

# Members' Toolkit

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## **Becoming a member**

Joining the ISO involves agreement with the organization's basic politics. These politics are outlined in *Where We Stand: The Politics of the International Socialist Organization* (published by the ISO education department) and explained more fully in *The Meaning of Marxism*, by Paul D'Amato (available from [haymarketbooks.org](http://haymarketbooks.org)).

Members also agree to pay monthly dues to the organization, according to its sliding scale dues structure (see below), to read, take and sell *Socialist Worker* newspaper, and to participate in building movements.

In order for the ISO to grow, we have to convince other people of the need to join the organization. So by joining, members commit themselves to building the organization where they live. If you have joined in a city where there are already other members, you can immediately get involved in local organizing. If you are the first member in your locality, then the first step is meeting the people who can become the next members. Contact the ISO organizing department at [orgdept@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:orgdept@internationalsocialist.org) to figure out ways that fit your situation.

This Members' Toolkit is aimed at acquainting new members with the organizational structures and basic routines of the ISO.

New members should also acquaint themselves with the "Becoming a Marxist" reading guide, a recommended list of readings to further members' Marxist education, which appears as "Appendix C" below.

## **Organizing Branches**

The basic unit of local organization is the ISO branch. Most of the day-to-day decisions about the ISO's local activities are made in the branches. Therefore, the ISO places great importance on branch work.

In formal terms, a minimum of five ISO members who live close enough to one another to meet regularly constitutes a branch. There is no upper limit to the number of members that a branch can have, though branches of more than thirty members can become unwieldy. In cities with a large number of members, it may be practical to organize more than one branch. Decisions about whether and how to divide branches should be made in consultation with the ISO organizing department.

The branch organizes the essential tasks of local organizing, movement activity and the political education of members. In order to be most effective, even the smallest branch should elect a comrade as "branch organizer," who is in charge of overseeing basic organizational and political tasks. Larger branches – which by definition are capable of more ambitious tasks – should also elect a branch committee of two to four members, which is explained more fully below.

## **Branch meetings**

Branch meetings are the center of the branch's political life. Branches should provide an environment in which members can learn our politics and learn how to apply those politics in everyday situations.

The branch meeting is where discussions and assessments of political work take place. Therefore, branch meetings must be well organized and planned to stimulate discussion and decision-making, so that every member takes part in determining the direction of branch activities. Branch meetings should have a chairperson who follows basic democratic procedure (see "How to chair an ISO branch meeting" below), and decisions should be made by majority vote.

All branches should encourage healthy political debate among members – debate and discussion help to clarify our politics. But this also requires all members to behave in a collaborative manner when airing disagreements. Most often, branches have no trouble maintaining a supportive and comradely atmosphere. But it is worth keeping in mind that it is unacceptable for any member to behave in a hostile or otherwise uncomradely manner toward other members or allies. Never forget that we are all on the same side, even when we disagree about particular issues, and we cannot afford to let debates result in a breakdown of mutual trust and collaboration.

Branch meetings should occur weekly, preferably at the same time and place. While all members are expected to attend branch meetings, nonmembers who are sympathetic to the ISO should also be encouraged to attend weekly meetings. The meetings should be held in a public place where possible - for instance, in a campus lecture hall or at a community center - to make them more accessible. Meetings should be kept to a two-hour time limit to make sure everyone can stay until the end of the meeting – and hopefully stick around for informal discussion at a nearby restaurant or coffee house afterward.

There are three kinds of branch meetings: organizing, educational and public meetings, which are rotated week by week (although specific decisions about how often to hold which kind of meeting depend on the circumstances of each individual branch). The purpose of each type of meeting is explained below:

- **Organizing meetings:** These meetings are important to ensure that the entire branch is involved in decision-making about all aspects of the branch's work – from deciding the topic for the next public meeting to discussing members' involvement in building movements. There should be an agenda for each meeting, proposed by the branch committee or branch organizer, which branch members vote to accept or amend at the start of each meeting. While every meeting cannot involve discussions about every aspect of the branch's work, branches should aim to hold focused discussions about all areas of work that members are involved in over a roughly two month time span.
- **Educational meetings:** All members need ongoing political education, and this should be reflected in branch meetings. Although educational meetings can include one or two organizational items on the agenda, the bulk of these meetings should be taken up with a discussion of one planned educational item, with recommended readings from publications such as the *International Socialist Review (ISR)*. New branches can consult the "Becoming a Marxist" reading guide for help in planning branch education.
- **Public meetings:** Well-publicized and -organized public meetings are a key way to both meet new people interested in radical politics and also engage people who have already expressed interest in the ISO. For this reason, branches should plan to hold a public forum at least once a month. The topics

for public forums include a wide range of possibilities, but branches should aim for a balance between responding to the issues of the day and more focused political presentations. Meetings on the war in Afghanistan, abortion rights, fighting budget cuts, or LGBT rights are important in attracting people becoming radicalized around a particular issue. But it is also important to hold meetings such as “The Meaning of Marxism” or “The Case for Socialism” which can draw people interested in a broad radical analysis of society. (See below for a step-by-step guide to organizing a public meeting.)

## **Fractions**

When there are a number of activities going on at the same time, larger branches will want to organize themselves into fractions. A fraction, or subcommittee, is simply a group of members that focuses on a particular political activity or area of movement work. Not all fractions need to be permanent, but should focus on fulfilling the needs of the branch at any particular time. For example, a fraction might be organized to focus on anti-death penalty or immigrants’ rights work, to build for a national demonstration, or to build for an upcoming ISO conference. It is important that members get involved in fractions, but also make sure to focus themselves mainly on only *one* fraction. One purpose of fractions is to establish a division of labor in the branch that allows all members to be involved in activity while at the same time ensuring that no members are spreading themselves too thin.

