Socialism from below, revolutionary justice, and workers’ democracy require the extension of the same democratic rights to everyone—whether they be leaders or rank and file; holders of majority or minority views; people bringing charges or those being charged; opponents or supporters; those you believe or disbelieve; friends or enemies. Rights are not selective. If you do not fight for the rights of everyone, you will likely lose your own.

This has always been a foundational principle of workers’ democracy and socialist justice. Cases of sexual assault present deeply sensitive and complex issues. We know that the vast majority of complainants who courageously come forward under the most difficult of circumstances are telling the truth. We know that they have been disgracefully attacked, dismissed, slandered, campaigned against, harassed, isolated, and disbelieved under capitalism. We know that they need special protections, at times because of physical safety concerns, and always because they have been traumatized and have needs that often involve support, counseling, advocates, and more.

As revolutionary Marxists and socialist-feminists, we take such charges and abuses and assaults incredibly seriously. Yet we are not courts or forensic teams. We also know that there are and have been individual, exceptional cases where false accusations have in fact been made. And while we know that no jail time will be directly applied by any decision we make as an organization, nonetheless, we must take seriously the fact that in rare cases, the lives and careers of innocent comrades can be ruined. When the person charged is guilty, a ruined life is the least consequence deserved. Because of the exceptional case of a false charge, though, we owe our comrades the democratic process of a fair hearing, even when they are charged with the most serious of crimes.

There remains much to be figured out about how best to handle these complex cases. When our first case under the new procedure came up in 2013, I was involved in one aspect of developing the guidelines given to the National Disciplinary Committee, an aspect that was key: I insisted adamantly that our premise be that in any given case, we must ensure the most basic rights and protections of revolutionary socialist democracy for all sides. This includes the right to democratic procedures; to fair, impartial judging panels and actual hearings; to the opportunity to present and challenge evidence and testimony; and, if you are the one charged, to know what the charges against you are and be given the opportunity to face and question either the claimant or the claimant’s advocate.

This was my passionate argument in 2013, as it is today, within the context of a culture—and, for quite awhile, a Steering Committee majority—that either accepted, or was unwilling to challenge, the idea that “you must believe the woman”—you cannot believe the man—in all charges of male-female sexual assault. And that therefore, the basic rights and norms of workers’ self defense are not applicable.

Here are basic, undisputed data of public record:

Six years ago, a non-member made a rape charge against a member. It was the first time that a disciplinary committee or the Steering Committee had dealt with such a charge. There was no clear guidance on how to do so. Prior to that, similar situations had been handled informally by the National Secretary.

This charge was made in a context in which there had just been a rape charge against a leading member of the British SWP. That case had been handled by the British leadership in an unjust,
sexist manner, and had been a shocking a betrayal of basic democratic norms, in order to defend a leading member. It had led to an implosion and the discrediting of the SWP. Coming out of the resulting split in Britain was the idea that you must believe the person charging assault. In this context, without clear guidelines, the American ISO Steering Committee did not want to be associated with the British disgrace. On most issues, the ISO Steering Committee did not give clear guidelines to the National Disciplinary Committee (NDC).

Inside the Steering Committee, I argued that some guidelines had to be given, including, among others, respect for basic democratic rights, no matter how serious the charge: that no one could be held guilty until proven innocent. That there had to be a hearing in which the person charged in this case, and those charged in all other cases, could defend themselves; examine the evidence and witnesses against them; supply evidence and testimony; and face the person charging them or that person’s advocate. Eventually, after long discussions and arguments, these ideas were accepted by the Steering Committee.

These are cornerstone elements of workers’ democracy and socialism from below. I defy any comrade to say these rights do not apply to them, if ever they are accused.

The National Disciplinary Committee (NDC) came in with a finding that the Respondent had committed rape. Although they had not been given adequate guidelines, they had been given clear guidelines about certain basic rights, which they acknowledged they had violated. It was pointed out to them that they had reached their conclusion without the opportunity for the Respondent to present his own defense in a hearing, without his ability to question the evidence and witnesses against him, without the opportunity for him to raise questions to the claimant, even through an advocate. No one charged with a serious crime—even murder, or our worst enemies—should be denied these rights.

The Disciplinary Committee agreed, and reached a written finding that “this hearing has ended in a procedural mistrial. After coming to a unanimous decision, we now rescind our votes, our verdict, and our recommendations. . . . No hearing was ever convened, the Respondent (a) never had the opportunity to address the Committee and attempt to convince them of his innocence, and; (b) the Respondent never had the opportunity to rebut witness testimony.”

