This Conflict is About Methods of Leadership

Forty-nine National Committee and Seattle City Committee members and invited observers are signed onto this majority statement. This includes 31 National Committee members and elected alternates, alongside 25 Seattle City Committee members and invited observers. Given the very tight timeframe we had to draft, edit, and ask for signatories, there are several other NC and CC members and observers who have also taken a stand against the methods of the minority group and who we anticipate will add their names to this statement. This is a slightly updated draft from the one initially circulated to the Seattle Convention on May 6th, with additional signatories added, several small corrections, improving language open to misinterpretation, alongside copy edits. ***- May 9, 2018***

Signatories in alphabetical order by last name: ***Patrick A*** *(NC member),* ***Elan A*** *(NC alternate),* ***Ellen A*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Tom B*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Justin B*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Kelly B*** *(EC member),* ***Erin B*** *(NC member),* ***Misty B*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Sarah C*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Toya C*** *(NC member),* ***Tom C*** *(EC member),* ***Steve E*** *(NC member),* ***Chris G*** *(NC member),* ***Marty H*** *(NC member),* ***Justin H*** *(NC member),* ***Eljeer H*** *(NC member),* ***Ginger J*** *(NC member),* ***Alan J*** *(EC member),* ***Emerson J*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Nick J*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Dan Ka*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Josh K*** *(NC member, Seattle CC),* ***Bryan K*** *(EC member, IEC member),* ***George MFB*** *(NC member),* ***Matt M*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Emily M*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Tiffani M*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Ty M*** *(EC member, Seattle CC),* ***Genevieve M*** *(NC member),* ***Andy M*** *(NC member),* ***Keely M*** *(NC alternate),* ***Colin M*** *(Seattle CC observer),* ***Kailyn N*** *(NC alternate, Seattle CC),* ***Leon P*** *(NC member),* ***Sonja P*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Jeremy P*** *(NC alternate, Seattle CC),* ***Calvin P*** *(EC member, Seattle CC),* ***Jordan Q*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Rob R*** *(NC Member),* ***Freeman R*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Kshama S*** *(EC member, Seattle CC),* ***Teddy S*** *(NC member),* ***Sasha S*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Logan S*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Ryan T*** *(NC alternate),* ***Ryan W*** *(NC alternate),* ***Tony W*** *(Seattle CC),* ***Nick W*** *(NC alternate),* ***Adam Z*** *(NC member, Seattle CC)*

1. Marxists have on many occasions pointed out that, as a general rule of history, sharp changes in the objective situation inevitably lead to tensions and often crises within every political tendency and institution in capitalist society. History has not spared the socialist movement and revolutionary parties from this fate. As comrades on all sides of the present conflict have pointed out, the huge opportunities that have opened up to build Socialist Alternative within the fast-deepening crisis of global capitalism, combined with our rapid growth in size and influence since 2013, have placed tremendous pressures on our organization, and on our elected leadership bodies in particular.

2. While there is general agreement on the conditions which underlie the

present internal tensions, there are very different explanations over the character of the conflict. In the opening section of the document “Response to the EC Majority Reply,” authored by five comrades who initiated the minority group on the National Committee, they outline the three issues around which the comrades believe the conflict has hinged: “(1) Moving Beyond a Propagandistic Approach... (2) The Relationship Between a Public Representative and a Marxist Party... (3) Internal Democracy.”

3. Developing these themes, the minority statement attempts to paint a picture of fundamental shifts in the political direction of Socialist Alternative, especially in Seattle, following a breakdown in working relations between Philip and Stephan, on the one hand, and the rest of the national Executive Committee (EC) and Seattle Executive Committee (SEC). Taking this case further, in his sum-up at the April 22 Seattle City Committee (CC) meeting, Philip memorably took up the comparison another comrade had made of the present conflict to the 1903 split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, emphasizing that what appear to be small differences today will later develop into fundamental political differences. It seems clear that this perspective is the political basis on which the five minority comrades on the NC have attempted to justify building an organized faction within Socialist Alternative.

4. We urge all comrades to look beneath the headlines of this debate, to carefully examine all the political issues highlighted by all sides, and to ask themselves: Has there been a convincing case presented that big enough differences exist to justify comparing this conflict to the 1903 split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks? Are the differences large enough to justify the factional campaign the minority have waged within Socialist Alternative? Or should the political differences raised by the comrades be resolvable through healthy, comradely debate, within the framework of building a collective leadership?

5. The conclusion of the signers of this statement, and the conclusion of a big majority of all the elected leadership bodies in Socialist Alternative and the CWI, is that the intensity and scale of this conflict is not justified by any of the political disagreements the minority comrades have raised.

6. If you agree, then we urge you to ask another question: If the political issues raised by the minority don’t justify factional divisions, then what is actually at the heart of this conflict? In our view, the minority have systematically exaggerated differences and over-polarized the organization around secondary issues in order to distract from the real issues underlying this conflict. In reality, we believe the central question around which sharp divisions opened up in the leadership have been destructive methods of debate and destructive methods of building a collective leadership. This conflict began with comrades standing up to bullying behavior and a rejection of the accusations against Kshama’s accountability.

7. We also cannot agree with their allegation that comrades’ democratic rights

to raise political differences have been suppressed. Despite the paralyzing character of this debate and the effect it has had on the practical work of Socialist Alternative in Seattle and nationally, extensive debates have been organized, from a full day at CWI's International Executive Committee (IEC) meeting in December, three full days at the National Committee (NC) meetings in December and March, and over four full days at the Seattle City Committee (CC), and now in the wider Seattle membership. Plans exist to bring the discussion to the national membership in the pre-Convention discussions. In the meantime, a host of other other burning discussions and areas work have been set aside to make space for this debate.

