

*Organizing*  
**A SOCIALIST  
ALTERNATIVE  
BRANCH**

A GUIDE FOR  
BRANCH ORGANIZERS &  
BRANCH COMMITTEES



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# ORGANISING A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE BRANCH

- A guide for branch organisers & branch committees -

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# Introduction

Capitalism has failed working people and youth. Millions are frustrated with the two parties of big business and are looking for fundamental change. Socialist Alternative has the potential to grow even more rapidly with the vacuum that exists and the potential for struggle. To fully seize these opportunities, we need sharp strategy and tactics. We need to be well organized to recruit effectively, raise finances and build our profile in struggles.

Being a member of Socialist Alternative means being active in the struggle for a better world. Agreeing with the need for democratic socialism is just the starting point. We need to build an organization of people committed to making it a reality.

This guide is designed to assist members in their effort to build and organize a Socialist Alternative branch in their area. While we hope you will find it useful whether you are an experienced socialist organizer or new member, it is only able to give a general outline of how to deal with the tasks, challenges and difficulties you may face. Advice here should also be discussed with your regional organizer and National Committee members.

# Why build a Socialist Alternative branch?

The starting point for our organization is not organizational structures, but politics. We are fighting to win mass support for our ideas and our program – because we believe that they offer the working class the best tools with which to fight in our interests and ultimately build a democratic socialist society. Still, ideas and program need organization to become material forces that can influence the course of events. Reaching and winning people to our politics will be impossible unless we are well organized. We need to be able argue for socialist ideas in the most effective and efficient ways possible.

Socialist Alternative is a national organization. We have a national leadership, publish a national newspaper and website, produce books, pamphlets and leaflets for national distribution, and our highest decision making body is our national convention. However, it is through local branches that we organize much of our work and bring our ideas and program into working class communities. It is through testing our ideas and program in action, through the activity of the branches, that we can have confidence in our perspectives and win new people to socialist ideas.

Our branches are the key building blocks of our organization as a whole. It is the branches that bring together members from different fields (workplaces, schools, universities, trade unions, community campaigns, etc.) on a regular basis to coordinate our work. It is in the branch that members discuss and debate our political positions, learn the lessons of revolutionary and working class struggles and study Marxism. It is the branches that elect delegates to our national convention to democratically decide on the perspectives, priorities and program of Socialist Alternative. It is the activity of the branches that helps give us an accurate reflection of the mood and consciousness that exist amongst working people across the country. The branch is a school where

we develop experienced socialist activists (or 'cadre').

This guide is aimed at helping you set up a Socialist Alternative branch or strengthen your existing branch.

## Recruitment and party building

### Being active

We have to aim that every member of the organization plays a role in building it. Whether this means selling our paper to a few friends or co-workers, or participating in an important campaign or union dispute, the more members who engage in political activity the stronger the branch will be.

The influence of a Socialist Alternative branch will depend on how active it is. We want to build branches that are visible in the community, have roots in working class areas, are active in unions and on local campuses and have a reputation for leading struggle.

A decisive measure of our strength is the size of our active membership. The more active, politically-sharp and committed members we have the more able we will be to effectively lead and intervene in struggle and encourage new people to get involved.

So the first step to founding a new branch is to recruit to Socialist Alternative. This is also a key task of every Socialist Alternative branch, no matter how well established. Every member, even our newest members, are capable of recruiting new people.

For tips on recruitment, see the recruitment guide at the end of this document (How to recruit to Socialist Alternative: A guide for all members – p. 29)

In every meeting, every activity and every campaign we need

to be conscious of recruiting new members. We want to recruit people who see us as an active and relevant force campaigning for change and convincing people of the need for socialism. This is why campaigning among working class and young people forms the basis of our activity.

The first task is to make sure we are visible. We need to have regular, well-publicized public meetings, a wide variety of public activities and street tables on international, national and local issues. We should also go posterizing on a regular basis and build a subscription base for our paper.

It's important that we build links with different workers', student and community organizations. When setting branch priorities we should consider not only the campaigns that have the best chance of taking the workers' movement forward, but also those with conscious and enthusiastic workers and young people that we could ask to join us.

Unless we do this kind of campaigning our pool of potential recruits will be limited to those who find out about the Socialist Alternative through a national source (often our website). In any case, new recruits worth having will not want to be part of an organization that is not active and campaigning – so activity is also an essential part of consolidating new members.

## Ask people to join!

Everyone who buys our paper or engages in conversation on a table should be asked if they are interested in joining Socialist Alternative or in finding out more about us. Many people will say 'no', though others will say 'yes' – if we don't ask we'll never know! It may only take one discussion on the spot to recognize someone is politically close to us and keen to join. If that is the case, you can recruit them then and there – remember to get them to fill out an auto-dues form.

