

# Building Political Power: 2016-2018 FRSO Strategic Orientation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This document presents FRSO's three-year (2016-2018) strategic orientation, as well as the analysis and strategic thinking the plan is based on. Its purpose is to translate our 2016 Main Political Report's general analysis of conditions into a specific plan of action. It should be read by every member of the organization and discussed by every district.
- 1.2. The MPR argued that the united front we need to build is composed of three layers: the strategic alliance at the core, progressive allies, and tactical allies. ***The argument in this document is that the key intervention for advancing the struggle and building the united front in this period is developing the strategic alliance through the building of independent political organization.*** Further, we argue that in order for this to happen, our organization must promote a deepening of theory and practice around building independent political power and organization.
- 1.3. This is not a task separate from building the united front against the New Confederacy. Rather, our task is to strengthen the united front by developing the strategic alliance such that it can win over our progressive allies and take tactical advantage of splits among our enemies in order to isolate and defeat them one by one. Without an independent political instrument it would be impossible to lead the struggle through its various twists and turns and at the same time maintain initiative and carry out struggles against neoliberal Democrats within the united front. Building this independent political organization is essentially building the capacity of the strategic alliance to assert its leadership.
- 1.4. This strategic orientation is also *not* a rejection of red mass work (RMW), the central task of the 2013-16 period. The purpose of that focus last period was the rebuilding the unit and mass work foundations of our organization and, out of this work, to produce grounded strategy. While much work remains to be done to implement RMW in all our districts, the 2013-16 strategic orientation grows directly out of the theory and practice of RMW. Even as building independent political organization becomes the focus of the organization's work, RMW remains foundational.
- 1.5. ***Our central task in this period is to develop and unite the advanced fighters—in our mass work as well as the rest of the Left—around the necessity of political organization and strategy.*** Further we must do so in a way that, whenever possible, links the building of political power with building a movement towards socialism. Our organization must promote on the Left and among progressive forces our particular vision and program for political power, led by the strategic alliance and rooted in the South.

- 1.6. While this document aims to guide planning for the next three years, its strategic orientation is not limited to just three years. In fact it orients us to an entire political period, likely lasting a decade or more, and determined by two factors, one external to the Left and one internal. Externally this period is defined by the main enemy: the New Confederacy. Internally the period is defined by the need for independent political organization. As long as these two factors define the external and internal situation, our strategic orientation will likely hold. The transformation of these factors is not a three-year task, but at the end of the three year period, we will revisit our analysis of the political situation, our implementation plans, and changes in conditions.
- 1.7. During this three-year period, however, there are three ways that our organization can make decisive contributions that move this work forward:
  - (1) **At the national level** by carrying out a systematic campaign which promotes the question of political power and connects the question of political power to the struggle for socialism through a speaking tour, printed literature, social media, etc. We have already seen how a similar process around *Which Way Is Left?* had a very important influence, not only on the Left but also with the advanced fighters in our mass work. This time, our task is to promote “the question of political power”.
  - (2) **In North Carolina and potentially Tennessee** launching new chapters of a mass party/independent political organization. This will provide an opportunity for our organization to concentrate resources in places where we can experiment, model, and innovate around the building of protagonist/participatory political power that defeats our enemies, wins concrete improvements, and nurtures the development of the germs of a socialist society. This will also allow our organization to enter into deep dialogue and partnership with MXGM and other Leftists around the country who are experimenting with the building of political power (e.g. working people’s assembly projects).
  - (3) **At the district level** using the national campaign as leverage, our cadre will engage the advanced in our mass work and/or peripheries around the question of political power and the current balance of forces. Through systematic dialogue, engagement with the national campaign and travel to our IPO pilot project(s), our cadre will promote both thinking and practice among the advanced that deepens mass consciousness around the New Confederacy, the Neoliberal Democrats, and the need to construct a united front—a Third Reconstruction—around the leadership of the strategic alliance and a political strategy and program.
- 1.8. Carrying out this kind of plan will require a political consolidation of our membership around a line for building political power. Every cadre in our organization must develop a deeper understanding of what is meant when we say that we are fighting to build the independent political power of the strategic alliance. And, our cadre must be able to make the link between the immediate tactics and struggles for political power with the deeper struggle for socialism.
- 1.9. This is not only a question of theoretical study. It is also a question of *applying* theory to the conditions in each district in order to develop concrete thinking about what the fight for power should look like in their state and in their cities within that state. Thus, the first step in our plan will be an internal cadre development and district-level analysis/planning around a

coherent understanding of politics, power, and strategy for socialism. Only on this firm foundation will it be possible to launch the national campaign, the IPO pilot(s), and systematically develop the advanced around the questions of political power. As the work continues, ongoing theoretical and political development will be necessary to strengthen our cadre's practice and maintain our politics and strategy.

