

Pre-convention bulletin #14 / February 11, 2015 for members only

<u>Documents</u>	Page
How are we using print SW? ES	1
Organizing a Socialist Presence at a Union Convention DK, EL, SP	6
Fall 2014 Campus Assessment – Northeastern University A, C, L, S	9
Since when is the ISO quiet about the Democrats? ER	12
Running for State-Senate as a Green in Portland, Maine: Causes and Consequences OH	12
A Lesson from the Chicago Socialist Campaign BB	14
<u>Document with Resolution</u>	
Against the Proposals set forth in the document "Believing Survivors: A Response to Concerns" DB	16

How are we using print SW?

At its 2014 convention, the ISO launched a campaign to put the print edition of *Socialist Worker* back at the center of our organizing. We argued that the revolutionary newspaper continued to be a key tool for building socialist organization and we should therefore work to re-establish the ISO's use of SW, which had fallen off in recent years.

In last year's document "Putting SW at the center," AM emphasized "the stress that Lenin puts on the revolutionary paper being the chief tool for presenting a principled set of socialist politics—the paper centralizes and crystallizes the full range of those politics. As Lenin says, promoting those politics is the task of socialists at all times, regardless of the ups and downs of particular struggles or movements, and all the more so in times when anger at the system in general opens people to a broad discussion about the socialist alternative."

The website is a place for our members, and the growing audience of people who read it on a regular basis, to go for socialist politics, analysis of world events and important debates on the left. It can of course react to world events more quickly than a monthly paper. But it doesn't play the same role as the print edition.

The print SW pulls together a range of articles into one package and presents socialist analysis on a range of questions. This means that, unlike circulating an individual article on a particular topic from the website, members selling SW are arguing for a whole set of socialist ideas. So while someone at an antiracist protest may buy our paper on the basis of a set of articles on police brutality, they will also find out about what we

say about the prospects for the left after the Greek elections, what we say about the Obama administration and find an article about socialist tradition or history. They will also read reports from socialists engaged in local struggles, like Vermont single-payer activists strategizing about the next steps in their fight.

The campaign around putting the print paper back at the center focused on re-motivating a regular routine of street sales that had declined in recent years. We underlined the importance of members engaging with layers of people who are radicalizing but may not yet be part of any organization. And while they are still a minority of the people you might meet on a street corner, as opposed to a protest, there is an audience for socialist ideas and organization.

This initiative included second Saturday street sales, where branches focused on organizing members to take part in well-built monthly street sales, including plenty of information about upcoming meetings, petitions, literature, etc. Over the last year, the National Office has written up proposals in the ISO Notes for topics and campaigns to focus on for these sales, such as solidarity with Palestine or Justice for Mike Brown. A key element to these sales was preparing beforehand to discuss what's in the paper and what the sale was going to focus on, and an assessment afterward about how it went and what kind of conversations members got into.

We also talked about establishing better routine around reading the print SW, including SW reading groups, and the five-for-me program where members buy five papers each month to sell to co-workers, fellow students, friends and other people they meet that might be interested in socialist politics.

Members took the campaign around the print SW seriously, and a year later, a number of branches have made great strides in the use of SW. This means that we're in a much better position to generalize these successes out to other branches that might still be having trouble getting SW sales off the ground. And now we're also in a position to strategize about how to use SW more.

In the hopes of sharing out the experiences of branches, this document tries to include as many quotes as possible from a recent survey of SW organizers around the country about their experiences using SW over the last year.

It took some hard work on the part of branches to put print SW back at the center, including important arguments among members over why we are prioritizing selling the print paper in community street sales at this time. But in places where the case was made—and sometimes several times—and won, members describe really exciting community sales that engage with a working-class audience that we would not have met before.

Here's an example from New York City:

Since the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the Uptown branch (based in Harlem) has seen its work to establish a strong routine around SW pay off exponentially. Throughout the fall, the branch struggled to re-launch public street sales (which had nearly ceased to exist) and by November and December were able to have a couple of really successful tablings.

This process was an integral part of rebuilding the branch's confidence and cohesion. It was a slow process that took persistent effort and political motivation on the part of the SW organizer. But because of the work that was done before the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the branch has been positioned to tap into an increased audience--largely Black, working-class and other people of color--that is looking for radical politics and ways to get involved. This lent dynamism to the sales and meant that they've become easier to organize and people were more excited to be on them.

The branch went from having done about one sale per month in September--December to doing three sales in January in which they sold about 100 papers. A new member who joined in the midst of this has been on almost all of the sales and was able to bring two contacts

from them to the most recent branch meeting. In February, almost all of the members have bought five-for-me's already and the branch is planning to do four sales. It is not a coincidence that branch meetings have become more exciting and the branch is starting to draw around a larger periphery--and particularly a periphery of working-class people of color. The last working meeting had six contacts at it.

The process of rebuilding SW routines and rebuilding the branch have gone hand in hand. The Black Lives Matter movement has helped to inject energy and an excitement about politics into the branch, but--especially in the absence of the mass demonstrations we saw in November and December--it would not have been possible to connect with that sentiment and bring people into the ISO if it had not been for the outward orientation of the tablings.

Likewise, just about every coordinator who has had success described having to experiment, with failures and successes along the way, with times and locations in order to find the right place to sell that could accommodate as many members as possible.

A wrote about their branches' experiences building these monthly public sales:

SW practices were poorly organized in the San Francisco Bay Area during 2013, only a handful of comrades participated in sporadic street or campus sales or bought five-for-me's. But we achieved significant improvements in 2014.

The Oakland branch led the way by launching a Second Saturday Sale in April on Lakeshore Avenue in a busy commercial district with lots of diverse foot traffic. Between 9 and 12 comrades participate in this sale and they usually sell between 10 and 16 papers and collect between 4 and 10 people's contact information.

The Oakland branch has also had success tabling at the popular First Friday street festival. Comrades usually set up a pretty impressive display of Haymarket titles and sometimes make use of striking banners and other forms of creative visual display. But we have found that, due to the timing of the event, it is difficult for comrades to familiarize themselves with the new paper.

