

# **WS\_resignation**

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Comrades, I am writing to submit to you my resignation from the Central Committee of the PSL and my resignation from membership.

I have been a member of this organization for 17 years, more than half of my life. When I first joined, I used to sneak out of my parents' house to attend Party meetings and had to open a P.O. box to receive Party literature. I spent years building Party branches in various cities — Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Asheville, Baltimore, Louisville, Lexington and elsewhere. I was elected to the Central Committee three times, and before that was an observer present at every CC meeting for seven years. I worked for over four years on the Loud & Clear podcast alongside Brian Becker, then later on The Socialist Program. When the National Communications Department was established in 2022, I was made its director, and I have written the bulk of both external and internal Party materials for several years now, including ghost-writing materials for individual Party leaders. This is all to say that I have truly dedicated myself to the Party — this has been the singular purpose of my life. I do not make this decision lightly.

In recent years, I have been working in the “Center” of the Party, the New York office, which was established about three years ago, and I have become deeply disturbed by the crystallization of trends which I previously hoped were marks of the organization's newness. These trends are the deep political dishonesty of the organization's top leadership circle; the lack of serious strategic assessment; sectarianism and hostility towards mass organizing; the recklessness of the organization's top leadership; and the marginalization of leaders who raise disagreements on a sincere political basis. I hoped and believed that the maturation of the Party would create the conditions for these problems to be overcome, namely that the emergence of more leaders from the branches could bring a greater health and honesty to the organization. But the reverse has become true. As the top leadership has gained access to more resources and more dutiful personnel, these tendencies have only hardened.

Rather than producing a more thoughtful, more rooted national leadership, I have seen person after person I respected come into the Center only to assimilate into total deference to Brian and Ben Becker, or otherwise quietly leave.

Seeing this, I have many times wanted to leave the organization. These last two years have been the most difficult in my Party tenure. I have wrestled over the

responsibility to fight for “the party” and my recognition that it is not and will not become a true revolutionary party, a vehicle for the working class to win power. These last two years, I have made the calculation to conceal my full political views in order not to be displaced from central leadership, not out of a desire to retain any title but out of serious concern for the irresponsibility of the impulses of the Party's top leaders and a commitment to mitigating them. This is a pitiful position. But I firmly believe that if I had done anything other than this, I would have been rapidly marginalized from meaningful positions of leadership and would not have been able to prevent top Party leadership from making decisions that would endanger the entire membership in gravely serious ways. I have decided now that this is no longer a meaningful contribution to the struggle for socialism.

## Why now

The breaking point for me has been witnessing the profound dishonesty of the Branch Organizing Conference and the hardening of the leadership's antagonism towards organizing the working class.

Comrades do not generally know that the Branch Organizing Conference only came to life because Ben Becker was concerned about bringing the Bylaws changes that he sought to make to the floor of the Party Congress. He worried that the changes, most notably significantly lowering the requirements of membership, would be controversial. His solution was to propose bringing together a body of hand-picked branch leaders to act as an acceptable enough substitution for the Congress to sign off on the changes. But in the process of putting together this group, he got carried away and the idea grew and grew into a de facto second round of the Congress — but without the constitutionally mandated processes, elections, and rights. In the end, the same hesitations over bringing the Bylaws to a vote led to them once again being put off, this time to the Central Committee.

In the end, the Conference became more of a defensive pep rally meant to reinforce, or “unify”, the Party around a celebration of its supposed “vanguard” status in defense against growing internal problems. After the Party Congress, there was a series of quiet resignations from Congress delegates based on concerns with the Party's core political analysis and the suffocation of internal debate. There has also been a growing panic amongst the top Party leadership that several areas are succeeding in developing base building projects and conducting their own internal education. conducting their own internal education.

The Conference became a key venue to check this trend, but with great efforts made to disguise the Party leadership's true aims. Members were not told that their leaders are against base building and mass organizing work, that they view it as being in direct competition with growing the PSL. Members were not told that the leadership is suspicious of branches exploring education beyond that provided nationally from the PSL or TPF.

Instead of making direct interventions that could be debated on their political merits, members were presented with a wildly inflated picture of the PSL's strength and an orientation on the current political landscape that anticipates nearing ruptures of a revolutionary proportion. The practical implication of such an outlook is that members must make their singular focus “building the Party” in preparation for these impending critical openings. They were given cherry picked history lessons on the Bolsheviks and the U.S. Communist Party suggesting the PSL is on the brink of a massive expansion in scale and influence. Members were also presented with promises of a new, expansive and immersive, long-term educational period, a “National Cadre Development Program” that the national leadership will be driving — thus, no need to be driving education at the local level. In reality, this was a last-minute appropriation of an existing multi-part educational series that runs through the PSL's line on the full history of the core debates of the Communist Movement from the 1860s through the fall of the Soviet Union. It was devel-

oped by founding members many years ago, and a couple of branches continue to utilize it as introductory education.

Another instructive example of what has been going on behind the scenes is the semi-controversy that arose around a seemingly new labor orientation given at the conference. In the panel on organization entitled “Building the Organization to Scale,” there was a speech given by a young union member who is not part of the national leadership. It may have seemed curious to attendees that this speech was not given by a member of the Labor Department leadership or Central Committee. That was because Ben and Husayn recognized that the content of this speech was a departure from the previous orientation that had not been run through other Labor Department leaders, and thus sought to distance themselves from direct responsibility for it. The comrade’s speech made the argument that we should reconsider the value and viability of organizing and moving unions. They’re too few, too weak, and too slow. Instead, our orientation to workplace organizing should focus on

slow. Instead, our orientation to workplace organizing should focus on promoting Party literature, forming discussion groups, and recruiting coworkers to the Party and to the Action Network.

