

Pre-convention Bulletin #27 / February 14, 2014

for members only

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Convention information and deadlines

Convention location: Northwestern University. We have sent out meeting room and other convention details for attendees in a Convention Information Sheet.

Pre-convention documents and resolutions: The deadline for submitting documents and resolutions for pre-convention bulletins is past. **All comrades who submit new documents or resolutions will be required to make their own copies to be distributed at the convention. We will include all of these in the post-convention bulletin, which reports back to the entire membership.**

Please note the following reminders:

1. SW and dues:

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

If your branch owes money for dues and/or SW it must be received by the start of registration on Saturday. If absolutely necessary, send outstanding payments along with your delegate. **We discourage waiting until the convention to pay branch debts because it will interfere with the streamlined registration process, wasting time unnecessarily while other comrades are forced to wait.**

2. Double dues payments for February.

The ISO rules require all members to pay double dues for the month of February.

Here is how to handle the double dues:

If your branch delegates will be flying to the convention, use the double dues money to reimburse your delegates. If you have any money left over, turn it in to the national office to help pay for other branches' delegates. If your branch's double dues are not enough to fully pay for your delegates' plane fares, the national office will make up the difference.

If your branch's delegates do not need to fly to the convention, you should turn over all your double dues to the national office to reimburse other branch's delegates.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact sharon@internationalsocialist.org.

Documents

Organizational Perspectives

The organization is currently engaged in a concurrent set of debates. Some of these have been very useful and constructive, while others have been far less so. Some have been conducted internally, while others have taken place externally, often involving fewer members than nonmembers—many of them ill-informed to pass judgment on our present or past internal practices, and who seem to be more interested in discrediting—or trying to wreck—the ISO than contributing to building a viable revolutionary organization.

Despite some of the difficulties involved, this whirlwind of debates has the advantage of helping our members to discern which issues our organization needs to debate right now and which are not only unnecessary, but also damaging. While the ISO has faced problems over the last year, they are not necessarily those raised by the “Renewal Faction” or other critics.

Assessing the 2013 Perspective

The political picture was mixed a year ago, as the following quotes illustrate (“Organizational and political perspectives,” Ahmed S., Pre-convention Bulletin #5, February 1, 2013):

But although coordinated police repression succeeded in shutting down the Occupy encampments, the sentiment that existed in Occupy has not just been obliterated. If anything, there is much more of that sentiment, proliferated very widely. There's a huge audience that agrees with the radical analysis of Occupy, and even the need for radical action. But between that sentiment and organization there is a very wide gap, as there is between consciousness and mobilization.

The document also emphasized the importance of the continuing economic crisis, arguing,

The second aspect of the political landscape is that the economic and social conditions [of the ongoing economic crisis] have not changed—nor has the program of those who are in charge of this society. Those who were fortunate enough to be in Chicago during last fall's teachers' strike experienced a major labor battle that I think is indicative of labor battles to come. This doesn't mean that every city will have a strike as well organized as the CTU or with those kind of numbers. But it is clear that the template—the attack on public sector workers—is moving ahead, utilizing the legislatures in a whole number of states. And actually, below the surface, you can see the labor movement for the first time, moving.

Finally, the document laid out the core perspective for 2013 as follows:

In this kind of situation, what can we expect in the coming year—what can our core perspective be? The ISO has typically been sober about our perspectives and our own relatively small size. Without changing that realistic approach, we need to also aim for growth—not just numerical growth but also qualitative growth of our own membership. These two things are very closely related. You can only grow in numbers with growth in political development and engagement of the members. We have a much bigger audience around us. Our ability to engage with that audience and to lead practically in struggle involves these separate but related phenomena.

As a larger organization with a higher level of politics, we can play an even more important role than before. [Emphasis added.]

Our ability to transform our organization into a more serious, more rooted, larger organization should provide the kind of framework by which we determine our areas of work and actually set particular aims for ourselves—district by district and for the organization as a whole. We are in a good position to do so, even if the radicalization has not yet produced the growth of political organization that we would have liked to see.

The year 2013 witnessed one significant breakthrough, thanks to the ongoing struggle for equal marriage. By 2013, a majority of the U.S. population approved of same-sex marriage, compared with just 27 percent in 1996—representing a sea change in consciousness. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled Prop 8 unconstitutional, and California became one of 16 states that had by then legalized same-sex marriage. Obama himself reversed his earlier opposition to this basic civil right in 2012, due to pressure from below.

Aside from this important victory, there were no “obvious” or significant breakthroughs emerged in 2013. And 2013 saw clear setbacks. But, as will be argued later, this kind “impressionism”—while important to understand the overall mood activists including our membership may feel—can downplay or not take into account changes that continue to take place at a “molecular” level, less obviously on the radar.

The last year has witnessed a major setback in the Arab spring—perhaps best exemplified by the military crackdown on Egyptian revolutionaries in July. This crackdown followed immediately after enormous demonstrations on June 30—the largest thus far—involving millions of Egyptians taking to the streets to demand the ouster of Mohammed Morsi as president. The protests could have launched the second phase of the Egyptian revolution, but the military acted quickly and harshly to prevent that possibility in the near term.

Nor did the CTU strike of September 2012 produce an immediate rise in teachers’ strikes in 2013.

The end of the Occupy movement left a vacuum of activism in a number of localities. This was not the case in larger cities, where the ISO has larger districts, or in places such as Seattle, where our comrades have been key in successfully initiating struggles such as the MAP boycott. But in many other places, comrades have noted how low the level of activism has been.

In the summer of 2013, in the face of a possible U.S. military intervention in Syria, debates raged on the left over whether Syrian rebels should be supported or denounced – while those who are against the Syrian opposition abandoned the long-standing principle of the right to self-determination among oppressed peoples.

Thus, by mid-2013 there was an increasing disorientation in the left, along with a sense among activists that, while class and social struggles had been set back, the ruling class drive on austerity continued to escalate—leaving many to wonder whether the struggles of 2011 and 2012 were just blips in an otherwise dismal political landscape.

And yet, the year ended up abuzz with the discussion of the Sawant victory in Seattle and the Fight for 15.

The SWP crisis and its ramifications

In January 2013, the SWP internal crisis over a mishandled rape allegation—against a member of its Central Committee—exploded. The problem involved what has since been revealed as a cover-up on the part of the SWP Central Committee, and this crisis only worsened as the year progressed. The CC's extreme reaction against the party's opposition (formed in response to the CC's mishandling of the rape allegation), which also worsened over the course of the last year, demonstrated an utter lack of democracy in the organization.

While the ISO had been expelled from the International Socialist Tendency some 12 years earlier, the SWP's crisis nevertheless quickly became our crisis—indeed this was the case for the organized socialist left throughout the English-speaking world. Many on the broader left adopted the view that 1) the entire revolutionary left is sexist and 2) that Leninism—most often caricatured in the most extreme manner—is responsible for this situation and also obsolete.

Leading up to the ISO's 2013 convention, many members sought to wrestle with the SWP's crisis by proposing and motivating internal structures and policies that would prevent such a crisis taking place in the ISO. These led to a number of constructive discussions and decisions—including the formation of a Disciplinary Committee elected by the 2013 convention. These debates and discussions have continued through this last year, and will undoubtedly continue this coming year as comrades strive further to collectively grapple with issues of oppression and democracy within the revolutionary socialist movement.