8. Through this consuming process, support and sympathy for the arguments of the minority comrades has steadily eroded at every level, to the point where among the 42 National Committee members and elected alternates only five support the minority group with 33 identifying with the majority. Following months of debate on the Seattle City Committee, those five NC comrades have only won the consistent support of four others among the 38 CC members and regularly invited observers, while 27 have come to identify with the majority opposition to their methods.

9. Despite their failure to convince any of the elected bodies of their views, and resolutions at all levels urging the comrades to wrap up their factional campaign, the issues clearly remain unresolved in the eyes of the small minority group. Rather than wrapping up their factional organizing and attempting to rebuild trust and collaborative relations, the minority keeps escalating their efforts. Rather than raising differences in a spirit of solidarity, to use debate to strengthen the organization, they have used every opportunity to sow divisions and to try and expose and undermine the elected leadership bodies. The comrades have a right to raise criticisms, and to propose changes to the leadership bodies, but as we will demonstrate, throughout much of the last year, they organized their faction in secret and did not openly put forward their full conclusions and aims.

10. In light of this situation, the EC has proposed a structured debate on these questions throughout the entire national membership in the run-up to the October National Convention. Similarly, in Seattle, where a number of Branch Committee members not aligned with either side urged the debate be brought even sooner than this into the local membership, the Seattle CC organized a full day-long report to all Seattle BC members on the conflict in April, and the debate is now being brought into the Seattle City Convention on May 6.

11. Throughout this process, we will continue to call on the comrades to step back from their unfounded attacks on Kshama and the elected leadership bodies of Socialist Alternative, to wrap up their factional campaign, and to engage in a serious discussion around steps to rebuild trust and a collective leadership. Within this process, the organization remains fully committed to defending the vital democratic space to discuss out all differences over our

analysis, program, strategy, and tactics. In our view, a vital foundation for a meaningful and healthy debate to take place is an ending of the method of over-polarization and the factional organizing which have characterized the discussions so far.

12. *This statement will begin by outlining what, in our view, are the roots of the divisions and the destructive methods of the minority, and what has led us to our conclusions about the character of the conflict. Given the need to produce this document in a more rushed timescale than originally planned (the reasons for which are explained in the final section of this statement), our intention is to produce an addendum in the next couple weeks which will take up further several of the specific issues of analysis, program, and tactics around which the minority have attempted to falsely polarize this conflict. We aim to demonstrate in more detail the lack of evidence for the minority's case.*

Methods are political

13. In their document "Response to the EC Majority Reply," the minority grouping attempts to simplify the tensions into a familiar trope for socialists: as a clash between "two main viewpoints" (par. 6) in the leadership over how to respond to the huge events unfolding in US society. When comrades have stood up against the destructive and maneuvering methods of debate adopted by Philip and Stephan in particular, they have attempted to write off these criticisms as secondary, saying: "Instead of a debate around the political issues, the EC Majority has presented this debate largely in personal and organizational terms" (para. 11).

14. We do not agree that the question of methods for building a collective leadership in a revolutionary party are not themselves deeply political questions. The task of constructing a revolutionary leadership, of building strong political teams that bring together the collective experience of our active membership, and of generalizing the political lessons from this experience, are all profoundly political problems.

15. In fact, there is a long history of discussion, debate, and commentary in the Marxist movement over precisely the question of how an authoritative leadership of a revolutionary party is forged. This is first and foremost achieved through developing correct perspectives, program, and strategy to intervene in the class struggle - but the very ability of a revolutionary party to develop political clarity is intimately bound up with correct methods of leadership. All comrades who have studied the early history of the Russian Marxist movement will remember Lenin's critique of Plekhanov's sometimes abusive and informal methods of leadership which, while a relative problem from the beginning, became an absolute fetter on the development of the organization when the objective situation opened up the potential for the dramatic growth of Marxism in Russia. Trotsky wrote on many occasions to challenge and correct destructive methods of debate within the fledgling

sections of the 4th International.

16. Within the history of the CWI itself, questions of methods of debate and of how to build a collective leadership have arisen many times, most famously as a feature of the factional conflict with Ted Grant and Alan Woods that contributed to the split in 1991. A full quarter century later, the false methods of leadership of the IMT (the international set up by Grant and Woods after they split from the CWI) were again a feature of the discussions leading up to the CWI's merger with *Izquierda Revolucionaria* (IR) in the Spanish State last year, who had left the IMT several years before. The IR comrades described how the inability of the IMT to achieve clarity on perspectives, program, and strategy was linked to the top-down and maneuvering methods introduced into the IMT leadership by Woods. In particular, they referenced his intolerance of anyone who challenged his authority, and the stunting political impact this had on the leadership bodies.

17. While we are not attempting to draw any direct analogies between these past examples and the present debate over methods in SA, we believe this history demonstrates the profoundly political character of leadership methods and holds important lessons for the present conflict within Socialist Alternative. As the discussion has unfolded over the course of the past year, a large majority on all the bodies where it was discussed have come to the conclusion that what is at stake in this debate is a fundamental issue: the methodology for organizing democratic debate in a revolutionary party and constructing its leadership. Political differences over our current perspectives and tactics deserve a full debate, but the deeper issues being expressed in the present internal divisions are the methods of building a collective leadership on a democratic centralist basis.

What is "the majority"?

18. With the debate now moving into the wider membership, it has unfortunately become necessary to put down in writing this initial statement of the majority of National Committee (NC) members and invited observers. Up until now, the central arguments which have unified a large majority of the elected leadership bodies of Socialist Alternative against the methods of the minority group have been developed in the verbal discussions, especially at the December International Executive Committee (IEC) and National Committee meetings, but not yet in written form.

