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Working People's ASSEMBLIES

Social Justice Unionism
for the 21st Century



**Working People's Assemblies:
Social Justice Unionism for the 21st Century**

Introduction

The labor movement in the United States has been in a crisis for several decades. The most organized sector of that movement, the trade unions, have faced shrinking numbers, density, and an offensive from both employers and government. Technological changes in the workforce have tended to transform and eliminate unionized jobs, while the dominant, individualistic culture typically found within the U.S. has been strengthened over the last 30 years. None of this is news to anyone likely to pick up and read this pamphlet.

We argue that the prolonged crisis of the movement is rooted in our past: the political weaknesses of Gompersism has hemmed us in for most of the entire history of the trade union movement in the United States. More common, but less precise terms for this conservative brand of unionism might be “business unionism” or “bread and butter unionism”. We assert that if we understand this history, the contending social justice counter-currents of our past from which we can learn, and changes in the U.S. workforce today, we have the opportunity to turn things around. Social justice unionism in the U.S. today calls for a particular politics: a recognition that trade unions are just one part of a broader working class movement that can be united to advance new forms of organizing to build regional working class power. Key to this is an ideological re-founding of the broader labor movement on social justice principles, especially the fight against white supremacy.

Where We Are

The U.S. trade union movement, and the U.S. working class generally, face extremely difficult times. Union density (the percentage of workers legally eligible to be organized who are actually union members) is at less than 6.8% in the private sector, comparable to rates of the 1920s. The Great Financial Panic of 2008 laid bare for hundreds of millions of people the decayed nature of the capitalist world economy, and destroyed 1.4 million unionized jobs in the United States. It came on the cusp of nearly 30 years of what economists call neoliberal policies by the U.S. ruling class: privatization, free trade and deregulation of all sectors of the economy, including the labor market. (The use of “liberal” in the term neoliberal is an economic term, meaning essentially “without restraints on corporations”; not to be confused with the mainstream political concept of “liberal”) Neoliberalism challenges the very existence of unions, and paints us as an antiquated fetter on the efficient workings of the capitalist free market. Giant multi-national corporations tell us the “free market” will eventually surely take care of us all, if we just leave them alone.

Two- and three-tier wage agreements are the standard in many private industries. When workers retiring today first punched a clock in the 1970s, over 90% of private sector workers could look to a retirement supported by a traditional defined-benefit pension plan. Today fewer than 20% of retiring workers receive that. Similarly, over 70% of private sector workers had affordable health care from their employers, and the rate of health care insurance coverage for public sector health workers was even higher. Affordable health care at private employers is disappearing, and there is no help in sight from Washington on that score. Labor law, perched precariously on the Constitutional right of Congress to maintain stability in interstate commerce, has become so useless that to organize new members many unions ignore the law entirely. Beginning in the 1970s, the building trades unions were driven out of the home housing markets and retreated to a reduced existence in the largest cities. They were largely confined to federally funded projects which have legally mandated prevailing wage protection. Essentially this required union pay rates and training in this sector of the industry. This further consolidated union membership into the public sector, such that for the

first time in our history the majority of union members in the U.S. are government employees, and they have become the latest target of right wing savagery.

The value produced by the U.S. economy has doubled since 1980—but the wealth has been hoarded by the richest among us. In 1980 the top 1% controlled 10% of the country's wealth—today they control 40%. Overall, taxes are down to 15% of the value of the economy—the lowest rate in 60 years, despite the whining of the Fox News Neanderthals. While the wealthiest complain about an official tax rate of 35% for the highest earners—down from 90% in the 1950s—the tax code is so twisted to benefit the rich that the 400 richest families in the United States pay only 17% of their income in taxes. The shift of the tax burden from the wealthiest capitalists accounts almost entirely for the national debt.

The relentless political and ideological attacks on unions in the public discourse has taken its toll, although studies still indicate that if given the opportunity most workers would join a union. The verdict from our corporate mouthpieces can get a little confusing: was it autoworkers who destroyed the economy, or steelworkers? Immigrant workers? Welfare mothers? The overpaid union building trades? In their endless search for a scapegoat for their own crimes, corporate America and their conservative and liberal apologists have recently decided that it was public school teachers who ruined America after all!

The terrain faced by the next generation of workers is so different than that of their parents that it appears as a lunar landscape. It turns out that what looked normal for a few short decades to the better paid, unionized sector of the American workforce—pensions, health care, an escalating living wage, public education, the hope and expectation of a better life than their parents—was in fact a brief respite, won through struggle, from the ongoing impoverishment of the working class majority.

Beginning in the U.S. with the Reagan presidency, thirty years of corporate attacks and the current financial crisis have yet generated more than despair and suffering. Governments and social movements in the global South are pushing forward with new socialist experi-

ments. Here in the US, socialism and even more so anti-capitalism, is growing increasingly popular. A 2010 Gallup poll reported that 36% of Americans have a positive view of “socialism”. In that poll, Democrats regarded socialism and capitalism with equal favorability at 53%.

New forms of resistance and determined struggle have surfaced to challenge capital. This pamphlet is the expression of the desire of the Workers Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization to contribute to those new (and in some cases re-born) forms of organizing.

The Working Class is Our Home

The working class is our home. In the popular post-World War II discourse, the working class officially disappeared from polite conversation. What emerged was a myth that most everybody became “middle class”—whether you were a plant manager or an electrician, custodian, assembler; a teacher or the CEO; the minimum wage clerk at the cash register. A handful of enterprising rich folks, currently known by the perverse title of “job creators”, occupied the top tier of this structure. In this myth, the “poor” are seen as undeserving, despised for living off of the giant middle class. As always in America, this nonsense was fed, and enforced, by racist and patriarchal stereotypes and myths.

But there is indeed a working class, and we are the overwhelming majority. As labor educator Michael Zweig and others have pointed out, if you define the working class as those who sell their labor and have little power over their jobs and lives, we constitute over 63% of the population.¹ If you include workers whose power is diminishing, such as teachers, that percentage climbs. Poverty, Zweig explains, is something that happens to working class people, not a permanent condition of a different social class of folks.

As Karl Marx said more than 150 years ago, the working class is the class with the interest to create a new world, the class that stands in opposition to the small ruling class, which can only liberate itself from wage-slavery by creating a more just, socialist society for all. Marx declared in the Communist manifesto:

“The proletarians [or workers] cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation...the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”

Echoes of the Occupy movement’s definition of the 99%!

Unions remain a critical institution for defending working class power and standards of living. Union wages are higher in every case than non-union wages in the same industries (estimates range from 15% to 28%), although the “union difference” is decreasing as union density and power declines. Union members still have a better chance of having a pension, decent health care, and other benefits than non-union workers. Estimates of the union difference with wages and benefits combined range as high as 43%! The union difference is highest for workers of color, particularly women of color.

Unions remain perhaps the key element in the ongoing struggle to defend what’s left of the limited “social contract” between workers and employers since World War II: Social Security, laws that sustain minimum and living wages (like the Davis-Bacon Act in the construction industry), health and safety on the job, civil rights, and environmental regulations.

A union is formed when workers come together *as workers*. Unions contribute to building working class ties across racial and gender barriers, and contribute to a broader, class-based understanding of problems with our economy and the country. Corporate America often understands this better than some liberals who underestimate the importance of the labor movement. No matter how weak the trade union movement becomes, multinational corporations wage war on “big labor”, seeking to neutralize unions by either co-opting us into the corporate “team”, or trying to exterminate us altogether. As the fascist sympathizer President Albert Sloan of General Motors put it after World War II:

“It took fourteen years to rid this country of prohibition. It is going to take a good while to rid the country of The New Deal, but sooner or later the ax falls and we get a change.”

Even in the period from World War II to the 1970s, which most labor historians often describe as tranquil periods of labor peace and collaboration, the elemental class struggle continued on. The longest strike in U.S. history (as measured in terms of hours lost from work) by the United Steelworkers against U.S. Steel took place in 1959. The following year General Electric crushed a strike of GE workers, who had been divided and weakened by the purge of its most left-wing members

How We Got Here: Gomperism in the U.S. Trade Union Movement

Trade unions have attempted to re-group in recent decades. Since President Sweeney was elected in 1995 in the first-ever contested officer elections the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)—the largest union federation in the U.S.—has taken some positive steps. In particular, it has worked to re-energize Central Labor Councils (CLCs), the organizations of AFL-CIO unions in a geographic area, after they had been ignored and undermined for more than half a century. If unions are where workers come together as workers, CLCs are where unions come together as a class, and at least potentially as a movement. The more innovative CLCs now include non-union workers organizations (such as workers' centers) as official affiliates, something hard to imagine just a few years ago.

As a result of the need for union growth, decades of internal struggle by leftists, and the growth of independent immigrant workers movements, the AFL-CIO reached out to immigrant workers, including the undocumented, after a hundred years of white-chauvinist immigrant bashing. It at least tolerated anti-war sentiment against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, although the divided Federation did nothing to build the anti-war movement other than pass a Convention resolution. The AFL-CIO dismantled most vestiges of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which used its operations in other countries to try to purge the left wing of the unions in every country, helped overthrow governments that threatened U.S. corporate investments, and functioned as U.S. government spies. The Federation reached out a hand to the global

justice (or “anti-globalization”) movement and sought to re-build its relationship with progressive academics and labor studies programs. The Federation immediately understood the importance of the Occupy movement last year, and supported it in an unusually respectful way.

But the U.S. trade union movement as a whole is still in the grips of Gompersism, (named after the first president of the AFL-CIO, Samuel Gompers), the conservative bread-and-butter unionism that situates itself inside the framework of capitalism. Gompersism has helped bring about our current demise and offers no hope to rejuvenate our ranks and our power. Sometimes known as American “pragmatism”, it rejects any progressive ideological or overarching political theories, and rejects building alliances based on principles. Instead it accepts the notion that we are somehow all free players in the capitalist market, and that collectively-bargained contracts for those already in unions are the only legitimate goal of the movement. Gompersism especially rejects any direct discussion of white supremacy, the Achilles heel of the U.S. labor movement. Gompersism has a cruel and disastrous history in the U.S., and to continue with it in the face of globalization and the current re-making of the U.S. working class borders on insanity.

Under Samuel Gompers, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) supported murderous imperialist adventures of the U.S. government time and again. Gompers supported the seizure of Panama from Colombia to construct the Canal, and only asked that union labor be used in its construction. He positioned the AFL as the federation of patriotic unions, as opposed to left-wing unions and socialists who opposed the slaughter of workers of all countries during World War I:

“We do not oppose....the development of our power and influence which the United States may exert upon the destinies of the nations of the earth.”

Gompers claimed that the “higher intelligence” of the U.S. [read white] workers justified U.S. wars of aggression and U.S. business exploitation all over the world. There were limits, however, to his taste for U.S. domination when it conflicted with his racism. He

rejected the notion of annexing the “semi-savage population” of the Philippines.

Courageous organizing efforts like those of the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association in the beet fields of California were refused the protection and solidarity of admission to the AFL unless they drove out their own members of Asian descent (which they refused to do). Racially white supremacist and segregated unions were included in the Federation until the 1960s, even those like the Railroad brotherhoods whose whites-only constitutions had been built on bloody pogroms against African American members. Retreating from the fight to win legal protection as human or natural rights, Gompers declared “The whole gospel of the labor movement is summed up in one phrase: freedom of contract.” Union activists learned the truth of the bitter popular saying, “when you walk in here, you leave the Constitution at the door.”

As has been the case throughout the history of this trend in the U.S. trade union movement, Gompers adopted a program of cooperation with employers that paralleled cooperation with the U.S. state abroad. The AFL signed on to the corporate “American Plan” in the early part of the 1920s, which combined the construction of “open shops” and even company unions in the guise of “Americanizing” immigrant workers. And, as usual, the U.S. unions received little in return for their ideological loyalty to capital.

The history of the U.S. labor movement at the beginning of the last century and before may seem distant and irrelevant to today’s activists. Look, then, at the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, considered the Magna Carta for American workers and still today the basic law “protecting” unions in this country. Sold as a way to restore business peace in the middle of the Great Depression, it was, like all New Deal legislation, an explicit compromise with Southern Democrats who presided over lynch law in the old Confederacy. Domestic workers and agricultural workers, who at the time encompassed most African American workers as well as Chicano/a and Filipino and Chinese workers in the West and Southwest, were excluded from coverage by the law. They still are today, three quarters of a century later!

New York's Senator Wagner, the chief architect of the new law, attempted to write into the law language that would ban discrimination on the job, but was told—by the AFL!—that if the language was not deleted the unions would kill the bill entirely. So the Black Freedom movement continued to develop, of necessity, on its own largely separate course. The anti-job discrimination language would wait 30 years, until the 1964 Civil Rights Act. “Whites only” by-laws remained in place for many AFL-CIO unions until the mid-1960s, sometimes enforced by the murder of workers of color. Even the historic black freedom March on Washington in 1963, where Martin Luther King gave his famous “I have a dream” speech and which led to the Civil Rights Act the following year, while endorsed by some unions, was not endorsed or supported by the AFL-CIO.

While the federation claimed it did not have the power to force its racist affiliated unions to open their doors to workers of color, it aggressively exercised its authority to exclude left-wing unions and leaders. The purge of communists and other militants during the Red Scare of the 1950s divided unions, wasted millions of dollars and effort in raids by right wing unions on left-wing unions, and ruined individual lives. It had the lasting effect of narrowing the debate over labor's direction, reinforcing the Gompertist anti-intellectualism in the movement that has undercut our vision and starved the discussion over strategy and tactics. Saluting the flag at union meetings and loyalty to the government became more important than loyalty to the interests of our class. The death of the even the notion of the “working class” disarmed us, and was largely unchallenged, even within the working class itself. “Operation Dixie”, the post-World War II effort to organize the South, was shut down amidst the purge of the left. Organizing the large majority of non-union workers was de-emphasized and de-funded, as unions focused exclusively on their current dues-paying members. While there was an occasional foray against out-right gangsterism in the labor movement, usually under government pressure, petty corruption and a stifling, self-perpetuating bureaucracy became the rule.

From World War II to the 1970s, the weaknesses of Gompertism were less evident, as the labor movement stagnated under a relatively stable political regime in the United States. Even a Republican like

Dwight Eisenhower (president from 1952-1960), satisfied perhaps that the more threatening elements of the labor movement were tamed, would say, “Only a fool would try to deprive working men and working women of their right to join the union of their choice.”

Wildcat strikes of Black workers against racist oppression in auto and other industries (sometimes against the union as well as the company) shattered the illusion of peace from time to time, but for the most part the purged and passive labor movement was utterly unprepared for what was to come. The accumulation and profit crisis hit U.S. corporations in the 1970s, as the rate of profit fell and capital sought new areas for profitable investment. The corporations turned on their labor “partners”, and the working class, with a renewed vengeance.

An indicator of the hold of Gompersism on the U.S. labor movement today is that the vision of even the best of our national leaders is essentially New Deal Nostalgia, a wistful appeal to a flawed compromise that contained within it the promise of its own demise—and is not about to return on its white horse in any case. Many unions still cling to a stubborn view that somehow things will change on their own, as though our history is determined by “cycles” like the business cycle. The hope is that if we just adjust to wage and benefit cuts to save our jobs, somehow things will once again go our way. “Teaming”, “competitive wages”, “jointness”, etc. mimic Gompers’s “American Plan”, and lead to the same unilateral disarmament in the class struggle.

It is impossible in a pamphlet like this to cast much light on the compromises and concessions that have been made in collective bargaining by local and international unions in recent decades. But it is absolutely clear that giving any ground whatsoever in a strategic sense is delusional. The notion that we will somehow be better served by a “modern” strategy that abandons the notion that we have different interests than corporate bosses, is disastrous, even traitorous. Bargaining and conflict take place in all circumstances—including within “teaming” schemes—because workers and corporate bosses have different interests. If there is anything that our history teaches us, it is that the only purpose of a compromise is to get ready for the next round of struggle. Behind each concession is the demand for

the next one. Class peace is temporary and relative. Class conflict is fundamental and permanent.

Gomperism advances the notion of working class conciliation to capitalists, the inevitability of a capitalist world and the impossibility of socialism. Another indicator of the hold of Gomperism in today's labor movement is the fealty of the trade union movement to the Democratic Party, which began even before Gompers. It is hard to find a union leader, including one at the national level, who isn't furious with workers' treatment by the national Democratic Party as a whole. After all, it was President Clinton, who gained office in 1992 with Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, who delivered such disasters as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the repeal of the Glass-Steagale Act, a protective measure from the New Deal which helped prevent banks from engaging in dangerous exploitative and speculative lending. Obama has continued in this capitalist mode, with free trade agreements, a compromised health care plan that left the industry in the hands of the private insurers, reduced civil rights in the name of national security, and war.

On the fundamental issues of the day, Democratic "neoliberal lite" hasn't done us many favors. Yet we continue to give hundreds of millions of dollars to the Democrats every election cycle, while our own independent structures, educational activities, and organizing funds are emaciated. For example, the Democratic Party in New Jersey receives some 30 times the funds from unions that state federations and CLCs collect from affiliated unions in their state. The Democrats build their city and ward organizations with our money. This travesty is repeated in every state and at the national level.

The problem, of course, is that the increasingly rabid Republican Party serves to make the Democrats look like a less threatening option. Today we face the possibility of national Right to Work legislation if the Republicans win control of the Senate and the Presidency, achieving what the Republican governors and legislators implemented in states like Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana. These folks are openly racist, and continually frame their attacks on labor and the Democrats in racially coded terms. They uphold false and oppressive patriarchal notions of "True Womanhood" or are openly hateful

towards women. They claim they want to “cure” gays, lesbians and transgender brothers and sisters, while they discriminate and stir up hatred against them.

Especially at the state and local level, unions depend on local Democrats for things that matter to their members. There are examples of Democratic lawmakers who are genuine allies, in not just legislative matters but contract and organizing battles as well. But self-imposed slavish loyalty to the Democratic Party clearly is part of our current conundrum. Third-party efforts to form a labor party or other progressive third party efforts have failed, largely due to the narrow electoral system in the United States. “Fusion” voting, where the labor movement can endorse (or not endorse) candidates on their own party’s line (like the Working Families Party in New York) have at least given the labor movement some semi-independent leverage in the few states where such efforts are legal. In a more promising development, unions are experimenting with independent efforts at local electoral power-building at the municipal level, independently of the local Democratic Party.

Social Justice Unionism

There are also stubborn left-wing trends in the history of the U.S. trade union movement with which we identify and which provide the inspiration for the kind of trade unionism that we need to rebuild today: **Social justice unionism**. From the beginning of the first manufacturing industries in the United States, when large-scale production of textiles and shoes replaced artisan and home production, workers recognized that the new concentration of wealth among capitalists was destroying the “Equal Rights” that they believed they were promised by the American Revolution. They organized against their employers, often with an inclusive, radical vision, and at times linking the struggle against wage-slavery with the abolitionist fight against Black slavery in the South. While in the United States this trend has usually been dominated by Gomerism and white chauvinism, it has persisted nevertheless.

Black workers were excluded from most unions of the National Labor Union led by William Sylvis after the Civil War, even though Sylvis pointed out that of the four million African Americans of the

time, “a greater proportion of them labor with their hands than can be counted from among the same number of any other people on earth”. So the ship-builder Isaac Myers build the National Colored Labor Union, organizing black workers and forging a political strategy of linking the black labor movement (and Chinese immigrant workers) with the defense of Radical Reconstruction in the post Civil War south, which had granted voting and free labor rights to African Americans in the former slave states. Efforts to bring the NCLU and the NLU together foundered over white exclusionism and white unionists’ loyalty to the white supremacist Democratic Party. As W.E.B. Dubois described it:

“As the Negroes [in the NCLU] moved from unionism toward political action, white labor in the North not only moved in the opposite direction...but also evolved the American Blindspot for the Negro and his problems. It lost interest and vital touch with Southern labor and acted as through the millions of laborers in the South did not exist.”

In a telling incident, the son of the great escaped slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass was expelled from the Washington, D.C. local of the Typographer’s Union, which meant that Lewis Douglass lost his government printing job. Upholding the action of the segregated local, the International Typographers Union claimed that admitting African Americans would cause anarchy and disintegration of the union:

“Surely no one who has the welfare of the craft at heart will seriously contend that the union of thousands of white printers should be destroyed for the purpose of granting a barren hone of membership to a few Negroes.”

The “welfare of the craft” was color-coded. This was pragmatism: morally and strategically bankrupt.

An orgy of lynching and murder consolidated white supremacy and defeated Reconstruction in the South between the 1870s and 1900. Black businesses, the churches of outspoken ministers, and schools were shuttered, confiscated and burned. In the West, non-white immigrants were scape-goated, such as when the famous Union Label

originated as an effort by the Cigar Makers International Union to drive Chinese workers from the trade.

Against the brutal repression by courts, judges, police and anti-anarchist and anti-communist political repression, workers continued to organize at the turn of the new century, but again we were divided. Skilled craft and railroad unions which excluded Black and Asian workers developed a racist approach of fighting the employers on the one hand, and fighting to defend their relatively privileged position compared to Black, Chinese and sometimes other immigrant workers on the other. These unions coalesced into the AFL, led by Samuel Gompers, chosen as president at its founding convention in 1886. Gompers founded another unsavory U.S. labor tradition by serving until he died in office in 1924.

The Knights of Labor, by contrast, organized across trades and included Black workers and Mexicans in the Southwest (but joined the AFL in excluding Chinese workers). Ida B. Wells, the great Black journalist, feminist and anti-lynching crusader of the period, attended a Knights meeting in Memphis the same year the AFL was founded, and observed: “everyone who came was welcomed, and every woman from black to white was seated with the courtesy usually extended to white ladies alone in this town.” Yet as the racist restoration of white supremacy after Reconstruction intensified, the Knights’s commitment to the inclusion of some non-white workers ended. It expelled its Mexican leaders in New Mexico who had involved the Knights with the Chicano (or Mexican-American) struggle to defend their lands from the railroads. The Knights purged suspected anarchists, and by 1894 actually called for the deportation of Black people to Africa.

The racist AFL survived and continued to grow because of the growth of the skilled trades as the U.S. industrialized, and due to its commitment to the struggle for the eight hour day. But the majority of workers in the U.S. were left at the mercy of the capitalists, until the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) again challenged the conservative U.S. labor movement with a radical, inclusive vision. When “Big Bill” Haywood, leader of the Western Federation of Miners, called the first convention of the IWW to order in Chicago on June 27, 1905, he deliberately used the words “Fellow Workers”,

as opposed to “citizens”, to indicate that the IWW’s One Big Union would include immigrants and native-born, men and women, and all races. Haywood laid out the program of the IWW in stark terms:

“We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working-class movement in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution without regard to capitalist masters!”

Unlike the all male leadership of the AFL, the podium at that founding convention included proven leaders like Mother Jones, already a labor agitator for nearly 50 years, and Lucy Parsons, the fiery Chicago anarchist whose husband had been framed and hanged after the Haymarket bombing in Chicago in 1886. Also the IWW hired women organizers.

The IWW led historic strikes of previously unorganized immigrant workers in the textile and other industries, and at times led millions of workers, although its formal membership was probably less than a hundred thousand at any given time. When the World War I was declared, fought by competing imperialist powers to re-divide the world, the fiercely internationalist IWW opposed it and suffered jailings and deportations of much of its leadership. The repression around the war and anti-Red raids, combined with the IWW’s inability to build consistent organization inside or outside the workplace, sidelined the union as a major force in the movement in the 1920s.

The pro-war and pro-capitalist AFL was challenged again in the late 1920s and 1930s, first by the work of the Communist Party and other leftists in the South and Southwest. Armed with its new understanding—that African Americans are a distinct people with a right to self-determination, as well as overwhelmingly part of the U.S. working class—the Communist Party threw itself into organizing multi-racial unions in places like Birmingham, Alabama. There sheriff Eugene “Bull” Connor, who would become notorious for his attacks on Civil Rights demonstrators for the next two decades, led the forces of law and order against integrated unions and the left. The Communist Party helped organized sharecroppers’ unions in the South, and built the Union of Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of

America in Texas along the Rio Grande valley, and among tobacco workers in North Carolina.

The unions of the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), created in 1935 as an alternative to the AFL with the goal of organizing workers in the massive manufacturing industries without regard to skill or craft, included Black, Mexican and Asian workers (although sometimes in jobs that were segregated by the companies with union collusion, as in the steel industry). Millions of workers were signed up as both the CIO and the AFL grew with the formal legalization of unions by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

The anti-fascist nature of World War II tended to open democratic opportunities at home as well. A. Phillip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters organized the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). This was an all-black movement that threatened to organize a massive march on the U.S. capital to expose the hypocrisy of the U.S. fighting against fascism abroad while standing on segregation and the corpses of lynch victims at home. Comparing Southern Senators and foreign dictators, the MOWM declared there was “no difference between Hitler of Germany and Talmadge of Mississippi, or Tojo of Japan and Bilbo of Mississippi”. In response, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination in the defense industries. Both union membership and black membership within union ranks grew dramatically during World War II.

After the War the CIO launched “Operation Dixie”, a multi-union effort to pierce the anti-union and Jim Crow Southern bastion, which was recognized as holding back not just Southern blacks, but Southern whites and all workers in the entire country. The promise was to take the limited victories of the New Deal and push back still farther against the restraints on working class freedom in the country. But again, the effort stumbled against the savage white supremacy of the employers. There had been promising left-led Southern organizing like that of the Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Union (FTA) which had won 52 of 62 organizing drives up to 1946. But that was abandoned as the FTA was expelled from the CIO as a “Communist” union. Racist corporate-backed politicians and journalists warned that Joseph Stalin and race-mixing were the real issue with headlines

like: “Operation Dixie: The Iron Curtain Descends”, and “The South is Anglo-Saxon; the North is mixed races”. The fears of sexual relations between Black men and white women has consistently been woven at the core of white supremacy in the United States, used as justification for the most vicious physical assaults on African Americans. The bodies of black women, however, were considered by the white supremacists to be the rightful property of white men.

The combined offensive by the government and the Gomerist pragmatists and their liberal friends in the labor movement, along with the U.S. government’s attack on the Communist Party and other leftists as part of their Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, meant the demise of Operation Dixie and the end of the left’s ability to maintain a left pole in the labor movements. The FTA mentioned above was just one of the left-wing unions expelled from the CIO—there were fourteen (representing 1.4 million workers), in 1949. Two years earlier Congress had passed the Taft-Hartley Act which demanded loyalty pledges from union leaders and made illegal many of the tactics that had made the mass organizing of the 1930s successful, from sit-down strikes to secondary boycotts. What had promised to be a another wave of advances in the history of the U.S. working class, after the massive post-war strikes of 1946 that had class-wide, not union- specific demands (for example, pay raises for all and universal health insurance), turned out instead to be the high-water point as the tide turned backward. Many of labor’s most far-sighted leaders and of its strongest anti-racist fighters were driven from our ranks.

The post-war housing boom opened racially exclusive white tracts in the suburbs at the same time that the later years of the Great Migration brought several million Southern Black workers into Northern cities. White World War II veterans went to college, courtesy of the GI Bill of 1946, by the millions. Black veterans came home to Jim Crow and white supremacist violence in the South and segregation in the North. Union density reached its peak in 1954, and the CIO, purged of its leftists and much of its militancy, re-united with the AFL in 1955, segregated unions included. The stage was set for a period of complacency and back-sliding by the U.S. labor movement. Union leaders thought they had a seat at the table, and had become recognized “labor statesmen”. The illusion covered the decay of the

Gomperist labor movement and ill-prepared the disarmed trade unionists for the corporate attacks of the neoliberal period mentioned above.ⁱⁱ

Where We're Going: Social Justice Unionism in the 21st Century

This short survey of the history of the trade union movement reveals that, again and again, the movement has foundered—even when it appeared to be at a point of strength—on narrow pragmatism and compromise with white supremacy and privilege. Today, this Gomperist pragmatism—“bread and butter” business unionism, pro-capitalist, and pro-war—is exhausted. It is utterly incapable of responding to successful attacks against the working class described in the first few pages of this pamphlet: the rollback of workers’ rights, wages and working conditions. It is certainly unable to deal with the ecological disaster facing us, brought on in part by unions buying into perpetual growth as the key to improvement, or for real democracy where the working class, not the capitalist class calls the tune.

In contrast to Gomperism, what we in Freedom Road (Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organizacion Socialista del Camino para la Libertad) call “social justice unionism” has a program that is in line with the actual challenges facing our movement. We prefer the term “social justice,” rather than “social movement” unionism to emphasize political principles as opposed to simply militant tactics. As is usual in our history, Social Justice Unionism is a minority trend in our movement today but it is digging in, building alliances, struggle and new forms of organization. In *Solidarity Divided*, Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Fernando Gapsin review the above history and more, and sketch out a review of actually-existing Social Justice Unionism as it is being built on the ground.ⁱⁱⁱ

Social justice unionism has to include a cultural transformation of our unions. Taking our cues from Ella Baker and her extraordinary commitment to and success in developing leaders in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi in the early 1960s, we sometimes use the term, “Leadership Development Unionism” to describe our methods of organizing.

As we mentioned earlier, union leaders seem to spend an inordinate amount of time figuring out how to stay in office, and preferably, die in office. In our view of leadership development, the goal of a union leader is to make himself or herself replaceable. The essential task of leadership is to find ways for members to make contributions, to learn, to feel positive about that contribution, and to come back for more. We need a culture in the labor movement where the highest praise you can offer an active trade unionist is that he or she got someone involved, inspired someone, welcomed someone and help develop them into leaders. This method works. There are people in your union right now who have these skills. Very likely many of them are women.

Leadership Development Unionism is neither a luxury we cannot afford, nor a “soft skill” brought to us from a consciousness-raising group. It is an upfront investment that pays off a thousand-fold down the road. It is necessary if the labor movement is to meet the challenges of this period. If we don’t change the culture of the movement, we drive away our one essential “resource”—our people.

Social justice unionism in the 21st century is developing, in part, because of changes in the composition of the working class in the United States. This has been called the “rise of the New Working Class”. A massive migration of new immigrants from Central America, the Caribbean, Asia and increasingly Africa has located millions of new workers of color alongside African Americans who already resided in urban cores across the country. Increasingly, the influx of new workers has spread to the rural Midwest and Southeast as well. Reduced union density, the narrow focus of most unions on retaining their upper sector working class base, President Clinton’s “end of welfare as we know it”, and the general impoverishment of the working class have all contributed to the worsening condition of this growing sector. This growing sector is concentrated in urban and inner-ring suburban areas already occupied by large African American populations, and comprised disproportionately of women of color. These workers are concentrated in the hospitality industry, low-wage manufacturing such as textiles, food and other light industry, retail, security, and personal services, and in the burgeoning “social reproduction” industries, such as formal and informal sector

cooking, cleaning, healthcare, childcare, elder care, etc. Despite the efforts of a few unions to organize in some of these sectors (notably UNITE HERE and SEIU), the rate of unionization for these workers remains low or non-existent. These workers struggle with barely-subsistence level wages and the worst working conditions of any workers in the United States.

At the same time, these workers are at the fulcrum of the neoliberal assault on the “social wage”—that is, the wide array of benefits that make life livable: pensions, health insurance, childcare assistance, public education, unemployment insurance, safe streets, city parks and recreation facilities, etc. Thus these workers are in a daily struggle on two fronts, an overlapping battlefield at the workplace and in the community.

The fact that this growing sector of the working class is situated at the fulcrum of the fight to defend the social wage indicates the key importance of the public sector unions in this period. Public sector unions serve both their members and the public, including providing the hard work that delivers all the elements of the social wage noted above. African American workers in particular gained large-scale employment in the public sector beginning in the 1960s. The Black Freedom Movement broke down discriminatory barriers at the same time public sector workers were organizing unions in large numbers for the first time. As Freedom Road has an additional pamphlet on the fight to defend the public sector, please see *In Defense of Public Sector Services and Workers* for a more in-depth exploration of this topic.

Neglected by most traditional unions, these workers have organized non-union working class organizations for their defense. While some are especially vulnerable because they are among the 12 million undocumented workers among the U.S. working class, the strength of organizing traditions among and discrimination against immigrant workers and African American workers has driven the organizing process forward. These new organizations have many roots—some are faith-based, some organize around a workplace or a particular type of employment such as day-laborers, some focus on the foreclosure crisis, and yet others are based in particular neighborhoods.

These “New Working Class Organizations,” whether job-oriented or not, are an increasingly important part of the labor movement today.

They are typically positioned on the left wing of the politics of community organizing, long dominated by the Saul Alinsky-inspired Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) culture of organizing. Reformist urban organizers have had success in certain areas, such as living wage ordinances—municipal laws which require employers, especially those that do business with the city, to pay a “living” wage that is above the minimum wage.

But as the Center for Third World Organizing and a host of leftist Workers Centers have noted, IAF-inspired groups carve a “non-ideological” path remarkably parallel to the Gompertist trend in the trade union movement. They intentionally avoid directly challenging white supremacy, and make little or no effort to unearth the class relations that underlie exploitation and contribute to racist and patriarchal oppression in the United States. “Organizing” becomes a series of escalating civic actions that result in a negotiated settlement that more often than not reinforce existing class, race and sexual domination. One reason that modern union “pragmatists” so closely mirror the work of the Alinsky-style community organizations is that many of today’s union organizers and some of our leaders were trained by these community organizing groups.

Unions in the U.S. tend to operate in a manner similar to corporations—with a wholesale focus on protecting their narrow institutional interests. For example, in New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo successfully broke the solidarity of the New York union movement by offering needed jobs to the building trades with the money saved by eliminating public sector work. Fundamental notions of working class solidarity gave way to the interests of a particular union and its members. On the other hand, when in Wisconsin the police and firefighters were asked to support Governor Scott Walker’s proposed draconian legislation that would bust other public sector unions while exempting their own unions they said they would rather stand together with their union brothers and sisters than to support a tyrant like Walker.^{iv} Building this kind of solidarity requires a fundamental struggle for unions to expand their vision of what they represent: instead of a narrow focus only the interest of their dues

paying members, unions must exercise international class solidarity. As argued in *Solidarity Divided*, unions must think and act in ways both local and global. They have to embrace the whole interest of the working class and not just those interests of their members.

In this context, even traditional employment-based union organizing itself becomes a product of the alliance of trade unions and whole communities. Building working class power becomes the goal, whether in a struggle for a collective bargaining agreement or seizing political leadership of a municipality. The Wisconsin uprising was an example, but so did the International Longshore Warehouse Union's (ILWU) militant battle in Longview, Washington. That struggle highlights how a "communities of solidarity", in this case built by Portland Jobs with Justice, the Occupy Wall Street Movement and an internationalist class struggle union culture, can achieve victory despite all-out opposition from the corporations, the law, the courts and the police.

There is now nearly a two decade history of unions trying to crawl out of the narrow frame of Gomperism to develop various forms of "community-labor alliances", and considerable progress has been made. Union Cities, the program for CLCs initiated in 1996 by the AFL-CIO encouraged CLCs to build alliances with community organizations is an example. Serious efforts were made to go beyond the "call a collar" tactic of calling on sympathetic clergy to side with unions during a contract or organizing campaign without providing reciprocal union support, and without relationships being built at the base of the respective organizations.

Recently more stable "deep coalition" relationships between progressive local unions, CLCs and community partners have been established in "regional power-building" efforts, often allied with associations such as Working Partnerships USA. Members of the building trades unions, especially the non-licensed crafts like the Painters and the Carpenters, have in some areas developed aggressive outreach and organizing efforts to immigrant workers, and partnerships with immigrant-based Workers Centers. The Amalgamated Transit Union, under new leadership, has developed innovative organizing partnerships with Riders Unions and other community groups in defense of public transportation as a public good, not just as a provider

of good jobs for their members. UNITE HERE is engaging in non-partisan, labor-based electoral work in several cities. As mentioned above, a few CLCs already invite workers centers or other non-traditional working class groups such as Taxi Drivers associations or day laborer groups to affiliate as members of the Councils.

On the “community” side of the equation, Right to the City-affiliated coalitions challenge the dominant economic development paradigms in the major cities, which often drive poorer working class people out of the newly desirable central cities so that “yuppification” can take hold. The Right to the City folks also specifically attempt to develop “counter-hegemonic” projects and cultures, designed to challenge the dominant “common sense” of our times, from racism to notions of who really creates wealth. We owe a great deal of our understanding of these concepts to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

We are calling for the next generation of community labor alliances: **the permanent construction of a social bloc of working class organizations in a municipality or region, built on an upward spiral of political consciousness and education, to actively contend for power with the capitalists and their politicians**—a “working people’s assembly”, to use a concept introduced in *Solidarity Divided*.

These blocs create *communities of solidarity* based on mutual respect and common strategic interests, built up over time, with an ideological foundation explicitly based on class struggle, opposition to patriarchal and white supremacist practices, fighting for the environment and rock-solid working class unity. Clearly, in a working class that is so heavily influenced by white supremacy, patriarchal ideology and anti-immigrant and homophobic prejudices, this kind of effort will require mass political education as a foundation of the project. To borrow another contribution from Antonio Gramsci, this is a strategy for non-revolutionary periods, while engaged in a “war of position”—where the working class can gradually build its forces during a period of capitalist domination.

As mentioned above, these working class coalitions may have an electoral aspect, especially in local elections, although they are not primarily electoral efforts. They will go beyond efforts to influence

a particular development and do their own research on the local economy leading to proposals from the coalitions themselves: from “community benefit agreements” that force developers to contribute to local, community-controlled hiring, training and social investment, to revisiting the long tradition in the U.S. of creating worker-owned businesses, or cooperatives.

The trend toward cooperatives is gaining increasing attention as local activists take responsibility for creative approaches to economic development—sometimes referred to as the “solidarity economy”—in large urban areas largely abandoned by the so-called “job creators”. The recent alliance between the United Steelworkers of America (USW) and the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque area of Spain is an indication of this trend. Unionized and more explicitly left-wing cooperatives of the Bologna area, situated in Italy’s historic “Red Belt”, may also be instructive. From the perspective of a social bloc contending for working class power, the goal is not only to create a handful of decent jobs, but to expand our institutional power and organizing base. A network of worker-owned cooperatives can be part of the power-building effort.

Conclusion

We focus on the challenge and promise of Social Justice Unionism in this century, and in particular the opportunity to overcome the historic failure of the U.S. trade union movement to consistently challenge white supremacy, by building permanent alliances between unions and New Working Class Organizations in urban areas to contend for working class power. However, we do not mean to say that this is the only comprehensive program for the labor movement.

The reform of local unions through the use of Leadership Development Unionism and building progressive left-led coalitions within unions are also important aspects of our work. In fact, it is hard to imagine building either strong labor councils or strategic alliances with New Working Class Organizations effectively without strong, left-led local unions from which to build. The effort to transform local unions may involve oppositional reform caucuses, and will certainly involve internal education campaigns, efforts to increase and focus organizing, and creative and militant collective bargaining

strategies. There is abundant literature available which discuss these strategies in depth, available from progressive labor journals such as Labor Notes, and books such as *Solidarity Divided*.

We work night and day to transform our local unions into fighting, class-conscious organizations. While good union staff are crucial to success, they are usually at the mercy of elected officials, and their work is often constricted by the politics of their local and international unions. We encourage progressive and left-wing union members to engage as rank-and-file members, becoming local leaders in the long haul of building a base in their unions and moving their organizations to the left.

