

Addendum: The PSL response to the above document and our clarifications

This is an addendum to a document detailing the Party for Socialism and Liberation's unethical handling of an internal rape investigation, which can be found below:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ntjUqtB-k4wuBuN4bc8r9ABxfNsIDVU2YOHw9E92TzM/edit?usp=sharing>.

The party has responded to this document with a statement distributed internally to members of the Philadelphia branch via email on Christmas Day. We will include the entire text of their statement below in a larger font. Our responses will be written below each point. We believe that rank-and-file members who read PSL's statement should also read the document to which it responds. This will allow them to have the proper context to evaluate the statement, in the spirit of the much-cited maxim: "No investigation, no right to speak."

In its response to the release of our above document (first internally and then externally), as well as in its response to dissent within its own ranks, PSL has deployed several cult-like tactics, including:

1. One-on-one meetings between members and leadership, which members are not allowed to discuss with anyone outside leadership. The party often demands that "unconvinced" members attend these meetings immediately, with no time to formally prepare responses or criticisms—despite the fact that leadership has already collaborated in preparation for the meeting—and, in some cases, actively refuses to postpone meetings in spite of members' already-existing personal commitments, holidays, and so on.
2. Long, frequent branch meetings meant to confuse and wear down rank-and-file members, from which any members suspected of dissent are barred, with little prior notice. Often no questions are taken.
3. Punishing members suspected of "horizontal communication" within the party itself.
4. Heavy emphasis on "trust" in leadership and members of the in-group.
5. Baseless accusations that those involved in our statement have a racially-motivated agenda in releasing our criticisms, as well as an outright lie that the endorsers of our document are uniformly "white men."
6. Intense scrutiny of social media and social practices, including penalties for members who unfriend someone in leadership or remove PSL copy from their bio.
7. Long, elaborate self-improvement and personal growth testimonials from current members which have been posted on social media in a coordinated response and herald PSL (as well as specifically presidential candidate Gloria La Riva) as exempt from normal practices of criticism.
8. Invoking vague (and unsubstantiated) fears of state repression to avoid criticism.
9. Open encouragement for members to resign if they disagree with leadership.
10. Unilaterally terminating membership of or suspending (without notification of actual charges) anyone even suspected of dissent, in violation of the party's own Constitution.

We believe that these are long-standing, deliberate practices within the PSL, and we condemn the use of these tactics as antithetical to socialist democracy within a supposedly Leninist party.

We are releasing our response to the PSL's statement publicly in order to circumvent the PSL's normal process of restricting the flow of information between members and branches. The PSL's overcentralization of information and unnecessary secrecy is well known to current and former members,



and they have continued, if not *accelerated*, this trend. The PSL response statement was originally presented to members as a response that would be publicly posted due to the circulation of our “Ruthless Criticism” document online, but the PSL has instead opted to use this statement as a list of talking points when addressing the situation in internal meetings with other branches, not sharing their statement outside of the Philadelphia branch.

This is in line with the party’s practice of controlling access to information through forcing multiple one-on-one meetings with leadership to address the same topic, preventing people the party judges as likely to express criticism from joining branch meetings, and other secretive behaviors outlined above. One notable example of the party’s clumsy attempts to prevent expression of internal dissent was the suspension, “pending an investigation,” of a member in a West Coast branch for removing PSL copy from his social media bios—fifteen minutes before a scheduled branch

meeting.

Publication of this new PSL statement internally to all members would allow everyone to see the text of the statement and discuss it together to come to common understandings and criticisms—which, it appears, is precisely what the party wants to avoid. Reading off the document in several meetings between different branches allows leadership to tweak their presentation as needed, selectively omit information, and generally create confusion among rank-and-file members about the basic facts of the case, necessitating games of Telephone to fill in the blanks. The party then uses misconceptions bred by a lack of access to information as “proof” that only party leadership has the full and correct assessment of the facts.

PSL’s statement is framed as a summary of the situation. As it does not link to or extensively reference our document, this reinforces the obvious—its intended audience is rank-and-file members who are mostly or totally unfamiliar with the situation. The party has repeatedly referred to our account of the situation as partial, only including a “tiny sliver” of the evidence. Given the extreme brevity of their statement, it seems they are demanding that members accept one “tiny sliver” of evidence over another. We would like to point out that our document (excluding this addendum) is 23 pages long—hardly a cursory account by any measure.