1.10. If this work of consolidation and implementation of the proposed national plan is carried out, we will accomplish a number of important breakthroughs for our organization:

- (1) We will see large-scale growth in membership. The elements of this plan lay the foundation for recruitment, both in districts that already have strong mass work and direction and for districts who are struggling. The cadre development and district planning aspects are the ground work and the national tour and campaign on the question of political strategy and organization will help attract and engage potential new recruits to grow districts and even found new ones.
- (2) We will strengthen the national coherence of the organization. Comrades will no longer feel that they are off on their own or simply the members of a local district organization. Whether it is through their implementation of the district level aspect of the plan, through helping to develop and carry out the national campaign, or participating in the IPO work, members will all be working in a unified direction. Members will be able to say clearly what FRSO does and why it is essential.
- (3) We will have clear mechanisms for translating our line/theory into practice and testing it through dialogue with the advanced and implementation on the ground.
- (4) We will build our reputation and influence on the Left and in progressive circles. As a driving force in the conversation about political strategy and organization and through our the example of our on the ground projects FRSO will be seen as a key movement actor.

1.11. The remainder of the document is dedicated to spelling out what was briefly summarized in this introduction:

**Section 2: The Question of Political Power** explains what we mean by the term “political power” and why we think it is so necessary in this moment.

**Section 3: Two, Three, Many Jacksons** draws on the inspiring effort of the Jackson Plan and the Lumumba election to draw out a distinct vision for fighting for political power as opposed to simply fighting for reform or resistance. We put particular attention on the elements of self-determination and revolutionary approaches to building power.

**Section 4: The Life of the Party** outlines an initial skeleton for building political power based on the Jackson Plan's focus on the issues of self-determination, participatory democracy, and solidarity economics, but adds to this our organization's line on the strategic alliance, as well as the need for an independent political *organization* to build struggle and power both inside and outside of government.

**Section 5: Political Power & The Struggle Against the New Confederacy** connects the need to build political power with the MPR's analysis that the main enemy in this period is the New

Confederacy. It also re-presents the MPR's analysis of the central role that controlling state level governments plays in the power of the New Confederacy and the necessity for our forces to move towards contesting at this level.

## 2. THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL POWER

- 2.1. What is political power? Political power is the relative ability of an alliance of forces to implement its program for the organization of society in the face of competing alliances and programs. Political struggle lifts movements and organizations beyond specific issues or constituencies and puts forward an overall plan for society as a whole.
- 2.2. Most Left organizing in the US, however, functions at the level of resistance and/or reform around specific issues. People take on campaigns—living wages, civilian review boards of police, etc.—and put pressure on decision-makers to win victories that otherwise would not be conceded. In these fights the various sections of the people fight for their direct self-interests in a concrete situation and against a specific target. This level of struggle is essential. It is the way that people are brought into motion and begin to get radicalized.
- 2.3. However, resistance and reform struggle, no matter how militant their tactics, have their limits. Why? Because specific issues are ultimately only battle lines in an overall struggle for political power—a struggle over who will govern. Only by understanding where issue fights fit in the broader relationship between all classes and peoples—that is in the realm of politics and the state—does it become possible to understand and then to organize to overturn the system that we are fighting. This is precisely what Lenin argued in *What Is To Be Done?*:

Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected — unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social-Democratic point of view and no other. The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class-consciousness, unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events to observe every other social class in all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata, and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention, observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social-Democrats; for the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up, not solely with a fully clear theoretical understanding — or rather, not so much with the theoretical, as with the practical, understanding — of the relationships between all the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life...Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere

of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.<sup>1</sup>

- 2.4. Further, it is not enough to just “call out” the system. In order to build a united front capable of defeating the enemy, we must put forward our own program and alternative. This is what we mean by the political struggle: *contesting not only specific policies, but the way that society and the relations between classes—the economy and government—are organized*. And this cannot be merely theoretical. The political struggle involves both exposing and struggling against the enemy’s political program *and* putting forward our own alternative that points the way towards socialism, even as it has to begin with the current balance of forces.
- 2.5. The necessity of moving from immediate struggles to the struggle for political power was the thrust behind the working people’s assemblies, one of the main solutions to the crisis of organized labor proposed in Bill Fletcher & Fernando Gapasin’s *Solidarity Divided*. In that book, the authors argue that organized labor needed to shift from a focus on representing its members to representing the working class as a whole. In order to do so, the struggle would need to move from the question of only struggling with specific employers to building a united front in a city to contest for the way that government and development were organized in that city.
- 2.6. Many of the advanced fighters and thinkers in the social movement Left have also seen the need to expand the struggle from issue-based struggles to struggles that cohere blocs/alliances around an alternative vision for governing, beginning at the local level. Such thinking has informed projects from Virginia New Majority and its shift to focusing on local elections to the San Francisco and Oakland Rising Projects. Writing about both the lessons and the potential for New Working Class Organizations (NWCO’s) to lead the way towards the building of Left political power, Jon Liss & David Staples had the following to say:

“Our point is that the numerous struggles and small-scale victories of NWCO groups are not linked to a larger-scale agenda and remain isolated exceptions and not general rules...”

“The work of most NWCO groups has been centered in specific communities and/or nationalities. Each of us has tended to look at “the community” as the center of the universe. All projects and programs and actions are stereotypically viewed through this filter. This has tended to lead to a lot of good local work that adds up to a relatively small collective impact. Our power, as a result, has been considerably less than the sum of our parts. We generally limited ourselves to local matters, or the concerns of one factory or one worksite, or the plight of one neighborhood. With very few exceptions, we did not address global concerns or pressure capital in a way that actually challenged ideological and political hegemony. Few groups thought of power beyond a very limited framework. At the same time, there was no central organization, political party, or network to

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<sup>1</sup>Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, “Political Exposures And “Training In Revolutionary Activity” and “The Working Class as Vanguard Fighter for Democracy”

coordinate these “community-based” efforts...

