

Discussion Document for the National Committee

Update on the US Political Situation and Our Tasks

By Philip Locker and Stephan Kimmerle

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This document was distributed as a discussion document for the National Committee in Minneapolis on July 8-10, 2017 as a contribution on some of the key political developments in the US and the central organizational challenges facing Socialist Alternative at this time.

The document was not intended to be a rounded out perspectives document that covers all aspects of the situation in the US, but instead focused on elements of the political issues that represented the biggest challenges to our organization at that time: The character of the Trump administration and state of the resistance against it, how we engage in the anti-Trump resistance, how we relate to the Berniecrats, developments with DSA, and our approach to the struggle around healthcare. The document also aimed to stimulate a discussion on the new tasks facing Socialist Alternative in this radically new political situation, our growth to over 1,000 members, a shift in focus towards cadre building and internal political development, and how this fits into our medium term targets.

We have updated the document to incorporate points from the valuable discussion at the NC meeting. In light of the political debate at the NC meeting regarding aspects of the document we have worked to make some of our formulations more precise and elaborated on some points, as is necessary in any living discussion. The document has also been proofread.

In the little over a month since the NC meet in Minneapolis we have seen an intensification of the turmoil and crisis in US politics. Events have continued to move at a rapid pace. These include the far-right rally and terror murder in Charlottesville which has unleashed a powerful wave of outrage against racism and Trump; massive outcry and uproar against Trump's hesitant response and defense of the far-right which has resulted in a growing isolation of Trump from sections of the Republican Party and big business;

the defeat of Trumpcare in the Senate; the ban on transgender people in the military; and the various shakeups and upheavals within the Trump administration. We have not updated the document to take into account these or other developments since the NC as it would have required substantial additions.

The Character of the Trump Regime

- 1.** The character of the Trump administration is in flux, reflecting the intense pressure of contradictory forces. At this point the predominant tendency remains right-wing populism and nationalism, along with a radical agenda of deregulation and tax cuts for the rich and big business. Trump also continues to act in a highly erratic, unbalanced, and bizarre fashion. While this is an expression of his own peculiar psychology it is also fundamentally rooted in his populist "anti-establishment" political approach and is a reflection of his authoritarian and bonapartist inclinations.
- 2.** This is part of an international development: The traditional parties through which the capitalists used to rule are in crisis. Populist forces to the right and new formations on the left are developing. The search for a fundamentally different left alternative was highlighted with Jeremy Corbyn's appeal, especially to young people, which spread the message internationally that we can change the balance of forces if we dare to take a clear anti-corporate and left stand. On the other side, the dangers of the right are also growing as the results for Marine Le Pen in France have shown. But even there, we saw the potential for a new left force around Melancon and the huge working class mobilizations one year ago.
- 3.** The lack of a credible political path forward under capitalism, the anger and disgust at establishment institutions, compels the ruling class to improvise with populist forces and rely on more authoritarian methods.
- 4.** Ten years after the Great Recession capitalism as a world system and its ideological legitimacy have not

recovered. On the contrary, the historic and growing chasm between rich and poor is further undermining the credibility of the system. Inter-imperialist tensions are rising.

5. While Trump is an expression of the relative decline of US imperialism on a world scale, he is also acting as a catalyst which is accelerating this decline. This was graphically displayed with the stunning US isolation at the recent G20 - some called it the "G19" - summit in Hamburg, Germany.

6. In the US, there is a deep and sharp split within the ruling class over Trump. The most rapacious, arrogant, and short-sighted sections have so far supported him. At this stage, the majority of Corporate America has supported or tolerated Trump on the basis of a very narrow-minded enthusiasm for his agenda of tax cuts and deregulation, although doubts are rising about his ability to deliver given a certain governmental paralysis.

7. Trump is relatively independent from broader sections of the ruling class to an unusual degree. The strategists of capitalism have only partially succeeded in bringing Trump to heel through the normal checks and balances of bourgeois politics, the legal system, the capitalist media, scandals and investigations, and stirring up of public opinion against him.

8. This battle over Trump's tendency to assert his own independence from the broader ruling class to pursue his own narrow interests came to a head most clearly with his firing of FBI Director James Comey. This was met with opposition by the majority of the ruling class, the political establishment of the Democratic and Republican parties, the leading strata of the US state machine, and the capitalist media. The result has been an uneasy standoff, with the ruling class firing warning shots but not being prepared to take decisive action to push Trump back. While Trump's position was weakened by this affair, he continues to feel out the limits of how far he can go.

9. The section of the ruling class represented by the Democratic Party is fiercely opposed to Trump for their own political, strategic, and economic reasons. But there have also been important efforts by the Republican establishment to limit the influence of right-wing nationalist/populist figures like Steve Bannon and surround Trump with more reliable advisers for the ruling class like the National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster. McMaster was brought in after the firing of the previous National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who was strongly opposed by the foreign policy and

intelligence establishment for his unbalanced right-wing ideological approach.

10. We have seen the results of this "moderating" influence in Trump's failure to act on his pledge to withdraw from NAFTA. This pressure – along with mass protests from below – has also contributed to ~~is also seen in~~ the defeats and delays in Trump's Muslim Ban (despite the recent, huge concession made by the Supreme Court) and in various obstructions to Trump's promise to build "the wall" on the Mexican border. On immigration, Trump has carried out a more vicious and brutal deportation policy, but has not yet unleashed an all out campaign of mass deportation of millions as he promised.

11. On the other side, Trump's more radical right-wing populist agenda have also found expression on a number of policy fronts. It is seen in his attempts at the Muslim Ban, his blatant pandering to the Religious Right, tearing up the Trans Pacific Partnership, withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, and his flouting of the norms of bourgeois democracy.

No Trump Boom

12. Wall Street's spasm of euphoria following Trump's election appears to be over, increasingly replaced by skepticism over what this administration will actually be able to deliver. Further, the capitalist cycle that started after the Great Recession shows some indications that it is reaching its limits. The depth of the crisis 2007-08 along with the growth of China allowed this cycle to be longer than normal. However, China's slowing growth rate along with mounting debt and unsustainable bubbles point to deep contradictions in the Chinese economy. The low level of interest rates internationally, while partially succeeding in preventing a financial meltdown, has not been able to stimulate significant growth and now limits the ability of the capitalist states to respond to future problems.

13. In the US, the official unemployment rate is very low, but the workforce participation rate has still not reached pre-crisis levels. The accumulation of debt around student loans and credit cards still hangs over the US economy. CEOs indicate a high level of economic confidence, yet corporate investment still remains relatively low.

14. New additional "[k]nee-jerk deregulation [through the Trump administration] is not the only threat to financial stability. It's entirely possible that the system is more fragile than the Fed's stress tests [of banks]

indicate,” warns the editorial board of the *New York Times* (July 3, 2017).

15. New trade tariffs will not help the US economy, but will instead increase the battles between capitalist classes internationally. The outcry by sections of US industry that consume steel against Trump’s populist-nationalist attempts to “defend” American steel production demonstrates how intertwined international production is today. A reactionary nationalist agenda of protectionism will not lead to more wealth, but will undermine in the medium term the economic strength of corporate America as well as negatively impacting working people. At the same time, the consequences of neo-liberal free trade and globalization have led to huge inequality and social tensions which are fueling a rise in protectionist and nationalist sentiments. Marxists need to explain that neither capitalist free trade nor protectionism will benefit the working class, but instead international socialist planning is needed.

16. We cannot predict the exact timing of the next recession. But it is likely that Trump will be confronted with an economic slowdown during his term. At the very least there is no sign that he will fulfill his ambitious pledges for high growth rates and a return of good paying industrial jobs. This will have a further destabilizing effect on Trump’s administration and will be decisive in undermining his popular base.

17. The whole character of the recovery after the Great Recession underlines the rotten character of capitalism today. A tiny elite is getting richer while workers and the poor pay for it. The inability of capitalism to develop the productive forces expresses itself in the remarkable reversal of globalization that has begun to develop as well as sharper tensions between the imperialist powers expressed in proxy wars and deeply unstable international relations. Putting Trump in charge of US imperialism in such a situation is enormously accelerating this emerging disorder.

The State of the Movement against Trump

18. We saw an enormous wave of protest and a growth of organized left and progressive forces in the period from Election Day through the middle of March. The high point of protest so far was the January 21 women’s marches. The mood for bold, fighting tactics, like mass direct action, hit its peak at the end of January and in February with the Airport occupations and the widespread discussion of strike actions.

