

A New Knot

Statement in Protest of Our Expulsion From Socialist Alternative

For a Revolutionary Socialist Organization With a Principled Marxist Approach to Mass Work and Internal Democracy

By the Former Minority Group in Socialist Alternative, September 20, 2018

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1. Over the last two years there has been an explosion of interest in socialist ideas in the U.S. We are witnessing **the biggest opportunity for building the socialist movement since the 1970s**, and within that a historic chance to build the forces of revolutionary Marxism. This is most evident in the 50,000 and growing members of DSA and the election of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Julia Salazar in New York City and other socialists elected to statewide and local offices.

2. We see a contradictory process across the world as capitalism lurches from one crisis to the next: populist right-wing forces gain power while the working class raises its head in struggle once again. In the U.S. we stand before a huge opening for socialist ideas, activism, and a new wave of organizing.

3. Capitalism's uneven rhythm of revolution and counter-revolution since the 2007/08 economic crisis led to shifting forces in the new and difficult terrain Marxists are operating on. While parts of Europe and South America are in the grip of mild reaction, there are also important first attempts to develop new formations to fight for left-wing and working-class policies. A new giant, the rising proletariat in China and other parts of Asia, is entering the scene, though it is inexperienced and politically underdeveloped. The relative decline of U.S. imperialism along with the rise of China and increasing chaos in world relations is leading to growing inter-imperialist tensions. In this cauldron new waves of mass movements and class struggles will inevitably develop, though

starting from a historically low level of consciousness, organization, and leadership.

4. In the U.S. the right-wing populist Trump administration both poses a threat to working-class people and spurs on left and working-class movements. A new generation is entering the political arena to fight capitalism, sexism, racism, and all forms of oppression.

5. The era we are in is in many ways new terrain for the socialist movement. The collapse of Stalinism in 1989/1991 led to a huge setback of consciousness and working-class organization internationally. The experiences of the last 150 years of socialist struggle have to be relearned by wider layers of working-class activists.

6. This makes the dual task of the revolutionary party that much more difficult: to rebuild broader forces to defend working-class interests while at the same time rebuilding strong Marxist cadre that are able to influence this process and offer a lead to end capitalism once and for all. Moreover, a revolutionary party must navigate the sudden changes and sharp turns exemplified by the election of Trump and the host of new questions it has raised.

7. Starting in 2011 Socialist Alternative grew tremendously due to its razor sharp political analysis and audacious intervention in the growing wave of struggle, starting with the Battle of Wisconsin and Occupy.

8. **However, instead of boldly orienting toward the new openings of the anti-Trump movement and the growth of DSA with an active, engaging, and principled intervention, Socialist Alternative has spent the last year and half mired in a deep internal crisis. SA's ability and will to use debate to hone our perspectives and interventions in these movements has degenerated. Why did the current SA leadership, along with the**

leadership of the CWI, allow the organization to get to this state? We believe there were three main challenges:

a. **The need for an active and principled Marxist intervention** which fights to win political influence in new movements and emerging left-wing formations like DSA.

Two wings exist in the national leadership of Socialist Alternative. On the one hand, a conservative wing around Alan J, Tom C, and Bryan K on the East Coast, who defended the fundamental ideas of Trotskyism and the CWI during previous difficult decades. Unfortunately, they have been unable to fully adapt to a new situation, instead tending to engage with new phenomenon in a **hands-off — what we call an abstract propagandistic — approach**, that stays safely away from the complexities of on-the-ground mass work and errs in a sectarian direction.

b. Seemingly contrary to this propagandistic approach, **the Seattle part of the current leadership of SA has helped pull the organization toward engaging in mass phenomena, most prominently through our Seattle council office. However, the challenge is in utilizing Kshama Sawant's elected position in a revolutionary manner under the democratic oversight of SA.**

Both wings of the current SA leadership have developed an **over-reliance on the council office which has driven them towards an opportunist political and organizational approach out of fears about Kshama getting re-elected in 2019.** The most recent example of subordinating the needs of building a revolutionary party to the short-term

needs of the council office and for re-election was the “Yes” vote on the Seattle police chief (you’ll find more about that [in this document](#)). We do not say this to minimize the importance of Kshama’s re-election, which we will actively fight for despite being expelled from SA; it is SA’s tunnel-vision regarding the council office that is mistaken and actually counter-productive to getting Kshama re-elected.

c. **The need for robust democratic discussion and debate** about these issues — a healthy culture of internal democracy in practice, not just formally. It is not a crime at all for there to be opposing wings in the leadership of SA; on the contrary, this can be extremely useful in honing our perspectives and tactics. But the current leadership’s refusal to be accountable for their politics has dragged SA over the last year and a half on a zig-zag course that creates huge obstacles in training new layers of cadre in principled mass work. When the Minority has challenged this approach **the response has been the development of a top-down, bureaucratic regime:** removing two full-timers from the council office in political retaliation, driving out longstanding full-timers, turning leadership bodies into factional tools of the Majority and excluding from leadership bodies elected members who do not share the views of the Majority. Instead of justifying these changes politically, which would be impossible for a politically unprincipled bloc, the Majority was forced to rely on character assassination and factual distortions.