19. For a long time, there was hesitancy on the part of many of the signers of this document write up our sharp criticisms of the Philip and Stephan's methods and behavior in order to avoid more fully entrenching the divisions. Many of us initially hoped that that they would - as they have at times in the past - accept responsibility for their actions and agree to steps to rebuild trust and a collective leadership where their talents could continue to be used for the benefit of the movement.

20. While a number of important political questions have come up as part of this debate, the signers of this statement do not believe that the sharp divisions in our leadership hinge around vital questions of political perspectives, program, or strategy. In our view, from the outset of this conflict, Philip and Stephan have continuously exaggerated differences, seized on small mistakes or imbalances, and exploited the very real problems we face - largely resulting from the conflict itself - in order to obscure calls to take responsibility for their destructive approach and build support for their faction. Ironically, while they claim to be struggling for political clarity, among the biggest casualties of this conflict is a dramatic undermining of healthy spaces for democratic debate. Open discussion is destroyed when comrades fear that every mistake, every disagreement, will be weaponized to whip up further divisions and disorganization.

21. In reality, on the very political issues around which the minority has attempted to artificially polarize the organization, a healthy debate and spectrum of opinion exists among the the comrades who constitute the majority. While we reject attempts to exaggerate and draw bright lines of division on issues like our approach to DSA, how we intervene in the impeachment debate, or the disagreements over Seattle SA's structures, some of us in the majority have raised very similar arguments as minority comrades or agreed with their points. All the wider political issues raised by minority comrades are completely legitimate questions to discuss, debate, and try to reach clarity around, *but they are not the issues around which the majority and minority can consistently distinguish themselves from one another.*

22. Instead, what unifies the majority is: a) an objection to continuous over-polarization around secondary disagreements, b) an intolerance for bullying patterns of behavior, c) an appeal to end the unfounded attacks on Kshama's character, and d) opposition to Philip and Stephan's decision, after failing to win a majority for their views on any body where the debate has been aired, to wage an initially secret factional war within Socialist Alternative around various secondary political and organization issues. These are unhealthy methods of debate which have done more to politically confuse than clarify issues, disorganized our work, shattered the hard-won collective leadership we'd built in the previous period, and are now threatening to plunge our organization further into crisis.

23. Therefore, while the minority group has framed their central written contribution to this debate as a response to the October "EC Majority Reply" we want to be clear that the current NC and CC majority do not base our case on that document. Already, at the NC meeting in December (i.e. before the minority submitted their "Response" in February), the six authors of the "EC Majority Reply" made clear that they accept important mistakes were made in their document. Others in the current majority also accept they made important mistakes in an earlier period of the the conflict by echoing mistaken arguments and supporting problematic aspects of the minority's

approach.

24. Mistakes are inevitable in revolutionary politics. We recognize that mistakes have been made on all sides in this extremely difficult, often confusing, and deeply polarizing debate. We believe that building a politically strong, responsive, and democratic collective leadership requires a preparedness to openly acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Pretenses to infallibility within the socialist movement should be viewed with suspicion and have on too many occasions introduced a corrosive, top-down atmosphere into organizations. In our view, a central problem with the approach of the minority has been their refusal, at each stage of the discussion, to acknowledge their mistakes in a meaningful way or to change their approach.

How did we get here?

25. Writing up this account of the breakdown in relations in the leadership of Socialist Alternative is inevitably distasteful but has at this stage become necessary. Understandably most comrades will have a healthy distaste for anything that smacks of personal attacks or an unnecessary airing of dirty laundry. It is far simpler and clearer when conflicts can be neatly explained around easily distinguishable political differences, disconnected from the individuals or groups who advocate them. Of course, such a clean separation is never really possible and the task of all comrades in this debate is, unfortunately, to soberly look at and then judge the differing explanations of how this conflict originated, how it evolved, and what lessons to draw out of the experience.

26. This conflict began as a revolt against the methods of leadership of Philip and Stephan. Elected by the EC to be National Secretary (our highest elected position) in 2016, Philip also played a central role in the leadership of Seattle Socialist Alternative. Stephan was formerly a member of the International Secretariat (the day-to-day elected leadership of the CWI based on London), but after moving to Seattle in 2014 came to play the central role in the local organization, coordinating the SEC and leading five full-timers on the Seattle Party Building Team. While the tremendous pressures of the work over the past period created a number of tensions between comrades, they especially tested the approach to leadership of these two comrades who were, until last summer, playing the dominant roles.

27. The current conflict initially broke out on the national EC in early April 2017, not over any wider political disagreements as the minority alleges, but rather over the role of one individual in the Seattle leadership. In fact it was Philip who initially proposed that the EC agree to change Stephan’s role to focus on national work as a way to resolve the breakdown in relations that had developed on the Seattle EC between Stephan, on the one hand, and Kshama and Calvin on the other. By April 2017, the escalating tensions in the Seattle leadership had been discussed by national EC members for nearly a year, and the Seattle EC had become less and less functional largely due to what Philip himself acknowledged was Stephan’s increasingly “belligerent” approach to Kshama and Calvin.

28. Initially there was consensus on the proposal to change Stephan’s role, and

no one motivated this proposal on the basis of political disagreements with Stephan. While comrades on the EC and SEC had differing views on the character of the breakdown in relations, the aim was to achieve an agreeable re-organization of roles. So, despite the serious concerns some EC comrades had over Stephan's belligerence, there was no call from anyone to formally assign blame to Stephan for the breakdown in relations.

29. Disagreements only arose when Philip and Stephan wanted to, in effect, formally assign blame to Kshama. They raised that Kshama had a pattern of refusing to work with people, that she wanted to pick and choose who was on the elected leadership bodies, and that this amounted to a dangerous lack of accountability. Flowing from this narrative, they proposed that EC and the International Secretariat (the IS is the elected leadership of the CWI) should formally register its agreement with these views by saying to Kshama that "this can't happen again."

