

# Pre-convention bulletin #16 / February 11, 2015 for members only

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## NYC Teacher Fraction Convention Document 2015

The past year for the NYC Teacher Fraction has been a tumultuous one. Like the previous two years, much of our organizing energy has gone into building MORE, The Movement of Rank and File Educators, an opposition caucus in the UFT, taking on positions of chapter leader within our schools, and locally organizing opt out campaigns. In this document we will address

1) the larger political climate of NYC education work, 2) current debates within MORE and 3) challenges and questions concerning the role of our fraction. Because organizing within MORE has taken up so much of our political time and energy, this document will focus largely on that work.

1) Larger political climate of NYC education work

Currently, education activism is turning toward the planned attacks on public education and teacher unions announced by Governor Cuomo. During the election, he declared public education "the last monopoly" and made clear it was his plan to destroy that monopoly. During his recent State of the State address he laid out a clear plan of attack including everything from increasing the charter cap to increasing the weight of high stakes test in teacher evaluations. As the opt out movement and disgust with high stakes testing grow, the governor has launched an all out attack in which increasing the use of test scores to evaluate teachers is central. This could present an incredible opportunity for a real fight back as it makes clear the ways in which teacher, student and parent interests are aligned. To make things even more interesting, Chancellor Fariña (head of the NYC Department of Education) came out against Cuomo's plan. In response, the UFT called for an emergency DA to discuss how to respond. So, far, however, their call to action has been limited to a TV ad campaign, a twitter campaign, local forums, and a "do whatever your chapter thinks will work." Given the UFT's

traditional lobbying strategy, eroded in the last twenty years, has completely lost leverage with the elimination of Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, the union leadership has no idea how to mobilize its membership to pressure the politicians in other ways.

For MORE, this attack represents a huge organizing opportunity, and members are already working to build local campaigns in their school communities. What's more, Fariña's now public position against the Governor serves to widen MORE's opportunity to argue for more militant union wide actions within the UFT and to lead such actions in practice without as much fear of repercussions. Unfortunately, given what has happened in the last 6 months, it's not clear that MORE has the infrastructure or leadership capabilities to organize and implement a strong campaign against Cuomo's attack.

MORE is, and has been since its formation, a politically heterogeneous caucus. We formed from several groups ranging from Teachers for a Just Contract - a caucus that mostly took up bread and butter issues - to groups like NYCoRE whose members tend to be younger and more focused on being radical inside the classroom through social justice pedagogy, and are often not that interested in union politics. MORE really got its first important boost with a conference called "The State of the Union" coming out of occupy the DOE. From that conference, MORE the caucus was officially born that spring. The level of activity that year was extremely high with wide layers of people directly taking on the board of education in public PEP (Panel for Education Policy) meetings. On the heels of Occupy, people were making political connections between different struggles. In many ways, for people working in the Ed Justice movement, MORE was the organizational expression of that activism.

Since then, MORE has been successful in organizing around specific campaigns like a Vote No campaign on last year's contract and a very successful drive to demand a vote for union members on the new teacher evaluation deal that was forced through last spring. The level of frustration around the new teacher evaluation deal and the contract were relatively high and provided clear organizing opportunities.

This year has been significantly different for several reasons. Bloomberg is no longer Mayor and his successor, De Blasio, has made it a priority to make friends with teachers. His new head of the Department of Education, Chancellor Fariña, was a long time teacher and her administrator and has already ushered in significant if not sweeping changes around questions of testing and school leadership. The contract, and especially teacher evaluation deal, that were strongly opposed have not been the immediate disaster that we anticipated. For example, more than 97% of teachers were rated developing or better under the new system despite its reliance on test scores and inappropriate use of the Danielson rubric as a tool of evaluation.

While this is likely to change in the year to come, for now the result is that MORE has struggled to orient on any one specific organizing campaign, instead focusing on local organizing.

The Opt-out movement, on the other hand, has continued to grow and gain momentum. Last year, thousands of parents across New York State opted their students out of taking the common core tests. In addition, several teachers in NYC refused to give exams in their schools. Fariña's administration took no disciplinary action against teachers that refused to give tests - the numbers were very small and limited to only two schools - and made it clear that schools should support their parents' decisions to opt students out of the tests. Compared to Bloomberg and his DOE, these are tremendous changes. Again, the opt-out movement presents clear organizing opportunities, but MORE has struggled to orient on it as an exclusively teacher organization.

Finally, the Black Lives Matter movement has drawn clear lines between those in education justice work that see anti-racist organizing as a clear part of the fight for public education and those who do not. The next section will go into that more fully.

All of these factors combined have resulted in somewhat of a crisis within MORE. Up until the last month or so with Cuomo's clear planned attack, there has been little to unify the organization and

much to divide us. Many of the political disagreements that were put aside when the group formed, have resurfaced during lower levels of struggle and then were just blown wide open when MORE was confronted with a growing movement against police brutality. It has become increasingly clear that MORE is not led by a shared commitment to a set of principles, but by individuals' politics at any given time. The result has been a complete lack of leadership, an inability to focus on any wider campaigns, and politics and organizational strategy that swing from one pole to the another.

## 2) Current debates within MORE

In August, MORE put out a statement in response to the UFT's endorsement of Sharpton's March for Justice after the murder of Eric Garner in Staten Island. In an effort to span the various political tendencies within the caucus, MORE's statement did everything from issue a statement of solidarity with Eric Garner's family to call for due process for "all workers" and ask that the PBA (Police Benevolent Society) and UFT work together to find democratic solutions to problems of over policing of our student population. In short, it was a political pretzel.

Since then, several debates have unfolded. Political disagreements that have existed from the beginning have been thrown into sharp relief by a lack of any clear concrete campaign unifying us and the growing movement against police brutality taking center stage in NYC.

### *Debate #1 Social Justice Unionism versus Trade Unionism.*

Every different opinion is represented in MORE. The farthest extreme are those arguing that MORE should only take up issues that directly affect teachers at school and nothing else. In the middle are folks that are in favor of social justice unionism, but have different opinions about what that means. Does that only mean that we make arguments about how our contractual rights are actually social justice issues and take up fights around charter schools and testing?

Or does it mean that the caucus takes a strong stand around issues like police brutality that may not be directly connected to many teachers at all, but does directly affect the communities in which most of us work?

### *Debate #2 What is the role of a union caucus in the fight against racism?*

This one is very much connected to debate number one, but is even more polarizing. There is a layer of members that firmly believe that MORE must take strong positions around issues like the school to prison pipeline and police brutality and identify racist practices within the DOE as well as other institutions. The opposing view is often that a union caucus has no business talking about race, and doing so will only serve to narrow our audience and turn people off.