Make sure you get as much information as possible from those who say 'yes' or 'maybe'. The easiest way of doing this is to have contact sheets handy at all times. It is best to try to set up a specific time and place for your next discussion. Also remember that it is much easier to follow someone up if you have a telephone number than if you only have their email address. Always make sure that when you get someone's contact details that they are legible – otherwise it was a waste of everyone's time!

It is also good to find out as much as possible about what your 'contact' (a contact is anyone with whom we've made contact that may be interested in becoming a member) wants to happen next. Ask if they want to attend a meeting, help a campaign and if they would like to meet up for a discussion about Socialist Alternative. Finding out this information gives you some idea of how interested the person is and makes it easier for you to contact them again. It might be useful to write this information on the back of the contact sheet.

## Organizing the follow up of contacts

Contact work should be regularly discussed in the branch committee and/or branch meetings. One key person in the branch should be responsible for overseeing recruitment. This is usually the Branch Organizer, but you may also decide to nominate a Recruitment Organizer. This does not mean that it is their job to discuss with every contact – but they are responsible for making sure contact work happens, keeping a record of who is responsible for following up each contact, and discussing progress made.

It's very important that contacts are followed up quickly – as a general rule this should be within 48 hours. It is the role of the Recruitment Organizer (or the Branch Organizer) to make sure this is happening.

Every effort should be made to increase the number of members

involved in recruitment. Bringing newer members with you when you have contact discussions is a good way to get more members involved in this work.

If possible, the person who spoke to the contact should do the initial follow up. People will often feel more comfortable doing something new if they have already met someone involved, even if only briefly.

It is important that individual members are responsible, not just for a first follow up, but also for regular contact with these potential members – inviting them to meetings and activities, selling them the paper and having regular individual (or small-group) political discussions with them.

Sometimes branch members can lose enthusiasm about a contact who continually doesn't come to activities they were invited to (especially if they said they would attend!). This may be because they are genuinely not that interested. However, they may simply have competing interests or responsibilities in their life and have not yet been convinced to make politics one of their priorities. If unsure, ask the person if they want to keep being informed of activities and make sure that they know they are still welcome.

Even when you have 'given up' on a contact, keep them in mind for major events. Over time people's feeling about Socialist Alternative and their ability to be involved may change. As long as you are not pestering them, you can keep them on your list.

When recruiting to the party, it is important to bear in mind that each person will have a different background of ideas and experiences, so flexibility is important. For example a 16 year-old who wants to 'smash the system' could after one discussion be won over to our socialist program and decide to join. Someone who comes from a different political tradition or ideology may take more convincing. Some may want to join first and find out more after. Some may want to work with us over a prolonged



period before deciding to join. There is nothing wrong with either approach. Encouragement and friendliness are important either way. Asking people to contribute (financially, in discussions, by putting up posters, by preparing rally materials, etc.) before they join can be a good way to help them gain a better understanding of our organization and help make people feel that they have a role to play. No one will be enthusiastic to join an organization in which they don't see a role for themselves.

If someone comes from another Left group it is usually best to take things slow and test unity in action before membership is seriously discussed.

In general, we want to put up as few barriers as possible to joining us. However, we need to be sure new members are in agreement with our basic politics. Before they join every new member should have a discussion (or attend a meeting) on what Socialist Alternative stands for. This does not mean that it is necessary to go through every aspect of our program. However, it does mean giving new members an outline of what we stand for (which is printed in our paper and on our website). It is also important that they understand the necessity of linking the day-to-day struggle to defend workers' living conditions to the need for a fundamental change in society; and that we stand for a democratic, socialist planned economy.

We ask every member to make a regular financial contribution through monthly membership dues. The reason we ask for membership dues as a requirement for joining is that unlike capitalist parties who raise their money from big business contributions, we rely on our members dues and donations from supporters. We can only raise the money needed to continue and expand our work if all branches take members dues seriously. Dues should represent a real sacrifice, equivalent to 5-10% of income. Some can pay more, and some can't pay the full requested level, but dues shouldn't just be a token amount, they should be a significant contribution. Every new member should be

signed up to auto-dues.

We encourage every member to do their best to attend weekly branch meetings and weekly activities. While we recognize that different members have different commitments in their life, we are striving to build an active organization. For instance, a student member may have more time during the week for party activity, but less income to contribute to party finances. On the other hand, a worker member may have less time for party activity during the week, but contribute more in dues. Regardless of differences of activity levels, the branch meetings need to be the core of the life of the branch, and members need to be made aware of the importance and purpose of these meetings.

Members with childcare commitments may need support from the branch to regularly attend activity. This can particularly be the case for single parents. For members in this situation, the branch should consider childcare or child-friendly spaces, especially for branch meetings. We do not want members being excluded from party activity because of the failure of the state to provide adequate childcare!