9. The political issues we raised in this debate were important, but in no way

represented life or death questions that could not be discussed out between comrades with different views within one revolutionary organization. They included:

- ▶ Our analysis, perspectives, and tactics toward DSA
- ▶ Calling on DSA to launch a new socialist party
- ▶ For SA members to apply to join DSA and work openly as dual members to build the broad socialist movement while building a revolutionary wing of DSA
- ▶ Our analysis and tactics towards Berniecrats and DSA-Democrats
- ▶ Voting “No” on Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best
- ▶ Our policy and tactics towards the demand to impeach Trump

10. Lively and open political debate within one organization was critical in the development of the Bolshevik party. Tragically, the current SA leadership refused to allow a genuinely democratic discussion about the issues we raised. They have made it increasingly clear they cannot tolerate the existence of an organized opposition within SA. This policy, if not corrected, has implications for SA far beyond this debate or any of the immediate issues we raised.

11. We have warned since earlier this year that the SA leadership was preparing the ground to expel us. On September 12, a **resolution was put forward that appeals to the upcoming National Convention to “suspend” (in reality expel) the five National Committee (NC) members who are part of the Minority, if the Minority continues to exercise its democratic right to be an organized opposition.** This is straight out of the playbook of the bureaucratic approach of the American and British SWPs, both of which only allow members the “right” to form factions under strictly controlled conditions, a policy the CWI

has long said it opposes. This is a mockery of genuine Leninism and Trotskyism.

12. However, the National Executive Committee (EC) is not waiting for the National Convention to formally expel the Minority. On September 15, at a Seattle SA citywide membership meeting, Ty M (member of the EC and the Majority) revealed that the EC organized a meeting of the NC on August 11 and invited the Seattle City Committee (CC) to discuss and decide the controversial issue of Kshama voting in favor of the new Seattle police chief on August 13. However, **they excluded all seven elected Minority NC and CC members from this meeting and kept the meeting secret from the organization.**

13. Instead of democratic discussion, the EC orchestrated a farcical NC phone meeting. The play that we were allowed to watch and unconsciously participate in was an NC phone meeting on August 16, *after the real discussion had taken place*. No one participating admitted that the real NC discussion had happened five days before. When we protested that the NC and Seattle City Committee should have met to discuss this important issue before public action was taken, the EC lied by claiming that there was no time for a discussion of the NC and Seattle CC before the vote.

14. Calvin P (member of the EC and the Majority) argued in his sum-up at the September 15 Seattle citywide membership meeting that while this decision-making process was not in line with “formal democracy,” it was necessary to allow a “real discussion.” A “real discussion” where the only NC and Seattle CC members who had written a document arguing against Kshama voting for the police chief were secretly excluded from the “debate.”

15. The resolution to the National Convention to formally suspend all Minority NC members has only been brought forward

after they established it *de facto*. **The EC has already split the organization and suspended the Minority. This is a *de facto* expulsion which is actually more undemocratic than an openly acknowledged expulsion.**

16. This process began almost a year and half ago with a secret, administrative removal of two members from the Seattle Executive Committee (SEC) and a fraudulent election where the national EC would only allow the Seattle City Committee to “elect” a new SEC on the condition that we would not raise disagreements or put forward an alternative SEC slate. While the SA leadership was consumed by a fierce conflict, the debate was hidden from the membership of SA for almost a year and a half. Rather than answer our arguments politically, the EC relied on character assassination and instilling an atmosphere of paranoia in the organization.

17. In an unprecedented act of political retaliation, the EC fired a full-timer who they perceived to be critical of the leadership and supportive of the Minority, right when the debate was being brought outside of the EC for the first time. Such a bureaucratic approach is deeply damaging to SA’s ability to have free and open internal discussion when its elected leadership bodies are made up roughly half of full-timers.

18. When another full-timer in the city council office raised criticisms of this at a meeting of the Seattle City Committee (a body she was an elected member of), she was also met with fierce political retaliation and forced to resign as a full-timer. Since then four other full-timers who were part of the Minority have had their work made impossible by a spiteful EC. In total, six Minority comrades were either fired or driven out of their positions as full-timers.

19. The Majority has established a new tradition in SA where dissenting views are

silenced. A new generation of SA members are being trained in these methods, which include:

- a) slanderous attacks on comrades to avoid political discussion and debate;
- b) treating organized internal opposition as an enemy within, essentially as a “fifth column” (as one Majority supporting Seattle City Committee member called us at a February 2018 CC meeting); and
- c) allowing the EC to administratively change leadership bodies without transparent, democratic elections.

Why We Are Not Attending the National Convention

20. It is absolutely clear that there is no longer space for members of the Minority to democratically influence the direction of SA. It does not make sense for us to continue to be a part of this charade with a predetermined outcome. We refuse to take part in another round of show trials where the verdict has already been decided.

21. Any political issue that the Minority dares to weigh in on is met only with a de-politicized frenzy. Comrades who share our views on political questions are pressured to distance themselves from the Minority. The EC demagogically claims that “We would love to have a debate, but the Minority isn’t allowing that to happen!”

