

Tempest Pre-Convention Submissions

The Tempest Convention will be held on the weekend of November 5th in Chicago. This is a running document of pre-convention submissions. New documents are added to the top of the list, so the higher up on the table of contents, the newer a document is.

Make sure to get writing - even a couple of paragraphs that lay out some questions, or short pieces that explain how you are thinking about our project, are helpful and worthwhile to the collective effort of developing our new organizing project.

Email submissions to tempestzine@gmail.com - we will send you a confirmation that we have received it. Please submit all documents by Sunday, October 24th to ensure that everyone has time to read them before the convention.

Finally, we trust comrades will respect that these are internal only. This is to ensure that folks can write in a style that is intended for this particular audience and not feel undue pressure to perfect their arguments and ideas.

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Labor and Tempest (Elizabeth L., Chicago)

Business unionism has had a strangle-hold on the U.S. labor movement since the mid-1940s. It pushed back on rank n file democracy, debate, militancy and systematically removed socialists, anarchists, communists from its ranks. After World War II to about the mid 1960s, capitalism could afford to give workers decent wages and benefits in the middle of an economic boom to maintain labor peace. But subsequent periods of economic recession from the 1970s through the present, have allowed the bureaucratization laid early on to led to decades of concessionary contracts from union leadership. This led to low level of confidence to fight back and demand something different. Today, we have inherited a labor movement, which is a shell of what it was during the 1930s leading into WWII, with unionization rates now in the private sector at about 6% and the public sector about double, at 12%.

This is not to say there haven't been incredible periods of labor upheaval over the last 60 years or so. Immediately prior to the Covid crisis, the last large upsurge in strikes occurred in 2018-19, with large-scale walkout of educators beginning in the right-to-work states of West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, where it is illegal to strike. These inspired subsequent strikes in Oakland, Los Angeles and again, in Chicago. It was the pandemic that put a hold on this building strike wave.

The last 19 months the pandemic, began with a low level of strikes in 2020 with only six strikes according to U.S. Labor Bureau Statistics. But 2021 has begun to show a shift of some significance. But you wouldn't necessarily realize the scope of activity based on the usual sources. According to the Labor Action Tracker from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, there have been 178 strikes counted so far in 2021 (the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics has recorded only 12 work stoppages involving at least 1,000 workers since January 2021).

Since July, with the Frito Lay strike in Wichita, KS, there has been one after the other of private sector manufacturing strikes, each ending with mixed tentative agreements and votes, but each seeming to reflect a deepening anger and increased willingness of rank n file workers willing to take on their union leaderships and say what has been bargained "is not good enough." This is most notably the case for Washington carpenters, IASTE and UAW at John Deere members, all who have vocally opposed the tentative agreements brought to them by their negotiation teams.

There have been at least 30 strikes of health care workers so far this year, according to a tracker from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. The main motivators are abysmal working conditions, combined with a lack of adequate pay and benefit increases. "From our members, I've never heard the word 'strike' uttered so many times, whether they're covered by a contract or not. Whether they're in negotiations or not," said Jamie Lucas, the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals. "They're fed up. The reasons have always been there, but there's a new realization that they have the upper hand." K-12 and higher ed teachers have not struck at the levels of other workers, they have lead powerful actions, including refusing to go inside unsafe buildings and instead teaching outside in the cold and rain.

The significance of these strikes is not just that they may indicate a potential "strike wave," but what they reveal about the subterranean anger, built over years and decades of workers being sold contracts which call for "give backs". They seem to indicate a shift in consciousness amongst a wider layer of workers across different industries into more open and active confrontation with their bosses and their union leaderships and staff. It's not clear how or if this will deepen (or what that means exactly), but it's surely welcome given the overall state of the current U.S. labor movement.

For several months now, the Tempest Labor Committee has been having discussions to try to piece together what is going on within the labor The connection which has been lost between open revolutionaries both on political and practical questions within and across workplaces, industries and strikes and collective struggles, whether they win or lose, seems to be a central part of what needs to be rebuilt. This is a tall order. What does this mean for a small group like Tempest? Here are a few ideas and would more than welcome other suggestions.

Building on what we have been doing already is a good place to start. Continuing to write about labor, whether on strikes, key questions or debates, such as "What are the concrete steps of the militant minority?" or "How should socialists practical and politically approach strike picket lines?" and circulating these onto union, labor or union list serves, social media, within different political organizations or formations. It would also be extremely helpful to get more reports or articles on what is going on in different industries or unions.

We should continue to do public events on key topics in labor, as we did around the Teamster elections, the Bessemer Amazon union organizing drive, school reopening, etc. to draw labor

activists, militants and revolutionaries to attend and discuss our politics with them from all the connections we have already. We also want use this and our articles as ways to intentionally build political relationships with labor militants across industries and ask them to join Tempest.

Figuring out the moment: a short tasks and perspectives (Andy S)

I think it was Luis who made the distinction between the period in general and the “short period” – what’s immediately in front of us. Sean and brian’s document gave a useful framework for the period in a big picture sense. I want to try and tie some things together by describing the conjuncture we’re in, and how that shapes Tempest.

Looking Back at 2020

When we launched Tempest in 2020, the situation was surprisingly different than it is now just a year later. A big push for us was the rapid degeneration of the “new socialist movement” around DSA: the Bernie Sanders campaign went out with a whimper, completely unexamined, and DSA immediately shifted to [prepare a lesser evil position in support of Biden](#). Jacobin magazine pushed a hard editorial line in favor of electoralism, against movement activism, and promoted what looks like a liberal turn in its politics. This was all *before* police murdered George Floyd, with DSA completely absent in the ensuing protest movement.

Our hypothesis for Tempest was that there was a larger audience for discussions about movement strategy, political analysis, and principled debate that was being suppressed by the consolidation of a leadership structure in DSA by the major caucuses, and that their position was dependent on *not* discussing what was happening. We had hoped that we could provoke a debate with comrades we disagreed with and draw out politics in a serious way. We regularly invited people we disagreed with to submit to Tempest, to write responses, to engage our arguments. To my knowledge no one has taken us up on that. We hosted a debate with Eric Blanc and Collective Power Network over electoral strategy, which was a wholly negative experience, but beyond that most of our perspectives have been ignored unless they gain so much traction that there’s no response but to say something.

That moment has passed, and we’ve been coming to grips with a different situation since the summer, if not before. COVID dissolved many of the social bonds for politics and organization and deepened the existing alienation most people feel on a good day. Labor activity plummeted, and the elemental person-to-person contact that all struggle depends on was enormously limited. (The important exception being the BLM struggle, which managed to sustain weeks of protest safely.)

In 2020, the state (even under Trump) had some kind of containment strategy for the pandemic with lockdowns, mask mandates, testing and contact tracing. We saw that get challenged state by state, becoming the fuel for the growth of the far right, and a number of battles tested the efficacy of a full reopen. Once the vaccine became available at the beginning of 2021, containment went out the window and the national consensus became full reopen anywhere it hadn’t already happened. Democratic supporters like Randi Weingarten of the American

Federation of Teachers (AFT) was a supporter of the vaccine-only strategy, and we've seemingly been disciplined into accepting that this is just normal and acceptable now.

Unstable politics for Biden

The obvious change between now and then is that the general context is different with the changing of the guards from Trump to Biden. There was a lot of debate about whether Trump was the executive of choice for US capital. The explanation for Biden's win in a nutshell is that capital did not support Trump's erratic behavior and preferred a more rational administrator. Biden's task, then, was to "normalize" once again by competently managing COVID and restoring imperial hegemony.

Ashley's article [*Imperialist Keynesianism*](#) (one of our most read on the website), explained that the "break" from neoliberalism we were starting to see under Biden was not the marker of an enlightened regime, but the domestic program to "rebuild" the United States to a point where it could compete economically on the world stage, for a grander imperial design. There are two points worth highlighting here: first, there is a change in the operation of world imperialism. We've discussed this, but the growing US-China rivalry has become a central feature of the period. Second, domestic reforms are part of a calculation about how to execute those designs primarily, but that isn't broadly understood by the DSA milieu. (In general, we need to be able to explain inter-imperialist rivalry clearly going forward.)

This is not a done deal though. Biden isn't able to rally the forces to be able to accomplish this, and confidence in his ability is plummeting. Democrats have a razor thin majority in Congress, and they're unable to move their agenda forward. Biden was also left holding the bag when the occupation of Afghanistan collapsed, which could have been Trump's problem had he not lost the election. Biden's approval ratings have sunk, and the smart bet is for the Democrats to get destroyed during the 2022 midterm elections. The "Biden age" could be over before it's really begun.

The movements

Coming to grips with how things *have* shifted under Biden has been difficult enough for many, and it's still more difficult because this all seems so unstable. Many who were activated for the first time after last year's George Floyd protests are demoralized as the movement has been suppressed. Biden played an important role in delegitimizing demands to defund the police (and so did Sanders for that matter!), and a section of the movement moved into municipal reform campaigns which got absorbed into a cycle of pressuring politicians and running elections. Democrats created a wall and flat refused to make any changes, save for some glossy photos and adopted slogans. (A coworker said to me that "Black lives matter" has become the new "Buy local" for liberals here.)

There's been a major offensive against gender and reproductive rights, particularly over a new law in Texas that restricts abortion access and deputizes citizens to report violations of the law. A Supreme Court case in November will relitigate *Roe v. Wade*. The protest response has been wanting, at least in comparison to the Women's March after Trump took office. DSA has been silent on abortion, as it was last year about BLM.

The labor movement has revived some strikes, but these have a peculiar character. They deal with being overworked. In the case of Nabisco, their principal demand was not to lose what they had. As the strike progressed, the issue of mandatory overtime and grueling shifts appeared, but 1) they weren't able to make gains on the issue, and 2) the union (BCTGM) settled and suppressed dissent from the Portland local who kicked off the strike. Carpenters voted their contract down in Seattle multiple times and forced a reluctant leadership to strike. 60,000 IATSE workers were prepared to strike, again largely over long working hours – IATSE leadership reached a deal to avoid the strike but ditched the main issue. It remains to be seen if the contract will ratify. UAW John Deere workers are currently on strike, rejecting a proposed agreement. Depending on the outcome of that strike, it could give the UAW Democracy effort the boost it needs to win the direct vote in the union. From what I can tell, every advance labor makes begins with a defensive struggle, which can turn into a forward advance in the course of the battles depending on how things play out.

The Left

Describing what the “left” is at any time is hard since there's always more going on than can be acknowledged, but in broad strokes the left in 2021 can be categorized as existing in a few places: 1) DSA; 2) explicitly socialist groups apart from DSA; and 3) movement organizations, institutions, and independent cadres including abolitionist groups, climate activists, labor networks, etc. I'll focus on DSA here.

Anecdotally, I think there's a general sense of exhaustion. It's a difficult moment, and COVID has removed a lot of the reinvigorating parts of movement work for many. There isn't a unifying struggle that is able to provide leadership, give a sense of advance, and give confidence about what we're doing and where to go. As described above, **there are struggles**. But it takes us back to a phenomenon Brian and Sean describe in terms of the capacity that exists to support and build upon these. Paraphrasing Richard Seymour, there have been movements that emerge over the last thirty years, but they rarely leave something behind.

I would argue that DSA has peaked and is disintegrating rather quickly. Bernie Sanders was *the* thing that brought people into DSA and gave it some kind of external regulation. With Sanders' defeat and willing incorporation into the Biden-Democrats, DSA does not have a sense of what it is supposed to do any longer. The political tendencies that could coexist for the aim of supporting Sanders are no longer compatible without the campaign. For myself, early on I thought that it was possible (though probably not likely) that the Sanders moment could be the pretext and DSA might be able to transcend that and become a “democratic, socialist” (to quote Aaron A) organization that had an independent direction. I think there was some [struggle about that for a time](#), but forces like Bread and Roses intervened heavily to direct the organization in an electoralist direction while speaking the language of the far left. This is best demonstrated by the shift in DSA's electoral policy: from the “dirty break”, which spoke in favor of political independence and criticized the Democratic Party, to the neo-realignment perspective that the organization drifted towards and then officially became the orientation at the 2021 convention. As of October 2021, many DSA chapters are reporting substantially lower participation. Leading caucuses have basically consolidated the leadership roles in a bureaucratic manner, and in trying to solidify their hold on the organization they're hemorrhaging members.

The difficulty in figuring out how to relate to DSA is that it's in between being and becoming, so to speak. Two years ago, DSA was the assumed place new socialists would go to as the largest socialist organization in the United States. The organization had prestige. We can't make that

assumption any longer. The profile of the group has changed, and the possibilities for what DSA might do are much more limited. The issue for us in Tempest is that this process isn't complete, and so there are *some* good people in DSA, some new people who are very interested in our politics, but likely just as many who don't care for DSA any longer or aren't going there as the first stop.

This makes it particularly difficult to determine what we should do. Our members are extremely frustrated by DSA. The new consensus among leaders is that the big tent needs to be "brought in", and that some positions should not be in DSA. Namely, "trots". There is coordinated hostility to any dissent on "DSA campaigns" or criticisms of "DSA elected". That's just reality now.

Is that frustration sufficient to dismiss the structure and access that DSA provides? That's an open question. The articles we write on DSA are consistently the most read on our website – the reporting and perspectives we give are largely absent from the rest of the organization. (None of the large causes gave any reflections on the convention, for example.) I would argue that we should continue our general orientation of "be in DSA if it makes sense, don't if it doesn't", but we should be very deliberate about whether to take on leadership roles in chapters. In the long term, I don't think DSA is going to house the broad socialist project we would like to see, much less be part of initiating a party. One thing I think we can say decisively is that DSA national is pretty much unreformable and not worth the effort.

It's beyond my ability here to consider the rest of the left, but many other documents in this bulletin have talked about our relationship to other socialist organizations. For the sake of recording history: Socialist Alternative decided earlier this year to join DSA while maintaining its own organization – they don't appear to have committed to DSA so much as they wish to be present for the debates inside the organization. The bulk of SALT's national profile has remained synonymous with Kshama Sawant as they work against her recall. Revolutionary Socialist Network (RSN) seems to be hitting some hard times, with conflict over its direction among the constituent groups. Marxist Center has been quiet recently, with some tension between Philly Socialists and other affiliates, and some turmoil in NYC's Red Bloom expelling some members.

Solidarity still exists, but I'm not sure what state they're in – in 2018 Dan La Botz said that Soli had decided to dissolve its organization and become more of a network and education project, but it seems like that isn't the case. When I quit in 2014, it was 300 members on paper with an active core of more like 60. Solidarity is producing a pretty good podcast now, but it is split internally on its allegiances in DSA: some Solidarity members are in Bread & Roses, some in Tempest, some independent of a formation, and others uninterested in DSA at all.

Left Voice has been consistently putting out articles, which has built a loyal audience around its website. They still maintain an orthodox Trotskyist orientation that has been quite sectarian at points, but their consistency and sharp criticism has been important.

Tempest – Tasks and Perspectives

That brings us back to Tempest. I think much of the difficulty we have in coming up with an orientation for "what should Tempest *do*" is reflective of the general moment. The political situation is unstable, there is not a leading movement or opposition force, left organizations are scattered and DSA is on the downswing (but far from gone). This makes it difficult to set a course with certainty. We are also just over one hundred members, scattered across the United States. Our highest concentrations don't go beyond a few dozen members in any locale. We are

not able to launch a campaign taken on by members of our organization in any serious way, as much as we may like to.

Publications

In 2020, we did make decisions on some collective work that seems to have been overlooked in some remarks: we prioritized building our website. That effort has been fairly successful. Tempestmag.org consistently publishes at least a few articles each week; the pieces are high quality; and we've often been able to be an intellectual/political leader in our interventions. The publication has attracted new members to Tempest, and, as it's been said by others, our perspectives were able to sway an audience significantly beyond our numbers when tested at the DSA convention. The limitations of our media is that Tempest is targeted socialist cadres generally – active partisans, though not necessarily trained activists. The publication can sometimes go beyond that when writing about concrete issues but given the length and style its not what I'd think is the primary audience.

For the coming year, I'd **urge us to recommit to building the website**: electing the editorial board at our convention, actively discussing what pieces we need to put out, and figuring out how we give adequate support to writers, artists, and comrades running the website. This is a collective task – as we've grown, its been relegated more to a core team, but I think its important that this is understood to be one of the central things Tempest can contribute. At some point we may be able to put together some print materials, but this should flow from a function: its not hard to make fliers and stuff, but we have to have a use for them. (Natalia and I created a bunch of short fliers for Restaurant Organizing Project, so its very possible to do.)

Beyond that, if we have the capacity we should begin doing a podcast – probably start by launching a more general Tempest podcast, but could do a few different “programs” as part of our feed as it develops. Written word is obviously important, but there's a huge audience that regularly looks to audio content – often who don't read articles. It would be easy to start by interviewing authors about the articles we publish to generate content to maximize what we already have. I'm sure there are plenty of other ideas for what we could do, but I think the point is that we just have to do it.

Areas of Work

For the time being, what we are able to do is discuss common areas of work, offer support, share analysis, and try to raise politics together. We have a labor fraction that discusses the state of the labor movement, for example, but we don't have anything like concentrations at workplaces. There's still a large value in being able to figure out what's happening together, forge a common analysis, and then put on external-facing events, but we're very limited in being able to directly coordinate our activity.

What Tempest members have focused on over the past year is:

- DSA (see Natalia's report)
- Labor
- Ecosocialism
- Internal education
- Anti-racism / abolition

These have functioned more like networks, save for the DSA convention, but have been useful still. I generally think this can continue, but we have to make sure not to spread ourselves too thin – should we find that we have a dozen working groups for 100-some members, that will be a problem.

A “model”

As we’ve discussed a lot about what it is Tempest is or is trying to be, particularly in the framework of “to micro-party, or not to micro-party”, we clearly are searching for a concept of ourselves and how we see that moving things forward. The contributions to this bulletin have challenged a lot of my thinking, and what I’ve landed on is that in many ways what we’re trying to do is akin to the Spartakus Group of Rosa Luxemburg. We don’t think we’re a party, nor that we’ll be the nucleus of that party. But we do *want* a party and see that we could contribute to building it in working with others. Comrades should listen to [Sean L’s talk on the German Revolution](#), which discusses the German Communist Party, but the Spartakus Group was important to that while not simply being a micro-party that grew to be the real revolutionary party, or whatever.

I think this is useful because it suggests that 1) it is useful to build Tempest as a group; 2) it maintains that humble sense of what we are realistically capable of, while having a broader horizon; 3) has a sense that other forces are necessary to building the party/organization we want; and 4) it gives a sense of what we might do along the way.

I’ve already stressed that I think we need to continue our publication – what’s made it *good* is that its not an academic journal or wholly abstract. Tempest pieces reflect involvement and investment in struggles, while having a clear political perspective. Right now, one of the things we can contribute is analysis. People are hungry for ideas and want to be able to make sense of the world. To the extent we can help do that, we’ll be doing something useful.

A second thing that will be critical is that we need to train and develop cadres. Even among DSA’s leadership layer, nearly of them have been politically/organizationally trained, generally by cadre organizations. Many leading labor and movement activists have likewise been formally trained. This matters. Our predecessor organizations were generally able to train cadres in ways that were useful, but that task has been left aside with the dissolution of many of these organizations. I think it will be important for Tempest to be able to train activists systematically, as organizers and thinkers. What this looks like obviously needs to be thought through, but I think it has to happen. We could take some pointers from the [IIRE](#) in trying to create open programs to train people, including our own members but available to movement activists or DSA members who are interested. A lot of the basics are not being transmitted – it’s a political task to take up.

A last thing I wanted to suggest before closing is that Sean and Brian’s document emphasizes the problem of “hollow working-class institutions”, the loss of the infrastructure of dissent. This is useful but rebuilding working-class institutions and the social fabric of our class is something that is not unique to this period. Time and again socialists have had to forge the bonds between workers, and it cannot be assumed that this will just exist. We know about social democracy having “cradle to the grave” programs, but the CIO also had to create baseball programs and all kinds of social institutions to build the bonds of solidarity that were needed to successfully struggle. That we have to take that up again is important, and it asks us to be *institution builders* and not just activists. Its also not as though these organizations have been cleared away

entirely – we live with empty buildings and rubble, which in some ways makes it harder than if we were starting from scratch.

Ideas for a multimedia strategy for *Tempest* **(Hector R., Los Angeles)**

The following ideas come from a small amount of research on Marxist approaches to technology, and the role of technology in social change. We could talk about both of those topics for days but I have only included a few references to elaborate points or give examples. My main argument is that Tempest must use the most advanced means of communication to disseminate our politics and train our members using a podcast and a YouTube channel.

I. Media and Social Change

When we look at social movements and social change, we see the deployment of technologies to advance the politics and struggles of those movements. The printing press is one of the most famous examples, but all radicals have employed advanced means of communication, for example, Engels had a telephone by 1895, shortly before his death, newspapers and printing materials were indispensable to the Russian Revolution, during his exile in Mexico, Trotsky used the phonograph to record speeches, and Cuban guerrilleros created Radio Rebelde to spread their message from the Sierra Maestra.

The Zapatistas of Chiapas were also early pioneers of net activism by using internet tools to build digital infrastructures like web archives, websites and mailing lists. This was not something they set out to do from the beginning but picked up quickly with encouragement from their global allies. With the introduction of the smartphone and social media, we have also seen the rise of Twitter revolutions, which we know were not just organized on social media, and which relied on decades of organizational experience of their participants. Many of us in Tempest have also seen the use of technology in social movements, such as Occupy Wall Street and #BlackLivesMatter. Some of us have also leveraged these networks during strikes, for example, to fundraise over \$40,000 during the solidarity campaign “Tacos for Teachers” to support UTLA during their strike in 2019.

For the most part, the American left has been a late adopter of Web 2.0 and the ISO only got around to a podcast in the later years of its existence. The ISO skipped a YouTube channel and instead opted for a platform to upload Socialism Conference talks (wearemany.org). Of course, this archive has helped develop many of us for the better, but the medium left a lot to be desired. Our podcast, Better Off Red, however, was very useful, and considered a success all around. After the ISO’s dissolution, it’s one of the things I missed most since I could always count on a podcast for good political analysis. As Tempest, we have also used our website and

our social media pages to build our small network and to stream discussions and debates. In part, because the dissolution of the ISO, our small size and the pandemic left us no choice.

Technologies are not good or bad but do carry the values of the societies that create them. With these modes of communication, we must also be aware of the risks and consequences. For example, our media pages can be easily shutdown or get spammed by trolls. So, we must really grapple with the pros and cons of these mediums. As Richard Seymour has shown, social media platforms operate on addiction and distort reality, creating an alternate reality through spectacle and simulacra. What's more, we're not just dealing with 'social media' but a *social industry* that seeks to shape us through algorithms. The material and theoretical implications of this reality is something we should study further and try to anticipate potential issues that might arise from our reliance on these means.

II. Tempest Strategy

As we embark on our project, we should take more care to figure out a well thought out media strategy for Tempest. For example, we need to consider what makes most sense for us at this stage. Should we start with a podcast or a YouTube channel? What should be the format of the programming? Interviews, news roundup, commentary, skill shares, strategy shares, book clubs?

Personally, I think that we should start with a short podcast, one that isn't a chore to get through, perhaps a 30-minute Sunday program with a 10-minute news-roundup or discussion of current events, followed by an in-depth interview or debate about current events, strikes, books, etc. I think a Sunday program would work because DemocracyNow! has a lock on the weekly shows. Once set up, we can use our podcast to train our membership to speak publicly about their areas of expertise or topics they're learning about. Our public programming should be part of our toolset to develop the cadre we know we need to train.

Once we've gotten a handle on a podcast with good quality and good content, we can move onto a YouTube channel, since it will take more work and more equipment to produce something regularly. **Novara Media** in the UK is a great example of what we should work towards, with live commentary specials during elections, uprisings or major protests. We should continue live streaming our public Zoom events on our social media, as we already do, however, there is a big generational gap between Facebook and Gen Z. Whereas Millennials and Gen Z have switched to Instagram and TikTok, respectively, *everyone* watches YouTube.

I believe that in the aftermath of the 2020 BLM uprising and with the dissatisfaction of members in DSA, Tempest can project itself to these and new audiences through media. We're at a point where we've accumulated a good number of Marxist cadres that we can portray as "**influencers**" with social media and other technologies to project our politics and raise our profile and grow our membership considerably in the next year or two.

In conclusion, we must develop a multimedia wing of our operations to help plan, develop and disseminate our materials, from graphics, to audio, video, and merch. However, we must take our time to think through this project. We need to make sure we develop a good aesthetic identity in graphics, to train ourselves to speak in public, on tv, (and to debate), and to develop quality merchandise with which people can identify and be proud of wearing. Our media and merch should be of good quality and dripping with style to attract young audiences and to rise above the petty criticisms of our opponents who will look for the most minor defects to discredit us. Of course, our merch will be union made, but it must also be beautiful, and part of the tools we use to create a vibrant, flamboyant, revolutionary Marxist culture on the US left.

Proposal:

Tempest will create a media working group to explore the potential and operation of a podcast, a YouTube channel, and a merchandise operation. The working group will propose a budget and the structure of a media committee. The proposals and budget will be presented to the membership for a vote no later than the end of February 2022.

In my mind, I think we should work with the following timelines:

- Set-up podcast by spring 2022
 - Begin experimenting with merch to prepare for Socialism Conference 2022 and roll deep
 - Launch YouTube channel 2023
-

Four Distinct Approaches to Revolutionary Politics (Aaron A. - NYC)

As this is the end of this convention period, and others have done great work in laying out some of the broader dynamics and the outlines of both political and organizational perspectives, I want to expand on an idea I raised in one of the pre-Convention discussions. This is something I have been observing and thinking about since the launch of the Tempest Collective.

Broadly speaking, I think we can identify four generalized approaches to organization building from within the U.S. revolutionary Left since 2016. Other contributions (for e.g. Haley and Luis) have likewise pointed either explicitly or implicitly, to the distinctions I will lay out in greater detail below.

The Liquidators

The first group is the one I will say the least about. These are a group of subjective revolutionaries who—having often come out of the sects which necessarily marked the previous generation of revolutionary organization—liquidated themselves in the cycles of the Sanders phenomenon. At root, the Sanders dynamic as a *symptom* of a broader, international dynamic

(of polarization and radicalization, of the crisis and reconstitution of ruling parties and coalitions, all under the shadow of the exhaustion of a stable neoliberalism) gets confused *for cause*, seeing it as a singular, qualitative, nationally contingent break-through for the Left.

Over the last five-plus years there has been a marked evolution amongst these comrades. Many have reached the point where they have ceased describing themselves as revolutionaries, and for some we see a shrinking relationship to the Marxist tradition broadly understood. Many of these comrades have firmly established themselves in the leadership cliques of the DSA, overseeing its rightward trajectory. In part, this grows out of a natural and seemingly uninterrogated evolution of the Sanders strategy, based upon a growing commitment to building an enduring left-wing within the Democratic Party, in what looks increasingly like a Harringtonite realignment strategy for the early 21st Century.

In particular, this trend includes those who: defended the DSA's abstentionist stance to the 2020 rebellion; oppose an abolitionist stance more broadly (on immigration and mass incarceration), often on a class reductive basis; offer fairly complete obeisance to the "socialist" elected, in particular Sanders, looking to them in setting political leads with little apparent concern about accountability; have argued against any orientation to the abortion justice movement; and have generally supported a popular front line viz the Biden Administration.

Some of the leaders of this trend have found material benefit to their "evolution"—as staffers for electeds, the Democratic Party, or as part of its broader apparatus of NGOs, lobbying formations, or through the sudden broadening of professional and academic networks generally, etc. These individuals are likely lost to revolutionary politics, if history is any guide. However, there were hundreds, if not thousands, of subjective revolutionaries who came through this experience and who were initially won, in the flush of the mass support, to support for Bernie Sanders but not necessarily to the Sanders strategy whose right-ward evolution was not a foregone conclusion for everyone. Some of these comrades are re-visiting this experience and need to be engaged.

Too sect-sy...

The admittedly partial "discussion" between Haley P. ("Where Tempest started and some thoughts on where we might be heading") and Paul L. ("Organization, Program, and the Future of Tempest") is illustrative and worth a detour, to introduce what it is which defines this second current.

Haley argues that Tempest is a revolutionary organization which has "intentionally rejected two alternative perspectives that came out of the collapse of the International Socialist Organization ("ISO"), one of which argued for dissolving ourselves completely into the electorally-oriented socialist movement; the other argued for reconstituting a revolutionary organization on the basis of *programmatic unity* (i.e. an updated version of the ISO's "Where We Stand.*)" Emphasis added.

Paul L. argues that Tempest is *not* a revolutionary organization because we do not have such a program as he defines it. He writes, “[t]he Tempest Collective certainly consists of revolutionaries but is definitely not a *revolutionary organization*, if that is understood as an organization whose practical orientation could be capable of bringing a revolution. For that, a *program* is required that has potential for making sense to a mass base...” Emphasis in original.

As against Haley’s equation of program with the “Where We Stand”, Paul L. explains that program should be understood as “providing a strategic and tactical approach whose implementation can get us from *here* to *there* – from the “here” of present realities to the “there” of revolutionary transformation. Theory and practice must be merged through practical campaigns that make sense to people, that are geared to win victories, and that push in the direction of a power-shift.” In this sense, a “Where We Stand” is not a statement of program, but rather a statement of principles.

While I agree with Paul on pointing out the difference between program and principles, I think Haley’s overarching point is important. The statement of principles in “Our Politics”, while a baseline for understanding our politics, is not a sufficient basis for understanding why the Tempest Collective exists. A series of perspectives on the moment, which are always partial and evolving, built upon the common politics and principles, are what defines us. In this, I also agree with Haley in seeing Tempest as an existing revolutionary organization in the narrow sense, or a well organized, organizing project seeking to build such an organization, in the sense of its active goal.

More importantly, I would hope that it is an uncontroversial—albeit disappointing—statement, that neither Tempest nor any of the existing groups on the Left in this country have a “practical orientation [that] could be capable of *bringing* a revolution”, emphasis added, at least not in any meaningful timeline. In fact, among the shared perspectives which I think should define Tempest, are those articulated in the excellent contribution by Sean L. and Brian B. These include the understanding that the institutions of working class resistance have been hollowed out and need to be rebuilt, and that, relatedly, the working class vanguard likewise has not yet reconstituted itself. For all these reasons, and others, the 100+ person Tempest Collective cannot realistically establish a revolutionary program.

Nonetheless, this over-estimation of the role of program, and its centrality in defining the organization, has hamstrung the Trotskyist movement since 1938 and is also a defining feature of this grouping of organizations. In one way, the whole post-war Trotskyist movement was defined by addressing an error from the founding of the Fourth International (“FI”). In late 1938 Trotsky wrote, “During the next ten years the programme of the Fourth International will become the guide of millions and these revolutionary millions will know how to storm earth and heaven.”

¹

¹ Trotsky, *The founding of the Fourth International*, **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39**, p.87, cited in Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky’s Marxism*, Chapter 5.

This over-estimation of the capacity of the FI to “bring” revolution with a correct program, was related to another inherited argument: that the terminal crisis for capitalism had been reached. In 1939 Trotsky wrote, “[t]he further existence of the system is impossible.”²

On the one hand, the failure of this prediction to play out, the survival and thriving of post-war Stalinism, and the continuing weakness and marginalization of the forces of revolutionary socialism (of which Trotskyism was but one current, albeit the best known and most coherent), came to define the debates within our tradition through the early 1960s at least. On the other hand, the need both to defend a tiny, embattled revolutionary traditions, largely separated from the working class vanguard (where it existed), and one self-defined by its “Programme” and a high degree of theoretical unity, came to define the conditions of organizational life for its adherents over many decades, including through the neo-liberal decades of retreat and one-sided class-war of the last forty plus years.

Though these examples are not exclusive, the International Socialist traditions, in both the U.S. and Britain, were formed in explicit challenge to these predictions and both tried, at different points in time, to overcome the political and organizational limits which these politics usually thrust on its inheritors. As David McNally writes in “Leninism, the Microparty and Revolutionary Organization”,

“[T]his is in many ways one of the most vital inheritances from that early period of what we have come to call the IS tradition. The rejection of substitutionism, the rejection of the small group acting as if it is already the revolutionary party in embryo and it needs effectively to mimic Bolshevik Party models of organization rather than recognizing...that there are no timeless principles when it comes to organization.”

So what then is the approach of small groups of revolutionaries where even the possibility of a Revolutionary Program- as defined above - is off the table? With some exceptions, the last generation of revolutionary socialist organizations were unable to overcome the basic tension which had faced post-war Trotskyism. Largely following, to varying degrees, the micro-sect model.

Despite the brief promise of the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970, what could be described as a working class vanguard failed to reassert itself, likewise the process of class formation and class resistance was reversed and began a four decade process of even further erosion by the one-sided class-war. The myriad crises across **all** of the tendencies of the Trotskyist movement, culminate in the present, depressing state of affairs at which any honest look in the mirror of the tradition would arrive. Whatever historic specificities led to the particular crises, at their root lay a failure to overcome—despite the incredible human energies and resources having been spent in these endeavours—these basic tensions and this model.

² Trotsky, *The USSR in war, In Defence of Marxism*, London: New Park 1971, p.9. Cited in Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism*, Chapter 5.

Following this brief historic detour, the second of the four approaches include groupings of comrades for whom this crisis of the organized revolutionary Left over the last decade-plus, or this history since 1945, including the problem of the micro-sect, appears, in the main, to be a non-factor in their conception of party building.

Either they reduce the generalized crisis of the revolutionary Left to more or less contingent problems in their own prior organizations and seek to rebuild, not just in political continuity, but in the same manner with the same model. Two examples here include Socialist Alternative and its international formation International Socialist Alternative essentially reproducing the method and model of the Committee for a Workers' International ("CWI") The other includes some of the former ISO branches who have constituted themselves around the Revolutionary Socialist Network ("RSN"), and whose approach seems to be to rebuild using the same method and model as the ISO.

Or, they exist in organizations born of an earlier crisis, in their own immediate family of Trotskyism, and see themselves as either the true inheritors of a tradition—see for example the Internationalists viz. the "Spartacists" tradition—or see themselves as having transcended the limits of their native tradition, see for example, Left Voice (and its International formation, the Trotskyist Fraction) and its break with Morenoism.

Often the method is essentially sectarian, seeking to build one's project and organization as always the single most important goal in any discrete struggle. And by, in the first instance, identifying the points of departure of other organizations and comrades from the correct line. This is often marked by a 'flag planting' posture towards reformism, i.e. sterile (if formally correct) condemnations, with little tactical consideration of winning those who do not already agree, and often outside the bounds of the organizing efforts themselves.

The related symptom of this approach is the failure to center the live questions of perspectives whose urgency defines any given conjuncture, but rather approaches politics as though a set of already existing answers are sufficient and can be readily deployed in polemics.

It is worth acknowledging that all of these examples appear to have managed some modicum of relative growth in the last few years. So my criticism is not that this approach is a strict barrier on building something, but rather that what is being built, at best, is insufficient to start bridging the gap between the current weakened state of both revolutionary organization and working class institutions, or at worst, ends up in a sectarian or ultra-left posture.

Base-building as deferral

While a theoretical argument for this approach can be found in *Viewpoint Magazine*, it is one seemingly shared by formations like the *Marxist Center* and the DSA caucus, *Emerge*. And there is a broader, common-sense about the primacy of base-building, sometimes spoken of (confusingly in my opinion) as building dual power.

This trend starts with a premise with which we would agree—that the institutions of working class organization and resistance have been hollow-out and weakened—and then generally defers all other questions of, and roles for, a revolutionary party, to the future, after these institutions have been rebuilt.

In “Party as Articulator”, Salar Mohandesi argues against a process of actively rebuilding the forces for a party (be it mass reformist or revolutionary). He writes,

“I’d like to propose a different approach to the party. Instead of treating it as a single fixed entity that tries to conquer state power, either by an insurrection or an election, I suggest we think of the “party” as an organization among others, one defined by its *articulating function*, as that which unites disparate social forces, links struggles over time, and facilitates the collective project of building socialism beyond the state.”

“[T]his coming together of diverse social forces is the single greatest threat to the existing capitalist order.”

While a fuller critique of the Mohandesi piece is in order—and would be fruitful in examining how the author understands the role of the party viz. the state, sets up an opponent in “dogmatist” Marxists, and rejects the idea of spontaneism—it is relevant here to see the ways in which important questions are either answered or deferred.

How are these initial sites of resistance and composition to be built? What is the role of revolutionaries? What is the role of politics? What is the vehicle through which political struggle is undertaken in these formations? While the assertion of the development of sites of articulation, or “dual power” that are *not* non-profits and *not* tied up in the networks of ruling class party politics and patronage is a fine goal, how these are to come into being is left for the future, or for the unnamed forces class struggle to sort-out. And how are revolutionaries then to be educated and trained? Assuming this is still important, are we simply relying on this to happen through these sites of articulation? This brings us back to the problem of how politics and struggle evolve, internal to these sites. And as much as pure politics, or propaganda is derided, who is to play the role of challenging the dominant ideas and arguments, or more deeply the dominant ideologies, without some such process (be it from “within” or “without”). It is also hard to imagine where the strength of politics, needed within the sites of “articulation” or in the process of future party formation, as conceived by Mohandesi, to come from.

An example of the problem with the vacuum created by these questions can be found in the Emerge caucus, which reaches consensus on party building and the base-building process in a decidedly opportunist direction.

In its own piece, written a few weeks later in September 2020, Emerge presented its own position “On the Party Question: The Ballot Line, Third Partyism and A Fighting DSA”.

“Emerge is pro-organization: we believe in creating a party-like organization in the working class. This party-like organization would be an organization of organizers which stitches

together different fronts of working class struggle into a cohesive political unity. It would be a headquarters for the class struggle....”

So far, so familiar. It then goes on:

“DSA is itself in many ways beginning to function as a party-like organization. In our New York City chapter, our organizers have tied together different fronts of class struggle, from rent-strikes to school reopenings to our Defund NYPD campaign. Our electoral work has put our own members in office, and these candidates and campaigns have taken part in mutual aid and street action....While we have our fair share of failures and setbacks, these successes suggest that ***DSA might be different from our desired party-like organization in degree, but not in kind.***” Emphasis added.

This position of DSA as meeting the conditions of “the party” threatens to completely elide the question of politics, and simply takes the existing process unfolding within the DSA as an exemplar of the dynamic contemplated by Mohandesi. There is not the time or space to go through all of the ways in which the evolution of the DSA—already apparent by September 2020— and its consensus electoralism, supported if not led by Emerge, has taken a decidedly reformist, realignmentist, and right-wing turn. This has been well documented in Tempest. The idea that the work of the DSA and the state of politics within that work, could serve as the basis for a Party (or party-like organization) capable of challenging the state is depressingly laughable.

It is worth re-stating that Emerge is not the only grouping which has broadly adopted the Party conception suggested by Mohandesi. The Marxist Center, and its affiliated groups like Red Bloom and Philly Socialists, share a base-building approach. Its first point of unity unsurprisingly begins, “[c]ommit to ***building institutions of and for the working class***, using local organizing to unite the workers of the world to execute the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.” Emphasis added. However, its Points of Unity are silent on the party question similarly deferring many of the questions raised above.

While a more explicitly left-wing formation (see, for example, point of unity #4³) the place of politics in the base-building project continues to rear its head. In fact, a debate has developed within that tradition around this problem. With some arguing that some of the foundational conceptions of base-building, are voluntarist and apolitical. See Introduction “From Tide to Wave: Base building a Communist Politics”, Jean RD Allen and Teresa Kalisz, 2021, pg. iv.

To these, I would add the question: whether gathering groups of revolutionaries with different conceptions of what defines a socialist politics, and different positions on issues as relevant as

³ “Reject the strategy of administering or reforming capitalism and recognize that the capitalist state can never be made to serve the interests of the working class as a whole. Work against the interests of the capitalist state even if holding government office.”

campism and the definition of anti-imperialist solidarity, or popular frontism has enough of a basis of political unity? Once these doors of enquiry are opened beyond a blanket commitment to base building these questions are likely to come to the fore.

However, for purposes of this contribution, it is important only to see this broad base-building approach and its range of iterations, as an alternative model taken up by revolutionaries, especially in the period since 2016.

Summary of Tempest

Needless to say, what I have been implying as a fourth, distinct approach is that of Tempest. The argument for this fourth approach has been implicit throughout, and within many of the previous submissions. But I will try to summarize and conclude.

In short, there are five tasks, in no specific order of priority:

1. To educate and cohere revolutionary cadre;
2. Embed ourselves in areas of struggle, and likely struggle;
3. Maintain flexibility to respond quickly to both evolving and flash-fire episodic struggle;
4. Building and rebuilding both revolutionary organization (in and beyond Tempest) and broader formations in which we are strategically implanted.
5. Maintain and build socialist media that can sharply engage in serve propagandistic, agitational, and organizational efforts.

These tasks arise from a set of understandings of the moment. The working class in the U.S. has suffered incredible attacks and a hollowing out of its own culture and institutions and mechanisms of self-defence, and which itself as of yet lacks a clear vanguard layer. Thus, like the rest of the Left in the U.S. the Tempest Collective is too small and too unmoored from the class to be capable of having a revolutionary program in the sense of “providing a strategic and tactical approach whose implementation can get us from *here* to *there* – from the “here” of present realities to the “there” of revolutionary transformation.”

Nonetheless, Tempest strives to be a (well-organized) organizing project, seeking to be an organization in the imminent sense. We are seeking to build both the Collective, and to actively engage in areas of work which both reflect the implantation of our members, our collective sense of priorities which arise from our perspectives. And to the extent our Collective is a transitional form, in the context of a broader recomposition of the revolutionary Left, we actively strive for a modesty—not of our goals or our willingness to fight—but in the sense of understanding our own capacities in relation to the tasks as a whole and in understanding the transience of organizational forms.

The political bases of our unity, while essential insofar as we could not succeed in our tasks without such a baseline agreement, is not in itself a sufficient basis to define the Tempest

Collective. Rather, we come together and build based both on our agreed set of politics, but also share a set of perspectives around issues facing the Left, the class as a whole, and the movements in their parts. These are not sets of dead doctrine, but are comprised of live questions that we are actively engaged in debating and investigating.

A partial (i.e. incomplete!!) list of such perspectives would include understanding:

- The crisis of neo-liberalism, the extent to which we are witnessing a transition in ruling class strategies comparable to the late 1970s or the late 1940s;
- The global economic slump and its roots;
- The increasing inter-state rivalries, the evolution of imperialism, in the context of a deteriorating or increasingly destabilized “world order”;
- China, and its model, and what it has to teach and develop our theories of imperialism;
- The impasse in bourgeois politics;
- The failure of the reformist Left to figure out how to build itself and lead struggle;
- The crisis and recomposition of the revolutionary Left;
- The decomposition of the infrastructures of dissent among working class and oppressed communities;
- The resurgent right, and the role of fascism *per se*;
- Understanding abolitionist theory and politics, and its role in organizing strategies within the working class;
- The specific dynamics of the Black liberation struggle, and the prospects for building solidarity and strengthening organizing efforts;
- The exhaustion of the existing U.S. trade union leadership, and the role of the trade unions in the return of increasing workplace struggles;
- The steady increase (and limits) of mass struggle and rebellion internationally, largely in the absence of the historical formations of working class organization;
- The role of the climate crisis in re-shaping the contours of all above;

Will there be a strike at UPS in 2023? Why the Teamsters are important for Tempest (Joe A, Chicago)

One of the most exciting developments since the launching of Tempest last year has been the popularity of our articles and events on the trade union movement. Our labor articles are consistently in the top ten of our most read pieces. I think this reflects an audience out there that is looking for a more critical take on trends in the labor movement.

The rest of left media that focuses on the trade unions, whether it be Jacobin, Labor Notes, In These Times, Dissent or more liberal publications like the American Prospect, have their strengths or celebrity writers but are politically weak, where not clueless. I'm of the opinion that labor journalism in this country is in pretty bad shape with few exceptions. Part of the problem is that most labor writers just don't have any practical understanding of how unions work or their internal political culture.

We are a small group and outside of a handful of members we are likely to influence working class activists or gain new members for Tempest largely through our writings on our website or possibly in the future through the publication of pamphlets. That's why I want to make a pitch that we continue to write regularly on developments in the logistics industry and the Teamsters. It doesn't mean locking ourselves into a set number of articles or getting lost in the minutiae of the union but simply to make a political assessment of what would be politically useful for us.

Andy S. and myself have written regularly on these topics for Tempest and other publications but it would be good if we could mentor others who are interested in deepening their knowledge of the Teamsters. The added importance of this is that discussion around union organizing Amazon will largely revolve around the Teamsters, for better or worse, in the near future. Though the effort by Chris Smalls' to launch an independent Amazon Labor Union bares some watching.

Teamster 101

The Teamsters remains the most important logistics union in North America, despite its collapse in the freight industry during the 1980s and 1990s, which was once its stronghold. It was the political base for Jimmy Hoffa, Sr. Partly filling that space was the massive growth of United Parcel Service (UPS) from the 1970s onward. Today, despite the spin-off of UPS Freight, over 250,000 Teamsters work at UPS. UPS Freight was rebranded T-Force and it remains a Teamster company with Canadian ownership.

In many ways, the Teamsters remained a viable national union because of the ubiquitous presence of UPS in the daily commercial and residential delivery life of the United States long

before the pandemic but has deepened since then. Adding to the Teamsters potential power are the rail unions that have merged with the Teamsters, is great but vastly underutilized. The last time there was a major national Teamster strike was in 1997 at UPS. My book *The Package King* goes through much of this history.

There are, of course, other important logistics unions that someone or others might want to develop a good working knowledge of, such as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on the West Coast, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) on the East and Gulf Coasts. Lastly, the Transport Workers Union (TWU) But, the Teamsters dwarf them in membership numbers that are currently standing at around 1.2 million.

Besides having a big presence at UPS, the Teamsters still represent major national trucking companies like Yellow and ABF, and it has a large footprint in the grocery industry. However, It has also lost around 300,000 over the last decade, losing 65,000 alone in 2019, the last year of the Trump boom before the pandemic. Despite this national presence, the Teamsters are still predominantly a decentralized union made up of local and regional companies.

The Teamster is also one of the most multiracial and multiethnic unions in the United States while nearly one-third of its members are women. In that way it mirrors the other big industrial unions like the Steelworkers or the UAW. While the stereotypical view of the Teamsters is that of a large, male truck driver is somewhat antiquated, it still holds true in far too many cases. There's a macho culture, especially at UPS and the old trucking companies, and a disturbing influence of far right ideas and racism in the union. This is one aspect of the political ecology of the Teamsters.

The declaration of the Amazon threat by outgoing Teamster leader James P. Hoffa, Jr. at the 2021 union convention was well over a decade late, and whether the union's Amazon organizing campaign can succeed is something I'm skeptical about. But, if the new leadership that is likely to win the Teamster election, Sean O'Brien and Fred Zuckerman, put a greater effort into the campaign it could gain wider support than the current one that is largely a PR campaign.

Will there be a strike at UPS?

I see Tempest as being part of the best of Trotskyist/ International Socialist tradition in our approach to the Teamsters. Despite the crisis situation that the union finds itself in, it is not going away. It will be a key place for the class struggle and socialist politics well into the future but we need to develop our own ideas about what this means as we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21 Century.

The Trotskyists of the Communist League of America (CLA) in 1934 led the Minneapolis trucking strikes that was one of the central events in the rise of the militant workers movement in the 1930s. The International Socialists in the 1970s launched Teamsters for Decent Contract and later Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) that played a central role in winning the

right-to-vote and electing the short lived reform leadership of Ron Carey. TDU, however, has long been in decline and has thrown in with Sean O'Brien; something Andy and I have written about.

But, the union is very different now. The Trotskyist were on the ground floor of creating a new union from scratch. TDU began with the union still institutionally strong but with a rotting foundation. While winning the right to vote, the Teamsters are a bureaucratic monstrosity with many decades of concessions and billions in institutionalized joint employer-union pension funds, and a bloated officialdom. The Mafia may no longer run the union but authoritarian bureaucrats with their political machines dominated political life in the union.

It is not a young or vibrant union, and whether it can be turned around is questionable. The Carey years were an example of how trying to revive the union was and how that effort failed. Care's election in 1991 created a reactionary alliance between old guard officials, Teamsters employers, and the Republicans in control of Congress after the 1994 congressional elections. The UPS strike in 1997 gave a greater boost to an already existing "Get Carey" campaign that forced him out of office following the historic strike.

Will there be a strike at UPS in 2023? Sean O'Brien and Fred Zuckerman are far less threatening figures than Ron Carey but a clash of expectations between UPS Teamsters and the company is in the offering for the 2023 National Master UPS contract. Much of O'Brien and Zuckerman's political support comes from UPS Teamsters and their critical stance on the 2018 contract dispute. Opposition to concessions has been building among UPSers since the 2013 contract and was one of the major factors in Hoffa nearly losing the election in 2016.

