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## 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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## Frequently Asked Questions about the Freedom Road Socialist Organization

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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’an 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 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 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**

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## **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.

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## **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

Posted on [Wednesday January 27th, 2010](#) by [Freedom Road Socialist Organization](#)

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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