22. Yet it was the EC that has worked to avoid debate. First and foremost they hid this debate from the members of SA for almost a year and a half. Now they secretly exclude NC and Seattle City Committee members from participation in meetings of the bodies they were elected to.

23. With the Minority not at the National Convention, it will be harder for the EC to use

the Minority as a scapegoat for any and all problems in the organization and as an excuse to avoid political debate. They will need to politically justify their opportunist decision to argue for Kshama voting for the new Seattle police chief. They will need to present to convention attendees their perspective on DSA and why they have had such a limited political impact within it. They will have to argue for a building resolution that largely calls for continuation of routine building methods and does not advance any serious new strategy, tactics, or initiatives for the significantly changed political situation we are now in.

24. Rather than continue an increasingly sterile debate, we have decided to turn outwards and direct our energy toward more productive outlets. There are currently huge opportunities to build the forces of Marxism in the U.S. We believe that our ideas and tactics, and those of the SA Majority, should be tested out in practice.

25. As Leon Trotsky wrote, “Obviously it is extremely desirable to safeguard the unity of the organization. But there are situations ... in which two groups pull in opposite directions in so obvious a fashion that it paralyzes the life of the organization. What remains to be done? Above all, every possibility of an honest accord must be thoroughly pursued. But if these attempts have no result, there remains only to say to each other: let us try to work separately and in six months or more, we will see which of us is right, and then perhaps we will meet each other seriously on the common path. Such an action is called a split. But at times a split is a lesser evil. An organization that is smaller but more unanimous can have enormous success with a correct policy, while an organization which is torn by internal strife is condemned to rot.” (*Writings*, 1930–31, p. 328)

26. It is in this spirit that we are accepting our expulsion from SA.

27. It didn't have to end like this. A healthy revolutionary party must make room for different political views (within the framework of its fundamental tenets). As the class struggle progresses, comrades will draw different conclusions and they need the right to organize on the basis of those conclusions. The Minority is not a politically homogenous group on all questions, and we aim to build a organization that allows for internal debate. It is rich, dynamic, comradely debates on key political questions which keep the edge of a revolutionary party sharp.

28. We hope and believe that SA can still make a valuable contribution to the building of the forces of Marxism in the U.S. in the next period. We also believe we can make an important contribution. Rather than continuing to participate in an increasingly toxic debate, we will turn our attention and energy outwards.

29. Ironically, we believe we will be able to make a far bigger contribution to the re-election of Kshama Sawant in 2019 from outside of SA. We are discussing significant initiatives that we can take that will assist with Kshama's 2019 re-election. However, given the undemocratic regime now prevailing in SA, in reality we will not be able to productively contribute to the struggle to build the forces of Marxism inside of SA.

30. **We hope that with time and experience, it will be possible for SA and our organization to find a road back to building a common revolutionary organization. Events will help to clarify issues for comrades on both sides of this unfortunate split.** We are committed to re-evaluating all the questions of this debate in light of new experience and the result of each organization's interventions in the class struggle. We hope that the leaders and members of SA will adopt the same approach, and that on the basis of bigger events which demand the maximum unity of revolutionary

forces, our two organizations will be able to fuse together again on a higher political and organizational plane.

31. In the meantime we will work side by side with Socialist Alternative leaders and members in a comradely fashion to advance the interests of the workers movement.

Taking Allegations of Misconduct Extremely Seriously

32. We have rejected the allegations and distortions made against one comrade after another, over and over in previous documents and debates. When each allegation has been shown to be false or so exaggerated as to lose its meaning, it is simply dropped by the Majority without explanation. But the rallying cry of "bad methods" continues and grows.

33. We take any allegation of misconduct, including bullying, extremely seriously. We joined the revolutionary movement to root out racism, sexism, bullying, and all forms of oppression from this world. During years of internal debates inside SA, many members – members who would later be with the Majority and Minority – had moments when they succumbed to emotional pressures and spoke angrily and rashly to each other.

34. During this internal debate, democracy in the organization was stifled; members of the Minority were lied about and systematically ostracized. As in previous years, members on both sides had moments of weakness and spoke angrily. A revolutionary organization should call out members who make these mistakes when they are made, give them a chance to grow without allowing them to harm others, and seek to address the larger situation that created this pressure.

35. Instead, during the debate, the Majority made exaggerated accusations against comrades associated with the Minority, and weaponized these accusations to carry out a campaign of character assassination in the service of a political agenda that could not be realized through an open, democratic, political debate. This is not the way to build a welcoming organization that fosters the development of all comrades in a healthy atmosphere of respectful debate.

36. Members of the Minority who have made mistakes have openly owned up to them, apologized, and committed to learning and working to avoid such mistakes. The Majority members, in addition to denying problems in their own behavior, have only sought to address behavioral issues as a political bludgeon against the Minority. Unfortunately, when aggressive behavior of EC Majority members was on full display, such as at the February 2018 Seattle City Committee meeting or the March 2018 NC meeting, Majority supporters were silent. Moreover, the current SA leadership has spread these noxious methods to the wider organization, miseducating Socialist Alternative members in this destructive approach to debate. What will be the ramifications for SA members in future internal debates?

