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Welcome to the first-ever issue of Out to Win! This new journal from LeftRoots will explore strategy to win socialist liberation from the perspective of leftists on the frontlines of movement struggles inside the belly of the beast.

**Liberatory Strategy in This Moment**

Any discussion of strategy to win a certain future must begin with an assessment of the present. So let's start with some broad points about this moment that we (you and LeftRoots) probably agree on (since, after all, you are reading this brand-new LeftRoots publication).

Since you picked up or downloaded the journal, we probably agree that we are in a moment filled with dangerous reaction and unprecedented possibility. That human activity is threatening humanity’s very existence. That right now, a ruling class hell-bent on intensifying imperialist war, neoliberal austerity, unfettered extraction of natural resources, and militarized crackdowns is dominating the planet. That overlapping crises—economic crisis, ecological crisis, as well as crisis of empire—are raining chaos and misery on the world.

And, like us, you’ve found power in the face of all of this by coming together with others to take action. You’ve knocked on doors. You’ve attended and organized marches and rallies. You’ve gone to political education trainings. You’ve done everything you can think of. Like us, you take hope as you see people all around the world rise up in search of genuine solutions.

The nature of this historical moment—an oppressive system in deep crisis—makes fundamental change possible, but it does not make it inevitable. Scattered and
disconnected action alone, no matter how heartfelt, will not be enough to overcome the powerful forces of reaction lined up against us and against the planet.

This fact, then, begs a vital question the Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire posed often: What can we do today, so that tomorrow we can achieve what seems impossible today?

That’s where liberatory strategy comes in.

**WHO IS LEFTROOTS?**

In the last weeks and months, working people across the country have taken action to win better schools, to win quality healthcare and wages for hotel workers, and to force the federal government to re-open. Community members have rallied to win justice for survivors of police brutality. Everyday people have elected a wave of politicians promising to enact progressive and radical policy at the state and federal levels.

Committed and talented organizers and activists—guided by a critique of exploitation, white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and colonialism, by a vision of a better future, and by a belief that that future is achievable—have worked tirelessly behind the scenes of all of those struggles. Drawing on the insights of the Chilean political activist Marta Harnecker, we call this growing group ‘the social movement left’. LeftRoots grows out of this social movement left.

We are a national organization of social movement leftists with a shared conviction that people like us—leftists engaged in mass organizations and social movements—have a unique, but as yet unfulfilled, role to play in helping to reimagine and give life to a broad U.S. left that is as radical as it is grounded in mass struggles. In LeftRoots, we are preparing ourselves and one another to play that role.

Because the forces fighting for a better future will battle that monstrous triumvirate of capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, LeftRoots has intentionally cultivated a membership with super-majorities both of people of color and of women and gender-oppressed people. Most of us became active in the movement in just the last ten years, and for most of us, LeftRoots is our first experience in a self-described socialist organization. And while we might not look like what most people in the United States think of...
when they think about socialists, we know that a strong and vibrant left committed to winning liberation for all people and the planet must draw many, many more people from our communities.

Our central purposes are to:
1. Develop strategy to build 21st century socialism; and
2. Develop cadres with the individual and collective skills to formulate, evaluate, and carry out such a strategy.

We call this system “twenty-first century socialism”. Others use different terms to describe similar visions. Whatever we call it, we cannot win it without grounded and comprehensive strategy. And the ability to develop, evaluate, and carry out strategy is a skill we all can learn.

Unfortunately, we haven't cultivated it yet. Far too few social movement leftists in the United States have been trained as liberatory strategists. That is not because of any individual shortcomings. Historical and structural realities have made it difficult for U.S. organizers and activists radicalized over the past thirty years to get the training we need. We plan to explore some of those reasons in future issues of this journal but for now, it is enough to say that social movement leftists can and must learn to be socialist strategists. It is our only hope for winning the future our people and planet deserve.

We hope Out to Win! will help all of us develop the strategic capacities that our movement and our future need.
Okay, strategy is important, but what is it, exactly? When LeftRoots says ‘liberatory strategy’, we mean a theory of change that describes how a set of aligned forces might, on ever-changing terrain and against opposing forces, shift the balance of power in order to make fundamental change in a society.

Since the reality of ‘fundamental change’ can seem so far over the horizon, many of us are likely to have different theories of what it will take to get us there. After all, many ‘21st century socialists’ will have different visions in mind for a truly liberated society, and many will have different assessments of where we are starting from now. This is not necessarily a bad thing. But without a common framework for how we turn our various visions and assessments into coherent strategies, those differences can produce unnecessary confusion and conflict between individuals, organizations, sectors and regions that need to learn from each other if we intend to win.

To support social movement leftists clarifying their own strategic orientations and to facilitate more productive debate and discussion, LeftRoots is working to develop a framework for liberatory strategy based on our work, study, and reflection—our praxis. So far, this framework has eight components:

1. **VISION**. Liberatory strategy must be grounded in a clear vision of a liberated society that brings an end to capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. This vision offers not only a sense of direction, it also informs what capacities, practices, and commitments we must develop to make the vision real.

2. **SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS** provides a structural assessment of the society’s base and superstructure. This systemic analysis both informs the basic categories of how society is organized as well as reveals whether that system can support the grounding vision.

3. **CONJUNCTURAL ANALYSIS** is an assessment of the concrete conditions of the moment and of the terrain we’re fighting on. Our struggles take place in existing conditions, not ideal or abstract ones, so a grounded analysis of what is actually happening now, of the state of and shifts in social, economic, political, and cultural systems, is critical.

4. **STRATEGY** provides the narrative through-line of how the vision can be achieved despite the opposition’s resistance.

5. **WITH SCENARIO PLANNING** we can prepare to respond to possible, near-future events in ways that advance the strategy. These scenarios grow from the conjunctural analysis and an assessment of how change is happening.

6. **HYPOTHESIS** are building blocks of strategy: answers to key strategic questions that must be proven or disproven in practice. Guided by materialist curiosity, the movement should gear its actions toward testing the validity of a strategy’s hypotheses.

7. **ACTION**. Strategy alone does not guarantee victory. We have to do the work, and social movement leftists need to be skilled in many areas in order to carry out the diverse set of activities a successful movement will require of them.

8. **EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT**. Strategy is not chiseled into stone. It is living, evolving theory that must incorporate lessons and new information over time. With evaluation and assessment, we can determine what worked, what didn’t, and why. This should happen throughout the strategy development process so we can make any necessary adjustments to make our work more effective in the future.
After our founding in 2014, LeftRoots spent its first three years developing our individual and collective capacities for liberatory strategy. As the rising tide of right-wing nationalism and Trumpism came into sharper relief in 2016, we felt an incredible sense of urgency and sped up our process.

In April 2017, nine LeftRoots cadres, elected by the membership and the leadership, formed an ‘advance team’ to produce a discussion document that would give us something concrete to reference and play with as we began organization-wide conversations about liberatory strategy. In September 2017, after just six months of working together, that team completed the first document in this issue, “We Believe That We Can Win”. The organization spent the next year discussing and debating its content and developing a plan to share some of our discussions with the movement.

“WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN WIN”

It is important to note that “We Believe that We Can Win” is not LeftRoots’ line. It will not provide the singular basis for all of LeftRoots’ (or LeftRoots cadres’) activities internally or externally as we move forward, nor is it something around which we are trying to align other movement forces. It is the starting point for LeftRoots’ (and we hope the movement’s) continuing discussion about liberatory strategy.

“We Believe that We Can Win” simply represents the consensus of the advance team that wrote it. It was their best effort—given their current skill and knowledge and the time limits they were working with—to produce an example of a strategic orientation that could guide not just a campaign or an organization, but an entire revolutionary movement. It is sweeping and ambitious, and we believe that it can foster the types of discussion about liberatory strategy that we need.

It can be hard to remember how quickly conditions have changed in the past two years. As we publish the first issue of Out to Win!, “We Believe that We Can Win” is now more than a year old. Some events it imagined have come to pass and are now part of what many of us understand as the ‘new normal’ but they were not that in the spring of 2017. And, of course, many things have happened that it did not anticipate. Despite the monumental shifts in U.S. and world politics since its writing, though, we think that “We Believe that We Can Win” remains an important document to share and discuss.

It builds on the three prior years of organizational discussions to synthesize and articulate our framework for liberatory strategy, while moving beyond that framework to put informational and analytic flesh on the skeleton it provides. For the (non-LeftRoots) reader, it provides a peek inside the early stages of our development as strategists.

The organizational discussions about “We Believe that We Can Win” that began in the spring of 2017 are ongoing. They have revealed major weaknesses in places where the ideas are underdeveloped and entire questions remain unexplored. They have also uncovered debates within LeftRoots, where we lack organizational consensus and need to more fully explore our
differences and to subject some of those differences to testing in practice.

This document does not mark the end of a process but the beginning of one. It is one example of a set of strategic hypotheses based in the context of current conditions. It is a discussion document, produced by nine of our comrades, that has pushed our collective thinking forward, and we hope it will do the same for others.

ARTICLES SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO “WE BELIEVE...”

As stated above, LeftRoots’ internal discussions about “We Believe that We Can Win” have revealed differences and debates within our membership. As we prepared to share “We Believe that We Can Win”, several teams LeftRoots cadres came together to write critiques of and responses to “We Believe that We Can Win” that would be published alongside it. This inaugural issue of Out to Win! includes not only “We Believe that We Can Win”, but also seven response articles:

**PAGE 67**
**WE ARE LOSING, BUT WE CAN WIN: CARAVANS, IMPERIALISM AND WAGING THE WAR OF POSITION FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**
By the LeftRoots Ad Hoc Anti-Imperialism Working Group
“As of this writing the U.S. is actively attempting to overthrow the government of Venezuela and there is a very real threat of a U.S. backed coup or even a U.S. invasion and thus far social movements here in the U.S. are engaging in very little organized resistance to this intervention ... As social movement leftists it is imperative that we work within our organizations, particularly mass-based base-building organizations, to incorporate anti-imperialism and internationalism into the way we frame our campaigns and develop our strategy.”

**PAGE 79**
**LIBERATION FOR OUR PEOPLE AND OUR PLANET: ECOCLOGICAL JUSTICE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**
by LeftRoots’ Environmental Justice and Climate Justice Praxis Circle
“The scale of the crisis, which will impact millions (or likely, billions) of people, presents opportunities to unite a large number of social forces in a broad, counter-hegemonic united front that can advance the kind of transformative, and ultimately anti-capitalist, program we need...The united front will need to contend with a devastatingly short timeline that demands radical results on climate change faster than we are likely to be able to assemble the forces necessary to fully overthrow capital and realize our vision for an ecologically just socialism of the 21st century. This has profound implications for strategy, tactics, and program.”

**PAGE 103**
**TAKING ACCOUNT OF STATE VIOLENCE: A PROPOSED REVISION OF WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN WIN**
by the Ad Hoc State Violence Study Team
“(W)e find that “We Believe That We Can Win,” fails to foreground the role of the state, and its coercive capabilities, throughout its assessment of the system and our current conjuncture. In essence, the role of the state as an instrument of coercion in “We Believe That We Can Win,” remains underdeveloped and understated... Perhaps more so than any other factor, the racialized violence of domestic policing and immigrant detention, mass imprisonment and military intervention have the potential to bring together [Black, Latinx and Indigenous people from the lower layers of the working class], while also building a coalition inclusive of the associated social forces.”
**ГENDER OPPRESSIONS AND REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY**

By the Unicorn Collective. Unicorns include: Adlemy, Cynthia, Erika, Luz, Najla, Rose, Tara, and more

“Class, race, gender, sexuality, and planet are essential parts of our vision, our assessment, and our strategy...Those of us who came together as a collective to write about these intersections felt an analysis of cisheteropatriarchy was underdeveloped in “We Believe That We Can Win,” and that the 21st century socialism that we are working towards cannot exist without dismantling multiple oppressive systems at once.”

**THE ROLE OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER MOVEMENTS: RACE, NATIONALITY OPPRESSION AND REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY**

by Carolyn Chou, Cecilia Lim, Lydia Lowe, Don Misumi, Sian Miranda Singh ÓFaoláin, Jensine Raihan, Helena Wong

“Strategy still needs to emerge from collective practice, analysis, and struggle, so it is premature for LeftRoots to name specific “driving forces” at this moment. We believe that social movement activists, including LR cadre, need to learn more about the role of AAPIs in the US ...[W]e believe that the vast majority of AAPIs of all classes have a stake in the struggle against racial monopoly capitalism and that the struggles of the most exploited sectors of the AAPI working class have particularly advanced and continue to advance the interests of the entire working class and benefit all of US society.”

**THE NONPROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX IS A MASTER’S TOOL**

By the Nonprofits and Revolutionary Strategy Study Team

“One of the defenses of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex from leftists who run nonprofits is that nonprofits are just a tool we can use to do revolutionary work. We argue that the NPIC is not a neutral tool, but rather a master’s tool as Lorde describes it. Working in a social movement nonprofit puts us squarely in a neoliberal institution, within the master’s house, where our interests as a working-class are obscured and our strategies and practices become aligned with the capitalist class interests that drive the system.”
**PAGE 140**

**THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF A REVIVED UNION MOVEMENT**

by members of the LeftRoots Labor Praxis Circle

We argue that the features of the unions make the union movement critical to the labor movement, and the labor movement as a whole is vital to (a) the defeat of Trumpism and (b) our ability to build a 21st-century socialist movement to scale... Our praxis circle plans to do further study, which will draw from our experiences and from the experiences of other left unionists ... We invite unionists to become part of Left Roots and join us on this journey!

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**STRATEGY & BASE: A PRAXIS FOR POWER**

Written by members of LeftRoots’ Basebuilding Praxis Circle

“Given the interlocking ecological, political, and economic crises impacting the vast majority of humanity, why aren’t exploited and oppressed communities flooding into community organizations and committing their lives to overhauling society? ... Because we are anchored in basebuilding organizations across different sectors and geography nationally, LeftRoots is in a unique position to convene movement leaders to synthesize, test out, and further develop a transformative basebuilding praxis.”

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**READING THESE ARTICLES IN CONTEXT**

Each of these articles was drafted by LeftRoots members in some collective process. In most cases, the writing offers a glimpse into months of internal discussion, debate, theory, and practice. Like “We Believe that We Can Win”, they do not reflect a unity among all LeftRoots members; rather, they represent the views of the groups that drafted them.

For many, it was the first time trying to write about strategy and strategic questions in this way. As in every issue of Out to Win!, we hope the pieces here offer grounded assessments, sharp analysis, and an intersection of theory, practice, and reflection. We also know that writing such pieces is a skill that we will develop over time, and that we will stumble at times along the way.

For this inaugural edition of Out to Win!, our editorial team worked with the writing groups to present their arguments as strongly and clearly as possible. We have been very mindful to avoid editing the ideas and arguments themselves, though, and it has been up to the authors to determine the shape and content of their final articles. As such, each article presents the distinctive views of its authors, and not of the editorial team, the National Coordinating Committee, or the organization as a whole.
The members of LeftRoots do not offer these perspectives from the sidelines. We are living, leading, and fighting on the frontlines of key struggles across the country. We are not just commenting; we are working hard because we are committed to winning. That’s why we named the journal *Out to Win!*

It’s an approach, a mantra, and now a leftist journal. We believe it is our duty to not just to fight for 21st century socialism but to win it. Every article published in *Out to Win!* will mark an advance in our movement’s strategic development. Some pieces you will agree with, some you may not, but they are all submitted for consideration in the spirit of strengthening the social movement left.

The task before us is monumental. If successful, we will bend the arc of history. We will shift the conditions of our lives and countless ones that come after us. We will restore balance on the planet we call home and aid in its regeneration. We will do nothing less than change the world.

If ever those who cared about justice had the luxury of time, that time has passed. This tumultuous and often terrifying political moment makes it clear and unmistakable: the stakes are high, the timeframe is short, the margin for error is narrow. We must act anew, with rigor and passion. We must act with urgency. Our eyes, minds, and hearts must be open and alert to the changing conditions.

Most of all, this moment reminds us of how much we need each other. We can’t get there on our own. We are grateful to be doing the hard work of building a way out of this mess, alongside so many brave and brilliant comrades across the country and around the globe. We must act together. We must act with strategic clarity. And we must be *Out to Win!*
WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN WIN:
A STRATEGY FOR SOCIALIST LIBERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

BY LEFTROOTS STRATEGY LAB ADVANCE TEAM:
H “THE GERMINATOR”
M “IRON CHEF”
MERLE “THE MARXIST PERSONAL TRAINER” RATNER
MILENA “THE ARCHITECT” VELIS
RAPHEAL “THE WARRIOR HEART” RANDALL
STEVE “THE BARD” AND “THE MECHANIC” MEACHAM
S “THE BAT WITH THE BAD KNEES”
STEVE “LIGHTER OF PATHS” WILLIAMS
TOUSSAINT “THE REVOLUTIONARY EXCAVATOR” LOSIER

INTRODUCTION: MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

The potential to build socialism for the 21st century is greater today than it has been in at least a generation. At the same time, the threat of fascism or some form of authoritarianism in the United States is very real. In this pivotal chapter of human history, we must work relentlessly to strengthen the former possibility while neutralizing the latter. This requires radical change at multiple levels.

The inability of the capitalist class to steward the planet and to meet the needs of the world’s peoples urgently calls for bold action. Against multiple crises, various forces are competing to define what that bold action should be. The volatility of this moment demands clear-eyed strategy to make possible what has long been impossible. We must assess and gather the revolutionary potential that lies in our current conditions, shift the balance of forces more favorably toward our aims, and root ourselves in the strengths we possess even in this time of relative weakness.

LeftRoots cadres and social movement organizers across the country are doing crucial organizing, mass mobilization, direct action, direct service, academic, artistic, educational, and therapeutic work to address the crises in our communities and in the world. Despite the promise and actual gains of these struggles, we often feel isolated in our work. Too frequently we are fighting for important reforms with little more than a radical slogan to connect them to a visionary strategy.
Building a powerful left requires developing both liberatory strategy and revolutionary strategists. LeftRoots was founded to meet this dual purpose. LeftRoots is a national formation of Left social movement organizers and activists in the United States who want to connect grassroots struggles to a strategy to win liberation for all people and the planet. LeftRoots is committed to 1) developing strategy to win socialism for the 21st century, and 2) to developing cadres who have the capacities to evaluate, formulate, modify and carry out that strategy.

In February 2017, LeftRoots selected a group of nine cadres to serve on an Advance Team to create the document you are currently reading. Over a nine-week period, our assignment was to articulate a vision of 21st century socialism; to assess the current system, conditions, class and social forces; and to project likely near-future scenarios. From this, we were to draft at least one strategy for socialist liberation. If there were strategic differences among us, we were to draft as many strategic orientations as necessary. The organization would then use whatever we came up with to begin a four-year process of strategy development, experimentation, and capacity building.

Each of us came to the Advance Team from different theoretical traditions and movement work. None of us had ever taken on a project like this. All of us questioned whether we were up to the task. Still we dove in, fueled by the trust of our comrades, and by the yearning to build the kind of strategy that this moment demands. We researched, debated, wrote, sang, laughed, and cried. We struggled with each other and with ourselves, discovering our limitations and developing our abilities.

In the end, this challenging and comradely process led us to strategic unity and also deeply transformed us. We know that all LeftRoots cadres, along with our movement allies, will also be transformed as we forge a powerful path forward together. When we felt overwhelmed by the task before us, we often returned to the words of Paulo Freire. We posted them on the wall of every room in which we met. Now we offer them to all of you as we collectively engage in this daunting and exciting process: “What can we do today, so that tomorrow we can do what we are unable to do today?”

What you are about to read is imperfect and incomplete. We are painfully aware of some of the gaps it contains, and how these expose our limitations. Still, we believe it is the best we could have come up with given constraints of time, energy, and experience. We acknowledge these shortcomings to you, comrades, not out of modesty, but as an invitation to engage and to lead.

The document is divided into three main chapters: Vision of 21st Century Socialism, Assessment of the Current System, and Strategy for Socialist Liberation. These flow from LeftRoots’ definition of transformative revolutionary strategy: a framework that projects what series of actions can, on shifting terrain and against an opposing force(s), align a set of counter-forces to build the power and influence needed to achieve a currently unattainable objective. Transformative strategy serves to guide the decisions, tactics and plans of aligned forces to make the advances and build the capacities we need to meet our goal. All three components—vision, assessment, and strategy— are essential for grounding us in our time, place, and conditions.

This document is not LeftRoots’ new line. For LeftRoots cadres, it is a jumping-off point for all cadres to deepen our capacities as strategists, to sharpen our individual
and collective clarity about how to struggle today in a way that advances us toward liberation. Over the next three years, Leftroots cadre will engage in a strategy development process that includes developing assessments, scenario projections, and strategic interventions that build on, or differ with “We Believe That We Can Win.” Cadre will also engage in shared organizing experiments to test hypotheses contained in this document and in other strategic orientations developed through this process. In 2021, cadre will come together at a Congress where we expect a culmination of this multi-year process to result in the ratification of a strategy, or multiple strategies, that cadre have developed. At that point, Leftroots will become one or more political formations operating from a strategy or strategies for winning 21st century socialism.

It is important to note that we focused our work specifically on shifting the correlation of forces in the United States. LeftRoots takes inspiration from the strength and wisdom of movements around the globe, and seeks to build comradeship and joint struggle at an international scale. Socialist liberation must be rooted in international solidarity, especially for those of us struggling within a settler colonial and imperial superpower like the United States. Liberation here cannot rest on exploitation and subjugation elsewhere. However, the reality is that many movements beyond U.S. borders are more mature and vibrant than our own, and the relative weakness of the U.S. left hinders our capacity to support popular struggles throughout the world. It is our duty to change that.

To transform society, social movement left forces must be brave enough to change ourselves and the way we do our work. There is no single person, front of struggle, constituency, or organization strong enough to face down the enemies before us. We must bring together our different trajectories and accumulated wisdoms, and then synthesize and grow beyond them. We must ruthlessly assess our conditions, align our strengths with the weaknesses of our enemies, and vigorously build our forces. The imperative to construct a bigger “we” brought LeftRoots into this strategy process. It will carry us forward as we debate, amend, and apply the ideas captured here to achieve a better world for future generations.

All cadres have stretched and made sacrifices to participate in LeftRoots because we yearn for something even more powerful, even more beautiful than to defend ourselves and each other from the brutalizing onslaught of this period. We want revolutionary change. We want liberation. We believe that we can win.
Utopia is on the horizon. 
I know very well that I will never reach her. 
If I walk ten steps closer, 
she moves ten steps back. 
The more I look for her, 
the less I find her, 
because she moves away as I approach. 
So what is utopia for? 
It is for this, for walking. 
—Eduardo Galeano, referring to a discussion with Fernando Birri
**PART 1: VISION OF 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

**THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE**
A vision of socialism for the 21st century starts from the understanding that capitalism is neither natural nor inevitable. It is a system created by people. Therefore, people can dismantle it. Building toward a liberated society requires us first to envision it. This does not mean that social movement leftists should disconnect from present-day realities or conjure up the most radical-sounding demands, but it does mean that we must rise above pessimism. Vision is a tool for struggle. It helps us to decide what work to prioritize and how to navigate the many twists and turns along the revolutionary road. Our ongoing task as leftists is to pair vision with a sober analysis of conditions, and then to maximize the possibility of advancing toward that vision. This approach to strategy is the most radical work we can undertake.

It is more possible to talk about socialism in the United States today than it has been for decades. As the Cold War recedes into memory, the hold of anti-communist propaganda especially on younger people has weakened. The aftermath of the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis undermined the legitimacy of neoliberalism, motivating a growing number of people to seek out alternatives. The popularity of Bernie Sanders, the self-avowed socialist who ran for president in 2016, reflects this change. However, confusion persists about what socialism has been in the past versus what it could be in the future. This makes it imperative for today’s social movement leftists to define and popularize a vision for socialism in the 21st century. There is an alternative.

A work in progress, LeftRoots’ vision for 21st century socialism includes an economic base that reproduces social relations of equity, participatory democracy, and solidarity. In articulating this vision we join movements, organizations, and intellectuals around the world seeking to unshackle their societies from capitalist control. Our vision builds on the lessons of 20th century socialist experiments. It is designed to deepen democracy in all aspects of society by developing our collective capacities to shape the future. It operates on a liberatory logic absent of any justification for exploitation, racial supremacy, heteropatriarchy, subjugation, or extractivism.

**BUILDING ON 20TH CENTURY SOCIALISM**
Our vision of 21st century socialism builds on the failures, challenges, and successes of the dozens of socialist experiments in the 20th century. These took place in vastly different contexts, yet they all have lessons to teach us. Most 20th century socialist experiments emerged in peasant economies marked by scarcity and low productive forces. Looking to raise the standard of living for their people, revolutionary governments launched aggressive programs of economic development that distorted the relationship between economics and politics, between people and the earth. Many revolutionary governments prioritized producing goods and services over producing new social relations. Most also faced fierce opposition from imperialist and counter-revolutionary forces that incentivized them to become highly centralized. This often
Many revolutionary governments prioritized producing goods and services over producing new social relations. Most also faced fierce opposition from imperialist and counter-revolutionary forces that incentivized them to become highly centralized. This often led to a concentration of power that enabled corruption, the weakening of popular accountability, and environmental harm. In some cases, the emancipatory promise of socialism mutated into authoritarian state projects, resulting in state-mass violations of human, political, and civil rights.

civil rights. Another challenge, which persists today, was the need for an economic system that strikes the right balance between socialist development and elements of market-based production.

Despite these challenges, 20th century socialist experiments made huge gains by promoting relations of equity and solidarity. Several socialist countries improved the lives of millions of people by providing healthcare and education, often doing so better than countries with advanced economies. Many countries also dedicated resources to fighting gender and racial inequality, and significantly deepened democracy by building up the leadership and participation of historically oppressed groups. Socialist countries also created models for sustainable agriculture, supported cultural production, and built new national identities based on socialist values. On a global scale, these countries provided an anti-imperialist pole, demonstrating an alternative to capitalism and providing material support for anti-colonial and self-determination struggles around the world. Socialist projects in the last century were far from perfect and it is important not to romanticize them. Yet it is equally important to note their successes, which are too often obscured by capitalist media and culture.

Today, socialist countries struggle to develop while surviving in a capitalist world. LeftRoots’ concept of 21st century socialism draws heavily on theories elaborated in the global south, particularly during “the pink tide” in Latin America. However, we must stay grounded in our particular conditions in the United States. The reality is that no country has implemented 21st century socialism. Still we believe this vision can guide us on our revolutionary road.

**BREAKING WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM**

We have named the system of domination that characterizes U.S. society today *racial monopoly capitalism*. It is a process of capital accumulation dominated by large-scale corporations in the hands of a small circle of families. Developed through settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and imperialism, it has racially codified the exploitation of the working class. Its processes of accumulation have relied on patriarchal property relations: a man’s ownership of his wife, offspring, and property. In the current period, the system’s process of accumulation is profoundly unstable. This is due to its increased reliance on debt financing and speculation to stave off the long-term tendency toward stagnant growth in the economy’s productive sectors.

Capitalism shapes the relations between people and production around the drive for more and more profit.
In capitalism, a small minority of society privately owns the means of production. The vast majority of us have no ownership of the tools needed to meet our survival needs. We must work in order to live. The purpose of capitalist production is not to meet collective human needs. On the contrary, it relies on top-down decision-making that creates undemocratic social relations and profound alienation. Those of us who work in order to live have little or no opportunity to shape the decisions and institutions governing our daily lives. This exploitation of human labor is facilitated by what society has deemed women’s work – to rear, to regenerate, and to physically reproduce the people who produce things. Such reproductive labor mainly takes place outside of the formal economy, even as it enables it, at very little cost to capitalists.

Socialism for the 21st century requires transforming the relationships between people, production, and the planet. It is a system designed to generate not profit for the few, but human development for all – a democratic society in which all people can realize their full potential as individuals, while contributing to collectively identified needs.

**THE LOGIC OF 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

The logic of 21st century socialism relies on three interdependent pillars: social ownership of the means of production, production to meet collectively determined needs, and direct participation. We call this the “socialist triangle.”

Social ownership of the means of production is not possible under capitalism, yet it is the only way to ensure that society’s productive capacity supports the needs and development of all people, and stewardship of the planet. Drawing on the lessons of 20th century socialism, social ownership implies a more profound democratic practice than was possible only through state ownership. Previous socialist experiments employed the state as a proxy for the people. This largely failed to produce emancipatory results. Instead, it gave rise to a coordinator class whose privilege grew from their exclusive roles within the state. In 21st century socialism, all people would be subjects and collective actors, producers and decision-makers. Orienting production
toward collectively determined needs prevents the monopolization or control of society’s productive forces by capitalists, state bureaucracy, or any single social group.

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True social ownership requires us to understand and believe that the productive apparatus of society belongs to us. This calls for collective and democratic management, distinct from the completely centrally-managed production of many 20th century socialist experiments, and radically different from the top-down management of capitalist production. Self-managed production produces goods and services and our ability to make decision about our own lives, communities, and society. It has the potential to defuse the heteropatriarchal social relations of reproductive work. Rather than managing such work individually or privately in the home, communities would manage it collectively. Social ownership also rejects the bureaucratically managed production found in most 20th century socialist experiments. Self-managed production can take the form of cooperatives and participatory planning at different scales, with people who perform the labor, use the goods and services produced, or risk being negatively affected by aspects of production all making governing decisions.

In capitalism, workers exist to fulfill the profit motives of capital. In 21st century socialism, we would harness and deploy the wealth of society to develop the full capacities of human beings. Rather than encouraging the pursuit of purely individualistic ends, such a society would steer production to meet shared needs such as healthy food, housing, medical care, education, leisure, and cultural production. Sustained and democratic struggle to dismantle social relations based on domination, subjugation, and capitalist competition would give way to genuine human solidarity. As a society, we would have to rediscover our human needs, which have been distorted by consumerism, alienation, and other effects of racial monopoly capitalism. We would have to commit to rejecting authoritarian ideas of sameness, and instead build unity based on the appreciation of difference. Socialism for the 21st century would produce and reproduce people who act on the basis of solidarity, expanding the revolutionary imagination of our society, while working to right historical wrongs including slavery, settler colonialism, worker exploitation, and imperialism. Unlike capitalism, the logic of 21st century socialism contains these possibilities.

The socialist triangle is not simply a list of principles or values. It is the logic of a dynamic, self-reproducing, and organic system. Each component can only develop if the other two are in place. For example, social ownership of the means of production relies on using those means to meet people’s collectively determined needs. Self-managed production to meet society’s needs can only take place if the people own and control the means of production together. Finally, the direct decision-making in this type of economic system transforms human beings – our capacities, our needs, and our relationships to each other.

**A SOCIALIST ECONOMIC BASE**

Prussian-born revolutionary philosopher, economist, and journalist Karl Marx (1818-1883) developed the concepts of base and superstructure to describe the relationship between production and civil society. The base refers to the forces and relations of production (what we often
call the economy) – for example, class relations, capital, commodities, and private property in capitalism. The superstructure refers to all other aspects of society such as culture, politics, family, religion, law, art, and science. Base and superstructure have a dialectical relationship. One influences the other, but the base tends to dominate, shaping the development of the superstructure, which then serves to justify and reproduce the social relations of production.

