

Concerns Regarding Worsening Situation in the Seattle Leadership

Hi EC,

For the last months, Calvin, Adam, and I have made a sincere effort to try to move towards a healthy collective leadership in the Seattle Executive Committee (SEC) and in Seattle generally, and to try to rebuild from the polarizing effects of the conflicts earlier this year. While we did not expect an easy path, we had hoped that all SEC comrades would approach this with the seriousness and urgency that it deserves.

I am writing this letter to register that in my view the situation is getting worse, rather than better, due to highly irresponsible behavior by SEC comrades. There have been several recent events which I will report, which unfortunately appear to speak to ongoing problematic methods that need to be addressed.

New Rumors about a Lack of Accountability by the Council Office

It has come to my attention, reported to me by several different Seattle branch members in recent weeks, that new rumors are being spread maligning the Council Office and questioning its accountability to the democratic structures of the organization. It is clear from the details of the rumors that the ultimate source would have to be SEC members. Since that time, there has been confirmation of some of the sources, as I will explain below.

There are multiple specific rumors. I have now heard from a number of Branch Committee (BC) members that there is an insinuation that the Affordable Housing Alliance (AHA) coalition, and its inaugural meeting, were undemocratically created by the Council Office without oversight of the SEC. A second accusation is that our recent vote on the appointment to the vacant City Council position was done undemocratically without oversight of the structures of the organization. A third is that decisions around this year's People's Budget have also been made unaccountably by the Council Office without SEC oversight.

Philip has admitted in the SEC that he registered concerns about our AHA coalition to non-SEC comrades, though he did not explain to whom. After we heard through other members, Ty admitted to us that he raised his concern to a branch organizer, Colin, about our vote on the appointment to the vacant City Council position, which then rapidly spread to the rest of Colin's BC and beyond. The source of the People's Budget rumor is unclear, but it's hard to imagine the details reported could come from a non-SEC member.

All of this represents a highly irresponsible doubling down on the earlier accusations, from this Spring, against the Council Office and me of a lack of accountability, only now no longer restricted to NC members, but being raised with a wide layer of BC members and fulltimers in the Seattle organization. James and Rebekah, who work parttime and fulltime, respectively, in the Council Office have both reported these rumors. There is a real danger of these irresponsible actions seriously damaging morale or even creating a factionalized situation in our City Council office.

Rebekah informed Adam recently that these rumors are quickly becoming widespread among branch members.

I will further explain the rumors and facts of the situation below.

Affordable Housing Alliance (AHA) and People's Budget

The most common example being cited in the new rumors is the recently launched 2017 People's Budget. Seattle members have been told that the Council Office did not have proper discussions within the SEC about whether the branches should orient towards the People's Budget, and that the Council Office essentially steamrolled its way on this issue, and did not give branches the opportunity to participate in the decisions.

In reality, the reason there was a delay in going to the City Committee and the branches with the People's Budget ideas was that Philip and Ty on the SEC pushed back hard against the idea of doing a People's Budget this year (we have held one every year since winning the City Council seat), or if we did do it, to do it in a small way with the Council Office and without involving the branches.

The perspectives put forward were that there wasn't much room for SA to play a leadership role during this year's budget season, that we were crowded out by the Katie Wilson-dominated liberal activist layer. Philip even suggested that we should dissolve our AHA coalition and effectively leave the current organizing around housing and homelessness issues in the hands of Katie Wilson and other Housing for All Coalition leaders (the liberal reformist activist layer). It was only because of Calvin, Adam, and my insistence that the People's Budget went ahead.

These are tactical questions and of course need to be debated, and in general, we should not engage in internal point-scoring. But what stands out to me is that branch members are being told (likely by Philip and/or Ty) that the Council Office is not communicating and didn't involve the larger membership on AHA and the People's Budget, even though SEC decisions were in fact stalled by Philip and Ty, as part of their larger pattern of resistance to proposals made by the Council Office. For what it's worth, the Council Office's proposals to prominently fight for the People's Budget, and lead the way on 'Stop the Sweeps' of homeless people and 'Progressive Business Tax' to fund housing and services have been proven completely correct so far. Council comrades skillfully pushed back against the liberal activist leaders by winning over rank-and-file activists, forcing two Councilmembers (Mike O'Brien and the new appointee we voted for, Kirsten Harris-Talley) to support the demands. We are clearly succeeding in using our People's Budget and Stop the Sweeps proposal to energize and mobilize, and are getting a huge echo as well as media coverage. Whether we can win the demands outright will depend on the strength of the campaign in the next few weeks, but the main goal is clearly already confirmed as a decisive success.

This recent attempt to oppose broader branch involvement in the Council Office work is only the latest in a series. There has unfortunately been a longstanding practice by the Party-Building Team (PBT) (before Ty arrived) of pushing back against branch involvement. SEC members on the PBT have asserted that branches are not excited about the Council work, have other more politically important things to do, that engaging in opportunities opened up by our Council

position is not politically educational enough, and that it's hard to motivate members to take an interest in the Council work.

The reality is quite the opposite, and we have heard from many BC members in this regard, who have wondered why branches are not asked to be more involved. Interestingly, one of the reasons cited at a recent SEC meeting unwittingly by Ty, as to why City Committee (CC) members should not see a document listing possible roles for branches in the People's Budget movement, was that he worried "they will be excited" about the People's Budget, and presumably it would be hard to hold them back.