37. We reject the Majority's incessant focus on the "Minority leadership" as a way to maintain their claim that this debate is all about the wounded egos of two specific men. This dismisses and ignores the many other members of the Minority who have taken a clear political stand on far more important questions than any individual's pride.

38. This is especially offensive to the many female, POC, and LGBTQ members of the Minority, who have played leading roles within the debate and within the Minority itself. We are committed to building a powerful Marxist organization where all oppressed and

marginalized people play leading roles in the fight for our liberation. We support a strategy that roots out the oppressive ideologies that divide the working class against itself and keep it from uniting and taking power. We expect far more from a revolutionary organization and leadership than what Socialist Alternative has devolved into.

A Consistent and Principled Political Record

39. While the arguments of the Majority have changed with each new turn in this debate, the Minority's positions have been consistent. The Majority has repeatedly withdrawn documents and tried to stop documents from being circulated that no longer fit their current position (for example see [Kshama's letter to the IEC](#), [Ty M's response](#), [Patrick A, Ty M, and Kailyn N's appeal to the IEC](#), and [Patrick A's resolution for the December 2017 NC](#). For an explanation of the background to these documents and how the EC attempted to hide them see our *Alternative Guide* to the debate in the [Minority Bulletin #1](#)).

40. In contrast, the Minority stands by all of the documents we wrote in the course of this debate. Where we believe we have made mistakes, we have openly acknowledged and addressed them, rather than trying to hide them.

41. We encourage comrades to look back now and in the future as events continue to clarify the issues in this debate. While the Majority wants to rewrite the events of this debate and prettify the history of SA, we encourage SA members to read all the documents of this debate in the order they appeared.

42. The original documents in this debate make clear what this debate is about. The first

document from Minority comrades, [Update on U.S. Political Situation and Our Tasks](#), included:

- ▶ arguing for a bold engagement in the battle against Trump, even if demands like “impeachment” are themselves contested territory with liberal forces
- ▶ how to engage in the new campaigns and movements developing in the Trump era, such as the struggle against Trumpcare and the fight for Medicare for All
- ▶ how to engage with a new layer of Sandernistas, especially its left-wing in the rapidly growing DSA
- ▶ the lessons of the growth of SA over the previous period due to SA’s principled mass work; and
- ▶ the central importance of political clarity and robust debate in developing a new layer of cadre and building a revolutionary organization.

43. In contrast, the Majority and their documents are marked by continual zig-zags. Their first document was the [EC Majority Reply](#) which tried to counter our arguments about the importance of DSA with generalizations and downplaying the importance of DSA with an emphasis on “Our Revolution” and “Draft Bernie for a People’s Party,” while engaging in a shocking level of slander and unsubstantiated accusations. This document was littered with inconsistencies, distortions, and falsehoods that the Minority answered point by point in our [Response to the EC Majority Reply](#). The Majority has never answered these refutations, nor did they withdraw their false claims. Instead they chose to silently move on without comment. And this is from a grouping that claims to be waging a struggle for “good methods”!

44. **The Majority went on to adopt a very different political analysis and approach**

towards DSA, flip-flop on impeachment (they were against it before they were for it with no political explanation), and drop most of their other political claims in the *EC Majority Reply*. Instead of openly answering our criticisms of the *EC Majority Reply* and clarifying where their views had changed and on what basis, they attempted to paper over the issues, downplaying the importance of their own document and arguing it was a low priority for comrades to read.

45. **Originally, the Majority argued that this debate was about how to analyze and respond to new major political events, not just methods of leadership:** “The election of Trump, the protests that have developed against him, the divisions in the two major parties and the growth of the left in the US pose new questions for our leadership and our organization as a whole. Big events like this often provoke debates in our party; we welcome a comradely discussion on these issues being aired fully in the NC and beyond... The majority of EC members disagree with *many important political and organizational* assertions in [Philip L and Stephan K’s July Update document]... We feel the need to reply at length here in order to clarify the *political* differences that need to be discussed further in the organization” (paragraphs 1-2, emphasis added).

46. They go on to say “We feel [disagreements about DSA] indicates a *political disagreement* in our leadership that *should be debated thoroughly*” (paragraph 31, emphasis added, [EC Majority Reply](#)).

47. Yet eight months later the Majority did a complete U-turn. In their document, [This Conflict Is About Methods of Leadership](#), they state, “Except for some minor differences on perspectives for DSA, or tactical slogans like calling for DSA to launch a new socialist party (which a number of the signers of this statement also agree with), no major

differences were found ... [At] this stage the only differences that have emerged have been minor - issues of emphasis, orientation, and tactics” (paragraph 72).

48. They went on to add a new introduction to their *EC Majority Reply* which “urge[s] comrades to focus more” on the *Methods* document instead of their first main document. The *Methods* document itself declares “we want to be clear that the current NC and CC majority do not base our case on [the *EC Majority Reply*]” (paragraph 23).