19. The resistance of millions taking the streets had a significant impact. First and foremost it succeeded in making visible the massive scale of opposition to Trump and gave confidence to people to fight back. Together with the deep divisions in the capitalist class, this resistance was a decisive factor in limiting the billionaire president’s ability to impose his Muslim ban. Mass public opposition and outrage have created huge obstacles for Trump to push through his brutal repeal of Obamacare.

20. The initial wave of struggle succeeded in helping hundreds of thousands of new people get activated and to some extent organized. Maybe the largest organizational expression of this has been in the explosive growth of the liberal “Indivisible” movement. By the beginning of February, less than two months after their start with the publication of the *Indivisible Guide*, more than 3,800 local groups had been formed which were affiliated in some way to the movement. They now claim over 5,800 local groups (with at least 2 in every congressional district).

21. We have also seen a very significant growth of the socialist left, albeit on a much smaller scale. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has grown from around 8,500 on Election Day to over 21,000 as of early May with over 120 local chapters across the country. This represents the largest socialist formation in the U.S. since the 1960s, and it is well positioned to grow further. During this time the number of paid subscribers to the socialist journal *Jacobin* nearly doubled to over 30,000.

22. This explosive growth in organized forces appears to have plateaued around the middle of March, reflecting a certain change in the mood. However, this new layer has learned important lessons from their initial experience and is now better prepared for the coming battles.

23. Following the Women’s March the movement stepped up. The Muslim ban was met with airport actions. A discussion developed around strike action on the days without immigrants in February, International Women’s Day and for May Day. This pointed in the right direction: Using peaceful mass civil disobedience and the collective power of workers as more powerful tools to hit the profits of Trump’s billionaire backers. In April the Tax Day protests, science marches, and the people’s climate march showed again the potential for resistance. The May 1st protests and strikes, while not a breakthrough for the movement, were the largest since 2006.

24. But overall, despite historic protests and growing anger which succeeded in delaying or blocking a number of aspects of Trump's agenda, it remains the case that Trump has not been decisively defeated and is instead still pushing ahead with his reactionary policies. While Trump has failed to implement much of his agenda so far due to the mass resistance and ruling class opposition, he remains a deeply menacing figure who is perceived to be a dramatic threat to wide sections of society. Trump has been able to install Neil Gorsuch on the Supreme Court and to use his executive powers to carry out a number of attacks: a ramping up of repression and deportation of immigrants, a reversal of the limited oversight of police departments under the Obama administration with encouragement of racist and violent policing, a return to more aggressive "war on drugs" and "war on crime" policies, systematic deregulation, significant undermining of the EPA, and withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord. And Trump and the Republican controlled Congress still threaten to attack healthcare and Planned Parenthood, give tax cuts to the rich, etc.

25. This experience has led to a certain understanding in the movement that just protesting is not enough. But the attempts to move towards a higher level of struggle through mass direct action reached their limits for the time being.

26. Instead the dominant tendency, under the influence of the Democratic Party establishment, has been to increasingly look to fight Trump through investigations into various scandals, impeachment, and, most of all, the upcoming 2018 elections. At this point, this represents the "path of least resistance" for the masses to test out.

27. The upcoming 2018 elections will increasingly become the dominant focus of the majority of those looking to fight Trump. This is being seized on by the Democratic Party to divert energy away from building mass struggle.

28. Alongside this have been other changes in the mood of different layers. The feeling of urgency which took hold of wide sections immediately after Trump was elected and inaugurated has cooled down some. This is part of a wider process of people becoming somewhat used to Trump's outrageous actions and policies. We have also seen a weakening of the feeling among a minority of the movement which had exaggerated fears of Trump, calling him a "fascist" and painting the picture of an imminent dictatorship. However, the dominant sentiment among progressive workers and youth is still a

massive anger, fear and disgust at Trump, which is further reinforced by the falling support for Trump overall in society.

29. All of this has resulted, for the moment, in a certain lull in struggle. This is part of the inevitable ebb and flow of any mass movement, which needs at certain conjunctures to pause to catch its breath, digest its experiences, and draw lessons. If the Republicans are able to push through Trumpcare, this would represent a major defeat and could lead to a certain demoralization for a time, further prolonging this lull in struggle.

30. However, this lull is temporary. We do not know exactly when, but there is little doubt that at a certain point we will see new explosions of mass struggle taking various forms.

31. It would be a major mistake to confuse the slowing down of protest with a decline in mass opposition to Trump. In fact, support for Trump continues to fall, though only slowly so far among Republican voters (though opinion polls show a shift from "strong support" to "weak support" for Trump). The degree of public opposition to Trump is unprecedented for any president this early in their term.

32. New twists and turns in the situation are inevitable. The whip of Trump's counter-revolution will provoke new and higher levels of protest, which will hit new limits and be followed by new phases when activists search for a way forward. Inherent in the situation is the danger of the movement reaching a certain impasse, particularly given the inadequacy of its leadership and the low level of organization. This can be triggered by, or allow for, Trump defeating the resistance of certain communities, which can lead to a mood of demoralization for a time.

33. New events, such as terrorist attacks, outbursts of anger in riots, or foreign conflicts, can also undermine the movement and strengthen Trump temporarily. In a situation of political crisis at home it is possible that Trump will look to save himself by starting a war or seizing on a foreign conflict to rally the country around the flag. While this can have a certain impact, it would lay the basis for an even deeper crisis and recoil against Trump sooner rather than later.

34. The movement is faced with overcoming its limitations in the form of its leadership, program, and low level of organization. The struggle of activists with these questions represents a key opening for us. Despite all the obstacles and setbacks, these challenges are

propelling the most advanced activists forward in a molecular process of searching for the necessary [ideas](#) and tools to effectively resist.

35. We need to make sure Socialist Alternative is at the center of these debates in a politically cohesive way, with a bold approach to educate our members to intervene in a principled fashion in these openings, bringing Marxism to a new generation while systematically strengthening our organization.

Upheaval in the Political System

36. The main perspective is one of an on-going crisis and deep polarization of US society. This will unleash new waves of politicization, struggle, and even elements of rebellion [along with the growth of outright reactionary forces](#).

37. The opposition to Trump amongst the capitalist class is a key politicizing factor that inflames protest. His disregard for elementary principles of bourgeois democracy, which the capitalists rely on to keep any administration under their control and serving their overall interests rather than the narrow needs of the president and their clique, fuels increased debate in the media.

38. The rift between Trump and the intelligence agencies and the deep state is very significant. Condensed in the Comey affair, we can see how the bureaucracy of the capitalist state represents conflicting but broader interests of the ruling class as a whole. The attempts by Trump to free himself from some of the checks and balances within the bourgeois state are being met with fierce resistance.

39. While the more farsighted sections of the ruling class were unable to avoid a Trump presidency, they are now working overtime to at least rein him in and surround him with an apparatus that keeps him in check.

40. While there is a growing discussion of impeachment, it is unlikely to happen in the short term. There needs to be more disillusionment amongst Trump's base before the GOP in Congress could move in that direction, [and/or](#) a far greater political rebellion within the US to force the hand of the ruling class. However, the representatives of the bourgeois are clearly dangling a sword over Trump's head in the form of Russia, obstruction of justice, or potentially other scandals, to have at their disposal if they decide to remove Trump to protect the interests of their system.

41. For working people these battles within the ruling elite make the dishonest methods of capitalist rule, the cronyism, corruption, backstabbing, and house of cards methods even more visible. Whenever Trump leaves the White House he will leave more anger and disgust at the whole system behind in the minds of workers and young people. [The splits at the top of society undermine the legitimacy of the ruling class as a whole, which encourages the middle class and working class to question Trump and the system as well.](#)

42. While we recognize that impeachment is not immediately posed, the issue is worth examining for a number of reasons. It is very likely the issue will arise again at a number of points, and we need our forces to be politically prepared with how we should respond especially given the confusion and ultra-left attitudes towards it among some on the far left. Further, from the point of view of method, the issue is useful to explore in clarifying our overall approach towards the anti-Trump movement and the Democrats within it.

43. While the Democratic Party leadership wants to use the question of impeachment as a tool to divert energy away from building a mass movement, Marxists can and should seize on these developments to drive a wedge between left-wing workers and their Democratic Party (mis)leaders, while utilizing the mood for impeachment to agitate for mass protests and organizing from below to drive out Trump.