“The NWCO grouping is not collectively in a position where we can effectively challenge head on the commanding heights of the U.S. government and economy. Locally and regionally, however, with patient work, we can position ourselves to develop an alternative logic for government and begin, neighborhood by neighborhood, municipality by municipality, and jurisdiction by jurisdiction to build local blocs and challenge the political and economic hegemony of capital nationally and internationally. Partly this is a matter of finding a scale of struggle in sync with our current capacities...

“Collectively, we “multinational peoples against empire” must develop a common agenda and framework for our NWCO; ultimately, we must collectively seek to promulgate a new “common sense” for our times and in our regions. Finally, we must break out of our provincialism and communitarianism and explain our views and work in ways that undercut the dominant ideology. A majoritarian movement at the local level requires its own worldview – its own common sense. To transform from a widely scattered movement against the worst outrages of early twenty-first century neo-liberal capitalism and militarism and into a movement for regional socialism, we need to develop an alternative system of governance and living – an alternative “governmentality” as Michel Foucault put it. By this, we do not mean appointing our friends and families to municipal jobs, or changing a few faces within any given administration, or gaining a “seat at the table,” but rather thinking out and implementing a new system of power and new relationship of government to collective life and death issues. Drawing on practice in Brazil, Italy, the United States, and elsewhere, NWCO can and must develop new principles of governmentality. Such a program would have to provide an alternative to the dominant worldview, materially and qualitatively improve people’s lives through real changes, and by creating “capital” indigestion in the belly of the beast actually provide the best solidarity possible to the millions around the world engaged in liberatory struggle. Particularities matter, but the conscious and collective development of a municipal program raises the stakes – for us and for capital. We are, in practice, already building a “new majority” – and we owe it to ourselves and the women and men struggling for liberation around world to struggle for nothing less.”<sup>2</sup>

2.7. Starting from similar critical reflections, advanced leaders of mass struggle around the country have been experimenting with capturing local government positions as a means for advancing their struggles: the Socialist Alternative running people for office in Seattle, the New Lynn coalition in Massachusetts, the Chicago Teacher’s Union’s efforts to build independent political power, etc. However, from our perspective, the vision of the Jackson Plan in Mississippi offers important inspiration because of its focus on dual power, self-determination, and long-term radical social transformation.

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2 Liss & Staples, “New Kids on the Historic Bloc: Worker’s Centers & Municipal Socialism”

### 3. TWO, THREE, MANY JACKSONS

*“The Jackson Plan is an initiative to apply many of the best practices in the promotion of participatory democracy, solidarity economy, and sustainable development and combine them with progressive community organizing and electoral politics. The objectives of the Jackson Plan are to deepen democracy in Mississippi and to build a vibrant, people centered solidarity economy in Jackson and throughout the state of Mississippi that empowers Black and other oppressed peoples in the state.”*

3.1. In 2013 Chokwe Lumumba ran for mayor of Jackson, MS and electrified the US Left. It was certainly not the first time that a Leftist had run and won an elected office. And given the US Left’s suspicious relationship to elections, it certainly wasn’t the possibility of winning an office that was exciting people. The real reason that people were excited about the Lumumba election was that it was the tip of the spear for a comprehensive strategy—the Jackson Plan—for putting the Left politics of self-determination and people’s power into a contest for governmental control of a city. In other words, the Lumumba campaign dared to contest local capitalist leadership of a city by presenting the people of Jackson with an alternative program based on Left politics, but rooted in a united front practice.

3.2. In our view, the Jackson Plan is unique in its combination of a number of crucial elements:

- (1) **People’s Assemblies:** the heart of the Jackson Plan is the development of People’s Assemblies, geographically-based institutions where people in a specific city ward organize to analyze and address their problems through projects and campaigns, including issue fights and electoral campaigns. These organs of direct democracy are designed to operate autonomously as vehicle for building independent power and consciousness for Black and other oppressed communities.
- (2) **Comprehensive Electoral Strategy:** here the Plan aims to build an independent political vehicle/party capable of building radical voting blocs as well as a network of progressive officials. The purpose is to try to negate the repressive power of the state and limit the influence of transnational capital locally while creating openings for struggle and restoring the commons/public sector.
- (3) **Dual Power Politics:** the Jackson Plan articulates a clear, Left view of the question of political power and the state: it is necessary to contest within the existing state through issue/policy fights and the capture of government offices *and* at the same time to be building institutions of participatory (what Harnecker would call protagonist) democracy that are independent of the existing state and seek to transcend it.
- (4) **Self-Determination Politics:** in addition to its focus on building dual power, the Jackson Plan focuses on doing this among Black people in the Black Belt south specifically. The analysis is that the US state structure is not merely capitalist, but *colonial/racial* (or white supremacist). The goal of building dual power is not simply to contest neoliberalism’s repression, gentrification, and austerity, but also to challenge the structural racism of the state.
- (5) **Solidarity Economy:** finally, the Jackson Plan seeks to nourish a local solidarity economy, specifically through the building of co-ops. Through the Cooperation Jackson project they

are working first to build a housing co-op. The long term goal, however, is to provide an alternative to the capitalist organization of the economy.

