

Minority Introduction to the Internal Debate

For Internal Democracy, Principled Mass Work, and the Revolutionary Use of Public Office

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behalf of the Minority group

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1. Recent historic events – such as the Sanders campaign, local Berniecrat candidacies, Trump’s presidency, and the rise of DSA – have required SA to develop new tactics. Meanwhile, SA has grown dramatically since we elected Kshama in 2013. Engaging with these new mass developments, and our new mass work, especially in Seattle, has led to growing pains and disagreements about priorities and tactics.
2. **Since April 2017 a major debate erupted in the SA leadership, revolving around three main issues:**
 - A. **The Relationship between a Marxist party and its public representatives**
 - B. **Moving beyond an abstract, propagandistic approach of commenting on events from the sidelines**
 - C. **Democracy within SA**

These political disagreements were dealt with by a majority of the SA leadership carrying out a series of changes to the composition of SA leadership bodies. They did not inform the membership of the changes, claiming that they were needed to resolve personal disputes, not political disagreements. However, in reality, we have seen a number of important changes in the organization’s political direction.

A. The Relationship between a Marxist Party and its Public Representatives

3. When revolutionaries win elected office in capitalist society, we inevitably face opportunist pressures. Unfortunately, in a growing number of instances the new SA leadership has not responded to these pressures in a transparent or principled manner. **The clearest example of this is the Executive Committee (EC) decision to have our councilmember vote in favor of the new Seattle police chief largely out of fear about our re-election prospects. Even more worrying, the EC’s document explaining their “Yes” vote pretends that the re-election is not a factor in their calculations!**
4. Our previous document, *For a Democratic Debate about Principled Mass Work*, points to another example of opportunism, specifically:

the reduction of democratic oversight over the work of our city council office. Long-standing conflicting pressures between building SA and our council work added to tensions on the Seattle Executive Committee (SEC). Instead of resolving this through open, democratic debate, the SEC was changed on the basis of our city councilmember

refusing to participate on the body unless other elected members were removed. These changes have led to our Seattle branches shifting away, to a certain extent, from party-building and cadre development toward mobilizing behind initiatives of our city council office...

This is not a “Seattle” question. Any time Marxists win a mass position there are opportunist pressures to de-prioritize the building of a revolutionary organization and dilute our Marxist politics. How we deal with these challenges with our first elected representative is establishing a foundation for how we deal with much bigger pressures when we have many elected officials and union leaders across the country.

5. The [September issue of *Socialism Today*](#), journal of the CWI in Britain, underlines this point:

The possibility of creeping bureaucratization exists in every workers' organisation, including the most formally democratic ... Leon Trotsky wrote of the pressure on even the most dedicated leaders, “to concentrate their attentions solely upon questions of administration, of appointments and transfers; to narrow their horizon; to weaken their revolutionary spirit.” Such processes, he added, “develop slowly and almost imperceptibly, but reveal themselves abruptly. To see in this warning, based upon objective Marxist foresight, an 'outrage', an 'assault,' etc., really requires the skittish sensitivity and arrogance of bureaucrats.”

B. Sectarian, Propagandistic Approach

6. Conversely, the EC has adopted a more conservative, propagandistic approach of limiting ourselves to commenting on developments from the sidelines. This leads to sectarian mistakes which unnecessarily isolate SA from radicalizing layers, losing opportunities to lead or influence broader struggles.
7. A key political example has been different approaches DSA. The *EC Majority Reply to Document from SK and PL* advocated orienting to Our Revolution instead of orienting to DSA. In contrast, the Minority has argued consistently that the growth of DSA is a historic development which represents at this time the biggest opportunity to spread Marxist ideas.
8. We must adopt tactics to come as close as possible with these newly radicalizing socialists, while conducting a relentless political struggle for consistent revolutionary Marxist ideas. That is why the Minority has argued that SA members should become members of DSA. In contrast, the EC has argued against joining DSA to openly fight for our politics within DSA, missing major opportunities to build support for Marxism.
9. Since the Minority has been driven out of leadership, a political shift has taken place within SA away from what we call “principled mass work.” This was the approach that guided SA when the organization made huge breakthroughs from 2011 to 2016. This approach was based on utilizing flexible tactics, united front methods, and a transitional approach to actively intervene in broader movements to fight for influence and leadership within them on a principled Marxist basis.
10. But what made this debate so divisive and damaging was the undemocratic, unhealthy methods the EC resorted to in order to push through their political positions. We formed

the Minority group to oppose the EC's opportunist subordination of the organization to the needs of our City Council position, advocate for a return to principled mass work and, in particular, to sound the alarm about its unprecedented undemocratic measures.