44. We want to see Trump driven from office. This can take various forms. From a socialist standpoint, the ideal way would be through a mass revolt that forces Trump to resign. But in most people's minds, impeachment is the [most common](#) symbol [associated with](#) bringing down Trump. As we have said repeatedly in our material and discussions, we demand the Democrats in Congress do everything in their power to fight Trump. Impeachment is one of the more powerful tools at their disposal.

45. There is a strong mood to see Trump brought down, and the vast majority of progressives want the Democrats in Congress to move to impeach Trump. We should seize on this to highlight the chasm between their desires and the timidity of the Democrats and the establishment who are hesitant to wage an all-out war against Trump, including dragging their feet on beginning a serious campaign to remove Trump through impeachment.

46. As Philip and Tom wrote in their contribution to the February NC (published in Members Bulletin #86) in

the section *Demanding the Democrats Fight Trump*: “We should participate in such efforts [of the base of the Democrats demanding determined efforts against Trump] and support demands for the Democrats to delay, obstruct, and block Trump’s right-wing agenda. Given the conservative, cowardly, compromising outlook which dominates the psychology and ideology of the Democratic establishment, such an approach will not come naturally to them. Instead they will need to be pushed into taking such a confrontational stance by the pressure of a powerful left-wing movement from below (though ruling-class opposition to Trump can also push the Democrats into adopting a firmer oppositional stance). Throughout this we will need to continually but patiently help the best workers and youth draw the conclusion that there can be no trust in the Democratic Party and a new party is needed, one that is 100% part of the resistance to Trump and the Billionaire Class.”

47. Our position is: there should be no trust or reliance in the establishment, [including the Democratic Party establishment](#), to fight Trump but instead we must build our own independent strength in struggle. Flowing from this, we argue for building a massive movement [from below](#) to drive Trump from office, which is the best way to compel the Democrats, and later even a section of Republicans, to begin serious efforts to impeach Trump.

48. To the extent the Democrats move to begin a serious fight to impeach Trump, we will welcome it, while explaining this reflects the pressure from below and that rather than trusting the Democratic politicians, we must redouble that pressure from below by stepping up and strengthening our movements.

49. Again as Philip and Tom wrote in February “To the degree the Democrats put up resistance to Trump, we will welcome it, while explaining that this is contrary to their political orientation but was the result of the pressure of the movement from below, which demonstrates the need to not rely on them but instead build up the independent power of working people. Furthermore, we will explain that it is not enough for left Democrats to vote the correct way, but that they should use their position to actively help publicize and organize for mass protests and actions that will build the movement against Trump. Throughout this process we can explain we need an opposition party that is actively part of leading the struggle against Trump and the billionaires, not one that is compromised and needs to be dragged into struggle.”

Divisions in the Democratic Party

50. Both parties are in serious turmoil. The two party system is steadily being undermined and could see serious challenges in the coming period from the left and the right.

51. However, the political search for a left alternative to the right-wing Republicans and the Wall Street Democrats is more complicated in the age of Trump than it was when the Democrats controlled the White House. Nevertheless, it still is an important tendency which continues to plow ahead, though at this stage in a more subterranean, disguised fashion. Only 38% of people think that Trump is “in touch with the concerns of most people.” But in a striking display of the overall crisis of legitimacy of establishment politics, the GOP with 32% and the Democrats with 28%, have even lower numbers than Trump (*Washington Post*, April 23, 2017).

52. In the movements the consciousness of the majority is towards trying to reform the Democratic Party, but among many it is without much enthusiasm. As we have explained in previous material, there is a deep anger, even hatred, for the pro-corporate leaders of the Democratic Party among this layer.

53. Nevertheless, the dominant tendency at this stage is for this mood to be channeled not in the direction of beginning to build a new political party, but instead towards fighting the corporate leaders of the Democratic Party by working to take over the Party along the lines of Bernie Sanders strategy, a “tea party of the left.” It will take further events for these illusions to be shattered and the necessary steps taken [to build a powerful mass left populist or working class political alternative to the Democrats](#). But the deep skepticism that already underlies the sentiment towards reforming the Democrats is a powerful indication to the future storms being prepared.

54. With each of the four major special Congressional elections this year being lost by the Democrats (while not in friendly territory for them), the deep divisions within the Democratic Party broke out into the open. This is part of a furious debate over how to win the coming midterm elections. Berniercrats are pushing for a shift to the left, while the leadership of the Party is trying to hold them back. The corporate leadership is standing firm and has kept Nancy Pelosi (so far) in place. But in their struggle against the Sanders wing the establishment has been forced to use their left face, like former labor secretary Tom Perez, who narrowly won the DNC chair against Keith Ellison.

55. The perspective put forward in Philip and Tom's contribution to the February NC is being confirmed by events. They wrote "So far, mainstream Democrats have avoided a split by bending somewhat to the pressure from their base and Sanders, while maintaining control of the party's main levers of power. [It is] highly unlikely that the left will succeed in seriously changing the underlying character of the Democratic Party or in rallying substantial forces for an organized left-wing split in the short term. Far more likely is that there will be a lot of new energy in and around the Democrats that will push it to adopt a stronger oppositional stance towards Trump, and in a more left-wing direction in general, but will not succeed in fundamentally dislodging the pro-corporate leadership of the party."

56. Events have also confirmed our diagnosis from the February NC that on the basis of the experience of the post-2011 struggles and the Sanders campaign, combined with the radicalization taking place in the struggle against Trump, there is an important minority that could be won now to joining a new, radical left-wing or socialist party. The pressure in this direction was indicated by RoseAnn DeMoro, Executive Director of National Nurses United, in her support at the People's Summit for Sanders to launch a new People's Party. Unfortunately, it appears DeMoro's support remains rhetorical at this stage. Nevertheless, it is a pointer to the coming upheavals that will result in steps towards building a new left party.

57. We have argued that the scope for such a development would depend on the authority of the leading elements who establish it. If Sanders were prepared to launch a "People's Party" - which he is not currently - hundreds of thousands of members could be signed up. But even under this most favorable scenario, such a "People's Party" would still likely be in the minority and would need to orient towards and maintain a dialogue with the genuine workers and youth who would still need to go through further experiences to draw the conclusion that a break from the Democrats is needed rather than supporting left Democrats.

58. More concretely given Sanders' political attachment to reforming the Democrats, the space currently exists for a broad Socialist Party of 50,000 to 100,000 members if DSA were prepared to boldly take the lead, along with us and working with other forces. While this would not be a mass workers party, it would represent an important step forward by bringing together an important section of the most left-wing workers and youth into a common radical left party.

Indications of this potential is shown in the growth of DSA from 8,500 to 21,000 members since Trump's election, the 42,000 who have signed the petition demanding Sanders launch a "People's Party," and the support that DSA, SA, and independent left candidates have received in local elections this year.

59. We have also seen some significant, though limited, successes of left wing candidates within the Democrats.¹

Democratic Socialists of America

60. Particularly noteworthy for us is the success of some DSA members running for local office. More than a dozen DSA members now serve in local posts across the country (John Nichols, [The Nation, 4/20/2017](#)). As far as we can tell, none of these have been elected as independent candidates, either running as Democrats or not explicitly addressing the issue when standing in "nonpartisan" races.

- 1 John Nichols summarized these developments in a recent article in [The Nation](#) ("[A Progressive Electoral Wave Is Sweeping the Country](#)," 6/15/2017):
 - a. Chokwe Lumumba was elected Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi's largest city, with 93% of the vote in a general election that drew one of the highest turnouts the city has seen in years. Lumumba won 55% of the vote in a Democratic primary that saw him oust the centrist incumbent mayor.
 - b. On May 16 the veteran civil-rights lawyer Lawrence Krasner won the Democratic primary for Philadelphia district attorney. Krasner, who had defended Occupy Philadelphia and Black Lives Matter protesters, beat a crowded field of contenders with a campaign that promised progressive criminal-justice reform.
 - c. In St. Louis on April 4 Natalie Vowell won a citywide school-board seat with "an intersectional campaign that focused not just on education policy but addressed the housing, employment, and criminal-justice issues that often determine whether students succeed. A Sanders delegate to the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Vowell promised to 'empower parents across the economic spectrum and stop equating poverty with apathy.'"
 - d. "In Scott Walker's Wisconsin, April voting saw Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers win a statewide nonpartisan race after being targeted by conservative backers of the 'school choice' schemes ... Evers won 70 percent of the vote in a state that narrowly backed Trump last fall."
 - e. In New York another 2016 Sanders delegate, Christine Pellegrino, was elected with 58% of the vote in a district that gave Trump a 23-point edge last November. Pellegrino, an elementary-school teacher and union activist, "ran an edgy anti corruption campaign that recognized the mood among voters frustrated with both major parties."