O'Brien and Zuckerman have made big promises to UPS Teamsters to get their votes, and they won't be easily bamboozled by cosmetic contract language changes. UPSers want substantial changes that do away with the many multiple tiered jobs and pay scales that have infuriated workers for many years. These and similar issues are the driving issues behind the current wave of strikes in the U.S. At the same time, we should keep in mind that while the 2018 National UPS was voted down, and imposed undemocratically by Hoffa, a majority of UPS Teamsters covered by the contract didn't vote, while this year's Teamster election may hit a new low point in membership turnout.

Pushing back also against a strike is the traditional bargaining posture of the Teamsters, partially broken during the Carey years, of protecting "union" companies through concessions against the competition of "non-union" companies. While this has been a self-defeating strategy it has been pervasive throughout the mainstream industrial labor movement. However, some are openly arguing to prepare for a national strike. Greg Kerwood, a UPS Teamster and one of Sean O'Brien more aggressive social media advocates, wrote this past summer in the online *Teamster Rebel* website:

No one ever *wants* a strike. But given the corporate arrogance that exists after four decades of unfettered pursuit of profit, the frustration of UPS Teamsters after two

decades of stalled progress, the signs of a broader labor pushback, and the changing views of the public, a strike seems not only unavoidable, but necessary for the good of the country.

So the time is now, brothers and sisters, to prepare for what may be inevitable. Start saving your money, start engaging yourself and your fellow members in your local union, and start talking to your friends and neighbors about what life is like at UPS. Because the odds are good that we will have to take this fight to the streets — for ourselves, for our families, for the labor movement, for the whole working class, and indeed for our nation.

Whether it is inevitable is debatable but I think we should be prepared for that possibility. A national UPS strike would be of national political significance for the left and the labor movement. One small note to finish. We shouldn't forget about T-Force, formerly UPS Freight, there is also a possibility of a national though smaller in number and name recognition. Its new Montreal-based owners are pushing through a rationalization program that could lead to a national strike.

Thoughts on the macro situation, organizational form and non-sectarianism (Pete I., Brooklyn)

At the risk of being somewhat redundant, I'm going to post a link to an article I wrote that *Tempest* published in early September. Here it is:

<https://www.tempestmag.org/2021/09/the-outlines-of-opposition-in-a-post-trump-u-s-a/>

It's long and heavily descriptive of the objective situation facing the left and global capitalism. In most of those respects it agrees with the analyses put forward by Sean L. and Brian B., Adam T. and especially that of Natalia T. when she writes "[t]he system is undergoing a deep crisis and profound transition." It may slightly diverge from theirs and other *Tempest* members' analyses in one important, class-specific way, which I'll discuss at the end. But at the suggestion of some comrades I decided to simply link to this piece and highlight how its proposals relate to those already posed by several comrades in the ongoing debate over *Tempest's* strategy and purpose.

In essence, I argue there that:

- 1) There are two fluid-yet-identifiable social coalitions in the US today that are politically antagonistic:
 - A. a metropolitan, multiracial, progressive PMC/working-class alliance seen in the 2020 BLM upsurge and other recent movements; and
 - B. an exurban, mostly white, petite-bourgeois-led alliance that includes reactionary PMC and many workers and was seen in the Trump 2020/anti-lockdown/QAnon/"Stop the Steal" protests, etc., with
 - C. a divided ruling class, some of whose segments favor A while others favor B, but which is generally trying to balance between them, agrees on continued US

imperialism, police funding etc. and distrusts the mass or populist elements of both coalitions;

- 2) That building movements and cohering anti-capitalist consciousness on the first side (A) of this dyad should be a central task of socialists in the US; but
- 3) That extant models of doing so, such as the increasingly reformist DSA and the revolutionary micro-party, have proven largely insufficient, even while displaying respective strengths;
- 4) Therefore, the organizational form best suited to pursue this mass-movement-building and political-cohering project is, in negative outline, something of a hybrid between the two: “A network or collaborative left ecosystem...composed of groups from multiple standpoints and constituencies” as a *starting point* for building a unified mass party in the medium to long term.

So what would doing this mean for Tempest? It seems fair to conclude that no one in these pre-convention discussions is advocating a simple re-run of the micro-party model. Haley P. praises the ways our flexible, dual-membership approach has thus far inhibited sectarianism and kept us in tune with wider activism; Andy S. identifies the inability of small revolutionary left groups to meet the political demands of the turbulent post-Great Recession era; and while Brian B. comes closer to defending aspects of the micro party—largely emphasizing the *historical context* of its growth and failure—both his and Sean L.’s, as well as Adam T.’s and Paul L.’s contributions argue for the temporary nature of the Tempest Collective and our ultimate need to dissolve ourselves within a larger formation or regroupment (though differing on proposed timelines and political thresholds). On the other hand, it also seems abundantly clear that none of us would be here if we believed DSA, or something like it, provided an adequate vehicle for cohering the left.

Between these streams of broad-based agreement, perhaps we can acknowledge that Tempest, though extremely new and small, is well situated to catalyze and pursue an authentic and multi-stage process of polycentric party formation. Many of us have gone through the experience of problematic, egoistic micro-parties that either collapsed or rapidly degraded; thus we are alert to the dangers of sectarianism and small-scale bureaucratism. Tempest is also new and unburdened by past organizational mistakes, bad associations, an entrenched “brand” or practices of questionable use (e.g. the weekly paper sale) that persist largely out of habit or tradition.

These features, combined with the correctness of our basic program (“Our Politics”), its resonance with a wider layer of revolutionary-leaning activists, and the depth of movement experience and embeddedness among our members, place us in a unique position to initiate broader left collaboration, rebuild “working-class institutions,” as Sean and Brian put it and become an “aggregator of liberation” as Paul KD terms his more specific proposal for a multi-tendency website. This doesn’t mean we are “special,” “chosen” or in any way immune to pathologies—just that our particular pre-history, shared perspectives and wealth of situated practice enable us to play a potentially outsized role in the longer-term process of regroupment and party building.

Adam T. argues we should immediately begin a left regroupment process, echoing convincing arguments he made to this effect in North Star in 2013, though in a very different present context. Paul L. argues something similar, if on a slightly longer timeline and less left-group-centric, when he proposes that Tempest’s mission should be to “pass out of

existence.” Andy S., Jonah b.A. and others caution that such regroupment moves or broader dissolution at our current juncture would be premature. I agree with the latter more than the former but both/all are making the same basic point: that Tempest should centrally be engaged in building a bigger left formation above and around ourselves. Succumbing to the sectarian trope would consist in avoiding durable alliances and regroupment even when the time is right, clinging to our “brand,” our structures, our habits, etc. out of pure institutional inertia. These are things it seems most, if not all, want to avoid.

But at the same time, we need something more durable, visible, action- and recruitment ready than the nascent propaganda and info-sharing collective we currently have. Inevitably this will be more *party-like*—even if not or never an actual party—and would enable us to pursue regroupment and party formation from a position of relative strength and embeddedness rather than weakness and obscurity. Existing proposals make this more concrete: creating or formalizing local sub-groups with their own elected structures; creating specific national, international and regional areas of work—centrally including climate activism though not necessarily under the “Green New Deal” moniker; creating more outward visibility such as Tempest banners, signs or newsletters at public events; and engaging in more active and targeted recruitment.

If we do these things while maintaining our minimal points of agreement (rather than some extensive and elaborate “program”), allowing and even encouraging dual-membership and the space to do so, avoiding “slate” elections, building into our activist work a culture of seeking and coordinating with external allies rather than go it alone, and taking steps where/whenever possible to form larger-order networks or parties, we can plausibly combat sectarian tendencies in the medium to long-term. But “long-term” is relative: the next 30-40 years will likely look very different for the left, the US and the planet than the last 30-40 years, when many left groups formed and degraded under the crushing weight of neoliberalism but on the longer timeframe of (relative) imperial and climate stability. Put simply, the coming period will likely not allow us to degrade in the same way the ISO did.

Last point, and more meta. In the article I linked to I deploy a controversial class concept—the “professional-managerial class”—to distinguish key elements of the emerging macro coalitions in contemporary US politics. I don’t use this term in the bizarre, mean-spirited way some *Jacobin* and *Nonsite* authors do, but rather as an objective means of disaggregating diverse material interests and collective practices within the near-universal “employee” (or would-be employee) category. I know that some, possibly many Tempest members disagree with this concept or designation and that’s fine—I don’t seek to make this a major point of debate. But I raise it simply because it helps elucidate a key dilemma for much of the existing (and late 20th-century) US left: active inclusion and durable membership among frontline, non-professional workers, unemployed people and those without college degrees. Whether we call the long-standing gulf between these folks and the more commonly found educated professionals in left organizations a *class gulf* is academic and not really relevant. But given that this gulf clearly exists and thus makes most left organizations *not representative of the actual working class* (in addition to equally troubling divergences of race, nativity, gender identity, etc.), it is relevant to continue challenging ourselves and the wider left eco-system to expand beyond our established constituencies—trying to make ourselves accessible and organizationally relevant to larger shares of working class and oppressed people. I have no immediate prescription for how to do this other than an amalgam of ideas others have put forward: focusing

on *relationship-* and *institution-building* rather than abstract programmatic agreement; focusing on *concrete and achievable goals* that materially improve people's lives; focusing on *activism and movements* rather than the arcane, alienating mechanics of elections and policy, etc. Adam T. regularly poses the larger-order cultural questions implied by this, so I will conclude simply with an acknowledgement of his thought in this area and a reminder that, even if Tempest can't "solve" this problem (and I don't think we can *right now*), we should frontload it in our thinking and outreach.

A Workplace and Union Report (Alex S)

This is a report on workplace and union activism that I am involved in, a discussion of the prospect of a mass school strike in Fall 2022, and a response to some other convention documents.

I am an employee of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). The district serves about 55,000 students and employs nearly ten thousand people at more than one hundred schools. Some of our biggest issues are COVID-19 health and safety, the labor shortage and lack of substitutes, and insufficient compensation, especially for hourly classified staff, such as instructional aides, security aides, and family liaisons.

I work as a special education instructional aide at Francisco Middle School (FMS) in the Chinatown-North Beach neighborhood. There are about six hundred students at FMS and about eighty employees. Nearly seventy of us are represented by UESF. I was elected Union Building Representative in August, which means that I chair an elected, seven-member Union Building Committee (UBC). I am also a delegate to the General Assembly, a UESF policy-making body of site-based representatives.

There is not a strong tradition of workplace organization at FMS, but this school year the new UBC has made progress toward establishing one. Typically about 20 percent of the site membership participates in weekly UBC meetings at lunch, and as much as 40 percent have attended particular meetings this semester. About 25 percent participated in a morning [walk-in](#) demonstration in September to demand improved COVID-19 health and safety conditions. And more than 90 percent signed a [petition](#) in October that makes further COVID-19 health and safety demands. Some of our organizing has led to real improvements in conditions at the site. The week following our walk-in demonstration SFUSD installed air purifier appliances in nearly every indoor space at our school. More recently, we organized a credible threat to withhold emergency coverage for a classroom in need of a long-term substitute teacher, and forced SFUSD to reassign someone from the district office to cover that classroom.

Me and my coworkers at FMS represent what is only a minority of SFUSD school sites where strong UBCs are being built. FMS was one of only five school sites where health and safety demonstrations took place in September. Only one-third of school sites were organized enough

to collect any signatures for the petition circulated in October, and only one-fourth of UBCs collected petition signatures from a majority of educators at their school site.

There are, however, reasons to believe that UESF members might become more active. More than two thousand members voted in the internal UESF election in May, the highest rate of participation in decades. These members rejected a slate of incumbent officers who had been part of the local leadership faction for a long time. Instead, they supported a slate of younger McAleveytes and members of the Party for Socialism and Liberation that swept every principal officer position and nearly every seat on the UESF Executive Board.

The new UESF leadership reflects a new mood among the UESF membership, but not only that. 2012 and 2019 Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strikes, 2018 wildcat school strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and elsewhere, and especially 2019 strikes by United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and Oakland Education Association (OEA) contributed to a new openness toward militancy and strike action that is present among educators throughout California.

The presidents of educator union locals from the big, urban, coastal California school districts have been meeting with each other regularly for several years to build a coalition called California Alliance for Community Schools (CACS). The group includes, UTLA, San Diego Education Association, San José Teachers Association, UESF, OEA, and others. These locals have synchronized their contract cycles—CACS plans currently include statewide, coordinated, open bargaining in Fall 2022.

The prospect of a school strike in every major city along the California coastline is a promising one, but we cannot rely on the plans of union presidents to realize it. Rank and file union members and militant minority groups will have to organize themselves to prepare this struggle. That is a reason why I am involved in building a caucus of UESF members called San Francisco Movement Of Rank and file Educators (SF MORE).

SF MORE is a small group of socialist educators and other radicals with only about a dozen members. The caucus has its origins in a sick-out campaign to demonstrate solidarity with the OEA strike in Spring 2019. SF MORE was formally launched as an organized group with this [website](#) in Spring 2021. That May we successfully passed a resolution in [solidarity with Palestine](#) at the UESF General Assembly. The caucus turned its attention to school site organizing this Fall and experienced some success. SF MORE activists initiated four of the five [school site health and safety demonstrations](#) that took place in SFUSD schools this September.

I thank Charlie P from New York for the convention document, “Some Thoughts on Revolutionary Socialist Work in the Unions/Workplace.” Charlie shares some valuable insight and contributes to an important discussion about union and workplace activism. He argues that:

the rebuilding of the ‘militant minority’ in the workplace remains ... the *main task* of socialists in the workplace because it is the *necessary* (but not sufficient) *precondition* for creating real links between workers’ struggle inside and outside the point of production.

Charlie counterposes this perspective to that which gives “equal weight” to rebuilding the militant minority through struggle in the workplace, raising broader political issues like Palestine, and basic socialist education.

My response is that I am less interested in debating the relative weight of these tasks than I am in developing a coherent perspective and concrete plan of action that *integrates all three*. I am not aware of any historical example of a militant minority layer of workplace activists with no articulated vision of social justice beyond the workplace, and no relationship to a tradition of political education.

Consider the Caucus Of Rank and file Educators (CORE)—an activist grouping inside of the CTU that was launched more than a decade ago to build a fighting, democratic union. CORE has had a lot of success in reforming CTU and, in turn, inspiring much of the rest of the labor movement, especially other public school educators. However, unresolved political differences among key activists have at times threatened to paralyze the group, like when then-CTU President and CORE member Karen Lewis publicly considered a run for mayor as a liberal Democrat. Furthermore, fuzziness about socialist principles like working class self-reliance tend to undermine the independence of the caucus, especially now that CORE members have occupied CTU principal officer positions for many years. To paraphrase what one CORE member said to me this summer, “the caucus used to train and develop workplace activists, but now CTU does that itself, so what is the point of CORE?”

What ought to be the relationship of Tempest and the broader socialist Left to all of this?

- I have not put very much effort into recruiting members of SF MORE to Tempest, but there may be at least two who are possible to recruit in the relatively-short term. Some assistance from other comrades in thinking through this task would be very welcome.
- A California-wide grouping of Tempest Collective members would be a useful in preparing for the possibility of a statewide school strike next Fall.
- The socialist Left is concentrated in white collar workplaces in urban centers. We cannot be satisfied with this situation, but we also need to organize where we are at in order to get to where we want to be in the future. If Tempest were able to anchor or help to initiate a national grouping of socialist educators and union activists, that would be a major contribution to the development of our movement.

Art, Media, New Media, Cultural Analysis (Unvarnished) (Brian Y)

I wonder how Socialists approach culture-- more specifically art like film, television, fiction, comedy, sports etc? I wonder how we approach these topics as participants in the culture who work in the arts or people who wear the cap of fandom while holding space to be critical of how this is connected to the larger Racial Capitalist system? I mean not to be abstract, but I think us of the Socialist intellectual variety can have the tendency to lay aside the conversations about film, television, theatre, and things relevant to pop-culture. This strikes me as odd when a mass of people have access to streaming platforms such as youtube, Netflix, Spotify, HBO Max, and the like. In many ways, I believe Socialists should always be vigilant of what is drawing the attention of many people. Socialist should be vigilant of what people are excited about, angry at, and involved in.

I think we have to be careful not to condescend. By this, I mean that we don't entirely stand outside the cultural conversations that happen as people who are merely observant. We are a part of the culture because we are the people. I love the more shallow aspects of the Met Gala that praise the spectacle of what Lil Nas X wears (He was Gorgeous in the Black and gold. As a pansexual I approve lol). But, I also have a critical perspective on celebrity work-- loosely, the idea that celebrity culture tends to uplift the American dream and the fantasy of individual creativity, will, and determination as the means to lift the working class out of the ghettos, the hoods, the rural areas etc. I love theatre, but I'm often taken aback by the barriers of entry theatre has for so many young actors, playwrights, dramaturgs, and even spectators who don't have the funds to go to the more commercial areas of Chicago's downtown or Lincoln Park. Even more, I'm taken aback by how a lot of narratives, still unto this day, don't engage the life of the economically marginalized people who might drive Chicago CTA; who might be unemployed; who might be an Alabama Amazon worker. I love theatre as an art form, but want to be more critical of specific artworks and how the institutions exist under racial capitalism.

As we have read and realize, capitalism pervades every aspect of our society. But, we don't subscribe to a type of pessimism. We are involved in making the revolution towards Socialism a reality. So, we should have things to say about the Atlanta television series or even the cultural renaissance of valuable radicals and movements such as James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and the interest that people are now having in the Black Panther Parties organizing. I guess the focus is how do we provide alternatives to trite narratives, the uncritical praise of such things that reify capitalist ideology.

For instance, I was watching a clip of the show Claws. And to be honest, the show looks extremely appealing. However, the narrative of the show (I surmise from the commercial) is how do these women achieve the American Dream-- more so their drive to become CEOs under capitalism. Now, there is so much to love about these narratives: the ambition and resolve of the character to chase her dream; the emotional connection any person might get from watching someone be resilient; and the charm of the aesthetics. But, I wonder how Socialists can reach

people about the more pernicious elements of these narratives of accumulation and individualism. Not from a place solely of smugly distancing ourselves from the enjoyment of these, potentially, light-hearted (in intention) shows.

I wonder how to encourage Socialist consciousness that centers our need to control our own bodies, the majority controlling our workplaces, control our communities. I think a lot about empowering people to notice our individual and, invariably, our collective agency to self-govern and self-determine. So, how do we write, review, react to art and media? How do we assert counter-hegemonic analysis, thought, and alternatives to engage people both outside and inside the Socialist movement?

In our own historical understanding, we understand that dominant systems maintain their power in a myriad of ways. One of interest to me is the way capitalist ideology and propaganda presents the system as the endpoint of humanity. As if there wasn't feudalism before; as if the slave system prevails; as if the poor and working class haven't had a history of resistance.

Comrades, we write insively against the military industrial complex, internal and external domination from the American prison and police system, the political suppression of laborers in the authoritarian workspaces, the environmental doom imminent if we don't dismantle capitalism, etc. In addition to these affirmative endeavors, we should be vigilant towards art, media, and new media. In the midst, we could play a part in the radicalization of consciousness that's already taking place. This is somewhat unvarnished and rambling, but how do we counter the pervasive ideology of capitalism that has (in some ways) and continues to colonize our consciousness. This in the way we consume art, media, and new media.

Tempest Membership Report (Jessica HW on behalf of membership committee)

The purpose of this report is to provide the collective with more information about it's membership, briefly report on membership procedures and pose some questions to consider at Convention in regards to growing and leveraging our membership.

The membership committee was created when the previous organizing committee was transformed into the Steering Committee and the Membership Committee. There are 5-6 regular participants and our main tasks are: on-boarding new members and organizing political education events.

As you all know, the process for joining the Tempest Collective is intentionally easy. When people join online members of the committee will follow up with them, set up a phone call (typically lasts an hour or so) and if they agree with the basic set of politics of group and agree

to set up dues we get them connected with our google groups, Slack and any committee/working group they are interested in joining.

So far our membership has grown with a rather passive approach to recruitment. As a small group that hasn't yet had its founding convention, we are still developing a coherent identity and strategy around engagement with broader forces. The membership committee has had multiple conversations around a more targeted approach to membership that may allow us to address issues of diversity within the group. Hopefully, this report will provide some data that can help us begin a more systematic approach to recruitment that will allow us to be implanted in workplaces and more representative of the younger diverse generation of activists who will be leaders in future struggles.

The pace of growth has been up and down (see graph of monthly membership growth). The spike in growth of 8/1/2021 is primarily due to the Greensboro Socialists group joining en masse. There could be more opportunities for group joining, however we have not discussed any specific plans around this. It would require more follow up with our members who are connected to other groups of activists and some group consensus around what groups would be prioritized.

Survey of our Membership:

The following conclusions are drawn from the limited data received by our [Tempest Membership Survey](#) - 78 of 120 responses. However, there are some trends that can give us ideas about how we might leverage our membership based on geographic proximity, sectoral employment, links to social movements and left organizations.

Geography:

We are a small group scattered across a large area. However, there are places where our membership is concentrated and where the possibility of coordinated activism exists and should be encouraged. Hector A and I are working on a visualization/mapping project that will hopefully be ready by Convention that will allow us to visualize our concentration and identify regional proximity so that members can meet together around activism when the opportunity presents itself. This could facilitate implementing some of the suggestions from Thomas H's document on local organizing.

For the purpose of this report I have created subcategories of regions to help members find ways to connect despite relative isolation. Regions include South, Midwest, NYC, West, MidAtlantic, New England. We have a small handful of members who live outside the US.

- NYC metro area: 31 members
- Midwest: 21 members, 8 in Chicago
- South: 22 members with 16 members from Greensboro
- West: 16 members with 14 from California

- New England: 16 members
- Mid-Atlantic: 4

Implantation in workplaces and social movements:

Without adequate demographic information only so much can be gleaned about workplaces/unions/activist organizations that our membership is connected to. However, there is some sectoral distribution that can give us a place to start.

43 of 78 respondents are members of unions, making labor movement a natural focus for the Tempest Collective. 23 of 78 respondents work in higher education as staff, professors, students, adjuncts, etc.. 9 members work in public education.

Our members are connected to many left organizations - DSA being the most common. Within DSA our members are involved in Restaurant Workers Organizing Project, Internationalism from Below, Anti-facism working group, abolitionist working groups, etc.

Other left groups include: Borderland Socialists, Jewish Voice for Peace, local Defund organizing, local tenant unions, Sunrise Movement, About Face (Veterans Against the War), Left Roots, local union caucuses, Chicago Teachers Union, and more.

Our members have connections to various international groups such as: Venezuelan Workers Solidarity, MST Argentina, Global Ecosocialist Network.

Further Questions:

The question of diversifying our membership has been a frequent topic of discussion among our committee. We acknowledge that like many other left spaces Tempest Collective skews white, cis-gender and male. We all understand how systematic oppression reinforces this trend but as socialists we ought to figure out ways to challenge these barriers however we can. This may be through affirmative action, intentional recruitment and developing ties to specific movements around fighting oppression.

The membership committee has concluded that our recruitment practices should be more intentional if we want to overcome the barriers oppressed people face around getting involved in politics. This could mean helping comrades think about their workplaces and whether there are coworkers who might be interested in joining Tempest. Or it may mean working with an important movement activist to produce an interview/article around local activism.

Does it make sense to organize regional meetings (even if only by zoom) to discuss politics of the region and potential for coordinated efforts around specific struggles/campaigns?

Where do we want to recruit? How can the organization help comrades organize around themselves even if they are relatively isolated from other members?

Some Notes on Sexual Harm, Accountability, and Organizational Culture (Sean Larson)

As has been noted in prior documents, revolutionary organizations around the world have collapsed, leaving in their wake disarray and, at worst, a political vacuum capitalized-upon by the right. In many of these instances (the ISO, the SWP in the UK in 2013, in some ways, Solidarity), the precipitating events to the crisis was revelations of sexual assault and especially the coverup of those assaults by leadership bodies. These coverups and the resulting collapses, of course, did not spring solely from the specific cases at hand, but were connected to longer, cumulative processes that downplayed harmful interpersonal dynamics within organizations and also undermined organizational democracy.

The recognition of the need to seriously discuss and address sexual assault within left organizations has tended to arise within the crisis itself. While that is somewhat understandable, crisis is also probably the most constrained, high-intensity context for those discussions to happen. If we are ever going to escape this conundrum, and more importantly, build durable organizations that are welcoming to and affirming of survivors of sexual harm, we are going to have to commit to thinking through these things in a more consistent manner.

Over the last two years I have had some opportunities to read and engage with others on these subjects, and although I am far from an expert, I have been grateful to learn from others with far more experience and knowledge. In the hope that more comrades will add their thoughts and continue to challenge complacent attitudes with regard to sexual assault and harm on the left, I wanted to contribute some notes toward our continued collective thinking on these issues as part of our convention discussion. These thoughts are really just a start, they build partially on our [Tempest solidarity agreement](#), but with a focus on the implications for sexual harm and accountability. Moreover, given Tempest's current gender demographics, it is imperative that cis heterosexual men take some responsibility for these (often difficult) discussions of dismantling sexism within left organizational contexts, while taking a lead from a long tradition of abolitionist and feminist thinkers and organizers.

Here is the main point I would like to make: there will be no impeccable harm response structure or process that we create that will do the work for us, upon which we can displace our collective and individual responsibilities. The value of such structures and processes will be determined by the kind of culture of accountability we are able to create on a much broader and deeper level within the collective.

Avoiding the problem creates brittle organizations

First: the problem. By not taking the time to reflect on issues of abuse and sexual harm and develop more honest, robust cultures around addressing them, left organizations have often grown brittle, unable to reconcile feminist political commitments and practical internal steps when it counts. One symptom of this fragility is the impulse to treat incidents of harm that arise

as anomalies or fringe cases. That approach leaves organizations with no real way of dealing with harm except to deny, dodge, or automatically defend the accused because if the accusations are true, then they reveal much deeper problems about the organization.[1]

The problems exposed become so daunting that it is far easier to reach for the easy, readily available alternative: “No you don’t understand, his feminist credentials check out; he is a committed socialist; I know him, he couldn’t have done this, there must be another explanation.” It can seem like the only way to restore dignity, legitimacy, and credibility to the accused (and to the organization) is to question whether the harm even happened at all. More alarmingly, even further measures are sometimes taken in desperate hope of restoring the prior “equilibrium,” up to and including questioning the credibility of the survivor or the cynical deployment of abolitionist language (“no one is disposable, so this person can’t face consequences”).

But what if the problems *are* much larger?

It is well known that sexual assault, interpersonal abuse, and other harms are happening all the time, in society and on the left. It is happening to people we love, and people we love are perpetrating harm as well. If we are serious about addressing sexual harm, we can’t just treat it like a third rail to hush up, tiptoe around, or withdraw from. We cannot afford to rely on a framework in which our goal is to return to the *status quo ante*, as if everything was already fine. Building healthy relationships and organizations can only come from acknowledgement of these harms and the work—on ourselves and in community—to repair and transform them.

As Rachel Herzing and Isaac Ontiveros write, “Rather than assume that the relationships, families, and communities in which violence occur are sites of irreparable, unchangeable harm,” we should understand “those relationships, families, and communities as locations of potential change and transformation.”[2]

The responsible thing to do when harm occurs is to approach it as part of our world that we are attempting to change. It is a central challenge that, by tackling head-on, we can collectively grow through and become stronger. Rather than trying to quickly resolve the individual case to make it go away, our approach in these situations should be to come through with stronger networks and supports for the next time that it happens.

On developing processes and believing survivors

We have to recognize that the problems were never reducible to how an individual case was handled—which would imply that next time, when some harm inevitably arises, we just have to “get it right” and we’ll be ok. That is fantasy thinking, a shortcut we rely on in order to avoid the far more difficult process of changing organizational cultures and self-examination.

At the same time, individual cases do come up, and will continue to come up. We have a responsibility to handle these with care, attentiveness, and according to our feminist and abolitionist principles. That means we will have to think more intentionally about our existing

processes. There are many questions related to these processes and situations, including who has decision-making power, what the purpose and guidelines of an “investigation” should look like, and how to ensure everyone has a fair hearing. In these very cursory notes, I will not comment on the details of how such processes should work except to say that, in most cases, there is not a debate about whether sexual contact happened, but the “debate” is about whether you allow the survivor to define their experience of that contact.

Believing survivors should be the unequivocal starting point. It is a recognition that the entire context in which we are operating (including on the left) is one in which survivors are treated as disposable. It emphasizes the need to actually listen to people’s stories and pierce through the mythology of what sexual assault looks like. Believing survivors is the foundation on which to build, whether through some sort of investigative process, accountability process, or, if necessary, expulsion.

Sometimes, “believe survivors” has been used performatively as a kind of pre-emptive slogan, a means of shutting down these very interrogations, community accountability processes, and even avoiding attending to the express needs of the survivor. That should not change anything about the principle described above or how we approach survivors when they come forward.

If the only time we talk about or do anything about incidents of sexual harm is during crisis, then the default assumptions about how to handle, restore, and heal (or not) will reign within the organization. Those default assumptions are punitive in nature: “crimes” can only be dealt with by “punishment.” This mentality leaves no room for a survivor-centered process (which can indeed include consequences for those who cause harm). The default assumption of punishment as the sole solution not only creates barriers to accountability for those who cause harm (generating defensiveness, denial, evasion, etc), it also unhelpfully raises the stakes for survivors and can lead to discouraging them from coming forward and reporting harms. That’s why these assumptions need to be interrogated. The point of such interrogation is not to say there should be no consequences for those who cause harm, but rather that preemptively determining those consequences as a group can undermine accountability, healing, and the needs of the survivor.

Within accountability processes, restorative or transformative justice, and abolitionist approaches to harm,[3] one thing that is pretty consistent across the board is that they are experimental, messy things. They often fail, but sometimes succeed. The idea that these are a waste of time because they are not a completely worked-out theory and scientifically reliable practice is based on an assumption that our current system (i.e. essentially *nothing*) is a viable alternative. It is not.

Cultivating accountability

In many instances (but not all), survivors of harm do not want maximal punishment for those who caused the harms. Instead, they may seek accountability and repair. Accountability is not something that happens to bad people—indeed, it is not something that can be imposed on

someone else—rather, it is a human skill that must be cultivated. It is also a collective issue. “As long as most people in our community have rotten accountability skills, people who abuse will be able to get away with their abuse. Their lack of accountability will not be particularly noticeable or interesting until it is too late.” Organizations do not necessarily have to operate this way. As Connie Burk has written,

Cultivating deep skills (and community investment) in personal accountability also better equips us to respectfully request accountability from others and to be aware when someone is highly resistant to taking responsibility for their actions. As more people develop these skills, the community becomes better able to expect and support ethical, organic accountability processes.[4]

Accountability is essential to any real relationship. Although apologies are not necessarily analogous to repairing the trauma of sexual harm, they may offer a useful illustration of becoming accountable. Between individuals, a real apology hits home with an admission of harm, because it is a complete surrender to the other person’s point of view. This surrender usually takes place first, shortly followed by or accompanied by a genuine (i.e. non-excuse) exploration of *why* it happened: insecurity, underconfidence, self-hatred, history of harm done to the person causing harm. This “why?” is a moment of deep vulnerability, but it is made possible and more likely by that initial concession or surrender to the other person’s narrative and truth.

In the process leading to an apology, however, there is usually at first resistance to admit any wrongdoing. While that occurs, a victim cannot meaningfully have their harm addressed. In the meantime, disengagement may be required. The person who caused harm does not have any inherent right to the relationship, whether a friendship, a romantic relationship, mentorship, or anything else. The same principle applies in a community or organizational setting, although trust is made more complicated by the fact that the constituent members of a community change over time and come from a wider range of socializations. Regardless, our goal has to be to move toward a situation where we collectively recognize that “intention” does not change the impact of behaviors and where admission of harm is viewed as an opportunity for growth in individuals and in relationships. In other words, we need to “create environments that support people in their efforts toward self-accountability” as well.[5]

Creating that kind of environment will require taking steps to develop collective infrastructures of support for accountability, the purpose of which is to provide more options for survivors and people who have experienced harm. At the same time, we have to recognize that these infrastructures will only really be effective within a larger organizational context that encourages accountability, rather than sweeping harm under the rug.

Organizational culture and the direct relevance to the larger political context

A chief factor in whether an individual accountability process is successful is the existence of a community with a set of expectations and shared commitments—realized through consistent

implementation—where both parties see themselves as broadly accountable to that communal culture. We need to think more intentionally about the kinds of practices that would make Tempest a space in which survivors feel comfortable coming forward, and in which taking accountability is encouraged and incentivized as an opportunity for growth. Only in such a context does “community accountability” become something tangible and useful, rather than a buzzword easily misapplied.

Obviously, this kind of organizational culture is something that cannot be spontaneously generated when the crisis demands it. In fact, there are much larger social forces that have long been at work undermining the relationships essential to such a culture of accountability.

Relationships have deteriorated under the neoliberal regime of capital accumulation. As we are all very well aware, working-class institutions like unions, community centers, tenant organizations, public meeting spaces, and broader political organizations have all but disappeared over the last 50 years. The fabric of working-class life we read about in the 1930s or 1960s seems almost unrecognizable today, living as we do through transactional, often consumption-based interactions and in gentrified Disneyland cities. We want to rebuild the working-class institutions that were so central to sustaining and building on longer political upsurges in the past, but we don’t even talk to our neighbors

I don’t have a grand strategy for rebuilding the infrastructures of working-class life around the globe right now, but I do think it is important that all of the institutions that created a workers’ public sphere in the past were built on deep, multifaceted ties amongst workers, strong and reliable relationships that were the bedrock of political credibility. Those ties among people are not somehow different when we’re talking about the grand battles of the class struggle vs. the relationships between comrades in an organization.

Anyone who has organized or gone on strike before knows that it is not as simple as getting the workers to understand that the boss is their enemy. They already know that. Strikes become possible only through a process of developing trust among those who work together, breaking down barriers between each other, and accustoming oneself to relying on the collective, rather than the weakness of individual strategies. That trust and openness which is so crucial to being able to take the risks of job actions (and, ultimately, larger political action), is built through practice. Smaller job actions like petitions or coordinated slowdowns can be a start. When these are successful, it builds confidence to do more, to see other workers through new categories, and to rely on each other for bigger risks.

The same collective process of transforming uncertainty into confidence, suspicion into trust is at work when a group of neighbors come together to intervene in a neighbor’s domestic violence situation without calling the cops. Our responses to harm in practice can be a crucial element of making our vision for a better world not only more likely, but also more credible.[6] The credibility of revolutionary socialism must be built, and it is built by being a material force in people’s everyday lives that can meet needs and draw the political connections between immediate experiences and the operations of the capitalist state, its institutions, and market relations. That applies no less to how we handle sexual assault within our organization than it

does to strike preparation. In both instances, there is a lot you can do correctly in the moment to ensure success, but ultimately success depends on the longer-term groundwork that has been laid over months and years to build a culture in which trust can flourish.

[1] Relatedly, I would argue that the “solution” [adopted](#) by the Revolutionary Socialist Network, to automatically expel anyone who is accused of harm, is far from the trump card solution they think it is. Instead, this “solution” can be squarely located within the exact same logic: push the problem away in order to defend the unblemished legitimacy of the organization. Moreover, this approach provides no means for the survivor’s self-defined needs to guide whatever process occurs.

[2] From “Making Our Stories Matter” in *The Revolution Starts at Home*, p. 208

[3] For some very useful discussions of all of these, see Mariame Kaba, *We Do This Til’ We Free Us*, pp. 132-156.

[4] *The Revolution Starts at Home* p. 267

[5] *Ibid.* p. 111

[6] See “What Does it Feel like when Change Finally Comes?” in *The Revolution Starts at Home*, p. 231

Pre-Convention Document from GRS (Anderson B, Mara G, Joel S, and Tina T.) -- Greensboro Revolutionary Socialists

In this document we are going to discuss the organizing work of the Greensboro Revolutionary Socialists (GRS). We will cover four broad topics of our organization. 1). Our transition from being a branch of the ISO to the GRS and then joining Tempest. 2) Our membership and periphery 3) Our methodology and structure. 4). Our movement activity.

Part I: “Transition” (from ISO to GRS to Tempest)

From ISO to GRS

When the ISO dissolved in March of 2019 the Greensboro branch had around twenty members. The dissolution and all the events that led up to the dissolution was difficult and trying. Nevertheless, the branch kept meeting weekly throughout the aftermath of the dissolution and

decided that the best thing we could do was to continue building, continue organizing and continue to make our contribution to carrying on the tradition of revolution from below. We decided to form a new organization with a new name that would retain the best components of the ISO while discarding the worst of it. Over a four-month period we wrote, debated, and voted on dozens of proposals. In these discussions we discussed perspectives, goals, and what type of organization we wanted to build. We also wrestled with the ISO rape coverup and discussed ways to create structures of accountability, transformative justice in order to avoid harm, particularly harm caused by sexual violence.

By the end of this four-month period we made many decisions, but I will just mention four here. First, we decided on the name Greensboro Revolutionary Socialists. Second, we voted to have seven points of unity (anti-oppression, build the left, democratic socialism, ecosocialism, internationalism, socialism from below and southern orientation). Every member in the organization contributed to writing these points of unity. Third, we voted on a comprehensive code of conduct. Fourth, we decided to have a branch steward who is delegated to field complaints and organize transformative measures when necessary.

Political Education

The majority of our organizing revolves around political education and movement work. Here we will discuss political education and later in the document we will discuss movement work. We have developed a number of twelve-week education plans. During those twelve weeks we discuss a particular topic every three weeks, for a total of four meetings per topic. Some of the topics we have discussed are: imperialism, ecosocialism, intro to Marxism, police abolition, Mariame Kaba's *We Do This Until We Free Us*, *Feminism of the 99%*, and *Palestine: a Socialist Introduction*. These education plans were successful in the political development of our members as well as drawing newer people into our periphery. We also hosted a Marxism Day School in January of 2020 which brought out over seventy-five people from all across the South. The day school had four different sessions covering a variety of topics including: 1) reform or revolution, 2) Cartography for Class Consciousness, 3) Radicalism in the South: Panthers, SNCC and Millbillies, and 4) Building the Left from the South. We have also done a series of movie screenings. We purchased a projector and a large screen to enable us to have movie screenings outside observing COVID protocols. Some of the movies we have screened include: *Parasite*, *Union Time*, [*What Binds Us to This Place*](#), *Sorry to Bother You*, *The Big Scary "S" Word*, and *Judas and the Black Messiah*. We follow each movie screening with a discussion. Many of our newest comrades are comrades we met at these movie screenings.

Joining Tempest

A handful of comrades from Greensboro attended the meeting at the 2019 Socialism Conference that started the conversation about the group that later became Tempest. At the time we recognized the importance of a project of building a national organization that was revolutionary, internationalist, and that had the politics of socialism-from-below. We originally committed ourselves to help build that project, but we ended up being overwhelmed with local organizing. So, despite keeping up with the bulletin and other developments from afar, we were

not as active in building Tempest as we had anticipated. Once Tempest launched, we started having discussions about joining and we ended up deciding to join as a group in June of this year. At that point GRS had eighteen members.

Part II: “Membership”

GRS Membership and our comrades

The Greensboro Revolutionary Socialists comprise both active members, somewhat active members, and non-active members. Since the collapse of the ISO, we have maintained a core group of former- ISO members and active organizers in the community. We currently have twenty-two dues paying members, about 12-15 of which are actively attending the majority of meetings and organizing in movements. Film screenings and discussions are two principal ways we have connected, added, and “recruited” comrades to the Greensboro Revolutionary Socialists. Specific GRS-led actions and organizing have contributed to our efforts to rebuild and strategize.

GRS and Tempest

Last June, GRS had several discussions regarding joining a revolutionary socialist organization or group that extended beyond North Carolina. We were attracted to Tempest because of its revolutionary socialist orientation, experimental approach to recruitment, the website, and future involvement in the various committees. We imagine Tempest as critical to our continued organizing and role as a revolutionary socialist group in the South.

Organizing efforts in Greensboro and surrounding areas

Over the past two years, GRS has maintained a revolutionary force in the local community and throughout the state. Most of our members live in Greensboro, but we have many who live in other parts of the Triad (the Triad is a region in North Carolina that is made up of three cities, Greensboro, Winston Salem and High Point). In addition to the organizing efforts and activities in Greensboro discussed below, there have been actions and efforts by several comrades who live in Winston Salem. For example, the Triad Abolition Project was formed during last summer’s rebellion and continues to work with abolition efforts in Winston-Salem and Greensboro. Teachers’ actions in coalition with grassroots groups and the FCAE (Forsyth County Association of Educators) from 2018 to the present represent the unionization efforts in North Carolina, including the union win of National Nurses United Mission nurses in Asheville, and the ongoing public workers’ victories in various cities (Charlotte, Greensboro) in conjunction with UE150.

A revolutionary socialist future

The guiding force behind activity with GRS and Tempest has been an openness to working with leftist groups -- while adhering to our revolutionary socialist core-- and coalition-building when necessary and prudent. When we imagine who will join us, we envision a more radicalizing

working-class in the environment of increasing and replicating crises. Furthermore, we imagine an organic and exciting rebuilding of the left manifested in a cross-pollination of movements centered in recent revitalization of social movements, specifically abolition.

Part III: “Methodology and Structure”

This section will give a brief overview of our organization structure and methodology. First, we decided to have a few leadership roles. These are listed below.

1. Leadership committee:
 - a. Charts the political direction of the branch, organizes weekly meetings.
2. Secretary:
 - a. Takes meeting notes.
3. Treasurer:
 - a. Keeps track of and disperses money based on branch decisions
4. Branch steward:
 - a. Field complaints, organize restorative measures
5. Literature organizer:
 - a. In charge of keeping up with our literature, replenishing the stock, etc.

All positions and roles are immediately recallable at any time depending on the needs and decisions of the group. We also decided to create three fractions that we believe are essential for the division of tasks and group priorities. They are broken down as follows

1. Direct action fraction
 - a. This fraction engages in local movement work coalitions and organizing efforts. This fraction is in charge of keeping up to date with the mobilization activities that take place in the community and its surroundings, it is also in charge of bringing proposals for the group to evaluate our participation in nearby struggles, it is also in charge of proposing activities of solidarity around national and international situations.
2. The publicity fraction
 - a. The publicity fraction is responsible for the dissemination of information about our public meetings, events, and activities. It is also in charge of all out social media as well as coordinating local, national, and international campaigns through those social networks. The publicity fraction also collaborates with the direct-action fraction to ensure that all actions have all the necessary signage and propaganda including making banners, posters, chant sheets, table for books, speakers, megaphones, or any necessary audiovisual equipment.
3. Membership development fraction
 - a. This fraction is in charge of the political education of the members, organizing the aforementioned education series, the Marxist Day Schools,

as well as a buddy system where political development can take place in one-on-one settings.

We hold weekly meetings with an agenda that is discussed and voted on by the group. The weekly meetings are not publicized publicly but non-members are welcome. We use a progressive stack system. We hold our meetings in a local space that we rent each week but have a projector where people who can't make it in person can Zoom into the meetings. Finally, we have three membership requirements. 1). General agreement with our points of unity. 2) Pay dues (\$5 for unemployed or comrades with children, \$10 for everyone else). 3) Adhere to our code of conduct.

Part IV: “Activity”

Since the dissolution of the ISO and the founding of GRS, we've been engaging in local movement-work as often as we can. One of our main efforts has been helping to lead the Greensboro Justice Coalition (GJC), a collection of ten organizations in the city committed to the struggle against police violence. The movement is centered around the police murder of Marcus Deon Smith in September 2018, and the city's refusal to settle with Smith's family. (Smith died after being hogtied by the Greensboro police as he was having a mental-health crisis.) The movement's victories include winning a court order to release the body-camera recordings of fifty incidents of hogtying by the GPD, and more generally, having been able to sustain pressure on the city in order to keep the case alive. (There are weekly 'Mondays for Marcus' rallies, as well as much larger, more militant actions.) Because of the work of the GJC keeping the case alive and in the public, across the country dozens of news outlets, both in print and video, have done exposés on the case. Finally, among our roles in this group is our commitment to continue to pull it to the left, when other members suggest myopic liberal solutions to the problems of police brutality and the city government's complicity.

In addition to the GJC, GRS is very involved in one of the most important and militant labor forces in North Carolina: The state's public-school workers, particularly the teachers. The burgeoning unionization of teachers in NC has been remarkable in the face of horribly anti-worker, anti-union conditions. As a branch of the ISO, and now as GRS, we've been on the frontlines of this struggle. We've had several members and close contacts who are also teachers and members of these new unions, specifically the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), and the Guilford County Association of Educators (GCAE) in Greensboro. In one of the most important labor victories in Greensboro during the pandemic, the GCAE (with support from GRS and many others) rallied in the streets to demand from the Guilford County Board of Education an across-the-board 5% raise, *and* at least a \$15 minimum wage for every single public-school employee, including cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and more. They won. (There's nothing quite as magnificent as one labor force getting into the streets in solidarity with others at their workplace – especially in the South across so many class, race, and gender lines – despite the fact that their jobs and job classifications and compensation are very separate.)

GRS was involved in another coalition that helped to lead rallies outside an Amazon warehouse in Kernersville, NC, ahead of the union vote in Bessemer, Alabama. The rallies were usually

50-60 people strong, and the leadership coalition included comrades from GRS, Winston-Salem's DSA, the Sunrise Movement, and the IATSE. (At one rally we met a UNC-Greensboro professor who made the film *Union Time*, a documentary about the titanic and ultimately successful union drive in Tar Heel, NC, at the Smithfield hog-processing plant. We hosted him and a crowd of about two dozen for a film-screening and a discussion of Southern labor struggles, as the union campaign in Bessemer was still underway.)

In the national and international currents that have risen up over the past couple of years, GRS has played a local organizing role, including in the uprising following the murder of George Floyd, the mass actions in solidarity with Palestine this past spring, and in the Women's Marches whenever they've occurred. We've organized several smaller actions, too, such as a car protest in Greensboro early in the pandemic to demand Covid protections for incarcerated and houseless folks, and a fundraiser for striking sanitation workers in Virginia Beach.

Finally, certain members of GRS are heavily involved in other political and labor organizations across the state, such as the UE150 – the public-sector workers' union that struggles against our state's Jim-Crow-era laws that deny collective bargaining for state employees and sponsor the toxic right-to-work culture that's now pervasive across the country.

Tempest's discussion of political perspectives (Peter Solenberger)

1. The Conjuncture

In "Some Thoughts to Help Get Us Thinking About Political Perspectives" Natalia T poses some key questions about the conjuncture. I want to take up two of them.

Neoliberalism

To counter the Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying economic collapse, the US government made an enormous Keynesian intervention into the economy: \$3 trillion in March 2020, \$1 trillion in December 2020, and \$2 trillion in March 2021.

The 2020 rescue plans were bipartisan, supported by politicians from Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell to Bernie Sanders and AOC. They showed a ruling-class consensus that aggressive action was necessary to rescue the economy and prevent social chaos.

The March 2021 rescue plan was a partisan measure passed by Democrats with no support from Republicans, but also without much fuss. The Republican leaders were signaling that, although they'd supported the rescue, they would fight legislation that made structural changes

to the economy. They would agree to a physical infrastructure bill of \$1 trillion over ten years, half of it new money, but nothing more. Their plan is to take back one or both houses of Congress in 2022 by campaigning against “tax and spend” Democrats.

The Biden administration, supported by Bernie Sanders, AOC and other left Democrats, proposed the “Build Back Better” bill, which would spend \$3.5 trillion on measures to help children, families, retirees and students and to protect the environment, financed by higher taxes on corporations and high-income households. Joe Manchin, Kyrsten Sinema, and other right Democrats demanded that the bill be cut back and include no tax increases on businesses. Manchin named \$1.5 trillion over ten years as his maximum figure.

At this point, it seems that the evenly split congress, the Republican boycott, and the right-Democrat ultimatum will block any structural change. The left Democrats will vote for the “compromise,” since the alternative is nothing at all. The Democratic base will be demoralized, the Republicans will win one or both houses of Congress in 2022, and the Biden administration will achieve nothing more legislatively.

When the dust settles, the two-party system will have averted catastrophe and restored the neoliberal *status quo ante* with the acquiescence of the DP left. A brilliant performance.

The problems of inequality, poverty, oppression, climate change, pandemics, militarism, war, and all the other evils of capitalist society won’t have been solved. The crisis will continue, as will resistance.

Class struggle

The pandemic, the accompanying economic collapse, and the chaotic and strangled recovery have led to a tight labor market. Five million workers are still out, because they have to take care of family members, their former jobs are still too dangerous or unavailable, or they’re unwilling to work under their previous conditions. The tight labor market gives workers more leverage, so money wages are rising and, in some cases, conditions are improving.