C. Bureaucratic Regime

- 11. The latest example of the EC's top-down approach was the vote in favor of the new Seattle Police Chief. This controversial decision was made without any meeting of the National Committee (NC), the Seattle City Committee, nor any discussion in the Seattle branches beforehand.**
- 12.** In his August 11th email to the City Committee, Ty explained that before the EC made its decision, the EC had "a number of discussions with many NC and Seattle City Committee members in recent days." However, not a single Minority member of the NC or City Committee was included in these discussions until a staff meeting only three days before the City Council vote. Our proposal for an emergency meeting to discuss this was rejected by the EC.
- 13.** We rapidly wrote a document against voting for the new police chief before the vote was held. However the EC, who knew about this vote long before we did, only released a written statement explaining its "Yes" vote *after* Kshama had already cast her vote in favor of the new police chief. This is indicative of the low priority the EC places on allowing members to give meaningful input on critical issues.

Stage-Managed National Convention

- 14.** The EC presents the coming National Convention as an expression of SA's vibrant democracy. Yet for almost 1.5 years they've hidden a major debate from the vast majority of members, despite the Minority's repeated proposals to inform the organization. There was not a single Members Bulletin for over a year from April 2017 until July 2018 while this debate was raging. At each stage the EC has only broadened the discussion in a carefully controlled manner.
- 15.** The outcome of this debate at the coming Convention was already predetermined, before the pre-convention discussion period had even begun. The Convention will be a stage managed, tightly controlled affair designed to produce the necessary outcome for the new SA leadership: a "democratic" affirmation of their legitimacy, a retroactive exoneration of the EC's blatantly undemocratic measures, and a condemnation of the Minority group within SA.
- 16.** The National Convention was preceded by an "expanded National Committee" meeting in June, which was a *de facto* dress rehearsal. The NC is a body of 42 members, yet the vast majority of those attending were not NC members. The meeting had over 80 observers present, largely made up of Branch Committee members from across the country.
- 17.** This meeting was held before the pre-Convention discussion period had begun and without any proper debate of the issues outside the NC (except in Seattle). The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the observers – who, as key branch leaders, will make up the vast majority of delegates to the National Convention – to the internal debate. This terrain was the most favorable way for the EC to introduce the observers to the internal debate because speaking rights were given only to NC members, who

overwhelmingly support the EC's position.

18. The documents for the June "expanded NC" were presented in a selective, brazenly factional manner, riddled with new inaccurate or highly one-sided assertions by the Majority leadership with no equal ability of the Minority to answer. For details, please see our *Minority Bulletin #1* in the "Referenced Material" Google folder.

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19. The June meeting also continued the EC's unhealthy methods of character assassination to avoid political debate. Rather than a patient, comradely debate on political substance, the EC created an emotionally charged atmosphere aimed at personally discrediting Minority comrades as disloyal or abusive bullies. The EC has also discouraged debate with appeals to trust the leaders and defend Kshama.
20. Very similar methods were deployed at the debates at the International Executive Committee, NC, Seattle City Committee, and Seattle City Convention. After preparing the ground in these ways, the EC now feels confident to allow a "full democratic debate" at the National Convention.

Excluded from Meaningful Roles in SA

21. The Minority raised earlier this year that we feared the EC was preparing to expel us from SA. However, it has become increasingly clear that our rights as members of SA have already been *de facto* suspended, and we are being blocked from playing any meaningful role in the organization.
22. First Minority comrades were excluded from meaningful participation in EC discussions and decisions. Since then, Minority comrades have similarly been excluded from observing DSA meetings and being involved in democratic SA discussions and decisions, even though many of us have been elected as branch organizers, City Committee members, and/or NC members.
23. The EC has worked to create an atmosphere of extreme hostility toward Minority comrades. The EC argues the Minority is obstructing the work of the organization, and in May, they spread the rumor that we are disloyally working to lead a split from SA. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy that allows the EC to increasingly exclude us from any meaningful role in the organization.
24. We have fought for almost 1.5 years to raise our views and work to reform SA, despite extreme political, organizational and social pressure to be silent. During this time Minority members have actively recruited, stepped up to become branch organizers, and made significant financial contributions to the organization.
25. **The SA leadership is turning reality upside down. They are increasingly working to drive us out by increasingly making it impossible for us to function within SA. This is a disgraceful approach of treating comrades, some of whom**

have devoted decades to building our organization, as enemies to be “crushed” rather than comrades who should be debated based on the merit of the ideas.

