

# United States: The ISO's vote to dissolve and what comes next

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**SocialistWorker.org reports on the results of an organization-wide online poll to determine what's next in the wake of the ISO's organizational crisis.**

MEMBERS AND recent ex-members of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) have decided to dissolve the organization and end publication of *SocialistWorker.org* over the coming weeks, but also to support several working groups and initiatives going forward, and to work toward continued collaboration in rebuilding independent revolutionary socialist organization.

These decisions followed a week of online voting that ended March 29 on nearly two-dozen proposals put forward ahead of an all-member conference call on March 24. Nearly 500 members, participants in disaffiliated branches and recently resigned members took part in the vote.

The decisions came in the wake of a severe crisis in the ISO after information surfaced about a horribly mishandled sexual assault accusation in 2013. An independent disciplinary committee at the time came to the conclusion that an ISO member had clearly violated the organization's code of conduct and should be expelled, but the 2013 Steering Committee interfered with the committee's work, overturned its decision and effectively silenced anyone who dissented from the course it chose.

This report is meant for our comrades and friends on the left, in the U.S. and around the world to explain what the ISO has decided in its voting and what comes next for us. There will be a few more reflections on the crisis in our organization and what it means for all of us in the socialist movement going forward in the coming days before we cease publication — though we intend to keep our work archived at this website into the future.

**AROUND ONE-third** of the active proposals that ISO members voted on concerned the future of the organization itself.

Around 70 percent of those who voted chose proposals that dissolved the ISO in some fashion, versus proposals that delayed the decision or favored the group's continuation, though with major changes.

The proposal that won an outright majority of votes put forward a plan for a period of transition before disbanding. A Crisis Leadership Team — made up of members of the recently elected Steering Committee and National Committee, plus representatives from the ISO's National Branch Council, Survivors' Justice Working Group and #MeToo Commission — is empowered to oversee the process.

One important task in this period will be to provide support for working groups and initiatives that will continue after the ISO disbands.

Many of the ISO's working groups and newly formed caucuses — ranging from the Survivors' Justice Working Group and other working groups to the trans caucus — plan to continue to draw together socialists on a local basis and around the country.

Proposals that directly and indirectly spoke to the future of these formations won strong support. In particular, there was a clear mandate for proposals that center survivors and fight sexual assault. The vote also supported a process for continuing to investigate the 2013 sexual assault case and how a decision then was derailed, and to report the findings publicly.

As for SocialistWorker.org, we will continue to publish for a brief period of a week or two. After SW ends publication, a new blog or website is being established to function, as SW has for the past several weeks, as a public-facing continuation of the internal discussion among ISO members and former members.

Many members passionately supported trying to keep SW going in different forms, but this website and SW's paper edition have always been bound up with the ISO, so our future can't be separated from the organization behind it. We do, however, plan to keep SW online into the future as an archive of the ISO's activism and analysis going back several decades.

**IN THE same spirit**, the proposal for the planned dissolution of the ISO set out a course to keep soon-to-be-former members of the ISO connected, with a goal of contributing to the rebuilding of a revolutionary socialist current on the left into the future.

Many, though not all, branches of the ISO, including those that voted to disaffiliate from the group in recent weeks, are committed to staying together on a local basis. And, of course, the things that brought people around the ISO in the first place — being active in struggles and organizing work, as well as projecting socialist politics — will continue to motivate those who participated in the ISO.

Another proposal with strong support will keep the coordinating committee of the ISO National Branch Council together to be a means to connect local formations during the coming months at least.

This matches the sentiment expressed in the proposal for dissolution for members and groups of members to participate in future discussions that draw out the lessons of the ISO's experience and take up the challenge of revolutionary socialist organization in the future:

*"We are not proposing that we could simply rebuild a new ISO. After a sufficient national break that allows us time to take care of our bodies and minds, we should do a deep dive into the political lessons collectively. We will develop a listserv for those committed to reclaiming our politics, and we will convene monthly Zoom calls to read, argue and debate the politics that can take us forward and figure out what kind of publication and organization comes out of this process."*

There are some specific plans already for advancing this discussion. A proposal for former ISO members to organize regional meet-ups and conferences in the coming months won support.

So did another suggestion for members and groups of former ISO members to continue building the Socialism conference as an important space for the whole left. The conference will take place in Chicago on July 4-7 with an expanded alliance of sponsors, led by Haymarket Books and the Center for Economic Research and Social Change.

All of us who were part of the ISO have been through a wrenching and soul-searching process. As the organization's leadership team pointed out when releasing the vote totals, it will take time for all of us to process, rebuild trust and move ahead.

But for everyone who participated, the ISO's vote to dissolve was the outcome of an honest and passionate discussion about how we could lay the basis for the collective hope we all share: to put forward the politics of socialism from below in the struggles of the future.

### **International Socialist Organization (ISO)**

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### **P.S.**

- Socialist Worker, April 2, 2019:

<https://socialistworker.org/2019/04/02/the-isos-vote-to-dissolve-and-what-comes-next>