We also ask all members to sell our paper. Our paper is the best resource we have to get our ideas out into working class communities. The paper can provide a basis for discussion with contacts. The broader our readership the more influence we can build in society and the more effectively we can build our organization.

## Recruitment Checklist:

- Do they understand (and agree with) the general perspectives and program of our party?
- Do they understand the member requirements of dues and regular branch attendance?
- Are they willing to take on a role in branch activity?
- Are they willing to sell our paper and try to recruit to the

party?

- Are they willing to be politically active in their workplace/school/community?

## Consolidating new members

### What happens when someone joins?

Recruiting someone is only the beginning of making them feel at home in the organization. The process of integrating them takes place over time. However, the first weeks and months of membership are particularly important. The integration process has to start with convincing new members of the importance of political education – motivation for this cannot be taken for granted. We need to make sure new members are reading our paper. All of our new members should go through our new members reading program to develop an understanding of basic Marxist ideas and method. Some new members will be fairly convinced by our ideas before joining, while some other will have joined because they are passionate about only one area of our work. Only by going through this education process will people begin to fully understand what type of organization we are building and why.

We have to find the best way of helping each individual member to develop. Some new members are so inspired by our ideas that they read avidly and develop themselves with only minimal help from other comrades. Others will require a more structured approach like regular individual discussions, reading groups and day schools. All new members should be encouraged to take part in political discussions whether they happen in the branch or informal discussions in a social setting. All comrades should be following current events by reading daily newspapers and other important publications.

Asking a new member to write an article or to introduce an agenda item in the branch can boost their development. This should not always be on the most obvious subject, like 'education cuts' for a student member, or 'health care reform' for a hospital worker. We must make a concerted effort to take them beyond their previous realm of knowledge and experience and develop and broaden their ability to analyze events from a Marxist standpoint. New members don't just need an understanding what's wrong with capitalism; they also need an understanding of our method and approach to changing the system.

Whatever the consolidation process for each individual, we should aim to give every active comrade in the organization, from the most experienced to the newest, the job of assisting the integration of at least one other member or contact. Political education and integration is not just the task of the most experienced comrades, but can be done by all comrades at all levels, and in fact it must be done by all comrades if we are to pay the necessary attention to this crucial aspect of our building work.

As well as political education, there are several other important aspects of consolidation. Giving every member their own targets and a role in the branch work is important, including new members. Social events are also important. When new people join our branch we do not want them to feel like outsiders!

On activities, help and a degree of training should be given to new members, rather than assuming that they know what to do. This may be on the seemingly simplest of things, like how and why we use petitions on our tables.

We should also encourage and give political support to new members to intervene in the movement – be it on a picket line, in their union local, student union, or in a local campaign. It should never be assumed that people automatically know or are confident in how to do these things and how to put our ideas into action.

All new members should have a ‘three month review’, a discussion where we check in about what they think of the organization. This is a chance for them to raise any problems they are having but it is also an opportunity for us to ask them to increase their level of commitment to the party. Many will be willing to take on more responsibility and/or pay higher dues than they were when they joined.

## Who counts as a member?

The level of activity and financial contribution of a given member often reflects their level of political understanding and commitment to the party. If a member has dropped off on activity or hasn’t paid their dues, it may well be for political reasons. If this is the case, individual discussions may be needed to address any political problems.

Branch Organizers should always be evaluating the activity of members and the branch as a whole, and attempting to draw conclusions about our successes and our failures in recruiting and consolidating members.

As long as they pay dues, members should be kept on the branch list. People that refuse to pay or keep dodging the issue of dues could be put on a list of party supporters, while we continue to politically convince them to make the commitment to become members.

Some ideas for roles that can be given to new members:

- Presenting an short overview of a local, national or international news item in the branch
- Reporting on a picket/protest/campaign meeting (that they attended) in the branch
- Explaining the importance of an upcoming event/protest/

industrial action in the branch

- Helping prepare tables, paint banners, make placards for upcoming activity
- Being delegated with organizing a poster run
- Selling papers, collecting donations, staffing tables, etc. at public meetings/events
- Being delegated with organizing a meeting/discussion at their campus, school etc.
- Writing a short article/report/review for the paper
- Preparing a lead-off for the branch
- Attend contact discussions (alongside a more experienced member)

(Each new member's personal abilities, strengths and weaknesses should be taken into account when asking them to contribute and take on roles)

## The role of Branch Organizers

### Organizing a meeting

New branches are generally formed out of a series of political discussions. These may be small meetings amongst a few members, public meetings aimed at finding new members, or a mixture of both. Either way, Socialist Alternative members attempting to establish or strengthen a branch will need to know how to organize successful political meetings.

The starting point for organizing any meeting is clarity of purpose: what is the meeting for? When this is clear, it becomes clear who should be invited to participate and how the meeting should be planned and promoted.