### *Debate #3 Who is the audience for MORE?*

This is a key debate for the caucus. Is the audience educators that are somewhat politicized already? Keyed into larger political movements? Is our audience specifically trade union activists that may or may not agree with a SJU framework? Is our audience anyone that's frustrated with Unity (leadership of UFT)? Is it possible to orient on more than one group? Can we appeal to trade unionists and at the same time set a strong lead around social justice issues?

## 3) Challenges and questions concerning the role of our fraction

The last 6 months of organizing within MORE have raised many questions for the fraction. *First, can MORE continue to function with such diverse sets of political ideas?* The caucus has not yet been able to productively and democratically discuss these political issues. **Instead, political debates have been shrouded in accusations about individual people's intentions, and specifically the motivations of the ISO. It became impossible to operate because of accusations,**

**for example, that the ISO and NYCoRE stacked meetings to reverse the August statement. The level of personal vitriol was so high that we decided it was most productive for our two members on the MORE steering committee to resign in December, rather than subject themselves to continued personal attacks.**

*Second, is there potential for MORE to develop into a truly social justice caucus? When MORE formed, the organization laid out strong points of unity that include the importance of fighting for racial justice and allying meaningfully with the communities that we serve. Despite that the points of unity exist, there are members that do not agree with them. If MORE is unable to stand by it's principles of social justice and commitment to take up issues that do not only fall under bread and butter demands, is the caucus a project that our members should continue to relate to? If so, in what capacity? Third, and stemming from question two, is caucus building in this climate the best way to build rank and file capacity and cohere a left within that rank and file?*

Finally, *what is the role of our fraction within the larger project of the ISO?* Theoretically, the teacher fraction seeks to build rank and file capacity within our work-places and our union, bring socialist politics and analysis to education movement work and draw around a periphery of co-workers and activists that are explicitly interested in the politics of the ISO. The goal of building a rank and file opposition caucus that seeks to increase union democracy and militancy as well as raise social justice connections in trade unions has been a clear part of those objectives. Currently though, there is are two main tensions. The first is that building a rank and file caucus inevitably means dealing with the pressures of union politics - the pulls of the Democratic party, a totally top down bureaucratic leadership and a rank and file that is largely passive with politics that range from the far right to the far left. Building a caucus in this climate is obviously a different project that building a revolutionary party, and we should have corresponding expectations. There is a balance of accepting that these are different projects, that the caucus we are building may not always uphold leftist politics, and fighting for the principles and political priorities that we feel are crucial.

The second tension is time and resources. Since the formation of MORE, the majority of comrades' organizing energy has gone into the caucus and / or into building their chapters as chapter chairs. At first, comrades were central to the internal functioning of MORE and often held MORE together because we bring a set of organizing and political abilities that are rare in this period. Over the past 6 months, the energy required to continually fight for a social justice perspective on the steering committee and beyond has drained members' political time and stamina. This has taken huge toll on our ability to do anything else, namely party building and projecting the ISO. We have not hosted a happy hour or study group independently as the ISO fraction since last year.

In addition, our failure to centralize everything happening in MORE this past fall meant that the teachers involved in building MORE and those that were not had completely different experiences. We were not able to assess collectively or move forward as a group. The NYC district has several new UFT members that have not been fully integrated into the fraction. This is in part due to their involvement in other work, but also the result of the fraction's lack of cohesion and very narrow focus on caucus building.

Our goal for the coming year is to re-cohere and centralize fraction work and re-establish fraction meetings as an essential place for all teacher comrades to discuss political developments within education work. With regards to caucus building, we plan to take a more strategic and political approach to the organizing, working to cohere a group of members that share a social justice perspective, rather than getting so deeply involved in upholding infrastructure.

**NYC Teacher Fraction**

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## **Assessment of labor work, and thoughts on moving forward**

I am writing this document as part of the overall effort to re-assess our labor work, situate it in the national organization as a whole, and offer some thoughts on some organizational structures that we are trying to implement to better centralize and politicize our work. All critiques and mistakes that I refer to are ones that I have made myself and should not be taken as anything other than comradely, and with positive intent.

The context that union activists are operating in include neoliberal attacks on the public sector, the dismantling of state services, and an economy that continues to fail to meet the needs of working class people. We have an official labor movement that also continuously avoids the type of confrontation and struggle that we would need to win back lost gains, much less win new struggles. Union membership tends to be quite passive, and uninvolved in struggle. While there are some notable exceptions, like the CTU strike, it was an ungeneralized high point in an otherwise inactive labor movement.

This adds up to an overwhelmingly defensive and beaten down position for the working class, and it's a situation that our union members have been facing, and trying to function in, for as long as they have been in their unions. In addition to the overall political climate being challenging to work in, it is also the case that our members by and large are isolated in their workplaces and unions, with only a small number of exceptions.

The challenges facing us, as revolutionaries in a political minority in an ineffectual labor movement deeply entrenched in the Democratic Party are almost too numerous to mention, so I will focus on only a couple, and also focus on the areas where we do have some concentration, and finish with some thoughts on how to organize ourselves moving forward.

It is worth saying briefly, that one area though where continue to be particularly alone, is on the omnipresent question of the Democrats. The labor movement's deep ties with the Democratic Party further complicates our role, as one of the assumed responsibilities of labor leaders is to advertise their union's support for (typically) Democratic Party candidates. If you were to look over almost any progressive union website's political endorsements it's likely to be a straight Democratic Party line list. Even when we can get a union to endorse a single local independent candidate (Dan Siegel in Oakland, for example) it doesn't change the union's, and the members', overall support for the Democrats as the only real option in their minds.

In spite of our critique of the political weaknesses of labor, of the undemocratic structures of our unions, or our assessment of the state of labor at any given time, it is always the case that we see the unions as key organizations of the working class, and central to rebuilding the labor movement as well as rebuilding the left as a whole. For this reason, it is right that we encourage union members to participate in their unions, both in formal elected roles, as well as in informal, rank and file struggles or campaigns.

However, the shared contradictions and pressures that our members face (and in spite of the variety of unions, and geographical spread, there is continuity) have not been fully explored or theorized by the ISO as a whole. This has left members at times feeling that they are working on their own, and then less able to sort through the political complexities or push back on the pressures that we face.

One example of this is the reality is that for a number of our members there is tremendous pressure to run for office. Sometimes that means getting recruited into higher and higher union office, while other times we have to figure out ways to withstand the pressure and decline to run while not burning bridges. I believe that there are two distinct reasons for this tendency for our members to be pulled into union office.