While in many ways the SWP crisis overshadowed other issues as the 2013 convention, comrades had also begun addressing the changed political situation during 2012. Whereas 2011 had witnessed the rise of the Arab spring, the working-class uprising in Wisconsin, and the rise of Occupy, the year that followed was far more contradictory. The Occupy movement did not survive the synchronized police repression that forcibly evicted encampments across the country in late 2011. Wisconsin's public sector workers' unions experienced a dramatic decline in membership, while Gov. Scott Walker easily survived the recall effort. On the other hand, Syriza in Greece gained enormous electoral support in the elections of early summer 2012. And the Chicago Teachers Union led a massive walkout in September of that year, using a different model of unionism—with significant reverberation among union activists, especially teacher activists, in unions around the U.S.

The ISO--an inflated perspective?

Thus, the ISO had begun addressing the changes in the political landscape since 2011 in the run up to the convention a year ago. And, as described above, by mid-2013 many on the left had begun wondering whether the struggles of 2011 and 2012—including revolutionary struggle in the Middle East—had been mere flashes in the pan, rather than the rise of resistance in the context of a political period marked by the economic crisis beginning in 2008.

Quite understandably, many ISO comrades have been wondering whether 1) the ISO has had an inflated perspective since the economic crash and the election of Obama in 2008 and 2) the organization's recent emphasis on deepening members' understanding of Marxism is a form of retreat in response to changed political conditions. While the Renewal Faction has raised these issues as part of its critique of the ISO's perspectives over a longer period of time, other comrades have also expressed doubts about our perspectives since the onset of the Great Recession and Obama's election in 2008.

There are several separate (though some are clearly interrelated) issues.

First, there is no *automatic* revolt to economic crisis—but there *was* actually a rise in struggle, meaning the building of a real resistance, in 2011.

It is certainly the case that the ISO's perspectives in early 2009 expected a continued rise in struggle, based upon the occupation of Republic Windows and Doors and the rise of the equal marriage movement in November and December 2008. It soon became clear, however, that these two struggles emerged *in*

anticipation of Obama's presidency. It is also the case that there was a flurry of industrial action and real hope produced that it would have been wrong to ignore. Once Obama took office, he quickly proved himself an unrepentant defender of the class and political status quo, escalating the pace of corporate bailouts while offering nothing to ordinary workers, and less than nothing to African-Americans victimized by the status quo.

Nevertheless, the level of struggle *did* begin to rise significantly by early 2011, as noted above. While we did not get the timing right, we did understand the underlying dynamics that propel resistance from below. Class and social struggles never proceed in a linear fashion, but are always marked by ebbs and flows, victories as well as setbacks. To think otherwise belies the lessons of history. While we cannot always predict the timing of advances—or defeats—our primary responsibility is to identify the overall trajectory of class and social dynamics in any given political period.

At the present time, we are not faced with a mounting class struggle. Yet as this document is being written, teachers from Portland, OR are scheduled to strike, after months of grassroots struggle similar to what preceded the CTU strike. Kshama Sawant's victory in November, likewise, has spurred socialist electoral initiatives in other cities. The Fight for 15 and other low wage campaigns have had an ideological impact far beyond the numbers involved so far—giving momentum to the fight to raise the minimum wage. The environmental struggle, including “System Change Not Climate Change,” is an arena of activism in which ISO members have been able to play a key role.

There is no shortage of opportunity for us to relate to struggles. Moreover, the radicalization has continued around us, while Sawant's election has shown the audience that exists for explicitly socialist politics.

Projecting the ISO

We will only attract this radicalizing layer of people to the ISO, however, if we make a priority of projecting our organization and its politics. We should aim to be meeting not only self-conscious radical activists but also those people who are radicalizing but not yet involved in any particular movement or struggle. This involves regular and well-built *public meetings*—which are organized not only through Facebook but also by publicizing widely and personally calling people on our contact lists to invite them. It also involves a routine around *regular paper sales*. When the ISO had a weekly print paper, the paper provided a particular rhythm for ISO routines—including weekly paper sales. This is no longer the case. While print media is in decline, it still plays a crucial role for the left in providing a pole of attraction—which is why the Occupy movements in New York City, Chicago and Oakland all produced their own print papers.

Today, we have many more members implanted in unions and grassroots movements, which is an enormous step forward for the organization. By necessity, this has changed the rhythm of the organization, in that fractions play a much larger role in these members' activity. At the same time, branch routines have begun to change to reflect this greater implantation—with a greater emphasis on fraction meetings and activities. In New York City, comrades have been experimenting with a move to shift the meeting rotation in non-student branches, with branch meetings and fraction meetings on alternate weeks rather than holding both every week. It should be emphasized, however, that NYC campus branches have retained weekly branch meetings. Moreover, the verdict is still out on whether the experiment in community branches to shift to biweekly branch meetings has worked out the way comrades had hoped.

Selling Socialist Worker

But the monthly print edition of SW remains underutilized. The September NC meeting proposed a renewed emphasis on the role of the print edition of Socialist Worker—asking members to organize SW routines around public sales in the hope of using these experiences to measure its use through concrete experiences. However useful the SW website is (and it is!), it cannot replace the function of the print paper, which remains a key tool for the ISO in projecting our politics outward—beyond activist networks in which we are already involved.

Why Marxist education is not a retreat

The NC's decision to place a renewed emphasis on Marxist education in the ISO should be viewed in the political context described above. The need for a higher level of political development in the ISO was already part of the ISO's 2013 perspectives—not as a retreat, but in order to more successfully engage those who are radicalizing around us. Although we have not been able to adequately address these two NC initiatives because of new debates that have arisen since September, they remain crucial next steps for us. As an organization, we should always be seeking ways to fill the ideological openings that exist. There is an urgent need to develop our membership as developed Marxists in order to more successfully win the radicalizing layers of people around us to an explicitly Marxist worldview.

The importance of public meetings

To that end, we should be sure to have regular public meetings—not just on topical issues like police violence or the Arab Spring, but to make the socialist case on the economic crisis, climate change, women's oppression, Black liberation, immigration, etc. At the same time, every ISO district/branch should have a systematic approach to political education through study groups or special meetings. The ISO has produced a number of educational guides for these purposes, and the National Office can work with comrades to help develop an education program.

The point of such education is not to create a "talk shop," but to answer the questions of ISO members and those interested in our organization and the Marxist tradition. Socialism 2013 drew a large and politically engaged audience, demonstrating concretely that there is still a much larger audience for Marxist politics and activism than we can directly engage.

The need for greater organizational cohesion

The political difficulties experienced over the last year exposed the unevenness among branches within the organization. While larger districts (with larger numbers of politically developed cadres) have moved forward, a number of branches—especially those branches that are geographically isolated, smaller, or lacking developed cadre members—have experienced real setbacks. In some cases, branches have become internalized or demoralized about prospects for growth, sometimes leading to downplaying the need for public meetings and SW sales—leading to further internalization and demoralization.

In other cases, comrades encountered personal crises that led to internal disputes in branches. A small number of branches were directly affected by the Renewal Faction, resulting in months of factional debate.