We live in the reform struggles, often in defensive battles during at this point in history, every day. But as we fight, we strive to always do three things:

- 1. Win as much as possible and weaken the enemy through collective and militant action;**
 - 2. Spread class consciousness and build the unity of the working class through education and organization;**
 - 3. Recruit people to socialism by promoting international solidarity, agitating against capitalism, studying, and providing a program to build an alternative world.**
-

In other words, we do what Karl Marx called for in the Communist Manifesto:

“In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, [communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.”

About Us

Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organizacion Socialista del Camino para la Libertad members are working class people and people of all races and gender identities. We are both veteran comrades who have 30 to 50 years in the trade union movement, and young people who recently joined our revolutionary movement through Workers Centers, or just began to work. We take pride in the fact that Freedom Road members in the trade union and New Working Class Organizations work respectfully with other socialists, progressive activists and all others in a non-sectarian way, seeking to learn, share lessons from victories and defeats, and humbly contribute to building the left wing of the labor movement. We also work with other socialists, revolutionaries, revolutionary nationalists and leaders of social movements to create a revolutionary party in the United States, a process we call “Left Refoundation.” See our pamphlet *Which Way is Left? Theory, Politics, Organization and 21st-Century Socialism* for more on this topic.

As we stated in our introduction, these are tough times for workers in the U.S. This is the hand we have been dealt, and there is no other. But our class has been on the defensive for most of its existence. We are optimistic that we have an opportunity at this particular point in history, based on the actual nature of the history, class structure and struggle in the U.S. today, to overcome past weaknesses to create a new, stronger labor movement set on a revolutionary course. We believe the creation of class-conscious coalitions/assemblies with unions and New Working Class Organizations united at their core, is a key way to proceed with this task.

Join us to build Social Justice Unionism in the United States, to build progressive New Working Class Organizations among oppressed sectors of our class, bring them together in communities of solidarity, and build the socialist current among working class people.

To contact Freedom Road, or for copies of Freedom Road publications mentioned in this piece, contact us at: www.freedomroad.org.

Notes



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Our History

Since this article was written we adopted a new name, Liberation Road, in April 2019.

This article was originally written for our 25th anniversary in 2010. We've tried to keep it punchy yet politically rich and not full of code words. Feel free to skip around and find the period/development that interests you most. We're working on a sum up/companion piece that's shorter with graphics and charts. Stay tuned!

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INTRODUCTION

The world is certainly different from 1985 when two small organizations, Proletarian Unity League (PUL) and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters (RWH), formed Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organización Socialista del Camino Para La Libertad (FRSO/OSCL).

Both PUL and the RWH came out of what was called the New Communist Movement (NCM). During the Sixties, tens of thousands of young people in this country called themselves revolutionaries. A slew of parties and organizations arose in preparation for a revolution that seemed on the horizon. Most groups told the world they were the only ones who could lead the revolution. By the late '70s the upsurge had subsided. Shortly afterwards, the NCM collapsed as well, in large part because of in-fighting between groups/parties each claiming the be "the one true" one.

Both PUL and RWH had opposed this "one true path" thinking. They centered unity efforts among survivors of the collapse who shared that viewpoint. Even so, it was an earnest struggle just to unite the two groups in 1985.

Line was hammered out on a number of issues. In particular, PUL folk got RWH members clear on the role of white privilege—specifically the role white privilege plays in maintaining the oppression of the Black nation, the Chicana/o nation and the First Nations, and in stunting the development of class consciousness and unity in the US working class.

The Congress voted to become the Freedom Road, borrowing another name for the Underground Railroad, so as to put the struggle of the Black Nation, and by implication all oppressed nationalities, at the center of our politics, even if the new organization was still uncomfortably white.

By dumping grandiose names so popular from the 1930s – 1970s, and avoiding claims to be "The Party," Freedom Road now had openings to share our vision of how a real revolutionary party could only be built by uniting a broad range of forces, based on working together in struggle.

MORE UNITY

The merger of the two organizations was just the start. When more groups rallied to Freedom Road, it validated our approach that party building should take place by unifying socialist forces from various backgrounds.

First, in 1986 came a West Coast-based group called the Organization for Revolutionary Unity (ORU). They brought a wealth of experience, especially from the Chicano movement.

ORU had ties on the other side of the continent with the Amilcar Cabral-Paul Robeson Collective, Black Marxist-Leninists who had moved to the traditional homeland of the Black Nation, the Black Belt South. Their decision in 1989 to join The Road was a watershed. Now we were a group with increased membership of people of color with a presence in Black revolutionary and nationalist circles.

THE JACKSON CAMPAIGNS

All of this came after Jesse Jackson's 1984 bid for the Democratic Party nomination for President. His 1984 and 1988 bids marked the high point of nearly 20-year period when the Black Liberation Movement's main focus was electoral, a strategy geared toward consolidating gains that had been won in the street.

But the two Jackson campaigns were more than that. Jackson had the most left platform of any major party candidate in the 20th century. He won support from a broad array of forces—African Americans, naturally, and other oppressed nationality communities, but also several unions, white family farmers in the Midwest crippled by the Reagan Recession, gays facing the first great wave of AIDS deaths, feminists, students and more. Much of the organized socialist left in the US, and an even larger section of unaffiliated reds and revolutionaries threw themselves into the campaigns.

Jackson's newly formed National Rainbow Coalition, billed as an independent form that would fight inside and outside of the Democratic Party for a radical agenda, provided a common project for comrades to work on and around. Now we could test and strengthen the unity we had built. In 1988, Jackson won nearly a third of the

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delegates, and the Democratic Party moved hard to co-opt him.

When Jackson slid into the Democratic Party mainstream he tried to bring his whole campaign with him. But The Road members joined others fighting to keep their state Rainbows independent until he dissolved them.

ANOTHER MERGER

Among those who chose to go with Jesse into the Democrats were members of the League for Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), the largest surviving group from the New Communist Movement. They disbanded the group and distanced themselves from their revolutionary past. Not everyone in LRS agreed.

These folks established the Socialist Organizing Network. By 1995 they had merged with The Road. The new organization maintained the The Road name along with most of the line and functioning of the original The Road.

LEFT POLES

The 1990s were a transitional decade, with an economy transformed by neo-liberalism, de-unionization, and the revolution in information/communications technology. The election of “moderate” Democrat Bill Clinton as President disarmed many, in particular the leaders of mainstream organizations in the social movements. They essentially rolled over as Clinton continued neoliberal Reagan/Bush policies like deregulation, most fatefully in finance.

Under these circumstances, The Road made the strategic decision to build organized left poles within the various social movements. Examples included La Raza Left Asian Left Forum, the Labor Left, and especially the Black Radical Congress.

In 1998 over 2,000 Black intellectuals, organizers, politicians, workers, students, community folk and leftists gathered in Chicago to start the Black Radical Congress (BRC). The BRC was conceived in response to the sexism of the Million Man March and its rebuff of the black Left. Grassroots groups like the Organization of Black Struggle from St. Louis and Black Workers For Justice from North Carolina helped anchor it. It issued a Black Freedom Agenda and launched several national campaigns.

In the course of doing this kind of work, The Road adopted in the late '90s ambitious goals for transforming the internal culture and demographics of Liberation Road, to make the organization majority people of color, upping the figures for women, young folks, LGBTQ, and working class people, and developing these folks as our leadership. Making substantial progress on that goal has meant that not everyone who wants to join can come in when they want.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

“Tell no lies. Claim no easy victories,” the African revolutionary Amilcar Cabral admonished. So...

The worst thing to happen to The Road since 1985 was the split in the organization in 1999.

Two related questions led to the split: What is socialism? How do you build a party?

The first came up in the '80s. A few members, based in the Midwest, decided that any country ruled by a self-defined Communist Party was de facto socialist. The Tiananmen Square Massacre of Chinese workers and students in 1989 became the line in the sand. The Midwest comrades held that it had saved socialism.

Unimpressed, the 1991 Congress, by a considerable majority, adopted “On The Crisis of Socialism,” which called for a rethinking of the history of the socialist model established by the October Revolution and identified questions, like democracy, for which answers had to be developed. It became one of our three basic unity documents.

The party building issue got sharp later in the '90s. The Midwest grouping firmly opposed a proposal that Liberation Road should center its work on Left Refoundation, a different approach to building a revolutionary socialist party—or parties—in the US that would draw a wide range of organizations and individuals into an extended process of rebuilding the left. The folks from the Midwest favored a traditional party building approach of recruiting people to the existing group, all in line with long-established and unchanged Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Left Refoundation, focusing as it did on the crisis in socialism in theory, organization and practice, was anathema to them and they openly declared their intention to drive out its advocates. When they could rally no one else to this effort, they left.

The Midwest split group included a minority of the leading body, a minority of the members, a minority of the districts. Of all the groups that had united to create Freedom Road, they had several members who had been in the old RWH, one from SON, and none from the others. They quickly abandoned key elements of The Road's political line, dropping the position on the crisis of socialism and then rewriting the basic document on the statement on national oppression to eliminate the term “white privilege” and downplay the concept.

All this would not be remembered today if the Midwest group had not decided to use the name Freedom Road as well.

A NEW GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS

One of the most important developments in the history of The Road/El Camino was the merger with Fire By Night (FbN) in 2000. This was the first group to join Liberation Road that had not come out of the NCM. This new generation of revolutionaries came to The Road through the student movement and anarchism. They brought with them fresh ideas, analysis, language, culture, and experience. They helped transform The Road.

MOVING INTO THE CURRENT DECADE

Eleven years ago, the Battle of Seattle announced a new configuration of forces on the U.S. political scene. The developing No Global alliance of unions, environmentalists, anti-imperialists around a critique of corporate transnational neo-liberalism and the optimistic slogan, “A Better World is Possible” promised to shape the political struggle in the US in the new century.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon cut off that path. Instead, for the first time since Vietnam, US imperialism plunged into a full-scale war of occupation. Two, in fact. This totally changed the dynamics of the struggle in the US. Members started building an antiwar movement nationally (United for Peace and Justice, US Labor Against the War, Veterans for Peace, the Iraq Moratorium) and locally while combating attacks on immigrants and Muslims.

Two other major developments stand out. One was the devastation from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The inability of the left and the Black movement to counter the Bush administration and capital's remake of the Gulf Coast underlined the need for a coordinated and organized left.

The other development was the huge immigrant upsurge of 2006, which made it clear that any revival of the labor movement would require immigrant workers playing a leading role. Work that comrades had long been engaged in positioned us to help lead the DC area demonstrations and play a strong role in Los Angeles, two centers of the levantimiento.

SOCIALISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY IN THE US

Since the late '90s, much of The Road/El Camino's political work has been centered on advancing and refining the project of Left Refoundation. The effort started with exploratory national meetings among several revolutionary socialist (and a few social movement groups), which developed closer working relationships but did not produce organizational progress.

From this The Road sharpened the vision of Left Refoundation. Drawing on the analysis of Latin American socialist and political thinker, Marta Harnecker, The Road has said it must be based on the fusion of forces from both the Party Left (socialist organizations) and the Social Movement Left (mass-based groups in different sectors with left politics and a core open to socialism). Two pamphlets were written with these new sights and widely circulated: "Which Way is Left" and "The Young and the Leftless" (aimed at younger activists). Both make the call for a broad party-building project on the left which required a reassessment of long-established organizational models, theory and practice. These pamphlets, coupled with participation in local social forums and the USSF, locally-based cross-left forms, and being a founding organization of Revolutionary Work in Our Times has stirred interest in a new generation of revolutionaries based in the social movements.

Another aspect of Left Refoundation has been the development of new theory. As a contribution The Road undertook a several year project of writing a book, The Cost of Privilege, which lays out a basic understanding of the centrality of national oppression to capitalist rule in this country and the mechanisms by which it is maintained. A pamphlet entitled "Intersectionality" presents our view on the inter-connectedness between different oppressions, class, national, gender and others, and has been important in drawing a new layer of queer and trans youth into the group.

In fact, our emphasis on creating something new and substantially larger and broader than any existing socialist group, focused on developing 21st century socialism in all its aspects, has resulted in a lot of new comrades knocking on the door. A few are veterans of the New Communist Movement, but it has mainly been younger folks from the anarchist tradition, small ultra-left groups and the cores of NGO-type groups who have signed on. This has helped Freedom Road expand into several new cities in the last few years, with more in prospect.

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The world is a very different place from what it was when Freedom Road was born, with some of the biggest changes happening in the last few years. Today there is a national government focused on the rescue of large blocs of finance capital, soaring budget deficits and defunding of social services at the state and local level, huge, on-going, and probable structural unemployment, two costly and deadly war/occupations, and now ecological catastrophe. The footing is tricky and the stakes are high.

One thing that has not changed is the need for revolutionary socialist organization built on a new foundation with new theory and practice, drawing from the variety of national cultures that make up the US, and in harmony with nature. It's the best tool working and oppressed people have to wage struggle, to analyze and sum up battles and the changing terrain, to forge a vision of the future and a plan to get there.

We are revolutionary socialists in the U.S. dedicated to fighting for a social system where social wealth is not in the hands of a few billionaires, but is controlled by the people.



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Frequently Asked Questions

- [What makes Liberation Road different from the other socialist groups out there?](#)
- [Can you explain what you mean by national oppression and white privilege?](#)
- [What's Left Refoundation?](#)
- [Is Left Refoundation the same as left groups joining together, or regroupment?](#)
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WHAT MAKES LIBERATION ROAD DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER SOCIALIST GROUPS OUT THERE?

Politically, the two keystones of our identity are our emphasis on national oppression, self-determination and white privilege; and our commitment what we call Left Refoundation. There is no other group on the left that places these two positions at the heart of its politics.

We support the concept of the intersections of oppression between race, gender, sexuality and class. This is the idea that no one form of oppression operates independently. Each is impacted to a greater or lesser degree by the others. It is necessary to remember that if we are truly to become revolutionaries, we must learn how to organize all our oppressed to end all our oppressions.

We have placed a strong emphasis on combating patriarchy. This means supporting the leadership of women and queer people in our organization and the movements we work in. Internally, we are also engaged in a lengthy study process on patriarchy which will lead to the creation of a new organizational document on the topic.

Also people tell us that we seem "normal," and aren't constantly trying to sell them a newspaper.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN BY NATIONAL OPPRESSION AND WHITE PRIVILEGE?

We hold that what is usually termed racism is, in fact, an entire social structure of national oppression. The history of this country, built as it is on stolen land and stolen labor, means that the US contains within its borders actual oppressed nations, internal colonies — the "First Peoples" or indigenous nations including the indigenous peoples of Alaska, and the Black, Chicana/o and Hawai'ian nations. It also colonially dominates the "commonwealth" (actually nation) of Puerto Rico. We hold that those nations have the right of self-determination, up to and including the right to secede and form separate countries if that is their wish. On the foundation of this national oppression, immigrants from oppressed or Third World nations and dark-skinned people generally are also subject to discrimination, state and vigilante violence and other forms of domination which we fight.

Further, we believe the historic weakness and low class consciousness of the US working class is principally due to the system of small, real and deadly privileges granted to those who have been defined as "white," even when they are exploited workers. This system was first intentionally promoted by the British settler elite in the 17th century, to divide and conquer rebellious indentured servants. Their strategy has remained at the heart of capitalist rule throughout US history. The system of privileges and the ideology of white supremacy have also taken on a life of its own, in institutions and in white people's hearts and minds. Any organization, any movement, which fails to tackle these issues in a determined and consistent way cannot hope to throw out the capitalists who rob and dehumanize all of us.

WHAT'S LEFT REFOUNDATION?

The Road sees the need for a powerful disciplined revolutionary organization, big enough, deeply rooted enough among the people, and well-coordinated enough to challenge the white supremacist US ruling class for power. But such an organization cannot be built the "traditional" way: by a small group which through its good organizing and correct political line grows into a vanguard party. In this complex country of 280 million, that's not about to happen any time soon. Instead we need to conceive and develop an ongoing, long-range process. It will involve many activists participating in joint projects and organizing at the local, regional and national levels. Interwoven with this is the collaborative development of up-to-date theory and the discussion of program and strategy — core principles, key campaigns, short and long-term goals, methods of working together and visions of the society we want to build.

Such a process requires that participants be willing to set aside many of their most cherished bottom lines to try

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and formulate a new unity. It will also require thinking through and struggling out some degree of unity about what lessons we have learned from our current organizing efforts, from earlier upsurges here in the US and from other revolutions and efforts to build socialism.

IS LEFT REFOUNDATION THE SAME AS LEFT GROUPS JOINING TOGETHER, OR REGROUPMENT?

Unlike regroupment or left unity, Left Refoundation is not mainly about bringing together existing self-identified socialist groups (or independent socialists). Even together, these forces are too small and too white, too old, too male and too middle-class. Refoundation calls for those who already believe in socialism to reach out and engage others active in diverse social movements of working and oppressed people. There's no blueprint for this, but we're trying to learn from examples of groups around the world who've tried similar things.

HOW DID LIBERATION ROAD GET STARTED?

Though The Road was founded in 1985, our roots lie in the upsurges of the '60s. Older The Road members cut their teeth in the Civil Right Movement and the Black rebellions that shook the country and in all that came after: the Chicano National Movement, the birth of the modern women's movement, the gay liberation movement, ecology activism, and the generational revolt against the Vietnam war and the whole corporate culture of death and destruction.

By the early 1970s, thousands of young people had passed from resistance to revolution and began to form the new disciplined Marxist-Leninist groups. These outfits concentrated their members in the working class, and collectively became known as the New Communist Movement (NCM). As the upsurge of the '60s faded and the realization set in of how difficult and protracted the making of revolution in the belly of the Beast would actually be, the NCM imploded. Sectarianism and ultra-leftism also played a big part in that. The original Liberation Road was formed in 1985 by two surviving groups — the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters — and other groups merged later on.

For folks who weren't around when all this took place, Max Elbaum's book, *Revolution in the Air*, is a good place to start. Our website has a number of exchanges with Max about his views and also comments on the book, as well as a Family Tree of the New Communist Movement. If you're into this sort of thing, this material will shed more light on the NCM and Liberation Road's own history.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE NAME LIBERATION ROAD?

When The Road was founded in 1985, some members had been already been through the naming thing a couple of times and really, really didn't want, this time around, a boring, lefty-sounding name full of terms like Proletarian, Bolshevik, Headquarters, Communist, etc.

Liberation Road is a term that Black people and allies used for the Underground Railroad, a key element in the resistance of Black working people to their enslavement, the central struggle which shaped this country. Our leaflet, *Liberation Road: An Introduction*, pivots on our name and provides a much deeper answer to this question.

ARE THERE REALLY TWO GROUPS USING THE THE ROAD NAME?

Unfortunately, yes.

In 1999 a section of the organization based in Chicago and Minneapolis split off. The overwhelming majority of comrades of color and most of the overall membership, the National Executive Committee and the local branches (which we call districts) stayed with the organization. Yet those who left chose to keep the name Liberation Road. It is a good name.

WHY DID THE 1999 SPLIT HAPPEN?

Those who left objected to the concept of Left Refoundation, even though it flowed out of Liberation Road's original orientation.

From our founding The Road has carried out a line and practice of promoting unity among revolutionary organizations and, as a necessary result, of leaving political space for diverse views internally. Of all the groups which had united to build the Road, no one from the Proletarian Unity League, no one from the Organization of Revolutionary Unity, no one from the Paul Robeson/Amilcar Cabral Collective and only one comrade who had been in the Socialist Organizing Network took part in the split.

The very first thing the minority did after bailing out was to ditch one of the three Basic Documents of our organization, the Statement on the Crisis of Socialism. They decided that there is no crisis of socialism — everything is just fine, nothing needs to be rethought.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE ATTEMPTS TO BUILD SOCIALISM SO FAR?

We see them as part of a long historic process in which we learn new lessons from each new attempt, both its successes and its setbacks. Our most thorough discussion of this question is summed up in the 1991 "Statement on the Crisis of Socialism" which examined the collapse of Soviet-style regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement in China.

The glaring reality these events highlighted was the lack of socialist democracy. In Eastern Europe, for example, significant layers of the people hated their nominally Communist leaders and ditched them — because they had erected a huge, repressive state apparatus above the people. While the imperialist powers are constantly trying to destroy efforts at socialism, we concluded that we can't chalk up these failures up to imperialist intervention alone. So we believe socialists need to re-think the one party state and pay more attention to developing new democratic forms and struggling out class, patriarchal, national and rural/urban contradictions after the revolution.

At the same time, we take very seriously our obligation to stop our government from undermining existing self-identified socialist regimes through economic embargoes, military threats, etc. — whatever criticisms we may have of these regimes.

ARE YOU MARXISTS? LENINISTS? MAOISTS? TROTSKYISTS?

We learn from many revolutionaries and we idolize none.

Among the things we draw from Marx: the analysis of how capitalism works and why it is a dynamic but irrational system; and of class struggle as the motor force of history. Marx and Engels believed that working people are capable of overturning capitalism and creating a society based on human need not profit. They learned from the rise and smashing of the Paris Commune that workers could create incredible democratic governance forms but must be prepared to defend them with weapons against exploiters grabbing back power.

From Lenin: an understanding of imperialism — of the revolutionary potential unleashed when oppressed

nations struggle for self-determination, and of the tendency of socialists in imperialist countries to fall into reformism and support their own bourgeoisies in imperialist wars. Lenin also emphasized that the capitalist state must be completely destroyed and he made breakthroughs in building a revolutionary party — for which there is definitely no everlasting formula!

From Mao, the methods of the mass line and the united front — how to learn from the experiences and insights of workers and broad masses to formulate demands and build struggles that are as broad and inclusive as possible yet also really challenge the system; and the insight that the transitional relations of production under the socialist state generate new exploiters who must be prevented from restoring capitalism.

We have many friends who are Trotskyists.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER THEORISTS AND REVOLUTIONARIES THAT YOU DRAW FROM?

Many — some famous and some too little known. Amílcar Cabral on the role of culture in revolutionary process, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Ella Baker's promotion of organization-centered leaders rather than leader-centered organizations, Ted Allen's analysis of the invention of the white race and white privilege, Marta Harnecker's call to Latin American socialists to bridge what she calls the party left and the social movement left, Robert Biel's analysis of the new imperialism, Audre Lorde's pioneering work on the intersection of oppressions, Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, Richard LeVins on imperialism, ecology and public health, Kjersti Ericsson of Norway's Workers Communist Party on women's oppression in society and how that gets reflected — and can be fought — inside communist organizations.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ANARCHISTS?

Some of our members come out of the anarchist tradition, originally from the important '90s group Love and Rage and then in the Fire by Night Organizing Committee. They don't consider themselves anarchists any more, and they wrote a critique of anarchism and their own past practice. In struggles, we often unite with the fighting spirit and bold tactics of anarchists, and we learn from their thinking about the relationship between the individual and the collective. But overall we don't think anarchism offers strategies or organizing methods that can unite broad masses for revolutionary transformation. Check out "After Winter Must Come Spring" for more on this.

ARE YOU AGAINST RELIGION?

We come from a political tradition that is not religious and sees organized religion primarily as a tool of the existing order, encouraging oppressed people to seek salvation in the hereafter rather than justice today. However, there are obvious exceptions to this — major trends in the Black church, and the many people of faith who've been fighters for justice and even socialism, and with whom we're honored to work in many struggles. In fact, some Liberation Road members identify as religious and actively participate in congregations. We believe that the role of religion and, more broadly, spirituality is among the important topics that that we need to explore more deeply.

DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THERE COULD EVER BE A REVOLUTION IN THIS COUNTRY?

We think it's both necessary and possible, but obviously it will not be easy. And because this is the Belly of the Beast of imperialism, we don't expect to be the leading edge globally — a lot of revolutionary struggles in the Third World will doubtless lead the way. (Of course it's all inter-connected; revolutionaries in the global South have told us that the stronger we get, the more space they have to carry through their battles.)

Despite the actual strength of our rulers and, even more, of their hegemony — the dominance their worldview has within the society — which we breathe in like the air around us, a careful look reveals deepening cracks which run through the system from top to bottom. This country is riven by many contradictions, internally and globally, and we don't know which may break through and have a shattering effect. The US is supposedly a democracy but one party pays to keep Black people off the voter rolls and the other makes no consistent or wholehearted effort to prevent it. Troops are returning maimed or spiritually destroyed from an invasion they know should never have been undertaken. Millions of people live in fear as their health benefits and retirement security disappear. Everything from the environment to human relationships is turned into a commodity and offered for sale.

WHAT DOES REVOLUTION LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

We're not crystal-ball gazers, and we're not one of those groups that predicts the imminent collapse of capitalism at least once every seven years. We anticipate a long process involving many tactics and sites of struggle, in which white supremacist imperialist hegemony — the "common sense" understanding of what's right and who gets to make decisions—begins to break down. When there's some qualitative break — when the masses of people finally decide they've had enough and are ready to overturn the system — history shows us that the exploiters simply won't step aside peacefully. So the forces of the people must be prepared to advance our interests and defend ourselves by any means necessary.

WHAT'S YOUR VISION OF SOCIALISM?

To quote from our "Statement on the Crisis of Socialism," "We identify socialism... not simply with public ownership of the means of production, but with the cultivation of mass participation in and control over economic, political and social institutions and structures."

It will be a long process but we look toward these developments: overcoming national oppression, male supremacy and heterosexism; eliminating the divisions in the labor process between planning/administration and execution; each individual having the chance to develop as a full human being with collective support — especially people with disabilities who are currently marginalized; and workers actually controlling a rational production process (and consumption process) that doesn't destroy the earth for our grandchildren. This involves a cultural shift in which people come to find fulfillment in human relationships and creative work rather than consuming, so that the over-consumption of resources in the global North will end.

WHAT DOES THE ROAD ACTUALLY DO ANYWAY?

We are an organization of revolutionary organizers, who work together to build mass struggles. Then we evaluate and sum up collectively in order to learn from our practice, and fight white supremacist capitalism more effectively in the next round.

In each struggle of working and oppressed people that we engage in, we try to: (1) win what victories can be won (democratic rights, better working conditions, etc.) and strike blows at the enemy (for instance, weaken US imperialism's capacity to intervene militarily); (2) build the organized forces of the people (progressive, ongoing labor and community groups or anti-war coalitions, etc.); and (3) win new fighters to socialism. If knowledge really does come from the people, then we should actually be out there, working and struggling with them.

WHAT SECTORS DO YOU WORK IN?

We believe that oppressed nationalities and the multi-national working class will be at the core of the revolutionary united front in this country. With that in mind we predominantly work in the Black and Chicano movements and various immigrants' struggles, and in labor unions, workers centers and labor/community groups and coalitions (e.g. against public transit cutbacks etc.). Some of our work against patriarchy and heterosexism takes place through caucuses within nationality and worker groups; for example, we helped to found the Women's Commission of Black Workers for Justice and have folks in Pride at Work. At the same time, we also work in a citywide LGBT group with a broad progressive agenda.

In all our organizing, we pay attention to the intersection of oppressions—class, national, patriarchal, heterosexist — and how this concretely affect people's lives. We believe understanding this can help to deepen struggles, build greater unity between various sections of the people, and foster revolutionary consciousness.

Over the past three years, we have also been working in the anti-war movement and organizing with vets and military families. Given the historical role of students in sparking struggle in other sectors, we do some student work — but not enough and not as much as we've done in the past. In all our work, we try to build and work within genuinely broad united fronts, rather than close fronts that pretend to be independent and open but are actually dominated by us and recruiting grounds for us.

HOW DO YOUR POSITIONS ON NATIONAL LIBERATION AND WHITE PRIVILEGE AFFECT YOUR PRACTICE?

In everyday terms, our commitment to national liberation means that we don't consider it inherently divisive when people of color in a labor union or anti-war group or a socialist group want to make criticisms of white supremacist behavior or meet together and discuss whatever issues they choose. It is only by bringing these issues forward and winning the support of the whole group for oppressed nationality demands that true multi-national unity can be built. As stated above, we also build the independent organizations and movements of oppressed nationalities, and we try whenever possible to break the "white united front" (for example, helping found a group of Italian Americans opposed to the Columbus Quincentennial). We also try to insure that all comrades learn about and draw inspiration from the historical resistance of people of color.

WHY DON'T I SEE YOU WITH BANNERS AND PAPERS AT DEMOS?

Well, for one thing we currently don't have a paper; instead we have a web site, statements and pamphlets. This isn't a question of principle, just a question of resources. As for large banners, when we march, we are generally with the mass organizations in which we are based. Occasionally we organize contingents but even then, that's not us alone but, for example, in concert with other anti-imperialist groups in an anti-war march. Overall we probably err in a "movementist" direction — focusing on the broad movement and underplaying our own independent public face. This can sometimes make us seem mysterious so we're trying to rectify by having more public statements at demos, a more user-friendly web site, more literature tables etc.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS?

Well, we don't have any illusions about transforming the Democratic Party into a vehicle of revolution. But the electoral arena has of necessity often been an arena of struggle for the working class and oppressed people — and will probably remain so through the long process of forging a broad united front against white-supremacist imperialism. In California, we've worked against various racist propositions like the anti-immigrant 187. In Boston, Atlanta and other cities, we also have worked in local electoral campaigns, where elected officials (including Democrats) can be held accountable by a movement to work for better public schools, affordable housing and public transit, immigrants' and oppressed nationality rights, less brutal policing, etc.

Much less often, we have worked on national campaigns focused on the Democratic Party, but only when they help to promote an anti-racist and pro-people agenda, like the Rainbow Coalition in the '80s. We also work in and hope to build formations outside of the two-party system, especially in the context of left reformation and the long-term struggle.

HOW ARE YOU STRUCTURED AS AN ORGANIZATION?

We have districts in about a dozen cities and the larger districts are broken down into units based on work area (for example, a community unit, a student unit and an anti-war unit). We have a small National Executive Committee in which each member is elected to a specific responsibility, and national commissions and work teams which guide our mass work in particular sectors. Our basic line is set by Congresses, which generally take place every two to three years. Districts develop a local plan for carrying out the line and strategy set by the Congress, recruit new members, and nurture each other through the alienation and assaults of life under capitalism.

We believe that each of us has the obligation to try to test the group's ideas in all the work that we do (mindful of the culture and flow of the mass organizations in which we work), sum up collectively whether the group's line was useful in practice or not, and give each other constructive criticism on how we work. This is what makes us a cadre organization.

WHAT IS YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP?

We are about 46% oppressed-nationality cadre and 44% women. 20% of our cadre identify as LGBTQ. As far as age range goes, 40% of us are under 35 and we have some older and some middle aged folks. About half of our cadre are of working-class origin, with most of the rest middle-strata and 1% "other."

We are actively engaged in a transformation process aimed at changing our composition to become a majority oppressed nationality, and a majority women. Transformation means changing our demographics, culture, consciousness and practice and it is creating a space that is welcoming and supportive of oppressed nationality cadre and has an active feminist group process.

HOW DO PEOPLE JOIN LIBERATION ROAD?

People join a local district. Usually they meet us through doing mass work, and if they seem compatible in approach, we invite them to study our Unity Documents and other key points of line and theory. If there seems to be a fit, after common work and study with us, they join up. Because we believe in working collectively in the same mass organizations, it's somewhat more complicated and demanding to join Liberation Road than a group which lets you just sign up and come to meetings if you agree with their ideas. This approach is embodied in the formal requirement that a member agree with our basic documents (which you can find on this website) and general line, be actively involved in fighting the enemy and take part in the collective life of the organization (including paying dues).

If you have further questions not covered in this FAQ, call a customer service representative at...

No, not really! But contact us and we'll do our best to answer.

We are revolutionary socialists in the U.S. dedicated to fighting for a social system where social wealth is not in the hands of a few billionaires, but is controlled by the people.

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Which Way Is Left?

Theory, Politics, Organization and 21st-Century Socialism



Freedom Road Socialist Organization
Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (FRSO/OSCL)

Which Way Is Left?

Theory, Politics, Organization
and 21st-Century Socialism

“Study because we will need all your intelligence.
Agitate because we will need all your enthusiasm.
Organize because we will need all your strength.”

—the motto of the first issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo*,
the Italian revolutionary Left newspaper organized
by communist leader Antonio Gramsci in 1919

Cover art adapted from a painting by Harlem Renaissance artist
Aaron Douglas entitled *Spirits Rising*.

Introduction

Freedom Road Socialist Organization / Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (FRSO/OSCL)¹ writes this paper as a contribution to the development here in the US of a sustained, mass revolutionary Left, something that does not yet exist. To facilitate the discussion within the Left and the broader progressive movement, this document includes a brief historical summation, explores lessons learned, and makes an assessment of key social forces. All of this has helped to inform our political analysis and deepen our own understanding of the current conditions. In the spirit of revolutionary unity and dialogue, FRSO/OSCL offers some initial recommendations and thoughts for moving forward.

The mammoth demands of our time and capitalism's relentless assault on the world's oppressed people and the earth's resources make this task urgent. It is only with a decisive victory over capitalism and the beginning of a process of revolutionary transformation that we can pull the Earth away from social and ecological collapse.

For more than 20 years, FRSO/OSCL has been grappling with the absence of such a movement. We invite others to collaborate in this effort. From our discussions, drawing on many sources both inside and outside the socialist movement, we have concluded that the prospects for full democracy and working-class power and leadership in this country require a re-examination and overhaul of the theory, program (practice) and organizational components of socialism and revolutionary movements as they exist today. This process, which we are calling *Left Refoundation*, includes the task of building a revolutionary party or parties for socialism. It will require the collective input of not only those forces who already see the need for a decisive victory over capitalism, but also the tens of thousands of working-class and oppressed peoples who know something is wrong, but as yet don't have a place and means to actualize their dreams.

While there are many lessons to be learned from socialist projects of the past, we believe that with a clear summation of previous experiments and at-

1. For more information about FRSO/OSCL, go to www.freedomroad.org

tempts at building a new kind of society we can create a socialism for the 21st century. Nothing short of a revolution can address the inequality and environmental destruction caused by the white supremacist patriarchal capitalist system. As socialists we continue to fight for an economic, social and political system led by the oppressed and the working class. We stand for a democratic and revolutionary vision of socialism, one that is not represented by the development of a new ruling clique or exploitative class but is represented by the actual empowerment of the working class and all oppressed people. We draw from and uphold feminism, environmentalism, queer and transgender liberation and national liberation struggles at home and abroad.

In this paper we are choosing to focus mostly on the organizational aspect of revolutionary change: the need for organization(s) and, ultimately, a party or parties of the revolutionary Left. Such a party would not, at this time or any time in the near future, be an electoral party in the traditional sense. Rather, we see such an organization as one that brings together grassroots leaders from among the oppressed, leaders out of existing progressive social movements. It would not only fight for the final goal of the end of capitalism and the establishment of socialism but would also engage in struggles for reform within capitalism, while playing a key role in educating its base and allies to the need for fundamental social transformation.

The ultimate contour of the party—Is it an umbrella of multiple organizations? One unified organization with distinct tendencies? How will accountability and full democracy be joined?—should not necessarily be determined at this stage. It is part of a lengthy process, one that we foresee taking years. Yet our basic conclusion is that in the absence of organizations, particularly a revolutionary party, it is unlikely that we will defeat capitalism. As many other movements and leaders have concluded, it is the duty of revolutionaries to develop the theory and practice that will result in the creation of such organizations and a party. If we don't start putting this idea on the table today, we won't be in a position to take advantage of events that present themselves. The Katrina aftermath and the recent immigrant rights upsurge highlight the consequences of not having a national framework and organization that can respond and articulate a left perspective.

In our view (which we will discuss at some length!), none of the socialist projects to date—whether the Soviet experience, Euro-communism, Maoism, Trotskyism, anarchism, or social democracy—have been able to create a real mass socialist practice. In the minds of most people, socialism has been discredited and is not seen as a desirable alternative, even to people who feel that capitalism is bad for themselves and the planet. So the question becomes, what is the alternative? With this paper we hope to open the door to something new, different and extraordinary that will unite us in struggle; to something that sparks debate and questioning of even some basic “Marxist” assumptions; to something that unifies the history of the social movements

with the lessons of the many different tendencies of the political Left. In short, to something that brings us closer to the kind of future we want to see for ourselves, our children and many generations to come.

Throughout the paper we will refer to “the crisis of socialism”—that is, the failures, mistakes and shortcomings of previous socialist projects that impact and influence all revolutionaries today. Given this crisis, we recognize the need for a revolutionary socialist theory and practice that guide us in making revolutionary change for the 21st century.

Capitalism has proven to be an agile and persistent enemy. It constantly takes advantage of the weaknesses of radicals and revolutionaries and the organizations they build. Capitalism’s sustained assault has created a chaotic world—massive displacement of peoples, imperialist aggression, shifting political alliances around the world, nuclear posturing and armament, environmental degradation and disasters—which the Left is unprepared to confront.

Fortunately, we here in the US are not alone in this search for revolutionary theory, program and organizations that work in today’s world. Revolutionaries from Nepal to Latin America, from Scandinavia to Africa, and from the Philippines to Europe are engaged in this process as well. Their struggles can serve as a source of inspiration and give us something to chew on as we work to transform the world around us.

Within this context, those committed to capitalism’s end and to revolutionary transformation, both within the advanced capitalist world of the global North and the Global South, must obligate themselves to a rigorous process of reflection, self-examination, correction, theorizing and strategizing. This includes, but is not limited to, those such as ourselves who uphold revolutionary socialism. The answers to the crisis of the Left are not contained in books from another era, although elements of the answers certainly can be found in the works of prior revolutionaries. Likewise, works from other theorists on a whole range of topics—patriarchy, white supremacy, the environment—while important to the revitalization of socialism, are not in themselves the magic bullet. However, the question of developing a revolutionary theory and practice for the 21st century must begin with our willingness to face some hard truths about what worked and what did not in 20th century socialism, as well as to confront the realities and challenges of the imperialism (and the imperialist state) of our era: *neo-liberal globalization*. This is where we will begin the first of many conversations.

Neo-liberal Globalization: The Imperialism of the 21st Century

World War II transformed the world. The two principal powers to emerge, at least militarily, were the US and the USSR. From 1945 through roughly 1973, the Western capitalist countries experienced what has been called the

“golden age of capitalism,” a misnomer in many senses, though for the West, and especially the US, there was a demonstrable rise in living standards.

During this same period the US, and in a somewhat different manner its Western capitalist allies, initiated a hostile anti-left/anti-communist ideological campaign, the “Cold War,” against the Soviet-dominated bloc. For the US all that mattered was that this bloc was (1) largely outside of the sphere of Western capitalism, (2) unpredictable, (3) in counterpoint to the US-dominated “nuclear umbrella,” and (4) generally, though inconsistently, supportive of national liberation movements, especially in the Global South, as well as local leftist movements.² In the US, this anti-left ideological campaign had an internal component targeting left and progressive organizations.

A combination of the Vietnam War, domestic class struggles (including the freedom movements of people of color and the women’s movement) and economic stagnation challenged the Keynesian operating consensus.³ This consensus, which operated from the idea that the state should intervene in both maintaining capital’s growth and offsetting some of the harsher effects of capitalism on the poor, had been dominant in the US up until that period. In response, capitalists began experimenting with eliminating institutional and political constraints to capital accumulation and profits. First known as *Thatcherism* (in the US, *Reaganism*), the world came to understand this as the theory of *neo-liberalism*. Ideologically, there has been a shift toward aggressive, individual-focused economics, as public service, the public sector, and spending for public good are seen as antithetical to a vibrant economy. We are no longer each other’s keepers, but it’s “take care of number one” and “greed is good.”