One, is that there is a political vacuum of labor activists, and the political clarity and consistency of ISO members in unions means that we are often asked to take up more and more official work for the unions, in committees, as reps/stewards, on executive boards, bargaining teams, etc. Often these bodies are understaffed, and function on a largely voluntary basis. It's rare that a low-level election is contested, which means that many active rank and filers wind up getting pulled away from the very rank and file

activity that they are leading or participating in, or have to balance the responsibilities of the union office with the work they may be doing at the site level.

The other reason, and it's not entirely unrelated to the above reason, is that the logic of running for higher and higher office, especially for a reliable and respected activist, is a legitimate political end in itself for many committed union activists. But it is not an end in itself for ISO members, nor is it politically a natural or obvious trajectory that we must follow.

The combination of the vacuum and the logic of running for office is a powerful pull on our members, myself included. Resisting it requires political clarity, and facing the reality that other activists may be critical of the decision not to run.

**In SS's document, "The dilemma faced by revolutionary socialists in unions today", she says:**

*Most ISO members in unions, because of their effectiveness, are routinely asked to run for union office. Refusing to do so threatens to damage their reputation as union activists—as being those who talk of union reform but don't take the actions that could actually change union policy at the top. Given the dire state of the union movement today, however, the difficulties involved in holding unions together often prove quite demoralizing—and depoliticizing.*

This is an important point, and highlights the need that we have, as ISO members, and labor cadre, to develop a clearer and more holistic labor perspective. Following the trajectory that the logical next step is to run for office, or fearing that we may jeopardize relationships if we don't, may mean that we are being pulled politically, and we need a counterweight to those pulls. This is the project that we need to take up now-- figuring out strategies and political trajectories that are consistent with the practice of implantation, that focuses on and tries to build the strength and organization of the rank and file, that aims to democratize our unions, and, to the extent possible, depending on local political conditions, has a critical but collaborative relationship with official leadership. It is also a task that needs to be part of the general perspective in our branches and districts.

Our labor perspective shouldn't try and predict what we think will happen in labor, big or small, but should empower our members to be able to make decisions within a broad framework, with some supportive guidelines and structures.

### **Where should we focus our energies?**

Given our relative size organizationally, and as individuals being spread out in different unions across the country, we need to be very modest about how much influence we can have on our local, state and national unions. We also have to be modest about our influence as isolated revolutionaries in work sites. The pulls and pressures on us are numerous, and our capacity is limited. Given that, I would argue that the place we should focus our energy, and spend the next year or so re-orienting ourselves, is on our sites, and on the rank and file.

What does that mean? For many of us, we straddle the rank and file orientation with some form of elected or official union position. For myself, I am a site rep at a large high school, and am nearing the end of a 2-year executive board position. I am also co-chair of our organizing team, and have been on a bargaining team, and a variety of other committees. Some of us work part time for our union, or have release time in a union, participate on bargaining teams, or hold higher office. Some of us work with caucuses, political or organizational union committees. Many of us attend local, state, and even national union meetings, such as state councils, or the AFT Convention. It would be an understatement to say that we have far too many things on our far too many plates. Thinking through critically whether we need to be involved on all of these levels, or in all of these formations needs to be part or reorienting our labor perspective in the next year or so.

I also believe that the more absorbed we are into the leadership, the less we are able to be effective at our sites, and that that is to our detriment. I will look at this from two angles, the first being that at the end of

the day, it is the strength of the sites and the rank and file members that will be the base of how and where the labor movement is rebuilt. In the ISO, we have always had an orientation on the rank and file (I am not using the term “rank and file strategy” in any specific way. I simply mean it as a focus more on the members than on the leadership.) Over the years, with more and more people getting involved in official union structures, I think we have gradually, and inadvertently, lost this orientation. The impact can be as simple as not having enough time to attend to site matters, or think strategically about your workplace, or as complex and more problematic as becoming absorbed politically. Without getting into the specifics, I have definitely experienced this distancing from the site rank and file, and have to actively work to correct, or at least mitigate it.

The second angle is the more serious one. As S writes in her document in addressing the contradictions that we face in our unions (and this is the first part of the quote above)

*On the other hand, all comrades who are activists in their unions during the present low level of class struggle face a different contradiction than the one described in this document thus far—but one which is no less important: Our comrades, alongside other unionists critical of their current union leaders’ practices, face very real pressure from their fellow rank and filers to replace the current leadership. To be sure, it is not enough to criticize the current leadership without suggesting a path to replacing it.*

I agree with all of the challenges that S points out which stem from this reality. But I want to add another dimension as it relates to the fact that it leads our members away from sites and the rank and file. I believe that sometimes we have erroneously conflated progressive unionism with rank and file unionism, not realizing clearly enough that progressive or member oriented leadership doesn’t mean bottom-up leadership. In fact, a progressive leadership can be as top down as a right wing one. Having a progressive leadership, or being part of progressive leadership can obviously have its advantages, but it should not be mistaken for democratic reform.

Social justice unionism, or social movement unionism has many incarnations and interpretations. It is entirely possible to have a union leadership that takes all the right positions, (opposes fracking, participates in Black Lives Matter protests, supports gay marriage) but is not internally democratic. Taking on political questions in the union is an essential contribution that our members make to the unions we are part of. But internal democracy and rank and file voice, and rank and file led struggle do not flow inevitably from progressive politics. In fact sometimes the progressive positions are easier to win than the democratic reforms. In my experience, passing a resolution around a political issue can be easier than passing a resolution calling for open bargaining sessions, for example.

Balancing the political role that unions can, and sometimes do play, with the need for a strong union capable of fighting for good contracts for its members is a delicate task. I’m quite sure I have made the mistake numerous times of leaning too far to one side or the other. It is my belief though, that the best way to build a social justice/radical thread in our unions is to do it on the basis of an activated and involved membership. For this reason, we need to focus on union democracy as well as on the political activities and arguments (especially raising objections to resources going into electoral campaigns instead of member organizing). Site strength and unity is the source of strength for a union as a whole. It is also extremely difficult to build, and many good activists, quite understandably, wind up setting their sights instead on elected leadership (either becoming completely reliant on the leadership, or becoming the elected leaders themselves.)