The “great resignation” is too atomized to be regarded as a general strike, but it does express workers’ greater confidence and their sense that they’re not “lucky just to have a job.” Strike activity is approaching its 2018-19 level but remains far below the level of the 1940s through the 1970s. There are some promising organizing drives, but union density remains quite low.

Revolutionary socialists should celebrate, support, and participate in the organizing drives, strikes, and street action. They’re essential for rebuilding working-class consciousness, organization, and struggle. But we should keep the current ferment in perspective.

Waves of rebellion had been rising and falling since the mid-1990s, when “There is no alternative” began to give way to “Another world is possible” among activists. Some highlights in the US were the 1997 UPS strike, the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the 2000-02 global justice movement, the huge rallies against the 2003 Iraq war, the 2004 March for Women’s Lives, the 2005-06 Katrina solidarity, the 2006-07 marches and strikes for immigrant rights, rejection of

austerity during the 2008 Great Recession, Barack Obama's 2008 election, the Dreamers, Wisconsin 2011, Occupy 2011, the 2012 Chicago teachers' strike, the 2012-15 Fight for Fifteen actions, the 2013-14 Black Lives Matter movement, the 2014 calling out of campus rape and the #MeToo movement, the campaign for same-sex marriage culminating in the 2015 Supreme Court decision, the 2015 and 2017 climate marches, the 2017 Women's March, the 2018-19 teachers' strikes, Black Lives Matter 2020, the 2016 and 2020 Bernie Sanders campaigns, and the 2020-21 mobilizations against Trump.

Much more could be added, but the picture is clear: waves of struggle, but not a generalized upsurge like that of the 1960s and 1970s. During that period the unions peaked, the rank-and-file movement grew, wildcat strikes broke out. The Civil Rights movement became mass and won legal and social reforms. The Black Power movement and urban rebellions continued the fight. The antiwar movement, the women's movement, the lesbian/gay movement, the environmental movement, and others emerged and won important victories. Millions of young people and workers regarded themselves as anticapitalist, even revolutionary.

We can anticipate that at some point the episodic struggles will become generalized and self-reinforcing, creating very different conditions for rebuilding the working-class vanguard and, within it, revolutionary parties. But we can't know when. We should contribute all we can, but we should also pace ourselves for what may still be a long haul.

2. Building Tempest

Tempest has done a very good job of building itself, in my view. The problem still to be addressed, however, is building for what? More on that below.

Antecedents

First a bit of history to explain how I approach this question. I joined Tempest in May 2021. I'd been looking for something positive to emerge from the ex-ISO milieu and finally saw it in Tempest.

I'd been a revolutionary socialist long before that. I joined Solidarity in 2002 with other comrades of the Trotskyist League (TL), a Detroit-based revolutionary collective active in union and community struggles. Through the 1980s we'd been members of the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL), another Detroit-based collective.

The RWL had started well, with an outward-looking regroupment perspective, but by the end of 1980s a majority of the RWL leadership had come to the conclusion that the RWL was the only consistently revolutionary group in the US. Rejecting that insanity, a third of the RWL split, along with a majority of our International cothinkers. We formed the TL as a section of the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO).

Acutely aware of the dangers of trying to build a small, self-contained group, we actively sought regroupment. We wanted to be in the Fourth International (FI), where our International cothinkers had formed a tendency.

We looked first to the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT), led by Paul L and others we came to know. We'd have joined the FIT, except that it joined Solidarity in 1992 and we weren't ready to do that. We next tried Socialist Action (SA). Our approach failed, essentially because of SA's sectarianism. As SA leader Nat Weinstein explained, "You're too big for us to assimilate and too small for us to have to unite with."

We then turned to Solidarity. It had a revolutionary socialist program. It was rooted in struggles, particularly labor. We'd worked with it in the 1995-97 Detroit newspaper strike and other struggles. It was democratic and had learned to accommodate differences of opinion. It had good positions on special oppression. Its Fourth International Caucus linked it to the FI. It was to our right and too loose, but we thought we could live with that, so long as we could express our views.

We knew of the ISO from NYC comrades. We wouldn't have looked in its direction in any case, since it had no links to the FI. But we also saw flaws that would have made our being there quite difficult.

Its analysis that "the 1990s are the 1930s in slow motion" misunderstood the conjuncture. It put out some good propaganda, but it didn't root itself in struggles. It jumped from struggle to struggle as it saw opportunities to sell papers and recruit. It dismissed concerns with special oppression as "identity politics." Its interpretation of democratic-centralism was too skewed to centralism, with a ban on tendencies between conventions and leadership discipline against the membership. It seemed self-righteous, thinking that it was the guardian of revolutionary truth, and didn't seek to unite with others or even work with them, except on its own terms. Some of this may have been unfair, but that's how we saw the situation.

Lessons learned

I won't try to speak for other comrades, but my view of the ISO changed after about 2004, as I read ISO publications, attended some Socialism conferences, and had occasional exchanges with ISO leaders.

The ISO had made considerable progress after it separated from the British SWP in 2001. It adopted a more realistic view of the conjuncture. It made efforts to root itself, most impressively in the Chicago Teachers Union. It improved its position on special oppression. It seemed more willing to relate to other left groups. It loosened its discipline and permitted leaders and ranks to express their views more openly.

In retrospect, the changes were too little, too late. But they were enough to persuade me to begin arguing in Solidarity and with ISOers, when I saw them, that the ISO and Solidarity should unite. Their strengths complemented each other and could help overcome their weaknesses. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

Tempest, emerging from the rubble of the ISO's collapse, has consolidated the gains that the ISO had been making. Andy S's "Tempest and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Left," Haley Pessin's "Where Tempest started and some thoughts on where we might be heading," and other pre-convention contributions show this. The reservations I had about the ISO around engaging with struggles, special oppression, and democracy I don't have with Tempest.

Building for what?

In "A short [comment?] on regroupment" Andy S writes:

Adam's piece on regroupment sparked a lot of conversation. I think everyone agrees that whenever we can work with others we should, that we need to maintain a nonsectarian attitude to other formations, and we should really try to leave our axes at the door. The issue is: regroupment for what? To do what?

This applies to building Tempest, as well. Building for what? To do what? Tempest may stall at 100, especially since DSA seems to be stalling, or we may grow to 200, 300 or even 1000. But we'd still be far too small to have much impact on the class struggle, let alone revolution. And if that were all we did, we'd surely degenerate into a sect of some sort.

In "Organization, program, and the future of Tempest" Paul LeBlanc fills in what he describes as "the missing piece."

What should be primary is actually helping to mobilize practical struggles capable of materially defending and advancing the urgent needs of workers and the oppressed — struggles that can make sense to people in the here-and-now but also tilt toward mass revolutionary consciousness and, if fought effectively, insurgency and power-shift.

Our theory, our education, our articulation of positions and principles should be inseparable from such practical work. We should be engaged in several practical campaigns (to my way of thinking, the Green New Deal is one of these) that help define us, that create a practical framework of struggle in which we might converge (a regroupment to advance actual struggles) with other groups prepared to work with us in fighting the good fight and pushing toward victory.

Paul's proposal leads to two further questions: Which campaigns? And with whom? On the first question, Paul proposes the Green New Deal. Tempest comrades have also been involved in labor work, anti-racism/abolition, immigrant rights, reproductive/gender rights, anti-imperialism/international solidarity, and other areas.

Under capitalism there's no shortage of vital issues around which campaigns might be built. But what will people actually organize around? Which brings us to the second question, with whom?

At this point I think those questions have to be answered locally. The Tempest website can carry articles analyzing issues and reporting on struggles. It can promote a method. But at this point I think that's the limit of our centralism.

I'll close on the question of regroupment. Tempest should engage in campaigns, but they won't lead to regroupment unless we seek it. And without regroupment, we'll be much less effective in the short run, and we'll degenerate in the long run. Regroupment for what? To be effective, to survive.

With whom? I think there is some low-hanging fruit in the socialism-from-below milieu. We should begin there. Tempest, Solidarity, New Politics, and Spectre overlap. Many of us belong to more than one. Their websites carry articles on the same subjects, from the same viewpoint, and often by the same authors. I think we'd be far more effective if we united. To their mutual detriment, Solidarity and the ISO were too sectarian toward each other to unite. We should be able to do better now.

Reclaiming Prefigurative Politics: Clarifying the Politics and Its Relevance to the Tempest Collective (Leandro Herrera)

At a Tempest Collective internal education meeting where antiracism and abolition was the topic of study, a conversation emerged around prefigurative politics. This conversation was sparked by my interpretation of a paragraph in the chapter on "Transforming Punishment: What is Accountability without Punishment" in Mariame Kaba's book, "We Do This Till We Free Us". The paragraph goes as follows:

"The conditions in which abolitionist approaches will flourish won't magically appear. They must be fought for and nurtured and defended. For those conditions to exist, we need to put in the steady work of eliminating the use of surveillance, policing, sentencing, and imprisonment. For those conditions to exist, we need to practice operating without using those systems and institutions. For those conditions to exist, we must create them. Acceding, as some do, to "prison in the meantime" only prevents them from taking root."

I had interpreted this paragraph as an argument in favor of prefigurative politics. However, in the ensuing discussion it became clear that there were misconceptions about what the term means. Some comrades alluded to the example of "building a commune at the edge of society" as what comes to their minds. Others raised that building alternative institutions to existing state structures is not a strategy that challenges the state directly. Examples of state-run police alternatives for addressing harm that have been setup by the contemporary abolitionist movement were also cited as representative of building these institutions, and by corollary another example of prefigurative politics in action. While these examples grasp at certain

aspects of prefigurative politics, and there are valid criticisms of the examples listed above, the term itself has a definite history and meaning which I argue should be reclaimed explicitly towards revolutionary praxis.

In this essay I will make an argument on why prefigurative politics are relevant to the Tempest Collective. To do so, I will discuss in turn how prefigurative politics has been originally conceptualized, how it has been misunderstood, and offer actual historical examples of the concept in practice to clarify what the term means. Some understand prefigurative politics as utopian or reformist ideas that are not grounded in a dialectical materialist analysis of the world. However, as I outline in this essay, prefigurative politics is salient and necessary to revolutionary politics that seeks to transform social relations and institutions via struggle from below. For this reason, I offer some insights and suggestions on the ways in which prefigurative politics should matter to the Tempest Collective -- both in terms of what end goals are we striving towards and therefore what practices, methods, and strategies are we undertaking to reach these ends.

A Brief Introduction

To start, a definition is in order. Prefigurative politics is “the deliberate experimental implementation of the desired future social relations in the here and now.” [\[1\]](#) The idea is based on observations and discussions from Marxists and anarchist thinkers during the time of the First International and can be summarized in the following, familiar line: in each societal epoch, the nucleus of each future society was conceived of in the old. In historical materialist writings this is expressed in the idea that capitalist social relations emerged from feudalism, that feudalism emerged from ancient slave societies, and so on. The revolutions that cemented these societal transformations didn’t create these relations from scratch - instead they “further developed, generalised, and systematised certain things that had already emerged in the earlier form of society. In other words, the *figures* of the new societies they built were *prefigured* in those that came before.” [\[2\]](#)

Far from being an idealist notion that is disconnected from the material reality that shapes social relations, prefigurative politics answers a very critical problem: a future society can only come about if people in the old society can build it. That requires that people in the old society are consciously organized in institutions that reproduce social relations that are fundamental to the new society. To quote Paul Raekstad and Eivind Dahl in their piece, “What is Prefigurative Politics?”:

“If we want to introduce a free, equal, and democratic socialist society, we need people who already have the power or the ability to re-organise society in such a way. And we need enough people to be driven to do so and who have the consciousness needed to do so. But the basic institutions we have – capitalism, the state, and so on – don’t develop these powers, drives, or consciousness. Capitalism and good revolutionary theory are certainly important for developing a socialist movement, but they alone cannot teach us how to live and organise in anti-capitalist, much less more comprehensively non-oppressive and non-dominating, ways. So how can we ever emancipate ourselves?

The answer is that we can do this by developing movements and organisations who themselves embody the kinds of social relations and practices we aim for in a future society. We can emancipate ourselves only if we start building the new society within the shell of the old one. We can begin to prefigure parts or aspects of the new society within the one we have.“ [\[3\]](#)

These ideas are reflected in the organizing and writings of the far left. Socialists and anarchists organize themselves in collectives where democratic decision making, egalitarianism, and methods of anti-oppression are actively cultivated and aspired to (obviously with varying degrees of success). The process of workplace organizing rank and file militant unions involves the training of workers in the practices and behaviors of such a union, engaging in transformative acts and struggles, and forming a collective *prior to formal recognition*. Tenant unions, worker centers, and other such organizations can also be thought of as training grounds for generating radical collective consciousness and activity. There are other examples, but these are the clearest ones that come to my mind. As we will see below, however, projects of prefigurative politics face significant challenges and do not always lead to revolutionary outcomes.

What prefigurative politics is not

As mentioned above, there are many examples and ideas that people associate with prefigurative politics. It is worth going through some of these and parsing what are actual weaknesses and misunderstandings given the concept previously laid out.

1. Utopian experiments and “the commune on the edge of society”

There have been many attempts in building institutions that, in isolation, seek to model of an egalitarian and supposedly harmonious society. Much has been written about the idealism that underpinned such experiments like those of Charles Fourier, Saint Simon, and Robert Owen. Examples that might be less familiar are the agrarian communes that have historically been tried in different countries over time, but nonetheless have emerged even in modern times. Still others are whole towns that exist as self-contained, and ostensibly “self-sufficient”, communities. In a sense these examples do fit the concept of modeling some sort of ideal society, but the spirit in which these experiments are conducted is against that of the Marxists and anarchists who had theorized the need to organize people in institutions that can facilitate their development as class-conscious actors who can fight for their self-emancipation. More important is that these experiments were not practical for achieving the goals of liberation from all forms of oppression as that necessitates dismantling capitalism, ending imperialism, and eliminating other large scale social relations of domination and coercion the world over. The means here do not lead to the desired ends, and this is true of many other common examples of prefigurative politics.

2. The non-profit industrial complex, and state-run services framed as alternatives

A more modern approach to alleviating social ills is found in the widespread emergence of the non-profit industrial complex. These are organizations that arise to address very specific needs, often providing services and aid to oppressed communities and individuals who lack resources for dealing with all kinds of harms and difficult life circumstances. Generally these organizations do not fit the mold of prefigurative politics, but I include them here as they are sometimes cited as negative examples of what such politics looks like in practice. To do so, however, conflates the term with institutions that do not have the explicit aim of transforming people into agents of change. Rather, their *modus operandi* is to act on behalf of the people they seek to provide services to. To put the distinction between these types of orgs and actual prefigurative politics another way, many nonprofits seek to ameliorate conditions while preserving the status quo (a reformist aim) as opposed to challenging current conditions with an anticapitalist horizon (a revolutionary aim).

In the U.S. many of these orgs turn to oppressive practices in their own running (high levels of exploitation among workers, poor working conditions, overworking, etc.), often stemming from their oversight and financial ties to donors or the state, both of which impose restricted budgets and other conditions that compromise on the quality of care and services these orgs can provide. As a result these orgs can adopt their own carceral logic. There are far more in-depth analyses available that describe the political economy of these institutions and the issues with them, but suffice it to say there is overwhelming evidence on the issues with them. Exceptions to this criticism are nonprofits that take on a mobilizing and more radical political role like with social movement orgs. Additionally, NGOs can fit in one or the other of these categories but getting into the nuances of such orgs is beyond the scope of this writing.

Other contemporary examples of alternative, “prefigurative” institutions are those being developed by some modern abolitionists and police defunding activists. These are non-police response services aimed at curtailing the role of the police but are subject to state oversight and funding. While such institutions can advance the cause of abolitionism in the short term by providing clear examples of what a reduced role of policing in people’s lives could look like, these attempts are necessarily constrained by the same issues posed to nonprofits - their goal is not creating the conditions for the self-emancipation of the working class and oppressed peoples. As I will get to below, there are alternatives to this model that involve direct community control and have much more revolutionary potential.

Base-building projects: contemporary and historical examples of prefigurative politics

So far I have cited examples of what doesn’t fit the concept of prefigurative politics in order to clarify certain misconceptions of what it is. The next question, then, is what do examples of prefigurative politics look like? I alluded to some examples in the beginning of this piece, but I want to delve into one family of examples in particular: mutual aid, tenants unions, workers centers, and others that are collectively known as “dual power” or base building projects. The term “dual power” itself has historically referred to spontaneous organs of working class political

power that arise during revolutionary situations and that posed a revolutionary alternative structure to the existing bourgeois state. The contemporary use of the term has come to refer to the creation of alternative institutions that bring workers, people of marginalized backgrounds, and activists together in common activity and on an explicitly left wing political basis as a way of prefiguring the institutions referred to in the classical definition. These institutions are democratically run and controlled by the people they aim to serve as well as the people providing the labor that is organized through these institutions.

The strategy of prefiguring independent working class institutions and networks has emerged as a solution to a number of problems for the anticapitalist left: the working class has endured nearly 50 years of atomization, stagnant wages, and worsening working conditions. Prior to and during that period, socialists of all stripes have struggled with their severed connection to the labor movement and to workers in general. However, we have entered a new period where radical politics has a mass and growing audience. The explanatory power of anticapitalist arguments and theory once again is finding purchase as a result of people's daily lived experiences in a declining capitalist empire and successive mass social movements like Occupy, BLM, and the George Floyd rebellions. Unfortunately the working class still suffers from an underdevelopment of "infrastructures of dissent" as one comrade put it in a recent Tempest Collective discussion.

Given all the above, what is to be done? More specifically, how do socialists intervene in a situation where working class institutions have been hollowed out, and the opportunities for building political relationships and trust with other people is mostly found within mixed households, college campuses, social movement orgs and other institutions that are dominated by reformist politics, and workplaces that are disproportionately not unionized? How do we attempt to reconnect radical politics and socialism with workers and the oppressed, and in the process move the revolutionary left from marginality into integration with the communities we organize in? How do we bridge the various divides that still plague the working class and oppressed along racial, gender, ethnic, national, ability, religious and other lines? Most critically, how do we address all these issues in a period that is characterized by episodic struggle, with long pauses between moments of political upsurge? The typical answers to these questions include the following:

- we must engage in social struggle wherever it appears
- we must organize in our workplaces, fighting for workers rights and for unionization where possible
- we must try, where possible, to connect different movements, orgs, and struggles in common action together, building solidarity in the process

Dual power projects are an attempt to put some of these answers on a practical footing. By engaging in sustained projects that service communities, we can bring together people in common and urgent communal work that focuses not just on building collective struggle, but on the infrastructure needed to expand and grow those struggles. Often such work puts us in direct

contact with people from marginalized backgrounds, such as with workers centers and immigrants rights orgs, or food distribution efforts in low-income communities that are disproportionately Black and Latinx. This opens up opportunities for developing relationships where political questions and conversations can be conducted, or even further down the line can create avenues for collective political education among those involved in the work as well as those receiving aid. The people who volunteer in such work are also transformed in the process, building familiarity and trust with each other. By engaging in a practice of regular collective work that addresses communal needs, socialists can begin to rebuild the kind of ties to communities they once had that can be leveraged for social struggles when they emerge.

There's also the matter of the institutions that bring these different projects together, from local councils to workers centers and other assemblies where people can practice democratic decision making, ideally in ways that challenge prevailing hierarchies found in society. That means having principles and systems in place for dealing with racism, sexism, and other oppressive societal muck. More specifically, that means implementing accountability structures that are actionable and accessible to all people that are part of that institution.

So far I have framed dual power in terms of services and structure. An additional, critical factor in the utility of these strategies is in their role in struggles and social movements. Usually dual power projects are built around not just communal needs, but on specific struggles that are being waged or that need to be waged in addressing those needs. Tenant unions are a good example of struggle-based projects as they attempt to fight against exploitative landlord-tenant relations, housing insecurity, and more. Another is community self-defense networks, projects that help mobilize antifascist responses to far right incursions into communities. Further still is food distribution and community gardens as they aim to address food precarity and poverty, and can sometimes put people in direct conflict with developers who fight the community over land rights and usage. The practice of fighting for people's needs and alleviating conditions of precarity among workers and other oppressed classes and groups can also create new conditions from which people are better able to wage more intensive struggles, and it builds confidence and experience in those struggles independent of existing state and mainstream political party structures.

Sometimes these projects and orgs can form broad networks of resistance that can serve as the nuclei for larger fights against oppressive state actions. In a way they can form, if not an "infrastructure of dissent", then perhaps an "ecosystem of dissent" that is organically linked to local struggles and communities and could be a precursor to the former. This was very apparent in my own experience with antifascist and abolitionist mobilizations. It was the activists and volunteers who were part of the various mutual aid efforts, social movement orgs, and in some cases even labor orgs that formed the network of antifascists and abolitionists that would mobilize in protest of the killing of Daunte Wright as well as counterprotesting a state-wide Back the Blue caravan that deliberately chose Northampton, "the most liberal city in all of Massachusetts", as their ultimate destination for promoting their brand of fascist politics.

Far from being a new concept, it is worth noting the historic attempts at projects that focus on building independent institutions that attempted to grapple with communal needs and their role

in rebellions and revolutionary movements. Two examples come to my mind on this: the school and breakfast programs of the Black Panther Party, and the mutual aid networks that featured significantly in the uprisings in Belarus last year.

The Black Panthers understood that addressing community needs in a direct way was not an answer to the fundamental problems plaguing Black society, but was a strategic stepping stone in their goals for achieving a democratic society in which the rights and lives of Black people were fully valued, and fully liberated in many senses. Their projects and political practice *prefigured* a different world. It is clear that community aid was central to their organizing strategy as evidenced in writing like the following passage:

“We recognized that in order to bring the people to the level of consciousness where they would seize the time, it would be necessary to serve their interests in survival by developing programs which would help them to meet their daily needs. For a long time we have had such programs not only for survival but for organizational purposes. Now we not only have a breakfast program for schoolchildren, we have clothing programs, we have health clinics which provide free medical and dental services, we have programs for prisoners and their families, and we are opening clothing and shoe factories to provide for more of the needs of the community. Most recently we have begun a testing and research program on sickle-cell anemia; and we know that 98 percent of the victims of this disease are Black. To fail to combat this disease is to submit to genocide; to battle it is survival.

All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but they are not solutions to our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending revolution. We say that the survival program of the Black Panther Party is like the survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft. It helps him to sustain himself until he can get completely out of that situation. So the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors.” [\[4\]](#)

A more contemporary example is found in the mutual aid networks of Belarus during the recent uprisings there. As visiting professor Siarhei Biareishyk revealed in his account of the events taking place in Viewpoint Magazine, the history that preceded them, and the political conditions in the country,

“While national sovereignty – under perpetual threat from Russia – remains an acute issue, the opposition leadership borne out of the nationalist protests and politics of the late 1980s and early ‘90s, which dominated the resistance of previous years, now is a non-factor. As a result, heretofore “apolitical” parts of the population with an aversion to nationalist politics joined the struggle. The lack of leadership during the current protests has been not so much a hindrance to

resistance, but its condition of possibility. The decentralized fronts of struggle and heterogeneous forms of protest speak to the emergence of “civil society” – a term widely used in Belarus to designate unofficial networks of grassroots organizations and initiatives of mutual help – as the decisive political factor in the coming struggle. The kind of politics that will take shape in Belarus hinges on this emergent force.

The incompetence of the current government and the popular distrust in the authorities run side by side with the strengthening solidarity among the population. Lukashenko famously downplayed the danger of COVID-19 and the official statistics were fabricated. The response to the pandemic in Belarus was spearheaded by a mass mobilization of different communities and civil society took it upon itself to provide PPE and resources for the overworked medical staff. These days medical workers are engaged around the clock in the hospitals, where severely injured people poured in from the streets and police torture chambers.

The new forms of organization of civil society manifested themselves also during the electoral campaign: for example, the initiative “Honest People” prepared a significant number of independent observers. Though they were ultimately kicked out from the poll sites, they provided significant evidence of voting fraud. Most importantly, this and other networks of citizens remain in effect in initiatives for further political action. The strength of the organization of civil society, devoid of centralized leadership, will prove necessary not only when striking workers lose their jobs or when families of prisoners need assistance, but also in the process of any peaceful transfer of power. As during the pandemic response, the solidarity of civil society, and its effectiveness, will be decisive to the success of the current uprising.” [\[5\]](#)

The rest of the article presents a fascinating interplay between the emergent civil society networks and existing labor institutions in their attempts to face off against state repression. Similarly, in an interview in RS21 Dr. Biareishyk provides the following reply to the question of lessons to learn from the protests:

“Perhaps it is too early to talk about lessons we can learn in terms of the prescriptive forms of protest. Positive and negative lessons in terms of strategy and organization are being learned daily, however. Also, there may be certain kinds of lesson we can learn in terms of analysing how a pre-revolutionary situation arises. What we can observe is that the creation of networks that are in themselves not political in content, in a revolutionary moment become by their mere existence political because they function outside of the regime. There is also a certain dialectic that shows the new possibilities for republicanism as a result of authoritarianism, which is foreclosed in liberal democracies with strong institutional history. By this I mean: long-term authoritarianism inadvertently created communities of mutual aid to survive in the repressive regime; now these

communities are taking the initiative to rebuild the country beyond the apparatus of representative democracy. The thing that I hear from friends again and again is that this country has to be 'built by us, nobody will do it for us,' and how to do it must be invented. Just as they had to respond to the Covid emergency themselves, people perceive themselves as active actors in restructuring their communities, their republic (literally 'common thing', *res publica* in Latin), beyond the representative apparatus that has failed them." [\[6\]](#)

Some critics argue that since this strategy focuses on servicing communities, it does not pose a challenge to the state. Others argue that in practice this work amounts to charity, and thus does not have any revolutionary potential. Both of these critiques however miss the point of such strategies, namely the issues they are trying to address and what their short and long term goals are. These criticisms also neglect the role such projects have actually played, both in historical and in modern times, in advancing radical politics in moments of rebellion and upheaval. However, not all attempts at base-building are without their flaws. In fact, there are a few valid criticisms that have been levied in the past couple of years based on reflections of such projects. One is that mutual aid projects in particular often amount to charity work (i.e. they are not mutual at all), and another is that they don't necessarily further the goal of spreading socialist ideas. Both of these criticisms seem to be aimed at an issue of execution in some form or another, and are also not unique to base-building projects. In the case of mutual aid for example, creating a process that is mutually beneficial requires sustained engagement, building trust, and empowering the people receiving aid through education, training, and alleviating their needs. While not all recipients of aid will return the favor, the very act of providing that aid builds solidarity and can in some circumstances inspire people to contribute to the process in other ways that are feasible for them.

On the second point, a foundation for any project on the left should be the explicit political ambitions that guide the work performed. If we want to advance socialist ideas, those ideas need to be a central feature in the actual practice of the work. One example of this in practice is with a group called Southern Solidarity [\[7\]](#) which has been organizing food and medical distributions to unhoused people in New Orleans. Included with the aid packages the group distributes are pamphlets that discuss resource issues within a larger social justice and systemic context, making the political nature of the group explicit from the outset. Volunteers can also engage in political discussions with recipients organically and can be trained in effective ways of broaching such conversations. There are also political educational panels in which all people in the networks the groups are connected to are encouraged to attend, starting with content that is directly relevant to people's immediate lives and building off of that process to include bigger topics that are less tangible but no less important. Admittedly these kinds of methods should be part and parcel of any attempt to build leftwing institutions and orgs. We can already see what happens when they aren't included in the way DSA practices electoralism.

Relevance to Tempest

Given that this piece was submitted for discussion in the pre-convention period, it is worth asking what parts of the information above can be applied to Tempest. What can we learn from the attempts at base building, the role of community in historical and contemporary social struggles, the successes and failures of social movement orgs, and how we can address the various issues facing the working and oppressed classes using the lens of prefigurative politics? I think starting with the following questions can further clarify the utility of such projects and practices:

- What are we prefiguring as the Tempest Collective? Are we aspiring towards a certain outcome (i.e. a liberatory project based on collective ownership and democratic control of the means of production? A society without hierarchical systems of oppression? Both?), and what are the practices we can use to train ourselves in service of that outcome? What are the structures we can use to reinforce and encourage that training?
- How can we support our members in their political development beyond just education? What structures do we need to facilitate such efforts?
- How do we counter bad habits in organizing projects on the left such as burnout, voluntarism, and disengaged memberships?
- How can we engage in infrastructure building with other organizations and build our forces on the left, creating the space to “practice what we preach” and make a material difference in people’s lives?

These questions can be divided into where the focus is drawn in Tempest, i.e. internal versus external. The first three are internally directed, and the last externally. For internal applications of a prefigurative lens, these questions are an attempt to grapple with a simple idea: if we want to model radical democracy as a starting point for a revolutionary socialist project, then we need to think about maximizing representation, participation, and distribution of information. For external applications, it is worth thinking about how we can reconnect socialist ideas with the working class (in practice as well as in theory), what institutions and alliances we can build with other forces and projects in order to provide a backbone to social movements and struggles that can transmit lessons, communications, facilitate coordination across multiple geographic scales, and foster wider relationships among workers and activists. I will attempt to provide some suggestions and potential answers to these questions below as a way to ground these ideas in practical next steps.

Regarding the first question, the answers in the first point are pretty evident in the membership principles laid out on the Tempest Magazine website, which I won’t reproduce here for brevity. The Collective is already engaging in thoughtful practices and policies stated in our Solidarity Principles document, and we have a fairly healthy culture of debate and discussion as well as openness to different frameworks and ideas even if there are occasional sharp disagreements and misunderstandings. However, I think we can still improve in these areas, specifically towards examining our own political biases and questioning deeply-held assumptions (anyone

who has seen me push back on mischaracterizations and misunderstandings of anarchist theory and practices on Slack and elsewhere may have a sense of what I am referring to here). Historically Marxists have not always had the greatest of understandings of racial and gender dynamics; indigenous struggles, sovereignty, and history; and interpersonal relationships and behaviors that reinforce the systemic oppressions impressed upon us in our current society. Having a practice of humility and empathy, and attempting to understand different frameworks on their own terms, including ones that are not always well understood by the Marxist left, would go a long way towards unifying the broader radicalizing layers of the working and other oppressed classes as well as the existing radical left.

In terms of supporting our members in their development, much of the pre-convention discussion has emphasized the importance of cadre. However, political education alone is not enough to train ourselves to be leaders in the movements and struggles we are embedded in. I think Tempest members are already addressing this in some ways through encouraging people to join our committees, take on some responsibilities, and where possible step into leadership/organizational roles. Taking a cue from Labor Notes' organizer trainings, I think we should also collectively strategize how all members can plug into Tempest, either by applying their unique skills and experiences towards new roles and committees or expanding on existing work. Creative use of media in producing educational content beyond just writing, like a podcast or YouTube video series, would be an interesting endeavor and have multiple benefits in amplifying the work Tempest is already engaged in, and it could also address issues of content accessibility for our members and our audience.

A major area that could use more focus is on countering the alienation experienced in society and the culture of voluntarism and resultant burnout that is pervasive on the left. As I mentioned earlier, and as multiple comrades have alluded to over the course of the pre-convention period, the conditions of the working class today include a high degree of atomization and the hollowing out of institutions controlled by the wider public. As activists organizing in our local contexts this is somewhat mitigated by being rooted in local struggles, but as a collective that is spread out across the country we have only barely begun to explore possibilities of building our own community of comrades with shared politics outside of purely political discussions and panels. The Tempest happy hour event earlier this year was an excellent step in the right direction, as was the DSA committee debrief after the public panel on the party question. Creating more spaces for general socializing would help foster a sense of collectivity and comradeship that is sorely lacking in political spaces. Facilitating collective writing projects like contributions to pre-convention bulletins in the future would also help turn such a process away from a deeply individualistic and atomized one into something that helps comrades pondering similar ideas improve and clarify them. An example for such a process is what the editorial committee already does for the website and for comrades who pitch and submit articles there.

Further, helping comrades who may not have the capacity, circumstances, or confidence in writing individual pieces find their voice or articulate their own contribution through other means would go a long way in generating more robust and thorough discussion. This can be done by interviewing members, organizing writing/ pre-convention content production groups based on specific topics or questions, and expanding collective discussion that have already taken place

like with the Green New Deal Working Group, the Labor and DSA committees, etc. By providing more collective facilitation, we can create an on-ramp for encouraging greater participation, buy-in, and opportunities for comrades to take on organizational roles.

On the question of what to do externally, I agree with what Sean L. and Brian B. laid out in the section “Next Steps: Building a Useful and Credible Force” in their revolutionary perspectives document. In summary, they argue that we should maintain a focus on clear political analysis of struggles and events that shape our circumstances, train people to become militants steeped in revolutionary theory and practice (i.e. cadre), coordinate action across locales, and work towards new organizational combinations. All of this is compatible with what I have laid out regarding prefigurative politics in this document. I would go one step further in suggesting that we seriously think about the material impacts we have as well as the practices we adopt and promote through our work in social movements and struggles. As an example, in my local abolitionist work I observed how the lack of a tangible alternative to the police meant that many liberals and voters clung to the police despite hundreds of hours of public commentary on police abuse, the overwhelming evidence and statistics on how ineffective the police are in addressing community safety needs, and the extensive work done by activists to promote a model of an institution that could actually address issues of community care. People need to actually experience what a world without police would look like in order to disabuse them of its necessity, which is why I am considering starting a neighborhood de-escalation team as a small first step. This team would build relationships in the community and step in to respond to mental health and other crises that do not require an armed response and provide an opportunity for people to call their community members rather than the police. This has been a key demand of the Defund activists in my area, but there is no reason we cannot begin to construct that alternative ourselves given the often cited need for it among activists and community members and the benefits it could provide in advance the cause of abolitionism. It also provides community members the opportunity to build coordinated networks of activists that can be mobilized in response to organized protests or for antifascist counter-demonstrations against far right rallies.

In conclusion, revolutionary socialism and the solidarity that underpins our shared conceptions of it cannot remain an abstract political framework. It must be modeled, demonstrated, and tangibly experienced in ways big and small. This should be done wherever possible in our local circumstances in order for our politics to really take root in the imagination and practice of the wider working class in between episodic struggles. Doing so provides us the opportunities to rebuild genuine working class institutions on an explicitly militant political basis. During periods of greater struggle, such as what we are witnessing now with an upsurge in strike activity across the country, or in the George Floyd rebellion of last summer, we can use that infrastructure to amplify those struggles, provide a counterweight to reformist forces and politics, and build momentum and organizational strength in the working and oppressed classes for future struggles.

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Regional Report and a few Reflections (Derek Bartholomew [OKC])

Hi, comrades. I just want to offer a few thoughts about the current state of activism in my city. And as a preliminary, I wish to apologize for the hasty preparation of this document, as I have been tending to personal commitments that have limited my own activity level over the past year. Accordingly, this report will offer only a few general reflections and suggestions that may or may not be generalizable to your own locations.

Presently in OKC there is a multiplicity of attacks and setbacks that beset organizers of the left (the few that we have), which has and continues to have a detrimental effect upon the sustainability of significant movement building around reproduction rights, trans rights, antiracism, antiwar, and ecological justice. These obstacles have led to disorientation, disillusionment, and burnout. In other words, we are operating in a very atomized environment, that is overwhelmingly reformist in nature, notwithstanding the logistical complications brought about with covid-19.

The advent of the national uprisings in the wake of the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd had a real qualitative and quantitative impact upon the intensity and level of political activism in OKC. It brought thousands into the streets, many of whom were young activists, new layers of people in the fight for racial justice.

As other major cities, we had a handful of demonstrations that shutdown key arteries of the city, including several major streets within the commercial district, that caused the flow of capital to temporarily slowdown to a trickle. There was, for about 60 days, serious momentum around BLM; however, this momentum was regrettably sabotaged from within, primarily by white liberals who didn't agree with illegal marches, property destruction, etc., who not only operated in bad faith but also exposed activists to doxxing by allowing boogaloo-boy types within our organizing spaces, without our consent or any debate, because they quixotically believed that through dialogue we could win them to our side. Needless to say, without belaboring the point, this led to infighting and retreats into ultra leftism on the one hand and reformism on the other — not since OWS have I felt more certain for the need for revolutionary discipline and party-building.

Now that I have outlined the most negative aspects in a very schematic fashion that leftists face in OKC, I would like to share one positive development. After the summer uprisings of '20, the Oklahoma Coalition for Revolutionary Action (OCRA) was formed.

OCRA is comprised of the Oklahoma People's Party, Serve the People, For the People — all of which are Stalinist in their political orientation — the Autonomous Brown Berets, IWW, DSA, Oklahoma Tenants Union (OUT), and About-Face (VAW). Our primary efforts have been towards monthly mutual-aid fairs, raising anywhere from \$1,000-\$2,000 on monthly basis. These mutual-aid fairs have included a handful of services, from brake-light repairs, immunization information, information for tenant defense, handing out forms that allow parents to un-enroll their children from military recruitment through NCLB laws, and bags of fresh produce, shelf-safe milk, seeds feminine and other hygiene products. These fairs have been remarkably successful from the perspective recruiting more young activists to join the various above political organizations and volunteering their time to help with the fairs. Beyond this, and arguably most importantly, we have created new spaces for political discussion and handed out fliers focusing on abolition information (hyperlinks to Mariam Kaba articles) and anticapitalist propaganda about wage-theft, etc., inside each grocery bag.

These events, while not only creating public space for emancipatory politics to be discussed, have had positive psychological benefits for those who've participated within these spaces because it is something tangible that activists can walk away from feeling as if they materially improved another person's life.

I would like to encourage each collective member — where it makes sense — to build analogous left-wing coalitions in your area and to find public spaces to hold mutual-aid fairs. I feel like this is one way in which we can have a reasonable influence on building a left-wing culture and set of practices that will help us recruit motivated activists, who we can invite to join Tempest and get more exposure to our politics. If anyone has logistical questions, please feel free to ask me, and I will do my best to help.

Finally, I'd like to strongly encourage comrades to not see these kinds of tactics as a retreat from workplace organizing, for mutual-aid fairs are only one useful strategy among many. And I think there's in fact a strong Marxist theoretical justification for adopting mutual-aid as an important tactic. However, it requires taking social reproduction theory (SRT) very seriously. To focus only on the site of production, where surplus value is created through unpaid wages, while ignoring how labor-power itself is created and recreated within the domestic sphere is to have one-sided understanding of the totality of social relations within the capitalist system. More importantly, by understanding SRT, we can better understand differential oppressions within a Marxist framework, which will allow us to be more rigorous in our analysis of gender, race, and sexuality and these differences are used to divide us not only at the level of production, i.e., things such as wage-gaps, racial and gender divisions within the sphere of labor, and so on, but also to divide us politically and socially outside the workplace.

I'd like to propose we read books that focus on these vital questions, books such as Tithi Bhattacharya's *Social Reproduction Theory* anthology and Holly Lewis' *Politics of Everybody*, as only a few examples. In other words, we must as Marxists continue to improve our tools of analysis if we wish to build a more ethical world. Thank you for considering my proposals.

The moment, the crisis of the left and some ideas moving forward (Luis from NYC)

Submitted 10/19/2021

In this contribution I would like to briefly put forward an argument which relates some of what I understand to be the main topics of debate towards the Tempest conference. First, some elements for the analysis of the present situation. Second, how this moment acts on (and is influenced by) what has been referred to as the crisis of the revolutionary left. And finally, a few lines on possible ways in which this has concrete consequences for our day to day activity and organizational form.

1) The moment

I think it is important to ground all our discussions in an analysis of the present moment, not only on the specific conjuncture or situation, but also on the broader stage or period. It is in the latter which I would like to focus my contributions.

I agree with several (probably all) of the elements of analysis in this respect put forward by Natalia in her thoughts about political perspectives. Especially when she argues that: *"The period can't be flattened out, and must be understood in all its contradictions, but I do believe that we are in a prolonged period of crisis, and resistance."* We are living in a period that can be characterized by the following interrelated elements: crisis, polarization, radicalization, rebellions and opportunities for both the radical left and the radical right.

The crisis, although rooted in the profound contradictions of the mode of accumulation structured since the 1970/80's, is multidimensional. Economically, the neoliberal politics of austerity, privatization, plunder of nature, commodification of social reproduction, debt and financialization have been in profound crisis since 2008.

The debt crisis is possibly one of the most potentially destabilizing at present. The public debt of states around the world, the private debts of corporations and the private debt of households, could face huge problems if interest rates start rising as a response to the prospect (and reality) of inflation. This could lead to further state defaults (Argentina and Turkey are two examples of this), crashing of corporations (Evergrande, zombie companies) and of course a wave of household bankruptcies. This is a latent perspective.

But it is not the only one. The ecological crisis which is unfolding can have even deeper consequences with unforeseen ramifications.

This is combined with a crisis of legitimacy of the political regimes, by which I mean the specific institutional articulations through which ruling class power is exercised. A common feature of many of the bourgeois-democratic regimes during the previous period had been their

articulation around a consensus of the traditional political parties towards the neoliberal “center”. The alternation, commonly bipartisan or built around two large coalitions, did not imply substantial modifications in government policies. This was built on the basis of a shift to the right by the Social Democratic, Labor or “progressive” political parties, which in many cases were the main implementers of neoliberal reforms and austerity plans. The crisis and the rise in the class struggle hit hard on this reality, particularly punishing the old “center-left” parties.

Completing this perspective is the crisis in the US imperialist hegemony. I will not develop this further, but only say that, while it still remains the main imperialist power, it now faces an increasing challenge from China. This adds increasing inter-imperialist tensions to the mix.

The main take from all this is that we are living in an unstable period of high volatility, in which we will see crises in governments and political regimes and the possibility of rebellions in different parts of the world.

2) The crisis of the revolutionary left

The elements described above changed the landscape in which the revolutionary left operated. I do not want to enter into a description of the previous moment, but, in general, I think we can say that it was a more defensive period for the revolutionary left. Although a detailed analysis would reveal contradictions, it is safe to say that the 80 and 90’s saw the consolidation of the neoliberal project. And particularly the 90’s, a deep crisis of the revolutionary left internationally. One contradiction I do want to mention is that the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a crisis of the stalinist left, which did provide certain opportunities for the revolutionary socialist left, and, more importantly I think it is of great importance for the present period.

In these conditions, sections of the radical, revolutionary left did grow internationally. Several trotskyst organizations accumulated cadre and gained (limited) influence in countries such as Argentina, France, England and others. Perhaps the ISO could be included here.

The 2008 crisis shook things up. There was a wave of mobilizations and a rise in class struggle internationally. The Arab Spring, the rebellions and occupations of the “squares” from Tahrir in Egypt to Puerta del Sol in Madrid, passing through Syntagma Square in Athens and reaching Occupy Wall Street in the streets of New York. In Latin America this cycle was strongly felt in the streets of Santiago de Chile with the student rebellion of 2011 and in Brazil against the increase in transport fees in 2013.

This, combined with the crisis of the stalinist left and the neoliberal conversion of the traditional reformist parties, opened new space to the left of the political spectrum. The small organizations of the revolutionary left were not able to capitalize this. And we had the growth of different forms of new radical left formations: from “left populists” like Podemos, to broad left parties like the original NPA and the PSOL, to coalitions of left forces like Syriza, and others. The DSA is the expression of this in the US. For a period these formations were/are the political home of many of those who were/are radicalizing.

The question of how to relate to these formations became a pressing (and divisive) issue in the revolutionary left. I think there are broadly 3 responses. One was an impressionistic view of the potential of these formations which led to an opportunistic orientation of liquidating the revolutionary organizations within these new formations and abandoning revolutionary strategy. I think you all can think of local examples of this. A second one was a sectarian “business as usual” approach, which centered in lashing out against these formations effectively becoming isolated from the process. These two responses were probably the dominant ones. And led to bureaucratic responses which precipitated crises in several organizations.

The third approach was focused in trying to engage with the radicalization which had found a vehicle in these formations, while at the same time maintaining a revolutionary strategy and organization. This of course is easier said than done. But it involves a non-sectarian tactical approach based on the concrete analysis of the specific conditions. Blanket abstract formulas for all place and time are not up to the task. The specific way in which to relate to these formations can vary: incorporating as a revolutionary current within a broader formation, tactical electoral participation, united front tactics without incorporating into the formation, etc. One aspect is fundamental in all this: keeping an independent revolutionary organization. In order to navigate these complicated waters democratic internal debate was more important than ever. This was all too often lacking.

This third position is the one I believe my comrades of the MST from Argentina try to build, and it is the shared perspective that brought me to Tempest. As I interpret it, I think it is related to the overview Andy about the different trajectories of comrades after the crisis of the ISO, which was also developed by Aaron in his intervention in the last pre-convention meeting and is also mentioned by Haley as the intentional rejection by Tempest of the two alternative perspectives that came out of the collapse of the ISO.

To summarize, the crisis of the revolutionary left coincides with a period of greater opportunities when compared to the immediate past. It is precisely the failure to meet this new moment that led to the crisis.

3) Ideas moving forward

Finally I would like to contribute some ideas as to how all this relates to concrete tasks moving forward. The essential conclusion that I gather from the previous analysis is that, beyond conjunctures of relative calm and other of greater dynamic in terms of struggles, the general framework of the period will continue to produce radicalization. This will provide opportunities of growth for the revolutionary left.

Although I lack specific knowledge of the political landscape of the revolutionary Left in the US, I am certain that, given the current state of the revolutionary left internationally, no one group or tradition can proclaim itself to be THE revolutionary organization. An organization capable of

having decisive influence over events will most likely come out of a general reorganization of the left in a context of wider radicalization of the working class and oppressed groups.

Revolutionary cadres come from different traditions and there is also a layer of newly radicalized activists with no previous experience in other organizations or that have only been members of DSA for a brief time or of different movements. Common activity over time will allow us to build a new, improved and revolutionary theoretical, political and methodological synthesis.

From this I gather the importance of intervening in reality, of active participation, of a militant organization. And also of the need for democratic structures. In this sense, I think that the 3 proposals raised by Thomas H. in his contribution "Thinking of Organization", are concrete steps we could take quickly. Also in the spirit of understanding that one convention won't solve everything, but concrete steps in the correct direction are fundamental.

Finally, I am convinced that none of these elements can be resolved nationally. The problems of the US Left are very similar to the problems of the left internationally. Organizing internationally was never just a matter of being in solidarity with the struggles of the exploited and oppressed everywhere. That is of course fundamental. But it also had the practical sense of understanding that the conditions of modern capitalism create common problems and challenges which can be better addressed thinking and acting in common internationally. In this sense, I would encourage Tempest as an organization to engage in as much common work and debate as possible (given the limited time, resources, and national priorities) with other organizations internationally. As many of you know, I am a member of the International Socialist League and in the spirit of the above, I extend the invitation to Tempest to actively participate in events and debates organized by it. Also to actively read and debate international publications.

Tempest and 2021 and 2023 DSA conventions (Peter Solenberger)

October 17, 2021

The Tempest intervention around the 2021 DSA convention was splendid. With only 1 percent of the delegates Tempest directly swayed 23.5% of the convention on Resolution #38 ("Socialist Horizon") and indirectly swayed 43.4% on the Bread & Roses left's amendment to the leadership's electoral Resolution #8. The B&R left would not have proposed and maintained its amendment, had it not felt the presence and pressure of Tempest and others to its left.

The DSA convention and Tempest's intervention are well-covered in the "DSA Committee Report" by Natalia T for the DSA Committee and the articles and videos on the Tempest website

to which it refers. In this contribution I want to discuss the next DSA convention and what more Tempest and other revolutionary socialists might do there.

We can't know the state of DSA or the state of the revolutionary socialist movement two years from now. Will DSA be worth another major intervention? Will Tempest have the forces to intervene on a larger scale? Will revolutionary socialists in DSA collaborate, rather than go their own way?

Leaving those questions aside, what might we want to do? Here are some thoughts.

Platform

The Platform adopted by the 2021 DSA convention is social-democratic, thoroughly reformist. Its strategy is “deepening and strengthening democracy” with the goal of “a new political order through a second constitutional convention to write the founding documents of a new socialist democracy.”

The Tempest DSA Committee felt that we didn't have the bandwidth (to use Andy S's excellent expression) to present an alternative draft or amendments. I was disappointed, but I'd joined the process too late to urge that we try.

Marxist Unity tried to amend the platform to reverse its reformist line. I think this was a mistake. They'd have done better to propose an alternative draft, making the counterposition of perspectives clearer. Social-democracy can't be amended into revolutionary socialism.

If DSA is worth the effort in 2023 and we and allies have the bandwidth, I think we should propose a new DSA program, with a short introduction declaring DSA's socialist goal and short list of demands sketching out working-class solutions to the problems of capitalist society. The 2021 DSA Platform could be left in place for now as an historical document.

It's very unlikely that the DSA left could win the organization to a Marxist program, but the struggle for one could help build the revolutionary pole.

Electoral policy

The approach taken by the DSA left in 2021 was to propose that DSA begin to break with the Democratic Party now. Tempest, Socialist Alternative, Reform & Revolution, Marxist Unity, and the Bread & Roses left had different ways of doing this, but each sought to begin to put the break in the “dirty break,” as R&R described it.

