Important convention information and deadlines

Documents

Notes on the Social, Economic and Political Conditions in Mexico
HA

Assessing the experience of the Logan Square (Chicago) branch
CE and GP

Electoral work in San Diego
AW

Document with resolutions

Believing Survivors: A Response to Concerns
BE, CG, MF, MC, RA

Important convention information and deadlines
which reports back to the entire membership.

Please submit your documents and/or resolutions to [redacted] 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 [redacted].
   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.

Notes on the Social, Economic and Political Conditions in Mexico

Introduction
As some comrades are aware, I have been living in Mexico for a couple of months and writing to Socialist Worker on the social, political and economic conditions in the country. I am submitting this document for the 2015 preconvention to inform comrades of the situation here.¹

¹ For more details and context comrades are strongly advised to read Dan Labotz’s 2014 Year in Review of Mexican Politics:
Comrades should read this document and inform themselves of the situation here because Mexico is going through a political period when the current government is facing a legitimacy crisis because the Mexican state and its institutions—from the police to the Supreme Court—are facing a legitimacy crisis.

Comrades are probably aware of the case of the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa but it is worth rehashing a few basics: On September 26, 2014 a police convoy intercepted three buses of students from the teacher’s college of Ayotzinapa in the outskirts of the city of Iguala in the southern state of Guerrero. The police killed six people and disappeared 43 of them. Until today they have yet to be found, either dead or alive.

The case of the 43 students detonated a protest movement that toppled the state government of Guerrero and that has plunged the Mexican government into a legitimacy crisis. Furthermore, investigative reports have revealed extensive participation from municipal and federal police in the disappearance of the students.

Growing evidence suggests that the army were also involved and that in fact they might be the ones that disappeared the students. This trajectory has reached an impasse since the government will not concede to an independent investigation of the army, its barracks and its bases.

I will discuss more of these details below, but I should let comrades know that this document is only an overview of major developments and as is the case in such documents a lot of details are missing. Comrades should follow the footnotes and see the list of recommended readings below if they want to get a better idea of what is going on.

Lastly, the approximations in this document are based on observations, readings and discussions with Mexican socialists. However, I would appreciate it if comrades who are following Mexican politics could engage with what I write here or on Socialist Worker to exchange our views and shape our interpretations, preferably through Socialist Worker exchanges or email conversations.

1. The Return of the PRI and the Pact for Mexico

Mexico has suffered one of the most destructive ruling class offensives in Latin America for the last three decades and things will only get worse for working class Mexicans with the current government in power. In 2012 the Institutional Revolutionary Party came back to power headed by President Enrique Peña Nieto. Once in power the PRI orchestrated the Pact for Mexico—a pact between the PRI, the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The basis for this pact was the agreement to recognize Peña Nieto as the legitimate president of Mexico, since the election saw widespread vote rigging. However, the centerpiece of the Pact for Mexico was the agreement to approve a series of neoliberal structural reforms.

From fiscal policy to the energy sector, the structural reforms that have been enacted have been a victory for the ruling class of Mexico as well as for international capital.

The Education Reform, for example will require standardized tests for all students and merit pay for teachers. When the reform was signed into law in 2013 thousands of teachers went on strike throughout Mexico. In response the government threatened to crush the teacher’s protests and then initiated a round of negotiations with the teachers. The government succeeded in demobilizing the movement through its carrot and sick tactics. Besides Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán and Mexico City, where the left wing of the teacher’s union is strong, the Education reform will go through as planned.

The Telecommunications Reform that was singed into law further deregulated the telecommunications industry to allow other companies to enter the sector. Another particularly dreadful reform is the Labor

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2 The PRI ruled Mexico for 71 years (1929-2000). Although Enrique Peña Nieto or “Peña” or “EPN” as he is known here, is the current President and the face of the PRI, he is not a very astute politician, akin to the Mexican version of George W. Bush. In fact, he is a puppet for a clan within the PRI known as the Grupo Atlacomulco.

3 For more information on the strike see Socialist Worker’s extensive coverage from the fall of 2013: “Teachers take a stand in Mexico”; “Rebellion of the teachers in Mexico” among others.
Reform law that allows for more subcontracting and outsourcing—even government services. This law has also lowered the minimum wage and made it easier for bosses to fire their workers.

The crown jewel of the neoliberal reforms is the Energy Reformed that was signed into law in the summer of 2014. This reform will open up the Mexican energy market for foreign investment not just in oil but also in electricity, natural gas and fracking. Although the world slump in oil prices has lowered the enthusiasm of foreign capital, the reform will still go through as planned.

2. Socio-Economic Situation

With the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement small-scale agriculture was decimated. Farmers have had to sell, rent or abandon their land and migrate to the United States. For many people, the drug economy has become one of the only viable forms of employment—especially in the countryside—through marihuana and poppy plantations, but also clandestine meth labs and small-scale distribution. This has also led to widespread activities by organized crime in the form of burglaries, cattle rustling, extortion, and money laundering through small-scale investments in land and real estate. Such activities are most common in regions where peasant movements are weakest.

The impact of organized crime also extends to macroeconomic proportions and this power has concretely translated into politics. Whereas the Mexican political class benefited from cartel bribes and kept them mostly subservient in exchange of protection, in the last fifteen years cartels have become directly involved in politics and political campaigns. Drug cartels put forward their own candidates or back a politician’s campaign with money but also intimidate those voting for other candidates.

Although this is not the case everywhere and with every politician, it is very common in small towns and cities. This behavior is of course entirely in line with that of capital and capitalists and in Mexico the influence of organized crime in economics and politics has led to the near collapse of several state governments, most recently in Michoacán and Guerrero. Several state governments in the north are also on the verge of collapse. Again, this is entirely in line with the behavior of capital and capitalists. Like in any other industry, they buy influence, protection and politicians. The increasing amounts of violence should be directly correlated with the amounts of money being made from the drug economy.