30. The majority of the EC and the IS didn't agree to placing the blame on Kshama or censuring her as a condition to gain agreement on changing Stephan's role. The majority urged the minority comrades, having clearly registered their views and offered their warnings, to move forward together with the decision to change Stephan's role.

31. Instead, EC comrades report that Philip dramatically deepened the dispute at an EC meeting on April 7, 2017, working himself into an extended angry tirade, yelling and interrupting comrades, and accusing the majority of EC members and the IS of "covering up" for Kshama's lack of accountability. He accused comrades of trying to marginalize Stephan because of past political disagreements with him on the EC. Philip also opened an increasingly vicious set of attacks on Kshama, relating compromising quotes he alleged other EC and IS comrades said about Kshama in private conversations with him, and levelled a series of insults and barbed comments against others.

32. This was not the first time it was necessary for other leading comrades to call out Philip for behaving in a bullying and unbalanced way, but on previous occasions he would acknowledge his mistake and work to repair relations. Given his real political talents and the central role he played in many of the successes in Seattle, there had been serious attempts by all comrades to build a wider leadership team that made it possible for Philip to play a central political role on the EC and SEC. While Philip offered a semi-apology for aspects of his behavior, EC and NC comrades report that the episode on April 7, 2017, opened a whole period of similar and even more outrageous and bullying behavior by Philip toward those who challenged him, shattering working relations on the EC, SEC, and eventually with a number of NC and Seattle CC members.

33. In the aftermath of Philip's behavior and accusations at the April 7 EC meeting, a majority of EC members agreed to temporarily elect Tom to join Bryan and Philip as "EC Convenors," given the breakdown in relations and lack of trust a majority now felt toward Philip. While the Convenors have no formal decision making power - they meet each week to prepare agendas and proposals for the EC to review - Philip and Stephan made a major issue of this change, alleging that it reflected an attempt to marginalize Philip alongside Stephan because of past political disagreements. Given how this narrative has become a central issue for the minority comrades, while debates were a regular feature on EC meetings, it is important to note that there were no

significant political divisions causing tensions on the EC in the months leading up to April 2017. The February 2017 National Committee featured a unanimous vote on the US Perspectives and Building Priorities documents, and there was agreement that the substantial draft document by Philip and Tom C on our tactics in the Trump era should be completed and circulated to the membership (it was subsequently published in the New Member Education Program).

34. In their "Response," the minority objects to calling out Philip's behavior, labelling it hearsay and demanding that comrades ask for investigations into specific incidents before introducing Philip's bullying behavior into the debate. However, until his resignation in December, Philip was serving as National Secretary, the most influential elected position in our organization. With numerous comrades on the EC, the NC, and beyond reporting similar experiences and, in the context of Philip accusing EC and NC comrades of an undemocratic "lock-out" because he was raising political disagreement, the need to raise objections to Philip's pattern of behavior became a decidedly political question.

35. Similarly, when Philip initially proposed changing Stephan's role on the EC, no one suggested opening a discussion on Stephan's own significant history of broken relations. However, as Philip and Stephan doubled down on their accusations against Kshama, this opened up a discussion on Stephan's own methods of leadership and debate. As the discussion unfolded it became clear that the experiences with Stephan described by Kshama and Calvin corresponded with the experiences of other comrades on the EC and the International. Their descriptions of Stephan's bullying and belittling approach toward them when disagreements arose, of maneuvering to build a block among other SEC members against them without openly raising his full disagreements on the SEC, all found parallels in the experiences of other comrades.

36. Most EC members had experienced a similar conflicts with Stephan and had strained working relations. Similarly the comrades on the International Secretariat, a body that Stephan had served on until moving the Seattle in 2014, described previous episodes of breakdowns in relations between Stephan and other leading comrades, including a complete breakdown in relations with the leadership of our German EC on which Stephan had long served, leading up to his moving out of Germany to the International Center. At the day-long discussion on this conflict at the IEC last December, the leading comrades of the German section described their conclusions that, over a whole period, Stephan had a pattern of elevating secondary disagreements to such level as to lead to a breakdown in relations. Subsequently, when he was a member of the IS, one of Stephan's responsibility was to work with our Greek organization. However, reporting similar objections around methods of debate, the entire Greek leadership signed a letter asking the IS to re-assign Stephan.

37. We do not agree with the very serious accusations against Kshama and we believe the proposal to censure her for the breakdown in relations was wrong. We also do not accept the allegation that Kshama has a pattern of refusing to work with people or that she has acted in an unaccountable manner. Under the intense pressures which have faced the Seattle and national leadership in recent years, virtually all leading comrades have had their share of conflicts

and tensions with others. While it has been possible for others to shift their roles and responsibilities as needed to manage these tensions, given Kshama's elected position she has faced the most intense pressures while, at the same time, she has not had the option of simply shifting her role or taking extensive time off from work.

38. The minority has produced various lists of individuals who they claim Kshama has refused to work with. A number of these individuals dispute their narrative and have objected to being on this list. In Philip and Stephan's case, we believe they were primarily responsible for creating an intolerable environment on the SEC that inhibited the ability of it to function. The decision to change their roles was collective, not simply based on Kshama's preferences. In reality, the allegations about Kshama's alleged lack of accountability have amounted to an irresponsible campaign of maligning another comrade. In a Marxist organization it is a truism to say that all members have a democratic right and responsibility to raise disagreements and criticisms of our leading representatives. However, aside from the question of individual roles (which have been answered), the minority has completely failed to demonstrate where, politically, Kshama has been unaccountable to the organization and our program.

39. There are also allegations relating to staffing decisions in the council office which, after full discussions on NC and City Committee, we do not at all agree with. However, rather than answering those accusations here, we are appealing to all comrades to keep these issues to a verbal debate rather than online or in print, given how previously our internal documents have been leaked and published online. These accusations could be used by the establishment and corporate media to undermine our hard won position in Seattle.