This orientation was shocking to many people in the audience, and, immediately, there were texts being exchanged asking about this apparent reorientation. By the time audience comment was through and the speakers were returned to for final comments, the speaker gave a comment that walked back much of what he had said.

In the Central Committee meeting following the conference, Husayn, Ben and Brian Becker made it a point to remark on the speech, distancing themselves. They characterized the speaker as “flippant” and spoke of the problems with “speaking in shorthand.” The reality is that Husayn wrote the talk that the speaker gave. He also wrote the comment the speaker delivered walking it back. Further, this is the orientation that all of them have quietly been giving for some time. This is at least the third time that I have heard this orientation presented. Yet if other leaders were to try to contest the position, they would deny any disagreement.

This maneuvering by the top party leadership is not in and of itself new. I have seen a hundred times over how the top leadership will go to great lengths to defeat a political trend they disagree with not through direct and open political struggle, but through some sort of disorienting maneuver that never makes an admission of conflict. What *is* new is the potential that has emerged within the organization for real, impactful work that I am watching be stifled. Witnessing this is revealing to me the stakes of allowing this farce to continue. It is capturing and suffocating the possibilities of the embryonic socialist movement. I believe that this is a greater threat than anything.

I have been extremely disturbed by the secret machinations within the New York office to extinguish or wrest control of the base building projects gaining ground in Denver and Brooklyn. Both areas, through separate processes of development, have found their way to building community center projects that operate as genuine mass organizations. There was an initial attempt to dissuade each area from this direction, but when the dissuasion didn’t work, the approach was taken to give leaders of both areas the impression that the top leadership was nonetheless supportive of their projects and interested in further debate and discussion. Behind closed doors, the national leadership has been working with insiders in both areas to inform on and undermine the projects. I

working with insiders in both areas to inform on and undermine the projects. I know this both from being in proximity to these conversations and because I have been asked to play a role in this subterfuge.

In recent months, I have been aware of growing outrage in the office about the Brooklyn leadership's focus on cultivating community partnerships and relationships, and most vehemently the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Freedom Center. I have been approached multiple times, in secret conspiratorial huddles and one-on-one meetings, trying to ensure that I don't sympathize with the efforts. It is well known that I believe in the centrality of base building for the communist movement today — I helped lead base building projects in the Philadelphia branch and have written extensively on the subject. I have tried to generally avoid involvement in these discussions because I know the only goal is to pin me to a position against the members in Brooklyn. I have, however, heard other members receiving orientation on counter-organizing within the district.

Avoiding involvement became impossible when I was asked repeatedly to put my name to a document opposing base building in Brooklyn, a position I clearly do not support. I was asked first by Layan and Wyatt at the Branch Organizing Conference, then again in the New York office in a one-on-one with Ben Becker. I declined directly, saying that I agreed with the Brooklyn strategy of base building and explained why. This triggered yet another meeting with Ben Becker, David, Gabi, and Wyatt, where I was told that Brooklyn's approach, which included raising comradely but critical analysis of the efficacy of previous work, would make the branch "feel bad" and "feel confused". I explained why I thought having honest assessment and differences of views expressed internally was healthy. I tried to steer the conversation in the direction of the political and strategic principles in dispute and explained why I agreed with the base building strategy. This was met with tears and anger, then it was made explicitly clear by the four of them that they viewed base building as incompatible with the approach of the PSL. I informed them that the previous night I had been reached out to by the Brooklyn leadership to speak at their district retreat based on my experience and writings on base building, and I had planned to go. They said they did not object to me speaking at the retreat, but reiterated how "confusing" they thought it would be.

Shortly later, the same night, Ben called me four times to urge me not to speak. The final time he called me, around 11:00pm that night, he told me that the Standing Committee of the Central Committee had just held an emergency

Standing Committee of the Central Committee had just held an emergency meeting and voted that I could not speak at the retreat. While explaining why I disagreed with that decision, that I am a Central Committee member — one of the longest tenured members of the organization and the national leadership — expressing sincere political views that are not outside of stated Party line, I accepted and informed the Brooklyn leadership I would not be attending.

I later learned that at this retreat, a group of five members intervened forcefully, disruptively, and in a clearly orchestrated manner. Each of these members is current or former staff. The entire retreat, these five members read from a document on their phones, in a way that was completely unsubtle and visible to all attendees. One of the members emotionally stormed out. Having the experience of 17 years in the organization, and a decade in national leadership, I am certain that this was coordinated by Ben.

Later in the week, I was sat down by Brian Becker for more than three hours, questioned about my loyalty, and plied with what was clearly meant to be intimidating information. I was informed directly of the national leadership's plans to kill the political trends coming out of Den-

ver and Brooklyn. I was informed that he and others have been working secretly with select members of the Denver Steering Committee to incapacitate the other Denver leaders who have developed strong critiques around the issue of mass organizing and the PSL's political orientation. He characterized the section of the leadership driving the Colorado People's Center disrespectfully, and claimed that Lillian House specifically is driving a strategy for mass organizing based on personal grievances. This is astonishing, as Lillian has been an open advocate for local mass organizing and base building for the entire time that she was in New York. In fact, this was a major source of frustration for the leadership, particularly for Ben, who found Lillian's participation in leadership discussions annoying and would often say so to others. It is absolutely well known that the Colorado People's Center is a project with the explicit aim of base building and mass organizing. She reported multiple times within top leadership meetings on the project, and just two weeks ago, Brian applauded the center in front of the Central Committee. The national leadership has repeatedly given the impression that they embrace the project and Lillian as a dynamic leader, while behind closed doors they have denigrated both her and Denver and followed them with suspicion. Now, without an acknowledgement of the political difference, they are planning to empower their chosen representatives in Denver to temper the current direction of the People's Center and bring the

Denver to temper the current direction of the People's Center and bring the branch back in line. After spelling out what they intend for Denver, I was asked pointedly if I wanted to remain a national leader, and if so if I had to exercise the expected discipline.

