



## Theses on Left Refoundation

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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. Other documents related to the split are available [here](#).]*

**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.

<https://frso.org/posts/theses-on-left-refoundation/>