I think this was correct, but it left unclear what the various groups really thought. Why did they propose what they did? What did they expect to happen if their proposals carried?

The B&R left and R&R seemed to think that a “dirty break” policy is correct. Marxist Unity and Socialist Alternative seemed to think that the policy is necessary only in the sense that a majority of DSAers think it's necessary.

In our 2023 intervention, if we make one, I think Tempest should be very clear about what we think. We should say publicly that DSA is large enough and rooted enough in struggles to cut loose from the Democrats now.

If we support steps toward independence, rather than full independence, we should say clearly that we're doing so not because we think that's the right course but because we understand that most DSA members still feel that the organization isn't strong enough to cut loose. We anticipate that the experience of running DSA candidates against Democrats will show that the sky doesn't fall and encourage the organization to advance to full independence.

Labor

Resolution #5 "Building Worker Power to Win Democratic Socialism: A Labor Strategy for DSA in 2021-2023" asserts: "This convention affirms that DSA supports the organized efforts of rank-and-file workers, inside and outside of DSA, to transform their unions into militant and democratic vehicles of and for the multiracial working class at work, in the community, and in the political arena." But it's completely silent on the obstacles or how to overcome them.

The resolution doesn't mention the union bureaucracy or the electoral trap of the Democratic Party and the two-party system. It doesn't mention the division of the working class along the lines of race, nation, gender, education/skill, trade, urban vs. rural, etc. It doesn't mention the neoliberal offensive, the working-class retreat, or the sorry state of the unions. It doesn't discuss what would be needed to advance from the current atomization to organized class struggle.

Socialist Alternative proposed Amendment #2 to give the resolution an edge against the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, but this seemed mostly for show. They didn't try to formulate a common position with others of the DSA left.

If DSA is worth the effort in 2023 and Tempest and our allies have the bandwidth, I think we should propose an alternative draft on labor.

Action beyond electoralism

DSA members participated individually in the Back Lives Matter protests, but the organization had no activist orientation toward it. This is a general pattern. Some DSA members are involved in immigrant rights, reproductive rights, tenants rights, environmental, and other work. DSA has commissions or working groups in these areas. But DSA isn't part of the movements. Even labor work is mainly solidarity from outside. Elections are the only area where DSA has organic activity.

The convention adopted resolutions on labor, abolition, immigration, ecosocialism, and other areas of non-electoral activity. But these were adopted pro forma, mainly through the consent agenda, with little discussion. Resolutions adopted this way generally remain a dead letter.

Addressing this wouldn't be easy, since DSA is mainly an electoral organization. But if DSA is worth the effort in 2023 and Tempest and our allies have the bandwidth, I think we should propose resolutions that address this weakness concretely. We might focus on one or two particular struggles and generalize from that.

Internationalism

Internationalism from Below proposed Resolution #17 "Internationalist Principles, Political Education and Solidarity" as an alternative to the International Committee's Resolution #14 "Committing to International Socialist Solidarity."

The DSA leadership tried to get the International Committee's resolution adopted as part of the consent agenda, with no discussion. Internationalism from Below, Tempest, and others of the DSA left were able to get the resolution removed from the consent agenda and to force a discussion. As explained in the Tempest reports, about a third of the convention bucked the leadership.

This was excellent work. The one flaw I see is that we too often framed our position in terms of opposing "campism." Most DSA members who supported Resolution #14 did so because they wanted to be internationalist. Our seeming to dismiss their position with the jargon term "campist" confused and annoyed them.

There are true campists in DSA, but most DSAers are not campist. They want to relate to major left forces in other countries, particularly countries oppressed by US imperialism. To them the obvious way to do this is to relate to mass left parties, such as those in the São Paulo Forum. This is something like DSA's orientation to the Democratic Party left or DSA's former orientation to the Second International. Being from the US, they're reluctant to criticize the targets of US imperialism. This is more like white liberal guilt than campism.

If we intervene around internationalism in the future, I think we should drop the term "campism" and just explain directly what we mean.

DSA left

The DSA left had up to 43.4% of the votes at the convention, yet it lost on almost every issue. A major reason for this was that the left was divided into currents which didn't work together except on an ad hoc basis when immediate circumstances required it. Each current had its own angle and priorities, each wanted to promote its influence, and each wanted the others to go away. That's natural and not all bad. But it weakened what the left as a whole could do.

If Tempest makes a major intervention in the 2023 DSA convention, I think we should develop a list of what we see as priorities for the convention and, without formulating specific proposals, approach the rest of the DSA left and ask for an open discussion.

Some may respond positively. Others may not. We may have to develop our own proposals on every question. But we should model non-sectarianism and advance the simple proposition: Divided, we will lose; united, we might win. However the others respond, this should help build a left pole in DSA.

Revolutionary Preparation: Perspectives 2021-2022 (brian bean & Sean Larson, Chicago)

A year in, Tempest has made some modest progress. We are now at something of a crossroads: we are still too small to shape the contours of class struggle, but the world around us is compelling us to develop past the point of a discussion group passively accumulating members. Many of us know what we do *not* want to become (a sect, a nucleus, a pretend vanguard, etc), but specifying a positive vision has proven challenging. In this document,

without any pretense at comprehensiveness, we analyze some relevant features of the class struggle and left strategy today, and attempt to provide a framework for how we think about developing as an organization.

Currently, we don't think that Tempest alone is in a position to develop a detailed "program," the implementation of which will bring the working class from our present realities to revolution. We do, however, argue that it is time we start standing on our own two feet as an organization, and take some modest steps in the direction of playing a role in the ever-turbulent class struggle and emerging social movements. We need to think seriously about what it will take to build and rebuild institutions of the class—ultimately a party formation of some kind—and fashion our current priorities and activities to contribute toward that end.

Politics contest for dominance within social movements, and that is the context in which our politics matter most. We need to project the need for explicit revolutionary organization to counteract the dominance of reformism in social movements and in the DSA, and that will include taking steps toward collaboration and organizational ties with layers far beyond just the currently existing socialist groups. Revolutionary politics are our asset, but that need not restrict us to particular inherited forms of organization, and flexibility in this regard is a core strength of Tempest. Flexibility should not become a cover for passivity, however: we should be advancing, even while maintaining a critical eye and guarding against decontextualized organizational truisms.

Crises Are Multiplying

The multiple crises we confront now, in the third decade of the 21st century, present dynamics we have yet to fully assimilate. At the forefront is the ongoing and looming climate crisis. Mitigating the emergency demands swift and immediate action to stop fossil fuel use and extraction. And yet, Biden and the world's leaders [represent](#) "slow roads to possibly nowhere and commitments to flawed frameworks" and a climate gradualism that offers no hope. The catastrophe has already begun. Climate effects reverberate and threaten to unlock social chaos, and the climate crisis is increasingly incorporating a multiplicity of social, political, and economic crises within it. Far from "collapse," the contours of the climate catastrophe are yielding an intensification of capitalist social dynamics. As climate activist Jonathan Neale [points out](#),

Society will not disintegrate, it will not come apart. It will intensify. Power will concentrate. (...) It will come in the form of tanks in the streets and the military or the fascists taking power.

The ecological catastrophe is a crisis of human civilization beyond anything faced in the 20th century. This catastrophe may play out in purely ecological terms, and the environmental movement, as traditionally understood, may be the chief means of combating it. But this is not the only possibility, and not even the most likely. This catastrophe is increasingly acting itself out through several other major social dynamics of capitalist societies, most notably the

abandonment of racialized and colonized people to climate destruction, and intensified xenophobia in service of reactionary nationalist projects.

As this process continues, borders will not crumble but will become more militarized and strictly enforced. The ruling class politics of racism and nativism will be blasted louder and louder to legitimize repressive measures, war, and cruelty on an unprecedented scale. Fascism must always be understood in terms of the specific crisis that produces it.⁴ Ecological collapse is now reconfiguring racialization regimes, geopolitical jockeying, and long-term plans to secure uninterrupted profit-extraction.

The question of imperialism will be even more important in this period due to the attempts by the US ruling class to retool and adapt to a systemic crisis and decline of U.S. [imperialism](#). Biden's [stated goal](#) to put the U.S. ruling class back at the head of the world table tells us that the tensions and competition between ruling classes of different nation states will continue to become exacerbated. Central to this escalating dynamic is the tectonic shift transforming the once-manageable rivalry with China into a new era of great power competition. This will have a destabilizing effect on global politics and the recent maneuverings of the US/UK/Australia [alliance](#) are but one example.

This context is necessary to understand whatever elements of social spending Biden has attempted to pass—albeit the main social fruit of the infrastructure bill was left to die on the vine. These proposals were not the product of a victorious left transforming American politics as [some](#) have argued. Rather, they are part of an articulated strategy by the ruling class to restore profitability and imperial hegemony. Failure to make this assessment sets one up to take solace and credit for a victory that will not actually fix the crisis, and underestimates the need to build a combative force against those who are making calculated concessions to Keynesianism on behalf of capital. Sanders and other socialist electeds [rallying support](#) for Biden and dropping popular programs/campaigns around Medicare for All and the Green New Deal is one example of many.

Biden's maneuvers are not a blip, but the beginning of a *long* era of a new, muscular [liberal imperialism](#). Far from validating a conception of history in which the socialist movement patiently advances along a conciliatory “road to power” until power falls like a ripe fruit from the capitalist system, this process confirms that the road of history is convulsive, riven by crisis. Our orientation should be on these unresolved and simmering crises, and the historical leaps that spring from them in times of struggle.

The State of the Class Struggle

At the same time, the last two years have birthed an erratic and explosive resistance from below, with a trajectory marred and shaped by the effects of the pandemic. In this light we must remember that 2019—simultaneously distant and adjacent in the Covid time warp—was a year

⁴ See Geoff Eley, “[Fascism Then and Now](#)” in *Socialist Register*, 2016. See also the Zetkin Collective's new book, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*, especially chapter 7.

of international rebellion, with the return of the [mass strike](#) in dozens of countries from Colombia, Chile, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Hong Kong and beyond. Almost a quarter of all nations [saw](#) major civil disruptions in 2019 alone. Rebellion, riot, revolution, and confrontational protest against state structures were infectious, confident, and eruptive. The following year, we saw the rebellion against anti-Black racism and state violence that spiked last summer and continues to bubble up as reflective of this global phenomenon, played out in the United States through the lens of the generative intervention of the Black freedom struggle and as the political fruits of the abolitionist movement. The explosive vitality of the broadly antiracist, abolitionist movement will be [central](#) to any reawakening of the U.S. working class.

In the United States, the activity of the labor movement (which is also a social movement) can be characterized as ambiguous. 2018 was marked by a strike [wave](#) in the education sector largely in Republican-dominated “red” states, without collective bargaining agreements, that were largely illegal and political in character. Conjecture about how this would buoy a US labor movement still reeling after decades of defeats and Democratic party-related atrophy were thrown up in the air by the pandemic, which sparked a [flurry](#) of labor activity around Covid-related safety demands, mostly in sectors unorganized in NLRB unions. In the health care and education sectors, this was expressed through demands for protection of health care workers and related fights to close schools, keep them closed, or have appropriate safety provisions. Despite this, 2020 did not see an expansion of a strike wave and instead had the third [lowest](#) level of strikes since 1947.

Much hope was laid on the failed bid to organize Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama. Through a polarized campaign under intense national scrutiny, the union lost the vote amid an extraordinary union-busting campaign deployed by the boss. The meaning of this loss is contested and wildly contradictory, ranging from an [assessment](#) that even though the drive failed to win, it has built momentum for other victories, to a criticism of the [tactics](#) of the drive, to a [criticism](#) of the [overall strategy](#) of the union who ran the drive.

The ambiguity of Bessemer reflects that of the labor movement in general. There is certainly class anger and the very fact that there was an attempt to unionize Amazon (as well as [other](#) campaigns [against](#) the monolithic corporation) reflects a certain uptick in worker self-activity. At the same time, labor officialdom is still focused on the panacea of fixes driven through lobbying within the Democratic Party, such as the PRO ACT and Biden’s recovery plans. The strike authorizations and preparations at IATSE, John Deere, Kellogg, Kaiser Permanente, and others that have emerged recently also show signs of pushing this [uptick](#) toward something like a return to 2018, though the outcome remains unpredictable. At the same time, it is far from obvious that the labor movement is on the up-and-up. And any sober observer should be able to see that something needs to dramatically shift for labor in this country to make a breakthrough.

Hollow Working-Class Institutions

The deeper conditions behind this debate are almost universally recognized on the left, but these represent a challenge so daunting, it is often easier left ignored. We speak of course of

the great hollowing-out of unions, working-class institutions, ‘infrastructures of dissent’, and politicized community organizations. In their place have arisen a whole host of NGOs, consumer associations, and media claiming to speak for the emaciated class.

The situation was illustrated most strikingly through the flagship electoral campaigns of the last several years. The social democratic hopes of Britain and the United States and elsewhere were dashed as working-class and left-wing infrastructure proved unable to contend with ruling-class machines. Despite immensely popular policies that polled with overwhelming support, the Sanders campaign failed to mobilize active support to rival the poll numbers.

Both the Sanders and the Corbyn campaigns, insofar as they were read as “of the left” by working people, lacked credibility. We witnessed this through interviews with formerly staunch labor districts in the UK, as well as when the longtime fixture of the Democratic establishment in South Carolina threw the Democratic primaries for Biden by a mere signal. In both instances, the remarkable thing was not the power of these establishments, but the hollowness of alternative working-class institutions ostensibly challenging them. As Duncan Thomas [diagnosed](#) in the case of the Corbyn campaign,

Even when people at the doorsteps agreed with me, even when I thought I had won them around, in the marginal seats which Labour lost, time and again people simply did not believe that we were credible.

I don’t mean the kind of credibility that you win by producing a fully costed manifesto, or the kind of credibility that can be lost by a negative review from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. I mean the kind of credibility that you can only gain through a long-term and mundane demonstration that you are a positive force in people’s daily lives. Put bluntly, it is hard to convince someone you’ve never met, in a town you’ve never been in, that Labour really can effect a fundamental and irreversible shift in wealth and power, when the local party often can’t even adequately organize bin collection. Under these circumstances, it is reasonable for people to doubt us.

The decline of industrial-era workplaces and the offshoring of auto, steel, and the other bastions of the glory days of American unions certainly changed the landscape in irretrievable ways. With neoliberalism came a rise in financial services, insurance, and above all real estate capital that completely reshaped cities and the contours of labor in this country. But it was not only the workplace that changed. The fraying of social institutions like local and community organizations, publicly accessible gathering places like pubs and athletic events, non-corporatized political conferences, block clubs, and even [religious institutions](#) have led to a rise in increasingly alienated and decontextualized public spheres (Twitter, the gentrified café, organizational branches severed from contact with other branches, small and union-free workplaces). As these spaces disappeared, so did the human relationships and attendant cultural realities which sustained them and were generated through them.

In the absence of these spaces and infrastructures, the emergence of nonprofits and NGOs echoes loudly. Many of the social movement organizations that have emerged in the last ten

years have fallen into the traps of the [nonprofit industrial complex](#). Several organizations that grew out of the [Momentum school](#), most notably the Sunrise Movement that made a splash from 2018-2020, have now [lost a clear direction](#) beyond the electoralist prism. Perhaps even more tragically, the insurgent waves of antiracist revolt have not left any mass organizations in their wake. The lack of this key component has meant that mass political consciousness remains largely undirected and thus fickle. A talented pool of movement cadre and revolutionaries steeled by these events are the heirs to the most important social movement in this country since the 1960s, but they remain insufficiently organized. The movement against anti-Black racism is one that will [continue](#) to [set the fires](#) in this country but these essential organizational questions will remain.

As we confront this hollow landscape, we must remember it is not historically unique. When unions were initially built from scratch, there was no template. Workers in motion, by necessity, come to various creative organizational solutions in ways we cannot plan for. At the core of whatever forms emerge, however, are relationships of trust between people. Although our landscape and institutions will look completely different today, rebuilding these kinds of relationships is the precondition for any working-class or socialist consciousness to emerge in a durable form that has any hope of challenging and defeating capital. “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” one British socialist once remarked, “but it was built.”

Historically, the last iteration of this vital working-class social fabric was [woven](#) by the militancy of the left.

Left Strategy: Electoralism Hasn’t Addressed the Problem

Over that last year and a half, we have been reading a lot of fantasy writing, and if you’ve been following strategic debates on the left, so have you.

Much of the oxygen has been sucked up by various forms of electoralism. To attempt an independent electoral initiative from conditions lacking in credible class and movement institutions, as with the Green Party strategy, is a dead end. Forty years of experience with efforts of this kind have yielded diminishing returns as unionization rates have fallen and the remnants of 20th century organizations have been dismembered. No amount of reverence for Eugene Debs will bring back the conditions that gave rise to him. We have a [very different-looking working class](#) right now, with different geopolitical arrangements, social landscapes, and generations of people. What is not different is the coercive capacity of the Democratic Party, which has proven only *more* adept at preventing infiltration and cleavage from the left. That the Democrats have maintained a vice grip at the same time that they have—as Kim Moody [wrote](#) in his precise analysis of the last presidential election—shifted even more towards the center and developed a class base as “the party of alt finance, Wall Street, the media, Silicon Valley, much of the military-industrial complex, and the prosperous” only bespeaks their relative strength.

By now it should be quite clear that the dirty break as strategy was always a [figment of](#) leftist [imagination](#). There was never a there there: no planning, no preparation, no vision. For several years, large parts of the socialist left were fixated on what amounted to, in the [words](#) of Tim Horras, a “huckster’s doodad.” The two campaigns of Bernie Sanders may well have catapulted “democratic socialism” into popular awareness, but they did little, if anything, to build the kinds of class institutions we all collectively understand are required for any version of a socialist future. The unfortunate reality is that AOC and her tremendous popularity are not, in any way, related to the so-called dirty break strategy or building any socialist organizations. Neither are the rest of the “squad.” The age-old dilemma has proven no more surmountable: pouring efforts into Democratic Party channels meant they have reached a wide audience, but the message they are confined to promoting requires them to sell the bankrupt Democratic Party to a skeptical working class instead of building on existing political disaffection from the establishment. Who gets the bird?

The dirty break’s former champions have now moved on to a reinforcement strategy of various strands. The guiding principle is to prove the organized left’s indispensability for the Democratic Party through exceptional voter turnouts. In no scenario, however, does ingratiating ourselves with our class enemies result in any durable power for our side, so the trajectory of this strategy is left without elaboration entirely. Far from an explicit plan or course of action, we are left only with blind trust that the Democratic establishment will one day wise up. At this point we can be mature enough to graduate from this suffocating tutelage and pursue our own, self-defined aims.

Extricating the left from the whirlpool of the Democratic Party will require not just sufficient momentum to reach escape velocity, but solid ground toward which to leap.

Infrastructure, Movement, Organization

We have to be clear about our larger, medium-term goals: recomposition of the broadly-defined organizational infrastructure of a new working class from the raw materials and conditions of our current conjuncture, and through that process of class formation, the recomposition of a class-conscious layer of revolutionaries in the tens and hundreds of thousands. This is the precondition of both building an independent working-class party of the left and of advancing workers’ power. A negative lesson we can and should internalize from the experience of the last fifty years of revolutionary organization is that there will be no magical day of liberation that is not consciously built.

No class infrastructure has been built by a tiny group’s political program. The real key to revitalizing the infrastructures of the class struggle are social movements. These movements, which have arisen in the midst of political crises, unleash hitherto unseen reservoirs of political energy. However, these movements alone will not carry us to revolution, and they are dialectically related to the infrastructures of dissent that are built from them, harnessing and expanding the energy of the social movement. As David McNally and Charlie Post [wrote](#) earlier this year,

It is in building infrastructures of dissent—new unions, antiracist and feminist organizations, tenants' associations, new socialist media and organization—that today's "militant minority" can build for the transformative struggles of tomorrow. But to do this requires that our horizons extend far beyond electoralism and that our priority is insurgent mass struggle to change society—and to assist the self-transformation of workers into a class that can remake the world.

The crucial point is this: Those infrastructures are not automatically sedimented from these moments of upheaval, the social movement cannot do the work of class recomposition alone. On the contrary, the explosions of 2020 showed just how crucial it is for revolutionaries to be connected with incipient local institutions, mutual aid groups, and citywide political campaigns that incorporate organized class forces. Movements are contested terrains, and the outcomes of movements are determined by the forces doing that contesting. As Colin Barker astutely observed,

The conflict between "reform" and "revolution" is conducted at once within movements and between movements and their opponents, in actual struggles. "Alternativity" is always present, difference always indicates potential. It is a seemingly regular feature of movements that they divide. If at their birth they seem to represent a new unity, often accompanied by a wave of poetic enthusiasm, the scale and complexity of the problems they encounter are always liable to engender differentiation and division: over their goals, their methods of struggle, their very meaning. Their progress is marked by crises of development, "turning points," and the clashes of alternative conceptions and alternative leaderships. The result of those often dramatic struggles and encounters are never predetermined. What counts is whether there develops, *within* and *across* the whole terrain of movement debate, an *intransigent wing* that has educated itself and its auditors in the dangers of resubordination and that can offer a vision of *going further* and *aiming higher*. Victory for such an intransigent tendency means, not demobilization and disappointment, but still wider mobilization and contestation, up to and including an expansive democratic challenge to the entire power setup. Its capacity to influence the movement is not a one-off achievement, but is learned, developed, and tested in multiple particular conflicts, in small and large crises.⁵

The decisive factor for our side, as well as for capital, is organization. Real outcomes of struggles small and large are determined by organizational muscle. While we can never remain satisfied with small-scale organizations of revolutionaries, in these current conditions, even scrappy organizations can have relatively significant influence. Our starting point when discussing the question of organization should be what an organization of revolutionaries in the third decade of the 21st century needs to be able to do, given the constraints of our size and composition. Last summer's antiracist rebellion began to furnish some answers to that.

⁵ Barker in *Revolutionary Rehearsals in the Neoliberal Age*, p. 54-55.

As revolutionaries we understand that crises drive historical change. It is during political crises that horizons open up, when the actions of revolutionaries can pull larger layers of people in motion toward revolutionary perspectives and organizations. Regardless of what organizational forms we adopt, the task remains to prepare for such moments, and that will require forming, in the words of Daniel Bensaïd, “a conscious project and a force capable of initiative – of decision.” Given our current size and circumstances, we have to recognize that we will not produce the detailed map for the masses to follow along the path to revolution. That is something that will be produced by much larger layers than ourselves. But that should not resign us to passivity—far from it. Bensaïd’s words continue to ring true:

We must ‘prepare’ (contrary to Kautsky’s assertion) the revolution by constructing a collective capable of acting in extreme situations, without being paralyzed at the first hurdle or suffering division at the first obstacle. What enables decision and action is not just the passive accumulation of forces and the good education of party cadres; it is the quality of the ties woven with the social movement and the political and moral legitimacy of its direction.

We need to take steps toward the emergence of that strategic operator. Building the foundations will require deepening our collective ties with neighborhood organizations, rank-and-file unions and caucuses, workplace organizing drives, and any organizations with political influence among working-class communities. Those relationships will be crucial to 1) mobilizing wider layers of the class (and class power) during the moments of uprising, 2) expanding and lengthening these movements, and 3) consciously cohering or revitalizing institutions and organizations out of the high points of social movements. The question is how to deepen these ties not as individuals, but *as a collective*.

Revolutionary Politics as Strategic Coherence

Reformism (of various stripes) remains the dominant politics among the milieu in which infrastructures of dissent are being formed and the militant minority is organized. This is the case both in social movements and in the Democratic Socialists of America. This should not be surprising, as ruling-class ideas saturate and are propagated within the fabric of the vast array of NGOs, educational institutions, Democratic Party apparatuses, media etc. Counteracting this powerful pull in any real way will require the coordinated efforts of revolutionaries and an alternative set of revolutionary politics.

As we deepen ties in local work, our political task remains building a current of revolutionaries. Ultimately that will require both coherence and coordination among revolutionaries on a national scale, and we should not shy away from arguing for this. We will not be able to play a role in rebuilding working-class institutions without simultaneously combating the politics of reformism that have contributed to their destruction.

Revolutionary ideas alone will not crowd out an all-pervasive reformism or the politics of passivity and adaption. Revolutionary politics have to come alive in the world as an organized,

nationwide counter-force in order to have influence. A meaningful new formation or organization of revolutionaries needs to be cohered around the strategic need for revolutionaries to contest and counteract the forces of reformism within working-class movements. Rather than calling for an abstract grouping around ideas, combining with other revolutionaries is a question of *strategy* within social movements, premised on expanding and pushing the wider social movements around us further.

Revolutionaries—those whose activity connects current efforts and partial struggle with the need for systematic overthrow of capitalism and the capitalist state should organize together. That project will transcend present organizational boundaries, and we need to be ready for our own collective to transform and combine with others through these collaborations sooner rather than later. That is why we need to be raising the organizational question among larger layers as well, not as a call for the regroupment of currently existing socialist groups, but a strategic and practical argument to achieve common political ends. In the words of Daniel Bensaïd, revolutionary politics without organization ends up with “the aimless tailism towards the spontaneity of social movement or the worst forms of elitist individualistic vanguardism.” Humbly, but explicitly and urgently, we need to project the Tempest collective as the people most serious about this collaborative process, necessarily rooted in struggle.

With that purpose in mind, we should seek out opportunities to collaborate with the many anti-capitalist organizations populating the left landscape today, not just for discussions, but for practical initiatives on the road to even closer organizational ties. These organizations range far beyond self-described socialists, and include many groups that have developed broad and intersectional visions of politics, such as [Dissenters](#), [System Change Not Climate Change](#), the [Red Nation](#), [NYC for Abortion Rights](#), the [Autonomous Tenants Union](#), the [Black Abolitionist Network](#), dissenting Black Lives Matter chapters, [Red Canary Song](#), the [Abolitionist Teaching Network](#), even elements in DSA, and many others. Mass parties do not fall from the sky when the moment demands. They must be built.

Next Steps: Building a Useful and Credible Force

Our goal is to pull wider and wider layers around revolutionary politics and socialism from below, recognizing that this will not be a linear process, but rather will hinge upon the upsurge of social movements. Expanding the influence of socialism from below can only be accomplished by a credible social force, which is premised on a thickening of relationships on a largely local level, but firmly connected to national initiatives when the opportunity arises. That is why a central feature of our perspective has to be building anew the legitimacy, credibility, and meaningful operation of genuinely working-class institutions, not restoring the credibility of capitalist institutions like the Democratic Party.

Institutions become genuinely working-class, i.e. able to withstand pressures from capital and the state, by having a political backbone and revolutionaries involved in day-to-day work. Revolutionaries involved in practical work must be politically prepared and organized to contest against the dominant politics of reformism. The point is not to incrementally build up to a

revolution one relationship at a time, but to enmesh revolutionary politics in the real relationships that matter when the next uprising occurs, as it inevitably will.

With just over 100 members, Tempest is obviously too small to run some sort of implantation or industrialization campaign, and that is not the immediate objective we are putting forward. Right now, our website can and does facilitate practical work and relationships, while allowing space for necessary discussion and political assessment. The context described above—of the problems with existing working-class institutions and what will be required to build them anew—is rather intended as a framework for where we should orient our current steps, and where we should aim to contribute when possible. Already, the most encouraging parts of our work originate in practical activity.

Below are some modest proposals for collective work (much of which we are already pursuing) we can do between social upheavals in order to better prepare for them.

1. **Provide clear, honest analysis of current events, class struggles, and otherwise-neglected social struggles.** This obviously requires a media apparatus of some kind, which we have begun to build. Given the absence of news on a city level, let alone in a single shopfloor or neighborhood, even basic reporting and coverage has historically worked wonders to bring working people around socialists and look to them for some guidance. As many of us know from experience, people involved in small or large social struggles view honest coverage of their campaigns with gratitude. We can be an asset to movement allies in this regard.
2. **Develop political cadre.** The precious trust generated among groups of people through shared practical activity and broadly shared political analysis proves indispensable for action and decision in moments of surging and unpredictable social movements. These relationships benefit from being steeped in revolutionary politics, but crucially, from being enmeshed in other spaces and other networks, especially of organized workers. An open, permanently curious, and accessible political education will be essential to providing an ideological backbone for movement militants.
3. **Coordinate action, even very limited action, across locales.** Given our current size, this goal may still be aspirational. But it is not as far away as we may think. Limited national protest actions can be organized in collaboration with local organizational partners when others, like the DSA, fail to meet the moment. More importantly, coordinated initiatives in workplaces, such as the Restaurant Organizing Project, are invaluable to the formation of a fighting political force. We should replicate and expand these initiatives in a coordinated fashion wherever possible.
4. **Explicitly and collectively begin discussing new organizational combinations.** A new revolutionary formation of the left is needed. The Tempest collective itself will not be the thing that *becomes* a new revolutionary organization by some slow accumulation of members. Similarly, regroupment based on shared ideas to found a revolutionary group

will reproduce a micro-party of the currently existing left. However there are steps we can take carefully to begin the process of approaching and working with further-flung anti-capitalist organizations and individual movement cadre, with an eye toward strategic combination on a longer term basis.

To summarize: the above points should provide an answer to the question, “What does Tempest do?” We are an organizing project that is attempting to foster the creation of revolutionary organization as part of building the “intransigent” wing of social movements that can contest the politics of reformism in the fight for a better world. Such a revolutionary formation can only come about through close contact and collaboration with the actually existing militant minority among current social movements. All of our activity is preparation, carried out with an understanding that “all forms of mass self-activity can be preparations for some greater moment of social transformation, if they are treated as such.”⁶

Conclusion

For several years now, we’ve had a glimpse, or rather, a full eyeful, of what the world can look like devoid of a belief in a better one. In the absence of a sustaining vision and clarity of purpose, petty squabbles and mutual recrimination flourish, friendships forged in the heights of victorious joy and reinforced through shared losses and defeats begin to grow stale or wither entirely. The very notion of political commitment is presented as an embarrassment, to be hushed, sometimes extinguished in the temporarily soothing pools of irony and apathy.

The only antidote is the conviction that it is indeed possible to start from where we are, with the world as *it is*, and collectively remake both ourselves and the world around us into something new, something whole and lasting. If we can take a moment to see the world with honesty and gratitude, the truth of this conviction is demonstrated all around us, in all our relations. Acute moments of crisis are met with upswellings of care, collective condemnations, and attempts at aid. These are not strong enough, of course. They are embers that must be nurtured. Socialism and revolution must be conscientiously built, from below, and shaped by forces much broader than those who currently call themselves revolutionaries. We cannot afford to leave this project up to chance; we must take responsibility for our part in that process. We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. It’s time we set our course, and trust ourselves to adjust and change as needed along the way.

Critical Thoughts About the Micro-Sect (brian b)

(submitted 10/14/21)

The following article was published in March 2019 as the group I was a part of, the International Socialist Organization, stumbled into dissolution. This collapse can be--as Andy S. states in his

⁶ Neil Davidson, in *Revolutionary Rehearsals in the Neoliberal Age*, p. 364.

convention document--described as “a more generalized crisis of the revolutionary left.” In the discussion around this crisis of the international revolutionary left, I have found that a number of essays by Hal Draper, and the formulation of the “micro-sect” are oft discussed. Then, as in now I think that Draper’s “micro-sect” article has some usefulness but that largely we should be critical. I am submitting for publication in our convention documents because I think it touches on a number of the discussions we are having that reference the themes of Draper’s piece; sometimes explicitly so. As a point of disclaimer some of my points of emphasis may be different today than when it was written, which I hope to flesh that out in an upcoming document for convention.

The recent situation in the ISO has rightfully produced a trenchant criticism of what has been termed the “micro-party” form of revolutionary socialist organization.

One of the pieces that has been dusted off and heralded as affording valuable insight is Hal Draper’s 1973 essay **“Anatomy of the Micro-Sect.”** This and the similar, though less known, 1971 **“Toward a New Beginning — On Another Road”** reflect Draper’s polemics against the group that he helped form — the International Socialists (IS) — which he left in 1971 as part of a small split that became the International Socialist Committee (ISC).

Undoubtedly, one reason that these essays are being shared is that the author is one of the founders of the IS and a theoretical leader of the tradition, imbuing his criticism with particular force. “Even your (or our) founder broke from this project, so it must be wrong” is what seems to be implied.

While much of Draper’s work is incredibly important,[1] I think “Anatomy of the Micro-Sect” has flaws as an analytical piece and is less helpful than its seeming popularity would reflect.

My argument is not intended as a defense of the micro-party, which should be a matter of debate that — I hope — is enriched by our reflections on the ISO. One such piece that I think is more helpful than Draper’s is David McNally’s 2009 essay **“The Period, The Party, and The Next Left.”** But it’s worth noting that McNally’s piece largely presents a negative case and does not attempt to present a “recipe” for an alternative.

What’s good

Draper’s description of an atomized far left — DSA notwithstanding — sadly still resonates today. He depicts a tangle of orthodox Trotsky sects of “super sophistication in Marxism and futility in practices” and Maoist/Stalinist groups that have an “amnesia,” “ignorance” and “primitivism” of Marxism and political practice. His primary critique is that any left organization that “counterposes” its “programmatic points against the real movement of the workers in the class” is a sect.

This is a valuable insight, and Draper's description of the way in which adherence to "program" can lead groups to define themselves primarily in terms of how they *differentiate* themselves from the working-class movement as opposed to how they can try to work to further working class self-activity is illuminating.

The focus on self-activity, on the emancipation of the working class being carried out by the working class itself, exemplifies the best of the tradition of "socialism from below."

Additionally, his anatomy — in the lesser read "Toward A New Beginning" — of the dangers of an organizational method of the "small mass party" acting "as if" it was already that mass party is salient and should be a caveat for any left organization.[2]

This critical insight of Draper's is not completely unique. This same emphasis on working to break out of the sterile orthodoxy of "toy Bolshevism" also exemplifies some of the best work of the British IS, later the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Tony Cliff's "**Trotsky on substitutionism**" is one such work where he criticizes the "leadership shown by small sects as 'blackboard socialism'...in which didactic methods take the place of participation in struggle." [3] He counterposes this with an organization that "conducts a dialogue" and "learns from the experience of the mass movement."

Duncan Hallas' work also continually grapples with this. In Hallas' "**Sectarianism**", he writes:

Sectarians, for Marx and Engels, were those who created "utopias," abstract schemes derived from supposed general principles, to which people were to be won by persuasion and example — co-operative "islands of socialism" and suchlike — as opposed to the Marxist emphasis on the real movement, the actual class struggle. It was with this in mind that Marx wrote: "The sect sees the justification for its existence and its point of honor not in what it has in *common* with the class movement but in the *particular shibboleth* which *distinguishes* it from the movement." (The emphasis is Marx's own.)

This dynamic, of aversion to what Hallas calls "**program fetishism**" and "**building the leadership**," was also being theorized in the late 1960s and 1970s in a different context that attempted to articulate revolutionary organization in a non-sectarian manner, holding the primary importance of the self-activity of the working class as the ultimate requirement for building a socialist movement.

There is a humility to these writings that are an important revolutionary attribute. Small groups pretending to be today's equivalent of the Bolsheviks are both arrogant and pitiful. Draper's article shares this humility, and while there are certainly reasons to be

critical of the trajectory of the British IS/SWP, I think that there is much more to be explored without what I think is Draper's drastic overcorrection.

As Draper begins to lay out his vision for how to avoid the pitfalls of the micro-sect, he puts forward two arguments against two possible solutions.

The first is that a unity of sects, what I would call a "regroupment-first" model, is not the answer, and in this, I agree wholeheartedly with Draper. The second argument Draper takes on is against "broad tent" organizations. Draper argues that even if groups organize around a "minimum socialist (or radical) basis on which 'everyone' can agree," even if it be "abstract socialism," that is still *too much* of a differentiation from the working-class movement.

By this definition, even groups like DSA (not sure at what numerical threshold Draper would discontinue his sect definition) and indeed any organization based on political ideas in social movements and the union struggle fail, in Draper's opinion.

While the questions he asks are good ones (and are also grappled with elsewhere in the International Socialist tradition), one must still ask what is the solution to this dilemma — unless one is content with complete liquidation and the unimportance of socialist ideas. This brings us to what Draper advocates in his conclusion.

What is not good

For Draper, those interested in building a mass socialist party without replicating the errors of the micro-sect should group themselves around a "political center." Draper argues that individual socialist militants should organize where they are and try to organize informal "socialist circles" around some kind of publication.

In my opinion, however, this solution is woefully inadequate, and this greatly detracts from the usefulness of Draper's critiques.

Firstly, there is the historical context that is important to note. When Draper was first writing these pieces arguing that "micro-sects" would de facto fail to engage with building a worker's movement, the IS was just beginning to form in 1969 and was composed of several divergent ideological forms that took almost three years to sort out.

However, in 1974 — one year after publication of "Anatomy of the Micro-Sect" — the IS in the United States was beginning to engage in some of its most effective and

important trade union work, including the building of rank-and-file movements and caucuses around the country.

Groupings such as Teamsters for Democratic Union came from this activity, and this was a part of a surge of labor activity that culminated in 1974 in highest number of strikes since the Second World War.

In the UK, the **IS/SWP from 1971 through 1974** was similarly making a turn, participating in and building a nascent shop stewards movement. The IS/SWP initiated factory branches, recruited worker militants, deepening its implantation in the trade union movement, and expanding readership of its publication.

Meanwhile, the ISC — Draper's side of the split from the IS — turned out to be a flop, and it is barely a footnote to history.

So at the same time that Draper condemned the potential for small socialist groups to break out of their isolation, a couple actually took modest steps in that direction, managing to positively engage in building a rank-and-file movement of militant workers.

The flip side of this is that Draper perhaps had some prescience about the period of radicalization hitting its peak in 1968-69. Neoliberalism would rear its head just a decade later, and the downturn in struggle was just around the corner. Both of these groups would go on to encounter difficulties and make significant political errors as the overall climate for revolutionary groups became much more challenging.

So while these two organizations had their shortcoming, categorizing them as irrelevant sects does not exactly describe them in their totality; meanwhile, Draper's own attempt at building a "political center" was failing.

Draper's approach seems very propagandistic organizationally at a point in time in which it was proven that revolutionary groups could play modest activist roles in building movements. The best ideas can't substitute for organization.

Secondly, one can see that Draper's model has not passed the test of time. The examples of a "political center" that Draper hoped would train and cohere a new socialist movement included the journals *Monthly Review* and *Dissent*. Draper hoped that publications such as these could serve as the nuclei around which informal socialist circles could be organized.[4]

Needless to say, it's difficult to sustain the idea that the core of the new socialist movement has come from publications such as these. Additionally, Draper makes the

argument that the “sect” model makes it more difficult to keep the socialist movement independent of the Democrats.

In the intervening decades, without organization to help cohere a core of independent politics, publications like these have generally succumbed to the swampiness around the Democratic Party. Though they may offer critiques of the party, various authors take a multitude of positions around the various strategies that focus on reforming, taking over, or influencing the Democratic Party through an inside-out strategy.

One could make the argument that the more recent success of *Jacobin* might be the best example of what Draper argued. However, one cannot separate the effect of *Jacobin* from the organization of the Democratic Socialists of America.

This problematizes the seeming ease of the “make a journal” approach of the political center that Draper advocates. A membership organization that can be a “mutual center of training and debate,” as Hallas calls it, is the level of organization required to be able to actively combat the fact that the dominant ideas of any age are those of the ruling class. A high level of organization is required to combat — even ideologically — these dominant ideas that are perpetually generated and highly funded by our class enemies.

Lastly, there’s the problem of a hypothetical “political center” anchored by a publication without some kind of organization connected to it. Draper places the emphasis on an editorial board to give shape to the outlook of the political center.

But a publication independent of any organization means that these editors are an unelected, unaccountable body of people in charge of a set of ideas that then in turn informs all these informal socialist circles.

Obviously, a good publication can reflect lively debate among its readership, but Draper’s opposition to any kind of political organization means that he imbues the editorial board with unelected authority while the socialist militants grouped around the publication, who per Draper’s prescription have no say over the publication, should go out and build reading groups around a publication they have no control over.

Draper’s solution to building a “political center” is a flimsy solution to a real challenge. The questions he is trying to grapple with are indeed substantial ones, which in my opinion the IS tradition at its best has attempted to tackle. It is clear that the question of the method of the “micro-party” needs to be further explored, and yet I find that Draper’s piece is a false lead.

There is *much* more theoretical work that can be done, and the David McNally piece and some of the pieces from the British SWP in the Haymarket volume *Party and Class* provide a better starting point. Additionally, the documents generated by the debate about democratic centralism in the British IS in 1968 are fascinating.

IS (U.S.) member Sam Farber's critical analysis of the British IS in 1973 is also worth a read. The split documents of the 1977 split that created the ISO in the U.S. are also instructive in many ways, especially the letter to the IS (U.S.) from the IS (UK) central committee (drafted by Hallas and, I think, unavailable online). Paul Le Blanc too recently penned some reflections.

All this is to say that the left must engage in some serious political and theoretical work to grapple further with the question of organization and that Draper's late work is less helpful in this task.

But wrestling with these questions is essential, and this wrestling must be related to an analysis of the current moment with all of the challenges and opportunities it presents us with today. Ambiguity and abstraction will not serve us well in this process.

Notes

1. Most notably his multi-volume *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* and the essays "Two Souls of Socialism," "Who's Going To Be the Lesser Evil in 1968?," "The Mind of Clark Kerr," "ABC of National Liberation Movements," Draper's writings on free speech, among others too numerous to mention.
2. I believe that the conception of the "small mass revolutionary party" came from Max Shachtman.
3. Cliff, in my opinion, is a highly contradictory figure. On the one hand, he exemplified the "small mass party" approach I am critiquing in his three-volume political biography of Lenin that equated *in toto* the building of a small propaganda group with that of a revolutionary party. On the other hand, his work also exuded a focus on self-emancipation in which he is often startlingly clear. This no doubt comes from both his attention to Lenin, his early Luxemburg-ism, and the influence of the libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis' *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.
4. Draper's history is dodgy as well. In "Anatomy of a Micro-Sect," he holds the newspaper that Lenin edited — *Iskra* — as a positive example but does not mention that *Iskra* was a publication of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, which had a program and definitely did not have a mass base in Russia. The party conferences elected the editorial board.

Radical Education (Sam S)

Outside of academia, access to the specialized knowledge of radical intellectuals is mediated by journals, books, interviews, panels, and reading groups. This is a proposal for Tempest to propose the following form of education to the broader left (Haymarket and Verso in particular):

Formation of an online education center where experts offer structured classes on their field of expertise. Some aspects of such a center would be:

1. Classes are offered for free. Donations are welcome.
2. Syllabi are offered by instructors to be approved by organizers.
3. Participants who sign up for a class agree to attend the sessions, do the readings, and engage in discussion.
4. Organizers work to have a diversity of instructors and participants.
5. As always, the Left is deeply divided on many issues. It is important that all tendencies be represented so that participants can get to the root of differences in ideas, tactics, and strategies.

Proposal for Tempest retreat for non-cismale comrades (Emma WB & Andy S)

Tempest's membership is disproportionately male and white, which reflects the demographics of the larger socialist movement. Without active intervention, we shouldn't expect this to change spontaneously. In order to attract and retain comrades from marginalized identities, we in Tempest will have to promote development and leadership of our comrades and create spaces as needed to be supportive.

As a small step to facilitate this, we are proposing a retreat for Tempest members (and close comrades) who are women, trans, and gender non-conforming in 2022. Depending on interest, we could also invite activists from other organizations, such as New York for Abortion Rights, to participate. We would propose allocating at least \$3000 in Tempest funds and potentially doing a collection in addition to support expenses. A retreat would ideally take place in person, perhaps around the July Socialism Conference in Chicago. As a second option, it could happen online with comrades meeting up in person locally.

The main goal of the retreat would be to create a space where women, trans, and GNC members can gather. In concept, this would be part political training and part dedicated space. We anticipate the retreat would be a place for development of Tempest cadres in core politics, and to discuss the state of gender liberation, strategy for Tempest, recruitment, and how to intervene locally in struggles. There should be ample social and self-organized time. We hope

this retreat would generate ideas and proposals for the larger Collective to take up. We leave the specifics of the retreat to be decided by a retreat planning committee in the event this general proposal passes.

Our hope is that carving out a space like this would both build the confidence of our own members and make Tempest an attractive home for new comrades.

(submitted 10/06)

ORGANIZATION, PROGRAM, AND THE FUTURE OF TEMPEST (Paul LeBlanc)

In what follows, I want to identify what concerns me most about the Tempest Collective, and to argue for a certain approach related to what strikes me as a fatal “missing piece” in our organization. The quality of our comrades – most of whom are significantly younger than I am – gives me a sense of hope for the future, yet the missing piece has been bugging me, and it sometimes brings me close to despair. So I will focus on that. But first a few preliminaries.

Preliminaries

Our Tempest Collective is transitory – and to the extent we understand that, the stronger we will be. A roller-coaster era of decomposition of the revolutionary left, roughly stretching from 1989 to 2019, provides the context of its origins. Tempest’s destiny should be to pass out of existence, through a broader process of revolutionary re-composition.

Projecting ourselves as the nucleus (however modest) of the revolutionary group we want to see would, in my opinion, create a dynamic that will yield a sect, cutting across the re-composition process that is so necessary for the rebuilding of a genuinely revolutionary left.

Among the strengths in Tempest is a broad recognition that we are little more than a fragment of revolutionary-minded comrades, still trying to figure out more specifically what we think and where we’re going. We are determined not to settle for being just another left-wing sect.

I have sympathy with Adam T’s determination (in his contribution “For Revolutionary Unity”) to reject a sectarian evolution, and his desire to speed up a more fruitful re-composition – for which he urges an orientation of regroupment with other fragments. But I also very much like the response of Andy S (in his contribution “A short on regroupment”): “Regroupment for what? To do what?” That “to do *what*” issue is key, I think. He goes on to insightfully critique Solidarity, a major “regroupment” project that he was part of (and that I was also part of in earlier days) which, despite the genuine excellence of its comrades, “demonstrates the problem of regroupment absent function.”

The Missing Piece

Andy's "to do *what?*" question intersects with Thomas Hummel's opening comment in his contribution "Thinking About Organization." He says: "there's a balance that socialist groups need to strike between being open enough to attract diverse groups of people and having enough ideological unity to be able to *carry out actions together.*" These are, to my way of thinking, inseparable: (1) having enough ideological unity and (2) being able to carry out actions.

In her recent contribution "Where Tempest started and some thoughts on where we might be heading," Haley Pessin seems to suggest a problem when she argues "there is no reason for us to limit our activity to political propaganda." This strikes me not as a mere rhetorical flourish, but as gently pushing against a *tendency to limit our activity to sharing ideas.*

In an early contribution ("Tempest and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Left"), Andy S touches on this as well – but in a way that is quite revealing. The bulk of his contribution is focused on the internal democracy and openness essential for any organization aspiring to be a genuinely dynamic and creative *revolutionary collective.* Andy also stresses the importance of what he terms a "core politics around revolution, struggle, Marxism, independent politics, anti-oppression, nonsectarianism, democracy, and anti-campism." Yet this "core politics" seems an almost perfunctory check-list, more or less abstracted from what he emphasizes in his later contribution – the key question of "to do *what.*" In the early article he puts it this way:

To be healthy, we'll have to keep an external focus; we have to be "doing things".

And that's it: doing things. This brings to mind an approach which I am sure Andy did not mean to convey, but it gets at what is bugging me, so I will lay it out in caricature form. To be a revolutionary is to have revolutionary thoughts, revolutionary "positions." Once you have those thoughts, of course, you need to show that you are healthy and serious by actually "*doing things.*" But defining and arguing for politically correct positions constitute what's primary.

That is not sufficiently revolutionary, not in the way I believe Luxemburg or Lenin or Trotsky were revolutionary. Our revolutionary tradition -- stretching from Marx to Gramsci and beyond -- pushes in a very different direction. What should be primary is actually helping to mobilize *practical struggles* capable of materially defending and advancing the urgent needs of workers and the oppressed – struggles that can make sense to people in the here-and-now but also tilt toward mass revolutionary consciousness and, if fought effectively, insurgency and power-shift.

Our theory, our education, our articulation of positions and principles should be inseparable from such practical work. We should be engaged in several practical campaigns (to my way of thinking, the Green New Deal is one of these) that help define us, that create a practical framework of struggle in which we might converge (a regroupment to advance actual struggles) with other groups prepared to work with us in fighting the good fight and pushing toward victory. Haley puts it well in asserting the need "to test our ideas in practice alongside allies and others who may be open to these ideas," though the assertion is weakened without reference to specifics.

Revolutionary Program

The Tempest Collective certainly consists of revolutionaries but is definitely not a *revolutionary organization*, if that is understood as an organization whose practical orientation could be

capable of bringing a revolution. For that, a *program* is required that has potential for making sense to a mass base, a program providing a strategic and tactical approach whose implementation can get us from *here* to *there* – from the “here” of present realities to the “there” of revolutionary transformation. Theory and practice must be merged through practical campaigns that make sense to people, that are geared to win victories, and that push in the direction of a power-shift.