Fractions should report on their activities periodically (at least once every two months or so) to branch meetings in order to generalize the lessons they have learned and to allow input from the collective experience of the entire branch. No branch should allow fractions to operate autonomously: Every fraction is accountable to the decisions of the branch regarding its approach to a particular area of work, just as every branch is accountable to the rest of the national organization. This requires regular reporting to the branch at branch meetings.

## **Financing the Organization**

The ISO has no other reliable source of income than its membership. For this reason, finances have to be a key priority for the entire organization, including its branches. This, of course, requires branches to make sure that payments for dues, *Socialist Worker*, the *ISR* and other literature get sent to the national office on time.

Every branch should elect a branch treasurer, whose job is to ensure that all members are paying dues. The best (and easiest) way to get dues in regularly is to sign all comrades up for automatic dues withdrawal, so the treasurer does not need to personally collect them each month. A copy of the form appears as “Appendix B” in this Toolkit.

Below is the current sliding scale dues structure for the ISO:

### **Monthly dues**

Monthly net income	Members w/out children	Members w/ children
\$500–\$600	\$20–\$25	\$10–\$25

\$600–\$800	\$25–\$35	\$10–\$35
\$800–1,000	\$35–\$45	\$10–\$45
\$1,000–1,200	\$45–\$55	\$10–\$55
\$1200–\$1400	\$55–\$65	\$20–\$65
\$1,400–\$1,600	\$65–\$80	\$20–\$80
\$1600 and up of income	\$80 + 7.5 percent	
over \$1600	\$30 and up	

Every branch should aim to become self-reliant financially, in order to fund its own local activities (meeting room costs, printing flyers, etc.). In addition, when inviting outside speakers, branches need to cover the speaker’s travel costs.

There are many creative ways for branches to raise money. Some colleges have large honoraria funds available to fund speakers with academic credentials (including book authors), and ISO members on campuses should try to navigate the bureaucracy to access honoraria for invited speakers. This can be difficult at the beginning, but we are as deserving to access such funds as other student organizations on any campus.

Fundraising should be an ongoing aspect of every branch’s activity. Besides yard sales, car washes, parties and concerts, branches can brainstorm about new and creative ways to raise money – such as having a “Change for change” jar that gets passed around at every meeting – which over time can make a difference.

And keep in mind that fundraising events can and should be about more than raising money. Radical film series, Socialist holiday parties (such as May Day or International Women’s Day) and other fundraisers are also political events, which can draw in not only members but allies and other activists that we work with in movements.

### **Socialist Worker**

Socialist Worker is the main publication of the ISO and its leading public face aside from members. *Socialist Worker* has been a newspaper since the ISO’s founding, and is currently published on a monthly basis, while SocialistWorker.org has taken on greater importance in recent years -- and has expanded its readership well beyond the ISO’s membership. In both formats, *SW* is a crucial tool for reaching out to a wider audience for socialist politics.

*SW* is more than just a tool for putting forward socialist views and publicizing the ISO’s analysis of political events. We use the Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin’s conception of the uses of a revolutionary paper to understand the roles both *Socialist Worker* and SocialistWorker.org can play for us. Lenin summarized those ideas in the article “What is to be done?”

*The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect,*

*it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organization will naturally take shape that will engage, not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence these events.*

In other words, *SW* is also a crucial tool in the ways it creates a concrete relationship with an audience for socialist ideas. Selling the paper and promoting the Website identifies the people who are interested in the organization and puts us in a tangible, face-to-face relationship. In addition, ISO members gain from conversations with *SW* readers because the process of ongoing political engagement with nonmembers helps *members* learn to articulate our politics more effectively to those outside the organization.

Even though the SocialistWorker.org website has taken on more importance for the ISO, we continue to publish and sell a paper edition. Selling the newspaper is an important part of being a member of the organization.

Branches organize tabling events in communities and on campuses on a weekly basis where selling the paper is an important part – sometimes the main thing – we’ll want to be doing. Tablings have to be planned carefully. There should be signs to draw people’s attention, and a well-organized table with petitions, leaflets for upcoming meetings and protests, the *ISR*, and some basic books on ISO politics. Whether you’re asking people to sign a petition, to buy the paper or to take a leaflet about an important struggle or upcoming ISO event, you should be confident and thinking about how to engage people who are interested in the ISO.

We also sell the paper as a part of how we relate to political events like demonstrations or public forums. Again, the priority isn’t selling as many papers as possible but identifying the people who are interested in our politics and beginning a discussion with them. For the same reason, members are expected to buy five or more copies of each issue, and to sell individually to workmates, friends, etc. with the goal of building a political relationship with people who are sympathetic to the ISO and could be drawn closer to the organization. Members should also be reading SocialistWorker.org regularly – hopefully every day, since it is updated daily during the week. The website provides news of struggles we are involved in around the organization and also provides a political analysis of important issues. Members should promote the website to anyone interested in socialist politics as the place to go regularly for news and views from the left – this is an important way of increasing the ISO’s profile. Be sure to send out articles from the site by e-mail or to activist listservs. *Socialist Worker* has a Facebook page that members should promote if they’re FB users, as well as contributing its presence on other social media.

## **Branch structures**

### **The Branch Committee**

As described above, branches that grow to more than eight or nine members should elect a branch leadership – a branch committee – to help organize the branch's activities. Much of a branch's ability to grow and to gain political experience depends on the effectiveness of its branch committee.

A branch committee's responsibilities are twofold, and it should hold regular meetings to achieve them:

First, it must make sure that the branch's routines (branch meetings, literature tablings, dues payments, etc.) are established and consistently carried out. *This does not mean that the branch committee must directly organize every activity – that would be counterproductive.* Instead, the branch committee must make sure that someone in the branch is organizing each activity. The goal for every branch is to encourage all members to participate fully in carrying out branch responsibilities. This goal can only be achieved through comradely inspiration and motivation. Once members understand *why* a particular activity is important – such as fundraising – they are much more easily convinced to take responsibility for achieving the branch's goals.