"Administrative measures?"

40. After fully hearing out the minority comrades over the course of this debate, we completely reject the ongoing false narrative that Stephan's role was changed from Seattle to national work simply because Kshama demanded it. The decision was made by the EC as a whole because the SEC had become dysfunctional. We also disagree that this was done in an administrative, undemocratic fashion. It is the task of the nationally elected leadership bodies to work out the roles and responsibilities of all national full-timers, and especially EC members. In addition to a lengthy effort to resolve tensions, EC comrades discussed multiple proposals for a mutually agreeable way forward before the decision was finally taken in April of 2017. Ultimately the change in roles was made by a democratic vote with a clear majority on the national EC.

41. Disagreements have also been raised about the EC's opposition to bringing the full debate, even before the real issues were clarified for most EC comrades, into the Seattle City Committee last June, where a new SEC was proposed and elected without Stephan. The EC's initial aim was to make every effort toward repairing relations before widening the conflict and further entrenching the divisions. However, given how the conflict has unfolded, in retrospect there is general agreement that it would have been better to have organized an emergency debate at the National Committee beforehand and from there brought the disagreement fully into the City

Committee before holding a vote for the SEC.

42. While acknowledging this mistake, we don't agree with the characterization that the EC's approach amounted to "administrative measures," or taking the Seattle organization into "trusteeship," or that it is "unprecedented." It is not at all unprecedented for elected leadership bodies to make every attempt to resolve interpersonal disputes, breakdowns in relations, or even political disputes over secondary questions without always airing the full conflict before the wider membership. Many Branch Committee members will have experienced disagreements and arguments on their BC's that were discussed out, sometimes over the course of several meetings, in an attempt to resolve them before bringing the debate fully into the branch. There are many examples in the history of our organization, from the Branch Committee level up to the EC, where breakdowns in working relations led to changes in comrades' roles, but where the full messy background was not reported to the wider bodies or membership. This in no way means any political disagreements connected to such disputes should be hidden from the wider organization, but we have insisted on a structured democratic debate.

43. For that reason, we also don't agree that this debate should have been aired on the Seattle CC before the National Committee, given that the dispute was centered among EC members and the central objections raised were to the refusal of EC to censure Kshama and the allegation that Stephan's role was being changed because of political differences. Philip and Stephan have the right to air their views, and they have done so at many levels of the organization, now including the Seattle Convention. The National Committee also has rights, and given that Philip and Stephan were elected by the National Committee to their roles on the EC, the NC had the right and obligation to organize a full debate and to then make it's views known to the Seattle City Committee and wider membership when the discussion is brought there.

44. Given the central importance of our city council position to our whole national organization, and the role of the whole organization in winning and defending the seat, the question of who is the day-to-day leadership team coordinating the council work is not primarily a decision of the Seattle City Committee. In practice, since Kshama's election in 2013, the council work has been overseen by members of the EC in Seattle, who worked under the EC's general direction, and who were also elected to the SEC. Previously both Philip and Stephan vigorously defended the need for the council work to be under general direction of the national EC, with local EC members delegated to be the day-to-day leadership team. When important debates on the SEC developed under Philip and Stephan's leadership these were typically brought to the EC and resolved there if possible before being brought into the Seattle City Committee. Especially for the EC members serving on the SEC, they are first and foremost accountable to the EC and the National Committee who elected them.

45. The last year has demonstrated that a lot of time and extensive discussions were needed for the issues to be clarified even to most EC members, NC members, and City Committee members. From very early in the conflict, the debate assumed a larger character than the narrow question of the composition of the SEC or Stephan's role. It was necessary to both take decisions that allowed the SEC to function while at the same time opening a

process of structured debate on the wider issues posed, starting in the national and international elected leadership bodies.

46. The accusation by Philip and Stephan that they have been “locked out” of the EC simply because they held differing views also flips things upside down. What is the substance of this accusation? The comrades are able to register their votes on all questions, put forward proposals, and, where they don’t get agreement, they can and at times have brought their disagreements and proposals into the National Committee (which the EC is accountable to). What is true is that the the previous collaborative atmosphere on the EC has been shattered. In the context of Philip and Stephan adopting an openly hostile attitude toward the rest of the leadership, where EC members felt their every statement was scrutinized and often distorted, the EC meetings quickly became a sterile environment for political discussion.

47. Previously EC meetings were characterized by healthy back-and-forth discussions, where comrades could test ideas out without feeling they would be pinned to the wall with every mistake. Comrades generally could trust that sensitive discussions would not be reported outside of EC meetings without common agreement. However, this was clearly happening with NC members in the minority group and beyond. While informal discussion outside EC meetings was always a feature of how proposals came together, this has undoubtedly increased among majority EC members in the present atmosphere. What the comrades characterize as a “lock-out” amounts to little more than these kinds of adaptations to a breakdown in trust and a shattering of the hard-won collective leadership on the EC.

Accountability

48. Alongside the accusation that Kshama wants to pick and choose who is on the Seattle leadership bodies, is the linked idea that this debate is rooted in fundamentally different conceptions of the relationship between elected officials and the revolutionary party. In the minority “Response,” (para. 9) they say that “a conflict developed fundamentally about whether our party should direct our council office or, in contrast, whether our council work should be allowed to act independently and given its weight, in effect, direct our party.” While there is room for debate over what our campaigning focus in Seattle should be, or what the pace and balance of our work should be at any given period, we consider it a gross exaggeration to suggest the Seattle leadership are abandoning the basic ideas of Marxism regarding the role of elections and elected officials for a revolutionary party.