Neo-liberalism became the ideological orientation for the dramatic reorganization of global capitalism. Unfolding in earnest since the mid-1970s, this reorganization—generally called *globalization*—includes features like the electronics revolution—aided hyper-mobility of capital, internationalization of production, feminization of the proletariat, decreasing trade protections, and the creation of an international economic infrastructure to facilitate capital accumulation and strengthen the role of the international capitalist class. Neo-liberal globalization has brought about a more exaggerated wealth polarization on the planet and a deepening of the dependency of the Global South on the North (particularly through so-called Third World

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2. The failure of the Soviets and the French Communist Party to support the Algerian national liberation struggle is an example of that inconsistency.
 3. Keynesian economics emphasizes the role of the capitalist state in promoting economic growth, and within that, a certain level of income equity. (There needs to be demand in order to keep the system moving.) In the US, Keynesianism took two forms: (1) the New Deal reform program under FDR and (2) what came to be known as “military Keynesianism:” the use of military spending to prop up the economy.

debt), as well as a full-blown assault on the grassroots organizations of the people, including, but not limited to, labor unions.

As Samir Amin argues in *The Liberal Virus*, US-dominated neo-liberal globalization (or in Marxist terms, the imperialism of the 21st century) has the potential to be more violent, more destructive, and more deadly to more people, especially the world's peasants, than any other period of capitalist development. The current reorganization of global capitalism is no less violent than was the conquest of the Americas or the slave trade in Africa. Military violence and repression characterize this reorganization. High-tech weapons make the conduct of war game-like, shielding the public from seeing first-hand the dead bodies, scorched land and ruined infrastructure their "games" have produced.

The Neo-liberal Authoritarian State

Of particular importance to the Left is the question of the evolution of the state under neo-liberal globalization. Some think that neo-liberalism diminishes the role of the state in relation to direct rule of corporate power; however, we see neo-liberalism as needing a strong state. First, the state is needed to manage the radical reorganization of capital and ensure international compliance with the dictates of global capital in general and US imperialism in particular. A second role for the state is to repress and control any resistance to this restructuring. The state has changed to meet these demands. Civil liberties and the parameters of acceptable political discourse (i.e., what is considered to be legitimate opinion) have narrowed. The police, military and prisons are more important than ever, while the public sector and concern for public welfare are the least priority. State repression has not been the response to a resurgence of the popular movements to the same degree that occurred in the '60s and '70s, when the state violently attempted to quash those movements. Instead, the powers-that-be use the threat of terrorism to advance their long-term economic and political interests, both in the US and internationally. The ongoing criminal disregard for Hurricane Katrina survivors can be contrasted with the US's massive investment in the invasion of Iraq, with the aim of controlling (and privatizing) the Iraqi state and its natural resources.

This pronounced evolution of the state is toward what we could call a *neo-liberal authoritarian state*. This is to be distinguished from other forms of

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4. Fascism, at least as described by theorists such as Poulantzas, involves a level of lawlessness and a radical elimination of the democratic capitalist state. Fascism is also, ironically, a very revolutionary movement in that it introduces a break with established bourgeois democratic practices and institutions. Fascism is not the same as a conservative capitalist regime, though fascists often align with political conservatives.
 5. Power bloc is a term coined by the Greek-born theoretician Nicos Poulantzas to describe the alignment of classes and class fractions that dominates a capitalist social formation.

right-wing rule including 20th-century fascism⁴ in many important respects, some of which are: (1) an evolution rather than an abrupt termination of democratic rule and rights; (2) no organized mass movement in power calling for an end to constitutional democracy; and (3) no split within the *power bloc*⁵ that cannot, at this time, be resolved through legal means.

Segments of the US Left have the habit of identifying any and all forms of repressive right-wing rule with fascism. This complicates any analysis, but also—and quite ironically—romanticizes bourgeois democracy in that it equates bourgeois democracy with relative peace and freedom for the vast majority of people. As the history of the US demonstrates time and again, repression is a cornerstone of US bourgeois democracy.

The neo-liberal authoritarian state—not a particularly scientific name but one that tries to capture the essence of what is unfolding—represents the evolution of the Western bourgeois democratic state. It has brought with it the slow decline in civil liberties and rights, as well as the slow narrowing of acceptable political discourse. It is highly repressive, and in its repression serves the interests of global capital and the reorganization of global capitalism itself. In this sense it is not a simple description of this or that administration—e.g., the Bush administration—but rather a *tendency* of capitalist rule during this era.

The ferocity of the neo-liberal authoritarian state is also connected to the increasingly unilateral thrust of US foreign policy. The US desires to limit international input, including from its own allies. The US seeks a global monopoly in determining the final shape and form of the reorganization of global capitalism, at least in the immediate future.

The dissolution of the welfare state and the emergence of neo-liberalism (and the neo-liberal authoritarian state) have brought profound confusion within the ranks of the popular movements. Most of the established movements in the US to one degree or another found themselves shaped within the context of the New Deal welfare state. As the New Deal consensus⁶ unraveled, the progressive social movements found it increasingly difficult to find their bearings. At each moment a loss here or a loss there was seen as a temporary setback, rather than as the reality that the entire New Deal consensus and the welfare state were coming to an end.

Neo-liberal globalization is far more than companies moving offshore; it is about the changing nature of work, capital and the legitimacy of the state. It is clear now that the state will not provide for the masses of people in order

6. New Deal consensus was the political alignment developed first under President Franklin Roosevelt. It represented the adoption of a version of Keynesian economics, social reform, and the strengthening of the state's role in the economy as a whole. This consensus, in one form or another, existed until the mid-1970s when it unraveled in response to capitalist stagnation, class struggle, the demands of domestic progressive social movements for an expansion of democracy, and a changing international situation.

to resolve their everyday problems. As the state is further drained of resources, irrespective of the intent of individual political leaders, it becomes more difficult to deliver on promises and demands.

The reorganization of global capitalism brings with it growing “expendable” populations, including those thrown off the land and forced to migrate to cities or foreign lands. Next, there are narrowing job options. In the US the starved and shrinking public sector most heavily impacts African Americans who, since the 1960s, have found the public sector to be a major source of work. The expendable also include those associated with 20th-century manufacturing jobs (and agricultural jobs in cotton and tobacco) in the global North. Manufacturing has not disappeared globally, or even in the US, but it has changed in shape, size and composition. *Mechanization* and *casualization* have made the workforce vulnerable to feelings of endless competition from others. Competition is both domestic and international. The fear of competition from immigrants, or of jobs being outsourced to foreign lands, has all workers looking over their shoulders. *No job is immune from neo-liberal globalization*. Rather, it is *how* neo-liberal globalization will affect the job.

Within neo-liberal globalization there has been an increased feminization of the global proletariat. This tendency has immense implications for changing gender roles and the question of work. Jobs in the global economy become gendered and feminized and therefore degraded with lower pay and worsening working conditions. As men, particularly from the middle strata (here we refer to elements of the *petit bourgeoisie*),⁷ find themselves educated but out of work, they often see women as competitors for employment, although men do not work in jobs that have been traditionally reserved for women. The men perceive women as the enemy rather than recognizing the oppression that they face as women and as workers. Various forms of right-wing populism that attempt to reassert male supremacy speak to this fear. Al Qaeda-type clerical fascism is simply an extreme version of this right-wing backlash.

The increased workforce participation of women, along with the demands of women for democracy and against male supremacy, has sparked backlash from the political Right. This backlash, which poses as a defense of alleged “family values,” is another means to challenge gender roles, broadly defined. With neo-liberal globalization and increasing competition for resources, along with the pauperization of entire populations, women become the convenient target of the political Right and scapegoats for the problems faced by male members of the workforce (and those who wish to enter the formal workforce).

7. Sometimes referred to as the middle class, the *petit bourgeoisie* is the class between the bourgeoisie and the working class and can include shopkeepers, supervisors and low-level managers, and various types of “professional” jobs (lawyers, doctors, etc.) The p.b. has contradictory tendencies, sometimes conservative (often seen as the social basis of fascist states), but their economic and social position is tenuous in the neo-liberal state.

Neo-liberal globalization poses ecological dangers as everything becomes a commodity and every bit of the planet is scoured for profits. Fragile lands are drilled for oil. Genetic modification of food crops makes them vulnerable to disease and undermines local subsistence farming. Funds for basic healthcare services are lacking. Then, of course, there is the continued use of fossil fuels and the resulting global warming. China's embrace of the full capitalist road, along with India's drive for world-class status, means that nearly one-third of the planet is diving into the unquenchable thirst for fossil fuels, especially oil. Pressures can only mount since we have either passed or will soon pass *peak oil*.⁸

As neo-liberal globalization propels the planet and its people deeper into crisis, certain questions arise from this assessment of the current period. They are:

- Has class struggle intensified in this period? Is there more of a tug-of-war over the planet's resources? If so, how and between whom?
- In what ways is neo-liberal globalization strengthening in this period? Does it face any weaknesses or challenges? How about US dominance?
- Are there more or fewer opportunities for social movements to work together in this period?
- Does neo-liberalism narrow or open opportunities for reform under capitalism?
- What roles are women playing as an independent political force? Where are women challenging male supremacy and traditional gender roles?
- Have the material conditions for international working-class unity improved? Or has competition over resources intensified tendencies towards division and fragmentation?

Neo-liberal Globalization, Resistance and the Left

Neo-liberal globalization, including the growing ecological crisis, coupled with the discrediting of the socialist and communist projects, are the defining contradictions of our time. They shape the context and terrain in which today's mass popular movements, left parties and organizations, and radicals of all stripes operate and develop. Questions and criticisms of the socialist and communist Lefts, whether fair or unfair, true or untrue, have gained widespread currency among working people throughout the world. This reality has made it all the more difficult to formulate an alternate vision and

8. Peak oil refers to the point at which we've used up so much oil that, even with more drilling and exploration, the total world rate of oil production will subsequently begin to decrease.

project to neo-liberal globalization. We find this to be the case throughout the world, although it plays out differently in different places according to different conditions.

As we discuss elsewhere in this paper, economic restructuring, technological revolution and growing competition from new capitalist powers have torn asunder the economic model, political framework and social contract that emerged in the US post-WWII. Simultaneously, and closely related, the post-WWII international order is also being rearranged, and a new international order is emerging. This process, which began some thirty years ago, was accelerated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and reached a qualitatively new phase after the attacks and massacre in New York on 9/11.

All of this has had a great impact on the politics and program of the Left, the mass popular movements and other left radicals. It has affected the underlying conditions, the alignment and balance of social forces, and the strategic options and practical goals of all the movements and organizations in question. Moreover, the emerging new international order has had a profound impact on the national liberation movements, similarly affecting the context, political alignments, program and politics of those movements.

For better or worse, this all comes at a time when the political Left is experiencing a crisis of historic proportions. The inability of the Left to provide a theoretical and programmatic basis for an alternate model to neo-liberal globalization compounds the crisis that humanity, and indeed the planet, faces. Unless present trends are reversed, we face a future of economic instability, resource depletion, ecological crisis, social strife and war. For now, “Another World is Possible” remains a slogan.

The Left internationally no longer has an organizing center of gravity as it did with the Socialist Internationals of the mid- to late-1800s or the Soviet-led Third Communist International of 1919–1943. It is important to remind ourselves that during a brief period from the 1920s to the 1940s, millions of people around the world marched under a common banner. Armed with a common ideology—Marxist communism—working people across the world joined together and adopted a common set of politics, program, demands, and slogans in a united movement. This is not to imply the Left was ever monolithic, but this center of gravity created the context for a common experience and understanding on the part of millions of working people. While there may be many criticisms of the communist parties of that era, there is much to be learned from their experience.

Similarly, the anti-colonial and national liberation movements of the post-WWII period represented a common historical process and experience. These movements overthrew the European colonial world order, tattered as it was after World War II. Many, if not most, of the national liberation struggles were inspired and led by socialist and communist activists and Marxist intellectuals. From Asia to Latin America to Africa, in country after country, or-

ganizations inspired by variants of Marxism-Leninism (including Maoism as well as the “Castroism” of the Cuban Revolution) formed the core of the revolutionary process, which sought to use the tools of Marxism in a dialectical way to address the conditions and context in their countries. During this period a range of institutions and organizations, such as the Bandung Conference, the Tri-Continents and the Pan-African Conferences, came together to provide leadership and political coherence to the movements. A vital part of this historic upsurge was the Black Liberation Movement in the US, providing a bridge between the movements of the Global South and the freedom struggle in the heart of the US empire. All of this served to create a common experience and context for the development of the theoretical and political framework that guided the action of millions of people around the globe.

No such common global and historic movement exists today. On the world stage today there is a wide array of new and old radical movements and radical critiques of capitalism. Organizations born in the 1930s interact with New Left forces from the 1960s, both operating in the context of new movements, organizations and revolutionary ideologies. Building unity in this context presents numerous challenges. Perhaps most importantly, we lack a common language and theoretical frame of reference to contextualize our activism. Far too often we either do not understand each other or misunderstand each other’s actions.

This much said, there are also a number of positive trends coming together that could provide the basis for a renewal of the Left. A brief survey of global trends reveals a diverse Left that is in ascendancy in many places and is pursuing many different paths to power and many different economic models. Mindful of the risk of oversimplification, the following survey attempts to pick out a few examples of how different social sectors and movements around the world are fighting back and confronting the neo-liberal onslaught.

The left popular movements

One of the most exciting features of the recent period has been the emergence of numerous mass popular movements with explicitly left politics. Among these are the global justice movement, indigenous people’s movements, LGBT movements, environmental movements, women’s movements, immigrant rights movements, anti-war movements and poor people’s movements. Many of these have affected the politics of their countries dramatically, forging new ground in radical action and thought. Often they have advanced a thoroughly radical critique of capitalism from a new vantage point, thus deepening our understanding of the reality in which we live. It is also noteworthy that many of these movements have become truly global in nature. Facilitated by the IT revolution, movements have grown in the context of the internet and accessible/rapid global travel, forging a common experience and identity across borders.

New class-based movements such as the MST (landless workers movement) in Brazil have built truly mass left organizations with the capacity to mobilize a base around a radical and revolutionary agenda. Similarly, throughout Latin America, the past decade has witnessed the resurgence of militant unions and popular movements capable of bringing down governments and effectively resisting the neo-liberal onslaught (e.g., Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Panamá).

More recently, the Oaxaca Peoples' Assembly (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca or APPO) in Oaxaca, Mexico, has provided a new model for struggle in the current period. This explosive popular struggle began when the teachers' union went on strike over fairly common negotiating demands around pay and benefits. From there things snowballed into a mass popular uprising that called into question the economic and political system in power. Facing increased repression, the teachers and their allies were able to link the contract fight to the larger struggle for democracy and against the PRI machine in Oaxaca.⁹

In doing so they opened a Pandora's Box of tensions directly related to the effects of the wrenching economic restructuring Mexico has experienced since the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), calling into question the political system, the rampant corruption and the current economic model. The list of demands grew to include more funding for education, better social services, improved health care, and better housing, all of which placed the APPO on a collision course not only with the PRI, but also with neo-liberalism itself. Organizationally and politically, the movement rapidly evolved into a broad front of various social sectors, classes and organizations. It moved from protest to active resistance to the system. Moreover, the movement found creative ways to engage in struggle, mobilize support, organize its base and fight for power in the streets.

Looking at a few of these resurgent left popular movements raises some daunting questions for us to consider. How do we leverage power locally when the power of the ruling class is so concentrated internationally? How do we gain concessions from a state that is increasingly starved of funds and resources? How do we build an alternate (and locally driven) economic model in the context of neo-liberal globalization? How do we build unity in a diverse movement? How do we build effective organizations in an environment of repression? What demands can be won here and now, and can the movement survive the invasion and repression by the state?

New-Left armed national liberation movements

A range of organizations with roots in the New Left and the national liberation movements of the post-WWII period have continued to develop, and in

9. The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, which ran Mexico for most of the 20th century

some cases grow and flourish, in today's context. These come from many different political traditions, contexts and histories. While their methods may differ widely, they share a common analysis rooted in the intersection between national, cultural and class oppression.

In Latin America, the FARC and ELN of Colombia are two organizations born of this era that organized around linking national liberation to the fight for socialism. The FARC (like many in Latin America) argues that neo-liberalism is but a phase of imperialism and that national liberation remains an unfulfilled goal. The FARC has waged armed struggle for over 40 years, building a standing army and controlling wide swaths of Colombian territory. Yet it remains in a strategic stalemate that appears to have no end.¹⁰

In the Middle East, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Kurdish Workers Party are examples of movements that continue to adhere to a strategic vision that incorporates Marxist analysis and a national-liberation program, linked to the broader historical struggle for socialism. In South Asia, several Maoist-inspired armed movements continue to gain ground. Most notably in Nepal, the armed Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) recently played a vital role in the overthrow of the monarchy. The strength, vibrancy and apparent strategic flexibility of the Nepalese insurgency have surprised many in the West. Similarly, the Maoist insurgency in India has taken many by surprise. Amid the news of spectacular growth and an economic "takeoff," the insurgency highlights the grinding poverty and discontent on the Indian subcontinent.

One of the most important organizations from this political tradition is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The CPP has waged an armed struggle through its military front, the New People's Army, for over 30 years. The party remains deeply rooted in the countryside, in the urban mass movements and within the national struggle. It has been the leading force in many struggles, large and small, over the years. The party identifies itself as a Marxist-Leninist cadre organization from the Maoist tradition. The CPP advocates armed struggle and the seizure of state power in the context of a national multi-class struggle against imperialism. This struggle necessitates a united-front politics that seeks to establish a *new democracy* and national liberation as a step towards communism. The party takes a long-term view of this process and is apparently capable of maintaining the armed struggle for decades to come. While unlikely to take power anytime soon, neither the Philippine Army nor US imperialism has been able to defeat the CPP militarily or isolate the party politically.

10. Time and space do not permit an examination of the particularities of these or other revolutionary forces in Colombia. Nothing contained in this document, however, represents either a critique or affirmation of the practice of these organizations.

All of the abovementioned armed movements face difficult challenges and are grappling with a host of issues, including: How to justify the reality of a permanent state of war? Does armed struggle as a strategy preclude other methods, tactics and strategies? How has neo-liberalism affected class relations and the alignment of social forces in the Global South? How have relations with the capitalist *metropole* changed? How have the mechanisms of imperialism changed? How should the revolutionary movement construct a progressive and socialist economic model? How do these trends affect the *national project* and the eventual transition to socialism, and what does this imply for strategy and the basis and composition of the united front and the politics of national liberation?

The South African Communist Party

The South African Communist Party (SACP) continues to provide a dynamic and innovative model for a mass-based party with deep roots in the popular movements and with a demonstrated capacity to win elections and participate in government. The party was, and remains, part of the *tripartite* ruling alliance in South Africa along with the African National Congress (ANC) and the trade-union confederation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The SACP was a clandestine organization during the fight against Apartheid. During this period, SACP members were a part of the ANC and COSATU, but the SACP maintained its own organization throughout and grew into a vital part of the movement against Apartheid, even though during the Apartheid period they were numerically small.

Given the reality of the Apartheid regime, it is not surprising that the SACP incorporated an analysis of race and nation into its thinking long ago. Moreover, the party operated as part of a united front since the 1940s and '50s. For these and other reasons the SACP, although once part of the Soviet sphere, was able to sustain itself even in the face of the collapse of the Soviet Union and many pro-Soviet parties. This is reflected in the open and rigorous internal debate that has emerged in the post-Apartheid transition period, providing a model for creating a truly democratic as well as united and effective organization. Two of the more difficult questions for the SACP include how to reach today's youth and reverse the relative decline in membership in the post-Apartheid era.

As part of the ruling tri-partite alliance, the party has grappled with a range of difficult questions and conditions including the transition from Apartheid to constitutional democracy, the reality of extreme economic segregation and dislocation, the AIDS crisis, the struggle against institutional racism, how to challenge the ANC around economic and AIDS policy without breaking the tri-partite alliance, how to forge a new economic model amid the socio-economic devastation wrought by Apartheid and the reality of neo-liberal globalization, and how much longer the tri-partite alliance will remain effective.

The new Latin American electoral left

In the past decade a new, largely electoral left has emerged in Latin America. This electoral upsurge includes numerous movements and organizations, with diverse backgrounds and programs, from across the Americas. During this period a number of leftist and center-left organizations have become major powers in the legislatures and have captured the presidency in numerous countries: Evo Morales from the Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia, independent Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Daniel Ortega from the FSLN in Nicaragua, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Néstor Kirchner and the center-left *peronistas* in Argentina, and Michelle Bachelet from the Socialist Party in Chile. It is also worth mentioning the PRD in México and Andrés Manuel López Obrador's narrow loss in the recent presidential elections.

One of the oldest and largest left electoral parties is the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil, founded in 1982 and led by Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva. Over the course of two decades, the PT has built a truly mass electoral party with deep roots among the urban and rural working class as well as progressive middle sectors. The party grew slowly and methodically, steadily gaining ground throughout the 1980s and 1990s. First the PT fielded local candidates and captured municipal assemblies. Then they gained governorships. Finally they built a legislative bloc and, in alliance with other political forces, captured the presidency. The PT recently has come under great scrutiny and sharp criticism for a range of perceived failures, including campaign finance scandals and corruption investigations involving some of Lula's closest aides. There have also been a fair number of criticisms of the PT's economic program and a questioning of Lula's posture vis-à-vis the United States.

All of the above movements face a host of questions regarding the electoral road to power. How do you move an agenda through a state apparatus created by the elite? Can such a state be used to overthrow the existing economic order? How do you move from reform to revolution within the context of elections? How do you overthrow the state absent a politico-military organization capable of carrying it out, and how do you overcome the economic sabotage sure to follow? How do you mobilize a base for struggle while at the same time governing? How do you overcome the lack of technical, managerial and regulatory capacity in many radical organizations? And how do you stave off an imperialist intervention?

Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela

The Hugo Chávez-led government in Venezuela has generated great interest globally and radically affected the Left in Latin America and beyond. Fueled to some degree by an oil boom, the Chávez Administration has found itself in a favorable position to build an alternate economic and political model. Social investments (education, infrastructure, health care) have risen

to the top of the government's agenda, and devolving control of government spending to the local level has yielded many positive results. Furthermore, literacy campaigns and the emphasis on preventative and locally based healthcare are having a dramatic effect. Chávez has done much to promote the self-organization of the working classes. Land-reform measures, limited as they might be, and the reversal of previous privatizations of state enterprises both indicate that the process is moving to a new level.

Moreover, the attempts to create an alternate trade bloc to the US-led FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) agenda has placed Chávez on the front lines of the struggle against neo-liberal globalization. His explicit call for a "21st-century socialism" and steps toward the creation of a unified socialist party portend more to come. It appears that Mr. Chávez is committed to a social revolution, but where it's all going is difficult to tell at this point. After six years of Chávez in power, the Venezuelan economy remains well within the capitalist orbit, and poverty has not significantly changed. While Chávez's popular base has grown, it is also true that his political alliance has narrowed, with various parties leaving the ruling coalition.

Having come to power through elections, the Chávez government and the Bolivarian Revolution share many of the challenges faced by other left electoral movements. However, Chávez's apparent willingness to push the envelope and advance the struggle means many of these questions will be posed most sharply in Venezuela. The recent decision of the Communist Party of Venezuela *not* to dissolve organizationally and join a unified party indicates a rigorous and thorough debate. What began as a revolution from above must become a popular revolution advanced by the masses if it's to reach a new level.

The Crisis of Socialism: A Short History

Now that we've examined a bit about what's happening in the world today, we'd like to take a step back and look at socialism in the 20th century. We do this not only because it's important to look at and understand the past, but also because the criticisms, failures and successes of socialist projects have changed, challenged and enriched Marxist theory and practice. This section will focus on the two major socialist experiments, the USSR and China, as they were dominant models of socialism in the 20th century that influenced generations of revolutionaries. We will also look at the relationship and interchange between Marxism and a broad range of social movements and at Cuba.

Since the first attempts to create a socialist project, there have been criticisms both from within the socialist Left and from without. Some of the problems emerging from within the socialist project included revelations

about Stalin in the Soviet Union, splits in the international communist movement and the emergence of a new social democracy.¹¹ From without, various social forces criticized, broadened and reshaped socialist theory and practice, including the national liberation, women's, environmental and LGBT movements.

Before we begin discussing problems internal to the 20th-century socialist projects, let's take a brief look at the predicament that revolutionary socialists faced in the industrial capitalist states in the 1920s, specifically: In a non-revolutionary period where the institutions and culture of bourgeois democratic rule had gained hegemony (a concept we will explore more deeply in this section), how could class struggle—the struggle, indeed, for consistent democracy—be pursued in a revolutionary way? How could the working class and oppressed people fight for and win liberation? How could socialism prevail?

Italian communist leader Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s and '30s answered these questions. Gramsci suggested that in advanced capitalist societies one significant feature helped to explain the dominance of the bourgeoisie. He called it *hegemony*, meaning the ideological dominance of capitalism as a system of thought and practice. Gramsci wrote about how the dominant class shapes the common sense of a particular era, reworking Marx's notion that the leading classes determine the leading ideas of that period. Additionally, Gramsci called upon Marxists to pay attention to the non-state segment of capitalist society, or what he called *civil society*, suggesting that that civil society was not a clear instrument of the capitalist state.¹² Class struggle, in other words, would take place within civil society as well as against (and within) the state itself.

Gramsci differentiated between two different periods of resistance that call for different strategies. One period Gramsci termed a *war of position*, when it is not a revolutionary period and the struggle for social transformation takes on a protracted nature. In this period the goal is to eat away at the hegemony of the ruling class. In the other, a *war of maneuver* period, the class struggle takes on a dynamic character. This may involve classes struggling outright for state power and the use of direct physical force and confrontation.

For Gramsci, the revolutionary party needs to be a means of leading the struggle for socialism and integrating the struggle against bourgeois hegemony—including the struggles in the cultural, education, economic and state arenas—with the struggles for outright state power. The party also needs to

11. This term has changed meaning over the years, but since WWII it largely refers to parties that have renounced the overthrow of capitalism and instead work to create reforms within the system.

12. These ideas were later developed by French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser when he discussed the notion that he termed *ideological state apparatuses*.

take the lead in constructing what Gramsci saw as a *historic bloc*, or strategic alliance of key forces, whose shared interests lie in the construction of a socialist project. In 1920 Italy, Gramsci saw a critical north-south alliance as necessary to bring together workers, mostly in northern Italy, with the oppressed peasants of southern Italy to create a revolutionary front.

Many of Gramsci's ideas can be useful for us today in our analysis either of past socialist projects or of current conditions. Unfortunately, Gramsci spent much of his life in prison for his political activity, and his contributions were largely ignored in the communist movement until after Stalin's death in 1953.

Stalinism and the Soviet Union

After Stalin's death, it was clear that the revolutionary upsurge in the western capitalist countries following the Bolshevik Revolution was spent and that bourgeois rule was more developed and sophisticated than anticipated. Stalinism compounded the problem with the following:

- Heinous crimes against the people and members of other left organizations and tendencies in the name of suppressing counterrevolutionaries
- The suppression of the self-determination of the various national minorities within the Soviet Union and the promotion of Great Russian chauvinism, despite initial efforts in exactly the opposite direction
- A mechanical and linear reading of Marxism leading to the belief that socialism was inevitable and that all societies had traveled through the same modes of production.
- Interpreting socialism in a narrow economic way, where state control of resources became an end in itself, rather than a transitional phase between capitalism and communism during which reversals were always possible, even without outside intervention or armed insurrection
- Asserting that class struggle is always antagonistic—even under socialism—and thus emphasizing administrative/repressive measures for its handling; ironically evolving into a view that downplayed class struggle altogether
- Retreating from the early advances of the Soviet Revolution on women's emancipation in favor of patriarchal views and practices (e.g., a ban on abortion), and an overall incomplete understanding of patriarchy and its effects on social relations
- Embracing capitalist relations of production in the name of building the productive forces
- Demanding blind support of the USSR (e.g., insisting that communists worldwide support the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact), including

discouraging certain anti-imperialist struggles if they were deemed to hurt the interests of the USSR (e.g., Greece after World War II)

The revelations concerning Stalin and the quality of life in the Soviet Bloc sent tidal waves throughout the revolutionary movement internationally, setting off a chain of splits and reexaminations. One set of critiques moved away from revolution toward a theory of the evolution of socialism. For social democrats it just reaffirmed that no attempt should have been made to introduce socialism through a revolutionary process. A number of communist parties in Western Europe took elements from Gramsci regarding the protracted nature of the struggle for socialism and transformed an otherwise revolutionary theory into one that dovetailed with social democracy. In practical terms this trend, in later years called Euro-communism, saw itself as building institutions within the capitalist countries, thus abdicating the notion of revolutionary change in favor of a more evolutionary process. In many cases, this meant an accommodation to their country's foreign policy and an ignoring of international solidarity.

A significant section of the communist movement worldwide (including most of the leadership of the traditional communist parties from the USSR to Germany to the US to India and Iraq) viewed the Stalinist process as largely the problem of an individual—Stalin—and his clique. This led to superficial examinations of the experience rather than looking at the totality of the 1917–1953 period and the particularities of the class struggle in the USSR. These parties then went on to elaborate a theory that favored a retreat from a revolutionary perspective to one of a peaceful transition to socialism and peaceful coexistence with capitalism.¹³

There were also significant critiques of the Stalin period from within the broader Left. These included anarchists, Trotskyists, and what later became known as Maoists. The anarchists criticized the entire Soviet revolution from the beginning for its failure to immediately transition into a decentralized system of direct rule by the workers. At the same time, they raised significant criticisms of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for substituting itself for the workers and for failing to recognize the importance of democracy. Anarchist and socialist women from all tendencies criticized the Soviet system for retreating on women's rights and promoting a shallow equality—

13. It must be noted that Stalin advanced the notion of peaceful coexistence both directly and indirectly. The 1945 Yalta agreement, carving up spheres of influence after WWII, was fundamentally about this.

14. Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) was active in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. After 1923, he led opposition to Stalin, who exiled him in 1929. His two main theoretical contributions were (1) the idea that pre-industrial nations will develop unevenly, taking on features of both industrialized and pre-capitalist nations and (2) the idea of *permanent revolution*, which advocates that revolution be promoted in other countries.

women should be equal breadwinners to men and could work in jobs traditionally reserved for men (like doctors). The Trotskyists' critique largely focused on the period after Leon Trotsky¹⁴ lost power within the Soviet party. Their critiques ranged from seeing the Soviet state as a deformed workers' state to those who saw it as a form of bureaucratic collectivism, techno-bureaucracy, or state capitalism.

Maoism

One of the most influential critiques from the left came from those later defined as Maoists. Ironically, while the Maoists generally held up the Stalin period (claiming that it was 70% positive, 30% negative), the revolutionary Marxism they elaborated differed in many fundamental ways from that of Stalinism. Maoists criticized Soviet socialism for placing too much power in the hands of the party leadership and too little trust in the ability of ordinary people (peasants in particular) to develop theory, plan, and lead practice. Also, they believed that Stalinism emphasized the development of heavy industry at the expense of light industry/commodities and agriculture (the first task being to feed the people), focused too much on economics and too little on politics (the question of who and how society is run being central), and equated socialism only with developing productive forces and not transforming social relations. Looking at the Soviet experience, Maoism further concluded that class struggle does not end with revolution or socialism. Instead, given the power of bourgeois ideology, it must be ongoing. Without conscious effort, a party leadership divorced from the base could ossify into a self-serving bureaucratic clique and eventually could become a state capitalist class. Together these elements formed the theory on which the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was based. Eventually, Maoism split with the Soviet Union (and their allies), calling on the oppressed people's of the world to oppose both the US and the USSR. It is from within the sphere of Maoism that FRSO/OSCL largely originates.

Nevertheless, Maoism failed to break some of the significant constraints that existed within Marxism-Leninism. Though Mao himself during the Cultural Revolution suggested that alternative forms of organization might be needed in order to guarantee that the communist party did not degenerate, there was a fundamental reluctance to believe that other—pro-socialist—political parties or organizations had a role in shaping the society.

Second, while Maoism had a great deal to say about the *national question*, i.e., the question of the oppression of nations by imperialists or larger nations, it generally failed to connect this analysis to the question of a broader understanding of democracy and what self-determination means under socialism. Maoists had a lot to say about how the national question was being handled in the Soviet Bloc but did not look internally at the implications for China and the peoples within its borders. The assumption, for instance, that socialism automatically resolved the national question ignored the continu-

ing class struggle and struggle for revolutionary democracy that had transpired for historically oppressed peoples *under socialism*.

Additionally, Maoism had little to say concerning the issues of indirect control (hegemony) that Gramsci raised regarding the struggle for power in developed capitalist states. Lastly, the Chinese Revolution released women from some of the most odious patriarchal practices (like foot-binding) but failed to delve into the deep-rooted ways that patriarchy determines societal values and practices. The death of Mao in 1976 signaled the decline of Maoism, though it has since been upheld, in one form or another, by various revolutionary forces and has been a launch pad for new revolutionary thinking.

There are things that can be learned from the theory and practice of rebuilding society in China under socialism: the idea that no one socialist country has a right to dictate to others and, more generally, the notion of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; lessons from the Cultural Revolution, which was intended to mobilize the masses to advance the struggle for socialism and overcome feudal and capitalist traditions but which in truth was a failure; economic development; understanding the importance of the rural sector; advancing the need for a continuous revolutionary process; lifting of millions of people out of poverty and illiteracy; and the introduction of healthcare for masses of people. However, the balance sheet must show that Maoism was defeated. The mistakes, mostly from the *left* (most notably the excesses within the Cultural Revolution), have paved the way for the return of bourgeois ideology and capitalism within the Chinese Communist Party.

Interactions between Marxism and the social movements

The crisis of socialism and emerging social and revolutionary movements introduced new thinking in various spheres. Revolutionary feminism emerged as a critique of the economism and patriarchy within much of traditional Marxism. It criticized traditional Marxism and existing socialist societies for failing to fully grasp the challenge of gender relations and male supremacy and their interrelations with class (and race/nationality). This movement had its roots in the early 20th century, in the efforts of individuals like Clara Zetkin and others to develop what we might now call a *socialist feminist* view. Experiments in the early period of the Soviet Union, ranging from challenging traditional relationships to full equality in jobs, opened up a realm of possibilities, though these were largely short-circuited during the Stalin era. Various socialist movements experienced struggles around the role of women and made various challenges to male-supremacist beliefs and practices. Rarely, however, was the independence of the women's movement recognized as a critical political factor.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, with the rise of what some have termed *second-wave feminism*, a new challenge to male supremacy emerged. Elements

of this movement in the US, some arising from the freedom movements of people of color, others from the anti-war movement, began a more radical critique of both existing social movements, as well as a critique of male supremacy and heterosexism. Socialist feminism was one tendency that emerged within this movement. *Radical feminism* and other tendencies also emerged. To a great extent they all challenged the economic determinism of traditional Marxism. Yet those who did not draw a level of ideological inspiration from Marxism tended, over time, to separate gender from race and class and divorce social relations from the larger economic and political system—capitalism.

Critiques of the socialist experience on the national question proliferated as well. The Yugoslav experience, as with the Soviet experience, demonstrated that national tensions and chauvinism could be controlled—temporarily—through repression, but that rooting out the sources of such tension was a task that would take decades and could not be resolved solely through suppression.

Early debates following the Russian Revolution pointed to significant questions regarding how the national question should be understood. As noted earlier, Lenin, and later Mao, emphasized the strategic significance of the movements of oppressed nationalities as independent revolutionary forces in the struggle against imperialism. Debates within the Communist International, however, went further than this and examined questions about the trajectory of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples. In particular, after kicking out the imperialists, would these movements of colonial peoples leap straight to socialism or follow a capitalist route of development? Leaders such as Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and others said that if the working class and peasantry led a multi-class nationalist revolution, or *national democratic revolution*, it could lead to socialism. This concept is embodied in Mao's discussions of the united front. During the entire period of formal and later neo-colonialism, various questions were raised as to how multi-class such a movement could actually be given the nature of capitalism. In other words, could a patriotic, anti-imperialist bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries really be mobilized as part of a broad front against imperialism?

Changes in the economy and technology also affected the crisis of socialism. The Soviet Union, as well as other countries claiming to be socialist, attempted to compete economically with the West. There was, however, a clash of value systems inherent in these different paths. The pressure of Western consumerism was a difficult one, particularly as the USSR emphasized heavy industry and limited what consumer goods were produced to high-level military sector workers and party officials and bureaucrats (*nomenklatura*). Additionally, the USSR was less able to adjust to the scientific-technological revolution in electronics. The Soviet organizational model (applied in all spheres of life from politics to economics) was both top-down and top-

heavy and lacked input and control from below. This gummed up the system in very fundamental ways.

All told, while important critiques of existing socialist societies emerged, they largely did not gel as a new theory of revolutionary struggle. Rather, the most coherent theory to surface was post-modernism, which emerged in post-WWII Europe and highlighted both the failure of 20th-century socialist projects and the horrific aftermath of WWII. In many ways a form of modern nihilism, postmodernism promotes the idea that there is no objective reality outside of each person's subjective experiences; so the world consists of nothing but people telling their stories ("discourses"). Many postmodernists deny the existence of over-arching theories—be they political, religious or scientific ones—that attempt to explain the world or provide a common framework for analysis. Postmodernism's focus on individual experience also reflects the Marxist projects' inability to fully grasp and effectively fight for national, gender and sexual liberation.

The collapse of an overarching theory tended to promote sectoral struggles. Ethnic struggles replaced national liberation struggles in much of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. The proposition of the nation-state as an ethnic state came to be linked with various forms of ethnic cleansing, whether in the former Yugoslavia or in Rwanda. Right-wing religious currents arose to speak on behalf of different sections of the population, often advancing views that mythologized the past (e.g., the manner in which right-wing Islamists promote a history of Islam that is both ahistorical and repressive.)

Castro and the Cuban Model

Other trends emerged in and around Marxism, responding to the stagnation of Soviet-style socialism and the rising crisis of socialism. One such trend was called Castroism or the Cuban Revolutionary Model. This model focused on the unification of the political and military structures and the use of what came to be termed *armed propaganda*. The Cubans, repudiating other Latin American communist parties for their unwillingness to engage in the armed struggle, viewed armed conflict as a catalyst to larger mass action.

The Castroist model had appeal in Latin America, Africa and parts of the Middle East. In addition, it was highly critical of the Soviet model of socialism. However, contrary to the Maoist critique, the Cubans focused on the Soviets' lack of consistent support for revolutionary movements and internal economic stagnation. With regard to the latter, the Cubans criticized Soviet over-reliance on material incentives, instead of moral ones, to encourage popular involvement in the struggle to strengthen socialism.

There was also a tinge of idealism within the Cuban framework. The Castroists tended to promote force of will instead of properly analyzing and responding to concrete conditions, especially outside of Cuba. Che Guevara's attempt to spread revolution in the Bolivian jungle exemplifies this idealism,

which was also seen in the Chinese Revolution. In both cases, this idealism represented an attempt to get beyond the determinism and lethargy so apparent in the Soviet model. After the collapse of the USSR, Cuba entered a “Special Period” and has since faced great challenges, including the ongoing US embargo.

The collapse of the USSR had ripple effects on socialist and communist parties all over the globe, raising the crisis of socialism to a new level. Despairing, many revolutionary forces concluded that socialism was a utopia that could never be reached. The primary task of the Left became, therefore, to create the best possible conditions under capitalism for the oppressed. The struggle for revolution and liberation was put off to a distant future.

