

The reform process of the Socialist International

SI Working Group on Reform

Final Report to the SI Council in Costa Rica, 23-24 of January 2012

Introduction

The Council of Socialist International in Athens on 1–2 of July 2011 established a working group on the reform of the Socialist International, to be co-chaired by SI Vice-Presidents Eero Heinäluoma (SDP, Finland), Beatriz Paredes (PRI, Mexico) and Nouzha Chekrouni (USFP, Morocco), to prepare proposals on this matter in advance of the next Council meeting. The first meeting of the Group took place in Geneva in September 2011, and the second in Marrakech in December 2011. The working group has been open to all member parties of the SI.

Before the Athens SI Council meeting in July 2011 the President and the Secretary General touched on the need and importance of a reform in a letter sent on 4 April to all member parties. A number of member parties also communicated their views on the same matter on 14 April.

It is obvious that there is a need to maintain a continuous process of reform in the SI. During the years there have also been processes in the SI to build up the reform, such as the Initiatives presented by the SG at the 1999 Congress and the Fassino report, the recommendations of which were approved in the SI in 2004.

1. Objectives and the current situation

1.1 The objectives of the SI reform

The objective of the reform is to create the preconditions for the strengthening of the Socialist International. For its further empowerment as an international institution with global visibility that can also reach citizens and activists on all continents.

At the moment, the international labour movement and progressive forces have a major asset in the Socialist International, the value of which is hard to measure. Now it is time to use the full potential of this asset. There is hard work but also collective experiences of success in store for everyone. The SI can only be as strong as its member parties and their ability to co-operate.

We have at hand a great platform for progressive ideas. We must create amongst ourselves an atmosphere that will inspire new people to join in. We need new generations – also those who have traditionally not been interested in politics but are now awakening to the injustices of the world.

The SI reform is a common project of all the member parties, in which the concept of “we” describes the movement. The development of a collective political vision happens step by step, by taking a stand on relevant political questions.

Only by strengthening the connections between progressive parties can we hope to see social justice, sustainability and international peace progress worldwide.

The Socialist International as a global organisation consists of parties that have different political traditions. This has to be taken into account during the reform work.

The objective is also to create constant adaptability to change. Only that can guarantee that the progressive movement can be involved in the globalising world development.

In this context it would be interesting to re-assess the recommendations of the Fassino report from 2004.

To cite two concrete examples from the report of the Chair of the Working Group to the SI Madrid Council, 7-8 February 2004:

- "Developing initiatives and statements from the SI on the occasion of the most relevant international meetings and the main events of the world politics (UN Assembly, G meetings, WTO and so on), also holding, whenever possible, meetings of ministers and national representatives belonging to the socialist family."

- "Wide opportunities are emerging in the relations with political and opinion movements with whom the SI can establish permanent relations and forms of cooperation."

A lot of work has been done to implement these objectives but there is still work that remains. Now it is good to once again bring up new objectives and make concrete plans for their implementation.

Referring to a statement made in the letter of April 4 2011 by the SI President and Secretary General, which captures for us one of the most important goals of the SI: "we need to renew our structures and have the capacity to imagine how we can seize the opportunity to influence people, public opinion, civil society and governments." In order to accomplish this, adequate preparatory and follow-up work must be done.

1.2 The current state of the Socialist International

In the past few years the SI has been characterised by strong growth in the number of members and, at the same time, a decrease in its financial resources. This creates new challenges on how to guarantee geographic balance, independence and political and ideological coherence.

The SI is ever more important regionally. In evaluating our work we should also underline that we have also had a significant number of successful initiatives. The SI, having acted throughout decades on international and global scenes, has a unique potential of viewing and understanding problems in the world.

In the reform work, the basic position is the socialist point of view: Change is always an opportunity.

The principles of the SI are alive; they are current and relevant to the needs of the working people. There are people that are not free – so we have to stand for freedom. To make people free we need solidarity more than ever, and we still have to do a lot to achieve justice for all.

In the reform, it is important to recognise that an important part of the process is that the member parties should also be committed to the International and its activities.

2 Recommended actions for the SI reform

2.1 Recommended actions related to political tasks

In the operations of the SI, planning themes and influencing through campaigning must be strengthened. This requires medium-term scheduling.

The SI, whilst investing in the areas where it has traditionally been strong, has the potential to explore also new paths of action and influence.

We need more in-depth debates. We should continue to be involved vis-à-vis international conflicts, and strive to promote our ideas on the international scene.

2.2 Recommended actions related to organisational work

Like every large political organisation, the SI can improve its functioning if all members contribute to the elaboration of a long enough term strategy and to the creation of more opportunities of interaction.

In political terms, the SI can be assertive and pro-active, with ambitious objectives.