49. Ironically, the International Secretariat (I.S.) of the CWI, who solidly backed the methods of the Majority, also made it clear that this debate is about politics. In preparation for a discussion on the debate in the U.S. leadership at the December 2017 International Executive Committee (IEC) meeting of the CWI, the I.S. circulated exchanges between them and mainly Philip L and Stephan K regarding differences over how to intervene in the Sanders campaign. Please judge for yourselves: Philip and Stephan wrote [about the Sanders tactic](#) in response to [this statement](#) from the I.S. Philip and Stephan wrote [this document on the “safe states tactic,”](#) and this was the [response of the I.S.](#) When we argued for confidently engaging in a comradely [debate with the ISO about Sanders](#), the I.S. sent [this anxious letter](#).

50. Again, in our view, the Sanders debate exemplifies a tendency towards a more propagandistic approach on the EC and the I.S. – an abstract position of producing Marxist commentary from the sidelines, but failing to seriously engage in the concrete issues posed in a real struggle for influence and leadership in the actual battles that our class is starting to engage in, regardless of the very confused consciousness they are starting with.

51. This does not stop the very same comrades from covering up for the

opportunistic moves that are taken out of fear of losing the city council seat in Seattle with policies like voting for the new police chief. **This alliance of some comrades who adopt a sectarian approach with other comrades who sometimes adopt opportunist positions is why the Minority has characterized the EC as an unprincipled bloc.**

History of Debate in SA

52. It is no problem for debates to develop in a Marxist organization. In fact, it has always been through extensive internal debate that Marxists have navigated important tactical and strategic questions.

53. For Socialist Alternative, the long period of factional debates from 1999 to 2009 equipped us very well to politically intervene in the Battle of Wisconsin, Occupy, the fight for 15, the growing interest in socialism, and the Sanders campaign. And from these interventions, we grew by leaps and bounds, positioning ourselves to be better able to intervene in future struggles with even more impact.

54. The internal struggle within SA from 1999 to 2009 was fundamentally between two distinct trends, one based on an older layer of comrades grouped around Alan J, Tom C, and Bryan K, and another around a new generation grouped around Philip L, Ramy K, and Ty M along with Lynn W of the CWI I.S.

55. Vigorous debates took place over our intervention in the U.S. Labor Party in the late 1990s; the critical importance of youth work in building our organization; the Nader campaigns of 2000, 2004 and 2008; the anti-war movement; the 2005 Supreme Court nomination fight; the slogan of a “Workers Party;” and the debate at 2009 Convention on the character of the period, including

perspectives for struggle and the development of consciousness; along with other issues.

56. Throughout these debates there were underlying issues. The former wing tended in the direction of workerism along with an abstract, propagandistic approach which lagged behind new developments. However, when confronted with the task of providing leadership to broader formations, they leaned in an opportunist direction.

57. The latter wing (hereafter referred to as “our tendency”) was fighting to politically equip the organization with the necessary understanding of a fundamentally new era, along with an approach of actively intervening in broader developments with flexible tactics and united front methods to most effectively wage a Marxist struggle for political influence and leadership within these broader forces.

58. The archive of previous [Members Bulletins of SA](#) give a clear account of these debates, and we recommend comrades read them and study SA’s history.

59. Throughout these debates, the CWI I.S. generally politically agreed with our tendency, yet repeatedly intervened to organizationally prop up the more propagandistic grouping in order to keep a certain balance of power, which would allow them to maintain control over the organization. Their unprincipled approach of balancing between the two wings of the SA leadership enormously complicated the struggle for political clarity within SA.

60. However, beginning in 2010 a certain coming together between the two wings of the SA leadership was accomplished. This was achieved despite the efforts of the CWI I.S. to keep the U.S. leadership divided. While this newly united SA leadership was based on organizational compromises, the political approach that was adopted was entirely

consistent with the positions that our tendency had been fighting for since 1999.

61. Finally armed with a generally united leadership team and a correct political approach, SA was able to make huge steps forward in the period from 2010 to 2016. We grew from 200 to 1,000 members, had outstanding interventions in Wisconsin, Occupy, the fight for 15, the Sanders campaign, and elected and re-elected Kshama Sawant to the Seattle City Council.

62. Yet an ongoing political struggle was still taking place within the SA leadership, though more muted at this stage. Almost all the tactical turns necessary for these successful interventions sparked intense debates within the SA leadership. We had debates over:

- a. fighting to win the 2013 election as opposed to merely running a propaganda campaign
- b. launching Democrats for Sawant and Small Business for Sawant in 2013
- c. when we were leading the fight for 15 in Seattle, the three-year phase-in for small business and a collective bargaining opt-out for hotel workers
- d. our tactics to drag left Democrats into a common fight with us during the 2015 Sawant re-election campaign
- e. and most fiercely over our Sanders tactics.

63. **While in the end the EC agreed to these tactics, there were clearly the outline of two wings on the EC on each of these questions. One wing proposed these flexible but principled tactics and most clearly argued for them, and another wing that, while eventually agreeing, was hesitant and uncomfortable with the direction being taken.**

A New Knot Must be Tied

64. We look forward to working with SA comrades in the struggles and discussions opening up in the U.S. and internationally. We will not focus our time as one small group attacking another small group on the left. There is more to win and more to do for serious Marxists.