- 3.3. In summarizing their approach the authors of the Plan articulated it as having three pillars, two political and one economic. The “combination of building and exercising dual-power: building autonomous People’s Assemblies and critical engagement with the state via independent party politics—[these] are the two fundamental political pillars of the Jackson Plan”. The third element is a “critical long-term commitment to build a local Solidarity Economy that links the regional and national Solidarity Economy networks to advance the struggle for economic democracy”.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.4. The fact that the Jackson Plan was launched in Jackson, MS is not just a reflection of MXGM’s commitment to Black liberation. It also reflects a sharp analysis of the balance of forces. The authors write that “Black Belt regions with mid-sized cities like Jackson with similar race and class demographics” are the places that have “the greatest potential for success given the current balance of forces in the US, primarily because these cities don’t possess the same degree of consolidated transnational capital to contend as do larger cities”. This aligns with our organization’s analysis of the South/Sunbelt as a critical region because of the combination of the progressive, majority oppressed nationality bases in the southeast and southwest *and* because of the relative weakness of the local ruling classes in the urban areas as compared to “global cities”.
- 3.5. Some comrades, when they hear us talk about contesting for government positions and using elections as a key element of our strategy (and not just a sometimes tactic) get very concerned. They think that what we are proposing is that socialism can be legislated through elections or without overthrowing the existing capitalist state. They think we are spreading the illusion that capturing elected or administrative positions is the same thing as having political supremacy—confusing limited *offices* with *state power*.
- 3.6. We acknowledge and believe it is crucial to understand the difference between state power (political supremacy) and the occupying of certain positions—and subordinate ones at that—within government. And we believe the approach in Jackson points towards a revolutionary way of engaging the existing capitalist state. We must not confuse occupying a tactically advantageous position within the government with being able to take over government as a whole as a means for implementing socialism. There are at least three facts that will keep state power in the hands of the capitalist class even as we engage in struggles over government positions: (1) they will continue to control the state and federal layers of government not to mention the courts, federal reserve, etc. (2) they will continue to control the military/repressive forces, and (3) they will still control the means of production and therefore the major resources needed to run society.
- 3.7. Having acknowledged this, we believe that too many comrades concerned about the illusions and limits of governmental positions have not grasped the real uses of contesting and occupying positions on this terrain of struggle. The reality is that a great many important

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3 MXGM, *The Jackson-Kush Plan*



decisions get made by government bodies. And not only this, but elections, when led by an independent political organization, are a tremendous means through which people become politically conscious. Why? Because in the course of elections people become deeply and precisely acquainted with all the different forces who are vying for power as well as the different social forces whose leadership is being contested for. This process is incredibly rich with educative experience for the raising of political class consciousness.

- 3.8. What's more, the arena of government is also a place where the various sections of the ruling class come into conflict with one another and is therefore a place where it becomes possible to pit one section of the enemy against the other as well as to win sections of the progressive middle strata to our demands or program. As organizers we do this around our issues in every one of our campaigns. Understood from this angle, every campaign is essentially a united front effort to divide the enemy and win a majority of allies (strategic or tactical) to our side. The arena of government is a critical place for waging this struggle and, as mentioned earlier, for educating the masses about the interests and nature of the system and other political forces. It is only through this kind of thoroughgoing struggle and education that it becomes possible to expose (read: isolate) the ruling class and win mass support for revolutionary transformation. Why should we only use this method when fighting for issues? Should we not also use it in a systematic political strategy?
- 3.9. Further, in our analysis, white supremacy is not some rootless ideology floating in the heads of white people. From its very origins *white supremacy has been a system organized and re-organized through the political system and political struggle*. From the invention of the white race and racial slavery to the racialization of Mexicans in the Southwest to Jim Crow to mass incarceration to attacks on voting rights and new forms of urban/suburban and political district gerrymandering and segregation, white supremacy and the struggle against it has and will continue to depend on the organization of racial relations through the political arena.
- 3.10. The struggle against white supremacy is not merely a struggle against discrimination, it is not (at its core) a struggle for democratic rights. While that is the initial form it often takes, the struggles of oppressed nationality peoples sooner or later run up against the fact that the "discrimination" they face is, in fact, woven into the very structures of the US political system: immigration law, political districts, the rights of the incarcerated, etc, etc. The liberal frame for thinking about the abuses of this system of political rule is to think of it as a problem of discrimination. But the communist view is to call it what it is: the concrete form that the ruling class organizes the political alliance of the white united front. Discrimination is the effect of the *political system* of what we call white supremacist national oppression. The systems of racial slavery, Jim Crow, Mexican coerced labor in the Southwest, and the exploitation of Asian labor in the West and Hawai'i were first and foremost *systems of political rule and alliances*.
- 3.11. As communists our answer to the question of national oppression is not to fight discrimination and for the granting of "equal rights". Of course we unite with such struggles, but because white supremacy is in fact the form of capitalist political rule in the US, it is impossible to abolish inequality and discrimination without completely transforming the US political system and the state it is based on. This is why we believe that the struggles of oppressed nationality peoples for freedom has a *revolutionary* impulse and an impulse

towards socialism that must merge with the revolutionary impulse in the struggle against capitalism.