In Haley’s “Where Tempest started” document there is a different way of defining program than that which is suggested here. Looking at that may help us as we wrestle with the challenges facing us. She says: “We chose to organize on the basis of strategic (rather than programmatic) unity because we felt these questions were the most central to meeting the current period, which would require concretely organizing alternatives to reformism, not merely restating a set of principles.”

The way Haley seems to define *program* is different from how I am seeing it: the notion of charting a strategic pathway to get from the “here” of destructive capitalism to the “there” of improved lives, liberation, and socialism. It is more like the check-list of abstract “core principles” that Andy referred to. The way Haley seems to define *strategy* separates it from and seems to counterpose it to “program.” But her “strategy” also seems to add up to abstract core principles -- “the need to organize explicitly as revolutionaries” and the need to “reject reformism” and the need for “the self-activity of the working class, i.e. struggle from below.” It is not clear how this adds up to a practical political orientation, as opposed to a check-list of political virtues.

It seems to me that we need not a list of virtues but a practical political orientation, which we can test out in practice alongside like-minded allies and others. We need to be engaged in actual campaigns for positive changes -- not just protests, but efforts to win victories. Such efforts should be part of a fighting strategy that is moved forward by a variety of creative tactics, grounded in our revolutionary traditions. This is how I understand the term “program.”

The point is not to engage in terminological quibbles, but to develop a practical orientation that builds consciousness, experience, practical political skills, and confidence among more and more people -- fighting for and winning reforms (changes for the better in the here-and-now) as the means for building a force for social revolution, as Rosa Luxemburg expressed it long ago.

Perhaps a new entity might come together by 2025 – a revolutionary organization oriented by the kind of *practical* revolutionary program just alluded to, capable of helping comrades (broadly-defined) to navigate through the tempests of our time in a manner that can help bring humanity to the long-desired goal of socialism. To the extent that comrades of the Tempest Collective have such an understanding and commitment, joining together in real struggles along with a variety of allies and others, I think we will be able to make positive contributions to this process.

(submitted 10/6/21)

In the spirit of short reports: Report on DSA Anti-Fascist work, national and in Chicago (Glenn A)

National DSA Anti-Fascist Working group:

At the DSA 2019 convention a resolution was passed to form an anti-fascist working group. While this was technically acted upon, the working group was limited to a handful of people working online in secrecy and doing occasional educations when requested. In January, Bill M initiated a Zoom call for a national AF network which drew ~15 people, with a goal of building a public, outward looking AFWG. After some initial bumps and toxicity, a functioning national working group formed.

The group has periodic meetings, twitter account and an active KeyBase account with 67 members. There has been a single public webinar, which unfortunately is only available in excerpts on a podcast:

<https://revolutionsperminute.simplecast.com/episodes/fascists-bound-to-lose>. The report from Portland, OR was very useful. There is a statement on Medium:

<https://dsaantifascist.medium.com/national-dsa-antifascist-working-group-announcement-15d69341fcd>, and a page on the DSA website:

<https://www.dsausa.org/working-groups/anti-fascist-working-group/>.

After the initial formation I have not actively participated in the national group. The last time I checked there were about six DSA AF working groups formed – NYC, Chicago, a few others in New York state, and a few in other locations.

Chicago DSA AF Working Group

The Chicago DSA AF working group (I'm going to call it the AFWG) was initiated in January '21 by a group of ex-ISO members, several of which are Tempest members. We became an official CDSA working group shortly thereafter with a close and contentious vote by the executive committee. The support of several other ex-ISO members on the EC were crucial in the 'yes' vote. Those arguing against were concerned about violence and questioned the need for a separate working group. Similar opposition was raised for other DSA AF groups around the country.

Our first public meeting was well attended, something like 30 present. Our numbers have fluctuated since then, dropping off to about a ten for several months. Many of the initial group have been drawn in other directions, but several non-ex-ISO DSA members have stepped up. The politics of the group have centered on activism – organizing solidarity and counter-rallies – in contrast to the wider Chicago DSA. There has been an emphasis on working with other AF group (largely anarchist), and the general perspective is mobilizing numbers to counter fascist actions.

Until recently, our biggest event was a series of rallies outside of a Planned Parenthood that had been repeatedly vandalized. About 70 people were mobilized over several nights. More information at Rampant: <https://rampantmag.com/2021/06/out-of-the-lobbies-into-the-streets/>. We also produced some propaganda, took part in the national webinar above, and had an in-person, outdoor social over the summer.

On September 18th we organized our largest and most successful event, a counter protest of an anti-vax protest organized by Proud Boys and other far-rightists. It was a very successful event, mobilizing 100-150 people. But more importantly the organizing cohered a layer of new activists in the working group.

The rightist rally was part of a national far-right day of action, people probably saw the event in Washington DC in defense of the Jan 16 rioters. In Chicago it was pitched as an anti-vax 'freedom' rally, but was organized by Proud Boys and other fairly open fascists on far-right message boards. The working group only became aware of the rally on 9/7 but we quickly decided to call for a counter-rally and called an organizing meeting. Without going into the play-by-play, we wound up with participation from the PSL, an anarchist collective, Food Not Bombs, Red Rabbits and a radical marching band. Red Rabbits actually had a special training for this event, as they haven't marshalled a counter against the far right before. With those groups and publicity through DSA social media we managed to bring out ~150 people, most of whom were unaffiliated or general DSA members.

The fascists brought out a similar number, almost all from the surrounding suburbs. The hard-right organizers were attempting to bring out a wider audience with the anti-vax/freedom pitch, and they appeared to have been successful. Most of the group appeared to be suburban conservatives – pretty far right, softish racist, lots of 'Karen' types, but not many street brawlers. This is what we had expected although we did plan for confrontation. This may be the pattern we see for a period as the far-right attempts to grow. We produced flyers explaining the what the anti-vax were up to, and the differences between our groups.

At the rally itself we managed to box the fascists into a small area in Millennium Park (downtown Chicago). Police showed up very rapidly and separated the two groups with barriers. After two hours the fascists retreated further into the park where they were allowed to march to Trump tower, sans police. We attempted to cut them off but were prevented by our police escort.

Summary

This rally was one of the larger (largest?) events initiated by a DSA group since COVID started. It was initiated entirely by the AFWG, against a real hesitation on the Chicago left. Several groups declined to endorse because of a perceived threat of violence (including SA, others).

Today the CWG has about a dozen active members, only three of whom are ex-ISO. A newer member of PSL is also active. We include people who are not DSA members. The general political outlook of the group is consistent anti-racist/fascist, mobilizing numbers rather than 'traditional' small-group antifa tactics, and no emphasis on electoralism. The group is essentially a section of the left wing of the CDSA. Organizing for the counter rally really helped to cohere this group, new politicians are learning how to organize.

There are some shortcomings in the AFWG. There has been little to no interest in political education. The question of what is a fascist has been discussed generally, but blurs the line between actual fascists and non-fascist racists. Until we organized for this counter-rally, participation was very spotty. I was actually concerned about the long-term viability of the group.

The counter-rally itself was one of the more collaborative events that I've helped organize. It was mainly organized through a Signal group, which worked very well. The anarchist grouping was very helpful – they had a lot of experience in monitoring far-right groups. Also, there seems to have been some tactical re-appraisal on their part. Chicago has a history of black-block type actions, which were not proposed and did not happen at this event. A small number did show up in BB colors, but were very restrained. Despite several attempts by individual rightist to provoke violence, no one took the bait.

We are currently working on a solidarity event with a local restaurant that was tagged with racists (and anti-vax) graffiti. Also, the above anti-vax group is planning on another rally at the end of November which we will mobilize for.

For an Aggregator of Liberation (Paul KD)

THE PROBLEM: The revolutionary left is very split up right now. If we were in communication with each other, this might be ok. But we are not! We don't talk to each other much at all. Well, we do, but only within our own groups. Vaguely post-Trot groupuscles talk to each other, Mao types talk to each other (well, they're better at talking *about* other groups but they're not very nice about it), the left of DSA talks to each other, Wobblies talk to each other, etc. All together, there's been a ton of great organizing, writing, revolution-making, etc. by revolutionary-minded people, but it all feels very isolated.

BUT THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE: As Adam T alluded to, in the 60s, there were tons of efforts to bridge divides between small revolutionary groups in the US, across tendencies. Third World Newsreel, Liberation News Service, and ecumenical magazines like *The Guardian* and *Radical America* all did great jobs attempting this. And this was before the internet! Infoshops, zine readers, and mags like the *Utne Reader* were in the same vein, popping up later on.

SO I HAVE AN IDEA: Tempest, along with other revolutionary media and groupuscles, shall create an "AGGREGATOR OF LIBERATION." This will be a news site collecting and reposting articles by revolutionaries. To be as ecumenical as possible, the site shall have a pretty simple set of points of unity. I think Adam T's suggestions are good here: 1) Reject the Democratic Party, 2) Call for workers revolution, 3) Actively oppose all racism and heterosexism, 4) Prioritize the class struggle and working-class democracy, 5) Support queer and trans rights, 6) Oppose US imperialism and capitalist borders, and attempt to do these things, however imperfectly, in practice and not just words. Ideally, this should encompass most outlets, from the Tiqqunheads at *III Will* to the Macnairites at *Cosmonaut*, and everywhere in between.

WHY AN AGGREGATOR AND NOT A FULL SITE: I've seen a lot of attempts at this in the past which falter based on wild editorial arguments. I'm thinking specifically of *Partisan*, which has already lost a member group. To avoid this, the "AGGREGATOR OF LIBERATION" would exclusively repost articles from other sites. To encourage arguments, praise, attacks, etc. being sent to the right places, I'm envisioning that we would only post the first few paragraphs of a piece and then direct the reader to the original site for more.

Some Thoughts to Help Get Us Thinking About Political Perspectives (Natalia T)

In Tempest, some of us talk about revolutionary politics being tied to a strategy and not to a program of positions. When we say that, what we mean is that our next steps and our arguments are developed and determined based on an understanding of current conditions, clarity about our future goals, and an assessment of what next steps could move us from one to the other given what is available to us. Our outlook is not predetermined by the historical traditions of revolutionaries, although it is imperative that we embrace and learn from those too. We need to build a revolutionary politics and revolutionary organization that is meant for today's circumstances.

Part of the endeavor that we are attempting to kick-start with the convention is a deeper and better understanding of what the defining features of our moment are and how, as revolutionaries, we can contribute to the development of the most robust revolutionary current/organization/party/front that can be built. To figure out what Tempest is doing, we need to think about our long term goals, and to collectively develop a better analysis of the current situation. To that end, I want to lay out some of the features of this moment that I think warrant more conversation. These discussions can help us think through the parameters of revolutionary organization today and what we think the next steps are for our collective.

This is meant to get a discussion going, it is by no means comprehensive, perfect or fully encompassing the range of issues that must be taken up about the period we are in. It's a starting point for what I believe will be a fruitful discussion that builds on, corrects and clarifies the admittedly schematic and overly-generalized topics taken up below.

The system is undergoing a deep crisis and profound transition. Here are some important features:

- **Flowing from the global crisis of the economy, there is a new and ongoing reconfiguration of imperial rivalries.** Most notably between the US and China. While the US remains an imperial might, it is in a trend of relative decline and reconfiguration (AUKUS pact; Afghanistan; onshoring jobs domestically). Meanwhile, the US is still reliant on Chinese manufacturing and reluctant to slow trade with China because of the implications on the global supply chain. We need to flesh all this out with more specificity and think through what the prospects for the global economic growth are and how that impacts the US/Chinese imperial projects today. This dynamic exists in the context of a world that is experiencing the effects of climate change more every day, and there is an obvious tension between the global action needed to address the extent of the catastrophe, and capitalist competition between nation-states.

- **Connected to the financial and imperial reconfiguration is a crisis of political representation for the ruling class parties.** It is in this context that we can understand the rise of new broad party formations and reformist projects globally. The traditional parties of the center and of left social democracy have declined/collapsed across Europe. The UK, Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands...basically you can't find an exceptional example in western Europe, either the traditional parties have disappeared, or the levels of support are exponentially diminished. The Pink Tide in Latin America replaced traditional parties with new developmentalist and reformist projects. In the US this dynamic is exemplified by the Sanders vs Trump phenomenon, and the ruling class continues to try to restore credibility, within the confines of the particularities of the two-party system.
- **This brings us to the Biden administration's perspective and strategy.** Biden has come to power tasked with revitalizing the US imperial project and stature on the international stage after the damage done to its credibility by Trump. What are the implications of the infrastructure package? What is the strategy the Democratic Party is using to attempt to address the endemic low wages, poverty, lack of health care that shape life in the US? And does this mean neoliberalism is over? How will the tensions with state governments on social policy be addressed? How does all of this inform the credibility and growth of the far right?
- **The state of the US working class.** Somewhere between the defeat of the Bessmer union drive at Amazon, the proliferation of localized and challenging strikes, the reassertion of the boss's control in the return to work mandates and the George Floyd uprising, there is a picture of what the balance of class forces looks like today. We need more assessment and discussion of the dynamics.
- **Crucial features of capitalism and resistance:**
 - The impacts of the neoliberal restructuring of economies has led to a rise in social-reproductive sectors like education and healthcare. Workers in these sectors are some of the most militant and active and have produced an important section of a "militant minority" in these arenas
 - It is notable that the feminist movement internationally has shown itself to be among the most explosive movements of the moment -especially around fights against femicide and for abortion access which entail taking up protest against the far right (Mexico, Argentina, Poland, Brazil)
 - Unprecedented Migration and familiar xenophobia
 - Popular struggles for democracy and against police violence
 - I'm sure I'm missing a couple of things here...

The period can't be flattened out, and must be understood in all its contradictions, but I do believe that we are in a prolonged period of crisis, and resistance. This exists alongside a very weakened revolutionary left internationally. The collapse of revolutionary organizations that grew up in the previous period have left their mark. But so has the experience, repeatedly, of recent mass uprisings that have not produced lasting alternatives. Among the challenges we face is a general questioning on the left of the viability of social revolution. As Barker and Dale write in the introduction to the new Revolutionary Rehearsals:

“[in 2019]...uprisings have mounted inspirational challenges to, and in some cases overthrown, regimes in Sudan, Algeria, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Ecuador, Chile, Iraq and Iran. In most cases, old-regime forces deploy the tools of counterrevolution - ballots, corruption, divide-and-rule tactics, co-optation, as well as murderous violence. How might the pattern be broken? Could global capitalism itself become subject to challenge, with social revolution once again appearing on the horizon of possibility?”

The relative strength of regimes to reassert dominance, the historic weakness of working class institutions, the fact that the world seems to only get worse, has led many on the left to the conclusion that revolution is no longer possible. In the US, dominant forces on the left have taken it even a step further to an overall rejection of social movements as being inconsequential. And yet, titanic struggles internationally continue to rise up and push the envelope.

We believe that revolution is possible. Larger and new revolutionary organizations and political parties will come into being when the class struggle reasserts itself as a force - and we can't let go of that belief, even when the process feels far off or is complicated and delayed by a Biden Presidency and the demoralization of the pandemic. A very small group of comrades in Tempest, along with many pockets and groups of others, live to assert the horizons that were seen, even in recent memory, and to link them to the small, important, but insufficient struggles of today, in order to develop a revolutionary politics for our times.

Where Tempest started and some thoughts on where we might be heading (Haley Pessin)

Comrades have already contributed some useful history on the formation and development of the Tempest Collective (see Andy S, “[Tempest and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Left](#)”). Below, I add some additional background and attempt to draw out some ideas on the question of revolutionary organization.

I. The origins of Tempest – developing a revolutionary current

Tempest intentionally began with an extremely modest (but no less important) aim: creating and launching a website that would serve as a political center for revolutionary socialists in the U.S. who shared broad agreement around the politics of “socialism from below.”

We felt such a political center was needed in part because the main organizations that ascribed to these politics had collapsed (most notably the International Socialist Organization [ISO]), which resulted in the scattering and isolation of revolutionaries around the country. For those of

us who continued to find value in these politics, if not the organizational models that contained them, we no longer had a place to draw common assessments about the state of the world or the role of socialists and opportunities for the Left in responding to the current terrain.

Despite the renewed radicalization in labor and against anti-Black racism, along with the development of a new socialist movement and the growth of DSA, a common theme we encountered was the lack of spaces in or out of the organized Left to have the kinds of big-picture strategy discussions needed to chart a trajectory for the Left. In DSA, this meant (and continues to mean) that electoralism was the default strategy for any campaign, regardless of whether other opportunities existed for organizing around leftwing demands; this also made it much harder to find out what other DSA members actually thought we should do or to challenge the idea that electoralist strategies were the most effective way to win our demands. Questions like how to respond to social movements, how to create and strengthen the infrastructures needed to sustain them, and how to train a Left capable of intervening productively in struggles and winning others to greater militancy were typically left unassessed and unaddressed in favor of shortcuts and short-term “solutions” to the rightward drift of U.S. politics (i.e. electing self-described socialists to office).

These issues far exceed what we thought Tempest would be able to respond to, given our size: our goal was not to become a replacement for the local organizing comrades were already engaged in, or to immediately launch ourselves as a new political organization or caucus. For one, we were too spread out across the country to initiate common work outside a few cities like New York and Chicago, where we had a concentration of members. The general consensus was that we would remain isolated if we prematurely declared our small group of mostly ex-IS members to be the basis for reconstituting a revolutionary regroupment. Instead, our approach was to see Tempest (and possibly other forces) as helping to create the basis for a revolutionary “current” (i.e. a tendency) that was organically rooted in organizing spaces, including people who had not previously been in cadre organizations.

We also had different assessments about the extent to which Tempest should focus on intervening within DSA, the largest socialist organization on the Left, or in other sites of radicalization beyond the organized Left. This tension has not been entirely resolved, although the rightward shift within DSA and its top-down internal structure largely precludes intervening at the national level. While we were able to make a significant [political intervention](#) at the 2021 DSA Convention, our success was primarily in projecting an alternative perspective to those articulated by the dominant, electoralist DSA caucuses—and in finding an audience within DSA that is reaching similar conclusions on several questions (e.g. a renewed soft campism, political independence, and organizational democracy and accountability). The obstacles to democratizing or changing the direction of the organization as a whole remain firmly entrenched, at least for now. It will likely take significant activity outside of DSA and a rise in struggle for this to change—and even then, there is no guarantee that it will.

Ultimately, Tempest’s orientation has not been about whether we are “all in” or “all out” of DSA, even though a good number of us are DSA members and coordinate our work through

Tempest's DSA committee. Rather, our primary goal has been to provide a starting point for developing common assessments, orientations, and perspectives among revolutionaries that allow us to respond to key strategic questions facing the Left, whether in or out of DSA. Clearly, we were not the only ones who saw the importance of the online newspaper as a collective organizer, as evidenced by the proliferation of publications like Spectre, Rampant, and Lux. All of these have helped carve out a unique space for discussion, politics, and organizing to the left of Jacobin, which has converged around an increasingly narrow, stale political line.

Arguably, the creation of a shared forum in which to project and have out key strategic discussions and debates on the Left has been one of Tempest's most successful contributions to date, through our website as well as public discussions and events. The other has been in developing an ongoing space for comrades seeking to develop a "socialism from below" current based on the following, shared approach to organizing in the present political juncture.

II. Our basis of unity – program vs strategy

Tempest's primary basis of unity can be summed up in the following two strategic perspectives:

- 1) Revolutionaries should prioritize relating to and engaging with the new radicalization, but we maintain the need to organize explicitly as revolutionaries, i.e. those organizing for the overthrow of capitalism, who reject reformism as a viable path toward winning a socialist society; and
- 2) The self-activity of the working-class, i.e. struggle from below, is the most important factor in the development of a revolutionary socialist current in the U.S. and is necessary for winning a socialist alternative to capitalism.

We intentionally rejected two alternative perspectives that came out of the collapse of the ISO, one of which argued for dissolving ourselves completely into the electorally-oriented socialist movement; the other argued for reconstituting a revolutionary organization on the basis of programmatic unity (i.e. an updated version of the ISO's "Where We Stand."). As both Andy S and Bill K noted in their pre-convention documents (see Bill K, "The Tempest Collective and Revolutionary Socialism"), there are other political principles and perspectives that members of Tempest broadly share (on internationalism, anti-oppression, political independence, etc.), but I would argue the two above-mentioned perspectives are what distinguishes our approach to developing a revolutionary current. We chose to organize on the basis of strategic (rather than programmatic) unity because we felt these questions were the most central to meeting the current period, which would require concretely organizing alternatives to reformism, not merely restating a set of principles.

In addition, we hoped to recruit and integrate comrades from a diverse range of traditions within the new socialist movement, including people who were never part of the IS tradition, but who shared our strategic perspectives. We have, of course, attracted invaluable, experienced members who were previously in revolutionary socialist organizations, but our ability to recruit members beyond that milieu continues to be an important measure of our success in

establishing a genuine revolutionary current with roots in practical action and key sites of organizing.

Finally, we conceived of the Tempest Collective as something people could join—that is, not just a print publication (tempestmag.org), but a collective of socialists engaged in practical political work around the country. This raised the question of what it actually meant to “join” Tempest, since we were intentionally putting off the question of forming a political organization, at least in the traditional sense.

Currently, joining Tempest means identifying with the above political perspectives; projecting and arguing for them where possible in organizing spaces; and organizing common work through our committees, both locally and nationally (steering committee, events committee, editing committee, finance committee, DSA committee, anti-racism committee, labor committee, membership committee, and the recently-formed climate work committee).

Cumulatively, these committees facilitate the creation of forums in and beyond Tempest to discuss significant strategic discussions and debates on the Left toward joint action. Some examples of this work include organizing forums and joint statements with comrades in Internationalism from Below; setting up the [panel “Fighting the far right in the Biden era,”](#) which led to a national anti-fascist call to better coordinate this work (despite resistance from DSA leadership); and hosting [commentary](#) on our website and livestream reports on the DSA convention to assess what happened, which had an outsized impact given the lack of forums to do so, even among DSA members.

Despite putting off the question of forming a new organization, Tempest has managed to make active, coordinated interventions on the Left. We are collectively organizing things, even if we’d all like to become capable of doing much more, and we know that doing so is urgently necessary.

My key point is this: The above efforts point to ways that Tempest already operates as a revolutionary organization of sorts, albeit one very different from cadre organizations like the ISO, Solidarity, and others that predate today’s radicalization.

One thing I think we’ve done right is being very intentional about assessing what is and isn’t working in Tempest on a regular basis. Even when we have not had immediate answers to issues, like the need to recruit more comrades of color, women, queer, and trans comrades, it’s important that we’ve highlighted these issues rather than setting them aside. In other cases, regular assessments have allowed us to respond to issues as they arise, such as when we adopted a solidarity agreement outlining shared expectations of comradeship. We should remain open to changing and adapting as we go, including when that means shifting how we operate collectively.

We are all here because we agree on the need for revolutionary organization, even if we have many different conceptions of what that means and are still in the process of figuring out what

kind of organization best meets the moment, allowing us to put revolutionary politics into practice. Struggle changes consciousness, but because workers do not go into struggle evenly or all at once, revolutionary organization is necessary among those who have drawn common conclusions about the need to end capitalism. The working class has the unique power to bring the system to a halt, but this is only a potential power so long as workers remain a class in themselves, and not for themselves—conscious of their collective power as well as their interest in fighting to end all forms of exploitation and oppression. The role of revolutionary socialists—and of revolutionary organization—is to organize those workers who have reached revolutionary consciousness through struggle in order to fight for the interests of our class, to provide leadership in the class struggle, and to win other workers to socialism. One can agree with all of this without having answered the question of what form that organization should take, or how to ensure it is sufficiently flexible to match the moment we're in.

III. What kind of organization is Tempest now – and what can we become?

Part of why the question of revolutionary organization has come to a head now in a sharper way is that Tempest has grown to over one hundred members since we launched in 2019—we're one, not "the" organization, but we are gradually getting to a point where it makes sense to ask what the next phase of our existence will look like, how much more we think we can grow, and where we are best positioned to advance politics and struggle around us. There are obviously bigger concrete and theoretical questions we need to take up given the problems of previous revolutionary organizations in the U.S.: what positives we should take from those traditions (e.g. being able to punch above our weight; training layers of revolutionary cadre capable of leading in struggle; etc.) and how to avoid the pitfalls and worst practices of those groups to the best of our abilities.

I actually think we have at least a couple of answers based on the ways Tempest already operates, some of which account for why we've been able to grow and how we've been able to contribute to organizing beyond ourselves:

Dual-membership, external activity:

Currently, being a member of Tempest does not preclude being a member of DSA or movement organizations if and where that makes sense. I think this is a really healthy development as far as avoiding sectarian impulses that would otherwise cut us off from others on the Left who are open to revolutionary politics. It also reflects an important strategic assessment of our forces and opportunities for growth: given our size, and in order to ensure we are growing through actual, practical activity—not just based on abstract political agreement—we need to be rooted in organizations and struggles beyond ourselves.

No one organization is currently in a position to advance or actualize revolutionary politics on its own. At the same time, there is no reason for us to limit our activity to political propaganda,

particularly in a period of radicalization. Many opportunities exist to test our ideas in practice alongside allies and others who may be open to these ideas, despite the fact that there are not yet enough organized revolutionaries to argue for them. If comrades are already involved in organizing and political spaces where it is possible to develop relationships beyond ourselves, to organize our side, and to advance class struggle as well as revolutionary politics, it is work that we should encourage.

This is very different from the way many previous revolutionary organizations have functioned, either because dual-membership was explicitly discouraged or because of sectarianism between organizations or toward external activity: in the ISO, for example, there was a tendency to treat external organizing that we were not actively involved in or leading as counterposed to our own organization's growth and success—a practice which ran counter to our (correct) belief that our own organization could not substitute for the development of a genuine vanguard made up of leaders in struggle. There was a constant fear that members who got involved in external work might be “pulled” by the movements away from revolutionary politics, rather than seeing members as capable of bringing revolutionary politics to those movements. In other cases, comrades’ “political seriousness” was questioned if they were unwilling to shift to prioritize work deemed important by the leadership.

If we expect to recruit and develop comrades as leaders within the working class, then we cannot afford to put our members in the position of “choosing” between working in our small organization or working within a range of broader ones. In fact, there may be points in the future where other organizations develop (around issues of anti-Black racism, abortion rights, immigrant rights, or environmental justice, to name a few) that we should make a special point to relate to and organize with not only as Tempest, but also as active members. This is equally necessary to recruiting more comrades of color, as well as women, trans, and queer comrades. To overcome our status as a political minority, we need to be embedded in local activity where we are with others who are not (yet) in Tempest, or strictly revolutionaries, even as we try to advance revolutionary perspectives and win others to them. Equally, we should view recruiting members as a way to strengthen and enrich our own organization, deepening our connections to a variety of experiences and struggles, rather than recruiting comrades away from them.

Flexible requirements for activity within Tempest:

Rather than having set requirements for member activity within Tempest (e.g. everyone has a high bar of what we're expected to do on a weekly basis), we have so far kept requirements fairly loose. Assuming basic agreement with our shared strategic perspectives and basic politics, anyone who joins is then free to join any of our committees, to attend regular member-only meetings, to invite politically close comrades to engage in our public forums, and to raise ideas for what we should do next. Other than that, comrades ultimately assess for themselves what activity is possible for them to do, and how frequently, based on their own availability, activity, and interests.

Primarily, Tempest serves as a central place for wider assessments among revolutionary socialists, for making political interventions on key strategic questions, and for strategizing

around similar areas of work. For some of us, this means that the majority of our concrete organizing takes place outside of Tempest (an obvious example of this is the DSA committee). For other members, Tempest committees may be a primary activity in and of itself (e.g., the steering, events, and editorial committees). This has allowed us to attract and involve comrades who may have significantly different life circumstances and organizing capacities (due to hectic work schedules, family obligations, etc.). It means that comrades are able to contribute where they can and be accountable to democratic decisions, without the pressure to fulfill a particular set of activities or hours of activity per week in order to maintain membership. Most importantly, membership in Tempest (ideally) enhances work outside of Tempest, without impinging on the important activity comrades are engaged in elsewhere. I think it makes sense to maintain this kind of flexibility.

In addition, we should strive to support and encourage the activity of members who have fewer opportunities for political organizing—either because they are the only Tempest member in their location or due to time constraints. We want everyone to feel they can contribute meaningfully in this national space, whether through political education, writing, helping to coordinate public events, or participating in Tempest committees whenever possible.

At the same time, we need not limit ourselves to these activities as a collective, especially as we grow. We may need to reassess whether our existing committees are sufficient for engaging our full membership, and whether we have sufficient concentrations of members in other key areas of work to establish additional committees. We should consider other ways to help advance local and national organizing, and other forums in which we can make political interventions (through joint events, educational resources and groups open to non-Tempest members or close allies, national organizing initiatives, the Socialism Conference, etc.).

In places where we have concentrations of members, I support Thomas H's proposal to pursue the creation of Tempest branches and/or regional committees (see "Thinking about organization"). This way, we can more efficiently engage in local organizing, while also making more explicit efforts to attract others to Tempest who agree with our strategic perspectives and who are excited to help carry them out. In other words, we should more concretely think about what recruitment to Tempest might look like. A promising example is in New York, where a slate of (majority) Tempest members and allies are running to lead the DSA Labor Branch. We should think through whether the potential exists to attract more people to Tempest through this and similar work.

Ultimately, it is crucial that we strive to maintain the same flexibility we started with, regularly assessing our organizational form in light of developments within and outside Tempest. We shouldn't be too precious about creating a new "model" of revolutionary organization, especially since we will likely be only one of the constituent parts of a future revolutionary current—the components and relevance of which will be determined through developments in the class struggle, not whatever organizational forms happen to work today. We should treat our own organization as a set of ongoing practices, rather than a set "model," and remain open to shifting when conditions change, so that we change with them.

PROMISING EXPERIMENTS (Avery W)

In San Diego 5 members and fellow travellers of the former ISO Branch have continued monthly meetings over the last 2 years as Borderland Socialists (BLS). These 5 have also regularly participated in monthly Labor History Caucus meetings (chaired by a BLS/Tempest member) in SEIU Local 221. The Caucus is open to community members.

The Labor History Talks attract 6-10 regulars from the Local who were not in the former ISO. The Talks' attraction seems to be that they use Marxism to instill a sense of workers' class consciousness, pride, and power. They also attempt to broaden Union members' politics beyond bread and butter issues to the full range of social questions, especially racism and sexism. For some, this latter may be the key attraction.

Those attending from the Local are mostly women 30-60, worksite leaders or activists, and disproportionately women of color, especially Black women.

A subset, with the same characteristics, have become regulars of the BLS meetings, identifying loosely as socialists. The only formal membership criterion for BLS membership is joining the email list. BLS meetings now average 10.

Members of the former ISO have also led, for over 2 years, a series of Popular Education sessions for members of the San Diego Tenants' Union. These meetings have been primarily in Spanish, and have regularly attracted 10-15 tenants, with many frequent fliers. The Popular Education sessions promote the same basic politics as the Labor History talks, but framed by tenants' issues.

With the end of the ISO, San Diego members sought to make socialist organization accessible and attractive to "ordinary" workers- defined here as those without anti-capitalist backgrounds, and who are not on their own initiative seeking far left spaces. Despite decades of effort, it had proven impossible in the ISO Branch to build this type of membership or audience.

3 of these new members have read or started reading Teamster Rebellion and/or Revolutionary Rehearsals. But suggestions for reading and reading groups have overall not been followed up. Most of the new attendees have not broken decisively from the electoral-political strategies promoted by SEIU. Most are only being exposed to revolutionary perspectives and convictions, rather than committing to them.

Yet we believe this small-scale breakthrough shows one way to address the key problem for the whole left today- how to begin to re-create a mass, class-conscious, socialist-leaning working class layer. Not because we are working on a mass level. But because a mass class-conscious layer will have to have spaces congenial to ordinary workers.

Our model may end up creating new Marxist cadre, or it may not. We think it is worthwhile in either case. But whether ordinary workers only become self-identifying socialists without specific revolutionary commitments, or something more, we might need a longer-term approach than many of us in Tempest are used to. We have been impressed by the consistency of our new members. We seem to be witnessing workers gradually respect, trust, and take for granted a socialist milieu. This may be just as important for their integration as reading and debate.

Preliminary conclusions:

1. Left working-class education projects can attract ordinary workers.
2. Ordinary union workers can be attracted to a socialist milieu closely connected to
3. their union, promulgating politics beyond bread and butter issues, and meeting less often than micro-parties require.
4. This may be a much-needed way to recruit working class POC and women.
5. Rather than create local Tempest branches, Tempest members could consider starting ideologically looser socialist groups in which they participate. Fully revolutionary politics can be put forward in these groups, with longer-term expectations about winning ordinary workers to them. (I am not arguing against starting local Tempest branches, merely pointing out another possible approach.)
6. Local socialist collectives can cohere around common projects within individuals' unions, if the union has spaces open to community members. BLS probably would have fallen apart without this common project.

I would like to encourage Tempest members to share local more experiences. I believe that local experimentation must provide us with the data we need to figure out how to take the new mass socialist movement toward mass working class implantation.

A short on regroupment (Andy S)

Adam's piece on regroupment sparked a lot of conversation. I think everyone agrees that whenever we can work with others we should, that we need to maintain a nonsectarian attitude

to other formations, and we should really try to leave our axes at the door. The issue is: regroupment for what? To do what?

Effective regroupments fulfill a function. In most places, that's to present a common electoral front. Bloco Esquerda in Portugal was formed out of the left's failure to defeat the Catholic Church over abortion; in the aftermath, the Maoist and Trotskyist parties agreed to form a "Left Bloc" to avoid splitting their support and to work on the concrete issues they could agree on. They had opportunity and reason, and the party could then make the lists and win seats. Die Linke in Germany and the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark are similar. And if we're being honest, DSA's "big tent" existed because of the common project of trying to elect Sanders. Whether we agree with the particular aims of the formations or not, those alliances/regroupments could exist because they had a function and a tangible objective. There has to be a purpose, something that is a demonstrable benefit that convinces the component forces that their differences can and should coexist for the purpose of accomplishing the larger goal. Without that, there's no glue to hold it together.

Solidarity was formed as a revolutionary socialist regroupment, and, while it holds a special place in my heart, it demonstrates the problem of regroupment absent function. That is, Solidarity formed as an attempt at creating a broader organization that could regroup the scattered remains of the left from the 1970's. Trot groups that had split or been the results of expulsion were the basis of the regroupment, namely the SWP dissidents, the International Socialists and the IS's split, Workers Power. Those surviving small organizations were having problems maintaining themselves, and decided to regroup, building Solidarity as a house that hoped for more regroupments from the Maoists and NCM groups as well.

There were two major problems with the project. The first was that building a regroupment organization meant that Solidarity was very hesitant to develop its own coherent identity and activity. There was no immediate purpose for the organization, so nothing fused the groups together as Solidarity. The constituent Trot groups weren't particularly enthused about regrouping, it was a necessity, and they essentially had a détente where they agreed not to push on issues they disagreed on and to essentially allow local branches to build in their traditions (Chicago as SWP, Detroit as IS, LA as WP, etc). The two projects that Solidarity maintained, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and Labor Notes, were developed by the IS and Solidarity never embarked on similar efforts. The group abdicated creating a "Solidarity politics", and it became difficult to reproduce for new, younger members.

The second was that even the very broad tenets of Solidarity's organization were unacceptable to the Maoist and Communist left. The sticking point was "political independence", where these other tendencies rejected the orientation to the Democratic Party and would not be part of an organization that attempted to build independent political parties or formations. Many of them formed Freedom Road instead. One effect of this failure was to convince many in Solidarity to jettison political independence and accept DSA's embrace of Sanders and "class struggle elections" in the Democratic Party.

These traditions exist for a reason: struggle *hasn't* solved the problem yet. There are divisions that have hardened in light of certain impasses in our context. (Trots and Maoists can work together amicably in Portugal, but the representative structure makes for a different context.) The Democrats and political independence have been a hard divide since the invention of the Popular Front. "Campism" lost its luster in the aftermath of the USSR, but it's reared its ugly head again and created some of the sharpest conflict on the left now. With the end of the Sanders campaign, the alliance of socialists in DSA is already starting to crack up and the leadership's approach is to lock down the "big tent". Those disagreements are becoming untenable.

Any regroupment will have to negotiate what terms it will operate on, and whether that's appealing or not will depend on what the regroupment can accomplish. Without opportunity, purpose, and function, a regroupment is an ideological project and its likely to hit all the same snags Solidarity hit. This is not an "anti-regroupment" perspective – whenever we can, we should work with other forces and always search for unity. That's going to be found primarily through common activity, which we currently don't really have with other formations. (The closest would have been efforts through the DSA convention to oppose declaring for the Democrats and campism, where there were actionable goals.) What we don't want is a regroupment for the sake of regroupment, relying on ideology, where we introduce conflicts without becoming greater than the sum of the parts.

DSA Committee Report (Natalia T for DSA Committee)

How has Tempest Approached DSA?

The Tempest Collective (TC) has many members who are active in DSA to different extents. Because of the weight and space that the 100,000 person socialist organization has occupied in the period between 2016-2020, questions of strategy and orientation naturally led to some discussion of DSA, either positive or negative.

From the beginning, the TC attempted to carve out a space that was not defined by our relationship to DSA, but rather saw DSA as part of the landscape on which we operate. We neither wanted to be a caucus defined by our position inside the larger organization, nor did we want to announce ourselves as holier than DSA from outside of it. Instead, our approach has been: if it makes sense for TC members to be in DSA where they are and based on the organizing they do, then they should be, but it's not a requirement.

Those of us who are active in DSA have attempted to navigate how to be openly critical of the dominant organized politics in the organization, while also finding ways to be organically involved in chapters, activism and the general milieu so as to get a hearing for our arguments.

Overall, we have had a lot of success in that experiment, which has allowed us to collaborate with broader layers of socialists, raise strategy arguments in a way that brought the ideas into the organization for members to discuss/read. We have also built some small, but important struggles that wouldn't have happened without us.

All that said, TC agreed from the outset that DSA is not the be-all-end-all audience for revolutionary politics, and we are going to need to take stock of where DSA heads over the next year.

What have we done?

- The website has [dozens of articles](#) that report on the state of DSA or raise strategic arguments about areas of organizing and electoral politics, these have been some of our most read articles on the site
- We helped bring DSA speakers and layers of the DSA milieu into the following TC [public forums](#) and Facebook Live events:
 - Socialists and the Anti-Racist Uprising
 - Socialist Strategy and Workers' Resistance in the Pandemic
 - Fighting the Far Right in the Biden Era
 - National Solidarity Meeting for Bessemer Amazon Workers
 - Biden, Borders, and the Fight for Migrant Rights
 - The Party Question in DSA
 - Towards a Socialist Horizon: For a Democratic DSA
 - Labor Under Biden: The Case for Class Struggle Unionism
 - Which Way Forward for DSA?
 - Debriefing the DSA Convention Trilogy
- DSA Convention
 - We won 15 delegate or alternate seats
 - We put forward a resolution and 2 by-law changes to the national convention. All three had enough support to be considered by delegates for the agenda, two had enough support to make it onto the Convention agenda (which ensured that democracy and political independence were discussed at the convention when delegates were together)
 - We participated in meetings of local formations in advance of the convention (Intersectional Socialists for Black Lives in Los Angeles, and Sprout in Chicago)
 - We supported Internationalism from Below's [resolutions](#) to the DSA Convention
 - We organized livestreams to present our proposals to a wider-audience and answer questions
 - We organized a successful campaign to get R14 removed from the consent agenda so that the international policy of the organization could be discussed
 - We were one of the only places that did regular independent reporting, recaps and analysis of the convention - before, during and after. One of the only other places to recap the convention was the Socialist Forum, a DSA internal

publication. The others were caucuses that require DSA membership to participate in.

- Activism and Labor Organizing
 - We initiated a campaign to get DSA to take a position in solidarity with Tara Reade during Biden's presidential campaign. 13 SocFem working groups and 31 DSA chapters signed on to an [open letter](#) calling on Biden to drop out of the race so that a sexual assault investigation could be carried out
 - We initiated the Restaurant Organizing Project - a rank-and-file led restaurant worker network for strategizing about unionizing the industry that still exists and more than a year later
 - We initiated a mass Defund the NYPD march through the Racial Justice Working Group in NYC at the height of the George Floyd uprising, when DSA was abstaining from giving active support to the movement
 - We participated in sub-committees of the International Committee in an effort to try to bring international context and knowledge to a DSA audience and to develop a healthier, more representative, body
 - We hosted a panel on Amazon at Bessemer as DSA was silent and deferential to the RWDSU. DSA then replicated our event with the same speakers weeks later.
- Branches and Chapters
 - Beyond all that, members are active in branches doing political education, training, advocating for a more democratic and political culture, and in some cases, in the leadership of the chapter/branch (hopefully we can hear reports from these experiences from Madison, Burlington, Chicago & High Peaks)
 - We have also recruited DSA members to Tempest and to our events and discussions via our activism in the organization.

What we are doing now

The political period that gave rise to the DSA we know today is shifting. This is going to have an impact on what the ground looks like in the organization, and therefore, what we might expect to be able to contribute moving forward.

We are experiencing a decline in participation at every level of the organization, and a reluctance/inability of the existing leadership to assess this and shift accordingly. We do not expect DSA to continue to grow as it has, in light of the new political conjuncture without Trump & Sanders, DSA's decisions regarding BLM and electoralism, and because we do not expect the electoral victories to sweep in the same way as they had in the previous period. DSA is trying to keep doing what it's doing, but the signs are that this is leading to diminishing returns, and is, in practice, driving the activity of the organization to the right.

At the same time, this leaves a potential opening for Tempest's arguments. In Chicago, Elizabeth L ran on a slate for the leadership of the Labor Branch that won on the basis of bringing politics and perspectives into the branch to be able to organize better as socialists labor

activists. In NYC, we are following suit and attempting a similar experiment. Our goal has never been to take over the leadership of DSA and try to make the organization adhere to our politics. The existence of DSA provides opportunities for us to push for debates and common activity amongst different stripes of socialists. But sadly, it's an open question how long this space will continue to exist. Everything we do in DSA is facilitated by the fact that we are also organized as revolutionaries in the Tempest project. In the ideal situation, DSA would be a broader, democratic formation where revolutionaries could play a leadership role, but DSA's shift to the right has been in part predicated on an undemocratic structure and a disengaged paper membership.

Questions moving forward

- What is going to happen to DSA over the next year? Will there be a significant section of the membership who grow frustrated and search for a different type of politics?
- Where do we expect future struggles to pop off? What orientation do we expect DSA to take to those?
- What are the prospects for a left coming together inside DSA to advocate to transform the organization into a healthier multi-tendency group?
- Are there other initiatives we could take to help develop an alternative center of gravity to the electoralist machine? Labor seems like the key place we are positioned to contribute.
- How much attention do we think should be put on the DSA world moving forward after the convention? Do we need to adjust how much of what Tempest does is in relation to an argument with DSA?

Getting Regroupment Right: A Response to Adam T (Jonah b A)

I support Comrade Adam's suggestion that the revolutionary left would be well-served by substantial reorganization toward the end of greater collaboration and a "common democratic practice." Whereas from within the sects of the last political period, such collaboration seemed impossible due to the perceived need for a high degree of political agreement in the exercise of our Marxist practice, this (B"H) post-sect period seems to suggest the exact opposite: in the face of a large DSA and an expanding social-democratic infrastructure at least on the national stage, revolutionaries must present a viable alternative pole of attraction soon, or go down with the ship.

Comrades who continue to argue for the careful elaboration of Tempest's political principles and the recruitment of socialists in the ones and twos to our group are, in my assessment, arguing in practice for a return to a model that died with the British SWP, the ISO, the CWI, etc. Of course, we would correct certain mistakes this time around; but the influence of toy bolshevism would

remain--and in fact, does remain within our group. Comrades have argued that recruitment to the *Tempest* Collective ought to number among our top priorities. I can't imagine a reason for this unless these comrades see another micro-sect in their future. Our goal should be to recruit socialists to something qualitatively different from the organizational forms of the past. This, it seems to me, is what is at stake in the discussion of regroupment.

I appreciate Adam's vision of "marshalling together as many revolutionary socialist comrades as possible to organize wider layers of working-class socialists toward revolutionary and radical ends." I don't think this vision is reducible to the always-present need to have big, vibrant revolutionary organizations either; the presence of a real mass socialist movement within which to operate necessitates a political home of sufficient size for revolutionaries to intervene in the current political moment. The transition that Adam describes from a period of cadre accumulation to a period of intervention in a living socialist movement has been *felt* by revolutionary socialists in this country; and this has resulted in a relative impatience among many comrades with the inadequate options on offer, old and new. This dynamic was present in the organization-rending debates of the ISO, Socialist Alternative, the IWW, and others, as comrades clamored to either overhaul their organizations--and fast!--to fit the current moment, or else jump ship for where the real action was. It has been present in the rise and fall of an astonishing number of projects that have attempted to bring together the left wing of the "New Socialist Movement" in just a couple of years, with the DSA Refoundation Caucus and Marxist Center representing two of the most promising attempts (and disheartening defeats). And it has been present in the relatively slow growth, or else decline, of some newer projects perceived as breaking insufficiently from the habits of the past: I see RSN, Left Voice, and a handful of DSA caucuses as (perhaps necessary) victims of this dynamic.

We've had our fair share of weeks where decades happen over the last couple of years; and with climate catastrophe only accelerating, that trend shows no signs of slowing down. Revolutionaries simply aren't willing to invest the years that are necessary to build stable bureaucracies of the radical left to continue politics as usual--and with good reason. Organizational projects of all kinds have a relatively short timeframe within which to prove themselves to be dynamic and viable. (Few examples have passed this test; Philly Socialists, despite the recent crisis of the Marxist Center, is undoubtedly one of them). And in particular, there is a premium on breaking through the left's great challenges of the last several decades--in particular, its seeming inability to 1. root itself organically within the working class, and 2. build organizations reflective of the diversity, especially the racial diversity, of the working class. Adam spends the opening of his document emphasizing the urgency of the moment. But I think this urgency is actually quite deeply felt by large swathes of the left--if not across the board within our group. Rather than resulting in expeditious regroupment and building, however, it has resulted in a kind of revolutionary scavenger hunt, as revolutionaries run from project to project looking for the organization or political form that has figured out the answers--and not sticking around for long once it becomes clear that their new experiment isn't *the thing*.

In this context, it is crucial that any efforts at regroupment or unification have a very clear conception of what the purpose of such efforts are. Projects that are slow to figure this out are

bound to bore their audience, and fail to cohere the substantial layer of radicals that Adam talks about. This is a problem not simply because revolutionaries are our “customers”; it is a problem because the very efficacy of a regroupment project lies in its attracting enough interest to meaningfully intervene in a millions-strong socialist movement. If a project fails to gain buy-in from the revolutionaries that it engages within the ‘timeframe,’ it is unlikely that it will ever become a compelling political force.

To this end, I want to propose a couple of considerations on both the purpose of regroupment at this conjuncture, and the organizational philosophy that ought to guide any potential regroupment projects.

1. Qualitative change, not quantitative

For the reasons I’ve listed above, along with a whole host of political reasons that Hal Draper describes in “Anatomy of the Micro-Sect,” a project which simply creates a larger sect is simply not worth our time. While a political organization that unites the whole post-Trotskyist left, for example, is perhaps desirable, it is unlikely to pass the New Socialist smell test I describe above, and is therefore unlikely to come anywhere close to the bold steps Adam suggests are necessary to forestall barbarism. It is therefore confusing to me that, as he goes to describe concrete steps which ought to be taken toward regroupment, Adam only mentions groups within a fairly narrow set of political traditions--with the possible exception of Marxist Center. If a real consolidation of the revolutionary left is to take place, its initiators have to set their horizons much broader. At the very least, in my opinion and off the top of my head, conversations should additionally include: the anti-fascist organizing collectives, collectives within the Movement for Black Lives, Red Nation and other socialist Indigenous groupings, the Libertarian Socialist Network, the Socialist Rifle Association (it’s astonishing to me that a 10,000-member strong organization composed overwhelmingly of revolutionary workers of various traditions does not figure into regroupment conversations more frequently), the Industrial Workers of the World and its offshoots in Minneapolis and elsewhere, the Palestinian Youth Movement, Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, and radicals in the rank-and-file movement in the unions. There are undoubtedly more, and comrades are welcome to disagree with any particular suggestions in this list, but my point is about approach: maybe now more than ever, it is not a guarantee that the most dynamic, most implanted, sharpest revolutionaries are organized in groups with the word “socialist” in the name. Many of us have found corners of the movement where we can do good work and have stuck with them. Nor can we count on those activists finding their way to us by simply grabbing the people who agree with us most and planting a flag. An effort of the scale described by Adam must be initiated by a large and diverse coalition of left-wing revolutionaries from the outset if it has any chance of serving as a real organizational home of the revolutionary left. It is only by casting a wide net early and deploying our relationships with a diverse cast of revolutionaries from the outset that we can hope to create anything other than ISO/SAIt/Solidarity 2.0.