We offer this framework because we believe that understanding base, superstructure and their relationship is a critical capacity in developing and assessing liberatory strategy, and that this - in particular, a solid understanding of the capitalist base - is currently an area of weakness for most social movement leftists. The reason we suggest it is a priority for social movement lefts to address is because it has a major impact on how we see change happening. Rather than seeing major social and political change merely as the result of collective desire, this framework helps us to see that major change in society is normally driven by changes in the base. Grounding our work in this can help make our actions more effective.

Some within the Marxist tradition have used the base and superstructure framework to mistakenly argue that economics alone determines social conditions. This can lead to the view that capitalism must be ended before white supremacy or patriarchy can be confronted. We could not disagree more strongly with this view. As you’ll see later in the document, we build our analysis from the assessment that the capitalist base grew out of white supremacy and patriarchy, and that both white supremacy and patriarchy reshape and are reshaped by the base to this day.

The economic base of racial monopoly capitalism relies on competition, violence, and exploitation – the historical mechanisms of settler colonialism, chattel slavery, heteropatriarchy, and imperialism. This shapes a superstructure that normalizes rivalries between groups and individuals, where some deserve rights and prosperity, while others do not.

Twenty-first century socialism’s economic base instead relies on the collective stewardship of resources and the planet. Increasingly, scientists agree that we are now living in an era of human-produced climate change and species extinction that they call the anthropocene. We face the critical need to curtail the use of fossil fuels and to refashion our relationship to the earth. Our survival depends on redefining productive efficiency to include protection of the earth. Agriculture may need to become much more labor-intensive in order to create non-alienating work for many people while building healthy and sustainable food systems. We can expect climate catastrophes to continue and to accelerate in the coming decades. Our response will need to embrace principles of global solidarity and equity.
The economic base of 21st century socialism will shape how culture, family, politics, science, law, and other institutions of the superstructure operate, and these in turn will reproduce the values of the new society. The logic of human development and stewardship of the earth can reproduce social relations that alter the meaning of race, family, gender, nation, and work. In capitalism, race is a core economic and social relation of domination and subordination. In 21st century socialism, this would be replaced by social production for communal needs. Deflated of its power to subjugate, control, or eliminate segments of society, the meaning of race would transform over time. Likewise, in capitalism the family is a unit of production. Social relations of heteropatriarchy function to reproduce workers and consumers. In 21st century socialism, people could configure families freely based on relationships of love and interdependence. Families would be nested within broader social relations of mutual support, embracing the full human spectrum of gender and sexuality.

**Human Development in 21st Century Socialism**

The motive force of capitalism is profit. The motive force of 21st century socialism is human development – the nurturing of truly rich and multi-faceted human beings. Capitalism produces people rich only in material possessions in a zero-sum game with few winners and many losers. Members of society are alienated from each other and from a meaningful sense of themselves. In 21st century socialism, people would be able to develop their full potential and individuality under the conditions of solidarity and mutual care. The development of each of us would depend on the development of all of us. While there will be many stages along the way toward replacing racial monopoly capitalism with 21st century socialism, a key assumption of our vision is that each stage of struggle will create two things - the product of our work and changes in ourselves. The things we do, and how and with whom we do them, shape who we become both individually and collectively...

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“...every human activity has two products—both the change in circumstances and the change in self, both the change in the object of labor and the change in the laborer. In addition to the material product of activity, there always is a second product—the human product. Unfortunately, that second product is often forgotten.

Accordingly, we need to ask a question that is rarely asked: what are the changes in the worker? What kinds of people are produced in the workplace? And the answer is that it depends. It depends upon the nature of relations within the process of production. That second product, under the appropriate conditions, can be positive. But, as Marx understood when discussing the failure of workers to struggle, the second product also can be negative.¹

In capitalism, when we work for a wage, we produce the things we make, and this work also produces us. It encourages us to view each other as competitors, to accept domination and subjugation, to consume as a way to stave off alienation, and to measure a person’s value.
based on their usefulness to capital. In contrast, 21st century socialism would produce people who cooperate and act on a basis of solidarity, who bridge capitalism’s inherent divide between mind and body, and who stand in the dignity of their inalienable existence in the web of ecological relations.

How then, do we get from here to there? A key tool lies in expanding opportunities for people to produce themselves anew in liberatory and positive ways. Protagonism is an individual and collective practice of participation based on the belief that each of us can and should take an active part in writing our own life stories. Through protagonism we can work collaboratively to improve our conditions. Protagonism assumes that when someone changes our circumstances for us, we are unable to grow as profoundly as we do when we work together to change our circumstances.

Protagonism also implies that in order for us to fight for a new society, we have to see that fight as ours. This will only happen if the struggle is owned collectively in practice – that is, if we actually shape and influence the decisions needed to meet our needs and to improve our lives. We will only be able to build the forces needed to build a new society if our struggles offer opportunities to build the skills and confidence we need to solve problems, and to work and govern together. The right endlessly disparages socialism as a way to “give people free stuff”. Indeed, if this is what socialism does, then it will fail. Protagonism is central to producing the means, institutions, and capacities we all need for liberation.

**THE STATE IN 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

The U.S. state developed to facilitate accumulation by a white, male, and wealthy minority through racial monopoly capitalism. Pursuing socialism for the 21st century requires constructing a new national identity– a new “we” that rejects heroic myths about the “founding fathers”. This new identity must reckon with the legacy of the crimes through which our nation was formed. It should take pride in the fact that poor, working, and racially oppressed peoples have consistently paved the centuries-long, redemptive road toward America’s true promise. A new “we” must also embrace the interests of peoples around the world who have borne immeasurable pain in the name of American freedom.

There have been many debates among leftists over the role of the state, including whether it has any role at all in a socialist society. We believe that social ownership of the means of production will require a level of institutional coordination and connection - in other words, a state. However, the state would function radically differently from any state in 20th century socialism or in capitalism. Transforming the state is an important part of building socialist liberation that will need to go beyond electing socialists to positions in the current state, though this will also be necessary. The primary function of the state in 21st century socialism will be to facilitate direct participation. A secondary role will be to regulate the distribution of goods and services, to manage markets, and to constrain the ecological impacts of production.
As facilitator, the state will ensure that people have an ample voice in decisions that affect their lives and communities. This is a key aspect of building the people power needed to deepen the socialist project. “Self-managed production” requires popular participation in planning among workers and in communities. This might take the form of community councils and worker councils with opportunities to engage at the local level and beyond. Coordination at a wider level may require bodies of representatives from local and workplace councils. While direct decision-making and protagonism are crucial, a society of our scale and complexity cannot function without some level of representative coordination.

As regulator, the state will be important in the stages before reaching a fully realized socialist society, constraining capitalism to create more space for socialism. The state may also administer tightly controlled markets in some areas. To confront the climate crisis, it will need to make visible the environmental impacts of production; to enforce strict regulations on extraction, production, and consumption; and to repair our already traumatized ecosystem.

Socialism in this yet-nascent century will need new economic instruments to support decentralized planning work. We will have to put information technology to socialist uses, applying advances in capitalist logistics, and making transparent the costs and benefits of any economic activity to humanity and the planet. Countries such as Iceland have already experimented with crowdsourcing the writing of a new constitution. In 21st century socialism, we could apply the technology that enables us to vote for a singer on *American Idol* in real time to allow large numbers of people to vote on how to allocate the resources that are owned by all of us.

As the largest economy in the developed world, the United States has a greater capacity to produce and distribute goods than almost any other society in human history. We can easily meet people’s needs and more. At the same time, the U.S. population exists within a sophisticated system of social control that reproduces low human development. Capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and imperialism have all under-developed our people, producing individualism, racism, ruthless competition, and national chauvinism. Our key challenge will not be to produce enough to meet our people’s needs, but to transform ourselves and our relationships to each other, and to build our socialist capacities.
PART 2
ASSESSMENT OF THE SYSTEM

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The abuse and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again...
—Langston Hughes, Let America Be America Again
In Part I we identified the system of racial monopoly capitalism in the United States in which large-scale corporations, owned by a small circle of wealthy families, dominate the process of capital accumulation. The system’s racially structured exploitation of the working class has its roots in settler colonialism, slavery, and imperialism, and relies on patriarchal property relations. The gendered exploitation of unwaged social reproductive labor like housecleaning, childcare, and sex work forms the basis of capital accumulation in racial monopoly capitalism. In this chapter, we will explore the system’s historical development and internal contradictions in order to understand how to change it and build socialism for the 21st century.

In order to develop effective strategy, social movement leftists must understand how the current crises of racial monopoly capitalism reflect its internal contradictions. These contradictions cyclically sharpen, leading to crises that the exploiting classes must actively address. By radically disrupting the status quo, these crises threaten the system and offer openings for various social forces to compete for the power to reshape society.

Historically, socialists have tended to say that the fundamental contradiction in capitalism is between the private ownership of the means of production and the social relations of production. However, people worldwide now face multiple interrelated threats: catastrophic climate change, economic crises, rising authoritarianism, permanent war, deepening alienation, and the growing disposability of human labor. It is now possible to say that the fundamental contradiction in the system is between the narrow economic interests of the capitalist class and the needs of humanity and the earth.

**Origins and Development of Racial Monopoly Capitalism**

Emerging from feudalism, Western European countries initially dominated the capitalist world economy that prefigured U.S. racial monopoly capitalism. As “core” countries marked by higher-skill and capital-intensive production, they formed the center of a global order. Western Europe dominated over countries on the “periphery”, which largely depended on low-skill and labor-intensive production and on the extraction of raw materials. This worldwide division of labor, known as Western imperialism, was made possible by the spoils of slavery and indigenous dispossession in the Americas and endures today.

The United States grew out of these conditions, emerging as an independent nation when British colonies in North America declared their independence. U.S. imperialism began with the westward expansion into indigenous lands during the 1800s, including the annexation of much of Mexico in the 1840s. Having achieved dominance over a sizeable portion of the North American continent, the United States continued its imperialist project overseas. It overthrew the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893, then invaded and colonized Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines in the Spanish American war of 1898. These early examples of American expansionism began a long pattern of economic strong-arming and violent aggression that would establish the United States as the world’s leading military and imperialist power. This facilitated the upward mobility of key segments of the U.S. population and fundamentally shaped the formation, class structure, and current crises of racial monopoly capitalism.
GENOCIDE AND CHATTEL SLAVERY

The United States is the only advanced capitalist economy to develop out of a chattel slave society. Its current character reflects the preeminent role that enslaved labor has had on its development. Upon arrival, European settler colonial authorities viewed indigenous peoples through the lens of a racial hierarchy that justified their enslavement, dispossession, and genocide. The conquest of communally held indigenous lands would provide the central means of production for the settler society's ruling class, mainly a contingent of large landowners. Conquest, appropriation of native lands, and policing of settlement boundaries over the course of several centuries would drive the colonization of the continent and set the foundation for a violent and unequal social order.

White supremacy informed the development of slavery, first of American Indians and then of Africans. The traffic in and unpaid labor of millions of these captive peoples would serve as the basis of the early settler colonial economy. The total numbers of imported Africans forcibly brought to the North American colonies was a fraction of the captives brought to the Caribbean and South America. However, they would come to form the bottom layer of U.S. settler colonial society – a landless, property-less class of laborers held in chains.

The constitutional founding of the United States in 1787 helped to consolidate this racialized class structure and the basic pattern of wealth and power. From the outset, the U.S. served the interests of the top five percent of Southern families, known as planters who owned 20 or more enslaved persons. Despite the promise of gradual emancipation that Northern slaveholding states offered, enslaved Africans would remain central to U.S. production and finance as the basic foundation of wealth and prosperity.

By the early 1800s, the value of enslaved people rivaled all other forms of wealth combined. Although enslaved people labored in a variety of ways, the most important quickly became the production of raw cotton. Cotton was the largest single export of the antebellum United States and was central to developing the Industrial Revolution. Revenue from cotton exports fueled broad wealth
inequality, financed the importation of machinery, and stimulated the growth of financial and transportation services. Slavery was central to the emergence of U.S. capitalism. The brutality of labor discipline in the production of cotton and other plantation crops sparked numerous slave rebellions, including Gabriel Prosser’s 1822 conspiracy and Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt. This in turn led to even harsher terms of enslavement, a more vigorous abolitionist movement, and a reactionary tendency among the planter elite.

Rather than challenging the hegemonic position of large plantation owners, small-scale capitalist enterprises in the North sought financing from slaveholders. Northern capitalists in textile, lumber, and flour industries severely exploited the labor of their employees, particularly women and children, by mobilizing ethnic and national differences as “racial” ones to undercut demands for higher wages and better working conditions. Similarly, Northern capitalists mollified white working men who demanded greater political rights and economic opportunities by granting them access to property and privilege, secured through the further exploitation of enslaved Africans, and through the expropriation of Mexican and American Indian lands stretching from Alabama to Texas. This racial bribery of working-class white people would become an established practice in racial monopoly capitalism.

**WHITE REDEMPTION, MANIFEST DESTINY, ASIAN EXCLUSION**

A resurgent white capitalist class in the 1870s defeated Reconstruction, and ushered in the renovation of white supremacy. This took place in the South as “Jim Crow,” in the Plains as “Manifest Destiny,” and in the West as “Asian Exclusion.” Despite important differences, Black, Tejano, Chinese, and American Indian peoples all found themselves under attack at the direction of society’s ruling class. Taken together, these efforts consolidated the United States as both a continental empire and a predominantly capitalist economy.

Beginning in the 1890s, Northern capitalists established corporate monopolies to secure an advantage over their rivals. Reflecting the affinity of capitalists to secure profits through monopoly power, corporations increasingly sought sole control over raw materials, commodity production, and consumer markets. Repeatedly, industrialists worked with investment bankers to secure natural resources and to install heavy machinery, ensuring market dominance.

The turn of the century saw the United States become the world’s leading industrial producer and pivot to overseas imperialism, powered by monopoly capital. In contrast to the nationally exclusive colonial economies commanded by Western European powers, U.S. imperialism often positioned itself as proponent of “free trade.” This approach justified the use of military force in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and the Americas to secure favorable terms for U.S. corporations on colonized and nominally independent countries.
Monopoly capital played a preeminent role in the U.S. domestic economy. While chastened here and there by sporadic campaigns to break up large corporations, or “trusts,” the demands of monopoly capital would prompt new waves of industrial development and European immigration. Capitalists again turned to racial divisions to defeat strikes and organizing campaigns, particularly those that attempted to build solidarity across racial divisions. Key segments of white workers responded by using legal and extra-legal methods, including strikes and race riots, to maintain what remained a largely symbolic yet still privileged racial status. As in the past, monopoly capitalists secured their hegemonic position through the consent of key sections of the working class.

In the decades leading up to the Great Depression, the over-accumulation of goods and the growth of speculative bubbles periodically created “panics” or recessions that disrupted the business cycle. In the contradiction between capital and labor that reproduces capitalism, capitalists commodify and buy the labor power of workers, retaining a surplus over the cost of wages. At the same time, capitalists generally rely on workers to purchase the commodities they sell in order to realize this surplus as profit. This dynamic frames the broader contradiction between production and the realization of profit. Although highly profitable, exploitation can leave workers so impoverished that as consumers they are unable to purchase the goods produced. This leads to a crisis of over-production. Increasing the supply of credit can help ensure high levels of consumption and thus, profit realization, but it also produces speculative bubbles. This tendency has been a key characteristic of racial monopoly capitalism, and its effects came to a head in the Stock Market crash of 1929.

THE NEW DEAL AND FREEDOM STRUGGLES
The Great Depression marked the country’s deepest economic crisis. A giant wave of worker organizing, often led by communists, led to increased labor militancy and creating industrial unions – the birth of the modern labor movement. The crisis produced tremendous labor struggles and also led to a split within the capitalist class. Capital-intensive and internationally oriented industries sided with New Deal reforms that shifted the state to a Keynesian approach to managing capital's contradictions. These reforms involved concessions to working class white people including the recognition of trade unions, the provision of a social wage, and public employment programs. Joined by more internationally oriented commercial banks, a new set of monopoly capitalists took the reins of a new racialized class alliance to use the state to avoid crises of over-production.

This process would be fully realized after WWII, when the United States became the world’s leading capitalist economy. As a dominant power, the United States facilitated a set of procedures through the international monetary system known as the Bretton Woods agreements. These agreements created new international institutions – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Following the U.S. vision of free trade, they firmly adhered to private property rights, fixed exchange rates, and the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. These policies reset the terms of the capitalist world system, with the United States as its economic center. During the 1950s and 60s, countries that refused to play a subordinate economic and political role to racial monopoly capitalism faced clandestine intervention or overt invasion.

The post-WWII period also marked the emergence of the United States as a military superpower, a role that it continues to play today, although its dominance is being challenged, particularly by Russia and China. Armed conquest has always been a central feature of U.S. imperialism. Over the next half century, the U.S. state would wage wars or counterinsurgencies against countries from Iran to Congo to the Dominican Republic. U.S. wars in Korea and Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos killed tens of millions of people. The U.S. established nearly 800 military bases around the world to secure its military supremacy, to set itself against the gains of socialist and anti-colonial liberation efforts, and to defend the interests of monopoly capital.
As U.S. government spending propelled sustained economic growth and prosperity accruing from its position as a world leader, U.S. corporations faced little competition in producing for both foreign and domestic consumer markets. With unprecedented profitability, capitalists responded to a surge in labor militancy by agreeing to a greater share of these gains for workers. In the workplace, this meant higher wages, insurance benefits, and retirement pensions. At the same time, McCarthyism in the 1950’s led to purges of communists and leftists in labor unions and the destruction of the more progressive CIO which merged with the more conservative AFL. Outside of the workplace, it produced a set of social democratic benefits predominantly for racially privileged sections of the working class through public assistance, suburban housing subsidies, unemployment insurance, expanded opportunities for college education, and limited access to health insurance. In exchange for these gains the labor movement granted monopoly capitalists social peace and consent to Cold War politics.

Multiple factors prompted a sharp decline in corporate profits in the early 1970s, leading capitalists to abandon the Keynesian approach to managing capitalism’s contradictions. After decades of struggle, the Black Freedom movement had won not only the extension of democratic rights to Southern states, but also the extension of the U.S. welfare state to broader segments of society. Other movements had secured higher taxes on the wealthy and new workplace and environmental regulations, all of which increased the cost of doing business.

U.S. corporations also faced greater competition from their Western European and Japanese rivals, whose production enjoyed lower labor costs, higher productivity, and, thus increased profitability. More broadly, this competition reflected a greater leveling among the three, and their convergence as a “Triad” of imperialist powers. Closer to home, a glut of consumer goods, poor management, the rising cost of oil, and a lack of new investment in modernizing industrial production also fueled the crisis of the 1970s.

Overt and organized as well as clandestine and covert expressions of working class power compounded these problems. Not only did workers easily skip shifts or switch jobs, they also launched strikes of both the sanctioned and unsanctioned “wildcat” variety. In 1970, for instance, over 66 million days of labor time were lost due to work stoppage, the highest yearly loss due to worker unrest since the postwar strike wave of 1946. Drawing on the militancy of the era’s freedom movements, workers sought democratic representation in their own unions and equal pay from their employers.

The “liberal” or free-market approach of the long pre-Great Depression era had created a crisis of over-production. The relatively brief shift to a Keynesian approach resolved that, but led to a crisis of profitability. Faced with an increasingly militant working class, particularly led by nonwhite workers in the nation’s largest cities, key segments of the monopoly capitalist class faced either further decreasing their share of profit or disciplining the working class. They chose discipline, both at the point of production and throughout society.

**NEOLIBERALISM AND FINANCE CAPITAL**

Racial monopoly capitalism responded to the profitability crisis of the 1970s with the return to a free-market approach, often referred to as “neoliberal capitalism”. In keeping with the system’s pattern of managing its key contradictions, this did not resolve the crisis, but instead displaced it to other sectors of economy and postponed its most sweeping impacts. In doing so, it enabled the consolidation of racial monopoly capitalism and placed the finance sector in a dominant role.

As its core, this response was a counteroffensive that sought to discipline the working class in a highly racialized way. This included inducing a deep recession by raising interest rates – cutting borrowing and buying power and stifling economic activity in general. Not only did this increase unemployment, it also undercut wages, which had been rising more or less consistently for three decades. This counteroffensive also took place through overt attacks on organized labor, cuts to business and...
income taxes, and a decline in social programs, burdening women with exponentially more socially reproductive labor. It also featured federal support for more repressive criminal justice policies, which from the outset prioritized labor discipline and social control over narrow profit interests.

This neoliberal counteroffensive sought to shred the social safety net, privatize public goods, and remove business regulation. The state had been central to each of these initiatives. In an effort to lower both the cost and political power of the U.S. working class, neoliberalism internationalized the reserve army of labor by expanding production and increasing the exploitation of workers in the Global South. Over the past four decades, these processes have led to a dramatic increase in domestic and international inequality.

In prioritizing increased profitability, the neoliberal management of racial monopoly capitalism set the stage for a cyclical crisis of over-production. The capitalist class sought to head off this problem by expanding access to consumer and business credit. While this approach helped to prop up consumer demand, it also ceded greater influence to finance capital, further displacing – but again, not resolving – the profitability crisis. Indeed, finance capital’s relative independence from manufacturing and service sectors of the economy led to increased volatility, where speculative bubbles and economic crashes started to occur frequently and with ever more severity for growing swaths of society.

With finance capital in leadership, neoliberal capitalism deregulated the credit system and financial industries. The dictates of lenders and bondholders, whether on Wall Street or in the World Bank, forced progressive U.S. cities and social democratic leadership of foreign nations to adopt more conservative social and fiscal policies.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States took the lead in crafting so-called “free trade” agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and World Trade Organization agreements, that seek to insure the primacy of neoliberal markets by preventing state interference in their operations. At the same time, the dominance of finance capital led to more economic recession, from the Savings and Loans crisis of the late 1980s to the subprime mortgage crisis of the late 2000s. The effects ricocheted across national boundaries. All of this constrained the power of national, state, and local governments just as women and people of color were finally winning elected offices at higher numbers and at various levels of government.

The current period also includes the rapid pace of technological change and automation, and the growing disposability of human labor. Capitalists have long sought to apply labor-saving technologies both to restrain the power of labor and to boost profitability. In the United States this became particularly evident during the course of the 1960s as technology in major aspects of manufacturing portended a broader wave of deindustrialization. Capitalist application of technological innovation explains the majority of manufacturing job losses. Today the exponential growth in computer power puts at risk entire categories of work, from low-paying service-sector jobs to high-paying professional occupations.

Along with automation, there has been a decline in masculinized jobs over several decades, and growth in feminized sectors. Sectors like manufacturing, mining, and agriculture are in sharp decline, and a significant sector of mid-level managers have experienced a loss of authority and autonomy. The major job-growth sectors are in feminized jobs that require emotional labor and cooperation skills, including retail and food service, elder care, healthcare, and education. Feminized jobs offer lower pay based on the economic structure of patriarchy, where work traditionally done by women is worth less, because it is unwaged. If women earn wages outside the home, capitalism treats their earnings as merely a supplement to those of a male head of household. This drives down wages and working conditions for the whole working class and accelerates the casualization of labor, reshaping the contours of the system’s class structure.
This current period is marked by a profound economic instability stemming from the system’s decreasing ability to sustainably extract profit. In order to stave off stagnation in the productive sectors of the underlying economy, the capitalist class has come to see debt financing and financial speculation as the only way forward. These structural constraints combined with the capitalist class’ lack of alternative solutions means that, more and more, instability is becoming capitalism’s new normal.

A group’s class position can profoundly impact their interest in changing the system. Determining who is on our side, who is opposed, and whom we need to bring to our side in order to win is one of our crucial tasks as strategists.

CLASS STRUCTURE IN RACIAL MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

A sharp and ever-evolving assessment of how different class and social forces relate to the system and to one another is essential in crafting socialist strategy. Class is a key category for analyzing society because it relates to how the system extracts, produces, and distributes the materials needed for human life. A group’s class position can profoundly impact their interest in changing the system. Determining who is on our side, who is opposed, and whom we need to bring to our side in order to win is one of our crucial tasks as strategists.

While class analysis is necessary, it is also insufficient. Under racial monopoly capitalism, a wide range of factors shape people’s consciousness, interests, and revolutionary potential including race, gender, sexuality, religion, geographic region, etc. We must assess these factors in relationship to one another in order to offer a concrete and grounded assessment of society. Many self-proclaimed left organizations have made the mistake of insisting that class alone shapes social struggle. An integrated analysis of class and social forces is key to refining the social mapping we need, especially given the current tremors in our society. We will discuss this in the next segment of this chapter.

The concept of class is one of the key tools that revolutionaries have used to analyze society, but there are very few class analyses of contemporary U.S. society. There are many reasons for this. First, there is no consensus about what class means. Although it was central to his analysis, Marx did not fully define what he meant by class, so revolutionaries have had to develop their own understanding of it. Furthermore, the Cold War Era defeat of socialist projects and organizations left a younger generation of organizers and activists without sufficient training in class analysis. The fact that people in the United States most often use class to describe a person’s income or cultural preferences confuses matters further. All of this makes our task of doing a class analysis difficult.

To address this challenge, we have found that developing a nuanced definition of class that is most suitable for analyzing the class structure of U.S. society under racial monopoly capitalism is key. Here, we define a class as a group of people connected to each other by a common relationship to racial monopoly capitalism’s process of exploitation. Rather than approaching class analysis in economic terms frozen in 19th century conditions, this definition seeks to distinguish different classes from one another by their relationships to the process of exploitation.

Our definition of class seeks to renew our engagement with Marxist class theory. Although Karl Marx himself never offered a concise definition of class, most of those within the Marxist tradition define class as a group’s relationship to the ownership and control of raw materials, tools, and workplaces that make up the
means of production. In some sense, this classical definition is most useful in a capitalist society where most people work in factories using machines and physical labor to make commodities. It is less complete in a society like our own where manufacturing has been declining and most people do not work in factories. With

This definition better accounts for the various ways in which, under racial monopoly capitalism, value is extracted by dispossession and expropriation, particularly from women and non-white workers. Moreover, it allows us to better account for how power is organized through control over social reproductive labor, like unpaid childcare and housework.

service, technology, finance, and medical sectors of the economy expanding, many people work in non-physical production jobs. Moreover, many people work from home or in other non-traditional workplaces, and/or in precarious employment, ranging from temporary jobs to contract workers to the emerging Gig Economy. All in all, the extraction of value increasingly happens outside of the formal workplace, and ownership of and control over the means of production is much more attenuated and internationalized now than in earlier periods.

Our definition also seeks to draw on the example of revolutionaries who sought to refine the classical Marxist definition of class so that they could more accurately assess how capitalism functioned in their societies. To this end, our definition focuses not only on who owns and controls the means of production, but also on how value is extracted by capital, also known as the process of exploitation. Just like the classical definition, this includes the extraction of surplus value on the job – roughly the difference in value between what a worker produces for the capitalist and the lower amount that she receives as a wage. At the same time, it also seeks to draw attention to the significant role that other forms of exploitation like predatory lending, the repossessing of property, and the use of unpaid prison labor play in shaping how power is exercised and value is extracted. This definition better accounts for the various ways in which, under racial monopoly capitalism, value is extracted by dispossession and expropriation, particularly from women and non-white workers. Moreover, it allows us to better account for how power is organized through control over social reproductive labor, like unpaid childcare and housework.

Our assessment is that racial monopoly capitalism has given rise to a distinct class structure in the United States – the capitalist class, the professional managerial class, the small-scale capitalist class, and the working class.

**THE CAPITALIST CLASS**

This class includes the executives, board members, and major shareholders who own and control the corporations and other major capitalist institutions that shape the exploitation process in the United States and around the globe.

The dominant layer within this class is the *monopoly capitalist layer* – those who own and control multinational corporations and whose power is becoming more concentrated. This is best exemplified by the emergence of “Too Big to Fail” banks over the past several decades. In the 1980s, the five largest banks in the United States controlled 29% of total banking assets, or 14% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). By 2012, those banks controlled 86% of GDP, reflecting their monopoly character. Similar concentration is taking across the economy, resulting in a smaller number of wealthy people amassing even greater power. The Koch brothers, Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, Jamie Diamond, and Jeff Bezos are all members of this class. They operate globally even though they are rooted and invested in the United States, often viewing
this as the best option to ensure their continued market dominance.

The monopoly capitalist layer serves to advance the interests of the capitalist class as a whole. It includes a dynamic cohort of socio-political elites with general ideological affinity regarding the economy.

The subordinate layer of this class is the non-monopoly capitalist layer. This group of people have not attained monopoly status, yet they often play important roles on regional or local levels. Their actions tend to be driven more by the sectoral interests of their corporations.

**THE PROFESSIONAL MANAGERIAL CLASS**

This class controls the day-to-day operations of the high-level mechanisms of racial monopoly capitalism. Although they do not own the process of exploitation, they exert a tremendous amount of control and influence over it. This class includes managerial, financial, marketing, media, and state professionals who serve to: (1) control the labor process; (2) expand the propensity of people to consume; (3) manage a growing financial sector; (4) manage public opinion; and (5) provide public-spending supports to private corporations as well as relief work for the general population (itself a vital subsidy to capital, allowing it to avoid the full cost of reproducing labor power).

The operative layer of this class includes the political and security agents who serve to defend and carry out the interests of the capitalist class, especially the monopoly capitalist layer. Politicians in this layer operate largely on the national and international level, though they include some state and city politicians from key circuits in the global system of exploitation. They may not enter office as monopoly capitalists, but once they are vetted, groomed and deployed, their interests merge with those whom they serve. This layer also includes ideologically committed members of the armed forces and police.

The executive layer of the professional managerial class includes mostly white-collar workers like financial advisors and analysts, advertising executives, lobbyists, think-tank intellectuals, philanthropic foundation officers, corporate managers and consultants. Members of this layer mostly own their homes or can afford to rent wherever they choose to live. They often live in affluent
suburban communities, and utilize private services as often as they use public services, if not more. These individuals are materially wealthy and do not rely on debt for sustenance. Similar to members of the operative layer, members of the executive layer accept and help to propagate the norms and values of the capitalist class as common sense.

Together, the capitalist class and the professional managerial class comprise the exploiting classes of racial monopoly capitalism, and represent the core opposition to socialist liberation.

THE SMALL-SCALE CAPITALIST CLASS
Small-scale capitalists have a high degree of control or ownership over small aspects of the process of exploitation. Compared to other countries, this class, often referred to as “the petty bourgeoisie”, is relatively large and varied in the United States, though it is smaller than the working class. Many members of this class often work long hours and exploit themselves on the job, but the discipline they experience at work is different from the discipline imposed on the working class.

The small-scale capitalist class includes an upper layer of owners of small to medium-sized businesses that produce commodities or provide services. This includes some professionals like doctors, lawyers, and accountants who own private practices; small to medium farmers; and small landlords who acquire the majority of their income from rent.

The lower layer of this class is growing, including more people who work independently but whose control of the means of production is contingent and whose situation may be akin to workers’ relation to the process of exploitation, having surplus value extracted from their work through leasing and credit arrangements. This layer includes small vendors and owner-operators — some taxi drivers and bodega owners who often depend on financing and debt, as well as independent vendors who sell on online sales platforms like eBay and Etsy. The lived conditions of this layer often resemble those of the working class, and as the promise of economic prosperity fades, growing numbers from this layer may be more open to aligning with working-class movements. Also, as economic conditions have worsened, many members of the working class have sought small-scale capitalist ventures to try and mitigate economic insecurity.