65. We are committed to developing cadre that are able to work within the wider workers and left movements, within the imperfect attempts of the boldest and most farsighted workers and youth to move forward and learn in struggle.

66. Parting ways with SA does not alter our commitment to Marxism, revolutionary socialism, and Trotskyism. We seek to build an internationalist organization based on the standpoint of the working class as the decisive force to lead the struggle of all the oppressed for a new socialist society based on equality and solidarity.

67. A central lesson of the painful history of the international class struggle over the past 100 years is that the working class needs a mass revolutionary party with a farsighted Marxist leadership along with a mass revolutionary international to successfully carry out the struggle for socialism. A mass revolutionary party must be deeply rooted in the workplaces, neighborhoods, struggles against sexism, racism, and all forms of social oppression.

68. Our new organization is committed to making an important contribution to this project, the building of an internationalist, multi-racial working-class revolutionary party which is capable of providing the leadership the working class so desperately deserves.

69. **No group on the left, including Socialist Alternative, can claim to be such a force at this**

point of time. We believe SA as an organization, the individual members of SA, and other activists in the revolutionary left have a key role to contribute. Most important, however, will be a new generation of fighters and revolutionaries that will develop out of the titanic battles that are coming. We aim to help forge a principled, democratic, internationalist, revolutionary left that can bring together the best of the different trends on the socialist left along with new radical forces that will develop in the coming period. **As part of such a process we hope that we will be able to join together with SA and others again in the future as part of a much larger revolutionary organization.**

70. The CWI was able over a whole historic period to contribute to the development of such cadre, rooted in the struggles of the working class. This is the tradition we are coming from: the application of Marxist ideas within the workers movement – principled mass work. We are aware of the shoulders of the giants that we stand on.

71. We build on Lenin's contribution to forming a revolutionary, internationalist party, Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism, the theory and practice of the united front, the transitional method, and the Marxist understanding of the state. We value the discussions and documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International, which show a huge battle over ideas to move forward in the spirit of uncompromising principles and the flexible approach of the united front.

72. Many of us put our heart and souls into building Socialist Alternative and the CWI for our entire adult lives, some for years, and some for decades. SA and the CWI have contributed in countless ways to the worldwide socialist struggle. We do not accept our *de facto* expulsion lightly. We aim to carry forward the

best traditions of these organizations, while seeking to leave behind the unhealthy elements of dogma and bureaucratic methods that unfortunately begun to develop in SA and the CWI.

73. Leon Trotsky wrote in [My Life](#) about the Zimmerwald conference in 1915, when socialists opposed to World War I first gathered: “The thread of history often breaks, then a new knot must be tied.” At that time a huge thread had broken.

74. Despite attempts to build the Fourth International over 80 years, we are still in the beginning stages of patching together the many threads needed to not only defend Marxist ideas but to “offer a program based on international experience in the struggle of the proletariat and of all the oppressed of the world for liberation” ([Transitional Program](#) by Leon Trotsky).

75. The founding document of the CWI, [Program of the International \(1970\)](#), described the conditions of the young Fourth International: “[following the political bankruptcy of the Communist International,] as in the days after the collapse of the Second International, the revolutionary internationalists remained small isolated sects.” It explains the consistent problems Marxists faced: “isolation from the masses, and the impossibility of tiny organisations getting the ear and finding support among the mass of the working class.” Their task was to acquire “experience and understanding, of combating both sectarianism and opportunism. It was a means of developing a flexible approach, with the implacability of principle, as a means of preparing the cadres for the great events which impended.”

76. The large majority of the leaders of the Fourth International (USFI) failed to recognize or understand the fundamentally changed objective situation that followed World War II,

and therefore stumbled from one error to the next. Isolated from the working class, most tendencies of the Fourth International either gave in to opportunist pressures or made a virtue out of the necessity of commenting on the class struggle from the sidelines and developed in a sectarian direction. Many accomplished the feat of wildly oscillating from opportunism to sectarianism and back again.

77. Mandelism, the dominant theory of the USFI, heavily tended in the direction of bowing down before every existing movement and trailing behind it without an independent Marxist policy and program. A common theme which developed in different Trotskyist currents, either out of opportunism or sectarianism, was that genuine Marxist ideas were considered abstract principles that must be defended in difficult times, however, not necessarily applied in the daily battles. In effect, this meant either following the lead of reformist dominated movements or standing on the sidelines, commenting on the class struggle as if Marxist ideas had nothing to do with being part of the struggles of our class.

78. The CWI stood out among the various Trotskyist forces for its clarity of analysis and ability to combine programmatic intransigence with tactical flexibility. We base ourselves on the best traditions and political accomplishments of the CWI, including its generally correct analysis of the post-World War II world situation, the extension of Stalinism into Eastern Europe, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution and the Colonial Revolutions, the collapse of Stalinism, the neoliberal offensive, the bourgeoisification of the traditional workers parties, and the consequent falling back of consciousness.