Second, the branch committee helps the entire branch chart a political direction by regularly assessing the state of the branch and its involvement in movements, the success of fractions and activities, political questions that need to be addressed, and other political challenges facing the branch at any given time. In other words, the tasks of the branch committee are not "mechanical" or "bureaucratic"; rather, they require political judgment, confidence, leadership and flair.

The branch committee should be composed of branch members whose political judgment and experience, enthusiasm for the politics, and commitment to the organization are high. Every branch should elect its branch committee on an annual basis, but can also hold an election whenever necessary if the majority of the branch agrees to it.

## **Other Branch Leadership Roles**

Each branch, in order to be successful, will need individual members to take responsibility for the coordination of certain areas of work – and the larger the branch, the more areas of work there are. The biggest branches should have a branch organizer, a membership coordinator, a contact coordinator, a treasurer, a *Socialist Worker* organizer, a literature organizer, an *International Socialist Review* organizer, and an organizer for each of the branch's fractions.

Branch committee members should play some of these roles, while other members in the branch can fulfill the rest. In smaller branches, one branch committee member might be able to take on more than one of these roles, while in larger branches that becomes less efficient.

The following are brief descriptions of the duties of the various organizers and coordinators in a branch:

- **The branch organizer:** The branch organizer is the member who is responsible for the overall direction of the branch. This person should be prepared to propose meeting topics and activities for the branch to organize

around and to offer a political lead to the branch based on current ISO perspectives. *Keep in mind that these should all come in the way of proposals and not decisions, since the branch should make these decisions in branch meetings to ensure branch democracy.*

- **The membership coordinator:** The membership coordinator keeps track of the status and development of both long-standing and new members. When someone joins the ISO, the membership coordinator works to involve the new member in branch activities and to help broaden their understanding of the ISO's politics. When someone joins the ISO the membership coordinator should organize a formal meeting with one or several new members to review the organization's formal requirements for membership and to answer any questions – political or organizational – that new members might have.
- **The contact coordinator:** The contact coordinator makes sure that branch members are in regular contact with nonmembers who have expressed an interest in the ISO. And keep in mind that, despite the wonders of internet communication, there is still no substitute for personal phone calls and face-to-face meetings.

The contact coordinator also takes charge of branch mailing lists and sign-up sheets with an eye toward focusing on the nonmembers who seem the most interesting in getting involved with the ISO.

The contact coordinator should make sure that all branch comrades are engaging people around us in ongoing political discussion and activity, with the aim of convincing them of Marxist politics and the need for socialist organization.

- **The treasurer:** The treasurer is responsible for collecting monthly dues from branch members (and signing them up for automatic dues withdrawal), coordinating branch fundraising activities, and sending funds to the national office.
- **The Socialist Worker organizer:** The SW organizer oversees distribution, sales, and payment for the print paper. This person also assigns members to write articles for SocialistWorker.org. The more articles branches write about local events, the better SocialistWorker.org becomes as a left resource. Our goal is for all members to be thinking proactively about contributing articles to the website on an ongoing basis.
- **The literature organizer:** The literature organizer makes sure that the branch has a full stock of books and pamphlets, pays its literature bills and promotes relevant literature within the branch and to nonmembers. The literature organizer should also help to make sure that the branch organizes regular literature tablings.
- **The International Socialist Review (ISR) organizer:** The ISR organizer encourages members and nonmembers to take out a subscription to the ISR, finds local bookstores to carry the ISR, and uses articles from current and back issues of the ISR to help educate ISO members. The ISR organizer

should also make sure that the branch sells the *ISR* to contacts and allies, and at movement meetings and demonstrations.

- **The fraction organizer:** Each fraction should have a fraction organizer. The fraction organizer makes sure that the fraction meets regularly and puts forward proposals for consideration at the fraction's meeting, in consultation with other comrades in the fraction. The fraction organizer should also make sure to provide periodic reports to the branch committee or branch organizer and the branch as whole, at branch meetings.

## **Branch "routines" are a springboard for involvement in struggle**

The branch roles and routines described above are not by any means the sum total of branch work. On the contrary, a branch's routine is the springboard that allows the branch to play a more effective role in struggle. As Karl Marx argued, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." The ISO is not a talk shop but an activist organization.

Well-established routines make it possible for branches to respond quickly to changing political conditions and to help to initiate struggle alongside other activists whenever needed. New branches should be prepared for some challenges in establishing the branch routines, but once they have been politically motivated and established as the branch norm, they will become second nature to branch members. The result: a strong branch, with members always on the lookout for opportunities to become involved in local struggles, whenever they arise.

## **Building movements**

There is no shortage of movement activity and opportunities for struggle. These struggles may or may not be large, but many of the small struggles taking place today have the potential to develop into future mass movements. And many of today's movement leaders will become tomorrow's revolutionaries.

*The ISO does not involve itself in struggles just to "recruit" from them and walk away.* On the contrary, we aim to involve our members in every opportunity for meaningful struggle in every locality – and we build all genuine movements, whether or not they result in new ISO members. Struggle – and in particular, class struggle – is the only way to advance that aim.

In addition, ISO members adhere to a set of principles that require our members to respond to attacks, however small the response beyond ourselves. These include opposition to imperialist escapades, mobilizations against fascists and the KKK, responding to attacks on the oppressed, and participation in class struggles. More generally, ISO members aim to build strong grassroots movements that can advance the struggles of the working-class and the oppressed, the world over.