The need for greater organizational cohesion

The overall picture of the organization over the last year has exposed the need for greater cohesion across the organization—including more help from the center when problems arise. This means greater cohesion not only among branches but also among comrades active in numerous unions and movements. Our organization has lacked the structures for comrades to formulate common strategies and make decisions about both long- and short-term aims in particular areas of work.

An important adjustment lies in the way we have utilized national organizers. Until now, we have relied on a set of organizers assigned to help coordinate and develop local leadership across branches, districts and regions. In addition to this, we formed a National Office a few years ago to oversee all other aspects of organizing—including loosely organized fractions around various aspects of comrades' work in unions, on campuses and in a range of movements.

The first problem with this approach to organizing is that both bodies have been understaffed. We simply did not have enough organizers—especially after the number of branches multiplied both due to the growth of the organization but also due to the larger number of branches that came of dividing into separate campus and community branches. A number of branches were thus left without an assigned organizer, simply due to understaffing.

The national office has been chronically understaffed over the last couple of years because key members were assigned to write books (necessary to the continued political development of the organization), stretching the remaining members beyond their capacity.

Secondly, by separating branch organizing and the national office into two separate bodies (organizers and the national office), we were less able to integrate the two. This left many movement fractions without adequate integration with other aspects of the ISO, much less a clear sense of purpose or even structure—leading to an ad hoc character of our approach to both branches and movement work. Too often, the “left hand didn’t know what the right hand was doing.”

We have responded to the problems described above by changing our organizing practices in the following way:

1. All organizers will now function within a single national office—now a body of 12 comrades. (Fortunately, two members of the national office have now returned from book leave and resumed their organizational responsibilities, which will also help our previous problem with understaffing.)
2. We are discontinuing the separation between branch and movement organizing by functioning as a single body. Moreover, we are incorporating regular Haymarket, ISR and dues reports on an ongoing basis.
3. This reorganization will discontinue the role of “regional organizer” (although not the role of district organizer in the three largest districts, New York, Chicago and the Bay Area). Every branch will instead be assigned to one of the 12 members of the NO, who will be responsible for ongoing communication, collaboration and help resolving problems, working out next steps for the branch, etc. This member of the national office will also be assigned to keep track of the branch’s dues payments, membership figures, SW sales routines, public meetings, Haymarket, ISR, and fraction work—and will report this information to the entire national office.
4. The national office will also help to oversee existing fractions and help in the creation of new ones as needed. Thus far, we have identified the following as areas for our involvement in ongoing fraction work (this does not preclude other possibilities): environmental movement; Fight for 15; electoral work; fund drive and other internal campaigns; BDS; student work; labor work.

We hope that this reorganization will be much more effective in helping to cohere the organization, branch by branch. ISO members are far more implanted in struggles, workplaces and movements than ever before in our history, evidenced in many documents submitted for pre-convention discussion. Our aim in the coming year, as in the last, should be both the qualitative and quantitative growth of the organization.

ISO Steering Committee

Reprint of “Leaking internal ISO docs: A question of revolutionary ethics” by Mike Ely of the Kasama Project

We reprint below a post from Mike Ely of the Kasama Project to Ross Wolfe (formerly of the Platypus Society), who hosts a web site that has reprinted a full set of ISO pre-convention bulletins. I believe that the arguments put forward by Mike are an important corrective to the currently accepted notion that given that there is no such thing as ‘privacy’ in the age of the NSA, it is okay to violate the internal discussions of the left—or for that matter of any social movement, trade union, etc. This is published with Mike’s permission.

This discussion is clearly ongoing. And the confusions abound. Louis Proyect of Marxmail conflates “Leninism,” operating in “semi-clandestine” manner with the simple right of organizations and movements having the right to debate internally without the expectation that all their discussions are posted for the

world to see.

ISO Steering Committee

Leaking internal ISO docs: A question of revolutionary ethics

Over the last week, the **Charnel-House blog** has been posting internal documents of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) -- focused on 19 issues of the ISO's internal pre-conference bulletins.

This is provoking important discussion about the right and wrong of such an act.

Is it principled and justified to violate the security of other radical, left anti-government groups -- and publish their private documents for all to see?

The following is a letter written by Mike Ely to Ross Wolfe. Ross is the person behind the posting of the ISO internal documents.

We hope this letter contributes to deeper understanding and common practice.

* * * * *

February 11

Ross:

I am writing you to raise some very serious and troubling issues.

It came to my attention today that you have published internal stolen documents from a left organization (the ISO). And apparently you did so without even reading them closely and weighing what the content and impacts would be.

This is a very wrong, dangerous and hostile practice. It will have consequences you have not thought through seriously. It will serve to model culture and behavior within the left that have implications far beyond you or the ISO.

I want to open a comradely discussion with you by making this criticism.

And specifically, I want to ask you to take down this post and retract your decision to post secret documents.

A left that has no secrets is a left that is incapable of higher tasks.

If we are to have necessary security cultures (and private debates) within specific left circles -- we must of necessity respect the security and privacy of other organizations (even ones we consider wrong, corrupt or compromised.)

When I wrote my series of very sharp and rather devastating polemics with the RCP, we very carefully and consciously refrained from publishing (or even quoting) any of their internal documents. We did not discuss internal meetings or the internal actions of individuals (including myself). We separated political criticism from toxic "leaks."

Put another way: The ISO is not the NSA. Leaking their documents hurts the effort to build organizations that can face and challenge the government.

It is also disturbing that you are publishing documents from an "anonymous" source.

Let me pose the obvious question: How do you know you aren't being drawn into some cointelpro operation? Did you think that through? How do you know that some police cell did not say "Let's break up the ISO and use these documents to do it?" Why would you allow yourself to potentially be a pawn in that kind of operation?

To be clear: I am not suggesting you are (yourself) a police agent. I don't think everyone who does something reckless, thoughtless, or hostile (in such a sectarian way) is necessarily a police agent.

I understand your politics. I understand that you think the left is dead and wrong. But even so, do you want

a culture when people feel empowered to leak the documents of a future undead and better left? What practices and behavior and cautions should we model?

I am pointing out that we operate in a world (and a political landscape) where the government has spent untold billions on surveillance and infiltration -- and where massive campaigns of police provocation are visible around us.

Please respond to this. Please think over this deeply. Please think about the importance of respecting the privacy and integrity of even-those-we-disagree-with.

And please consider reversing your very reckless and toxic action.

Yours in the common struggle,

Mike Ely

<http://kasamaproject.org/threads/entry/leaking-internal-iso-docs-a-question-of-revolutionary-ethics#kmt-45889>

Holding the Renewal Faction accountable

Since its formation in November, the ISO Renewal Faction has repeatedly and egregiously violated the rules, norms and practices of the ISO in a number of respects. Moreover, rather than trying to win over comrades to a program while "renewing" or "reforming" the ISO, the faction, as it shrinks in membership, has devoted its energies to damaging and discrediting the organization.

The most serious violation of the ISO's code of conduct, not to mention elementary standards of decency on the left, came when faction leader and former ISO member Shaun J.'s published on Facebook the accusation that a member of the ISO is/was a police informant.