The Dispersed Left in the US

The crisis of left organizations, program and theory has, of course, affected the US Left as well as the Left internationally. Neo-liberalism, as we’ve discussed, has aggravated the problem. The US Left is not consolidated around socialism and has been largely unable to develop a framework for work on common projects and a shared vision. Efforts in the 1970s to consolidate New Left formations all, to varying degrees, crashed. While there were particularities to each experience,¹⁵ there were certain features that most of these efforts had in common:

- An inconsistent, and in some cases outright incorrect, underplaying of the question of race and national oppression in the US
- An often mechanical and superficial understanding of male supremacy and issues of gender relations
- An overestimation of the potential for revolutionary struggle during the 1970s (and for some groups, for every year since then); also a corresponding failure to understand the complexities of the political Right¹⁶
- A lack of understanding of the nature of the US political state and the types of left organization(s) necessary to build a struggle that ultimately results in revolution
- A failure to truly integrate an internationalist perspective into the ongoing work of the respective projects

15. See Max Elbaum’s *Revolution in the Air* for a thought-provoking look at the Marxist-Leninist experience.

16. Most sections of the Left tended to look at the political Right as largely monolithic. We tended to view right-wing movements and/or government repression as illustrative of fascist tendencies, creeping fascism, or in some cases, the arrival of fascism. Sara Diamond’s *Roads to Dominion* is an interesting look at the US Right.

- Sectarianism and factionalism
- A phenomenon that Max Elbaum coined as “miniaturized Leninism”: the tendency for each small organization to have the features and functions of a mass revolutionary party of the oppressed (like a newspaper) even though the group’s base and resources were insufficient

State repression compounded the crisis of socialism in the US, a factor that cannot be ignored and continues to manifest itself in similar yet different forms today. Projects like the FBI’s notorious Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) destroyed countless Black left organizations and individuals and disrupted efforts at unity between various tendencies on the Left. The African-American Left probably suffered the most from that specific repressive program, though other movements, like the Puerto Rican and Native American movements, were often subject to dramatic state repression that went un- or underreported in most US media.

While there have been important developments at the mass level, the Left in the US has made few breakthroughs. A variety of groups and collectives have thrown in the towel. Without the support of a group, few former revolutionaries have been able to withstand the gravitational pull of capitalist hegemony. Many have drifted to reformism, folded into the Democratic Party, become part of the NGO world or been absorbed into trade unionism that poses no fundamental threat to capitalism. Many of the remaining socialist organizations, as a way of staving off oblivion, have stayed well within their own comfort zones (what Mao called the *mountain stronghold mentality*), generally represented by the attitude of “smaller but better,” and have downplayed the importance of developing new theory and revolutionary practice. Yet these organizational forms are largely inappropriate for addressing the theoretical and practical questions related to the development of a revolutionary movement. As such, we are less than the sum of our parts at precisely the moment when a visionary socialist Left is so needed.

Various efforts have emerged within the socialist Left toward unity or regroupment.¹⁷ While these efforts have been sincere, they have run up against several problems. We might note that many of these same issues plague the social movements. These problems include:

- Lack of trust among organizations
- Very stretched resources among small organizations
- Mountain-stronghold/comfort zone mentality
- Lack of attention to the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory¹⁸

17. Regroupment is not the same as Left Refoundation. Regroupment’s focus is generally on uniting existing forces and organizations. The call for new theoretical work and program has not been central.

- The inability to break from a pragmatism that has folks walking with their eyes close to the ground
- The complete infection by bourgeois individualism in the form of cowboy revolutionary; by this we mean a real tendency to form new organizations at the drop of a hat

To this list must be added a factor that often goes unmentioned: *the lack of a sense of what it will take to actually build a movement that can challenge for power in the US. Specifically, a failure to appreciate the scale of organization that will be needed and, therefore, the steps necessary to bring such an organization into existence.* As such, irrespective of intent and rhetoric, most of the Left has become content to build movements of resistance but is not prepared to theorize the steps necessary to create an organization capable of building an offensive strategy.

In our view, such an organization is a *party for socialism*, an explicitly anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist party rooted within the oppressed. This means a party of the working class, but also a party that is understood to be a representative of those dispossessed by capitalism. The first sections of this paper described the characteristics of the neo-liberal, imperialist state and explored the problems of socialist experiments of the 20th century. We then looked briefly at resistance movements to neo-liberal globalization. The remainder of this paper argues that building revolutionary organization is a critical task at this time.

Why a party?

Questions of left organization fundamentally revolve around an assessment of the period, the state and the nature of the struggle for transformation. As we argued earlier, the state is not a neutral zone where anybody and everybody has equal room to play. The state reflects and advances the interests and needs of the class(es) in power, and we have noted its repressive functions, some more obvious than others.

Some revolutionaries, reacting to the corrosive aftermath of 20th-century socialist experiments, believe that taking state power is both useless and wrong. Enormous mistakes and fundamental theoretical and practical weaknesses infected many socialist attempts of the last century. Out of this analysis comes the belief that the Left must lead the resistance against neo-liberal globalization and force capital to make various concessions. At some point, the masses of oppressed people will conclude that capitalism must be transcended and will take action largely on their own.

Unfortunately, this idea has no historical basis. Transcending any social system has always necessitated a *conscious* combination of broad-based edu-

18. Which can play out as either reliance on old theory, up to and including dogmatism and revisionism, or it can play itself out as downplaying theory altogether and a reliance on activity in the mass movements to spontaneously generate a new revolutionary current.

cation (education through the practice of struggle as well as through analysis), an organization of a segment of the masses, and leadership (generally in the form of an organization or political party).

The absence of organization effectively condemns the oppressed to constant resistance battles. Even when such battles are won, the danger is that victory will be short-lived and that the oppressed will tire and despair. Examples of defensive battles and short-lived victories abound: the recent immigrant rights upsurge, battles against repeated racist and anti-immigrant ballot initiatives, union organizing victories in plants that then move abroad, anti-gentrification battles in urban neighborhoods...

A revolutionary party would be a vehicle for creating conscious organization, broad-based education and effective leadership of and by the working class and oppressed people. Without organization, our political ideas remain dreams unfulfilled. Why do we need revolutionary organization? Here is why:

- The struggle for structural reform and consistent democracy, while being part of the role of the Left, is insufficient. We must struggle to transform society and work with others to transform the planet.
- There is a desperate need for new theory and an explanation and practice that goes beyond any one particular sector but speaks to and with the various sectors that are in struggle with capital, providing them with an overarching sense of interconnection.
- There is a need to have a political organization that has members in various struggles linking these reform struggles to the larger struggle for transformation. A party aims to have developed campaigns that serve both to educate as well as change the conditions of the people. For instance, a party for socialism could involve itself in the struggles within the union movement toward a new labor unionism. Such a party could organize the unemployed both to demand employment and to create cooperatives that can provide for survival and foster self-reliance and self-organization among the oppressed.
- A party for socialism could build a truly internationalist politics, educating people in the US about global struggles against imperialism, pursuing struggles here that support people's movements in other countries, and fighting within the US to end the imperialist policies and actions of the US government. The fights, for instance, in the 1980s against South African Apartheid and US intervention in Central America provided real support for the forces on the ground.
- A party for socialism must be a party that struggles against patriarchy and for women's emancipation. Not only has the bourgeois white women's movement gained hegemony within women's movement, but

there are also now attacks from the Right that must be overcome. A party for socialism must center itself on the intersection of oppressions (race, class, gender, sexual identity and choice) and deal with internal contradictions and with how this interplay impacts the road to socialist emancipation.¹⁹

- A party for socialism is essential to pursue the struggles against racism (white supremacy) and national oppression. Central to any strategy for change in the US must be a thorough understanding of the nature of racialized patriarchal capitalism. Playing the race card has effectively kept people of color subordinated and the working class divided for hundreds of years. Every attempt by white leftists and progressives to avoid dealing with this question has led to abject failure. Socialism cannot come to the US primarily in a white skin; it must represent the spectrum of the rainbow and be largely developed and led by historically oppressed peoples. This means building and supporting struggles for national self-determination over land, political power and economic justice among the African-American, Chicano, Asian-Pacific American, Arab, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian and Native American peoples. It means fighting for full democratic and economic rights for those peoples uprooted from their lands and denied democracy. A party for socialism must be a party of color.

Now we would like to pose a few questions that we by no means have an answer to, but believe are critical for discussion amongst self-identified socialists, leftists, and all people interested in revolutionary change. These are some of the very questions that we believe should be discussed widely and collectively.

- What do healthy and accountable relationships between people's movements and the organized Left—whether parties or small left collectives and cadres—look like? How do we rethink the relationship between a party and organizations of workers, neighbors, etc., including the relationship between a party and spontaneous action?

19. Much could be—and has been—written on this subject alone, but we restrict our comments here to emphasize the following points. Class is not a concept that exists in isolation from other oppressions, nor are other oppressions, e.g. male supremacy, in isolation. A party must grasp this theoretically and practically. At the same time, the law of contradiction is critical, particularly with regard to strategy. Specifically, at any one moment there is a principal contradiction, the resolution of which impacts other contradictions. The principal contradiction is itself influenced by secondary contradictions. Thus, a party for socialism must be keenly aware of this dialectical relationship and must not try to reduce all contradictions to the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist era, that between labor and capital, or to reduce all contradictions to the principal contradiction. Economic determinism has led many left currents to ignore secondary contradictions, and often to misread the principal contradiction in a particular period.

- How do we ensure that the organizations and/or parties that we build will not, once there is a level of power (whether state power or a power within the mass movement), devolve into terror, bureaucracy and state capitalism?
- How will the fight for gender, queer and sexual liberation construct a new kind of party and left?
- What is the role of culture in a party(ies), and how do we create counter-hegemonic culture in political movements today?
- Is a new kind of party prepared to take leadership from the movements of workers, women, oppressed nationalities? How will practice and theory developed out of those movements be respected and recognized by left organizations and movements?

What is a party?

Given the nature of the capitalist state as well as the necessity to construct a project that fights for power, we are inevitably confronted with questions of political organization. Yet there are no perfect organizations, nor are there organizations that serve all purposes. To better explain the concept of a party, it is useful to contrast it to other forms of organization.

In the context of the US, there is a dual nature to fighting for political power. There is the immediate fight for political power within the framework of democratic capitalism.²⁰ This framework can still in some significant sense be defined as such, despite its historical disenfranchisement of those defined as not white and its authoritarian turn under neo-liberal globalization. In a non-revolutionary situation where the masses of people have confidence in the existing system (or wish to have such confidence), the Left cannot afford to sit back in the role of perpetual naysayer. Utilizing the rights that supposedly exist through a constitutional republic, the Left, in alliance with other progressive forces, should be mounting a long-term challenge for political power. This would combine electoral and non-electoral means of raising struggle. Operating within this context means creating a broad left/progressive formation capable of operating openly and uniting in its program the key objectives of the progressive social movements. Its goal is the expansion of democracy and the institution of structural reforms within the parameters of the capitalist system, pushing the system to its limits.

This, however, is *not* the same thing as gaining state power. Gaining state power represents the process of altering power relations in a fundamental

20. Or, as Marx called it, a “bourgeois democracy,” where there is universal suffrage, the rule of law, political competition and certain political liberties. The elite use the laws and elections to legitimize their rule, but the working class can use these same tools of democracy to advance their aims, thus threatening the very foundation of bourgeois rule.

manner. Real transformation and liberation must involve replacing the existing capitalist state. This is part of the long-term struggle for power, a struggle that needs to be led by a party or parties (for example, in a revolutionary front formation). However, the larger struggle for socialism cannot be left to the actions of a party alone but must involve the people as agents of their own emancipation.

A party for socialism has a different set of tasks than a left/progressive formation. Latin American theorist Marta Harnecker speaks about a new party for socialism as representing the unity of the organized Left and the social-movement Lefts. This concept is quite important in our thinking concerning Left Refoundation. The organized Left refers to the existing political formations and groupings of the self-defined Left. The social-movement Lefts refers to the left wings of the progressive social movements, e.g. the left wings of the global justice movement, environmental, women's, and national movements. The creation of a party for socialism necessitates the fusion of both Lefts, in an effort to develop what Gramsci called a historic bloc, or what we would call a *strategic political bloc*.²¹

The party for socialism also must be firmly rooted in both the working class and other oppressed strata, as well as in the progressive social movements that are expressions of objectives of these strata. This may be an awkward way of saying that it is not enough to build a party for socialism that has a large base within the working class, if that party is not tied directly into the various social movements that are engaged in the struggle against capital. We say fusion because the organized Left needs to root itself within the mass movements based on principles of mutual respect and learning, rather than seeking to exploit those movements.

Some lessons from history

It is useful to briefly review (since a full explanation requires a separate book!) some of the critical lessons that one can draw from various revolutionary left experiences in the 20th century when thinking about the task of creating a party for socialism:

- **We need to engage in critical summation.** While Marxism serves as a guide to theory and practice, it does not provide the answer to each and every question confronting humanity. Marxism, for instance, does not have a theory of the personality, and never set out to have one. Nevertheless, historical materialism and materialist dialectics²² provide a means to identify and answer many of the complicated questions facing the social movements. Historical materialism serves as a social science that, as with other social sciences, does not provide ready-made answers

21. A historic bloc or strategic political bloc is broader than any one party. Yet, as we pointed out earlier, the party has as its role the building of such a bloc if it ever wishes to gain power.

but does provide a means to grapple with the questions. Practice and critical summation over time lay the foundation for conclusions. Parties that believe they are omnipotent and omniscient are parties on the road to self-destruction.

- **Democracy serves as both a goal and a practice.** Democracy cannot be an abstraction; it must be built into the process of revolutionary struggle. This paper has looked at some exciting new developments in this area. They remind us that democracy cannot be something that is put off to a distant future but must be demonstrated in practice. A party's openness to criticism and its accountability between and among all levels (often called *democratic centralism*) are essential to ensure against cultism and stagnation. This approach is important in addressing some of the damning criticisms of left-wing parties—particularly communist parties—that gain power and then move in an authoritarian direction. Democracy must be built into revolutionary practice from the inception.
- **There is not necessarily one organization for each class.** Orthodox Marxism-Leninism has argued that since there exists only one class interest within the working class there must be only one party. This formulation is idealist and problematic. Capitalism (particularly neo-liberalism) constantly reshapes the material realities working people face across the globe. In turn, the working class is constantly remaking itself. This means that there are constantly changing contradictions within classes that cannot all be handled in the same manner. While the party for socialism should be strongly rooted within the working class, it should not see itself as the sole voice for that class. There may be contending socialist parties, there may be united fronts, or there may be one party. Thus, the form of a revolutionary party can never be cast in stone. It changes depending on material conditions. Whatever the configuration, room must exist for the creation of new formations, particularly under socialism, that challenge bureaucratization of the party and any tendencies toward the development of new oppressive classes. Thus, in addition to the potential for other parties, independent grassroots organizations and social movements are essential for the vitality of a socialist project.
- **There is a constant need to revolutionize organizations.** This need exists irrespective of the period. It includes leadership development (em-

22. Historical materialism/materialist dialectics are the theoretical and methodological foundations of Marxism, a study of how change happens as well as an understanding of how material circumstances shape relationships between people and classes and ultimately the historical development of humanity.

phasizing working-class women of color and building organizational models where they can lead *as women*); the personal development of individuals; the creation of new social relations that liberate individuals (and help heal those traumatized and wounded by capitalism); the struggle against bureaucracy; and the struggle against racism/chauvinism, sexism,²³ the gender binary, heterosexism, and class privilege. These struggles, at least until the distant future, are never completely won.

There are structural steps that can be introduced or at least considered, such as term limits for leadership (like the rotation of leaders over a reasonable period of time), commissions that develop theory and advocate for the issues of specific constituencies, full internal debate (assuming we're not operating under conditions of severe repression), percentages of traditionally excluded groups on leading bodies, and regular education on the issues.

- **The creation of theory is essential.** The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory is central to the existence of a revolutionary Left and revolutionary organization. When theory stagnates, strategy falters. Actual experience must guide the development and evaluation of theory—not just the experiences of one organization, but of various organizations over a period. The creation of theory is more than simply reading what others have written and translating that into US conditions. It means that the Left must commission its own theoreticians to develop theory relative to both the US and to the world. This means, among other things, that there must be latitude for differences of opinion and even heresy.
- **It's important to recognize other revolutionary currents even if they are from another political/ideological tradition.** This is related, but not identical, to the earlier point regarding multi-party socialism. The Left, particularly the communist Left, has often seen the legitimacy of only its own revolutionary tradition. In the US, for instance, too many leftists who have benefited from white, male, heterosexist and other forms of privilege have seen the Left as largely themselves and have ignored other radical traditions, especially from the movements of people of color. To some extent this blindness/dismissal contributed to the rise of *identity politics*, where individual movements not only sought legitimacy, but also disconnected these currents from other social movements.
- **Revolutionary fronts can be one vehicle for pursuing the struggle for socialism, or they can be transitional.** The experiences in Latin America, particularly with the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Libera-

23. Within the Marxist-Leninist tradition these are referred to as white supremacy/national chauvinism and patriarchy.

tion front (FMLN) and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua, offered a particularly interesting approach toward building unity between political tendencies that had at various moments quite literally been at war with one another. In both cases these fronts transitioned into political parties. That may be a method to be considered in the US.

So, Where Do We Go from Here?

The notion of Left Refoundation and party building brings with it a need to think even more deeply about the approach toward constructing a party. Here are a few assumptions and proposals.

- Despite the absolute need for a party of socialism, short of unusual circumstances we are a long way off from a genuine party. By genuine we mean a party that has thousands of members and a significant dedicated core (*cohesive element*, to use Gramsci's phrase). Ultimately, we need to be thinking in terms of a party of hundreds of thousands of members.
- This means, among other things, that those forces committed to the building of a party must themselves have roots in progressive social movements and mass struggles. This does not mean, however, that any one pre-party organization or formation can or should assume that it will be in all such movements and struggles. In such movements, however, the revolutionary Left must identify real mass leaders and win them to socialism. It means that the revolutionary Left is struggling to strengthen the progressive social movements, particularly by building the united-front character of these movements. The Left within those social movements, some of whom may be involved in the building of a party, would have tasks specific to those social movements, and the revolutionary Left must be a part of supporting this work. The revolutionary Left must be learning from the experiences within these movements and summarizing the practice on the level of theory. That theory can in return support these movements and serve as a component of the overall theory for the construction of a socialist project in this country.
- There is a need for intermediate steps that can place the US Left in the position to create such a party. Intermediate steps might mean a front—as mentioned earlier—or some other sort of transitional organization(s).
- The construction of a party for socialism must begin with agreement on the actual situation (domestically and globally), along with agreement on the minimum conditions or points of unity necessary in order to

have a principled, working organization. This means that there must be agreement that some matters will not be settled in the immediate, though a process might be established to work them through.

- No one organization will simply grow in size and become *the* party. Building a party will require a conscious coming together of forces on the revolutionary Left and will not happen spontaneously.
- Ideally, a group of organizations from both the organized and social-movement Lefts would agree to host a Left-rebuilding initiative. Some efforts in this direction have been attempted but have not succeeded. Our conclusion from this is that insufficient trust existed between organizations in order for them to place time and resources into such a project, or to engage their own base in the idea. Additionally, there is often a lack of urgency. These efforts also seemed to come undone in part due to different views on how a party can and should come about. One classic example of this was referenced earlier, i.e., an almost evolutionist view that a party will spontaneously emerge from mass struggle when conditions are ripe. Thus, there is no need to develop a strategy for party building because when the time is right, it will rise. For these and other reasons we have concluded that party building must be driven from below.
- Left Refoundation assumes much more than the unification of existing organizations in the organized and social-movement Lefts. It proposes that there must be a process to bring forward and develop the leadership of new leftists who may never have been part of any organization. It also means building political and organizational unity with those leftists who view themselves as being solitary and not part of any organization or current. Finally it means moving to unity with the various forms of collectives and study groups that are springing up out of the various movements. We must ensure revolutionary diversity by race, nationality, gender and class composition in order to succeed. This means bringing forward the real leaders of the social movements, as well as identifying organizational forms that promote full participation and eventual unification.

From this, we would suggest:

- **Organizational alliances:** Organizations that share a common vision toward the construction of a party for socialism, or even simply the strengthening of the revolutionary Left, but which are not prepared to unite should forge alliances. We envision these alliances taking place among and between the organized Left and social-movement Lefts. Such alliances should be formal agreements to work on common projects, share information, and offer support to one another where possible. Obviously, if there is sufficient unity to merge, that should be done.

These options are not in contradiction.

- **Promotion of debate:** There are a number of existing vehicles that can act as a mechanism for debate and exchange among leftists. These forums, some of which may evolve out of a Left Refoundation-type process, can provide news and analysis regarding issues that are otherwise ignored. In other words, it can be a mechanism to move broad discussions and debates within the organized and social-movement Lefts. Debate can also include:
 - ¶ **Formal debates:** The Brecht Forum in New York and the Center for Political Education in San Francisco regularly hold debates and discussions on issues of concern to leftists. Most locales, urban and rural, lack these institutions. Debates on issues ranging from the question of the party to global warming must be taken on the road.
 - ¶ **Study/discussion groups:** There is a desperate need for venues in which leftists can study and dialogue and ultimately take practical action. Groups need to use all forms of education (visual, oral, and hands-on), so that all types of learners can play an equal part. These groups can help to create the conditions for new forms of organization.
 - ¶ **Local social investigation, planning and activity:** The Left typically involves itself in defensive coalitions and joint work around a specific problem. Some leftists believe that by doing this, unity will spontaneously emerge. There is little evidence to support this idea. Only conscious effort brings unity. We suggest that leftists who have some level of principled unity within a specific geographic area come together to (a) conduct an analysis of the state of the class struggle in that area; (b) identify points where a coherent Left could make a difference in building, strengthening, etc., a struggle; and (c) agree upon projects or points of concentration. These efforts are building blocks for the revival of revolutionary politics.
- **Strengthening the social-movement Lefts:** Part of our work must be to reinforce the social-movement Lefts, not simply in their relationship to party building, but as independent forces in their own right. The social-movement Lefts are quite diverse ideologically. Revolutionary Marxists have an obligation to approach the social-movement Lefts as comrades but not with the immediate, or in some cases long-term, prospect of unification. FRSO/OSCL, for instance, has worked very closely with African-American revolutionary nationalists where both sides agreed that there was no prospect of unification, but where a close relationship was useful in order to advance the work. This approach is important with all social-movement Lefts.

- **Building national, real-world project(s):** It is important for left formations and individuals to engage in national-level projects. Such projects should not be fanciful inventions just to bring us together, but should be based on an analysis of real-world events and the manner in which the Left can both contribute to and gain from active participation. This breaks down the sense of isolation that so often haunts the movement. But it also demonstrates the impact that the Left can have on real-world events. The Jesse Jackson Presidential campaigns of 1984 and especially 1988 were interesting examples of where the Left did have considerable impact. Individual leftists played prominent roles in the campaign, including developing positions (platforms) and organizing constituencies that might otherwise have failed to engage with the campaign. In some cases, forces from different left groupings were able to work together to build the campaigns in their areas. Had the Left been more united, we would have had a more significant impact.
- **Building international Left cooperation and solidarity:** Regularly ignored in the US by most of the Left is the question of international solidarity within the global revolutionary Left. This is not a call for the creation of a new Communist International or similar formation, but there are interesting global dialogues unfolding that are bringing together forces that might not otherwise interact. The Sao Paulo Forum, for instance, brings together a cross-section of the Latin American Left. The World Social Forum has shown itself to be a very useful meeting ground. Within the international trade union movement, there have been South-South dialogues between the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the Brazilian Central Única dos Trabalhadores, and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions—unions either led by leftists or where the Left plays a major role. For us in the US, we need to look at such global interactions as an opportunity to learn from other experiences, strategize in addressing issues of common concern, and educate our respective members and base concerning issues facing oppressed people internationally so that we can build a stronger domestic movement against US imperialism. We should discuss building a movement in the US against empire that can be seen as part of an international united front against imperialism with the US as the main enemy.
- **Going multi-generational:** The notion that every generation needs to start over and create its own organizations carries major weight. It is, nevertheless, problematic. There is immense knowledge and experience that crosses generational lines. Left Refoundation, as we have reiterated, is not solely or mainly about the coming together of existing organizations. It is about laying the conditions for the revitalization of the revolutionary Left and the building of a party for socialism. It requires that older organizations and activists be open to listening to and following

the initiatives of newer formations and younger activists—something that has proven difficult for many. This will mean a continuous process of cultural change, a cultural revolution so to speak, as different age groups lend their voices to the process of rebuilding the revolutionary Left.

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This pamphlet has been produced not to answer all questions but instead to provoke a discussion. In a nutshell, we are suggesting that while the socialist experiment of the 20th century largely failed, socialism is more necessary than ever. As the great Polish/German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg enunciated nearly 100 years ago, the “choice for humanity is either socialism or barbarism.” While many people thought her statement a rhetorical gimmick, actual global conditions are making it clear that the alternative is in fact that stark. Getting to socialism, however, involves not only a process of struggle but also theory, strategy and organization. In the absence of both revolutionary theory and revolutionary organization, we know that the masses of oppressed people will continue to resist, but ultimately they will be squashed by our common oppressors.

This paper is a modest attempt to put out the current political thinking and analysis, which we understand as a contribution to a much larger conversation about the way forward. This paper is not a call to make something like Freedom Road, but rather much bigger and more inclusive, and with a different name altogether. We don't expect that we will necessarily stop being who we are in creating something new with you (although in all likelihood the process itself will transform all of us). What we want is to join with you, social movement movers and shakers and members of left organizations, in developing something new, different and extraordinary that will unite us in struggle.

One unifying theme will be the struggle against the state, the instrument of the ruling class, and one goal is to build some kind of socialism. But in the process we are open to all sorts of debate, to questioning assumptions, even aspects of what has been deemed as Marxism. We are willing to create something that fuses all the history of the social movements of the last forty years with the lessons of the many different tendencies of the political left.

Revolutionary theory and organization instill the confidence that we need to proceed under the most adverse of conditions. We look forward to joining with you and others in bringing a socialist future into existence.

For more information on Left Refoundation and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization / Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (FRSO/OSCL), please feel free to check out our website at www.freedomroad.org and contact us at freedomroad@freedomroad.org

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Who We Are

While The Road/El Camino was formed in 1985 as a merger of socialist organizations that came from the movements of the 1960s and 70s, today we are multi-generational, with a majority of our members under age 35 – not yet born when our organization was formed.

The Road/El Camino renewed our commitment to both our historical principles and to make a more powerful contribution to the social movements in the United States, with a clear focus on building the resistance to Trump, and challenging the left and the fighters in the social movements to confront the question of a path to power.

FREEDOM: WHAT WE WANT

For as far back as the historical record goes, human society has been propelled forward by the struggle for freedom. From the slave rebellions of ancient Rome to the peasant uprisings that slashed through China's history, from the resistance against the slave trade to the anti-colonial struggles that have rocked Africa, the Americas and the Asian-Pacific region over the last two centuries, to the bloody fights to build unions at the workplace, people have always resisted grinding exploitation and brutal oppression.

Today the rich and powerful, the tiny handful who squat atop our social pyramid, try to claim the banner of freedom for themselves. They use this mighty word to sell everything from convertibles to toothpaste, and now even racist right wing populists have tried to steal this language. And when they do, they reveal what they think freedom means. For the rulers, freedom means the freedom to structure everything in society to serve their own interests. Meanwhile, for the great working class majority, the freedom preached by the one percent means only the freedom to choose between a rock and a hard place, between selling our labor to them to enrich them further and starving to death.

But we have a different vision of freedom. The great majority of the globe's people want freedom from misery, from exploitation, from the jackboots of the state, from living our whole lives in alienation and insecurity. We want freedom for the peoples of the world to own our histories, cultures and languages, and to determine our own destinies. And more, we want freedom to become fully human, to develop all our gifts and abilities. And millions of us sense that this cannot be done by each of us as individuals, but only by the pooling of our collective strength and wisdom.

ROAD: HOW WE GET THERE

The long history of people struggling for freedom shows us a lot about the path we have to travel. It is always a struggle because those who run and benefit from the existing order have no interest whatsoever in giving up their power and privilege. We stand in internationalist solidarity with all people of the world who are waging this battle under their own conditions, and often waging it against the same ruling class we are fighting, for the rulers of the US are still the dominant power in the world today.

We look for inspiration and lessons to key episodes in this long struggle for freedom. The Paris Commune of 1871 showed that the wretched of the earth could storm heaven, seize power and reorganize society. The Russian revolution showed that the new society could be defended and built in the face of everything the old order could throw against it. The Cultural Revolution in China showed that only the masses of people can challenge a new elite from taking over the government and seizing the fruits of the revolution, as had happened in the Soviet Union. Each of these heroic efforts to push forward into the realm of freedom eventually wound up in a swamp or a box canyon, but not before our road had been blazed far into new and uncharted terrain.

There is also much to learn from the countless fighters who have helped scout the terrain ahead. These include not just Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin and Mao Zedong, but Malcolm X, Ella Baker, Amilcar Cabral, Jose Carlos Mariategui, Antonio Gramsci, Jose Marti, Franz Fanon, Digna Ochoa, Berta Carceres, and many, many more. And in the end, of course, we can only bring the road into being through the hard work of building it.

FREEDOM ROAD: THE PATH IN THE US

These two words, linked together, have a special meaning. This country was built on the enslavement and continued exploitation and domination of the African American people and other oppressed peoples like the First Nations (Native Americans) and the Chicana/o people, whose homeland, Aztlan, is in the Southwest. In slavery days, Liberation Road referred to the Underground Railroad. The words became the refrain of the marching song of the 200,000 Black troops in the Civil War who dealt a decisive blow to the power of the Southern slaveocracy, a great stride forward on history's path.

Today, the oppression of minority nationalities remains central to the capitalist system in this country. Today, the road to freedom means that those communities must have the right to determine their own destinies. Because of this, the central feature of the road to freedom in the United States is the alliance of the people's movements in different communities of color with the movement of the vast working class, made up of laboring people of all nationalities and races.

SOCIALISM: THE SOCIETY WE WILL BUILD

Freedom cannot be won for a few. If any are in chains, no one is truly free. Nor can freedom be given as a gift. It must be taken by the many because only in doing so can we learn to use and expand it.

The rich hate the thought of socialism so much that they call socialist any reform in the system that cuts into their wealth in the slightest—from public education and the graduated income tax in the old days, to environmental regulations and a national health care system today. Such reforms, however righteous and needed they might be—and we fight for them tooth and nail—are not socialism.

Real freedom will require the destruction, by every means necessary, of the whole current social order based on the rights of the wealthy to keep everything they have and constantly grab for more.

Real freedom, socialism, will mean turning that system over, or, more accurately, standing things right side up. It will mean organizing society and the economy on an entirely different basis, where the wealth created by the labor of the many goes to serve the people and not to enrich a tiny handful of parasites. It will mean that education, health care, jobs, air we can breathe and water we can drink — will all be rights, and that people will have the opportunity and resources they need to develop their potential as human beings and to increase their contributions to the well-being of all.

The working people will rule and the old exploiters (and newer wannabes) will be held back. So will those, like white supremacists, who seek to poison and divide the people. True democracy is not choosing between two puppets for the capitalists once every four years. It is the masses of people learning to become the masters of society.

The wealth of society, produced by the labor of millions, will benefit the many, not enrich the few. Because the highest law of giant capitalist corporations is "expand or die," enormous waste, suffering and environmental destruction are built into the system we live under. In place of this dog-eat-dog madness, we need cooperation, collectivity and planning.

Socialism is society ruled by the vast working class majority, and the first step in a transition to a world without classes. The plain fact is: we, the working class of people, make all of society run, each and every day. Why shouldn't we run all of society?

ORGANIZATION: THE KEY TOOL

The only way that working people have ever won anything is by organizing and fighting. In our neighborhoods, in community organizations, in our workplaces, in unions, wherever there is a need to fight, people build organization. As the great labor anthem "Solidarity Forever" says,

What force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one? But the union makes us strong.

This is where you will find members of the Liberation Road. We are involved in and build a wide range of organizations in many fronts of the people's struggles. We are in immigrant workers' centers and labor unions and rank and file caucuses. We are in organizations in oppressed communities, in the Movement for Black Lives and the Climate Justice movement. We are in student groups, in teacher and parent organizations. We are in the LBGTQ organizations and movement, international solidarity groups, and many more.

In each of these fights we unite all who can be united, and always have three goals:

- Win as much as possible and weaken the enemy through collective and militant action;
- Spread class consciousness and build the unity of the working class through education and organization;
- Recruit people to socialism by promoting international solidarity, agitating against capitalism, studying, and providing a program to build an alternative world.

We learn from Ella Baker, a leading light of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, and her insistence that people make their own history and movements must develop their own leaders. We learn from the Chinese leader Mao Zedong, with his insistence that all correct ideas come "from the masses, to the masses." We listen, we learn, and we lift our people.

SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION: THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Again, these are words that have a special meaning when linked together. The various organizations mentioned above aim to defend the rights and living standards of working people and other sections of the population. They are invaluable, but they are not enough.

In the final analysis, we need an organization dedicated to building all of those struggles and welding them together into a revolutionary movement which replaces the whole capitalist system and builds a new world on the ashes of the old. Such an organization needs to be disciplined. It needs to be able to call on its members for ideas and summation of the struggle, for sacrifice in building the people's movements, and for courage in fighting the enemy.

Such an organization must also be large enough to unite the tens of thousands and eventually millions of us into a mighty force, a party or parties, that can shatter the foundations of this corrupt, racist system.

We have no illusions that Liberation Road will on its own become such an organization, but we work to help bring such a force into being when the conditions for it grow ripe. In the meantime, we will seek to strengthen our members, to train and recruit new fighters and always to continue to build the many struggles which defend the ground the people have gained in earlier battles. We will always work to unite with other revolutionary forces. And we will always fight to push the road to freedom a little further into the new territory that lies ahead.

THE CENTRAL TASK TODAY: BUILDING FROM PROTEST TO POWER

The waves of protest that spread across the country after the 2016 election showed the power of the people's rage and resistance. But it has been built, in general, without a strategy to contend for power. We need to move from protest to power. We need to build independent political organization.

Trump's electoral victory was the culmination of decades of organizing by the right wing forces that we call the New Confederacy. The Republican Party today is a social bloc of forces committed to austerity, white supremacy and social hatreds. When they gain power – and they have come to control 25 states in all three branches of government, while the Democrats control 6 – they destroy unions, push the most homophobic and trans-phobic propaganda and policy, overrule progressive local movements or laws by state legislative "preemption", and organize to repeal every last trace of the New Deal and the Civil Rights movement, and more. They have seized the initiative against the increasingly exposed neo-liberal Democrats, who have to answer for their own share of suffering and are subservient to the banks. And their power is rooted in the Old South.

In response, state-by-state efforts have emerged by progressive forces to bring together the multi-racial working class with minority nationalities and others to fight back. These organizations, which differ in many ways, have several things in common. They have a broad vision of contending for power. They work in the street and in the election booth. They work inside and outside the Democratic Party. They fight both austerity and white supremacy. And they build on the strategic alliance of the working class of all races and languages with the movements based in communities of color.

Bringing together the advanced fighters around the necessity of political organization and strategy is the focus of our work today, as part of the movement for socialism, and as we build the resistance. In some cases we will initiate such efforts, in others we will pitch in and learn from others where such efforts are already going strong.

We have entered a period of numerical and political growth of the socialist movement in the US. We hope you will join us.

About Us

- Who We Are
- Our History
- Frequently Asked Questions
- How We Work
- Our Cadre
- ¡Presente!
- El Proyecto Izquierda Latina
- Latinx Left Project

[Freedom Road Socialist Organization \(FRSO\)](#): This movement, based in New York, New York, apparently coined the term “left refoundation.” It originated out of Maoism. In Freedom Road’s Left Refoundation, relationships are established between different socialist organizations and movements (a type of “frontism”). The controversies surrounding the [Theses on Left Refoundation](#) resulted in a permanent split between [Freedom Road Socialist Organization](#) (Left Refoundation) and [Freedom Road Socialist Organization](#) (Maoist). Each group has continued to claim its own legitimacy. Communist historian Doug Enaa Greene has provided an interesting autobiographical critique of Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation) in a YouTube Video: [Cold Water in the Eye](#). The organization also maintains its own [YouTube channel](#). Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation) was strongly influenced by the work of Chilean sociologist Marta Harnecker (discussed in an [earlier section](#) of the book).

“Left Refoundation, a dialectical process between the ‘organized Left’ and the ‘social movement Left.’ In general, the ‘organized Left’ refers to revolutionaries belonging to existing Left organizations. The ‘social movement Left’ generally refers to individuals who self-identify as leftists or revolutionaries, participate in on-the-ground movement work, but haven’t joined any existing organization.” [Editor, [“Revolutionary Work In Our Times and Left Refoundation: Building a New Culture of the Left.”](#) *Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation)*. September 18th, 2009. Retrieved on August 30th, 2015.]

“Drawing on the analysis of Latin American socialist and political thinker, Marta Harnecker, FRSO has said it must be based on the fusion of forces from both the Party Left (socialist organizations) and the Social Movement Left (mass-based groups in different sectors with left politics and a core open to socialism). Two pamphlets were written with these new sights and widely circulated: ‘Which Way is Left’ and ‘The Young and the Leftless’ (aimed at younger activists). Both make the call for a broad party-building project on the left which required a reassessment of long-established organizational models, theory and practice. These pamphlets, coupled with participation in local social forums and the USSF, locally-based cross-left forms, and being a founding organization of Revolutionary Work in Our Times has stirred interest in a new generation of revolutionaries based in the social movements.” [Editor, “[Our History](#).” Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation). 2010. Retrieved on August 12th, 2017.]

“Many — some famous and some too little known [have influenced us]. Amilcar Cabral on the role of culture in revolutionary process, Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Ella Baker’s promotion of organization-centered leaders rather than leadercentered organizations, Ted Allen’s analysis of the invention of the white race and white privilege, Marta Harnecker’s call to Latin American socialists to bridge what she calls the party left and the social movement left, Robert Biel’s analysis of the new imperialism, Audre Lorde’s pioneering work on the intersection of oppressions, Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, Richard Levins on imperialism, ecology and public health, Kjersti Ericsson of Norway’s Workers Communist

Party on women's oppression in society and how that gets reflected — and can be fought — inside communist organizations.” [Editor, “[Frequently Asked Questions](#). Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation). Undated. Retrieved on August 12th, 2017.]

“Given all that is required of us in this moment, we know that we cannot accomplish our goals without a stronger Left. Left Refoundation work must continue to play a guiding role in our strategies. Building on relationships we've developed with advanced forces in the social movement Left, we will embark on a new Left Refoundation effort, the construction of a new ‘Socialist Front.’ This Front will provide an opportunity to collaborate with left forces around shared work. In addition to the Front, the US Social Forum and continued participation in Revolutionary Work in Our Times (RWIOT) will also be important elements in our Left Refoundation work.” [Editor, “[A Strategy for the Coming Period: 2010 – 2013](#).” *Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation)*. January 27th, 2010. Retrieved on September 12th, 2015.]

“Left Refoundation is a process for recreating, reestablishing, and reasserting an ideological and institutional base in the U.S. for overthrowing capitalism and beginning to create a socialist society. One initial objective of Left Refoundation is to create public discourse on the subject of revolution and socialism. Another objective is to evaluate socialist theory and practice in a way that encourages collaboration and development of strategy on the Left. Building the ideological and institutional base for a new type of socialist party will require public debate,

collaborative analysis and broad scale struggles that have revolutionary potential. In the past, party building preoccupied major sectors of the Socialist Left. In recent years, most independent socialists and socialist organizations have paid little attention to this element of our overall strategy for revolution.” [Editor, “[Meeting the Challenge of Crisis and Opportunity: Left Refoundation and Party Building](#).” *Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Left Refoundation)*. Undated. Page 3. Retrieved on September 18th, 2015.]