49. Undoubtedly, as the “Response” points out, huge pressures exist on our organization due to the powerful platform and influence we have won through our council position and the growth of our party in Seattle. Our relatively small number of Marxist cadre bear a heavy burden of trying offer leadership on the myriad day to day challenges, trying to maintain a principled approach to complicated tactical questions. The pace of work and demands facing the council office and the pressures facing the branches can be different and has at times been the source of tensions and debates. Under these conditions, mistakes have been made and will continue to be made. The question is

whether we can collectively learn from those mistakes, make corrections, and use the debates around these experiences to build a stronger collective leadership and cadre base for Socialist Alternative in Seattle and nationally.

50. What stands out, however, in the minority “Response” as well as the discussions on this issue in the run-up to the Seattle Convention, is how minor the actual examples the bring up to demonstrate the alleged fundamental difference. The “Response” (para. 34) points to our hugely successful 2017 city budget fight in Seattle, where our call for the city to build 1,000 homes instead of the police precinct not only helped “Block the Bunker” but also won $29 million for affordable housing. Amid growing tensions in the Seattle leadership at the time, the comrades point to a slight difference in emphasis between an SA leaflet and a council produced leaflet on the issue as their evidence of two fundamentally different ideas?

51. As their next piece of evidence, the “Response” makes the case that various specific disagreements over the balance of party work in the past - how much were branches oriented to various struggles around the council office - is evidence of fundamental differences in approach. While there is room for debate over the right balance on any given campaign - and there have been healthy debates on these questions among majority comrades in Seattle - we don’t agree that any of the past differences constitute a proposal for the council office to “act independently and given its weight, in effect, direct our party.” All key decisions over our core prioritizes continue to be discussed and agreed by the elected leadership bodies. If anything, over the past year the role of the City Committee in discussing and debating priorities has been heightened, with far more frequent meetings and engaged discussions and debates.

52. In the City Committee debates on this issue in February and March 2018, Ramy and other minority comrades repeatedly linked their criticism of Kshama to the specter of the historic betrayal of the Social Democratic Party bending to the opportunist pressures and sending millions of workers to their slaughter in WW1. Numerous other examples of historic betrayals by socialist leaders were also raised to create an aura of suspicion and doubt around Kshama. Similarly exaggerated points, including repeated assertions by Philip in particular about the “tunnel vision” of council comrades, have been a feature in branch discussions around Seattle Perspectives and Priorities.

53. But Seattle comrades report that what is again striking is how minimal and insignificant the concrete differences to our approach and priorities have been. Despite numerous amendments being written up, on balance they add up to relatively small differences in emphasis. Ridiculous claims of Kshama bending to opportunist pressures have been made in relation to a recent housing town hall we organized where our speakers did not put enough emphasis on our wider socialist program. While all comrades agreed afterwards that this was an imbalance, while the SEC explained it reflected a rushed preparation of the program, a number of minority comrades raised

that this represented a seeping abandonment of the transitional approach!

54. A lengthy amendment was then drafted for the Seattle Perspectives document outlining general truisms about the transitional method, and how we apply that to the housing fight. The SEC was in broad agreement with this amendment and, with the exception of a couple barbed lines, accepted is as friendly. However the whole episode is just one example of the destructive and exaggerated method of debate, where every mistake is seized upon and every political debate weaponized to try to paint a picture of a politically rudderless Seattle leadership now that Philip and Stephan have been "undemocratically" taken out of the local leadership.

55. From early on in the debate, part of the accusation from Philip and Stephan was that the International Secretariat, alongside the EC, was "covering up" for Kshama's lack of accountability. In numerous conversations with IS and EC members, Philip in particular characterized the IS as having a "rotten" approach, and at the IEC meeting in December he said the IS used "maneuvering" and Zinoviest methods - understood in our tradition to mean a dishonest or bureaucratic intervention of the international leadership. Comrades in the minority have accused members of the IS, IEC, and EC of siding against them out of a desire to avoid clashing with Kshama as she veers in an opportunist direction. But the whole history of our international contradicts this.

56. To just take the most important modern example, in the late '90s we had six Members of Parliament in Scotland, in many respects the the strongest position of any section of the CWI during a difficult period for the international and the workers' movement. Facing the huge pressures of a period of reaction, the majority of the Scottish section, including all our Members of Parliament, began moving in an opportunist direction and downplaying the need to build a revolutionary party. The International Secretariat did not hesitate to carry out a full debate in all sections of the CWI around this question.

57. The material from both sides of this debate is extremely educational and can be read on marxist.net. The IS supported a small group in Scotland against the majority who led hundreds of members and 6 Members of Parliament in order to defend Marxist ideas. The subsequent political degeneration of the former CWI members in Scotland and the modest, but important, development of Socialist Party Scotland demonstrate how the IS and IEC were correct. It also shows how, even in the face of much bigger losses than the minority alleges they fear in Seattle, the IS and IEC have no record of shying away from defending Marxist ideas and organization against the opportunist pressures when they threaten to derail the work of building the revolutionary party.

Is a faction justified?

58. For many Seattle CC members, the "expanded" City Committee meeting on April 22 ("expanded" to include all Seattle BC members to hear both sides of the debate), clarified the political trajectory of the minority group. In his contribution to expanded CC meeting, Ted (who was recruited by Philip and

has worked closely with him for 18 years) elaborated his impression from conversations with Philip in the early days of the conflict last spring and summer. Ted explained the minority saw this as “a 1903 moment,” referring to the initial split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. After fully exploring the political issues over many months, Ted went on to say, he didn’t agree with that characterization or that the differences justified organizing a faction.

59. Responding to Ted in his sum-up for the minority group, Philip took up and developed the comparison to 1903 made by Ted. Memorably using the metaphor of the present “acorn” of small differences that could soon become a full-grown “tree” of fundamental political divisions, Philip explained that just like the divisions between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903, if comrades feel today’s disagreements in SA don’t yet appear significant enough to justify the approach of his minority grouping, that was only because they haven’t yet matured.