Whether a public or internal meeting, attendance can be maximized by making clear why the meeting is being held and what will be discussed. Regardless of the size of a meeting, a clear agenda should be agreed beforehand. This helps give the meeting structure, so the most focused, democratic and fruitful discussion can be had. The agenda should include allotted times for each agenda item, to ensure the meeting does not run overtime.

## Chairing a meeting

One of the most important roles in a political meeting is that of chair. Chairing a meeting is not simply an organizational task; a good chair uses their political knowledge and experience to facilitate good discussion. Implementing an agenda should not be a mechanical task. All of our structures, including our meeting structures, need to service out political goals. This means being flexible within the outline of the agenda to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute and decisions can be reached within a reasonable time frame.

While flexibility is important, there is also a level of procedural knowledge and professionalism required to chair a meeting with authority. Planning and preparation is the best way to ensure your competency as chair. Will there be resolutions put to the meeting? If so, how will you organize the voting? If procedures have not already been established, it is best to clarify these processes at the beginning of the meeting. However, you will probably find most meetings will not require participants to formally vote.

The purpose of most political meetings is to find clarity around specific agenda items. This requires the chair to be aware of the positions and views being put forward, and structure the debate fairly. A successful political meeting is generally one where discussion has led to clarification and a plan of action has been reached.

Chairing is an important skill that all branch members should aim to develop over time.

## The Branch Committee

Once you have recruited enough people to hold regular branch meetings (you may only need 3 or 4 to begin with) it is time to start developing a Branch Committee - a team of committed members willing to organize the running of the branch. It is important that we build a team to take on this task.

Socialist Alternative branches are not discussion groups. The branch is integral to the political development, activity, democracy, growth and effectiveness of the organization and our interventions in the class struggle. Therefore, organizing Socialist Alternative branches requires members taking on specific tasks to ensure the branch is functioning according to its purpose.

In the beginning it may be just one member organizing the branch, but as the branch grows, if one person is responsible for every aspect work – from booking meeting rooms, to collecting finances, to political education, to running campaigns – this will severely limit the capacity of that branch to develop activists and to grow.

While a well organized branch meeting can ensure that a lot of the branch's weekly activity and discussion is efficiently organized, it cannot, because of time and the scope of issues that sometimes need to be covered, cover every aspect of a branch's work and development.

A Branch Committee is generally made up of three to five party members, who are both the political leadership of the branch and it's most active and determined members. A Branch Committee should also reflect the different areas of work that the branch is involved in locally and nationally. The BC should be elected as a team and a slate.



Branch Committees usually meet once a week. They discuss in a more detailed way how the branch is developing, what the priorities are in both public campaigning and internal party development. An important function of a Branch Committee is to try to keep the 'business' side of the branch meeting to less than one hour after the main political discussion. This way the more technical aspects of the activity can be gone through in detail at a Committee meeting rather than new people attending having to sit for hours on end listening to detail they may find boring.

There are a whole number of issues a Branch Committee will need to discuss at different stages of its development. A look at branch recruitment and development of new members should be discussed at all Branch Committee meetings. Members dues, finances and fundraising will need to be fairly regularly discussed as well.

Branch Committees should also aim to have political discussions on contemporary events (and sometimes historical issues too) to help develop the Branch Committee members in their leadership roles. Overall the Branch Committee should be a body that does a regular health check on the development of the branch, and looks at how political events are developing and what our priorities are. Branch Committee members are the key comrades responsible for driving the work of the branch by inspiring and assisting all members of the branch to intervene in political developments and to build the organization.

There are various different roles members in the branch should aim to take on, and roles each Branch Committee member should take responsibility for. However, flexibility is crucial in organizing a revolutionary party. Different responsibilities amongst branch members should always reflect the actual goals and activities of the branch.

# The Branch Organizer

The Branch Organizer is the organizer of the organizers, a key person in the branch and one of its political leaders. This is why, in general, the Branch Organizer's role should be filled by a comrade who displays the right blend of enthusiasm, experience and political education. However, this does not mean that the Branch Organizer always has to be a longstanding member. In some cases, newer members, while they may not yet have much experience, more than make up for that with enthusiasm, political drive and a keenness to learn!

It is not the role of the Branch Organizer to do all of the organizing work, but rather oversee and coordinate this work.

There are a number of important areas that a Branch Organizer has to oversee:

- That the branch is achieving the best possible recruitment and integration.
- To try and ensure that the branch is orientating towards the most important struggles, or potential struggles, for the party locally and nationally. This will require closely following what events and actions are taking place in your local area or region.
- To ensure the different priorities of the branch work are tied together and a clear plan of action regarding the branch's work is conveyed to the branch members every week.
- To ensure that branch meetings and Branch Committee meetings take place on a regular basis and that they are adequately prepared for, including a schedule for the month planned out, speakers confirmed, venues booked and that all members, contacts and supporters invited.
- To ensure that proper records and accounts of the branch work, finances, and activities are kept.
- To prepare the branch agenda prioritizing key issues, in a

concise format so as to keep the branch meeting an appropriate length.