While we do not believe PSL’s statement is in good faith—rather, it is a collection of strawmen meant to discredit concerned members and resignees in order to retain membership—we have replied in good faith because we think rank-and-file members deserve a robust understanding of the situation.

10 brief points summarizing a disciplinary situation in Philadelphia

1. For months Black women in the PSL have been subjected to a vicious, racist and degrading online and offline smear campaign based on lies and fabrications.
2. For months an online defamatory smear campaign has falsely claimed the Party “covered up” a sexual abuse accusation in Philadelphia. When an allegation was first made against

a PSL member, Steven P., in July, he was suspended as the investigation began and removed completely from political activity; he has remained suspended from all political activity and social contact with Philadelphia members to this day.

The authors and endorsers of our “Ruthless Criticism...” document are not affiliated with nor responsible for any online smear campaign whatsoever. Our document does not use the word “cover-up,” except in quoting the words of others. Our claims, to be distinguished from any supposed “false claims” mentioned in this point, are recorded in the document in all their nuance and with supporting evidence; scroll up to read them. It is explicitly stated that the document’s purpose is to address unethical behavior on the part of leadership, as distinct from the unequivocal assertion that a cover-up occurred. Whether or not a “cover-up” did occur, we contended, and continue to contend, that *this situation was handled unethically*.

The evidence on its own *does* suggest that a cover-up is well within the realm of possibility. Because the endorsers and authors of this document include women and trans survivors of rape and abuse among their ranks, we were originally motivated by hope that leadership would address this behavior and answer the concerns we expressed. To prove our claims false, one would have to actually address the text. PSL leadership’s consistent refusal to address almost any specific points in our document does not inspire confidence.

Though it is claimed Steven has remained suspended from all social contact, the incident involving Timour K. and other party members hanging out with Steven in August remains unaddressed in the party’s response, although in a December 20th call with members of the Central Committee it was excused as a “misunderstanding.”

3. The same person who conducted the racist campaign against Black women organizers of the PSL is the same person who also accused Steven P. of coercive sex. The evidence gathered showed that this allegation was not true.

Here we would like to point out a disingenuous rhetorical tactic that is used throughout this statement. Everyone concerned about the conduct of leadership throughout this process is aware of Griselda’s past remarks. Because Article V, Section 2.3 of the party constitution requires that PSL members be inquisitive Marxists, we have applied enough critical thinking to the situation to know that two things can be true at the same time: 1.) The party has a basic duty to defend its members from racism and misogyny, especially that which involves party matters. 2.) The core of the investigation was a rape and abuse accusation *leveled by a Xicana woman against a white man*. These accusations should be handled in a professional and ethical manner, especially in regards to communication with rank-and-file members.



Rape is never acceptable. It is not acceptable to rape a woman who engages in racist behavior, and a man who would rape a racist woman would rape anti-racist women as well. Therefore, any investigation by leadership into the perpetrator’s sexual assault, and any presentation of the situation to members not involved in the investigation, should have been conducted professionally and without consideration of the victim’s putative racism. Instead, it has been cited

by the party as “discrediting on political grounds.” Among many things, this professional conduct would have included *not* citing harassment to erode sympathy for the accuser among rank-and-file members before the investigation had even concluded. Despite the continued assertions of PSL leadership, this issue was in no way handled in the *only* way it could have been.

It was asserted by a member of the Central Committee in their December 20th Zoom meeting with endorsers of this document that the harassment of Black women in the PSL cannot be separated from the other circumstances surrounding this investigation. An element of Marxist thought is the ability to apprehend the internal difference of a state of affairs. Our document made painstaking efforts to distinguish what parts of the situation we were responding to. Leadership refuses to make those distinctions, not because they are incapable of apprehending them but because they have found a convenient way to turn the focus of this investigation onto the outside accuser instead of their valued member. The party’s stated intent to defend Black women members does *not* dismiss the evidence presented in this document or absolve the party of how it handled this rape investigation.

We would also like to point out the way leadership repeatedly asserts that the effectiveness of its investigative process is self-evident, demanding that readers presume its integrity on faith. Even the Central Committee did not present its conclusion on the case at the December 20th meeting as being *indisputably proven*. They presented relevant evidence to the endorsers to justify their conclusion, even asking the endorsers on the spot to give their opinion as a way of soliciting understanding for the position they were in. Presenting this withheld evidence was a step in the right direction toward demonstrating integrity to rank-and-file members, notwithstanding the manipulative context—or it *would have been*, had it not been much too late and only confined to a few “dissenters” who had been purposefully isolated from the rest of the membership.