61. The most prominent of these has been Khalid Kamau who was elected on April 18 with 67% of the vote to the City Council of South Fulton, Georgia. Khalid highlighted his experience as a BLM and Fight for 15 organizer and was also a Sanders delegate at last year's Democratic National Convention.

62. Another victory for DSA was the election of Dylan Parker, a 28-year-old diesel mechanic, to the City Council of Rock Island, Illinois, a city of 39,000 people. His campaign called for universal high-speed Internet access and expanding Rock Island's publicly owned hydroelectric power plant. Parker won 68% of the vote on April 4. (John Nichols, *The Nation*, 4/20/2017)

63. Unfortunately, it appears that neither Kamau nor Parker's campaigns had a very visible socialist profile. Further, their programs were relatively limited.²

64. But the key question now for DSA and their representatives will be: how will they use these elected positions? Will they boldly use them as platforms to build movements and lead struggles? Fight for bold, left-wing policies? Help spread and build a left-wing insurgency against corporate Democrats which builds towards a new party of working people? Use their position to popularize socialism? Such an approach will require standing against the ferocious opportunist and careerist pressures of capitalist society, the leaders of the labor and progressive movements, and the low level of mass consciousness of their own voters.

65. As far as we can see, unfortunately, this has not been the spirit employed by these campaigns so far and is not the instinct of the DSA leaders. However, these individuals will be tested and pushed in all kinds of directions under different pressures from above and from below. Our example of how to use a council position can play, and is playing, a certain role in helping people to see what is possible.

66. Nina Turner taking over the presidency of Sanders' Our Revolution could point to an important

² It is interesting to note after being elected Parker announced he would donate all \$6,000 of his salary as an Alderman to "non-profits and organizations benefiting Rock Island. While his contribution will be a negligible amount with respect to the funding necessary to provide the services and desires of the citizens of Rock Island, Alderman Parker recognizes the need for citizens to step forward, participate in the public arena and commit some personal dedication to building a stronger, healthier and livable community." While an excellent step, Parker poses this more in a liberal fashion than the class struggle, socialist way we raise the question of a worker's wage and donating the surplus towards building movements.

shift in Our Revolution. However, it is significant that DSA and not Our Revolution developed into the main force to express the aspirations of the Sandernistas as a broad organization with democratic rights of members and a socialist profile.

67. DSA is the most visible expression at this time of the search for a radical alternative and for a socialist force. While still a small organization in a country of 325 million people, it represents an important early indication of new formations developing. Its growth is particularly notable as it expresses the growth in workers and youth joining the socialist movement. While far from a mass force, DSA's growth is significant given the vacuum on the left of organized membership organizations and relative to the tiny size of forces in the US who identify as socialist over the past period and historically.

68. DSA is now the biggest organization calling itself socialist since the 1960s, and the third largest in US history. However, it is far weaker than the pre-WWI Socialist Party or the Communist Party in the 1930s and 40s not just in membership size, but also in its much weaker political program, and dramatically less social weight and roots in the working class. While an important layer of union activists and workers have joined DSA, it is so far dominated by white collar workers, college educated youth, and more middle class elements. Its members are largely new to activism and are not deeply rooted in the working class or in various social movements, as big sections of the early SP and CP were. Given the very new political character of the forces joining DSA, and its lack of a mass base, its perspectives at this stage for the medium term are very open as it could evolve in all sorts of different directions in response to big events.

69. As outlined in our materials, we welcome a new generation searching for socialist ideas getting organized in a broader organization like DSA. What does this mean? We welcome the tens of thousands of young people and workers who have decided they are socialists and want to get active in a socialist organization. This is an important step forward and represents a progressive development. At the same time we believe that the politics of the DSA leaders are not adequate for the task of rebuilding a politically principled socialist movement. These political limitations, including the limitations of DSA's left leaders, are already a relative obstacle to DSA seizing the full potential to build the socialist movement and wider workers struggles today, and if not overcome DSA's reformist politics will at a certain stage emerge as

a decisive obstacle for these newly developing socialists to move forward. But at this stage, it is correct to emphasize the progressive features in this phenomenon, while maintaining an independent Marxist position and warning, in a friendly and patient manner, of the political limitations of DSA. We want to work with DSA, and Our Revolution where it has an active life, to help these new forces draw the necessary political conclusions from the fight backs against Trump and the billionaire class. We want to work with them and their organizations, DSA and others like Our Revolution where it has an active life, to help them and the movements to draw political conclusions from joint fightbacks against Trump and the billionaire class.

70. While DSA is a broad organization in flux and with a wide variety of political outlooks within it, the dominant approach is towards a left-wing, social democratic (in the sense of social democracy in the post-war period before the collapse of Stalinism), reformist policy. However, this political approach is fundamentally insufficient to achieve the far reaching change in society many of those newly joining the socialist movement want. In contrast, to build the socialist movement on principled foundations, to avoid the mistakes that have dominated the previous mass left formations, a consistent Marxist, revolutionary theory, program, and methods will be needed. We wish to work with the new forces organizing around DSA to win a section of them to Marxist politics to build such a force while collaborating with others to build broader fighting formations of workers and youth that include other non-revolutionary tendencies.

71. While the leading layer of DSA has a left-wing, social democratic, reformist approach, the character of the new forces joining DSA is quite mixed and not yet fully settled. The dominant character at this point is their low political level, their lack of experience, and confusion on various issues. This is not an attack on the new people joining DSA, but is a reflection of the low starting point of almost all workers and youth who are being politicized in this period. Any left force that would grow explosively at this point in time, including ourselves, would have to deal with the same dynamic. What is most important at this stage is that this layer has taken a big step forward, identifying as socialist, drawing the conclusion that they need to active and organized, that many of them have committed themselves to building a socialist movement. At the same time, this new socialist layer is quite political undeveloped, which we need to be alive to and work to

educate in Marxism in a patient and non-sectarian manner.

72. There is a wide range of evolving political outlooks, some contradictory with each other, within this layer joining DSA. This ranges from left-liberalism, reformism, anarchism, utopian socialism, left-wing identity politics, as well as those who describe themselves as Maoists, Marxist-Leninists, Marxists and Trotskyists. In this environment of widespread confusion and a low level of political understanding, ultra-left moods and views can gain widespread support at the same time opportunist and reformist positions are also adopted. It will take time, experience, political debate, and the conscious intervention of Marxists, for these new forces to learn further lessons and politically develop a deeper understanding of capitalism, class struggle, socialist politics, and Marxist theory. Of course, big sections of these new forces can be miseducated by the various leading political trends in DSA and on the broader left. That is why it is incumbent on us to search for every possible opportunity to work together with the new layers joining DSA and engage in a comradely political discussion and debate with the aim of spreading Marxist politics and combating the false political approach of various dominant trends on the left.

73. The potential exists for DSA to grow towards 30,000 or even 50,000 members in the next period. To fully seize on this DSA needs to overcome a certain lack of ambition within their leadership, which flows from their politics: their lack of systematically and consciously developing perspectives to identify the opportunities and understand the processes at work. In addition, DSA's development is also limited by the anxious approach of some of its leaders who fear that by taking bold initiatives they will "lose control."

74. At DSA's upcoming August convention their left wing, much of which considers itself to be Marxist and who has all the momentum on its side, will have a big opportunity to help shape the direction of DSA. A consistently Marxist tendency in DSA should be fighting for the leadership of DSA on the basis of movement building and a class struggle approach, socialist policies, a systematic approach to educating their new members in the ideas and methods of Marxism, and adopting an internationalist working class policy which would include leaving the pro-capitalist Second International. Unfortunately, the leaders of the left wing of DSA do not appear, from what we can see from outside of DSA, to share this approach and are not fully grasping these opportunities. While generally supporting the left-wing

of DSA when they fight against the right-wing of DSA, we recognize that the left-wing leaders, even those claiming to be Marxists, also tend to act in a reformist fashion, though with a more radical approach than the right-wing. But it is also clear that the dynamic of the new forces entering DSA, and big events, could push them much further down this road to the left at a certain stage.