At the same time, Marxism provides the only way forward for human society. This recognition requires that we build a revolutionary socialist movement, and ISO members aim to win others to Marxism and to involve them with the ISO's activities. Building the ISO is never counterposed to building movements. Far from weakening existing movements, a stronger ISO will help to strengthen them at the grassroots.

## **The national organization**

The branch is the representative of the ISO at the local level, but the ISO is a national organization, and its policies and positions are set at the national, rather than branch, level. The annual national convention, which brings together elected delegates from every branch of the ISO, is the ISO's highest decision-making body. It assesses the ISO nationally and votes on plans to move the ISO forward in the coming year.

Between conventions, the ISO steering committee (SC), elected by branch delegates at the national convention, is empowered to make decisions related to the day-to-day functioning of the ISO. This includes producing all of the ISO's publications, including *Socialist Worker* newspaper and the daily website of SocialistWorker.org, and the *ISO Notes*. (The *ISO Notes* is an internal publication that is circulated to all members every 2-3 weeks with reports on the activities of the organization.)

There are two other national leadership structures in the ISO: 1) The national committee (NC); 2) the national branch council (NBC).

- 1) **The NC:** The ISO elects the national committee (NC) at its annual convention. The NC is a national leadership body that is broader than the SC, which meets two to three times per year with the SC to discuss a range of political issues, perspectives, strategies in movements, etc. in between national conventions.
- 2) **The NBC:** The national branch council (NBC) is a consultative body that meets with representatives of the steering committee via monthly conference calls (which can be scheduled more frequently if needed). Every branch is entitled to a representative to the NBC. This representative should be the branch organizer or, if the branch organizer is unable to attend the conference calls on a consistent basis, another comrade elected to represent the branch. Members who are in localities with fewer than five members (and therefore too small to constitute a branch) can request observer status on the NBC by emailing the ISO Organizing Department.

At the national convention, the national organization sets out a general perspective, which is then debated and voted upon by all branch delegates. The steering committee and the national committee are accountable to the decisions made at the national convention, but both also have the authority to implement changes as needed in between conventions. Each local branch, as part of the national organization, should plan its activities with an aim to implement the national perspective. (See "Appendix A: Rules and Procedures" for a more detailed explanation of the national convention and the ISO's national leadership bodies.)

Branches should maintain regular contact with the national office ([orgdept@internationalsocialist.org](mailto:orgdept@internationalsocialist.org)), regional organizers, and district organizers, who exist in large cities that have several branches. This contact allows branches to discuss branch successes and problems, to get ideas for branch activities, and to clarify the organization's positions on fast-breaking political developments. Branches should also contact the national office to request speakers and materials such as newspapers and membership cards. If a branch would like to invite a speaker from

the national office, the branch should plan to defray the costs of travel for that speaker, as discussed above.

## **Decision-making and leadership in the ISO**

As described above, the ISO is not a collective of autonomous local branches, but a national organization with a national perspective. This flows from our overriding political task – to play a role in creating a future revolutionary party capable of coordinating class struggle on a national scale against a centralized and powerful ruling class. This task by definition requires a degree of centralization within the organization.

As described above, the national convention is the highest decision-making body in the organization. But the organization cannot function solely on decisions made by its annual convention. The pace of struggle requires an elected national leadership capable of making day-to-day decisions about the ISO's publications and its actions based on the general perspectives of the organization in between national conventions.

Just as we recognize the necessity of organized leadership within the working class movement, we recognize the necessity of organized leadership within a revolutionary organization. Our organization is action-oriented, so it must be able to take action at a moment's notice – and this requires members to entrust its democratically elected leadership with the authority to make the necessary decisions.

At the same time, our aim is to develop an ever-widening layer of *leadership* among members – people capable of taking initiative, thinking on their feet, and leading our work. Such members we call "cadre": self-selecting members committed to developing themselves as Marxist activists. This involves a serious approach to both Marxist education and activist experience, with the aim of earning leadership over time in the struggles in which we are involved.

We are therefore both democratic and centralist, described by Lenin as "democratic centralist." Our basic approach to organizing can be summed up by the phrase, "freedom of discussion; unity in action." Keep in mind, however, that the ISO's political principles are also set by our adherence to Marxism. Our opposition to racism is a principle that is not open to dispute, for example.

Without debate, discussion, and democratic decision-making, the organization would be unable to elicit the fullest political commitment and input from each member, or to generalize from experiences within the organization, which will naturally vary by individual, branch, region, and area of work. Full debate and discussion are necessary to develop a national perspective, which we do annually at the ISO convention.

## **The how to's:**

- **How to organize a public meeting, step by step**

1. **Find a location:** Aim for a room that you can fill safely. Better a packed small room than a half-empty auditorium!

2. **The flyer is the most important thing:** Make the flyer large and easy to read from across the street. Also, make it interesting! The text should be short (a few sentences are good) and attempt to provoke questions and interest in the topic rather than explaining the whole issue. That's what the meeting is for. Too many words only take away from the main point. Be certain to include the date, time, and exact location of your meeting on the poster, along with directions and phone number information.
3. **Invite and confirm speakers:** Name an approximate date, never less than a couple of weeks away. If you are expecting speakers from out of town for big public meetings, four weeks of preparation time is best. The speaker will need time to prepare the talk and make travel arrangements, and your branch will want time to build and publicize the meeting. You should allow ten days to two weeks of preparation for speakers from your own branch.
4. **Decide the purpose of the meeting:** What do you want to talk to cover and what kind of audience are you aiming for? Make sure to communicate this to the speaker ahead of time.
5. **Make sure that all comrades are asking nonmembers to attend the meeting:** Comrades should also work to make the necessary arrangements to help nonmembers get to the meeting, such as offering rides or meet-ups.
6. **Make sure that wider publicity is taking place:** Meetings should not be publicized just through social websites and emails but also postering flyers far and wide. When postering, however, please note that there are new legal restrictions in place since 9/11 that allow police to fine organizations that poster in banned public places. *For this reason, the ISO does not endorse its members placing flyers in public places where prohibited by local or state law. Examples may include mailboxes, light poles or signposts. Members are encouraged to verify their state and local law for application regulations. All flyers should be marked "Do not post where prohibited."*
7. **Try to get stories or interviews on local radio stations or in newspapers with the speaker:** If you can provide a newsworthy angle, they may run a story or an interview that includes details of the meeting.
8. **Assign a comrade to organize a literature table for the meeting:** The table should have books and pamphlets relevant to the topic of the meeting, along with a general selection of Marxist literature – including the *ISR* and *Socialist Worker*.