THE WORKING CLASS
The working class does not own or control the process of exploitation, and is the largest class formation in the United States. To survive, its members are forced to sell their ability to work or to subject themselves to the various methods that the exploiting classes use to extract value. This broad category includes those who are formally unemployed.

The upper layer of the working class includes software developers, computer programmers, and financial traders who work for employers. This layer includes some occupations which have been displaced from the small-scale capitalist and professional managerial classes such as doctors who now work for healthcare conglomerates. Although many have retirement savings and own stocks, bonds, and/or mutual funds, members of this layer cannot live off their investments. They could live off their savings for at least six months if they needed to. They tend to own property or to be able to afford rent it in neighborhoods of their choice. This layer may use debt to finance large purchases (i.e., home, car, etc.) but debt
payments make up a small percentage of their expenses. They are more likely to be white and cis male than the rest of the working class.

The **middle layer** of the working class is more varied, including many but not all workers who are employed in unionized jobs. In spite of the attack on unions over the past 30 years, members of this middle layer generally enjoy a higher level of stability than other members of the working class, though not at the level of the upper layer. Unionized workers in this middle layer range from public-sector workers to nurses and some other healthcare workers. Another section of this middle layer includes middle-management workers and sales workers. Many in this layer have responded to stagnant wages and to the slashing of the social wage by relying heavily on debt and public services.

The **excluded layer** of the working class has traditionally been referred to as the “reserve army of labor.” This includes those working people whom the exploiting classes exclude from formal employment in order to discipline employed workers by temporarily calling them into the production process. It also includes the “permanently unemployed” and those not counted in the official workforce (i.e., imprisoned people, older laid-off people who are not getting rehired, younger people who move in with their parents, and people getting by in the informal economy). This layer will increase significantly if projections about technology and automation permanently replacing millions of jobs over the next five to 10 years come to pass. Many in this layer are houseless or precariously housed. This layer constitutes roughly 20 percent of the U.S. population.

Although it is central to the entire class structure of the United States right now, precarity is the defining dynamic in the working class, resulting in a general trend of downward mobility. The worry of falling into the ranks of the excluded layer of the working class is growing among members of other classes, especially the small-scale capitalist class and other layers of the working class.

While class is a way of describing people in terms of their relationship to the process of exploitation, people also inhabit other positions in society that inform their interests, consciousness, and choices. The same person who is a worker in a hyper-exploited layer of the working class is also a woman, and/or an Asian immigrant, and/or a youth and/or LGBTQ, and/or disabled, etc. The next section describes our understanding of the current crises and correlation of social forces.
THE CONJUNCTURE: CRITICALITY AND THE CORRELATION OF FORCES

When a conjuncture unrolls, there is no ‘going back’. History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment. You have to attend, ‘violently, with all the ‘pessimism of the intellect’ at your command, to the ‘discipline of the conjuncture’.

—Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*

“Conjuncture” describes the dynamic set of circumstances that reveal a crisis or rupture in the system and that provide new opportunities to contest for power in society. The Jamaican-born, UK-based cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1932-2014), used the term largely as a call to action for strategic political, social, intellectual, and cultural intervention. A conjuncture is the result of a set of objective and subjective contradictions that reflect the dialectical relationship between the base (economy) and superstructure (society).

For example:

- The rise of white nationalism is part of the current conjuncture. It stems in part from the contradiction between the belief in the rightful material and social benefits of white identity and the downward mobility of growing numbers of white people.

- The insurgency in both parties reflects a rebellion against the neoliberal bloc, which has included the political establishment of the GOP and the Democratic Party. This stems in part from the inability of the finance sector to resolve the crisis of realization, fueling resentment among a growing swath of precarious and downwardly mobile Americans.

THE CRISIS

The current conjuncture *simultaneously* includes the consolidation of rightwing power, with growing momentum on the far right; new openings for anti-neoliberal and even avowedly socialist politics; widespread downward mobility; ecological and climate crisis; loss of public faith in mainstream institutions (except the military, police, and small businesses); insurgency in both political parties; and a dynamically shifting cultural terrain of race, class and gender. This conjuncture grows from the intersection of three dynamic and interrelated crises.

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

It is important to note that ecological crisis is also a critical part of our current conjuncture. Due to the limited time the Strategy Lab Advance Team had to draft this document, we could not adequately develop and articulate an analysis of the climate crisis and more precisely analyze the role that it plays in the current conjuncture. This issue deserves much more research and analysis, to serve the purpose of developing strategy. In particular, a sober assessment of the correlation of forces within the climate fight will be critical in determining how left forces should move forward in this moment.

The ecological crisis represents both an urgent and existential threat to our species, particularly in the Global South, and communities of color and working class communities in the U.S. Ecological crises grow in relationship to economic, political, and ideological crises. For instance, as the interlocking impacts of climate change and neoliberal globalization grow, we are seeing increased migration, and in response, increased xenophobic backlash.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

In the economic base, the capitalist class is contending with a crisis of the realization of surplus value, and the resulting problem of protracted stagnation. This crisis produced the economic recession of 2007-8, a moment that demonstrated the monopoly power of finance as the most influential sector of the economy. Finance capital helped to facilitate an economic recovery whose benefits largely went to the exploiting class. It also used the crisis to discipline labor, facilitating the downward mobility and precarious position of large segments of the working class. These attacks exacerbated the already weakened position of organized labor. Fifty years ago, nearly one-third of U.S. workers belonged to a union. Today, only 11 percent of workers are unionized, including
just over six percent of private-sector workers. Today, capitalists are seeking to destroy the ability of unions to exist by withdrawing labor’s right to require dues from the members they are obligated to represent. If they succeed in gutting unions, this will have serious economic and political repercussions for the working class and will undermine the only large institutional source of funding for progressive political candidates.

The crisis in the base has contributed to a growing—though not outright—loss of legitimacy for the neoliberal management of racial monopoly capitalism. This is best reflected in the 2016 electoral success of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, which represented an insurgent force within the Republican Party. While candidate Trump promoted policies that diverged from the neoliberal program, the GOP establishment and its donors have largely tolerated his administration, which has not yet threatened the fundamentals of racial monopoly capitalism. In turn, President Trump has adjusted to their interests. His governing coalition—primarily composed of white nationalists, Wall Street executives, military hawks, and conservative evangelical Christians—is not yet consolidated and it is unclear which forces will dominate.

The Republican political establishment has attempted to maintain a foothold within this governing coalition, but has seen its ability to lead undercut to some extent. The shaky position of establishment Republicans has emerged even as the GOP now dominates both state and federal levels of government. The GOP controls all three branches of federal government, including the Supreme Court. It also controls 32 state legislatures, including 17 with veto-proof majorities, and 33 governorships. This state governing power directly affects 60 percent of the U.S. population. There remains some unity between the GOP’s neoliberal establishment and the rightwing authoritarian segment of Trump’s forces, particularly in decimating labor and voting rights. At the same time, there are important differences that have made it difficult for the party to govern effectively.

Just as neoliberal Republicans have lost ground, the leadership of neoliberal Democrats—grouped around the Blue Dog and New Democrat coalitions—faces increasingly insurgent forces within and outside of the
Democratic Party. Neoliberal politics remains dominant within the party, but the Keynesian and Social Democratic core of these insurgent forces presents their biggest challenge. It is reflected in the popularity of Senator Bernie Sanders, yet much of this growing opposition to the party’s neoliberal establishment is reflected in a variety of groups ranging from MoveOn.org to Our Revolution. Still, Neoliberal Democrats remain able to field and run candidates of color with politics that promote the interests of the capitalist class.

State-level redistricting and attacks on democratic rights, like voting rights and civil liberties, seek to disenfranchise nonwhite voters. This aggressively racist endeavor seeks to disenfranchise those social forces whose interests are opposed to the more ruthless form of neoliberalism that the capitalist class is pursuing. At the same time that the limited avenues for participation in bourgeois democracy are under assault, the recent growth of the far right portends what could become the social base of fascism.

These shifts have touched key liberal institutions, including the corporate media. A decade and a half since the start of the 2003 War in Iraq, public confidence in the corporate media, which is increasingly monopolized, remains shaken. This is reflected in the growing influence of “fake news”, which first emerged as an online phenomenon primarily on the far right. The phrase now serves as an allegation of inaccuracy against traditional media outlets, demonstrating the decline in mainstream corporate control over the perceived legitimacy of information. In tandem with this decline in control has been the rise of powerful means for user-created and distributed alternative media, principally via the Internet.

This crisis of legitimacy extends to the international arena, where the United States remains dominant with the largest and most powerful military in the world. Nevertheless, it faces the emergence of a more multi-polar world, with greater contestation for markets and resources. The U.S. is waging costly wars in the Middle East and Africa that it is unable to win or resolve, resulting in the destabilization of countries, immense death and bloodshed and the spawning of greater right-wing authoritarianism and fundamentalism. Consequently, the neoliberal class alliance is less able to provide the spoils of imperialism to key segments of the working class.

**IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS**

The conjuncture is also marked by a deepening ideological crisis. This both echoes and compounds the crises emerging in U.S. economic and political spheres. Ideology can be understood as the range of assumptions, values, and cultural norms that
shape the superstructure of a given society. While reflected in things like laws, morality, religion, and politics, ideology is the medium of struggle between classes and associated social forces for legitimacy. The capitalist class seeks to maintain its dominance over other classes not only through violence and force, but also through popular consent and participation.

Racial monopoly capitalism is riddled with crises, but there is no guarantee that the system will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions... Moreover, the current balance of forces would make such a collapse disastrous for 21st century socialism, given the momentum of rightwing authoritarianism and the concentration of armed power on the right.

Following decades of neoliberal policies, growing wealth inequality and decreased social mobility have made more visible the contradiction between ideas like American Exceptionalism and the American Dream, and the realities of precarity and downward social mobility. This has affected white Americans in a particularly deep way, manifesting as a crisis of white identity reflected in rising rates of suicide and addiction-related deaths, rising mortality rates particularly for white women in the South and Midwest, and the momentum behind Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign. For centuries, working-class white Americans have been the main target of ruling-class efforts to claim the legitimate right to govern. Ideas like freedom, democracy, and prosperity provided leverage in these efforts to convince the majority of white Americans to accept subservience to capital in exchange for privilege and status relative to non-whites and non-Americans.

Changes in racial demographics and family structure have further inflamed this crisis of whiteness and national identity. Over the past half century, the population of the United States has become increasingly non-white, in large part due to mass migration resulting from U.S. economic and military interventions abroad. A projected non-white majority by 2042 threatens to weaken the implicit association between whiteness and American identity. Cultural changes are also undermining heteropatriarchal norms as fewer households are based on a marriage between a man and a woman, and growing numbers of people understand gender identity to be fluid. Together these changes have tended to cast the current ideological crisis as one of patriarchal white identity.

Racial monopoly capitalism is riddled with crises, but there is no guarantee that the system will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. The capitalist class has proven resourceful in finding ways to maintain its dominance. Moreover, the current balance of forces would make such a collapse disastrous for 21st century socialism, given the momentum of rightwing authoritarianism and the concentration of armed power on the right. Our task as revolutionary strategists is to advance the struggle for socialism, peace, and liberation in this moment of compound crisis.

THE CORRELATION OF FORCES

Various political forces are in motion in response to the compound crisis described in the previous segment. These forces are contesting, whether knowingly or not, for the millions of people who fall somewhere in the middle of the political spectrum and who do not see themselves as activists, making them open to persuasion by organized forces on the left and the right. This contestable “middle” is key to building a front broad enough to engage the conjuncture and to build power effectively. This raises questions including:
• What is the level, scale, and quality of organization among competing class and social forces?

• Among the politically unaffiliated middle forces, for whom do we need to contest to achieve our goals in the long term? How can we build with them in the coming period?

• What do we know about the projected base for which we are contesting?

For decades, the social movement left has largely either ignored or lumped together rightwing forces without discerning their distinctive interests, political capacities, and social bases. Recent events should put to rest any notion that the left can effectively build power without understanding the trends and dynamics among various forces on the right. Being aware of the differences that distinguish them creates potential opportunities to split their alliances.

The right has developed a rich organizational ecosystem that includes institutions supporting the Christian right, the secular (corporate or libertarian) right, and the xenophobic (racist) right. Although there are ideological differences and overlap among these sectors, they each play a role in the current conjuncture in relationship to a revanchist and misogynistic white backlash against immigrants and Muslims in particular, and against the demographic shift toward a majority-minority nation more generally.

The far right includes a significant armed wing composed of various paramilitary forces that are increasingly coordinating with state forces. These rightwing forces grew substantially in response to President Barack Obama’s first administration, with the number of Patriot groups, including armed militias, rising by 755% during the first three years alone. The Tea Party also developed as a direct response to the Obama presidency, accusing Obama of being a foreigner, a Muslim, and a socialist who sought to “destroy America”. Most recently, the so-called Alt-Right has emerged as a white nationalist force, mobi-
lizing a sense of white male victimhood and marginalization. The violent “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville featured a range of groups including white nationalists and armed Patriot groups.

**Much of the social movement left is trapped inside the nonprofit charity structure, leaving us reliant on an organizational form that legally prevents us from contesting for political power.**

In contrast, there is no coherent left in the United States although some of the essential building blocks exist. There are important socialist organizations across the country with cadres, but they are small and lack influence. None is seen to represent fully a fight against racial monopoly capitalism for a qualitatively better future. The Democratic Socialists of America have grown tremendously, building on the success of the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. Like other socialist organizations, they are not yet sufficiently rooted in the class and social forces needed for a successful fight for socialism in the 21st century, but they are taking action, most notably with the campaign for single-payer healthcare. Promising discussions are happening between various socialist organizations about developing left unity and shared work.

Overall, there is not a coherent national left strategy, leaving people to do their own thing either as individuals or as organizations and networks that are overly shaped by philanthropy. American exceptionalism leaves us without the insight and power of joint internationalist struggle. Parochialism leaves us with serious blind spots where we project the conditions of the city or region in which we are working onto the country as a whole, rather than forging a shared understanding of the conditions, capacities, and opportunities that could be networked together and strategically leveraged across different geographies. The U.S. left, as a whole, sits in the shadow of the long-term decline of the labor movement. There are promising efforts in unions, such as the National Nurses Union, Chicago Teachers Union, and the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, raising the visibility of worker struggles in various sectors but unionization rates are low, there is little strike activity, and labor must develop ways to build working class power as a leverage against finance capital. Few unions seem committed to the deep, transformative organizing that is necessary and possible now. With the shifts happening in the structure of the economy, the labor movement is in a position to develop innovative working-class organizing approaches that both confront workplace and community issues.

Much of the social movement left is trapped inside the nonprofit charity structure, leaving us reliant on an organizational form that legally prevents us from contesting for political power. Many of these groups do critical work developing leaders, building counter-institutions, providing services and advocating for policy change, but that work usually happens in isolation, which minimizes its potential impact. Outside the nonprofit structure, there are important and exciting initiatives, but these are smaller than the moment demands. Driven by some of these initiatives like the Global Black Lives Matters network, The Movement for Black Lives, No DAPL, and the broad immigrant rights movement, there has been a qualitative shift in street politics, reflected in an upsurge in popular mobilization and increased efforts to facilitate a greater degree of coordination.

Most of the forces that would make up a robust left does not have electoral experience. Some emergent forces also lack experience in organizing, and instead rely on in-person and online mobilizations. Negative U.S. traditions like individualism, pragmatism, postmodernism, and anti-intellectualism also negatively affect the left. There remains a dearth of institutions that teach people how to build bases, despite the pressing need to organize the unorganized.
Despite opportunities presented by the conjuncture, social movement leftists tend to fetishize marginalization itself as if it were a source of power. This prevents much of the left from effectively challenging marginalization and adopting a posture of leadership for society and the nation as a whole. Trauma and alienation reinforce this dynamic, especially in the absence of a left politics of militancy, resilience, and solidarity.

Social movement activists and organizers suffer from a persistent misunderstanding of the correlation of forces. We ahistorically overestimate our side’s capacity and influence, and often hold anti-capitalism as a personal moral commitment rather than as a long-term project.

There are promising experiments in organizing that is multi-generational, engages alienation politically, and is building a robust inside/outside electoral organizing model anchored in left politics. There are seeds of what could become institutions for socialist reproduction—alternative economic institutions like cooperatives, mutual aid work, and community-based mental health and resilience networks. Although more social movement activists and organizers identify with socialism as a vision for society, this idea lacks the organizational form required to usher in a new phase of struggle.

International dimension of the conjuncture and correlation of forces

An assessment of the current conjuncture and correlation of forces is not complete without considering the international dimension, particularly given the role of the U.S. as the world’s dominant imperialist power. Time constraints did not allow for this full analysis in this document yet this is a pressing task for U.S. leftists.

Capitalism is in crisis internationally, with the struggle for ever greater profits amid economic crises causing a greater wealth gap between the ruling classes and the working and poor classes, resulting in numerous wars over access to resources and profits. New phenomena need discussion, including the rise of global right-wing forces, “failed states”, the impact of climate change on the survival of developing nations and the rising role of China as a global economic power and potential challenger to U.S. hegemony. The question of how capitalist globalization operates is also important, and there are debates among the left about whether or not there is a global ruling class and a developing supranational state. Overall, we can say that, while the U.S. is still the foremost imperialist power, it faces increasing economic competition particularly from Europe and China and is waging ever more dangerous wars across the planet to attempt to shore up its imperialist standing.

International left opposition to imperialism and capitalism exists in the remaining socialist countries (to various extents), in some progressive countries like Venezuela and South Africa and among peoples’ movements, particularly in the third world. Yet this opposition is scattered, lacks organizational coherence and faces strong repression and attacks. Clearly, the growth of a U.S. left/socialist movement with a strong
anti-imperialist dimension of its strategy will play a crucial role in improving this correlation of forces!

**POPULAR FORCES AND GEOGRAPHY**

We were unable to do a complete assessment of this topic, but our inquiries led us to the following hypotheses, which require testing:

1. The exploited classes of the current base of the far right are stronger in rural and semi-rural areas as well as in smaller rust-belt cities.

2. The non-monopoly capitalist class, the professional managerial class and the upper layer of the small-scale capitalist class that support and fund the far right are stronger in affluent suburban and urban areas.

3. The monopoly capitalists who align with the right are tied to metropolitan areas due to their business interests in finance, real estate, extractive industries, and other industries largely managed in global cities.

4. The emergent left is strongest at the municipal level in multiracial urban centers. Gentrification and the suburbanization of poverty are diluting that power, while offering opportunities to organize displaced segments of the working class in rural and suburban areas to transform political culture and compete with the right.

5. Urban centers are strategic points of pressure on the ruling class, as this is mainly where vested ruling-class interests reside.

6. Suburban areas are experiencing an influx of non-white and working-class people – a change whose effects we do not yet fully know. They are home to a particularly important form of alienation as a sites where racialized ideals of the American family and the American Dream have taken hold, both of which have been eroding in recent decades.

7. Rural areas are strategic points of pressure to target networks of distribution for fossil fuels, on which a section of the ruling-class coalition depends. They are also central to agriculture and to cultivating the food on which we all depend. Although rural organizing has not been a stronghold of the left in the last generation, capital’s renewed push for resource extraction in territories controlled by sovereign indigenous nations has created new fronts of struggle.

8. Bold and urgent work has developed in rural areas, and has all-too often been isolated from national support by the social movement left.

9. Progressive Southern organizing has amplified over the last two decades both in power and sophistication, coordinating across both rural and urban areas in the context of explicit white supremacy. At a national level the social movement left must support, learn from, and expand on this work, particularly given the economic growth and changing demographics in the South.

10. The lessons learned by frontline organizations in rural areas and in the U.S. South are particularly important to national work in this moment, as they contend with the politics, organizations, and political culture of white nationalism and neo-confederacy that have reached national prominence through Trumpism.

11. States with left-leaning state alliances and coalitions have a leading role to play in the national resistance to Trumpism. They can leverage their power to create roadblocks to rightwing consolidation nationally, and can innovate progressive alternatives like universal healthcare at scale.
I feel real proud that I was able to live in a period where I saw people rise up. And that makes all the difference. Because this is not a theoretical question to me no more... And I always pride myself with a couple of quotes by Frederick Engels that’ve helped me so much.

“We can and must begin to build socialism, not with abstract human material, not with human material created by us, but with the human material that has been bequeathed to us by capitalism.”

So I can’t make no people, I can’t make no movement. We gotta take this—what we got, and we gotta work with this thing to build a movement out of it for our future.

—General Baker. 2009 interview
Successful liberatory strategy does not emerge out of thin air. It does not come from simply adhering to long-term goals or from engaging in sloppy experimentation. Rather, strategy is the combination of an audacious vision; a sober assessment of the conditions, contradictions, and forces in motion; grounded forecasts of potential scenarios; and a coherent theory of the capacities needed to navigate both the known and the unknown. At its best, liberatory strategy paints a picture of the revolutionary road that cadres can use to prioritize our work and amplify our efforts, while remaining vigilant and prepared to adjust if necessary.

LeftRoots defines strategy as a framework for projecting a series of actions, amid challenges and opposing forces, to assemble the counter-forces and capacities we need to achieve an outcome that is not possible now. Strategy is particularly important when the vision is not immediately achievable. This approach rests on the premise that we – the people and our movements – will have to navigate a road with many twists and turns in order to shift the correlation of forces and reshape the terrain on which we struggle. At each phase of struggle, we must respond to Freire’s pointed question, “What can we do today, so that tomorrow we can do what we are unable to do today?”

Guided by this question, we propose a strategy of protracted struggle during which left forces construct and lead a socialist “historic bloc”. This concept comes from the theoretical writings of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Imprisoned for more than 20 years under Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime, Gramsci’s insights are particularly relevant for us as social movement leftists in the United States, since the bulk of his theory tackled the challenge of waging socialist struggles in advanced capitalist countries like our own. A historic bloc is a robust alliance of class and social forces united by a shared vision. Depending on the conditions and correlation of forces in play at different phases of struggle, this bloc will change and grow along the revolutionary road to socialism for the 21st century.

Anchored in our vision and assessment, we project six connected phases of contestation. The first phase focuses on defeating the Trump coalition in the 2018 and 2020 elections in key local, state, and national arenas while also preparing to launch a revolutionary political instrument by 2022. If social movement leftists play a significant role in defeating Trump’s forces in a way that asserts the viability of a socialist alternative, we would both mature our forces and build leverage for subsequent phases of struggle.

**HEGEMONY AND THE HISTORIC BLOC**

Gramsci observed that in advanced capitalist countries, the capitalist class maintains its dominance through a dynamic and fluid method of rule that not only uses state repression, but also motivates oppressed people to actively participate and invest in the system of their own oppression. The capitalist class does this by propagating a host of ideas, morals, and cultural norms, and by offering material and symbolic concessions to segments of the working class. For this reason, Gramsci urged socialists to remember “that ‘popular beliefs’ and similar ideas are themselves material forces” – meaning that...
they have the power to shape material reality. Gramsci named this method of class rule hegemoney, emphasizing the tendency of capitalists to lead, rather than simply to dominate, key segments of the working class.\(^3\)

Given the power of hegemoney, Gramsci proposed two pivotal phases in the struggle for socialism: the war of position and the war of maneuver. This two-pronged strategy involves disrupting the bourgeois social order to gain the legitimacy needed eventually to seize state power.

Consider how hegemoney and historic blocs worked in the shift from liberal Keynesianism to neoliberalism in the United States in the last half of the 20th century. Amid the conjuncture of the Civil Rights Era, the right neutralized the main forces opposing capitalism by violently attacking U.S. liberation movements through programs like COINTELPRO and by stoking public fear of Communism with Cold War propaganda. This effectively eliminated capital's need to maintain the Keynesian compromise with labor. Meanwhile, beginning with the 1964 and 1968 Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon campaigns, the Republican “Southern Strategy” used appeals to white voters’ racial and cultural anxieties to pull them from the Democratic Party into the GOP.

With stagflation and the oil crisis in the 1970s, and growing resentment particularly among Southern whites against the gains of the Civil Rights, Women's, and LGBTQ movements, a rightwing coalition stepped in to speak directly to this conjuncture, and to exploit it. Using thinly veiled racial and cultural appeals particularly aimed at racist Southern whites and conservative Christians, this coalition successfully flipped the South to the Republican Party, and elected Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980. It expanded mainstream political space for attacks on women, people of color, LGBTQ people, poor people, and the labor movement that it would later parlay into support for the War on Drugs, corporate deregulation, and tax cuts for the wealthy.

The dominant forces leading the GOP’s historic bloc in the 1970s were the neoliberals. These ruling class forces sought to defend and advance “free enterprise” by building their own think tanks, taking over both political parties, winning legal strategies like the treatment of campaign contributions as free speech, using the media, and more. All of this gave rise to a surge in conservative

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intellectualism and philanthropy that deeply shaped public opinion and the terrain on which social movement leftists were forced to struggle. As Stuart Hall describes, “It is part of the right’s project to turn the tide on every front – in civil society and moral life as much as in economic habits and expectations. Its project, in short, is to become hegemonic, to address the common experience, to speak to and for the nation.”4

In order to advance now, we will need to speak to more than just the need to improve working conditions or reduce income inequality. We will need ideas that speak to the aspirations and yearnings of popular forces that can reverberate in our neighborhoods, our kitchens, our schools, and the corner store.

Gramsci wrote that crises were important because they “create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions.”5 Indeed, as we have written earlier, crises are moments when new things become possible. However, as left political educator Harmony Goldberg puts it:

[Crises] do not ensure that oppressed people will believe in the need for a new economy or that they will have the power to wage a successful revolutionary struggle. To Gramsci, an insurrectionary moment will only succeed if it follows a long-term effort to win oppressed people over to a transformative vision...

If progressive forces have not adequately prepared for these moments of crisis, they are likely to be outstripped by the well-resourced and practiced ruling class who can ‘reabsorb the control that was slipping from its grasp’. Thus, the preparation of progressive forces in the periods preceding a crisis is potentially even more decisive than the political decisions made in the moment of crisis itself. Because “a crisis cannot give the attacking forces the ability to organise with lightning speed in time and in space”, the work to “prepare for it [i.e. political struggle during a crisis] minutely and technically in peacetime” is the most likely determinate of victory.6

The current convergence of economic, political, and ideological crises is not likely to be resolved soon, and we have not had the opportunity to prepare our forces for the dangers and opportunities they present. The war of position and the war of maneuver provide a helpful framework for thinking about how to develop our capacities as we struggle toward socialism for the 21st century, despite the challenges of this rapidly shifting landscape. Constructing the historic bloc will call on our forces to lead in a way that we have not done before, and eventually to govern.

We anticipate that a successful war of maneuver will require a dynamic political instrument that is in service to and grows out of a vibrant movement eco-system with the capacity to defend revolutionary forces from counter-attack. More than simply a political party, this organization must be capable of mobilizing millions of people who have been brought together in a broad, cross-class alliance, best understood as a socialist historic bloc. Committed to securing the interests of its driving sectors, the formation of this historic bloc will reflect the contributions of tens of thousands of trained and tested cadres deployed throughout the country as well as an interlocking set of institutions that meet people’s needs outside of racial monopoly capitalism.

**CLASS AND SOCIAL FORCES IN THE HISTORIC BLOC**

The concept of the historic bloc is a challenge to the misinterpretation of Marxist theory that the socialist revolution is a struggle of and for the working class alone.

Gramsci argues that, although one class (the working class) must be the central driving force in a revolutionary movement, a successful strategy requires the building of an alliance of multiple class forces. He describes this cross-class alliance as a “social bloc” or a “historic bloc.” This historic bloc must be united by a “national-popular” vision that represents the interests and hopes of all of its constituent class forces. The “historic bloc” strategy is one in which – rather than “dominating” other classes – the
The class and social forces that we see as the bloc’s driving force are Blacks, Latinos, and Indigenous people—particularly women and gender-oppressed people—from the middle, hyper-exploited, and excluded layers of the working class.

The interaction between race, gender, and class within racial monopoly capitalism in the United States is complex and dynamic. Because of how the system has developed, no one in this country—regardless of power or privilege—is untouched by capitalism, white supremacy, or heteropatriarchy. These have material implications in everyone’s daily life. Yet developing our strategic capacities requires us to identify how the system has fostered revolutionary potential among certain class and social forces—that is, which groups are least economically, politically and ideologically invested in the survival of racial monopoly capitalism and are therefore positioned to challenge the hegemony of the monopoly capitalist class. Strategy requires us to discern which class and social forces are positioned in key choke-points in the economy and/or political structure, or are key to subverting the dominant narrative that supports the system. The construction of a socialist historic bloc will depend on the contributions of the entire working class and associated social forces. However, U.S. hegemony has given carrots to some and sticks to others. The racial bribe that began in 1705 evolved to become a recurring feature of U.S. hegemony throughout history. This has distorted class consciousness, making it impossible to say that the entire U.S. working class will be the driving force in the historic bloc without strategically interrupting the intertwined narratives of class, race, gender.

We do not assert that Blacks, Latinos, and Indigenous people—particularly women and gender-oppressed people—from the middle, hyper-exploited, and excluded layers of the working class make up the driving force because they are the most exploited or oppressed, or because of any moral designation. It is also important to stress that the driving force does not represent demographic categories, but rather the general interests of people in those working-class layers combined with their potential access to levers of economic and political power. Obviously, the consciousness and lived experience of any particular individual may or may not express the interests of the overall group. The hypothesis is that the interests of the driving force will reflect the broader needs and interests of the entire working class and related social forces, and that advancing them would benefit all of society. Organizations composed of these layers of the working class are likely to play a significant role in the broad cross-class, multiracial historic bloc.

Experiences of the system’s brutality do not guarantee that a segment of the working class will play a driving role within the historic bloc. The development and current form of racial monopoly capitalism has positioned these layers of the driving force in strategically significant ways.
Black people in the middle, hyper-exploited, and excluded layers of the working class are part of the driving force because of their historical and structural relationship to the formation of U.S. racial monopoly capitalism as enslaved and super-exploited labor. Black workers are positioned in key choke-points of the economy, both in private and government sectors and in the military. With few exceptions, the capitalist class has tended not to extend concessions to this segment of the working class, relying instead on mechanisms of force rather than on participation and consent. Moreover, U.S. hegemony has used their symbolic denigration – reflected most clearly in narratives of criminality – as the force and leverage against which a positive white American national identity is uplifted and upheld. This has shaped the economic and political interests of this segment of the working class in direct opposition to the interests of the capitalist class. This is reflected in the long arc of the Black freedom struggle, which has not only fought for the specific interests of Black people, but has also inspired and catalyzed other liberation struggles. Additionally, victories of Black freedom struggles have advanced the interests of the entire working class. Today, working-class Black people – and particularly Black women – are the most consistently left-leaning political constituency in the United States. They overwhelmingly rejected Donald Trump’s candidacy and a majority of them support a socialist alternative. Given the class stratification that has taken place within the Black community over the last 40 years, it is Black people in these layers of the working class who will play a driving role in the socialist historic bloc.