60. This was the clearest expression yet, in a formal setting outside of EC meetings and private conversations, of the leading minority comrades’ perspective that this conflict is heading toward an eventual split. While this interpretation is firmly denied by the comrades, it is difficult to explain their approach to the conflict in any other way. Unfortunately, what has already became clear to most of the signers of this document is that Philip and Stephan had been building a secret faction for much of the last year, based on a deep hostility to the US and International leadership and exaggerated claims of political differences. The whole logic of their approach has led them to wage a campaign of proxy debates designed to to expose and undermine the national and Seattle ECs, Kshama, and the Council Office. Rather than raising disagreements with the aim of politically developing and strengthening the organization, the leading minority comrades have carried out a factional guerrilla campaign.

61. We do not throw the word “faction” into this discussion as a slur, but rather to try and clearly describe the politics and methods of the minority group. In the Marxist tradition, a faction is organized when a group within the revolutionary party decides that fundamental issues of political principle are at stake and that the task of building a viable revolutionary party requires a fundamental change in direction including a serious change in the leadership bodies.

62. However, alongside the right to organize a faction in a revolutionary party comes the obligation of a faction to openly and honestly declare its politics and its aims. After a year the comrades have yet to produce a clear statement fully elaborating their full political conclusions and aims. Even the 29 page “Response to the EC Majority Reply,” which the comrades subsequently called the declaration of their grouping, does not spell out their full political conclusions or aims, and does not make the case for building their faction.

63. NC and CC members heard reports from Ty, who initially worked closely with Philip and Stephan on the EC and who attended faction meetings with the five authors of the “Response” in September and October. Ty’s reports filled out an already clear picture that the comrades had abandoned the perspective of winning over a majority of Socialist Alternative and the CWI, but, rather than working collaboratively as a loyal minority, were instead waging a factional war in order to leave Socialist Alternative with the largest possible numbers. Specifically, when discussing with Philip and Stephan what life outside the CWI would look like, Ty reports the comrades explained their idea of forming a Marxist faction within DSA. This idea has now emerged as a prominent proposal from Philip and others within the pre-Convention debate in Seattle, though of course not explicitly explained as part of a perspective for a split.

64. None of this has been openly spelled out on the NC or in the Seattle City Committee, but Philip’s use of the comparison to 1903 at the April 22 expanded CC meeting, alongside their overall tactics in the lead-up to the Seattle Convention, are consistent with what the comrades have said more frankly in private discussions. This has been a dishonest and poisonous method of debate, forcing the National Committee and Seattle City Committee into endless proxy battles. We believe this approach is deeply out of step with healthy traditions of open debate within the Marxist movement and the CWI.

65. Normally, political disagreements and criticisms should be raised in a spirit of solidarity, with debate organized to politically strengthen the organization and to sharpen the politics of the cadre and elected leadership bodies. If conducted in a proportional and open manner, debates can educate the wider organization, correct mistakes, and develop the political cohesion and confidence in the revolutionary party. Even when much bigger tactical disagreements have emerged in the organization, with much bigger issues are at stake, comrades have not resorted to organizing a secret faction. This was demonstrated in Socialist Alternative in 2015 and 2016 in the debate around our Bernie Sanders tactics, when initially a significant section of the membership was very unsure about the approach and a minority were strongly opposed.

66. From the outset, the group opposed to our tactics toward the Sanders campaign openly explained their full disagreements, first before the National Committee, and then within a structured debate among the wider membership. While the disagreements were quite sharp, they conducted themselves in an open and responsible manner that made it possible to work out an agreed framework for a clear debate. But we must underline that there is a profound difference between this approach and the approach of the minority today, which while unable to point to equally significant differences in analysis, program, or tactics, has taken a far more hostile view to the elected leadership and conducted itself in a far more combative and disruptive fashion.

67. After nearly a year of debate and six months of actively building their group, even their February “Response” failed to fully spell out their full political conclusions, or openly explain the aims and character of their group. Rather than taking a proportional approach to the political differences, and being prepared to work over a longer period of time in a collaborative way to allow developments to either confirm or negate their criticisms, the combative and destructive quality of their campaign appears to flow from an approach of trying to find adherents before a split occurs.

68. While we don’t accept that the political questions spelled out in the minority “Response” justify the organization of a faction, we are concerned about the political logic of the minority group. By resorting to exaggerations and mischaracterizations of other comrades views to justify building a minority faction, the comrades risk losing their own political rudder. The history of the left is unfortunately thick with internal divisions creating a political logic driven more by organizational considerations, by a need to differentiate themselves.

69. In the pre-Convention debate in Seattle, comrades report that the growing emphasis by the minority group on democratic issues which appear geared toward mobilizing behind them comrades who, from a different political starting place, also have raised democratic concerns. To take one small example, whereas leading comrades in the minority have previously argued against requiring the City Committee or National Committee to produce written rather than oral reports to branches, now this proposal appears to be encouraged by the comrades.

70. The same general danger exists for all sides in a conflict of this character, of saying “black” when the other side says “white.” A central task of the comrades who consider themselves in the majority, therefore, must be to bring together comrades who have political agreement with points raised by the minority, alongside comrades who disagree on these same points, into a common block against the campaign of false polarization to justify the organization aims of the faction. Only on this basis will we be able to defend the democratic space to have a genuine and healthy debate around these very political questions, to learn from one-another, and to politically strengthen our elected leadership bodies.

71. While there are many examples in the history of the Marxist movement where much bigger programmatic and tactical differences were resolved within the framework of a common organization and collective leadership, there are also many examples where petty organizational schisms contributed to groups evolving away from Marxist ideas. There are also examples, like the IR in Spain today, or Trotsky before 1917, of groups and individuals who broke with the revolutionary party at one stage but found there way back at another. The factional logic of this conflict could indeed produce more serious political differences down the road, though we do not believe that is at all inevitable.