- **How to chair a public meeting:**

**Starting the meeting:** Remember that the chairperson is the first to speak. The impression you create is important. The key point is to appear confident and welcoming (after all, we should make it clear that we are pleased to see all attendees).

If you are not very confident, it is better to write out your opening remarks. These remarks are not just a formality – they should get the attention of the audience and prepare the way for the speaker.

You should have a conversation with the speaker beforehand and make sure that you are on the same page about the title of the talk (it's surprising how often chairpersons announce something other than the topic that the speaker prepared for). Also make sure that the speaker understands how much time is allotted for the talk. Finally, ask the speaker how he or she wishes to be introduced when you make your opening remarks to the audience.

Experienced chairpersons have all sorts of opening gambits, but beginners should feel free to use a simple and obvious approach. It might go something like this:

"Good evening and welcome to this meeting of the [your city here] branch of the International Socialist Organization. Tonight, [name of speaker, along with relevant details about speaker] is going to speak on [topic of meeting].

"She will speak for 30 minutes [or whatever time has been fixed], and then we will have plenty of time for questions and discussion. Without further ado, I will turn it over to [speaker's name]."

You should be ready to vary your remarks when warranted by circumstances. If a few people are standing at the back even though there are empty seats in front (people always sit at the back first), you should coax them forward. You can say something like, "There are a few seats toward the front. It would probably be more comfortable for everyone and save the speaker's voice if everyone could move forward."

Then you should pause, coax them more if necessary, and give them time to move. Also, make sure everyone knows that you are glad to see them, even if you have only five people when you expected fifty.

Similarly, if you have a packed room and people are shuffling in while you speak, don't hesitate to say, "We'll wait a minute or two so everyone can get settled."

A final word on manner: Stand up to speak when possible, unless the meeting is very small. Speak clearly and not too quickly. Never mumble. Address the audience, not the floor.

**During the talk:** Not all speakers always know when to stop talking. This can often be avoided if the chairperson goes through what is needed with the speaker before the talk.

Also, little notes with "10 minutes left," "5 minutes left," (or in whatever increments the speaker prefers), "WRAP UPI" or "STOP!!!" (in large letters) should be put in front of the speaker at the appropriate times during the course of their talk. This can help the speaker edit the talk on the fly and keep it from going on too long.

It is the chairperson's job to see that the speaker sticks more or less to the allotted time, to allow ample time for discussion. No one else can do it. However, if a speaker has the audience enthralled well beyond the allotted time, or if it would be politically difficult to call a stop, the chairperson should not do so. These decisions require on-the-spot judgments, and the chairperson should make them politically.

Interruptions pose a less frequent difficulty. Audiences usually are incredibly patient, but now and then you will get a little heckling. Experienced speakers who know their

stuff ought to be able to deal with this – indeed, they can probably turn it to their advantage. The intervention of the chair is not called for unless things look like they are getting out of hand.

If the interruptions are developing into a real nuisance, then, of course, it is your job to stop it. The thing to remember is this: You have to carry the audience with you. Stand up, stop the speaker and say, "Just a second," and in a patient but firm fashion, appeal to the heckler and the audience: "We are allotting plenty of time for questions and comments after the speaker is finished. It would be helpful if people would allow [speaker's name] to finish and save their own contributions for the discussion period. Everyone who wants to will get a turn to speak, so let's have things run in an orderly fashion. And please respect the chair."

Normally, if this is put across in a pleasant, confident manner it will do the trick. If it doesn't, you will have to repeat your request. As a last resort, warn hecklers that if they persist, they will be asked to leave. This is a very rare situation.

Tact and good humor will usually carry the day.

**Questions and discussion:** Once the talk is finished, you can give the audience a chance to formulate questions by passing around the ISO mailing list and making one or two short announcements. Set a time limit (3 minutes is ample) for contributions. Inform the audience of this limit and apply it impartially to all. Leave room for questions to be taken up from the floor before returning it to the speaker, but do allow the speaker to respond to questions as needed. If there are a number of questions on the floor that haven't been addressed by the audience, it makes sense for the speaker to get a chance to respond.

It is generally a good idea at the very beginning to ask people to raise questions if they have them. This can encourage people to get their disagreements out early rather than at the very end of the discussion period, which provides for a fuller conversation.

One common problem is a questioner who doesn't understand the difference between asking a question and making a speech. This person must be tactfully but firmly be kept to a three-minute time limit. Make sure that everyone has a fair chance to ask a question or formulate a disagreement, but don't allow anyone to carry on a dialog with the speaker to the exclusion of less pushy, but perhaps more useful, questioners.

When time or the discussion has run out, call it to an end.

If there are activities planned that relate to the topic of the meeting, the comrade coordinating the activity should make a brief announcement, calling on others to get involved. Then make any brief announcements from the chair with care and cheerfulness. Be sure to advertise other literature and ISO pamphlets available on the book table, calling attention to anything that might be particularly relevant to the subject of the meeting.

Make sure to announce the restaurant or bar where you will be gathering for more informal discussion after the meeting, and don't forget to thank people for coming.