As comrades will be aware, the Steering Committee requested that the members of the Renewal Faction distance themselves from this claim. We pointed out that Shaun based this charge on internal Boston Police documents, riddled with redactions, and published in response to a National Lawyer's Guild lawsuit against BPD's spying on the mid-2000s antiwar movement.

Since the Renewal Faction follows a policy in which all members of the faction must agree with positions issued in its name, the Steering Committee posed a challenge: Did all members of the faction agree with Shaun's charge, and if not, individuals should say so. The Faction's response, published in *Pre-Convention Bulletin 17*, spoke volumes:

The police report that reveals Keegan's conversation with the Boston police has been posted publicly online since October 2012 as part of a highly-publicized release of Boston Police Department "intelligence reports" on the antiwar movement following a lawsuit by the ACLU and National Lawyers Guild. When Shaun read these documents, he was shocked and disturbed to discover that Keegan had conveyed political information to the police. He spoke to the Boston district organizer about the matter on at least two occasions, asking him to address it with Keegan. This was never done. Shortly thereafter, as Shaun has documented in *External Bulletin* (<https://externalbulletin.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/the-experience-of-a-dissident-in-the-iso-i-the-trial/>), Keegan played an important role in undermining the Boston ISO's support for Shaun in his trial on criminal charges stemming from his false arrest during an antiwar protest.

The document goes on to say that "No one is accusing Keegan of being a police informant." But this is precisely what it is doing. Such a disavowal is meaningless, given that Renewal has already asserted "Keegan had conveyed political information to the police," which is then used to explain that "Keegan played an important role in undermining the Boston ISO's support for Shaun in his trial on criminal charges stemming from his false arrest during an antiwar protest." The implication could not be clearer: a comrade allegedly collaborated with the police, and then allegedly worked to undermine solidarity for another member facing prosecution for an anti-war arrest. The faction then doubles down on its destructive

innuendo: "[Shaun] has told the truth, a truth that members and collaborators of the ISO should know, especially given the leadership's amazingly indifferent attitude. To renounce someone for telling the truth is to renounce the truth itself. We refuse to do so."

We note that all but one of the original faction members signed this statement.

We believe that the slander of comrade Keegan is but one example of the contempt with which the faction holds not just the elected leadership of the ISO, but its entire membership. Implying that an ISO member is a police informer is a practice known on the left as "snitch-jacketing." As comrades Aaron A. and Don L. point out in their recent pre-convention bulletin article (See ISO pre-convention bulletin #21), this practice had an enormously destructive impact on the left, driving wedges into the civil rights and antiwar movements and organizations such as the Black Panther Party. It is bad enough that faction leader Shaun J. would engage in snitch-jacketing on Facebook, but it is beyond the pale that the entire Renewal Faction would endorse this action. It begs the question as to whether the faction is interested less in "renewing" the ISO than destroying it.

There are several other examples of the Renewal faction's destructive behavior:

- *The habitually abusive and disrespectful posture that leading faction members, such as Shaun J. and Ben S. of Atlanta, take toward other members of the ISO.* Immediately preceding the Facebook post that accused Keegan O. of being a police agent, Shaun J. wrote of Boston comrade Sofia A, that "I have never tried to make you look like 'an amateur and a confused fool.' It is scarcely necessary." This was Shaun's response to several long, and detailed, posts that challenged Shaun's charges that the Boston branch abandoned him while he was standing trial for an arrest at an antiwar protest. Similarly, Ben S.'s aggressive behavior in an Atlanta branch meeting, including repeated interruptions of the chairperson, prompted nearly the entire Atlanta branch to sign a letter protesting his hostile behavior. This type of behavior has nothing to do with sharp political debate inside the ISO, and should be condemned for what it is: personal abuse and bullying. (Ben S., who had not paid dues to the ISO in months, subsequently resigned.)
- *The constant—and baseless—allegations that the ISO is suppressing the faction.* The faction and its individual members continuously charge that the internal bulletin is refusing to print their material, and, in affect, suppressing their expression. This is false. The internal bulletin has, to date, published three documents issued under the faction's name, plus at least three documents by faction members Brian C. and Ben S. and former faction member Nurit T. We published the initial set of Renewal documents *after* they had already been published on the faction's website, and despite the fact that the faction included nonmembers of the ISO. Ahmed S. and Jennifer R. debated faction secretary Brian C. on the questions of political and organizational perspectives at a Providence preconvention discussion meeting where most of the Renewal Faction were in attendance. Renewal Faction. They did so in order to provide the faction the opportunity to air its views in a full and open debate with a member of the ISO's national leadership.
- *The willful misrepresentation of communications with the Steering Committee.* After Keeanga T. reached out to Shaun J. to inquire about his decision to resign, Ahmed S. went to Boston to meet with the district and with Shaun J. individually. When Ahmed offered to initiate a process to reintegrate Shaun into the ISO, Shaun declined—only to then publicly accuse the SC of "excluding" him. In another case, Keeanga told ex-member Vanessa B. to stop posting comments on Keeanga's Facebook wall. The faction has redefined that interaction as evidence of a political dispute that led to Vanessa being expelled. In fact, Vanessa had not been a member in good standing because she had not paid dues in more than two years.
- *The deliberate flouting by the Cambridge (MA) branch of the Steering Committee's clear communications regarding Shaun J.'s membership status.* The Steering Committee informed Shaun J. and the Boston district that Shaun—despite his unequivocal decision to resign from the ISO—could be reintegrated into the ISO through a process guided by the Steering Committee. Instead, the Cambridge branch—without informing the Boston district, the regional organizer or the Steering Committee—unilaterally voted to readmit Shaun as a member.

- *The publication of CERSC financial records in a manner that will invite attacks on both CERSC and the ISO.* Faction leader Shaun J. published online the tax reporting forms of the Center for Economic Research and Social Change. While these documents are available to the public, political enemies of the ISO, have attempted to use such material to discredit both organizations. By posting this document, including naming the individual responsibilities of ISO comrades, the faction is effectively inviting right-wing websites like Breitbart.com or David Horowitz's "discover the networks" operation to target the ISO. Given that, in recent years, several ISO comrades have come under attack from these elements, putting their jobs at risk, this is a serious matter. Some anarchists and the sectarian online publications North Star and Counterpunch have falsely accused CERSC of supporting Israeli apartheid via ownership of stock in Caterpillar, Inc. CERSC itself has never bought any stock. It has received donations of stocks from supporters including two donations of stock Caterpillar stock and one of BP stock. There have been other donations. These are hardly secrets. And what are the Renewal faction implying? That holding funds in a bank account (as in Citibank is a "cleaner" alternative?) This is just mud slinging. Furthermore, faction members could be asked the same questions as to whom they work for, and the size of their paychecks. But that is not our method.
- *The inclusion of people who are not members of the ISO as members of the faction.* Renewal arrogates for itself the right to include people who are not members in good standing of the ISO in the faction, unilaterally giving nonmembers access to the ISO's internal discussions in a manner that violates the democratic rights of ISO members. Indeed, two members of the faction, Yuval S. and Ben S. (who, as noted above, have both since resigned from the ISO), were not in good standing because of dues arrears stretching back months. The faction has also claimed as a member, Vanessa B., who Despite virtually no participation in the life of the organization for years, she has become a vocal critic of the "internal culture" of the ISO. Faction leader Shaun J., as noted above, resigned from the ISO months ago of his own volition. Of course, these individuals are free to appeal to the ISO Convention, the highest body of the organization, to reinstate their membership. But unilateral actions by the faction cannot confer membership in the ISO.
- *Insisting on an internal factional discipline that overrides responsibility and accountability to the ISO.* The Renewal faction's insistence on centralism—or rather, lockstep uniformity—is telling. By holding members to a highly regimented and authoritarian internal regime, the faction demands that its members have a greater discipline to itself than to the ISO. Essentially, it is operating not as a loyal minority trying to shift the organization, but a group that operates separately and is accountable only to itself. Thus when vocal faction member Ben S., was confronted with the fact that he hadn't paid dues in almost two years, he admitted it publicly and then resigned in the same email. So multiple faction members haven't paid dues in years (e.g., Yuval, Ben); others were inactive in the organization for years (e.g. Alden, Vanessa). Nevertheless, the faction has robust suggestions for how the ISO can "renew" itself: industrializing socialist cadre in Southern factories, for one. This is yet another example of the faction's lack of political seriousness, despite its pretensions.