79. Based on a generally correct analysis, the CWI was also able to find a road out of isolation, especially in Britain, and build a powerful Marxist trend deeply rooted in the

real movements of the British working class and its organizations: the trade unions and the Labour Party. Out of this the CWI was able to develop a principled Marxist approach to mass work, flexible tactics, united front methods, and a transitional approach.

80. Again, the *Program of the International* spells this out when it said, “The task is at one and the same time to maintain theoretical intransigence with flexibility of tactics in order to get closer to the working class ... We are now thrown back to a position near to our starting point, of small groupings, struggling against the stream of opportunist tendencies. Historically, the Marxist movement has been thrown far back by isolation from the mass movement.”

81. With a decisive change in the world situation following the collapse of Stalinism and the swing to the right in Social Democracy, a crisis opened up in the CWI that resulted in a section of the organization that was unable to adopt to the new situation splitting away to form the International Marxist Tendency (IMT).

A Non-Dogmatic, Living Marxism

82. “Modern Socialism is, in its essence, the direct product of the recognition, on the one hand, of the class antagonisms existing in the society of today between proprietors and non-proprietors, between capitalists and wage-workers; on the other hand, of the anarchy existing in production.” That is the first sentence in [Friedrich Engels’ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*](#).

83. Engels argued every ideological trend has its roots in the shifting material interests within a contradictory social order. He boldly argued that this applies to Marxism itself. Flowing from this, Marx and Engels were

completely opposed to any conception of Marxism as a ready-made dogma to be defended and kept safe in the shrines of great leaders. A living Marxism is a method which seeks to make conscious the real, actual developments of the class struggle. At the same time, real developments in society leave their mark on the organizations claiming to put forward Marxist ideas as well.

84. After 1989, the CWI relatively quickly understood the new world situation and the resulting challenges. (There was a brief episode of talk about the “Red 90s,” once the obstacle of Stalinism had been removed. However, that was corrected.) Faced with a wave of capitalist triumphalism and a collapse in socialist and class consciousness, the task for most of the sections of the CWI and its flagship in Britain changed. Comrades had to swim against the current, raise their own banner, and stand against the attempts of former working-class fighters, comrades, and left leaders to move to the right.

85. This period left its scars on the Marxist movement, including the CWI. For an extended period starting in 1989, the objective situation was generally unfavorable and the CWI was unavoidably isolated. This has contributed to a conservative tendency and elements of a routinist approach of producing increasingly stale propaganda. There is a lack of imagination to boldly address a new generation. **This is visible in the political hesitancy of the CWI toward the new global women's movement and its limited material attempting to clarify a Marxist critique of identity politics within a clear anti-oppression, socialist feminist framework, rather than crude criticisms that remain separated from a real engagement in the struggle against racism, sexism etc.**

86. The CWI has also become increasingly reliant on a small circle of leaders who have been in their positions for decades. Peter

Taaffe has made a huge political contribution to the Trotskyist movement and has been the outstanding leader of the CWI. However, he has tended to dominate the leadership of the CWI in an increasingly unhealthy way. It should be of concern to comrades that he has been the general secretary of the British section for 54 years when for many years it has been clear that others are fully capable of assuming that position.

87. Without a broad layer of politically strong cadre steeped in a democratic culture, a top-down approach has developed in the CWI. On a number of occasions the I.S. has intervened in various sections, not on the basis of principled politics but instead out of narrow organizational considerations arising more out of questions of their prestige. **Unless these weaknesses are openly challenged and corrected, this will lead to a series of upheavals and debates in the CWI in the coming period.**

88. The next historic shift in the world situation made these scars increasingly visible. With the Great Recession in 2007/08, new opportunities for rebuilding the forces of Marxism were put back on the agenda. However, it is also a highly complicated situation given the very low level of consciousness and organization combined with a huge crisis of capitalism, which has quickly confronted the working class with mighty battles and fundamental questions.

89. In our view, on a number of occasions since 2008, the CWI has not been able to fully realize the opportunities to audaciously intervene with principled politics (we will expand on these points in future material). In a situation of a general stagnation of the CWI, the I.S. opportunistically decided to accommodate itself toward the demands of Kshama Sawant out of a desire to keep such a valuable position for the CWI.

90. They also reacted in a defensive fashion against those elements in the U.S. leadership which were prepared to challenge them. They felt uneasy with the bold new tactics that our tendency has developed and shared some of the conservatism of the EC Majority, as shown in the debates around the Sanders tactics.

91. We recognize the huge contribution that the CWI added to the Marxist movement, such as the battles in Liverpool and against the poll tax and the development of a Marxist understanding of a number of key historical developments since World War II. However, it is tragic that exactly at the time of a new uprising against capitalism, when the conditions are opening up for Marxist ideas to have a huge impact, the CWI is being held back by unhealthy methods and political conservatism .

Boldly Turning Toward the New Socialist Movement

92. As we embark on building a Marxist force rooted within the emerging socialist forces in the U.S., we invite SA comrades who agree with our criticisms of the current leadership of SA and the CWI to join us in building a new organization capable of assisting our class in the struggle.

