

FRSO's Strategy for a New Historical Period

Adopted at the Freedom Road Socialist Organization's 2003 Congress

The main task of socialists in this period is to win a significant minority of the US population to oppose the program of planetary military control, or empire, which Bush and company are implementing. We must win a subset of this significant minority to be fully anti-imperialist. Anti-empire and then anti-imperialist practice — both of which include opposition to white supremacy within the US — is the key link for building a socialist movement in the US.

So many important changes have occurred since our last Congress that FRSO should no longer go about “business as usual.”

September 11, 2003 signaled the big change going on in the balance of forces between nations, between peoples, and between classes. It showed that the US — the strongest economic, military, political, ideological and cultural superpower the world has ever known — is vulnerable. Ascending and ascendant particularly since WWII, the US was held back by rivalry with the Soviet bloc. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, it seemed like the US would break totally free of the pack, and have a long and leisurely romp with unrestrained world supremacy. It would have free reign in the candy store of the world's markets, labor supply, and resources.

Only a dozen years in, that ruling-class dream smashed head-on into reality and is turning into a nightmare. In response, the US under Bush unveiled a new policy of preventive war to defend the empire and unleashed two wars in two years, two countries reduced to rubble. Open talk of “empire” is heard from the white (and colored) mouths in the white rooms of the White House. At home, at this high peak of power, US citizens are told to be afraid, be very afraid, and that for our mighty government to protect them, they must give up their civil protections. Open talk of the efficacy of torture is heard. Scapegoated for the attacks

on the US, people of color are targeted, and women face new immiseration. The bad news is that the mask and gloves are off.

The good news is that the mask and gloves are off. More people now see the inhuman face of capitalism more clearly. People in the US see that the fist hurts them too, rather than protecting them. The streets around the world have experienced more protest than in a quarter of a century. There is uneasiness about the disconnect between the words of democracy and deeds looking like fascism.

The Home Front

For the last several years, we have focused on building the left poles of the mass movements — in oppressed nationality communities, and in labor. We have also tried to unite consciously socialist forces. Unfortunately, what we have found is that it is hard to build left poles within movements when the movements themselves are very weak. There are many militant fight-backs and good organizing around specific issues — incarceration, affordable housing, welfare, police brutality, legalization, environmental justice — lots of struggle, but they do not yet a mighty river make. A lot of the organizing is being done out of non-profit organizations, which are not independent of the government — the 501c3 tax designation was set up as an instrument of control — or the private foundations that usually fund them. This often limits the political independence of many of these organizations. While the anti-war movement and the protests against neo-liberal trade policies were huge, they were mainly white, and have not yet produced strong sustainable organization. Even among anti-capitalists and anti-imperialists, the US ideology of individualism works in favor of anarchism, and identity politics is stronger than class analysis among younger activists. Some of the older

activists want the old days to return, with themselves still at the head. Personal stuff and small-group mentality also impeded the efforts to build united left poles or motion toward a party.

Opportunities for growth

The pre-Congress political report describes the incredible changes in the US and the world situation since our last Congress. As complex and difficult as things seem in terms of the ruling-class offensive, we think that there are very important opportunities for the growth of revolutionary socialism in this next period. Every day throughout the world we see a confirmation of the thesis that where there is oppression there is resistance. The new conditions open up new opportunities. In the past it was a stretch to talk about proletarian internationalism as we organized workers or community struggles. Today, it is not just possible, it is imperative! Last time, we focused on building the global justice movement within the US and did little coordinated solidarity work as an organization. Now, we must also look at where external forces can most put a hurt on US hegemony.

Our analysis of these conditions leads us to the conclusion that the focus of the work of revolutionaries in this next period should be on building a movement against the US empire, with a strong anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-patriarchy component within it. We recognize that we must increase our emphasis on combating patriarchy in general and its manifestations within our movements and organizations. By “anti-empire,” we mean folks who actively oppose US wars such as Iraq and the notion of the US being an aggressive military bully. By “anti-imperialist,” we mean people who understand that the wars such as the one against Iraq are an inevitable part of the capitalist system and can only end when that system is gone. We believe that FRSO can make important contributions to building such a movement, within the framework of our strengths and weaknesses.