## **Conclusion**

To quote S again:

*The organization has thus had no clear policy to guide comrades in unions in recent years. This is because 40 years of one-sided class war is unprecedented in U.S. history. While comrades are encouraged to learn the history of the U.S. labor movement, and the role of socialists within it, we cannot look to any historical model to precisely guide us in our present conditions. We have*

*therefore relied on the experiences and initiatives of our members as the most effective way to learn what kind of approach is most effective.*

I believe that it is time to start developing some internal structures so that we can use to support our comrades in this difficult yet important work. The many years of union experience that our members in the ISO have is, in and of itself, a valuable resource. We should work to centralize our experience, and generalize the lessons, so as to chart the course forward.

Out of the National Committee we have formed a Labor Committee, and a National Teachers Fraction. The goal of both of these is to centralize our work, challenges and accumulated experience of our union members. It is a small but important step toward reorganization of labor work.

The National Teachers fraction has set as a goal regular conference calls on topics relevant to teachers, such as Reform Caucuses, and the neoliberal attack on education. Other goals we have (as this is a work in progress) is be able to share information and documents, such as resolutions. We also aim to help develop some political continuity among ourselves on important issues in education, like high stakes testing, or the Common Core. We have a wealth of experience and knowledge, but are only beginning to develop the structures to maximize them.

Recently in the Bay Area, we worked on the district committee level to support a comrade through a difficult decisions making process when she was asked to run for office. It was a very thorough and illuminating, and sometimes challenging process, but in the end, I believe it serves as a model for this type of decision-making.

I do not have hard and fast proposals, nor do I recommend a set of definitive policies around running for office, or participating in committees, or caucuses. What I would like to see us do, and I think we are beginning to do this, is to set up some structures for communication and collaboration. I believe that over the course of the next year or so, we should re-assess the roles and positions that we hold, and in some cases, step down. Now, this has to be done in a politically savvy way. Should I not continue on the OEA Executive Board, it will not be through a sudden resignation, but rather by not running for re-election when my term is up.

Decisions to run or not should be made in communication with the local and if possible national leadership. We should be open with our union allies about decisions that we make, but need to be able to make political decisions from the point of view of our ISO labor perspective first, not the perceived needs of the union.

The work that ISO members have been able to do, from the high profile examples of work actions or strikes, to the less visible, but extremely important work defending union members' jobs, protecting safe working conditions, or any number of other smaller struggles we are always involved in, speak to the seriousness with which the ISO takes labor. We now have enough members with enough shared experience to be able to develop a labor perspective that takes the reality of the labor movement and the reality of our political perspective and capacity into consideration. This document is meant as part of the process of setting a political and organizational labor perspective.

**JM**

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## **Notes in Response to the “Believing Survivors...” Document**

We agree in general terms with the points made by RC (PCB#12) and DB (PCB#14) in their documents, but we wanted to make a few additional points.

1. The authors of “Believing Survivors...” (PCB#9) counter-pose disciplinary procedures that ensure full due process rights to a need to believe survivors. They claim that their proposals do not dispense with due process because the respondent can offer a statement and evidence in their defense. However, they

start from a presumption of guilt, which can only be disproved by “direct evidence” refuting a complainant’s statement. They never actually define what constitutes direct evidence; this is a troublesome omission as it seems to present a very high bar for any defense a respondent might wish to offer.

Presumably, the most direct evidence is eyewitness testimony, so in a he-said, she-said situation, there are two pieces of direct evidence already. They may be of different evidentiary value, but the proposed standard of proof guarantees that the respondent’s testimony has no value on its own. The disciplinary procedures proposed by the Rules Commission proposes a standard of “material evidence”—simply put, the requirement that evidence be pertinent to the deciding case. This is also vague, but in a good way. It recognizes that pieces of evidence may have different degrees of value, and it would be up to the NDC to judge those relative merits.

The authors of “Believing Survivors” say that the disciplinary procedures presume the “innocence of the accused.” In reality, the proposed rules do not start from a presumption of innocence (or guilt), but a commitment to supporting women who come forward while also preserving the right of the accused to a full and fair hearing. We cannot stress enough that we approach such cases from a starting point of a predisposition to believing survivors. But this *general* understanding cannot substitute for the difficult work of hearing and evaluating *individual* cases. As Marxists we can understand the root causes of sexual violence and identify general trends, but this cannot translate into a simple formula (such as that proposed by the document authors) for evaluating a particular charge of sexual assault.

2. In this sense, we think that the authors of “Believing Survivors...” have misunderstood SS’s point about the need to understand sexual assault in an intersectional way. S’s document (PCB#2) argued that rape and sexual assault could not be understood *solely* through the lens of women’s oppression. She pointed to the history of racism as one example of the complexity of the dynamics surround sexual assault issues. The authors of “Believing Survivors...” respond by pointing out that because of this history Black women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence and least likely to be believed when they come forward. This is absolutely true.

However, the point of having an intersectional approach is not to create a hierarchy of oppression in which we attempt to identify the most oppressed group and create policies on that basis. Instead, it is to understand the complex ways in which different forms of oppression operate and interact in our society. Precisely because of this complexity, we cannot have a mechanical formula for determining the outcome of sexual assault or misconduct cases.

Put another way, the authors of “Believing Survivors” are concerned that women's claims about sexual misconduct are routinely doubted or disbelieved, and they argue for a disciplinary process that will avoid re-enacting the automatic skepticism that women are subject to in sexist society-at-large. But the comrades’ position neglects to take into account the fact that racist society-at-large applies the same kind of routine doubt to Black men's claims of innocence. The ISO needs to find ways to avoid re-enacting the automatic skepticism that women face without re-enacting the automatic skepticism that Black men face. But the comrades’ proposal would write the latter skepticism into the rules.

While we can understand the general context in which sexual assault takes place and in which charges are brought forward, each case is highly individual and must be treated as such. There is a history of Black men being falsely accused of rape by white women; it does not follow that every allegation of rape by a white woman against a Black man is automatically false. We know that false allegations of rape are rare; it does not follow that every allegation of rape is automatically true. We know that the idea of “gray rape” has been used in a victim-blaming way to minimize the severity of rape; it does not follow that all allegations are automatically as simple as the “Believing Survivors...” document suggests.

3. This is why we agree with RC (PCB#12) that it is imperative to rely on the political judgment of those we elect to hear these individual cases. This judgment is shaped by our understanding of women’s oppression and the politics of sexual assault as discussed in S’s original document. The

rules committee has spent a lot of time and paid careful attention to creating disciplinary procedures that provide support and assistance for those coming forward with complaints, that protect the due process rights of our members and that guide the members of our disciplinary bodies in hearing and evaluating complex cases. But these guidelines cannot be a formula set in stone; instead, they outline a set of procedures to guide revolutionary socialists committed to protecting the needs and safety of our members, and particularly our most vulnerable and oppressed members.