Finally, last night, trying one last time to address this issue in what should be the democratic bodies of the Party, the Brooklyn leadership asked that their strategy be discussed at the meeting of the New York Branch Committee. This is the body above the Steering Committee in New York that six of them are part of. When the point came up in the agenda, the junior members of the branch leadership came right out with it and expressed that base building was in contradiction to the strategy of the branch and the Party. But the members of the national leadership present, with the exception of myself — Ben, Karla, Layan, Manolo — shifted to the tactic of denying that there was a fundamental difference being expressed. Once again, with gross feigned magnanimity, they opted to conceal their views on a controversial issue so as not to risk a debate that could weaken their grip on the organization, just like with the Branch Organizing Conference and so many other instances. I expect that in the coming days, they will adopt the same posture internally, arguing that mass organizing is something they support.

I know this is false and I am not just inferring this. I have heard them talk behind closed doors for months about their opposition to the base building and mass organizing work that comrades are doing across the country, and have read draft documents they've written to combat the trend. This position was alluded to in a document written by Brian Becker that characterized mass organizing work as "too pedestrian," but Ben Becker wrote more explicitly against base building and mass organizing in a document titled "Turning to the working class: What it should mean and what it shouldn't." This document was circulated amongst the inner circle in the New York office, but was ultimately not shared out of concern that it would cause debate. In preparatory documents for the conference, key objectives included establishing that "pivoting is the essence of revolution," and "deep organizing...isn't part of [our] theory of revolution."

It would be naive and irresponsible to take part in any further "processes" within the organization to deal with these questions. How can I continue to play dumb, knowing how such commissions and working groups are formed solely to drag out and delay resolution on an issue

until a disfavored view loses its momentum. Congress attendees, consider where the promised “AI commission” and “Trans liberation commission” went? Even if any type of commission” and “Trans liberation commission” went? Even if any type of process actually were to come into being, it would be characterized by the same concealment of views and false “unity” to secure agreement while the actual decision making and implementation would remain completely under the control of Brian, Ben and the circle they keep around them.

Comrades, remaining in this organization has become the inverse of my political principles and I find no room within it to fight. I can no longer ignore the conclusion that I have been in the process of reaching over the years, and have now arrived at. Despite the presence of many people whom I respect and admire in the organization, the PSL is a fundamentally dead-end project driven by shallow and opportunistic leaders. These leaders squander the vibrancy of their most dynamic organizers and under-develop those who place their trust in them. I do not believe that the PSL’s narrow agitational focus and exaggerated political analysis is adequate for the tasks of our time. I do not believe there is the possibility of meaningfully moving the organization. I do not believe it is permissible for a communist to continue onwards in this organization in light of these conclusions.

I firmly believe that membership in the PSL must be based on a voluntary commitment to the organization’s clearly and openly stated political line and structure. I believe most members have essentially no idea what the PSL’s top leaders really think, how this impacts the directives members are tasked with carrying out, and how the organization really operates. I feel a responsibility in choosing to make my own exit to share insight into the dynamics beyond this final experience that have led me to a certainty this organization is a dead end — - dynamics that are only plainly visible to the small handful of people that are allowed into the inner circle. I am not going to give an exhaustive account of my experiences, but I hope to shed enough light that others can believe their own eyes about the organization and its limitations and make an informed decision about how to exercise their political commitment to the movement for socialism, as I have made mine.

There are so many sincere, dedicated people in the PSL, and the intention of this letter is not to harm them, though I recognize it will be disruptive. I am departing not to abandon the fight for socialism, but because I am determined to commit my life to a real path towards winning it.

# The fantasy of the Socialist Consciousness thesis

The core political line of the PSL is an opportunistic distortion of Leninism that conveniently aligns with the PSL's marginal position in relation to the working class. Most members are likely not totally clear on what their organization imagines is the path to a successful socialist transformation of society in the U.S. While they are instructed intensively in the minutiae of the Party's line on historical and geopolitical issues, members are largely left to themselves to deduce what the PSL's theory of revolution might be.

Most members develop a sense that it is something like this: As capitalism inevitably produces injustices, the revolutionary party calls or joins protests. It recruits participants in these protest movements by expressing views that participants come to see as correct. When there are not protests, the party does agitational outreach to show itself and change the minds of more people. Capitalism's own dynamics ensure that this cycle can be relied on to continue. Eventually, the capitalist system produces a crisis acute enough to throw the system into question, and if the Party is big enough, the protests can become a revolution.

This is essentially it. The PSL dresses up this simplistic concept with the socialist consciousness thesis — the idea that unique historical conditions preclude any path to revolution but to widely popularize our particular definition of socialism, positioning the party for the abrupt seizure of power at the time of a revolutionary crisis.

It is my firm belief that the PSL deliberately uses imprecise language, delivered with supreme confidence, to obscure the superficiality of its strategic and tactical approach. If the PSL can be said to have any strategy, it is to announce its ideas as often, loudly, and on as many issues as possible.

The socialist consciousness line is textbook idealism — that there is a magic set of words that can prepare the working class for revolution. This flies in the face of what communists historically have held: that the working class comes to class and revolutionary consciousness through the process of profound experiences gained through struggle, and, yes, repeated agitational exposures from the trusted organizers they fight with side-by-side.

The socialist consciousness theory relies on such a simplistic and flattened view of politics that it ignores almost every major question facing the working class and socialist movement — the atomization of the working class, the

class and socialist movement — the atomization of the working class, the strength of right wing influence amongst the working class, the unprecedented powers of the capitalist state.