4. One of the Black women attacked in this online smear campaign is a PSL organizer who the accuser discovered was developing a relationship with Steven P., her ex-boyfriend. Despite their formal end of their relationship, the accuser and Steven continued living together and having consensual sex.
5. Almost immediately after seeing Steven with the Black woman organizer, she initiated claims of abuse against him. She then fabricated false and serious criminal charges against the PSL, and threatened to go to Trump’s Department of Homeland Security. Her stated goal was to have Steven and other PSL members arrested, using invented stories related to PSL’s activities at the peak of the anti-racist protests this summer. She continued pushing the same false criminal conspiracy for months, advancing a version of it as recently as a few weeks ago to Steven P.’s employer, Villanova University. The impact, if sustained, would be to trigger a law enforcement response against many PSL members.

Point 4 of the party’s response is so spurious and irrelevant to the material facts of the case and the party’s handling of it that it would almost not be worth mentioning were it not so disgustingly misogynistic. The bourgeois state’s own “rape shield” laws would prevent the party from bringing up that Griselda and Steven had continued to have occasional consensual sex. As recent critics have said, when the capitalist court system is better at protecting victims than a “revolutionary” party, there’s a serious problem.

Many parts of our document were written to criticize this framing, including point 8 in the section on the unethical handling of the situation by the Philadelphia Steering Committee. Steven and PSL hold a significant share of the responsibility in this matter. We provided important context on her mental health, on Steven implicating Griselda in actions that could invite state repression, and on Steven sharing potentially incriminating internal information—on top of all the context on Griselda’s situation during this time, which the party has once again chosen to ignore. This point is one instance of many in which leadership has omitted and concealed facts that might reveal its share of responsibility for how these events transpired.

Throughout this entire process, PSL leadership has taken advantage of the left’s “cop taboo” to annihilate sympathy for Griselda among membership and suggest that anyone questioning leadership’s handling of the situation is a police sympathizer. Anyone who speaks up is expected to qualify with “It’s not okay that she threatened to call the DHS!” or “I don’t support Griselda’s actions, but...” (indeed, as *we ourselves* did in our previously released document, when we were still attempting to appeal to PSL leadership). In the crude fashion of the “ultra-leftist” the party portrays itself in contrast to, it expects its members to abhor the victim categorically without so much as wondering what was going through her head. Any expression of empathy, even curiosity, is met with something between condescension and vitriol—and as individuals steeped in the left-wing subculture (and more specifically, the COINTELPRO-baiting norms encouraged within the PSL), everyone in the party accepts that as the appropriate response.

It has been very convenient for the party that this happened. Now leadership can constantly mention these threats without providing any context in order to demonize Griselda, and no one will question whether they could have mitigated the situation.

Griselda was already alienated from the party, with tenuous social relationships within the city, when this occurred. Steven didn’t let her come to protests during the uprising in June (for “safety reasons”). She moved to Philadelphia simply because Steven was moving here. She confessed to friends throughout her time here that she had trouble making friends, had trouble finding a job, and didn’t feel at home here. All the while, Steven had a robust social life, was studying for his PhD, and was one of the most influential people in the Philadelphia branch of the PSL.

Imagine already feeling this alienated and dependent on your ex-partner, then watching his entire social network unite behind him when you tell people he raped you.



6. As a result, on Dec. 14, the women of the PSL's Central Committee issued a statement finally responding to and exposing the campaign of threats and defamation against Black women in the PSL, against Steven P. and against the PSL itself. The Black woman organizer who has been the subject of so much bullying and slander (by name), as well as the Party statement, named the person leading these dangerous, false and racist attacks. The statement summarized in brief the exhaustive months-long investigation involving hundreds of hours of meticulous

work. The evidence collected in that investigation — which refutes the allegation of sexual abuse — was turned over to Villanova University’s Title IX trial committee, a process under a confidentiality agreement. The full evidence was delivered on Dec. 15.