- To make sure there is regular communication between branch members, with other branches in the region and with the Regional Organizer.

The art of being a good Branch Organizer is in knowing how to delegate and inspire other party members to take on roles in the branch. The best leaders lead from the front. If you are asking people to take on roles or tasks, make sure you understand those roles and tasks yourself.

A Branch Organizer should see it as their responsibility to politically develop themselves by reading the party press and publications, keeping in touch with local, national and international developments and by reading our theoretical material and the classics of Marxism to give guidance on the day-to-day issues that the branch will have to tackle. In turn the Branch Organizer should pass on their knowledge and political experience to other members and should always be developing others in the branch to play the Branch Organizer's role in the future.

Different branch members will often have a different focus and be engaged in different types of activity. Sometimes there will be a lot of discussions needed in the branch meetings, and they will compete for time. It is important that branch members get information about what is going on, but it is important that they get it with the right priority and emphasis attached. A good Branch Organizer will always sift out the key lessons and afford each discussion time according to its broader significance.

## The Branch Treasurer

The second most important role is the Branch Treasurer. For Socialist Alternative, our politics and program is the fundamental basis of our work. Yet our ideas cannot be properly formulated or

implemented without resources. Our national paper is essential, as are our pamphlets, leaflets and posters. Our income also finances our party office and full-time staff.

We also pay a regular subscription to our international, the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), with some of our finances subsidizing the work of comrades internationally, particularly in the developing world where resources are tight. Therefore, we have to rely on getting finance from our members, supporters and working class people who support our work. We are proud that our organization is financed by these means. Our comrades and supporters make huge financial sacrifices so that we can struggle against capitalism and fight for a socialist society.

Just as finance is crucial in providing supplies during a war, so it is in the financing of political struggles and the class war that we are engaged in!

The Branch Treasurer needs to keep a diligent eye on the branch finances and fundraising.

The most crucial part of our income is the monthly members dues that our members pay. It is the task of the Branch Treasurer to make sure these are collected, that dues targets are reached and to campaign to increase our dues collection.

In a world where people are often judged on the basis of the wealth, and where many people struggle to keep up with unaffordable bills and growing expenses, party subs can often seem like just another chore or expense. There can be a tendency for members to de-prioritise party subs compared to other expenses in their life that they feel are more pressing and immediate.

It is therefore crucial that the Branch Treasurer always takes a political approach to finances and member's dues. Regular and full explanations about why we need to raise money and what has

been achieved with the money we've raised are necessary. To do this, full and proper records of all branch finances need to be kept and regularly reported to the branch. The Branch Treasurer should keep in regular contact with the National Treasurer, submitting regular finance reports and discuss national finance targets to report back to the branch.

As well as the regular members dues from our members we also need to find other ways to fundraise. We should establish a habit of asking those not in our organization, but who support our aims and campaigns, to contribute financially. This may happen through a sustainer drive, through periodic appeals, tables, at meetings or through specific fundraising activities.

Each branch needs to develop Fighting Fund targets based on our national targets and outline plans to reach these targets. The Branch Treasurer does not necessarily organise all fundraising in the branch, but needs to work closely with other branch members to make sure fundraising is being done and targets are being met.

Some branches also set targets for individuals at tables, rallies and public events.

Some practical points for Branch Treasurers:

- Remember to give regular financial reports at the branch; you may have to organize extra tables and activities to reach your Fighting Fund target.
- Remind branch members why finance is essential and give examples of how the money is being spent.
- Proper financial records need to be kept so all members have full confidence in the party finances. These records are presented to members on request at National Conference, and are presented monthly to the National Committee.

# The Branch Paper Organizer

All branches should have a Paper Organizer, who takes on the following responsibilities:

1. Paper subscriptions – Subscriptions are important for providing a base income for the paper, while helping to ensure party members and supporters receive and read every issue. All branch members should be asked to take out a subscription - ask anyone who has not. Anyone with a lapsed subscription should be contacted and asked to re-subscribe. The Paper Organizer should also regularly remind branch members to try to get new subscriptions when doing weekly activities and contact work.
2. Sales – Your branch may have an Activities Organizer, but either way, the Paper Organizer needs to take particular interest in making sure enough activity is taking place to meet the paper target. Every branch should have at least one weekly table, and also find other events to sell the paper at.

Remember to be always on the lookout for one-off events where your branch can sell papers such as festivals and political film showings.

The Paper Organizer should monitor the number of papers sold on activities and propose ways to improve sales. This may include pointing out highlights of the paper in branch meetings and before paper sales.