It is reasonable that members will be defensive of the PSL's documents. It is unfortunately necessary to disabuse the membership of the idea that the core political documents of the PSL are carefully considered products of collective study, debate, and discussion. There is no meaningful collective leadership shaping the core political perspectives of the PSL beyond Brian Becker, Ben Becker, and formerly Eugene Puryear. In fact, core political documents often stem from a sudden

thought that occurs to an individual. They are typically hastily assembled and often have basic historical and logical errors. It is not at all uncommon in recent years for the Central Committee to receive documents without notice, cobbled together just in time for meetings, that are full of typos and are essentially recycled content from previous documents. (This has improved now with the prolific use of AI chatbots.) This gets by because of the strong cultural norm within the national leadership, shaped since the founding of the organization, to unanimously and enthusiastically praise whatever documents or directives are received from top Party leaders.

The basic historical analysis that forms the premise of the PSL's Socialist Consciousness thesis is wrong. Is it really true that socialist transformation could not come to the United States through the struggle for democracy or the struggle for national liberation? What about the period in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the country came perhaps the closest it has ever been to socialist revolution? This was based on the internal national liberation struggles of the oppressed nationalities of the United States, principally the Black nation, waged in concert with the anti-colonial struggle of the people of Southeast Asia that delivered the U.S. empire its most humiliating military defeat.

Brian himself directly contradicted the Socialist Consciousness thesis at the 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress with a shift in its central theme. Shortly ahead of this Congress, Brian learned about an obscure Supreme Court case, *Moore v Harper*, and a related fringe legal concept called the "independent state legislature theory". Brian extrapolated from this that a faction of the bourgeoisie was intent on using this case to end the democratic form of government in the United States and install a right-wing dictatorship. Thus, the central task of revolutionaries, as articulated in the 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, must be to urgently turn towards the struggle to defend democracy, a struggle which could only be defeated by a

people's movement led by the PSL, which then could lead to a socialist revolution.

The fundamental contradiction between the central proclamation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the PSL's official Socialist Consciousness line was never acknowledged or explained. They existed simultaneously in direct contradiction. That no one even on the Central Committee ever challenged this speaks to the culture of blind deference expected of all PSL members, even elected national leaders, to Brian Becker.

## Not a party but a tendency

It is only possible to understand how the organization could have such a one dimensional approach by appreciating its lineage. PSL calls itself a party but, by concrete measures, it is an ideological tendency: an organization defined by its comprehensive political line, or as the PSL calls it, its “highly refined worldview”. A party is an organization that can credibly claim to represent a class or a section of a class. A party is solidified through a historical process in which the relationship between organization and base is formed; prior to that it is a pre party formation. A tendency is an organization that gains ground not by organizing the working class but by gaining influence amongst radicals. This is not a criticism over semantics — the PSL calling itself a party as a reflection of its aspirations is reasonable enough — but a matter of clarifying the nature of the PSL as an organization.

The PSL’s basic approach was imported from the organization PSL emerged from — Workers World Party — and remains fundamentally unchanged. The PSL did not split from WWP over politics, but over the degradation of WWP as a functional organization.

The main difference between PSL and WWP is that today there is a much smaller “movement” within which to compete than in the 1960s and 70s, when WWP was at its prime. Ironically, the empty left landscape has benefited the PSL, which has become at least one of the biggest fish in a small pond. The leaders of PSL feel validated in the correctness of their approach — by doggedly raising its own flag in protests and on social media, the PSL has grown in reputation and numbers. Since breaking out on their own in 2004, they have surpassed WWP and anything WWP ever was, becoming one of the dominant forces in the small U.S. left. The PSL is hypnotized by this relative success. The way PSL speaks of itself, many people internally and externally are shocked

when they learn the PSL only has about 4000 members, and after more than twenty years of existence, its activity still does not go far beyond the protests and street outreach you can see from social media.

There is at least a logic to building a tendency in a period where a powerful working class movement exists, for revolutionaries to make their primary task working to influence the course of this movement. But today, in the aftermath of decades of global revolutionary defeat, the systematic destruction of left and working class organization in the U.S., and the advance of the organized far right — to organize an ideological tendency is to embrace historical irrelevancy.

We are often told that “the biggest campaign is to build the Party.” Actually, the biggest campaign must be to address the diminished position and power of the working class. Through this process, a real communist party can be born. The

PSL could achieve unquestionable hegemony within the existing left and still have no prospect of affecting real social change. We cannot lose sight of the most elementary of our political convictions, proven time and time and time again, that the masses make history. The prospect of a victorious socialist revolutionary struggle is contingent upon the participation of the working class, organized as a class.

The PSL's internal culture and structures guard this extremely insular political perspective. If PSL members are trained, it is to learn and regurgitate the Party's line — "to speak as leaders of the nation" — not to internalize the Marxist method and how it can be applied in deep and rigorous political study, discussion, strategizing, and experimentation considering the problems of our day. PSL members are in fact guided away from asking tough questions. *Why do our events and protests seem to mainly mobilize activists from a middle class background and rarely people from the more oppressed strata of the working class directly affected by the issues in question? Is this a problem a protest-oriented organization can solve?* One can see why such questions are guarded against.

It is extremely abnormal for a communist organization to have such a low level of internal political engagement as the PSL. Critical debriefs are not a practice of the top Party leadership, not a part of the Party Congress process, not conducted by the Central Committee, and they are even banned within the New York City branch at the direction of top Party leaders. Where there are exceptions in the branches, it is to the credit of branch leadership and membership.

membership.