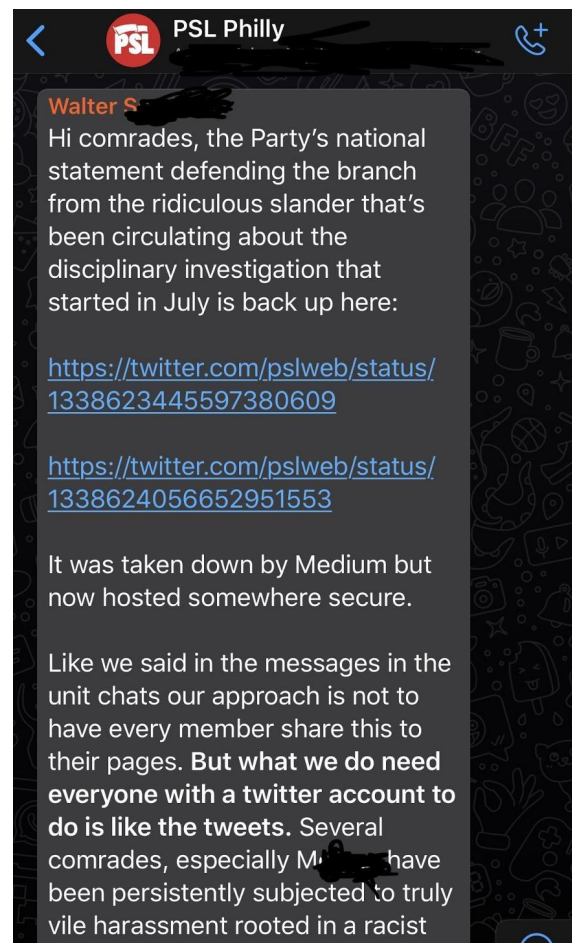
Internal critics of the PSL’s actions have been accused of refusing to defend their Black women comrades. We will note here that leadership has entertained no internal critique that suggests there were other possible courses of action that could have better achieved the goal of defending our Black women comrades. Leadership expects us to assume that the only way to protect Black women in the party was to entirely deny that a non-party member had been assaulted. From the way they speak about it, you’d think they had handled everything flawlessly the entire time.

7. On Dec. 18, the person who made the false allegations and conducted the campaign of defamation, threats and racist bullying removed her online posts. We in turn removed our public statement. She also retracted her allegations in a Title IX case that she had filed with Villanova University. Although under the Title IX regulations, the University had the right to pursue the complaint on its own, based on the evidence already in their possession, they decided to dismiss the complaint.

Our document addresses how this retraction occurred only after Griselda begged PSL to take the statement down because she was “suicidal” and “relapsing.” This point and the one previous omit the significant fact that after posting the statement, PSL mobilized its members to take part in a harassment campaign *against Griselda*. It was not merely the content of the statement—which our document showed to omit key facts, use Griselda’s full legal name, and, appallingly, *quote segments of an account of a sexual assault to make it look like an admission of consent*—which pressured her into deleting her posts.

Internally, we are told, Walter S. in Philadelphia briefly described this incident without mentioning the word “suicidal” or explaining the reason for Griselda’s distress (that the use of her full legal name caused the PSL statement to appear in Google searches for her name), concluding that “[PSL] consider[s] this a success” and that the statement had “served its purpose,” and taking no questions. In their own words, harassing a victim into withdrawing her accusations and scrubbing her Internet presence was a “success”; we shudder to imagine what leadership’s reaction might have been had Griselda actually caused herself harm.

8. Anyone who accuses the PSL of harboring rapists should be ashamed. The PSL has a strong women-led process for dealing with allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse. Every allegation is taken seriously and every credible one investigated fully and objectively. If Steven P. had been a rapist,



he would have been expelled. PSL has expelled people for far less serious charges of abuse. For the sake of “optics,” the simplest thing would be to expel someone as soon as they are accused of abuse; then an organization could never be accused of “harboring abusers.” But the PSL has a commitment to seeking the truth and following its disciplinary and investigative processes, which have been discussed and ratified in detail by elected Party Congresses after lengthy party-wide discussions and amendment periods. As a condition of membership, every member vows to adhere to those processes, which are the outcome of those democratic discussions and votes, and which provide due process and procedure rather than unaccountable ad hoc decision-making.

To tell “anyone” who believes the PSL is harboring rapists that they should be ashamed is bone-chilling. Any woman in or around the party should see this as a red flag.

Our document outlines compelling reasons that Steven’s case may not have followed a precedent of abusers being ousted. The main reasons are 1.) Steven’s exceptional value in the eyes of the party and his friendships with members of leadership and 2.) the unprofessional and unethical way in which members of leadership conducted themselves. Precedent is valuable context, but it does not discount the evidence provided in our document. You have no objective basis on which to say categorically, “If Steven P. had been a rapist, he would have been expelled,” and a lack of any self-doubt in this regard is a disturbing sign. Our charges stand on their own.