Some members of the NDC now claim they were intimidated and strong-armed into acknowledging the grave flaws of their process and conclusion. Any intimidation that may have occurred would of course be a disgrace. There is the fact that they had to be convinced of the need for a hearing and other basic rights in the first place.

Rather than sending the case back to the same Disciplinary Committee that had conducted a deeply flawed mistrial, the SC decided to send the case on to the Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee returned a decision of “insufficient evidence to make a determination, therefore no disciplinary actions recommended.” That decision was then brought to the 2014 convention. Some Appeals Committee members have now said their investigation was inadequate. If that is true it is, of course, a tragedy contributing to the flawed process. They did not say so at the time in any way that I know of. At the 2014 Convention, they took questions from the members and engaged in discussion with them. The Convention accepted the Appeals Committee’s report.

On Monday, March 11, 2019, a former member of the ISO and of the NDC put out a document claiming that the Steering Committee had carried out a six-year-long cover-up of a rape, placing much of the blame on the Steering Committee reps involved in the process. The new 2019 Steering Committee, meeting the next day, accepted this document, and sent it out to the membership without alternate perspective or data, raising the question of whether the two current Steering Committee members (Alan Maass and Joel Geier) who had been on the 2013 Steering Committee should recuse themselves from the current one.
On Thursday, March 14, Alan Maass put out a document defending one of the SC reps and attempting to make me chiefly responsible for the 2013 Steering Committees decisions and for the actions of other SC members. I wrote a quick, preliminary response and recused myself from the Steering Committee and its discussion of these questions.

That night, the Steering Committee and National Committee jointly reinstated the original decision from the 2013 NDC that had found that the Respondent had committed a rape despite the NDC’s repudiation, in June 2013, of those findings. This month’s expulsion for rape was again done without a hearing, without the Respondent, without his ability to present evidence or testimony. He is now being convicted on Facebook.

These are facts that cannot be disputed. People may have different interpretations about, and perspectives on, what went on, but the data I have just summarized are now out in the public record.

I include that data here not in an attempt to re-litigate, or to discuss everything that went on in what everyone agrees was a deeply-flawed process. But the material that many comrades have received leaves out relevant information and creates another deeply-flawed process.

The 2013 process, we all concur, was gravely flawed. But my advocating passionately for basic socialist, democratic rights—for the Respondent as well as for the Complainant and for everyone else—does not constitute one of those flaws, an injustice against the Complainant, an apology for rape, or the cover-up of a crime. This remains true no matter what a long-time detractor of mine, and leader now trying to purge his own ugly past, claims my role to have been.

The people who took part in expelling the Respondent in 2019, summarily and in absentia, include legal professionals. I doubt whether any of them would allow their clients to be treated this way. I doubt whether anyone who voted for summary expulsion in absentia would accept such undemocratic treatment of themselves.

The new leadership at that meeting also held the entire 2013 Steering Committee responsible for the cover-up of a rape and suspended them all from all leadership positions. Three members had their membership suspended—the two major historic leaders of the organization, and me—presumably on the acceptance of Alan’s perspective on my role on the SC and his charges against me, although no reason was given that I know of.

After twenty years of membership, I was suspended summarily and in absentia, without charges presented to me, without my presence, without a hearing, without even being asked a single question or allowed to say a single word. I’ve been informed that at some point I will be investigated “without prejudice.”

I have been the fighter on the ISO Steering Committee for workers’ democracy, democratic rights, and how to function on the principles of revolutionary socialism from below: that is my crime. No matter what slanders are now being circulated about me. I have never been a party to a cover-up of a crime, least of all one as odious as rape. I have never participated in driving or accepting an unjust investigation.

I continue to plead guilty to the charge of fighting for the most basic rights of workers’ democracy. I am still for what I argued for in 2013. People who disputed these rights then may still be disputing them today. I believe that upholding them was right then; it is right now. Democratic process is not an extra that can be tossed out when challenging circumstances arise.

A wonderful, powerful new movement from below—the Me Too movement—is drawing in people who want to fight sexual assault throughout this country and the world. They are educating those who did not already know or realize how devastatingly widespread, frequent and common experiences of sexual assault and abuse are. Extraordinarily courageous survivors have come
forward to reveal their experiences, tell their stories, pursue charges, and fight the battle against sexual assault.

Along with the healthy impact of new movements, there has also developed in the ISO a destructive internal call-out culture and a desperation to purge its ugly past. This culture has reproduced an inversion of the old culture. Many comrades are afraid that if they speak against the current they will also become a target. Therefore, good comrades who oppose the call-out culture with its personal denunciations are afraid to speak out—and it is understandable that they should protect themselves from a circular firing squad.