2. Organizing vs. Activism

During my time in the ISO, I did a lot of activism, but very little organizing. I believed, for much of my political “training period,” that recruiting a couple of sympathetic students to a campus campaign was the stuff of organizing. Jane McAlevey has made this point, Marianne Garneau has made this point, and Philly Socialists, as well as the radical wing of the Poor People’s Campaign, were basically built on this point: organizing in a way that builds real power goes deeper than this, and requires an entirely different set of skills and tactics. If any kind of regroupment project seeks to prove itself--both to have a shot at really serving as an organizational home of the revolutionary left, and to engage its members in meaningful work--then it must be initiated with a ruthless emphasis on organizing at the expense of many of the prevailing metrics of successful activism. I do not mean to substitute a debate of what kinds of organizing to do with a refrain to ‘Just organize!’; on the contrary, I think a debate over base building, the rank and file strategy, mutual aid, tenant organizing, and other attempts to answer this question would be a necessary part of achieving clarity on an organizing emphasis. But while this may come easy for those comrades who are already implanted in unions, tenants’ organizations and other organizing-heavy projects, it will, I’m guessing, take much more training, humility, and vulnerability from those of us who, being recruited on campuses and rushing from movement to movement since, have spent most of our political lives oblivious to this distinction.

3. Openness to New Organizational Forms

The two documents submitted by Andy already take on this point in detail, so I won’t beat a dead horse. I will just say this: the most meaningful political space that I have been a part of for the last 6 months aside from *Tempest*--the space that has produced the most organizing, the most mobilization, the most political education, the most meaningful mutual aid, and the most political growth among a politically heterogeneous group of people--has been a weekly socialist watch party of *The Bachelor* franchise.

I do not recommend that comrades organize their own *Bach*- nights, nor do I think this (or any) example gives an easily replicable model for the next successful organizational form. What this example illustrates for me, however, is that transformational political spaces can be created by talented socialists (I take very little credit for this one) in a wide array of social settings. The fact that we do not have the resources to found soccer leagues like the US Communist Party of the ‘30s or workers’ clubs like the Bolsheviks of the inter-revolutionary years should not stop us from enthusiastically experimenting with organizational containers for the political work--well beyond the occasional socialist movie night, socialist coffee hour, or ‘Marx and Margaritas’ fundraiser. Duncan Hallas writes in “Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party”:

“That alternative [to generalized apathy and the isolation of working-class people--i.e., the party] must be more than a mere collection of individuals giving general adherence to a platform. It must also be a centre for mutual training and debate, for raising the level of the raw activist to that of the experienced, for the fusion of the experiences and outlook of manual and white collar workers and intellectuals with ideas of scientific socialism.”

So far, so good.

“It must be a substitute for those institutions, special schools, universities, clubs, messes and so on, through which the ruling class imbues its cadres with a common outlook, tradition and loyalty. And it must do this without cutting off its militants from their fellow workers.”

In a context of unprecedented mutual isolation of working-class people and the “hollowing out” of our class’s institutions, the revolutionary left cannot afford to build a home only for activists. We must concern ourselves with the rebuilding of an institutional life for our class.

Revolutionary unity is not simply an evergreen fantasy; it is a political perspective which attempts to respond to concrete changes in our particular political environment. In the presence of a mass socialist movement and cascading social, economic, political, and ecological crises, the revolutionary left is in desperate need of a big, agile, and flexible political home from which to intervene not just in the movement, but in society. Whatever role we decide the *Tempest* Collective as such can play in navigating toward regroupment, the revolutionaries gathered here should conceive of our project as agitating for the kinds of political and strategic shifts that will contribute to the success of the next political home of the entire revolutionary left.

I have neglected to propose a specific organizational form for regroupment. I am generally supportive of the concrete steps that Adam suggests, and add only that we should think bigger. My strongest conviction, however--the one shared by both Adam and Andy by my reading--is that it cannot look like a bigger and better micro-sect. All that urgency that permeated the last ISO convention (for those who were there) that pushed us to overhaul the structures of the organization, to endorse Todd C.’s suggestion to open conversations about forming a party, and to take the unprecedented steps suggested by the Independence and Struggle platform’s eponymous proposals is still with us. All that sense of urgency and spirit of experimentation has to animate our efforts today; we have simply got nothing to lose.

Anti-Zionism ~ Anti-Semitism? (Adam T.)

I initially wrote the following to be a short message of concern on the organization slack. It grew longer and I considered submitting as a possible article. On reflection, however, I realized this dealt more with political matters I was hoping to clarify with the *Tempest* Collective itself, so I am submitting this as a pre-convention document.

In essence, I have some concerns about the recent interview, “Antisemitism Crisis in Labour” (September 16, 2021), that we posted with David Renton and Jeremy Randall. My concerns are related to methods of solidarity and anti-imperialist principle, as well as assessments of the political terrain in the UK.

I am not sure we should be promoting this point of view at *Tempest*. It might be ok to post this article in a broader far-left publication — in a publication with an established record of

running articles in unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, and more thorough coverage of the Corbyn Labour dynamics.

The following is not meant to be exhaustive — and I am no expert on these matters beyond that which I have read in the socialist press and the classics on this topic. However, I think it is important to raise my concerns about Randall and Renton's approach to these questions, and how Tempest should deal with them.

Should we be promoting comrades who have argued, for example, that *anti-Zionism invariably creates anti-semitism*, and that BDS is emblematic, in some way, of said anti-semitism?

The UK Labour Controversy

In the Renton-Randall interview, the dynamics of the actual “controversy” as it unfolded are rushed over. Regarding the 2012/2018 mural issue, mentioned in passing early in the interview, context is given short shrift. Corbyn repudiated his earlier (2012) passing support for the mural in question. The Labour Party under his leadership condemned the mural, and he apologized for not paying closer attention to the mural when he initially commented on it in 2012.

As Corbyn was quoted in the *Guardian* in 2018:

“I sincerely regret that I did not look more closely at the image I was commenting on, the contents of which are deeply disturbing and antisemitic,” he said. “The defence of free speech cannot be used as a justification for the promotion of antisemitism in any form. That is a view I’ve always held.”

Without this context, one might be tempted, until Randall's back-handed absolution of Corbyn, to think that Corbyn, a man arrested in 1984 for protesting South African apartheid, was an anti-semiter himself.

Let us not forget one of Corbyn's many “anti-semitic” crimes in the British press was to attend a seder organized by a Jewish group critical of Israel. The list of these false “crimes” goes on and on — a fact acknowledged, but again, glossed over in the interview.

The attacks on Lucianna Berger are mentioned, but little is said about the ongoing witch-hunts against the left-wing of the Labour Party; a wholesale purge of the socialist left, including rank-and-file Corbyn supporters, Marxists, the filmmaker Ken Loach, etc. Also unmentioned, Lucianna Berger did lead a breakaway group from the Labour Party (to the right). This obviously doesn't excuse any anti-Semitic comments made to or about her; and certainly doesn't excuse threats to her family. But she did betray the left Labour Party leadership. She was a traitor.

The Labour witch-hunts have systematically targeted, in particular, Jewish comrades critical of Israel and Zionism. I personally know a Jewish Labour comrade hounded from their local council position after months of harassment for their pro-Palestinian views. That was *before* the Starmer purges. For an example from the more recent purges see Labour comrade [“Leah Levane's response to her threatened ‘automatic expulsion’”](#) from Labour for the “crime” of speaking to the wrong organizations.

Randall Argues that Anti-Zionism Leads to Anti-Semitism

To be sure there is a particular history and present-reality of domestic anti-semitism in the UK and in the UK labour movement. The attempt to frame this historic, bourgeois, and homegrown anti-semitism as interchangeable or closely connected with campism is, however, very problematic in the context of contemporary UK politics and global imperialism. Indeed, the core of Randall's argument — constructed in a series of equivocating Matryoshka dolls — is that contemporary anti-Zionism, while not anti-semitic itself, invariably leads to anti-semitism.

First of all, Randall's citing of the Workers' Revolutionary Party — an organization that as I understand started to bleed its core membership in the mid-1970s (!), while mostly ignoring (in our interview) an assessment of the far more important Labour Militant and the International Socialists tendencies — is bending history to fit an argument. Of course, in a [transcribed speech](#) on Workers Liberty, Randall gives the UK Socialist Workers Party the same backhanded treatment as Corbyn, *they aren't anti-semitic but...*

As he explains: "If we can speak of a contemporary 'left anti-semitism,' I think we're not talking about straightforward racist hostility to Jews, but rather a political methodology which, carried through to its conclusion, has an **almost inescapably anti-semitic logic**." [emphasis added].

For Randall, it seems, BDS is anti-semitic (or creates anti-semitism).

After complaining about the ahistorical treatment of Israel in relationship to the national question — "There is no other people whose nationalism is treated so ahistorically" — Randall, rather ahistorically, compares solidarity with the Kurdish self-determination struggle to the Palestinian struggle:

"There is no global movement to boycott Turkish goods because they are Turkish; there is no global campaign to shut down performances by Turkish artists because they are Turkish; there is no move to disbar academic collaboration with Turkish academics because they are Turkish."

Instead of a global socialist left responding to the apartheid of the Israeli state, and building on our previous movement against South African apartheid, we are singling out Israel, and Jews, for presumably anti-semitic reasons, or in a way that inevitably becomes anti-semitic.

A large problem (particularly in the context of a country like the UK) is that conflating anti-semitism and campism treats anti-semitism as something that largely comes from *without* — from the colonies, i.e. from the brown and Black people colonized by the UK, the victims of Israel's colonization, and the socialist and communist allies of those colonized people. Randall makes this more explicit elsewhere. In the aforementioned presentation on Workers' Liberty, Randall argues there was a good "anti-Zionism" — among the Jewish European left before WW2 — but that has been displaced by a bad "anti-Zionism" now.

What are the roots of this bad "anti-Zionism"? Randall points to anti-semitic tropes employed by Stalinists — although he weirdly avoids unpacking Stalinist support for the formation of Israel. As Tony Cliff notes, the Stalinists spoke out of both sides of their mouths on the question. What really seems to be the problem is that the center of anti-Zionism moved from Europe to the colonial and post-colonial world, and to those who became the victims of Israel's colonial-settler project.

This bad anti-Zionism, he writes, "might be partially explained by the fact the Israeli state has become more heavily militarised, its colonial project in Palestine more barbaric, and so on, as time has progressed. But Marxist attitudes to the right of nations to self-determination have not, generally, tended to be determined by the brutality of their governments."

Of course he is simply wrong. Marxists welcome the dissolution of colonial projects. We do take into account the brutality of imperialist projects in our evaluations. And the proposed

solution from our tradition of anti-Zionist socialism — from which Tempest came — has been a call for a secular democratic state with rights for all — Israelis and Palestinians. We do not support an inversion of the racist pogroms currently directed at the Palestinian population.

In the Tempest interview, Randall argues that post-war anti-Zionism formed a “third strand” of anti-semitism, “that sees Israel as a uniquely reactionary state.” But Israel is, while not unique, a profoundly reactionary state based on the exclusion of half its governed population from self-determination, basic democratic rights, civil rights, and social welfare. It is a colonial-settler state based on fascist ideas of exterminism and religious-ethnic unity. Israel borrows heavily from the US colonization and exterminism project called “Manifest Destiny” and German Nazi ideas of *lebensraum*. In several polls a majority of Israel’s citizens have supported “transfer” — the wholesale ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Israel’s settlements are choking the occupied territories. We just witnessed another one-sided war against the Gaza Strip, denial of COVID vaccines for Palestinians, etc. But for Randall the barbarisms inflicted on the Palestinian people seems to be an aside rather than a central concern.

Randall’s transcribed presentation on Workers’ Liberty is full of innuendo, backtracks, and half-assertions. It is, frankly, confusing. It has to be. Because the core of the argument seems to be anti-Zionism was okay as long as it was European, white, and Jewish — and as long as the colonial project of Israel was an idea more than an actuality— but less acceptable once it became a matter of anti-colonial resistance, and global imperialist dynamics. As a Middle Eastern comrade of color wrote to me after the article was posted: “the pure erudite revolutionary socialist understanding (which applies to a century ago, not today’s Israel and ‘Zionism’ as is) versus the crude understanding of the Arab, Paki, Muslim amongst us today...”

Anti-Semitism, the UK Working-Class and Brexit

Randall’s arguments seem particularly problematic in relationship to the systematic and brutal racism and Islamophobia directed against persons of color within the UK — many of whom emigrated to the UK from colonized nations — especially Arab and Muslim populations. And Randall’s polemicizing against populism is, in this context, also suspect: If only “those people” knew how to oppose colonization the “right way.”

This is not unrelated to one of the central reasons Labour lost the last election, and Corbyn’s mistaken semi-neutrality on Brexit — also glossed over by Renton and Randall. As Adam Hanieh and Jeffery R. Webber write in the Spring 2021 issue of *Spectre*, much of the UK left has not fully processed the reformation of class that occurred during Thatcherism and the neoliberal restructuring of the British economy. (see “Race, Class, and the Left in Brexit Britain”).

Many old Labour bastions are no longer strongly organized working-class areas and the working-class has become more centered on certain urban areas, more diverse, less white, and more broke. When this shift is taken into account, actual working-class support for Brexit was much lower. Brexit comes into focus as a more clearly reactionary and petit-bourgeois project (not the contradictory labor vote that many on the UK left believed it was).

A false narrative developed among some that “real workers” wanted Brexit and “big city elites” were against it. If we don’t see the clearly racist and anti-semitic logic in this narrative — a narrative embraced by some of the same people accusing Corbyn’s Labour of anti-semitism — we are not paying attention. This narrative reflects the central tenants of anti-semitic “replacement theory”: The cosmopolitan elite (read: Jews) wants to replace you (read: “real”/white Britons) with foreigners (read: Black people, Muslims, Eastern Europeans, and so on).

This is part of how the logic of anti-semitism is playing out in Britain as “ideology and form of thought” (as Randall and Renton borrow from Moishe Postone) on a mass scale. And

Corbyn's Labour Party was one of the main obstacles, however imperfect it was, to *this mass anti-semitic ideology in motion*.

There is widespread (and growing) anti-semitism in the UK, as there is in the US, Europe, and much of the world. There were (and are) anti-semites in the Labour Party, and in the Liberal Democrats, and in the Conservative Party. However, the idea that it was fundamentally worse in Corbyn's Labour than it will be in Keir Starmer's "Labour," or the Conservatives, is absurd.

Corbyn repeatedly condemned anti-semitism while refusing to condemn legitimate criticism of Israel. He condemned bigotry over and over and over again. But he refused to cut ties with the exploited and oppressed in either the Middle East or London. And this was a mortal sin in the context of British racism and imperialism. Or rather, one of his mortal sins.

Indeed, the hue and cry about Corbyn was part and parcel of an overall right-turn in UK politics and in politics internationally; a rightward drift that often sees in Zionism a model for exclusionary states of one kind or another. As Jewish Voice for Labour notes, [far-right parties in Europe are becoming some of the biggest supporters of Zionism](#).

Divide and Conquer Trap?

The Brexit project overall has helped shift Britain — and particularly England — into a more inward-looking and backwards politics. This is evidenced by everything from a rising hatred against trans persons — including from a number of "leftists" — to insipid proposals to make British television more "British." In my opinion, we need to be careful not to fall into a "divide and conquer" trap set by the racist ruling-class of the British Empire amid its flailing political scene.

Some Thoughts on Revolutionary Socialist Work in the Unions/Workplace (Charlie P. NY)

This summer, a debate took place in the faculty union at the City University of New York, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), in which I have been active for over twenty-five years. I work with Rank and File Action (RAFA), an opposition caucus that originated in the "7K or Strike" (\$7,000 per course minimum wage for adjunct faculty) agitation during our last contract negotiations in 2018-2019. I was originally hesitant to work with a group that was almost exclusively graduate student and part-time employees, who in the past had done little to either build a base beyond radicalized folks or to win support among the full-time faculty, who were often condemned as "labor aristocrats" benefiting from the exploitation of adjunct labor. I was won over by their independent organizing, including outreach to full-timers with appeals that emphasized how the growth of a layer of precarious and low-paid faculty undermined the salaries and working conditions of full-timers. They ran a "vote no" campaign against an inadequate contract, which won around 20% of the PSC, which I actively supported. (<https://portside.org/2019-11-03/psc-cuny-contract-case-voting-no>).

This summer, RAFA prioritized winning members of the PSC Delegate, made up of the core union activists from the campus based chapters, to a resolution condemning Israeli repression of the Palestinians and mandating discussions in campus based Chapters of the situation in Palestine. To my surprise, the resolution passed despite the opposition of the ostensibly

“progressive” and “reform” leadership (which includes many who claim to be socialists). Once the resolution passed, the right-wing, *anti-union* forces at CUNY condemned the PSC’s action as “anti-Semitic” and are attempting, with limited success, to get members to resign from the PSC.

Despite being happy that a majority of the activist core of the PSC, the “union cadre,” was willing to buck the leadership and express elemental solidarity with Palestinian working people, I still felt uneasy. Should RAFA have prioritized the issue of Palestine this summer? My reading of colleagues e-mails and social media indicated that a wide swatch of union friendly (if less active) faculty and staff were much more concerned about CUNY’s reopening of face-to-face classes in the midst of the continuing pandemic. Although New York State had mandated that all faculty, staff and students be vaccinated and wear masks, many were worried about returning to buildings with inadequate ventilation, substandard janitorial services and generally poor maintenance.

The PSC leadership claimed to be leading the fight for a “safe reopening,” but, as usual, they limited themselves to holding press conferences, winning support from ‘friendly elected officials,’ and threatening legal action. I increasingly felt that RAFA should have prioritized how to effectively fight for a ‘safe reopening’ of campuses in late August. For me, the bigger priority was educating and organizing, to the extent possible with RAFA’s limited numbers, collective actions (informational picket-lines, workplace health and safety meetings, etc.) when classes began.

I am taking a “two-prong” approach to this question. First, when I am speaking to union members who question the PSC’s stance, I am defending both the substance of the resolution and the importance of the union engaging in solidarity with other working people—in this case the Palestinians. I am urging those considering leaving the union to reconsider—that it weakens *our collective* position in relationship to university management. I will recall the years I remained a member of the AFT despite its support for murderous anti-labor regimes in Central America and South Africa. Second, I am arguing with the other RAFA activists that the Palestine resolution should *not* have been our *main activity* this summer.

I am sharing this experience because it raises some very important strategic and tactical questions for revolutionary socialists active in workplaces and unions—what are our priorities in this arena of activity? Should we be primarily focused on encouraging increased worker activism and militancy, with the aim of expanding the “militant minority” of radical workplace leaders who are the potential “human material” for a real revolutionary workers’ organization? Or should we seek every opportunity to “politicize” our work by raising resolutions in solidarity, making links to non-workplace struggles against oppression, and recruiting our co-workers to socialism?

For those of us who were labor activists in either Solidarity (like myself) and in the ISO, there questions are reminiscent of some of the debates between our groups over the past twenty years. I hope that what follows will provoke a *comradely discussion* and debate among *Tempest* comrades. While I vigorously defend the *priority* Solidarity comrades placed on workplace organizing, I believe we often “bent the stick.” Specifically the our emphasis on militancy, solidarity and union democracy in a period of low workplace activism often led us to highlight electoral challenges to “old guard” leaders in our unions. This led to occasional alliances with forces that were not even committed to the democratic reform of our unions, no less workplace activism, most notably in the Teamsters—culminating in TDU’s active campaigning for Sean O’Brien.

Solidarity's labor work, following Kim Moody's vision of the rank and file strategy (<https://solidarity-us.org/pdfs/RFS.pdf>), prioritized cohering of a layer of militants, including many who were not ready to embrace revolutionary socialism, on the need to organize their co-workers independently (and if necessary, against) the labor officialdom. For us, raising "non-workplace issues" was strictly secondary to overcoming the decades of disorganization and defeats that had sapped the size of the 'militant minority' in the US working class. The task of doing socialist education (propaganda) and recruiting by the "ones and twos" out of this work, an extremely difficult task for a small group in a period of low class struggle, was often a distant third in terms of our work.

This perspective was rooted in our appreciation of Rosa Luxemburg's *The Mass Strike*. Unlike Kautsky, whose vision Lenin uncritically embraced in *What is to Be Done?*, Luxemburg was the first in the left-wing of pre-1914 socialism to question the "tried and tested" tactic—that workers would be won to socialism primarily through socialist education carried out by the party through the socialist press, pamphlets and election campaigns. (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1971/xx/ri-gersd.htm>). Workplace struggle was seen as inherently limited to trade union contestation of wages and benefits, and could produce no more than "trade union consciousness" or "economism"—one of the most misunderstood concepts in Marxist history (<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isr-iso/1998/no04/hallas.htm>). "Political" or "socialist" class consciousness would come "from the outside," through a "fusion" of socialist politics and the existing workers' movement.

Luxemburg essentially "flipped" the path to the "fusion" of revolutionary socialism and the working class in light of the experience of the mass strikes that swept the capitalist world in 1904-1907, reaching their height in the Russian Revolution of 1905-1906. Mass struggles, in particular workplace struggles were now at the center of the process of consolidating revolutionary working class politics. (For a fruitful synthesis of Luxemburg's theory and the practice of the Bolsheviks and early Comintern, see <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/196x/leninism/index.htm>)

Workplace actions involve confrontational action to win concessions from the employers. Historically, the most militant workplace struggles have not been primarily around wages and benefits. Instead, the issues of *control of the labor-process* – against deskilling, speed-up, unsafe working conditions, arbitrary changes in hours and work schedules, etc., and for control over hiring; firing and workplace discipline.—have been at the center of every upsurge of strike action over the past one-hundred and fifty years. Put simply, the most important workplace struggles, past and present, do not primarily challenge the immediate distribution of profits and wages, but contest capital's *despotic control* of work.

To be successful, these struggles require escalating actions and expanding solidarities built on confronting the workplace manifestations of gender and racial oppression. They often entail many participants taking combative and even illegal actions that carry real risks—losing employment and arrest and physical abuse by the police. As history has shown, in the course of building insurgent actions, significant minorities of working people often develop new ideas and outlooks to make sense of their direct experiences of struggle. They forge new perceptions of friends and foes, new understandings of the state and of militant struggle against it, and new solidarities born of struggle.

Workplace struggles require involving those who were, perhaps yesterday, passive, alienated, and accepting of the boss' authority while attempting to advance at the expense of other

workers—in particular racialized people, women, queer folks and immigrants. They engage in increasingly risky actions—to disrupt “business as usual” to one extent or another—and reach out to other workers across lines of race, gender, citizenship, and the like to build solidarity in struggle. Effective workplace organizing exposes who are the workers’ real enemies and who are their real allies. And finally collective actions can potentially win concrete gains and give people a sense of their *collective power*—allowing workers to shake off “the muck of ages”, including the racism and sexism that comes with atomization and powerlessness, opening them to more radical politics. (David McNally and I develop this point in some detail in <https://spectrejournal.com/beyond-electoralism/>.) Not surprisingly, the unions that were best able to mobilize their members around non-workplace issues like racism, rather than passing resolution, contributing funds and having a token presence in these struggles, were those with the strongest records of rank and file activism and organization at work.

This understanding of the development of class consciousness and the emergence of a “militant minority” of revolutionary minded workers shaped Solidarity’s priorities. Unfortunately, we were never as successful at recruiting worker activists to socialist politics or even building, through *Labor Notes*, a layer of rooted worker leaders who could argue for a radical, if not explicitly revolutionary socialist, politics. I believe this was primarily the result of the extremely low level of struggle prior to the last few years (and that has only *begun* to be reversed with the “Red State Teachers’ Revolt” and the slight uptick in strikes since then). Often we found ourselves spending almost all our time and energy maintaining small groups of activists in our unions, and, if we were elected to union office, attempting to maintain a minimal level of activity in increasingly sclerotic locals and chapters—with rare exceptions like UTLA and CTU.

This often led comrades in the ISO to accuse Solidarity of “stagism” and “economism.” Solidarity seemed to ignore “divisive” issues of race, gender, and imperialism. Solidarity was accused of believing that workers needed to *first* be militant in the workplace *before* socialists could or should raise “big picture” politics or build a substantive socialist organization.

By contrast, we thought ISO comrades were mistaken in giving equal weight to rebuilding the ‘militant minority’ and to raising non-workplace politics in our union work. We believed that the ISO comrades gave too much emphasis to socialist propaganda and warned against a “resolutionary socialism” that emphasized formal union stances at the expense of building membership activism. At times we thought the ISO was more interested in individual recruitment of other radicals from their union work—something they were much more successful at than we were-- than the longer-term project of promoting workplace struggles and creating new layers of radicals

Despite these differences, ISO and Solidarity members worked together to cohere the ‘militant minority’ around a program of militancy, solidarity, and democracy in several teachers unions (CTU, UTLA and the UFT) We also collaborated occasionally in support of “political” resolutions in our union. There was common activity in cross-union union groupings addressing broader politics, like US Labor against the War, mostly through *Labor Notes*. However, broader political issues and socialist education remained low priorities for Solidarity.

Was Solidarity guilty of “stagism”—militancy first, then politics? As Kim Moody has recently pointed out (<https://spectrejournal.com/the-rank-file-strategy-and-the-new-socialist-movement/>), our perspective was more a form of “taskism.” We *prioritized* rebuilding the militancy and democratic self-organization of workers, without which “socialism remains only a set of ideas.” The basis of prioritizing one task—reorganizing the ‘militant minority’ and promoting workplace struggle—over another—raising “broader” political issues—is the differences each involves in

terms of which layers are being organized, what we hope they will do, and the impact of this organizing and activity on workers' power and consciousness.

Very schematically, when socialists and other radicals introduce resolutions on non-workplace issues in their unions they are engaged in attempts to *persuade* the existing "union cadre"—the union activists who regularly attend meetings and are engaged in the life of the union—that the union as an institution needs to take a public position on racist police violence, US imperial wars, Palestine BDS, universal healthcare, etc. We are attempting to consolidate the politics of this layer of militants around an elemental act of *solidarity* with other working people at home and abroad

There is no question that helping the existing 'militant minority' develop a radical working class world-view is *one* of the tasks of revolutionary socialists. However, there are real *limits* to this activity, especially in the contemporary labor movement. Winning other union activists to these positions does not require them to take risky direct action against their employer. At worst, a militant may risk being socially ostracized by more conservative co-workers, but they do not risk being disciplined and fired.

More importantly, the union's adoption of a radical stand on non-workplace issues usually has little impact on relations with the boss or, generally, the broader relationship of class forces. For the most part, passing these resolutions will not draw new people into action—it is usually the makers of these resolutions who end up implementing them, having little impact on the union's official activities.

Often, these resolutions have little relevance for the vast majority of union members who remain passive and often alienated from the union. This is especially the case with "do-nothing" unions (the vast majority today) that are incapable of organizing the defense of its members against the employer. In sum, It does little to expand the circle of those who see themselves as *active agents of social change* and overcoming the sense of powerlessness that is endemic in workplaces across the US.

To a certain extent, the growth of DSA and the explosion of mass, militant non-workplace movements—last summer's BLM uprising in particular-- have changed the terms of these discussions. DSA Labor Branches remain, from report from comrades in several cities, more viable than other branches that are increasingly mired in Democratic Party election campaigns. These are places we can bring co-workers to learn both the organizing skills and *politics* through labor history, political discussions and the like which their unions cannot or will not provide. Moody pointed out who last summer's multiracial rebellion:

To a greater degree than in previous protests and riots over police murders of Black people, those over George Floyd's death have had more union support, including union bus drivers who refused to carry prisoners for the police in New York and elsewhere... Given the intensity of these mass demonstrations, there's no doubt that today's protesters and rioters will return to their jobs cleaning the offices of the rich, assisting the sick in hospitals, stacking shelves in a supermarket, or picking and packing in a warehouse with "attitude." Protest and militancy are contagious. Just as the upsurge that began in Ferguson created a new wave of activists and gave birth to Black Lives Matter, so this latest rebellion in the streets by working class people may create unknown workplace leaders and activists who will be disinclined to take the boss's shit anymore. (<https://spectrejournal.com/reversing-the-model/>)

However, without a substantial minority of worker activists prepared through workplace struggles to extend the sort of *material solidarity* in the form of strike action and to help integrate new militants into a workplace culture of struggle, these opportunities will bear little fruit. Put another way, the rebuilding of the “militant minority” in the workplace remains, in my opinion, the *main task* of socialists in the workplace because it is the *necessary* (but not sufficient) *precondition* for creating real links between workers’ struggle inside and outside the point of production.

The Abolitionist Road to Socialism (Sean L)

I wrote this [article](#) in July 2020 for Rampant Magazine. I am submitting it as part of the Tempest pre-convention discussion because this is still my perspective, and because it lays out a broad-strokes political orientation for socialists that I would like to be considered as we collectively think through the many questions confronting revolutionary socialists today. - SL

“We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.”
Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Socialism: a free society in which all people have control over their neighborhoods, their workplaces, their lives, and their bodies. This vision has guided countless heroic struggles to build a path out of a cruel, dream-killing capitalist reality. The best of strategic courses have recognized that working people possess the ultimate weapon against capital: by collectively withholding our labor, we can grind the system to a halt. The crucial strategic question for socialists then becomes: how can we unite the working class in order to use this collective power and transform society?

One prominent strategy among socialists today aims to tap into our side’s power in numbers by prioritizing “class-wide demands, policies that directly benefit all or most of the working class (in a given area or industry) at the expense of the capitalist class.”⁷ While this approach generally comes from a good place, striving toward solidarity and building our forces, its implementation remains largely detached from the realities of capitalist power in the United States.

A central feature of those realities, and a central barrier to working-class struggle in the US, has been racism. Any socialist strategy with a hope of defeating the capitalist class will have to grapple with racism as such. What follows is an analysis of the centrality of racism to the capitalist state project in this country today. That systemic feature is the reason why struggles against racism, if they are successful, have historically had to confront questions of state violence, capitalist class power, and imperialism. Antiracism, particularly when driven by an abolitionist mission, is thus what political class warfare looks like.

This article may just as well have been titled “The Antiracist Road to Socialism,” but there is a political specificity to abolition that deserves highlighting. Abolition, as conceived and practiced by Black feminist thinkers and organizers, is a revolutionary struggle to eradicate the conditions which give rise to prisons, police, and profit extraction. It is an eminently socialist aim.

⁷ <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/11/democratic-socialism-class-organizing-racism-sexism>

Now, at the beginning of a renewed period of unrest and struggle from below,⁸ the need to abolish key elements of capitalist state machinery is a prominent part of the nationwide antiracist movement, identifying the police and prisons as the irreducible problem to be eliminated. Like all social movements, antiracist movements have faltered when they relied on the capitalist or ruling class instead of the collective action of the multiracial working class. The working class, as the agent of abolition, has the collective power to carry this struggle through to the end. It is abolition, however, that the class struggle strives toward.

Subjectively, antiracist struggle plays a key role in the formation or composition of the working class, generalizing a revolutionary and socialist consciousness in a way unmatched by socialist projects that treat workers as a mere constituency or a passive audience of politics. Historically, the Black liberation struggle in particular has been central to working-class confidence, militancy, and self-organization. Of such things, socialism is made. On both structural and historical grounds, it is critical for socialists to make a pivot toward the antiracist struggle for abolition, the struggle for workers' power.

Racism is a Political Project of the Capitalist State

Many contemporary socialist strategies, to be elaborated later, rely upon a theoretical paradigm notably lacking precision with regard to the concept of racism. In the cases where racism is defined, it is usually discussed as a psychological bias of individuals. In more rigorous analyses, racism is presented as an effect measurable by disparate impacts in a number of social, political, economic, and medical categories. At best, these disparities are explained by reference to the enduring legacies of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, which deprived Black people of control over their own lives, plundered their collective wealth, and entrenched a social hierarchy so thoroughly that it has persisted well beyond the legal existence of these two systems of social-economic control.

Racism is undoubtedly perpetuated in individual ideas and practices, and excruciating disparities for racialized populations in all areas of life cannot be explained except by way of real systemic racist patterns in institution after institution. But if it stops here, this analytic paradigm obscures the fact that racism is fundamentally about *power*, and class power specifically. For socialist strategy, it is important to understand racism in the US as a political project of the ruling class,⁹ carried out by the vehicle of all collective ruling class projects: the capitalist state.

State power underpinned the slavery economy in the antebellum South, just as state legal and punitive structures underwrote the post-Reconstruction system of Jim Crow before its toppling. Over the last forty years of neoliberal ascendancy, sprawling structures of mass incarceration have arisen in the wake of these prior systems, reaching deep into the working class to create and reinforce physical, institutional, legal, and psychological barriers between working-class people. Pervasive racial profiling by police ensures that intake into the penal system targets populations of color at much higher rates. The “negative credential” associated with a criminal record or felony conviction functions as “a unique mechanism of state-sponsored

⁸ Since the first protests on May 26, the hot summer of 2020 has seen an average of 140 demonstrations *per day* for more than a month. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>

⁹ For a useful discussion of the concept of “political project” that eschews conspiratorial implications, see Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*.

stratification,”¹⁰ and adds a legal gloss to the racialized segmentation of the labor market. “Predatory inclusion” of African Americans in the housing market continues to drain Black wealth.¹¹ Legal disenfranchisement of wide swathes of the Black population, particularly in the South, deprives African Americans of even formal participation in democratic elections or jury decisions.

Beyond the individual cases, “the system of mass incarceration operates with stunning efficiency to sweep people of color off the streets, lock them in cages, and then release them into an inferior second-class status.”¹² When layered over the terrifyingly real legacies of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, racist lynchings, persistent segregation in housing, communities, and schools, and a yawning wealth gap, these penal structures have created what Michelle Alexander calls a “racial caste system” in the United States. In too many crucial respects, Black—and Indigenous¹³—people do not live in a democracy in this country.

The institutions responsible for mass incarceration and the racist patterns detailed above—the prisons, the police, the military—these are the constituent parts, the “bodies of armed men,” that make up the core of the capitalist state. They are also the primary elements of the racist system of mass incarceration, just as Jim Crow system was implemented through state legal systems and the violence that enforced them.

States within capitalism are not autonomous operators, somehow above the imperatives of the market. But the state is the guarantor of the contracts that make up the free market. It ensures the conditions for capital accumulation domestically by the creation of a profitable business climate and around the world by imperialist domination and intervention. This is what is happening when broken windows policing cements the frontiers of racist gentrification while shoring up and expanding property values in a neoliberal environment dominated by real estate capital.¹⁴ The US empire has long consisted of debt peonage of third world countries and ongoing settler-colonialism in North America,¹⁵ not to mention military intervention and illegal coups of foreign left-wing leaders who pose a threat to capital accumulation for US corporations. Insofar as it functions as a vehicle of ruling-class interests, the state carries out all that is required for profits to be extracted and multiplied.

State power legitimates itself through tales of ageless and natural right, nurturing a common sense among the governed that results not so much in consent, but resignation. At bottom, however, state power is built on violence, the power to take lives as if they belonged to state officials. That unique power is the source of states’ utility for capital, and racism is the means by which state death-making is routinely realized and made acceptable.¹⁶

For socialists, the “structures” of what we call “structural racism” have to be understood as the structures of the capitalist state. These structures have historical origins, develop within historically and socially concrete circumstances, and result from a series of decisions made by

¹⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* p. 151

¹¹ See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit*

¹² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* p. 103

¹³ See Charlie Aleck, “[Black and Indigenous Solidarity](#)”

¹⁴ <https://rampantmag.com/2020/02/23/who-runs-chicago>

¹⁵ See https://newpol.org/issue_post/are-you-a-settler

¹⁶ Or as Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s famous definition goes, “Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.” *Golden Gulag. Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007) p. 28. I read the “state-sanctioned” here as the indispensable political foundation for the no less violent “extra-legal” forms of racism.

real people. But they are structures nonetheless, and are subject to the imperatives of capitalism. The question then arises, is racism necessary for capitalism?

Racial Capital

At the highest level of abstraction, capitalism is a classed structure, compelling people into the class position of the worker by stripping them of the means to reproduce themselves and reducing them to selling their one remaining asset, their labor power, on the labor market in order to survive. The market works to ensure the ranks of these dispossessed only increase, while the wealth and power of the capitalists—owners of the means of production—accumulates and multiplies through the exploitation of the workers. To maintain their power and their livelihoods, capitalists have an interest in exploiting workers and keeping them divided. To secure their livelihoods and their freedom, workers in turn have an interest in joining together regardless of gender, race, or nationality and reclaiming the means of production under democratic control.

Foundational as it is to understanding the dynamics of our capitalist world, too many socialists confuse this theoretical model for a political strategy.

Although constructing a theoretical model which designates the class interests, compulsions, and constraints of the individuals and groups reproducing themselves under capitalism is analytically clarifying, it is not a substitute for a materialist examination of historically developing societies. That is to say, actual capitalist markets operate in conjunction with *states* of various kinds, organizing and exploiting human beings who understand themselves as more than sheer vectors of their class interest. Many a strategic problem could be clarified by rising, as Marx suggested, from the abstract to the concrete. It is also worth pointing out, however, that even on a high level of abstraction, capital accumulation requires the existence and reproduction of racism on a structural level.

Class may be universal, but employment is not. Capitalist competition ensures the continual production of a surplus population of unemployed people, rendered redundant by the advance of labor-saving technologies or cast out during periods of cyclical economic contraction.¹⁷ Because the system is designed to produce profit rather than fulfill needs, full employment doesn't result from its normal operation. Indeed, full employment is incompatible with the private ownership of the means of production. "The reproduction of the capacity for work would be prevented if the labor market were a "cover-all" institution; it would consequently destroy itself," as Claus Offe has pointed out.¹⁸ That is to say, labor power (and the humans that own it) has to be physically maintained and reproduced by a system of work largely outside of the labor market contract.¹⁹

¹⁷ "The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labour-army; during the periods of over-production and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check. Relative surplus population is therefore the pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works." Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I* ch. 25

¹⁸ Claus Offe, "The Political Economy of the Labour Market" in *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*. Ed. John Keane. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985. P. 26

¹⁹ For a piercing analysis of the severe consequences this has historically generated for gender-based oppression in capitalist societies, see Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*.

Capitalist societies thus face a dilemma: “they cannot possibly force the *entire* population into direct participation in the labor market, while at the same time they cannot make generally available the option of non-participation in the labor market (and thus dependence on means of subsistence external to it).”²⁰ To resolve this dilemma, capitalist societies have historically relied upon ascriptive categories (race, gender, nationality) to justify the relegation of entire segments of the dispossessed populations to a status of reserve for the labor market, subsisting outside of the formal employment relation in various informal economies. In this way, the expectation of participation in the labor market is enforced, while non-participation is only made available in severely restricted or criminalized ways.

On the basis of the same racialization and ascriptive categories, the looming threat of replacement by this reserve army disciplines the most exploited, “essential” workers, installing systematic political obstacles to their collective action. So-called “essential” workplaces (typically health care, food service, and transportation, among others) share an unavoidable reliance on wage labor, as opposed to labor-saving technologies prevalent in other sectors (notably many white-collar sectors). As Howard Botwinick has explained, such “essential” sectors depend most heavily upon cheap labor, and maintain slim profit margins.²¹ They therefore depend far more upon repression and the threat of replaceability than, say, a tech firm with a high dependence on technology and wider cushions of profit margins. Even before the threat of the unemployed reserve army is brought to bear as downward pressure on “essential” worker wages, the differential between these sectors in the labor market is highly racialized by design.²²

Even in the abstract, capitalism thus requires ascribed categories such as race, nationality, and gender to regulate the supply of labor. The concrete development of the United States social formation has historically featured race-creating systems of social control, particularly those of anti-Black racism, in a central role: from slavery,²³ to the post-Reconstruction reaction known as Jim Crow, and now mass incarceration.

Racism is ultimately generated and reproduced by the state as an essential condition of capitalist social and market relations.²⁴ It is not that capitalism and racism are separate and distinct systems; it is that racism is the essential interface that grafts an abstract capitalist system onto living, thinking humans and their societies. “Racial capitalism” is, therefore, just the name for capitalism that exists in the real world, i.e. the only kind.

²⁰ Offe, p. 37.

²¹ See Howard Botwinick, *Persistent Inequalities: Wage Disparity Under Capitalist Competition*, ch. 4. See also Charlie Post, [“Comments on Roediger’s Class, Race, and Marxism.”](#)

²² As Michael McCarthy very succinctly put it, “Capitalist differentiation in the labour market is racialized. Throughout this process, white workers tend to be concentrated in more efficient firms and capital-intensive industries whereas the opposite is true for people of colour. (...) Capitalism inherently produces unequal economic outcomes that do not always correspond to effort or skill level.” See Michael A. McCarthy, “Silent compulsions: capitalist markets and race,” in *Studies in Political Economy* (2016).

²³ See the landmark analysis by Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620-1877*.

²⁴ That is, again, racism as a state and state-backed structure of political domination and violence, rather than the historically specific ideologies thereby produced. To understand e.g. “slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery were the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice, and tobacco” would be a reversal of material causality. See Barbara Jean Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the USA” in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* p. 117.

In the United States, racism has been and remains the central political weapon of the ruling class, conducted through the repressive core of the state.²⁵ Any political struggle against capitalism in this country must grapple with this reality. Put simply, taking on and ultimately defeating the capitalist class will require a conscious class movement that can politically counter their key political project, racism.

Black Liberation as Independent Force

If racism is central to the capitalist state project in this country, the Black liberation struggle has shown us how to defeat it: by fighting racism on its own terms.

The repression of freedoms, human and civil rights, and meaningful human relationships among populations the world over has been a catalyst and driving force behind mass movements. Economic inequality has been a very important part of this generalized struggle, almost always deeply shaping the context in which they break out. But there is no sense in which economic equality can be said to encompass the highest aspiration of social movements. “The struggle against racism regularly intersects with struggles for economic equality,” as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has written,

but racism does not only express itself over economic questions. Antiracist struggles also take place in response to the social crises Black communities experience, including struggles against racial profiling, police brutality, housing, health care, educational inequality, and mass incarceration and other aspects of the “criminal justice” system.²⁶

Racism infiltrates all aspects of working-class social and political life, which is why the struggle against it is a life-affirming struggle in an expansive political sense. Racism has to be fought not only as peripheral to a class struggle happening elsewhere, but on its own terms, the terms of capitalist political power. That is what it means to fight racism *as racism*.

As noted above, the oppression of Black people is rooted in a fusion of class position and political-social oppression that is so fundamental to the operation of the American capitalist social formation that even the “struggle for daily survival” of Black people “generates anti-systemic elements of protest and political solidarity.” As Mike Davis argued thirty years ago, it is “a central contradiction at the heart of the American bourgeois democratic system.”²⁷ Twentieth century descriptions of this dynamic²⁸ have been resoundingly confirmed in the new millennium.

Black Lives Matter, just like the Black liberation struggles of the past and those to emerge, has proven to be an independent power that can shape (and has shaped) the entire political terrain and social life of this country. Beginning with the night of rage after Troy Davis was murdered in

²⁵ Unsurprisingly, analyses and strategies that seem to obscure or sidestep racism as a significant phenomenon in US society also tend to shy away from engagement with the class character of the state. See, for example, Adaner Usmani and John Clegg, “[The Economic Origins of Mass Incarceration](#),” an argument which also features a heavy and strange (for Marxists) reliance upon public opinion as an independent variable.

²⁶ <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-lives-matter-slavery-discrimination-socialism/>

²⁷ Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, p. 321

²⁸ For example, W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* and Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race and the Civil Rights Movement*.

2011 and exploding after the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, the sharpest edge of radicalism in the US over the last decade was consistently expressed through the militant BLM street protests, open rebellions in defiance of a neoliberal ruling class (including Black officials), and the marked socio-cultural shift that these engendered in their wake.

The ideological coherence and farsightedness of the Movement for Black Lives' anti-capitalist, internationalist 2016 platform²⁹ was a significant landmark of the movement's political growth and preparedness to assume general leadership. As historian Barbara Ransby has charted,

There is a direct link between the Black Lives Matter movement of 2012–16 uprisings and the protests of 2020, between Ferguson and Minneapolis, and between Mike Brown and George Floyd, both of them stand-ins for many others, including many women and trans victims of police, vigilante, and even intimate partner violence. The debates, local campaigns, organizational infrastructure, relationship building, and self-critiques that have occurred since Ferguson have prepared a new cadre of leaders for the biggest battle of their lives.³⁰

Through all of this, the movement for Black lives has re-emerged as “an independent force that has its own timing, logic, and perspective based on the history of racism and oppression in this country.”³¹ Recognizing the depth of the Black liberation struggle's independent power necessitates recognizing that antiracist social rebellion has long been the proper path to the revolutionary transformation of American capitalism.

Class-Wide Politics

It should be noted that such a priority is far from common sense among socialists today. According to one prominent strategy mentioned above, so-called universal class demands (e.g. raising the minimum wage to \$15) are the best way to build a broad, effective coalition because they can speak to the needs of workers across particular sectors, identities, and circumstances. The most-repeated arguments for this strategy are:

1. It has a unique ability to build a *majoritarian* coalition, because it speaks to workers across particular sectors, identities, and circumstances.
2. It helps highlight the central class contradiction of capitalist society and pushes on that central contradiction, as opposed to treating secondary effects or symptoms.
3. The benefits, if won, would disproportionately impact and uplift workers of color and others who face particular oppressions anyway.³²

These points are unobjectionable. Building broad coalitions, seriously challenging capitalist power and interests, and fulfilling the needs of the most oppressed in society are all indisputable aims for anyone calling themselves socialist.

²⁹ <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/>

³⁰ <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/black-lives-white-left/>

³¹ Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, p. 205. Or as C. L. R. James put it, the struggle for Black liberation has a “vitality and validity of its own.” See C. L. R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the US” (1948)

³² <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/12/bernie-sanders-racial-justice-presidential-campaign>

Because it is a strategic intervention, of course, this strategy also comes with certain prescriptions for what *not* to do. The chief polemical target of the “universalistic” paradigm is a strategy that would have us prioritize the fight against particular oppressions on their own terms (e.g. reparations for slavery). These kinds of strategies are rejected as inadequate because:

1. They are particularistic, only affecting a portion of the class and therefore unable to mobilize a majority of the class.³³
2. They shift the focus of struggle away from material demands and toward culture wars and bad ideas, which are presented as merely an effect of material circumstances.³⁴
3. They can alienate other workers who share a class interest but may not be culturally accustomed to the antiracist, genderqueer, or other norms of a left-wing “fringe.”³⁵
4. And finally, they not only fail to challenge the neoliberal ruling class project, they actively reinforce it by normalizing calls for “equality” within an accepted wider framework of capitalist exploitation.³⁶

These arguments in the negative begin to reveal the limitations of this paradigm. The problem is not that the universalist strategy has the wrong aims, and should be oriented toward a different goal. Rather, it is that by failing to recognize the nature and role of racism in this country, this nominally universalist strategy undermines its own goals and our ability to build broad, active coalitions, challenge capitalist power, and meet the needs of the most oppressed. Its assumptions (whether explicit or unstated) are wrong:

- In this framework all “particular” or sectional demands of “parts of” the working class are cast as narrowing from the start. Fidelity is maintained to an imagined potential universality in place of a living struggle with potential to universalize in the concrete.
- These arguments assume that the working class is already constituted, ready to be addressed as a political subject. There is no recognition of the dynamic process through which antiracist struggles are crucial, especially in the US, for class formation in the first place (more on this below).
- As discussed above, racism here is taken for granted to mean psychological bias of individuals or disparities in effects rooted in bygone systems of racial oppression that no longer shape contemporary capitalism.
- In the worst cases, a teeming, widespread antiracist movement of millions is collapsed into the attempts by neoliberal state managers and corporate spokespeople to co-opt that very movement.³⁷ The fact that “identity” can be and often is cynically appropriated³⁸ by neoliberal shills is not a compelling reason for socialists to scrap struggles against oppression.

Not all of these arguments critical of prioritizing antiracist or anti-oppression struggles are necessary to the strategic approach being described here. The most compelling, though, rest on a special, perhaps singular connection between so-called universal demands and working-class politics.

³³ <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/03/bernie-sanders-democratic-primary-results-joe-biden>

³⁴ <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/05/we-need-a-class-war-not-a-cultural-war>

³⁵ <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/mass-incarceration-prison-abolition-policing>

³⁶ See <https://nonsite.org/editorial/the-triumph-of-black-lives-matter-and-neoliberal-redemption> and <https://nonsite.org/editorial/how-racial-disparity-does-not-help-make-sense-of-patterns-of-police-violence-2>

³⁷ This is Adolph Reed’s hot take.