4. The authors of “Believing Survivors” downplay the reality of state infiltration of our organization, both in the present and the future, and the need to take steps in the here and now to protect our organization to the best of our ability from state interference. The authors state: “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.”

We do not assume that the state’s “primary tool” would be false accusations of sexual assault. Indeed, the history of COINTELPRO and other methods of state intervention in the left shows that the state seeks any and every way it can to sow discord, distrust and infighting. False accusations of sexual assault might not have been deployed during the 1960s and ‘70s (at least that we are aware of, though the New Left’s shoddy record of taking such allegations seriously might be one reason the state didn’t use such false accusations), but today such accusations clearly carry the potential to disrupt and paralyze left organizations. The authors suggest that even if the state does make use of infiltrators to lodge false accusations, our organization would be unable to guard against such accusations. But by dispensing with due process, the state is being handed a blank check to use such a tactic.

In our view, the prospect of state meddling means that it is even more critical that the ISO provide due process for respondents.

5. The authors of “Believing Survivors...” are concerned with questions that are not about whether our procedures are able to meet the needs and protect the rights of members involved in a disciplinary proceeding, but instead how we will be perceived based on our procedures. We do not believe this is an appropriate basis on which to develop our policies. The document authors acknowledge that it is possible that unwarranted disciplinary action could be the outcome of their proposed policy. But they believe that this is an acceptable price to pay in order to protect our reputation as an organization committed to fighting women’s oppression.

We do not agree. We cannot be an organization that is willing to sacrifice an individual member to prove a political point to those who would question our commitment to taking sexual assault seriously. The document authors are correct that if our disciplinary committee did not find sufficient evidence for action against an accused member, “it is by no means assured that our members or periphery would be satisfied with an explanation.” This is particularly true as we are committed to protecting the confidentiality of those involved in a disciplinary proceeding.

There is simply no substitute for the confidence of our own members in our organization’s commitment to women’s liberation, in the comrades we elect to handle disciplinary cases and the seriousness with which we take building an organization in which sexist ideas are challenged at the same time as women and other oppressed groups are encouraged and given confidence to lead. The authors are concerned that if there are cases in which no disciplinary action is taken, it could create an environment in which LGBT or women comrades feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

But creating a political culture in which members have confidence in our commitment to fighting oppression is not primarily achieved through our disciplinary procedures. It’s at the branch level and through the ongoing activity and practice that members can evaluate for themselves the seriousness of our approach to fighting oppression. We believe that we have a record to be proud of. Our disciplinary procedures and bodies are a safeguard—a way for us to handle difficult and complex cases. We believe

that the procedures developed by the rules committee meet the needs presented by such cases: a commitment to supporting those who come forward with a serious complaint and affording due process rights to those accused. They should not be asked to do more than that. The task of building an organization in which every member can have full confidence and thus is confident to defend must be the work of the entire membership; no policy or set of procedures can substitute for that task.

**JR'ēpf ER**

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## **Report back on the work of the Teacher Diversity Committee of New York City.**

This document will discuss:

1. historical use of tests to limit the number of Black and Latino teachers who obtain K-12 certification;
2. L.A.S.T. exam and NY State lawsuit *Gulino vs. Board of Ed*;
3. disproportionate excessing of Black teachers;
4. birth of TDCNYC;
5. sharp drop in the number of Black teachers hired under NYC Mayor Bloomberg's administration;
6. petition drive;
7. TDCNYC at the Harlem Book Fair;
8. Hawkins/Jones campaign;
9. presentation of signatures at the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), the governing body of the Dept. of Ed. under mayoral control;
10. key questions/goals;
11. key questions;
12. ISO organizing within the TDC.

### **Certification tests historically used to limit number of Black and Latino teachers**

Since the Supreme Court ended official segregation with the *Brown vs. Bd. of Ed* decision 60 years ago, the rate of Black and Latino teachers in the U.S. teaching force has remained disproportionately low, primarily through the use of culturally biased, high stakes tests required for certification. In particular, the teaching force in NYC has historically been among the most disproportionately white. While it is beyond the scope of this report to go into this history, it is important to consider as a broader context.

In this connection, the Liberal Arts and Science Test (L.A.S.T.) was imposed as a requirement for NY State K-12 certification in the early 1990's despite never having been validated. The L.A.S.T. pass rate by Blacks and Latinos has been significantly lower than whites. In response to this, a group of educators, including ISO member Marc Pessin, initiated a class action against the NY State Education Department and the New York City Board of Education in 1996. The suit against the state was later dismissed, but the case continued against the NYC Board of Education.

### **L.A.S.T. and *Gulino vs. Board of Education***

While it is beyond the scope of this document to go into the 18-year history of the *Gulino* case, below is a good timeline and history from the Center for Constitutional Rights, which provided legal services to the case: <http://ccrjustice.org/Gulino-v-Ed>

Here is another summary from the website for the *Gulino* case itself:

<http://www.gulinolitigation.com/overview>

What follows is italicized to show that it is a quotation from the website above.

*In 1996, plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against the NYC Dept. of Ed. and the NY State Education Department alleging that the DOE and SED were violating Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by requiring NYC*

*public school teachers to pass the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test ("LAST") to keep or obtain permanent teaching positions. Specifically, plaintiffs alleged that the LAST had an unlawful disparate impact on African-American and Latino teachers who took the test. The SED was dismissed from the case following trial in 2006.*

*On December 5, 2012, the Court found that the New York City Department of Education ("DOE") failed to establish, as required by federal law, that the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test ("LAST") was related to the job of teaching. The LAST was an exam created and administered by the New York State Education Department ("SED") to teacher candidates. Test takers were required to achieve a passing score on the LAST in order to receive state certification to teach in New York State public schools.*

*The Court also found that because the LAST was not shown to be related to the job of teaching, the DOE had violated Title VII by requiring plaintiffs to pass the LAST in order to receive a teaching license. The plaintiffs' complaint in this case is not based on a theory of intentional discrimination. Rather, the plaintiffs have alleged, and the Court found, that the DOE was liable for making employment decisions based on the state's exam under a "disparate impact" theory of discrimination.*

*In the same order in which the Court found that the DOE had violated Title VII by using the LAST, the Court also found that the plaintiffs could seek injunctive relief benefiting the entire class. In a subsequent order dated August 29, 2013, the Court further found that plaintiff class members are entitled to seek individualized monetary damages, such as backpay, and individualized injunctive relief, such as eligibility for in-system seniority.*

*Finally, on June 18, 2014, the Court amended the class definition so that the relief rulings apply to African-American and Latino individuals employed as New York City public school teachers on or after June 29, 1995, who failed the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test ("LAST") given on or before February 13, 2004, and as a result either lost or were denied a permanent teaching appointment.*

The Gulino class is estimated to be nearly 15,000 former teachers.