The paranoia that prevents self-reflection is rooted in political insecurity. There is an unspoken ban on members engaging with other contemporary left currents. Many members are likely unaware that there are sophisticated socialist debates within the U.S. left right now over strategy and tactics. There are significant socialist-led base building efforts making headway in New York City, in Chicago, in Minneapolis, in Los Angeles, in many parts of the country. Any form of rigorous engagement with the questions, proposals, experiments, and debates of our day that are occurring outside of the PSL are treated as a danger.

In fact, in the New York office there has been panic in recent months after learning that some members have read interviews from non-PSL leaders of the Minneapolis general strike published in Jacobin, and another group of members have been taking the Jane McAlevey Organizing for Power class.

The organization's structural deficiencies after more than twenty years of existence demonstrate plainly the PSL's defective internal character. There is no functioning national education department and there never has been for more than a few months. The National Organization Department was only recently made into a real department, but since the organizer who led this work was pushed out of the Center, the department has rapidly degraded into little more than a surveillance and mobilization structure wielded by the top national leadership. Currently the NOD is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars employing highly skilled software developers to create an AI-powered app to compile comprehensive reports from all areas of the Party for the top leadership circle without having to deal with time-consuming personal engagement with branch leaders. This app will be used to ensure compliance with national directives and surface openings like Minneapolis for the national leadership to opportunistically claim credit for. The National Liaisons system — initially developed to be a network of support that surfaced the needs of the branches and facilitated the development of schools, trainings, resources, and consultation, is today overseen by the leaders of the National Organization Department with an almost singular purpose of ensuring compliance with national directives. There have been no schools, trainings, educational materials, or organizer-to-organizer exchanges developed by the NOD in now over a year. Forums for the engagement of leaders beyond the top leadership circle like the Party Organizer and the National Council have rapidly degraded into just more echo chambers for Brian and Ben Becker and sites to enforce the

into just more echo chambers for Brian and Ben Becker and sites to enforce the latest agitational initiative.

## Concealed hostility towards mass organizations

Many members think that their organization is invested in building mass organizations. The PSL's top leaders, behind closed doors, believe members must be kept from this work. Mass organizations, they say, don't yield recruits, tie members up in responsibilities that keep them from "pivoting" to protest calls, and make the membership "conservative". For a tendency that is concerned exclusively with advancing its own position, the logic holds. Mass organizing, as compared to purely agitational activities, brings the organization into contact primarily with people who don't already share its ideological perspective. It does embed organizers in a position of responsibility to specific groups of workers. It does result in organizers who are deeply in touch with the gulf between the PSL's political line and where the masses of working people currently are. All of these things are extremely necessary.

Brian and Ben in particular recognize that their members believe in mass organizing work, and they thus carefully obscure their full political views with vague language and opt to kill mass organizing the long way. Rather than argue politically for the correctness of their position, they simply deny this work oxygen.

Branches are every day making attempts to develop local organizing campaigns, partnerships and coalitions, and mass organizations that build deep relationships with working class communities. Many branches have started to write branch strategy documents specifically to make progress on these objectives. This is a practice that came out of the Philadelphia and Denver branches and is viewed with suspicion by the top Party leadership, especially as it has inspired other cities to think critically about expanding the type of work a branch does.

With some exceptions, without training or guidance from the national organization, with constant orientations to force clumsy agitational campaigns into this work, and with repeated disruptions from competing national directives, long-term organizing efforts generally don't make it past an elementary level.

When branches do get far in prioritizing such efforts, the national organization treats it as a major threat.

This was something I experienced even before the current manchinations within

This was something I experienced even before the current manchinations within the Party Center in New York, as a branch leader in Philadelphia when we were building the PSL's first Liberation Center. Originally, the concept of a Liberation Center was to build a lasting institution in a working class neighborhood that becomes known for addressing the issues directly relevant to the day-to-day lives of the people living there and build struggles around them. Liberation Center volunteers would go out into the community, get to know people, develop a deep understanding of the neighborhood, get involved in the lives and efforts already existing there, and offer labor and their center as resources to strengthen these efforts and propose new initiatives of our own. Through this, the relationships would be built that would tie the Party deeply to

these communities and open up the space to build deep political consciousness over time in the neighborhood.

Brian, Ben, and Eugene sought to halt this proposal. It was ultimately settled with an unofficial deal that Philly would be allowed to continue but would have to represent the project within the Party using language obfuscating the real political proposal. I regret complying. I have seen over the years the consequence of blurring important political debates. Many cities have tried to emulate the Liberation Center concept, but without understanding it. In most places, it has more or less become diluted into just another name for a PSL office — a space primarily for PSL promotion.

The PSL uses the language of mass organizations, but it does not actually build them. A mass organization is a durable organizational form that involves a base of people outside of the party who are brought together to fight not just on the basis of agreement with a given position (like housing is a human right) but on the circumstances of their lives (like living in the same building or neighborhood). The PSL creates not mass organizations, but brands to put out protest calls, front organizations that consist of the same membership, and a supporter network. They all narrowly revolve around the PSL.

It makes sense that the PSL, as a tendency, finds mass organizations slow and frustrating. Again, a tendency is defined by its political line. That is what distinguishes it and attracts other radicals and greater influence within the left movement. If the PSL is engaged in low visibility, long-term work with people who are not going to immediately join and generate greater visibility, then newly radicalized people may end up in other left groups, losing potential numbers for PSL. If the PSL premises its success on growth and recruitment amongst radicals, then it is logical to favor activity that puts it at the front of every protest,

radicals, then it is logical to favor activity that puts it at the front of every protest, in every flashy battleground, speaking on every hot issue, because that's where the radicals will be able to see our position and find us.

This dependence on flash and visibility creates a particular tension with labor organizing, which cannot appeal only to the already ideologically sympathetic workers, but must do the long and hard organizing of moving all workers in the union regardless of pre-existing political views.