Latinos in the middle, hyper-exploited, and excluded layers of the working class, particularly immigrant workers, are part of the driving force because of their historical and structural relationship to settler colonialism and imperialism under racial monopoly capitalism. The settlement and expropriation of Mexican and Puerto Rican territory has placed this group’s general interests at odds with the perpetuation of racial monopoly capitalism. Over the past half century, the “push” of U.S. military and economic interventions and the “pull” of domestic demands for cheap and compliant labor have led ever-greater numbers of working-class Latinos to this country. In symbolic terms, this segment of the Latino population serves as a dangerous and unassimilated “other”. Working class Latinos occupy choke-points in the service sector, food production and the military. Given the class and political complexity and instability of Latino identity, it is Latinos in these layers of the working class who will be part of the driving force.

Indigenous people in the middle, hyper-exploited, and excluded layers of the working class, both those who live on reservations and those living in cities and small towns within the United States, are part of the driving force because of their historical and structural relationship specifically to the settler colonialist roots of racial monopoly capitalism. Rather than a founding or discrete event, settler colonialism is an ongoing project that functions as the economic and ideological basis for the United States. Today, this is reflected in attacks on Native American treaty rights, challenges to the sovereignty of tribal governments, the extraction of resources from indigenous lands, the utter devaluation of Native American lives, and the symbolic denial of the existence of Native peoples.
This segment of the working class has a long-practiced and culturally embedded interest in stewardship of the earth, a key component of 21st century socialism. Indigenous people in these layers of the working class will be part of the driving force.

What positions these class and social forces to be the driving force of the historic bloc is that they have the fewest interests in conflict with the realization of socialist liberation. The struggle for 21st century socialism meets not only their group interests, but also the general interests of society. It is important to remember that all of society would benefit from socialist liberation. The driving force must lead all other classes and social forces in a way that articulates this as common sense. However, the driving forces alone are not sufficient to win socialist liberation. The driving class and social forces must trust that they can inspire, lead, and sustain the entire bloc. We cannot retreat into marginalization by allowing our individual and collective experiences of exploitation, oppression, subjugation, and humiliation to prevent us from driving forward. We cannot leave it to those who have more privilege, more prestige, and more resources. We must lead in the construction of a new concept of who we are as a people and as a nation so that all of society sees their participation as essential, and then as obvious.

We will also need the active leadership of other classes and associated social forces in the formation and development of the historic bloc. Indeed, the specific contours of the historic bloc will look different in different geographic regions and contexts, and at different phases of struggle. Social movement leftists will need to do rigorous assessments of the correlation of forces and what it will take to win strategic advances in their particular geographic areas. At the national level, the historic bloc will need to incorporate the interests of various “key forces” including:

- The broader multiracial working class including Muslim, Arab, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and white peoples;
- Multiracial lower layer of the small-scale capitalist class;
- Black people across most classes;
- Women particularly in the working class; and
- LGBTQ peoples.

Beyond the driving and key forces, there will be other class layers and associated groups whose interests compel them to participate in the formation of the socialist historic bloc in different periods. Further analysis might reveal the strategic importance of targeted organizing among sectors of the working class that are not driving forces, because of their structural or symbolic relationship to the current hegemony of the Trump administration for example.

Leading does not mean that only working-class Black, Latino, and Indigenous people can occupy positions of public prominence or serve on organizational steering committees. This is not a flat issue of representation. Leading means assuming the responsibility to forge a new identity that both centers the interests of the driving forces while also developing organizations that embody and advance the interests of all forces within the historic bloc.
As the movement grows and builds strength, members of the small-scale capitalist class, the professional managerial class, and even some from the capitalist class are likely to break off and see their interests in alignment with those of our movement. This will be even more important as we identify particular choke-points in the racial monopoly capitalist system such as warehouse service workers along the supply chain or a union of aligned computer programmers from all classes may become more visibly essential in light of the trend toward computerization, automation, and artificial intelligence.

Our movement must look out for opportunities to break up and win over forces aligned with the prevailing hegemony—the monopoly capitalists. This strategic orientation assumes a protracted struggle not only to build our own forces, but also to split apart the class alliance on which our opponents rely.

Understanding the composition of the socialist historic bloc and the interests around which it must cohere is a fundamental task of revolutionary strategists. All of our tactics, campaigns, and initiatives should contribute to growing the capacities, relationships, and common sense that will bring this bloc into being.

**ROADMAP TO 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

Liberation is possible but not guaranteed. Because we are not yet on the doorstep of socialist liberation, we will have to traverse different phases. Each will be characterized by a unique correlation of forces. Each will demand new capacities and boundary-pushing tasks in order to prepare ourselves for the next phase of struggle.

We project that the long struggle for socialist liberation will advance through six dialectical phases. As opposed to a sequential progression from one phase to another, we anticipate a spiraling dynamic. Advance is unlikely to be linear. Instead we will likely see both progress and setbacks at each phase, demanding particular tasks of us as cadres. These tasks can be grouped into four areas: ideological, political, organizational, and social capacities. At each phase, we will build the competencies that we are likely to need in the next phase. Throughout, elements of the old are likely to be carried forward and transformed into the new. The phases include:

1. **Phase 1:** Defeat Trump and the forces he represents in 2018 and 2020, setting the conditions for a revolutionary political instrument.
2. **Phase 2:** Defeat the neoliberal bloc and animate the left.
3. **Phase 3:** Constrain the monopoly capitalist bloc and expand socialist experiments.
4. **Phase 4:** Build dual power and consolidate the socialist historic bloc.
5. **Phase 5:** Transform the state.
6. **Phase 6:** Realize socialism for the 21st century

The focus of each phase of the strategy is to take on work that can open up new possibilities and allow us to do things further down the line. Strategic work leverages our power and potential in the existing correlation of forces, breaks open and resolves a contradiction that leads to a qualitatively new set of conditions, and allows us to advance to the next phase on the revolutionary road.
our ability to win victories and exposing the contradictions of racial monopoly capitalism. Strategic work produces the building blocks for a socialist political instrument.

Because we will be in a period of experimentation during this first phase, and not yet prepared to take on a unified campaign, LeftRoots will sponsor labs in which cadres will conduct targeted experiments to test key hypotheses and share the results with the membership. We will also provide structure and support for cadres to reflect on their experiences and to develop the skills and relationships necessary to strengthen the work they are already doing to advance the struggle for socialist liberation. A key skill for all of us will be to assess how particular interventions during a given phase can lay the foundation for advancing the struggle in the subsequent one.

**PHASE 1: DEFEAT TRUMP AND THE FORCES HE REPRESENTS IN 2018 AND 2020, SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR A REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL INSTRUMENT**

Much of the work of this period is in reaction to the advances made by the right wing of monopoly capital, white nationalists, and the religious right that have come to form the Trump coalition. There are no shortcuts to advancing during this phase. The forces we face plotted, built and organized for years to secure their current position of power.

Waged strategically, we believe that the first phase will prepare socialist forces to take on the subsequent work of articulating a socialist historic bloc, which begins in earnest in the second phase and continues to the sixth.

**PHASE 2: DEFEAT THE NEOLIBERAL BLOC AND ANIMATE THE LEFT**

During this phase, the left will work to isolate and further delegitimize the neoliberal monopoly capitalists, and to peel off other sectors from this bloc. This will be increasingly possible due to the structural constraints facing racial monopoly capitalism. This will be ideological and political work: the left will emphasize political and economic democracy with campaigns focused on getting money out of politics, expanding formal mechanisms of democracy, and establishing new mechanisms for democratic participation and governance.

In this phase, leftists will launch the revolutionary political instrument. Once in place, we will launch experiments to revitalize the labor movement, to get accountable leftists elected in key regions, and to develop an interconnected network of left institutions.

**PHASE 3: CONSTRAIN THE MONOPOLY CAPITALIST BLOC AND EXPAND SOCIALIST EXPERIMENTS**

This phase will focus on expanding socialist experiments, likely to be happening within a broader ecosystem of socialist democracy. These experiments could include expanding and networking alternative economic institutions like worker and consumer co-ops, land trusts, public banks, etc. These socialist experiments would serve both to demonstrate the viability of an alternative to capitalism and to help develop the individual and collective capacities needed to expand socialist projects as opportunities arise.

To the degree that these projects successfully constrain monopoly capital’s ability to grow through speculative finance, they will help to limit the frequency and scale of economic recessions. The movement will also focus on organizing the military during this phase, since the capitalist class will undoubtedly seek to address these crises through repression. This will be increasingly possible as the driving forces of the socialist historic bloc successfully win over key social forces.

**PHASE 4: BUILD DUAL POWER AND CONсолIDATE THE SOCIALIST HISTORIC BLOC**

This phase marks the point at which socialist hegemony takes shape and begins to expand. The co-ops, land trusts and public banks that blossomed in phase 3 have now matured into a systemic alternative to racial monopoly capitalism in key areas, with corresponding social and political institutions. Leftists control seats of government in these areas as well as in other parts of the country.
Over time, these two systems compete for legitimacy. As the socialist experiments thrive and a new ‘common sense’ emerges, socialism comes to be seen as a more viable alternative, and more sectors align with the socialist historic bloc. A possible test during this period would be a constitutional convention during which leftists call for the dissolution of the electoral college and the creation of a more representative system of governance.

**PHASE 5: TRANSFORM THE STATE**

During this phase, major transformations in the economy and the state will take place. Key aspects of the socialist triangle will be developing in tandem. Most notably, ownership of the means of production in major industries will transfer to the people. The role of the state will shift from enabling monopoly capital’s accumulation of profit to regulating capitalist exchange and facilitating the emergence of socialist relations and institutions. One of the most important tasks during this fifth phase will be to launch an international political instrument to support movement struggles in other parts of the world.

**PHASE 6: REALIZE SOCIALISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

In the sixth phase, socialism for the 21st century will become an organic and self-reproducing system. Although socialist forces will still need to guard against counter-revolutionary efforts from the monopoly capitalist class, this phase marks the resolution of capitalism’s fundamental contradiction and demands expanded experimentation in protagonist civil society. Success here will enable the movement to deepen the roots of the political and cultural dimensions of what socialism for the 21st century makes possible.

This approach to strategy reflects our understanding of the struggle for 21st century socialism as a protracted one waged through a “war of position” that peels back the layers of capitalist class hegemony in a way that produces concrete opportunities for the left to contest for power. In order to carry out this struggle strategically, leftists must not only orient themselves toward victory in the short term, but also attend to building the capacities to advance down the revolutionary road in subsequent phases of struggle.

**STARTING NOW: PHASE ONE**

The first phase of the strategy for socialist liberation is to defeat Trump and the forces he represents in the 2018 and 2020 elections while laying the groundwork for a revolutionary political instrument. This phase holds two imperatives for the left to build the capacities required to advance to the next phase. This has important implications for how we carry out this work.

**DEFEAT TRUMP FORCES IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS**

Trump and the forces on which his power relies present a dangerous threat to all of humanity and the planet. With the Trump-led GOP controlling state and federal government – including the Supreme Court – and increasingly coordinating with organized white nationalist forces, Trump’s coalition is poised to advance a political, economic, and cultural project that threatens to crush any potential for progressive or socialist breakthroughs for at least a generation. The lack of a coherent and organized left in the United States means that leftist individuals and organizations need to participate in pro-democracy, anti-fascist anti-racist, and anti-sexist fronts to ensure that Trump’s forces lose majority control of the federal government and state legislatures in the 2018 and 2020 elections. These are the core ideological and political tasks in this first phase.

The strategic objective in this phase is to defeat Trump and his reactionary forces, to defend space for social movements to function and grow, to prevent the most brutal forms of repression, and to prepare for future phases of struggle where we can make greater advances. In our estimation, due to the real threat of authoritarianism and the consolidation of rightwing power, further advances will not be possible unless we achieve this. We say “participate in” rather than “lead” because of our assessment of the current conjuncture and correlation of forces, not because we want it to be that way. If we had a strong and vibrant left, we might
be able to assert a lead role among these forces, but we are not there—yet.

To do this we will have to counter a tendency in our movements that disdains electoral work as irrelevant or fears us getting our hands dirty or being coopted (even as we remain vigilant to avoid cooptation). At this stage, the only way to defeat Trump and Trumpism and all that implies is to change the balance of forces among those who exercise governmental power. Elections are also the largest national collective activity that class forces in the potential socialist historic bloc participate in – a site of struggle where millions of people are! We see electoral work as an important tactic in defeating the ultra-right and building our capacity for a political instrument for stage 2 of the struggle. We also see electoral work as encompassing not only getting votes for candidates, but base and coalition/front building among key sectors, building unity with other progressive forces to hold those elected accountable after elections and developing our capacity for left messaging. The electoral defeat of Trump is inextricably linked to building left capacity and laying the basis for the 2nd stage. Electoral work can be a school for training our cadre and will get us in contact with potentially millions of people from the driving and leading forces.

To neutralize this very real threat from the right, leftists will have to employ an inside/outside approach with the Democratic Party to work not only with progressives but also neoliberals with whom we have important political differences. This will look different in different places. Sometimes these fronts will exist within the Democratic Party; sometimes they will be outside. Sometimes leftists will have to work to elect neoliberal Democrats in this first phase if it is a pivotal contest that could shift the makeup of Congress and state legislatures.

Our evaluation cannot be based simply on whether a given candidate reflects our larger vision. Depending on the correlation of forces in a given situation, this might require leftists to support the election of neoliberals. On the other hand, we should be prepared to advance more left-leaning Democrats, fusion, or even independent candidates who have strong enough support to defeat Republicans.

The key confrontations during this first phase will take place in the mid-term elections in 2018 and the presidential elections in 2020. There should be ongoing work toward the elections in all aspects of our movement, but there will need to be focused and coordinated efforts in the particular swing states that can strip Trump and his forces from government positions. These struggles will be strategically important even if the movement does not currently have deep roots in those communities. The objective to oust Trump. This is not to suggest that electoral politics is the only, or even the most, important arena of struggle. However, we do intend to convey that who controls the government is a vitally important question, and that we should invest movement resources to ensure that Trump, the white nationalists, and the religious right no longer exercise control over public resources and the functioning of the state.

At the same time, we also must remain vigilant to the dangers in such an approach. Democrats and the class
and social interests they represent will try to co-opt our work and our efforts, and to redirect them toward the “multicultural neoliberalism” that has undergirded their policy platform. Even as leftists work within tactical fronts with the Democratic Party, we cannot get sucked into more centrist projects or risk being lumped in with neoliberals in the eyes of the people who are justifiably outraged at the neoliberal establishment. We cannot afford to defeat Trump in a way that leaves the left with no new capacity, leaving room for the neoliberals to reclaim hegemony.

The left must make clear that we are not a part of the neoliberal project. That is the way to out-organize the right in the populist arena, not by running to the center. These are real pitfalls that program and tactics will have to address. Movement history is littered with many examples of well-intentioned leftists engaged in these types of fronts who failed to build a stronger and better-prepared left capable of advancing the struggle. It will not be easy, but we believe that leftists must move full force in the fight against Trump, white nationalists, and fascists, while also attending to the long-term struggle against racial monopoly capitalism and preparing to lead the whole nation.

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As part of these electoral fights and as separate campaigns, we see two key policy fights that an aspiring left could take on during this first phase — the fight for universal single-payer healthcare and the fight to both defend and expand political democracy. This includes fighting against voter disenfranchisement and purges, getting money out of politics, and winning universal voting rights. We see these as issues that have strategic importance since success could trigger a significant shift in the correlation of forces.

The fight on healthcare would allow us to build a broader base among the key class and social forces in a developing socialist historic bloc. It would make clear how meeting the interests of working class Black, Latino, and Indigenous people, particularly women, benefits the majority of society. It also prefigures the socialist goal of meeting collective needs outside of the commodity market, and diminishes the power of important sectors of the monopoly capitalist class. The fight for voting rights and universal suffrage paves the way for expanded participation in social issues and better positions disenfranchised segments of the working class to exert political power.

We recognize that this does not cover all of important work happening now on the social movement left. We see these as issues that have strategic importance since success could trigger a significant shift in the correlation of forces engaged in politics. However, we are not calling for leftists to abandon their current work. We are hopeful that cadres will continue to do our work in ways that connect with this strategy and that stretch to incorporate new issues and approaches.

We also wrestled with the issue of climate change. We grappled with the knowledge that the climate crisis cannot be resolved under racial monopoly capitalism and that, according to scientific projections, we are unlikely to build socialist hegemony in the time necessary to avoid
the worst of catastrophic environmental crises. Given both the current and future impacts of ecological devastation, this is a critical front of struggle. Leftists will have to experiment with a range of strategies to effectively curb carbon emissions, based on a clear assessment of time, place and conditions. Effectively curbing carbon emissions is a vital factor since many proposed “solutions” are unlikely to have an actual impact on carbon emissions and ecological degradation. It is essential to acknowledge that many of these are not long-term solutions, as neoliberals would claim, but are rather minimal efforts that merely forestall the most disastrous effects of climate change. Nonetheless, we can deploy these tactics with the additional goal of gathering our forces into position.

Given that we are currently not powerful enough to win the solutions we need at the scale we need, we must also orient around building our forces even as we fight to curb carbon emissions. It is this orientation towards a tactical decision to advance a non-reformist reform that distinguishes it from a pure reform. How left forces organize around the reform matters. We must organize in such a way that builds our power and curtails the power of forces profiting from false solutions. In other words, left forces must focus on shifting the correlation of forces so that we can win what we truly need in the future.

We cannot predict the future. The current conjuncture is complex, and many things are not knowable at this phase. Events will not unfold in a linear fashion or in a way that we control. However, clarity about the tasks of each phase may allow the left to make qualitative leaps when unforeseen opportunities arise. LeftRoots offers this strategic orientation as a hypothesis, with the dual aim of providing a point of departure for urgent debates about strategy, and building our own capacities to develop and carry out strategy.

BUILDING TOWARD A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

Even as we work to defeat Trumpism, we must address its core weaknesses and prepare to go from defense to offense. That is why, even in this first phase of the strategy for socialist liberation, we must lay the groundwork for a revolutionary political instrument to emerge by 2022.

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LeftRoots has outlined eight key tasks that the political instrument must play:
1. Design an alternative project for the world we want to build that unifies the struggles of diverse social actors behind a common vision;
2. Eliminate the social and political fragmentation we have inherited, and construct a social force that is willing to fight and is capable of achieving the alternative;

Political instrument is a term that LeftRoots has taken from the Chilean movement activist Marta Harnecker. Reflecting on the need to transform popular energy “into a force capable of bringing about change,” she describes a political instrument as an organization “that can help overcome the dispersion and atomization of the exploited and oppressed by proposing an alternative national program to serve as a cohering instrument for broad popular sectors. Also needed are program and tactics that allow for unity in action so as to most effectively deal blows… to the powerful enemy that must be confronted in decisive moments and places.”

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2. Eliminate the social and political fragmentation we have inherited, and construct a social force that is willing to fight and is capable of achieving the alternative;
3. Continually analyze the global political situation and act on the basis of that analysis;
4. Encourage and facilitate the people’s protagonistic participation;
5. Transform the people’s consciousness by waging an effective and coordinated counter-hegemonic struggle that can reframe longstanding narratives propagated by the right;
6. Seek out and prepare cadres who can breathe new life into the political instrument by combining popular wisdom with a global analysis of the political situation;
7. Cooperate on the basis of mutual respect with social movements; and
8. Give early warning of the weaknesses perceived and the mistakes being made in the construction of the alternative project.

LeftRoots sees the emergence of this kind of political instrument as a necessary component of a liberatory movement. Without it, we cannot pull off the work with the flexibility, and at the scale, that this moment demands. Bringing a political instrument into being will involve more than wishing for it. In addition to helping to depose Trump and his allied forces, social movement leftists must sharpen our ability to formulate, debate, evaluate, and carry out revolutionary strategy; recruit and develop new cadres from the working class; and experiment with the interplay between popular movements and a would-be political instrument. We also see the importance of developing unity with existing non-sectarian left socialist organizations, along with leftists in social movement organizations.

LeftRoots does not see itself as the political instrument. We have set out to help change the conditions that have prevented the development of this type of political instrument. Although the conditions are not yet ripe for such an organization to form if a general call were made now, it is feasible that social, economic, and political volatility coupled with intentional action by leftists could bring forth such conditions in the next four to five years. This might happen by forming a new organization. It might happen through the merger of existing organizations. And it must involve the development and leadership of new cadres who do not currently see themselves as part of the left. Meeting these conditions is the organizational task of the first phase.

EYES WIDE OPEN: WATCH FOR SHIFTING CONDITIONS

This strategy is based on both assessments and hypotheses. There are important dynamics that social movement leftists must pay attention to in the course of the struggle. Shifts in any of the matters below could trigger the need to re-evaluate the strategic orientation:

POLITICS OF THE RIGHT

We seemed to agree that Trump broke significantly from the political and social consensus about how to maintain the legitimacy of neoliberalism. However, while he has delegitimized key international aspects of this order, like the World Trade Organization, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the
Trans-Pacific Partnership, his domestic policies have rolled back key federal government regulations and promoted the unfettered movement of capital. These differences prompt the question of whether or not his administration is moving to maintain the neoliberal management of racial monopoly capitalism, or pursue his campaign promises for an “America First” economic nationalism. This affects how we address what we see as the main task of the period — defeating the white nationalist right.

**Fascist movements can often harness a degree of anti-capitalist sentiment, with animus redirected toward Jews, Black people, or immigrants, rather than the capitalist class. Thus, it is important to monitor which sectors of the working class that fascist forces are actively organizing, and whether they could be won over to the left. Track regionally and nationally how members of the working class continue to relate to the rise of authoritarianism and to the Trump coalition specifically.**

If Trump moves further toward economic nationalism, will those members of the Trump coalition that reflect his supporters on Wall Street and among monopoly capitalists side with their neoliberal interests or with right-wing populists for the sake of maintaining political power? Will Trump try to win over centrist Democrats as well as independent and wedge voters with a privatized, business-friendly approach to infrastructure and jobs? How much will he play to the Christian Right? Attending to these questions may give us a clearer sense of how aligned members of this coalition remain, what potential exists to splinter them off, and what potential exists to win key segments over to a pro-democracy, or even, a pro-socialist project.

Monitor how wings of the state interact with right-wing street forces, as their open collaboration would mark a qualitative shift in the ability of the far right to secure legitimacy. This sort of development would be significant, even though members of the militia movement and other right-wing forces have already secured footholds in armed wings of the state, as well as in local GOP caucuses. We should be pay attention to how various right-wing forces, particularly the Alt-right and militia groups, seek to align themselves with – or serve the functions of – police, military, and border patrol agents.

**RACIAL MONOPOLY CAPITALISM**

Two issues related to how we understand the character of racial monopoly capitalism: Do white workers feel that they have more to gain from ending racial monopoly capitalism than they stand to lose from ending white privilege? Their consciousness may not be oriented strictly to this economic calculation. It is nonetheless important. Further, is this calculus changing recently, given the growing precariousness of the working class?

Conversely, what is the best way to understand the place of nonwhite people within the broader context of racial monopoly capitalism? Do, for instance, Black people constitute a “nation within a nation”? If so, does the Black
nation have the right to self-determination, up to and including secession?

Moreover, how do we best articulate the role that key forces like working class Asian Pacific Islanders (API) and white people will play in a historic bloc? While we did not name these as part of the driving force, they have an essential role to play, particularly as a result of racial monopoly capitalism’s ongoing reliance on winning the allegiance of these groups through material and symbolic concessions, as opposed to force. Additionally, segments of the API population have deep historical and structural relationships to U.S. imperialism, which has long been an area of weakness on the left. This has been reflected in multiple ways, most recently in the absence of a left voice on the escalating threat of nuclear war with North Korea. Particularly Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians have been uniquely caught at the nexus of race, religion, and empire for at least the last 16 years – serving as justification for endless war and domestic repression that affects all of society. How do we define their role in strengthening a broader cross-class, multi-racial alliance? Are there instances where organizing among the lower layers of working class whites and APIs might be more strategically important than those identified as driving forces, and, if so, how might we best articulate these moments as part of the broader strategy?

**COUNTER-HEGEMONIC STRUGGLE**

How do we organize against the right in a way that gains power relative to “multicultural neoliberalism” and builds sufficient capacity and power for subsequent phases?

Peopling the class analysis with real people: We did some of this as examples, but thinking about a multitude of real social categories will challenge us and lead us to adapt the class analysis. We anticipate that praxis circles can be important to deepening our analysis in this direction. Related to this is how groups may flip from one category to another as their political-economic situation changes. Groups once thought to be professionals organize and begin to act like workers. Their income changes, their consciousness changes, and they develop a new relationship to the larger political economy.

**Scenario-planning is designed to explore precisely the kind of volatile period we are experiencing. It seeks to assess the character of changing circumstances so that actors can figure out how to respond while still advancing their strategy.**

The changing nature of the struggle against hegemony. We have identified possible key contradictions to resolve in coming years. However, key contradictions shift, and thus, the counter-hegemonic struggle changes from one period to another. We plan to resolve the main contradiction in a way that sets the phase for addressing the next contradiction. This is simple to say, but hard to implement.

We discussed that a priority is to form the political instrument. The means that we must consciously build our forces as we struggle, and will be carrying out strategy while still very small. How we do this effectively remains an open question, one that we can only answer through practice.

**FORECASTING POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS**

In addition to adapting to shifting conditions, it will be important for social movement leftists to forecast potential developments that could arise from the volatility of current crises. We must be ready to plot a response to sudden developments that preserves opportunities to pursue a liberatory vision.
Scenario-planning is designed to explore precisely the kind of volatile period we are experiencing. It seeks to assess the character of changing circumstances so that actors can figure out how to respond while still advancing their strategy. In recent decades, the scenario-planning methodology has been used in a wide range of situations—from corporate market planning to navigating the transition from apartheid to a democratically elected government in South Africa. One of the most notable uses of scenario-planning is the work done by Shell Oil Company, which for more than 40 years has been projecting how government responses to climate change will impact their ability to extract profit.10

Dialectical materialism is the approach to assessing the possibility of change by examining the contradictions within a system. One of the major insights of dialectical materialism is that change does not move in a simple and linear way.

The scenario-planning methodology is very closely related to the analytic toolset that comes out of the Marxist tradition. Dialectical materialism is the approach to assessing the possibility of change by examining the contradictions within a system. One of the major insights of dialectical materialism is that change does not move in a simple and linear way. Long periods of what looks on the surface like calm and gradual change periodically erupt, suddenly shifting as long-standing contradictions become resolved and new ones take their place.11 As Marx suggested, understanding the contradictions that are in motion helps revolutionaries to anticipate change and to engage in key struggles in ways that advance the fight for liberation.

We employed both of these approaches as well as storytelling, and tried to imagine what some of the major ruptures might be during the years to come. We found this to be a helpful process, but we did not get to flesh out full plans for how social movement leftists or a strong U.S. left might respond in each scenario. We believe this should be a part of the organization’s ongoing work to sharpen and refine our individual and collective strategic orientations. Even though we did not draft complete scenarios and response plans, we did identify seven distinct events for which the movement should prepare. They are:

**The United States is hit by another economic crisis.** This could happen as a result of another speculative bubble (e.g., housing, hi-tech, debt, etc.) bursting. This could have devastating impact in a society already characterized by economic insecurity.

**A climate catastrophe** akin to Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, massive wildfires like the ones recently in Washington and California and/or earthquakes resulting from fracking and arctic drilling. Such a catastrophe could result in the massive displacement of people from one region to another, exacerbating pre-existing tensions. We have already seen the devastation of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma on the Caribbean and on the U.S. South, with the long-term implications still unfolding.

**The United States initiates another war.** With the number of hawks circling in Trump’s White House, this is frighteningly possible. The refusal to engage in diplomatic talks with North Korea, and Trump’s continued use of aggressive and inflammatory rhetoric is an example of this threat.

**Authoritarian seizure of governmental power.** A terrorist attack could provide cover for such actions, or it could come after prolonged struggle between the president and the legislative and judicial branches of the state. An especially chilling scenario was that this might happen on the eve of the 2020 presidential elections, providing a pretext for Trump to suspend elections that he would have lost.
Large-scale, vigilante action by the far right and white nationalists. As we have discussed, the far right is not just insurgent in the White House; they have strong organizations that are actively recruiting and reaching out to people whose interests are not being met by the monopoly capitalists. With the country’s rapid demographic change, white nationalist and neo-Nazi forces see an apocalyptic situation that requires murderous action to defend whiteness and Christian heteropatriarchy. We have recently seen the deadly impacts of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, and the earlier double-murder in Portland, OR. There is a danger of more large-scale, coordinated action by these forces.

Right-wing violence and left-wing militancy spirals into a civil war. As open violence becomes an increasingly prevalent feature of street protests, clashes break out into a broader conflict. As opposed to clear battle lines between pro- and anti-government forces, this war is characterized by a low-intensity conflict ranging across various cities and towns, reflecting a weakening of state institutions and the inability of political figures to resolve deeper social tensions.

A wave of spontaneous workplace protests leads to a renewal of the labor movement. After the Trump administration fails to meet his promises to precarious and displaced workers by securing a return of well-paying "middle-class" jobs, workers in several states engage in a wave of strikes and work stoppages demanding full-time employment at a living wage. Initially slow to respond, labor and community groups soon provide crucial support. In the process, they find that these workplace demands address key aspects of longstanding community issues. This wave of spontaneous and unorganized activity lays the foundation for a renewal of the labor movement and Trump's electoral defeat in the 2020 presidential election.

By our assessment, all of these scenarios are possible and some highly probable. This means that our movement(s) should make preparations now for the possible unfolding of any and all of these so that left forces can improve our capacity to quickly and effectively respond to what the moment brings. For example, in the event of an attempted coup, the movement might agree now that we will call for mass occupation of public spaces where millions of people refuse to leave until the coup plotters surrender. People throughout Latin America have demonstrated the power of this type of action.

Separately, we propose that all LeftRoots branches develop an emergency plan in case of a climate catastrophe. This is unfortunately very likely to happen. There is no reason for us to be taken by surprise by what is likely to come. Among other things, leftists should figure out how to respond to these types of events and to do so in a way that strengthens our ability to construct an allegiance in which the interests of Black, Latino, and Indigenous working-class forces, particularly women and gender-pressed people, are at the center.

How the emergent left responds to whatever situations confront us should plant the seeds of the historic bloc needed to advance the struggle for 21st socialism in the United States.
PART 4
CONCLUSION: WHAT IS REQUIRED OF US?

A crack like a sonic boom —
time hovers,
holds its breath — invisible knife
cuts the cord. Ice slams into water,
wave rises like a wall.
In all ways this is a birth,
a creature entering the fiery world
from an indigo blue womb,
separation and creation
in one swift gasp.
Remember: beginnings
emerge out of endings.
We are the grownups now.
This is our inheritance.
—Deborah A. Miranda, After Charlottesville
Strategy, as we have defined it, is a theory for assembling the forces and capacities necessary to overcome challenges and opposition to achieve a desired outcome. LeftRoots was founded on the assessment that social movement left forces can play a unique and pivotal role in any strategy for socialist liberation. We are positioned to animate the forces we need by helping to bring thousands of people into a vibrant, ass-kicking left. This will require a level of coordination and discipline to which we can only aspire right now. This strategy document is not yet a complete product or as a set of marching orders that we can use to deploy our forces to pivotal fights, but it is a beginning.

Times like these demand strategy and strategists. We have enough pundits who work in isolation. We need teams of revolutionary strategists working in partnership to assess opportunities and to move collectively across the various fronts of struggle in this country.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS REQUIRED OF US?

