

Proposal for long-term consolidation and sinking roots in Seattle - 12/7/17

By: Emily McArthur

Nationally and locally, the number one priority of our organization is the consolidation of our hundreds of new members into capable, independently-thinking Marxist cadre. This somewhat hard to define process involves intensive reading and discussion around historical and theoretical texts with leading members.

However, as leaders of this organization, we also need to demonstrate the dynamic, dialectical framework of consolidation. Being a skilled fighter for the working class in the mold of the Bolshevik party also means being able to implement lessons gleaned from discussion and reading in movements and workplace struggles. These skills can only be learned in the heat of struggle: mass protests, occupations, coalitions and campaigns test every socialist's ability to grapple with consciousness. However, as many of our articles and perspectives documents illustrate, we are nationally and locally experiencing a lull in movements that could potentially last through the course of the midterm elections.

Given the growing strength and activity of the housing movement and left in general in Seattle, it is essential that Socialist Alternative Seattle sink roots into the community and labor organizations that can help us win the battles ahead--including Rent Control, the fight for public housing, and the battle to retain Kshama's seat. Despite the tremendous work by our council office, the full scope of these opportunities can only be seized by sending a broader layer of our membership into struggles and coalitions forming in the communities around their branch. This concept will need to be applied in a strategic and organized way that takes into account the varying contexts of a given branch composition and specific political formations. For even the newest members, diving into other organizations armed with the methods of the CWI only serves to bring them closer and further convince them of our political ideas.

To an extent, this work is already happening naturally: comrades in the SEA have developed an active presence within SEE and used that position not only to fight for a May 1st strike, but to fight for the necessary strategies of outreach and support building for the strike. All the comrades who did impressive work around that fight learned an immense amount about the consciousness of teachers at different schools and the strength of the union leadership. These are priceless lessons for revolutionary socialists.

While there are several more concrete examples of this (the Housing for All coalition work, the Teamster 174 picket line interventions, and the new militant labor history study group started in Ironworkers local 86), so far we are not engaging a majority or even half of our BC layer--much less our broader membership--in this type of practical organizing work. I would like to propose two long term projects to drive forward the task of sinking roots.

Building Living Relationships with Coalitions and Organizations

Up until now, most relationships with external organizations have been centralized through the staff in the council office, and have--with a few exceptions--been more on a mobilization than building basis. Concretely, this would manifest in relationships like the one formed between the Ravenna Branch and WFSE 1488: members of WFSE 1488 did a series of Affordable Seattle tables with members of the Ravenna branch in the lead up to the November 1st occupation. With WFSE's statewide resolution to fight the ban on rent control and Democratic State Rep Marci introducing legislation to overturn the statewide ban on rent control, there's fruitful ground to continue to build a relationship with the organizers as a pathway to the workers of this large, relatively progressive, if not particularly strong union. In a conscious way, all branches should aim to take on similar projects with organizations like the NACs, Deescalate WASHINGTON, Tenants Union, UAW, People's Party, Our Revolution, and Indivisible (this list is in no way exhaustive). Having members gain confidence engaging with broader forces will not only make us a stronger political force, it will give us a more substantial knowledge and presence in the developments within these formations. This is happening in an unorganized, decentralized, and unassisted way. CC members should play an active role helping their branches build concrete working relationships with healthy organizations starting initially with those that we have a history of working with.

This will be a slow, exploratory process, and branches will need to learn to balance this kind of work with city and national priorities as they come up. We do not want our members getting bogged down doing all the work of signature gathering, poster hanging, event logistics, etc, but some level of co-work will likely be necessary--again discussing the correct balance with their bc, and with cc members will be a necessary learning experience.

Guiding Members into Strategic Workplaces and Unions

A second proposal is that the Labor caucus, in collaboration with the SEC, develop a list of suggested workplaces for members. While I am not suggesting a wholesale "Turn to Industry", I have had multiple experiences as a leading member where young, precariously employed or unemployed members ask for advice on politically strategic jobs.

A list that covers a broad set of skills, education levels, and strengths could help guide our growing membership into strategic workplaces with developing struggles. Having them think actively about their role on the job as a socialist will develop them as cadre and potentially shape coming fight backs. Ideally such a list would be a living document and have point-people with insight into a given industry's standards and political contours.

Examples:

Teamsters 174 - Trucking jobs - First Student bus drivers, Concrete Drivers, UPS Workers - Have done a series of one day strikes in the past year, the UPS contract is up in the next year. - *contact Jeremy Pricket* - Suggested Reading: [Cement Drivers Strike](#)

Seattle Educators Association - Teaching and Substitute Jobs in SPS - Had a strike in 2015 that Kshama's campaign engaged in. Has a progressive caucus (SEE) that our members engage in alongside several members from the ISO including Jesse Hagopian - *contact: Matt Maley* - Suggested Reading: [2015 Strike](#), [McCleary](#)

A system where BCs and participants in each of these struggles write short reports that are distributed to the CC regularly could help ensure that our leading bodies are abreast of fast moving struggles and developments while also helping to guide the work of the comrades. This infrastructure could provide leadership support and oversight while opening up the larger and larger numbers within our organization to the challenges of the day-to-day work of building working class struggle.