75. However, being pushed to the left in response to big events would likely mean responding in an empirical and pragmatic fashion (though it is possible for left leaders to develop as conscious Marxists in response to events if they can make a qualitative programmatic and theoretical breakthrough in their politics). History and experience have shown such a pragmatic approach, even if well meaning, is a serious political liability for left leaders to respond empirically and pragmatically to developments. Instead, the central lesson of Lenin and Trotsky is that conscious Marxist policies and strategies are needed which are systematically campaigned for in preparation for great events. Given the pressure of capitalist ideologies, particularly various reformist and left outlooks, this is best arrived at through a collective exchange of experience and democratic debate among conscious revolutionaries. This poses the need for revolutionaries to come together in an organized way, i.e. a revolutionary tendency, organization, or party depending on its stage of development. Unfortunately, this is not the approach of the leaders of the left in DSA.

76. The newly developing political discussions and debate among a broader left milieu is extremely welcome. Thousands are now following debates on the left - and we are more than confident that our ideas can find a big echo within them.

77. The recent New York Times op-ed on the legacy of the Russian Revolution by Bhaskar Sunkara, the editor of *Jacobin* and a leading figure on the left of DSA, is an example of the growing audience and discussion about socialist politics. While his article helps to popularize left politics and legitimize a discussion on socialism, he takes a very unclear position on the Russian Revolution by leaving the door wide open to the idea that it led to Stalinism. His article also puts forward a limited, reformist vision of socialism as a form of radical democracy rather than a fundamental transformation of society which includes bringing the commanding heights of the economy into public ownership and new, mass, democratic institutions which would allow workers and the oppressed to decisively end the rule of the capitalists and instead run society on their own.

78. There is a potential for a new, broad, democratic Socialist Party which is currently most clearly expressed in the growth of DSA. How far this development will go within the DSA remains to be seen. Our political differences with DSA include their hesitancy to break with the Democrats but goes much beyond that. We seek to have an open discussion with DSA and especially the left of the DSA about the need for working towards a broad, membership-based, left-wing party as an alternative to the Democrats, but also about what socialism actually means, how to break the power of corporate America, the need to take the top 500 companies under democratic public ownership, building a socialist movement based on movements of the working class rather than an electoralist outlook, international and historical questions, the need for a revolutionary party, and more.

BLM and Labor

79. The Black Lives Matter movement, which was the most dynamic struggle taking place in the US since its emergence in the summer of 2014, has been thrown back by Trump's victory in November. But already before Trump was elected the BLM movement was struggling. As we outlined in other material, this reflected its weaknesses in terms of a lack of political clarity, organization and clear proposals for next steps to advance the struggle. BLM also was not able to successfully mobilize large sections of the black working class. These elements of crisis in BLM pushed some forward to give better answers. We welcomed the discussions around the program of the Movement for Black Lives in 2016, despite its political weaknesses, while also highlighting the need for coordinated action and organization.

80. However, with the election of Trump, the Black Lives Matter movement lost some more of its dynamism. The strategy to put pressure on elected officials always had serious limitations. But this strategy appeared more promising under Obama than under the new Trump regime, with the racist Jeff Sessions in charge of the Department of Justice. Within BLM there is This reflects a certain political demoralization regarding Trump's election and a lack of clarity on how to move forward under these new conditions. It also expresses a feeling that continuing to protest is not enough and new ways of fighting are needed, a mood that was growing within BLM before the election of Trump. This has resulted in a limited development towards BLM activists running for political office, mainly under the banner of the

Democratic Party, but with some notable exceptions especially Nikkita Oliver's People's Party campaign for Mayor in Seattle.

81. The new campaign being led by Reverend Barber is important to follow and could open up important new vistas. Developments in the south could spark new impulses for the movement to reignite.

82. Labor's decline continues, with passivity and even collaboration with Trump. The "Friedrichs case," the threat of "right to work for less" for public sector workers through the Supreme Court is coming back, just under new names (Yohn v. California Teachers Association and Janus v. AFSCME). This Supreme Court Case could deal a major blow to the public sector unions, one of labor's last strongholds.

83. However, important spots of resistance do exist. The most dynamic forces are firstly the NNU and to a lesser extent CWA. There are also signs of life in some teacher's locals and a more fighting leadership in ATU. Most important is the search for working class methods of struggle with strikes and job actions with the discussion about anti-Trump strikes on March 8 and May 1. This points towards the potential for rebuilding a broad workers movement in an explosive fashion in the coming period, though quite possibly in new forms that will not simply be contained within the narrow confines of the existing union structures.

84. This document is not able to fully deal with the developments in BLM, labor and other social movements (such as the fight against sexism, the LGBT movement, and the environmental movement). We have tried to briefly highlight here the most important trends in BLM and labor that relates to and will impact other battles that we touch on in more depth throughout this document. Other material will be needed to analyze these movements in more depth.

The Struggle against Trumpcare, the Fight for Medicare for All, and Our Approach

85. Millions are terrified about the plans that Trump and the GOP are putting forward to replace Obamacare. With the failure, so far, of the Senate to pass Trumpcare, Trump even raised the idea of repealing before replacing. That would trigger an even bigger outcry. Regardless, the issue of healthcare has a huge potential to undermine Trump's support among his base.

86. Trumpcare represents the most reactionary attack on working people in the US in decades. It would

carry out an enormous transfer of wealth away from poor and working people to the super-rich, while barbarically throwing tens of millions off of healthcare.

87. This is a reminder of how incorrect much of the far left was in 2016 in insisting that there was no difference between Trump and Clinton or the Republicans and Democrats. The issue of healthcare sharply illustrates the reality that the Democratic policy of Obamacare is a "lesser evil" compared to Trumpcare. Recognizing this did not prevent us in any way from arguing against the dead-end of supporting the Democratic Party and instead for a vote for Jill Stein; in fact, it allowed us to win more support for this position.

88. We explained that the severe limitations of the market-based Obamacare policy (echoing RomneyCare in Massachusetts) opened the door to the Republicans to gain a popular echo with their attacks, as millions faced rising healthcare costs and an undermining of high-quality union healthcare plans, with a policy that still failed to achieve universal coverage and maintains the enormously wasteful and expensive for-profit healthcare system. That is why the best way to answer the Republican attacks is a Medicare for All socialized healthcare system that would provide universal and better healthcare at a reduced cost. And even more, it is actually a more politically popular position than Obamacare!

89. Following the Republican victories in the 2016 election, the repeal of Obamacare and replacing it with Trumpcare was the number one item on their political agenda. Despite controlling the White House, Congress and the Senate, this has been met with huge obstacles. So far it was more the mood of widespread public opposition than an organized movement that stopped the Republicans from moving forward, although the continual protests at town hall meetings and occupations of Congressional offices did have an important impact.

90. The Democrats are strongly opposed to Trumpcare and are using the mass media and other avenues to raise public awareness against it. Progressive groups tied to the Democratic Party have successfully mobilized for angry town halls and have flooded Republican Congress members with an avalanche of phone calls and letters. But with a few exceptions, there was no lead given to mobilize this anger into a mass struggle from below.

91. In this situation, our material and interventions need to start with opposing the Republican attack on healthcare. We want to defeat Trumpcare and we have

the best ideas for how to build a movement that can stop it. That Aiming our fire first and foremost at Trump and the Republicans is sometimes counterintuitive, given to the anger amongst our members towards the Democratic Party. But this is an important tactic, given that most progressive workers and youth are angry primarily at Trump, and they are less angry at the Democratic Party. This approach will best allow us to reach workers and youth with our politics, including the vital need for working people to organize independently of big business in their own movements and with their own political party.

92. Most people and even activists do not have a clear consciousness of what a serious, working class opposition to Trump in Congress and on the streets could do. There is a limited understanding of the potential to get organized and build a lasting movement. Confronted with the attacks by Trump, even Chuck Schumer manages to sound like a strong opponent of Trump to the untrained ears of some people who fear losing their healthcare.

93. We should explain a fighting strategy would be to organize national days of action which build towards a million person march on Washington DC, mass occupations of Republicans' offices and even a mass occupation of Congress itself, as well as strike action starting with unionized health care workers. In this context we should criticize the Democrats' refusal to take such steps and the hostility of the Democratic establishment towards Medicare for All. When they are in charge, like in New York or California, their machine kills the best defense we have against Trump: Mobilizing people to stop the attacks and to win single-payer in their states.