While the PSL espouses a desire to build the union movement, and there are PSL members who play important roles in trade unions and have led significant labor struggles, the PSL's top leadership views this at just another site for the PSL to raise its flag high. Behind closed doors, the comrades engaged in the labor movement are routinely treated with exasperation, as "always the most conservative element of a communist party." Comrades are directly instructed by the Party's labor department to minimize their involvement in union organizing drives so that they can more fully focus on "talking politics" to their co-workers and recruiting them to the PSL or PAN. Comrades who are labor leaders are expected to readily deliver endorsements for protest initiatives and provide legitimacy to hastily decided calls like the general strike orientation. But the responsibilities of true mass leaders are in direct tension with quick-return agitational interventions.

## Concealed sectarianism

For an organization that has been around for more than 20 years, the PSL is remarkably isolated. PSL members are told over and over that they are not in a sectarian organization, but their organization has a very limited view of who is worth cultivating relationships and collaboration with.

It is true that the PSL will work with most anyone, no matter how silly or discrediting, as long as they advance a PSL initiative (take General Strike US, for instance). But short-term utility is the primary basis of assessing external organizations and partners: will they or won't they advance a PSL initiative. Given that the PSL's work is oriented towards its own advancement and not that of working class organization, many serious working class formations are not very relevant to the PSL.

In the partnerships it does pursue, the narrowness of the PSL's goals lead to an extreme expectation of control. Members are trained in the importance of the Party being the "anchor" of any coalition it is part of. The "anchor" is a

Party being the "anchor" of any coalition it is part of. The "anchor" is a euphemism for the force that makes all core political decisions and has executive authority to handle on-the-spot decision making without challenge. Members learn that having other groups around the PSL that follow our lead is worth the trouble because it provides a shield against red-baiting from the right wing and identity-based attacks from the left. These expectations put a short expiration date on the partnerships the PSL pursues, especially those that have any responsibility to a social base, and indeed members are repeatedly instructed that "breakups are inevitable" and cadre should avoid forming too close a bond with anyone outside the PSL.

In reality, no organization that represents real social forces will forever be content to accept direction from an external "anchor" that expects the level of subservience that the PSL does.

This sectarianism is not just petty; it results in the squandering of historically important opportunities. In the 2024 election, for example, the Stein campaign came to the PSL leadership to propose that the Green Party and PSL unite their presidential campaigns. Because of paperwork deadlines and restrictive ballot access laws, it would only be possible for Stein to be the formal presidential candidate and Claudia De La Cruz would have to be vice-president. But Stein was willing to organize the campaign in a way that she and Claudia would be presented as co-equal candidates running in an alliance, both equally empowered to speak on behalf of the campaign. This proposal was met with emotional meltdowns by multiple top Party leaders. The offer was rejected. This was the basis on which the PSL killed the possibility of a powerful third-party unity ticket, in an election in which the two major parties put up a repeat of the most quintessentially detestable capitalist candidates — Joe Biden and Donald Trump — for the second time to the American people.

# Why reforming the organization is impossible

As a communist, I would not issue this resignation had it not become unmistakably clear that there are no democratic structures in the PSL that could effectuate a change in orientation. While the Party's Constitution outlines a genuine democratic centralist structure, this is not what the Party's national leadership practices. I have already described to some degree the real internal functionings of the party, but comrades need a fuller picture to really understand.

The top Party leadership carefully constructs a cosmetic democratic structure

The top Party leadership carefully constructs a cosmetic democratic structure that brings only innocuous details up for discussion and conceals its real decision-making process. While the Party Congress is under the impression that it elects the Party's national leadership, the real leadership is simply Brian and Ben Becker, formerly and to a limited degree Eugene, now to a limited degree Manolo, and whoever is permitted into their informal leadership clique. I speak having spent the last decade or so within this clique.

Unless you are brought into this clique, becoming a Central Committee member is essentially inconsequential. It does not on its own involve greater practical or political responsibility. The Central Committee gathers a few times a year, brought together at the convenience of the leadership clique. Central Committee meeting agendas are given less attention than most branches give to organizing SC retreats. Similar to the National Council, the bulk of the meeting is consumed by long lectures from Brian, Ben, and formerly Eugene.

In the 14 years that I have been attending CC meetings, I have come to understand that even when a decision is made by the Central Committee, that decision is only implemented if the leadership clique chooses to make it a priority. Countless hours have been spent at CC meetings discussing "big ideas" from the core leadership that never materialize. At the same time, ideas that Brian, Ben, or Eugene change their mind on or disapprove of personally will be quietly abandoned without consequence.

Attendees of the December 2024 Central Committee meeting will remember a proposal to build on the momentum of the 2024 presidential campaign by pursuing a united front in the electoral arena during the 2026 midterm with other left-wing forces opposed to the two-party system. This would then form the basis for initiatives to form a new third party that could present a unified, credible left-wing slate in the 2028 election. Every CC member who participated in the discussion spoke in favor of the proposal and it was adopted. But at a secret gathering two months later of the informal leadership body operating out of the Center, the initiative was discarded after five minutes of discussion.

The Party Congress is a carefully controlled performance allowing only superficial discussions. At the last Party Congress, both Ben and Brian Becker asserted openly that the purpose of the Congress is not to make major political decisions but to "build Party unity". This was honest. The entire Congress process is tightly orchestrated to strengthen devotion to the Party, not to

take up political questions. Great care is taken to avoid the surfacing of debates. At the last Party Congress, a participant openly disagreed with the PSL's proposed

last Party Congress, a participant openly disagreed with the PSL's proposed line on AI and was met with a coordinated string of comments lined up by top PSL leaders to decisively shut down the disagreement. Many attendees were confused and concerned by the display. Another delegate openly criticized it from the floor. Both of those members have quietly resigned since.