The San Francisco branch didn't implement the Second Saturday Sale plan in 2014. Instead, the branch attempted to organize a smaller weekly sale at the Alemany Farmers' Market. Comrades had some good experiences doing this, but the branch struggled to mobilize more than a small handful of members on a weekly basis. However, the branch reorganized and launched a Second Saturday Sale on Mission Street this January; six comrades sold 20 papers, which is the best street sale that branch has had in years.

There are also branches that report that they are still in process of implementing a routine of regular street sales—they feel like they're halfway there, and need to carry it through. There are also a few who say that they haven't begun really putting this into practice, and for them, it's worth going back to the SW documents from last year, and re-motivating print SW.

It's probably always going to be struggle to balance the routine of regular SW sales and other important organizing, such as movement work, but comrades say that once they have gotten the routines under their belts, the sales can really pay off, and become a place where we get to engage with people about socialist politics and build the ISO.

A described how her branch went about campaigning around SW (also check out her separate document on the role of SW).

Paper sales have been more regular for the entire branch in the past year than before. Initially, comrades were assessing that they felt rusty and underconfident but as we continued to use the paper in all aspects of the branch life, meetings, contact work, at

protests, etc. comrades really gained the confidence to put the paper front and center of our conversations on tablings and elsewhere. While we have met contacts out of the tablings, we have not yet recruited anyone from a street sale. I think some comrades are still grappling with the question of why we haven't recruited from street tablings but comrades have talked about how street sales have helped us gauge where consciousness is at beyond movement work, provide us a collective experience to engage our politics with people and assess how we are doing so, and they provide us an opportunity to meet people to bring around our branch.

Campus sales have been a really great way to meet new students and touch base with students we already have met. We have found that most students we meet on tablings are really open to a socialist perspective on what is going on in the world. We have met students who are really just beginning to question the priorities of our society as well as students who are already involved in some kind of left organizing on campus and have more defined thoughts on particular issues but still new to arguments about the need and possibilities for overthrowing capitalism. Usually at our tablings, we pair comrades up to approach people. This has been really helpful for developing assessments of conversations and learning how to work collaboratively in contact work.

Some organizers described the role of print SW and regular tablings to help built a profile on campus for the ISO. C wrote:

For the first half of 2014, the Portland branch based at Portland State University struggled to organize an effective SW routine. Tabling was haphazard and carried out by a small number of comrades. Five-for-me's were also used unevenly across the branch. Beginning in the late spring and continuing through the summer the branch began a process of re-prioritizing routines and more concretely implementing a campus perspective.

Since fall term, tabling on campus happens at least once a week during lunchtime at PSU. These tablings have made us more visible on campus and have brought several contacts around us. Our most successful conversations have been on topics of racism and the Black Lives Matter movement. In recent weeks we have done phenomenally well. One new member sold nearly 20 papers at a recent paper sale.

The print paper continues to be key—and popular—at protests. Many members are also becoming more confident using the paper and engaging with fellow protesters at big events, after several years of setting the paper on backburner. For example, members sold some 500 papers—with its special ecosocialism pullout section for the event—at the Climate March in New York City last year. And of course, it's been key at Black Lives Matter protests. It was pretty great to see a picture New York City members holding SWs with Mike Brown on the cover featured in BuzzFeed's "39 Dramatic Photos of the Eric Garner Protests In New York City."

D wrote:

Over the last year we have made a qualitative advance in our use of SW at political events, actions and on picket lines. Using the newspaper, our members are outward socialists, engaging others with our politics. Especially during high points of struggle (bus drivers strike, Palestine solidarity last summer, Black Lives Matter), we have found a large opening for selling SW. However, this confidence with SW is not automatic. We have found that our confidence and success with the paper is greatest when it is based on explicit discussion about how to sell a specific issue of SW to a specific audience. We have also, over the last year, been more active at engaging people who come to our meetings and events with SW. When someone new walks into our meeting, comrades use the paper as a basis for political discussion.

A said:

The Bay Area district got better at organizing SW interventions into demonstrations and other special events in 2014. Eight comrades sold 50 papers at the San Francisco Glenn Greenwald tour stop in June, 20 comrades sold 70 papers at the Oakland Peoples' Climate Rally in September, and 16 comrades sold 20+ papers at the Oakland Life is Living music festival in October. And 20+ comrades sold 40 papers combined at the San Francisco and Oakland Millions Marches in December.

In general, branches say that SW is more regularly read, with branches circulating articles in preparation for meetings and discussing article more regularly.

B wrote:

We have begun dedicating one branch meeting per month (ideally the first meeting of the month) to discussing key articles in the paper, in order to collectively prepare for SW sales and five-for-me's sales. It's been a challenge to get one meeting a month set aside for this purpose, as we have had a particularly ambitious public meeting schedule, but the benefits are obvious when we do so. Comrades take the paper more seriously, and are more confident talking the politics of the paper when they've collectively discussed key articles. As a side benefit, we have been selling more papers in branch meetings to contacts and periphery.

In several places, SW reading groups have proven to be a great way to get members to talk about the paper in preparation for sales, but have also shown to be a popular place for nonmembers to come and discuss the articles and the politics of the ISO. A Chicago branch reported that they had many contacts who turned out for SW—many more than actual members to help answer the questions.

A wrote:

They were great! We held them every Sunday at a cafe on campus in the late morning or early afternoon. They were often built coming out of our weekly meeting. We would discuss a few articles from the print issue or online if we wanted to cover a particular topic not in the print issue. They were often times a few members and one contact but they were so helpful for our new members and building a branch that they were totally worth it. There were a couple in which we got large numbers of contacts out for them.

Five-for-me's continues to be an area that almost every branch says it needs to work on. We ask that members buy five copies of the monthly paper when it comes out, one for themselves, and four to sell to others. Part of this is being able to have the paper—a calling card with the politics of the ISO in it--on-hand whenever you find someone you think might be interested at work, school or the laundromat (according to one branch member.)

A NYC member recently sold all her five-for-me's at the bar after a Jacobin reading group, which demonstrated the audience that exists for SW—and the ISO--within a broader radicalization.

Some of these individuals will be people comrades are meeting for the first time, but we also hope that five-for-me's can be used as a tool to maintain and organize relationships with people who are around the ISO, but may not come to meetings regularly. It is, for example, an excellent way to keep up a relationship with someone you met at a picket line or protest, or someone you interviewed for an article in the paper, who isn't yet in regular contact with us. Making a routine of getting them the paper is a good way to keep up those connections.