For progressives all over the world, the SI is an essential point of reference for greater visibility.

To maximise the political efficiency of the SI, the following elements should be of priority: a) strengthened coordination; b) improved co-operation; c) the elaboration of strategies and policies; d) the enhanced demonstration of the unity of progressives; and e) the development of common campaigns.

For the purpose of increasing the equal opportunities of all parties to participate in the SI activities, there is a need to research the opportunity to create a solidarity fund with clear rules and criteria for assistance of member parties.

The SI should support international campaigns, strengthen its long-term commitment in conflict regions and continue the establishment of special commissions and working groups on current issues and concrete events with a schedule and defined tasks.

The working methods and procedures of the regional and thematic committees should also be improved and reformed. The format of the statutory Councils and Congresses will be modified to include thematic working groups to complement the plenary speeches, if

the necessary financial means are available for interpretation, allowing for a deeper political discussion.

For increased visibility and strength, the SI should: a) invest in new means of communication including the use of social networks; b) launch fully-fledged campaigns; and c) increase interconnection with experts and intellectuals.

In order to transform great plans into great results we have to consolidate the financial base of the SI. It is necessary to understand that membership fees still constitute the most important part of the revenues and should not be paid subject to conditions. This will remain a fact even if new sources of income are found. The principles of burden-sharing are subject to reconsideration.

The right to participate with full rights in the proceedings of the Council and the Congress as well as the statutory committees must be made dependent on the payment of membership fees. Any exemptions must be approved by the SIFAC.

2.2.1 The SI leadership and its election

Elections to the SI leadership will be carried out by direct, open elections of candidates at the Congress. Candidates should register by transmitting their intentions to the SI office no later than a month prior to the Congress.

The statutes ought to state, in the future, that the President and the Secretary General of the SI are elected for a four year term. It is possible to elect the President and the Secretary General for one additional four year term.

2.2.2 Congress

Party leaders should make the effort to attend SI Congresses. We also welcome the participation in Congresses of significant political figures outside of our family and heads of other international organisations.

A Congress is a huge task also from the organisational and economic point of view. Therefore we propose to have the Congress every fourth year in the future.

2.2.3 Council

The SI Council must meet regularly twice a year. One of the annual meetings could be connected to another international event. Similarly to the Congresses and subject to the financial means available, workshops and panel discussions should be added to the main sessions.

The establishment of thematic working groups during the councils and congresses to complement the plenary speeches would, for instance, allow a better and deeper political discussion:

- The format of debates should be changed.

- Documents supporting discussions should be prepared through an inclusive process involving thematic/regional committees.
- Medium-term planning involving all those concerned would be valuable.

2.2.4 Committees

In the SI we should have more member parties take on an active role in leadership positions in the organisation. The introduction of Vice-Chairs in every Committee would enable a more efficient way of working.

In the statutory committees there is a need to revise the rules of procedure to guarantee transparency and equality to all members.

Attention must also be paid to the planning and implementation of committee work. Tighter scheduling of time during meetings would be beneficial.

2.2.4.1 Regional committees

One cornerstone for the future success of the SI is efficient regional work. The work of the regional committees must be strengthened. There is reason to investigate the possibilities to increase the number of local conferences in between the Council meetings.

Regional committees could improve the working capacities of the SI while keeping in mind its political cohesion. At the SI office, employees from different regions and cultural backgrounds are a positive element for the identity of the organisation. Shared regional responsibilities in the SI office are needed in the future when increasing the capacity of the office.

2.2.4.2 Permanent committees

We must increase the SI's ability to change its committee structure during intercongress periods if there is a transparent and democratic decision on this matter.

Special commissions and thematic committees could meet ad hoc to deal with current issues or concrete events within a limited time-frame and with clearly defined tasks. The product of the work of special commissions and thematic committees are an important tool in influencing political processes at the level of international institutions.

2.2.4.3 Temporary project groups

In the future, the SI should also use temporary project groups with precise schedules and clear assignments.

2.2.5 New ways to operate

The SI should explore the possibility of the added value in launching campaigns and using social media.

We should create a system that increases information exchange between parties, enabling, for example, the organisation of election training. We must utilise information exchange, through which the participants get access to “best practice” information.

Globally the social democratic movement organises various campaigns and in them experiences successes and adversities. It has been clearly visible that our political opponents in certain regions use the same themes from one election to another and hamper the conditions of our success.

The SI member parties could propose the organisation of annual election seminars, in which the latest successful campaigns and various campaigning techniques are discussed.

The significance of the SI is greater for small member parties and those that are just starting up. A specific project should be launched to offer operational support for those parties through a network structure that also uses new methods.