In the energy sector the economy is also in bad shape. Oil makes up 32% of the Mexican government’s revenue and it funds 40% of the Federal budget. However, since oil fell from $107 per barrel to less than $56 per barrel in the second half of 2014, we will be seeing budget cuts to social services. According to a readjusted budget released on February 1, the Departments of Education, Water, Agriculture, Social Security and Health will be among the hardest hit.

These are extremely bad news for working class Mexicans, who have seen their standard of living consistently falling for the last three decades. At the moment, of Mexico’s population of 120 million, 52.3 million people live in poverty and 55% of the working age population works in the informal sector. As if that wasn’t enough, just last year Mexico’s wages fell below those of China.

Unfortunately, the labor movement is very weak and disorganized for various historical reasons. The nation’s largest labor federations are loyal to the ruling PRI, they are also corrupt and undemocratic.

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4 See Socialist Worker’s “The energy “reform” scam in Mexico” for a detailed analysis of the reform and its consequences.
5 For a substantial fee, the police, the army and the courts also offer protection and preferential treatment.
6 The state governors of Sonora, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas are constantly embroiled in scandals and protest movements have begun to challenge their hold on power and corruption. These are important developments because social movements have been quiet for the most part in the north of the country because of police and cartel repression. But since the 2009 ABC childcare fire disaster in Hermosillo, Sonora, other movements have sprung, such as Occupy Tijuana in 2011 and #YoSoy132 in 2012. 2014 saw the largest protests in the north of the country in decades.
7 See footnote 15 in chapter 31 of Marx’s Capital vol. 1 then consider it with this information from the New York Times: “The Sinaloa cartel can buy a kilo of cocaine in the highlands of Colombia or Peru for around $2,000, then watch it accrue value as it makes its way to market. In Mexico, that kilo fetches more than $10,000. Jump the border to the United States, and it could sell wholesale for $30,000. Break it down into grams to distribute retail, and that same kilo sells for upward of $100,000—more than its weight in gold.” The drug economy—calculated in the billions of dollars per year—has concretely altered the nature of the Mexican state.
8 See chapter 3 of Dan Labotz’s Democracy in Mexico (1999).
3. Femicides return
Women have been one of the strongest hit sectors of Mexican population as the country plunges into social breakdown. In Mexico we have had a wave of femicides since the late 2000s. This phenomenon gained worldwide notoriety through the femicide epidemic coming out of Ciudad Juárez. The femicides epidemic, however, has moved away from Juárez and its epicenter is now Mexico State, adjacent to and part of the Mexico City metropolitan region.

The situation is such that, pressured by activists, the government has designed an “Alerta de Violencia de Género” (Gender Violence Alert) system, akin to a natural disaster response system; when a gender alert is declared, the government is supposed to open up resources and mobilize to protect women. However, since the creation of this emergency response system the government has refused to implement the alert system in all six states where activist organizations have demanded that it be activated. More and more dissatisfied with the government’s inaction, women’s groups and community organizations have sprung up all over the country to demand justice for their victims.

4. Repression, return to the dirty war
Most comrades are probably familiar with the Dirty Wars of Latin America in the 1970s and 80s. However, it is less known that in Mexico there was also a dirty war. From clandestine prisons and forced disappearances to movement infiltration and provocation, the dirty war claimed an unknown amount of victims, especially in social movements and guerrilla organizations.

We are seeing the return of these government policies to suppress dissent. Specifically, we have seen the imprisonment of local leaders of social struggles across the country. For example, community police commander Nestora Salgado, a Mexican-American woman from Olinalá, Guerrero and Jose Manuel Mireles, spokesperson of the self-defense movement in Michoacán, are both imprisoned in maximum-security jails and Nestora has been kept incommunicado for months. These are the most well known cases, but there are dozens of political prisoners from all over Mexico.

We also have a proliferation of cyber-attacks against activists and their social media activities. For example, it has been well documented that the government has a unit specifically dedicated to shut down websites and to use bots to shoot down movement hashtags on Twitter and other social media.

More recently, in the last several months when there have been massive protests across the country the government has resorted to the infiltration of protests and breakaway marches by army and police provocateurs disguised as civilians. Recently, these forces have also intimidated students and others leaving protests or near protest sites and conducted arbitrary arrests.

5. Social Movements and Ayotzinapa
One of the most well known struggles in Mexico and internationally is the struggle of the Zapatistas in the state of Chiapas. While the Zapatista communities have gained autonomy to a large degree, they have struggled to tackle important questions in the region, such as poverty and economic development. Furthermore, out migration to other parts of Mexico or the United States have also shifted the strength of the Zapatista base.

Besides communiqués and solidarity marches with Ayotzinapa parents and students the Zapatistas have remained largely absent from the movement—this at a time that has seen the largest ideological opening for an alternative to the corrupt and unpopular Peña Nieto administration. While I think this was a missed opportunity to strengthen ties with the existing social movements and the left, it falls in line with their abstentionist way of operating for the last several years.

This was indeed a missed opportunity since the Ayotzinapa struggle has brought a host of social contradictions developing for the last thirty years to the forefront of Mexican politics; the underfunding of

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8 Comrades that need background information can find detailed coverage of the Ayotzinapa movement on Socialist Worker. I recommend the interview “Voices from Ayotzinapa tell their story”.

education, the penetration of organized crime into political power and insecurity (violence). This is one of
the reasons why the Ayotzinapa case resonates so much with Mexicans.