Vote on Appointment to Vacant Council Position

Another new example of accusations against the Council Office is something that Ty himself has admitted: he recently talked to Colin, a very new branch organizer and unconsolidated member, and complained that he (Ty) found out about the Kirsten Harris-Talley vote in the media, and that he (Ty) was frustrated that the Council Office has had a record of not communicating properly, and that that has been a problem for the SEC on an ongoing basis. Colin later raised this with his fellow-BC members, and since my last conversation with Ty, I have heard the same rumor being repeated by several CC members and CC invitees.

I had in fact requested at the two SEC meetings prior to the vote that the topic be included in the SEC agenda. Unfortunately, those two meetings were each five and six hours long (!), and the topic was never addressed. Further, as was reported to SEC comrades, the vote on the appointment to the vacant City Council position was a politically very tricky, fast-changing issue with consequences if we made the wrong decision. It required us to be agile, and did not offer us any avenue for live consultation with the SEC - we had to make a final decision in the space of the last half hour right before the vote. Events since then have fully vindicated the decision. Not only was the vote proven correct in retrospect, our Council Office worked extremely well throughout the appointment process, building links with the best activists of the People's Party, totally upending backroom plans to appoint establishment candidate John Okamoto, and on top of that requiring all candidates to answer to a public community forum (for the first time in Seattle City Council history of temporary appointments), because of a resolution we forced the Council to pass.

After I found out about the rumors, I asked Ty, do you have disagreements with the decision to vote for Harris-Talley's appointment, or with how we politically presented our vote? Ty said he had no disagreements. Danny B. informed me that when Philip complained to him about the same thing, Danny asked Philip if he had any disagreements with the decision to vote for Harris-Talley. Philip also said he didn't have disagreements.

My question is, if SEC comrades do not have any political disagreements, why are they making such accusations about the Council Office? None of these specific concerns were in fact registered with me, or even questions asked about the process, before the rumors began to spread. Lastly, even if the comrades did have disagreements, it would still be extremely concerning to go immediately to the broader membership with such loaded accusations without fully airing them first on the SEC.

Consequences of Accusations about the Council Office

It is all the more astounding that these accusations are happening at the same time we are tasked with trying to repair the broken Seattle leadership, in the heat of the number one national priority of the Minneapolis election campaign, and with two lawsuits hanging over us.

When I confronted Ty recently about this in a meeting between Calvin, Ty, and myself on Oct 17, he expressed regret about his individual comments to Colin, but he also tried to portray it as somehow not a big deal. Worse, he continued with his (ongoing) accusation that the Council Office is systematically lax in communicating to the SEC, and that it does not consistently incorporate the SEC in important decisions, in spite of a mountain of evidence to the contrary.

This is a real problem, as I have quite clearly explained to Ty and Philip multiple times. I completely reject the idea that the Council Office is failing - in any way - to communicate to the SEC, or to be accountable to the SEC and the organization. As SEC comrades should be able to admit, Council comrades take great pains to include and consult the full SEC. We err on the side of taking political questions to the SEC. There have been many instances when I have personally insisted that Council comrades send advance notice to the SEC to make all leading members aware of a given political situation. But realistically, we cannot always inform the SEC of every detail or involve comrades on every question.

The comrades' idea of "accountability" for the Council Office appears to be only explainable as an idea of micromanaging rooted in distrust, particularly striking given the exceptionally high degree of ongoing communication and oversight, given that I am an elected member of the national EC tasked with leading the Council work, and not least given the success and political consistency of that work since we were elected. If there are political disagreements, then no doubt these should be discussed. But for over two years now, I have been at a loss to explain why there has been this continual attack on the Council Office.

As I have said to the EC before, if a CWI elected representative was in fact unaccountable, that would be an extremely serious matter, and would need to be dealt with through our elected structures. Do the comrades realize how damaging their actions can be to our organization as a whole? And how do they hope to consolidate members into SA while at the same time sowing doubts in their minds about the accountability of currently the most prominent public position of SA?

Needless to say, this risks a potentially quite difficult Council Office atmosphere on top of the huge pressures our office already faces. If this situation is not corrected, it will create worse problems for the Council Office work. Failure to correct this would indicate an inability to put the interests of our organization above the comrades' factional interests.

When Calvin and I recently met with Ty, he said that he agreed the political differences in our organization do not justify the damage to our organization posed by an ongoing faction in the US section. Yet, that is precisely what the comrades appear to be developing.

To take another recent example, SEC members who are not on the PBT were not made aware of a fulltimer study group, and only select non-PBT fulltimers (like Rebekah) were invited. Calvin, Adam, and I were completely unaware of this study group, and know about it only because of social media posts by comrades. To my knowledge, there have been no SEC

discussions about fulltimer study groups, what should be discussed, and who should attend them.

When Danny B was just in Seattle, Stephan told Kailyn that she shouldn't trust the IS's motives in their discussions with her. The question here is what do the comrades think they are doing when they convey the impression that the IS, the majority of the EC, and the Council Office are not to be trusted? That even a discussion with an IS member is somehow suspect?

Conclusion

Aside from everything else, my most urgent appeal to the comrades is that they refrain from bringing their factionalizing further in Minneapolis during the last days of the Ginger campaign. Already, it has been reported to me that criticisms of the election campaign similar to the ones the comrades have made in the EC phone meetings are being raised by other Seattle fulltimers who are currently in Minneapolis. We need all hands on deck right now and we need to maintain a high morale. I hope that can be respected for the remainder of the Ginger campaign.

Kshama

Sent October 28, 2017