“In 1999, a social democratic grouping left to pursue a strategy the splitters call ‘left refoundationism.’ ‘Left refoundationism’ rejects Leninism in favor of the goal to build a ‘mass socialist party.’ While they continue to use the name of our organization to build a social democratic project, we continue to build FRSO [Freedom Road Socialist Organization] as a Marxist-Leninist organization.” [Editor, “[Unity Statement of Freedom Road Socialist Organization](#).” *Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Maoist)*. 2005. Retrieved on August 30th, 2015.]

“... it is necessary to turn to a subject that has become a touchstone issue for so many self-described socialist and communist organizations: *left unity*. Also called regroupment, *rapprochement* [[MP3 audio file](#)], left refoundation and a number of other equally pretentious terms, advocating left unity is seen as: a) being the same as multi-tendency, non-doctrinaire or non-sectarian (or a combination thereof), and/or b) either a substitute or prerequisite for the building of a proletarian party.” [Editor, “[General Platform of the Workers Party](#).” *Workers Party in*

America: The Workers' Communist Party in the United States.
November 25th, 2012. Retrieved on September 12th, 2015.]

“From our discussions, drawing on many sources both inside and outside the socialist movement, we have concluded that the prospects for full democracy and working-class power and leadership in this country require a re-examination and overhaul of the theory, program (practice) and organizational components of socialism and revolutionary movements as they exist today. This process, which we are calling *Left Refoundation*, includes the task of building a revolutionary party or parties for socialism. It will require the collective input of not only those forces who already see the need for a decisive victory over capitalism, but also the tens of thousands of working-class and oppressed peoples who know something is wrong, but as yet don't have a place and means to actualize their dreams.” [Editor. [*Which Way is Left?: Theory, Politics, Organization and 21st Century Socialism*](#).” New York: *Freedom Road Socialist Organization*. 2007. Page 3.]

“Native Canadians and Native Americans are actively involved in the Stop Keystone XL movement already and among the key forces trying to stop the pipeline. This new upsurge has been welcomed by folks in the movement for the new strength and leadership it brings in what, despite its accomplishments so far, is undoubtedly an uphill battle. And it's an uphill battle because the present structure of the monopoly capitalist system is so dependent on carbonbased fuels and petrochemical feed stocks. A challenge on this scale to their right to despoil the planet in pursuit of profit is a challenge to

the future of that system itself!” [Editor. *Introducing Idle No More*. New York: Freedom Road Socialist Organization. 2013. Page 2.]

“Today, the movements against both mass incarceration and state sanctioned violence, in general, threaten the mass incarceration and criminalization complex. In history, it is Black people who have unified large sections of society to destroy chattel slavery, to increase who is eligible to participate in elections, to break the rule of Jim Crow, to win more agency and recognition and representation of our full selves. And, while Black political movements are usually multiracial coalitions, it is of paramount importance to note that it is Black people in general and oppressed genders that have won these monumental victories for the cause of justice.” [Black Organizing Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad. *Juneteenth: A Look at the Past to Find Our Way*. New York: Freedom Road Socialist Organization. 2017. Page 2.]

“The FRSO [Freedom Road Socialist Organization] was founded in 1985 with the merger of two organizations: the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters; this was followed by mergers with the Organization for Revolutionary Unity and the Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective. All of these mergers gave FRSO direct ties to the labor movement, the liberation movements of oppressed nationalities (Chicano and African American) and oppressed national minorities (Asian/Asian American, Puerto Rican), the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender movements, the anti-

imperialist movement, and the student movement. In 1993, the Socialist Organizing Network merged into FRSO. In 1999, FRSO suffered an organizational crisis that led to a split, and there are currently two separate organizations identifying themselves as FRSO. The organization that I am working with can be identified by the title of its newspaper, *Fight Back*, and when I discuss FRSO in this article, I will be referring to this organization.” [John D. Holst, “Globalization and Education within Two Revolutionary Organizations in the United States of America: A Gramscian Analysis.” *Adult Education Quarterly*. Volume 55, number 1, November 2004. Pages 23-40.]

“We believe that one of the most central challenges facing social movements is the absence of a strong Left, and we think that the conditions exist for a re-emergence of an engaged and engaging one. We believe that we can help to build a new kind of Left for our times, rooted in on-the-ground social movements; a Left that is compelling, relevant, rigorous, and visionary. This is partially true because so many of the participants we interviewed identified their politics as Left, but so many also mentioned feeling lost about how they might develop as a Leftist. So many of us are deeply rooted in the communities and sectors that have a vested interest in building a powerful movement of movements. For too long, we’ve been isolated. And yet, we keep plugging away, building the capacity of ordinary people to take control of our own destiny.” [Ntanya Lee and Steve Williams. *More than We Imagined: Activists’ Assessments on the Moment & the Way Forward*. San Francisco, California: Ear to the Ground Project. May, 2013. Page 39.]

“I am a member of Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) [Left Refoundation], which in Los Angeles works in the arenas of immigrant rights and environmental justice. As you can gather, I am an unapologetic socialist and am active in FRSO because I respect so many of its organizers and thinkers, but also because it is an organization that genuinely understands the strategic importance of the oppressed nationality freedom movements in the United States. This is reflected in long-standing work against police repression of African Americans and Latinos, labor organizing (both union and worker center) particularly among workers of color, as well as in the areas of environmental justice and immigrant rights. I am appreciative of the younger leadership that has emerged in FRSO. They have a lot to teach me, and I think they have a lot to teach the movement.

“As we get involved in that fight for a radical democratic program, a set of radical reforms, I think more and more people are going to realize that we can’t achieve this without a radical and revolutionary transformation of society. To save the planet we need that transformation, because as long as capitalism exists, it’s driven by the imperative of accumulation, of resource depletion, and the exploitation of working people. That’s the motive force of capitalism. Until we transcend that social system, unless we transcend that social system, I don’t know if the planet can survive. And the heart of the crisis is here in the United States so we have both a challenge and an opportunity here to affect that. There is no time to waste.”

[Bill Gallegos, “Interview with Bill Gallegos.” Anne Lewis, interviewer. *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*. Volume 67, issue 5, October 2015. Pages 19-34.]

<http://www.markfoster.net/jccc/marxisms3k.html>

RWIOT and Left Refoundation: Building a New Culture of the Left

Posted on [Friday September 18th, 2009](#) by [Freedom Road Socialist Organization](#)

Introduction

This past August, two hundred self-identified revolutionaries gathered in Chicago for the Revolutionary Work In Our Times (RWIOT) Strategic Dialogue. Like the [2007 USSF workshop](#) that sparked RWIOT and last year's [RWIOT Summer School](#), the driving force behind this year's gathering was a yearning to deepen dialogue and relationships between revolutionaries from different traditions, social movements, and organizations. The project's planning committee—composed of the New York Study Group, Solidarity, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), the League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA), Left Turn, and Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (FRSO/OSCL) — reflected this exciting commitment to cross-organizational and multi-tradition dialogue on the Left.

RWIOT and Left Refoundation

First, however, it is useful to understand how RWIOT is situated as part of a broader effort of Left Refoundation. After last year's summer school, there was significant feedback that people did not fully understand this aspect of RWIOT. This year, in order to facilitate greater understanding, there was a panel entitled, "RWIOT in the Context of the US Left." Representatives from each of the planning crews shared some useful historical context and theoretical foundations, and gave their take on how RWIOT figures into this broader process.

RWIOT's History

One of the most striking images of this presentation was a tremendous diagram of a river that helped everyone visualize the historical roots of the process. The streams forming the mouth of the river represented the founding of Left organizations committed to changing the worst aspects of "party Left" culture. These included the mergers that led to the founding of Solidarity and Freedom Road, as well as the formation of LRNA. Newer tributaries fed into the river further downstream, representing the additional participants in the USSF workshop on revolutionary organization, like NYSG and Bring the Ruckus. All of these streams joined to form the river that has become RWIOT. Throughout the planning of last year's summer school and this year's dialogue, a few more branches have flowed in and some have trailed away.

This image of a river beautifully captures the collectivity of the overall process of RWIOT. That emphasis then highlights the intent of RWIOT to build a stronger and more vibrant Left by drawing on the lessons of the 20th century in an attempt to chart a path for a socialism for the 21st century.

Theoretical Foundations

Slingshot

In order to understand the overall process however, it's useful to understand the concept of Left Refoundation, a dialectical process between the "organized Left" and the "social movement Left." In general, the "organized Left" refers to revolutionaries belonging to existing Left organizations. The "social movement Left" generally refers

to individuals who self-identify as leftists or revolutionaries, participate in on-the-ground movement work, but haven't joined any existing organization.

Obviously this language is imperfect, which is in part due to the fact that it's drawn from the work of Marta Harnecker, a Chilean theorist who studies popular democracy throughout Latin America. Because she hails from a region whose Left has historically been much more organized and influential, her language of "party Left" and "social Left" doesn't translate exactly.

In the US there is no "party Left" to speak of, which means in reality most people from the "organized Left" also participate in the social movements. While the intent of this article is not to wrestle over semantics, this has been part of the learning process of LR. This article by BJ, ["Social Movements and the Movement for Socialism"](#) however does further discuss Harnecker's language and our attempts to translate its application to our experiences in the US.

Context of the US Left

Perhaps the biggest challenge posed by our context in the US is the current composition of the left. The RWIOT organizers went to great lengths to try to account for this by setting up an application process and goals for targeted outreach, but it's impossible to avoid the reality that the Left isn't adequately based in oppressed nationality working class communities, and so the problem still made itself manifest.

On the second full day of the Strategic Dialogue, representatives from the women of color caucus gave a presentation that challenged all of the participants to consider the still inadequate composition of the left. They pointed specifically to an insufficient representation of women of color's voices, particularly those of women of African descent, on panels and in leadership roles as one manifestation of how multiple intersecting systems of oppression continue to permeate our work and divide our movements. Their intervention very presciently highlights the enormity of this challenge for the Left, and begs many as yet unanswered questions:

- If we're not based deeply enough in oppressed nationality working class communities, why is that? How can we change it?
- Are we actively engaged in transforming the composition of our organizations?
- Is there a lack of leadership development coming from the base?
- What strategies/visions are we advancing that can adequately address questions of composition, relevance, and scale?

Some other challenges, as well as opportunities, stem from the particular limitations and contributions that the "organized Left" and the "social movement Left" each bring to the table. Many of us are unfortunately also all too familiar with the negative aspects of the culture of the "organized Left" historically: vanguardism, sectarianism, and dogmatism. Max Elbaum coins the term "miniaturized Leninism" in his book *Revolution in the Air* in order to describe the trend of ever-increasing fragmentation and posturing that contributed to the demise of the Left and its current state of weakness.

On the other hand the "organized Left," or at least the portion who is attempting to learn from these mistakes, also has much to offer in terms of resources, analysis, and in generating effective long-term strategies and visions. Organizations can also play an important role in nurturing collectivity and combating the constant onslaught of

isolation under capitalism. Of course ultimately as socialists we also generally believe that organization plays an integral role in the revolutionary process, and eventually a party that can facilitate a mass socialist revolution is necessary.

At the same time it's important to recognize that the "social movement Left," or "unaffiliated Leftists", bring their own set of both strengths and weaknesses. One such strength, made evident at the Strategic Dialogue, was that some of the most exciting cultural aspects of the weekend were organized and facilitated by "social movement Leftists." For example there was a healing track which included acupuncture, massage, an altar, yoga classes, a breakout on Self-care for Revolutionaries, and a centering exercise to open and close the large group sessions each day. Some examples of common weaknesses of the "social movement Left" include the difficulty of connecting work across sectors, NGO-ization, inadequate opportunities to develop long-term vision and strategy, and an inability to adequately address questions of scale.

Building a New Left Culture

All in all the most exciting elements that have come out of RWIOT as a Left Leftist Lounge Party Refoundation project have come specifically from the team efforts of folks from the "social movement Left" and the "organized Left." In my opinion the ultimate highlight from this particular collaboration was the hot party on Saturday night that was organized by Leftist Lounge and boasted a cast of local performers, homemade mojitos and multiple DJ's. There was also a great deal of experimentation with formats at this gathering and many attempts to make the space more participatory. While an overall balance of course still needs to be struck—in some instances the popular education techniques were critiqued as actually hampering deeper conversation—the fact that these experiments are taking place demonstrates our willingness as a portion of the Left to begin thinking about how to harness our respective strengths and grow this thing beyond its constituent parts.

Lessons Learned

As another manifestation of Left Refoundation work, the gathering offered a number of important lessons. One is that what we aren't in the practice of, as either a small "party Left" or as a "social Left," is thinking to scale—big picture—and putting forward strategies to other sectors of the Left in order to share and learn. This is something we're going to have to learn in order to move Left Refoundation forward, and to really "go deep" in terms of our similarities or differences, beyond just sharing analysis. In order to facilitate this level of ongoing dialogue we'll need to develop infrastructure and institutions (at least eventually) that can foster this kind of debate and relationship-building over time, especially in relation to summing up our work.

Another major lesson is that while we have a wealth of conversations about our varying analyses (e.g. What's happening with the crisis? What's the nature of the Obama movement? What's the state of our movement?), what continues to be missing is real strategy conversation. Ironically, the conversations that most engaged people were centered on summations of and proposals for concrete work. The question then is: given our different or similar analyses of what's going on in the world, what is to be done?

Given this question, and perhaps most importantly, what we need is a vision for common work, based in the

sectors of the class with the highest stake in revolutionary transformation, that can adequately address questions of relevance and scale, emphasize developing leadership from the base, and advance socialism as a viable alternative.

For more information on this year's program click here to download the [registration packet](#).

Aiden Graham is a member of FRSO/OSCL and a librarian-in-training in Boston, MA. His struggle work consists mostly of queer and trans community organizing and anti-violence work that centers the experiences of women of color, though this last year was mostly focused on RWIOT. Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the substance of this article.

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What makes Freedom Road different from the other socialist groups out there?

Politically, the two keystones of our identity are our emphasis on national oppression, self-determination and white privilege; and our commitment what we call Left Refoundation. There is no other group on the left that places these two positions at the heart of its politics.

We support the concept of the intersections of oppression between race, gender, sexuality and class. This is the idea that no one form of oppression operates independently. Each is impacted to a greater or lesser degree by the others. It is necessary to remember that if we are truly to become revolutionaries, we must learn how to organize all our oppressed to end all our oppressions.

We have placed a strong emphasis on combating patriarchy. This means supporting the leadership of women and queer people in our organization and the movements we work in. Internally, we are also engaged in a lengthy study process on patriarchy which will lead to the creation of a new organizational document on the topic.

Also people tell us that we seem “normal,” and aren’t constantly trying to sell them a newspaper.

Can you explain what you mean by national oppression and white privilege?

We hold that what is usually termed racism is, in fact, an entire social structure of national oppression. The history of this country, built as it is on stolen land and stolen labor, means that the US contains within its borders actual oppressed nations, internal colonies — the “First Peoples” or indigenous nations including the indigenous peoples of Alaska, and the Black, Chicana/o and Hawai’ian nations. It also colonially dominates the “commonwealth” (actually nation) of Puerto Rico. We hold that those nations have the right of self-determination, up to and including the right to secede and form separate countries if that is their wish. On the foundation of this national oppression, immigrants from oppressed or Third World nations and dark-skinned people generally are also subject to discrimination, state and vigilante violence and other forms of domination which we fight.

Further, we believe the historic weakness and low class consciousness of the US working class is principally due to the system of small, real and deadly privileges granted to those who have been defined as “white,” even when they are exploited workers. This system was first intentionally promoted by the British settler elite in the 17th century, to divide and conquer rebellious indentured servants. Their strategy has remained at the heart of capitalist rule throughout US history. The system of privileges and the ideology of white supremacy have also taken on a life of its own, in institutions and in white people’s hearts and minds. Any organization, any movement, which fails to tackle these issues in a determined and consistent way cannot hope to throw out the capitalists who rob and dehumanize all of us.

What’s Left Refoundation?

FRSO sees the need for a powerful disciplined revolutionary organization, big enough, deeply rooted enough among the people, and well-coordinated enough to challenge the white supremacist US ruling class for power. But such an organization cannot be built the “traditional” way: by a small group which through its good organizing

and correct political line grows into a vanguard party. In this complex country of 280 million, that's not about to happen any time soon. Instead we need to conceive and develop an ongoing, long-range process. It will involve many activists participating in joint projects and organizing at the local, regional and national levels. Interwoven with this is the collaborative development of up-to-date theory and the discussion of program and strategy — core principles, key campaigns, short and long-term goals, methods of working together and visions of the society we want to build.

Such a process requires that participants be willing to set aside many of their most cherished bottom lines to try and formulate a new unity. It will also require thinking through and struggling out some degree of unity about what lessons we have learned from our current organizing efforts, from earlier upsurges here in the US and from other revolutions and efforts to build socialism.

Is Left Refoundation the same as left groups joining together, or regroupment?

Unlike regroupment or left unity, Left Refoundation is not mainly about bringing together existing self-identified socialist groups (or independent socialists). Even together, these forces are too small and too white, too old, too male and too middle-class. Refoundation calls for those who already believe in socialism to reach out and engage others active in diverse social movements of working and oppressed people. There's no blueprint for this, but we're trying to learn from examples of groups around the world who've tried similar things.

How did Freedom Road get started?

Though FRSO was founded in 1985, our roots lie in the upsurges of the '60s. Older FRSO members cut their teeth in the Civil Right Movement and the Black rebellions that shook the country and in all that came after: the Chicano National Movement, the birth of the modern women's movement, the gay liberation movement, ecology activism, and the generational revolt against the Vietnam war and the whole corporate culture of death and destruction.

By the early 1970s, thousands of young people had passed from resistance to revolution and began to form the new disciplined Marxist-Leninist groups. These outfits concentrated their members in the working class, and collectively became known as the New Communist Movement (NCM). As the upsurge of the '60s faded and the realization set in of how difficult and protracted the making of revolution in the belly of the Beast would actually be, the NCM imploded. Sectarianism and ultra-leftism also played a big part in that. The original Freedom Road Socialist Organization was formed in 1985 by two surviving groups — the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters — and other groups merged later on.

For folks who weren't around when all this took place, Max Elbaum's book, *Revolution in the Air*, is a good place to start. Our website has a number of exchanges with Max about his views and also comments on the book, as well as a Family Tree of the New Communist Movement. If you're into this sort of thing, this material will shed more light on the NCM and Freedom Road's own history.

How did you come up with the name Freedom Road Socialist Organization?

When FRSO was founded in 1985, some members had been already been through the naming thing a couple of times and really, really didn't want, this time around, a boring, lefty-sounding name full of terms like Proletarian,

Bolshevik, Headquarters, Communist, etc.

Freedom Road is a term that Black people and their allies used for the Underground Railroad, a key element in the resistance of Black working people to their enslavement, the central struggle which shaped this country. Our leaflet, *Freedom Road Socialist Organization: An Introduction*, pivots on our name and provides a much deeper answer to this question.

Are there really two groups using the FRSO name?

Unfortunately, yes.

In 1999 a section of the organization based in Chicago and Minneapolis split off. The overwhelming majority of comrades of color and most of the overall membership, the National Executive Committee and the local branches (which we call districts) stayed with the organization. Yet those who left chose to keep the name Freedom Road Socialist Organization. It is a good name.

Why did the 1999 split happen?

Those who left objected to the concept of Left Refoundation, even though it flowed out of Freedom Road's original orientation.

From our founding FRSO has carried out a line and practice of promoting unity among revolutionary organizations and, as a necessary result, of leaving political space for diverse views internally. Of all the groups which had united to build the Road, no one from the Proletarian Unity League, no one from the Organization of Revolutionary Unity, no one from the Paul Robeson/Amilcar Cabral Collective and only one comrade who had been in the Socialist Organizing Network took part in the split.

The very first thing the minority did after bailing out was to ditch one of the three Basic Documents of our organization, the *Statement on the Crisis of Socialism*. They decided that there is no crisis of socialism — everything is just fine, nothing needs to be rethought.

What do you think of the attempts to build socialism so far?

We see them as part of a long historic process in which we learn new lessons from each new attempt, both its successes and its setbacks. Our most thorough discussion of this question is summed up in the 1991 "Statement on the Crisis of Socialism" which examined the collapse of Soviet-style regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement in China.

The glaring reality these events highlighted was the lack of socialist democracy. In Eastern Europe, for example, significant layers of the people hated their nominally Communist leaders and ditched them — because they had erected a huge, repressive state apparatus above the people. While the imperialist powers are constantly trying to destroy efforts at socialism, we concluded that we can't chalk up these failures up to imperialist intervention alone. So we believe socialists need to re-think the one party state and pay more attention to developing new democratic forms and struggling out class, patriarchal, national and rural/urban contradictions after the revolution.

At the same time, we take very seriously our obligation to stop our government from undermining existing

self-identified socialist regimes through economic embargoes, military threats, etc. — whatever criticisms we may have of these regimes.

Are you Marxists? Leninists? Maoists? Trotskyists?

We learn from many revolutionaries and we idolize none.

Among the things we draw from Marx: the analysis of how capitalism works and why it is a dynamic but irrational system; and of class struggle as the motor force of history. Marx and Engels believed that working people are capable of overturning capitalism and creating a society based on human need not profit. They learned from the rise and smashing of the Paris Commune that workers could create incredible democratic governance forms but must be prepared to defend them with weapons against exploiters grabbing back power.

From Lenin: an understanding of imperialism — of the revolutionary potential unleashed when oppressed nations struggle for self-determination, and of the tendency of socialists in imperialist countries to fall into reformism and support their own bourgeoisies in imperialist wars. Lenin also emphasized that the capitalist state must be completely destroyed and he made breakthroughs in building a revolutionary party — for which there is definitely no everlasting formula!

From Mao, the methods of the mass line and the united front — how to learn from the experiences and insights of workers and broad masses to formulate demands and build struggles that are as broad and inclusive as possible yet also really challenge the system; and the insight that the transitional relations of production under the socialist state generate new exploiters who must be prevented from restoring capitalism.

We have many friends who are Trotskyists.

Are there any other theorists and revolutionaries that you draw from?

Many — some famous and some too little known. Amilcar Cabral on the role of culture in revolutionary process, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Ella Baker's promotion of organization-centered leaders rather than leader-centered organizations, Ted Allen's analysis of the invention of the white race and white privilege, Marta Harnecker's call to Latin American socialists to bridge what she calls the party left and the social movement left, Robert Biel's analysis of the new imperialism, Audre Lorde's pioneering work on the intersection of oppressions, Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, Richard Levins on imperialism, ecology and public health, Kjersti Ericsson of Norway's Workers Communist Party on women's oppression in society and how that gets reflected — and can be fought — inside communist organizations.

What do you think of anarchists?

Some of our members come out of the anarchist tradition, originally from the important '90s group Love and Rage and then in the Fire by Night Organizing Committee. They don't consider themselves anarchists any more, and they wrote a critique of anarchism and their own past practice. In struggles, we often unite with the fighting spirit and bold tactics of anarchists, and we learn from their thinking about the relationship between the individual and the collective. But overall we don't think anarchism offers strategies or organizing methods that can unite broad masses for revolutionary transformation. Check out "After Winter Must Come Spring" for more on this.

Are you against religion?

We come from a political tradition that is not religious and sees organized religion primarily as a tool of the existing order, encouraging oppressed people to seek salvation in the hereafter rather than justice today. However, there are obvious exceptions to this — major trends in the Black church, and the many people of faith who've been fighters for justice and even socialism, and with whom we're honored to work in many struggles. In fact, some Freedom Road members identify as religious and actively participate in congregations. We believe that the role of religion and, more broadly, spirituality is among the important topics that that we need to explore more deeply.

Do you really believe there could ever be a revolution in this country?

We think it's both necessary and possible, but obviously it will not be easy. And because this is the Belly of the Beast of imperialism, we don't expect to be the leading edge globally — a lot of revolutionary struggles in the Third World will doubtless lead the way. (Of course it's all inter-connected; revolutionaries in the global South have told us that the stronger we get, the more space they have to carry through their battles.)

Despite the actual strength of our rulers and, even more, of their hegemony — the dominance their worldview has within the society — which we breathe in like the air around us, a careful look reveals deepening cracks which run through the system from top to bottom. This country is riven by many contradictions, internally and globally, and we don't know which may break through and have a shattering effect. The US is supposedly a democracy but one party pays to keep Black people off the voter rolls and the other makes no consistent or wholehearted effort to prevent it. Troops are returning maimed or spiritually destroyed from an invasion they know should never have been undertaken. Millions of people live in fear as their health benefits and retirement security disappear. Everything from the environment to human relationships is turned into a commodity and offered for sale.

What does revolution look like to you?

We're not crystal-ball gazers, and we're not one of those groups that predicts the imminent collapse of capitalism at least once every seven years. We anticipate a long process involving many tactics and sites of struggle, in which white supremacist imperialist hegemony — the “common sense” understanding of what's right and who gets to make decisions—begins to break down. When there's some qualitative break — when the masses of people finally decide they've had enough and are ready to overturn the system — history shows us that the exploiters simply won't step aside peacefully. So the forces of the people must be prepared to advance our interests and defend ourselves by any means necessary.

What's your vision of socialism?

To quote from our “Statement on the Crisis of Socialism,” “We identify socialism... not simply with public ownership of the means of production, but with the cultivation of mass participation in and control over economic, political and social institutions and structures.”

It will be a long process but we look toward these developments: overcoming national oppression, male supremacy and heterosexism; eliminating the divisions in the labor process between planning/administration and execution; each individual having the chance to develop as a full human being with collective support —

especially people with disabilities who are currently marginalized; and workers actually controlling a rational production process (and consumption process) that doesn't destroy the earth for our grandchildren. This involves a cultural shift in which people come to find fulfillment in human relationships and creative work rather than consuming, so that the over-consumption of resources in the global North will end.

What does FRSO actually do anyway?

We are an organization of revolutionary organizers, who work together to build mass struggles. Then we evaluate and sum up collectively in order to learn from our practice, and fight white supremacist capitalism more effectively in the next round.

In each struggle of working and oppressed people that we engage in, we try to: (1) win what victories can be won (democratic rights, better working conditions, etc.) and strike blows at the enemy (for instance, weaken US imperialism's capacity to intervene militarily); (2) build the organized forces of the people (progressive, ongoing labor and community groups or anti-war coalitions, etc.); and (3) win new fighters to socialism. If knowledge really does come from the people, then we should actually be out there, working and struggling with them.

What sectors do you work in?

We believe that oppressed nationalities and the multi-national working class will be at the core of the revolutionary united front in this country. With that in mind we predominantly work in the Black and Chicano movements and various immigrants' struggles, and in labor unions, workers centers and labor/community groups and coalitions (e.g. against public transit cutbacks etc.). Some of our work against patriarchy and heterosexism takes place through caucuses within nationality and worker groups; for example, we helped to found the Women's Commission of Black Workers for Justice and have folks in Pride at Work. At the same time, we also work in a citywide LGBT group with a broad progressive agenda.

In all our organizing, we pay attention to the intersection of oppressions—class, national, patriarchal, heterosexist — and how this concretely affect people's lives. We believe understanding this can help to deepen struggles, build greater unity between various sections of the people, and foster revolutionary consciousness.

Over the past three years, we have also been working in the anti-war movement and organizing with vets and military families. Given the historical role of students in sparking struggle in other sectors, we do some student work — but not enough and not as much as we've done in the past. In all our work, we try to build and work within genuinely broad united fronts, rather than close fronts that pretend to be independent and open but are actually dominated by us and recruiting grounds for us.

How do your positions on national liberation and white privilege affect your practice?

In everyday terms, our commitment to national liberation means that we don't consider it inherently divisive when people of color in a labor union or anti-war group or a socialist group want to make criticisms of white supremacist behavior or meet together and discuss whatever issues they choose. It is only by bringing these issues forward and winning the support of the whole group for oppressed nationality demands that true multi-national unity can be built. As stated above, we also build the independent organizations and movements of oppressed nationalities, and we try whenever possible to break the "white united front" (for example, helping found a group of Italian

Americans opposed to the Columbus Quincentennial). We also try to insure that all comrades learn about and draw inspiration from the historical resistance of people of color.

Why don't I see you with banners and papers at demos?

Well, for one thing we currently don't have a paper; instead we have a web site, statements and pamphlets. This isn't a question of principle, just a question of resources. As for large banners, when we march, we are generally with the mass organizations in which we are based. Occasionally we organize contingents but even then, that's not us alone but, for example, in concert with other anti-imperialist groups in an anti-war march. Overall we probably err in a "movementist" direction — focusing on the broad movement and underplaying our own independent public face. This can sometimes make us seem mysterious so we're trying to rectify by having more public statements at demos, a more user-friendly web site, more literature tables etc.

Do you believe in electoral politics?

Well, we don't have any illusions about transforming the Democratic Party into a vehicle of revolution. But the electoral arena has of necessity often been an arena of struggle for the working class and oppressed people — and will probably remain so through the long process of forging a broad united front against white-supremacist imperialism. In California, we've worked against various racist propositions like the anti-immigrant 187. In Boston, Atlanta and other cities, we also have worked in local electoral campaigns, where elected officials (including Democrats) can be held accountable by a movement to work for better public schools, affordable housing and public transit, immigrants' and oppressed nationality rights, less brutal policing, etc.

Much less often, we have worked on national campaigns focused on the Democratic Party, but only when they help to promote an anti-racist and pro-people agenda, like the Rainbow Coalition in the '80s. We also work in and hope to build formations outside of the two-party system, especially in the context of left refoundation and the long-term struggle.

How are you structured as an organization?

We have districts in about a dozen cities and the larger districts are broken down into units based on work area (for example, a community unit, a student unit and an anti-war unit). We have a small National Executive Committee in which each member is elected to a specific responsibility, and national commissions and work teams which guide our mass work in particular sectors. Our basic line is set by Congresses, which generally take place every two to three years. Districts develop a local plan for carrying out the line and strategy set by the Congress, recruit new members, and nurture each other through the alienation and assaults of life under capitalism.

We believe that each of us has the obligation to try to test the group's ideas in all the work that we do (mindful of the culture and flow of the mass organizations in which we work), sum up collectively whether the group's line was useful in practice or not, and give each other constructive criticism on how we work. This is what makes us a cadre organization.

What is your demographic makeup?

We are about 46% oppressed-nationality cadre and 44% women. 20% of our cadre identify as LGBTQ, As far as

age range goes, 40% of us are under 35 and we have some older and some middle aged folks. About half of our cadre are of working-class origin, with most of the rest middle-strata and 1% "other."

We are actively engaged in a transformation process aimed at changing our composition to become a majority oppressed nationality, and a majority women. Transformation means changing our demographics, culture, consciousness and practice and it is creating a space that is welcoming and supportive of oppressed nationality cadre and has an active feminist group process.

How do people join Freedom Road?

People join a local district. Usually they meet us through doing mass work, and if they seem compatible in approach, we invite them to study our Unity Documents and other key points of line and theory. If there seems to be a fit, after common work and study with us, they join up. Because we believe in working collectively in the same mass organizations, it's somewhat more complicated and demanding to join Freedom Road than a group which lets you just sign up and come to meetings if you agree with their ideas. This approach is embodied in the formal requirement that a member agree with our basic documents (which you can find on this website) and general line, be actively involved in fighting the enemy and take part in the collective life of the organization (including paying dues).

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[NOTE: This is a document produced by Right Opportunists, now former members of the FRSO. This "Thesis" repudiates Marxism-Leninism and is based on the wrong assumption that the world is in a post-Leninist, post-Imperialist stage. It calls for a multi-tendency political party lead by reformist social democrats to replace the goal of a revolutionary M-L party.]

Theses on Left Refoundation

Introduction: The following paper concerns strategy, not strategy for socialism itself, but strategy for building a powerful socialist organization that can lead us all the way to socialism. In the past, we called this 'party-building', and at different times, it has preoccupied the socialist Left. In recent years, our organizations, and most independent socialist activists, have paid scant attention to this element of strategy.

Socialists have, instead, built our organizations as bulwarks of resistance, as trainers of the next generation, as keepers of the faith. In these times of right-wing dominance, we should count "keeper of the faith" as a worthwhile accomplishment. But over time, it means we settle for a whole lot less than we should. We lower our sights to fighting the good fight instead of winning liberation of the masses of the people.

To fight our common enemy, we all take risks week in and week out. To become more than the sum of our parts, we must take some very different kinds of risks. We can no longer dance around those risks. The time has come to put party-building decisively back on the table for discussion and for action.

That does not mean that we think some new nationwide revolutionary organization, reflecting working class fighters of all nationalities, lies at hand. It does mean the following:

- For all the damage it has done, the right-wing no longer inspires the same respect and caution it has these past twenty years. In the labor movement especially, but also in the African- American, Chicano and Asian movements and elsewhere, Left forces have begun again to look for ways to gain back the initiative.
- Global conditions offer new opportunities for international working class solidarity but also demand collaborative strategies for success.
- We have to address two contradictory factors: Since the 1970s, US capital has steadily found new strengths as it mastered, without eliminating, global stagnation. In the 1970s aftermath of the Vietnam War and the gains of the freedom struggles, capitalist expansion and profits went into a prolonged stagnation. In response, the attacks we now refer to as the triumph of neo-liberalism at home and worldwide over the welfare state and the dramatic extension of global markets brought a new period of capitalist growth.
- On the other hand, the more long term powerful trend is that of the decline of US imperialism. This decline, including the long-term shift of forces from the 'North' to the 'South', will have a tremendous impact on the nature of working class struggle in the US. In particular, the conditions which benefited many workers in the USA specifically, and the advanced capitalist countries generally, during the so-called 'golden age of capitalism' (roughly 1946-1973) are not returning short of a fundamental transformation of politics and economics...that is, short of socialism. Socialism, as a theory and practice of the class struggle, must adapt to these conditions.

The stubborn survival of revolutionary socialism even in the face of the deepening crisis of socialism propels us toward a re-examination of our unities and differences.

All of these factors tell us that the next five to fifteen years can witness the general refounding of the anti-capitalist Left. With that in mind, we offer the following propositions concerning our situation and what the socialist Left must do.

(1) We live at the convergence of three major crises in this era of imperialism: the "overthrow" of the welfare state by neo-liberalism, the crisis of socialism, and the crisis of the national liberation movements.

The crisis of the welfare state speaks to the consensus in the capitalist world in favor of the assumptions of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism refers to the generally accepted belief within the ruling circles that the role of the state as the provider of a social safety net needs to be narrowed and limited. Meanwhile, the state instead must actively promote open international markets and private accumulation. The rise of neo-liberalism has led to a backtracking by political parties that had supported the welfare state. This includes in many countries, political parties formerly associated with the Left. This has thrown into question, for many progressives and Leftists, the nature and demands of the reform struggle under capitalism. For the mass of working people, neo-liberalism has changed the face of imperialism domestically, showing itself to indeed be the picture of Dorian Gray.

The crisis of socialism has existed since the Stalin era. We ignore reality if we narrow this crisis to a limited period during which the Soviet bloc collapsed. Instead, the 'crisis of socialism' speaks to a series of contradictions that emerged in "actually existing socialism" and in the movements--particularly in the advanced capitalist nation-states--which attempted to achieve state power. Matters such as political democracy; the national question; the woman question; the environment; the land question and agrarian reform; and, the continuing struggle against capital (after the overthrow of capitalism) in order to strengthen the role and leadership of the working class, were handled in such a manner that new ruling groups emerged in the world of 'actually existing socialism.'

The groups divorced themselves from the masses and were unable (and often unwilling) to carry through the struggle for socialism and emancipation. This crisis steadily emerged despite often significant achievements in the realm of living standards and quality of life.

The crisis of the national liberation movements is integrally connected to the rise of neo-liberalism, the collapse of many socialist countries and the Soviet bloc, and the related crisis of socialism. Post World War II national liberation movements emerged in the context of the decline of the old colonial powers, the struggle between the two superpowers and the struggle between socialism and imperialism. An opening existed in order to fight for independence and national liberation. With the crisis of socialism, and specifically the crisis which emerged in the economic direction of the Soviet bloc, slow but steady capitulation to neo-liberalism emerged as a main trend. This affected even progressive forces in the Third World. As before, National liberation struggles remain constantly threatened and blackmailed by destabilization and military intervention (the hallmarks of imperialism). Today, these often take the additional form of 'structural adjustment.' These attacks and other demands imposed by imperialism impinge upon the national sovereignty of the oppressed nations. Behind the gun of neo-liberalism are Margaret Thatcher's infamous words: "There is no alternative!"

National liberation struggles face an additional crisis which has emerged as ethnic contradictions and 'ethnic cleansing'. National liberation struggles have, for example, been derailed into mistaking who is the actual perpetrator of national oppression, focusing in some cases less on imperialism and its local agents, and more on various ethnic groups. This and the strangle-hold of imperialism (via structural adjustment, etc.), have frustrated the development of many contemporary national liberation movements.

The crisis of the national liberation movements applies equally to domestic (US) national movements. The decline of the Left in the

national (oppressed nationality) movements in the USA has occurred with a concurrent rise to ideological and political hegemony of bourgeois forces. Like their counterparts in the Third World, some reform elements in oppressed nationality communities have sought accommodation with neo-liberalism. These forces, with their narrow, elitist and accommodationist strategies, have contributed to the demoralization and de-mobilization of these movements.

(2) For the masses of workers in the USA, the post-1973 period has been one of a defiant offensive of capital and a steady decline in living standards.

The average US worker has a living standard approximating the mid-1960s. This can be seen in longer working hours (or not working at all); working more than one job; the dramatic growth of credit card debt; millions of people without health insurance; and continued economic insecurity. Unionization stands at about 14%. More so than any time since the 1930s, capital can start off a negotiation cycle assuming no need for any significant concessions to labor.

The hope that one could predict a steady rise in one's living standard (or for that of one's children) is over for most workers. The spread of technology has rendered entire fields of work obsolete, and the enhanced ability of capital to move--but more importantly, its ability to have a credible threat held over the heads of the working class--has workers living in fear of their jobs and livelihoods.

(3) Many forces on the Left have resisted capital's offensive, joined by other progressives in different social movements.

The neo-liberal offensive aimed to break economic stagnation and the profits squeeze felt by the imperialist centers in the early 1970s. In the national movements, women's movement, labor movement, environmental movement, gay/lesbian movements, resistance has been the watchword. In some cases the Left-wings of these various

movements have been self-conscious and self-identified, but normally with respect to their movement alone.

Even as resistance grew as the 1980s turned into the 1990s, we have lacked a more cohesive, all-round political project for social transformation with which forces from various progressive social movements can identify. In the absence of such a project, fighters in the various movements have fallen back upon the frameworks and context of their respective movements in their battles with capital's neo-liberal offensive.

(4) Among the forces on the anti-capitalist Left, the decline of the Communist Parties framed the challenge to the present generation.

No one should deny the critical and exemplary role played by the Communist Party-USA (CPUSA) at key moments, such as during the 1930s and 1940s. This included their role in the building of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the '30s and '40s, the struggle against lynching and Jim Crow, the building of organizations to fight for self-determination for the African-American nation, and their general, anti-fascist stance during the bulk of that period. During much of this period the CPUSA held to the notion of the 'popular front', that is the view that a broad bloc of forces were necessary to defeat the challenge of fascism and war. The party's approach also emphasized building deep links for the party itself in the mass struggles, as they successfully accomplished in many movements and locales. In the African-American movement, by way of example, the CPUSA set out to construct their organization as a vehicle for Black liberation and for socialism.