Through all of this, we note that the faction has made little effort to respond to any of the multiple analytical or perspectives documents, authored by various members of the ISO Steering Committee, nor to other direct responses to the faction's "external bulletin" authored by members and districts around the organization. Instead, the output of faction members—as well as the faction itself—has tended toward the type of personalistic, destructive and abusive material discussed above, centered increasingly around Shaun J.

Indeed, Renewal's operation has nothing to do with the traditions and methods of debate in a revolutionary socialist organization. In our tradition, a faction is a temporary formation. It comes together based on its desire to argue a particular perspective, a position on an issue, or orientation to political work, for the organization to adopt. In some cases, a faction may move for a shift that, if implemented, may require a change in the organization's leadership. However serious its criticisms, a faction, therefore, is loyal to the overall project of the organization, and, it would stand to reason, respectful towards the members of the organization it is trying to convince of its positions. It is not a permanent "opposition party" that operates

according to internal rules that disciplines its members to the faction, rather than to the ISO as a whole. If the ISO decides, say, to mobilize much of its membership east of the Mississippi to attend a demonstration in Washington, the faction can't decide as a body that its members will neither attend nor mobilize for the demonstration.

The Renewal faction, however, took a fundamentally different approach. From the outset, the faction flouted the rules, norms and practices of the ISO and any notion of accountability. Rather than engage in principled debate within the ISO, the faction collaborated with hostile former members in trying to discredit the ISO. Instead of taking up the real questions and challenges facing the ISO, the faction has resorted to slandering a comrade as a police informant and other destructive behavior.

Delegates to the ISO Convention will have the responsibility of dealing with the faction. As the highest body in the organization, the ISO Convention will be entrusted with the task of ensuring the integrity and security of the ISO. Comrades who are delegates should resolve the issues raised by the Renewal Faction with that in mind.

ISO Steering Committee

A brief note on Socialist Outpost

In its first open letter to members of the ISO, the grouping of ex-members calling themselves Socialist Outpost raise a number of criticisms of the ISO, while claiming to have the best interests of the ISO in mind, stating, "we had (and have) no desire to see the organization or its work harmed."

This claim was a bit hard to accept, given that the initial statement said the ISO "seems to be a mere sect." Nevertheless, I and others took that statement at face value. Eric Ruder and Alan Maass directly addressed the issues raised by Socialist Outpost and other ex-members in their November 20, 2013 *Socialist Worker* article, "The challenges facing socialists today" (<http://socialistworker.org/print/2013/11/20/the-challenges-facing-socialists>).

Now, two days before the ISO Convention, Socialist Outpost has published a series of statements and documents totaling 25,000 words, in which they cite members-only conference calls and internal bulletin articles. Such an intervention into the internal affairs of the ISO hardly square with Outpost's claim of being "constructive" in its criticisms.

The timing of the Outpost publication is significant, as it coincides with efforts by individuals and groups inside and outside the ISO to publish our internal documents with the aim of disparaging and damaging the organization. Further, the Outpost authors apparently calculated that with so little time before the convention, their version of events—which are highly debatable, to say the least—will go uncontested.

On that point, they are correct. I have little time for, and even less interest in, making a detailed response in order to dispute several lengthy personal statements that have more to do with bruised egos and bitterness than serious political debate. In hindsight, the initial Outpost document seems to be a mere prelude to the current statement, which aims to discredit the ISO and raise doubts about its leadership.

It is noteworthy that the Outpost authors have never responded to the arguments laid out in Alan's and Eric's article that takes up their views. Rather, the Outpost blog, since its November debut, is devoted entirely to broadsides against the ISO, other than a brief statement on the electoral victory of socialist Kashama Sawant. Surely people who call for "a significant pole of attraction for the thousands of U. S. residents and citizens who think of themselves as socialists" can find some other topics worth writing about.

As someone who has collaborated closely with most members of the Socialist Outpost group, I am puzzled by the fact that they never raised their criticisms with me. Apparently, as member of the ISO Steering Committee, I am part of the "ISO bureaucracy," as Lorreta C. put it in her statement. Yet she never used

that term with me when I was part of her defense campaign against her employer, attending her hearing in federal court, or when she called me to consult me about trade union matters just a couple of weeks before the initial Socialist Outpost statement.

In fact, my collaboration with Loretta on her defense campaign proceeded without regard to her membership status. The same is true with my collaboration with Héctor R., which I sought to maintain even after he withdrew from political activity several years ago. In two lengthy meetings with me last year to discuss trade union matters, Héctor did not raise any of these issues with me. Moreover, I and other ISO comrades urged Héctor and Loretta to participate in Occupy Labor activities. Given all this, I cannot fathom why Héctor and Loretta did not raise their concerns with me directly.

I was also surprised by Adam T.'s decision to sign the Outpost statements. When he was removed as organizer, I asked to meet with him. Having been through a similar experience, I thought he might find the personal transition to be challenging, and wanted to offer my support. I urged him to keep writing for *Socialist Worker* and the ISR. When Adam gave up on building a branch and dropped out of the ISO, *Socialist Worker* nevertheless continued to publish his articles, and he was invited, as a nonmember, to speak at Socialism 2013. As with Loretta and Héctor, I saw this collaboration as a step towards greater cooperation and, I hoped, the possibility of them rejoining the ISO.

I also worked closely with Saman S. on Iran for several years, including stepping in to do his Socialism talk when he was too ill to do so. I regularly consulted him when writing articles on Iran, and we co-authored a lengthy piece for the ISR in 2009. It was in this period that Saman was not in an ISO branch, yet we continued to work closely together. Far from wanting to drive him—or any other Outpost member—out of the ISO, I saw this work as a way for Saman to make an important contribution to the ISO and the left on a key struggle of our time.

For all these reasons, and I am perplexed and disappointed by the latest statement from Socialist Outpost. Rather than promoting further collaboration among people who come from the same political tradition, their statement sows distrust and creates new obstacles to joint work.

Nevertheless, the goal of building revolutionary socialist organization as part of a vibrant, growing left is too important to be derailed by the personalism and resentment that characterize the latest Outpost document. I hope that members of Socialist Outpost will move beyond joining the attacks on the ISO and work alongside us in taking up the many challenges facing the left.