72. On many occasions Trotsky explained that at the root of major factional debates one can usually find underlying class issues and urged Marxists to seek to uncover these class issues. When this debate first broke out, while pointing to the core issue of the incorrect methods of Philip and Stephan, all comrades strove to uncover any possible deeper political issues. Except for some minor differences on perspectives for DSA, or tactical slogans like calling for DSA to launch a new socialist party (which a number of the signers of this statement also agree with), no major differences were found. Indeed, the US perspectives document was passed unanimously by the full NC in December. While does not mean the methodological issues won't become a precursor of deeper political differences, at this stage the only differences that have emerged have been minor - issues of emphasis, orientation, and tactics. Certainly, none of the specific political issues brought up by the minority justify the damaging methods of work that led to the breakdown in the leadership in April 2017 or the level of factional division up until the present moment.

Expanding the debate

73. At the March National Committee, where this debate was continued, it was agreed by a vote of 21 to 2 to put a temporary "pause" on this paralyzing internal conflict to allow the organization to again turn outward for a period. This was no "gag order," as some in the Seattle minority have dubbed it. A core component of democratic centralism is the idea that, to avoid devolving into an endless debating society, the organization as a whole has the right to decide how to structure debate. Just as a branch must frequently balance the democratic right of each member to raise things for discussion against the branch's collective right to democratically decide what to prioritize in a given meeting (i.e. what to put on the agenda and what not to), the whole organization, through its elected bodies, has the right to collectively open periods of discussion but also, once a given phase of debate is completed and decisions are reached, to collectively decide to focus outward again.

74. In Seattle, the "pause" was the basis on which we were able to build the "Tax Amazon" struggle, which has emerged as a ferocious battle with big business and the political establishment in Seattle and is gaining significant national media coverage. Comrades can agree or disagree whether this was correct, but it's not a serious approach to pretend we could have it both ways - to have continued a consuming debates around the internal crisis while also waging a serious battle for the Amazon Tax while maintaining the basic functioning of our structures, our finances, and other key interventions. The plan had been to end the "pause" in the month leading up to the June 23-25 National Committee meeting, and from there to open the national pre-Convention discussion where, if comrades chose, a structured debate on these issues could be brought into the wider membership in the run-up to the October National Convention.

75. In this overall national context, our hope was that the “pause” would also allow the Seattle organization to have a full, healthy discussion and debate around Seattle perspectives and priorities leading up the Seattle Convention. However, a number of Branch Committee comrades increasingly demanded that the full debate be brought sooner before the Seattle membership. This demand was especially understandable given how the pre-Convention discussion in Seattle increasingly became a proxy debate, with a highly polarized atmosphere and an unprecedented volume of amendments coming from comrades around the minority faction. We do not agree that the political content of the amendments justify the organization of a faction, but it became clear that the minority group was using the Convention debate as a proxy to build support for their wider criticisms.

76. Under these circumstances, the Seattle Executive Committee, with the agreement of the national EC, proposed bringing the full debate into the May 6 Seattle Convention. This initial statement was therefore rushed out in order to provide, in outline, our views on the key issues underlying this dispute.

77. We urge comrades to carefully listen to all sides, take a patient approach to the discussion, and draw their own conclusions. We in the majority are in no way expecting comrades to simply defer to the authority of the elected leadership bodies. At the same time, given the character of the issues under dispute, especially the allegations raised against Kshama by the minority and the disputed methods used by Philip and Stephan, we urge the comrades to ask themselves why - at every level of the organization where this debate has been had out - the comrades in the minority have seen support and sympathy for their position further erode away over the course of the discussion.

78. The International Executive Committee is the elected leadership of the CWI which meets for a week each year. It brings together comrades with decades of experience working alongside Philip and Stephan. The IEC met in December and spent over 11 hours debating the conflict in the US. At the end, 69 elected IEC members, alternative, and invited observers voted to reject the arguments put forward by Philip and Stephan, with only the two of them abstaining on the resolution. On the National Committee, out of the 42 elected members and alternates, only five (all from Seattle) have joined the minority, while 33 generally identify with the majority. On the Seattle City Committee, out of the 38 CC members and regularly invited observers, 28 have come to identify with the majority opposition to their methods, while only four others have come to consistently vote with five NC members and alternates who signed onto the minority groups’ February “Response.”

79. While taking the time to judge all the questions for yourselves, we urge comrades to consider why it is that virtually all of Philip and Stephan’s longest-standing and closest collaborators have completely lost confidence and trust in them. Is it because, as the minority alleges, we have suddenly become intolerant of disagreements being raised in the organization, or that

we want to squash any criticism of Kshama and the work of our Council Office? Over the course of this debate, we are confident a big majority comrades will recognize the ludicrous character of these accusations and join together with us in defending the organization from the destructive methods and factional campaign waged by the minority group.

80. The crisis of capitalism is preparing the ground for big events and a reawakening of the US working class. The wave of teachers strikes across parts of the US, the revolt of young people against the NRA, and the #MeToo movement are just the beginnings of the historic struggles that will develop in the years ahead. The “Tax Amazon” struggle shows our Seattle organization is positioned to make a great impact in this process. At the same time, we are under attack from the ruling class, the political establishment, and sections of the union bureaucracy. This highlights the immensity of our task and the need to build our organization in the best traditions of the Marxist movement, including the best methods of building collective leadership.

81. This debate will go wider into the organization, and it’s an important opportunity to develop leaders in our movement. Through studying the history of debate in the Marxist movement, engaging with the current dispute and intervention in the class struggle, we can strengthen the forces of the CWI in the US.