- **How to chair an ISO branch meeting**

In a branch meeting, the role of the chairperson is also absolutely vital. The chair can make the difference between brisk and pleasant meetings where people leave feeling that they have done something useful, and chaotic, tedious, and unnecessarily lengthy sessions. To achieve a desirable end, chairpersons need the same skills as for a public meeting, but they also need knowledge of the rudiments of procedure.

**The agenda:** Every organizing meeting, however small, needs an agenda. An agenda is simply a list of the items of business, the order in which they will be discussed and suggested time limits for each item (branch members can always vote to extend discussion on a particular item, while tabling another item to the next meeting to keep to a two-hour time limit).

It is the branch committee's or branch organizer's job to draft a proposed agenda. It is important that the agenda is realistic. It is pointless to try to get through too many items at one session, so it is important to make sure that the meeting does not struggle with an absurdly long agenda. Consider what is likely to be feasible and construct the agenda accordingly.

It is the chairperson's job to put it to the meeting for approval or amendment.

Often members will propose additions to the agenda. Remember that not every item proposed should be added to the agenda. Perhaps the majority doesn't want to discuss that particular item. The proposal to add or delete an item must be put to a vote. In general, the less discussion had about the agenda, the better. If the branch organizer and chairperson have done their jobs properly beforehand, acceptance of the agenda will take less than 5 minutes, and the meeting time will be conserved for matters of substance.

Once an agenda is adopted, it is your job to see that it is adhered to – and that members do not raise extraneous points that take the branch away from the agenda.

- **How to become an effective public speaker**

**Composing your speech:** Writing a speech is not the same as writing an article. No ironclad rule dictates how you should prepare your speech. The only goal is to make sure you are prepared to talk to your audience in a manner that is easily understandable.

One useful method of structuring a talk is the "topic method." The speech is broken down into a series of smaller topics or sections in outline form, and each section is a miniature speech in itself, which can be written and learned separately.

It is easier to keep this list of topics in mind, and have them written down as an outline, than to think of the address as a whole. On the platform, you start on number one and continue on that point while your thoughts last. If you think that you are grinding to a halt, then you can jump to the next topic. The audience will not

realize that something has been left out, so it isn't necessary to disrupt the whole speech trying to insert a forgotten fact.

Some speakers prefer to list the topics and then to put flesh on those bones. Others can't work this way. They prefer to develop an entire theme before going on to the next. Whatever the technique, the end product can be sorted into sections for use on the platform. This will help you construct the argument in a logical way, as each step develops from the last.

Using this basic structure, and with your target audience in mind, choose one or two key themes or arguments that you want to make sure you get across clearly. Then you need to set forward your arguments with facts to back them up – and articles from SocialistWorker.org and the *International Socialist Review* both provide indispensable information to help support your arguments. Writing a talk should not be an agonizing experience when the ISO's publications provide you with the all the research necessary.

When it comes to drafting your speech, the ideas must come through strong and clear. At every stage, check that what you've written is relevant. Make sure that you are telling a story, and remember that all good stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. After a long or complicated point, it often helps to illustrate the point by a simple story or joke, but make sure it is simple and based on the common experience of the audience.

One fault of many speakers is to include too much detail, which leaves everyone's head spinning full of statistics, percentages, and government reports. Another common fault is the use of jargon or technical words without explanation. Beware of assuming that your audience already knows the ins and outs of a trade or academic pursuit that may have taken you five years to learn.

One final point: A sentence may look like a work of art on paper, but in a speech, long, complicated sentences and paragraphs will only confuse matters. Keep it simple and straightforward. Practicing out loud will help you identify which sentences or phrases won't work when you're on the platform. It will also help you get a sense of how long your presentation will take to deliver – another common mistake to avoid is trying to cram too much material into too short a timeframe. If you practice beforehand, you'll find out if your twenty minute speech will really take forty minutes to deliver, and you'll be able to work on cutting it down before the meeting, before the pressure is on.

Delivering your speech: Unless your memory is truly extraordinary it will be impossible to remember the whole speech. A speech is really a series of small topics and can be remembered as such.

Don't read or recite what is in front of you. Say it out loud as naturally and conversationally as possible. It is important that your voice varies. When it is time to face the audience, address the back rows of the room. This will make sure that everyone can hear you. During the speech, there is no need to panic if you dry up on one section, or forget a part. Stop and look at your notes, pause, and continue.

And on the other hand, if you get a sudden burst of inspiration and depart from your notes, just pick up where you left off. Be aware of time, however – it's all too easy to

go off on a tangent for longer than you realize, and then find yourself needing to cut your talk on the fly at the end of your allotted time.

Lastly, there are useful tips on public speaking available for free on the Toastmasters website:

<http://www.toastmasters.org/MainMenuCategories/FreeResources/NeedHelpGivingASpeech.aspx>

**Discussion after your speech:** For many speakers, the most terrifying moment of the meeting comes when it is time to answer questions. Remember, the audience is basically on your side, and any hostile or aggressive questioner will not have their sympathy. You should answer any question in a good-humored, natural way.

If you are stuck, it is often useful to refer back to your speech. If one particular question really floors you, then don't be afraid to say that you are not sure what you think. No one should expect you to have all the answers to every question. It is always better to be honest than try to bamboozle the audience. Whatever you decide the final score was on the evening's performance, it will be much easier the next time.