Keeping in mind the need to be flexible because the political situation can always change in ways that we did not expect, we are proposing the following priorities and tasks for the next period. They are meant to be taken together as an overall plan of action to help us build an anti-empire and anti-imperialist movement:

1. Build the struggle against empire principally by strengthening and expanding work in base organizations of workers, oppressed nationalities, women, queer people, students and young people. This means showing the links between lavishing resources on the military while public schools and colleges, hospitals, clinics, and other public institutions that serve people of color and working people are shrunk and destroyed. It means explaining why male GIs coming back from battle are more likely to abuse their wives and kids. It means quoting the military recruiters who said on page 1 of the *New York Times* that they are “not worried” about their numbers, even when people are disenfranchised with war, because there are no other jobs for young people. And elements of the capitalist class want it that way. It means pointing out the connection between attacking dark peoples around the world, and the racial profiling, detentions, firing, and deportation of immigrants here at home, while filling up jails and prisons with poor people of color.

As a national organization we have not, in this last period, paid enough attention to the mass organizations in which comrades are based. Nor have we given enough thought as a national organization to developing new types of mass groups that may be appropriate for these times. We want to correct this mistake over the next three years, in a way that allows our mass work to lead both our theoretical work and our Left Refoundation work.

A couple of our districts can provide some positive examples and potentials. In one district in the South, comrades were at first stymied by a lack of access to institutions like the NAACP and Black churches, which reach broad masses of the Black community, as well as the strong conservative streak in a region overrun by military bases. So they started some new groups: a Black anti-war group based principally among and focused toward advanced workers; a multi-national hip-hop anti-war group with ties on the state campuses; and in a town adjoining a military base, they managed to help start a multi-national community anti-war group. This group has now drawn participation from parents and wives of GIs stationed in Iraq. None of the groups are huge, and all are somewhat fragile, but they have had a significant

impact on previously unorganized masses. The hip-hoppers filled most of a bus to Washington last January with young people who attended their jam the previous day. Together the groups organized a conference on “Understanding War and Empire” that drew 150 people. Freedom Road is known and highly respected by most progressive people in the area.

In another district, comrades work in a mostly oppressed nationality parent, teacher, and student educational justice coalition. Coalition students at several of the high school have filled buses for anti-war marches, and have initiated a campaign that connects anti-military demands with demands to reduce overcrowding. They are demanding that the schools eliminate the Junior ROTC programs and use the money to hire more teachers.

It is also the summing up of this type of complex and mass-based practice that can help us develop a deeper theoretical understanding of how to implement a revolutionary strategy in this period. In general, during this next period we should look to root ourselves in organizations that are engaged in or have the potential to engage in militant struggle, and in which we can have an open presence (the level of openness depending on the circumstances). We need to concentrate ourselves to have an impact on strategic mass organizations. It is hard for one comrade alone to affect the direction of a mass organization, advance our politics or recruit. In a labor union, if one comrade is elected an officer, others need to be in as rank-and-file workers so we can develop an independent base, be more open about anti-empire politics (something nearly impossible to do from a staff position), have a more openly socialist face, and bring advanced workers along to that perspective.

We should continue to emphasize building up our forces in the South and Southwest but with a more comprehensive and concrete plan for doing so. This means greater support from national leadership for our mass work and recruitment in Sun-belt districts and continued efforts to have members from other districts relocate to districts in those areas. We should look to concentrate in areas where African-Americans and Latinos are organizing as workers and there is also opportunity for building both nationality-based struggles and Black-Brown unity.