Simply ousting abusers is not itself a sign of success. At best, it is a sign of basic competence. The PSL does not have any formal education for members on issues of rape and abuse, any history of robust reflection on conditions that may have allowed abusers within the party’s ranks, or any history of offering support to victims to point to. All it has is a few cases where it correctly ousted abusers, plus the inclusion of women on the investigative committees. If the leaders of the PSL truly think that is enough, *they* should be ashamed.

Several other accusations of abuse have been made in the past six months against men in various branches of PSL; none of them have been investigated.

9. A relatively small group of individuals have either resigned or been expelled from the PSL as a result of this situation. Some secretly circulated, with only a tiny sliver of information that was collected, their own conclusions about the investigation to try and create a scandal. Some focused on alleged conflicts of interest in the Philadelphia Steering Committee, when in fact the Central Committee fully took over this investigation shortly after the initial allegations were made and came to its conclusions independently. A couple others opened up a literary critique of this or that phrase in the statement that the Party released to defend itself. They’ve done this instead of defending the Black members being smeared, or the Party’s right to defend itself and its members from serious threats. An elected



Latina leader of the Party called this out as racism, and now they have launched a false attack on her.

The assertion that this document was circulated to “try to create a scandal” is purely inflammatory. The document mentions instances in which these concerns were shared with leadership and went unaddressed, and the retaliation faced by the authors and endorsers is evidence enough that these documented issues would not have been taken seriously if presented by only a few individual members.

The “literary critique” here is described as if it were a bunch of quibbles. One of the most notable critiques of “this or that phrase” in the December 14th document is concerned with quotes from Griselda’s description of a sexual assault taken out of context and spun as though they were an admission of consent.

Our document acknowledges that the investigation was eventually passed to the Central Committee; this is a key reason *why* many of the Philadelphia Steering Committee’s actions were unethical. Though it is already abundantly clear in the text, we’d like to stress that our document does not attempt to relitigate the findings of the investigation; it presents evidence of unethical behavior *related to* the investigation, including that which took place *outside the formal process*. True, it was unethical for the Philadelphia Steering Committee *ever* to have had authority over this process, which allowed it to level retaliatory charges against Dakota, the member who brought the charges against Steven; but their unethical behavior continued after they passed on the responsibility of the investigation.

We neglected to point out in the initial document that Kerbie J., who was on the investigative committee, is a personal friend of Steven Powers. This would be an appropriate place to do so.

Refer to our response to point 3 in regard to the claim that we chose to present our concerns internally to leadership *instead of* “defending the Black members being smeared, or the party’s right to defend itself and its members from serious threats.” The only command issued to membership regarding the December 14th statement was for Philadelphia comrades to “like” the tweets linking the statement. Very few rank-and-file members were expected to do more to “defend” the party or its Black members during that time. In fact, PSL’s interpretation of democratic centralist social media conduct would tend to encourage that members do *nothing more* than that. It is nonsensical to portray members quietly documenting their critiques during this time as a serious delinquency.

We would like to identify another disingenuous rhetorical move used in this point that has recurred throughout this situation: the selective use of identity signifiers such as “Latina.” At the September 24th meeting to announce the results of the investigation, Walter S. stated that this situation was an example of the pitfalls of “reactionary ideologies like identity politics.” Despite explicitly denouncing identity politics as a framework for handling the investigation, leadership have repeatedly defended themselves and attempted to discredit accusers by citing the identities of those involved.

For example, in internal “emergency” meetings since the release of this document, Gloria La Riva claimed that all the authors of this document were “white men.” On top of failing to address any of the *content* of our document, this claim is a lie. One of the two composers of this document is trans-masculine, while the endorsers present at the December 20th Zoom call included a Palestinian woman, an Indigenous trans woman, and two other trans people who are not men. The white male signatory of this document, by the way, is a gay survivor of both child abuse and intimate partner abuse. That information may not have

been known to leadership, of course, because those identities were not cynically exploited for our document's aims.

The identities of all parties involved are, of course, at least tangentially relevant pieces of information. However, they have consistently been used as a red herring to avoid engaging with our critiques, in a manner that is embarrassing for members of the highest leadership bodies of a purportedly Marxist party. Leadership has rarely, if ever, mentioned that the accuser is a Latina woman and the accused a white man (preferring instead to act as though the *sole issue* is one of anti-Blackness!). They have not acknowledged the fact that Ben Becker, a white man, baited the endorsers on the December 20th Zoom call into altercations that made another Central Committee member's tearful reading of triggering material more emotionally taxing than it already was.