There are individual members, many of them union activists, who regularly use their five-for-me's. In the coming year, we should try to get their stories and experiences in the ISO Notes to share out to others.

The convention will be a great opportunity to assess how the campaign around SW has gone. In the coming year, we should continue to strategize about getting the most out of SW:

-- Branches that have seen public street sale successes should try to build upon that. For instance, there are branches who now are eager to organize more than just one large monthly public street sale, which is a great next step.

-- Branches that have yet to turn the corner might want to go back to last year's SW document "Putting SW at the center" and re-motivate the use of the print paper and discuss about what their sales look like.

-- Get five-for-me's on firmer footing, from the basics of collecting money for them every month to regularly discussing how they're used.

-- Currently, branches orders of SW are about 2,700 per month. With a little effort, it's reasonable that we could increase that to 4,000—take for instance, the impact of improving five-for-me's—and then we can begin to see the true size of our periphery. As Lenin argued when he famously called it the "scaffolding," the revolutionary newspaper is a propagandist, agitator and organizer. As for that third role, when we sell SW, we're establishing a relationship with a periphery of people we want to win over. Ultimately we want to win that audience for the paper to joining the organization. SW is an "organizer" in that the concrete act of selling the paper organizes a relationship to our periphery—it puts us face to face with people we want to win to the ISO.

ES for Steering Committee

Organizing a Socialist Presence at a Union Convention

Three comrades attended a national union convention this past fall, two as elected delegates, one as a guest from another state based union, which has no direct affiliation, but is in the same industry and shares a very similar vision and strategy.

The unions' names are left out, because these details are secondary to the experience. The union has about 85,000 members, the vast majority concentrated in one state. It has a self-described reputation as a progressive, "social justice union", and has conducted multiple one and two day strikes during contract campaigns, primarily in the state where they were founded.

While it has taken left wing positions on issues such as for single payer health care, against Keystone XL, taxing Wall Street, and actively builds movements to support these campaigns, it also engages in traditional union strategies of endorsing and promoting Democratic Party politicians as a means to achieve these ends.

One of the three was elected to attend the previous convention three years ago as a delegate, but as the only comrade there, it was more a learning and networking experience. Now that there were more comrades involved in the union, an organized participation was possible.

In the lead up we discussed what our goals should be and a two-fold approach was decided upon. First and foremost we wanted to meet and make contact with other union members who might be interested in socialists politics. Secondly, we wanted to assess the democratic structure and political content of the national organization, which purports to be member-led, and progressive in orientation.

The reason behind the first goal is that we agree with the ISO's general perspective that radical elements exists in all areas of our society. If comrades put open socialists politics out there, it will attract like minded individuals who we can consciously build socialist organization with, as this has been a key missing ingredient in the rising and falling social movements of the period.

The second goal was linked to the first in that we agree with Marx's statement "the emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself." If workers are to become fit to rule, they must

actively participate in their own liberation. Working class self-activity and consciousness can no more be handed down from well meaning union leaders than “democracy” can be bestowed upon Iraqis via bombs.

Democratic structures in the organizations of the working class must be in place. Because of the pressures of office, and even in the best circumstances, union leadership has the potential to become disconnected from the interests and needs of the rank and file. Democracy is essential for the rank and file being able to push in another direction.

Democracy is also important because it is a more accurate gauge of where the membership stands politically. Much like a conservative union leadership depends upon a passive membership to maintain their positions at the top of the structure, a progressive union leadership can also take advantage of a relatively passive membership as well, even if for radical ends.

Left-wing positions and actions can be organized by the leadership in the name of the membership. When executed without genuine debate and discussion, it papers over disagreement and can give a false impression of where the general membership’s political consciousness is at. This can lead to a gap between the expectations of the leadership and the activity and political commitment of the membership - both becoming frustrated by unfulfilled expectations.

With about 430 delegates and another 500 guests and staff participating, most of the 3 day event was taken up in classes and plenaries, with about 3 hours at the end devoted to voting on bylaws and resolutions. The political content of the convention was a mix of radical politics along with a confusing call for *both* independence and continuance of a relationship with the Democratic party.

At the last convention three years ago a Democratic Governor and Lieutenant Governor were keynote speakers. Despite both of them having imposed cuts to social services, they were touted as invaluable allies. At this convention, Barbara Lee, the only U.S. Representative to vote against war after 9/11 was the keynote speaker. One of her main messages was the importance of a “loyal opposition” to Obama’s war against ISIS. It was not mentioned how she has voted for every funding bill for Israel as well as the resolution endorsing “Operation Protective Edge” which included the murder of over 490 Palestinian children.

Issues such as single payer health care, environmental justice, taxing Wall Street, fighting austerity, social and internationalist unionism were presented from the front in the form of lectures. While the classes didn’t provide ample time for discussion or debate, significant disagreement to these left wing positions was not apparent.

On the first night, a debate between individuals took place at the bar with a long time staffer regarding the politics of the membership. He asserted that the membership was 70% “revolutionary in their consciousness,” even if they weren’t aware that their political positions were revolutionary. While he wasn’t convinced of the significant difference between being a conscious revolutionary and having progressive ideas, it did reveal how some of the senior staff of the union see their project. Through their leadership and control over the union, they impose these left wing ideas on the membership. While this is better than imposing right wing ideas, it still contains a significant element of top down staff driven trade unionism. The shortcomings of this approach will be evident later in the report.

In this atmosphere of all these left wing ideas, we anticipated that it would be more of a challenge to differentiate ourselves as socialists from the overall politics of the union. It turned out to be a more complex picture in the end.

Towards the first goal, we decided to host an event in our hotel room on the last night of the convention. We would also sell Socialist Worker and the ISR to as many as possible throughout the convention. Besides the people we already knew (which were very few) we targeted individuals by zeroing in on those who said left wing things in meetings or who responded to our comments. The flyer to advertise the

meeting was titled “Socialist Meetup” and included links to our organization and publications. Altogether we sold 20 copies of SW, and one copy of “Case for Socialism.”