However, it is also important to add that there were concrete organizational structures already in place by
the time the students were attacked and disappeared and that this organizational capacity served greatly to
help the movement explode on the scene.

For example, the Federation of Socialist Rural Students of Mexico (FECSM)—the student union for the
Rural Normal Schools (rural teacher’s colleges) with a strong Maoist orientation—has a long history of
organizing protests against budget cuts to their school system.

This highly centralized organization is closely tied with the Coordinating Committee of State Education
Workers of Guerrero (CETEG)—the left-wing of the teacher’s union of Guerrero state, where many
graduates of Normal schools teach—which has also been fighting against the education reform for more
than two years.

Furthermore, both the FECSM and the CETEG are organically tied to the Union of Peoples and
Organizations of Guerrero State (UPOEG)—a broad umbrella organization that is most well known for
kicking out corrupt police and politicians from many towns of Guerrero state and instituting community
police and self governance structures.

These three organizations have backed the parents and the students from Ayotzinapa in their struggle for
justice from the beginning. Mexico City organizations, especially student assemblies, responded to this call
and together forced the issue to national and international prominence.

Thus, it is not a coincidence that the Ayotzinapa movement exploded the way it did. Broad coalitions of
strong organizations that have influence beyond Guerrero were able to push the issue beyond those
immediately affected because the issue crystalized everything that is wrong with Mexico.

In fact, at the height of their strength this past Fall, these organizations and a host of others throughout
Guerrero took over more than two dozen towns in addition to the ones they already occupied, and forced a
dual power situation in parts of the state. As of writing it is my impression that this is still the case.

Unfortunately, Ayotzinapa can’t be automatically replicated throughout Mexico since the levels of
organization vary greatly state by state.

Furthermore, the movement faces important organizational challenges, some of which I have outlined in
Socialist Worker articles. Other problems are that there is a fatigue building up in the ranks. Although the
movement put the government on the defensive and several politicians had to step down, the state has
mostly remained intact. This has been frustrating and contributed to this fatigue.

Furthermore, the FECSM has been pushing the formation of a student union but based on its model, in a
sense, a top-down student union where they are at the top. Comrades here call these “mirrors”, where the
FECSM calls a specific action and all other schools in the national student union mirror that action.

This initiative was soon shut down by several universities’ students unions, among other reasons, the highly
undemocratic nature of the structure, but also the fact that the levels of militancy and political
consciousness are highly uneven among students, even in public universities.

Notwithstanding these challenges the movement has completely shifted the political terrain of Mexico.
Specifically, on the electoral arena it has caused a deep shakedown in the Party of the Democratic
Revolution (PRD) because of the direct involvement of some of its politicians in the Ayotzinapa case.

When the PRD formed in the late 80s it was a center-left party composed of existing politicians in the PRI
and sections of the pre-Zapatista left. As the party entered into the political system it was eventually
corrupted by the party system of state subsidies, which enabled the creation of political fiefdoms,
patronage networks. The Ayotzinapa case has exposed the PRD as a party of turncoat politicians and a bankrupt political project.

6. Electoral Politics and MORENA
The fall from grace of the PRD has opened the electoral arena for the Movement of National Regeneration (MORENA), a new political party headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. As a member of the PRD López Obrador ran for president twice and both times his electoral victory was stolen through widespread voter fraud. When López Obrador was in the PRD he rallied his supporters around the non-profit MORENA in 2012.

When López Obrador broke with the PRD it left with his followers and turned MORENA into a party that was officially recognized in 2014. However, the party is constrained by its emphasis on a purely electoral strategy and rarely goes outside of institutional channels to mobilize its membership. Furthermore, MORENA is also very top down and party militants are currently very unhappy because the top leadership is selecting candidates (often former PRD or PRI politicians) for the midterm elections and going against the wishes of local party committees.10

MORENA hopes to perform well during this year’s midterm elections, which will be the first trial of strength for the new party. However, the party will face a host of maneuvers from the establishment.

For their part, left organizations have also lost some members to MORENA and if the party performs well on the campaign trail the Left will be pressured to get out the vote for MORENA as the “lesser evil”.

7. The Left, its projects and its perspectives
Organizations on the Mexican Left, together with independent sectors of labor have made attempts to form worker’s political organizations in an attempt to become a pole of attraction for radicalized workers.

For example, the Mexican Electrician’s Union (SME)—which has been on strike since workers were locked out by the government in 2009—has been the backbone of the People’s and Worker’s Political Organization (OPT). From the beginning the organization has had an anti-capitalist and ecosocialist program and several Left organizations are active inside it. The OPT was founded in 2011 as a response to the government’s attacks on labor. However, the OPT failed to become a registered party in 2013 since it did not have enough signatures. The organization is currently facing a lot of pressure from the outside and from the inside to throw its support behind MORENA.

However, the left within the OPT is calling for a different strategy since they feel that active participation in the mid-term elections of June would only help the government as they attempt to channel and demobilize the social discontent of the streets into an institutional framework.

At the moment this seems to be the most important task for the government and just last week the Attorney General declared the Ayotzinapa case as closed—even though they can’t account for the missing students.

Furthermore, the government is intent on channeling discontent towards the elections because public scrutiny is turning towards the army—the most guarded institution of the Mexican state. In fact the slogans coming out of the demonstrations illustrate the shift in consciousness about the role of the state in the disappearance of the 43 students.

The slogans started as “they were taken alive and we want them back alive” then shifted to “The state did this” and evolved to “Peña out!” The latest slogan places the blame on the army; “It was the army”.

Because of the implications for the State the government however will no concede on this point but neither will the parents and the classmates of the 43 missing students. It seems then the movement has reached an impasse that will only be surmounted with stronger and more centralized organization.