<https://nonsite.org/editorial/how-racial-disparity-does-not-help-make-sense-of-patterns-of-police-violence>

³⁸ <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/26/beware-the-race-reductionist/>

Historically, many nominally “universal” programs like the New Deal or the Housing and Urban Development Act, have not in fact been universal. Despite the militant struggle required to win them and the significant reforms they involved, many of these programs have included provisions designed to exclude Black people via various explicit or implicit markers.³⁹ This remains a very live possibility today.

Medicare for All, for example, is a brilliant proposal that would significantly better the lives of all working people. A good way to strip it of meaning for millions of people in their daily lives, however, is to denigrate all particular, sectional issues through which it could be implemented. As Lillian Cicerchia incisively argued in the case of another “particular” demand, reproductive justice:

The Left can’t expect to “sneak” controversial provisions onto a more universal demand without developing a coherent defense of those provisions. It needs to pre-emptively inoculate the public against the Right’s anti-abortion attacks lest these attacks lead either to compromise on reproductive justice, or to the defeat of Medicare for All itself.⁴⁰

Ending racist police brutality or winning reparations for slavery are not usually included in the catalogue of “universal demands” that unite the class. But victories for the Black liberation struggle against racism have either directly included or triggered wins for much wider sections of the exploited and oppressed. As the Black feminist authors of the Combahee River Collective argued, “if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”⁴¹ To begin from the particularities of working-class life is not an abdication of the universal, but the first real-world step in achieving it.

By seeing class struggle through this lens, we eschew what Aimé Césaire aptly called an “emaciated universalism” in favor of building a living universal class movement, “enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.”⁴² It is not a question of moral obligation or solidarity—though it is that too—it is most pressingly a question of *strategy*. For socialists, the formation of the working class into a political subject is central to that strategy.

Social Movements are how Classes Struggle

The political strategy that presumes the existence of an undifferentiated “class” as our starting point is the same strategy that insists upon reducing the sprawling political dreams and fears of real workers to a pure, singularly economic antagonism with the boss. In this conception, the working class becomes a passive background, united only in slumber. Instead of building a unity out of the circumstances in which workers find themselves, this conception holds up a model to the world and demands that workers conform. Such a method tends to produce poor strategy.

³⁹ See Andrea Flynn, Susan R. Holmberg, Dorian T. Warren, and Felicia J. Wong, *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy*, ch. 4 and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.

⁴⁰ Lillian Cicerchia, “[What Medicare for All Means for Abortion Rights](#)”

⁴¹ “The Combahee River Collective Statement” in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, ed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, p. 23.

⁴² Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” 1956

As outlined above, the labor market at the core of capitalist social relations depends and thrives upon exclusion. Because of this, workers come into the world not as a class, but disorganized, competing with one another, and forced into various hierarchies. Overcoming these divisions and obstacles is a process of political struggle against the capitalist state that depends upon them; a process which is constitutive of a class in the first place. In the beginning is not class, but class struggle.

The meaning of class struggle – perhaps surprisingly – is regularly taken for granted. Once the working class can become conscious of itself as a class, it is assumed, it can assert its interest, the universal human interest, against the capitalists. In reality, long before that imagined glorious day on which the entirety of the working class rises, as one, to overthrow the capitalist order, there are politicized minorities of the class in movement, contesting for ideological leadership of the rest of the class, even while pulling other strata with them.

By nature of their activity and ideological contestation, these “movements” contribute to the self-definition or formation of the working class. “We cannot understand the way capitalist societies work without constant awareness of class struggle as a general process that underlies and shapes everything,” Colin Barker has observed. “However,” he continues,

class struggle always appears in ‘mediated’ forms. Classes, as social wholes, do not directly appear as political entities with formed wills and purposes, acting as homogeneous subjects. Nor should we assume that they ever will. Rather, actual class struggles never involve all workers equally, even at the very peak of mass revolutionary battles, and it is exactly for this reason that such struggles always pose vital questions about strategy and tactics. Nor, indeed, do actual movements ever involve simply members of ‘one class’. Further, the issues that arise in social struggles are not, mostly, capable of being simply ‘reduced’ to ‘class issues’ without taking account of a whole series of additional mediations.⁴³

Movements *move*: they are both active and convincing on a visceral level. Their omnipresent activity makes their politics unavoidable, surging through channels of everyday life, making clear the dividing lines between oppressors and oppressed, until even previously unconcerned or apolitical spectators feel drawn into the maelstrom, compelled to choose a side.

Solidarity

If this moment has shown anything, it is that white working-class people can be won to antiracist political demands on their own merits. As a *New York Times* analysis found, “nearly 95 percent of [1,360] counties that had a protest recently are majority white, and nearly three-quarters of the counties are more than 75 percent white.”⁴⁴ Contrary to popular left representations, white workers are not just robots who can only be misled into the antiracist movement by bread-and-butter demands. Solidarity is brewed in the cauldron of social movements, and movements against racism are particularly suited for this process.

⁴³ See the late Colin Barker’s groundbreaking, though neglected “[Class struggle, movement, party](#)” (2007), p. 14.

⁴⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>

The dehumanization inherent in racism and policing⁴⁵ has become palpable to millions of people this summer. It is a violent dehumanization that catches wide swathes of the population in its net: Police also criminalize and kill poor and working-class white people, and prisons are the new poor houses across all racial categories. This attack on the entire class, and the legitimacy of the state carrying it out, is made coherent, tolerable, or even acceptable through the logic and practices of racism.

Social movements against racism cannot rest on a solidarity consisting of a cost-benefit calculation in the abstract. Instead, antiracist movements tap into this deeper level of revulsion at dehumanization, they grow from and counteract the deeply personal, yet shared experiences among the dispossessed: invasive attacks against personal and bodily autonomy, affronts to dignity, blatant subversions of a commonly held moral sense of right and wrong, and degrading contempt for the aspirations of ordinary people. In short, dehumanization. In a culture where racism defines what is valued as human life and what is not, to take action against racism is to affirm a deeper level of shared life, worth, and interest.

In this way, the social movement functions as a second work of grace, socializing and re-socializing generations of workers. Through participation, they come to feel what is acceptable, who is to blame, what to expect and who to trust. There may be very little critical reflection on these questions while they are happening, but in the midst of struggle is when the deepest political commitments are instilled for life. This is the kind of solidarity needed by a working class contending for political power.

Challenging capitalist power is inseparable from challenging its incarnation in racism. Our side is not building, and cannot build power independently of how people make sense of the world or these narratives. We cannot build up an abstract power and only then combat their racist project; we combat their racist project *in order to* build up power on our side.

Class-Struggle Antiracism

The power of workers to collectively withdraw their labor is the ultimate weapon our class has in this system dependent upon exploiting that labor. Social movements from the Arab Spring to the Pink Tide to Occupy Wall Street achieved their peak power when they incorporated the weapon of workers' political strikes that halted the production and distribution of crucial goods and services. For socialists, organizing workplaces is not an expendable extra, it is central to building working-class power. The kind of practical knowledge and mutual trust that any strike requires in order to be carried out successfully can only be built up over longer periods of common organizing.

But as indispensable a tool as it is, workplace organization is not an end in itself. Such organizing assembles the tools, relationships, and infrastructure for the moment of political

⁴⁵ "In the contemporary world, racism is the ordinary means through which dehumanization achieves ideological normality, while, at the same time, the practice of dehumanizing people produces racial categories. Old races die, through extermination or assimilation, and new races come into being. The process is not biological, however, but rather the outcome of fatal encounters that ground contemporary political culture. This culture, in turn, is based in the modern secular state's dependence on classification, combined with militarism as a means through which classification maintains coherence." Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag. Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007) p. 244-45.

crises—crises which capitalism generates on a recurring basis. If we do not see our workplace organizing as preparation for these social explosions when widescale transformation becomes possible, we are not really building a socialist movement, we're limiting our horizons to the rebuilding of a labor movement within a more humane capitalism. The difference between that more economistic vision and a strategy preparing for social and political transformation manifests in organizing strategies today.

While struggles over jobs and working conditions are a permanent and necessary feature of working-class life under capitalism, these do not in and of themselves necessarily pose questions of political power. It is certainly not out of the question that bread-and-butter trade union campaigns may eventually lead to confrontations with political powers,⁴⁶ but these confrontations tend to happen when the union campaign itself takes on larger social questions, such as the Chicago Teachers Union “bargaining for the public good” against racist police murders or reopening schools in a pandemic, or nurses collectively fighting for PPE and other political demands. More to the point, it has been through supporting and participating in wider social movements that unions like the CTU and the UTLA have taken on larger social questions of resource distribution, the same questions at stake in the political project of racism.⁴⁷

The summer of 2020 saw the shutdown of ports on the West Coast of the United States, a proliferation of small-scale workplace actions against racist management, and what looks like the COVID-induced resurgence of a militant educators’ movement. Workers at Ford, which manufactures 62 percent of police vehicles, have begun demanding the company stop producing vehicles for cops.⁴⁸ These largely symbolic examples do not compare to the proliferation of wildcat strikes in a period of muscular class struggle, but they do represent the tissue knitting together the organizations of the class around political demands.

When issues of racism, and (with the prominence of the #Defund the Police demand) state power become subject to workplace discussions and actions, workers are laying a claim on the political and social direction of their society, and in some cases, demonstrating their structural power under capitalism to achieve these political aims.

The antiracist movement, like all social movements under capitalism, will run aground if it does not sooner or later incorporate the structural power of labor. If our strategic vision can rise to the level of society as a whole, however, we can recognize that racism is the linchpin of American capitalism, and the central political link in the chain of ruling class power. Accordingly, the struggle against racism is not a side issue for organized workers, it is a key political struggle to which we have to bring our organized class forces. Socialists are at their most useful not when steering struggles against racism into the workplaces, but when steering workplaces into supporting the explosive class struggles against racism.

Socialists should have a political horizon expansive enough to recognize that the antiracist struggle is not dropping unity on a class basis in favor of uniting on a race basis. Uniting against racism is what uniting on a class basis looks like.⁴⁹ That the antiracist movement confronts the

⁴⁶ For example, the militant struggle for the eight-hour day.

⁴⁷ For an in-depth analysis of this dynamic on within an international context, see David McNally, “The Return of the Mass Strike: Teachers, Students, Feminists, and the New Wave of Popular Upheavals,” in *Spectre* 1:1 (Spring 2020).

⁴⁸ <https://nypost.com/2020/07/10/ford-urged-to-stop-making-cop-cars-amid-george-floyd-protests>

⁴⁹ As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor put it, “Winning ordinary whites to an antiracist program is a key component in building a genuine, unified mass movement capable of challenging capital. Unity cannot be achieved by suggesting

question of capitalist state power directly and answers this question with “abolition” is what it means to have a perspective on actually *winning* the class war.

Abolition is Anti-Capitalism

Quite rapidly in the month of June, the summer rebellion cohered around a more specific demand: defund the police. This demand is a qualitative political step forward from liberal reform conceptions, identifying as it does the institution of police and policing as the irreducible problem in racist murders. But this movement cannot be reduced to that demand, which was always meant as top billing in the larger conceptual universe of abolition.⁵⁰

A growing proportion of the movement is making the salient connections between police abolition and the work that prison abolitionists have been methodically carrying out for decades. These organizers and theorists have always been clear that police and prisons are part of a vast prison-industrial complex, and cannot be abolished without fundamental transformation of our collective way of life. For so many of these demonstrators filling the summer streets, abolition is, in the words of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “about abolishing the conditions under which prison became the solution to problems, rather than abolishing the buildings we call prisons.”⁵¹

These are the conditions of capitalist-induced social crises experienced most acutely and consistently by Black communities, Indigenous communities, and other communities of racialized people. They are the conditions of daily life: racial profiling, the community disinvestment behind food and service deserts, housing insecurity and inequality, the death gap in health care, educational inequality, and insults to dignity in the workplace. At bottom, these are social manifestations of capitalist social relations and class rule. Antiracist struggles against these conditions must inevitably confront these questions of property, state violence, and even imperialism in order to advance.

The abolitionist movement has shown the meaning of revolutionary politics in its concreteness and its expansiveness. “This generation of abolitionists,” Robin D. G. Kelley has noted, “have the most visionary conception of abolition in history.”⁵² The outpouring onto the streets, the militancy of the demonstrations, and the sheer number and lasting nature of these protests can only be understood as a mass rejection of late-capitalist ways of life. They are not interested in tweaking, tinkering, or slightly improving blemishes on an otherwise tolerable state of affairs. Black Lives Matter has become the focal point of a vast array of all-pervasive, inarticulable outrages, which amount to a budding rejection of the capitalist order itself.

But abolition is not only the great refusal. Divesting from police is consistently paired with demands for *investing* in poor communities and public services. As part of a sustained movement over decades, abolitionists have by necessity had to envision new possibilities in

that Black people should downplay the role of racism in our society so as not to alienate whites—while only focusing on the “more important” struggle against economic inequality.”

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-lives-matter-slavery-discrimination-socialism/>

⁵⁰ See www.8toabolition.com

⁵¹ See the online discussion from April, 2020, “COVID-19, Decarceration, and Abolition,” available here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf3f5i9vJNM&list=PLcqXhVSDf0z11ryJT84qYfoVsosJ0Dq_l&index=4&t=0s.

We can clearly add policing to the prisons noted here, not to mention the militarization and U.S. imperialism.

⁵² <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/27/robin-dg-kelley-intercepted/>

place of an oppressive reality. As Kelley wrote in *Freedom Dreams*, “Without new visions, we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics, but a process that can and must transform us.”⁵³

For decades already, the unbound vision of abolitionism has been tied to creative practices that offer a positive hope of a life beyond policing and beyond capitalism.⁵⁴ This is true of the politically expansive, internationalist abolitionism of Critical Resistance,⁵⁵ just as it is true of the feminist, antiracist abolitionist network INCITE! and their analyses of the constraints of the hegemonic nonprofit models of organizing⁵⁶ within a larger movement countering state violence. Over this period, abolitionists have diligently put forward concrete models, practices, and experiments of living without police and without carceral “solutions.”⁵⁷

Abolition, then, is not some far off speculation or ideal state of affairs. Abolition is a *presence*, as Gilmore emphasizes. These long-term projects, along with the explosive rebellions in the streets, are happening now, already upon us. They are the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.

As a further positive program, Black radicals and progressives alike have called for reparations.⁵⁸ The sheer scale⁵⁹ of the plunder and systematic murder of Black people in this country demands a sweeping program of reparations. Racial oppression cannot be understood only as a historical holdover, because the mechanisms of the market and state political imperatives constantly generate new racist imperatives, structures, siloes, and incentives daily. But making this gaping historical wound whole is a starting point.

And that is precisely the point. Reparations are the bare minimum to reach an imagined “level playing field” under capitalism. But the actual achievement of a minimum program that cherishes Black life would “require levels of change dangerously close to the threshold of socialist transformation.”⁶⁰ In other words, it would require abolition. Land repatriation and other reparations to Indigenous peoples are also a bare minimum even by legal standards and yet also throw into question the entire order of settler colonialism. To calculate the scale of reparations adequate to the historical debt is to forcibly pry open one’s imagination, to dream of an altogether different world. Of this kind of dreaming there is unfortunately too little in the socialist movement.

⁵³ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (2002) p. xii.

⁵⁴ Among many other resources, see especially chapter 6, “Abolitionist Alternatives” in Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003).

⁵⁵ See Angela Davis and Gina Dent, “Prison as a Border: A Conversation on Gender, Globalization, and Punishment” in *Signs* 26:4 (Summer 2001) pp. 1235-1241; The CR10 Publications Collective, *Abolition Now! Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex* (2008) (available [here](#)), Introduction; and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence” in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson (2017), ch. 14.

⁵⁶ See INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2017) and the website of the national organization, <https://incite-national.org>.

⁵⁷ See the extensive *Creative Interventions Toolkit*, a product of years of experience and experimentation, [here](#), and also a recent brief outline of some on-the-ground organizing work by Mary Hooks of SONG, [here](#).

⁵⁸ See, most comprehensively, Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html>

⁶⁰ Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, p. 323

Socialism, the fully democratic society we are fighting for, is a matter of freedom, autonomy, sociality, and creativity. People fight for a better world when those brief windows open through which it can be seen, when they allow themselves to dream and fight to defend those dreams. You cannot bread-and-butter your way to that kind of freedom. Much larger questions of the human condition are at stake.

Abolition is the Road to Socialism

We are living through a historical moment of compounded political crises, global pandemic, economic recession, and looming ecological collapse. Sparks are inevitable in these fields of tinder. The question is whether the resulting wildfires will be coordinated nationwide and cohered in a trusted, organized, working-class force to contend for political power.

For too long, the left has been content with powerlessness, delegating responsibility and authority to trade union staffers and hoping desperately for a savior in electoral campaigns large and small. A left contending for power and mass influence should look to those times in US history when a left-wing politics rocked mainstream public discourse, disrupted business as usual, and effectively coerced reforms from the capitalist state.

History has always leapt forward in the US when the Black liberation struggle surged: in the abolitionist movement against slavery, in the core of Black Communists and organizers driving much of the militancy of the 1930s rebellions, and in the Civil Rights Movement that catalyzed a proliferation of other social movements. These social explosions could never contain themselves to the white bread and unsalted butter of the bureaucratic imagination.

Once again, a mass social movement is arising in this country. In myriad forms, it calls for abolition. It will have periods of advance and retreat, but the arc of its lasting rebellion against the conditions of capitalist rule cannot be denied.

Socialists now have a chance to participate whole-heartedly in this struggle. Participation will involve a deep learning process of internalizing the vast body of theory by Black feminist organizers and writers. Building socialist infrastructure to support and expand abolitionist objectives will also mean building real relationships while remaining active and involved between the uprisings. It will mean long-term implantation in the workplaces of strategic sectors of the economy, in order to bring the power of the organized working class and the strike weapon to the recurring social uprisings against racism. And it will, of course, mean directly naming and challenging racism in all areas of political work and campaigns.

One hundred and fifty years after the end of the Civil War, we should have the perspicacity to recognize a fundamental fact about the American social formation: the antiracist struggle for abolition *is* the struggle for socialism in the United States. Socialism is just a term. Beyond the democratic ownership of the means of production, it means full ideological, creative, bodily, and material autonomy, and free development in collaboration with a community. That is what the present abolitionist struggles are striving toward, and by contributing to and amplifying the fight for abolition, we are realizing in practice the struggle for socialism.

Some questions and initial thoughts (Emma WB)

Some questions and initial thoughts:

--What does it mean to organize as revolutionaries in a non-revolutionary moment? (I mean, this is probably what we all think about.) We can all see the potential for a revolutionary crisis. We all know from history that things can change quickly—something that makes me both hopeful and sometimes terrified. But what do we do now?

We can do our small part to facilitate and participate in class struggle, whether that's attempting to influence the direction of DSA, organizing in our workplaces, being part of and initiating protests/campaigns/etc. We can build relationships with other forces because sometimes it really does matter to have trust and rapport among the broader left. We can connect with newly radicalizing folks and help them find a political home or homes.

I want to point to two things I think we've done well so far in Tempest. One is that we don't act as though we can will socialism into being. We acknowledge that a small group of people with the "right" politics don't just make a revolution. This attitude allows us to shed moralism around our own activity and the activity of our comrades. One thing I hope to *not* recreate is the pressure and expectation I felt as an ISO member to make organizing the only thing in my life. That doesn't set comrades up to be active lifelong revolutionaries. And, speaking for myself, it had a stifling effect on my ability to understand the world.

Secondly, much of our interventions as Tempest (made mainly through the website) have actually engaged with the debates, rather than simply offering platitudes. Even when we have to shift the terms of the debate, we also engage on the other terms. I think this has been a more compelling and effective way to approach long-standing debates on the left.

--Who do we imagine will join Tempest? How do we want to be situated within the broader left?

For obvious reasons, most of our initial membership consisted of former members of other socialist orgs, especially the ISO.

A year and a half later, people who are not former ISO or Solidarity have joined Tempest. My understanding is this is mostly a result of them meeting other Tempest members while organizing (often in DSA but not necessarily), liking what we were about, and joining. At recent collective meetings, many of these new members have expressed gratitude for Tempest and commented on the ways in which it is helpful to be a member.

These are the layers of people I think we should orient to—younger, radicalizing people who we generally meet through our organizing work out in the world.

Our recruitment to Tempest thus far has been around agreement on a strategic orientation, not strong ideological agreement. I will always credit the ISO for developing me into a socialist. But it's not above critique. The new member education felt at times like it was geared towards achieving ideological homogeneity (often on questions that didn't feel particularly relevant to organizing today). So far, I think the way we recruit to Tempest better sets us up to be engaged in the world and influential on the socialist left.

--What do we have to offer people who join Tempest?

On a national level, we have the website, monthly collective meetings, and various committees. Now that we have those structures in place (and given the changing situation with covid), we can look towards local Tempest meetings where members can discuss and strategize the best use of their political time, whether that be the local DSA chapter, certain local activism, etc.

Given the crisis of the revolutionary left and the need to reassess questions of organization for the world as it exists today, it makes sense to have an experimental approach to our organizational form. Currently, we're mostly made up of people with some degree of political training who are already plugged into organizing. As new folks join with perhaps little or no experience with socialist organizing, local Tempest meetings could be particularly useful.

Additionally, we need to start thinking about how we "train" new members, by which I mean facilitate their development into socialist cadre, people who have the ability, confidence, and experience in critically analyzing the world and intervening in it alongside others.

This isn't an automatic process. It takes conscious effort and resources, particularly for people from oppressed identities. I saw this as a member of the ISO. We did a lot wrong, but something I appreciated was the number of ciswomen, trans, and nonbinary leaders in the organization. We should build upon and improve the practices that facilitated the leadership of people from oppressed identities

For Revolutionary Unity (Adam T.)

How many Trotskyists does it take to change a lightbulb?

None. They wait for objective conditions to change it.

Old socialist joke (date unknown)

Slouching Toward Catastrophe

The accumulating evidence suggests that we are doomed.

Salvage Editorial Collective,

“The Tragedy of the Worker: Towards the Proletarocene,”

Salvage (January 31, 2020)

We are rapidly running out of time.

Revolutionary Marxists are in a race — whether we know it or not — with fascism, climate catastrophe, and the disorganizing and demoralizing impact of a right-moving reformism within the new socialist movement. That movement has produced millions of socialists (lowercase “s”) in the US, and thousands of organized socialists. But it is currently at a very dangerous impasse.

Escalating climate catastrophe threatens the possibility of a “red plenty;” the material abundance that makes a genuinely democratic post-capitalist society possible. The liberal bourgeoisie is pinning many of its hopes on climate/carbon mitigation technologies — removing carbon from the atmosphere, etc. While some of these technologies are beginning to show promise, they cannot be scaled to undo or even minimize climate damage without massive cuts to carbon emissions. Reports indicate that there are likely going to be *more* carbon emissions this year than last. We are almost certainly locked into at least a 1.5 centigrade temperature increase (global average). Feedback loops may have already begun with melting permafrost releasing more greenhouse gases. Without epochal shifts in production and social organization, civilization may have less than a decade left before substantial climate related collapses.

As we approach the climate endgame, the threat of fascism and the far-right is growing. While millions are understandably exhausted by the pandemic and the Trump presidency, and have been willing to let Biden take the reins, the far-right is regrouping. While mostly driven off mainstream social media platforms, there are several far-right Telegram forums involving hundreds of thousands of people in the US. They are discussing, among other things, the need to develop “their own leadership” to stop relying on figures like Donald Trump and the Republican Party.

These hundreds of thousands — possibly millions — of “mainstream” election audit/antivax/COVID-19 conspiracy theorists and would-be-fascists are actively being courted by more ideologically coherent Nazis. While the “mainstream” far-right tends to reject some of the more doctrinaire aspects of Nazism — for example they tend to reject Nazi hatred of Israel because of their evangelical view of Israel’s role in the “Christian” apocalypse — they are doing so as they shape a particularly American fascism.

The intersection of far-right organizing and climate catastrophe further raises the question of exterminism. The world working-class weighted to trade has increased to such a size that there are far more of us than are needed to maintain capitalist production and accumulation — recent labor shortages in the US service industry and COVID-related supply problems notwithstanding. In the event of a prolonged disaster capitalism, the destruction of layers of living labor/variable capital can be seen by parts of the ruling- and middle-class as a positive good.

The logic of exterminism has already played out in the COVID-19 pandemic. When petit-bourgeois shopkeepers and similar elements raged against lockdowns in 2020, they were demanding mass death to maintain their precarious position within a faltering empire and neoliberal order. Who died? Who is mostly still dying? The sick, the poor, the working-class, the disabled, the elderly, people of color. The virus does fascism’s work for it.

The liberal and social democratic response was not to stop the virus, but to mitigate and slow the spread, in order to avoid greater damage to capitalism overall. This response to the virus is not unlike the liberal response to exterminism and fascism as growing political trends: containment and mitigation, a strategy that ultimately fails, and allows the virus/fascism to mutate/regroup. The bourgeois response to climate change is likely to play out in a similar manner.

The faltering progress of socialist reformism, the stalling of DSA and its right-ward drift, Corbyn’s marginalization in the UK, the UK’s left’s disastrous approach to Brexit, and the Sanders capitulation to the Biden administration, all threaten to discredit the new socialist movement in the eyes of working-class radicals, and working-class youth. This is not just a “big picture” point. It is also, as they say, “molecular.” The top-down, anti-democratic, overly electoral, and bureaucratic structure of many DSA chapters has driven away thousands of working-class people initially drawn to the organization by class conscious impulse.

The passivity of DSA as an organization around the BLM uprisings further risks discrediting the new socialist movement to the younger and more multiracial working-class. Similarly, simplistic attacks on “identity politics” coming from *Jacobin* and class-reductionist DSA caucuses risk alienating comrades of color, and many of our queer and trans siblings and comrades.

Many in the working-class, and particularly many younger workers, see or sense the impending catastrophes of fascism and climate disaster. Many have lived through

little else other than disaster — 9.11, a never ending war on terror, economic crisis (that often immiserated their families), the rise of Trump and domestic fascism in the US, the pandemic, all against a backdrop of worsening climate disaster (crystallized in consciousness from Hurricane Katrina through every flood, drought and fire that followed).

A perspective of patiently building a sect (that may collapse at any moment like almost every other sect has), or patiently accumulating congresspersons or city councillors (each of whom may betray you at any moment), is rightly suspect in this context of doom scrolling and catastrophe. As the meme says: *The end is coming. Eat trash. Be free.* Young workers are often very good at sensing bullshit. The disasters of the past 20 years prefigure more disasters to come. Many of these disasters will be worse. Millions have died from the pandemic. Millions more will soon die from climate change. Even more will die if the far-right makes a comeback in the US. In India, the Modi/BJP government has the blood of millions on its hands. This is not even to mention the possibility of increased imperial conflict. There is little time for a repeat of failed reformism, or a repeat of failed sectarianism.

But for the first time in two generations in the US, we may have the human material to begin to try something different.

The Leftward Movement of Young Workers is Not Axiomatic

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1920)

We have lived with a left-moving younger generation of workers and students for the better part of this century. But there is no guarantee this tendency will continue. A new socialist movement was born of the radicalization of the past twenty years, a radicalization that accelerated with the 2008 financial crisis that immiserated millions of people, and continued through Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, the 2016 Sanders campaign (albeit in a contradictory way), the growth of DSA, Trump reaction, etc.

At the same time, if the generation of workers ("millennials") who tended to embrace socialism (lower case "s") do not begin to see results from that identification — results from that nascent class-consciousness — they may become disillusioned and deactivated politically, or worse. The next generation ("generation Z"), seeing the failure of the previous cohort, could start to reject politics, or embrace anarchism (which may be preferable to the dominant politics of the current DSA), move right, or simply shut down under the weight of looming and ongoing disasters.

In other words, the deadening impact of a faltering reformism, evident in the dominant trends in DSA, is not simply a question of DSA, organization, or particular arguments here or there, it is also a question posed to the radical imagination and political horizons of two generations of working-class persons in the US. Thousands have already voted with their feet and left DSA. Whether or not the revolutionary socialist left can create a counter-center to *Jacobin* and the current DSA leadership is an urgent question, for two immediate reasons.

- 1) Moving the new socialist movement forward; a task the reformists can't accomplish in current conditions, at least not without significant pressure from their left.
- 2) Beginning to organize the most radical elements of the class into organization that jibes with and furthers their own material interests (i.e., Marxist organization).

On the latter point, propaganda, theoretical differentiation, and a primary focus on long-term strategies in this or that group or milieu, is not enough and sometimes even counter productive.

Instead, we must help create organizational space where a tenant facing eviction can find active solidarity, where a worker who wants to form a union can find resources to do so, where a soldier refusing deployment can find refuge, where the mother of a victim of the police can find people willing to put their bodies on the line for justice. And we must do so in a manner that enables those working-class siblings and comrades to have *ownership and mastery* of that organizational space. To be sure that will, over time, move the center of attention away from those of us who are academically trained. And that is a good thing.

Tempest cannot create that organizational space alone. No revolutionary Marxist organization in the US (at present) can. But together, we might be able to *begin* to create such a space. Together, we might be able to shift from a paradigm in which theory tends to outstrip practice, toward a practice on the scale of political actuality.

We Aren't Better Than Other Comrades

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

Tempest cannot claim any superiority to revolutionary comrades from Socialist Alternative, Solidarity, Reform and Revolution, the Revolutionary Socialist Networks, Left Voice, Worker's Voice, etc. Of course there are political disagreements. But, overall, we share far more in common than not — in particular a focus on, or movement towards, the democratic self-organization of the working-class, hostility to the Democratic Party, etc.

History has *proven* that we are no better. The other sects split and collapse. So did our ancestral organizations. Other tendencies compromise principle. So did many of us in the International Socialist Organization (ISO), in Solidarity, in the IS, in the old American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), etc. This or that tendency downplayed the class character of the Stalinist dictatorships. Our tendency misunderstood the disorganizing effect of Soviet collapse on the global left. We all have clay feet.

The “Leninist” party/organization model, as practiced by most revolutionaries in the “west” over the past 60 years, has failed. Of course, the sect version of “Leninism/democratic centralism,” bears very little resemblance to the actual practice of the revolutionary Bolsheviks up until and during the October Revolution, especially during periods of party legality. Rejecting this “toy Leninism” and an overblown need for theoretical differentiation, does not entail a rejection of the actual practice of the Bolsheviks before the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. Quite the opposite!

Nevertheless, post-war “Leninist” organizations, of wildly different taxonomies, have all succumbed to the same decline; failing to garner more than a few thousand members at best before their slow or rapid deaths. It is simply not Marxist to think every other sect collapsed because it was wrong on this or that theoretical point but we will get it right. It is philosophical idealism to think the right set of abstract politics, or the right theoretical insights, will inoculate a group from this broader failure. Something fundamental is not working.

What is not working is our separation from the class and our separation from other revolutionaries.

This dyad of separations is mutually reinforcing.

To be sure, the reconstitution of the working-class globally, geographically, racially and sectionally, has repositioned and fragmented the labor market. The historic bastions of the left — often centered in former industrial centers turned deindustrialized (sometimes global) cities — are separated from much of the blue-collar and industrial working-class. We tend to operate in milieus in which liberal petit-bourgeois and professional workers predominate along with low-paid service workers. The movement of industrial manufacturing and other blue collar work to “right to work” states and certain suburbs and towns has isolated the cosmopolitan left from large sections of the working-class. This is compounded by the byzantine racial and class segregation of

neoliberalism, even within our cities. In both industry and logistics, large nearby workplaces rarely enter much of the left's consciousness.

Each revolutionary socialist group has some kind of strategy around this problem; better or worse. But we are not in direct communication with each other about industrial and workplace implantation, community-class strategies, and so on. We are not presenting a united front of militant class consciousness that could draw in more workers. We have forgotten the elemental aspects of solidarity. We are disunited despite a common project.

At the same time we also know that dissolution into — or undue compromise with — reformist tendencies and projects will also eventually fail or decline. We have seen it with SYRIZA in Greece, LCR/NPA in France, and to some extent with Corbyn in the UK and DSA here in the United States.

This pattern begs the question of *unity among revolutionary Marxists*, allowing for comradely debate and disagreement, while remaining free to maneuver against reformism and liberalism, focusing on abolitionist anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, and hopefully doing so in an increasingly concerted manner over time.

We cannot counterpose “practical” organizing work with seeking unity of the revolutionary socialist left, because comrades in these other organizations also do “practical” organizing work. In almost every group worth discussing there is some implantation here or there, in this or that milieu, industry, location, struggle, etc. Similarly, we cannot counterpose building a multi-racial organization with seeking unity of the revolutionary socialist left. Some of these organizations are actually more multiracial than ours. Additionally, a more coherent and visible revolutionary left will make multiracial organizing easier, not harder.

In addition, there are hundreds — perhaps thousands — of independent Marxists and socialists in the US that might be won over to a more unified revolutionary project — a non-sectarian revolutionary option — were one made available to them. Many are former members of various left groups, or dissident (current or former) members of DSA, etc. They are not likely to submit to an arbitrary and absurd “democratic centralism,” but in a genuinely democratic revolutionary formation they might be real assets.

Socialist Movement or Primitive Accumulation of Cadre?

There is no socialism from below without the below. That “below” can only be partial and minimal in a group of less than one hundred people, which, according to our internal data, has been disproportionately white, male, and academic. While Marxist education is obviously important, we cannot overcome the contradiction “socialism from below without the below” with a “primitive accumulation of cadre.”

The “primitive accumulation of cadre” was a strategy for particular times, when the Trotskyist movement was marginal and under attack at its inception, and during the movement downturns of the post-war years, when actual Marxist practice, on any significant scale, was mostly not possible. The “primitive accumulation of cadre”—recruiting in the ones, twos, threes, fours, etc. — is a strategy that makes an *a priori* assumption that there will be a future in which objective conditions are more amenable to Marxist practice. The existence of such a future (see above) is very much in doubt.

Moreover, we now have an actual socialist movement and socialism has become a generational identifier for millions of working-class persons in the US. “Primitive accumulation of cadre” makes very little sense in this context. Instead, we should be marshalling together as many revolutionary socialist comrades as possible to organize wider layers of working-class socialists toward revolutionary and radical ends.

Writing historical articles, hot-takes, and documents is not, on its own, Marxist practice. Having a detailed position on each and every issue is not, on its own, Marxist practice. Even less so for a small group. Marxist practice aims to impact the world — ultimately on a significant scale. And there can be no wider political Marxist practice without some kind of critical mass of working-class organizers, thinkers, and comrades. We cannot afford to pretend those comrades don’t exist because we have a slightly different take on the class character of Cuba, etc.

We cannot counter “figuring our shit out” with reckoning on our attitude to the rest of the revolutionary left. Figuring out our attitude to other revolutionary socialists is a central part of “figuring our shit out.” To be blunt, we need every comrade possible to move toward the aforementioned Marxist practice; to have the inputs necessary to figure out the current terrain, and to implement actions on an increasingly wider scale that might be able to impact the confidence, organization, and consciousness of the class.

If you put a young turtle (depending on species, etc.) in a terrarium it will tend to grow to the size of the terrarium. If you put a young turtle in the wild it has a chance to grow much larger.

Against Capitalist Realism: Shoot the Moon

In this inert town this strange crowd that does not congregate,
does not mingle; adept at finding the moment of disengagement,
of escape, of evasion. This crowd that does not know how to
behave like a crowd; this crowd, you understand, that is so
completely alone under this sun, like a woman you would have
thought to be wholly in tune with her lyric cadence, who brusquely
calls out to a hypothetical rain and commands it to not fall...

Aimé Césaire, *Journal of a Homecoming* (1939)

Act now or maybe never.

In the card game, Hearts, you win, usually, by forcing the other players to take “tricks.” But you can also win by “Shooting the Moon,” by taking all the tricks. I know what I am arguing for is not unlike this card-game strategy. But the simple fact is, given that we are running out of time, and that the working-class has taken blow after blow after blow for decades, it is our only option if we want our Marxism to be a practice that changes the world in the here and now, on a larger scale, rather than a matter of localized and fragmented struggles (however important) combined with an also fragmented propaganda. We’ve likely taken too many tricks to win any other way.

This is also an argument against what the late cultural critic Mark Fisher called “capitalist realism;” the widespread sense, within neoliberal capitalism, that nothing outside of capitalist relations can be imagined.

The impulse to overly differentiate our organization from the rest of the revolutionary left is, I would argue, an internalization of capitalist realism. It is an internalization — into the socialist movement — of *branding*. This tends to see the radical worker or would-be revolutionary as a *consumer* and other revolutionaries as *competition*. This is the opposite of the “truth.” Radical workers are our equals and siblings (not consumers or clients or audience). And other revolutionary socialists are already our comrades.

The internalization of capitalist ideology — a view of the world, as Marx said, upside down as in a *camera obscura* (a tool that was used to make naturalistic drawings and paintings before the advent of photography) — also curtails our sense of what is possible. While few comrades would disagree that the climate crisis is a looming planetary disaster, fewer comrades seem willing to consider or imagine the scale of action *on our side* needed to prevent or mitigate that disaster — and *act*. Capitalist realism has made our dreams far too small.

The far-right is already dreaming outside the accepted logic of capitalist realism. They imagine horrors and call it utopia. They invert the disasters of the world to create anti-Semitic conspiracies. While ICE rounds up children into concentration camps, they imagine, instead, a secret cabal of politicians and celebrities harvesting the adrenochrome of children in a bid for immortality. The far right thirsts, by the millions, for a “Storm” that will restore the nation and punish its enemies. To be clear, that includes us.

The far right is out-imagining us. They are being patient with each other, more often than not, as they work on their program for 21st century American fascism. They are willing to use as well as break with politicians like Trump. They are borrowing from but also rejecting the more doctrinaire European fascists, while crafting their own far right mythology and politics.

We cannot afford to cede this ground to our fascist enemies.

Which Side Are You On? or Differentiation?

As noted, the impulse to differentiate is often a mistake.

Our starting point in approaching other revolutionaries, and each question, should be “which side are you on?”

For example, I believe some of us were mistaken in how we approached the protests in Cuba. While we were correct in our analysis of Cuba, for the most part, we failed to position ourselves first and foremost as revolutionaries within US imperialism. The first task of revolutionaries in the US, in these situations, is to oppose our own government. What if we had tried to organize protests, or pickets, under the banners, “Hands Off Cuba!” and “End the Sanctions!” This would have had the additional benefit of outflanking cynical attacks from Stalinists and social democrats — especially as most of them were never going to actually *do anything* aside from using Cuba as a cudgel.

Similarly, I am not sure “anti-campism” is always as central as some comrades have made it out to be. Whether or not Cuba is a degenerated workers state, state capitalism, or something else that isn’t perfect socialism, changes revolutionary practice in the US, at this point, very little. We are against US imperial interference in Cuba. We believe workers need more power in Cuba. We believe the social gains of the Cuban revolution are worth defending (often, against the ruling-party). On this, most every worthwhile Trotskyist or post-Trotskyist formation largely agrees (with finer points of difference here or there). Regardless, our main task here, in the US, is keeping our filthy ruling-class away from that country.

Similarly, if a working-class comrade is organizing grassroots workers at a logistics facility, and doing mostly good work, it makes little sense to prioritize disagreements about just how sclerotic the AFL-CIO is. We all agree it is sclerotic. We can parse out just how sclerotic it is, and how that impacts this or that struggle, as we go forward. What matters is what side that comrade is on. What matters is how they can help us forge new — and reforge old — methods in organizing the unorganized.

If there are political organizations that 1) Reject the Democratic Party, 2) Call for workers revolution, 3) Actively oppose all racism and heterosexism, 4) Prioritize the class struggle and working-class democracy, 5) Support queer and trans rights, 6) Oppose US imperialism and capitalist borders, and attempt to do these things, however imperfectly, in practice and not just words, they are probably on our side. We should treat them as such and actively pursue greater unity with them.

Lenin vs. “Leninism”

There is, obviously, a contradiction here.

We desperately need revolutionary unity but the albatross of a faux and doctrinaire “Leninism,” still accepted by many of our comrades, is one of the main impediments to revolutionary unity. This is why the question of revolutionary unity is

both a practical question of regroupment as well as a question of editorial and political attitude.

Convincing some of our comrades to break with a reified, abstract and historically less than accurate understanding of what a “Leninist” party is — one that gives too much power to a leadership that is often flat-footed and less than democratic — will take comradely discussion. Moreover, the leaders of some organizations, much like the SC of the old ISO, may balk at the prospect of becoming rank-and-file comrades in a larger movement, as it may mean surrendering the prerogatives of leadership within their own organizations.

This is Lenin vs. so-called “Leninism.” When Lenin initially argued for a unifying revolutionary newspaper across the Russian Empire this was, in large part, to bring together disparate local socialist groupings into a united movement. We face a similar problem. We have a fragmented revolutionary socialist left that needs to be united in common democratic practice. But, in a typical perversion of history, an abstracted (and capitalist realist) “Leninism” stands in the way.

While we should actively and practically seek organizational unity with those closest to us, those most interested in democratic revolutionary organization, we should also maintain an editorial, political, and organizational attitude that seeks wider revolutionary unity.

To borrow from the united front method, we should be willing to speak directly to rank-and-file comrades in other groups when necessary. This should not be done in a sectarian manner but flow from the practical and immediate concerns of the working-class and socialist movements. The fight against fascism demands revolutionary unity. We should approach the leaders of other groups to pursue this. If they decline this necessary collaboration, we should nevertheless call for unity with them, in a comradely manner, in our public writing, etc.

We should be the comrades who always want maximum revolutionary unity.

The “R” Word

That being said, there is no reason not to take practical steps towards regroupment where possible, particularly among those comrades closest to us, remnants of the ISO, IS, Solidarity, and other traditions, including revolutionary caucuses in the DSA, and all others close to us who have not fallen prey to a consuming opportunism (see certain former leaders of the ISO).

Our leadership can and should contact the leaderships of these other groups and begin conversations about what it would take to achieve unity. That means formally reaching out to the Revolutionary Socialist Networks, Solidarity, Reform and Revolution, to discuss these questions.

Secondly, we should propose joint projects with other revolutionary socialists — like Socialist Alternative, Left Voice, the Marxist Center, and so on. For example, one of

the things the revolutionary left desperately needs is an online publication that can challenge *Jacobin*. This could be a joint project among the revolutionary socialist left, not unlike the left-wing inter-press services created during the long 1960s. This publication could be edited by representatives from several organizations, republish work from the various groups, make articles available to each group, and solicit new material from the broader revolutionary left. It could also host discussion on historical, theoretical, and strategic debates.

We could propose an educational conference of all the revolutionary socialist groups, organized by representatives from Tempest, Solidarity, Reform and Revolution, Socialist Alternative, Left Voice, and others. We could organize a series of seminars with representatives from each group to discuss the question of revolutionary unity. We could propose joint meetings of the labor comrades in each of our organizations to share information and solidarity. We could propose joint meetings to discuss the revolutionary socialist strategy towards abolition and anti-racism.

Centrally, we need to propose a summit of the revolutionary left to plan for united action against the growing fascist threat.

Common Sense = Death

...party over, oops, out of time

Prince, "1999" (1982)

Accepting "common-sense" — in the meaning Gramsci used for the term, the hegemonic adaptation to capitalist ideology — will get us killed.

Marx's favorite mythological character was Prometheus. Prometheus, a demigod in Greek mythology, dared to steal fire from the gods and give it to the human race. For this act he was tortured for all eternity.

If Andreas Malm is correct that only something akin to war communism could avert total climate disaster, we do not have time to dither and be too clever by half. The working-class must seize the fire (means of production, etc); or at least plausibly begin to threaten the capitalist class at some large scale. To help contribute to this process, we must do everything we can to unify our forces, and help cultivate revolutionary imagination, organization, and action.

We may fail. It may even be likely that we fail. But the worst case scenario for incrementalism and overly cautious maneuvers, and the worst case scenario for moving forward in a promethean manner, are more or less the same. Total and complete ruin. Barbarism. The best case scenarios for these two options are night and day. Continuing in a narrow sect model will do little to stop the march to disaster. Capitalism will, to the delight of its libertarian twilight cult, mostly shrug. But if we dare to unify the revolutionary working-class left? There is a chance that could bring about something new.

Therefore, we have a choice. At least *try* to steal fire from the gods, or go more or less meekly into the eclipse of human civilization.

Tempest and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Left (Andy S)

At the September meeting, Alex gave a lead-in about the origins of *Tempest*: the dissolution of the ISO, the meetings at *Socialism 2019*, the Revolutionary Bulletin, and the preparations that led to launching the website in the summer of 2020. *Tempest* has since grown from the initial dozen or so members who formed the collective in mid-2020 to around one hundred members now, a year and a half later. Coming up on our first convention, there are many core questions we have to address in order to have a greater shared sense of what our project is and how we intend to action it; basically “who are we and what are we doing?” What I want to focus on in this intervention is more about the context in which we operate, and what that may mean for how we proceed.

The largest single event for the formation of *Tempest* was the dissolution of the ISO in the spring of 2019. The revolutionary left was already in a decline prior to the ISO dissolving itself, and with its departure revolutionary socialism in the US was unmoored. I was never a member of the ISO, I was in Solidarity through 2013, but talking to people and being at the sessions at *Socialism* where former members talked about what happened, there were a few distinct trajectories that ISO veterans were on.

One was to exclaim that “we don’t know anything” and to join DSA and fully embrace “democratic socialism” and the Bernie Sanders thing – many of those folks joined Bread & Roses and have been the most diehard opponents of revolution and independent politics since. A second position was that the ISO was an unfortunate situation, but there was no issue with the politics or practice per se – Revolutionary Socialist Network (RSN) I think is a product of this take. The third position I’d frame rather broadly, which didn’t reject revolutionary socialism but for one reason or another said, “now’s not the time”. This had many comrades who rightly needed to slow down, reflect on the difficult experiences they’d just been through, and waded into DSA with some openness. At the same time, it also included some comrades who opined against revolutionary organization and not so gradually accommodated DSA’s uncritical attitudes. What became *Tempest* embodied a last position, which was that the core of revolutionary socialism from below was still valuable, that revolutionaries *did* need organization, but that there were serious issues to contend with.

In the early discussions that formed *Tempest*, we agreed that we were not trying to build “ISO 2.0”, that we would be open to experimentation and to developing forms to address some of the issues we’d faced in our various organizations, but that we would continue to present our core politics. Much of what we did was practical, while also reacting to things we were dealing with,

not the least of which was the *need* to have a group of comrades who we shared perspectives with as things continued to turn sideways.

A crisis of the revolutionary left

A perspective that we generally shared in forming *Tempest* was that the pattern of revolutionary organizations folding, splitting, or expelling people suggested a more generalized *crisis* of the revolutionary left. In 2013, the UK Socialist Workers Party (SWP) faced a major crisis over its coverup of rape allegations – members deserted, and it became a landmark on the left for what enormous catastrophe awaited those who didn't take the issues seriously. Solidarity faced a similar issue around partner abuse and the leadership's unwillingness to respond appropriately at around the same time. This was of course the terminal issue in the ISO six years later. *Commune* magazine, an ultraleft publication that existed briefly in 2018-2019, folded after revelations of gendered misconduct from a central figure in their group. Clearly, issues of gender and sexual abuse were and are flashpoints, but each time they revealed something deeper in the culture of the organizations. Something about the structure of organizations and the distribution of power compounded issues, built up deep resentments and feelings of betrayal, and a sense of organizations that weren't meaningfully democratic.

The arrival of a new reformism internationally and the DSA/the Bernie Sanders moment domestically pushed that crisis into overtime. Largely what these new electoral formations did was create an alternative to revolutionary socialist organizations that were until then, largely, the only real game in town if you were serious about being a socialist. People quit organizations like Socialist Alternative, ISO, Solidarity, etc. to get in on "the action". *Reform & Revolution* was a split from Socialist Alternative from the right, arguing to get involved with Democratic Party elections as socialists through DSA. *Committee for a Workers' International* (CWI), Socialist Alternative's parent group, split in 2019 over "identity politics", resulting in at least three new internationals.

Maybe comrades don't agree on this account of the revolutionary left's crisis – I'm less concerned about these particulars than in pointing to the patterns and trajectory. What exactly this crisis is, what contributed to it, has continued to be a subject of debate among members of *Tempest* and I think has been an important part of the internal direction of our organization. Clearly there are the objective issues of changes in capitalism and the effects of neoliberalism, the low level of class struggle, and the isolation of socialists from the working class generally. But internal to the left's practices there are tensions that haven't been fully wrestled with: the social composition of revolutionary groups; theory and practice of the lived experience of the class as it exists through race, gender, sexuality, class, and other identities; internal accountability, most notably regarding how organizations handle abuse; and democratic control of the organization.