While about 8 had confirmed for the meetup, only two ended up attending: one rank and file and one staffer. The discussion centered around the overall state of the labor movement and its relationship to politicians.

The rank and file member who bought the book has since attended a regional Marxist Conference and is apparently considering joining the ISO. For a first attempt, while we felt we had succeeded at getting SW out, the turnout at the meetup was lower than we had expected.

The pursuit of our second goal was illuminating in regards to the image and reality of engaging with a supposed “member-led driven” union. We agreed to attempt to get a BDS resolution to the floor since the brutality of Israel’s latest war was still fresh in everyone’s mind. Getting a copy of the bylaws of the union was in itself an ordeal, and apparently elicited more paranoia than welcome into the process of the convention.

When a regional meeting was held with one of the co-presidents a month before, there was no clue as to the process by which one introduces resolutions from the floor.

The resolutions that delegates were to vote on included positions on union rights, single payer health care, international solidarity, climate justice, immigrant rights, GMOs, taxing Wall Street, and the preservation of voting rights. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that these were all written by staff before being reviewed by the elected board of directors (all rank and file workers). While all of these resolutions were progressive in political content, there was no clear mechanism to include the general membership in the process of developing these resolutions.

At the convention itself, there was not only confusion from leadership regarding the process of bringing resolutions to the floor, but outright resistance to it. We were told that deadlines had already passed and that the process was spelled out in the union’s bylaws and magazine. When asked to produce these rules, they weren’t able to do so. A staff person later confided that there was an explicit directive from the staff to the leadership to discourage anything from coming to the convention floor.

At one point, we were asked by a co-president if there weren’t disagreements with the resolutions themselves, why were we spending all this energy on getting something to the floor? It was argued that the problem wasn’t with the resolutions but that the process itself was flawed. How could members be expected to articulate and defend political positions that someone else came up with?

Because of the intense resistance from the leadership, instead of submitting an entirely new resolution, we would instead attempt to amend the existing resolution on international solidarity to include an anti-war statement and explicit condemnation of the Israeli war on Gaza.

The debate on the amendment to the resolution was heated, and in the end garnered support from about 20% of the delegates. Members who had military families spoke out in favor of an anti-war resolution, and others made backward statements such as “we should have the right to bomb others before they bomb us,” and “this is an attempt to put your personal ideology on us,” the second commentator apparently thinking the rest of the convention to be entirely non-ideological in nature! We learned later that staff encouraged those against it to argue their position, possibly not expecting such backward arguments.

There was an amendment to the amendment (which we supported because something was better than nothing) to make our amendment a simple anti-war statement, removing mention of Palestine, but that failed as well - possibly due to confusion over the process. After the convention ended, many came up to us to discuss how to work together at future conventions to get an anti-war resolution passed. Contact information was exchanged and SWs were sold.

Post convention, there was apparently a directive from the national leadership to “ice out” the delegate who proposed the amendment, which was described as “a stunt.” According to the staff who informed us of this directive, unofficial discipline could be carried out by not inviting this individual to national events and by not choosing them represent others in front of members or the media. Time will tell how effective this will be, as an activist cannot simply be “iced out” from co-workers who know them as a militant and look to them for leadership in fighting the boss.

The top down perspective by left wing union leadership (staff or otherwise) misunderstands the process by which members can become advocates for radical political positions. When political positions are handed down from above, without debate or discussion, rank and file members cannot be expected to understand or defend them. Furthermore, if the process of participation in the formulation of resolutions is shrouded in mystery and met with resistance, one cannot be surprised by a passive membership that is not engaged in activity, convention or otherwise.

Two main lessons can be drawn from this experience. One is that when engaging in political work within the context of a convention or other union gathering, bring as many other people along in your project. It was a mistake that we didn’t strategize on putting a resolution forward with others, so that it didn’t come from a couple of socialists, but from a group of delegates. While the issue we chose did strike a chord with people and garner significant support, it would have been more effective had we brought others into the planning and execution of it. It would have made it more difficult for the leadership to organize against it if they saw more widespread support initially. Despite our failure to get it passed, we did make good contacts for the future.

Second, and more importantly, we should collectively organize our participation in trade union conventions and conferences as members of a socialist organization. There is a generational gap in the radical current within trade unions. Activists and leadership who lived through the 1960’s and 70’s are quickly retiring from their jobs, and many still carried within them (in one form or another) the perspective of mass struggle and fight back.

We have a twofold task of rebuilding rank and file activity as well as a socialist current within workplaces. We need to consciously plan our tactics of operating at these events with these two tasks in mind and assess how effective we were afterwards.

DK, EL, SP

Fall 2014 Campus Assessment – Northeastern University

At the beginning at the fall semester, the Boston branch began orienting on the Northeastern campus as part of our national perspective on increasing our presence on campuses wherever possible. We had oriented on UMass Boston for a couple years but have not organized on campus since the spring semester of 2013. Since merging our campus branch with our community branch in 2013, we have had the opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of organizing at UMass Boston. While we were able to recruit 3 members to the ISO and sustain a presence on campus, we began to stagnate as a branch. One of the most important assessments of that organizing was that we didn’t have enough cadre to facilitate the cadre development of new members while continuing to try build a new periphery and recruit new people. We now have a fraction relating to campus work instead of a stretching our resources thin and creating another branch. And we have put a big emphasis on membership development in thinking about the organizing of branch and fractions. While there is potential to build at the many colleges and universities in Boston, the political climate at Northeastern makes it particularly ripe for building a socialist organization. There have been a number of recent victories for activists on campus that have built the political confidence of the left at NU.

Over the past few years, the campus left has pressured the university to cut ties with Adidas due to a report on factory conditions from Human Rights Consortium, as well as led a successful campaign to unionize the adjunct faculty. Additionally, the Left unwaveringly and unconditionally support the NU chapter of Student

for Justice in Palestine when it was suspended for about one month based on trumped-up charges, against the rights to free speech and to have certain political opinions. Due to support from many local, national and international groups, it was reinstated in April of 2014.