- 3.12. When we call for critical engagement with the capitalist state as a necessary compliment to our work of building dual power institutions and maintaining an independent political party we are not talking about something trivial or unimportant. We are talking about entering into, taking advantage of, and making use of the very contradictions of US society. In states overwhelmingly controlled by the New Confederacy (e.g. Tennessee, Texas, etc.) the balance of forces may be such that what we need to do is to mount a campaign of mass defiance/resistance mostly from outside of government because the base does not exist to capture office in a way that allows us to govern or it is not the right use of resources (again, think of the ANC struggle to topple the apartheid regime). However, in places where the basis exists, the capture of government positions and the passage of structural reforms has the potential to open tremendous space for further class struggle, the strengthening of the strategic alliance, and the isolation and defeat of our enemies.
- 3.13. In the closing of the Jackson Plan the authors write: “We are also looking to inspire, encourage and support Jackson plans in other Black Belt regions of the South...We would hope that over time Jackson Plan Solidarity Committees throughout the Black Belt South would take up this call to action and build their own local political bases of support to engage in dual power initiatives that can link with the forces advancing the Jackson Plan to empower Black and oppressed communities in the South”.
- 3.14. This is precisely what the NEC proposes that our organization do. We believe that these three elements—building autonomous assemblies, critical engagement with the state, and long-term building of solidarity economy—are the three essential elements for building political power. And, we believe that the politics of self-determination are essential to this. In f
- 3.15. However, we also believe that FRSO has something to unique to add to the dual/political power experimentation in the South on the question of organizing an independent political party to critically engage the existing state *and* as an instrument for building the people’s assemblies. We will take up this question in the next section.

#### 4. THE LIFE OF THE PARTY

*In order for political action to be effective, so that protests, resistance and struggles are really able to change things, to convert insurrections into revolutions, a political instrument capable of overcoming the dispersion and fragmentation of the exploited and the oppressed is required... I envisage this political instrument as an organisation capable of raising a national project that can unify and act as a compass for all those sectors that oppose neoliberalism. As a space that directs itself towards the rest of society, that respects the autonomy of the social movements instead of manipulating them, and whose militants and leaders are true popular pedagogues, capable of stimulating the knowledge that exists within the people—derived from their cultural traditions, as well as acquired in their daily struggles for survival—through the fusion of this knowledge with the most all-encompassing knowledge that the political organisation can offer.*

## ***Marta Harnecker***<sup>4</sup>

- 4.1. What is a party? Most US Leftists and progressives think of two things when they hear “political party”: (1) they think about electoral machines built to mobilize voters and win elections, or (2) they think about a disciplined organization where members have a high level of political unity about how to overthrow capitalism. The first is an example of a *capitalist* party. The second is an example of a *cadre organization*, which sometimes (as in the case of Russia and China) is also a party. But there is a more general and much more useful definition of a party that we will use: *a party is an organization that allows a class (or alliance of classes) to unite and organize itself politically.*
- 4.2. Only interested in mobilizing voters for candidates (organizing the working class under the leadership of the ruling class), the Democratic Party leadership prefers to rely mostly on advertising, mail, and temporary election-time organizing infrastructure. They long ago abandoned the work of building locally (precinct) based mass organizations. As a result of this and their capitalist leadership, the Democrats can’t be a party for the working class and oppressed nationalities, nor for the broadly progressive people of this country.
- 4.3. When we call for the creation of a new IPO, we are not talking only about forming an electoral machine—though building an electoral machine is *one part* of what we are talking about. Nor are we calling for a Left cadre organization—though the support of Left organizations like ours will be necessary. Instead we are calling for the creation of an organization that can unite and lead the political struggle of the strategic alliance in this historical period. We want a truly mass organization, rooted in precinct-level organizational structures and, of course, people’s assemblies at the ward/district level. In this way the IPO will truly be *an instrument for fusing revolutionary politics with the leadership and everyday struggles of the people*, not just a voice-piece for Leftist cadre.
- 4.4. Our ultimate vision is an organization in the hundreds of thousands, rooted among Black and Brown communities and organized workers, based in but not limited to the South and Southwest. In other words, we imagine a political organization that unites in practice the strategic alliance and which, in turn, is able to operate nimbly as a leading force within a broader united front. This is particularly critical in a period like ours when US society is polarizing and militant sections of oppressed nationality communities and the working class—the Movement for Black Lives, Not1More and the fight against deportations, the Chicahgo Teachers' Union, etc.—are engaged in powerful protest and organizing. We need a political organization that can speak to, learn from, and advance the struggles already being led by the militant sectors of the strategic alliance.
- 4.5. The Jackson Plan clearly identifies the need for an independent political party. However, in our view, their view of the party is too narrowly conceived as a vehicle for electoral politics. In our view the party—the political organization—that we need is not only an electoral vehicle. While election campaigns *must* be a core component of what the party does, we see the party primarily as the organizational form that facilitates the cohering of the strategic alliance in

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4 Harnecker, “Insurrections or Revolutions: The Role of the Political Instrument”. *Ideas for Struggle*

practice and allows it to lead the broader united front. This difference of views (or perhaps emphasis) around the role of the political party may also be the reason why the comrades in Jackson have not focused on the building of a political party as the key task. Of course, this may also have been more of a practical decision based on time and resources. However, we want to highlight that for us, the question of political *organization* is key.