93. We believe that time and events will make increasingly clear the SA leadership bending to opportunistic pressures, and on the other hand it's propagandistic approach. These tendencies will unnecessarily hinder SA's ability to seize opportunities to spread support for Marxism in the living struggles that will emerge. The only way to avoid this is for a democratic renewal that overcomes the bureaucratic methods the current SA leadership has established within SA through the debate that unfolded in 2017 and 2018. We hope that those that remain within SA will continue the struggle to overcome the current

leadership's weaknesses. However, regardless of how these debates unfold in SA, we are fully prepared to work together with SA in a comradely fashion which puts the interests of the broader movement first and foremost.

94. While we have been forced, at least for the coming period, to part ways with Socialist Alternative, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the struggle for a socialist world. This starts with the fight for clarity of Marxist ideas, with building cadre, while also engaging in the debates of a new generation of activists within DSA, the broader Sandernistas, labor, BLM, and the new women's movement.

95. We are proud of the work we achieved in developing SA's analysis and politics over two decades, leading the Sawant election campaigns, 15 Now, and our intervention in the Sanders campaign. More recently we have played central roles as activists in the Seattle education union, building two revolutionary branches in Ohio, and doing important work within a host of other struggles.

96. While the debate within SA has been painful, we look forward with enthusiasm to

taking advantage of the opportunities opening up for the socialist left across the country. We are eager to turn outward and work to develop the forces which can play a part in building a new internationalist, revolutionary, multi-racial working-class party, armed with a Marxist program, to liberate humanity and build a socialist world free of oppression and exploitation.

If you want to read more about how the debate developed, please read the [Minority Introduction to the Internal Debate](#): For Internal Democracy, Principled Mass Work, and the Revolutionary Use of Public Office, from August 20, 2018 and [For a Democratic Debate about Principled Mass Work - Reply to "This Conflict Is About Methods of Leadership"](#) from June 4, 2018.

We also recommend our "Alternative Guide" to the debate that you can find in the [Minority Bulletin #1](#).

Join us! We are launching a new Marxist organization.

Contact us to receive our publications, to talk, or to join.

PrincipledMassWork@gmail.com | (425) 231-9709 (Jeremy Thornes)

Appendix: Response to the EC's Falsehoods about the Regional Debates

Ramy Khalil's email below answers the EC's false claim that we would not attend the pre-convention regional debates. Ramy's email was sent to the national branch committee email list on September 14, but the EC refused to release it and allow members to see our response.

Despite being driven out of SA, we still stand prepared to engage in the regional debates that

were scheduled with all the branches/regions. Please contact Jeremy Thornes at (425) 231-9709 if you'd like to participate in a discussion with us.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Ramy Khalil <ramy2345@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Sep 14, 2018 at 11:41 AM

Subject: The Minority is prepared to participate in

regional debates
To: sa-bc@googlegroups.com

Dear comrades,

In contrast to the false claim by the Executive Committee (EC), the comrades with a minority viewpoint are absolutely prepared to participate in the regional debates. We (the Minority comrades) said we will try to attend in person if we are available and insisted we would attend at the very least by video-conference (Skype).

In Members Bulletin 91, the EC included an introduction full of attacks and distortions about the Minority, too many that we don't have time to respond to them all. But in just one example, the EC writes: "The EC offered to help pay for minority group comrades to fly to every region of the country to debate if they were unable to afford it financially. They have declined to attend any of the debates that are scheduled. This shows disrespect for the ability of our comrades around the country to hear a debate and come to their own conclusions."

Clearly, attending in person would provide for a better debate. But given that Minority comrades would probably not be available to fly around the country for multiple weekends in a row, we committed to attend the debates at the very least by video-conference (Skype). It is truly unacceptable that the EC has resorted to misleading the membership.

Below is the full thread of Gchat messages (all from September 5th) showing what we told the EC not only on this Gchat thread but also on the phone.

Comradely,
Ramy

Ramy wrote:

Hey Kelly,

I discussed the regional debates issue with Minority comrades again. Unfortunately, comrades have a number of constraints tying us down: jobs, childcare, many of us have now unfortunately been

forced to search for new jobs and need to be available for interviews, and a number of comrades are playing important roles in an on-going important union battle. So we cannot commit to attending these debates in person.

We do, however, sincerely propose that we attend by Skype, which we believe is technologically feasible. I've seen it done before. A large screen and speakers can be used to enhance the quality. If branches such as Philly don't want to travel far to a regional debate with someone through Skype, we are happy to work with you and any branch to organize a debate for just that branch via Skype.

Comradely,
Ramy

Kelly replied: OK thanks for getting back to me. This includes the Ohio/Pittsburgh debate as well?

Ramy: Yes

Kelly: Okay, I'll communicate with the branches that the minority will not attend.

Ramy: You mean that we will most likely not attend in person but that we will definitely attend by Skype, right?

Kelly: I'm not sure why you say "most likely not" when you just confirmed with me that you will not attend.

Could you clarify that?

Ramy: If for instance if any/some of us land a job quickly, and no longer need to be available for job interviews, then maybe our schedules would open up to attend some debates in person, rather than just Skype.

Kelly: Sounds like we should plan to you to inform us a few days before the debate in Ohio that you will attend. I guess that's useful to know.