3. Targets – The Paper Organizer should monitor progress towards the branch paper target and regularly report on it to the branch. The paper organizer should also monitor individual paper targets and overall targets for particular events. One way of doing this is to use tally cards. These can help ensure that all paper sales are accurately recorded and the money collected.

4. Content. It is important to have regular discussions on the paper

content at the branch. Give feedback afterwards to the editorial team on what your branch felt was good and bad about the current issue. Try to ensure that your branch is well represented in the paper by submitting articles and letters regularly.

Remember that members will be far less likely to actively sell a publication they have not read or do not feel they play a role in producing!

## The Branch Activity Organizer (15 Now Organizer)

It can be useful to nominate an Activity Organizer, who works closely with other branch committee members, particularly the Branch Organizer, to co-ordinate the weekly activity of the branch.

At this point in time, the Activity Organizer will be the 15 Now Organizer. As the focus and priorities of our national organization change, so too will the focus and priorities of the Activity Organizer.

The Activity Organizer (15 Now Organizer) may take on the following responsibilities:

1. Attendance – Ensuring there is adequate attendance at each activity. This may require phoning members and contacts, organising car-pooling, circulating details (like preparing an activity schedule for branch meetings), planning times and places to meet prior to and after activity, etc.

2. Preparation – Not every member of the branch will have been involved in every discussion about each activity. It is important that all members understand why we engage in each activity and what we are trying to achieve. Members may also need some practical skills training or advice on how to best partake in each branch activity. This will vary depending on what the activity is, but regular discussion in the branch before and after branch

activities will help facilitate active engagement.

3. Logistics – Many branch activities require a fair amount of planning and organizing. Even a simple table requires planning to run smoothly. The Activity Organizer should make sure every member is aware of and confident in their role before, during and after each activity. Members will be less inclined to be active in the branch if they do not understand their role or the activity is disorganized.

## Other organizers

All active members of a branch should be given a role, even the newest or most inexperienced. Not only does this spread out the workload, it also helps members feel they are contributing and gives them encouragement and training so that they can go on to play even more demanding roles for the party in future.

There are numerous organizers roles that can be assigned depending on the needs and activity of the branch.

Once a branch is large enough to have a whole layer of organizers, not all of them can be on the branch committee. If they are proving effective at their job they will be arguing for the branch to spend time on their issue. We need to encourage this while also discussing how work can be done outside branch meetings in a consultative way that does not cut across other priorities of branch work.

It is only after training a number of branch leaders and successfully recruiting to the branch that we will be in a position to divide a strong branch into two new branches. The way that we organize now needs to be informed by immediate tasks and short term goals, as well as our broader goal to build and expand Socialist Alternative.



# Setting and reaching targets

The setting of targets plays an important role in driving the work of the branch. Our targets are based on our political perspectives and reflect our organizational priorities. Targets are developed by the National Committee, in communication with the branches. Targets should be both achievable and push branches to their limits. Without targets the work to recruit, fundraise and sell our paper can become routine and ineffective.

Targets should always be discussed and agreed on by branches. Reports on whether targets have been met, or are on track to being met, should occur regularly. If targets are consistently not being met, a rethinking of the branch priorities may be required.

It is very important to report this information back to the national organization. Collating this information on a national level allows for a refining of priorities and the resetting of targets.

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# Who reports to who?

It is important that branches are regularly in contact with Socialist Alternative on a national level. We want to build branches that are actively adapting our perspectives and program to their local situation, but that are also in political and organizational alignment with other branches nationally.

To effectively influence the political environment in the US we need all branches to have a national consciousness. This means actively providing solidarity to other branches in struggle, and being aware of the national priorities of our organization. A national organization of disparate branches will be much weaker than one that is unified around shared aims and goals.

National targets are extremely important and need to be taken

seriously by all branches. The Branch Organizer (and Recruitment Organizer) should be in regular contact and provide regular reports to the Regional Organizer. The Branch Treasurer needs to report to the National Treasurer to make sure targets are being met. The Paper Organizer needs to make sure the branch is utilizing the paper to its fullest, and reporting the results to the Regional Organizer.

The method and regularity of this reporting should be discussed and decided with the regional and national leaderships of the organization.

Within the branch, it's important to find a method of communication that ensures members are contacted regularly and given every opportunity to take part in meetings and activities. For example, many branches have a structure like a tree where the branch secretary coordinates and overlooks all the twigs. In other words each leading member of the branch should have a list of members they are responsible for contacting for all the different events taking place according to their level of activity.

To give a hypothetical example:

Pam, one of the branch committee members, has a list of 5 members, some of which attend the branch regularly – she needs to contact these members to remind them of the branch meeting and about key activities. If they have missed previous meeting she should also fill them in on important discussion they missed. She also has a longer list of 5 less active members or supporters that need to be contacted every so often and for larger events. Pam will also have contacts she is responsible for, and contact each of them according to a plan discussed with the Branch Organizer (or Recruitment Organizer).