Here to develop our skills as revolutionary strategists. This is a process that will take time. There are no shortcuts to clarity, yet there are things social movement left forces can and must do now to set things in motion. The Advance Team offers the following guidance that we believe will be relevant regardless of whether cadres agree with what we have laid out. Together, this list of capacities demands that our movements assume a new stance to confront today’s challenges in ways that make liberation more attainable tomorrow. We propose that social movement left forces in general, and LeftRoots cadres in particular, use these to inform and animate our praxis in the coming period.

DEVELOP AS CADRE AND PREPARE THE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

As we noted in the previous chapter, political instruments play an indispensable role in socialist liberation. They strengthen, cohere, and amplify movements’ struggles while developing new cadres. In recent years, it has become vogue to imagine how revolutionary change might happen without such an organization. Even among movement activists who believe that a political instrument is necessary, many hope that someone else is building it.

Social movement left forces have a role to play in building the left in the next few years that no other force can play. This is a moment that demands that social movement left forces jump-start the process of becoming and creating new cadres, even though it will be difficult. We will be called on to respond to countless emergencies. A vibrant left of course must respond. However, we cannot allow that responsiveness to define every aspect of our work. We must devote time and energy to cultivating the capacities we will individually and collectively need to become cadres in the truest sense of the word.

Cadre-fication will not be easy. It will require all of us to shift our current practices. It will put more on our plates,
and it will challenge the individualism and the alienation that shape us all. Yet, if we succeed in seeing ourselves as protagonists in the revitalization of a left in the United States, the benefits will be real and lasting. Campaigns, tactics, organizations, fronts, and movements will all be stronger. Our capacity to carry out joint strategy will be multiplied. The consolidation of a political instrument will make this an organic process allowing more people to cadrefy as the struggle continues. It will offer cadres concrete ways to manifest resistance and to advance toward the vision of the world we wish to see.

**MAKE RIGOROUS & NUANCED ASSESSMENTS TO PLAN FOR CRISES**

The convergence of several crises means that the coming period will feature more and more unprecedented ruptures. While these ruptures are likely to have little precedent, they will not appear without warning—climate disaster, mob violence by white nationalists, another economic crisis or over-reach by our opposition, the moments that follow will create important and fleeting opportunities. Failing to imagine how the movement might respond, we risk squandering opportunities that might not present themselves again. In the coming period especially, regular assessment of conjuncture and balance of forces that is ruthless and scientific is necessary so that we can plan for the unexpected.

The conditions materially and politically in the United States today require us to embrace a more dialectical and historical view. Without assessments that are rooted in material conditions and the correlation of forces, we will continue to function based on moral principles and values, rather than putting our work into the context of a strategy for liberation. We must learn to lead change in a dynamic marked by fits and starts. Assessment practice will help us learn to see and take advantage of holes in the enemy’s strategy, to leverage our strengths strategically, and to embrace unexpected openings for us to articulate a left way forward. Viewing revolutionary change as a dialectical process compels us to read the political and human terrain on which we are functioning more carefully. Making regular, rigorous, nuanced assessments will position us to track and intervene in critical junctures of a trajectory whose direction and timeframe are not entirely under our control.

**FIGHT TO DEFEND AND EXPAND DEMOCRACY WHILE BUILDING PROTAGONISM AND PROTAGONISTS**

We must continue the crucial work of defending what democratic space does exist in our society as fraught with contradictions as those structures may be. We must adopt a dialectical view about the state, engaging it not as a monolithic target, but as an arena of contestation. Work to defend democratic rights and electoral work are both arenas that will be fundamental in setting the stage for future struggles as they are so central to hegemony in the United States. Where possible, we must experiment with governance and present the opportunity to advance our goals not simply in terms of policy agenda but in terms of power-building to forward the construction of the socialist historic bloc.

In our campaigns, we must seek out opportunities to win demands that expand space for working class people to exercise democratic control over the institutions shaping our lives. Winning state funding for education or a community benefits agreement from a corporation is a victory, but winning genuine community participation in decision-making about the allocation of those resources is an opportunity to develop working class protagonism.

The fight for democracy and protagonism must not be limited to demands on the state, they must also be defining features of our practice. In our work, we must constantly seek to develop the capacities of other people, as well as ourselves. This can happen at every scale, and at every level of experience, from encouraging a new member to take a leadership role in an action or event, to giving experienced cadre opportunities to learn how to govern. We must strive to do our work in a way that’s democratic and participatory, and that builds people’s individual and collective confidence in their ability to lead, make decisions, and solve problems related to the
interconnected conditions of their lives.

Institutions such as cooperative businesses or community-created schools can also be training grounds for building socialist protagonism, if they are closely connected with movement organizations, accountable to working class bases and aligned to the larger Left project. We must develop our protagonism as fighters, making demands of the current system, but we must also develop our protagonism as builders of the future. Alternative institutions can be a training ground for developing our ability to govern and lead the core institutions of a new society.

**DEVELOP HISTORICAL & INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Our revolutionary ancestors offer us their experiences so that we might struggle and win. We must see ourselves as part of a much longer arc of history than what is contained in one person’s lifetime, one organization, one country, or one political moment. Working within a white settler colonial state that managed to seize the throne as the world’s imperial superpower presents unique challenges. These include the provincialism, even among self-identified leftists, that mimics American exceptionalism and the arrogance of U.S. chauvinism. We must continue to learn from and engage with movement forces beyond U.S. borders. This means engaging with news on world events so that we can place our experiences, strategies, and development within an international context, just as we must engage with history to dialogue with our revolutionary ancestors across generations. We must deeply consider the movements and struggles of the future in the decisions we make today.

**LEVERAGE NON-REFORMIST REFORMS TO BUILD POPULAR BASES**

The struggle against racial monopoly capitalism will happen on multiple fronts, all of which are interdependent and must be connected. On each front, we must build on our practice of fighting for non-reformist reforms in an effort to reshape the terrain on which we struggle. We cannot limit our vision only to the realm of what is immediately possible, working only for reforms the current moment can accommodate. This hampers the development of our revolutionary imagination. We need a balance of both the practical and the aspirational, always remembering that our objective is socialist liberation. Reform fights are a vehicle for class struggle; they are not the point of class struggle. The kinds of fights that build organized and active bases of key sectors are particularly important.

The importance of waging fights for non-reformist reforms underscores the significance of base-building, especially among the class and social forces that will play key roles in the socialist historic bloc. A vibrant movement will feature hundreds of organizations employing different approaches. All of these are critical, and at different moments, different approaches will take center stage. Through it all, the movement organizations in general and social movement left forces in particular should seek to support organizations seeking to build bases among the multiracial working class. As these organizations struggle, members are forced to grapple with the hegemony of racial monopoly capitalism, new alliances are forged and new identities come into being. As those organizations articulate and struggle for non-reformist demands, socialist hegemony becomes a greater and greater force.

**BUILD A BIGGER “WE” TO LEAD FOR ALL OF SOCIETY**

Within the project of building a socialist bloc that is driven by the interests of working class Blacks, Latinos and Indigenous peoples, there is a tension between the centering the interests of those class and social forces and merely centering on individual people in those sectors. While both are important at different times, we are suggesting that the movement must deepen our ability to project why meeting the driving interests is in the best interests of all sectors of society. This is not the same as demanding that the leadership of the bloc is made up of Black, Latino, and/or Indigenous people. Centering on
the interests and how they will benefit others requires clarity about how those interests take shape over the course of the struggle and will lay the groundwork for the socialist historic bloc and a new common sense. The process of political struggle creates identity, just as class struggle forges class consciousness. We must consciously be creating a national identity in the United States that neither capitulates to the horrors of our history by ignoring or reifying them, nor capitulates to marginalization by failing to reframe a progressive U.S. identity that speaks to all of society. Doing so cedes too much important terrain to the right. In order to build that counter-hegemony, we must be part of creating a visionary, vibrant, and powerful left.

This will not be easy. The profound and daily experiences of disrespect and abuse heaped on communities of color for generations make it almost unimaginable to build with people who have participated in or failed to understand and call out that conduct. To survive, to fight, to see the future we deserve, we must make and have space to recover and nurture ourselves. We must avoid a defensive stance in leadership, one that shrinks down the “we” to those already aligned with our vision, politics, and practice. Organizing with working class Black, Latino and Indigenous people must prepare those forces to lead all of society.

It will not be easy, but history shows us that it is possible. During the Populist Movement of the 1890s, Black activists organized white farmers who had previously served in the Confederate Army. Our movement will not win on marginalization. We must agitate with the belief that other sectors will come to see their best interests as being intertwined with ours, building a left universalism that constructs unity across difference. Our movements must organize and prepare working-class Black, Latino, and Indigenous peoples, especially women and gender-oppressed people, to build a movement that leads from the collective interests that shape a future that will benefit everyone.

It will take more time to build a liberatory strategy around which we can all cohere, yet many of us are looking for guidance now. The Advance Team sees the capacities listed above as critical areas of engagement and development for the coming period. These capacities and this document are a beginning contribution to LeftRoots’ larger process to develop liberatory strategy and revolutionary strategists. We will join them together with the Little Red School and cadre-initiated labs where we can test key hypotheses about effective interventions in this moment. We hope that naming these capacities now can help strengthen our work as we start to engage the remaining parts of our organization’s process.

The fact that social movement left forces have built, and continue to build, an organization like LeftRoots means that new things are possible now. It is time for us to realize that potential. All of us on the Advance Team are humbled by the opportunity to call all of you comrades. We are excited to move forward on this journey together. While socialism for the 21st century is not achievable right now in the United States, it may be more achievable in the coming decades than at any previous point in history if we begin now. The times ahead will be perilous. They demand a boldness that our movements and the people have demonstrated time and again. They demand a pathway, a road for moving from where we are now to where we need to be. We hope this document helps to open up that pathway to the strategy, courage, and power that this moment demands.

Let’s re-commit ourselves to the promise of our ancestors and to the faith of generations yet to come. Let’s make what seems impossible today unstoppable tomorrow. Fighting for liberation is our inheritance, and we believe that we can win.
may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back  may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that
—Lucille Clifton, blessing the boats


3 Harmony Goldberg, Antonio Gramsci: A Brief Introduction to His Concepts of Hegemony, War of Position & the Historic Bloc.

4 Stuart Hall, Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left.

5 Antonio Gramsci. Selections from the Prison Notebooks.

6 Harmony Goldberg, Antonio Gramsci: A Brief Introduction to His Concepts of Hegemony, War of Position & the Historic Bloc.

7 Harmony Goldberg, Antonio Gramsci: A Brief Introduction to His Concepts of Hegemony, War of Position & the Historic Bloc.

8 Marta Harnecker, A World to Build: New Paths Toward Twenty-first Century Socialism.

9 LeftRoots founding document, “Why LeftRoots?”

10 Among the reports are The Shell Global Scenarios to 2025: The future business environment: trends, trade-offs and choices (2005); Shell Energy Scenarios to 2050 (2008); and Sustainability Report (2013).

11 This is obviously a very short overview of dialectical materialism. For some of us on the Advance Team, this was our first chance to learn about dialectical materialism, and all of us are still learning to apply this set of tools.

12 Cadre is not just a membership category in our organization. Cadre describes a relationship to a revolutionary strategy, to left organization. A cadre is a militant, someone who has dedicated her life to the struggle and who willingly makes sacrifices, learns skills, and plays roles that are required in order to fight for the change we wish to see.

13 A non-reformist reform is a reform “which does not base its validity and its right to exist on capitalist needs, criteria and rationalities.” This definition comes from André Gorz who argued that “to fight for alternative solutions and for structural reforms is not to fight for improvements in the capitalist system; it is rather to break it up, to restrict it, to create counter-powers which, instead of creating a new equilibrium, undermine its very foundations.” (André Gorz, Strategy for Labor, 1964).

14 This and other stories of the Populist Movement can be found in Solidarity Blues: Race, Culture and the American Left by Richard Iton.
Military and economic policies promoted by the U.S. have forced thousands to flee their homes in the Central American Exodus, with the vast majority fleeing Honduras. This has created massive refugee camps at the U.S. southern border where thousands of refugees are being forced to wait in precarious conditions to apply for asylum to the country responsible for their migration in the first place. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to prop up Honduran dictator Juan Orlando Hernández with political and economic support, enabling the imposition of neoliberal economic policy in Honduras and throughout the region. Last but not least, the Trump administration has instrumentalized the plight of these refugees and has whipped up xenophobic, nationalistic and white supremacist sentiment amongst a section of the U.S. working class. Simultaneously, they continue to militarize the border and conduct mass deportations and family separation of migrants.

As all of this happens there is almost complete silence in the mainstream media about the U.S. military and economic policies that are the root causes of the current series of caravans or migration more generally. Organized and active anti-imperialism in the U.S. continues to be relegated primarily to isolated organizations without a mass base while mass organizations and movements only rarely make anti-imperialist struggle a priority or even a talking point. As of this writing the U.S. is actively attempting to overthrow the government of Venezuela and there is a very real threat of a U.S. backed Coup or...
this intervention. And this is only the tip of the iceberg with regards to U.S. imperial policies in the western hemisphere and around the world.

This article uses the case of U.S. foreign policy in Honduras and the social movement response to the migrant caravans to make a broader argument about the strategic urgency of bringing anti-imperialism and internationalism into U.S.-based social movements. We believe the argument extends far beyond Honduras and the caravans, with important applications to the ways our movements could relate to other places confronting U.S. Empire, from Palestine and the Middle East, to Southeast Asia, Africa and beyond.

The lack of a cohesive anti-imperial movement has left our movements in isolated silos without an analysis or political formation capable of tying domestic struggles to the global struggle against U.S. Empire. These silos are characteristic of the neoliberal age, particularly in the United States. They are the result of the ruling class’s use of a combination of repression and co-optation in the aftermath of the wave of 60’s and 70’s militancy in order to drive a wedge between explicitly left and anti-imperialist political forces and labor and social movements in this country. This lack of an anti-imperialist framework amongst popular forces and corresponding lack of a grassroots base among most U.S.-based anti-imperialist formations has made the Left unable to shape the narrative or build the necessary power to shift the terrain upon which we are struggling.

The overcoming of this contradiction is not a question merely of ethical principle, but of strategic imperative. It is both necessary and possible to embed anti-imperialism in our work within the Empire to win what Gramsci calls the war of position and ultimately create the conditions necessary to build 21st century socialism. As social movement leftists it is imperative that we work within our organizations, particularly mass-based base-building organizations, to incorporate anti-imperialism and internationalism into the way we frame our campaigns and develop our strategy. The strategic importance of doing so can be summarized in three key points:

1) Anti-imperialism allows us to re-focus the debate about immigration to its root causes in order to more effectively counter the Right’s appeals to nationalism and xenophobia.

2) Anti-imperialism allows our movements to grapple with the transnational nature of capital, forming global strategies that correspond to capital’s own global plans while fostering the international relationships our movements will need at key strategic junctures.

3) Anti-imperialism provides our movements opportunities to learn from more advanced struggles around the world.

“After studying the Irish question for many years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the English ruling classes (and it will be decisive for the workers’ movement all over the world) cannot be delivered in England but only in Ireland... Owing to the constantly increasing concentration of leaseholds, Ireland constantly sends her own surplus to the English labour market, and thus forces down wages and lowers the material and moral position of the English working class. And most important of all! Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this... It is the special task of the Central Council in London to make the English workers realize that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their own social emancipation.”

We are not losing because the majority of the country supports Trump’s border wall or buys into his white supremacist and xenophobic narrative about immigrants. There is nothing inevitable about the dominance of equally disempowering right wing and liberal narratives about the caravans. The Right’s “invader” narrative and the liberal moralistic and victimizing narrative are both ahistorical. One paints migrants as inherently dangerous. The other paints them as passive victims. Both erase the effects of decades of U.S. military and economic intervention by both Democratic and Republican administrations in Latin America broadly and Honduras in particular as well as the agency of those in the caravans and those left behind in resisting that intervention.

The Right looks at the caravans and sees a threat. Liberals look at the caravan and see victims and charity cases. These narratives play into and reinforce each other. The liberal response easily appears as naïve to the Right, and plays directly into its framing of migrants competing with “Americans” [sic] for limited resources. Meanwhile, these narratives have shaped the terms of debate and left the only policy questions on the table to be how much and in what way to invest in border “security” and how narrow or broad of a segment of refugee seekers and currently undocumented immigrants are entitled to “relief.” The hegemony of these narratives and their corresponding policy implications preserve the power of U.S. Empire to protect the interests of capital at home and abroad and ensure the sidelining of any examination of the U.S. intervention and popular resistance that is the immediate context of the caravan.

**ANTIMPERIALISM AND IMMIGRATION**

“*If the 2009 coup d’etat had not happened and if the will of the people had been respected I wouldn’t be here in the conditions I am in, I am fleeing my country because they want to kill me just because of being part of a social movement and a party, LIBRE... With the help of the United States they have stolen our democracy, because they put in and take out Presidents in Honduras and all of Central America, they are the ones who do all of that.*”

—Miguel Angel, Honduran refugee and part of the Central American Exodus

**BACKDROP OF THE CARAVANS: U.S.-BACKED COUPS AND FRAUD IN HONDURAS**

It is impossible to understand the caravans that have been leaving Honduras without first examining the U.S. role in the 2009 coup d’etat that ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya Rosales. Zelaya had ended up on the wrong side of the Honduran oligarchy and its backers in the United States. Responding to the Honduran social movements, he had doubled the minimum wage, taken the side of peasants in land struggles, entered into negotiations with sectors of society that had always been cut off from decisions impacting them. When he called for a referendum on whether to let people vote on re-writing the constitution, his enemies decided to draw a line. They launched an all-out media assault on Zelaya, calling him a tool of Hugo Chávez, a communist, accusing him of trying to stay in power forever. A program officer from the International Republican Institute “joked” just three months before the coup at a briefing in Washington, D.C. about the situation that “coupes are supposed to be so three decades ago until now.” Then on June 28th, 2009 the Honduran military barged in to the president’s house and took him in his pajamas to a helicopter, flying him first to a U.S. base in Honduras and then on to Costa Rica. Led by Honduran General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, trained in the U.S. School of the Americas, they carried out the first coup of the 21st century in Central America. The military and Honduran oligarchy quickly imposed an interim government, undid most of the progressive reforms underway, and passed hundreds of concessions to corporate interests.
To the surprise of the coup's backers, however, thousands of people around the country spontaneously came out into the streets. Their numbers and the depth of their vision and commitment kept growing during hundreds of days of consecutive protest, with fearless women at the forefront. The movement was unprecedented in Honduras both for its scale and diversity. Members of unions, teachers, peasants, feminists, the LGBT community, indigenous and Garífuna communities all found themselves in the streets together day after day, under the same tear gas clouds, facing the same U.S.-made weapons, rallying behind the same cry – restoration of democracy and the convening of a National Constitutio

tal Assembly to “re-found” Honduras from below. Key moments included:

• The mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people to the Tegucigalpa airport when President Zelaya tried to return to the country, only to have the military shut down the airport, in the process shooting and killing a teenage boy – Isis Obed Murillo – who would become the first of hundreds of martyrs of the Honduran resistance.

• A march across the entire country by Lenca and Garífuna indigenous communities to try to escort President Zelaya back into the country at the Nicaraguan border.

• The mobilization of a million people to surround the Brazilian consulate where President Zelaya took refuge after sneaking back into the country.

At numerous junctures, with Honduras completely isolated diplomatically and facing unrelenting pressure in the streets and at ports, borders and workplaces, it seemed only a matter of time until the coup regime fell and President Zelaya would be reinstated. "elections" in the midst of heavy militarization, a wave of selective assassinations and brutal repression in the streets during ongoing protests. In her memoir, Hillary Clinton bragged openly about her strategy,

“In the subsequent days I spoke with my counterparts around the hemisphere … We strategized on a plan to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot.”

Those elections led to the installation into power of the National Party, which has ruled Honduras ever since. The initial ruler was Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo Sosa. Pepe Lobo's son is now serving 24 years for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States while his wife was arrested last year for embezzlement of public funds. Lobo was succeeded by current dictator Juan Orlando Hernández in 2013 elections denounced by electoral observers and the Honduran resistance, which participated with Zelaya’s wife as the candidate of the newly formed party LIBRE (Libertad y Refundación – Freedom and Refoundation), as fraudulent. Highlights of the first term of Juan Orlando Hernández (known in Honduras by his initials, JOH), included:

• A major corruption scandal where millions were stolen from the public hospital system via fake
pharmaceutical companies selling pills filled with flour to the public hospitals and funneling the money directly to the National Party, leading to the death of thousands who were treated with fake medicine.

- The intensification of land struggles around the country and corresponding increase in assassinations of peasant activists.

- The dramatic upsurge in drug trafficking.

- The 2016 assassination of Honduras’s most prominent activist, indigenous, feminist, socialist, environmentalist visionary organizer Berta Cáceres, by members of the Honduran military and security forces for a private dam corporation, under orders from the dam corporation’s executives and one of the dam’s primary investors – the Atala family, members of the Honduran oligarchy and key backers of both the 2009 coup and subsequent administrations.

As President of the congress under Lobo, JOH had paved the way for his own re-election – which is expressly forbidden in the Honduran constitution – by removing unfavorable Supreme Court justices and stacking the court with National Party loyalists. He further consolidated power as President by stacking all of the major public institutions – including the Supreme Electoral Tribunal – with close personal friends and political allies, as well as creating a Military Police force that responded directly to him, is empowered to carry out police functions, and is outfitted with the military-grade arms and equipment.

All of this was made possible by continued U.S. diplomatic, economic and military support throughout all of the post-coup administrations in Honduras. When news emerged that the military had participated in Berta Cáceres’s assassination, there were renewed calls in Honduras, around the world and within the U.S. to cut off military and police aid to the JOH dictatorship. A bill was even introduced into the U.S. congress calling for an end to security assistance to Honduras until human rights violations and impunity are brought under control, but both Democrats and Republicans have worked to undermine and block it and ensure a continual flow of military and police aid and training to the JOH regime.

**2017 ELECTORAL FRAUD AND REPRES SION: THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE CARAVANS**

With this backdrop, in 2017 JOH ran for re-election in violation of the Honduran constitution. The resistance movement, calculated that by bringing in the middle class, youth movement and those outraged by the blatant corruption of the dictatorship and forming a broad “Alliance Against the Dictatorship,” they could garner such an overwhelming majority at the polls that even the ballot-box stuffing, vote-buying, intimidation and militarization by the regime wouldn’t be able to steal enough votes to win. The LIBRE party joined with numerous other parties in the alliance, trained an army of observers from its rank and file to be present at every polling station and every table fighting for every vote, and ran noted TV personality and sports caster Salvador Nasralla as the candidate of the Alliance. Their math worked out. Despite widespread evidence of vote buying, heavy militarization and intimidation, and numerous other irregularities, the official vote count had them with an “irreversible lead” of 5% with almost 80% of the vote counted late the night of the elections. Nobody would have known, but one of the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal who went rogue and disobeyed orders to keep the vote totals secret and spoke out in the media. Shortly after his remarks, however, the system “went down” and there were days of silence from the electoral tribunal, days during which it was later revealed that the system “crashed” 169 times and somebody erased and reformatted the main hard drives storing the vote data. People had been celebrating around Honduras for three days when suddenly news began reporting that the system had come back online and that the remaining votes had overwhelmingly gone to JOH who had ended up with a slight “victory.”

Once again, the resistance took to the streets. This time, they were consistently met with live ammunition,
primarily fired by JOH’s military police. Over 30 people were shot dead. The dictator declared a state of emergency and ordered a military-imposed curfew. Thousands were beaten and gassed. Hundreds were arrested, some of whom are in jail to this day. The resistance nonetheless continued shutting down every highway and road it could in hundreds if not thousands of blockades around the country, some of which went on for months.

In a story all too familiar to the Honduran resistance, however, the U.S. swept in to save the dictator and crush the hopes of the resistance. The OAS and EU had refused to certify the election results, citing widespread irregularities. The OAS was openly calling for new elections. And the U.S. took three decisive actions. First, in the midst of the heaviest days of repression, it re-certified Honduras for “progress in human rights,” a congressionally-imposed condition to aid in place since shortly after the 2009 coup, releasing millions of dollars to the regime. Then U.S. charge-of-affairs (Honduras currently has no U.S. ambassador) Heidi Fulton appeared in a press conference next to Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE, in Spanish) President and ruling party loyalist David Matamoros, declaring that the U.S. had faith in the TSE and in the transparency of the Honduran electoral process. Finally, it lured Alliance candidate Salvador Nasralla to Washington, D.C., and eventually convinced him to join in a “national dialogue,” with the dictator despite vehement opposition from the base of the Alliance Against the Dictatorship.

**BIRTH OF MIGRANT CARAVANS**

After ten years resisting coups, corruption scandals, electoral fraud, and assassinations, many Hondurans lost hope and decided to flee. Migration from Honduras had been steady for many years, with a spike following Hurricane Mitch in 1998. But the number of refugees leaving Honduras skyrocketed ever since the 2009 coup d’etat and has continued to rise steadily since. But the highly visible mass waves of refugees traveling in caravans has become a particularly acute phenomenon just in the year since the late 2017 electoral fraud. An initial caravan starting in Southern Mexico in April 2018 drew predominantly Hondurans, who carried the Honduran flag and chanted “Fuera JOH” (‘out with JOH,’ the battle cry of the resistance in Honduras) as they marched through Mexico. Then in October, word began circulating on social media in Honduras that a caravan would depart from the northern industrial working class city of San Pedro Sula. Journalist Bartolo Fuentes, a member of the Honduran resistance and former LIBRE congressman, who has been accompanying and advocating for Honduran migrants since the late 90’s, expressed support for the idea on social media. His message was that people should stay and fight the dictatorship, but that if they choose to flee, they should know they have human rights to seek safety and should go in groups for safety. Those words were twisted by rightwing Honduran media to accuse him of organizing the caravans. They falsely claimed he was financing people and repeated this over and over in their broadcasts, leading thousands to believe the false claims and turn an initial group of several hundred into several thousand overnight. Fuentes was able to accompany and report on the caravan only as far as Guatemala City, where he was arbitrarily detained. In a later interview with Fox News Radio, he pointed squarely to the U.S. support for the dictatorship as the cause of the caravans:

*Let me first talk about the economic situation of the country. We’re a country of 70% poverty, of whom one half is in extreme poverty... These are people with no food, these are people who are trying to pay their rent, who are trying to pay for the basic needs of life, electricity for instance*
has gone up 700% since the coup d'etat. The basic cost of living has skyrocketed, and so people are forced to leave, they will go where they can to try to find a job. Add to that the situation of insecurity, of violence, of people who live in these conflicted areas... So, with that reality, nothing and no hope, people looked for a way to change the situation and then they had that hope for change stolen from them. That hope ended this last November when people massively went out to the polls, when they went out to vote out a government that has stolen from them healthcare and education, that has plundered, and then electoral fraud was committed, their votes weren't recognized and they went out to the streets to protest to have their votes recognized, they were shot down in the streets by live ammunition. Over 40 people were shot dead during those protests. It's a terrible reality. You have this terrible reality and then you have a little bit of hope and you have that snatched away from you, and then that fraud backed up by the United States. That's why we say that the U.S. is responsible for this migration flow, is responsible for this exodus.

—Bartolo Fuentes, Fox News Rundown 11/20/2018
(interpreted by LeftRoots cadre Matt Ginsberg-Jaeckle)

The rest of the story most of us are familiar with. The caravan grew to over 7,000 as it traversed Mexico. Throughout, refugees continued to link their plight in interviews directly to the regime of U.S.-backed dictator Juan Orlando Hernandez. Organizing themselves via nightly assemblies, the caravan adopted the name “Central American Exodus” and began issuing demands for better treatment by Mexican authorities and recognition as a humanitarian crisis that should be addressed in accordance with the guidelines of the International Compact on Migration and other international legal instruments protecting the rights of refugees. Members of the caravan that left last October are now in Tijuana at encampments, detained in San Diego, working along the U.S.-Mexico border, some have returned to Honduras for the time being, others have made it on their own across the border, and yet others have initiated asylum claims and found sponsors to be released to. Incredibly, groups of the exodus decided to retrace their steps back to Honduras and to the southern border of Mexico in the case of others to support their fellow Hondurans who have left on a second caravan that departed in January, seeing it as their responsibility to help spread what they
learned on their own caravan and facilitate stronger internal organizing amongst this next wave.

**RESPONSE BY THE U.S. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Refugees themselves have consistently referenced the coup and dictatorship, chanted "fuera JOH" throughout their journey, hung banners at their encampment in Tijuana that called out JOH for his actions, and spoke out in their press conferences against the Honduran dictatorship, yet there is virtually no mention of this in media coverage. What is even more surprising, perhaps, is that reference to the Honduran dictatorship and U.S. support for it has been overwhelmingly sidelined among social movement and progressive institutional responses to the caravan in the U.S.. A review of dozens of fundraising pages, alerts, blog posts and calls to action regarding the caravan from labor, community and immigrant rights organizations produced only scant reference to the Honduran dictatorship or U.S. support of it. While there are exceptions to this overall silence, including notably the It Takes Roots alliance of alliances, the majority of progressive institutions and movements responding to the caravan have not centered U.S. foreign policy in framing their calls to action. When it is mentioned, it is often in a non-specific way and without any reference to the clearest and most longstanding call from Honduran social movements – for an end to military and police aid to the dictatorship.

This should not be construed to say that the work of these and many other progressive organizations, institutions and individuals to support the Central American Exodus has not been important. Thousands of volunteers, hundreds of thousands of donations, and an outpouring of support in protests, on social media and through educational events have been invaluable contributions to softening the blow of the callous and racist approach of the U.S. government to the asylum seekers at the border. Likewise, responses that link the plight of asylum-seekers to the broader struggle for immigrant rights, against the border wall and border militarization, and against mass deportation are natural and important as well. Indeed, the very survival of millions in this country and in the countries of origin for immigrant families depends on these historic struggles. The argument could be made that achieving some of the policy aims of these struggles is far more feasible than cutting off military aid to the dictator or in any way curtailing U.S. imperialism. It is undoubtedly true that while there have been periods of amnesty under both Republican and Democratic administrations, setbacks to U.S. interventionism around the world have been few and far between for hundreds of years and, in the rare cases they have happened, been mostly due to armed resistance against the occupying forces in the countries of those interventions rather than domestic organizing in opposition.

Meanwhile, it is undeniable that other than perhaps the broad mobilizations against the invasion of Iraq, there has been little sustained mass-based anti-imperialism in the United States since the Vietnam War. While important work has always taken place opposing U.S. intervention around the world, the vast majority of the groups focused on such work on an ongoing basis draw primarily on university campuses to the extent they have any base at all. While there are important exceptions, such as U.S. Labor Against the War, About Face: Veterans Against the War, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, War Resisters League and others, there are relatively few organizations with roots in working class communities and a consistent anti-imperialist frame. Advocacy by networks such as the Honduras Solidarity Network has been able to garner significant support around legislative vehicles like the Berta Cáceres Bill for Human Rights in Honduras, which would cut off all military and police training and aid to the dictatorship until human rights violations and impunity cease, but the lack of a mass base by most network members combined with the scarcity of anti-imperialist work in mass organizations has meant that very few in the U.S. social movements even know it exists.