## • **How to write for SocialistWorker.org**

We don't want the articles published at SocialistWorker.org to fit into a single mold, so they sound like they are all written by the same person. But there are some basic ingredients in all good stories, and some common mistakes that are important to avoid. Here are a few suggestions that may help comrades planning to write an article for the website or paper:

- Remember that you're telling a story to a few people who may know the background to a protest or a political argument, but a lot of people who don't. So be sure to lay out the basic facts right from the start. The rule of journalism is that a news story should answer as many of "the 5 Ws" as possible in the first sentence or two—who, what, when, where and why. Try to think of whether you've answered these questions as you write.
- Check your facts carefully. Nothing discredits an article, a writer and a publication as quickly as getting basic information wrong. That includes the names of people, institutions, organizations, etc.
- Don't try to write like the *New York Times*, or – worse yet – an academic journal. These publications are designed to twist the reality of what's taking place, or at the very least, speak to an audience of specialists with their own special lingo, so they use language that complicates and confuses. When you write for SocialistWorker.org, use a clear and simple style. As George Orwell said in "Why I Write," "good prose is like a window pane." He meant good writing doesn't draw attention to itself, but to the ideas, facts and events that the writing is about.
- Be careful when using left or socialist terms. Remember that a lot of readers won't have a background in left-wing politics, so try as much as possible to define any terms you use, and to fill in the political and historical background for readers who are new to an issue.

- Be concise. There's no reason to write more than we need to, especially if the protests or activism we're reporting on are still modest. Relate the facts, give a flavor of the event, let people who participated say what they think via quotations, and wrap it up.
- Part of using a simple style means using the most descriptive and understandable language that you can. Orwell again: "Never use a long word where a short one will do."
- If you're repeating someone's ideas or research – even if you're paraphrasing them you should cite where they came from. This is important not just in avoiding plagiarism, but in giving your writing the authority of having sources to support it.
- Let people's voices be heard. Often, the most effective and persuasive points come from the people whose stories we're telling. If you can quote someone talking about the lessons they learned from a struggle, that's much better than putting the same points in your own words. Remember that the subject of your story is more important than how you write about it.
- Don't try to write an article that will answer every question about a particular issue. Especially in news stories about activism—but also in opinion articles—the more specific the focus of an article, the more effective it will be.
- You don't need to make the case for socialist revolution or explain how the Obama administration has disappointed its supporters in every article. Remember that your article will be one among many on the website or in the paper edition of *Socialist Worker*. You can count on the rest of the publication to take up the full range of socialist politics. If you can stay focused on the immediate details of what you're writing about and the specific political arguments that flow from them, your article will be more effective.

## **Appendix A: ISO Rules and Procedures**

### **ISO Rules and Procedures**

Adopted at the ISO founding convention, July 1978. Amended: 1980 convention, October 1983 special convention, 1984 convention, 1990 convention, 1991 convention, 1993 convention, 1994 convention, 1995 convention, 1996 convention, 1997 convention, July 2005 special convention.

#### **Preface**

The International Socialist Organization is an organization of revolutionary socialists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism internationally and the construction of a world socialist system.

The ISO stands in and develops the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky as opposed to the social democratic and Stalinist traditions. Standing as it does in this tradition, the ISO believes that the working class is the only force capable of building socialism in the world. Therefore, it strives to construct a revolutionary party composed in its overwhelming majority of workers.

The ISO stands for democratic centralism because the revolutionary party must be a disciplined, activist combat organization. It is democratic in reaching its decisions and centralist in carrying them out. The lower bodies of the organization are subordinated to the higher bodies, and all are subordinated to the delegated convention.

A revolutionary party is the instrument of the revolutionary struggle of the working class and bends its every effort to support and sustain that struggle.

#### **Rules**

##### **I. Name**

The name of the organization is the International Socialist Organization (hereafter referred to as "the ISO").

##### **II. Membership**

**A.** A member is one who agrees with the politics of the ISO (as outlined in "Where We Stand"), accepts its constitution, pays dues, and works within and under the direction of the appropriate bodies of the organization. Where possible, all members shall be members of an appropriate trade union. Every member must take and sell *Socialist Worker*.

**B.** Applicants for membership must sign a membership form. A membership card will be issued to each member. Membership must be renewed each year.

**C.** The basic unit of the ISO is the branch. A branch shall consist of not less than five (5) members who reside close enough to each other to meet regularly to carry out political activity.

**D.** Every member will belong to a duly constituted branch of the ISO. In areas where no branch exists, the Steering Committee (SC) will admit applicants as members-at-large.

**E.** Each member must pay monthly dues according to the dues schedule set by the Convention. Members-at-large will pay dues directly to the national center.

**F.** Any member more than six (6) months in arrears in dues is no longer considered a member of the ISO.

**G.** Disciplinary measures (suspension, censure, expulsion) are taken in case of need by branches, the National Committee or the Steering Committee. The disciplined member(s) have the right to respond to charges once in the internal bulletin. Disciplined members may appeal disciplinary decisions to an Appeals Committee composed of two at-large members elected by the National Convention, and one Steering Committee member. The Appeals Committee will report to the National Convention.

**H.** Any member or group of members has the right to call a caucus.

### **III. National convention**

**A.** The National Convention is the highest governing body of the organization. It shall be held once per year. The National Convention sets policy for the ISO, and it elects the Steering Committee and the Appeals Committee. Its decisions shall be binding on the entire membership

**B.** The national convention is composed of branch delegates elected by majority vote in each branch. Representation at the convention shall be proportionally based upon the dues-paying membership in good standing at the time of the Convention. The ratio of representation is set by the National Committee. The current delegate ratio is as follows: one delegate for the first five (5) dues paying members, and one delegate for every eight (8) members thereafter. Stated numerically, branches would receive one delegate for 5–12 dues-paying members, two delegates for 13–20 dues-paying members, three delegates for 21–28 dues-paying members, four delegates for 29–36 dues-paying members.

**C.** The National Committee shall issue the call for the convention at least sixty (60) days prior to the date of the convention for discussion of convention topics in branches and among members-at-large. An internal bulletin shall be issued during this preconvention discussion. Steering Committee documents shall begin appearing no later than two (2) weeks prior to the convention.