94. But we should also - in solidarity and very friendly in tone, but clear in content - criticize the failure of the labor and progressive organizations like Planned Parenthood, along with Sanders and Our Revolution, to organize an all-out campaign of mass struggle (though of all these groups, Sanders has done the most with his constant media appearances which include advocating for Medicare for All, his tour of a number of "red" states, and organizing protests in January and February).

95. On the other side, there is a huge opening to demand what is needed. As the *Washington Post* said "the biggest winner in the current health-care debate: Single-payer" (July 1, 2017). "Polling has shown government-provided healthcare to be a very popular notion among Americans. Depending on whether it's

described as a public option, Medicare for all, or federally funded universal health care, proposals are supported by 57 to 61 percent of Americans, compared with only 19 to 24 percent opposed." (*Seattle Times*, June 27, 2017)

96. While having been an annual ritual for left Democrats to move Single Payer forward at the state level or in the Congress without much of a fight, this year real momentum developed. The DSA door-knocked in California together with an enthusiastic campaign by the NNU. NY saw a real debate and anger when conservative Democrats blocked it.

97. Reflecting this pressure, Democratic Senators Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand have publicly come out in favor of Medicare for All and added to the momentum. "In the House, 112 of the 193 Democrats have cosponsored a singlepayer bill proposed by Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan and called the 'Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act.' Until recently, the bill had attracted a fraction of that support." (*New York Times*, 6/3/2017)

98. While left Democrats are seen as promoting and even campaigning for Medicare for All, corporate Democrats are seen as killing the bills where they are needed to shield the insurance and pharmaceutical companies.

99. We absolutely should expose the role of the Democratic Party and there are important opportunities to argue for independent candidates, independent of corporate cash and independent of the corporate Democratic Party, and for a new party to replace those in power who get in the way of Medicare for All.

100. However, we need to be careful to not come across like we are saying the struggle against Trumpcare or for Medicare for All needs to wait until we have a new party. We can and should offer ideas for how to build a real grassroots movement now, when the question of the development of a mass political alternative is not yet seen in the movement as an issue that will be solved very soon.

101. We support mobilizing people to call their representatives in Congress, but we do not agree with limiting the struggle to this. Instead, we use it as a step towards getting people actively engaged in community action groups, in unions taking a bold stand, and in an organized movement.

102. We want to call out the rotten capitalist system, where healthcare is organized for profit and argue to take

the insurance, pharmaceutical, and medical device companies and hospitals under democratic, public ownership as a step toward a socialist society. At this point in the movement we can open a dialogue with a wide section of activists on these far reaching proposals.

We are used to thinking it is easier to win workers to the idea of a new party than to the idea of fighting for socialism. But in this situation we can actually win a wider layer of workers to a socialist vision of socialized healthcare on the basis of bold anti-capitalist agitation than if we started with the question of breaking from the Democrats. But we don't stop with socialized medicine. We should pose the question what kind of party is needed to win it? The Democratic Party is the second most pro-capitalist party in the world. To abolish the private, for-profit insurance and healthcare companies will require building our own mass political party which fights the big healthcare companies and their system of capitalism, a party which is democratically run by its members, and bases itself on determined social struggle.

On this basis, a critique of the Democrats from us will be sharper, because it will be better understood than if we appear to lecture the movement from outside about a general truth of Marxism, that the Democratic Party is a capitalist party and working people need our own party.

103. Naomi Klein's new book, *No is Not Enough*, speaks to a broader sentiment. Klein identifies a radical truth, that more and more people in practice acknowledge, that even if we block Trump on each and every occasion, "the political conditions that produced [Trump's victory] and which are producing replicas around the world, will remain to be confronted." The new momentum behind the demand for Medicare for All is only one indicator of this. We need to re-think our demands, engage in a understanding way with the movements and help them use the strength of radical demands to overcome their weaknesses which lie in the lack of clarity about working class mobilization, independent organization, a break from the Democratic Party, and the need for a rounded out socialist program.

104. The struggle for healthcare will remain, with some ups and downs, a huge feature in US politics over the next year and beyond. The lessons for our approach that we can draw out today will also help us in many other fields of struggle.

Addressing Left Efforts to Reform the Democratic Party

105. The battle to defeat the Republicans' barbaric assault on healthcare poses very sharply the question of

how we address the issue of the Democratic Party in the new political situation with Donald Trump as President and the growth of left-wing efforts to transform the Democratic Party under the leadership of Bernie Sanders.

106. Our National Committee in February had an important discussion on this that made a number of significant points. We think it's useful to quote some of the key passages from Philip and Tom's contribution to that discussion that summarizes a number of the central points.

107. "We do not place our opposition to the Democratic Party against the needs of the movement. Instead, basing ourselves on the experience and tasks of the movement, we draw out the necessary lessons about the pro-capitalist, anti-worker character of the Democratic Party and the need for a new political force that is 100% against Trump and the billionaire class. To the extent that the Democrats fail to take the necessary measures to fight Trump in Congress, we will criticize them for it, pointing out that this flows from their conservative outlook and ties to big business and that we need to rely instead on building a massive movement from below and a new party which is consistently against Trump and can help lead the struggle."

108. And further: "In this new situation, it will not be adequate for us to simply rely on repeating our position that the Democratic Party is a big business party, the left should break from it and begin building a new party. This is still our view, but how do we pose things in these new circumstances? We should explain that in our view, the strategic task facing working people on the political plane is to build their own independent power by forming a broad, membership-based, left-wing party with a clear anti-corporate program that helps to unite and lead struggles and runs in elections."

109. We went on to explain that we should engage with genuine elements fighting to transform the Democratic Party into a "people's party" by putting forward that we think to achieve this would require an all out struggle to a) cut off all donations from corporations and the super-rich to the Democratic Party and its candidates; b) adopt a thoroughly anti-corporate left platform that elected officials must vote in accordance with or else lose the party's support and endorsement; and c) that the party is opened up for mass membership involvement and democratic control. We go on to explain that such a struggle would be met by an all-out resistance by the pro-corporate Democrats, inevitably leading to a

split and the emergence of a new party if the left stuck to its position.

110. We also summed up the underlying method we should use in this new situation: *“Our approach should be to ‘march separately’ – to put forward our own independent socialist policies and under our own independent Socialist Alternative banner – while ‘striking together’ against Trump; and within that, striking together with left Democrats like Sanders against the corporate Democrats. At each stage we will point out the political inadequacy of the corporate Democrats as well as the left Democrats and other left forces, drawing out the need for clear socialist policies.”*

111. “In this sense, our previous terminology of ‘building a movement independent of the Democratic Party’ is somewhat outdated in the current situation. We will need to find new ways to express the same idea but in way that reflects the current conditions. We can explain that the movement against Trump should not restrict itself to the limits of what the corporate Democrats are willing to accept but instead will be able to mobilize much greater support by putting forward bold demands like Medicare for All, etc.”

Historic Opportunity to Build SA Requires a Focus on Cadre Building

112. At present we see the biggest opportunities in the US since the 1970s to build the socialist movement and a distinct Marxist force. Socialist Alternative must do everything possible, and more, to seize this opening!

113. Trotskyists in the US can for the first time in a long period overcome some of our relative isolation. We can move over the next few years to 2,000 or even 5,000 members while developing serious roots in certain cities, among strategic sections of the working class, and within some unions. With the current battles and movements, there is a special opening to win more women and people of color.

114. While this is objectively possible, subjectively the immediate tasks facing Socialist Alternative are different. Our main task at this point of time is not recruitment. To be able to grow to 2,000 and then 3,000 members it is first necessary to make a qualitative breakthrough in the political development of the organization and the crystallization of a new layer of cadre.

115. This is not a formula for all times and places, but reflects the concrete stage of development of our organization at this particular conjuncture. In the past

we needed to continually argue against a tendency towards a conservative approach to recruitment and party building and in favor of a relatively in-the-hesitation-of-some-in-our-ranks-towards-an-“open door” policy towards recruitment. This was absolutely needed at that time. However, over the past 3.5 years our organization has grown from 250 to over 1,000 members and spread to many new parts of the country. Following Trump’s election we grew rapidly from around 850 members to almost 1,100.

116. The objective space to grow still exists. What has changed is that in a politically new and challenging situation, which our organization is struggling to adjust to, the internal balance between our cadre and newer members has now been stretched to the maximum. To go forward, we will need some time to politically educate the new forces which have joined and develop a wider layer of cadre. While reading books and discussions are necessary for political education, they are not sufficient. Most of all, it requires gaining experience dealing with the real challenges building movements and a Marxist approach of how to engage with working people searching for a way forward.