There is moral panic, and panic for the survival of the organization, as well. There is an environment reminiscent of the destructive culture at the end of SDS, the women’s “consciousness-raising” groups in some cities with the decline of the 60s’ women’s movement, and the culture many of us often experienced during COINTELPRO. The irony and particular tragedy now is that all that happened primarily at the end of the 60s, during decay and decline of our movements. This self-destruction is happening now, when we finally have precious new political opportunities and openings again.

In this meltdown of the ISO, whose past undemocratic chickens have now come home to roost, I have become collateral damage. After struggling for many difficult years for a more fair, open, political, and democratic organization accountable to the rank and file, I am now being scapegoated and attacked—asked to bear responsibility for the undemocratic actions of others whom I consistently opposed.

Resignation has been forced upon me. I have been summarily suspended _in absentia_ and slandered among the membership, _on the word_ alone of a long-time political detractor of mine, who for many years was Ahmed’s and Sharon’s agent against me. I do not believe that given the actions that have already been taken, and in the absence of agreement on the basic democratic rights of every member and every person, there can be any “impartial” investigation by people who’ve already found me guilty.

I will not be a scapegoat for people who have lost sight of what the democratic rights of members—rank and file as well as leaders—are, in a socialist organization.

These violations of workers’ democracy are being committed in public, in front of the broader Left. Even our friends and allies are confused by a process in which the ISO is carrying out disciplinary actions based on conclusions of responsibility and guilt, without charges, hearings, opportunity for self-defense, or any of the most basic rights and norms of workers’ democracy.

I have fought under the banner of revolutionary Marxism for over 60 years. I have been a member of our tendency for 59 years, in leading positions for much of that time. I was a militant throughout the 1960s movements against racism. I have fought for revolutionary feminism for well over 50 years, including the disgraceful years when under the influence of the British SWP, the ISO opposed feminism. In all of those six decades of membership in socialist organizations and movements, I have until now never faced any disciplinary charge against me. It’s a shock, then, for the first charge to lead to the suspension of my membership without my being there to defend myself. I am now suspending my own membership.

I have enormous respect and love and admiration for many comrades in the ISO. It is with great regret that I take this step. It is an extraordinary loss of the life I have led—trying to educate cadres; trying to create a democratic culture; trying to bring the organization into mass work and struggle in the mass movements in a non-sectarian collaboration; to fight unapologetically against all capitalist ideology, politics and parties; to stand unequivocally against all imperialism; against all oppression, for a united multi-racial and multi-national working class movement. The ISO had tremendous promise of making a contribution to the renewal of the American revolutionary socialist Left. There is now an internal crisis of self-immolation. Since I am suspended from
membership, I could play no role in attempting to overcome that crisis.

I hope at some point to be able to help in rebuilding a core of people devoted to revolutionary Marxism and its modern-day applications of socialism from below.

I still hold to all the same politics to which I’ve devoted my life; I have not changed. I am sorry for those people who are losing them.

My revolutionary commitment to staying in a horrible leadership culture in order to fight a difficult, often isolated, and highly taxing struggle for the rank and file, for the norms of revolutionary socialist democracy, and for the possibilities of the future, is a choice that has now tarred me in the eyes of many with guilt by association to the same anti-democratic leadership culture and practices that I consistently opposed.

I stayed despite the leadership. I stayed because of my respect, admiration and hope for the large number of wonderful cadres the ISO produced who had the ability to play leading roles in the mass movements, and were constantly undermined by a toxic leadership culture.

Many comrades know that I have been fighting toxic leadership and its culture for two decades. My family and I repeatedly made the choice to accept the great personal cost of politically opposing the old leadership. We have endured chronic personal attacks, attempts to disparage and isolate us, misrepresentations of our positions, resistance and delays in publishing our articles, insults, denigrations, dismissal, disallowing my vote on the SC, back-biting gossip in the corridors, and frequent slanders. We made the choice to take it, pay the personal price, and rise above the fray, for one reason only: We believed that new movements would someday emerge, and we hoped that by showing it was possible to fight for opposition and minority views, to function on the basis of politics and principle instead of personalism and slander, and to help train and politically educate sufficient cadres, the organization and leadership would change when the world around it did.

When that possibility finally materialized at the 2018 and 2019 conventions, I hardly expected to be the recipient of such charges, gossip, social media attacks, and undemocratic disciplinary procedures in response to my defense of the right of the accused to defend themselves.