**D.** The Convention will select a Convention steering committee to seat delegates and to handle questions of procedure. All resolutions and elections at the Convention will be settled by majority vote. The Steering Committee will report convention decisions and votes to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the convention ends.

**E.** Special conventions may be called by a majority of the membership polled at branch meetings after the issues of such a convention are discussed.

### **IV. Administrative**

**A.** Between national Conventions, the authority of the Convention is vested in the Steering Committee (SC) elected by the Convention, and in the National Committee (NC).

**B.** The Steering Committee is responsible for implementing the ISO's perspectives and initiatives as decided by the convention. The SC directs the ISO's work, functioning as the national authority of the ISO between conventions and NC meetings. The SC is responsible for organizing a national office, for overseeing the production of ISO literature, and for staffing the organization.

**C.** Members of the National Committee shall be elected annually by the national Convention. The size of the NC shall be determined at the Convention at the same time.

**D.** Between Conventions, the National Committee can make decisions on immediate questions and on questions tabled to it by the convention. The SC will report NC decisions and votes to the membership no later than sixty (60) days after the NC Meeting. The National Committee's decisions are binding on the organization as a whole.

**E.** The number of delegates to which each branch is entitled for its representation to a national meeting is based upon the number of its dues paying members as of 30 days before the national

meeting is to take place. Payment must continue in the month of the national meeting for the branch to be considered in good standing.

**F.** Any branch that fails to pay share of travel assessments for delegates plane fare to a national meeting will be considered a branch not in good standing, and its delegates will not be seated at the next national meeting. In order to ensure timely payment for delegates plane fares to national meetings, travel assessments are due to the national center prior to the national meeting. Thus, if a national meeting takes place on October 25, travel assessments should be included with October dues, to be paid by October 15. If the national meeting takes place on August 3, assessments should be paid along with July 2, to be paid by July 15.

**V. Amendments**

Amendments shall be made to these rules by majority vote of the National Convention.

**VI. Press**

All ISO publications—print and electronic—are subject to the direction of the organization and of the Steering Committee.

**ISO dues structure**  
 ——— **Monthly dues** ———

<b>Monthly net income</b>	<b>Members w/out children</b>	<b>Members w/ children</b>
\$500-\$600	\$20-\$25	\$10-\$25
\$600-\$800	\$25-\$35	\$10-\$35
\$800-1,000	\$35-\$45	\$10-\$45
\$1,000-1,200	\$45-\$55	\$10-\$55
\$1200-\$1400	\$55-\$65	\$20-\$65
\$1,400-\$1,600	\$65-\$80	\$20-\$80
\$1600 and up of income	\$80 + 7.5 percent	
over \$1600	\$30 and up	

The range of dues payments for members with children is intended to reflect varying circumstances of members (number of children, number of earners in the family, etc.). Those with more children and fewer earners should pay in the lower range, while those with additional earners and fewer children should pay in the higher range.

Any member with particularly difficult financial circumstances or unusually high expenses may negotiate a lower rate of payment with their branch treasurer, or in the case of members at large, with the national treasurer.

**Appendix B: Automatic Dues Withdrawal Form**

**International Socialist Organization  
Dues Auto-pay Authorization Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Last, First, Middle Initial

**Choose one:**

**New enrollment**

Complete, sign and return  
This form. Please attach  
a voided check to the form.

**Cancel participation**

Sign below and return this  
form.

**Increase/Lower**

Please circle one and  
return this form. Fill in  
new amount below.

**Bank Information**

Bank name: \_\_\_\_\_

Routing number\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Account number: \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of account (check one):    Checking     Savings

**\*Your bank's routing number is printed on your checks. It is the 9-digit number in the bottom-left corner.**

I hereby authorize and request the International Socialist Organization and the financial institution listed above to debit the indicated bank account in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ on the 16th day of each month.

I understand that I ***may terminate this agreement by giving notice to the International Socialist Organization.*** I may do this at any time in writing, but must also allow a reasonable amount of time after receipt for the International Socialist Organization to act upon it. ***I also understand that additional service charges may apply if payment is returned due to insufficient funds.***

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Remember to attach a voided check***

You may fax in a copy with a voided check to 773-583-6144 in order get this form in before the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, but you must follow it up by mailing the hard copy to the ISO, P.O. Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616.

**Appendix C:**

**Becoming a Marxist**

ISO Education Department

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**A suggested reading list for new members\***

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• **Before joining the ISO:**

By the time you join you should have read:

1. *Where We Stand: The Politics of the International Socialist Organization* (published by the ISO Education Department)
2. *The Meaning of Marxism*, by Paul D'Amato

Hopefully, you will also be planning to soon read:

1. *The Case for Socialism* by Alan Maass
2. *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, edited by Phil Gasper

• **During the first year or so:**

*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* by Frederick Engels

*The two Souls of Socialism*, by Hal Draper

*Left Wing Communism* by V.I. Lenin

"Disorders of the Left Kind" by Adam Turl  
([www.isreview.org/issues/37/infantile.shtml](http://www.isreview.org/issues/37/infantile.shtml))

*State and Revolution* by V.I. Lenin

*Imperialism* by V.I. Lenin

*Party and Class* by Cliff, Hallas, Harman, and Trotsky

*Reform or Revolution* by Rosa Luxemburg

*Black Liberation and Socialism* by Ahmed Shawki

*Subterranean Fire* by Sharon Smith

*Women and Socialism* by Sharon Smith

*Sexuality and Socialism* by Sherry Wolf

*The Democrats: A Critical History* by Lance Selfa

*Forging of the American Empire* by Sidney Lens

\* Unless noted otherwise, all titles are available from [haymarketbooks.org](http://haymarketbooks.org)