The Progressive Student Alliance also put together a rebuttal to University President Joseph Auon's State of NU address, called the Real State of NU. The RSNU brought together a number of political action groups across campus to discuss what it's like to actually deal with the administration. SJP, DivestNU (who led a successful resolution for the University to divest from fossil fuels), HEAT (Husky Environmental Action Team), SHARE (Sexual Health Advocacy Resources and Education) were all present. Some 300 people turned out. All of these fights brought out the best when it comes to solidarity, and has led to a greater appreciation on campus for interconnected struggle, which is part of the reason that we believe it is a good place to build an ISO branch.

Our fractions main goals for the fall semester included; *building the political development and leadership of members of the fraction, establishing a consistent presence on NU campus, and building a periphery and recruiting students.*

Cadre development

Like the branch as a whole, the fraction put a lot of emphasis on building a collective method. We made an effort to pair up around contact work, organize tablings that most fraction members could participate in, create a division of labor that encouraged people to take on different roles such as heading up a tabling, SW coffee hour, or a section of a fraction meeting. This method really helped comrades develop a new sense of confidence and folks were initiating contact work for the first time in a while and consistently following up with people. We also began talking about and acting on our national perspective on recruitment (fast tracking serious contacts to membership). This has meant we have been up front about recruitment with the people around us and have begun to use the Where We Stand packet as one of the first things we read with contacts. Talking through what these conversations look like in fraction and branch meetings has been key for giving people the confidence to be up front about recruitment. The political development of members has also been tied to the life of the branch, for example our emphasis on political education has played a huge role.

Presence on campus

We were able to table at Northeastern three times, where we were able to meet new NU students, build our meetings, sell Socialist Worker newspaper, and build the Peoples Climate March. One really great success from our one of tablings at NU was that a NU student and contact at the time kicked off our pre-meeting and set a really helpful lead. She focused on how we are engaging with new people about US intervention in Iraq and the priorities of capitalism. Our experience on tablings has really confirmed for us the opening for socialist politics – it has been very easy to initiate political conversations with people about socialism, imperialism, oppression, the environment, etc. And while we have had no problem meeting political students on campus interested in socialism, this is not to say that the students we meet are ready made Marxists. Some of the folks we have met who are in our immediate periphery are very new to politics and don't necessarily have a Marxist analysis of the war in Iraq or the role of the police but they are really open to what we have to say, have great instincts, and are interested in reading, discussing, and organizing with us.

The first public forum we hosted on campus, "Why you should join the socialists", drew out about 25 non-members. This was a big step forward for pushing the branch outward and all comrades were engaged with contacts before and after the meeting and engaged in the discussion. The discussion itself was great and contacts raised questions such as; how can I get involved, what does a revolution look like, and how can we use art for changing society, what about human nature? Many students had heard about the forum from seeing flyers on campus, word of mouth, or through social media. The campus blitz really paid off and we sold 14 copies of SW.

Coming out of the forum, we wanted to get contacts to the Peoples Climate March and our Socialist Worker Coffee Hour. Instead of everyone scheduling individual contact meetings, we wanted to

collectivize our contact work so we could all gain a better assessment of the people closest to us out of the 25 non-members that joined the forum. While we had flyers and an announcement at the forum, only 2 contacts showed up. We assessed that the building that we did for it was good but we didn't have a lot of time to follow up with people individually to try and win them to the coffee hour due to being busy building the Peoples Climate March. In the end it was a great discussion on the midterm elections and the role of the Democratic Party.

By the end of September, we assessed that we wanted to slow down our pacing and we began to make a lot of space in fraction meetings to assess contact work so that we could really solidify our periphery and bring contacts closer to the branch. We used fraction meetings to identify contacts, figure out what our conversations should look like (for example how to motivate a branch meeting that was an organizing meeting or how to talk about recruitment), and what the next steps were for contacts. These types of conversations were really helpful for giving our fraction the confidence to call up contacts and gave us a collective sense of how we were bringing contacts closer to the ISO.

Our second meeting at NU on racism and the civil war went very well. It drew out at least 10 contacts, including new people that our contacts brought. Contributions from contacts were great from talking about feeling betrayed by this system to the case of Rodney King and history of police violence. By the end of October we were trying to win folks to participate with us at the Friends of the IDF protest, which contacts came out to with us and we were able to meet new contacts including a couple NU students. We were also able to meet new people at a Black Lives Matter protest around the same time.

While it was right that we wanted to slow down from the campus blitz pace, we struggled to strike a balance. Our presence on campus lessened quite a bit once we hit November due to logistical challenges. This made it harder to attract a new periphery, get a better sense of campus politics, and engage our existing periphery in the branch building process at NU.

Building a periphery on campus/ recruitment

In the fall semester, we were able to build a periphery out of our two meetings on campus and recruit one NU student. We have met many NU students through tabling, our meetings on campus, and the bus to the Peoples Climate March. We have a couple close contacts from last semester that are still around the branch and have gotten involved in the process of building our kick off meeting. One of them recently participated on a tabling with us. She was very excited to participate and was able to raise concrete questions about what it means to be a member such as what are we trying to get out of tablings? Are we just hearing people out or trying to win them to socialist ideas? What have members experiences been like on tablings? This was a great experience for further integrating her into the branch and being able to talk about membership in the ISO in a more concrete way. Our student member that was recruited at the end of the fall semester is someone we met at a Palestine protest in the spring semester. When we first met her, she did not consider herself a socialist but was very open to our arguments on a range of questions and took her own political education very seriously. Her recruitment was the result of comrades being very direct and consistent about recruitment/membership as well as her own seriousness about political education and learning about the ISO. She had come out to Socialism 2014 with us, was away for the summer, but came back into the branch life in the fall and took the Marxism Day School very seriously.

Moving forward

Our fraction has already begun to build a new periphery with the start of a new semester and has done great work in bringing close contacts we met in the fall semester around our branch since coming back from winter break. In order to maintain and grow this new periphery it will be important to create a more consistent presence on campus. We are in the midst of our campus blitz for our forum "From Selma to Ferguson: The Radical Legacy of MLK". It has been a huge step forward to have a handful of NU students interested in helping us build the forum. Our experiences on tablings have been very positive and we have found that students are not only excited to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement but also excited to talk about the history of the civil rights movement as well as the ISO. Socialist Worker has been such a helpful tool for thinking about what our conversations with contacts should look like. We have recently been using Todd Chretien's article, A cancer that produces racism, in particular for thinking about contact

meetings and tablings. Along with continuing our goals from last semester we also want to win our closest contacts to registering for S15 and to helping us build it on campus. Getting people registered before the end of the semester will be really important for bringing out student periphery even closer to joining the ISO. Overall organizing at NU has been a great experience for our fraction and branch and we have begun to build a strong foundation in our branch building process at Northeastern.