Factional Disruption of Teachers Union Struggle

26. In pursuit of their factional agenda the EC has been prepared to damage the work of the organization. The latest example was their disruptive intervention into the work of the Seattle SA teachers caucus.

27. This is the most developed labor work of the Seattle organization, with six members of the union, two of whom are elected Executive Board members. They are organized in a well functioning SA caucus which meets every week or two to systematically intervene in this strategic union.

28. In the middle of phone-banking 1,300 substitute teachers for the healthcare campaign we are leading, mobilizing to a rally, and actively participating in contract negotiations (2 SA members are on the union bargaining committee), the teacher comrades had to deal with a heavy-handed factional intervention by the new SA leadership.

29. With very short notice, the Seattle EC proposed changing the leadership of the SA teachers caucus by replacing a Minority comrade (Philip) with Majority comrade (Tony W.) who had not been part of the caucus work.

30. Removing Minority comrades was a higher priority to the SA leadership than giving political assistance to members in the midst of an important union battle. The SEC had time to discuss making these changes, and decided to use the time of the City Committee to debate it, but they had no discussion or any political input on the healthcare campaign or contract negotiations.

31. The SA leadership was only stopped – for the time being – due to the opposition of the large majority of teacher comrades.

32. This is symptomatic of the unhealthy approach of the EC, which has been to drive out comrades from leadership positions if they have raised disagreements with our councilmember. First, Stephan was removed from the Seattle EC for standing up for the party priorities against the pressures of the council office. Philip was the first to propose that Stephan come off the SEC in an attempt to find a workable compromise, but when Philip objected to the undemocratic and politically unprincipled way Stephan’s removal was carried out, he too ended being removed undemocratically from the Seattle EC.

33. When Whitney J.K. raised concerns about these undemocratic changes, he was outright fired as a full-timer. When Rebekah raised concerns, her job as Kshama’s assistant was made impossible when, among other things, Kshama outright refused to work with her or even say “hello.”

34. The EC’s factional campaign, supported by the International Secretariat, has demoralized the membership. In our stronghold in Seattle, our membership has collapsed by over 1/3, and the organization is increasingly dominated by full-timers.

Mystifying the Debate

35. The main political arguments of this debate unfolded in a series of documents which respond to one another. Yet the EC is presenting these documents to members ripped out of

context and out of chronological order. The EC published the first set of documents in Packet #3 and the later documents in Packet #1, despite our repeated objections.

36. This reinforces the new argument their documents started emphasizing in May 2018 when they attempted to shift the debate away from political issues toward “methods of leadership.” Presenting the documents out of order serves this agenda, by obscuring the political issues that were debated in the previous exchanges.

37. We recommend reading the key political documents in the chronological order that they were written:

- a. *Update on the US Political Situation and Our Tasks* (Aug. 2017)
- b. *EC Majority Reply to Document from SK and PL* (Oct. 2017)
- c. *Response to EC Majority Reply* (Feb. 2018)
- d. *This Conflict is about Methods of Leadership* by the Majority (May 2018)
- e. Minority Reply to “This Conflict Is About Methods of Leadership” – *For a Democratic Debate about Principled Mass Work* (June 2018)
- f. Majority Reply: *Marxist Methods & False Narratives* (June 2018)

38. There are also important introductions to a number of documents in *Minority Bulletin #1* in the “Referenced Material” Google folder. The section called “Explanatory Notes from the Minority” provides important context that explains the relevance of these documents.

Conclusion

39. We appeal to all members to question the assertions of the SA leadership, and not accept emotional appeals. We urge members to carefully investigate these matters and speak out freely with your own independent views. Only in this way can we build a healthy revolutionary organization capable of measuring up to the historic tasks before us.