**ROOT CAUSES AND THE WAR OF POSITION**

In We Believe that We Can Win, the LeftRoots strategy advance team identifies working class immigrant communities, specifically those of Latin American origin, as one of the leading forces of an eventual movement
capable of finally defeating racial capitalism in the United States. This being the case, fights rooted in the immediate reality of those communities, particularly those that ensure its survival and the growth of its political power and organizational capability are essential, particularly in this period where White Nationalism is on the rise, and in control of at least the White House. But it would be a grave mistake to think that a focus on U.S. imperialism is a distraction from or in any way secondary to those fights. The above history – which repeats with important differences but even more important similarities in the home countries of almost every other immigrant community – makes clear that the primary contradiction that creates immigration in the first place is U.S. imperialism.

In Antonio Gramsci’s prison notebooks he describes advanced capitalist societies in military terms: “There was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks…” His description was meant to explain his concept of the war of position which is to fundamentally battle for hearts and minds at the level of civil society due to its sway on the consciousness of the masses. He was convinced that if we don’t engage at this level even in instances of economic disruption, where the contradictions of capitalism are most exaggerated, our forces won’t be ready to take action and could even swing to the side of authoritarianism and fascism as the working class did in Italy during the 1920s. We see this concept as vitally important to understanding the need to incorporate an anti-imperialist framework.

So what does the U.S. seek in a smaller country like Honduras? Why is it that, if the government professes a desire to stop migration waves from Central America, it continues to implement exactly the policies that provoke them, both economically, militarily and diplomatically? For decades, the ruling class has intentionally combined policies that displace migrants with those that criminalize them in order to produce a more exploitable and precarious workforce and increase their rate of profit. Yet if there is any consistency in the expressed worldview and actions of Donald Trump, it is the desire to stop immigration. Trump’s own war of position through the constant refrain of “build the wall” and moves to secure funding for an expansion of the already existing border wall serve not only to consolidate his white supremacist and extremely anti-immigrant base, but also to keep the focus on the border which strengthens the Right’s “invader” narrative and keeps the focus off how ongoing U.S. policy is provoking immigration. Regardless of the rhetoric, the reality is that capital needs to continue the policies which lead to waves of migration. It needs these policies to replace falling profits with money from extractive economies, it needs them to access exploitable workforces globally and produce more of them domestically, and it needs them to ensure the defeat of left alternatives, particularly in Latin America, that have challenged U.S. hegemony and undermined the narrative of neoliberalism and the end of history. The preservation of U.S. racial capitalism depends on foreign interventions to extract raw materials, drive down wages globally, and preserve U.S. domination.

Where, in this situation, do social movement forces find an opening? Just as Marx outlined in his letters on the “Irish question,” the ruling class has been extraordinarily successful at using the results of its militarized interventions to pit sections of the working class against each other. While it has been largely disproven that immigration actually depresses wages or takes jobs, arguing these statistics in communities ravaged by unemployment has not been extraordinarily successful. Even less successful have been appeals to peoples’ moral conscience. If anything, such liberal appeals confirm to conservatives what they are told by their party leaders – that “the Left” wants them to care about “others” over their own “self-interest.”

The only option to turn competing sections of the working class, particularly leading forces that are often pitted against each other, against their common enemy is to address the actions of that enemy head on. The case of Honduras is a particularly compelling opportunity to accomplish this. The dictator JOH’s brother was just arrested by the D.E.A. and is being charged as being a leading
drug kingpin and importer of cocaine into the United States. A witness in Chapo Guzmán’s trial just pointed to the Honduran army as the source of high caliber weaponry for the Sinaloa cartel. And yet the United States continues to send hundreds of millions of tax-payer dollars to that very dictator. Ensuring that communities understand U.S. intervention in Honduras as the real cause of the caravans, simultaneously turns anger back where it belongs and humanizes the plight of members of the exodus. Further, it provides a material basis for solidarity and a direct point of connection between struggles.

Concretely, labor and community movements can frame local and workplace struggles in terms of a competition between funding communities and workers or funding interventions and dictators. Immigrant rights struggles can center the causes of the caravan in the framing of responses to the caravan and other policies affecting asylum seekers. And explicitly anti-imperialist organizations need to do the work of base building, centering the leadership of those impacted by militarism in their organizations and connecting and taking leadership from local base-building organizations to fuse their opposition to U.S. intervention with the communities most impacted domestically by those interventions. The combined results of these strategies will help to win the war of position, undermine the Trump narrative about the caravan, highlight the agency of the asylum-seekers, and create the basis for a broad perception of unity of interest in opposition to U.S. policy.

GLOBAL STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT TRANSTHATIONAL CAPITAL

While this article’s primary focus is the way in which anti-imperialist work and framing can help win the war of position against the Right, internationalism is equally important to any winning strategy because of the nature of global capital. Many of the enemies our movements confront, whether they are real estate developers or employers or prison profiteers, are transnational entities or at a bare minimum receive significant international investment. Those we confront meet regularly whether at the World Economic Forum in Davos or in the halls and offices of the IMF and World Bank to advance an international strategy to open markets and increase profits for corporations. Our movements must also be global in scope and vision if we are to counter them effectively. This doesn’t just mean symbolic global days of action or counter-protests at summits. It also means building international relationships that can be leveraged at key moments of struggle. When Canada was attempting to privatize its postal service, Palestinian activists reciprocated the longstanding principled Palestinian solidarity of the Canadian postal workers union and picketed Stephen Harper on his visit to the West Bank. When UFCW workers in Pennsylvania were at a standstill with Brazilian-based meat industry giant JBS, Brazilian workers threatened to strike at its headquarters and pushed the company back to the bargaining table with U.S. workers. These are just two small examples that point to the potential of true internationalism and global strategies to advance local struggles.
Finally, one of the most important reasons our movements desperately need to grow our internationalist and anti-imperialist work and relationships is so that we can learn from advanced struggles around the world. It was after the visit of an organizer from South Africa’s Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign that Chicago tenants began putting up eviction blockades and occupying foreclosed homes. Most of the young organizers who led and won the campaign for a trauma center on Chicago’s south side visited Honduras and had a chance to exchange with and learn from key figures in the Honduran resistance.

A powerful example of an anti-colonial movement where taking leadership from those directly feeling the effects of U.S. empire has provided a clear strategy to solidarity forces in the U.S. (and around the world) is the Palestinian Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) Movement. The Palestinian call for international solidarity activists around the world to engage in BDS tactics targeting Israeli and international institutions engaged in oppression of the Palestinian people was released in July 2005. Palestinian civil society representatives who came together to craft the BDS call name their own study of international anti-colonial and anti-racist movements, particularly the South African anti-apartheid movement and the U.S. Southern Freedom (Civil Rights) Movement as one of the key inspirations for the BDS call. Prior to the BDS movement solidarity activists in the U.S. worked without a cohesive strategy. Much of the work was educational without clear demands or extremely difficult lobbying members of two parties absolutely committed to ongoing Israeli colonization in Palestine.

Over the past 14 years more and more solidarity organizations have recognized the value of this strategic call from Palestine and shifted to prioritize BDS tactics and many new national and local formations have coalesced around the world to specifically advance these tactics. The strategic orientation of BDS and the growing movement have led to concrete victories; French corporate giant Veolia lost billions of dollars in contracts around the world before being forced to withdraw from an Israeli rail project, G4S the largest security corporation on the planet was forced to sell off nearly all its holdings in Israel, among many other smaller victories. In the U.S. BDS has helped grow the Palestine solidarity movement into one of the most organized single-country solidarity movements and concretely shift the landscape. Palestine is also beginning to be a wedge within the democratic party. Two newly elected progressive congresspeople, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are openly supportive of the BDS movement. While BDS has yet to be adopted in a major way as a solidarity strategy by organizations base-building within low income communities of color in the U.S. the strong alliance with the Movement for Black Lives and the beginnings of working relationships within the labor movement where a number of union locals, as well as United Electrical nationally, have had members vote to endorse the BDS movement demonstrate promising signs of future alliances.

The growth of BDS has been important not just as an advance toward the eventual liberation of Palestine, but also for ways it has resonated with other divestment efforts in the U.S., in movements targeting the Prison Industrial Complex, fossil fuels industry and beyond.

BDS is one powerful example of how when social movements in the U.S. take leadership from countries and communities impacted by U.S. imperialism and act in coordination with them it can give us more clarity and unity for both fights domestically and abroad.
CONCLUSION

The vast power of U.S. empire and the many military, political, and economic structures that support it is intimidating and often seen as a monolith beyond our ability to impact it. But if we are going to win 21st century socialism, we have to take U.S. Empire head on. We have to expose the many and deep contradictions that enable nearly 700 overseas bases and military operations in 134 countries. And that will not be possible with framing and action that is limited to domestic struggles, nor with international solidarity that lacks a mass base. Capital produces its own contradictions, but if we don’t correctly identify them and seize the opportunity to turn cracks in the system into valleys, we risk losing a historic opportunity to capitalize on growing socialist energy and turn the tide of decades of waning power for the Left.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What holds us back from incorporating anti-imperialism into the framing of our domestic struggles?

2. Beyond the migrant caravans and the issue of immigration, where else do we see opportunities to connect domestic and international political issues?

3. Where, historically, have we seen examples of mass movements in the U.S. with a strong anti-imperialist commitment?

4. What happened to them? How did they express their anti-imperialism? What lessons did they learn?
LIBERATION FOR OUR PEOPLE AND OUR PLANET
ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM
by LeftRoots’ Environmental Justice and Climate Justice Praxis Circle

I. INTRODUCTION

“We need to come out of the endless growth paradigm that is the basis of the capitalist system, and seek for a new kind of society that is grounded on care for each other and nature. A society that seeks happiness for all and not profit for a few. A society based on a different concept of prosperity and well-being. A bio-society for life that includes humans and nature.”
-Pablo Solón, Bolivian social and environmental activist

“A revolution that is based on the people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind.”
-Grace Lee Boggs

The urgency of the climate crisis, combined with the inextricable links between racial monopoly capitalism and ecological degradation, make it imperative to integrate into LeftRoots’ vision of 21st century socialism a strong and clear commitment to ecological justice. This article aims to deepen the climate considerations touched on in “We Believe That We Can Win.” It is not intended to be a comprehensive outline of a left strategic orientation to the climate crisis. Instead, we point to several areas that are underdeveloped or ignored in We Believe That We Can Win, and that must be more thoroughly explored. We hope that, in the process, this article deepens LeftRoots’ internal engagement on and understanding of the ecological and climate justice crisis. We also hope it contributes to the strategic development of the ecological and climate justice left in the U.S.

We make three key strategic arguments related to the orientation articulated in We Believe That We Can Win:

1. Ecological justice must be understood as inextricable and necessary aspect of 21st century socialism and interwoven into many aspects of our vision. We believe LeftRoots should engage in conversation to
identify the best ways to effectively integrate it into our vision.

2. We need a climate justice united front, with political leadership from frontline Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and rural white working class communities. This united front should be in direct connection to the historic bloc proposed in We Believe That We Can Win to advance 21st century socialism.

3. Actions taken to address the climate crisis in the next 10 years have very serious survival implications, globally and for generations to come. Consequently, the left urgently needs to deepen and develop our strategies to resolve the contradictions between the urgent timeframe in which we must address the climate and ecological crises, and the longer timeframe necessary to build the forces needed to achieve our full vision for 21st century socialism.

We start by briefly examining the material impacts and realities of the current ecological crisis. We trace the deeply linked nature of racial monopoly capitalism and the current ecological crisis, and then articulate a vision for ecological justice that draws upon grassroots organizers and environmental justice movements across the globe. We then provide a sketch of the current climate conjuncture and identify possible “driving forces” of a potential climate justice united front. We conclude by outlining the key reasons why ecological justice is critical to the overall effort to build 21st century socialism.

We are keenly aware of many gaps in this article. Many of the issues we identify, the historical trends we mention, and the assertions we make need deeper analysis and research. We know that the lineage of eco-socialists, movement activists, and thinkers working at the intersections of ecological justice, capitalism, and socialism is vast; we regret that we could not more thoroughly engage in conversations with, nor research on, these many leaders, their work, and their thinking. Notwithstanding, we hope this humble offering sparks conversation and debate that will help refine our collective analysis of the strategic interventions the climate justice left should advance in this critical period.

II. THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: BASIC FACTS AND FRAMING

This article focuses on climate change, yet we have a broader understanding of the ecological crisis. When we use the term “ecological crisis,” we refer to an evolving, intersecting set of human-driven environmental problems that 1) threaten the delicate balance of both local and global ecosystems, 2) cause irreversible damage to ecosystems and pose the possibility of ecosystem collapse, and 3) generate a wide range of challenges for human populations.

Climate change is a central component of the ecological crisis, but the crisis also includes massive loss of biodiversity and extinction of species; industrial pollution of our air, water, and soil; compounding impacts on the health of people and other forms of life; deforestation; and humans’ massive over-use of resources, among others. This broader ecological devastation has been driven by the cycles of extraction, production, and disposal that characterize capitalism.2 Our vision for ecological justice encompasses and responds to this wide range of ecologically destructive activities, even as we attend to the urgency of the climate crisis specifically.

Throughout the article, we use the term “climate justice left” to refer to the organizations and people who are working specifically on climate change from a left perspective.

MATERIAL IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Since the industrial revolution, human impacts on Earth's climate and ecological systems have become devastating and, in several cases, irreversible. The
most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report indicates that we remain on a path toward 3°C of warming by 2100, which would have catastrophic impacts on living systems — particularly human coastal dwellers, the global poor, and Indigenous communities.

Climate change is already upon us. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, carbon dioxide levels are up 37 percent and global temperatures are up 1°C, while sea levels have risen almost seven inches over the last 100 years. We are already seeing the effects, from historic droughts and wildfires to more frequent and devastating storms and floods.

We face several climate “tipping points” in the coming decade, as economies continue growing faster than our ability to reduce associated emissions. In 2015, 170 countries agreed to try and limit warming by 2100 to 2°C, but the 2018 IPCC report showed that the extent of global disruption will be substantially less at 1.5°C of warming, as compared to 2°C. Either of these “best case” scenarios will still mean devastation for low-lying nations, irreparable damage to water and food systems in many places, and unconscionable loss of human life. The IPCC report laid out a clear, aggressive twelve-year timeline in order to limit warming to 1.5°C: we must reduce emissions by 45 percent by 2030. This will require extraordinary transitions in transportation, agriculture, land use, building infrastructure, and industrial and energy systems. If we do not, the greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere will make it extremely difficult to limit warming to even 2°C. More specifically, if emissions do not “peak” in 2020 and show a clear downward trajectory thereafter, it will be extremely difficult to achieve the level of reductions needed by 2030. Meanwhile, in 2017 global emissions reached a record high, and in 2018 emissions rose 3 percent in the U.S.

In contrast to the IPCC’s call to limit global warming to 1.5°C or 2°C, demands and target metrics advanced by climate justice movements are even more ambitious. For example, the People’s Demands for Climate Justice call for developed countries to make a commitment for a just transition to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, and an immediate moratorium on new fossil fuel exploration and extraction, among other demands.

As the climate crisis deepens, it will further exacerbate existing material and political inequalities, as communities that are already marginalized, exploited, and who have the fewest resources also get the least support for dealing with severe climate impacts. Ripple effects across the U.S. and globally will impact agricultural harvests, housing, health, infrastructure, property, and much more.

All of these crises and disasters present new and more frequent opportunities for the ruling class, neoliberals, and the right to consolidate their power and increase their profits, at least in the short term.

As social movement leftists in the nation most culpable for climate change (further explored below), we have a responsibility to attempt, by any strategic means necessary, to immediately decarbonize our society and advance a just transition towards regenerative economies.
“A true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global north and south ... In different ways, developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future.”
—Pope Francis, 2015 Encyclical on Climate

Responsibility for the greenhouse gas emissions that are leading drivers of climate change is not uniform. Rather, the “ecological debt” borne by the U.S. places a special responsibility on U.S. social movement leftists to address the climate crisis.

For decades, the U.S. was the world’s largest carbon emitter and, though now second to China in annual emissions,11 we still carry the greatest historical responsibility for the causes of climate change. Combined, the U.S., China, and the European Union presently contribute over 50 percent of total global emissions, and the top 10 emitting nations account for nearly three-quarters of global emissions.12 The U.S.’s emissions, in particular, are driven by extremely high rates of consumption of both natural resources and goods.

Meanwhile, despite having some of the lowest per capita emissions, people across the Global South will be most directly impacted by climate change in the quickest timeframe. Many of these nations still struggle to achieve basic living standards that much of the Global North has long enjoyed thanks to industries and activities that emit extremely high levels of greenhouse gases. This ecological debt places a great deal of the impetus for curbing these emissions on us here in the U.S.

All of these crises and disasters present new and more frequent opportunities for the ruling class, neoliberals, and the right to consolidate their power and increase their profits, at least in the short term.

The ecological debt – both in the U.S. and globally – has been driven by the ruling class. 100 companies have been the source of more than 70 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions since 1988.13 Around 50 percent of global emissions can be attributed to the richest 10 percent of people around the world, who have average carbon footprints 11 times as high as the poorest half of the population.14 In the U.S., the top 10 percent of polluters are responsible for 25 percent of total emissions, and the carbon footprint of the top 2 percent of wealthiest Americans is more than four times than those of people in the bottom 10 percent income bracket.15
III: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Developing a left strategic orientation to the ecological crisis requires a historical, materialist understanding of the causes of ecological destruction and the human activities driving the climate crisis. We begin by looking at the ecology of capitalist political economy.

As Europeans colonized North America and established racial capitalism, they viewed “natural resources” as endless potential commodities to be used, together with exploited human labor, to generate profit. This logic led to extreme violence in many forms. Workers, considered disposable in the quest for profit, had few protections from the dangers of extractive industries. The endless hunt for more natural resources fueled (and still fuels) war, imperialist expansion, and colonization, resulting in devastating ecological and human consequences beyond the extraction itself. One key form of violence often used to enable resource expropriation was, and continues to be, the use of military or paramilitary forces to assassinate environmental defenders. This violence continues today, as with the 2016 high profile murder of Indigenous, feminist land defender Berta Cacéres.

Viewing the “natural world” as a territory to conquer reinforced, and was reinforced by, the particular forms of gender-based oppression that emerged alongside capitalism. Like “nature,” European and white men have often looked at women and their bodies as territories to be conquered, particularly in communities of color and the Global South. The combination of unequal gender relations and exploitation of natural resources can cause specific, often unacknowledged harms to women, and can be accompanied by overt gender-based violence to further resource exploitation. For example, among Indigenous Adivasi people in India, deforestation has disproportionately impacted women. For generations, Adivasi people have relied on the forests for subsistence, which are also linked to spiritual practices and social structures. As the people responsible for feeding their

ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION AND THE FORMATION OF RACIAL MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

The roots of the contemporary ecological crisis are deeply embedded in the history and development of racial monopoly capitalism. The arrival, conquest, and settlement of Europeans in North America, as well as the genocide and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples fundamental to that process, relied in part on an ideology and practice of subjugating and exploiting the natural world itself.

Patriarchal European Christianity brought to North America a social construction of “nature” and the earth as wild, separate from humans, and in need of domination. This was and remains in direct contrast to Indigenous Peoples’ diverse cosmovisions and ways of life, in which nature is understood as an entity with whom to live in balance and the basis for spiritual practices. The Euro-Christian social construction of nature was a key element of the ideological matrix that justified the dehumanization of native peoples and, shortly thereafter, the enslavement of Africans.
families, women were particularly impacted by a new, state-sponsored effort to fell the trees. In response, Adi-vasi women have led a courageous and militant effort to stop the tree felling and, as a result, they face dispropor-
tionate violence and repression.23

“Women are suffering either by being refugees or by being affected by the situation that forces people to migrate to other countries. The system that forces people to migrate is the same system that is exploiting women’s bodies, women’s labor.... They keep forcing us into wars in the name of borders, and in the name of controlling natural resources.”
—Graça Samo, World March of Women International Secretariat in Mozambique

ALIENATION FROM LAND AND ECOLOGY
Racial monopoly capitalism has alienated workers from the land and from traditional, land-based ways of life as severely as it has alienated workers from their own labor. Peoples’ location within highly globalized, consumer-driven racial monopoly capitalism obscures both how basic necessities, such as food and housing, are produced from natural resources, and also obscures the ecological impacts of modern lifestyles.

The resulting generalized alienation from the earth’s natural systems impacts a vast majority of people in the U.S. today, although this dynamic plays out differently for specific peoples, classes, and communities. The alienation has been particularly acute for people of color here in the U.S. and for peoples of the Global South, whose continued displacement has been a driving factor in the production and reproduction of racial monopoly capitalism and colonialism. Land expropriation, imperialism, and war—each with its own destructive and compounding ecological impacts—have driven these peoples from their lands and countries of origin.

For Indigenous Peoples, alienation from ancestral lands and traditional ecological knowledge has occurred as a result of genocide, forced relocation, and the gener-al mechanisms of settler colonial conquest. For Afri-

American-Canadians, kidnapping and enslavement severed peoples’ connections to homelands; subsequently, the combination of structural racism (particularly in the form of historical restrictions on land ownership), and economic marginalization have continued to foreclose access to land for much of the Black community.24 Imperialism and global capitalism have severed the ties that immigrants from the Global South had to land in their countries of origin and pushed them to relocate to the U.S.

Dispossession from land is also common among white workers in the U.S., particularly in timber and coal coun-

try, but it has a different character. Many white people were alienated from their land in Europe through early capitalist mechanisms like enclosures and relocated to the U.S. Under white settler colonialism in North America, white people had access to land expropriated from Indigenous Peoples and from Mexico. With this important context, the experience of white working-class communities is illustrative of how racial monopoly capitalism combined resource extraction and exploitation of labor to produce profit and dispossession, leading to vast ecological destruction and long-term impacts on communities across Appalachia, the Pacific Northwest, and many other white working-class communities.

These common threads of dispossession, exploitation of land and of people, and alienation produce the seeds for a multi-racial historic bloc, discussed later in the article.

A CRITICAL CONTRADICTION: PRODUCTIVE FORCES AND ECOLOGICAL LIMITS
Marxist theory and socialist practice have had a com-
plicated relationship to ecology. Despite some debate about the extent to which Marx himself understood the contradiction between capitalism and ecology,25 most Marxists have focused on liberating the working class from capitalist exploitation—and liberating capitalism’s productive forces in the process. But this allows for the same extractivism and “growth at all costs” principles in socialism that have put capitalist development in contra-
diction with the earth’s natural limits.
This proved true for many 20th century socialist experiments, especially in the Soviet bloc, often with destructive long-term environmental outcomes comparable to its capitalist analogs. In the Global South, socialist and social democratic experiments confronted with abysmal living conditions after decades or centuries of colonial underdevelopment have too often relied on extractivism to generate the wealth needed to improve those conditions and foster “development.” While the constraints of global capitalism have offered these experiments only a very limited set of choices, social movements in some of these countries (e.g., Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia) often offer justified criticism of their governments’ misguided “developmentalist” policies.

This contradiction has led eco-socialists such as Saral Sarkar to pose the critical question: how can revolution be re-conceived not as unleashing the productive forces of the working class, but as “pulling the emergency brake on the locomotive of industrial growth and development”?

Roots of a 21st century socialism grounded in ecological justice

Today’s climate justice left, and our vision for ecological justice in 21st century socialism, is directly linked to the strong resistance and innovative thinking of the environmental justice (EJ) movement in the U.S., social movements from across the Global South, and Indigenous Peoples’ struggles. In contrast to the mainstream Euro-American environmental movement, these movements have explicitly linked protection and stewardship of the Earth to structural economic and racial injustice, as well as to anti-colonialist politics and demands for Indigenous sovereignty.

Today’s U.S. climate justice movement is rooted in the EJ movement, which has many overlaps with, but is distinct from, the climate justice left. The EJ movement emerged in the 1980s in response to the severe impacts of environmental racism, particularly the disproportionate pollution in low-income communities and communities of color. Led by Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities, the EJ movement has articulated the connections between race, class, and pollution, and has redefined “the environment” to include where people live, work, play, and pray. Many of the early EJ organizers came directly out of the racial, economic justice, and national liberation movements of the 1970s, including the American Indian Movement, Asian working class movements, Xicano movements in the Southwest, and Black Liberation struggles across the South. Many of these organizers are still active in the EJ and climate justice movements, providing unique political leadership.

At the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, EJ activists came together and developed the Environmental Justice Principles, a counter-hegemonic platform that explicitly indict several core principles of extractive capitalism. Among other things, it calls for “economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods” and the “political, economic and cultural liberation that [we have] been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our
communities and land and the genocide of our peoples...” This holistic understanding of the environment and root causes of environmental injustice was in direct contrast to the mainstream environmental movement, which is discussed in more detail in Section V.

A core EJ principle is that frontline communities (those most impacted by pollution) can and must speak for themselves. Since its’ beginning, the EJ movement has challenged racism within mainstream environmentalism. Critical EJ interventions have reshaped the terrain of both environmental and racial justice struggles, such as the explicit inclusion of worker rights and safety in the Environmental Justice Principles. This intervention was borne from the grassroots efforts of groups such as the United Farm Workers and others who addressed toxic exposures in the workplace, which were previously unacknowledged by the environmental movement. Today, the many different EJ organizations continue work on a broad range of issues, such as fighting toxics and for clean water. Unfortunately, these important struggles are beyond the scope of this article.

Many other indigenous, social and environmental movements both in the U.S. and internationally have been key in the development of an anti-capitalist politics of ecological justice. In the Global South, these include the Rubber Tappers’ movement in Brazil, Indigenous Adivasi forest peoples’ movements in India, resistance to oil and gas extraction in Nigeria, and many more. Global South leaders such as Vandana Shiva, Berta Cáceres, and Pablo Solón have made important contributions to the developing climate justice left politic, as have indigenous and land-based movements such as the Indigenous Environmental Network and La Via Campesina.

These organizers, thinkers and movements integrate a diverse range of traditions and tendencies in their work. Some, though not all, draw on principles of Marxism and socialism. Others have contributed frameworks around the rights of nature/Mother Earth, anti-colonialism/self-determination, ecofeminism, Indigenous lifeways and cosmology, anti-capitalism, radical ecology, and a rejection of a “growth at all costs” approach. Eco-socialism, a strand of socialism that combines socialist theory with ecology, has also contributed to a deeper theoretical understanding of the contradictions between ecology and capitalism. These are just some of the groups and tendencies we have drawn from to develop our vision for a 21st century socialism grounded in ecological justice.

IV: OUR VISION FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALIST ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

We believe one necessary addition to We Believe That We Can Win is the articulation of a vision for what ecological justice looks like in a 21st century socialist alternative. We have identified eight principles we believe could guide this vision, drawn from the following international and U.S.-based frameworks: Buen Vivir; Cochabamba Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth; Environmental Justice; Just Transition; Food Sovereignty and Agroecology; and Ecofeminism. We agree with much of the content in these frameworks, and have tried to synthesize common themes among them. We strongly encourage readers to familiarize themselves with the original documents referenced above, links to which can be found in the supplementary resources provided in Appendix A.

1. We must recognize that the relationship and harmony between human beings and nature is fundamental. We must recognize Mother Earth as a living system with whom we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and, for some, a spiritual relationship. We must affirm this understanding and relationship by upholding environmental justice: the right to be free from environmental destruction. (Buen Vivir; Cochabamba Agreement; Environmental Justice)

2. Life—rather than money, economic growth, or profit—must be at the center of any 21st century socialist...
We must pursue a fair and sustainable shift from an extractive economy to economies that uphold life, based on local conditions and determined by communities considering local needs. Human productive activity must achieve and support ecological balance. The land cannot be owned; it must be honored and protected. (Buen Vivir; Ecofeminism; Just Transition)

3. All exploitative, dominating, colonial relations must be transformed into reciprocal, respectful, mutual ones. White supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy are all root causes of environmental injustices and ecological devastation; racial and gender justice and the liberation of all peoples are key to environmental justice. Polluting industries must be held accountable for repairing harms so that communities and Mother Earth can heal. The transition to a new economy must provide for workers in extractive industries, as well as for the broader communities impacted by the climate crisis. (Ecofeminism; Environmental Justice; Just Transition)

4. Ecological justice must support and reinforce the self-determination of all peoples. Peoples must have the autonomy and control to determine their reciprocal relationships to each other and the land. For example, people's lands/territories must be protected from extraction, just as women's bodies must be protected from violence. (Ecofeminism; Food Sovereignty; Just Transition)

5. Solutions must be led by those most impacted by environmental and climate damages. Frontline communities must speak for themselves, and women's unique involvement in ecological defense must be recognized. (Ecofeminism; Environmental Justice)

6. Indigenous rights must be recovered, protected, and respected. 21st century socialism must recognize Indigenous rights to water and land, uphold treaties and the right to unceded territories; safeguard free, prior, and informed consent; and respect Indigenous sovereignty globally. (Buen Vivir; Cochabamba Agreement; Environmental Justice)

7. To challenge injustice and power hierarchies, we must build collective power based in grassroots communities. Individual well-being must be balanced with collective well-being, and challenges to injustice must not rely solely on the assertion of individual interests. (Buen Vivir; Cochabamba Agreement)

8. The reconstruction of energy and economic systems must include reparations, healing, and restoration from the devastating legacies of environmental racism. We must rehabilitate contaminated water, air, and land, especially in Indigenous communities, Black communities, communities impacted by extractive industries, and peoples throughout the Global South, to which the Global North owes a tremendous ecological debt. (Environmental Justice, Just Transition)

INTEGRATING ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE INTO LEFTROOTS’ VISION FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM

We Believe That We Can Win currently identifies ecological stewardship as part of the economic base of 21st century socialism. While we agree with this articulation, it is our position that ecological justice extends beyond the economic base, as reflected by the broad principles we have articulated above. Ecological justice must not only undergird any new political economy we build; ecological justice must also be an ever-evolving outcome of our new system; in its most advanced form, is also a framework for how we relate to nature and each other.

Rather than propose one particular strategy for accomplishing integration, we propose that LeftRoots engage in conversations at all levels of the organization to integrate ecological justice into our vision for 21st century socialism. Additional processes to consider may include adopting a set of overarching principles for ecological justice, or incorporating ecological justice into the “socialist triangle” articulated in We Believe That We Can Win. A few of the key shifts – by no means exhaustive – that we
could foresee coming out of such a process include:

- Recognizing the fundamental and irreplaceable contribution ecological balance makes to human development. Alienation from Mother Earth is part of capitalism. Respect for Mother Earth increases, and is an intrinsic and necessary part of human development.

- Ensuring that "social ownership of the means of production," and production itself, protects and affirms ecological boundaries (e.g., non-extractive industry, regenerative projects, and ecological restoration).

- Reimagining “collectively determined needs” to include stewardship for ecological abundance and the sustainability of natural resources.

In addition to their place in a vision for 21st century socialism, ecological justice must also be part of our analysis, strategy, and practice. This requires a swift and urgent “climate cadrefication” of leftists. We must increase eco-literacy so the climate crisis’ uniquely grave and urgent timeline can be integrated into strategic and tactical considerations. This cadrefication will enable us to reimagine the material infrastructure needed to underpin 21st century socialism, and to adapt to the changes underway in our physical, social, and political geographies (e.g., more people displaced as more places are no longer habitable). It will also allow us to further elaborate on the three revisions proposed above. Likewise, “climate cadrefication” will ensure that we, as leftists, move toward an ecologically balanced way of life that ceases to rely on the current extractive, consumer-driven model.