A, C, L, S, B

Since when is the ISO quiet about the Democrats?

In PCB#3 I wrote an article discussing the great difficulty of a Marxist in a leadership position in a union, which is supporting Democrats. After publication this topic was discussed in the national committee report and then in PCB#6 by the steering committee and by the Chicago ISO teachers fraction. Somehow these three groups discussed the same issue yet refused to acknowledge the earlier document.

These contributions offer many valuable insights and experiences but only tepidly weigh in on the situation. All three identify that “this contradiction is not easy to resolve” and that’s about it. There is no guidance on how to navigate such a situation given by either of the leadership bodies of the ISO nor the Chicago teacher’s fraction, which likely has the greatest actual experience in this arena. The steering committee argues that comrades should be judged on the entirety of their contribution, which may span decades. The clear implication is to overlook any recent breeches of standards by our comrades. Does this mean that supporting a Democrat can be OK for a member in this situation?

The national committee identifies a practice within the ISO union work as including “quietly voicing opposition to the union’s loyalty to the Democratic Party”. And perhaps this is part of the problem. Quiet opposition on one of the most important issues doesn’t seem like the best way forward and can lead to difficulties later. The steering committee identifies that comrades have great skills and are sometimes pulled into leadership positions. There is certainly a problem when the union membership is tied to the Democrats and identifies an important union member to lead, but is unaware that this prospective leader has fundamental opposition to the democrats and to the direction of the union. A profound respect for union democracy and decision making that is raised by the three contributions is correct and would rely upon an ISO member to rise to a leadership position with political fundamentals laid bare. ISO members should not rise to leadership as a Trojan horse of political ideas that only come out once in leadership. In my contribution I argue that it is necessary for comrades to be clear and open on matters like the Democrats that are so significant to labor’s strategy. This is a direction that preserves ISO principles of working class decision-making and opposition to the parties of capital. Of course, it may jeopardize the ability to attain and remain in a leadership position.

ER

Running for State-Senate as a Green in Portland, Maine: Causes and Consequences

This year I ran as a Green Party candidate for State-Senate in Maine SS District #28. This campaign was relatively successful, scoring roughly 27% of the vote in a two way race against a politically powerful democrat. If comrades would like to read a more general account of what it was like to run for office as a socialist, I would encourage them to read the article I wrote for SW, *Running for Real Change*. In this document I want to go over some of the particularities of the situation in Maine which lead to this campaign's relative success and I would like to asses the overall productivity of this effort in my three year on again, off again attempts to go from a solitary ISO member to having a branch in Portland.

Maine's Green Party

The most exceptional circumstance in Portland is the relative strength, weight and composition of the Green Party in Portland and in Maine. Statewide the party represents 36,000 registered voters, which is roughly 3% of the states total population. The activist base of the party is sizable, with somewhere around 50 dedicated and active members in the state, and about a dozen in Portland, the largest and most important city in Maine.

Socially, the party is rooted in the working and lower-middle classes of Maine. Activists in the city are sometimes workers—a handful in education and retail—but more often than not tend to be artists and craft sellers, professionals and (very) small business people. In the countryside these ranks expand to include small handfuls of subsistence and organic farmers. In many ways this social composition represents the overall backwardness of the Maine economy, which is one of the slowest growing economies in the country. Many of our former major industries, such as lumber, textile and paper production are either completely gone or a shadow of their former selves.

Maine's population meanwhile is older, whiter and poorer than much of the nation. We are a deeply segregated state, especially between whites and the African immigrant population which represent the majority of the non-white population in the state. In some ways the Green Party mirrors these trends, though it cuts against them in important ways too, as the party activists, especially in Portland, tend to be young and vibrant and are overwhelmingly below the age of 35.

Yet backwardness confers certain advantages, and in Maine these advantages have played out to create a much stronger Green Party throughout the Bush and Obama years than in the rest of the country. One important factor which has allowed the party to sustain and grow is the dominance of the peti-bourgeoisie in social and political life in the state. One of the state's key industries is Lobstering, an industry overwhelmingly dominated by small owner-operated fishing vessels—with crews of 3-7 that work tightly from dawn to dusk every day of the season. Maine is also the blueberry basket of the Northeast, with an agricultural output greater than all of the rest of New England combined. Finally, in the wake of deindustrialization in the state, Maine in general and Portland especially have grown into attractive locations for artists and small craft makers to live and work, and large layers of the population are practicing or aspiring artists. The “independent” mind of the peti-bougeoisie in politics along with the state's long tradition of resistance to outside interference and occupation—vis a vis Massachusetts—has lead to a culture consistently at odds with the two party system. For instance, two of the state's last six governors have been independents and no governor has won the office with a majority share of the vote since a least the 1970's. This has been fertile territory for Maine's Green-Independent Party to grow, and it isn't accidental that the state was home to the first ever chapter of the green party in the 1980's.

Taken together this means that one of the most striking features of my electoral campaign was just how unstriking the results were compared to the results of the dozen or so other candidates who ran for office last November. While I maintained my own personal claim to fame by securing the greatest number of total votes of any Green Candidate (please, please hold your applause), the reality is that other candidates running with similar backgrounds and nearly identical platforms to mine achieved nearly identical results. In every two-party race that we ran in we received between 25 and 30% of the vote. In every three-party race we ran in, we received between 10 and 20% of the votes. Moreover, in the three municipal elections where Green Party affiliated candidates ran, they won—including a town councilor in Northern Maine, a school board official in Portland, and a Water-board member in a rural town fighting tooth and nail to save their water from corporate privatization.