10 For this and other reasons the Ayotzinapa movement has kept its distance from MORENA.
For this reason the midterm elections will only serve to demobilize the movement, because they will in fact lead to a different resolution to the current impasse, one which will not bring justice.

8. Conclusion
As comrades can conclude from this brief overview the future for the Mexican working class left to the whims of capital does not look very bright. However, the left and the social movements are not strong enough to carry out this task. Yet still, widespread social discontent remains.

In the coming months the government will attempt to channel such discontent through institutional means, mainly the midterm elections of June. Even if there is a low turnout it will serve the regime to demobilize the street protests and to legitimize itself.

While the left and the social movements face a host of challenges to the success of their campaigns and their growth, the current political period is also very exciting. For example, at a national level, the student movement has not been this well organized since the late 1990s. Furthermore, if the last two years of the Peña Nieto presidency are any indication we will continue to see the growth of protest movements that will continue to put forward the demand for a political revolution through the slogans “¡Fuera Peña!” and “¡Qué se vayan todos!” because the government will only offer more of the same.

Mexicans are well aware of the political shifts occurring in Europe, first with Podemos and now with SYRIZA, and they will no doubt continue to look for alternatives to the current political regime.

HA

Further reading:

Political, Economic and Labor 2014 year in review:
http://www.ueinternational.org/MLNA/mlna_articles.php?id=232#1786
I strongly recommend that comrades interested in Mexican politics follow and sign up for Dan Labotz’s “Mexican Labor News and Analysis” newsletter: http://www.ueinternational.org/MLNA/

On Oil privatization and its economic impacts:
http://socialistworker.org/2014/09/09/mexicos-energy-reform-con
http://newpol.org/content/collapse-oil-prices-fall-peso-exacerbate-mexican-political-crisis
http://newpol.org/content/mexican-congress-passes-energy-reform-historic-defeat-left

On political prisoners Nestora Salgado and Mireles:
freestestora.org
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yznDnHwrvEg
http://socialistworker.org/2014/08/19/siding-against-the-autodefensas

Further reading/media in Spanish to follow
La Jornada newspaper
http://www.jornada.unam.mx
Proceso magazine
http://www.proceso.com.mx
Emeequis magazine

11 A December poll that asked the question “How much do you believe the President?” revealed that 12% believe “a lot”, 47% “a little” and 38% “nothing” (3% don’t know).
Assessing the experience of the Logan Square (Chicago) branch

Heading into this past fall, the Logan Square branch of the Chicago district was in an odd and challenging situation. The branch had recently lost seven members due to folks moving to other parts of the country. Most of those members were leaders of crucial movement work including education justice, Fight for 15, and electoral work. The other members were very promising developing cadre. Some of the members that moved away had also been in the current branch committee, which left the branch functioning without an official branch committee for a large part of the summer.

All of this was happening at a time where a huge opening had been created due to the uptick in struggle in the BDS movement as well as the Ferguson uprisings in the wake of the murder of Mike Brown. There were nationwide preparations for the massive Global Climate March in New York as well.

Topics at branch meetings were reflecting the movement work happening around us, and although participation at branch members had been mixed and uneven, many meetings started to feature several non-members and contacts. At times, nonmembers outnumbered active members for better or for worse.

The branch also had a more outward look than in the past, due to a branch meeting rotation schedule the Chicago District had voted on earlier in the spring, which prompted us to have a public forum at either the branch or district level roughly every fourth week. This document will not try to assess the overall success or shortcomings of the rotation schedule, but the conscious attempt to have a more outward approach with more consistent public meetings, which opened up a space for a wider periphery to become acquainted with the ISO in Chicago.

The new Branch Committee directly assessed the challenges, although very exciting ones at that, of prioritizing the growing periphery around us, and wanting to further cultivate it.

One of the highlights last October, was the “What Do Socialists Say About Elections?” public forum that the branch overwhelmingly voted to put on the basis that election work was a priority in our district and branch, and at the time, a potential Karen Lewis for Mayor campaign was spurring much debate with allies and contacts in our movement work (See document from CTU comrades in Bulletin #5 for more info on those debates).

There were a total of 45 attendees, with about 25 being non-members. That is note-worthy as there were more non-members that members in attendance, including some important movement allies and a few high school students, as well as the majority of the folks that Branch Committee had pegged as priority contacts.

The forum served as a catalyst in getting the branch to cement an outward perspective and help redevelop infrastructures such as tabling routines that had not been happening very frequently. We prioritized sit-down meetings with contacts closest to us, and sent personalized invites to allies in the electoral work as well as education justice work. The branch participated in three separate paper sales/flierings. A couple folks that attended the forum actually mentioned coming out because of neighborhood flierings done prior to it. A comrade organized a phone-banking, which brought out at least one contact we met at the Aaron Dixon forum at Columbia as well as a couple radicalizing high schoolers. There were also folks that found out about us via the internet and attended to check out a meeting.
Systemized Approach to Contact Work

Since late 2013, the contacts coordinator for Logan Square with the help of the branch has been following up with nonmembers in a variety of ways: keeping a document that listed contacts from paper sales and forum used for email blasts and phone banking; sending agendas to contacts; encouraging questions and sit-down meetings for those attending meetings; and with the help of BC, prioritizing contacts for potential ISO members. After Socialism 2015, a contact plan was developed that involved every member of the branch to follow-up with contacts, cadre members assigned to high-priority contacts and developing members as the secondary member to sit in at meetings and be part of the assessment of that work. While that plan was not entirely successful, it was the start of re-prioritizing contacts and forming deeper political relationships with nonmembers. Two of the 12 contacts in that original plan eventually became members.