Re-evaluation of our Re-launch & A More Selective Approach to Recruitment

117. With Trump's election a number of our plans as outlined in our May 2016 National Convention needed to be reviewed.

118. We were very well positioned among Bernie Sanders supporters and aimed to tap into the space for a “New Socialist Party” with our planned re-launch. We were moving forward with a bold approach to present our organization to a new layer of Sandernistas, which was linked to ambitious targets for recruitment. That was the correct approach under those circumstances.

119. However, the objective situation changed sharply in November. Our re-launch would have been a distraction from the urgent need to re-orient the organization towards the resistance against Trump and taking the time to have internal discussions to be able to come to terms with a radically altered political terrain.

120. Further, DSA emerged as a significant force with the potential to absorb a broader layer that we could not just include in our organization without losing our character as a distinct Marxist force. In this new situation we now use the slogan of a “New Socialist Party” to call for DSA to launch a broad, multi-tendency Socialist Party that can grow to 50,000 to 100,000

members rapidly. Such a new Socialist Party would not be a mass workers party, nor would it be a revolutionary party. But it would represent an important step forward by bringing together a significant section of the most left-wing workers and youth into a common party. Such a radical left party could play - with the correct policies, tactics, and leadership - an important role in spreading anti-capitalist and socialist ideas, strengthening the left-wing of the anti-Trump movement, and help a wider layer of progressive workers to more quickly draw the conclusion that a political alternative to the Democratic Party is needed. It would also represent an arena for the members of this party to learn through experience and for debate between the various political trends within it, which would provide important opportunities for us to spread our ideas.

121. The development of this slogan for a “New Socialist Party” is an important addition to our call for “a new party to fight the right” that in many-some occasions replaced our call for a “new party for the 99%.” It provides us with a more definite slogan to use when speaking to the radicalizing layers of the anti-Trump movement which makes more concrete the immediate steps that could be taken by DSA, and other left forces, towards building a stronger, more organized left and begin to build a political challenge to the Democratic Party. This call also corresponds with the objective process that is taking place towards the crystallization of a new socialist consciousness, especially among a section of youth, and the emergence of a new party. But it is not our only slogan, and is not the slogan we should use when addressing a broader audience.

122. We also need to change our approach to recruitment at this point of time. The resistance against Trump leads to a feeling of a need for broader unity that we have to skillfully withstand. Even some of our members were initially taken aback by Trump's victory and drew the conclusion that building a broader, united resistance should be our main focus now. The development of the DSA highlights a broader discussion about socialism where we need to develop a much clearer understanding within our ranks about the distinct Marxist contribution we want to bring to broader formations and the revolutionary character of our organization in contrast to broader formations.

123. The current imbalance between newer members and cadre within the organization is a challenge to fulfilling these tasks. Our leading members have to focus on developing more comrades in and through engaging in these battles.

124. Flowing from this, recruitment is a lower priority for the organization at this time. We should adopt a more selective approach to recruitment, looking to recruit on a higher political level. Generally, contacts should not be accepted into membership without having first discussed with us “part one” of the new version of the New Member Reading Packet and committing to read and discuss “part two.” Contacts who are not in agreement or open to learning our politics or methods should not be recruited, but instead asked to get a subscription to the paper and to become a sustainer.

Addressing Broader Audiences & Leading Mass Work on a Principled Marxist Basis

125. The Trump era will include a number of complications, setbacks, and lulls in the movement. Out of setbacks, higher and more developed attempts to fight back will arise. It would be naive to expect the broader movement or our organization to simply develop on a linear path of steady growth.

126. Reflecting the decades long struggle to defend revolutionary principles but unfortunately in isolation from the mass of the working class, the biggest challenge for small Marxist forces today is the tendency towards a sectarian approach and to dogmatically cling to old formulas rather than engage with the new openings. Paradoxically, the essence of this outlook is a fear of being unable to speak to broader forces on a principled Marxist basis. Put another way, once most of the socialist left is thrust out of their isolation narrow-sectarian-existence and into leadership of a broader struggle they tend to adopt an opportunist approach.

127. In contrast, we must politically educate and develop our organization to be able to offer revolutionary socialist ideas while finding the necessary tactics and language to engage with the emerging radicalization taking place, despite it starting from a low level of consciousness. Our political capacity to do this has been the principal strength which has allowed Socialist Alternative to stand out and become a point of attraction on the left over the past few years.

128. This did not happen accidentally. It is the product of a conscious, rigorous, unsparing approach towards political clarity in our analysis, program, demands, strategy, tactics, slogans, terminology, and organizational methods. This requires an ongoing, determined struggle against the dominant anti-political, anti-theoretical, and pragmatic attitude which dominates

the US left and working class and inevitably finds expression within our ranks.

129. This dominant approach on the left, which deceptively appears as a shortcut but only lays the basis for political blunders and setbacks, argues we are being “sectarian” and “splitting hairs” by demanding political precision and accuracy, i.e. it seeks to prettify political and organizational sloppiness which the majority of the left elevates into a virtue. In contrast, standing in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and the CWI we fight to maintain the sharpest possible political and organizational edge by taking a meticulous approach [towards even secondary issues](#).

130. This exacting, scientific attitude paid huge dividends when our carefully worked out analysis of the political situation allowed us, uniquely on the left, to identify the opening to the left of the Democratic Party in the immediate aftermath of Occupy. Further, we had the advantage of having an organization that operated as a democratic collective and was thus able to draw out the organizational conclusion of testing this hypothesis by asking Kshama Sawant to run for office in 2012. This allowed us to not just have a purely speculative analysis, but an instrument to measure and make visible this opening.

131. The strength of our principled, but tactically flexible approach was on full display in our leading role in the struggle for \$15 in Minneapolis and in Seattle, against the resistance of the labor leaders (and ultra-left groups). This was further complicated by the still existing proxy consciousness among the majority of workers. Without prettifying things, soberly facing up to all the limitations in mass consciousness, we were able to find ways to engage and activate new workers while working with and challenging the labor leaders.

132. Despite initial hesitation in our ranks, we were able to come to the correct decision that we would need to make concessions to the confused consciousness that existed in the majority of workers towards small business with a longer phase-in for small businesses, while explaining this concession openly in a principled manner and not pretending that it was something else. We also faced debate within SA and among the supporters of 15 Now in developing our tactic of including a “Collective Bargaining Opt Out” for hotel workers as a tool to win over Unite Here in the struggle in Seattle.

133. Critical to the election of Kshama Sawant in 2013 and her re-election in 2015 was our ability - unique on the left - to engage in a friendly dialogue with genuine

left-wing Democratic voters with the aim (and result) of actively winning many of them away from the Democratic Party. This was most visible in our bold initiative of launching “Democrats for Sawant” in 2013, which along with the launch of “Small Business for Sawant” was openly mocked at the time by sectarian elements. We made even more aggressive efforts in 2015 to help left-wing Democrats organize within their local Party structures to partially block the endorsement of the Democratic challenger to Sawant, acting to support the Socialist candidate who was systematically undermining the Democratic Party.

134. This principled but engaging approach, even on very hostile territory, was also critical to our successful work in the Seattle City Council. We have had to continually fight to drag various left-wing, and not so left-wing, Democratic politicians into collaborating with us on specific issues and struggles. It was also key to our intervention in the 2015 Seattle City Council elections, where we succeeded in sharpening the contradictions between the anti-corporate Democrats running against establishment Democrats by vigorously working in solidarity with the left Democrats in their conflicts against establishment Democrats, while continually working to educate their supporters (as well as many of our own supporters) on the capitalist character of the Democratic Party and the need for an independent political force for the left.

135. The experience of our intervention in the huge upheaval around the Bernie Sanders campaign was [among](#) the biggest contribution to our cadre development in the recent period. Intervening with a firm principled approach of breaking people away from the Democrats while getting involved in the radicalization and first steps of a new generation searching for socialist ideas - that combination was decisive to educate a new generation in our ranks and increase the cohesion of the organization. Our internal debates were crucial to making all comrades aware of the dangers of passive sectarianism as well as the threats of opportunism that such a tactic also includes.

136. The Sanders campaign underlined our political strength, demanding an ability to size up a situation concretely. Almost all of the rest of the other socialist groups were unable to do so, remaining trapped in a dogmatic and sectarian approach. On the other hand, DSA [with its impressionistic and empirical approach](#) was able to recognize the radicalization that was taking place. Unfortunately, they did so on an opportunistic basis,

tending not to fight against the weaknesses of Sanders from an independent socialist standpoint.