V: ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT CLIMATE CONJUNCTURE

“Living democracy grows like a tree: from the ground up.” —Vandana Shiva

Achieving our vision for ecological justice within 21st century socialism is a long-term project, but the climate crisis requires immediate interventions. This tension requires us to carefully analyze the current conjuncture to develop strategies for making dramatic advances in the immediate term while building power for deeper systemic shifts in the medium and long term.

THE STRENGTH OF EX extractive sectors

Products related to extraction are woven into nearly every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat, to the transport and energy we use. We use the term “extractive sector” to refer to corporations that directly extract fossil fuels, such as oil and gas companies, as well as those that are reliant on fossil-fuel products, such as industrial agriculture (which can also be considered extractive in other ways). This vast web of ecologically destructive industries, and the ruling class that controls them, maintain a strong grip on our political, economic, and social systems. They have created and maintain a broad hegemonic understanding that we “need” fossil fuels, that the alternatives are unrealistic, and/or that our overall growth- and consumption-oriented economic model is indefinitely sustainable.

The extractive sector has an extremely high level of access to and infiltration of the political system, concentrated on the right but including many centrists and liberals as well. These industries and their front groups are active at every political level, killing or weakening climate initiatives and policy at local, state, national, and international levels. For example, in the 2018 midterm elections, oil corporations successfully spent $31.5 million to kill a carbon fee proposal in Washington state and $41 million in Colorado to kill a new proposed oil and gas regulation. They exercise strong control over and access to the means of communication, including direct ownership of and influence over major television, print, and talk radio outlets. Extractive companies - and the ruling class who controls them - are supported by a network of conservative think tanks and funders who actively promote climate change denial, and explicitly work to undermine climate science.
The extractive sector is also tremendously adept at co-opting popular demands. For example, when oil companies install renewable energy to power the pumping of fossil fuels to demonstrate their “green” production, or develop renewable energy while maintaining oil drilling operations, they are offering superficial concessions to popular forces that maintain their basic extractive and destructive economic model—and their economic and political power within it.

These interests are a fundamental part of the neoliberal project of racial monopoly capitalism and have gained significant political leverage with the rise of the far right and Trumpism. Trump’s “energy dominance” agenda aims to reduce reliance on oil and gas imports and make the U.S. a larger player in the global oil and gas markets. This has led to a program of rapidly increased oil and gas production in the U.S., greenlighting increased oil and gas infrastructure, and dramatic environmental rollbacks. Today, for the first time in history, the U.S. is the largest producer of natural gas in the world and neck-and-neck with Russia and Saudi Arabia for top oil production.

However, even the powerful web of extractive industries is facing the contradiction of their production: the burning of fossil fuels is driving an ecological crisis that jeopardizes the very people, infrastructure, and systems needed to deliver and consume fossil fuel products and thus create a profit. For example, rising sea levels and increased storms threaten the physical infrastructure of oil extraction.

**THE POLITICAL BANKRUPTCY OF THE “MAINSTREAM” CLIMATE MOVEMENT**

While the climate justice left recognizes that capitalism is the fundamental driver of climate change, the broader U.S. climate movement is dominated by “mainstream” forces that do not recognize this root cause. The mainstream climate movement has historically been predominately white and “middle class,” and has both refused to address and directly perpetuated structural racial and economic injustice. While different mainstream actors have particular interests, they share a belief that the climate crisis can be averted while maintaining global neoliberal capitalism.

The mainstream climate movement has promoted policies that narrowly focus on counting and trying to reduce carbon dioxide parts per million on a global scale and addressing the impacts of climate change. Not only has this approach been generally ineffective—global emissions reached a record high in 2017, and in 2018 emissions rose 3 percent in the U.S.—it has also failed to address the disproportionate burden of impacts in frontline communities. Focusing on the aggregate amount of carbon dioxide at the state, national, or international level overlooks already existing or increasing levels of concentrated pollution in communities of color, and does not repair this harm or prevent further localized damage.

**While different mainstream actors have particular interests, they share a belief that the climate crisis can be averted while maintaining global neoliberal capitalism.**

Trump’s domestic agenda has been accompanied by an effort to undermine global climate progress. This has been bolstered internationally by the global rise of the far right, most recently with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, who is already revoking protections on the Amazon rainforest and attacking Indigenous sovereignty, agrarian reform, workers, Quilombola communities, peasants, women, and LGBTQ people.
The mainstream approach to the climate crisis, which lacks a systemic critique of capitalism, has been developed and promoted by mainstream, mostly white, and often middle-class environmental groups. They are bolstered by a network of liberal decision makers, academics, and scientists, and supported by a relatively large philanthropic sector. This has yielded a mainstream movement that has overwhelmingly failed to include or develop any “root cause” analysis or racial- and economic-justice lens. (Note that important changes are occurring right now within the mainstream movement sector, touched on below.)

Without a systemic analysis, a limited focus on carbon dioxide in the atmosphere does not advance transformative change. This dynamic was on clear display at the 2018’s Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, which named corporations like Salesforce and Google as key partners in the fight against climate change. If these companies can just clean up their supply chains, the logic goes, we can solve climate change and maintain the current model of economic development. In a similar vein, the mainstream movement has long promoted individualized responses to climate change, focusing on changing consumer behavior without fundamentally challenging existing power structures.

Many mainstream policy prescriptions have become recognized by the climate justice left as “false solutions” or “false promises” —activities that create a façade of climate action but do not challenge industry’s economic and political power or profits, cause harm to frontline communities and ecosystem, and are generally ineffective at significantly reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Some have been developed directly in coordination with the fossil fuel industry, led by the largest multinational oil corporations who have long recognized the growing reality of climate change. Many of these proposals rely on the market to drive reductions. They put a price on carbon dioxide pollution, making it more expensive to pollute, thus theoretically prompting businesses to pollute less. Such proposals are a marked departure from the direct regulation that has been the cornerstone of U.S. environmental policy since the 1970s. Regulation, which has strictly prohibited certain levels of pollution, has led to the cleanup of both our air and our waterways (and is now under attack by the Trump administration).

Other false promises promoted by the mainstream climate movement have a host of negative ecological impacts that make them unsustainable, as well as failing to challenge the fundamental power of the extractive sector. For example, hydroelectric dams are often touted as “clean” energy because they are not reliant on oil and gas, but dams destroy ecosystems and many have cut off Indigenous Peoples’ access to their ancestral territories, which are critical for both cultural and subsistence practices. Incinerators, nuclear energy plants, carbon capture and storage, and agro-fuels are among the many types of harmful energy projects that mainstream and industry forces promote as ‘solutions’.

Another type of false solution on the rise is geo-engineering: intentional, large-scale technological manipulation.
of the Earth’s systems in an effort to counteract some of the symptoms of climate change, control weather conditions, or reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. While ideas like “stratospheric aerosol injection” (building high-altitude planes to reflect sunlight back into space and thus cool the planet) might sound like science fiction, they are rapidly gaining traction. Proponents of geo-engineering range from liberals genuinely trying to reduce carbon dioxide, to pseudo-scientists promoted by industry. Geo-engineering often serves an intentional deflection from more effective actions, such as directly reducing emissions. The side effects and unintended consequences of such massive technological disruption of natural and managed ecosystems could have devastating impacts for generations to come, and it fails to address the root causes of climate change.

In summary, mainstream climate policy has not led to significant decreases in carbon emissions globally, nor has it galvanized widespread popular support. It has failed to speak to the interests of working-class people, either in content or in messaging, and it does not address the underlying economic, political, or social drivers of climate change.

**STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CLIMATE JUSTICE LEFT**

“Let us wake up, Humanity! We are out of time. We must shake our consciousness free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only ensure our own self-destruction...Our Mother Earth, militarized, fenced in, poisoned, a place where basic rights are systematically violated—demands that we take action. Let us build societies that allow us to live in a dignified way, and in a way that protects life. Let us come together and remain hopeful as we defend and care for the blood of this earth and of its spirits.”

—Berta Cáceres

Left forces within the climate movement have important strengths. For decades, we have been doing incredible on-the-ground work to intervene in mainstream climate politics, win inspiring campaigns across the country, and build out a grassroots-led vision for climate justice. For instance, the Just Transition framework provides emerging ideological clarity about the principles of a coherent left orientation to climate change, one that links it to a broader racial and economic justice agenda.

The climate justice left also has strong democratic practices, building on the legacy of the EJ and Indigenous rights movements, which contain strong sets of principles around developing leader-full movements; prioritizing the voices of those who are most directly impacted to speak for themselves; and democratic organizing as embodied through engagement of the Jemez Principles.

But the climate justice left has very little political power and operates at a very small scale. We have yet to grapple with the question of how to build real political power in a country as large as the U.S. We lack a clear assessment of what forces we need, whom we can pull left, or how we can build a united front powerful enough to make significant climate justice advances.

Most significantly, we face a stark incongruence between the short timeframe for addressing the climate crisis and the longer timeframe to assemble the forces necessary for large-scale revolutionary change. Achieving our full vision for ecological justice will take decades (or longer), but the latest scientific projections give us just 12 years to halve all global greenhouse gas emissions and prevent the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. We lack a clear understanding of what strategies will help accomplish the two distinct goals of building our power for long-term change and addressing the immediacy of the climate crisis. Without a strategic framework, we have no basis to assess the type of short-term tactical alliances we might need. We do not have alignment around whether or not compromises on mitigation measures will be necessary to address the most immediate impacts of the climate crisis, or what, if any, non-reformist reforms would advance our cause.

Our responsibilities as internationalists within the U.S. present other challenges. A just solution to the glob-
al climate crisis requires not only an environmental transformation of our economy, but also a substantial reduction in resource consumption by the U.S. How do we build a united front around a platform that combines radical environmental transformation of our economy, radical redistribution of wealth and economic power, and an overall contraction of our existing, growth-centered national economy? How do we ensure this contraction does not harm those in the U.S. already struggling to make ends meet?

Finally, the broader social movement left must integrate an analysis of ecological crisis into its strategy. Climate change will reshape the day-to-day lives of millions of people across the country and create ongoing and dynamic shifts in the political and economic terrain. How will this impact progressive efforts in the short-term, and what are the implications for developing a long-term strategy to build 21st century socialism?

THE CURRENT CLIMATE CONJUNCTURE: IMPORTANT BREAKS AND SCHISMS

Amidst ever-worsening scientific projections, there is also increasing recognition that the solutions to climate change must include broad, systemic shifts in society. Given these changing conditions, combined with our assessment of the mainstream and left climate forces and the state of extractive industries, we can identify some important breaks developing in the climate conjuncture. The climate justice left should continually assess these schisms and develop strategies to amplify them.

• Global-level liberal, and even neoliberal, forces dislike Trump’s extreme agenda. Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Accord and fanatical promotion of fossil fuels at the international level, particularly within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, has provoked a backlash among a wide range of neoliberal forces at the international level. This creates potential openings to build tactical international alliances and advance left solutions.

• Trump's international agenda of economic nationalism creates a potential contradiction with domestic oil and gas producers. A trade war with China, the U.S.'s largest market for oil and gas exports, directly undermines the profits of the oil and gas producers in the U.S. who are among Trump’s allies. This could lead to disarray on the right and opportunity for the left.

• There is increased media and scientific consensus on the failure of the mainstream climate movement’s approach, creating openings to amplify left solutions. Similarly, philanthropists are recognizing that mainstream solutions have not achieved the progress needed, which presents new opportunities to organize resource holders to support the climate justice left.

• The ruling class is increasingly concerned about climate change. Cultural influencers like Leonardo Di Caprio and venture capitalists like Tom Steyer, while they may perhaps be invested in maintaining racial monopoly capitalism, are increasingly taking action on climate change and against Trump.

• Mainstream environmental organizations are increasingly realizing their own limitations, while environmental and climate justice movements have been building alignment and growing in influence and impact. Mainstream groups are seeing that they must be more responsive to communities of color, that their lack of diversity alienates them from the growing majority of the U.S. population, and that their dominant approach to climate change is flawed. These breaks are an opportunity to advance ideological shifts within these mainstream organizations, as well as harness more power and funding for the left.

• There are active debates in the labor movement about climate change. For decades, conservative and centrist unions have blocked significant commitment from the labor movement as a whole to advance transformative solutions, and have at times taken action in direct opposition to climate justice demands. But progressive labor forces have
been advancing a left politic on climate change for decades, and now more unions are starting to consider bolder action. For example, the National Nurses United on climate change; the AFL-CIO issued a statement on climate change, even as they have taken contrary positions on key issues such as Dakota Access pipeline; and there were strong labor contingents within the 2018 climate mobilizations. While these efforts may be limited in scope and contain many contradictions, they nevertheless point to openings too deepen connections with the labor movement.

- The increased frequency of climate-related catastrophic events (super storms, wildfires, droughts, etc.) is impacting millions of people across the country and materially changing their day-to-day lives. Storm-devastated communities, from Puerto Rico to New York to Florida to Houston, and fire-ravaged areas in the West are still struggling many months after such disasters. From the depths of these tragedies, our forces can advance a left narrative around systemic drivers of climate change and transformative solutions. However, these crises also create opportunities for neoliberal and liberal forces to create “solutions” that maintain their dominance.

**Grounds for Hope**

The crisis is acute and the conjuncture presents daunting challenges, but extraordinary struggles for ecological justice in this period are constantly renewing our inspiration and imagination and giving us continued grounds for hope. Foremost, powerful campaigns and movements have united and galvanized a broad range of forces to win truly progressive climate change victories, including the fights against the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines. The No DAPL fight, for example, effectively articulated the links between ecological protection and Indigenous rights, and this message reached millions of people.

Likewise, the continued creativity and tenacity of grassroots organizing efforts across the country demonstrate that we can develop genuinely transformative solutions, even if we cannot yet bring them to scale. Community-based organizations working to meet people's needs in places hit by climate disasters have been developing a framework for “Just Recovery” after such events. Kentuckians for the Commonwealth demonstrates the breadth of issues climate justice leftists are taking on in an effort to demonstrate radically transformative solutions, including cleaning up the air, water, and land in coal-mining communities, fighting for a transition to green and renewable energy that creates good, local jobs, supporting participatory democracy and defending voting rights, and integrating racial justice and anti-oppression work throughout their efforts.

The 2018 elections ushered in a new wave of diverse decision-makers running on bold, progressive platforms and pushing more comprehensive ways to address climate change. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's proposed “Green New Deal” is the most prominent example. While it has created a new opportunity for the climate justice left to engage in national-level policy debate, it also contains contradictions and challenges.

The renewable energy sector is growing, with more and more states making renewable energy commitments. While large-scale renewable energy can have both ecological and political pitfalls, increased solar and wind energy undermines the profits of the fossil fuel sector and benefits the climate. Increased state-level commitments create opportunities to push for and win smaller-scale, decentralized, and community-controlled renewable energy projects at the local level.

Finally, it is worth recalling that even the most recent modeling from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows that it remains possible to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions enough to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5°C.
“I believe people in the U.S. and the world are starting to wake up. They are seeing our current economic system isn’t working. Humanity is starting to look at the need for new economic paradigms. The form of capitalism, as we know it, is coming to an end. Again, the dangers of capitalism are based upon the depletion of natural resources and its unfulfilling appetite for unlimited growth and constantly taking from Mother Earth without giving back. I think that we are starting to realize as humanity, as people of the world, along with Indigenous people, that we cannot continue to live like this.”
—Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network

In order to utilize the markedly shifting conjuncture to advance our vision for ecological justice and stem the climate crisis, it will require a massive social movement at all levels of society. We need a united front that unites broad segments of society to move systemic interventions around climate and ecological justice. Based on our structural and conjunctural analyses, we believe that the political leadership for this united front must come from Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and rural white working-class frontline communities. These will not be the only interests in the united front. The mainstream environmental movement will be a critical element of the united front. Among others, youth, labor and faith-based institutions - many of which are already active on climate - could all potentially be brought into the united front, as conditions and their own strategies dictate. However, in our assessment, the driving forces we’ve identified have the best capacity to build and provide leadership to the broad united front needed to advance genuine systemic change in the face of the existential threat of the climate crisis.

Below, we provide more analysis on why we have identified frontline groups as driving forces of the climate justice united front. We include a particular focus on Indigenous, Black, and women’s leadership, and outline why an internationalist perspective is critical.

FRONTLINES OF CRISIS, FOREFRONT OF CHANGE

Frontline Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and rural white working-class grassroots movements are playing a critical role in pressuring governments for meaningful action, developing long-term and sustainable alternatives and solutions on the ground, and helping vulnerable communities withstand and adapt to the impacts the climate crisis is already having. Our movements are born from surviving broken levees and oil spills in the Gulf Coast, the explosions of oil refineries and devastating wildfires in California, fracking’s destruction of land, air, and water across the Dakotas, and the devastating health conditions for workers and communities across the coal fields of the Appalachian mountains. Frontline communities today are already living with food shortages, health crises, contamination, and displacement. Driven by the clarity of what is already at stake in our communities right now, grassroots climate justice movements have

We need a united front that unites broad segments of society to move systemic interventions around climate and ecological justice. Based on our structural and conjunctural analyses, we believe that the political leadership for this united front must come from Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and rural white working-class frontline communities.
been the most courageous and uncompromising in rejecting half-measures and demanding real, enforceable and immediate action.

But this is not enough. While we understand the critical role of these grassroots, frontline movements, we also know that we have too little strategic clarity and political power to meet the urgency of the crisis. The moment requires us to take up the concept that Zapatismo advanced: *caminar preguntando* (to walk while asking questions). It calls for immediate action, testing our ideas and strategy in practice while making grounded, material assessments and developing thousands of new cadres.

**Globally, we can and must learn from the interwoven relationships among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, youth, labor, grassroots feminist, and Marxist movements in places as varied as the Philippines, South Africa, Haiti, Puerto Rico, India, Senegal, and the Americas.**

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ MOVEMENTS**

Indigenous Peoples’ movements offer visionary political and spiritual grounding, along with bold, militant, and strategic organizing that has led to some of the biggest climate victories in the last period. From the more than 280 nations and tribes that mobilized support with the water defenders of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation against the Dakota Access Pipeline, to the movements in defense of the Tar Sands and the Wet’suwet’en territory in the north, to the growing movements to protect the Bayou in the Gulf South and the Arctic Refuge in Alaska, Indigenous peoples across North America continue to put their bodies on the line as they lead some of the most effective and galvanizing struggles to stop extraction and confront polluters at the source.

The leadership that Indigenous Peoples are offering in the global climate movement presents new opportuni-

...ties to deepen relationships between and among left social movements and Indigenous movements. In North America, Indigenous movements have not always identified with the left or other social movements, and other racial and social justice movements in the U.S. have many times failed to deeply understand and take up Indigenous struggles as central to their own liberation. Some historical moments offer us important lessons, such as the relationships among the American Indian Movement, the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the Red Guard, and many of the other national liberation movements of the 1970s. Globally, we can and must learn from the interwoven relationships among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, youth, labor, grassroots feminist, and Marxist movements in places as varied as the Philippines, South Africa, Haiti, Puerto Rico, India, Senegal, and the Americas.

The leadership of Indigenous movements around questions of environmental and climate justice is shaping and sharpening left theory and consciousness. Two examples include the Cochabamba Accords that developed out of the 2010 Global Conference on Climate Change, and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, which represent a powerful alignment of popular movements from more than 140 nations with a deep grounding in anti-capitalist values and Indigenous world views. This type of alignment and recognition of Indigenous world views points to the potential for land and climate justice struggles to bring social movement leftists into direct on-the-ground practice and joint movement building with Indigenous movements. Particularly because *We Believe That We Can Win* identifies Indigenous Peoples as a driving force in the historic bloc necessary to achieve 21st century socialism, the shared experiences of climate justice practice and movement-building will be crucial to building relationships that are foundational to a successful historic bloc.
Black leadership plays a critical role in the struggle for climate justice. Racial monopoly capitalism’s model of resource extraction and exploitation was fundamentally shaped through the brutal theft, violence, and exploitation of generations of Black people—and, specifically, the enslavement of African peoples and the institution of chattel slavery.

The intersection of racism and ecological destruction continues to shape the lived reality for Black communities today: as a result of systematic disinvestment, marginalization, and racism, Black communities live in some of the most polluted areas, suffer related, disproportionate health consequences, and are often hit first and worst by the impacts of climate change. Ecological destruction and white supremacy have enabled each other for generations; to dismantle either, we must tackle both.

Survivors described the stadium as more of a concentration camp than an emergency shelter, without adequate toilets, potable water, or food. Almost 7,000 women and men in New Orleans jails were abandoned, locked in their cells for days without food while flood waters continued to rise. Three days after Katrina struck, armed National Guard troops blocked the road connecting the city of Gretna to New Orleans. Troops fired shots overhead to keep thousands of evacuees from crossing the bridge and escaping the flooding and chaos. Officially, more than 1,800 people died in the hurricane, subsequent floods, and lack of humanitarian support. Even now, after more than a decade of reconstruction, many Black residents who survived the storm remain displaced due to either storm damage or reconstruction-fueled gentrification.

The connections between white supremacy and the climate crisis have spurred important climate organizing in Black communities. The Movement for Black Lives platform explicitly addresses references to climate change in several sections, clearly articulating how Black communities have been impacted by environmental racism, and how liberation for Black people must include reparations for these harms.

Hurricane Katrina exposed how the deep legacies and living reality of anti-Black racism collides with climate change. In the fall of 2005, the world watched as the U.S. government abandoned hundreds of thousands of Black people in the face of a dire humanitarian crisis. When the levees broke and more than 85 percent of New Orleans was completely under water, tens of thousands of families were herded into the New Orleans Superdome. Black self-determination and to help develop the economic basis for a just transition away from the extractive economy. These cooperatives include efforts to re-establish collective Black connections to land, like a farming cooperative and a land trust. These are just two of the many powerful examples of Black-led organizing explicitly creating links between climate justice and racial justice. Yet we still need more Black-led organizations...
to engage in climate justice work. Supporting Black leadership in climate justice efforts is critical to building an effective movement for 21st century socialism.

**WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES**

As in many (or even most) popular movements around the world, women make up the overwhelming majority of leaders and activists in the climate justice movement, both in the U.S. and globally. Their leadership will be essential in any united front.

It is not surprising that women are prominent in this particular movement. A complex set of conditions, rooted in both traditional pre-colonial cultural practices and the development of capitalist heteropatriarchy, has often made women the caretakers not only of families or communities, but of the earth as well. Women movement leaders have also been subjected to life-threatening gender-based violence in struggles to defend water and the land. Examples include the epidemic of thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women across North America, and sexual violence within the male-dominated camps surrounding mines and extractive industry sites. We must defend our movement leaders, especially women, and directly confront gender-based violence that is tied to the extractive economy.

Grassroots feminist and ecological justice frameworks share many of the same principles, such as an emphasis on interconnectedness, mutual support, and transforming hierarchical relationships. These overlaps in conceptual frameworks point to important opportunities to build stronger practical links between intersectional feminist movements and movements for ecological justice. By creating these connections and lifting up both these tendencies, we can push back on the driving force of patriarchal racial monopoly capitalism in mutually reinforcing ways and build a stronger, cross-sectoral movement for 21st century socialism.

While much of ecofeminist literature has focused on a binary discussion of women, we must further investigate and expose how patriarchy and ecological destruction have combined to impact gender non-conforming and queer people in particular. Unfortunately, we were unable to explore this in the development of this article.

**BRINGING AN INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE**

As social movement leftists inside the United States, we must recognize the role of the U.S. in driving global racial monopoly capitalism, which continues to devastate the livelihoods and natural resources of peoples across the Global South. The global frontlines of the survival struggle are found across the African continent, the small island states, the Caribbean, Bangladesh, and forest-dependent communities across the Amazon, among others. It is a brutal irony that these communities contribute the least to the climate crisis, but suffer the most.

It is not just the crisis that has a global dimension, but the emerging solutions, as well. Social movements in the Global South are advancing bold visions for climate justice, and we must learn from and alongside these movements. We must develop solutions that provide reparations for the U.S.’s role in the ecological crisis; we must create strategies that do not displace extractive industries from one country or community to another; and we must hold multinational corporations and their...
ruling class accountable for the destruction in all countries. The climate justice left must build mutual solidarity with movements in the Global South to win the future that we all want, and that Mother Earth demands.

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CLIMATE JUSTICE UNITED FRONT AND THE HISTORIC BLOC**

The relationship between the proposed climate justice united front and the historic bloc identified in *We Believe That We Can Win* should be further explored by LeftRoots. While there is some overlap in the identification of Latinx, Black, and Indigenous communities as driving forces of both, the driving forces of the climate justice united front encompass a broader set of frontline communities including Asian, Asian Pacific Islander, and rural, white working class people, as well as a clear internationalist perspective and a focus on women’s leadership.

Given the magnitude of the ecological crisis facing humanity, it will be imperative that the overall socialist historic bloc has a deep understanding of ways to integrate ecological justice into political economy and governance. This suggests that the climate justice united front must make important contributions to the historic bloc, but how these contributions are fed into and directly impact the configuration of the historic bloc is a question LeftRoots needs to explore.

**VII: CONCLUSION**

The analysis in this article draws on the work of the many leaders, organizers, thinkers and everyday people across the decades who have built and continue to build the movements for environmental, climate, and ecological justice. As we expand the climate justice left and deepen the engagement of broader social movement forces, we must all continue to learn from the existing leadership in the movement.

We urge LeftRoots, and all 21st century socialists, to integrate ecological justice into our visions for 21st century socialism. Just as we fight for an economic system that supports human development, we must fight for a system that respects Mother Earth. In doing so, we recognize that humans are but one part of a broader ecosystem, and we strengthen our capacities, increase our long-term likelihood of survival, and undermine the many oppressive ideologies central to racial monopoly capitalism. We cannot overthrow patriarchal racial capitalism without a fundamentally different orientation to “nature.”

The deeply intertwined nature of resource extraction and racial monopoly capitalism means that legitimate solutions to the climate crisis and other ecological problems must challenge the foundations of the current political economy. Even the mainstream climate movement is increasingly recognizing that capitalism’s endless growth model is a primary driver of climate change. With every climate-related disaster, more people are questioning the logic of capitalist extraction and consumption, and linking this destructive logic to the severe ecological destruction we are facing.

The scale of the crisis, which will impact millions (or likely, billions) of people, presents opportunities to unite a large number of social forces in a broad, counter-hegemonic united front that can advance the kind of transformative, and ultimately anti-capitalist, program we need. To build such a united front, we must develop more coherent strategies. This will require further, careful assessments of all terrains of struggle, and we must determine where we can engage in ways that tip the balance of power. Likewise, we must continue to deepen efforts to build power at all levels and in all areas of society. All of this requires leadership from “driving forces” whose interests and strategic location align most closely with the larger project. We believe those forces are the most advanced elements of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and rural white working-class frontline communities.
The united front will need to contend with a devastatingly short timeline that demands radical results on climate change faster than we are likely to be able to assemble the forces necessary to fully overthrow capital and realize our vision for an ecologically just socialism of the 21st century. This has profound implications for strategy, tactics, and program. We must develop solutions that speak to the needs of working-class people across the country as we build their power to effect large-scale change—all while advancing a broader shift away from our current consumption- and extraction-based economy. This is no easy task.

Finally, all social movement leftists need to integrate climate and ecological justice into their own vision, analyses, and strategy, right alongside gender justice, economic justice, and racial justice. The social movement left needs to show up for climate justice struggles. We must educate ourselves and our base about the climate crisis, its roots, and what a vision based on ecological justice looks like.

This “climate cadrefication” is urgent. In the coming years, all of our communities will face climate-related catastrophes. First and foremost, we must help our people survive during these difficult times. Just as groups on the ground organized to help people after Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Maria, Harvey, and Irma, or supported fire-displaced people in California, we must all be prepared to build and strengthen networks of mutual care and support to ensure that no people are left behind. We must also use these crises as popular teaching moments, advancing a counter-hegemonic narrative and set of demands.

A climate justice united front has the potential to advance a truly transformative set of demands that not only addresses the crisis of climate change, but also advances our overall struggle to build 21st century socialism. Our challenge, and our opportunity, is to build—from the heartbreak of climate devastation—the strength, strategy, and vision to advance both ecological justice and socialism for the 21st century.
APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS ON ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

1. The People's Agreement of Cochabamba was created through a democratic consensus process of approximately 30,000 people from social movements around the world in 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia. It articulates an anti-capitalist ecological justice vision that recognizes the rights of Mother Earth and restores ecological balance. [https://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/](https://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/)

2. Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien (Living Well), also known as Suma qamaña and sumaq kawsay in Andean culture, and Lekil kuxlejal in Mayan culture, has its roots in indigenous worldviews. Buen Vivir is based on the belief that true wellbeing (“the good life or living well”) is only possible as part of a community. [https://systemalternatives.org/2018/02/27/vivir-bien-old-cosmovisions-and-new-paradigms/](https://systemalternatives.org/2018/02/27/vivir-bien-old-cosmovisions-and-new-paradigms/)

3. Ecofeminism is a framework that draws connections between the violence of natural resource extraction and gender-based violence. One of the first published articulations is the book *Ecofeminism*, by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies.

4. The Principles of Environmental Justice, drafted and adopted by delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC. These principles cover a variety of interconnected issues, from the interconnectedness of all living beings; to the need to stop production of all toxins and hold polluters accountable to clean up the waste they have generated; to the need to stop militarism; to the importance of countering the consumer culture, and more. [https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html](https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html)

5. The concept of just transition has emerged from various lineages, among them many visionary movement thinkers and actors, both internationally and in the U.S. More recently, this thinking has been further developed by Movement Generation, in concert with several other groups, into a framework for how to move from an extractive economy to one that is sustainable and just. See Movement Generations’ “From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition.” [https://movementgeneration.org/justtransition/](https://movementgeneration.org/justtransition/)

6. Food Sovereignty is the right for all people to decide what they eat and to ensure that food in their community is ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate. [https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/](https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/)

7. The Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing were created a meeting hosted by Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice in 1996. They articulate a vision and set of practices for organizing democratically. [https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf](https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf)
1 See We Believe That We Can Win, pp 30, pp 40, pp 45, and pp 181.


3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Global Warming of 1.5: Summary for Policymakers, IPCC, 2018.

4 NASA, 2018

5 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Global Warming of 1.5: Summary for Policymakers, IPCC, 2018.