Nevertheless, the CPUSA fell victim to tendencies which dragged down virtually all the Western communist parties. During and after World War II, the CPUSA backpedaled on self-determination and the struggles of the oppressed nationalities (for example, during World War II with Japanese-Americans and the African American March on Washington movement). This accompanied a growing acceptance of

reformism as a strategic stance. These changes put the CPUSA much in line with other traditional, pro-Soviet communist parties in other parts of the world. This contributed to a marginalization of their organization and role vis-a-vis emerging forces in older and newer progressive social movements.

In the advanced capitalist states overall, the Marxist-Leninist notion of the struggle for power vacillated between an approach of direct confrontation and class-against-class (notably during the infamous 'Third Period' in the Comintern in the 1920s and early 1930s, on the one hand, to the notion of the 'historic compromise' with capitalism, on the other. This was most clearly elaborated by the former Communist Party of Italy, but in essence adopted by many other pro-Soviet parties. At one point the party saw itself as the only important actor--the self-appointed vanguard--with all other forces serving as fronts or transmission belts. But then there was a flip to the opposite, with the party dissolving (at the least ideologically, and many times practically) into a larger mass, becoming something of an ideological apparition.

In neither case have these parties been able to build the historic bloc or popular democratic bloc of forces that can successfully challenge capitalism. Their notions of transformation, in other words, either tended toward being insurrectionary and sectarian, or evolutionist and reformist (sometimes at the same time, paradoxically). Even the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), which saw itself as following the teachings of Italian Marxist (and PCI leader) Antonio Gramsci and his view of building counter-hegemony, turned these words and thoughts into a justification for a further and further toning down of the program and objectives of the working class movement.

(5) In the USA, attempts at constructing Marxist and revolutionary socialist parties as alternatives to the CPUSA and other established parties either failed to take root or collapsed.

Due to 'left' sectarianism, and other forms of opportunism, as well as an ahistorical analysis of the reasons behind the failures of the Communist Party-USA, Marxists to the Left of the CPUSA--the so-called "anti-revisionist movement"--replicated in a compressed time-line many of the mistakes of the CPUSA from its different eras. The "anti-revisionist movement" of the 1970s collected together some of the finest leftists from the anti-war, oppressed nationality, and other social movements. Its cadre exerted significant influence and leadership over countless mass-based struggles from the late 1960s through the early 1980s.

Yet the movement proved to be less than the sum of its parts. It was unable to coalesce in such a manner that it could actually advance the struggle for a new Marxism and the progressive struggle on the ground. The activists from the anti-revisionist movement played major roles in many of the progressive social movements of the '70s onward. But among anti-capitalist fighters, they were not necessarily viewed as representing a newly emerging trend which could rally the working class or the broader strata of the oppressed.

(6) Left approaches which denied the need for a party of the Left did not fare particularly well either.

Semi-anarchist attempts at building working class leadership (e.g., Italy's 'Lotta Continua') tended to collapse earlier than Marxist-Leninists, particularly as the mass upsurges of the 1960s and early 1970s retreated.

During the 1980s, a separate strategy was followed by some on the Left who either denied-- outright--the need for a party or who put it so far into the future so as to deny it in practice. 'Single issue' movements and organizations, such as CISPES, left environmentalists and the gay/lesbian rights movements seemed to offer an alternative to rebuilding the Left. Without in any way dismissing the accomplishments, vigilance and valiance of these forces, their efforts did not result in the building of either a coherent Left nor the construction of a party (for those who argued that they were about party-building).

Other important trends, such as revolutionary nationalism, traditional democratic socialism, radical and socialist feminism, also rallied large numbers of committed activists and contributed to the waves of resistance in the 1970s and 1980s. But they too failed to become centers of new, nation-wide unifying left mobilization.

(7) In the wake of the collapse of most alternatives to the pro-Soviet approach to Marxism, the US activist base drifted to the right and an embrace of social democracy or non-Left progressive politics.

In most cases this tendency, sometimes among fine activists, led to their complete abandonment of any discussion of the issue of socialism and the building of an anti-capitalist alternative. Organizing more and more assumed the continued existence of capitalism. Strategically, the Left as a whole seemed to shift to building itself as a near perpetual opposition (with little chance of gaining power). Notably, in the wake of the Black-led electoral upsurge of the early-to-mid 1980s, many took the road of capitulation to the Democratic Party and a commitment to an exclusive 'insider' strategy.

(8) Socialism must face the specters of its past in order to move forward.

The world we live and struggle in, therefore confronts us with an immense set of paradoxes. Conditions exist which should result in very favorable ground for socialist activity. Yet a real socialist movement does not. There is anger stirring among the masses, particularly as their living standards implode, yet at the same time there is widespread despair. Many seemed to have fallen victim Margaret Thatcher's triumphant slogan, "There is no alternative," whether they even knew that she said it. Neo-liberalism has not resolved the basic contradictions of capitalism. Capitalism clearly remains in crisis. The Asian financial collapse provides the latest and perhaps most dramatic example. But the efforts to build an alternative--what Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin calls "Socialism I"--have not proven viable. From a global perspective, this

seems true whether the political parties which allegedly espouse the cause of social emancipation remain in power. As once said, with respect to the advanced capitalist countries, the masses may hate capitalism, but they fear socialism.

In order to advance a revolutionary cause, we must face the reality of this fear of socialism. Yes, the agents of capitalism have always smeared any efforts at independence and socialism. But it is also the case that Stalinian Marxism, and in particular its practice in the USSR, cast a stain on the cause of socialism. As noted earlier, Stalinian Marxism represented a perversion of Marxism-- in both theory and practice. Rejecting Marx, it denied class struggle (in all but its most extreme and military forms) under socialism. It took a narrow view of economic development which led to the poisoning of the environment. It promoted a Russian-centered view of the state (at least with regard to the USSR, though variants of this took place in other states which followed Stalinian Marxism) which, in practice, denied the right of national self-determination. Stalinian Marxism failed to identify steps which would increase the power of the worker in the workplace and in society as a whole, It ignored and in many ways encouraged--the growth of a class or strata which advanced the interests of capital (while paying lip-service to the words of socialism). It took an economist view of the struggle for the emancipation of women. It centered women's liberation almost totally on the role in the workplace, and failed to address issues of male supremacy in the home, Party and the state. It failed to provide political democracy in order to both engage in wide- spread debate as well as to overthrow the myriad of layers of oppression which exist in capitalist society. This is not an all-inclusive list, but rather a delineation of some of the key contributing factors to the crisis of socialism and the lack of attractiveness of many socialist models to the masses of working people. This specter will need to be confronted directly by those attempting to refound the Left and renovate Marxism.

(9) In these conditions, and to some extent, despite these conditions, a specific and directed effort must be made to build an alternative political project.

This is not just a matter of will, but rather a matter of necessity. The 'social-barbarism' represented by neo-liberalism threatens humanity as a whole as well as the physical environment itself. What was held in check by the politics of the Cold War, the vibrancy of the national liberation struggles and the influence of vital and rebuilt left- wings in many countries, has been unleashed on the world with full force.

(10) Thus, the question for Marxists specifically, and anti-capitalist leftists generally, is one of party-building, though building a party of a very new type.

Our task is not as vague as that of building a new socialist movement. Nor is our task as reactive as building the resistance movement among the masses, though both tasks are essential. In order to strengthen resistance at the base as well as offer a viable challenge to capitalism, we need to lay the foundations for an alternative political force. We need a political force firmly grounded within the working class and representing at least a trend within the radical tradition in the various progressive social movements. Such a force must be unapologetically anti-capitalist; avowedly socialist; democratic in both its view of the future society as well as the manner in which it operates; and represents the convergence of the workers, national and women's movements in composition and orientation, recognizing the central strategic significance of the national question and white supremacy in the history of 'racial' capitalism in the USA. This is a great deal to ask of any sort of party or social movement but it is the order and demand of the day.

The building of a party is our task not simply because we lack such a party. We recognize that we exist at a historical situation in which we cannot rely on the spontaneous regeneration of Marxism and revolutionary socialist theory in order to build a new revolutionary movement. The crisis of socialism has inhibited--though certainly not

stopped altogether--the emergence of Left culture (and cultural opposition). It has fragmented the opposition to imperialism. Party-building, therefore, needs to be seen as a broader task than organizing existing Marxists (and others on the Left). It has to include the task of encouraging and supporting theoretical exploration and development, Left culture and opposition to imperialist corruption, and the building of bridges between generations of activists.

(11) The type of party suggested here is mass, and working class, and will co-exist with other mass parties. This party of the dispossessed will need to be a party that seeks to advance the struggle for political power, both within the context of capitalism as well as in a post-capitalist environment.

It is not a party of the social democratic type: it will base its organizing on the recognition that capitalism will not disappear as a result of periodic reforms. The break between capitalism and socialism will, by necessity, be dramatic, and in its early stage it will be political, that is focusing on the establishment of a state led by the working class. Only in a worker's democracy will the conditions be created for the social revolution which will be necessary in order to fully eliminate capitalism and the power of capital, and emancipate the oppressed.

(12) The existence of our newer type party of the dispossessed is not antagonistic to other mass formations, be they organizations such as the Labor Party, the New Party, or mass organizations such as ACORN.

The socialist party we aim to construct must have a relationship of unity and struggle with other progressive formations and not attempt to replace them nor treat them as transmission belts. At the same time, this must be a party which articulates a vision of socialism which is revolutionary and democratic. As such, it cannot afford to be a loose network of associated individuals, but must be a disciplined political force, capable of advancing a vision and moving a program.

In addition, the party of the dispossessed must have a realistic sense of the capitalist state and the limitations of bourgeois democracy. Contrary to the experience of many other socialists and social democrats who, upon achieving power, assumed that the bourgeoisie would play fair, a party of the dispossessed must assume exactly the opposite. The bourgeoisie has never voluntarily given up power.

(13) We do not advance the notion of the (mythical) self-appointed vanguard party.

Much of the US anti-revisionist movement of the 1970s and early 1980s adopted the vanguard party idea as articulated by Stalinian Marxism. We suggest instead a party which will (hopefully) be part of the vanguard in the fight for socialism, a role which will be achieved through its practice in the class struggle rather than through a practice of self-assertion and rhetoric. In the very essence of this newer type party there must be the notion of building power for the dispossessed, and uniting in struggle with other forces in the progressive social movements.

(14) In addition to being a party which fuses the workers, national and women's movement in its essence, the party of the dispossessed will be a truly internationalist party.

It must be so in two respects. For one, it must be a party which actively fights the 'balkanization'/breakup which has historically existed in the US working class, and has heightened in this era of neo-liberalism. It must be a party which, while uniting with currents of revolutionary nationalism and welcoming revolutionary nationalists into its ranks, must not shirk from its responsibility to combat self-focused narrowness among various ethnic groups. It certainly must be a party that actively combats racism and white supremacy.

Internationalism also means a commitment to support and embrace other revolutionary and democratic struggles against imperialism. These include those struggles conducted among the nations of the 'South' as well as those advanced by oppressed nations and nationalities within

countries of the 'North'. Our internationalism actively advances the struggle for national self-determination as part of the struggle for socialism. We do not seek a formal, democratic statement of self-determination. Instead, we will organize for a self-determination which is part of the process of both opposing imperialism as well as reconstructing relations between nations and people on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Neo-liberalism's 'structural adjustment' has resulted in great damage to the environments, economy and social structures of the nations and peoples of the 'South'. Neo-liberalism has, as well, rendered whole populations redundant and marginal to the future of this planet. The newer type party--the party of the dispossessed--must align itself with these struggles and advance/support them here in the USA.

Our internationalism, however, does not stop there. It must also include a rejection of Euro-centrism in much of what parades itself as being Marxist theory. Internationalism means an interest and willingness to undertake examinations of other revolutionary currents, and the theories so elaborated. Our internationalism must encourage us to reflect, with our comrades in the countries of the 'South' on their social practice, and learn from their experiences in revolutionary and democratic struggles.

(15) In the current situation, we gain little by drawing a definitive line between those who believe that this party of the dispossessed will be a "Marxist-Leninist" party, or a party of some other type, e.g., the Brazilian Worker's Party.

The definition of a "Marxist-Leninist" party has evolved in countless different directions, including parties ranging from the Worker's Party of Korea [North], at one extreme, to the South African Communist Party and the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation, on to the Workers' (Communist) Party of Norway. At the same time, advocates of Marxist-Leninist party framework will need to define to what extent such a party addresses or ignores the crisis of socialism. This specifically includes the

contradictions that have arisen in party formation and state power. For their part, those advancing some other notion of a party of the dispossessed have the obligation of defining its class character and its role in the struggle for socialism. The greatest danger for such a party of the dispossessed is falling into one or another variety of social democracy, particularly in this era of neo-liberalism.

The issue of the party, and specifically terminology and content, will need to be worked through in the course of protracted struggle. At this juncture, a basis exists within Marxism for a current which rejects Stalinian Marxism and instead asserts a Marxism which is truly revolutionary, democratic and internationalist. Such a Marxism will help to lay the foundations for the party of the dispossessed here envisioned. This current will, at the outset, need to be quite broad recognizing that a reconstructed Marxism and a refounded Left will involve something akin to a united front. The historical analogy can be found in the relationship between Lenin and German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. They were both comrades in the struggle to create new revolutionary parties after World War I, despite significant differences on strategy, tactics, and ultimately, vision.

Splitting hairs on certain terminological questions will not advance the struggle around issues where clear lines of demarcation must be drawn, e.g., the content of the crisis of socialism.

A party of this type and emerging in this way will necessarily be multi-tendencied (the parameters of which must be defined over time). The reasons for this are both political and ideological. We need a broad front to address the crisis of socialism (and to defeat the remnants of Stalinian Marxism). We need unity to tackle the collective lack of clarity among revolutionary Marxists. We therefore must share a willingness to engage in a broad debate even among forces that were, in the past, at odds with one another. Such a debate will need to take place both within the context of a party, as well as within the broader Left. Socialists, agreeing to certain basic principles and strategy, need to create terms of

engagement that can exist within a party formation. This approach recognizes contributions to revolutionary theory from tendencies in addition to more traditional Marxist-Leninist, such as those coming from theorists of the women's, oppressed nationality and environmental movements.

The political reasons are just as compelling. A political alternative to both neo-liberalism as well as New Deal nostalgia must be built which exists at the mass level. The crisis facing working people, and the collapse of various reformist alternatives, demand that a coherent Left opposition/alternative be constructed. Such an alternative must be capable of engaging in broad struggles and not simply serving as a propaganda sect. Engagement at the level of mass politics necessitates an organization/party that is multi-tendencied, while nevertheless being socialist. It assumes that many issues of debate will need to be postponed while at the same time ensuring that we have sufficient unity in order to engage in the various aspects of the class struggle.

(16) The strategy of Left Refoundation envisions an approach to party-building which contrasts, in its fundamentals, with approaches taken in earlier periods.

Superficially, there may appear to be certain similarities. But at the level of theory, Left Refoundation proceeds from the notion of: practice > reflection/summation (resulting in the theorizing of experiences, individual and collective) > new practice... In Maoist terms, practice---theory---practice. This is not novel, at least as a stated position. However, Left Refoundationism wishes to translate this approach into a strategy for party-building which begins with acknowledging the experience and views/theories which already exist among anti-capitalist activists of various stripes. Therefore, the elements of the approach which we advance, include the following:

Identifying cores of leftist activists in various social movements, but particularly those grounded and based within the working class. Such activists may or may not be part of formal organizations. Whether

they are is secondary. This project is not a 'left unity' project in the sense of the uniting of existing organizations as its main aspect.

Seeking sponsors of the Refoundation project. This step is of critical importance and speaks directly to the need for interim (i.e., pre-party) organizations. The Refoundation project ideally needs institutional sponsors who are willing to help to build it (and its various components). Such co-sponsors might be other organizations or institutions, or a set of respected individuals. In any case, ideally, there is organizational support.

A structured, multi-year engagement with participants in this project which includes political discussion, study, debate, summation and the identification of points of theoretical and practical unity. An example of this would be to have a specific several-month project of addressing the lessons to be drawn from the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the crisis of socialism. What does such a collapse mean for a vision of socialism? How does class struggle play itself out during socialism? What is the relationship between political liberties, democracy and workers' power? (These questions are not exclusive.) Another example might be a specific examination of the national question (at the general level) followed or accompanied by a specific examination of particular national questions. What, for example, does the crisis of the national liberation struggles mean for domestic national questions? How should one view nationalism in the era of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment?

Paralleling and intersecting with a process of study, reflection and debate would also be engagement in collective, practical projects. Such projects should be consistent with the principles of unity which bring these various forces and individuals together. Such projects should also not be grandiose, e.g., running a 3rd party candidate for the US presidency, but should be rooted in the actual work of the people involved. Joint action aims to have a practical impact on the day-to-day struggles as well as be a means to learn from and implement the

outcome of theoretical discussions. This work should also be summarized and factored into the discussions that are taking place. One actual example of joint work which flows from a refoundationist approach are the current 'radical congress' initiatives first commenced in the Black Radical Congress project, and subsequently by developments among Asian and Chicano leftists. These initiatives reflect the centrality with which the Left Refoundationist position holds the national movements. Also the approach taken and advocated in the construction of these initiatives flows from a view that the rebuilding of the Left generally, and the Lefts in the national movements in particular, are not the province of one ideological or political tendency alone.

As our forces gain strength, areas of joint action may expand to address issues such as municipal and county political power; the transformation of national trade unions into strengthened centers of resistance; as well as other such projects. These will have to be carefully chosen.

This multi-year project needs to be pulled together at some future date. Those who entered into the project would, of course, need to understand and agree, that this project was not to be an abstract Left unity effort, but is aimed at constructing an organization/party. At the end of the period of engagement, the entire process would need to be summarized. Such a summation would aim to determine whether the basis exists to make the transition to such a party, i.e., whether unity has been reached on a real strategy; appropriate organizational form; bottom lines of unity; operational unity.

The approach advanced here borrows from and seeks to utilize popular education as, indeed, it is intended to be used: as a 'pedagogy of the oppressed', not a series of disconnected educational techniques. A semi-Maoist/Frierian approach to this project aims to create a democratic dialogue among forces interested in the construction of a party of the dispossessed.

(17) We need to start with broad, socialist unity.

What sorts of forces should be approached for this refoundation project? Specifically, around what would people need to agree? To some extent this must be an open question and one subject to intense negotiations. Nevertheless, the following are some basic outlines:

- Support of, and belief in the need to fight for, socialism. Socialism specifically being viewed as a social system where the working class is the leading class; where the struggle against capital continues; a system of enhanced political democracy and against oppression; a system which allows for political debate within the bounds of a constitution. (Note: Several of the authors of this paper hold that socialism is NOT a mode of production, but is a transitional period between capitalism and communism where the working class is in political control-- essentially a Maoist definition. But we should assume that not all who embrace a refoundation project will accept such a definition, at least in the beginning. It is critical, however, that a consensual definition of socialism is premised on the notion of class power as opposed to either utopian views or those views which downplay class and class struggle.).
- Recognition of the strategic significance of the "national question," broadly defined, and the struggle against racism/ white supremacy and FOR national self-determination, in particular. Signatories to the refoundation project should not be held to a specific definition of particular oppressed nationalities. But all should commit to principled debate on these questions, and recognize that the struggle against white supremacy is central to building a broad, popular bloc that can achieve power.
- Recognition that the struggle against male supremacy and for the emancipation of women is not an add-on struggle, but is part of the strategic formulation for the construction of socialism. This is not a struggle restricted to formal, democratic rights--though such a struggle is profoundly important--but is a struggle against

patriarchal roles and power which has consistently undermined progressive struggles and projects, including the struggles for national liberation and socialism. The struggle for gender equity must also be a struggle that recognizes the profound democratic question contained in the gay/lesbian movements. We must build a movement that challenges hetero-sexism as well as other forms of traditional male supremacy, both within the movement itself, as well as in the larger society.

- . The immediate and long-term importance of democracy. The refoundation project must assume a level of unity among its constituents which holds that the socialism for which we fight will be revolutionary and democratic. At the same time, the struggle for consistent democracy-- within the context of capitalism--is a transformational struggle for both the participants in such a struggle as well as for the larger society. The manner in which our movement operates must mirror--to the extent possible--the democratic vision we hold for the future. None of this should be taken, however, as idealism as to the nature of the capitalist state: at the point at which a socialist, anti-capitalist, or anti-imperialist movement takes ground, it will face vicious repression. Operating in an environment of repression will, by necessity, change the forms of organization necessary in order to prosecute any struggle.
- . The refoundation project must welcome those socialists who have placed a high priority on building the connection between the struggle for the environment and the struggle against capitalism. The refoundation project itself must be one which embraces the struggle to save the environment and is, therefore, willing to criticize the economic determinist abuses which have taken place in socialist and formerly socialist states where the environment was ignored and, often, destroyed.
- . Our project must be internationalist, in its commitment to self-determination and as raised above in point #14.

- The refoundation project must be one that bases itself within the working class and sees the working class as its home. This is not to deny other social movements, but it is to say that the socialist project is one that advances the demands and need for class power on the part of the working class. The refoundation project must strive to be a working class project, that is, a project of and for the working class!

Juntos Venceremos!/Together we will win!

--Drafted and submitted for discussion by [names withheld] from DC; [names withheld] from Bay Area; [names withheld] from Boston; [names withheld] from LA; [names withheld] from St. Louis, [names withheld] from San Diego

Postscript regarding Freedom Road Socialist Organization

The theses above do not mention FRSO. This was quite conscious. The theses attempt to outline an approach that goes well beyond any specific organization. There is an attempt here to define the rough outlines of a project that can embrace hundreds, if not thousands of socialists.

At the same time, there is the question of FRSO and where it should stand vis a vis the refoundation project, having embraced a fuller orientation to the left as part of our strategy at our last Congress. The following are specific suggestions:

(A) The transformation of FRSO should NOT be at the level of altering its principles of unity. The principles should remain intact, except to the extent to which it acknowledges that it--itself-- contains different tendencies and, as such, is not a traditional Marxist-Leninist organization. FRSO should be, as it was established in the very beginning, a revolutionary Marxist organization.

(B) FRSO should embrace the refoundation project and agree to help to sponsor it. Above all, given our political line and traditions, current FRSO work in the BRC and other radical congress initiatives flows directly from this perspective and should be built upon.

(C) FRSO should sponsor a theoretical project, either jointly with another institution(s), or along with some independent friends. Such a project could be an on-line magazine (with hard copies), along with an institute which could convene topical conferences. Such an effort would help to advance the theoretical debate so needed among socialists.

(D) FRSO should center its work on the building of a 21st century labor movement, allied with the national movements and women's movement. This involves both trade union work, as well as the building of organizations of and within the working class (e.g., among the unemployed, seasonal, temporary workers) which can ally with the

unions to resist the offensive of capital and advance structural demands. The overtly (or, perhaps, more traditional) political aspect of this initiative should be concentrated work in the Labor Party, and those chapters of the New Party which have a working class base (or significant orientation). Our work in the 'radical congress' initiatives should remain focused on the working classes of the oppressed nationalities. FRSO should be among those advancing the need for this critical alliance.

(E) In order for this work to advance, FRSO must grow, both through recruitment and mergers. The red herring advanced by the neo-Stalinists to the effect that a strategy of left refoundation will liquidate the organization is wrong in all aspects but one. It is wrong in that a left refoundation project needs institutional support, which means strong organization. Left Refoundation is not ideologically agnostic. It instead recognizes that in a period of a profound crisis of socialism, there must be a willingness for much more open ideological debate and exploration. Left Refoundation also recognizes that revolutionary Marxism must grow and deepen its roots within the working class, which means building an organizational linkage and bridge between socialists of different classes who wish to serve the working class.

But the neo-Stalinists are correct about one aspect of liquidationism: we do wish to liquidate Stalinian Marxism. We only regret having to do it again! We seek to build a Marxism which is revolutionary, democratic, internationalist, and firmly rooted in the work and practice of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, and countless other revolutionaries who envisioned, and gave their lives to advance, a historical current which could remove the curse of capitalism--in all its forms--from the face of this planet.

Summary for Internal Bulletin

"Theses on Left Refoundation" takes an overall look at the state of the left and of party building. We need to have a comprehensive analysis like this in order to implement the Congress' decision to pursue broader initiatives on the left. By party-building, the paper means the process by which small groups of dedicated revolutionaries contribute to the formation of broad-scale revolutionary organization, rooted in the best fighters of the working class, national and women's movements, and all other progressive and revolutionary mass movements.

We may choose to hold to the revolutionary ideological orientations of the seventies. But the paper takes as a given that the anti-revisionist movement from which our groups all emerged has disappeared. Similarly, other revolutionary initiatives of that era have also had their impact and faded. Left refoundation means explicitly restarting the process of building multi-national revolutionary organization at a national level.

This paper focuses on how folks coming from our tradition and experience can and should relate to that process, ideologically and practically. Other papers would have to follow addressing other traditions, notably revolutionary nationalism, in greater depth. The success this past month of the Black Radical Congress, shows the viability and importance of this kind of approach. The idea for the BRC originated among a core of African American organizers at the same time and in the same process by which internally, the slogan of Left Refoundation emerged. While the Congress only took a very first step, in order for it to achieve the real success it did achieve, it grew tremendously over the past two years from those initial ideas. Similarly, we see this paper in some form as part of the initial discussions with folks about what a new party-building process would look like for the revolutionary socialist left in the US."

We need to emphasize that this paper should be considered a work in progress. It started out as two pages and through discussions has grown

considerably. We intend the paper to spark further discussion both inside and outside our group, and we encourage folks to make additions and suggestions as the discussion develops, in the old-fashioned dialectical process. Based on discussion, we would hope to produce a shorter, more popularly written version in pamphlet form as well as get the ideas out in other more popular forms of communication.

<http://www.frso.org/about/theses.html>

Meeting the Challenge of Crisis and Opportunity

Left Refoundation and Party Building

About this paper: The Party-Building Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization takes pleasure in circulating the following paper. Like other socialist organizations, since its inception, Freedom Road has looked for opportunities to combine our own organizing with opportunities for strengthening the unity and coherence of socialist efforts overall. We endorse the themes presented here as an important part of our efforts in this general direction. Members of our organization from several cities worked on this paper over the last year and a half. We also appreciate the invaluable comments of friends and co-workers from other organizations who have seen this in draft and helped shape it. We don't see this as the final word on the way forward for the socialist left. Nor do we even see it as the first word, since others have also grappled with similar issues throughout this past decade. But we do sincerely hope it sparks interest, debate, and action toward bringing new national political organization to US socialist efforts. –January 2000

Introduction: The Crisis Facing the Left

The world we live and struggle in confronts us with an immense set of paradoxes. Conditions exist which should result in very favorable ground for socialist activity. Yet a real socialist movement does not exist.

There is anger stirring among the masses, particularly as their living standards implode. Yet at the same time, there is widespread despair. The media spreads the notion that history has indeed ended, and capitalism is the only alternative.

The time has come for Left activists to confront the challenge of creating a revolutionary socialist party. Neo-liberal capitalism's unrelenting expansionism threatens humanity as a whole and the physical environment itself. The earlier vibrancy of the national liberation struggles and the influence of vital Left movements in many countries has faded in the face of an invigorated post-Cold War global capitalism.

The slogan of Left Refoundation arises out of our assessment of the ideological and structural crisis among Leftists here in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Four major occurrences define this *crisis*:

- (1) **The crisis of socialism**, which predates the collapse of the Soviet Union
- (2) **The dismantling of the welfare state**,
- (3) **The crisis of national liberation movements**, and
- (4) **The rise of neoliberalism**.

All four are connected. The rise of neoliberalism and the crisis of socialism are intertwined with the destruction of the welfare state and the crisis of national liberation movements. This crisis is an ideological and structural vacuum in which words such as *revolution* become clichés and young revolutionaries seek meaning in a variety of ideological frameworks.

On the other hand, this vacuum provides Marxists a rare opportunity for reflection and reevaluation. This period affords Marxists an opportunity to shape revolutionary thought by creating a strategic vision for revolution and socialism. For success, this vision needs to include a long-range plan for the creating of a new type of political party with the capacity to stitch together revolutionary social movements behind a strategic unity that weakens and ultimately defeats and overthrows capitalism, ideologically and structurally.

The building of a party is our task because no such party presently exists, but also because we are in a historical situation in which we cannot rely on the spontaneous regeneration of Marxism and revolutionary socialist theory in order to build a new revolutionary movement. The crisis of socialism has inhibited that process. It has dampened, though certainly not stopped altogether, the emergence of Left culture and cultural opposition. It has fragmented

the opposition to imperialism and clouded the goal of achieving a socialist society.

Socialism in the Era of Neo-Liberalism

The enduring commitment to revolutionary socialism worldwide, despite its deepening crisis, impels us all to work toward a new assessment of the present situation. Based on such an assessment, revolutionary socialists will need to propose a new way forward. We believe that conditions exist for both the refoundation of an anti-capitalist left in the next five to fifteen years, and for the creation of a new socialist party. We offer the following ideas concerning our situation and the tasks of the Socialist Left.

Almost since the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. capital has put the network of social programs known as the welfare state under attack. While a new and vicious right attacked these programs head-on, realignment among liberals occurred as well. Clinton and Gore came out of this new, neo-liberal wing of the Democratic Party, full of free-market rationalization for trampling on rights and benefits long in place.

Worldwide, the rise of neo-liberalism led to a backtracking by political parties that had supported the welfare state. In some countries, the backtracking includes even some political parties formerly associated with the Left. For many progressives and Leftists, this turnabout has thrown into question the nature and demands of the reform struggle under capitalism. Many of us have lost confidence in addressing economic development, public safety, public education, and other issues. For the mass of working people in the U.S., neo-liberalism has meant a new façade for capitalism without a new leadership to confront it.

We ignore reality if we narrow the crisis of socialism to the period following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Instead, the crisis of socialism emerged over time in the course of political struggles. These struggles arose in the whole range of countries that threw off the rule of capital and began the transition to socialism, from the 1917 Russian Revolution, through

the post-World War II era, on into the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s through the 1970s. These countries handled a whole range of problems-- political democracy; the liberation and equality of oppressed nationalities; the emancipation and equality of women; the environment, the land question and agrarian reform--in such a manner that new ruling groups emerged. Overall, the role and leadership of the working class was not strengthened to continue the struggle against capital after the overthrow of capitalism.

Separate but equally serious problems arose in the socialist movements attempting to achieve state power mainly, though not exclusively, in the advanced capitalist countries. The groups divorced themselves from the people and were unable, and often unwilling, to carry through the struggle for socialism and emancipation.

In both cases, crisis steadily emerged despite often-significant achievements in the realm of living standards and quality of life.

The crisis of the national liberation movements is integrally connected to the rise of neo-liberalism, the collapse of many socialist countries, and the related crisis of socialism. Post World War II national liberation movements emerged in the context of the decline of the old colonial powers, the struggle between the U.S. and USSR, and the struggle between socialism and imperialism. An opening existed to fight for independence and national liberation. With the growing crisis of socialism, and particularly after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, most Third World nations could no longer politically or economically maneuver between the two superpowers. A slow but steady capitulation to neo-liberalism developed as a main trend.

Even progressive forces in the Third World found it hard to resist the neo-liberal tide. In many cases, Left movements were unable to lead an effective challenge to the threats, blackmail, and demands of imperialism for so-called structural adjustment to Third World economies. These attacks and demands often violated the national sovereignty of the oppressed nations. And behind the bankers and diplo-

mats, stand planes, warships and troops. The United States has repeatedly demonstrated this fact in Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere to enforce Margaret Thatcher's slogan for the New World Order: "There is no alternative!"

Contributing also to the crisis of the national liberation movements has been the emergence of ethnic conflicts, which have deflected the focus of the struggle away from imperialism and its local partners.

The crisis of the national liberation movements applies equally to national movements within the U.S. The decline of the left in the oppressed nationality movements has been matched by a rise to ideological and political leadership in its place of forces representing the professional and business classes. Like their counterparts in the Third World, many of these groups and individuals have accepted the framework of neo-liberalism. Their narrow, elitist, and accommodationist strategies contributed to the demoralization and de-mobilization of these movements.

The Challenge to the Working Class

Left Refoundation is a process for recreating, reestablishing, and reasserting an ideological and institutional base in the U.S. for overthrowing capitalism and beginning to create a socialist society. One initial objective of Left Refoundation is to create public discourse on the subject of revolution and socialism. Another objective is to evaluate socialist theory and practice in a way that encourages collaboration and development of strategy on the Left. Building the ideological and institutional base for a new type of socialist party will require public debate, collaborative analysis and broad scale struggles that have revolutionary potential. In the past, party building preoccupied major sectors of the Socialist Left. In recent years, most independent socialists and socialist organizations have paid little attention to this element of our overall strategy for revolution.

Socialists have instead built our organizations as bulwarks of resistance, as trainers of the next generation, and as keepers of the faith. In this past pe-

riod of right-wing dominance, we should count "keeper of the faith" as a worthwhile accomplishment. But over time, it means we settled in for a whole lot less than we need. We lowered our sights to fighting the good fight instead of winning liberation of the masses of the people.

To fight our common enemy, we all take risks daily. To become more than the sum of our parts, we must take some very different kinds of risks. We can no longer dance around those risks, hiding in the safety of our own organizational confines. The time has come to put party building decisively back on the table for discussion and action. A new priority on party building does not mean that we think some new nationwide revolutionary organization made up of working class fighters of all nationalities waits just around the corner. The refoundationist perspective contrasts with the party-building efforts of the 1970s, particularly efforts of elements of the self-proclaimed new communist movement—the Communist Labor Party (CLP), the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML) and the Communist Workers Party (CWP). Certain conditions in the U.S. and the world require revolutionaries to begin again the long arduous task of building a broad movement of the Left that has the objective of creating a new socialist party.

Corporate hegemony in the media and in education has created a dominant set of beliefs that stresses "no hope" and that the market economy is the only way forward. The absence of a strong Left in the U.S. contributes to this smothering ideological climate.

On the other hand, for all the damage it has done, the right wing no longer inspires the same mass respect it has these past twenty years. We all see glimmers of hope in the labor movement, as well as the African-American, Chicano, Asian movements, immigrant movements and Student movements. Left forces have begun to look for ways to gain back the initiative.

Capitalism has always been global. What is different now is the hyper-mobility of capital, trans-national

production, and the greater penetration of global markets, accelerating since the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Global conditions offer new opportunities for international working class solidarity, while demanding collaborative strategies for success.

Also different today is the incredible increase in both economic and environmental injustice. 225 individuals have accumulated wealth greater than 47% (2.5 billion) of the people on this planet. The economic immiseration of the overwhelming majority of the world's people both contributes to and is made worse by spreading environmental cancers, global warming, the destruction of ecosystems and resources, and the spectre of total corporate control of the world's food supply.

Since the 1970s, U.S. capitalism has steadily found new strengths to master global stagnation, but not eliminate it. Back in the 1970s, after its defeat in Vietnam and the gains of the freedom struggles, capitalist expansion and profits stagnated. In response, capitalist attacks on the welfare state combined with the dramatic extension of global markets brought a new period of capitalist growth. This imperialist trend in the class struggle found ideological and cultural justification as neo-liberalism, a consensus among ruling circles that the state would no longer act as provider of the social safety net or as regulator of the corporate sector. Instead, the state would reduce its role to opening international markets and ensuring corporate profits.

The other trend of the weakening of U.S. economic hegemony continues, and in the longer run, remains the more powerful historical factor. But in the here and now, we cannot underestimate the resiliency of U.S. imperialism. In addition, globalization reflects growing economic and military integration of Western European and Japanese economic powers. Its military advantage makes the U.S. the international corporate cop and the most dangerous imperialist power. Furthermore, imperialist agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the World Trade Organization can force neo-liberal policies onto weaker nation-states and devastate emerging working class movements. Immigrants

from developing nations still seek haven in the U.S. due to its relative position of privilege.

Capitalist economic trends include corporate restructuring, flexible production, privatization of public agencies, globalizing of the labor market, strategic use of technology and the shift to a service economy. This facet of the neo-liberal era has changed the nature of work, expanded the definition of worker, and intensified racial polarization in the U.S. working class. Some at the high end of the service industry remain privileged and benefit directly from U.S. imperialism. But as a whole, the U.S. working class suffered economic decline during this period. Both white workers and disproportionately, working class people of color and non-European immigrants have been thrown out of good paying manufacturing or public sector jobs (primary economic sector) and confined to low paying service and/or manufacturing jobs (secondary economic sector). Still others are forced into permanent temporary employment or the informal economic sector (hidden economy). And still others, primarily white women and women of color, are forced into the virtual slave labor of so-called Welfare Reform forced work.

In short, highly valued unionized skilled and semi-skilled working class occupations have dwindled in number without disappearing, and some new professional positions have emerged. Privilege in the distribution of work, benefits, housing and services within the U.S. working class remains an unmistakable and unavoidable factor. Privilege remains distinctly racialized to the advantage of white people over people of color and non-white immigrants. In turn, the ideology of white supremacy continues to have a material basis. A separate pattern of male privilege at work, in the community and at home also hinders working class unity. At the same time, a new consequence of globalization and neoliberalism is rising interracial tension among minority groups within the U.S. and between native U.S. minorities and new immigrants.

Resisting the Offensive of Capital

The average U.S. worker has a living standard approximating that of 1979, gaining ground again only after a twenty-five year decline. Workers today typically work longer hours on the job or cannot find steady work at all, need to hold down more than one job, or have to take temporary jobs. Credit card debt has risen dramatically. Millions of people lack health insurance. Overall, economic insecurity has grown.

Unionization stands at less than 14%. More so than at any time since the 1930s, capital can start off a union contract negotiation cycle assuming no need for any significant concessions to labor. The hope that one could predict a steady rise in one's living standard (or for that of one's children) is over for most workers. Business adoption of new technology has rendered entire fields of work obsolete. For many other workers, capital's greater flexibility to pick up its operations and move--and to continually hold the threat to move--has workers living in fear of their jobs and livelihoods.

The decline in the overall standard of living of the working class disproportionately hits oppressed nationality working class men, women and youth. Nonetheless, we also see reinvigorated scapegoating of immigrants and other people of color--for example, California's Propositions 187, 209, 227 and new Juvenile Justice Initiative. The combination of these two factors intensifies racial cleavages within the U.S. working class. At the same time, the grinding down of the working class as a whole also raises the potential for greater revolutionary unity.

The neo-liberal offensive targeted the economic stagnation and profits squeeze felt by the imperialist centers in the early 1970s. Union-busting, slashing the welfare safety net, weakening health, safety and environmental regulations, providing tax breaks and government assistance to big business has been the order of the '80s and '90s. In the movements of people of color and the women's, labor, environmental, gay and lesbian movements, resistance has been the watchword. While important efforts at collaboration occurred, the Left wings of these movements have not generally seen themselves as

part of a single larger, coherent anti-capitalist Left. And we have therefore not offered leadership within our movements from that perspective.

Resistance grew from the 1980s to the 1990s, but we continue to lack a more cohesive, all-round political project for social transformation with which forces from various progressive social movements can identify. In the absence of such a project, fighters in the various movements have fallen back upon the frameworks and contexts of their respective movements.

A new generation of activists has played an important part in this new wave of struggle. The fight for affirmative action, against police brutality, for welfare rights, the civil rights of gay and lesbian people and other issues provide a catalyst for new activism. Support for the Zapatistas, the Anti-Sweatshop campaigns, support for the struggle in the Pilipines and other campaigns also reflect a new internationalism. Young activists also have made their mark on struggles against injustice to workers--garment workers, immigrant worker rights, and for the right of workers to unite into unions. But among today's activist youth as well, the various causes have not found common ground in any comprehensive strategy that significantly challenges capitalism.