Lee S., Chicago

Documents with resolutions

Rules Commission report to the ISO's 2014 Convention

At the last ISO convention (February 2013), the following resolution, proposed by the Steering Committee, was passed unanimously:

This convention mandates the National Committee, at its meeting following the convention, to form a Rules Commission, not limited to NC members, to conduct a thorough review of all ISO rules and procedures. The commission will meet as necessary to make a proposal to the NC's fall meeting, and the NC will in turn make a proposal on ISO rules by the start of pre-convention discussion, to be taken up at the next ISO convention.

At its next meeting, the National Committee mandated that four members of the Steering Committee—Nicole C., Paul D., Bill R. and Eric R.—along with David W. (Oakland) and Lee W. (NYC) make up the commission.

The proposal was put forward by the Steering Committee with the recognition that the existing ISO rules were no longer adequate for the size and kind of organization that we want to be.

In the wake of the implosion of the British Socialist Workers Party, the Steering Committee and National Committee wanted to make sure that the ISO rules could provide a clear framework for both the rights and responsibilities of members. For example, the rules prior to those adopted at the 2013 convention lacked any explicit mechanism for disciplinary action at a national level beyond the Steering Committee or National Committee—potentially problematic in cases where there might be a conflict of interest. Likewise, the rules contained no specific code of conduct for the behavior of members.

A need for a comprehensive overview of the Rules that could clarify issues regarding the operation of factions and caucuses, for example, was also recognized.

To that end, throughout the year the Rules Commission has met repeatedly and drafted proposed updates to the ISO Rules and, for the first time, a proposed Code of Conduct to guide ISO members' behavior. We presented both the revised Rules and the Code of Conduct to the ISO National Committee for discussion and revision. We have also been working on drafting Disciplinary Procedures to guide the ISO's Disciplinary and Appeals Committees, as well as a document that can help provide a framework for branches and districts to deal with issues of discipline at a local level.

Regarding the proposed Rules and Code of Conduct (Rules Bulletin #1/Pre-Convention Bulletin #3): Members will note that the Rules and Code of Conduct are not exceedingly lengthy documents. Instead, our approach to both the revision of the Rules and to the draft of the Code of Conduct was not to dictate every minute prohibition on members' behavior, but rather to provide a general framework that we think provides for the best practices of a democratic centralist organization and for members willing to accept the principles of the ISO.

We approached the redraft of the Rules and the draft of the Code of Conduct keeping in mind that issues of political trust and discipline in a democratic centralist organization are paramount—as this pre-convention period has shown. Rather than suggest that the answer to political disputes lies in changes to specific rules, or creating a rule to apply to every situation, our feeling is that political issues have to be dealt with first on their own terms—that they can't be settled by mechanical references to rules.

We also want to reaffirm our belief that existing ISO leadership structures, including the Steering Committee and National Committee and branch committees, have a key role to play in questions of disciplinary matters. The creation last year of a separate National Disciplinary Committee was not meant to, and should not, be taken as an indication that these other bodies carry no disciplinary authority—but as a sign that the ISO recognized some cases could arise of a nature that necessitated a separate disciplinary body to ensure an impartial process and outcome.

Comrades will note that in addition to the proposed changes to the Rules as outlined in the previous Rules Bulletin, we are proposing three further amendments to the Rules that are listed the end of this document.

The first would mandate that “Admissions and readmissions of individuals into ISO membership are subject to oversight by the Steering Committee, the National Committee and the Convention. The Steering Committee must be notified of all transfers of members from one branch to another.”

We believe this should be a basic practice of the organization. On a practical level, we believe it's useful in a period in which we are arguing for the need for greater centralization. In a democratic centralist organization, members who have faced disciplinary action in one branch should not have the right to rejoin another branch without oversight of the organization's leading bodies.

The second amendment to the Rules proposal would remove language stating that members who are no longer in good standing because of four or more months of dues arrears must establish a plan to stay current with their branch treasurer. While this is a *minimum* requirement for reattaining good standing, we do not believe that this is universally the only requirement. Paying dues is about a political commitment to the

ISO—one of the basics of membership—and the question of arrears is also a political one. We believe that such cases are best handled on an individual basis by branches in consultation with the Steering Committee rather than written into the Rules.

The third amendment adds language establishing a quorum at the ISO's Convention—in order to conduct Convention business.

Guidelines for Branches and Disciplinary Procedures

Guidelines for Branches:

In addition to the revisions to the ISO Rules and the creation of a Code of Conduct that are being put forward for a vote at this convention, the Rules Commission is also in the process of developing a new document meant to give some guidance to branches for how to deal with disciplinary matters at a local level. This document, the Guidelines for Branches, was created not as formal procedures for disciplinary action at a branch level, but as a set of guiding principles for how to help branches deal with disciplinary issues when they arise. We aim to distribute it as part of the members' toolkit in the future.

We recognize the way in which capitalism divides us and can distort people's ideas—even those of self-described revolutionaries. But wherever possible, we want to win members away from backward ideas and toward an understanding of the realities of oppression and how to fight it—and sometimes this will mean having to carry out political arguments about individual members' behavior.

This means that, while the ISO thrives on debate and discussion, we expect members to treat each other with basic norms of comradely behavior. While we don't police members' behavior, it is the case that the political and personal behavior of individual comrades impacts the ability of other comrades, as well as the organization as a whole, to carry out its tasks.

However, handling such arguments can take skill and nuance—and many branches have little or no experience with such disciplinary questions. It can seem like a foreign concept to have to hold someone accountable for actions that have crossed a line as set out in the Rules or Code of Conduct, but that is a necessary part of leadership in an organization such as the ISO. To that end, we will be offering these guidelines for branches, once completed, in the ISO Members' Toolkit to help clarify the general method for approaching the question of disciplinary issues at a local level.

Disciplinary Procedures:

The Rules Commission also has begun a lengthy revision of the procedures used by the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees in hearing cases.

While the 2013 Convention instituted a Disciplinary Committee, and reconstituted a larger Appeals Committee, we continue to feel very strongly that the vast majority of disciplinary matters are best handled at a local level, with or without the consultation of the Steering Committee, and that local branch committees are generally in the best position to know when the behavior of a member has violated either ISO Rules or the Code of Conduct. This is the case whether or not there is another person making a complaint against a member.

The national Disciplinary Committee exists for those rare instances in which a branch is incapable of handling a matter at a local level, due to either a conflict of interest or the serious nature of a case. There will also be cases in which individual members approach the Committee directly with a case (and the Disciplinary Committee will have to decide whether to accept the case or if it is more appropriately referred back to a local level.)

Triggering the Disciplinary Committee process sets in motion a series of procedures that may include, among other things, the gathering of statements and rebuttals from a complainant and respondent, the gathering of statements from witnesses, interviews with various parties, a formal hearing process with

testimony in front of committee members, etc. The process is not meant to, and cannot, be a substitute for any legal proceedings—but is only meant to determine whether an ISO member committed a violation of the ISO Rules (and Code of Conduct, if passed) by engaging in a specific alleged behavior or behaviors.

