

# Which Way Is Left?

Theory, Politics, Organization and 21st-Century Socialism



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

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

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

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

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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1. For more information about FRSO/OSCL, go to [www.freedomroad.org](http://www.freedomroad.org)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The Neo-liberal Authoritarian State

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

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

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



right-wing rule including 20th-century fascism<sup>4</sup> in many important respects, some of which are: (1) an evolution rather than an abrupt termination of democratic rule and rights; (2) no organized mass movement in power calling for an end to constitutional democracy; and (3) no split within the *power bloc*<sup>5</sup> that cannot, at this time, be resolved through legal means.

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

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

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

The dissolution of the welfare state and the emergence of neo-liberalism (and the neo-liberal authoritarian state) have brought profound confusion within the ranks of the popular movements. Most of the established movements in the US to one degree or another found themselves shaped within the context of the New Deal welfare state. As the New Deal consensus<sup>6</sup> unraveled, the progressive social movements found it increasingly difficult to find their bearings. At each moment a loss here or a loss there was seen as a temporary setback, rather than as the reality that the entire New Deal consensus and the welfare state were coming to an end.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Neo-liberal Globalization, Resistance and the Left

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The left popular movements

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

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

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

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

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

### New-Left armed national liberation movements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The South African Communist Party

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

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

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



## The new Latin American electoral left

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

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

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

### Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela

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

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

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

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

## The Crisis of Socialism: A Short History

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Stalinism and the Soviet Union

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

women should be equal breadwinners to men and could work in jobs traditionally reserved for men (like doctors). The Trotskyists' critique largely focused on the period after Leon Trotsky<sup>14</sup> lost power within the Soviet party. Their critiques ranged from seeing the Soviet state as a deformed workers' state to those who saw it as a form of bureaucratic collectivism, techno-bureaucracy, or state capitalism.

## Maoism

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Interactions between Marxism and the social movements

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### Castro and the Cuban Model

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

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

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

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

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

## The Dispersed Left in the US

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

- An inconsistent, and in some cases outright incorrect, underplaying of the question of race and national oppression in the US
- An often mechanical and superficial understanding of male supremacy and issues of gender relations
- An overestimation of the potential for revolutionary struggle during the 1970s (and for some groups, for every year since then); also a corresponding failure to understand the complexities of the political Right<sup>16</sup>
- A lack of understanding of the nature of the US political state and the types of left organization(s) necessary to build a struggle that ultimately results in revolution
- A failure to truly integrate an internationalist perspective into the ongoing work of the respective projects

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Lack of trust among organizations
- Very stretched resources among small organizations
- Mountain-stronghold/comfort zone mentality
- Lack of attention to the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory<sup>18</sup>

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

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

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

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

### Why a party?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### What is a party?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Some lessons from history

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

- **We need to engage in critical summation.** While Marxism serves as a guide to theory and practice, it does not provide the answer to each and every question confronting humanity. Marxism, for instance, does not have a theory of the personality, and never set out to have one. Nevertheless, historical materialism and materialist dialectics<sup>22</sup> provide a means to identify and answer many of the complicated questions facing the social movements. Historical materialism serves as a social science that, as with other social sciences, does not provide ready-made answers

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## So, Where Do We Go from Here?

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

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

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

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

From this, we would suggest:

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

These options are not in contradiction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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