

# Introduction to the document “Solidarity Process Around Reports of Sexual Violence and Battering”

Tuesday 21 January 2014, by [Solidarity \(USA\)](#) (Date first published: 19 January 2014).

The 2013 Solidarity Convention spent a considerable amount of time and energy on the issues raised by the draft of the document, Solidarity Process Around Reports of Sexual Violence and Battering, in both its initial form and in its first revision. There was also an intense email discussion. This is an issue of political significance and also an issue that is highly charged emotionally due to its place at the intersection of the personal and political and to the experiences many members and associates have had in a violent and misogynist sexist society.

The process of creating this document was sparked by several incidents, among them the situation in the British SWP where many members have publicly resigned following repeated actions taken by the Central Committee to demean and silence survivors of gender violence and their allies while failing to hold aggressors, including leaders of the organization, accountable. In the aftermath of Occupy, traumatic events that occurred within encampments are now being widely discussed and debated. Additionally, a situation in California has come to light in which the Progressive Labor Party closed ranks in defense of a leader who had raped a fellow movement activist and failed completely to support the survivor in the aftermath of the attack. We are also aware of situations within our own organization over the years that have been responded to in problematic and inconsistent ways. We deeply regret that these incidents have at times caused survivors, women, and LGBTQ people to feel unwelcome and unsafe in and around Solidarity. We recognize that, despite identification with feminist politics, there is a problem of gendered violence in many radical and socialist communities. With this in mind, we strive to ensure that feminist politics are not simply espoused, but rather internalized and practiced throughout our organization.

It is in this context that a group of volunteers, brought together by the leadership, began its work.

Our socialist and feminist politics dictate that we take an unwavering, principled stand against patriarchal behavior and gendered violence in our movement and that we make our organizational spaces safer and empowering for survivors and people who are disproportionately impacted by gendered violence, including women and LGBTQ people. To do otherwise would not only be morally and politically reprehensible but would cause fatal damage to our overall project. With this fundamental commitment as our guide, we undertook a 5 month process of study, self-education, reflection, debate, and writing with the goal of developing a formal procedure for dealing with rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and other forms of gendered violence in our organization. Nine days prior to our convention, we released a draft document, agreed to by most but not all of the drafting committee members. It was intended to be a starting point for our organization in responding to cases ranging from low intensity sexual harassment to rape and sexual assault. This document attempted to combine the best aspects of different approaches currently being practiced on the left, including “zero tolerance” which emphasizes expulsion of aggressors as a necessary step for creating safer spaces and community accountability which utilizes an individualized case-by-case process to meet the survivor’s needs and repair the harm. In response, there have been a number of

debates over Facebook and over our listserv about the proposed processes, based primarily on a small (but not insignificant) part of the document that described a “continuum of sexual assault” and recommended organizational responses for each category of infraction.

In the ensuing debate, it became clear that the document did not adequately convey our fundamental support for survivors and for creating safer political and social spaces within our organization. Some of our comrades felt that the suggested policies would allow aggressors to get away with a “slap on the wrist.” In response, the document was revised to make expulsion mandatory in many cases and shift even more emphasis toward supporting survivors and away from rehabilitating aggressors as an organizational task. This is the version that was adopted provisionally at our convention, with the understanding that changes will be made in the policy as we learn more about these issues.

One important step forward outlined in this document is the establishment of the Commission on Gendered Violence, a 6 member body which will be responsible for evaluating and responding to cases, as well as coordinating member education on these issues. This will take the decision-making process out of branches and create more consistency throughout the organization. Although we have adopted an initial draft document, our work is far from done. This is a complex topic, one that people view through the prisms of their own varied life experiences. As in society as a whole, many members of our organization are survivors of sexual violence.

Moving forward, we strive to not only address the most egregious cases of gendered violence but also to transform the environment and culture within our organization by developing practices of intervening in the everyday instances of gendered harassment and sexist behavior. We seek to make our norms of behavior clearly known and to make Solidarity a place where such behavior is not tolerated. Our organization must be a comfortable place for all its members and contacts, be they people of color, young, old, differently-abled, male, female, queer, or straight. This document, which is already in the process of revision and elaboration, is an important step in this direction.

While this document focuses primarily on issues within our organization, we also want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to fighting gendered violence as a central part of our political project. Cultivating a feminist culture within our organization goes hand in hand with engaging in movements which challenge rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, and state-sanctioned gender violence throughout the world. The process of writing this document has sparked new connections with organizations and individuals in the movement against gendered violence and we commit to building those relationships as we move forward.

**Members of Solidarity**, January 19, 2014

*The full document is available on ESSF (article 30891), [Solidarity Process Around Reports of Sexual Violence and Battering](#)*

---

**P.S.**

\* <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4084>