2. Strengthen organizational consolidation and planning in Freedom Road. Help each district develop a clear district plan that includes ideological, political, and organizational goals. These plans would include mass work plans, local Left Refoundation plans, recruitment, and leadership development. In all this we need a continued emphasis on people of color, women and queer people of all nationalities. In addition, we need to systematically help the few comrades who are alone in a city to develop new districts. Consolidation does not mean that the Road goes into a fox-hole or that we operate outside of the context of trying to rebuild a revolutionary socialist party and reconstruct a Left. However, in order to most effectively carry out those responsibilities, we have to develop a much greater level of political clarity on how we see our tasks, pay greater attention to developing our political line for our work within the working class and national movements, and in a creative way highlight our advanced areas of mass work in order to attract younger working class activists of color, especially women. Our experience from the period since our last Congress affirms that Left Refoundation is strongest and shows real advances when it is grounded in work among the masses.

3. Refocus our work related to Left Refoundation. During this last period we have learned a great deal about the complexities and challenges of rebuilding the US left and trying to build a revolutionary socialist party. This experience is the basis for continuing to work for Left Refoundation in this next period, but with a sharper focus on some fresh approaches to carrying out this work. We will share some of our summation and our thoughts about future directions in upcoming papers.

4. Continue to develop anti-war and anti-occupation work in citywide coalitions and networks, and on the national level through UFPJ, Bring Them Home Now!, US Labor Against the War, etc. This is in addition to rooting our anti-empire work in our base-building work, as described above. We will help work this out concretely on a district-by-district basis. While deepening our anti-empire work

overall, we also need to strengthen and consolidate specifically anti-imperialist aspects of this work, by building solidarity around various targeted countries, developing materials that identify systems of imperialism and patriarchy and point toward socialism, and uniting with like-minded activists in the movements.

5. We need more theory. We reaffirm that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. “After Winter Must Come Spring,” the pamphlet by former leaders of the defunct Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, is a great start, illustrating how theory develops on the basis of experience/practice. The book that we are preparing on white privilege will also represent a major theoretical contribution from our organization. In this next period, our theoretical emphasis will be on the study, dissemination and discussion of theory on white privilege, and on developing one other major theoretical piece on the Sunbelt strategy. We will also need to deepen our thinking on Left Refoundation and party-building to carry this work forward. We also recognize a need for revolutionary socialists to overcome our past errors on questions of gender.

6. Develop a strong culture of summation within the organization. We need to sum up our work, especially our advanced experience among oppressed-nationality workers as well as our efforts that demonstrate a new commitment to anti-patriarchy practice.

7. Our international solidarity work should focus on one area. There are many important areas of potential solidarity work, including Palestine, Mexico, Colombia, the Philippines and Africa. Given our resources, we don't think the organization can have more than one main solidarity focus. We should look to develop such a focus using these criteria: the strategic importance of the country to US imperialism; how advanced the level of the struggle is there and our ideological compatibility with its leadership; our links with contacts who can facilitate this type of solidarity work.

8. Sum up our experience and develop our line around the challenges faced by Gay,

Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer activists working within the labor, oppressed nationality, and other social movements.

9. Suspend publication of our magazine and produce more timely publications. In order to produce more FRSO literature that is also timely, the Publications Team would focus instead on producing pamphlets, flyers, buttons, and posters. This team would also give priority to developing our website, so that it is timelier and with fresh articles, poems, etc.

10. FRSO will make the fight against patriarchy central to our work, both practically and theoretically. As a start we will consider the program of action coming out of the Southern International Working Women's Conference. The NEC should begin to figure out how to lead study and critique of the whole body of feminist and queer theory, including liberal, socialist, Black, Third World, and radical/lesbian trends with the goal of strengthening both socialist and feminist revolutionary theory.

The resistance and struggle against empire are drawing more and more fighters to the front or rather the battle today takes place on many fronts. We see the need to build a programmatic bridge between the various social movements. These movements include oppressed nationalities, LGBTQ, environmental, labor, women and the global justice movement. We recognize the interpenetration and intersectionality of these movements and will strive to deepen our understanding of the significance of this for building a revolutionary party and a revolutionary movement. Again with renewed determination more and more people are seeking a vision and guide to the future. As we build the fight against empire that programmatic message must be not only what we are AGAINST but what we are FOR — an agenda of peace, democracy, justice, liberation, self-determination, and socialism.

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