- 4.6. We view the political party as a key vehicle for both facilitating the integration of various sectors of struggle (living wage, affordable housing, police violence, contract negotiations, etc) into a single political force *and* for the construction of the people's assembly vehicles at the grassroots level. From this perspective the party we are talking about is not a cadre organization, like the Bolsheviks. It is more like a mass Left front organization, like the ANC during the struggle against apartheid in which trade unions, the communist party, and nationalist organizations all combined to fight against the regime of apartheid. Similarly, we believe that what we need is a political organization that can coordinate the struggle against first the New Confederacy and then neoliberalism as a whole.
- 4.7. In our view, we need a political party in order to build the people's assemblies, direct the engagement with the state, move forward the building of the solidarity economy, and train new layers of leaders and organizers. This doesn't mean that we think the party is everything. Rather we think that political parties are a necessary part of a political movement's ecosystem or infrastructure. Indeed, they can be thought of as the catalyst for these movements. We need assemblies and we need co-operatives and we need campaigns. But in order to coordinate these projects, we need a party that facilitates each of these as part of a coherent political project.
- 4.8. From what we can tell, MXGM/NAPO has functioned in many ways as the party organization driving the Jackson Plan. We believe, however, that while Left cadre organizations are essential contributors to the process, the political instrument that we need must be a mass Left organization that is bigger and broader than any of the Left organizations currently in existence and is united around a Left program and strategy, rather than around a specific ideological tradition.
- 4.9. What are the core components of an organization like this? A good place to start is Bill Fletcher's proposal for the elements of a neo-rainbow organization:
  - (1) to build an identifiable, accountable organization that operates inside and outside the Democratic Party;
  - (2) to have people of color in its core leadership, and a base among African-Americans and Latinos (not to the exclusion of others);
  - (3) to have a united-front approach to growth, encompassing diverse constituencies;
  - (4) to be pro-equality populist in its politics, embracing the struggles for racial, gender and economic justice as the cornerstones of democracy;
  - (5) to support a change in US foreign policy toward what can be called a democratic foreign policy;

(6) to root itself among working people and their issues, and develop a ground-up approach, involving ward and precinct organizations and a targeted effort to build political power in key strategic zones.<sup>5</sup>

4.10. Another useful way of thinking about this kind of political organization was written up by Anthony Thigpen (California Calls) and David Cantor (Working Families Party) around what they call building Independent Political Organizations (IPO's):

- By independent, we mean able to challenge corporate Democrats—ideologically, legislatively, and electorally—even as we help the Democrats defeat Republicans. How? By recruiting progressives to run in Democratic primaries against center-right incumbents, by paying early attention to candidate recruitment in open seats, and by focusing on defeating a few Republicans each cycle. We should be clear: This is not about taking over the Democratic Party. That won't work. They take you over, not the reverse. We propose building something outside the Democratic Party because we want to retain the ability to think like outsiders. We want—we need—to combine electoral work with community organizing, low-wage worker organizing, legislative lobbying, and even direct action. We have many allies inside the Democratic Party, but even they bow to caucus discipline and donor pressure. In their better moments, they will admit that they need pressure from the left, from outside the party, to stand up to the banks, the hedge funds, the insurance companies, the tech billionaires.
- By political, we mean having a core competency in electoral work and a public brand to accompany that work and advertise what we stand for. Unions and some community organizations and issue advocacy groups engage seriously in electoral politics. But even the best do not feature electoral work as their primary activity and core competency on a year-round basis. No one on the left has anything like the power of the Tea Party brand at his or her disposal. Politics is not just elections, of course, but ideas and issues, too. If we are serious about, say, increasing spending on schools and decreasing it on prisons, then we need to defeat one Democrat who is bad on this issue in a primary, defeat some Republicans when we need to flip a relevant chamber, and then tell the story repeatedly of how this happened. A new discourse on criminal justice and education will emerge. If we are on our game, we'll also place great new legislative staffers in the target states and deepen our relationships with leadership. Causes that should be easy (raising the minimum wage, say) will be easy, and we can save our energy for the harder fights.
- By organization, we mean a permanent, durable year-round operation of its own, not just an election-season coalition that borrows staff, resources, and expertise from its constituent groups. This means having a separate permanent staff, resources, relationships, campaigns, and activities that happen outside of and in addition to the work of the constituent organizations. This will require genuine power sharing, transparent rules, and independent money. No one organization or

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5 Fletcher & Glover, "Visualizing a Neo-Rainbow"

constituency can dominate the internal decision-making process, but all will need to exercise power commensurate with their contribution and potential.