2.2.6. More efficient flow of information

2.2.6.1 Communication toward members and developing interaction

A guiding principle for all action in the SI should be: how can we provide more information to the media about our work and our achievements?

The SI needs practical and effective communication methods. Member parties could contribute to this matter.

Parties could contribute to the SI's work outside of the framework of formal meetings through, if technically possible, conferences calls and email groups. The SI member parties can also play an important role by contributing to the SI network of experts.

Enhanced visibility could be ensured by means of:

- 1) More space in general for SI material on member parties' websites, e.g. articles, newsletters and interviews.
- 2) The possibility of direct SI membership for national party members to support and participate in SI activities with the goal of building up a global network of SI activists to improve the contacts of the SI to the grassroots level of activism.
- 3) The creation of a communication portfolio by the SI staff including new technologies.

Political initiatives to improve visibility include focused campaigns with clear objectives and a strategy.

Emails with visible mailing lists can enhance discussion among member parties and could be part of modern political communication, as well as regular newsletters, Facebook and Twitter.

2.2.6.2 Communication to the media

Raising the visibility of the SI requires active and continuous work with the media. Communications about meetings need to be published immediately. We should aim both for mainstream traditional media and social media.

Exchange of ideas and good practices between press officers and media experts of member parties should be encouraged.

For greater media coverage, the debates at SI meetings need to be focused on content and leaders need to be present. Naturally, the SI has to maintain and enhance its uncontested tradition as a platform for prominent keynote speakers at Councils and Congresses.

2.2.7 Women and the youth i.e. SIW and IUSY

It is important to invite IUSY, SIW, IFM-SEI representatives to all SI meetings, and it is equally important that they participate.

The SI must work as efficiently with gender issues as it does with any other political issue. There is a clear need to make a separate plan to develop relations between the SI and SIW and look at all of the details, such as the principles of the financing of the SIW through the SI. The current situation is not satisfactory, but we need key organisations such as national women's leagues to take the initiative. It is clear that in some of the parties, interest in the work of the SIW is limited. The SIW could be one of the cornerstones of our success in the future in some of the regions where we are weak today. Meetings of SIW will be held prior to SI Councils and Congresses to facilitate the attendance of SIW delegates at the SI meetings.

The IUSY and the SI are equally important to each other. The IUSY as the youth organisation of the SI has a natural role in SI activities and politics. The SI as the mother party provides a political arena for IUSY politics at the same time as IUSY participation ensures a young progressive perspective on SI politics.

The IUSY and the SI should jointly set up a commission that looks into the challenges for the young generation; the right to education, employment, migration and sustainable environmental, economical and social development.

The IUSY and the SI should jointly develop an annual leadership training/academy where young leaders can get the chance to improve their skills and, through exchange with current and former leaders, increase their knowledge and experience.

2.2.8 New partners

Various NGOs and unions, particularly the trade union movement, will continue to be natural cooperation partners for the SI. We must also increase our interaction with the “demonstrators of the streets”, the unofficial movements that strive for change toward a better and more just direction through peaceful and non-violent means.

To enrich our work in the Socialist International, broad contacts with the academic world and the scientific community are also of vital importance. Close to many parties there are also think-tanks that have competence, resources and good connections to their own operational environment. Those contacts should be improved and utilised through introducing the existing think tanks to all member parties and building a global network of SI related think tanks.

The work of the SI office and administration could be complemented by ready elements in political content. For example, the “SI stamp” can be put on products created by think tanks in close collaboration with SI bodies.

The SI must also explore ways to further coordinate its activities with the leadership of other international organisations. Regular meetings at different levels could be held within these organisations. The SI should continue to take advantage of important international events such as the UNGA. The SI should also continue and develop activities which enable politicians to build up networks like the SI has done with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

2.3 Suggestions related to administrative work

In the future, the composition of the different administrative organs, such as the Presidium, SIFAC, and the Ethics Committee of the SI, must reflect geographic balance and gender equality where the statutes of the SI have binding regulations for all decisions: “Representation of either gender in all elected statutory and non-statutory bodies of the SI must not be less than one third. This provision must be reflected in the composition of the delegations of member parties to SI congresses and councils”.

Sanctions should also be introduced if member parties do not follow the statutes of the SI.

2.3.1 Presidium

The members of the Presidium must represent the organisation's member base as broadly as possible.

It should be debated in the first meeting after the Congress whether there is a need, for efficiency reasons, for the Presidium to have a more defined internal division of labour.

The Presidium should continue to meet just before each Council and at least once a year separately. There are good reasons for having this special meeting during the UN General Assembly in September, as is the present practice.