The context in which Gloria La Riva invoked her Latina identity to accuse the endorsers of racism was as a response to claims that she is uneducated on issues of the transgender struggle and has done several things in the past that make her transgender comrades feel unsafe (and specifically in response to the mere act of acknowledgment that she is a cis woman!). The fact that "Latina" and "cisgender" are apparently mutually exclusive in her eyes simply gives further credibility to those claims. The party's claim that our "attack" on Gloria La Riva—as though merely acknowledging a transphobic statement was said is an attack—is false is also an outright lie. Several of the endorsers on the December 20th Zoom call were taking notes, and one was able to note her verbatim words. They are available online to those who look. Current party members may want to consider their relationship to a supposedly "revolutionary" party that casually lies to its membership to protect one Central Committee member's ego.

To reiterate, despite the Central Committee's repeated insistence that all members who wrote or endorsed this document (and the subsequent members who resigned) were "white men," many were women, LGBT, and/or people of color—not that these identities were especially relevant to what amounted to a moral and political decision for these now-former members. *Even had we all actually been white men*, this would have no bearing on the accuracy or impact of the charges. Our observations still would have been true: that PSL leadership showed an alarming level of bias in favor of the accused, immediately began sustained attacks on the accuser's character, ignored or dismissed any concerns raised, retaliated against anyone who made a serious effort to express their concerns, and eventually mobilized on a party-wide level to harass the accuser to a mental breaking point.

10. There are many lessons to be reviewed and learned from this months-long attack on the Party, which came in a form which for us was unprecedented. From the standpoint of this particular case, however, we now consider this matter closed. A properly constituted investigative and trial committee, composed of women democratically elected and entrusted to handle the most sensitive questions, made a unanimous decision. As per the norms of democratic centralism, the whole Party now unites behind it. Too much of our time has already been wasted on responding to a defamatory attack that falsely appropriated and grotesquely manipulated the hard-fought language and struggles of the women's movement. It was necessary to respond, however, given the vicious targeting of our Black members and the real implications for our members' security. As we enter 2021, the Party for Socialism and Liberation will redouble its efforts in the class struggle and in defense of the oppressed. This work, not words, will speak loudest about where people really stand.

The dichotomy of “work” and “words” in this point, a common refrain among party leadership, is insulting to the intellect of hard-working rank-and-file members. PSL dismisses almost all outside critique by portraying its critics as disingenuous, “online” armchair critics who are not doing “the work.” The party would have you forget that many of these critics were once themselves in the streets organizing as members of PSL, or have had poor experiences in past organizing spaces that PSL is now reproducing, or are simply organizers who *also* read and use the Internet. The supposedly petty “literary critique” initiated by this document could have substantial consequences for the socialist movement, insofar as PSL is the leading influence it claims to be.

In the wake of these disastrous decisions by party leadership, large numbers of PSL members and candidates have resigned, terminated their candidacies, or been expelled—including ten in Chicago, over a dozen in Philadelphia, all nine members of the Fayetteville, Arkansas branch, and the entire pre-branch formation in Johnson City, Tennessee, with the total estimate well over 50 at this time. Many more members plan to resign or are seriously considering doing so. Entire branches or pre-branch formations have already collapsed or teeter on the brink, erasing PSL’s presence in whole geographic areas. This is not just “words.”

The mass organizations and partyless communists who have lost interest in affiliation with the party will leave a void where a deeper relationship with the masses could have been built. The diminished morale of the concerned comrades who have chosen to stay for the moment will hamper the party’s efforts to play a leading role in the struggle going forward. To be abundantly clear: *this is a result of the party’s own actions, not those of the members who brought their concerns to leadership and then went public once their criticisms were forcibly suppressed. Democratic centralism is not a cudgel with which to silence whistleblowers, nor a catch-all excuse for unethical behavior.*

The members of the investigative committee for Steven’s case have repeatedly emphasized how many hours of work they put into the investigation. We, too, put hours into compiling our document. Leadership has accused us of intending to cause a scandal without explaining *what they think we would have to gain* (and there is truly no reasonable answer to this question). They have refused to consider that our concerns were earnest and that we wrote them out because we, originally, had faith in the party. In fact, a more pertinent question is *what the PSL had to gain* from its misconduct—the party leadership has much more motivation to protect Steven (a personal friend of many leaders whom they view as a longtime asset to their work) than they would have to support an unbiased, ethical handling of this matter. These “words” are “work,” and have actual, concrete implications—even if the party is too embarrassed to acknowledge them.