Another major turning point was a branch meeting following the Mike Brown case. A Chicago district member, who actually went to Ferguson the weekend after the incident, came to our branch to present. It appeared that people came because of the Facebook event besides our growing periphery.

Coming out of the successful meetings last October, the BC instituted another contact plan for the current periphery at the time. We used questions and disagreements from sit-down contact meetings to structure in-branch discussions and leveraged the resources that our Midwest Marxism Day School offered in order to continue the process of sitting down and talking to folks to convince them of our project and to join the organization. We also used many of the questions our contacts had to shape branch educationals. For instance, some of our contacts had questions regarding the role a revolutionary organization and the question of reform versus revolution, among others. The BC weighed these questions and organized an educational case study on Chile 1973 with the aims of touching on the centrality of building a revolutionary organization and what the cost of missing a revolutionary party means.

The result was that coming out of the Midwest Marxism Day School, the branch had 5 new members. Four joined in the weeks prior to the conference and out of our educational, and a former member re-joined the organization and the branch directly out of the Day School.

Challenges facing the Logan Square branch going forward

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the branch coming out of the new year and the pre-convention period is the question of how to get the majority of the branch engaged with our project and more active in building our infrastructures: attending branch meetings, a consistent SW routine, and contact work.

It is clear that one reason for uneven participation is the fact that many of the cadre in the branch are swamped with movement work, including union members and the folks in the elections fraction, dealing with the day-to-day struggles on working in a political campaign.

However, part of it may be an overall underestimation from many long-standing members of our branch about the political period we’re organizing in, whether it’s relating to the Black Lives Matter movement or just the mere fact that the branch was able to recruit nearly a half a dozen members in the span of a month-and-a-half.

Another step for the branch is continuing the focus on membership development, whether it be with the large influx of new members or the layer of developing cadre in the branch.

Since the recent success in recruiting, the branch has had two members officially resign due to political disagreements. One of the former members had been in the organization for close to five years, but had not been an active member of the branch in the recent past. The other individual was a newer member who had not been won to our politics on lesser-evilism and had openly been campaigning for Democrats during the midterm elections.
It should be a priority of the branch leadership and cadre to make sure all comrades are won over to the overall political perspectives as well as won over on the task at hand of being committed to building a revolutionary socialist organization.

One way in which the BC is trying to integrate the newer members is by kicking off a Meaning of Marxism discussion group and will continue to organize that. Another method is motivating comrades in the branch to attend the monthly Marxist Classics discussions organized by the District-wide Membership Development Team.

Lastly, the branch as a whole needs to focus on the issue of continuing to meet with contacts and developing a new periphery now that the majority of ours has joined the organization. That can only be done by creating a culture of comrades who are energized to build branch meetings and public forums, and engage in conversations based on the politics on SW with the people radicalizing around us.

Although aspects of the experience in the Logan Square branch are challenging and somewhat unique, we hope comrades from all branches can generalize about an opening which shows that a layer of radicalizing workers, students and activists take the politics of our organization seriously, and with the proper infrastructures in place, our organization can easily see a growth of membership both quantitatively and qualitatively.

CE and GP

Electoral work in San Diego

Last summer a Somali community activist and friend of the Branch came to our meeting and said we should run a socialist for City Council in 2016. She said the local taxi workers’ organizing committee would support this, as they wanted to replace a previously friendly Democrat. She approached us because for years we have had our meetings in District 9, a working class area that is 50% Latino with substantial East African, Vietnamese, and African American populations. Considering this a promising lead toward a campaign that would have initial backing from influential organizations in immigrant communities, we agreed to attend a meeting. The first meeting, at the taxi workers office, seemed promising. But soon the taxi workers’ organizer who had expressed interest changed tune, saying that the previously friendly Democrat had come through for the taxi workers after all.

But in discussing the possibility with members and contacts, we sensed a broad and unifying interest in running a socialist for City Council. For some the Sawant victory had them primed. For others the Great Recession area struggles, like Occupy and pro-Trayvon Martin protests, seemed to have set the stage for entering the electoral arena.

A loyal but loosely affiliated member of our Branch, a single immigrant mom who joined a few years ago, had emerged in recent minimum wage rallies as a passionate and popular critic of Democratic Party compromises. She had publicly confronted politicians who wavered. A native Spanish speaker, she had (and has) a magnetic charisma that made her a beloved figure on the local left, from progressive labor staffers to immigrant rights and San Diego City College student activists. We asked her to run, and after some hesitation she agreed.

We thought this presented an opportunity for the ISO to contribute to building a San Diego Socialist Campaign, inviting individuals and organizations, including other socialist orgs, to join on a basis of equality. At the same time, we counted on using the Branch’s regular meeting space for frequent community forums. A few organizations have responded positively, with the Greens and the brand new Socialist Alternative (SA) branch actively jumping on board. SA leaders initially expressed skepticism, but dropped this after persistent overtures.
Reaching out to people to come to initial organizing meetings, we were impressed by the enthusiasm. We were in fall 2014, preparing for an election in June 2016, and were able to get about 10 non-ISO people, including union staff and movement coalition leaders, to attend. At one rally in solidarity with Ferguson, attended by about 100 mostly young radical types, the candidate’s speech (with stats on local police abuses and specific proposals) attracted the most enthusiastic response of all speakers. This surprised me, because the young ultra-lefty crowd in attendance could easily have tuned out an electoral campaign speech.

Then a wave of personal and financial problems forced our candidate to drop out of the campaign. But the Campaign decided to continue. Not having a candidate set us back, yet without the experience of the candidate we would not have glimpsed the potential we now see.