There is a need to establish a clear rule on the nomination of the successor of a presidium member if she or he is not able to participate in the work of the SI Presidium. If a person elected in the SI congress is not able to participate in the work of the SI Presidium, the national party should nominate a successor who takes the place of the member elected in the congress and who will then be appointed to the position by the SI Council.

2.3.2 SIFAC

The SI's Finance and Administration Committee (SIFAC) must meet regularly at least once a year in addition to the meetings prior to the Council. Members with previous experience in financial and administration affairs should be proposed by member parties for this Committee. Party treasurers can be invited regularly to provide ideas and share experiences.

Members of SIFAC should provide ideas on the improvement of the Committee's work in cooperation with those responsible within the SI. The Chair and members of SIFAC should contribute actively in encouraging parties to regularly pay their fees. They should also contribute to the assessment of objective reasons that may impede certain member parties from paying their fee.

The composition of SIFAC must reflect the geographic balance of the SI membership.

2.3.3 Ethics Committee

The Ethical Charter is the basis for the conduct of all SI members. The recommendations of the Ethics Committee must set the standard for all SI actions. Every member party must accept the Ethical Charter and act accordingly.

The Ethics Committee must have the ability to act rapidly together with the Secretary General and President of the SI. The Ethics Committee may make rapid decisions by direct communication between meetings, for example, on expelling a party until the next Council meeting, where the expulsion would have to be approved with 2/3 of the vote.

The Ethics Committee should aim to meet at least two times per year in addition to meetings organised in connection with the Councils.

Geographic balance of the Committee is essential. The chairs of the regional committees should be invited to attend the Ethics Committee.

We should improve ways to develop measures for monitoring the political situation in different regions. The need to react is not only when a policy is proven wrong on the national level, but we must try to find ways to prevent that from happening through close consultation with the parties involved. The party, the status of which is in the focus of investigation in the Ethics Committee, should always be given the possibility to express its opinion during the process in the SI.

The working structure with the different categories, discussed by the Ethics Committee at its meeting in London in March 2011, is a good base for future work.

2.4. The SI secretariat

The role of the SI secretariat is crucial for the success of the work of the SI. To be strengthened, it needs more resources. It must be debated if capacity can be increased by the presence of a deputy secretary general or by more members of staff with clear areas of responsibility. The Secretary General will be elected in the Congress. The other appointments of the secretariat will be approved by the Presidium.

Also, to implement new means of communication, the office needs a separate employee.

The SI should consider developing opportunities for member parties to support the organisation in terms of logistics and human resources when they are hosting meetings or activities, or chairing committees.

The use of interns should be done strategically, e.g. in cooperation with universities, international study programmes or parties. A new tradition of having one intern at a time during the whole year could be established. Cooperation with parties, email lists and the creation of expert groups would complement such development. More interaction with parties on a regional basis could be useful.

A review must be done on the effects that the location of the SI office has on the global nature of the organisation, and on the possibilities of finding possible synergy benefits.

2.5. Financing of the SI

2.5.1 Budgeting, follow-up

We need a strong and clear process of decision-making and allocation of the resources of the organisation and a fair, agreed method in relation to the calculation of membership fees.

With better resources we are able to build a stronger SI. Without more financial resources there are very limited possibilities of having real development in the SI. In this reform process, one of the main tasks is to strengthen the financial base of the organisation, which is undeniably necessary in creating the conditions for its better functioning and efficiency.

2.5.2 Financial follow-up, income and expenditure

SIFAC members need to propose ideas for a timely assessment of the state of finances in parallel with ideas for transparent fundraising.

2.5.3 Membership, financing, membership fees and other income

In the future, parties, organisations and individuals could be members of the SI. Also supportive membership could be made possible.

Members must pay their membership fees annually: only a paid membership fee guarantees the right to participate in the organisation's events and the right to speak, make proposals and vote in meetings. If a member party has failed to pay the membership fee for longer than a year, it forfeits its right to speak, make proposals or vote in the SI meetings.

Revised criteria should be established to define the rate of the membership fee. Reform in relation to membership fees should be made during the year 2013.

We must strengthen the opportunities for new individual contributors outside of our member parties. The list of such contributors should be reviewed annually by SIFAC.

In the future, SIFAC must consider and decide if a limit should be set on the amount of an individual contribution, or if contributions in excess of a specific sum should be subject to approval by SIFAC.

3. Implementation of the reforms

When decisions about the SI reform process are made, we must at the same time clearly define a timetable and, according to the statutes, the allocation of responsibilities.

4. Follow-up of the implementation of the reforms

We need to examine a follow-up system for the SI reform that will begin from the next Congress. After the 2012 Congress, the SI leadership will report to the Council and Presidium about the implementation of the reform, at which stage adjustments could be made. A progress report should be presented to the SI Council in 2013.