In reality, the functional leadership of the Party lies with Brian and Ben, to be executed without debate by their immediate staff of devotees, organized in both small private meetings and a "Political Coordinating Committee" – the current unelected leadership clique that acts as a substitute for the elected Executive Committee. This team was assembled outside of any sanctioned process from hand-picked staff. Many times ideas that impact the focus of the entire organization are swiftly decided based on minutes of deliberation in this group.

Take the "general strike" line. Considering this has become the main intervention of the PSL in the anti-Trump movement, comrades may reasonably assume it was the product of extensive and measured discussion by the Central Committee or another elected leadership body. That is not the case. On October 14, the Political Coordination Committee met to discuss the No Kings Day protests that were coming that weekend. Democratic Party-aligned forces were showing greater interest in the big street protests. So was the PSL. Brian Becker asked the group if people expected the protests to be large. Most people said yes. This surprised Brian, who became worked up with jealousy over the large protests. He decided that the PSL needed to intervene in the No Kings protests to wrest influence from the liberals. Suddenly this became a moment of historic importance. The way to force the Democrats out was to put forward a demand that would give the initiative to the Party. The PSL would take up tactics to trick the No Kings Day leaders into adopting the language of "General Strike" by making the demand look like a groundswell, like enlisting several branches to make giant hand-painted banners at the last minute with the hopes that it would be captured on aerial footage and go viral.

That is the true story of how this line was adopted – a line that has cost the PSL relationships and legitimacy, infected the PSL with grandiosity, demanded from its members execution of the most absurd underhanded tactics, and has forced PSL members to embrace and defend a farcical political proposition.

This kind of leadership is only possible because a great deal of thought and energy has been put into assembling around Brian and Ben a team of people who will not only accept decisions made in such a ridiculous way, but work

who will not only accept decisions made in such a ridiculous way, but work tirelessly to bring them to fruition. This dynamic has become more pronounced than ever with the tightening of the relationship between the PSL and the People's Forum and the availability of more funds to hire staff from the NFD and now PAN. The leadership clique has now assembled a team of some dozen staffers who are highly administratively efficient and have round-the clock availability, but are mostly politically inexperienced and highly competitive with one another. The resulting dynamic is an organizational culture where every gathering is a race to see who can raise their hand first to express their enthusiastic agreement with the latest big idea and drop everything to execute the "new initiative".

Predictable from a sociological standpoint, the in-group is maintained by enforcing a strict delineation of the out-group. Brian, Ben, Eugene, and Manolo all cultivate an intense culture of gossip, surveillance, and competition amongst their staff. Many times this has resulted in out-

siders being removed from roles on the basis of some spun-up criticism resulting from rounds of speculation, never to be told directly the real reason for their removal. Disagreement is treated as disloyalty and is attributed to personal defect, especially when expressed by women. Behind leading women's backs, they are described as negative, insecure, abrasive, and jealous. Explanation of their political engagement is tied to their physical appearances and imagined associated insecurities.

If someone who has been brought into the leadership clique starts to fall into disfavor, they are put out to pasture in some way or another. This is typically accompanied by a quiet but far-reaching campaign of meetings and phone calls to characterize the ex-clique member as described above.

The brittleness this internal culture creates represents one more serious obstacle to the internal correction of the defects of the PSL.

## Why this can't wait

For years I was convinced that the only principled thing to do was to stay and build “the Party”. But realizing that the PSL is not and will not become a true revolutionary party of the working class, I believe it is irresponsible to continue investing time in this organization.

Inevitably, this decision to leave and to share my resignation will be portrayed as treason at a moment of heightened political intensity. This is the excuse of every self-serving bureaucracy in history that is unable to defend its actions

every self-serving bureaucracy in history that is unable to defend its actions based on their merits. The extreme nature of the political moment we are in is in fact what makes accepting the PSL's leadership failure intolerable.

Examine the PSL's record in the second Trump administration, with the foreseeable attacks on immigrants, the expansion of the repressive state apparatus, the slashing of essential public services, the dismantling of key restraints on executive power. The PSL, supposedly the revolutionary party of the U.S. working class, made no meaningful preparation. The PSL's top leadership merely churned out fruitless big idea after big idea.

In the immediate weeks following Trump's second victory, the PSL declared the need to focus on agitating around the “bread and butter” economic issues that swung the election for Trump. A series of pamphlets were designed on everything from the postal service to Social Security — 11 in total — and sent out to the branches.

A few weeks later, the leadership was convinced of the false idea that Trump would quickly lose interest in deportations, but still convened an “immigrant rights working group” that did not produce any coherent campaigns. The “don't open for ICE” outreach campaign was put together by the Communications Department as a face-saving measure.

In February, the PSL decided there was not enough resistance and it must launch a new round of days of action to protest Trump's domestic policies, under a new brand with viral potential. The name of this brand was the subject of several long meetings where nothing was decided. It was ultimately determined that an “off-site” meeting was needed. A room was rented for two days in a building a few blocks from the PSL office and meals were catered so that these top leaders could be “free from distractions”. The total price tag for this brainstorming session was about \$4,000. It produced a name, “World Without Billionaires” and big plans for a new website and social media pages. World Without Billionaires ended up being dropped before it was ever launched.

In April, Trump issued an executive order as part of his “tough on crime” crackdown, giving the Department of Defense 90 days to come up with a plan to make Pentagon assets available for use by domestic law enforcement bodies. This gave rise to a renewed “martial law” fantasy akin to the *Moore v. Harper* fixation. While Brian, Ben and Eugene became convinced that a full scale fascist coup was coming in just 90 days, the response was not to build a united front to defend democracy, but instead to recirculate the *Moore v Harper*

united front to defend democracy, but instead to recirculate the *Moore v Harper* pamphlet. They also became consumed with ridiculous and extremely costly contingency planning. When the 90 days came and went, the leadership clique quietly moved on without acknowledging the false premonition.