Many of the best young activists, including many of working class origin, are being recruited into the partly rejuvenated union movement. The difference with past generations is that they are entering as staff, usually organizers, instead of starting as workers on the floor or in the fields. The other difference is that the Left is not concentrated in the workplace as it once was.

Some who consciously see themselves as revolutionaries have formed organizations such as Standing Together Organizing a Revolutionary Movement (STORM), Asian Revolutionary Circle, Young Comrades, Accion Borricua, Black Panther Party Collective, Zulu Nation, Asians and Pacific Islanders For Community Empowerment, Pilipino Workers Collective, ACTION, Olean and SOUL. As in past generations, these emerging revolutionaries are searching for revolutionary answers. They are

seeking out answers from different theories and ideologies and perhaps, like past generations, they will develop their own visions for revolution. The international crisis of socialism, our inadequate summary of our (New Left) history and the lack of a clear revolutionary analysis, vision or alternative has impaired our ability to adequately bridge the ideological, cultural and experiential gap that exists between the '60s and '70s revolutionaries and the emerging revolutionaries of the '90s.

Learn From Earlier Efforts to Construct a Revolutionary Socialist Party

No one should deny the exemplary role played by the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) at key points in its history. Especially during the 1930s and 1940s, the Communist Party, working along with other Left organizations, helped organize the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) labor federation, mount the struggle against lynching and Jim Crow, and build new organizations to fight for self-determination for the African-American nation. The CPUSA's anti-fascist stance during most of that period made a huge difference.

During that time, the CPUSA held to what it called the popular front-- that a very broad political bloc was necessary to defeat the challenge of fascism and war. The party's approach also emphasized rooting itself in local workplace and community struggles, as they successfully accomplished in many movements and locales. In the African-American movement, by way of example, the CPUSA set out to construct their organization as a vehicle for Black liberation and socialism.

Nevertheless, the CPUSA fell victim to tendencies that dragged down virtually all the Western communist parties. During and after World War II, the CPUSA backed off its commitment to self-determination and the struggles of oppressed nationalities. The Party refused to oppose the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, did not support the wartime African American March on Washington, and eased up in its emphasis on organizing the South. Reformism became the

strategic stance of the CPUSA, putting it in line with traditional, pro-Soviet communist parties in other parts of the world. This, coupled with an uncritical identification with the USSR and its policies, contributed to a marginalization of their organization and role among emerging forces in older and newer progressive social movements.

In the advanced capitalist countries overall, Marxist-Leninist notions of the struggle for power swung back and forth between two extremes. At times, Marxist-Leninist parties emphasized direct confrontation with the state and sectarianism towards almost all other left forces. Parties saw themselves as the only important actor--the self-appointed vanguard--with all other forces serving as fronts that they sought to control or manipulate. In other times and places, Marxist-Leninists took a leap of faith to seek a historic compromise (in the Italian expression) with capitalism. Parties dissolved (at least ideologically and sometimes practically) into shapeless mass forms, becoming something of an ideological apparition.

Nowhere in the West did these parties succeed in building a strategic alliance of forces that could fully challenge capitalism and win state power. Even those communist movements that successfully led the anti-fascist struggle during World War II had trouble once in power. We certainly still have much to learn from these experiences. Some, such as the Italian party and its successor Party of Communist Refoundation, played an important role both in the student and labor revolts of the sixties as well as in reaching the present new activist generation. Yet the limitations of most of these parties provide an additional reflection of the crisis of socialism.

Engaged by the Vietnam war, the 60s freedom struggles, the women's movement and other new movements, a generation turned itself for a time to fundamental social change. Despite the problems of the traditional socialist left, many activists stuck with national organizations linked to that past--notably, the Communist Party, the Democratic Socialists of America, the Socialist party, the Socialist Workers

Party. Activists of color joined these organizations to a lesser degree, but overall this remains true.

Those organizations played an important role in furthering some crucial mass and reform struggles, but did not provide the breakthrough in thinking and organizing to move socialism forward.

A probably larger wave of activists moved out beyond the established socialist left to attempt to build new revolutionary parties. These all either failed to take root or collapsed after some initial success. At least among that sector known as the anti-revisionist or new communist movement, these efforts were plagued with left sectarianism and white chauvinism. Moreover, though they condemned the Communist Party as hopelessly lost or revisionist, they offered only incomplete or contradictory analyses of the shortcomings of the CPUSA and Soviet-style communism generally.

Many adopted an uncritical stance toward the Communist Party of China, and sometimes mechanically applied the experience of that Party to party building efforts here. One result was a proliferation of "pre-party" organizations that all tried to act like mini-parties, often seeing themselves as the center of the Left universe. They created unrealistic expectations for themselves. Seeking some kind of franchise from China, some of these pre-party organizations moved rapidly to consolidate as many loosely allied local study groups and collectives into jury-rigged national organizations.

These organizations in their different ways had master plans for party formation, but not true strategies for party building. *Party formation* assumes that the guiding organization or organizations have reached the maturity to present the key questions and the best possible answers. When this happens prematurely, movements, organizations and individuals participating find their own contributions greatly hampered. *Party Building* as we speak of it here contains fewer answers and far more questions. Debate and practical engagement together among a wide variety of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces takes place within a generally Marxist framework to

determine the culture, politics and structure of the new party.

The new party-builders of that earlier era included some of the finest left activists from the 1960s anti-war, oppressed nationality, and other social movements. Its activists exerted significant influence and leadership over countless mass-based struggles from the late 1960s to 1980s. Yet the movement proved to be less than the sum of its parts. It did not coalesce in such a manner that it could actually advance the struggle for a new Marxism and become a major political force in society. Those few anti-revisionist parties that did develop a significant mass base could not maintain and expand that influence past the 1980s.

Unfortunately, Left approaches that denied the need for a specific revolutionary party did not fare particularly well either. Highly decentralized or community-based attempts at building working class leadership (along the lines of Italy's Lotta Continua), tended to collapse earlier than the Marxist-Leninists, particularly as the mass upsurges of the 1960 and early '70s died down. A similar fate befell groups like Katipunan ng ma Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) in the U.S., which advocated building an anti-imperialist (as opposed to socialist) party. KDP ultimately abandoned its effort and joined the group Line of March, which itself collapsed in the late '80s. Many local activists also found an ideological home in the Democratic Socialists of America, which has remained relatively large throughout the 1990s, but largely unable to marshal effective, coordinated political strength.

Revolutionary organizations such as the Black Panther Party expanded rapidly and influenced thousands of activists, within and outside of the Black Liberation Movement. The BPP played a critical role in educating the masses about the real nature of the capitalist state, the liberation character of the African-American struggle, and the central role of the African American people's movement in the overall struggle for social change. Due to massive state infiltration and repression and complex internal contradictions, the Panthers also did not survive

into the 1980s as a major political organization. But the Panthers and other radical oppressed nationality initiatives of the late sixties inspired a second wave of oppressed nationality Marxist organizations, which in turn fed into the wider new communist movement described above.

During the 1980s, a separate strategy was followed by some on the Left who either denied outright the need for a party or who put it so far into the future as to deny it in practice. Single-issue movements and organizations, solidarity movements like the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), left environmentalists, and the gay/lesbian rights movements seemed to offer an alternative way of rebuilding the Left, through building up the mass movements. Without in any way dismissing the accomplishments, vigilance and valiance of these forces, their efforts failed to develop a coherent Left or to construct a party (for those who argued they were about doing so).

Other important trends, such as revolutionary nationalism, traditional democratic socialism, and radical and socialist feminism, also rallied large numbers of committed activists and contributed to the waves of resistance from the 1970s into the 1990s. But they too failed to become centers of new, nationwide unifying left mobilization.

In the wake of the collapse of most alternatives to the pro-Soviet approach to Marxism, the U.S. activist base drifted toward liberalism and left reformism, toward an embrace of social democracy or non-Left progressive politics, mostly tied to the Democratic Party. In most cases this tendency, sometimes among fine activists who continued highly effective grass roots organizing, led to their complete abandonment of an anti-capitalist alternative. Strategically, the mass of the Left accommodated itself to the continued existence of capitalism and to a large degree became nothing more than an opposition force within a capitalist context. This stance provided little or no chance of gaining real power. Notably, in the wake of the Black-led electoral upsurge of the early to mid-1980s, many took the road of maneuvering within the Democratic Party.

Some folks, lacking a clear strategy for rebuilding the Left and creating a new Party, focused more and more on just developing their own organizing and internal structures in the hopes that a revolutionary socialist party would eventually emerge out of developing objective and subjective conditions.

We offer this somewhat sweeping assessment not expecting to surprise very many people and certainly not hoping to depress anyone at this late date. We don't mean to gloss over the many positive advances that committed activists made in developing new organizing tactics and strategies and contributions to political theory during this period. Many people and groups have important stories to write and tell. In part, we think so few of us have done so because of the lack of a supportive, forward-looking political context. And we think an important common strand, even given all the external corporate, world wide imperialist, and right wing pressures has been the inattention or wrong-minded attention to party-building. We earnestly hope that the process we here call Left Refoundation will encourage that summarizing of experience in ways that will serve a new process of socialist party building.

By party building, we mean creating a party that learns from but that will be very different from the older models. Our task is not simply to take part in a new wave of socialist organizing. Nor is it solely to build resistance among the masses, though both tasks are essential. But in order to strengthen resistance at the base, as well as offer a viable challenge to capitalism, we need to lay the foundations for a socialist party. We need to help create a political force firmly grounded within the working class and oppressed nationality movements, and representing at least a trend within the radical tradition of other progressive social movements. We need a party unapologetically anti-capitalist, confidently socialist; democratic in both its view of the future society as well as in the manner in which it operates; and representing a convergence of the people's movements in composition and orientation.

Given this country's history, revolutionary strategy will only make sense if it centers on the freedom and

national liberation struggles here in the United States. A vital socialist movement will in turn depend on an uncompromising struggle against white supremacy, racism, and national oppression. Re-foundation depends on the new party reflecting the revolutionary character of the national liberation movements in the U.S., especially the working class from those movements. We need this in party membership and leadership, organizational culture, and practice.

Party building, therefore, will be a broader task than organizing existing Marxists and others on the Left. Party building has to include the task of encouraging and supporting broad-based theoretical exploration and development, left-wing culture, opposition to imperialist corruption, and the building of bridges between generations of activists. Activist work mainly helping to develop the mass movements can also help bring about a new party. The Party we want to help create must be rooted in the day-to-day struggle of the masses.

Learn From Socialism's Past in Order to Move Forward

Neo-liberalism has not resolved the basic contradictions of capitalism. From our many, different vantage points in workplaces and communities throughout the country, we all can see that the system remains in crisis. But 20th Century efforts to construct a socialist alternative--what Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin describes as Socialism I--have not proven viable. From a global perspective, this seems true even where political parties that proclaim social emancipation remain in power. As others have observed with respect to the advanced capitalist countries, the masses may hate capitalism, but they fear socialism.

In order to advance a revolutionary cause, we will have to face the reality of this fear of socialism. Yes, the agents of capitalism have always smeared any efforts at independence and socialism. And yes, revolutionary victories in Russia, China and elsewhere threw out the capitalists and other reactionaries and began the process of constructing socialist

societies for the benefit of the people. In many countries, for a time living conditions improved, the economy grew, arts and culture flourished, rights gained protection.

But it is also the case that Marxism, as practiced in the USSR, and influencing other parties elsewhere, increasingly came to cast a shadow on the cause of socialism. Contradicting Marx, the Soviet Communist leadership denied class struggle under socialism in all but its most extreme and military forms. It took a narrow view of economic development that led to the poisoning of the environment. It promoted a Russia-centered view of the state, which, in practice, denied the right of national self-determination to other peoples in the territory of the USSR.

The Soviet interpretation of Marxism failed to identify steps that would increase the power of the worker in the workplace and in society. It ignored, and in many ways encouraged, the growth of a class or strata that advanced the interests of capital, while paying lip service to socialism.

It adopted an economist view of the struggle for women's emancipation. Women's liberation was centered almost totally on the role in the workplace, and failed to address issues of male supremacy in the home, the Party, and the state. It failed to provide political democracy in order to both engage in widespread debate as well as to overthrow the myriad of layers of oppression inherited from capitalist society.

We don't offer this as an all-inclusive list, but rather a delineation of some of the key contributing factors to the crisis of socialism and to the apprehension many working people have about the models from the first, but not the last, socialist wave. While acknowledging many of the positive achievements of that era, those attempting to rebuild the Left and advance Marxism must be unafraid to confront this history.

Building the Party of the Dispossessed

We don't know exactly what the new party we seek will look like. Many groups and individuals, re-

flecting the full diversity of anti-capitalist struggle in the United States, will have to contribute to this. Reflecting this intended diversity, lets for the moment call this new formation we seek the Party of the Dispossessed.

And while we're just barely at the beginning of this process, we can suggest a few things based on all our experiences in the past period. The type of party suggested here needs to be mass and working class, and it will surely co-exist with other mass parties. This party of the dispossessed will need to be a party that seeks to advance the struggle for political power, both within the context of capitalism as well as in a post-capitalist environment.

To carry forward the long-term struggle, we can't make due with a social-democratic party. This new party needs to imbue our organizing with the recognition that capitalism will not disappear as a result of periodic reforms. We need to proclaim the goal not to reform capitalism, but to eliminate it. Contrary to social democrats, who, upon achieving power, again and again assumed that the ruling elite would play fair, a party of the dispossessed will assume exactly the opposite. The capitalists have never willingly given up power. That means that the working class must take state power and struggle to keep it. Only in a workers' democracy will the conditions be created for the social revolution that will be necessary in order to fully eliminate capitalism and the power of capital, and emancipate the oppressed.

The existence of our newer type of party of the dispossessed is not antagonistic to other mass formations, including the Labor Party, the New Party, or mass organizations such as ACORN. The socialist party we aim to construct will have a relationship of unity and struggle with progressive formations and not attempt to replace them or relegate them to fertile fields for recruitment. We seek a party that articulates a vision of socialism that is revolutionary and democratic. It cannot afford to be a loose network of associated individuals but needs to organize as a disciplined political force, capable of advancing a vision and moving a program. This

means the party needs to undertake coordinated regional and national campaigns, produce high quality publications, regularly summarize its practice and draw lessons from it, develop theory, systematically train its members, and have full time leadership and organizers.

Given the processes some of us lived through in the 1970s, we do not advance a new variation on the self-appointed vanguard party. Both the Communist Party USA and the 1970s oppositional Marxist-Leninist organizations postured as self-appointed vanguards. This stance stood at odds with the limited base and political influence of these organizations. We suggest instead a party that we hope will become part of the vanguard in the fight for socialism. We hope for this and will have to work for it. This role will emerge through practice in the class struggle rather than through public relations announcements. In the very essence of this newer type of party there must be the notion of building power for the dispossessed, and uniting in struggle with other forces in the progressive social movements.

Especially in the world we now live and organize in, the new party will need to be truly internationalist, in three respects. First, it needs to commit to actively combating racism, national oppression and white supremacy. Racism and national oppression have flourished again in the era of neo-liberalism and once again increased the historical tensions along racial and national lines within the U.S. working class. A new party also will need to unite with currents of revolutionary nationalism and struggle to welcome revolutionary nationalists into its ranks.

Internationalism also means a commitment to support and embrace other revolutionary and democratic struggles against imperialism. These include those struggles conducted among the nations of the South as well as those advanced by oppressed nations and nationalities within countries of the North. (The terms South and North offer another way of expressing the contradiction between the formerly colonized, under-developed countries disproportionately in the Southern Hemisphere and the indus-

trialized countries of the West and East.) Our internationalism actively advances the struggle for national self-determination as part of the struggle for socialism. Upholding the national rights of oppressed people within U.S. borders, the new party will organize for a self-determination that is part of the process of opposing imperialism and also of reconstructing relations between nations and people on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Neo-liberal policies have resulted in great damage to the environments, economies, and social structures of the nations and peoples of the South. Neo-liberalism has, as well, rendered whole populations marginal to the future envisioned by the large corporations that dominate the planet. A true newer type party--the party of the dispossessed will surely align itself with these peoples and advance and support their struggles here in the U.S.

Our internationalism, however, does not stop there. It must also include a rejection of Eurocentrism in much of what parades itself as being Marxist theory. The crisis of socialism is certainly a global crisis, but it is especially a crisis of theoretical fashions and organizational standards emanating from Eurocentric experience. Our internationalism encourages us to reflect on social practice alongside comrades in the countries of the South. We can learn from their experience in revolutionary and democratic struggles. Internationalism requires willingness to learn from the contributions of Third World revolutionaries to Marxism, as well as an interest and willingness to undertake examinations of other revolutionary currents, and the theories so elaborated.

Create An Alternative to Neo-Liberalism and New Deal Nostalgia

In the current situation, we gain little by drawing a definitive line between those who believe that this party of the dispossessed will be a Marxist-Leninist party, or a party of some other type, such as the Brazilian Worker's Party. The definition of a Marxist-Leninist party has evolved in countless different directions, including parties ranging from the

Worker's Party of Korea [North], at one extreme, to the South African Communist Party and the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation, on to the Workers (Communist) Party of Norway.

Advocates of traditional democratic centralist, cadre organizational frameworks will need to define to what extent such a party addresses or ignores the crisis of socialism. For their part, those advancing some other notion of a party of the dispossessed have the obligation to define its class character and its role in the struggle for socialism. Given the present state of the Left in this neo-liberal era, we can safely observe that the greatest danger for such a party of the dispossessed is falling into one or another variety of social democracy.

The specific nature of the party will need to be worked through in the course of an extended discussion, debate, analysis, and summing up of practice. We need to rely on those currents within Marxism that show willingness to learn from each other and from earlier socialist experience in order to assert a Marxism that is truly revolutionary, democratic and internationalist. A party of this type and emerging in this way will necessarily be multi-tendenced, the parameters of which must be defined over time. We need a broad front to address the crisis of socialism, and we need unity to tackle the collective lack of clarity among revolutionary Marxists.

This organizational task is simply beyond the resources of any one organization or grouping of individuals. We therefore must share a willingness to engage in broad debate even among forces that were, in the past, at odds with one another. Such a debate will need to take place both within the context of a party, as well as within the broader Left. Socialists, agreeing to certain basic principles and strategy, need to create terms of engagement that can exist within a party formation. This approach recognizes contributions to revolutionary theory from tendencies in addition to Marxism-Leninism, such as those coming from theorists of the women's, oppressed nationality, lesbian and gay, and environmental movements.

Political conditions today also argue for a multi-tendenced party. We need a mass political alternative to both neo-liberalism and New Deal nostalgia. The crisis facing working people, and the collapse of various reformist alternatives, demand a coherent Left opposition/alternative. Such an alternative must be capable of engaging in broad struggles and not simply serving as a propaganda sect. Engagement at the level of mass politics necessitates an organization/party that is multi-tendenced, while nevertheless being socialist. It assumes that many issues of debate will need to be postponed while at the same time ensuring that we have sufficient unity to engage in the various aspects of the class struggle.

The strategy of Left Refoundation envisions an approach to party building that contrasts, in its fundamentals, with approaches taken in earlier periods. Superficially, there may appear to be certain similarities. But at the level of theory, Left Refoundation proceeds from the notion of practice—reflection/ summation--new practice. Reflection and summation drive the process when they result in the theorizing of experiences, individual and collective. This is not novel, at least as a stated position. However, Left Refoundation wishes to translate this approach into a strategy for party building that begins with acknowledging the experience, politics and theories that already exist among anti-capitalist activists of various stripes. No one group possesses the Holy Grail. Therefore the approach we propose includes the following elements:

Identify cores of anti-capitalist activists: We need the support of dedicated but often isolated groupings of left-oriented activists organizing in all the contemporary social movements, but particularly those grounded and based within the working class sector of those movements, especially the oppressed nationality movements. Such activists may or may not be part of formal organizations. This main aspect of the project does not consist of uniting existing organizations, although it does not preclude that from happening.

Seek sponsors of the Refoundation project. This step is of critical importance. The Refoundation

project ideally needs institutional sponsors who are willing to help build it (and its various components). Such co-sponsors might be other organizations or institutions, or a set of respected individuals. In any case, ideally, there is organizational support.

Commit to a structured, multi-year engagement among participants in this project. This engagement needs to include political discussion, study, debate, summation and the identification of points of theoretical and practical unity. An example of this would be to have a specific several-month project of addressing the lessons to be drawn from the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the crisis of socialism. What does such a collapse mean for a vision of socialism? How do we get to socialism? How does class struggle play itself out during socialism? What is the relationship between political liberties, democracy and workers' power? (These questions are not exclusive.)

Another example might be a specific examination of the national liberation movements in the U.S. (at the general level), followed or accompanied by a specific examination of particular freedom struggles. What, for example, does the crisis of the national liberation struggles internationally affect domestic national movements? How should one view nationalism in the era of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment? Where should the work of the party of the dispossessed be concentrated? How does the party achieve the class, racial and gender composition necessary to truly represent the dispossessed?

Launch coordinated national organizing projects: Intersecting the process of study, reflection and debate would be engagement in collective, practical projects. Such projects should be consistent with the principles of unity that bring these various forces and individuals together. They should also not be grandiose, e.g., running our own 3rd party candidate for the U.S. presidency, but should be rooted in the actual work of the people involved. Joint action aims to have a practical impact on day-to-day struggles as well as serve as a means to learn from and implement the outcome of theoretical dis-

ussions. This work should also be summarized and factored into the discussions that are taking place.

Work to build the Black Radical Congress, the New Raza Left, and the Asian Left Forum illustrate some of the objectives of the refoundation approach, including the centrality of the national movements to the Left refoundation analysis. Also the approach taken and advocated in the construction of these initiatives flows from a view that the rebuilding of the Left generally, and the Lefts in the national movements in particular, are not the province of one ideological or political tendency alone.

As our forces gain strength, areas of joint action may expand to include issues such as municipal and county political power; the transformation of national trade unions into strengthened centers of resistance; community-centered public education, to name a few. These will have to be carefully chosen.

This multi-year project needs to be pulled together at some future date. Those who entered into the project would, of course, need to understand and agree that this project was not to be an abstract Left unity effort, but is aimed at constructing an organization/party. At the end of the period of engagement, the entire process would need to be summarized. Such a summation would aim to determine whether the basis exists to make the transition to such a party. We will need to know when unity has been reached on a real strategy; whether we have a critical mass of people; whether we have unified on an appropriate organizational form; when we have achieved bottom lines of political and operational unity.

The approach advanced here borrows from and seeks to utilize popular education as, indeed, it is intended to be used: as a "pedagogy of the oppressed," not a series of disconnected educational techniques. A Freirian approach to this project aims to create a democratic dialog among forces interested in the construction of a party of the dispossessed.

Begin With Broad Socialist Unity

What sorts of forces should be approached for this refoundationist project? Specifically, around what

would people need to agree? To some extent this must be an open question and one subject to intense negotiations. Nevertheless, the following are some basic outlines:

Recognize the need to fight for socialism. While perhaps continuing to disagree on particulars, we need to agree that we seek a social system in which the working class is the leading class, the struggle against capital continues, political democracy is enhanced, and political debate is allowed within the bounds of a constitution. At the very least, there should be a consensual definition of socialism premised on the notion of class power as opposed to utopian views or those views that downplay class and class struggle.

Recognize the strategic significance of the struggle against racism and white supremacy and for national self-determination. Signatories to the refoundation project should not be held to a specific definition of particular oppressed nationalities. But all should commit to principled debate on these questions, and recognize that the struggle against white supremacy is central to building a broad, popular bloc that can achieve power.

Recognize that the struggle against male supremacy and for the emancipation of women is not an add-on struggle, but is part of the strategic formulation for the construction of socialism. This is not a struggle restricted to formal, democratic rights--though such a struggle is profoundly important--but is a struggle against the patriarchal roles and power which have consistently undermined progressive struggles and projects, including the struggles for national liberation and socialism. The struggle for gender equity must also be a struggle that recognizes the profound democratic issue contained in the lesbian and gay movements. We must build a movement that challenges heterosexism as well as other forms of traditional male supremacy, both within the movement itself, and in the larger society.

Recognize the immediate and long-term importance of democracy. The refoundation project must assume a level of unity among its constituents that the socialism for which we fight will be revolutionary and democratic. In addition, the struggle for consistent democracy within the context of capitalism also must reflect the democratic vision we hold for the future. This does not mean that we should neglect the nature of the capitalist state: at the point at which a socialist, anti-capitalist, or anti-imperialist movement takes off, it will face vicious repression. Operating in an environment of repression will, by necessity, change the forms of organization necessary in order to prosecute any struggle.

Recognize the priority of connecting the struggle for the environment and the struggle against capitalism. The refoundation project itself embraces the struggle to save the environment and is willing to criticize the approach to economic construction that took place in the states of Socialism I, where the environment was ignored, and often destroyed.

Recognize that our project must be internationalist. We recognize that the United States is an em-

pire and adhere to the concept advanced by Samora Machel: "Internationalism is strategy, not charity."

Recognize our need to base Refoundation within the working class and sees the working class as its home. Without denying other sectors of social movements, the refoundation project must strive to be a working class project, that is, a project of and for the working class!

Unidos y Organizados, Venceremos/United and Organized, We Will Win!

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A Strategy for the Coming Period: 2010 – 2013

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Every three years, members of Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad come together to develop a strategic direction for the coming period. The decision about our strategic orientation follows a summation of our previous work, considerable debate, discussion and struggle amongst all members and flows from an analysis of the political conditions and main challenges we face in the coming period. Our new strategic orientation grows from a commitment to respond to the immediacy of our conditions and contextualizes our orientation within a longer-term vision of building power in this country. Far from abandoning our Left Refoundation orientation, this three-year strategy continues along that path.

As capitalism's contradictions deepen, efforts to hoist the costs of the economic and ecological crises onto the backs of the working class, people of color, and the Global South will intensify and will require militant resistance. As revolutionary socialists, we must go beyond resistance and begin fighting to win, translating the crisis of state legitimacy and of the neoliberal consensus into an opportunity for Left growth.

Now is the time to promote socialism and to expose capitalism's ruthless exploitation of people and the planet as the source of crisis. More and more people are questioning the willingness and even the ability of capitalism to resolve the problems we face. In this period we see an enormous opportunity to talk about socialism, an opportunity unlike anything we've seen in decades—but it cannot be the socialism of the 20th century. Twenty-first century socialism must be a socialism renewed by intersectionality, ecological sustainability, and radical democracy. A renewed vision of socialism must be rooted in deeper theoretical development, our innovative and power-building mass work, and dialogue with other parts of the party and social movement Left. It is this kind of vision that we must share boldly and broadly with masses of people.

Our mass work in the social movements must reflect both our understanding of the crises and our 21st-century socialist vision. As jobs and the social wage intensify as targets of ruling class efforts to shift the burden of the crisis onto the working class, we must be at the forefront of the struggle. We must work in a way that helps move us beyond resistance and towards power. This means developing strategies and demands that challenge the logics of capitalism, neoliberalism, and ecological exploitation and puts forward counter-proposals for how the crises can be resolved, with capital paying the costs. It also means fighting the crises in a way that roots us more deeply amongst the poorer sections of the working class and amongst public sector workers.

We must also put more resources into developing new kinds of organizing. New Working Class Organizations that combine electoral mass democratic work with fight-back organizing while building alternative institutions are leading the development of multi-tactic strategies. These strategies move us beyond resistance, offer methods for building power on a broader scale, and look at building local and regional power blocs capable of challenging capitalist modes of governance. At the same time they see municipal and local governments led by the Left as important steps in that process.

Building new movements in this country cannot be disconnected from the struggle against imperialism, in

particular US imperialism and the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The people of this country, who have already decisively rejected the Iraq War, are slowly beginning to turn against the Afghanistan War. While the anti-war movement has been slow to rebuild in the wake of the gravitational pull of the 2008 election campaign, mass sentiment against the wars is growing. Organizationally we need to assess where and how participation in anti-war work is possible and intentionally rebuild our active role in this movement.

Given all that is required of us in this moment, we know that we cannot accomplish our goals without a stronger Left. Left Refoundation work must continue to play a guiding role in our strategies. Building on relationships we've developed with advanced forces in the social movement Left, we will embark on a new Left Refoundation effort, the construction of a new "Socialist Front." This Front will provide an opportunity to collaborate with left forces around shared work. In addition to the Front, the US Social Forum and continued participation in Revolutionary Work in Our Times (RWIOT) will also be important elements in our Left Refoundation work.

If we are to rise to these tasks and take on the crises of our times, then we must also strengthen our own organization, applying our strategies with discipline and grounding our work and our vision in a firm grasp of the conditions in which we must act.

THREE INTERSECTING CRISES

The crisis we face is represented by the intersection of economic, political, and ecological forces. We know that capitalism, as a system, brings with it crises; that there is no other capitalism. In the aftermath of these crises a new method of accumulation emerges out of the ashes of the old. The form of accumulation and the nature of the state structure have depended on the dynamics of the class struggle. The crisis we face today however, particularly in relation to its ecological aspect, is a different sort of crisis that endangers the very survival of human—and for that matter all—life. The multi-sided nature of these crises makes this moment an extremely dangerous one, as well as one containing immense possibilities.

The Economic Collapse

The economic meltdown that commenced in 2007 and really got rolling in 2008 is not just the most significant capitalist crisis since the Great Depression, but signals the end of a capitalist "regime of accumulation"—neoliberalism—that had defined the ruling consensus in the US since the early 1980s. After nearly 30 years, the neo-liberal ruling consensus is unraveling. Its reliance on the "invisible hand" of the market to promote economic growth, on the promotion of bubbles and easy credit to offset the driving down of real wages in the US, on the shredding of the social safety net and the "globalization" of industrial production to work around the tendency of the rate of profit to fall—all these strategies have run up against objective limits. The current economic crisis, what can best be described as a global recession or depression, represents both the results of a crisis of overproduction and a crisis brought on by financial speculation.

As the housing market, commercial real estate and small banks collapse, unemployment continues to climb and state budget crises are imposing huge hardships on tens of millions. These conditions will affect the majority of people in this country, with deep consequences for the working class, especially immigrants and people from oppressed nationality communities.

The Political Crisis

The capitalist state has historically achieved legitimacy through a combination of both hegemony and repression. It is critical to acknowledge that stable capitalist societies cannot rely on repression alone. Legitimacy exists to a great extent to the degree to which the capitalist state is perceived as “fair” to a critical mass of people. Part of being fair is protecting the citizens of the nation-state. Insofar as the state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens and allows them to be ravaged, the state loses legitimacy.

Neoliberal globalization—the global reorganization of capitalism—brought with it the weakening of the sovereignty of many capitalist states. Insofar as they were linked to one another, particularly through free-trade agreements, those agreements put restrictions on the ability of the state to act in the interests of the population of their respective countries. The erosion of various protections to the citizenry has led to the sense that the state is no longer a legitimate actor.

This crisis of legitimacy has been sharpened not only by the economic collapse and its effects but also by ruling class responses to the collapse. While the very financial institutions that triggered the current economic meltdown and contributed most to global warming have been bailed out at public expense, working-class people—both the so-called middle class and the poor—have been faced with growing foreclosures and evictions, widespread layoffs and unemployment, and the slashing of government budgets and service provision. This strong state intervention in the economy not only directly contradicts neoliberal ideologies of the “free market,” but does so clearly in favor of capital, revealing the capitalist state as an instrument of the ruling class rather than the legitimate upholder of the common good.

The Ecological Crises

The deterioration of the environment has moved much faster than had been assumed by many. Most of the Left took environmental issues less than seriously, with the exception of nuclear power, and, in some cases, toxic waste. It has become increasingly clear, however, that the intersecting ecological crises, including but not limited to water, climate, food, toxics, and bio-diversity, deeply affect all living beings. The issue of whether we as humanity can survive these crises is squarely in front of us, and is no longer a distant problem or theoretical question. Climate change, peak oil, the depletion of the oceans through over-fishing, loss of forested areas, declining availability of drinking water, degradation of food, and chemical pollution of air, soil, and water are all issues of immediate and pressing concern.

This ecological factor is the unstable element in the larger equation of our conditions. Unlike previous capitalist crises, the current intersection of economic, political, and ecological forces has resulted in a situation that could quite possibly mean the end of human civilization. It is clear that capitalism, with its endless drive for accumulation, is hurtling us faster and faster towards catastrophe and that liberalism’s partial remedies offer no real solutions. But it is also true that traditional Marxist-Leninist thinking around “the development of productive forces” or economic development and production, mostly through massive industrialization, has been part of the problem.

Indigenous, oppressed-nationality, and small-scale agricultural and fishing communities—particularly women of color—have been disproportionately affected by ecological crises and have been at the vanguard of the struggle against the many ways that capitalism destroys environments and people. These communities, across the globe from the South to the North, and their environments have been subjected to the ruthless pillage of ongoing “primitive accumulation” (the extraction of raw materials for capitalist benefit) and have historically been the

places that toxic waste has been disposed of. Now they are the places most devastated by ecological disasters. It is essential that we look to the movements of those most affected for direction in developing movements and solutions.

Although these three intersecting crises represent an unprecedented opportunity for the Left to expose capitalism, win over greater numbers to socialism, and unite broad sectors behind its leadership, history has demonstrated that crisis does not automatically favor the Left. The response to neo-liberal globalization—and the response to the current threefold crisis—has come from both the Right and the Left. Right-wing populism is particularly dangerous because, contrary to other forms of right-wing ideology, it is generally based within social movements and tends to utilize some of the rhetoric of the Left. Unless the Left is willing and able to lead stronger movements on a greater scale, there are very serious possibilities that ecological crises will reach beyond the point of no return or that the Right will seize the initiative. There are signs that this is already happening. Recent polls show that fewer people than one year ago think there is human impacted climate change and global warming.

It is in this context that we situate our strategic orientation for the next three years, focusing on socialist interventions that will organize the working-class and oppressed nationality peoples against crisis austerity measures and around left strategies for winning power.

SOCIALIST INTERVENTIONS IN THE COMING PERIOD

Left Refoundation:

Deepen relationships and collaboration with organized and social movement Left forces

In the last period we recognized that the Left was “poorly situated to participate in, offer leadership to and help connect” ongoing struggles in a significant way and that “left forces in most of these movements are weak, fragmented, and usually drowned out by the more organized bourgeois forces.” As a result we focused on raising the question of organization and working towards “greater interconnection, cross-fertilization and common praxis between the organized, more consciously socialist or ‘party’ left, and the left forces of the social movements.”

This outlook continues to inform this period’s Left Refoundation orientation, which will focus on building a new “Socialist Front,” participation in the US Social Forum, and Revolutionary Work In Our Times (RWIOT).

Red Communications:

Boldly and broadly share a renewed vision of socialism

Historically, resistance to capitalism globally happened through national liberation struggles and Third-World Marxist struggles that were almost always tied to either the USSR or China in opposition to US imperialism. Within the US this was reflected as a larger revolutionary Left that participated in various people’s struggles and red work. For the past several decades, revolutionary forces and the broader left have been divided and operating under the assumption that an explicit call for socialism is not a practical strategy. Despite the seemingly obvious material contradictions that oppressed peoples experience on a daily basis, nearly all of our energy has been focused on practical, day-to-day organizing.

The recent economic crisis, however, has raised doubts among the masses about the infallibility of capitalism. There is a sizable crack in the system that presents the opportunity to re-introduce, re-imagine and de-mystify socialism as a viable alternative. Now is the time to popularize socialist ideas, dispel myths that have been propagated by the defenders of capitalism, and launch a campaign designed to move thousands and ultimately hundreds of thousands of people towards socialism.

Mass Work:

Bring analysis of the crisis and counter-hegemonic demands to mass work

Socialists active in the social movements must be encouraging resistance to crises based on an understanding of its three intersecting elements. This does not mean simply fighting back, but it means constructing (and organizing around) counterproposals to those that are being advanced by capital to address the three crises, e.g., the Left proposing nationalization of banks and of abandoned means of production (like auto plants), calling for a “retooling” of these means of production for the social good (using the abandoned auto plants to build mass transit vehicles and for other ecologically sustainable uses) and the development of regional planning systems.

In keeping with the analysis of a “lower/deeper” orientation, we must concentrate ourselves in the sectors of the working class where low-income oppressed-nationality workers, especially women, play a leading role. This often means fights around broader “social wage” issues, fights that incorporate community and workplace considerations in their struggles—demanding the reincorporation of public coverage for public needs like health care, education, childcare, social security, etc.

The inclusion of public sector workers must also be central to our analysis and work. These workers, many of whom are women of color, deliver the social wage that we seek to protect and expand and, as the economic crisis deepens, are on the frontlines of mass layoffs and budget cuts. Just as more and more folks turn to social-safety-net services to survive, the workers delivering these services are cut back below the already bare-bones, pre-crisis levels.

Mass Democratic Projects:

Study, support, and strengthen this work

For some time now, the leading edge of left responses to neoliberal globalization and its crises have worked by combining popular movements in the streets with a strategic orientation towards the state. The Bolivarian circles in Venezuela, Evo Morales’s indigenismo orientation to the social movement left in Bolivia, and the FMLN in El Salvador are all examples of this approach in Latin America. In Nepal, the Unified Communist Party (Maoist) has combined people’s war with electoral organizing and now mass insurrectionary activity. While the conditions in the US are different than Latin America or South Asia, we draw inspiration from these multi-tactic approaches to revolutionary strategy.

One of the most visible and exciting efforts at such multi-tactic strategies in the US has been the mass democratic projects developed out of New Working Class Organizations (NWCO). These projects seek to move beyond individual “communities,” and build alliances with broad progressive forces under the leadership of low-income, working-class people of color. They have been inspired by the Left in other countries who have used public office

at the local level to win important structural reforms, build their base, and challenge neoliberalism. At the same time they challenge bourgeois democratic governance practices by mobilizing and organizing the “lower/deeper” layers of society through participatory democracy.

Anti-War Work:

Rebuild the anti-war war movement

The government the people of the US elected, using taxes we pay, is pursuing two unjust and unjustifiable occupations with millions dead, damaged or displaced and with no end in sight. We have a proletarian obligation to resist these imperialist wars with deeds, not just words.

Environmental Justice:

Building a lens of ecological justice into our work

We look to incorporate an analysis and point towards solutions to ecological crises in our work as a means of promoting a mass-based understanding of the ecological crises among all sectors of the people. This work will include:

- Studying the history of ecological crises, its scientific basis, its connection to the accumulation process, and the steps necessary to shift the central paradigm of the system from accumulation to grassroots empowerment and human well-being.
- Recognize the historic and ongoing resistance of people of color to accumulation’s ravages – struggling to protect land and resources, opposing dumping and industrial pollution, living in balance with the earth’s natural wealth.
- Develop a unity statement on the ecological crisis for our organization.
- Promote discussions with other left organizations – roundtables, forums, schools – that bring together rank and file members and reach out to broader sectors of people, recognizing that the struggle for ideological clarity around ecological crises is a favorable context to refound the Left in the United States and to deepen unity among broader social movements.
- Generate popular materials that connect to the lives of working class people – in particular to oppressed nationalities, women, and youth.
- Consciously bring ecological crises into all popular, mass-based organizing work we do – identifying the links to both impending environmental collapse and the logic of the capitalist money-making system.
- Promote economic development strategies centered on “Green Jobs” and the ecological use of urban space – drawing on, many examples, including Cuba’s experience with permaculture and urban gardening.
- Fight for an environmental program that eases the impact of ecological crises on working class and other oppressed people, while placing these social forces in control of the social transformation required to resolve the crisis.