I don't think that I overstate the case when I say that in Maine the Green Party represents an *actual* third party in Maine. This is not to say that the party doesn't have problems—it has huge weaknesses and a far way to go before it will be firmly planted on the kind of organization and political footing it needs to contest seriously for an electoral majority, much less state power. But regardless of it's problems it represents something real, and that I think distinguishes it quite a bit from other Green Party's nationally. It also meant that my decision to run for office was based on a number of important political strengths that existed outside of me, especially a talented and rooted party cadre well versed in electoral work that could guide me through a very challenging and bureaucratic process. Indeed the fact that the party had secured a

ballot line *before* they had a candidate ready to fill it—and which I was able to sign up for pretty painlessly in July— speaks to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the party.

Assessing the Decision to Run

Overall I believe that I absolutely made the right decision in deciding to run for State Senate last July. Though the run itself was not without challenges, and there are certainly things that I would do differently next time around, the campaign gave me a raised profile and deeper roots in a number of the vibrant left-wing circles within the city. This included not only the Green Party but among a number of activists working in the environmental and black lives matter activism.

For one thing, running a successful campaign demonstrates that you have at least some sense of how to organize, how to talk to people and win them to your politics. It also shows that you have some ability to build capacity—to recruit other people to your cause and get them involved. It attaches to your name a notoriety and a recognition among broader layers of people and brings much wider credibility to the ideas that you present.

All of these aspects have played out in the wake of the campaign as I was able to carry momentum into a successful Socialist Worker discussion group. This discussion group, which meets bi-weekly around articles printed in the physical edition of the paper, is attended by a number of important Green party leaders, including another candidate for State-senate, a candidate for state legislature and one of the current co-chairs of the state party. These greens have formed the core of the group, but it has also attracted a looser broader periphery of three people who I met on the campaign trail who each attend semi-regularly. Finally, it was the discussion group that built a very successful public meeting on campus on “Racism, Capitalism and Revolution” which was attended by over 50 people including the entire core organizer group of the Black Lives Matter movement in Portland.

As successful as these outcomes have been, I think it's worth noting that if some of these structures had been in place before the campaign, the outcome would have been that much stronger. This was one thing that was noticeable: while I talked door-to-door with hundreds of voters across my district and convinced many of them to vote for me, I only brought a handful of them into any kind of organized activity. It's important to say that this isn't just a reflection of not having a branch in Portland, but it is also a reflection of the structures within the Green Party not being set up to involve and recruit new activists. Never the less, next time I walk into a campaign it will be crucial to have some better structures built in advance so that I can plug in the new people I meet into organized activity.

Overall, I would argue that deciding to run was clearly the correct decision. This decision was not based on the strength of a branch in Portland, but on the strength of the Green Party. Developing the strength of the Green Party as well as an actual branch of the ISO in Portland and Maine is the key next step between now and any potential future campaigns for office. But when the future branch does run a candidate in the future it will do so at a much higher level based on hard won experiences last fall.

OH

A Lesson from the Chicago Socialist Campaign

In reading the excellent election report from the Chicago District and Dan R.'s document in PCB#12 I thought it appropriate to emphasize one lesson drawn from the Chicago Socialist Campaign. I do so because the experience of the CSC has been helpful in thinking through questions about regroupment and the building of a mass party that have increased prominence first because of the Sawant election and secondly because of the recent win of Syriza.

It was the absolute correct move to get involved with the Chicago Socialist Campaign. The existence of the campaign and Mújica run in the 25th ward opened the door for us to be more involved in the various aldermanic campaigns that we are currently working in as the Chicago document describes. Us doing the

work around Mújica allowed us to project ourselves as players in the scene and facilitated us as a district relating to a Chicago aldermanic campaign that still has a movement character as a result of the ramifications of Mayor Emanuel's cuts and austerity. However it should be noted that CTU president Karen Lewis stepping out of the race has (despite her rightward shift the criticism we had publicly) greatly diminished this character. Despite the progressive gloss that has been slathered upon Garcia and Fioretti their campaigns are radically different than one of a labor leader who won a historic strike.

There are a number of benefits to our taking part in the Mújica campaign. As a result we can attempt to cohere an infrastructure in the neighborhood beyond the election. The campaign also has helped lay the ground for the upcoming Independent Political Action conference in Chicago. Within the campaign a number of comrades are now trained in the skill set of electoral work. Lastly a good turnout for Mújica will help function as an argument within CTU for the need and viability for a space left of the Democrats.

However, the campaign has also been very difficult work. The day to day work of maintaining a political campaign has a strong tendency to draw comrades' time away from political tasks. Instead it is tireless work largely of the day-to-day nit and grit of running a campaign. While from the outside the campaign has projected well, within the campaign it has been more messy..

The Chicago Socialist Campaign was initiated by a member of Socialist Alternative and an ex-member of Solidarity. After about three very successful meetings last spring (about 50, 100, and 50) the number in attendance dropped dramatically and was never fully recovered. After a candidate (who wound up running as a Democrat) left the campaign, and as Mújica became identified as the most viable candidate for the campaign, the SAlt member, the ex-member of Solidarity, and another member of Solidarity disappeared entirely. Since the summer the ISO has held down the core of the campaign. If we were not present the CSC probably would have died in the summer. While it is good that we kept it alive and viable there is a tendency for us to substitute for the campaign which exists independent from the tireless work that the comrades within the campaign have carried out.

Why is this important? There is a perspective that floats around the left (particularly the sectarian anti-sectarianists in the internet-left) that insists that what is needed in order for the formation of the much desired mass party, or for 'an American Syriza' is unity on the left. What often flows from this is that regroupment is the precondition for the building of a mass organization. As though the thing that is holding back the creation of a mass unified socialist party is the disunity of the left and that any project to carry this out must begin with refoundation of existing groups.

One of the cautionary lessons of the CSC is that the order of operations described by that perspective is wrong. The prospects for unity in socialist electoral efforts reflect a lot of challenges are often overemphasized.

In the other campaigns that we were rooted in the city we found that a much more vibrant core of activists grew organically around campaigns that were rooted out of struggles. The Meegan campaign--as the document describes--has been the best performing of the campaigns and has turned out quite an effective volunteer base. This base is the raw material that can be transformed into an activist and political infrastructure post-election. Similarly the Bautista campaign is well rooted in her environmental activism around pet coke in her neighborhood and the Smith campaign on the west side in her profile as a fighter around Fight For 15 and school closures. Mújica had an activist profile but this was often downplayed in the equation of the socialist campaign. He as an individual and the issues had more of a draw than the entity of the socialist unity.