The San Diego Socialist Campaign has now started organizing monthly forums in which we build panels with movement activists, state our preliminary thinking about a particular platform issue, and then break into groups to discuss ideas about what a full-fledged platform would say and do. Our January 15th meeting on police issues drew 25 non-ISO people, including several from recent protests who we had not otherwise met. Despite disorganization in the meeting, the break-out discussions were electric with a sense of ownership and purpose in moving toward proposals that are to be used for electoral campaigning.

So far we have three central campaigning issues: a $15.93 minimum wage (following a local study that said that figure is necessary to lift San Diego families into self-sufficiency), police control (ending the racist curfew sweep policy, measures against sexual abuse and racial profiling, and some as yet undefined steps toward demilitarization and disarmament), and immigrant justice (voting rights for the undocumented, creation of a genuine sanctuary city in San Diego). These 3 core planks reflect the main areas of recent movement activity in the District and the City. We pose them as a radical socialist counter to the three central issues used by Councilwoman Marti Emerald in her 2012 campaign: “public safety”, voter registration, and redevelopment money for the District. The Democrat Emerald is not unpopular, but no Republican ran against her. That and the fact that the race leads to a non-partisan primary election, in which the top two vote-getters go to a runoff if neither passes the 50% threshold, means that our Campaign does not face the spoiler issue. Emerald is also white and non-Spanish speaking in a newly created District whose lines were drawn intentionally to create a Latino majority. Thus we are prioritizing finding a bilingual Latino/Latina who will be able to campaign on Spanish-language radio and elsewhere.

Our future is anything but certain. We may find a candidate for 2016, or the Campaign may end up grooming someone for later than that. This document has been very cursory because our experience is so nascent that generalizable conclusions must mostly wait. But so far, what we have seen suggests that entering City Council races can be a powerful factor through which the ISO can contribute to unifying a local Left. Our Branch has a few new contacts met through the Campaign, with one on the verge of joining. We feel that we are reaping positive results while helping the Great Recession era grassroots Left take its next logical and natural step.

AW

Believing Survivors: A Response to Concerns

This document is intended to address concerns raised by SS (for the Steering Committee) in the document “The complexities of rape and sexual assault: A contribution” from Pre-convention Bulletin #2, and also reflects some discussion with other comrades since publication of a document written by two of us, “Towards a Disciplinary Procedure that Trusts Survivors,” in Internal Bulletin #2, July 2014.

We are in basic agreement with the principles and factual background in the Steering Committee’s document (roughly the first 10 pages), but our reasoning leads us to quite different practical conclusions. In this document we will respond to the concerns raised in the Steering Committee’s document (roughly the last 3 pages), and in doing so explain why our reasoning leads us to (still) argue the following:
At all levels of the organization, the standard of sufficient evidence in cases of sexual assault or intimate partner violence should be a statement by a named survivor against a named individual. An account of the events in question should be collected from the accused and any other relevant witnesses before a decision is reached. However, in the absence of direct counter-evidence beyond the word of the accused, a statement of this nature should be considered enough evidence to warrant disciplinary action. There should be no time limit or statute of limitations on when an accusation can be made.

**Preserving Due Process**

The first disagreement S raises in her document is an argument that due process is fundamental to democracy, and that the changes we suggest would eliminate due process. We believe our policy would not eliminate due process, which is fair treatment in adjudication. We maintain that anyone accused of sexual assault or intimate partner violence in our organization should have an opportunity to defend themselves, make a statement, produce evidence, and, if desired, appeal a decision.

Our disagreement is centered around what constitutes sufficient evidence to find that someone has violated our organization’s code of conduct in these cases. The Steering Committee document suggests we should be predisposed to believing accusers, while simultaneously presuming the innocence of the accused. Here we run up against a problem: Is it desirable - or even possible - to believe both accuser and accused? We believe that logically, practically, and politically speaking, the answer is no.

Because of the nature of sexual assault (i.e. most assaults happen in private and attackers are unlikely to confess), we will almost certainly be dealing with only two pieces of evidence: Two conflicting firsthand accounts. We do not have the capacity to gather forensic evidence, and even if we did it would likely be irrelevant as it would give no indication of consent.

HL correctly wrote in a 2014 Pre-Convention Bulletin: “Unless there are very unusual circumstances for a sexual assault (a direct witness, the respondent brags about the assault, etc.) it would be extremely difficult … to establish evidence in cases of sexual assault -- especially in cases where the perpetrator/victim know one another. … It is very difficult for a person to produce evidence about what they didn't wish at a particular moment. Moreover, attacks may be reported days, weeks, months, or years after an assault; trauma produces gaps and distortions in survivors’ memories and narratives.”

Our proposals address situations where two conflicting firsthand accounts of an event are the ONLY evidence. When this is the case, there are only three possible scenarios:

1. The accused is lying and/or delusional, and the accuser’s account is true.
2. The accuser is lying and/or delusional, and the accused’s account is true.
3. Both parties are lying and/or delusional, and neither account is true.

None of these scenarios allow for a simultaneous predisposition to believe the accuser and a presumption of innocence for the accused. One or the other (or both) of the accounts must be disbelieved. We do not include a scenario here in which both accounts are truthful because, as Jen Roesch has reported, research shows that “gray rape,” where the rapist believes that the other person is consenting, is essentially a myth.

We believe scenario #1 is vastly more likely than the other two. From both a political and a logical standpoint, we believe it is right to trust survivors and view their statements as sufficient evidence in such cases.

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13 [http://socialistworker.org/2013/01/07/victim-blaming-system-excuses-rape](http://socialistworker.org/2013/01/07/victim-blaming-system-excuses-rape)
As Rosie Warren of the International Socialist Network in Britain argued: “The statement that we believe someone alleging rape is not only an important act of solidarity, but is also, given what we know about the nature of allegations, the only logically coherent position to take.”