Given the three intersecting crises—economic, political, and ecological—created by the deepening of capitalism’s contradictions and spread of neoliberal globalization, this is a critical time to build the fight for the future: the future of our planet, the future of an economy which supplies what people need without exploitation, the opportunity to

bring people to socialism and away from reaction. This will require enormous effort, and requires us to move beyond resistance strategies toward building power. The stakes are high, the time is right, so let's get to work!

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Meeting the Challenge of Crisis and Opportunity

Left Refoundation and Party Building

About this paper: The Party-Building Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization takes pleasure in circulating the following paper. Like other socialist organizations, since its inception, Freedom Road has looked for opportunities to combine our own organizing with opportunities for strengthening the unity and coherence of socialist efforts overall. We endorse the themes presented here as an important part of our efforts in this general direction. Members of our organization from several cities worked on this paper over the last year and a half. We also appreciate the invaluable comments of friends and co-workers from other organizations who have seen this in draft and helped shape it. We don't see this as the final word on the way forward for the socialist left. Nor do we even see it as the first word, since others have also grappled with similar issues throughout this past decade. But we do sincerely hope it sparks interest, debate, and action toward bringing new national political organization to US socialist efforts. –January 2000

Introduction: The Crisis Facing the Left

The world we live and struggle in confronts us with an immense set of paradoxes. Conditions exist which should result in very favorable ground for socialist activity. Yet a real socialist movement does not exist.

There is anger stirring among the masses, particularly as their living standards implode. Yet at the same time, there is widespread despair. The media spreads the notion that history has indeed ended, and capitalism is the only alternative.

The time has come for Left activists to confront the challenge of creating a revolutionary socialist party. Neo-liberal capitalism's unrelenting expansionism threatens humanity as a whole and the physical environment itself. The earlier vibrancy of the national liberation struggles and the influence of vital Left movements in many countries has faded in the face of an invigorated post-Cold War global capitalism.

The slogan of Left Refoundation arises out of our assessment of the ideological and structural crisis among Leftists here in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Four major occurrences define this *crisis*:

- (1) **The crisis of socialism**, which predates the collapse of the Soviet Union
- (2) **The dismantling of the welfare state**,
- (3) **The crisis of national liberation movements**, and
- (4) **The rise of neoliberalism**.

All four are connected. The rise of neoliberalism and the crisis of socialism are intertwined with the destruction of the welfare state and the crisis of national liberation movements. This crisis is an ideological and structural vacuum in which words such as *revolution* become clichés and young revolutionaries seek meaning in a variety of ideological frameworks.

On the other hand, this vacuum provides Marxists a rare opportunity for reflection and reevaluation. This period affords Marxists an opportunity to shape revolutionary thought by creating a strategic vision for revolution and socialism. For success, this vision needs to include a long-range plan for the creating of a new type of political party with the capacity to stitch together revolutionary social movements behind a strategic unity that weakens and ultimately defeats and overthrows capitalism, ideologically and structurally.

The building of a party is our task because no such party presently exists, but also because we are in a historical situation in which we cannot rely on the spontaneous regeneration of Marxism and revolutionary socialist theory in order to build a new revolutionary movement. The crisis of socialism has inhibited that process. It has dampened, though certainly not stopped altogether, the emergence of Left culture and cultural opposition. It has fragmented

the opposition to imperialism and clouded the goal of achieving a socialist society.

Socialism in the Era of Neo-Liberalism

The enduring commitment to revolutionary socialism worldwide, despite its deepening crisis, impels us all to work toward a new assessment of the present situation. Based on such an assessment, revolutionary socialists will need to propose a new way forward. We believe that conditions exist for both the refoundation of an anti-capitalist left in the next five to fifteen years, and for the creation of a new socialist party. We offer the following ideas concerning our situation and the tasks of the Socialist Left.

Almost since the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. capital has put the network of social programs known as the welfare state under attack. While a new and vicious right attacked these programs head-on, realignment among liberals occurred as well. Clinton and Gore came out of this new, neo-liberal wing of the Democratic Party, full of free-market rationalization for trampling on rights and benefits long in place.

Worldwide, the rise of neo-liberalism led to a backtracking by political parties that had supported the welfare state. In some countries, the backtracking includes even some political parties formerly associated with the Left. For many progressives and Leftists, this turnabout has thrown into question the nature and demands of the reform struggle under capitalism. Many of us have lost confidence in addressing economic development, public safety, public education, and other issues. For the mass of working people in the U.S., neo-liberalism has meant a new façade for capitalism without a new leadership to confront it.

We ignore reality if we narrow the crisis of socialism to the period following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Instead, the crisis of socialism emerged over time in the course of political struggles. These struggles arose in the whole range of countries that threw off the rule of capital and began the transition to socialism, from the 1917 Russian Revolution, through

the post-World War II era, on into the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s through the 1970s. These countries handled a whole range of problems-- political democracy; the liberation and equality of oppressed nationalities; the emancipation and equality of women; the environment, the land question and agrarian reform--in such a manner that new ruling groups emerged. Overall, the role and leadership of the working class was not strengthened to continue the struggle against capital after the overthrow of capitalism.

Separate but equally serious problems arose in the socialist movements attempting to achieve state power mainly, though not exclusively, in the advanced capitalist countries. The groups divorced themselves from the people and were unable, and often unwilling, to carry through the struggle for socialism and emancipation.

In both cases, crisis steadily emerged despite often-significant achievements in the realm of living standards and quality of life.

The crisis of the national liberation movements is integrally connected to the rise of neo-liberalism, the collapse of many socialist countries, and the related crisis of socialism. Post World War II national liberation movements emerged in the context of the decline of the old colonial powers, the struggle between the U.S. and USSR, and the struggle between socialism and imperialism. An opening existed to fight for independence and national liberation. With the growing crisis of socialism, and particularly after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, most Third World nations could no longer politically or economically maneuver between the two superpowers. A slow but steady capitulation to neo-liberalism developed as a main trend.

Even progressive forces in the Third World found it hard to resist the neo-liberal tide. In many cases, Left movements were unable to lead an effective challenge to the threats, blackmail, and demands of imperialism for so-called structural adjustment to Third World economies. These attacks and demands often violated the national sovereignty of the oppressed nations. And behind the bankers and diplo-

mats, stand planes, warships and troops. The United States has repeatedly demonstrated this fact in Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere to enforce Margaret Thatcher's slogan for the New World Order: "There is no alternative!"

Contributing also to the crisis of the national liberation movements has been the emergence of ethnic conflicts, which have deflected the focus of the struggle away from imperialism and its local partners.

The crisis of the national liberation movements applies equally to national movements within the U.S. The decline of the left in the oppressed nationality movements has been matched by a rise to ideological and political leadership in its place of forces representing the professional and business classes. Like their counterparts in the Third World, many of these groups and individuals have accepted the framework of neo-liberalism. Their narrow, elitist, and accommodationist strategies contributed to the demoralization and de-mobilization of these movements.

The Challenge to the Working Class

Left Refoundation is a process for recreating, reestablishing, and reasserting an ideological and institutional base in the U.S. for overthrowing capitalism and beginning to create a socialist society. One initial objective of Left Refoundation is to create public discourse on the subject of revolution and socialism. Another objective is to evaluate socialist theory and practice in a way that encourages collaboration and development of strategy on the Left. Building the ideological and institutional base for a new type of socialist party will require public debate, collaborative analysis and broad scale struggles that have revolutionary potential. In the past, party building preoccupied major sectors of the Socialist Left. In recent years, most independent socialists and socialist organizations have paid little attention to this element of our overall strategy for revolution.

Socialists have instead built our organizations as bulwarks of resistance, as trainers of the next generation, and as keepers of the faith. In this past pe-

riod of right-wing dominance, we should count "keeper of the faith" as a worthwhile accomplishment. But over time, it means we settled in for a whole lot less than we need. We lowered our sights to fighting the good fight instead of winning liberation of the masses of the people.

To fight our common enemy, we all take risks daily. To become more than the sum of our parts, we must take some very different kinds of risks. We can no longer dance around those risks, hiding in the safety of our own organizational confines. The time has come to put party building decisively back on the table for discussion and action. A new priority on party building does not mean that we think some new nationwide revolutionary organization made up of working class fighters of all nationalities waits just around the corner. The refoundationist perspective contrasts with the party-building efforts of the 1970s, particularly efforts of elements of the self-proclaimed new communist movement—the Communist Labor Party (CLP), the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML) and the Communist Workers Party (CWP). Certain conditions in the U.S. and the world require revolutionaries to begin again the long arduous task of building a broad movement of the Left that has the objective of creating a new socialist party.

Corporate hegemony in the media and in education has created a dominant set of beliefs that stresses "no hope" and that the market economy is the only way forward. The absence of a strong Left in the U.S. contributes to this smothering ideological climate.

On the other hand, for all the damage it has done, the right wing no longer inspires the same mass respect it has these past twenty years. We all see glimmers of hope in the labor movement, as well as the African-American, Chicano, Asian movements, immigrant movements and Student movements. Left forces have begun to look for ways to gain back the initiative.

Capitalism has always been global. What is different now is the hyper-mobility of capital, trans-national

production, and the greater penetration of global markets, accelerating since the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Global conditions offer new opportunities for international working class solidarity, while demanding collaborative strategies for success.

Also different today is the incredible increase in both economic and environmental injustice. 225 individuals have accumulated wealth greater than 47% (2.5 billion) of the people on this planet. The economic immiseration of the overwhelming majority of the world's people both contributes to and is made worse by spreading environmental cancers, global warming, the destruction of ecosystems and resources, and the spectre of total corporate control of the world's food supply.

Since the 1970s, U.S. capitalism has steadily found new strengths to master global stagnation, but not eliminate it. Back in the 1970s, after its defeat in Vietnam and the gains of the freedom struggles, capitalist expansion and profits stagnated. In response, capitalist attacks on the welfare state combined with the dramatic extension of global markets brought a new period of capitalist growth. This imperialist trend in the class struggle found ideological and cultural justification as neo-liberalism, a consensus among ruling circles that the state would no longer act as provider of the social safety net or as regulator of the corporate sector. Instead, the state would reduce its role to opening international markets and ensuring corporate profits.

The other trend of the weakening of U.S. economic hegemony continues, and in the longer run, remains the more powerful historical factor. But in the here and now, we cannot underestimate the resiliency of U.S. imperialism. In addition, globalization reflects growing economic and military integration of Western European and Japanese economic powers. Its military advantage makes the U.S. the international corporate cop and the most dangerous imperialist power. Furthermore, imperialist agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the World Trade Organization can force neo-liberal policies onto weaker nation-states and devastate emerging working class movements. Immigrants

from developing nations still seek haven in the U.S. due to its relative position of privilege.

Capitalist economic trends include corporate restructuring, flexible production, privatization of public agencies, globalizing of the labor market, strategic use of technology and the shift to a service economy. This facet of the neo-liberal era has changed the nature of work, expanded the definition of worker, and intensified racial polarization in the U.S. working class. Some at the high end of the service industry remain privileged and benefit directly from U.S. imperialism. But as a whole, the U.S. working class suffered economic decline during this period. Both white workers and disproportionately, working class people of color and non-European immigrants have been thrown out of good paying manufacturing or public sector jobs (primary economic sector) and confined to low paying service and/or manufacturing jobs (secondary economic sector). Still others are forced into permanent temporary employment or the informal economic sector (hidden economy). And still others, primarily white women and women of color, are forced into the virtual slave labor of so-called Welfare Reform forced work.

In short, highly valued unionized skilled and semi-skilled working class occupations have dwindled in number without disappearing, and some new professional positions have emerged. Privilege in the distribution of work, benefits, housing and services within the U.S. working class remains an unmistakable and unavoidable factor. Privilege remains distinctly racialized to the advantage of white people over people of color and non-white immigrants. In turn, the ideology of white supremacy continues to have a material basis. A separate pattern of male privilege at work, in the community and at home also hinders working class unity. At the same time, a new consequence of globalization and neoliberalism is rising interracial tension among minority groups within the U.S. and between native U.S. minorities and new immigrants.

Resisting the Offensive of Capital

The average U.S. worker has a living standard approximating that of 1979, gaining ground again only after a twenty-five year decline. Workers today typically work longer hours on the job or cannot find steady work at all, need to hold down more than one job, or have to take temporary jobs. Credit card debt has risen dramatically. Millions of people lack health insurance. Overall, economic insecurity has grown.

Unionization stands at less than 14%. More so than at any time since the 1930s, capital can start off a union contract negotiation cycle assuming no need for any significant concessions to labor. The hope that one could predict a steady rise in one's living standard (or for that of one's children) is over for most workers. Business adoption of new technology has rendered entire fields of work obsolete. For many other workers, capital's greater flexibility to pick up its operations and move--and to continually hold the threat to move--has workers living in fear of their jobs and livelihoods.

The decline in the overall standard of living of the working class disproportionately hits oppressed nationality working class men, women and youth. Nonetheless, we also see reinvigorated scapegoating of immigrants and other people of color--for example, California's Propositions 187, 209, 227 and new Juvenile Justice Initiative. The combination of these two factors intensifies racial cleavages within the U.S. working class. At the same time, the grinding down of the working class as a whole also raises the potential for greater revolutionary unity.

The neo-liberal offensive targeted the economic stagnation and profits squeeze felt by the imperialist centers in the early 1970s. Union-busting, slashing the welfare safety net, weakening health, safety and environmental regulations, providing tax breaks and government assistance to big business has been the order of the '80s and '90s. In the movements of people of color and the women's, labor, environmental, gay and lesbian movements, resistance has been the watchword. While important efforts at collaboration occurred, the Left wings of these movements have not generally seen themselves as

part of a single larger, coherent anti-capitalist Left. And we have therefore not offered leadership within our movements from that perspective.

Resistance grew from the 1980s to the 1990s, but we continue to lack a more cohesive, all-round political project for social transformation with which forces from various progressive social movements can identify. In the absence of such a project, fighters in the various movements have fallen back upon the frameworks and contexts of their respective movements.

A new generation of activists has played an important part in this new wave of struggle. The fight for affirmative action, against police brutality, for welfare rights, the civil rights of gay and lesbian people and other issues provide a catalyst for new activism. Support for the Zapatistas, the Anti-Sweatshop campaigns, support for the struggle in the Pilipines and other campaigns also reflect a new internationalism. Young activists also have made their mark on struggles against injustice to workers--garment workers, immigrant worker rights, and for the right of workers to unite into unions. But among today's activist youth as well, the various causes have not found common ground in any comprehensive strategy that significantly challenges capitalism.

Many of the best young activists, including many of working class origin, are being recruited into the partly rejuvenated union movement. The difference with past generations is that they are entering as staff, usually organizers, instead of starting as workers on the floor or in the fields. The other difference is that the Left is not concentrated in the workplace as it once was.

Some who consciously see themselves as revolutionaries have formed organizations such as Standing Together Organizing a Revolutionary Movement (STORM), Asian Revolutionary Circle, Young Comrades, Accion Borricua, Black Panther Party Collective, Zulu Nation, Asians and Pacific Islanders For Community Empowerment, Pilipino Workers Collective, ACTION, Olean and SOUL. As in past generations, these emerging revolutionaries are searching for revolutionary answers. They are

seeking out answers from different theories and ideologies and perhaps, like past generations, they will develop their own visions for revolution. The international crisis of socialism, our inadequate summary of our (New Left) history and the lack of a clear revolutionary analysis, vision or alternative has impaired our ability to adequately bridge the ideological, cultural and experiential gap that exists between the '60s and '70s revolutionaries and the emerging revolutionaries of the '90s.

Learn From Earlier Efforts to Construct a Revolutionary Socialist Party

No one should deny the exemplary role played by the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) at key points in its history. Especially during the 1930s and 1940s, the Communist Party, working along with other Left organizations, helped organize the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) labor federation, mount the struggle against lynching and Jim Crow, and build new organizations to fight for self-determination for the African-American nation. The CPUSA's anti-fascist stance during most of that period made a huge difference.

During that time, the CPUSA held to what it called the popular front-- that a very broad political bloc was necessary to defeat the challenge of fascism and war. The party's approach also emphasized rooting itself in local workplace and community struggles, as they successfully accomplished in many movements and locales. In the African-American movement, by way of example, the CPUSA set out to construct their organization as a vehicle for Black liberation and socialism.

Nevertheless, the CPUSA fell victim to tendencies that dragged down virtually all the Western communist parties. During and after World War II, the CPUSA backed off its commitment to self-determination and the struggles of oppressed nationalities. The Party refused to oppose the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, did not support the wartime African American March on Washington, and eased up in its emphasis on organizing the South. Reformism became the

strategic stance of the CPUSA, putting it in line with traditional, pro-Soviet communist parties in other parts of the world. This, coupled with an uncritical identification with the USSR and its policies, contributed to a marginalization of their organization and role among emerging forces in older and newer progressive social movements.

In the advanced capitalist countries overall, Marxist-Leninist notions of the struggle for power swung back and forth between two extremes. At times, Marxist-Leninist parties emphasized direct confrontation with the state and sectarianism towards almost all other left forces. Parties saw themselves as the only important actor--the self-appointed vanguard--with all other forces serving as fronts that they sought to control or manipulate. In other times and places, Marxist-Leninists took a leap of faith to seek a historic compromise (in the Italian expression) with capitalism. Parties dissolved (at least ideologically and sometimes practically) into shapeless mass forms, becoming something of an ideological apparition.

Nowhere in the West did these parties succeed in building a strategic alliance of forces that could fully challenge capitalism and win state power. Even those communist movements that successfully led the anti-fascist struggle during World War II had trouble once in power. We certainly still have much to learn from these experiences. Some, such as the Italian party and its successor Party of Communist Refoundation, played an important role both in the student and labor revolts of the sixties as well as in reaching the present new activist generation. Yet the limitations of most of these parties provide an additional reflection of the crisis of socialism.

Engaged by the Vietnam war, the 60s freedom struggles, the women's movement and other new movements, a generation turned itself for a time to fundamental social change. Despite the problems of the traditional socialist left, many activists stuck with national organizations linked to that past--notably, the Communist Party, the Democratic Socialists of America, the Socialist party, the Socialist Workers

Party. Activists of color joined these organizations to a lesser degree, but overall this remains true.

Those organizations played an important role in furthering some crucial mass and reform struggles, but did not provide the breakthrough in thinking and organizing to move socialism forward.

A probably larger wave of activists moved out beyond the established socialist left to attempt to build new revolutionary parties. These all either failed to take root or collapsed after some initial success. At least among that sector known as the anti-revisionist or new communist movement, these efforts were plagued with left sectarianism and white chauvinism. Moreover, though they condemned the Communist Party as hopelessly lost or revisionist, they offered only incomplete or contradictory analyses of the shortcomings of the CPUSA and Soviet-style communism generally.

Many adopted an uncritical stance toward the Communist Party of China, and sometimes mechanically applied the experience of that Party to party building efforts here. One result was a proliferation of "pre-party" organizations that all tried to act like mini-parties, often seeing themselves as the center of the Left universe. They created unrealistic expectations for themselves. Seeking some kind of franchise from China, some of these pre-party organizations moved rapidly to consolidate as many loosely allied local study groups and collectives into jury-rigged national organizations.

These organizations in their different ways had master plans for party formation, but not true strategies for party building. *Party formation* assumes that the guiding organization or organizations have reached the maturity to present the key questions and the best possible answers. When this happens prematurely, movements, organizations and individuals participating find their own contributions greatly hampered. *Party Building* as we speak of it here contains fewer answers and far more questions. Debate and practical engagement together among a wide variety of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces takes place within a generally Marxist framework to

determine the culture, politics and structure of the new party.

The new party-builders of that earlier era included some of the finest left activists from the 1960s anti-war, oppressed nationality, and other social movements. Its activists exerted significant influence and leadership over countless mass-based struggles from the late 1960s to 1980s. Yet the movement proved to be less than the sum of its parts. It did not coalesce in such a manner that it could actually advance the struggle for a new Marxism and become a major political force in society. Those few anti-revisionist parties that did develop a significant mass base could not maintain and expand that influence past the 1980s.

Unfortunately, Left approaches that denied the need for a specific revolutionary party did not fare particularly well either. Highly decentralized or community-based attempts at building working class leadership (along the lines of Italy's Lotta Continua), tended to collapse earlier than the Marxist-Leninists, particularly as the mass upsurges of the 1960 and early '70s died down. A similar fate befell groups like Katipunan ng ma Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) in the U.S., which advocated building an anti-imperialist (as opposed to socialist) party. KDP ultimately abandoned its effort and joined the group Line of March, which itself collapsed in the late '80s. Many local activists also found an ideological home in the Democratic Socialists of America, which has remained relatively large throughout the 1990s, but largely unable to marshal effective, coordinated political strength.

Revolutionary organizations such as the Black Panther Party expanded rapidly and influenced thousands of activists, within and outside of the Black Liberation Movement. The BPP played a critical role in educating the masses about the real nature of the capitalist state, the liberation character of the African-American struggle, and the central role of the African American people's movement in the overall struggle for social change. Due to massive state infiltration and repression and complex internal contradictions, the Panthers also did not survive

into the 1980s as a major political organization. But the Panthers and other radical oppressed nationality initiatives of the late sixties inspired a second wave of oppressed nationality Marxist organizations, which in turn fed into the wider new communist movement described above.

During the 1980s, a separate strategy was followed by some on the Left who either denied outright the need for a party or who put it so far into the future as to deny it in practice. Single-issue movements and organizations, solidarity movements like the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), left environmentalists, and the gay/lesbian rights movements seemed to offer an alternative way of rebuilding the Left, through building up the mass movements. Without in any way dismissing the accomplishments, vigilance and valiance of these forces, their efforts failed to develop a coherent Left or to construct a party (for those who argued they were about doing so).

Other important trends, such as revolutionary nationalism, traditional democratic socialism, and radical and socialist feminism, also rallied large numbers of committed activists and contributed to the waves of resistance from the 1970s into the 1990s. But they too failed to become centers of new, nationwide unifying left mobilization.

In the wake of the collapse of most alternatives to the pro-Soviet approach to Marxism, the U.S. activist base drifted toward liberalism and left reformism, toward an embrace of social democracy or non-Left progressive politics, mostly tied to the Democratic Party. In most cases this tendency, sometimes among fine activists who continued highly effective grass roots organizing, led to their complete abandonment of an anti-capitalist alternative. Strategically, the mass of the Left accommodated itself to the continued existence of capitalism and to a large degree became nothing more than an opposition force within a capitalist context. This stance provided little or no chance of gaining real power. Notably, in the wake of the Black-led electoral upsurge of the early to mid-1980s, many took the road of maneuvering within the Democratic Party.

Some folks, lacking a clear strategy for rebuilding the Left and creating a new Party, focused more and more on just developing their own organizing and internal structures in the hopes that a revolutionary socialist party would eventually emerge out of developing objective and subjective conditions.

We offer this somewhat sweeping assessment not expecting to surprise very many people and certainly not hoping to depress anyone at this late date. We don't mean to gloss over the many positive advances that committed activists made in developing new organizing tactics and strategies and contributions to political theory during this period. Many people and groups have important stories to write and tell. In part, we think so few of us have done so because of the lack of a supportive, forward-looking political context. And we think an important common strand, even given all the external corporate, world wide imperialist, and right wing pressures has been the inattention or wrong-minded attention to party-building. We earnestly hope that the process we here call Left Refoundation will encourage that summarizing of experience in ways that will serve a new process of socialist party building.

By party building, we mean creating a party that learns from but that will be very different from the older models. Our task is not simply to take part in a new wave of socialist organizing. Nor is it solely to build resistance among the masses, though both tasks are essential. But in order to strengthen resistance at the base, as well as offer a viable challenge to capitalism, we need to lay the foundations for a socialist party. We need to help create a political force firmly grounded within the working class and oppressed nationality movements, and representing at least a trend within the radical tradition of other progressive social movements. We need a party unapologetically anti-capitalist, confidently socialist; democratic in both its view of the future society as well as in the manner in which it operates; and representing a convergence of the people's movements in composition and orientation.

Given this country's history, revolutionary strategy will only make sense if it centers on the freedom and

national liberation struggles here in the United States. A vital socialist movement will in turn depend on an uncompromising struggle against white supremacy, racism, and national oppression. Re-foundation depends on the new party reflecting the revolutionary character of the national liberation movements in the U.S., especially the working class from those movements. We need this in party membership and leadership, organizational culture, and practice.

Party building, therefore, will be a broader task than organizing existing Marxists and others on the Left. Party building has to include the task of encouraging and supporting broad-based theoretical exploration and development, left-wing culture, opposition to imperialist corruption, and the building of bridges between generations of activists. Activist work mainly helping to develop the mass movements can also help bring about a new party. The Party we want to help create must be rooted in the day-to-day struggle of the masses.

Learn From Socialism's Past in Order to Move Forward

Neo-liberalism has not resolved the basic contradictions of capitalism. From our many, different vantage points in workplaces and communities throughout the country, we all can see that the system remains in crisis. But 20th Century efforts to construct a socialist alternative--what Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin describes as Socialism I--have not proven viable. From a global perspective, this seems true even where political parties that proclaim social emancipation remain in power. As others have observed with respect to the advanced capitalist countries, the masses may hate capitalism, but they fear socialism.

In order to advance a revolutionary cause, we will have to face the reality of this fear of socialism. Yes, the agents of capitalism have always smeared any efforts at independence and socialism. And yes, revolutionary victories in Russia, China and elsewhere threw out the capitalists and other reactionaries and began the process of constructing socialist

societies for the benefit of the people. In many countries, for a time living conditions improved, the economy grew, arts and culture flourished, rights gained protection.

But it is also the case that Marxism, as practiced in the USSR, and influencing other parties elsewhere, increasingly came to cast a shadow on the cause of socialism. Contradicting Marx, the Soviet Communist leadership denied class struggle under socialism in all but its most extreme and military forms. It took a narrow view of economic development that led to the poisoning of the environment. It promoted a Russia-centered view of the state, which, in practice, denied the right of national self-determination to other peoples in the territory of the USSR.

The Soviet interpretation of Marxism failed to identify steps that would increase the power of the worker in the workplace and in society. It ignored, and in many ways encouraged, the growth of a class or strata that advanced the interests of capital, while paying lip service to socialism.

It adopted an economist view of the struggle for women's emancipation. Women's liberation was centered almost totally on the role in the workplace, and failed to address issues of male supremacy in the home, the Party, and the state. It failed to provide political democracy in order to both engage in widespread debate as well as to overthrow the myriad of layers of oppression inherited from capitalist society.

We don't offer this as an all-inclusive list, but rather a delineation of some of the key contributing factors to the crisis of socialism and to the apprehension many working people have about the models from the first, but not the last, socialist wave. While acknowledging many of the positive achievements of that era, those attempting to rebuild the Left and advance Marxism must be unafraid to confront this history.

Building the Party of the Dispossessed

We don't know exactly what the new party we seek will look like. Many groups and individuals, re-

flecting the full diversity of anti-capitalist struggle in the United States, will have to contribute to this. Reflecting this intended diversity, lets for the moment call this new formation we seek the Party of the Dispossessed.

And while we're just barely at the beginning of this process, we can suggest a few things based on all our experiences in the past period. The type of party suggested here needs to be mass and working class, and it will surely co-exist with other mass parties. This party of the dispossessed will need to be a party that seeks to advance the struggle for political power, both within the context of capitalism as well as in a post-capitalist environment.

To carry forward the long-term struggle, we can't make due with a social-democratic party. This new party needs to imbue our organizing with the recognition that capitalism will not disappear as a result of periodic reforms. We need to proclaim the goal not to reform capitalism, but to eliminate it. Contrary to social democrats, who, upon achieving power, again and again assumed that the ruling elite would play fair, a party of the dispossessed will assume exactly the opposite. The capitalists have never willingly given up power. That means that the working class must take state power and struggle to keep it. Only in a workers' democracy will the conditions be created for the social revolution that will be necessary in order to fully eliminate capitalism and the power of capital, and emancipate the oppressed.

The existence of our newer type of party of the dispossessed is not antagonistic to other mass formations, including the Labor Party, the New Party, or mass organizations such as ACORN. The socialist party we aim to construct will have a relationship of unity and struggle with progressive formations and not attempt to replace them or relegate them to fertile fields for recruitment. We seek a party that articulates a vision of socialism that is revolutionary and democratic. It cannot afford to be a loose network of associated individuals but needs to organize as a disciplined political force, capable of advancing a vision and moving a program. This

means the party needs to undertake coordinated regional and national campaigns, produce high quality publications, regularly summarize its practice and draw lessons from it, develop theory, systematically train its members, and have full time leadership and organizers.

Given the processes some of us lived through in the 1970s, we do not advance a new variation on the self-appointed vanguard party. Both the Communist Party USA and the 1970s oppositional Marxist-Leninist organizations postured as self-appointed vanguards. This stance stood at odds with the limited base and political influence of these organizations. We suggest instead a party that we hope will become part of the vanguard in the fight for socialism. We hope for this and will have to work for it. This role will emerge through practice in the class struggle rather than through public relations announcements. In the very essence of this newer type of party there must be the notion of building power for the dispossessed, and uniting in struggle with other forces in the progressive social movements.

Especially in the world we now live and organize in, the new party will need to be truly internationalist, in three respects. First, it needs to commit to actively combating racism, national oppression and white supremacy. Racism and national oppression have flourished again in the era of neo-liberalism and once again increased the historical tensions along racial and national lines within the U.S. working class. A new party also will need to unite with currents of revolutionary nationalism and struggle to welcome revolutionary nationalists into its ranks.

Internationalism also means a commitment to support and embrace other revolutionary and democratic struggles against imperialism. These include those struggles conducted among the nations of the South as well as those advanced by oppressed nations and nationalities within countries of the North. (The terms South and North offer another way of expressing the contradiction between the formerly colonized, under-developed countries disproportionately in the Southern Hemisphere and the indus-

trialized countries of the West and East.) Our internationalism actively advances the struggle for national self-determination as part of the struggle for socialism. Upholding the national rights of oppressed people within U.S. borders, the new party will organize for a self-determination that is part of the process of opposing imperialism and also of reconstructing relations between nations and people on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Neo-liberal policies have resulted in great damage to the environments, economies, and social structures of the nations and peoples of the South. Neo-liberalism has, as well, rendered whole populations marginal to the future envisioned by the large corporations that dominate the planet. A true newer type party--the party of the dispossessed will surely align itself with these peoples and advance and support their struggles here in the U.S.

Our internationalism, however, does not stop there. It must also include a rejection of Eurocentrism in much of what parades itself as being Marxist theory. The crisis of socialism is certainly a global crisis, but it is especially a crisis of theoretical fashions and organizational standards emanating from Eurocentric experience. Our internationalism encourages us to reflect on social practice alongside comrades in the countries of the South. We can learn from their experience in revolutionary and democratic struggles. Internationalism requires willingness to learn from the contributions of Third World revolutionaries to Marxism, as well as an interest and willingness to undertake examinations of other revolutionary currents, and the theories so elaborated.

Create An Alternative to Neo-Liberalism and New Deal Nostalgia

In the current situation, we gain little by drawing a definitive line between those who believe that this party of the dispossessed will be a Marxist-Leninist party, or a party of some other type, such as the Brazilian Worker's Party. The definition of a Marxist-Leninist party has evolved in countless different directions, including parties ranging from the

Worker's Party of Korea [North], at one extreme, to the South African Communist Party and the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation, on to the Workers (Communist) Party of Norway.

Advocates of traditional democratic centralist, cadre organizational frameworks will need to define to what extent such a party addresses or ignores the crisis of socialism. For their part, those advancing some other notion of a party of the dispossessed have the obligation to define its class character and its role in the struggle for socialism. Given the present state of the Left in this neo-liberal era, we can safely observe that the greatest danger for such a party of the dispossessed is falling into one or another variety of social democracy.

The specific nature of the party will need to be worked through in the course of an extended discussion, debate, analysis, and summing up of practice. We need to rely on those currents within Marxism that show willingness to learn from each other and from earlier socialist experience in order to assert a Marxism that is truly revolutionary, democratic and internationalist. A party of this type and emerging in this way will necessarily be multi-tendenced, the parameters of which must be defined over time. We need a broad front to address the crisis of socialism, and we need unity to tackle the collective lack of clarity among revolutionary Marxists.

This organizational task is simply beyond the resources of any one organization or grouping of individuals. We therefore must share a willingness to engage in broad debate even among forces that were, in the past, at odds with one another. Such a debate will need to take place both within the context of a party, as well as within the broader Left. Socialists, agreeing to certain basic principles and strategy, need to create terms of engagement that can exist within a party formation. This approach recognizes contributions to revolutionary theory from tendencies in addition to Marxism-Leninism, such as those coming from theorists of the women's, oppressed nationality, lesbian and gay, and environmental movements.

Political conditions today also argue for a multi-tendenced party. We need a mass political alternative to both neo-liberalism and New Deal nostalgia. The crisis facing working people, and the collapse of various reformist alternatives, demand a coherent Left opposition/alternative. Such an alternative must be capable of engaging in broad struggles and not simply serving as a propaganda sect. Engagement at the level of mass politics necessitates an organization/party that is multi-tendenced, while nevertheless being socialist. It assumes that many issues of debate will need to be postponed while at the same time ensuring that we have sufficient unity to engage in the various aspects of the class struggle.

The strategy of Left Refoundation envisions an approach to party building that contrasts, in its fundamentals, with approaches taken in earlier periods. Superficially, there may appear to be certain similarities. But at the level of theory, Left Refoundation proceeds from the notion of practice—reflection/ summation--new practice. Reflection and summation drive the process when they result in the theorizing of experiences, individual and collective. This is not novel, at least as a stated position. However, Left Refoundation wishes to translate this approach into a strategy for party building that begins with acknowledging the experience, politics and theories that already exist among anti-capitalist activists of various stripes. No one group possesses the Holy Grail. Therefore the approach we propose includes the following elements:

Identify cores of anti-capitalist activists: We need the support of dedicated but often isolated groupings of left-oriented activists organizing in all the contemporary social movements, but particularly those grounded and based within the working class sector of those movements, especially the oppressed nationality movements. Such activists may or may not be part of formal organizations. This main aspect of the project does not consist of uniting existing organizations, although it does not preclude that from happening.

Seek sponsors of the Refoundation project. This step is of critical importance. The Refoundation

project ideally needs institutional sponsors who are willing to help build it (and its various components). Such co-sponsors might be other organizations or institutions, or a set of respected individuals. In any case, ideally, there is organizational support.

Commit to a structured, multi-year engagement among participants in this project. This engagement needs to include political discussion, study, debate, summation and the identification of points of theoretical and practical unity. An example of this would be to have a specific several-month project of addressing the lessons to be drawn from the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the crisis of socialism. What does such a collapse mean for a vision of socialism? How do we get to socialism? How does class struggle play itself out during socialism? What is the relationship between political liberties, democracy and workers' power? (These questions are not exclusive.)

Another example might be a specific examination of the national liberation movements in the U.S. (at the general level), followed or accompanied by a specific examination of particular freedom struggles. What, for example, does the crisis of the national liberation struggles internationally affect domestic national movements? How should one view nationalism in the era of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment? Where should the work of the party of the dispossessed be concentrated? How does the party achieve the class, racial and gender composition necessary to truly represent the dispossessed?

Launch coordinated national organizing projects: Intersecting the process of study, reflection and debate would be engagement in collective, practical projects. Such projects should be consistent with the principles of unity that bring these various forces and individuals together. They should also not be grandiose, e.g., running our own 3rd party candidate for the U.S. presidency, but should be rooted in the actual work of the people involved. Joint action aims to have a practical impact on day-to-day struggles as well as serve as a means to learn from and implement the outcome of theoretical dis-

ussions. This work should also be summarized and factored into the discussions that are taking place.

Work to build the Black Radical Congress, the New Raza Left, and the Asian Left Forum illustrate some of the objectives of the refoundation approach, including the centrality of the national movements to the Left refoundation analysis. Also the approach taken and advocated in the construction of these initiatives flows from a view that the rebuilding of the Left generally, and the Lefts in the national movements in particular, are not the province of one ideological or political tendency alone.

As our forces gain strength, areas of joint action may expand to include issues such as municipal and county political power; the transformation of national trade unions into strengthened centers of resistance; community-centered public education, to name a few. These will have to be carefully chosen.

This multi-year project needs to be pulled together at some future date. Those who entered into the project would, of course, need to understand and agree that this project was not to be an abstract Left unity effort, but is aimed at constructing an organization/party. At the end of the period of engagement, the entire process would need to be summarized. Such a summation would aim to determine whether the basis exists to make the transition to such a party. We will need to know when unity has been reached on a real strategy; whether we have a critical mass of people; whether we have unified on an appropriate organizational form; when we have achieved bottom lines of political and operational unity.

The approach advanced here borrows from and seeks to utilize popular education as, indeed, it is intended to be used: as a "pedagogy of the oppressed," not a series of disconnected educational techniques. A Freirian approach to this project aims to create a democratic dialog among forces interested in the construction of a party of the dispossessed.

Begin With Broad Socialist Unity

What sorts of forces should be approached for this refoundationist project? Specifically, around what

would people need to agree? To some extent this must be an open question and one subject to intense negotiations. Nevertheless, the following are some basic outlines:

Recognize the need to fight for socialism. While perhaps continuing to disagree on particulars, we need to agree that we seek a social system in which the working class is the leading class, the struggle against capital continues, political democracy is enhanced, and political debate is allowed within the bounds of a constitution. At the very least, there should be a consensual definition of socialism premised on the notion of class power as opposed to utopian views or those views that downplay class and class struggle.

Recognize the strategic significance of the struggle against racism and white supremacy and for national self-determination. Signatories to the refoundation project should not be held to a specific definition of particular oppressed nationalities. But all should commit to principled debate on these questions, and recognize that the struggle against white supremacy is central to building a broad, popular bloc that can achieve power.

Recognize that the struggle against male supremacy and for the emancipation of women is not an add-on struggle, but is part of the strategic formulation for the construction of socialism. This is not a struggle restricted to formal, democratic rights--though such a struggle is profoundly important--but is a struggle against the patriarchal roles and power which have consistently undermined progressive struggles and projects, including the struggles for national liberation and socialism. The struggle for gender equity must also be a struggle that recognizes the profound democratic issue contained in the lesbian and gay movements. We must build a movement that challenges heterosexism as well as other forms of traditional male supremacy, both within the movement itself, and in the larger society.

Recognize the immediate and long-term importance of democracy. The refoundation project must assume a level of unity among its constituents that the socialism for which we fight will be revolutionary and democratic. In addition, the struggle for consistent democracy within the context of capitalism also must reflect the democratic vision we hold for the future. This does not mean that we should neglect the nature of the capitalist state: at the point at which a socialist, anti-capitalist, or anti-imperialist movement takes off, it will face vicious repression. Operating in an environment of repression will, by necessity, change the forms of organization necessary in order to prosecute any struggle.

Recognize the priority of connecting the struggle for the environment and the struggle against capitalism. The refoundation project itself embraces the struggle to save the environment and is willing to criticize the approach to economic construction that took place in the states of Socialism I, where the environment was ignored, and often destroyed.

Recognize that our project must be internationalist. We recognize that the United States is an em-

pire and adhere to the concept advanced by Samora Machel: "Internationalism is strategy, not charity."

Recognize our need to base Refoundation within the working class and sees the working class as its home. Without denying other sectors of social movements, the refoundation project must strive to be a working class project, that is, a project of and for the working class!

Unidos y Organizados, Venceremos/United and Organized, We Will Win!

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