In May, the intense protests against ICE in Los Angeles brought the Center's attention back to immigration and the Party was again "turned on a dime" — not to serious organizing projects among immigrant workers, but to the "Sick of ICE" initiative. This campaign banked on branches that had built their own immigration work to make it take off. But it was completely out of touch with the conditions and limitations of these projects. Branches were blamed for the initiative's flop, and throughout June, the Party was forced to keep trying to make it go viral.

Come July, the national organization had to race to catch up on preparations for the Party Congress that had been completely neglected. A little under two weeks before delegates were scheduled to arrive in New York, the "Interim" Coordinating Committee (the unofficial substitute for the Executive Committee and Standing Committee that preceded the Political Coordinating Committee) began taking up the agenda of the Congress on an emergency basis. The entire event was sloppily thrown together at the last minute. Because there was hardly any time to prepare, the sessions of the Congress were heavily filled by extensive talks from Brian, Ben, Eugene, and the immediate circle of men around them. Despite dominating the agenda, they repeatedly spoke over time. Discussion periods were so rushed that comments were cut at times to 90 seconds, making some delegates talk too fast to be understood, and most sessions did not get to the full line of delegates on stack. Besides the heavily choreographed "discussion" around AI, the Congress mostly ran like an extended National Council call, where members of the leadership clique elaborated on general political observations and projects that were already in progress.

After the Party Congress, the big initiative became the general strike. After Brian pushed the PSL to call for a general strike at No Kings Day, the PSL became the subject of ridicule online and amongst other organizers. This made Brian become obsessive, and any external mention of a coordinated work stoppage, whether in Chicago or Minneapolis, became the site of an intense campaign to get the PSL's chosen language taken up. The work of the Communications Department became almost exclusively content creation

promoting the idea of a general strike.

Ultimately, in the exceptional conditions of ICE's occupation of Minneapolis and the murder of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, a coalition in Minneapolis called for a statewide work stoppage. The PSL viewed this as their shot to bring their proclamations to life and sent in dozens of organizers to do outreach, particularly focused on getting the language of "general strike" adopted wherever possible.

The historic success of the January 23 general strike was underpinned by years of deep organizing led by a united front of mass organizations that the PSL had zero involvement in, widely referred to on the left as the "Minnesota Model." Surely the PSL's outreach efforts helped to make the day a success. But the PSL had the arrogance to claim primary credit for the success in Minneapolis, when it had done no long-term organizing there, was not part of the coalition that initiated the call, and merely sent in outsiders to popularize what was already in motion.

The organizers who embraced these PSL outsiders without sectarianism were denigrated to the PSL's National Council repeatedly after they failed to adopt the PSL's demands to extend and expand the general strike. Refusing to take no for an answer, the PSL used a Somali student organization as a front to push forward with the call, suggesting it was coming organically from

the Minneapolis forces behind the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Members were frantically directed to seek endorsements from other organizations, and the Communications Department was deployed to create graphics that would trick influencers and celebrities, outraged by the murders, to recirculate what they thought was the Minnesota demand. This ultimately succeeded in popularizing a mass action on January 30. Husayn, who led the PSL deployment to Minneapolis, later bragged to me that “the students had no idea what they were getting into.”

Whether you agree or disagree with the historical correctness of forcing the January 30 call through by any means necessary, the PSL’s swaggering arrogance in the aftermath should be alarming. Instead of having any interest in examining the long term organizing that allowed Minnesota to achieve such a show of force, or a desire to clarify and repair relationships, the PSL has contented itself to publish externally on its own role, and internally extoll its own leadership, even declaring itself now the proven vanguard.

# The responsibility of socialists today

Socialists today have the responsibility to rebuild a left that can contend for leadership of the working class. We must rebuild from a period of distortion and defeat. We must forge a left that can survive a repressive state that has demonstrated that it respects no legal nor moral constraint.

To take up these challenges, we must engage honestly and soberly with the challenges of our day and reject false shortcuts. We must build organization that cultivates cadre with both discipline and a deep responsibility for study,

debate, experimentation, and assessment. We must task up the long-term work of raising the level of organization of the entire working class, not just already politicized activists. We must build the organizational forms, campaigns, and united fronts necessary to concretize the power of the working class. We must engage in robust and sincere dialogue with other socialists pursuing various projects, rather than proclaim ourselves the vanguard and wait for everyone else to get in line behind us.

I am leaving not because I don't believe this is possible, but because I *do*.

I have made peace with the years I have spent in the PSL because I have realized that in order for a viable communist left to be rebuilt, one with genuine cadre who grapple with the lessons of the last century and the novel challenges we face today, there needed to be an intermediate generation of communists who experienced the inadequate remnants of the last wave of left organizing and developed the critiques necessary to go beyond what we inherited. If even a handful of individuals emerge from this generation with clear vision, having accepted their agency in charting the next stage of communist organizing in the U.S., then I believe that we have made a step forward, not backward.

I know that this handful has been formed, and maybe more. I am leaving alongside the leadership of the Brooklyn District to take the next step in the formation of a viable socialist movement in this country. While we will leave smaller in number than if we remained in the PSL, we are confident that in the long run, cultivating a healthy seed is a better choice than continuing to tend to a dying tree. We will engage respectfully with the members of the PSL who remain, understanding that it is hard to grasp the true nature of this organization without the proximity we have had.

With determination for what comes next,

Walter Smolarek

Walter Smolarek  
WS\_resignation  
June 2026

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vRIyGuCR41exdzbcZSf8BZC73zyY21Wq2Hpjii19ZnV>