If it sounds like a political party, that's not entirely wrong. Think of it as an "inside-outside" operation, and don't freak out that it will end up like the Greens in 2000. We are standing on the shoulders of the electorally minded organizers and lecturers for the abolitionists, the populists, the Non-Partisan League, the suffragists, the CIO, the civil-rights movement, and more. Like them, we want to change the rules of the game. We need to do to the Democrats what the Tea Party has done to the Republicans: build an effective organization that represents the Democrats' often-ignored political base.<sup>6</sup>

- 4.11. Inspired by the history of the Black liberation struggle and by the assertion of political independence in the Lumumba campaign, we have been talking about this new political instrument as the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP). We propose it, however, not as a legally separate political party, but rather as an independent political organization (probably a c4, but that along with the name needs to be the subject of more investigation and dialogue).
- 4.12. One comparison we have found helpful is thinking about the FDP/IPO as the Left version of the Tea Party. The Tea Party is clearly an independent force operating both inside and outside the Republican Party. It has its own funding sources, runs its own candidates against the "moderate" wing of the Republican Party, and pressures its elected officials to move its ALEC-drive agenda. But that isn't all. The Tea Party also functions inside and outside of the electoral and legislative arenas, engaging its members in publications, political education, protests, and cultural events. It trains activists, organizes journalists and lawyers, drafts policy, etc. The Tea Party does not shy away from challenging the wings of the Republican Party that they openly despise and fight with. They merely use the Republican Party as a vehicle for advancing their agenda. We want to operate with a similar level of independence and initiative in relation to the Democrats.
- 4.13. The actual working out of the details of party structure—legal structure, name, first campaign, etc.—should be undertaken over the course of 2016 inside of a newly constituted and focused Party Building Commission (PBC). However, we would like to outline what we believe to be the starting place for this discussion:
  - (1) **Basic party membership should be mass not cadre.** In other words, membership should be based on people agreeing with the party's program/platform, not on high-level ideological or participation criteria. People should be able to sign up to be party members online or when an activist knocks on their door. We need to build a truly *mass* organization that is able to educate, organize, and mobilize people to and through all of our struggles and tactics—from direct actions to elections.
  - (2) **The party needs to recruit its activists from the advanced fighters from every area of struggle.** We want to build an organization that unites the most developed fighters from every sector of struggle and brings them together across their issues and towards a larger

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<sup>6</sup> Cantor & Thigpen, "[Build An Independent Political Organization.](#)" *The American Prospect*, Nov 28, 2012.

political vision. The party would become a political home, uniting various sections of the college-educated/middle-strata Left as well as the Left that comes out of working class and oppressed nationality communities. During the last congress period a group of comrades proposed the creation of “mass socialist organizations” as a level of organization that would allow us to recruit a layer from among both independent Leftists and the most advanced from our mass work. As many of us have experienced ourselves, there are a significant number of activists and organizers who are looking for a political home but for whom the requirements of a communist cadre organization (both ideological and participation-wise) are too high. We believe that the FDP would play a similar role in capturing and cohering these active and decisive layers. The difference, of course, would be that members in the FDP would not need to be socialists, only aligned with our program.

- (3) **The party needs to be a space for different Left forces, individuals, and organizations to work together.** In other words it is a concrete project through which the Left can refound itself *in practice*, not as a Left unity process, but as a mass political project that unites in practice those sharing political/strategic unity that can be operationalized. We believe this should begin with MXGM/NAPO and continue from there. This also implies a view of the relationship between cadre/organized Left groups and the mass party. Our starting point for this is that of the relation between a party and a front which has individual membership. We will need to learn from the experiences of other multi-tendency Left organizations around the world.
- (4) **The party needs a communication organ.** In Lenin’s time this was a newspaper (Iskra). In our time we need to think about what the most effective means for communicating with our bases. The point of this organ is not as a platform for preaching at people. Rather, it must instead use current events to reflect and refine our line. For it is only through analyzing current events and culture that a line comes alive. If we want people to see the need for political power, if we want people to understand neoliberalism and the New Confederacy, then we need a vehicle that analyzes current events from this standpoint and which, in turn, can be used as a conversation piece between our cadre and the advanced and peripheries in the mass work. One potential means for something like this would be something like Huffington Post. The Huffington Post is a go-to place for progressive news. But in fact, only about 10% of its content is contributed by its own writers. The rest is all reposts, but reposts chosen because they fit the general politics of the editorial board. What if we had a site like that? And what if our districts printed articles that they then shared with the advanced in their mass work or did local events around?
- (5) **The party needs a platform** from which local chapters can build their specific struggles. We believe the starting place for that platform should be the principles of racial, economic, gender, environmental, and global justice.

4.14. Around what politics should our party be organized? What should its program be? The full answer to this question should be the subject of deep and concrete discussion over the course of 2016. However, we propose that the organization approve the following, drawn from Jackson, the work of Jon Liss, and the NEC’s own study and experience as a starting point for exploration by a new Party-Building Commission:

- (1) Political Vision & Values

- a. A Radical Democracy, A Society Where All Can Meet Their Full Potential
- b. System based on profits and greed and founded on racial and gender oppression is destroying our society
- c. Principles necessary for a just society
  - i. Racial Justice
  - ii. Economic Justice
  - iii. Gender Justice
  - iv. Environmental Justice
  - v. Global Justice
  - vi. Participatory Democracy

(2) Immediate Demands

- a. Opposing state violence: police accountability, deprioritizing marijuana, ending ICE raids, etc.
- b. Living Wages
- c. Progressive Taxation
- d. Human rights commissions with subpoena powers to oversee human rights enforcement in cities, especially in the areas of police, housing, and job discrimination
- e. Sanctuary city legislation
- f. Boycott, Divestment & Sactions in relation to international human rights violators (Israel, etc.)
- g. Participatory budgeting
- h. Land trusts & housing cooperatives that remove affordable housing from the market