The Branch Organizer needs to check that Pam is regularly contacting the people she is responsible for. A good time to do this is at a Branch Committee meeting and before major activity.

If all leading members like Pam are following up the people they are responsible for contacting then the workload is evenly distributed and no one slips through the net.

In addition to this, a text-out may occur weekly or twice weekly to remind the branch members of the week's activity. This should be coordinated by the Branch Organizer, so that any late changes or additions can be included. However, each members should retain responsibility for sending any texts to their contacts, to ensure a personal connection is maintained.

Tips on facilitating good communication in the branch:

- The first point of call for each branch member should generally be the Branch Organizer.
- Branch committee members should report back to the Branch Secretary on whether or not targets are being met.
- Branch Organizer should be clear on who they report to in the regional and national structures of the organization and maintain regular communication.
- Branch Organizers should make sure the workload is being share throughout the branch, and that branch committee members are performing their roles.
- While informal communication and discussion between members and branches is encouraged, branches may also choose to pass resolutions to communicate more formally with the rest of the organization.

# Conclusion

Organizing a Socialist Alternative branch needs to be informed by discussion, practice and regular re-evaluation. You may find some of the advice above does not suit the experiences or tasks facing your branch. However, the general practice of how we organise on a branch level outlined here originates from our politics and should be discussed in detail amongst Branch Organizers. The way we organize needs to reflect both the challenges imposed by capitalism and the approach we need to take to achieve a democratic socialist society.

A strong branch can only be built by a team of committed members (or initially just one committed member) taking initiative in applying our politics and program in everyday struggle. This cannot be learnt by rote. Every aspect of the branch work needs to go through a process of asking what, why and how?

- What are the key areas of struggle or potential struggle?
- What focus should we have in our branch work considering the current consciousness amongst workers and young people?
- Why do we do things a certain way? Is it the most effective approach?
- How and where are we recruiting new members? Should we focus on a particular area of work?
- How do our national perspectives relate to the situation in our local area?
- How can we effectively organize to intervene in or initiate struggle?

If a Socialist Alternative branch is organized with these questions in mind, we can achieve successes even in areas where we are currently not strong. By building dynamic branches and widening the layer of branch leaders now, we will be well placed to make

serious gains as more people start to question the logic of capitalism and decide it's time to fight back.

A genuinely mass, democratic, revolutionary socialist organization will only succeed if built on strong foundations. The foundation of our party is our politics, upon which we can build energetic and effective branches capable of leading the struggle towards socialism.

# Socialist Alternative Recruitment Guide

This is a very exciting time for Socialist Alternative. We have the very real potential to build a national organization with branches in all major cities and regions with upwards of 1,000 members. Such an organization could play a huge role in rebuilding a strong workers movement while putting forward a genuine socialist alternative to the rotten capitalist system.

These goals will only be achieved if all members of our organization play a role in recruitment. Even our newest members are capable of recruiting new people. However, there are some basic tips worth sharing to make sure recruitment is done with the best chance of success.

To recruit to Socialist Alternative, our members need to have some understanding of how to:

- **Organize contact discussions**
- **Sign up new members**
- **Consolidate new members**

## Contact discussions

A “contact” is anyone with whom we’ve made contact and who may be interested in joining our organization. If you are not sure if someone is a contact, ask them if they could see themselves joining an organization like Socialist Alternative. Their answer should give you an indication whether or not you should attempt to organize a contact discussion with them.

Try to make a time to meet up again while you are speaking with them, but if it’s not possible, getting a phone number is always

better than just an email. As a general rule we should follow up contacts within 48 hours.

It is important to plan the discussion beforehand. Organize to bring someone from your branch with you to your contact discussion so more members can gain experience in recruiting.

Think about what you already know about your contact and where they are coming from politically. What issues particularly interest them? You might want to bring along some material we have published on those issues. How much do they already know about history, politics, and socialism? Can you skip over some topics that they already understand and agree with, or do you need to start with the basics?

While you always want to organize your contact discussions based on what you know about your contact, there are some things you should always bring:

- 1. A membership application form**
- 2. The latest copy of our newspaper**
- 3. Fliers for upcoming events**
- 4. A sustainer form**

(Good socialist organizers have these things on them at all times!)

There is no 'correct' thing to say to convince contacts to join. Each person will be convinced by different aspects of our work, theory and program, depending on their experience, background and interests. The only way you can know how to convince someone that Socialist Alternative is the organization for them is to first listen to what they have to say.

The first step is to ask your contact questions about themselves and how they became interested in politics/activism. Some other useful questions to ask are: What issues are important to you? Do you already consider yourself a socialist?

Overall, allow your contact to do at least half the talking. Make sure not to dominate the discussion.