### **Disproportionate excessing of Black teachers**

In addition, during the same period, thousands of teachers, mostly in elementary and technical schools, were excessed as a result of school closings in response to low standardized test scores. Although there are no exact numbers available on the racial breakdown, these approximately 2,000 excessed teachers, called the "Absent Teacher Reserve", have been disproportionately Black, middle-aged and female. The space in the closed schools has largely been turned over to charter schools, although some small public schools have also been created. The new charter and small schools tend to hire young, white, inexperienced teachers (documented in the case of Success Academy charter school with FOIL requests), while the excessed teachers are required to move from school to school on weekly rotations like floaters. While the ATR's continue to receive a salary and benefits, under the new contract that went into effect in May 2014, they are no longer entitled to the same due process as non-excessed teachers, and can be terminated after a 1-day hearing. For this reason, their position is tenuous.

### **Birth of TDCNYC**

The Teacher Diversity Committee came together in 2013 in response to frustration around these hiring statistics, the ATR situation and ongoing delays in the resolution of the Gulino litigation. Several of the key people involved in founding the TDCNYC were active in starting the Gulino litigation, and were now involved in the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), the opposition caucus within the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the NYC teachers union. While the group's core has recently expanded, the core group of the TDC during most of this time has been 4-5 people. However, about 40 people have come to meetings and protests at some point.

### Sharp drop in Black teachers during years of Bloomberg administration

Around 2013, a member of the TDC obtained from a DOE official hiring statistics that showed that the rate of Black teachers hired by the NYC DOE fell from 27% to 11% during the period from 2001-2013 - a 57% drop.

While the number of Latino teachers remained more or less constant during this period, the 14% rate of Latino teachers in the NYC public schools is far lower than the 40% rate of Latino students. The number of white teachers hired during this period increased by almost 25%. The wider demographic context for this is that the student body is about 70% people of color, while only a third of the teaching force is.

The TDC initially established its activist presence by going to PEP meetings, and other sites of education protest. Later, as its first major project, the TDCNYC decided to create a petition listing its demands with a plan to present to Chancellor Carmen Fariña at a Panel for Education Policy.

### **Petition drive**

The drafting of the petition presented a number of challenges for the group. Firstly, while we all felt that the issue of teacher diversity was organically related to other racial issues, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, and restorative justice, we wanted it to have political and thematic independence. Secondly, it took a number of meetings and drafts - more than the group initially expected - to formulate demands that we thought would resonate with potential signers without being too wordy. And while the group is generally to the left of the Democratic party, the process gave us a finer sense of each other's political perspectives and priorities and helped us sharpen our collective goals.

The demand to “centrally monitor” is a response to the current situation whereby principals have complete control to hire teachers without any central monitoring overall. Principals gained this power in the late '90's/ early 00's: it has not always been the case. The petition is attached, but I list the demands that we asked of the DOE, namely, to:

- Make a policy statement that acknowledges the value of teacher diversity and the lack of such diversity in NYC public schools;
- Centrally monitor the racial demographic of hiring and firing in NYC public and charter schools.
- Centrally monitor the racial demographic of hiring and firing in NYC public and charter schools. In public school data reports include the racial profile for the teachers and administrators in each school as is currently done for the students.
- Raise the percentage of Black and Latino teachers hired in the system overall, with a special focus on raising the percentage of male teachers in those groups.
- Raise the percentage of persons of color in the NYC Teaching Fellows program to more closely match the NYC student body demographic. Make public the number and racial demographic of NYC Teaching Fellows hired.
- Settle *Gulino vs. Board of Education*, in which a recent court ruling found that the NY State LAST certification exam was not validated yet was used in 2002 to dismiss thousands of NYC teachers who were disproportionately Black and Latino.
- Invest in a clear and distinct paraprofessional-to-teacher career path that offers qualified applicants provisional teaching licenses while completing graduate degree requirements and subsidizes both undergraduate and graduate tuition at CUNY and SUNY.

### **Harlem Book Fair - July 2014**

Shortly after finalizing our petition, the group decided to try to raise the \$325 for a booth at the Harlem Book Fair. Unfortunately, we were unable and let the deadline for submissions pass. Despite this, we were called by the director in response to a message we had left, and

offered a free booth in appreciation of our work. We had only to pay for the rental of a tent cover. We were exhilarated by this unexpected opportunity, particularly since both MORE and Teachers Unite offered to support us financially for the cost of the banner and tent rental.

Our booth was positioned in an ideal location. Our new banner and James Baldwin quotes and pictures gave us an appealing look that synchronized with the fair's chosen theme of JB's 100 year anniversary. People were often queued up to sign the petition, which we had blown up on poster board so that people could read it while standing in line. When we counted 300 signatures at the end of the day, we shed our initial doubts about the viability of our petition and message. The HBF experience boosted our morale, and we decided on a goal of 1000 signatures over the next 5 months to present to Carmen Fariña at the PEP on November 25.

The petition continued to be well received everywhere it was taken, including outdoor concerts, CEC meetings, PEP meetings, a public meeting of the Black Educators for Excellence of NYC and the Millions March. The TDC was heartened by an endorsement from MORE and offer to post our petition on the MORE website. This was helpful on several fronts. For the TDC, it gave us an online presence until we developed one on our own.

Within MORE, which was increasingly divided over how to respond to racial issues, in particular the killing of Eric Garner by the police in August, there was general consensus even among the right wing that the TDC deserved complete support. The TDC was prominently featured in MORE's last newsletter issued in the fall, and contained information to find the petition online. This added another 400 signatures to the total.

While the TDC was able to get the petition translated into Spanish, plans to distribute in Latino communities were not realized. On a positive note, the Gulino case settled shortly after the petition was launched, a fact we noted on the second draft of the petition. My attempts to interest the branch and district to distribute the petitions on tablings did not receive a conclusive reply, probably due to the blur of other priorities. In any event, this was not assessed.

### **Hawkins/Jones campaign**

While the TDC members were politically sympathetic to the campaign, they were unwilling to endorse it without specific mention in its platform about the need to support teacher diversity. I raised this with the campaign, but we never revisited it because the Garner case exploded within MORE and all political energy went there.