In the case of these disciplinary procedures, the Rules Commission had a document from which to begin its revisions—a set of disciplinary procedures that were created on an emergency basis following the 2013 convention, when a case arose that a branch believed could not be heard at a local level. [Note: in the original form, these were called the “Guidelines for the temporary implementation of the ISO Disciplinary Process.” To distinguish these from the “Disciplinary Guidelines” section contained in the ISO Rules, we are referring to them as “Disciplinary Procedures” going forward.]

Under the circumstances, these interim guidelines were quickly developed by the Steering Committee, drawing on various disciplinary processes, including those used on college campuses. The Steering Committee held several emergency discussions where the procedures were developed for use by the ISO Disciplinary Committee, and the Disciplinary Committee began hearing the case soon after.

Throughout the Disciplinary process, it became clear that the procedures had several shortcomings, and did not always provide the kind of procedural clarity necessary in dealing with sensitive disciplinary processes. It was with this in mind that the Rules Commission began a process of revising the procedures—though we were not specifically mandated by the 2013 Convention to do so (neither the Disciplinary Committee nor the procedures existed at the time the resolution was put forward and voted on).

The Rules Commission initially suggested that we would present these procedures at convention as part of the overall package of rules. However, we’ve come to believe that that would be the wrong way to proceed.

While we’ve started the process of extensive revisions based on concrete experiences in disciplinary cases, the procedures require much further drafting and deliberation. Given the seriousness of this task, we believe it is important to take extreme care with these revisions and not to rush the process.

We also feel that the extent of the suggested revisions and the specificity procedures themselves would make it impossible for the Convention to work through in a timely or productive manner. (Comrades should note that the current working draft of the procedures is 22 pages long—mainly single spaced.)

Nor have we had the time to solicit feedback or have discussions about a draft from either the full Steering Committee or the members of the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees. We feel the political expertise and direct experience of these bodies in the disciplinary process makes their feedback essential in developing a revised draft of the procedures and applying the actual experience of having gone through a case to creating a process that is fair and that reflects politically the way in which an organization like the ISO should approach the question of disciplinary cases.

In addition, we also believe it would skew Convention in wrong direction if we focused discussions about ISO rules on vetting procedures that most comrades have no direct experience with.

Disciplinary procedures need to breathe and change based on our experiences in order to provide a process that we believe to be fair and politically principled—in fact, they already have been changed based on those experiences. The procedures impact the ability of those elected to the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees to implement and make decisions about serious cases. Comrades are elected to these committees with a high degree of political trust and approach their roles with a corresponding level of seriousness related to this task.

It seems to the Rules Commission therefore that it would be inappropriate for Convention to vote on procedures, locking these into place for a year and creating a static document that could not change during the year if circumstances arose.

Instead, we believe it's more important for the entire Convention to agree on the overarching framework--the Rules and Code of Conduct—that underpins the rights and responsibilities, as well as the expected conduct, of members of the ISO.

We are, however, asking this Convention to approve a resolution, attached at the end of this document, to extend the mandate of the current Rules Commission, at the direction of the National Committee, in order for the Commission to continue working on the draft of ISO Disciplinary Procedures and Branch Guidelines for approval by the ISO Steering and National Committees.

Our General Approach to the Procedures:

In approaching the drafting of the procedures, the Commission has discussed certain guiding principles that we feel are essential in ensuring due process and a fair disciplinary process for all members.

As stated above, we believe that in most cases it is best for disciplinary matters to be handled at a local level, where members may have a better grasp of the facts at hand and members can be addressed, sometimes in the moment, and where local leadership will typically be in the best position to collectively assess the situation.

In her document in Bulletin #13, Holly L., a member of the ISO's National Disciplinary Committee, raises whether branches should be tasked with following the same procedures that the Disciplinary Committee follows. The Rules Commission has also considered this question believe the answer to be no.

The level of specificity and the burdens that the procedures places on members hearing a case—in terms of investigation and hearing requirements, the gathering of testimony and statements, etc.—requires a time commitment and level of expertise and detail that local branches would be poorly equipped to carry out. The disciplinary process at the level of detail that the Committee is responsible for overseeing should be rare, we believe. (It also should be noted that serving as a member of the ISO's Disciplinary or Appeals Committee can be an extremely intensive process. When a case arises, depending on the level of complexity, it necessitates a high level of commitment in making sure a case is seen through to completion. This may require hours of phone conversations, missing meetings or putting aside other usual ISO responsibilities for the duration of a case.)

We also believe that disciplinary matters—both informal and formal, at the branch or national level—should be approached with the basic premise that the goal is not to be punitive, but rather, wherever possible, to win typically well-meaning comrades to an understanding of why a particular behavior may have crossed a line and, if necessary, have them engage in a restorative process. (This obviously may not be appropriate in cases involving very serious infractions, such as assault or strike breaking.)

The ISO disciplinary procedures are not meant to be analogous to, or a substitute for, any kind of police investigation or court proceeding. Rather, they are meant as a means for the organization to determine whether or not a member has violated our own internal Rules or (if passed) Code of Conduct by engaging in a specific alleged instance of prohibited conduct.

An Approach to Sexual Assault Cases:

Throughout this pre-convention period, several document have addressed questions of how to approach sexual assault complaints, with various suggestions and resolutions.

We want to reiterate that we believe that the procedures must be weighted to preserving the due process rights of *all* members, not just those of complainants or victims of inappropriate behavior. This is why, for example, while recognizing the seriousness of sexual assault cases and the way in which sexual assault victims are often traumatized by the criminal justice system, we believe it is appropriate for Disciplinary Committee members to refrain from making presumptions about the likelihood that an infraction occurred until all evidence is presented.

It is also for that reason, for example, that the procedures state explicitly that although we support the decision of a complainant in a sexual assault case to refuse to participate in the process, it may affect the ability of the committee to reach a finding of sufficient evidence. It cannot be the job of Disciplinary Committee members to act as lawyers for a complainant and attempt to make the case for that person.

While we have spent extra time crafting a separate set of procedures for sexual assault cases—because we recognize the traumatic nature of such cases—we also feel it would be a mistake to suggest that the low rate of false rape claims in the criminal justice system should be viewed as evidence in any particular case coming before the ISO’s Disciplinary Committee. Every case must be judged on its own merits, whether a case of sexual assault, or any other alleged violation. To do otherwise would seriously undermine the process to the point that few would agree to submit to it if a serious charge was leveled against them.

When we are confronted with a particular disciplinary situation, we have to make sure that we’re dealing with the facts and context of the particular complaint at hand. Of course our analysis of society and political principles will influence how we approach the situation, but we’re still bound by the facts of the specific case, and must be dedicated to upholding the rights of all parties involved.

This is also, in part, why we believe that complaints must not be “chased down” through the grapevine as comrades from San Diego suggest (Bulletin #19), but must be brought to the ISO by complainants themselves (whether they are ISO members or not). While we can strive to make our process sensitive to the needs of complainants in such cases when they do come forward, we do not believe comrades across the organization should be put into the role of de facto “police”—pursuing “leads” and possibly violating the wishes of a potential complainant (who may not only resent, but be traumatized, by an ISO member contacting them to ask if they were the victim of a sexual assault and to describe what took place).

