

# **SEC Response on the Seattle Structures Debate**

**Submitted to the Seattle City Committee for discussion, 1/23/18**

A number of very important issues over how Seattle Socialist Alternative organizes itself have come up around the discussion initiated on our structures. This short document is not meant to be a comprehensive statement on those issues, but rather a brief comment from the SEC on some of the key questions alongside several concrete proposed changes to our structures.

The SEC will produce a Seattle perspectives document in the coming weeks to be discussed and debated first in the City Committee meeting and then at the upcoming Seattle Convention open to all Seattle SA members.

In addition to building around housing issues, the anti-Trump movement, the women's movement and cadre development in the coming months, we will also need to participate in a broader independent defense campaign surrounding the lawsuits targeting Kshama.

Out of this debate we are confident the City Committee will arrive at proposals to better build our organization, develop leaders, strengthen the connection between the branches and Council Office and further solidify links with the national and international organization. We thank Tony W, Jeremy P, Sarah W, Ramy K, Emily M, Justin B, Rebekah L and other Seattle City Committee comrades for their contributions to this discussion.

## **Seattle and National Conventions**

This year Socialist Alternative will be holding a National Convention (date and location TBD), which is our highest decision-making body made up of elected delegates from all over the country and with representatives from the international leadership of the CWI present.

The pre-convention discussion period and the National Convention itself will be opportunities to develop cadre in our branches. Engagement with the national discussions around the anti-Trump movement, the midterm elections, DSA, #MeToo, party-building and many other topics at the national level will help develop Seattle comrades as well as input from the CWI leadership.

The Seattle Convention, tentatively planned for late March, needs to be well-prepared with a document on local perspectives that will help trace out the economic, social and political terrain for our work. Flowing from this, the SEC will bring a draft priorities resolution to the City Committee as well that will be further developed and decided at the City Committee in advance of the convention. The Seattle Convention will elect a new City Committee which will elect a new SEC.

## **Leadership Structures**

The City Committee needs to further develop into a strong leadership body for the Seattle organization. This means a CC that discusses national and local perspectives and works out the central tasks for building Socialist Alternative in the Seattle area. It should aim to meet monthly, or more often as needed, with proposals sent out well in advance of the meeting, allowing all comrades to fully participate in leading the Seattle work. To allow comrades to schedule and prepare for their participation in CC meetings, we will plan to hold them on the third Saturday of each month, adjusted as needed to avoid important conflicts.

The SEC is the day-to-day leadership of the Seattle organization, and needs a regular overview of the work. In addition to this, the SEC is re-establishing the Council Strategy Team - an SEC sub-committee necessary to focus on more detailed policy and strategy questions - which will be made up of Kshama, Ty and Calvin, with others invited as needed. The current SEC has chosen Ty and Calvin to convene SEC meetings at present. The SEC will give monthly political reports to the City Committee meetings on our key discussions and activities, alongside proposals for the work of SA Seattle going forward.

The Branch Organizer meetings should come together generally once a month. Ideally, this would happen shortly after the City Committee each month, which as the citywide elected leadership should set the tone for the organization that month. We should be flexible about the regularity and timing of the branch organizer meetings, allowing ourselves the room to respond to events. BO meetings should continue to be centered around political discussions but with an effort to include more non-fulltimers in giving lead-offs, with somewhat more focus on the concrete challenges facing BC's, along with the tasks of implementing City Committee decisions.

These changes are designed to aid political development and give a greater role to the elected citywide leadership body of the City Committee and more space where possible for BCs and branches to take ownership of their work. These changes can also help limit the number of hours spent in meetings so that Branch Organizers can focus more on activity, study groups and individual discussions that can help them develop the work. Branch organizers should have a fulltimer (or other experienced member) assigned to them for regular individual discussions on their branch's work.

## **Integration of Party Building, Council Work, and Branches**

Our council position in Seattle is the collective achievement of Socialist Alternative and the CWI, and how we use this position is fundamentally rooted in the wider strategic aims of building the Marxist movement in Seattle and internationally. This general principle in no way contradicts that, in Seattle especially, the work of the whole organization must be heavily geared toward defending and strengthening this "stronghold in enemy territory" that we've carved out. Our

Council Office is our strongest weapon for campaign work, socialist propaganda, and building the party, and the work of SA Seattle should aim to take full advantage of this position. There is of course a danger of linking up our branches and wider party to the council work in an imbalanced way or under-emphasizing other aspects of our work. However, an overcorrection for these potential pressures poses the opposite risk of underutilizing our strongest asset to develop SA's position in Seattle politics, and can also deprive our branches of the extremely valuable experience of building struggles around the opportunities opened up through our council work.

Unfortunately, over the whole past period, the SEC feels there has been an exaggerated separation between our work in the Council Office and the rest of the organization. We urgently need to overcome this politically, and we feel a part of this should be through a shift in our structures.

One part of this should be changing the composition of our weekly staff meetings to include comrades both from the Council Office as well as other local SA and national SA fulltimers. This will help raise the political level of the discussion and strengthen the connection to our work in the Council Office. We also want to encourage greater participation and responsibility for branches in the campaigns and coalitions currently centered around our Council Office. Part of this will include, in coordination with the SEC, more direct lines of communication between the Council Office and the branches where needed.

Every leading comrade should be involved in party-building work, and we want every member to be involved in strengthening our organization. The role of the Party Building Team is to help organize and lead this wider work, under the direction of the CC, the SEC, and the elected national leadership. The SEC has asked Calvin to attend to the PBT meetings for now to strengthen the cohesion of our work. The roles on the Party Building Team (Emily, Jordan, Kailyn, Sasha, Ty) and the Council Staff (Ted, Rebekah, Adam, Kshama) will continue to be worked out in practice with full and regular reports given to the City Committee.

We feel that the proposals above can strengthen our capacity as a revolutionary Marxist organization in this key stronghold of the US section of the CWI. Our structures need to be flexible, changes need to be tested out, and further shifts in our structures will flow from changes in the objective situation, the strength of our organization and the needs of cadre development as well as the class struggle itself. In this way we can build our organization, win further victories in Seattle, and prepare to help lead the working class to victory against capitalism.