137. In this new period it is also important to have an open, self-confident approach towards debates on the left especially given the strong feeling among progressives that the left is too divided and sectarian. We were able to take steps in this direction with the opening up of our paper for a comradely exchange and debate with the ISO and organizing Socialism Conferences with the DSA and others.

138. The question can be posed: why is it so important for us, a relatively small organization predominantly engaged in propaganda work, to be able to speak to broader audiences and lead mass work in a principled Marxist fashion?

139. First, we are speaking to a mass audience regularly through Kshama's work as a high-profile political leader in Seattle. This is the highest profile, most impactful work being done by the organization currently. Nor would we have been able to win this position, despite being a very small organization before Kshama was elected, if we had not been politically equipped with the necessary methodological approach towards mass work. (Kshama was elected in 2013 with almost 95,000 votes, certainly a mass audience, even though we only had 50-70 members at the time in Seattle!) We then needed to address an even larger mass audience when we led the fight for \$15 in Seattle in 2014. The tremendous example we set in Seattle was the turning point in allowing our organization to make a breakthrough nationally, establishing SA as a point of attraction for thousands and allowing us to grow by leaps and bounds in all areas of the country.

140. We have been able to build on this example in Minneapolis, with our mass campaigning for \$15 and with the Ginger Jentzen campaign for City Council. Given the relative vacuum on the left and the explosive developments that are impending, *similar opportunities will open up for SA in other cities across the country, even where we are relatively small, if we have local leaderships that are vigorously fighting to find these opportunities, and are politically equipped to carry out this work.*

141. We have also initiated or played leading roles in many other lively campaigns and struggles in numerous other parts of the country where comrades have done fantastic work. As we explained above, our intervention in the Sanders campaign was rooted in the same political approach of being able to break out of the trap of a

narrow sectarian outlook, while developing concrete demands and tactics to arm our comrades to do battle with the reformist, electoralist ideas that dominated the Sanders movement. Further, to successfully develop union work, our comrades must be politically equipped to speak to a broad consciousness while having the political firmness to argue for socialist ideas.

142. When we intervene in broader movements, we want to win the best elements to join SA. But on what basis? We want to win the most politically advanced elements to a program and strategy that will allow them to successfully lead these broader movements. This approach has long been the hallmark of the CWI. This requires that we, even where we are a small propaganda group, have the political understanding and tactical ability to assist the leadership of broader movements if they are won to our position to be able to lead a mass struggle on a principled, socialist basis.

143. Finally, to properly educate our members and train a healthy cadre we must politically inoculate them against ~~the diseases of~~ sectarianism, which plagues the socialist left, and its twin evil opportunism, which permeates all left forces which begin to have any broader impact on society.

144. Again, to rise to this challenge is a political task which requires a conscious effort and leadership. This will not happen without vigorous discussion and debate. The transformation of our organization over the past 4 years has required an on-going political effort to overcome the legacy of a small circle mentality and a propagandistic approach which naturally develops when an organization remains small and relatively isolated for a prolonged time.

145. In the new situation we have entered, with an organization of over 1,000 members and an explosive but complicated political situation where we can make new leaps forward but will also face unprecedented challenges, we will no doubt face new discussions and debates around shaking off old routines and outdated formulas to be able to measure up to the requirements of building a substantial revolutionary party of 2,000 to 5,000 members in the coming battles.

The Challenges Ahead

146. To generalize the political challenge outlined above: We need to be sharp and clear in defending Marxist ideas, but engage with a new layer of people that are starting with a very low level of political experience. It is unclear to most people what socialist ideas are.

There is a huge pragmatism about how to engage with the Democratic Party. There is not even much of an understanding of what it means to mobilize, organize, or build a movement. We can offer a lot of answers and need to combine the skills of the united front and the transitional method in a new period of mass anger, movements, and confusion.

147. Socialist Alternative has made tremendous steps forward. Just in the very recent period we have grown beyond 1,000 members, had the huge success of winning \$15 in Minneapolis, seen the launch of Ginger's dynamic campaign, and Kshama continues to have a high profile on the US left. We also started initiatives to work with the DSA. Our very successful summer school showed there is a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to building SA and a layer in the organization that is politically developing.

148. However, there is still a lot to do: On the one hand, the growth of DSA requires a deeper political understanding within the organization on the revolutionary character of Socialist Alternative and the vital importance of building a revolutionary party as opposed to just building broad formations. On the other hand, we need to further develop the skills to embrace the new layer of activists and politicized people, such as DSA members, in campaigning work and cooperation to develop the politics necessary to fight capitalism. This requires developing the political ability to work in a principled, yet non-sectarian and collaborative fashion, with other trends. This is a real and on-going challenge for all of us many of our members.

149. We have sharpened the theoretical understanding in the organization around the fight for black liberation. We need to deepen this while working to build amongst people of color in a challenging environment of Identity Politics in movements such as BLM.

150. Individual members are doing valuable work within their unions, like in MNA, Philadelphia and Boston nurses, ATU in Minnesota, the building trades and teachers in SeattleSEA, where the vacuum of leadership opens up opportunities for us. This work requires great sensitivity and political strength as part of long term strategy to build broader influence and recruit a core to SA.

151. At the same time, these successes pose new challenges, politically and organizationally. We can easily recruit people, but as outlined above we have reached a point where numerical growth will only be sustainable if

we develop the cadre to keep, organize, and educate new members. This task of cadre development, of political and organizational cohesion, starts at the top of the organization.

152. In this new situation the tasks of engaging with a new layer of radicalizing people, bringing together and distilling the collective experience of a much larger organization, strengthening the political understanding and cohesion within our ranks in a dynamic way, requires that we make some adjustments in the work of the EC and NC. Methods which were adequate in an earlier stage of development are no longer sufficient in these new circumstances.

153. We need the EC to more proactively and systematically organize an on-going discussion with the NC and the leadership in the different areas on political developments, identifying opportunities, getting input on the challenges and difficulties the branches are facing, where our members' consciousness is actually at, "warts and all," and give a politicized lead to organizational challenges. This requires the EC to have a finger on the pulse, a tight grip and understanding, of the actual state of the branches and membership.

154. This is linked to developing a more conscious approach of drawing out the political and organizational conclusions, and fighting to win clarity within the organization around them. For example, on the issue of the healthcare debate, we need to establish a common, cohesive understanding throughout our membership that a) Our starting point must be to fight to defeat Trumpcare, b) Our proposals for a fighting strategy to defeat it (i.e. protests, sit-ins, a million person march on Washington, and strikes of unionized healthcare workers), c) The debates and divisions within the Democrats over Medicare for All, d) How we need a more nuanced approach towards the Democrats in the context of this struggle, and e) The scope for bold anti-capitalist and socialist agitation.

155. The NC also needs to develop to play a more active-political role. The NC members need to be at the forefront of developing new local leaders and cadre. But the NC also needs to help politically lead the national organization by taking on responsibilities for writing material and political tasks, leading interventions, making visits, etc. ~~For-Freeing~~ NC members ~~be freed~~-up for this work will require successfully developing a wider layer of leaders in the branches, but also being willing to allow this newer layer to take on more responsibilities in

the branches and make some mistakes, which they will learn from. But most of all, the political role of the NC is first and foremost taking seriously and engaging in political discussions and debates. This does not mean NC members, who already sacrifice tremendously for the organization, should simply “do more” but rather that the organization as a whole needs to more consciously make hard choices and develop the conditions that free NC comrades up to play more of a political role.

156. For the EC to be successful and the sharpest possible tool requires that we have a lively, independent thinking, critically minded, self-confident, politically educated and informed NC which challenges the EC and holds it to account. In turn, the NC will only be able to fully play this role if it rests on a vibrant democratic culture within the ranks of the organization of politically educated Marxists rooted in living struggles of workers and youth - something we are far from. But we must begin to move towards this, starting with strengthening the role of the NC.

157. To develop cadre, we need more high quality, lively material which can tackle the key discussions and debates taking place on the left. The question of how we do this and develop our publications will be discussed at upcoming national meetings.

158. If we build and develop cadre through an understanding of -- and an active engagement in -- the battles against Trump and the billionaire class, we can lay the basis for a powerful Marxist force in the major imperialist power as part of a principled international socialist force which can give the best possible leadership to the working masses and oppressed struggling for change.