In the CSC people from existing socialist organizations got together to build a socialist electoral project though they had different conceptions of how and what this was to be. This meant that despite feeling for unity no actual basis for unity existed. Compared with Meegan's campaign where a trade unionist who happened to be a socialist emphasized the need for political independence from the two parties of capital and for a party explicitly tied to working class organizations (hardly a call for an explicitly socialist organization.) Meegan's base brought newcomers to activism in Chicago as well as seasoned organized and unorganized socialists. A kind of left unity was achieved without adopting a platform of left unity as a

precondition. Additionally this with done with some individuals who began this project not a part of the organized left.

Unity on the left will be created through participation in struggle. Something akin to regroupment will happen through the creation of a mass party and not the other way around. The Chicago Socialist Campaign with the combined forces of ourselves, SAlt, Solidarity, Socialist Party-USA, and Socialist Organizer would not have resulted in a very different result than the one that occurred. However that could not even happen as most of the other forces left the campaign. This is because of two reasons. The first is that the method of the ISO that we see ourselves as *cohering a mass party* rather than the ISO *becoming the mass party* is not a method that is shared by a majority of the left. The second is the objective factor that the left is small. All our energy committed to holding together a tiny motley rabble of socialist groups who do not share our method for organizing a party is better spent organizing with broader forces. This does not mean not organizing with other socialists. We have done so in the Meegan and Bautista campaign. This means that unity of the existing left is not an inviolable principle to be pursued as the precondition for a party. Regroupment pursued in the absence of sustained mass struggle is a pretty sad affair and lends little to the slow patient work of both organizing with the broader class and developing Marxist cadre trained in our method. What is needed is to continue to do this work and argue with the broader forces for a path towards independent working class organization. There are no shortcuts.

BB

Against the Proposals set forth in the document "Believing Survivors: A Response to Concerns"

I'd like to speak against the Proposals set forth in the document "Believing Survivors: A Response to Concerns," published in Bulletin #9.

The document asserts proposals that would effectively set forth a presumption of guilt against a member (male or female) when an allegation of sexual assault is made by another member. This then puts the onus on the accused to prove a negative - that the assault did NOT occur. I submit their proposal goes too far - but their document nevertheless raises legitimate concerns.

In the document, the authors assert that it is not possible to believe both the accuser and accused in cases of sexual assault. I disagree. A fact-finder can - after hearing all the evidence - believe both parties equally. The fact-finder can then EITHER decide the case on grounds other than mere credibility (e.g., the weight of other evidence presented), OR can simply find that the accuser has not proven their case by a preponderance of the evidence.

The document asserts that their proposals address situations in which the two conflicting accounts are the ONLY evidence. However, their actual proposals are not limited to those situations.

They then vastly oversimplify scenarios in which a fact-finder could ONLY find one, the other or both parties as either "lying or delusional." In my nearly 20 years of experience as a lawyer who handles domestic violence cases, I can say rarely are courtroom cases that black-and-white. Most cases operate (to borrow a phrase) within 50 shades of gray.

The authors then assert "the best way the ensure that we will consistently make the most principled decisions about sexual assault . . . is to adopt a clear policy of trusting survivors." With respect, this sees things only through the lens of survivors, and not through the lens of potential victims of false accusations. And while false accusations only occur in 2-8% of sexual assault cases - they do occur. But more to the point, the authors seems to completely ignore competing concerns about the impact of the criminal system of injustice - and what should be a principled stance as a socialist organization not to replicate lack of due process for the accused in our own organization.

The document then discounts the effect expulsion does have on a member found guilty of a sexual assault. Certainly it's not nearly as bad as going to prison or losing a job, but losing something that's a large part of one's life, a commitment one made great life sacrifices for and was potentially willing to die for, is not something to be dismissed with the wave of a hand (done twice in their document).

And while the authors claim to lack knowledge of any case in which a left organization was harmed by expelling members accused of sexual assault, this ignores that in the COINTELPRO era, the FBI used just such a tactic not uncommonly. But we may not be able to cite to more recent examples because COINTELPRO is likely not a widespread tactic employed by law enforcement anymore (though not saying it doesn't occur at all) - simply due to the relative weakness of the left vis-a-vis its 1960's counterparts.

The document then completely discounts the potential - when the left does become bigger and thus more of a threat to the capitalist state - for law enforcement to concoct accusations of sexual assault to marginalize leading members of left organizations. The authors then assert its foolhardy on our part to think we could discover that tactic even if it was taking place, citing to the Black Powers movement only discovering same after-the-fact. And while the Black Panthers (to cite one example within the Black Power movement) were largely unaware of the extent of the infiltration or the forms it was taking, it is also unclear that they had a formal complaint & investigation procedure in place such as the one we're currently looking to implement. However, the point is that we probably WOULD have difficulty in discovering a false accusation of sexual assault put on by a 21st-century COINTELPRO. But knowing so SUPPORTS more due process protections for the accused, not less.

I agree wholeheartedly with the authors' arguments regarding the discounting of victims of sexual assault within the current criminal system of injustice. However, their proposals do indeed take away due process because they rob the accused of his/her ability to confront the evidence submitted by the accuser.

I submit we should instead seek to balance the two positions asserted - between a "presumption of innocence" versus a "presumption of guilt." I submit there is no need for either presumption EITHER WAY in what is akin to an administrative hearing. ISO disciplinary hearings are not criminal hearings, but they are also not without punitive consequences - not to mention the stigma attached even to a public censure of a member found guilty of being sexually inappropriate with another member.

In our disciplinary hearings, an accuser shouldn't have to testify and no inferences should be drawn against the accuser based on the failure to testify. However, the accused still should have a right to testify, to present other witnesses & evidence and to point out the omissions and/or inconsistencies in the accuser's account. Having a statement of the accuser be sufficient to prove a case against the accused is akin to an Inquisition, not a due process hearing in which each side's case is patiently listened to and deliberated upon.

PROPOSAL:

For the reasons set forth above, we should make clear in our disciplinary procedures that there is neither a presumption of innocence nor a presumption of guilt. This thereby protects the rights of the accused, while simultaneously protecting the rights of the accuser/alleged victim.

- DB