Remember, you may be the only person your contact has met who agrees with their Left-wing or progressive ideas! If you have a discussion where there is some agreement and some disagreement, focus on the points of agreement before moving on to any points of disagreement. Remember that contacts do not have to agree with everything Socialist Alternative stands for before they join. There is always room for further discussion later down the track.

One of the best tools to use during contact discussions is the paper. If you are setting up a contact discussion, ask them to read the paper before you meet. This will give you a number of topics to discuss. If they haven't yet read the paper, you can still use the topics covered in the paper for discussion. The paper editorial board chose those topics for a reason! The aim of the paper is to relate to consciousness as it exists, and point people towards socialist solutions. This is also the aim of contact discussions. If people agree with what is written in our paper it is a good indication that we should ask them to join.

Don't worry, you don't need to know the answer to every question. If your contact asks you a question you don't know the answer to, it is absolutely fine to say that you don't know, but that you can find out for them.

The key point you need to draw out of each discussion is how the problems people face are either caused by or are linked to the capitalist system, and how we can never solve those problems within the framework of capitalism. Explain that is why we need to fight for democratic socialism and build an organisation capable of leading that struggle.

Socialist Alternative and the Committee for a Workers' International have proud histories of real struggle. Don't shy away



from talking about our successes. People will want to be part of an effective organisation and we want people to be excited about what we can achieve!

At the end of your discussion you should have a sense of where the person stands. Are they:

### 1. Ready to become a member

If your discussion goes well, ask them to join! When asking someone to join you should point out why they can play an important role in our organization. If they generally agree with our ideas, or are open to our ideas and excited about the work of our organization, then we should ask them to join. (See the next section 'Signing up new members')

### 2. Still a contact

Your discussion may have gone well, but your contact still may not be ready to join. Ask them why that is and what they think would help them make up their mind. Suggest that they take out a subscription to the paper to find out more, and make a judgement whether inviting them to a branch meeting might help.

Whatever your next step, make sure you organize a clear plan to meet again. This might be before an action or before a branch meeting, that you could then invite them to after your discussion. Also consider if there is someone in your branch who your contact might relate well to, and bring them to your next discussion.

### 3. A supporter, but not a member

Some contacts will not be interested or suitable to become a member of Socialist Alternative. However, they may still be able to support us in some way. Ask them if they would become a sustainer, to help fund our work. Ask them to take out a subscription to the paper, even if they don't fully agree. If

appropriate, ask if they would like to be invited to major events in the future.

Even if someone doesn't want to join, it can be useful to keep some type of contact with them. They may become good allies in unions or political campaigns, and the barriers to them joining now may shift in the future.

Whichever category they fall into, don't be shy asking people to make a commitment! This is true whether you're asking them to join the organization or simply asking them to give a donation.

Don't forget to report back to your branch organizer (or recruitment organizer) after doing contact work.

## Signing up new members

Before someone joins, we want to make sure they are moving toward and will likely arrive at the following key conclusions:

- 1. Confidence in the working class as the key agent of social change**
- 2. The need to fight for public ownership of all the big corporations under the democratic control of elected representatives of the workers and the wider public**
- 3. The need to sever ties with the capitalist parties and work to build an independent workers' party**
- 4. That we are a revolutionary organization that fights for reforms to build a movement strong enough to get rid of capitalism and replace it with democratic socialism.**

Generally we would want a new member to agree with 90% of our "What We Stand For" column in our newspaper.

If you're confident of these things, it's time to sign up your contact as a new member!

Signing up a new member is not just a matter of filling out a membership form - though please make sure the form is filled out so we have their full contact details. New members also need to have discussions about three key things:

## Membership dues

An important aspect of membership is making a financial contribution to the organization through membership dues. This importance needs to be made clear so new members are conscious of the dues and start on the highest possible dues they can afford. While we don't want finances to be a barrier to membership, we also want to encourage, as a starting point, new members to consider contributing 5-10% of their wage per month.

## Activity

It's important that new members understand that we are an active, democratic organisation. This means we want all members to be involved in the campaigning work, fight for our ideas and be involved in political discussions in the organization. This involves attending branch meetings as often as possible, selling the paper, and getting involved in struggle.

## Education

Every new member should be sold a New Member Education Program when they join. It is crucial that we deepen the political understanding of new members as soon as they join. The following political discussions should be planned in conjunction with your Branch Organizer.

## Consolidating new members

When someone agrees to join Socialist Alternative, this is just the beginning. The first few months of membership are key to integrating new members into the organisation. Make sure you keep in regular contact with new members you have recruited during this time. Sometimes people have questions, but are too shy to ask them in branch meetings. You should continue to ask their opinions and encourage them to share their thoughts.

Ultimately new members are more likely to remain members if they have thorough political understanding of our organisation and our work. Your political discussions should not end when your contact becomes a comrade!