### **Presentation of signatures**

On November 25, the TDC, joined by several members of MORE, including several ISO comrades, presented its petition to the PEP and Carmen Fariña with a statement, which one of the members read aloud while 2 of us stood behind him with the banner. In fact, MORE's support for the struggle against racism (including but not limited to its support for the TDC) swayed a Black member of the TDC to run for the MORE steering committee, to which she has been recently elected. This connection augurs well for both MORE and the TDC.

At the next PEP meeting in December, a TDC member in attendance for personal reasons unrelated to the TDC was surprised to hear the TDC petition referenced positively in public by members of the PEP. However, the main response was a proposal to start a program to encourage high school students to become teachers. While the TDC is not against the proposal, it feels that priority should be given to the demands of its petition, and that this response is too gradualist. Nevertheless, we were heartened to find our petition acknowledged in public, with tacit acceptance of the data we used, which was received from an official and not publicly available.

This is also an improvement on previous statements on diversity by the DOE, which have been confined almost entirely to discussing the diversity of the third-party vendors who supply the DOE, rather than its teachers.

It was also mentioned at the December PEP that an initiative was underway to capture data that would allow the DOE to track diversity. Using a personal connection, one of the TDC members was able a week later to get an audience with Norman Fruchter, a DeBlasio appointee to the PEP, and Annenberg Foundation member to discuss the demands of our petition. The suggestion from Fruchter was that we contact Odelia Levy, the head of the Office of Equal Opportunity of the Dept. of Ed. with our demands, and what data indicators we believe need to be captured.

As a result, 6 members of the TDC, including a Gulino litigant, met with OL and 3 members of her team last week for an hour-long meeting. The stock answer to all of our questions was “We’ll check with Human Resources and get back to you”. When we asked for an expected time of report back, OL was unwilling to commit to any deadline. However, despite the lack of any concrete response, it was very morale building for members of the TDCNYC to confront bureaucrats and see the human face of the powers arrayed against them.

### **Key questions and goals for the TDCNYC**

In fact, the very success of the Gulino litigation raises many questions about the value of legal strategies in effecting change. While the Gulino case has ended in a generous settlement for nearly 15,000 Black and Latino teachers, this achievement must be balanced against the fact that, while NY state has eliminated the biased L.A.S.T., it has initiated in its place a new set of racially discriminatory certification tests that merely re-creates the conditions the Gulino litigation was meant to eliminate (see <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/27/us/many-teachers-fail-state-certification-tests.html>). How to respond to this new set of discriminatory testing will be a real test of the TDC.

Other goals include:

1. Developing our mailing list from the petition signatures (current priority)
2. Developing an online presence
3. Returning to the Harlem Book Fair 2015
4. Getting speaking engagements
5. Optimizing our relationship with MORE;
6. regionalizing the issue of teacher diversity (taking it beyond NYC).

### **Key questions for the TDCNYC**

1. Given our resources, how do we best appoint our time, especially for the issues that are close to the issue of teacher diversity, such as school-to-prison pipeline, or restorative justice?
2. How much effort should we put into pressuring public officials?
3. How do we turn sympathizers into organizers?
4. How do we connect with the BlackLivesMatter movement?
5. How do we better implant ourselves in the community?

### **Promoting the ISO within the TDC**

While I have been successful in selling the SW to the TDC, particularly to Michelle B., the effort needs to become more consistent. However, the main problem is the fact that the TDC tends to organize by email, and lacks a regular meeting schedule. To the extent that the group meets, it is usually at protest sites, such as the PEP, where there is little time to speak before the meeting begins. Nevertheless, the TDC represents a real audience for the SW, and even the ISR, which needs to be developed.

The ISO's plan to focus on the Black Lives Matter movement and anti-racist struggles dovetails well with TDC work. The next priority is to invite TDC members to our upcoming district meeting on racism and introduce them to socialist politics.

**MH**

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## **TOWARD A NATIONAL ANTI-AUSTERITY CAMPAIGN**

[Editor's note: This document was originally submitted for the 2014

Convention by AP]

Re-submitted for 2015 by MS

### **Updated introduction 2015**

Due to other important debates and conversations at last year's convention, I believe that the proposal below was not able to get sufficient attention. Recent international developments in particular, the electoral and political advances both in Greece and in Spain warrant giving this proposal a second look.

—MS

## **TOWARD A NATIONAL ANTI-AUSTERITY CAMPAIGN**

The purpose of the following document is to outline a vision for a nationwide anti-austerity campaign organized through a broad coalition of independent left-wing forces. This document aims to generate a vibrant discussion over long-term strategic perspectives for resistance to austerity.

At the end is a proposal to the National Convention to sanction the formation of a special national fraction tasked with appealing to sympathetic organizations and allies for the formation of an organizing committee that will plan and build for a national anti-austerity conference.

### **Background**

Under "Perspectives" from Pre-convention Bulletin #1, AM described the "ruling class consensus" in the present period as "'smash and grab': take as much as you can, as quickly as you can, and resist even the slightest concession to workers."

The ongoing economic crisis has generated the precondition for exciting, dramatic, and heroic moments of resistance across globe. However, nowhere has the austerity tide been turned back. Austerity is likely to carry on into the foreseeable future.

The caving of the traditional formations of mass working class organization--the large union federations and social democratic parties--has been a global phenomenon. The U.S., of course, has been no exception and the labor bureaucracy remains tied to the Democratic Party, in spite of the fact that they have been the face of austerity since the election of President Obama. Even in extreme instances where labor has faced virtual extinction--such as the passage of right-to-work in Michigan--the bureaucracy has promised to carry on with business as usual and redoubled their efforts to support Democratic Party candidates in 2014.

The crisis has, in some instances, led to dramatic political shifts and exciting new developments. The ascension of SYRIZA in Greece, the organization of the People's Assembly and Left Unity in Britain, and the merger of the Revolutionary Socialist Party into Socialist Alternative in Australia, are just a few examples that point toward the potential for the crisis of austerity to generate renewed interest and new formations on the Left. The growth of left-wing and social democratic publications like *Jacobin*, *Dissent*, *n+1*, and *The New Inquiry*, reveals that the U.S. has not been excluded from this process.

There remains, however, no organizational or political expression through which popular hostility to austerity can be sustained in the United States. What we can learn from the developments abroad and our own circumstances in the United States is that *if there is to be any protracted resistance to austerity we must lay the foundation for that struggle ourselves.*

We have seen that the crisis of austerity is able to produce sharp bitterness and anger that can generate powerful outbursts, such as those we saw in 2011. While these eruptions have been sporadic and episodic, *we should expect and prepare for more of these outbursts in the future.*

Revolutionary organizations—including our own organization—have made powerful contributions to the fight against austerity. It goes without saying, however, that the ISO is too small and politically narrow to act as the organizational scaffolding for a future anti-austerity movement. The vast majority of participants in the movements of 2011, for instance, were often *sympathetic* to the aims of revolutionary socialists, but were generally not prepared—for a multitude of reasons,—to commit themselves to a specifically Marxist organization such as the ISO.

