitalism for granted, but don't yet see why organizing now around that point is important. When the immediate issue is not the overthrow of capitalism why shouldn't anti-capitalists just be involved in movements around immediate issues and leave discussions of capitalism to personal conversation ? If revolution is not on the immediate agenda, why do we need to reach out to new people on the issue of revolution today?

We will only recruit and hold people in this layer when we can give adequate answers to these questions--- in both theory and practice. We should orient our education aimed at this emerging anti-capitalist layer around these questions both generally in branch meetings and study groups and in individual and small group conversation.

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## **Document with Resolution:**

### **Regarding Dues and Accessibility (resubmitted from 2014)**

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

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

#### **Resolution:**

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

cash each month, another member deposits the dues and sends in a Dues Check Off in the name of the cash-paying member attached to the other member's bank account. This practice should continue, and the details written down.

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

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

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