David McNally gave a talk for the *Revolutionary Bulletin* in 2019 that I've submitted for this preconvention bulletin. His talk discusses alternatives to the sect model, and the conception of

revolutionaries and our role in the period. McNally returns to Hallas, Deutscher, and the Socialist Review Group to give some historic examples of others who've taken up similar tasks while remaining committed revolutionary socialists. The point he gets to, that I think David Camfield says more plainly, is that most of us are trained that politics and the organizational form ("Leninism", however defined) are permanently fused. Their argument is that we can decouple the two. We can hold fast to our perspectives on politics and analysis without insisting on a singular organizational form.

I think this pairs well with [the talk we published recently by Gilbert Achcar](#). Achcar's central argument was that organization is dependent on historical context, and there isn't one transhistorical party form that is correct. He suggests a materialist conception of "the party", which must take into account technology, social formation, history, culture, and so on. (He doesn't seem to have much experience with Occupy or the internet to see the problems there, but that's another matter.) Neither Achcar nor McNally hand waive organization: they agree that organization matters immensely. I think one of our core perspectives is that in crises that could be revolutionary, there must be organized revolutionaries or the process will ultimately fail. (This is highlighted in Colin Barker's *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, as well as the newer version *Revolutionary Rehearsals in the 21st Century*.)

Takeaways

I hesitate to call these "conclusions", but for *Tempest* I think there are a few takeaways. First, we need to do some accounting for the problems of the revolutionary left. Something certainly happened to get us in the position that we're in now, and I don't think its sufficient to simply blame the objective situation. In a nutshell, it shouldn't be miserable to be in a revolutionary socialist group. I think we've taken good steps with the adoption of our [Solidarity Agreement](#). We have also done some preliminary work regarding accountability controls, though it is far from complete. There is clearly still work to do in our racial and gender composition. We'll have to be proactive and avoid any kind of moralism or paralysis. To be healthy, we'll have to keep an external focus; we have to be "doing things". (This was an early debate in *Tempest*: when was the right time to launch? The majority position was that in order to attract the people we want we have to be active.)

Second, while we should be open in our approach to organization, it doesn't mean we "don't know anything" or that all the past experiences can be set aside – that's exactly the attitude that's led many former comrades to dissolve themselves into the main currents in DSA. Yes, there are negatives that we want to avoid: leadership elections as whole slates or substitutions clearly wasn't good – that existed in Solidarity as well as the ISO. Some of the norms of "democratic centralism" also left much to be desired. But there are practices from former organizations that were extremely positive, things that we would want to recreate: study and debate; cadre development; writing and receiving reports. Likewise, considering history and the critiques of certain types of organization are still very useful – social democratic parties and "horizontal networks" come to mind. Our approach should be that democratic organization is a

must, and the form that takes is an ongoing effort that we can continue to experiment with. We take what's useful and desirable, leave aside what's not.

Lastly, we have a core politics around revolution, struggle, Marxism, independent politics, anti-oppression, nonsectarianism, democracy, and anti-campism. I think having this as our foundation is part of what has made *Tempest* successful. We share basic assumptions. We've generally called this a "strategic outlook", particularly in terms of how we relate to other forces. At the same time, we value openness and pluralism. That's a strength but will make for some tensions. The "openness" I think is towards questions of strategy and tactics, perspectives on what we should be doing, but not on core principles. (Soma Marik noted in her book *Revolutionary Democracy* that Lenin attempted to preserve unity in the RSLDP as long as he could, until it was *politically* no longer possible – organizational differences coexisted so long as the politics were unified.) My general take is that so long as differences don't turn into obstructionism, the pluralism is something we should embrace.

We need to ensure that we've created a space where comrades are confident in the organization even as we differ. I left Solidarity because I lost confidence in the organization, not because I disagreed with its politics (then) or structure. Charlie P likely has more to say, but Solidarity did have some good innovations in trying to build a structure that could manage disagreements internal to the organization rather than dominating or expelling minority positions. A few that I think we might consider are things like publishing minorities positions internally alongside majority decisions to incorporate the entire discussion; the express right to organize internally and to proportional representation on leadership bodies; the right to state your disagreement with a collective position while fairly representing it. (In Solidarity's case, the founding through regroupment discouraged the organization from actually embarking on united action for fear of broaching disagreement; they abdicated the project of a *national* organization, education and campaigns, in favor of local fiefs.) There will be an ongoing tension between "unity" and "pluralism", but one I think we have to embrace if we're going to be a revolutionary socialist organization that doesn't recreate the sect model.

David McNally on Leninism, the Microparty and Revolutionary Organization

Submitted by Andy S

The following is a transcription of a talk given by David McNally For a webinar on 11/02/19

NOTE: Some wording may differ slightly from the recorded talk to make it more readable, the content has not been altered

David McNally was a founding member of the Canadian International Socialists in the 1970s and of the New Socialist Group in the 1990s. He is active today in anti-racist organizing in Houston, Texas, where he also teaches history.

One starting point for this is to say that micro-Leninism is in a very profound crisis internationally right now. By which I mean that the party building projects that came out of the New Left of the late-1960s and mid-1970s mostly collapsed in short order, and those that have hung on have almost universally been in a profound crisis over the last decade or so.

I think we should put that in the larger historical perspective because really within five years of the Russian Revolution, Lenin was raising very significant concerns about how the Bolshevik experience might be translated. He recognized that the early congresses of the Communist International produced, as he put it at the fourth congress in 1922, were “too Russian.” He uses that term over and over about a variety of resolutions. He says that these Comintern documents reflect Russian experience and the danger is that foreign revolutionaries “cannot be content with hanging the revolutions in the corner like icons and praying to them, nothing can be achieved that way, they must simulate part of the Russian experience, just how that will be done I do not know.” So that is Lenin with his brutal honesty saying that there is something really crucial in the Bolshevik experience, but how it is to be transmitted and translated into other contexts, I don’t know, and he goes on and on in that idiom.

For those of you who are familiar with Tony Cliff’s volumes on Lenin, he has a chapter in the one devoted to world revolution called *The Grafting of Bolshevism Fails*. Essentially Cliff is rehearsing the same idea that we get from Lenin that in the wave of world revolution from 1917 until about 1927, there is no other successful working class seizure of power. In that sense, the grafting of Bolshevism to non-Russian parties, movements and so on had failed to that claim.

That was the German experience of the early 1920s, where under the leadership of people who were essentially ‘Luxemburgist,’ by which I mean they were trained by Rosa Luxemburg, particularly Paul Levi and Clara Zetkin. In Germany there was a short lived period where a certain kind of grafting or at least synthesis looked highly promising. And that was when largely under Paul Levi’s leadership, the German Communist Party (KPD) essentially absorbed the vast bulk of the membership of the Independent Social Democrats, a party that, in the language of the time, we would have characterized as left-centrist. The KPD went from about 80,000 members to about 450,000 members in the course of this. This is the one historic case we have where what we might call a local or indigenous revolutionary working class current, essentially what I’m calling Luxemburgist currents, did actually briefly fuse with or synthesize with some of the key experiences coming out of the Bolshevik revolution.

For all kinds of reasons many of you are familiar with, that synthesis was short-lived, Levi was removed from the leadership of the KPD, what I’ll call an ultra left leadership that succeeded him essentially wrecked historic opportunities in 1921 and 1923. Levi is driven out, and then Luxemburgism becomes essentially an early substitute for Trotskyism and is roundly denounced and vilified within the KPD. That is the one case we have, and I think it’s important because rather than an attempt to mechanically transpose the Russian experience, it was an attempt to integrate that experience with longer-standing German revolutionary traditions.

It seems to me that we have no other examples like that by the period of fascism and Stalinism onwards. There really isn’t another effort at creating a mass party more or less in the revolutionary tradition which is deeply affected by the Russian Revolutionary experience. Then

for all of us, the historic problem becomes what to make of the Leninist project when the working class vanguard is defeated, which is of course what happens under fascism and Stalinism.

At that moment, Leninism, as any of us would recognize it, becomes a socially marginal project of small cores of activists who lack any kind of mass base in working class politics, whose dedication is sometimes unbelievably inspiring in the way that they hold to anti-Stalinist revolutionary socialism-from-below in the face of Stalinism and fascism. But as Duncan Hallas observed, whose isolation often produces a kind of mechanic culture that sees a small band of a few dozen as the living embodiment of the revolutionary Marxist tradition, and with that, a whole series of self-isolating practices. A propensity to split and sectarianism. Delusions of grandeur. Hallas has a whole series of articles where he refers to the extreme end product of that as “politics as religion”

I’m going to stay with Hallas for a moment because one of the things which is so interesting about the early years of the International Socialist Tendency is that Tony Cliff had explicitly disavowed Lenin and Leninism. The Socialist Review Group of the 1950s and 1960s was explicitly Luxemburgist. I think there were all kinds of shortcomings to the way Cliff understood and theorized that, but I think the healthy element was that they went around saying they were anti-substitutionist: they didn’t believe any small band of revolutionaries could declare themselves a vanguard, that no revolutionary party could exist which did not at minimum bring together tens-of-thousands of working class militants.

In their practice, they disavowed the micro-party - the idea that they were embryonically a revolutionary party. On the contrary, they laughed at that, they mocked it, they made fun of the other Trotskyist currents for having such pretension. They saw themselves as simply trying to preserve and develop particularly with respect to the analysis of Stalinism, the labor movement and of the political economy of post-war capitalism to develop socialism-from-below, to tackle new challenges and to remain relevant in a changed world. When they did begin to develop some working class implantation in the late 1960s and early 1970s and it’s still fascinating to read what Duncan Hallas writes in the early paragraphs of Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party. I’m going to quote from the second paragraph of that, this is Hallas in 1971:

In human terms, an organized layer of thousands of workers, firmly rooted amongst their fellow workers and with a shared consciousness of the necessity for socialism and the way to achieve it has to be created. Or rather, it has to be re-created.

He goes on to say it once existed in the 1920s, but we have not had such an organized layer of class conscious working class militants whose political project is organizing for socialism for fifty years.

What is really important about that claim by Hallas is it put the recreation of a working class vanguard at the center of the project of Marxist organizing. I want to highlight the Hallas point for a moment because the micro-Leninist project worked on the assumption that the working class vanguard was still there, but was being misled. The project of the Socialist Review Group in

the early British International Socialists proceeded from the conception that no, that working class vanguard disappeared in the period of fascism, Stalinism and the post-war economic boom, but that it was reemerging in an embryonic form and one of the key tasks of revolutionaries in the socialism-from-below tradition was to assist and nurture its political formation and to build a revolutionary current within that project. That is why they put such huge emphasis on building a rank-and-file movement in the unions in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They believed that the rank-and-file movement was the indispensable framework in which any kind of even pre-party formation could begin to develop.

It seems to me, and here I start to turn to our political moment, that this is in many ways one of the most vital inheritances from that early period of what we have come to call the IS tradition. The rejection of substitutionism, the rejection of the small group acting as if it is already the revolutionary party in embryo and it needs effectively to mimic Bolshevik Party models of organization rather than recognizing, as Hallas will also say in the essay from which I was quoting, that there are no timeless principles when it comes to organization.

Organization is a practical problem of real people in real circumstances and so in the 1950s, the Socialist Review Group was extremely loose, they were in the Labour Party, but they insisted on having publications that got revolutionary socialism-from-below with a non-dogmatic agenda of real exploration out there. Later in a new wave of struggle they decided it was time to get more centralized and organized, not necessarily all wrong, but I think the way in which Tony Cliff then adopted Lenin and Leninism created all kinds of problems - more so when those models were then foisted on groups of a few dozen or at best a couple of hundred in other parts of the world. Groups that were still utterly marginal and were not really even engaged in projects of how to rebuild working class vanguards. In the [Charlie Post and Kit Weiner piece](#) you'll see the same sort of discussion of that project of having to rebuild working class vanguards to make questions of revolutionary organization viable in a meaningful, political sense again. In a different kind of idiom, some of the best sections of the Italian workerists refer to this as the problem of class recomposition. Really what we're talking about is the recomposition of working class vanguards.

I want to emphasize that today we need to pose a whole series of new questions about what that kind of recomposition ought to look like. I say that because models inherited from other periods don't necessarily disclose to us new patterns of struggle. I'll put out there, though this is not central to anything I'm saying in terms of the broader questions of organizing today, that it seems to me we confront new social explosions that are bypassing the traditional organizations of the working class in the first instance.

If you think about student strikes, I'm most familiar with the mass strikes of hundreds-of-thousands of students in Quebec. If you think about global climate strikes; the International Women's Strike. These are all strikes in one of the senses in which Rosa Luxemburg uses the term "mass strike" in her famous pamphlet from 1905-6. She refers to demonstrative strikes. They are mass strikes, but they are demonstrative in the sense in which they are essentially demonstrating and mobilizing around key political questions of the moment and then the question becomes strategically and tactically how do you then link them into workplace mobilizations and strikes and so on.

It seems to me we've got the early stages of the emergence of a vanguard layer that is not coming in the first instance through workplace struggle or through any kind of immersion in the traditional organizations of the working class. There are some key exceptions: the teachers strikes in the US - although I would argue they too are most successful when they have some characteristics of community mobilizations and so on. In other words, the configuration on the ground of mass struggle looks different today.

The second side of the challenge is that new currents of Left Reformism are emerging in this context. What is really different with a lot of these new currents is for the whole new layer that is emerging, there is not a record of sell-outs. For most of the Left of the last 50 years, social democracy was a project of betrayal and you could point over and over again to how social democrats sold out struggles. This was true in Canada, across Europe, Brazil, the ANC experience in South Africa, and so on. We are now seeing new left reformist currents and projects that are not tainted by sell-outs. Therefore, there is a lot more space for activists to come in and imagine much more radical left politics as being compatible with strategic orientations that remain left social democrat and left reformist. That both creates real space for those of us who are trying to rebuild revolutionary socialism-from-below, but it also creates all kinds of serious problems and challenges.

There are those who want to read the thing I wrote ten years ago and say this is a rejection of the need for revolutionary organization or of the need to build revolutionary parties. I don't hold that view at all. I think revolutionary organization remains vital. I think long term, even maybe medium term, the project of revolutionary parties is indispensable. But I think that in the micro-Leninist caricature, the fundamental problem identified by Hallas which is that there will be no meaningful mass revolutionary socialist organization until the class conscious layer of hundreds-of-thousands is developed within society, that was short-circuited.

The worst form of the short-circuiting was simply to assume that the vanguard is there and is being misled and simply to denounce everyone else and claim yourself the true leadership. One of the key strategic questions for those of us today who believe, as I do, that revolutionary organization matters and that ultimately our project does have to be building mass revolutionary socialist parties, is that we need to grapple with the strategy, tactics and organizational forms appropriate to being a left current within the recomposition of working class vanguards. I use working class in the broadest sense to include the unemployed, to include students that are participating in climate strikes, the social layers that are mobilizing against transit hikes in Chile, or against WhatsApp taxes in Lebanon. These are the human material out of which vanguard layers are built, and they are much more complex than certain more doctrinaire notions that it has to be only organized trade unionists. It's going to look very different after 40 years of neoliberalism. In short, revolutionary organization does matter, but it's got to be revolutionary organization that has some sense of what I'm calling that strategic problem of the recomposition of working class vanguards in all their diversity today, and a figuring out of meaningful but adaptable forms of organizing that suit that moment and that also allow it to work with reformist currents that are out there.

The Tempest Collective and Revolutionary Socialism (Bill K, Boston)

The Tempest Collective's "Statement of Purpose" begins by defining our broader perspective as "building the socialist movement and winning reforms." It goes on to emphasize "working class demands like Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, Defunding the Police, Gender Liberation, Open Borders" and to affirm that earlier reforms of this kind "have not been won without a mass-based movement."

At the same time, the Tempest home page defines our magazine and collective as "A Revolutionary Socialist Project." And our Statement of Purpose, at the end of the section on "Feminism & LGBTQ Liberation," refers in bold letters to "**The project of revolutionary socialism.**" This revolutionary emphasis is picked up and spelled out in a bit more detail a few pages later, at the end of the section on "Independent Working Class Institutions": "The growth of working class organization should go hand in hand with the growth of all wings of the movement, including a revolutionary one. This is the pole of the movement we aim to contribute to building, with the goal of a strong and vibrant revolutionary current, front or organization."

Much of the Tempest Collective's present work is focused, understandably, on fighting for reforms in ways that remain independent of the Democratic Party and that emphasize movements led by workers and the oppressed over electoral politics. This focus is realized in practical terms through the work that many Tempest comrades do as members of their unions and of DSA. It informed the ways in which Tempest members developed their organized and effective intervention in the 2021 DSA national convention.

But what about the "revolutionary" part of Tempest's stated agenda? Many of us regularly refer to this in defining our perspective and our project, but we need to do more to develop a detailed, historically informed common understanding of what we mean by calling ourselves "revolutionary socialists." However far we may now be from a moment in the U.S. that Marxists would recognize as genuinely "revolutionary," we need to know what we mean when we represent ourselves as working to build "a strong and vibrant revolutionary current" in the broader socialist movement. We need to be able to say why and how it matters that we fight for reforms from a revolutionary perspective.

The Tempest Political Education series got underway on August 17th with a session on "Revolutionary Marxism" featuring Hal Draper's "The Two Souls of Socialism" and Robert Brenner's "The Problem of Reformism." This discussion established a good beginning to what should become a sustained internal educational focus. Our initial discussion needs to be extended by revisiting key formulations from the immediate period of the Bolshevik Revolution: Lenin's concepts of the "vanguard party" and of "democratic centralism," Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution," Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* and her debates with Lenin about the character and role of the Bolshevik Party. Other debates among the Bolsheviks themselves and between the Bolsheviks and other organizations within revolutionary Marxism of the early 20th century should be taken up.

Our discussion of revolutionary socialism should also look at more recent attempts to build revolutionary socialist organizations, assessing the successes and the failures of these attempts. A guiding question should be: what would it mean to build a credible revolutionary socialist organization in the US today? Can Tempest play a role in building an *intersectional*

revolutionary socialist party, one that integrates a commitment to anti-capitalist class struggle with the fight against racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia? What kinds of connections to revolutionary socialist initiatives and formations in other countries do we need to explore? Should our longer-term project be directed towards creating a revolutionary socialist party in the US—or towards creating a broader, more inclusive socialist party with a revolutionary wing?

These and related questions will certainly come up in a reading group (currently being discussed by a number of Tempest members) organized around the new Haymarket book *Revolutionary Rehearsals in the Neoliberal Age*. We might also discuss shorter interventions such as David McNally's "What is the Meaning of Revolution Today? Beyond the New Reformism" recently published in Spectre (<https://spectrejournal.com/author/david-mcnally/>).

Our discussions of what Tempest understands by "revolutionary socialism" need not make a fetish of emphasizing what differentiates our politics from the politics of other currents and organizations on the revolutionary left. But we need to be clear about our principled opposition to Stalinism and "campism."

It's time for the Tempest Collective to begin reimagining and enacting in more explicit terms what it means to fight for serious reforms from a perspective committed to revolutionary socialism from below.

Proposal to make the Green New Deal a Central Campaign of the Tempest Collective (Paul L, Paul F, Lee W, and Tom H [9/4/21])

The Tempest Collective stands as a force for revolutionary socialism by giving voice to revolutionary Marxist theory and traditions, by articulating an uncompromising critique of capitalism, and by critically discussing the limitations of non-revolutionary orientations that crop up among social and political activists.

But our organization can be an adequate force for revolutionary socialism only if it especially focuses attention and energies on actual campaigns and struggles in the here-and-now that both speak to the pressing needs of the working-class and oppressed majorities of our people, in the United States and throughout the world, and which project winning victories that have the capacity of helping build a socialist majority that will be capable of bringing to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.

We believe that the Tempest Collective must distinguish itself among activists through helping advance consciousness and mobilize support for the Green New Deal. We call for a coordinated effort within our organization to make this one of the Tempest Collective's priorities – not an exclusive priority, but a central priority.

The Nature of the Crises We Face and the Centrality of the Green New Deal

Economic crises and declining living standards have characterized the experience of a majority of the American people over the past several decades, with an accelerating pace of climate change and ecological wreckage, with an epidemic of hurricanes, a plague of wildfires, and a devastating coronavirus pandemic as portents of worse to come. This relates to a globalization process that has enhanced the power and profits of multi-national corporations at the expense of the well-being of a majority of the people – with mounting damage to our quality of life and a livable environment. This is far from being unique to the United States – it afflicts all countries, with many hit harder than we are.

The point of the Green New Deal is to help ensure human survival and a decent quality of life for all, maintaining an environment healthy enough to sustain life. It involves ending and reversing the damage to our environment, while at the same time ensuring union scale jobs, with a special focus on people of color and on displaced fossil fuel industry workers, racial justice, health care, housing, mass transit systems, education, and cultural opportunities – in short mutual respect and quality of life for all people.

We envision a movement for the Green New Deal that embraces the great majority of people in our multi-faceted working class, who can currently be found across the political spectrum – including those self-identifying as freedom-loving anarchists and enlightened conservatives, with humanist liberals and varieties of socialists in-between, including Democrats and Republicans and Greens and independents. Within the common effort, we must be able to share our different perspectives on the realities we face – with the best of the socialists providing clear and informed analyses with tireless organizing and tactical know-how. This effort cannot be guided, however, by the spirit of compromise, but by the science of climate change and the actual needs of our society's laboring majority.

A diluted and compromised version of the Green New Deal cannot preserve a livable environment. **Science doesn't compromise, the natural world doesn't compromise:** a failure within the next few decades to end the use of fossil fuels, a failure to end practices that destroy a livable environment, threatens to destroy hundreds of millions of human lives and bring about the collapse of civilization. Only the timely implementation of a genuine Green New Deal can ensure:

- a. ending and reversing the damage to our environment, repairing social harms -- cutting climate pollution in half by 2030, eliminating use of fossil fuels by 2050;
- b. ensuring full employment and economic well-being for displaced fossil fuel industry workers; creating more than 15 million good jobs and ending the unemployment crisis by ensuring family sustaining jobs with strong wage and benefit guarantees for all people in rebuilding an environmentally sustainable economy;

c. ensuring health care, housing, mass transit systems, healthy food, education, and cultural opportunities for all.

Regardless of the political starting point of those who become seriously engaged in this struggle, the nature of the problems we face and the logic of the struggle we must wage naturally flows in the direction of fundamentally challenging the dynamics of capitalism and of reaching in the direction of a socialist democracy.

A serious limitation of many who are working for a Green New Deal is the tendency to limit discussion and activity within boundaries that are far too narrow to allow for overcoming the powerful forces we are up against. A focus on discussions among the staff and supporters of various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), a focus on electing and lobbying politicians, a focus on advancing one or another piece of legislation within present-day political structures and contexts will be insufficient.

Far greater attention than is the norm at present must focus on reaching out to those who have not been included in the discussion, the diverse sectors of the working class and oppressed social layers – building mass consciousness and mass mobilizations throughout our country in favor of a genuine Green New Deal, building an increasingly militant united front composed of the great majority of people who want survival and decent life for themselves and for future generations.

What Should We Do?

The Tempest Collective should become known as one of the foremost advocates of a genuine Green New Deal. We should adopt as a central campaign of our organization helping to create a network of coalitions and a nation-wide movement that will effectively struggle to create mass consciousness and mobilize mass support and pressure for a Green New Deal. We should seek to build this in various cities and towns where we have members and branches. There are a variety of components that can be part of the practical implementation of such a campaign. These include:

1. Work to form reading groups (in person or via Zoom) to help many of us, in Tempest and beyond, to explore the specifics of the climate crisis, the kinds of policies that could overcome the crisis, and the kinds of struggles that could be waged to make such policies a reality. An example of this was a three-part series organized in Pittsburgh around Jonathan Neale's outstanding work *Fight the Fire: Green New Deals and Climate Jobs* (available free on-line here: <https://theecologist.org/fight-the-fire>), with the author joining the readers through Zoom to discuss his work.

2. Help to organize a campaign of utilizing speakers, videos and fact sheets and more for educational outreach among increasing numbers of community groups, student groups, trade unions, religious groups, bringing increasing numbers of people into “the conversation” and – ultimately – the struggle for climate justice and a Green New Deal.
3. Help to organize town meetings, community forums, and popular assemblies that can bring together significant sectors of our communities to hear and discuss informed presentations on the environmental crisis and what can and must be done to overcome it – with special reference to the Green New Deal being part of the program.
4. Engage in building coalitions to carry out reform struggles (combining popular education, legislative battles, mobilization in the streets and communities and workplaces), that can result in modest but meaningful victories while giving more and more people organizing experience and a sense of their own power, at the same time pushing in the direction of the Green New Deal – in some cases providing clean water for communities, in some cases defending and expanding mass transit systems, in some cases forcing the passage of legislation that will stop polluters, that will help create climate jobs, that will bring decent health care for all, etc.
5. Seek global connections with global justice activists around the world – through international conferences and speaking tours, and coordinated action campaigns. This must include peoples of all inhabited continents, with special attention to the needs and situations of those who have been oppressed by imperialism. Indigenous rights and the struggles of land and water protectors are a crucial part of Green New Deal goals and strategies. Climate change can only be dealt with effectively on a global level. More than this, an underlying concept of the Green New Deal is that necessary changes must be brought about in ways that ensure improvement in the quality of life for all people, particularly those traditionally oppressed and exploited -- enabling people to share in the decisions that affect their lives, with the free development of each being a condition for the free development of all.

As we gain experience in such practical efforts over the coming year – learning from actual struggles, learning from working with others, learning from our victories and our mistakes – we will be able to assess how the struggle is can best be built, best be won, best be developed in a manner that will contribute to a mass socialist ferment that can truly, not simply in words, transform society.

Thinking About Organization (Thomas Hummel)

There’s a balance that socialist groups need to strike between being open enough to attract diverse groups of people and having enough ideological unity to be able to carry out actions together.

Tempest has been successful thus far because of its openness, and, while a plurality of ideas is necessary for any healthy organization, I do think it's important to start to think about how we want to slowly move from a collective that is finding its ideological footing, to eventually becoming an organization that can carry out large projects with unity in action.

I think this means a few first steps:

1. Deciding upon priority areas for work during the coming period at convention, with the understanding that circumstances in local regions may favor one area of work over another, and that decisions about where exactly work should be done should ultimately fall to the local group rather than a central body.
2. A more coherent organization of branches - groups of people in an area should be meeting at least once a month to talk strategy and to plan organized interventions in activist groups and at protests.
3. Creation of some regular deliverable - whether this is a monthly bulletin, or a small handout about Tempest, we should start to go to events together as Tempest with something to give people.
 - a. This may entail the creation of a "bulletin committee" or something similar whose job it is to regularly create this deliverable. We would need to produce some shorter and more focused articles that would be appropriate for this format.

Interested to hear what others think about this.

Reframing Lenin: on the question of revolutionary organization (**Nathan Moore**)

August 28, 2021 The "organization" question is an important one for revolutionaries. Revolution—the overthrow of capitalism and the reconstitution of society on a more humane socialist basis—will require militants among the working class consciously organizing together to help influence broader social struggle. Absent a politically confident working class that is organized to fight for political power internationally in order to democratically organize production on a global scale, revolution will fail and more reactionary alternatives will fill the political void.

Socialist scholars and activists (past and present) involved in the Trotskyist movement have identified "organization" as a key component of what constitutes Leninism.[1] The reason is obvious: the October Revolution of 1917 remains one of the few examples of the working class coming to political power in history. Without the Bolshevik Party shaping this struggle, the revolution would not have gone as far as it did before counterrevolution and the rise of fascism throughout Europe severely curtailed its progress—a development itself attributable to the

failure of revolutionary organization in these countries during the interwar period. Revolutionary organization is critical to the success of the revolutionary movement. Vladimir Lenin, the most prominent member of the Bolshevik Party, was a principal contributor to bringing a revolutionary organization of such a caliber together. Consequently, discussions regarding Leninism bring to the forefront ideas about what constitutes effective revolutionary organization.

However, perhaps it is time to reframe Lenin in a way that will be useful for socialists today. What I propose is nothing original; it is based on what others have already explained sufficiently in their work. The idea is simply to bring their examination to light, shift the focus from the organization and party question highlighted in their titles, and situate it within other important elements in Leninism.[2]

What is Leninism?

Leninism is not a distinct variation or school of Marxism; rather, it is an extension of the Marxist method. At the turn of the 20th century, Lenin applied Marxism to Russian conditions that, on the surface, resembled very little to the countries of industrial Europe. Socialist historian Paul Le Blanc notes how Nikolai Bukharin explained this continuity between Leninism and Marxism:

Comparing the views of Marx with those of Lenin, Bukharin argued, 'it is clear that Leninist Marxism represents quite a particular form of ideological education, for the simple reason that it is itself a child of a somewhat different epoch.' At the same time, Bukharin added, 'if we regard Marxism not as the entirety of ideas such as existed in the time of Marx', but as a distinctive tool and methodology, then 'Leninism is not something that modifies or revises the method of Marxist teaching' but 'a complete return to the Marxism formulated by Marx and Engels themselves.'[3]

So, to get at the question "what constitutes Leninism?", we have to first ask: "what constitutes Marxism?" and capture the "methodology" Bukharin identifies.

Marxism can best be summarized as a dialectical unity of three elements: revolutionary theory, organization, and strategy/tactics. These three elements mutually reinforce and shape one another in dynamic fashion. Marxism is the scientific analysis of capitalist motion and the development of resistance to it. Organization can only be understood, and developed fully, in relation to the theory guiding it and the strategy/tactics employed within the working class struggle.

Socialists who have highlighted the organization question as central to Leninism in their work do discuss these other elements (revolutionary theory and strategy/tactics) that are important to Leninism. For example, Le Blanc—in a recent essay assessing the field of Leninism today—offers a critique of Negri's framing of Leninism in their work *Factory of Strategy* with this alternative lens: "there should first be an analysis of society and how it should be altered,

followed by the development of strategy on how to bring about such change, and only then the development of an organisation capable of carrying out that strategy for social change.”[4]

It is this idea that I want to develop further: to shine a light on all three elements equally so that the question of organization is not privileged, but properly situated. To reiterate what LeBlanc observes above, revolutionary Marxist theory is rooted in a scientific understanding of capitalism in all the concrete forms in which it manifests itself in a given historical period as well as analyzing the forms of resistance to capitalism. Through theory, one can grasp “a line of march”; a strategy and corresponding tactics (a plan of action) around which revolutionaries and the broader working class movement can discuss, implement, and assess in order to strengthen their collective resistance. Organization is the vehicle through which the theory and strategy/tactics (“practice”) are fused. A key ingredient to keep the three elements of theory, organization, and strategy/tactics growing and developing in tandem is a developing working class movement, and deep connection with it.

If organization is viewed abstractly from theory and strategy/tactics—and absent a vibrant working class movement—the danger is that revolutionaries become isolated and compensate for their lack of influence with grandiose characterizations of their “correct positions” and the limited scope of their activity. Even worse, this can create a culture of abuse perpetrated by a “leadership” that is perceived to be more politically experienced, and therefore trusted, over the general membership.[5]

Today, in the context of a decades-long retreat of working class organization since the 1970’s, there is a particular need for developing quality revolutionary theory that can explain the changing complexities of capitalism and help inform a strategy and set of tactics to pursue in a given struggle, even if their impact will not be immediately felt among the broader working class. From this starting point, revolutionaries can experiment with modes of organization that are organically tied to broader movements of the working class and the left, regardless of their level of strength. Revolutionary organization, in any historical moment, should reflect a healthy connection between Marxism and the struggles of the time (no matter their level of development) that bring Marxist theory to life.

To grasp why this is a better way for revolutionaries to approach the question of organization today, let’s take a look at the early political lives of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Lenin.

The early political life of Marx and Engels (1842-1850)

Before the revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels spent much of their time elaborating their materialist conception of history against the idealist trends of the time.[6] These ideas were shaped by the workers' struggles, in particular the workers uprisings in Silesia and Prague in 1844. Feeling confident in their materialist worldview, which saw the liberation of humanity as the historic mission of the working class—and having a sense that the working class movement

in Europe was heating up, they made modest attempts at organization by setting up Correspondence Committees among revolutionaries to engage in the free flow exchange of ideas: a period of theoretical debate and clarification. Out of these committees, and through the League of the Just, the Communist League was launched—the first attempt to create an international proletarian organization. The Communist League commissioned Marx and Engels to produce the first popular exposition of the League's views in a programme of action that represented the distillation of unity between revolutionary theory, organization, and strategy/tactics: *The Communist Manifesto*.

This theoretical production and grounding proved critical in framing their understanding of the world, so that when 1848 arrived, they were able to participate fully and with confidence, seeing their ideas come to life in the struggle unfolding before their eyes. Their strategy during the revolution involved building the confidence of working class organizations within the broader democratic movement and outside of the recently formed parliamentary assemblies.

Within this general strategy they argued for some tactics and against others:

1. They disagreed with a proposal to assemble a German émigré army from France to march into Germany as a way to accelerate revolutionary events.[7]
2. In the fall of 1848 they argued for people to refuse paying taxes to the government; in essence, refusal to fund the counter revolution that was beginning to position itself against the movement.[8]
3. They gave critical support to democratic candidates of the Left elected to the various legislative assemblies throughout Germany at the beginning, although this changed as the struggle matured.[9]
4. They defended themselves and others writing for their newspaper the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (NRZ) in court against charges of slandering Prussian state officials, being acquitted by a jury on two occasions.[10]
5. Engels participated in a workers' uprising in the German states of Baden and Palintate in 1849, engaging in armed confrontation with Prussian military detachments on a number of occasions.[11]

The organizational formations in which Marx and Engels participated during 1848 changed as the struggle unfolded. At the beginning of the revolution—from the spring to fall of 1848—through their journal the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* based in Cologne Germany, they organized themselves as a radical democratic group within a broader democratic movement and organization (The Democratic Society in Cologne). During a particularly pitched phase of the revolution in the fall of 1848, Marx and Engels concluded that the petty-bourgeois democratic forces in the revolution were not steadfast defenders of democratic principles. Instead, these groups sought agreements with the forces of reaction through their elected Left

delegates in the National Assembly. From this experience, Marx and Engels helped form an organization that was both broad and more homogenous in working class composition (The Cologne Workers' Association), and independent of the broader democratic movements. They advocated the extension of similar associations throughout Germany.[12]

The idea of organizing independent organizations of the working class did not originate with the 1848 revolution. Engels, throughout the 1840's, reported regularly on the state of the Chartist movement in England, an independent and broad organization of the English working class, and looked upon it as the best example of independent working class organization in Europe. What Marx and Engels sought was maximum unity of forces against feudal and bureaucratic reaction in the economically and politically less developed nation of Germany. They pushed the democratic movement as far as it could go, and when experience of the movement compelled them to push further than the democratic forces were willing to go, they advocated forming more homogeneous, but still broad, organizations of the working class independent of the petty-bourgeois democratic parties.

After the revolutionary movement had passed and failed, Marx and Engels drew a number of important conclusions regarding strategy and organization: the need for independent working class organization; for the working class to participate in elections with their own candidates; to unite with other democratic forces in so far as they fight, while maintaining an independent political position and organization.[13] These conclusions did not lead them to subsequently organize narrow organizations composed only of the ideologically committed. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions and the dissolution of the Communist League, Marx and Engels returned to theoretical work and reporting on the important struggles of the day and the political questions of the moment. They supported the continued growth of Chartism in Britain during the 1850's and 60's and were key players in the founding of the First International: an amalgam of various radical groups with history and roots in the working class movement.[14]

To summarize, a revolutionary movement requires quality theory, a scientific understanding of the world in the specific historical moment in which revolutionaries are situated. From there, modest attempts at revolutionary organization can come to be which channel a discussion among broader layers of the working class regarding the strategy and tactics (which are deeply informed by theory) needed to strengthen the collective resistance of the working class. The dialectical interaction between revolutionary theory, organization, and strategy/tactics accelerates in heightened periods of working class struggle and is the basis for fortifying genuine revolutionary organization; such organization can't be prefigured with models. Organization is a tool to bridge theory with practice (strategy/tactics); nothing more.

The early political life of Lenin (1893-1903)

A similar construction can be made of Lenin's early political life. Lenin began his political life with an intense study of Marxist theory. By the time he began writing in 1893 he had already read the

first two volumes of *Capital*, among other works by Engels and Georgi Plekhanov, the “father of Russian Marxism.” Leon Trotsky noted that Lenin’s study of *Capital* was so thorough that he could easily reference this work when engaging with others in political discussions and debate.[15] He also intently studied statistics regarding economic life in the Russian countryside. The combination of Marxist theory in *Capital* alongside an intense study and observation of production relations in the Russian countryside, enabled Lenin to understand that, even though Russia remained an autocracy and was not as industrial as Europe, capitalism had fully penetrated Russia undermining forever pre-capitalist relations that had existed for centuries. Lenin produced a monumental work during this time that grounded his political positions for the remainder of his life: *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. [16]

This study informed a critical debate taking place at the end of the 19th century among liberals, democrats, and revolutionary socialists on the nature of capitalism within Russia. Some liberal democrats (like Peter Struve) uncritically supported the growth of capitalist development no matter how such “progress” trampled upon the people. The political party that formed a little later from these ideas was the Constitutional-Democratic Party (“Cadet” Party). Other radical democrats, like the Narodniks and later Socialist Revolutionaries, denied that capitalism was a predominant force in Russia and that the foundation for socialism lay in peasant production of the countryside.[17]

These competing theories had a profound impact on political practice later on. Whereas the Cadets downplayed the need for revolution to achieve democracy in Russia, the Socialist Revolutionaries sought a detour around capitalist development, focused on organizing among the peasantry and even advocated—and carried out—the assassination of members of the autocratic government (“terrorism”).

Lenin and other Russian Marxists of the time—organized within the Russian-based *League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class* and the emigre-based *Emancipation of Labor* group—took a different position. Their grounding in Marxist theory corroborated the predominance of capitalist relations of production throughout Russia, and pointed to the leading role of the working class in the cities and countryside and their revolutionary role in overthrowing the autocracy.

The working class movement in Russia had grown considerably by the mid 1890’s. The objective for the Russian Marxists at this time was to become more rooted in the actual struggles of the working-class movement, first by understanding their workplace conditions and the political questions they faced. They disseminated their ideas among workers in the factories through writing, leafleting and study circles.[18] These were the first modest attempts to develop revolutionary organization and a strategy for winning wider groups of workers to the idea of organizing for socialism and revolution against the autocracy. As growing numbers of ‘conscious workers’ became active in the revolutionary organization, at the same time earning increased confidence of and authority among broader sectors of the working class, the goal of bringing together socialism and the working class would be realized.

Riding on the crest of this burgeoning movement alongside a fully developed socialist movement organizing mass parties in Europe, the Russians understandably felt a little behind and attempted to match—as much as they could in very undemocratic conditions—the level of political organization their comrades in other countries were able to achieve.[19] Lenin, and others in the *League*, argued that Russian Marxism had firm theoretical grounding against liberal democratic and agrarian democratic trends predominant in the country; the time had come to establish a political program (a distillation of their theoretical ideas communicated publicly) that could serve as a strategic guide for revolutionary activity. The discussion of political program and strategy naturally dovetailed with having an organization.[20] They attempted to organize the first Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in 1898 but the police successfully infiltrated the gathering, arrested its members and forced them into exile in Siberia. Lenin, after serving his exile in Siberia, left Russia to live and organize the Russian movement abroad in Europe.

Following the First Congress, the growing workers movement continued to give life to localized struggles throughout Russia from which local organizations with a Marxist outlook began to develop. Lenin, along with other Russian emigres living abroad, launched the newspaper *Iskra*. The objective of producing *Iskra* was to open frank discussion and debate among Marxist revolutionaries through their publications around a number of theoretical and strategic issues concerning the path to revolution in Russia.[21] Lenin's critical contribution to this debate was his work *What is to be Done?*.

The first successful congress to convene with the hope of creating a formal Russian party was the Second Congress of the RSDLP held in London in 1903. It is important to emphasize that the Congress was the culmination of an extensive discussion among all Russian Marxists. Only through this period of clarification among the disparate Russian Marxist groups, could a politically confident Marxist movement form, hitherto localized, throughout the country behind the project of a unified party that could give national coordination to the socialist struggle.

Lenin's contentious positions at the Congress—concerning a more strict definition of party membership (on which he was initially willing to compromise), a more restricted editorial board composition, and respecting the democratic decisions of the Congress—followed the seriousness with which Lenin approached the theoretical disputes (that informed strategy) aired in the previous two-and-a-half years. Even though a fully united party did not form following the Second Congress because of what seemed at the time to be acrimonious hair-splitting, this gathering is seen as the foundation of his views on questions of organization, and consequently, the “birth of Leninism.”[22] But it would be erroneous to view this Congress as a question of party organization absent the serious theoretical and strategic debate and struggle of the previous years (also very much constituent elements in Leninism, and Marxism). In Lenin's view, if the Russian revolutionary movement were to be taken seriously, its organization would have to match the high level of theoretical and strategic thinking that Russian Marxists had elaborated over the previous decades as well as the high level of agitation among the emergent working class movement. Otherwise, their attempts at influencing this movement would founder.

To summarize, the Second Congress only came to be because of an insurgent movement on the part of the Russian working class on the one hand, and the already advanced stages of workers organization achieved in other countries on the other. The question of organization was not settled before a vibrant working class movement took off; on the contrary, it was developed as a result of advances in the level of struggle within Russia in particular. Alongside a strengthening movement, the years between 1900 and 1903 was an important period of clarification among Russian Marxists. Before a national party could cohere, rigorous and honest debate and discussion needed to happen grounded in the theoretical and strategic questions of the day.

What does this mean for today?

A common charge that Marxists have leveled against anarchists is that they prefigure the future egalitarian/communist society at the expense of understanding the level of political organization required to defeat the capitalist class. But a similar charge could be brought against Marxists for prefiguring the type of organization that is required to bring about a successful revolutionary movement of the working class.

Revolutionary organization on par with Bolshevism can only develop organically from periods of heightened struggle, where conscious revolutionaries rooted in working class life organize together to advance the struggles of the class. There is a danger of overstating what constitutes “real” revolutionary organization. These pretensions of having the answer to what constitutes revolutionary organization has certainly played a role in the many splits (and even dissolutions) that many revolutionary socialist groups have suffered since the 1950’s—although at root to every split is the presence of acute theoretical disagreements.

Much has been written to capture an authentic picture of what constitutes revolutionary organization from the Bolshevik experience. Important characteristics have been gleaned: flexibility in structure and organization to adapt to changing circumstances; democracy and frank discussion and debate among the membership alongside unity in action (without subservience but with continual reflection and assessment); connection with working class life and the political questions it faces; etc.[23] These qualities are valuable and need to be kept in mind but they are necessarily abstract. Accordingly, the question of what kind of organization revolutionary socialists should build today can only be resolved within the concrete conditions we face and not through overly abstract reference to past “models” of organization.

The conditions of the late United States, and global, capitalism of today resembles little the political period of the early 20th century, when the socialist movement was broad, powerful, and independently organized. Today most of the combative struggles are not taking place within workplaces, but around issues of working class oppression within communities (BLM/#Defund, Standing Rock, immigrant rights, MeToo and Abortion rights defense). There is a need to

develop quality theory that can capture the complexity of the capitalist world in which we live and inform the resistance to it.

Some of the important theoretical contributions that come to mind today are: analysis of the transformations of the US and global working class;[24] the centrality of social reproduction work to the functioning of capitalism and its oppressive role over the lives of women and other oppressed groups;[25] the return of the “mass strike” as a form of resistance central to many struggles worldwide that do not spawn from the traditional unionized sections of the working class but from the spheres of social reproduction;[26] the need to place a politics of race and gender at the center of socialist struggle and revolution over reductionist arguments that treat these oppressions as peripheral to economic exploitation;[27] and the need for genuinely revolutionary internationalism.[28] Such internationalism involves not only opposing all aspects of imperialism and supporting all struggles for human freedom and dignity, but also helping to build coordinated global struggles against environmental degradation, against racial and sexual oppression, against class exploitation, and against the new upsurge of fascism. It includes the need for revolutionaries and activists of all countries to gain insights and strength from each other in their common struggle.

Revolutionary socialists should be flexible on the question of organization and not attempt to prefigure what can only develop naturally in organic connection with the struggles of the working class as they exist today. After all, the level of struggle will dictate the kinds of organization that will make sense and be possible in any given historical moment. Revolutionaries should organize together and within broader formations of like-minded socialists and radicals in order to facilitate a collective effort to shape local struggles at a level commensurate with their numbers and resources. Healthy revolutionary organizations will produce well-rounded Marxist theory that accurately captures the new forms of capitalist reality that we face today in order to inform the strategy and tactics (“practice”) that will help strengthen the future workers’ movement.

Capitalism continually changes in form but its essence remains the same. The tasks for revolutionaries are to study and discuss these changes in order to develop theory that can guide and inform actions today that will help shape the future and bigger battles of tomorrow. Without revolutionary theory there can be no practice (strategy and tactics). Without revolutionary practice, theory becomes dogma. The interaction of theory and practice can only occur with some degree of organization and coordination among revolutionaries rooted in the working class; the forms of organization that revolutionaries use to advance struggle will change with the times and level of struggle. Today this will require flexibility and experimentation, the key to any process wishing to emulate the authentic scientific method of Marxism.

Notes

[1] Ernest Mandel, “[Leninist Theory of Organization](#).”, Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), and Tony Cliff, *Building the Party*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2002).

[2] This discussion is the extension of one started by David McNalley with the former International Socialist Organization (ISO), subsequently published in their online publication *Socialist Worker*: "[The Period, the Party, and the Next Left](#)," March 22, 2019

[3] Paul Le Blanc. "Lenin Studies: Method and Organization." *Historical Materialism*, 25.4: (2017), 107

[4] Le Blanc, "Lenin Studies: Method and Organization," 116. Leblanc also discusses this in his book "Lenin and the Revolutionary Party," 302 as well as the potential pitfalls in overapplying what worked during Lenin's time in Russia to very different conditions today, 304-305.

[5] Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 312-320. See also David McNally, "[The Period, the Party, and the Next Left](#)," *Socialist Worker*, March 22, 2019.

[6] Some key works elaborating their materialist theory during this time were *The German Ideology* (although never published) and *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

[7] See Karl Marx, *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 6* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2013), endnote 205.

[8] See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 8* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), XV.

[9] August Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets or Both?* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2019), pp. 6-7.

[10] See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 8* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), endnote 1.

[11] See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 10* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), pp. 211-237.

[12] See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 7* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), endnote 245.

[13] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Address of the Central Authority to the League, March 1850," *Marx and Engels Collected Works: Volume 10*, 277-287.

[14] See Johnstone, "Marx and Engels and the Concept of the Party," *Class, Party and Revolution*, 77-86 and Nimtz, "Marx and Engels on the Revolutionary Party," *Class, Party, and Revolution*, 263-268.

[15] Lenin wrote to his sister on December 13, 1894, inquiring about her ability to obtain a copy of Capital Volume III for him. See VI. Lenin, "[3. To his sister Maria](#)" (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977).. Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky On Lenin* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2017), 176.

[16] Neil Harding's central insight is the extent to which Lenin's theoretical grounding around the question of Russian capitalist development shaped his political and strategic framework in these early years: Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought, Volume 1*, (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2009).

[17] VI Lenin, "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve's Book: the Reflection of Marxism in Bourgeois Literature," *Collected Works: Volume 1* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1963), 333-508.

[18] For summaries of revolutionary Marxist activity in Russia during this time see Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 13-34 and Cliff, *Building the Party*, 35-57.

[19] Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: in Context* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008).

[20] See VI. Lenin, "[The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats, 1897](#)," *Collected Works: Volume 2* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1972), 323. VI. Lenin, "[Articles for 'Rabochaya Gazeta': Our Immediate Task, 1899](#)" *Collected Works: Volume 4* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964), 215-220, and VI. Lenin, "[A Draft of our Party Programme, 1899](#)," *Collected Works: Volume 4* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964), 227.

[21] Le Blanc and Cliff give good summaries of this period: see Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 35-70 and Cliff, *Building the Party*, 59-84. Lih challenges the assumption Le Blanc and Cliff maintain regarding the centrality of "economism" being central to the discussion among revolutionaries of the time, despite Lenin's emphasis in *What is to be Done?* (WITBD): See Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, 217-278. However, even Lih's work does show that there still did exist a lack of clarity among Russian Marxists on the relationship between "economic" and "political" struggle (see pages 279 to 334). Also, it is important to note Lenin's organizational conclusions in WITBD work are a product of discussions around a number of questions debated among Marxists since the mid-1890's. For a good summary of these theoretical and strategic discussions see Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 21-26.

[22] Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 51.

[23] Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, 250-251.

[24] Kim Moody, *On New Terrain* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017) and Kim Moody "On the Global Working Class" *New Politics* 70: pp. 41-50

[25] Tithi Bhattacharya ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

[26] David McNally, "The Return of the Mass Strike," *Spectre* 1:1 (2020), 3-34

[27] See [*Spectre Journal*](#)

[28] Ashley Smith and Kevin Lin, "The New China-U.S. Cold War," *New Politics*, Vol. 28:1 (Summer 2020), 80-90.