Beyond the potential trauma to an alleged victim, we feel strongly that such a process—in which every allegation posted on the Internet by a third party (including those patently hostile to the ISO) is taken as a serious complaint would leave the ISO extremely vulnerable to attack by hostile political forces as well as the state. (For an object lesson in this, comrades may want to read about COINTELPRO and the impact that tactics like smear campaigns had on the left of the 1960s and 70s. In fact, although false rape charges may be very low, incidences of manipulation of accusations by the state or those hostile to revolutionary groups are not unprecedented. See <http://www.isreview.org/issues/49/cointelpro.shtml> and <http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/cointelpro-and-black-radical-movement> for further information.)

Similarly, we believe that basic procedures like the need for a written statement by a complainant in such cases, are a necessary part of due process. A member can only fully respond to or rebut the charges they face if they have a detailed accounting of what they are accused of, by the person who is accusing them—not an account filtered through the interpretation of a third party.

In Holly’s document in Bulletin #13 she talks about a branch expelling someone in part because members felt they had a “political commitment to believe women.” While not commenting on the particular case in question, we want to assert that, when it comes to the formal functioning of the ISO’s national Disciplinary Committee, “believing women” cannot mean simultaneously denying male comrades the right to due process.

Using gender oppression as criteria to weigh a complaint, as Bo and Zakiya suggest (Bulletin #23), is a recipe for a disciplinary process that is not only unfair but potentially easily exploitable. It does not serve any ISO member well—male or female—for the organization to set up a disciplinary process in which all male comrades, including those who are themselves members of oppressed and marginalized groups, are treated in such a manner.

The purpose of our disciplinary procedures and Code of Conduct is to provide the organization with the ability to address situations that impede its political mission. They are not set up so that we can prefigure the society we’d like in the organization today. Nor do we want to institute a “call-out” culture inside the organization.

We would criticize any capitalist court system in which a certain group of people was treated as “guilty until proven innocent.” We should not enshrine such attitudes in our own Disciplinary Procedures. It would be inappropriate to prejudge any case before it has been fully investigated.

While Holly L. (Bulletin #21) suggests that an adversarial disciplinary procedure that presumes innocence essentially makes the respondent in a case have to assert that a complainant is a liar or delusional, we believe that the flip side—in which a respondent is presumed to have committed a sexual assault unless they can “prove” their innocence—is just as problematic.

Other Concerns:

Other important concerns about the procedures are raised by Holly L. (Bulletins #13 and #21) and Keegan O. (Bulletin #15), also a member of the ISO’s National Disciplinary Committee, in their documents. Both raise what are in their view specific failings of the Disciplinary Procedures, in addition to underlying political issues related to the way in which cases, in particular sexual assault cases, are heard.

While we don’t have the space to address all of the specifics they raise here, we want to note that in several instances, the Rules Commission shares similar concerns. Keegan raises, for example, the issue of whether a 1-year deadline on complaints is too strict, particularly in serious cases. We have flagged that same issue for discussion. Holly raises that it is currently possible for a comrade to be indefinitely suspended following an accusation if the accuser chooses not to engage with our disciplinary process—also a problem we have noted and flagged for discussion.

Holly also raises certain qualms about the rules regarding what a Disciplinary Committee member can and cannot consider as evidence during a proceeding. We know that there are likely debates around this specific issue—and we believe it is worth further discussion in the organization as a whole.

We also believe that at least some of the practical concerns that Holly raises regarding confusion on the part of Disciplinary Committee members (who, after all, are not trained in such procedures) could be alleviated somewhat by instituting a process in which both Disciplinary and Appeals Committee members meet with a Steering Committee representative at the beginning of their elected term in order to thoroughly review the rules and disciplinary process. This is part of what we are suggesting in the new draft of the procedures.

But we also believe that the issue of the ISOs disciplinary process touches on political issues that members are likely to have a wide range of opinions on, including the above issues of whether sexual assault complaints should be automatically weighted in favor of the complainant; if the fact that a complainant would choose to not participate in a disciplinary process should impact the outcome of the case; and whether the ISO’s Disciplinary Committee should accept non-written complaints or investigate complaints related to sexual assault that may be made second- or third-hand.

We believe that these issues deserve further discussion, and we want to encourage members to contribute their thoughts and questions in the coming weeks and months in the ISO Internal Bulletin. And, in addition to soliciting the feedback of 2013 Disciplinary and Appeals Committee members, the Steering Committee and members of the National Committee, the Rules Commission will also be creating a Google Doc of the draft of the new procedures and providing the link in a future issue of the ISO notes or internal bulletin--so that members who wish to review the procedures may do so and send any comments and feedback for the Rules Commission to consider.

We are encouraged by the seriousness with which comrades across the organization have approached these questions, and are happy about the prospect of a collaborative and comradely discussion going forward.

Resolutions from the ISO Rules Commission:

1. That the ISO convention accepts the Rules as proposed by the Rules Commission in Pre-convention Bulletin #3 (Rules Bulletin #1), *with the following three amendments:*

Amendment 1:

Under Section II, "Membership", Paragraph D, that the following paragraph:

"D. Whenever possible, every member will belong to a duly constituted branch of the ISO. In areas where no branch exists, the Steering Committee will admit applicants as members-at-large."

Be amended to read:

"D. Whenever possible, every member will belong to a duly constituted branch of the ISO. In areas where no branch exists, the Steering Committee will admit applicants as members-at-large. Admissions and readmissions of individuals into ISO membership are subject to oversight by the Steering Committee, the National Committee and the Convention. The Steering Committee must be notified of all transfers of members from one branch to another."

Amendment 2:

Under Section II, "Membership", Paragraph F, that the following paragraph:

"F. Any member more than four (4) months in arrears in dues is no longer considered a member of the ISO. To re-establish membership, those in arrears must establish a plan to stay current with their branch treasurer (or in the case of members at large, with the national treasurer)."

Be amended to read:

"F. Any member more than four (4) months in arrears in dues is no longer considered a member of the ISO."

Amendment 3:

Under Section IV, "Leading bodies—National Convention," Paragraph D, that the following paragraph:

"D. The Convention will select a convention steering committee to seat delegates and to handle questions of procedure during the course of convention. All resolutions and elections at the Convention will be settled by majority vote. Abstaining and absent delegates are not counted when determining a majority. The national Steering Committee will report convention decisions and votes to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the Convention ends."

Be amended to read:

"D. The Convention will select a convention steering committee to seat delegates and to handle questions of procedure during the course of convention. A quorum, consisting of a majority of the total number of delegates allotted to the branches, must be present to conduct Convention business. All resolutions and elections at the Convention will be settled by majority vote. Abstaining and absent delegates are not counted when determining a majority. The national Steering Committee will report convention decisions and votes to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the Convention ends."

2. That the ISO Convention votes to accept the Code of Conduct as proposed by the Rules Commission in Preconvention Bulletin #3 (Rules Bulletin #1), with the above 3 amendments.

3. That the ISO convention mandates that the Rules Commission continue working on the draft of ISO Disciplinary Procedures and Branch Guidelines for approval by the ISO Steering and National Committees, and that the National Committee of the ISO add members as it sees fit to the Rules Commission to aid in this process.

Submitted by the ISO Rules Commission