*If the Left is to prepare for any outbursts against austerity in the future, therefore, we must intentionally set out to lay down the broad foundation for a movement that can unite and sustain those forces.*

## **Vision**

What could such a foundation look like?

Imagine that in the near future we see an eruption like those we witnessed in 2011. This is not an unlikely scenario. Now picture the difference it would make if we were a part of a wider network of militants committed to the formation of a sustained and successful anti-austerity movement opposed to the policies of both ruling parties. This network would ideally be comprised of people from a diverse range of political tendencies and backgrounds--socialists, anarchists, social democrats, teachers, nurses, students, postal workers, and more. Consider the organizational weight and capacity it would add to our own efforts as revolutionary socialists if we were able to construct such a network.

The objective of this coalition would be to give sustained political expression and organization to the widespread anti-austerity sentiment around us, and to eventually form the basis for a militant political resistance to austerity in the United States.

A successful, nationwide coalition would unite a wide range of forces reflective of the full scope of austerity's warpath. Revolutionary socialist and social democratic organizations; community organizations fighting foreclosures and gentrification; parents and students fighting against school closures; graduate and adjunct instructors at public and private colleges and universities; women's groups resisting attacks on Planned Parenthood; workers in the Fight for 15; and locals in education, nursing, postal service, or public sector unions, etc.

Such a coalition would necessarily need a broad basis for political unity, such as:

1. Opposition to all forms of austerity (i.e., any attempt by the ruling class to reduce the "social wage," including service cuts, privatizations, school closures, anti-union legislation, etc.)
2. Affirmative action against any attempt to divide the working class (that is, active opposition to racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, national oppression, and imperialism)
3. Complete political independence from the Democratic Party

This movement would engage not only in broad agitation and organization on both a local and national scale, but would also facilitate popular education on a mass scale on a wide range of topics including:

- The roots and causes of the economic crisis and austerity
- The intersectional costs and impacts of austerity on women, people of color, immigrants, queer people, disabled people, etc.
- The role that racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and imperialism play in justifying and supporting austerity
- The ecological costs of austerity
- The global scope of austerity, and the political threats posed by the rising far right

- The scale and the lessons of the global resistance to austerity
- The political role of the Democratic Party in the U.S. and in carrying out the austerity agenda
- Left-wing alternatives to austerity, and the kinds of organizations, institutions, and resistance needed to make them politically possible

This movement would utilize a range of tactics under a strategy that aims to unite and cohere anti-austerity forces to the greatest degree possible. Local campaigns could build for a mass occupation of schools being threatened with closure; run left-wing anti-austerity candidates against Democratic or Republican candidates; organize ballot referenda for minimum wage, rent control, or foreclosure moratoriums, etc.

In the long term, this coalition could publish its own website, a regular monthly newsletter, leaflets and pamphlets; host regular public forums, discussions, debates, study groups, classes, and even regional and national conferences.

Such an organization, of course, would need to finance itself. It would likely require formal membership and a dues structure.

The formation of a successful, broad coalition would lay the basis for long-term left unity and political organization (i.e., regroupment).

### **First steps**

This movement will not come out of nowhere. It will be the result of hard, patient work of dedicated cadre. Our organization can play a critical role in spearheading this effort.

Our organization is in a special position to take the first steps in initiating this sort of project because of our record and our grassroots experience.

As a first step toward crystallizing this anti-austerity coalition, a nationwide anti-austerity conference could be planned that would bring together a wide variety of groups and individuals.

This conference could be organized by a planning committee that could include not only members of other revolutionary organizations like Solidarity and Socialist Alternative, but social democratic, community, labor, and other progressive organizations as well: *Jacobin*, for instance, as well as the Young Democratic Socialists, members of community anti-foreclosure and anti-gentrification organizations, feminist organizations, teachers' caucuses like CORE, MORE, the Bad Ass Teachers Association, etc.

The conference would host discussions, debates, and workshops on the politics of anti-austerity and strategies for resistance. We could invite familiar speakers that would attract a large audience, for instance: Kshama Sawant, Ty Moore, Jill Stein, Cornell West, Karen Lewis, Bhaskar Sunkara, and representatives from campaigns like the Fight for 15, OUR Walmart, etc.

If this conference is successful, the conference's organizing committee could take further steps through planning smaller regional conferences that would help cohere more localized networks.

If these are successful, in medium- to long-term future we could see the committee calling for a national founding convention that would discuss, debate, and vote on the political points of unity for a national anti-austerity coalition and elect a national steering committee.

### **Important considerations**

In undertaking these first steps, there is the risk that the necessary energy and activity for this sort of project does not exist, and that might put us down the path of substitutionism. We cannot determine ahead of time, with scientific precision, if all the necessary energy for this project exists.

We do know, however, several important facts: 1) The ongoing austerity crisis will drive significant

sections of the working class toward anger and will continue to open large ideological openings for the Left; 2) This bitterness will produce the conditions for future outbursts such as those we saw in 2011; 3) No structure yet exists to carry these outbursts past their initial, episodic and “spontaneous” phases, and 4) That such a structure will not be constructed through the traditional organization of the working-class, i.e., the unions.

With these considerations, I believe that the risks posed are outweighed by the costs of not adequately preparing for future outbursts.

Lenin was often fond of quoting Napoleon, saying, “*On s’engage et puis...on voit.*” That is, “first you engage; then you see.” In this spirit, we should consider taking cautious first steps while making regular, honest, and sober assessments of our work, while making use of our cumulative experience from past attempts at building coalitions and networks to best avoid making substitutionist errors.

In assessing our work, we should consider the range of forces we are able to bring together, and the level of participation and commitment of each organization.

I believe the following proposal is well within the reach of our organization. However, for those comrades who believe this is too ambitious, I think that should lead to other questions and conversations for us to consider collectively: is this kind of movement desirable? If so, what kind of resources, institutions, practices, discussions, and debates do we need to have within the ISO and within the broader Left to make such an undertaking possible? What kind of a Left do we need and what does this mean for the ISO?

### **Proposed**

**The National Convention approves of the creation of a special national fraction empowered to draft an appeal for the formation of an organizing committee within the next 90 days that will plan and build for a national anti-austerity conference, after which the organization will evaluate the potential for further efforts toward developing a national anti-austerity coalition.**

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