(3) Structural Demands

- a. The re-writing of city charters to respect human rights and environmental justice<sup>7</sup>
- b. The re-writing of state constitutions to recognize the collective rights of Black, immigrant, and indigenous peoples and their political autonomy in regions where they are the majority<sup>8</sup>
- c. Democratic control of energy & a just transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy

4.15. These are only an initial starting point, a skeleton which will need to be fleshed out by the NEC & PBC. Indeed, these leadership bodies will need to study the question of parties and assemblies, both to clarify (a) the relation between a mass party (IPO/FDP) and a still necessary revolutionary party and (b) the forms, role, and possibilities of assemblies and their relationship to the mass and revolutionary party. The results of this study will inform our work and be shared with the membership as a whole. At the same time, conditions on the ground will also be given attention and shape national leadership's approach to implementing assembly and party-building work in districts.

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<sup>7</sup> The idea of replacing current city charters with human rights charters was taken from the Jackson Plan.

<sup>8</sup> The idea of calling constitutional conventions as a way to organize mass campaigns to restructure the rules of the game is taken from the struggle of indigenous and oppressed nationality self-determination struggles in Latin America as well as in Kurdistan.



## 5. POLITICAL POWER & THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE NEW CONFEDERACY

- 5.1. We have proposed that the central task of our organization to initiate in this period is building the struggle for political power as the key strategy for self-determination and socialism. But this is not an abstract “struggle”: it is a struggle against a concrete enemy in a concrete form. In the MPR we asserted that the immediate enemy of the progressive forces is the New Confederacy, the alliance of racist, Right wing forces and sections of the bourgeoisie that has used the federalist structure of the United States to exercise power even as a political minority.
- 5.2. We identified in the MPR that the crucial strategic theater of struggle right now as state government (not the “state” in Marxist sense, but the state as in North Carolina, or Florida, etc.). Why? Our immediate enemy—the New Confederacy—has seized power at this decisive governmental level, using the same strategic and tactical maneuvers that their ancestors (the Old Confederacy!) did. The US federalist structure, which gives undue national powers to the states, was of course engineered precisely to allow racist, ruling class forces to maintain their power; as a social structure it has continued to do this throughout US history. The Republican party, the principle political instrument of the New Confederacy, commands complete control of 24 states (that is, the party controls the governorship and the entirety of the legislature; the Democrats control 6).
- 5.3. The New Confederate control over states allows them to control majority politics through disproportionate representation in the US Senate and increasingly intractable control of the US House through gerrymandering. In this way they are a regime of national consequence, not just a regional enemy. (Take as an example of this the spread of Right-to-Work laws, and the impending Friedrichs decision. These are policies promoted by the New Confederacy, and while supported by neoliberal Democrats in some instances, those are instances only in which they have been enabled by the New Confederate agenda. The New Confederacy is using the states as both a test tube and a petri dish—experimenting with implementation of policy, and a headquarters from which to expand those policies across states.) Put another way, the New Confederacy sets the stage for many of the neoliberal Democrats’ otherwise abated agendas. In some areas of the organization it will thus make sense for comrades to focus energy on targeting neoliberal Democrats, but as a national organization we need to see the national picture: the New Confederacy has the initiative, is growing, and is the main national threat to our forces and people.
- 5.4. In those regions the New Confederacy does control, on the other hand, they are an enemy of a different kind than in those places where they do not: exercising their power not just to make and remake states along corporate, conservative, racial lines, but also to control municipalities. In states across the country, Republican legislatures are barring cities and municipalities from enacting progressive legislation, effectively vesting all power in the state house. (In Tennessee, for instance, Memphis passed a living wage ordinance; it was taken away by a law banning municipal wage and hour policies by the state legislature. Nashville passed a law barring discrimination on the basis of sexuality in metro hiring; this, too, was undone by the legislature. Etc.)

- 5.5. Our work must thus account for the decisive leveraging of power at the state level by our enemy. This is a critical strategic shift. Much of the social justice and organized Left is focused on community organizing and city-based work, and the labor movement is largely focused on specific workplaces or industries, or national-level policy. Our contention is that while of course we must start somewhere—the immediate launch of statewide projects would overwhelm us—we must also be building toward real contests for power at the state level.
- 5.6. This means raising the issue of state politics and the strategy of the New Confederacy in every area we talk about our plans; using tactics that target the New Confederate state blocs, like passing resolutions against the work of the state, bringing lawsuits, leading direct actions, etc.; and cultivating candidates from the local headquarters we build to be state level candidates. Insomuch as we are talking about a struggle for power against a regime which already has power, we must consistently tailor our tactics to overthrow that regime. We must avoid localism, which is an objective weakness in the current balance of forces.

## **6. TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION**

- 6.1. The work of the organization will proceed through three broad stages: (1) internal preparation, (2) campaign launch during which we launch the IPO/FDP pilot(s), the speakers tour, and organize delegations to the FDP sites; and (3) campaign consolidation during which we complete the campaign and consolidate the results into recruitment and plans for every district around how, based on local conditions, they can contribute to the building of independent political organization rooted in the strategic alliance. Flowing from this strategic orientation, the NEC will produce a workplan or workplans for districts and commissions.