Some members have argued that our political principles against sexism will protect us against unfairly favoring the accused without needing to change our policies. Often, we feel that this will in fact be the case. Our instincts most of the time will lead us to trust survivors. However, there are times when our long-standing political relationships with other comrades can impede our political objectivity. It’s only natural that we might resist considering that our comrade could have raped someone: If we thought they were capable of rape, they wouldn’t be our comrade in the first place. The best way to ensure that we will consistently make the most principled decisions about sexual assault and intimate partner violence is to adopt a clear policy of trusting survivors.

What would we be sacrificing by adopting this policy?

Although we do not believe that this change would remove due process, as we said before, we cannot deny that unwarranted disciplinary action could be the outcome in the unlikely case of a false accusation. We believe that this small possibility must be weighed with two other facts:

1. The most severe discipline we can impose is expulsion from our organization. While members rightly highly value involvement in the ISO, the material impact on the accused is in no way comparable to a criminal conviction, workplace firing, or even expulsion from school.

2. Our organization must be prepared to defend its decisions in such cases to members and periphery. In the event that a member was accused and the accusation was not sustained, we would have to be prepared to defend and explain the decision not to believe the accuser. It is by no means assured that our members or periphery would be satisfied with an explanation, and if they were not, serious harm could be done to the ISO.

As we said in our previous document, by disbelieving accusers, we run a much greater risk of allowing attackers to remain in the organization than “of expelling someone who has not done anything wrong. … Disbelieving [survivors] in the face of overwhelming sexual oppression will have a much greater negative impact on our organization, its standing, and the struggle against exploitation and oppression than any opposite error could.” Our efforts to develop women and LGBT comrades into confident revolutionary leaders will be severely hampered if we allow an environment to develop where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

It’s true that we wouldn’t propose this standard for other violations of our code of conduct, rules, etc., but sexual assault is unique in that the stigma is at least as great for accusers as for accused.

This position will allow us to deal with sexual assault accusations with less harm to the movement, the organization, and everyone involved- - not least, survivors. An organization that commits to this is an organization that will rightly win respect in the struggle against gender- based oppression and attract and retain the strongest anti--sexist fighters.

We don’t know of any cases in which harm was caused by left organizations promptly expelling members accused of sexual violence. Several cases do immediately come to mind of harm caused by not promptly expelling members accused of sexual violence.

The dismissal of rape or intimate partner violence allegations against members has wrecked multiple left groups in recent years (with the SP and SWP in UK being foremost examples).

Guarding Against State Infiltration

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The second concern raised in the steering committee document is that the aims and methods of state infiltration need to be more carefully considered. S argues that the policy change we suggest would make us more vulnerable to state infiltration because anyone could be removed.

The starting point for this disagreement is an assumption that the primary tool that the state would make use of would be false accusations of sexual assault. In fact, we are not aware of specific evidence that the state has historically used false rape accusations to remove leading members of left organizations. However, there is extensive evidence that state infiltrators have used sexual violence and/or deceptive sexual relationships as tools against activists.

Recent instances of this include:

- FBI informant Craig Monteilh had sex under false pretenses with multiple women while undercover in an Orange County mosque
- Undercover cop Mark Kennedy in Britain had sex under false pretenses with multiple women in the environmental movement he was infiltrating
- Undercover cop Mark Jacobs in Britain engaged in at least one long-term relationship under false pretenses with women connected to the anti-globalization and anarchist movements he was infiltrating
- Undercover cop Bob Lambert in Britain had a three-year relationship under false pretenses with a woman in the environmental movement that he was infiltrating and then disappeared after they had a child together
- FBI informant Brandon Darby, who infiltrated Common Ground in New Orleans and led to the arrests of other activists in Texas, is reported to have harassed women in the movement, engaged in sexual relationships under false pretenses with numerous activists, and possibly sexually assaulted activists

Police in multiple states have been documented to have sex under false pretenses with prostitutes before arresting them (for having had sex with them). At least in some cases, this is considered entirely legal. The state also regularly utilizes sexual violence as a means of repression, whether in the form of CIA torture methods or the regular abuse of male and female prisoners in the U.S. prison system. Rather than focusing our concerns on the idea that state agents will fill our ranks posing as assault survivors, we are more concerned about the potential for agents of the state to commit sexual violence against us and other working class people.

This of course does not mean that we should not be cautious. We should be cognizant of the potential for infiltration, and it would certainly be highly suspicious if all of a sudden many leading members were being accused of sexual assault, but such a concern could be addressed as it came up.

If the state were to attempt to harm our organization by making false claims via infiltrators, we can assume that they would most likely do so by having consensual sex with a member, and lying afterward to claim that the encounter was non-consensual. This would present us with a situation of two conflicting firsthand accounts, as described above.

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15 http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/20/fbi-informant
17 http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jan/19/undercover-police-officer-mark-jacobs
19 http://www.democracynow.org/2009/1/6/prominent_austin_activist_admits_he_infiltrated
21 http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/03/21/hawaii_law_allows_cops_to_have_sex_with_prostitutes_before_arresting_them.html
If an instance of a false accusation by a state agent did occur, we would not have any special method to determine whether or not the accusation was false unless we had direct evidence to suggest that the person making the accusation was lying, and our policy allows for direct evidence to be used in any hearing. Frankly, we are fooling ourselves if we think we could detect an agent or saboteur solely on the basis of two conflicting firsthand accounts. In the past, when the FBI targeted the Black Power movement for instance, activists found out about infiltration primarily through the capture or release of classified documents, NOT by determining whose individual statements were the most believable.

