**From:** Joanna Misnik [mailto:joannam@igc.org]
**Sent:** Sunday, January 5, 2014 3:35 PM
**To:** 'NC@solidarity-us.org'
**Subject:** regroupment for the ballot box

Dear all,

Please note this meeting in NYC. I believe there is some motion in Philly as well, and probably a number of other cities, based on the Seattle election success. I believe we should view these efforts as regroupment initiatives of a different sort than we might have envisioned in the past. Their first value is bringing socialists and independent left activists together in the same room to talk about the political situation locally and nationally and what might be done together. This coming together has value in and of itself, whether or not viable socialist campaigns jump off in a given city. I believe Solidarity should participate wherever this is happening and share our experiences.

I am appending a preliminary report on the meeting to launch a socialist campaign in Chicago. Since that meeting, a program committee has met twice and is crafting a proposal to our next general meeting in the third week of January. Agreement that this will be an explicitly socialist campaign has been reached in this committee, clearing up the original ambiguity. The next Chicago branch meeting will discuss this initiative as well as hear an update on the efforts of the CTU to mount an independent slate of candidates for the 2015 municipal elections. We will be inviting Steve Edwards from Socialist Alternative as well as comrades from Socialist Outpost active in this effort.

Joanna

**Notes on the first meeting of “a Socialist Campaign in Chicago, held December 20**

Joanna M

First off, I look forward to Simon’s observations about this meeting, as he might be looking through a different lens. Nick L. was there but I believe came in late.

Built through word of mouth and through a facebook page mounted by Isaac S., the “Socialist Campaign in Chicago” exploratory meeting brought together nearly 50 people, a decent mix of organized socialists and radical activists, young and old (though not that many African-Americans). The inspiration, of course, came from the successes of the Socialist Alternative campaigns in Seattle and Minneapolis. (Solidarity endorsed both of these campaigns, but our actual involvement was very minimal.)

Socialist groups present were Solidarity, Socialist Alternative, of course (3 or 4 people), ISO (maybe 5 people, Keeanga Taylor and Shaun Harken from the national leadership), DSA (one or two, with an overlapping Greeen Party membership), a member of LRNA working for the National Nurses Union, an SP member, one member of the Party of Socialism and Liberation/ANSWER. A member of the Progressive Democrats was also present. As for the radical activists, I am less familiar with them and the groups with which they work; they tended to comprise the younger attendees (here Simon may have more info). There seemed to be some housing and community activists, a few from multikulti radical media projects, Micah L. from Jacobin, Metro Tenants Organization, Peter Orlikoff and Myron Pearlman from the CTU strike support efforts, single payer organizations, a few staffers from ngo’s with which I am not familiar. (Isaac S. is functioning as the secretary of this group. An email list has been launched and the attendance sheet has a record of all the affiliations represented.)

The good news is the meeting was able to attract a decent sized and broadly based crowd, the mood of which was that this was a launch of a common electoral project in Chicago. The not so good news is that the meeting, in my view, did not reach defined clarity of purpose: running socialist(s) in Chicago. The proposed agenda seemed to assume this was our common purpose and we should launch energy, action, research to getting something started. However, at the very outset, Steve E. from SAlt stated clearly that we should defy the Democrats and run independent candidates, whether or not they identified as socialists, thus broadening the contours of the project in a way that I think might well overreach the capacity of this particular group of folk -- in this town, anyway.

The discussion revealed this lack of clarity. Discussion of a socialist campaign was not as vibrant as a host of suggestions as to who might run as an independent, who had run as an independent, maybe the CTU will run independents, etc. As well (this may be agism here), the millennial, post-Occupy tendency to lose a sense of proportion set in from time to time , with suggestions like hosting conferences all over the city with people’s organizations which would define the campaign “from below,” building a new mass movement/third party in Chicago that isn’t just about elections, letting the people determine the platform in grandiose ways. All of this shows good instincts, but it also shows the tendency to react to getting forty radicals in a room by assuming that a new day has dawned on a tabula rasa in a wasteland of other players. The brazenness and complexity of mounting a few socialist candidates with a cultivated, activist identity and insertion in local movements just got lost, I think. In fact, I think just finding viable socialist candidate(s) who won’t be just symbolic like old-fashioned “party propaganda campaigns” is a big challenge for this effort here.

This excerpt from an email of a member of the logistics committee (there were three committees established – logistics, outreach, and platform) confirms this confusion:

*It's unfortunate, however, that even questions as general as yours remain unapproachable because the campaign itself is still so indefinite: note that Thursday's meeting ended before we had decided whether we'll be running Aldermanic campaigns in the wards at all, rather than for some other municipal office (though no one should be surprised if an Aldermanic race is exactly what we decide on). Independent or open socialist? Undecided too.

Indeed, the logistics committee's biggest task now is arguably to determine the FEASIBILITY of a getting Socialist candidate into a 2015 Aldermanic race at all. Which ward, how much money, to whom to reach out: I fear that none of us can supply satisfying answers to your questions yet.*

A lot of these unknowns are inevitable at a launch of this open, initial type among groups and individuals who have never worked together on a political effort before. Most present (aside from the Greens and a few others) have very limited electoral expertise at all. But there was, in my view, a failure of the initiating leaders to decisively push the idea that our particular focus was on running socialist campaign(s) specifically. This of course would not rule out socialist campaigns pointing to, giving a nod to independent campaigns that are militant expressions of working class interests differing from the Democratic Party and the city political machine.

Hopefully, this will all get worked out. But we did miss an opportunity at the outset in terms of self-definition.

Note on the ISO: Though adequately represented, the ISO played no role, said nothing. They were clearly, and rather glumly, in observation mode. Some discussion should be held with them. (I actually think, if they could behave themselves, they could be of help in the search for viable candidates.)

Note on Steve Edwards: He ran after me at the meeting, saying he really wanted to talk privately. He was rather surprised and alarmed at the ramblings at the meeting and said he now agreed with me when I spoke to try and focus the group as the launching pad of explicitly socialist campaigning.

Tiny note on comportment: Myron complained that as soon as the meeting ended, a Salt member came up to give him and paper and introduced him to their org. This just might be because they were distributing their paper’s coverage of Sawant, and it might not. Groups like the ISO and Salt have no real experience and bad instincts about being sensitive to self-advertisement in efforts like these. At some point, we might have to talk this out.

Finally, if Solidarity had been stronger and more into this as a project, it might well have been a good idea to convene a discussion among all the socialist groups in the city as a preliminary to this meeting to develop a more focused sense of purpose and proposal. I think this might have happened had Isaac, who is clearly a central leader of this initiative, remained a member of our organization. But he left in part because he did not see Solidarity as capable of taking this kind of initiative. In addition, I believe he draws from the RWIOT experience a need to stress involvement of independent activists and lays less stress on a baseline of socialist organizations. Either way, I take some personal responsibility for not pushing harder for taking initiative after the first appeal Steve Edwards made to me for a private meeting. Oh, well. We’re in it now, and let’s give it some attention and energy.