In the absence of direct evidence, the implication that we must always be on guard against state infiltration in the form of false rape accusations actually serves to undermine anyone who may come forward about an assault. Particularly because it would often be very difficult to determine if someone is a state agent, the focus on this question could potentially create an environment where all accusers are viewed as potential state agents - an environment that would ultimately be hostile to survivors and their needs.

In fact, the account that is the most consistent and believable does not necessarily, in cases that involve trauma, correspond to the account that is true. Extensive research has been done on the way survivors’ memories and accounts can be affected by trauma. Particularly since most of our members have no training in sexual assault counseling, it would be a huge mistake for us to assume that we will be able to determine whether a survivor is being truthful based on the consistency of their account of events.

Privileging One Kind of Oppression

The final objection raised in S’s document is that our policy would privilege women’s oppression over racial and other forms of oppression. In order to accept that we are doing this, one would have to assume that the only intersection of race and gender relevant to this situation is Black men being falsely accused of rape. However, the history (including that cited in S’s document) demonstrates otherwise: Black women, Native women, and other women of color are subject to higher rates of sexual and intimate partner violence and are the least likely to be believed when they come forward.

An intersectional approach to understanding sexual violence must contend with false accusations of rape against Black men, to be sure. This is why socialists reject calls for expanding the prison system and the role of the state in response to sexual assault. It is important to note, however, that our disciplinary process does not mimic or reinforce the new Jim Crow. Expulsion from the ISO is not equivalent to a felony charge, nor does our organization benefit (the way the state benefits from holding prisoners) from expelling Black men.

An intersectional approach to sexual violence must also contend with the high rates of sexual assault and intimate partner violence experienced by Black women and other women of color. Abuse is widespread, and anyone can be attacked, but statistics show women of color and gender nonconforming people disproportionately suffer gender-based or intimate violence. As with many other forms of violence, the poor, the incarcerated, and the undocumented are especially vulnerable.

Angela Davis pointed to this issue when she argued that “few feminist theorists seriously analyzed the special circumstances surrounding the Black woman as rape victim. The historical knot binding Black women—systematically abused and violated by white men—to Black men—maimed and murdered because of the racist manipulation of the rape charge—has just begun to be acknowledged to any significant extent.”

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22 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape_trauma_syndrome
http://www.doj.state.or.us/victims/pdf/women_of_color_network_facts_sexual_violence_2006.pdf,
https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims,
26 Davis, Angela. “Women, Race and Class.” 173
Kimberlé Crenshaw has documented the fact that “African-American victims of rape are least likely to be believed”\textsuperscript{27} and that, ultimately, “Black women are more likely to be raped than Black men are to be falsely accused of it.”\textsuperscript{28}

Sexual violence is widespread and most accusations are true. In fact, a man of any race is more likely to himself be abused than to be falsely accused.\textsuperscript{29} However, survivors are routinely disbelieved, especially if they are Black women. A commitment to combating both racism and sexism should dictate that we trust survivors, who will often be women of color.

A Recommendation for Consent Education in the ISO

We feel that education on intimate violence and consent would be beneficial to the organization as a whole. Women’s rights activists have long maintained that dispelling the sexist myths that surround intimate violence is important for creating an atmosphere where sexism isn’t tolerated and where accusations are reflexively taken seriously. While many comrades have worked on campaigns around sexual assault policies on campuses and elsewhere, we can’t assume that all comrades have this education. As part of this education, we should openly acknowledge the raced and gendered nature of sexual power dynamics, and make sure cis-male comrades in particular know they should actively support the pleasure and safety (including minimizing risks of pregnancy or disease) of non-cis-male people in shared sexual situations. Consent education will also prepare our members to direct survivors to community resources\textsuperscript{30} as appropriate, since we are not in a position to provide such support ourselves. As a starting point, we recommend the pamphlet “An Anti-Sexism Manifesto: The Rights of Women and the Responsibilities of Socialist Men” by Sandra Bloodworth of Socialist Alternative in Australia.\textsuperscript{31}

Proposals

We believe that the adoption of this policy across our organization is necessary both to protect the ISO and to fulfill our commitment to battling oppression. Therefore, we are submitting three proposals for changes to our rules.

Proposal #1: Add a paragraph to section III.B of the current ISO Rules:

"If an accusation is made of sexual assault or intimate partner violence, a statement by a named survivor against a named individual should constitute a preponderance of evidence. An account of the events in question should be collected from the accused and any other relevant witnesses before a decision is reached. However, in the absence of direct counter-evidence beyond the word of the accused, a statement of this nature should be considered enough evidence to warrant disciplinary action."

Proposal #2: Revise Disciplinary Procedures “Step-by-step guidelines for Disciplinary Committee proceedings”\textsuperscript{3d} to read:

“The complaint must be written by the complainant alone. It cannot be submitted on behalf of another person. However, in cases of sexual assault or intimate partner violence, the complainant’s statement may be a written statement signed by the complainant, an audio recording of the complainant’s verbal account of events (made with the complainant’s consent), or both.”

Proposal #3: Add a point to the Disciplinary Procedures under the section ”Additional procedures that apply in sexual misconduct cases” that reads:

\textsuperscript{27} Crenshaw, Kimberle Williams. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” p. 291/505

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p. 293/507

\textsuperscript{29} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/08/false-rape-accusations_n_6290380.html

\textsuperscript{30} RAINN has a directory of rape crisis centers accessible at http://centers.rainn.org/.

\textsuperscript{31} http://bit.ly/1CzgHU3
"In cases involving sexual assault or intimate partner violence, if there is no direct counter-evidence available beyond the respondent's statement, the statement by the complainant should constitute a preponderance of evidence."

BE, CG, MF, MC, RA