6 Ibid.


16 We use the term “racial monopoly capitalism” as articulated in We Believe that We Can Win. See We Believe..., pp 20.


18 Many Indigenous authors have articulated the unique cosmovation of Indigenous Peoples and the conflict with Euro-Christian conceptions of resources. See for example: Deloria, Vine. 1999. For This Land: Writings on Religion in America; Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1999. From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty In Hawai‘i. 19 Many authors have articulated the links between the conquest of the native peoples and the subordination of the earth itself. One example is indigenous scholar-activist John Mohawk (1945-2006). See https://centerfornowneconomics.org/publications/how-the-conquest-of-indigenous-peoples-parallels-the-conquest-of-nature/


21 See, for example, Ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation by Silvia Federici.


30 We Believe that We Can Win, pp 21

31 We Believe that We Can Win, pp 24

32 Ibid., pp 24-27.


42 Wake Smith and Gernot Wagner 2018 Environ. Res. Lett. 13 124001. See also: https://geoengineering.environment.harvard.edu/geoengineering

43 The concept of just transition has emerged from various lineages, among them many visionary movement thinkers and actors, both internationally and in the U.S. More recently, this thinking has been further developed by Movement Generation, in concert with several other groups, into a framework for how to move from an extractive economy to one that is sustainable and just. See Movement Generations’ “From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition.” https://movementgeneration.org/justtransition/


47 See Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. http://kftc.org


50 For more information, see https://cooperationjackson.org.


TAKING ACCOUNT OF STATE VIOLENCE:
A PROPOSED REVISION OF WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN WIN
by the Ad Hoc State Violence Study Team

Building on a discussion convened at the first Leftroots Congress on the topic of mass incarceration, policing, immigration detention, and other forms of state violence, this statement proposes a revision to We Believe that We Can Win (WBTWCW).

While the characterizations of racial monopoly capitalism and the strategy of the historic bloc in WBTWCW are largely sound, we see an important flaw in the analysis. This is reflected in the document’s failure to seriously engage with the current scale of this nation’s institutions of policing, surveillance, temporary detention, long-term imprisonment, and militarism, even as these repressive institutions pose significant obstacles to the prospects of revolutionary struggle.

These repressive institutions bear down heavily on the lower layers of the working class. In the US today, some 70 million people have felony jackets, with severe consequences for their ability to work, keep their families together, vote, obtain housing and social services, or exercise any semblance of individual or collective self-determination. About 113 million adults have an immediate family member who is formerly or currently incarcerated, including six out of ten African Americans and a similar proportion of Native Americans.

These repressive institutions now hold roughly 42,000 people in immigrant detention, while simultaneously criminalizing more than 10 million, overwhelmingly working class, undocumented immigrants. These institutions legitimize the separation of families, whether through mass deportation, juvenile incarceration, or the wholesale loss of parental rights by imprisoned parents. LGBTQ people and people living with HIV, particularly LGBTQ people of color, transgender, and gender non-conforming people and LGBTQ youth face widespread profiling, harassment, and sexual assault.
by police while in jail or prison. Beyond this entrenched pattern of individual harm, these institutions create a profound obstacle to revolutionary struggle by seeking to broadly demobilize the lower layers of the working class.

Perhaps no fact better represents the enormity of this obstacle than the historic and continued incarceration of political prisoners, some of whom have now been held behind bars for nearly a half century. These include: Russel Maroon Shoatz, Mumia Abu Jamal and other veterans of the Black Liberation Movement; Puerto Rican independentista Oscar Lopez Rivera, recently freed after 36 years in prison; leaders of the Native American sovereignty movement, most notably Leonard Peltier; and on to recent waves of activists from the Animal Rights, Environmental Justice, Occupy Wall Street, No DAPL, Black Lives Matters protests, the immigrant rights movement and others.

This domestic repression is mirrored by and further enhanced through the U.S. military’s projection of power abroad, ostensibly as the “world’s policeman.” Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military has pursued the goal of “full spectrum dominance,” or control over all dimensions of potential battlefield conflict. For military and civilian officials, this has meant a pursuit of superiority in various fields of conflict, including terrestrial, aerial, maritime, extraterrestrial, psychological, biochemical, and cybertechnological. Over the past three decades, this approach has led not only to the U.S. military maintaining nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories abroad, but also its innovative use of cyberattacks, drone strikes, special forces operations and even a proposed Space Force. As such, this country’s military budget, is greater than those of the next ten largest spenders combined. And rather than remaining abroad, aspects of this war machine inevitably find their way home, from the transfer of military equipment to local police departments to the now routine use of military consultants in the entertainment industry.

Taking all of this into account, we find that WBTWCW fails to foreground the role of the state, and its coercive capabilities, throughout its assessment of the system and our current conjuncture. In essence, the role of the state as an instrument of coercion in WBTWCW remains underdeveloped and understated.

This theoretical flaw also runs through the depiction of the Revolutionary Road, beginning with its unbalanced account of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. The document largely attends to the capitalist class efforts to win the consent of key sections of the working class (taking place through what he termed “civil society”), but makes few references to the use of force, the other element of class rule identified by Gramsci (operating through what he termed “political society”). As Gramsci argued, these are two sides of the same coin: “The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations – which, therefore, in certain
situations, are artificially multiplied.” Here, Gramsci is clearly concerned with the exercise of both force and consent, noting the reciprocal relationship between the two during periods that were not marked by political or economic crisis. In contrast, WBTWCW addresses only one aspect of hegemony, a theoretical limitation that fails to fully account for the key role of force, ranging from state sanctioned violence to the more indirect forms of coercion, like the mistreatment of large numbers of women, children and people with disabilities through what remains of the “welfare” system.

As Gramsci dialectical approach suggests, force is not simply a material matter, but also a deeply ideological and political one. As the account of the current conjuncture in WBTWCW notes, the police and military, along with small businesses, are key institutions that retain a significant degree of legitimacy. While various public and private institutions have lost prestige over the past decade, much of the country’s identification with these key repressive institutions helps to shore up the hegemony of the racial monopoly capitalist class. Similarly, as members of the operative layer of the professional managerial class, the most ideologically committed members of these institution often serve as a leading edge of reactionary right-wing mobilizations. The active role of police, prison guard and border patrol unions in the Trump coalition has demonstrated this quite clearly. At the same time, those who are not ideologically committed remain an important “middle force,” aggressively pursued by those on the right, particularly white nationalists, while their experience of how much the state’s exercise of force stands in contradiction to the avowed explanation makes them open to persuasion by the organized and social movement left. Because of their relationship to various medical, housing and educational benefits associated with the GI Bill as well as the stress of multiple deployments and service-related mental health challenges, those in the military may emerge as a key middle force.

In the service of fully developing LeftRoots’ conception of the state, WBTWCW should be revised to draw further on Gramsci’s account of force, especially when it is being exercised during periods of crisis. Our document should point to the strategic importance of contending with state-sanctioned violence. Perhaps more so than any other factor, the racialized violence of domestic policing and immigrant detention, mass imprisonment and military intervention have the potential to bring together the driving forces, while also building a coalition inclusive of the associated social forces. Within the U.S. population as a whole, the driving forces face disproportionate patterns of police violence, criminal incarceration, voter suppression, post-release surveillance and legalized discrimination. In other words, contending directly with state-sanctioned violence would help to anchor a historic bloc led by these forces and joined by the associated social forces.

This approach to directly engaging those directly impacted by state violence might also serve as a grassroots counterweight to an approach to revolutionary struggle that in WBTWCW is largely concerned with the formal strictures of the electoral arena in Phases 1 and 2. Securing institutional reforms that constrain the state’s coercive capacities would not only help to consolidate this emerging bloc, but also would help to further broaden the political space needed for the driving forces, particularly those from the excluded layer of the working class, to operate.

If taken up in a way that points to the inadequacy of piecemeal reforms and isolated victories, these efforts have the possibility of further weakening and delegitimizing the capitalist state while also highlighting the need to build the sort of alternative institutions envisioned in Phase 3. With the role of racialized state violence deeply embedded in the emergence of racial monopoly capitalism, a commitment to eliminating the institutions that exercise it could help to ground the process of constructing the socialist hegemony outlined in Phase 4 and founding the socialist state described in Phase 5.

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Our vision for 21st century socialism is a vision of collective liberation. It is a vision for a society free of capitalism and economic exploitation, white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and exploitation of the planet. To achieve this vision, it is essential to understand how these mutually reinforcing exploitative and oppressive systems have reinforced each other for centuries, formed the foundations of cis-heteropatriarchal racial monopoly capitalism, and given rise to current conditions. And we need a strategy where women, femmes, non-binary people, and queer and trans people who are working-class people of color – especially Black, Brown, and Indigenous – are at the center of leadership, power, and basebuilding.

Said differently, class, race, gender, sexuality, and planet are essential parts of our vision, our assessment, and our strategy: three of the components LeftRoots is developing to build a full strategy for 21st century socialism and collective liberation. Those of us who came together as a collective to write about these intersections felt an analysis of cis-heteropatriarchy was underdeveloped in “We Believe That Win,” and that the 21st century socialism that we are working towards cannot exist without dismantleing multiple oppressive systems at once.

The Unicorn Collective offers this excerpt of our writings to begin showing how to deepen the centrality of class, race, gender and sexuality, and planet in our collective strategy-development. Our work is a continuation of the work of past and current freedom fighters, our cultural heritage and ancestral wisdom, and the upbringing and care from our (chosen) families and communities. And our work is just a beginning, scratching the surface of how cis-heteropatriarchy, intertwined with capitalism, white supremacy, and exploitation of the planet, is central to our strategy. We stake a claim for how these systems interconnect and thread through a connected vision, assessment, and strategy by beginning to voice this analysis and by opening up space for our comrades in LeftRoots and the broader left to prioritize and build this analysis together.

In addition, we look to open our collective imagination for how we co-create and share strategy. In longer pieces, of which we include excerpts here, we experiment with recounting herstory, storytelling, poetry, song, art, science fiction, and visioning to show that theory is alive and active.
The longer discussion we embarked on (of which you'll only get a taste here) explores 4 threads. This article include one full piece followed by three excerpts:

1. (included here in full) a revisiting of the history section of We Believe that We Can Win, providing a retelling of the history of racial monopoly capitalism that includes more explicit gender analysis. We illuminate the ways gender along with race were fundamentally integrated into the creation of the owning class of the United States and the alliances that were built to maintain oppressive systems and control.

2. an effort to grapple with questions of healing, indigeneity, and our relationship with the earth. We discuss the exploitation of the planet and attacks on femme and queer people's knowledge of healing, and present a transformative vision of our relationship with Mother Earth.

3. a dialogue between two unicorns about where queer and trans identities, desires, and politics fit within the strategy document, with some attention towards so-called “reproductive labor.” We touch on the racialized and gendered control of sex, bodies, and labor; radical queer resistance and imagination; and a transformative vision of community, collective care, and sex.

4. an argument for the importance of transformative justice within socialist strategy. We argue that an assessment of society today must include acknowledging the deep and widespread harm of gender violence; and present a vision of transformative justice and ending gender violence.

Although we only include one piece -- the historical telling -- in full here, we hope it lays a strong foundation for continued analysis about class, race, gender, sexuality, and planet in our assessment, vision, and strategy. For example, the history lays out how oppressive systems in the first three pieces were part of the foundation of the development of racial monopoly capitalism in the United States: through the racialized and gendered dispossession of land and genocide of indigenous people; the racialized and gendered control of sex, bodies, and labor; and racialized and gendered violence.

**OUR WRITING PROCESS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Our writing process unfolded in fits and starts. One of the ways that we grounded ourselves was to meet regularly, converse, and read together -- an iterative process. We allowed the process to flow organically, not sure of what we would collectively produce. Out of our conversations came a desire for a bibliography of readings that might inspire and challenge us. From this list, we read The Combahee River Collective Statement, Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and others, to help clarify our thoughts. Out of these discussions, we began to free-write together in pairs, as a way to get ideas on paper. In a string of pieces we developed, we draw on various grounds of feminist theory: Anzaldúa and Chicana feminist epistemologies, queer theory, feminist restorative justice, Marxist feminism, and Black feminism. Rather than a linear argument, we constructed a constellation of ideas and provocations. We share excerpts of our pieces here to open much needed dialogue regarding the inclusion of a stronger cisheteropatriarchy analysis in our revolutionary strategy.

We call ourselves Unicorns because we recognize our own magic.
“We Believe That We Can Win” offers a succinct history of racial monopoly capitalism. This passage strongly captures the intersection of race and class dynamics, but lacks a deeper gender analysis. We thought it would be useful to do an experiment: retell the brief history with an infused and intertwined gender analysis. Our gender analysis does not stand apart or alongside the analysis of race and class; rather, it is interconnected. Thus, our first edit was to the title. We call this piece “Origins and Development of Cisheteropatriarchal Racial Monopoly Capitalism.”

Our second edit came in the first phrase of the history section: “Emerging from feudalism...” The story of the European invasion of the Americas is rooted in much more than the political economic structure of feudalism. So we begin our history with a very broad-strokes description of the systems of oppression that ideologically grounded the settler-invaders and shaped their actions in the Americas.

Read on to see further edits -- how we massaged and adapted and added to and mixed in what we hope is an intersectional retelling that shows the historical underpinnings of current conditions.

The grey text is generally from the original “We Believe That We Can Win” document. The black text is new text.

When conquering-colonists landed in North America in the late 15th century, they brought with them the habits, outlooks, and systems rooted in European political economy and culture. The historical shift from feudalism to capitalism was complicated and multifaceted. This includes:

1. **An oppressive economic system.** Authoritarian feudalism enforced strict social-economic hierarchies, with serfs at the bottom where they enjoyed very few freedoms, and their labor enriched the lords. Under feudalism, the advent of “rents” brought a new division of labor: “productive” labor done by European men for money (which was more valued) and “reproductive” labor done by European women for free (devalued). Also, at this time, the economy was driven by forced free labor/slavery and by colonization and resource extraction.

2. **The beginnings of white supremacy.** For millennia, it had been common for Europeans to invade neighboring tribes or communities to capture and enslave whoever lost in the skirmish. However, by the 15th century, Europeans moved beyond the capture and exploitation of other white Europeans. They began colonizing what they called the East Indies (South Asia and Southeast Asia), and it became more common to use the construct of white-western “superiority” as a justification to exploit these lands and peoples. Simultaneously, Portugal embarked upon what Professor Gerald Horne calls the “apocalypse of white settler colonialism” in 1444 when Portuguese captains kidnapped and sold into slavery 235 Africans. Furthermore, a long history of violent anti-Semitism prefigured modern racism by systematically marginalizing and persecuting Jews and rationalizing violence and genocide against a group constructed as “other.”

3. **Cisheteropatriarchy.** Elevating private property, elites dismantled the “commons” and enclosed the land. European women who had experienced solidarity growing and foraging for food together were now isolated on private plots and divorced from each other and the land. Their labor was devalued and invisible, yet was essential for creating and nurturing new generations of workers to generate wealth for the lords. Laws and religious doctrine enforced the

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1 [http://www.brycchancarey.com/slavery/chrono2.htm](http://www.brycchancarey.com/slavery/chrono2.htm)
primacy of the male-headed family and promoted cis-heteronormative sex while criminalizing anything else. Meanwhile, goddess-centered worship and land-based paganism had fallen to the dominance of a single, angry, patriarchal god. Women healers who treated people with herbs and practiced midwifery were considered witches and tortured and burned at the stake. In general, women's bodies were set up to be owned and controlled, though the specifics of what this looked like were qualitatively different depending on the race and class of the women. As European women were being locked into a particular form of patriarchy, African and Indigenous women were being enslaved and defined as rape-able -- exploited sexually and having their productive and reproductive labor expropriated.

4. Violation of planet. Ideologically, these practices combined to shift humans' relationship to the earth from one of reciprocity to one of opposition. Rather than being intimately allied and aligned with nature, the dominant practice and the ideology was now “man against nature.” Nature was something to be battled; its resources and gifts should be tamed, controlled, and extracted.

5. Western European countries with these social, political, and economic systems prefigured U.S. cis-heteropatriarchal, extractive, racial monopoly capitalism. The consequence of these exploitative and oppressive systems is nothing less than devastation for the planet and most humans, species, and eco-systems. Understanding how they mutually reinforce each other and give rise to our current conditions is essential to our efforts to contest those conditions and create new ones.

WESTERN IMPERIALISM

European “core” countries marked by higher-skill and capital-intensive production formed the center of a global order. Western Europe dominated countries on the “periphery,” which largely depended on low-skill and labor-intensive production and on the extraction of raw materials. This worldwide division of labor, known as Western imperialism, was made possible by the spoils of the racialized exploitation of women, by slavery, and by Indigenous genocide and dispossession in the Americas, and by the wholesale destruction of natural resources; and all of this endures today.

WHITE SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE MAKING OF THE U.S.

What would become the United States was structured in the context of these global shifts. White settler colonialism, living on stolen land, having murdered or displaced the vast majority of original inhabitants, white settler colonial landowners declared their independence from Britain. Critical here is the fact that slavery was already embedded in the emerging U.S. social order. The first enslaved Africans arrived on a Portuguese slave ship in 1619. This would put into motion a trajectory. The enslavement of African men, women, and children would become the political economic underpinning of racial capitalism in the U.S. Further, U.S. imperialism began with the initial expropriation of Native lands and resources with the westward militarized movement into indigenous lands during the 1800s, including the annexation of much of Mexico in the 1840s. To justify genocide and forced displacement, westward displacement needed a strong racial lens -- one that allowed whites to see Indigenous people as less than human. By this time there was already a discourse of African inferiority that was transferred to Native Americans. At first, Native people were targeted as “savage” non-Christians. As Native people were forced to convert to Christianity, white settlers had to search for another way to marginalize them and justify their ongoing extermination. Slavery had already defined skin color as the great divide -- so rather than simply being savages (as initially), Native Americans began to be marked by color -- racialized. This represents an important chapter in the millennia-long story of the construction of race. This racialized othering would extend to exploited Asian and Mexican labor as expropriation of land and labor shaped the very contours of what became the U.S.
These racially othered peoples were also gendered. This allowed working class/poor white men to see themselves as white and above those racial others and assert patriarchal control over white women.

As Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz describes, the violent takeover of Indigenous lands and peoples was not just an appropriation of resources, but a devastation of way of being, a relationship to land and to each other, and to our bodies. She says, “A rich, ancient agricultural civilization was appropriated. The Europeans appropriated it and then created agribusiness, capitalized, monetized the land, created real estate. The land is the body of the native people. The land as a body is monetized, capitalized. As is the African body. Not just African labor. That’s only half of it. It’s the human body. Land conquest and chattel slavery are so interlinked that if you separate them, you end up with a distorted story. And that interlink has to be at the core of a complete revision of U.S. history.”

The war against Native Americans had a sex/gender dimension as well. Matrifocal indigenous cultures were not hierarchical and were a threat to patriarchal white settlers, and so invading Europeans set about discrediting and dismantling Indigenous families and cultural practices. In Cherokee culture, for example, the balance between men’s and women’s power “made hierarchy, which often serves to oppress women, untenable.” A similar reciprocity existed among the Lenni Lenape women and men, who depended equally on “important gifts of food and other resources given among friends, family, and husbands and wives.” Furthermore, there were more than 500 distinct Native cultures in North America, yet all of them had some form of sex/gender fluidity -- what LGBTQ Indigenous folks have currently named “Two Spirit.” White Christian invaders singled out gender non-conforming people for torture and death. “When Christopher Columbus encountered the Two Spirit people, he and his crew threw them into pits with their war dogs and were torn limb from limb.” There are many stories of Native resistance to white settler attempts to criminalize non-heteronormative practices. Indigenous feminists have coined the term “Feminist since 1492,” indicating the original feminism on the North American continent was Native women’s resistance to the intersectional oppressions that came from colonization.

Having achieved dominance over much of the land and many of the peoples of the North American continent, the United States continued its imperialist project overseas. It overthrew the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893, then invaded and colonized Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines in the Spanish American war of 1898. These early examples of American expansionism began a long pattern of economic strong-arming, violent aggression and sexual violence that would establish the United States as the world’s leading military and imperialist power. This facilitated the upward mobility of key segments of the U.S. population and fundamentally shaped the formation, class structure, and current crises of cis-heteropatriarchal, racial monopoly capitalism.
The United States is the only advanced capitalist economy to develop out of a chattel slave society. Its current character reflects the preeminent role that enslaved labor has had on its development. Upon arrival, European settler colonial authorities viewed indigenous peoples through the lens of a racial hierarchy that justified their enslavement, dispossession, and genocide. The conquest of communally held indigenous lands would provide the central means of production for the settler society’s racialized patriarchal ruling class, mainly a contingent of large landowners. A particular form of racialized sexual violence against enslaved and Native women contributed in essential ways to the destruction of those communities, while it simultaneously lifted up rigid ideas of what “normal” white “femininity” and “masculinity” should look like. Conquest, appropriation of native lands, rape, and policing of settlement boundaries over the course of several centuries would drive the colonization of the continent and set the foundation for a violent and unequal social order.

White supremacy informed the development of slavery, first of American Indians and then of Africans. The traffic in and unpaid labor of millions of these captive peoples would serve as the basis of the early settler colonial economy. The total numbers of imported Africans forcibly brought to the North American colonies was a fraction of the captives brought to the Caribbean and South America. However, they would come to form the bottom layer of U.S. settler colonial society – a landless, property-less class of laborers held in chains.

Starting in the early 18th century, slave owners passed laws that legally codified a racialized class structure. They developed a racial class alliance that secured economic, political, and cultural domination by those deemed to be “white”. A pivotal moment took place in 1676 when Nathaniel Bacon staged what is now known as Bacon’s Rebellion. Demanding further appropriation of indigenous land and greater political power for small landowners, Bacon mobilized enslaved Africans and European indentured servants to rebel against the Virginia Governor. After suppressing the rebellion, large-scale slave-owners established the Virginia Slave Codes of 1705, codifying a hereditary and matrilineal basis for slave status. By choosing a matrilineal basis for slave status, these Codes essentially sanctioned white rape of black female slaves, ensuring that any offspring resulting from sexual violence would mean additional “property” for the master. Designed to impede further working-class alliances, these laws stripped enslaved African people of what few rights they had previously had, normalized rape as a way for slave-owners to reproduce enslaved people, and decisively tethered race and heteropatriarchy to class.

Above this enslaved layer of society, slave codes created a class of white male settlers largely freed of the old class constraints under European feudalism. This was due to the ability of white men to own property – meaning both expropriated land and enslaved persons. Because white men had exclusive access to property ownership, white male wage laborers had a sense of upward mobility, which was dependent on systemic oppression of women and people of color. This was the colonial seed from which the myth of the “American Dream” took root. As Cheryl Harris so aptly conceptualizes in her powerful piece “Whiteness as Property,” whiteness was more than ideology. It was the whole corpus of political and social guarantees for white men. It was the guarantee of the protection of the law/legal order. It was the guarantee of property rights, and it was the guarantee that the whole social order was created for them (of course mediated by class).

Cis-heteropatriarchy also informed the development of slavery. The “family” is a key organizing unit in society. In most white families, women were not just subordinate to men but actually considered to be the property of men. Until the mid-19th century, white women did not have “a separate legal existence from her husband.” According to “coverture” – English property laws brought over by the colonists – a white woman could not sign contracts, be
the guardians of her underage children if her husband died, or own wealth except under limited circumstances. In the early to mid-19th century, these laws started to change, and white women won the right to own property, notably tying this added degree of freedom to private property ownership.

But for much of U.S. history, economic and cultural pressures trained white females to submit to fathers and brothers, and then husbands. White women did invisible and non-compensated work in the home, or they controlled slaves or (often immigrant) servants to do invisible work for no pay or very little pay. White supremacy, class structure, and cis-heteropatriarchy combined to create rigid gender norms by rewarding passivity and “purity” in white women while simultaneously eroticizing and demonizing the sexuality of non-white women. Regardless of class position, white women’s economic survival was greatly attached to getting a husband, and many suffered legalized terror in the form of abuse and violence from men in their families. Simultaneous to being the targets of gender oppression, white women were brought into the circle of racism and became perpetrators of oppression by accepting the ideologies of Black inferiority. For enslaved Black women, marriage wasn’t a real option under slavery. And for free Black women and immigrant women, marriage did not provide the kind of “protection” (i.e., access to class and race privilege) that it provided for some white women.

The constitutional founding of the United States in 1787 helped to consolidate this race- and gender-informed class structure and the basic pattern of wealth and power. From the outset, women, many servants, slaves, and non-land-owning men were barely considered people in the Constitution. The U.S. served the interests of the top five percent of male-headed Southern families, known as planters who owned 20 or more enslaved persons. Despite the promise of gradual emancipation that Northern slaveholding states offered, enslaved Africans would remain central to U.S. production and finance as the basic foundation of wealth and prosperity. By the early 1800s, the value of enslaved people rivaled all other forms of wealth combined. Much of this wealth was literally created by the super exploitation of enslaved black women’s bodies, who gave birth to children who became the “property” of white men. This particular form of exploitation, often involving rape and always involving a level of control over women’s reproductive systems, was necessary for the creation of wealth generated by slavery. Although enslaved people labored in a variety of ways, the most important quickly became the production of raw cotton. Cotton was the largest single export of the antebellum United States and was central to developing the Industrial Revolution. Revenue from cotton exports fueled broad wealth inequality, financed the importation of machinery, and stimulated the growth of financial and transportation services. Slavery was central to the emergence of U.S. capitalism. The brutality of labor discipline in the production of cotton and other plantation crops sparked numerous slave rebellions, including Gabriel Prosser’s 1822 conspiracy and Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt. This in turn led to even harsher terms of enslavement, a more vigorous abolitionist movement, and a reactionary tendency among the planter elite. Slave patrols set up to capture runaway slaves were the origin of early policing in the U.S. Thus, policing was designed to protect “property” — white land holdings, factories, and enslaved Africans as “property.”

Another form of “policing” was the laws that harshly punished intimacy between white and black people, that regulated sex and sexuality by making miscegenation illegal but accepting the rape of enslaved women by slave owners. In her essay, “Body and Blood,” Brit Bennett describes how slavery gave rise to a particular kind of race- and gender-focused criminalization and policing: “White men, who for centuries had turned the routine rape of
enslaved Black women into financial gain, projected onto Black male bodies an image of violent, uncontrollable, interracial lust. They also framed Black female bodies as inherently lustful. In this calculation, the innocence of white women needed to be protected at all costs; Black women, already gone in their own lust, were incapable of being raped. This is the history of Black women in America, not a small feature but the single definition: Your body does not belong to you. Anybody can touch you. Your body is both the location of violence and the result. How could we not fear a body like this?7 White people use gender in particular ways -- for example, criminalizing the black male body and dehumanizing the black female body -- to enforce white supremacy. Reclaiming our bodies, our right to bodily agency and pleasure, and access to a full spectrum of sexes and sexualities is thus a strike against white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and capitalism.

Rather than challenging the hegemonic position of large plantation owners, small-scale capitalist enterprises in the North sought financing from slaveholders. Northern capitalists in textile, lumber, and flour industries severely exploited the labor of their employees, particularly women and children, by mobilizing ethnic and national differences as “racial” ones to undercut demands for higher wages and better working conditions. Similarly, Northern capitalists mollified white working men who demanded greater political rights and economic opportunities by granting them access to property and privilege, secured through the exploitation of women, the further exploitation of enslaved Africans, and through the expropriation of Mexican and American Indian lands stretching from Alabama to Texas. This racial bribery of working-class white people would become an established practice in racial monopoly capitalism.

But the racial bribery was not just about race. For poor white men, the “racial bribe” meant that they would ally themselves with rich white men on the thin promise that they would someday be class peers. For poor white women, there was no class mobility that was not linked to being a wife, so white women (of all classes) were forced to ally themselves with the patriarch of the family and against women and men of color, as well as other white women (who may have been competitors for access to the patriarch).

In the mid-19th century, a grassroots, multi-racial abolitionist movement led by women and men had raised the social cost of slavery for elites. Additionally, an alliance of Northern landowners and capitalists had begun to challenge the expansionist ambitions of the South, causing a breakdown of the racial class alliance and leading to the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865). After the war, Reconstruction brought the (conditional) abolition of slavery, as well as citizenship and voting rights for formerly enslaved men. The racialized order would not end, built on the continued exploitation of Black labor, male and female. This was guaranteed in anti-black practices such as Black codes and lynching. Ultimately the U.S. state would create the racial apartheid society out of the Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 -- separate but not equal.

Major features of the old order would persist: the reliance on cheap and compliant labor disciplined by legal and vigilante violence, a racial- and gender-stratified class structure, the ability of capitalists to secure the consent of key sections of the working class by affording them privileges associated with white and/or male identity and the spoils of westward expansion, which was not a “natural” or automatic “expansion” but more like an ongoing imperial invasion that was pushed and shaped by the pressures of the thirst for land, emerging capitalism (note: capitalism is being made during this period; land grabs fueled the process of land theft), white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy. And it came at enormous expense, including millions of Native people who had once lived in hundreds of distinct cultures. Not only were most Native people killed and most tribes forcibly displaced during this period. The boarding school period was a late 19th century effort to “kill the Indian and save the Man.” Formed in terms of patriarchy discourse, in fact, Native women and girls were forced into gendered/socially reproductive labor and were sex-

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7 Can We All Be Feminists, June Eric-Udorie, p. 168.
ually preyed upon. These girls cleaned, cooked, and did the bidding of the boarding school authorities and white families. Indigenous languages were removed and hair was cut. The construction of race (and white supremacy) continued in the use of European immigrants to “settle” the west, and other immigrants (such as Chinese men) to do certain kinds of hard labor associated with western expansion (such as building the railroad), and the criminalization of Mexicans living in territory annexed by the U.S., and other race-stratified approaches to rewarding and punishing immigrants and Native people of various ethnicities. The ongoing invasion of the west during this period was a showcase for the intersectional oppressions of race, class, and gender -- upending, violating, and almost wiping out as it did many peoples, cultures, and lands. This genocide, of course, had already been expressed in the millions of Africans who never made it to these shores as enslaved labor but drowned, thrown overboard, murdered.

**EXCERPTS**

**FROM “UNICORN MUSINGS ON HEALING, INDIGENEOITY, AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MOTHER EARTH”**

The concept of Stewards of the Earth is introduced by WBTWCW as follows: “The economic base for 21st century socialism instead relies on the collective stewardship of resources and the planet”; and “The logic of human development and stewardship of the earth can reproduce social relations that alter the meaning of race, family, gender, nation, and work.” This concept misses the mark because humans are not caretakers of the earth, but rather coexist with the planet in interdependent and reciprocal relationship. We also question whether the idea of human development captures the essence of a socialist vision that is in right relationship with the Earth. Can we explore a vision that centers the whole planet/ ecosystem and not humans and our development? Development that historically has come at the expense of the Earth? It is key to understand our reciprocal relationship to plants and the ecosystem and internalize our innate knowledge of respect and humility.

**FROM “A QUEER INTERVENTION”**

Pleasure explodes puritanical norms and sexuality helps us center liberation as a joyful, exciting, beautiful thing to fight for. Sexuality can be an energetic force in individual people’s lives, a part of day-to-day existence, but also is a movement force. We need this force for fighting capitalism. Sexuality is one piece of making the impossible possible. Sexuality can connect us to fantasy, dreaming, and desiring new worlds. If we are really going to take down these systems we need that energetic force. There is something about sexuality as a generative force -- as unruly and difficult to control as it is -- that is essential in this fight. We need to think big and bold and expansively.

**FROM “TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND ENDING GENDER VIOLENCE”**

We must first acknowledge the harm that gender violence has caused both in society and in our movement, as part of our history and assessment. We must acknowledge how violence against gender-oppressed people occurs through many systems intertwined with white supremacy and capitalism; and in particular, we must acknowledge the traumatic legacy of the violence of emotional abuse, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.

After assessing and acknowledging that harm, we must also develop a strategy that addresses it. We must commit to tackle sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism in society, and we must commit within our movements not to replicate dynamics of these systems, which have persistently undermined radical movements. We must commit to model a twenty-first century socialism where gender-oppressed Black and Brown people’s needs, analysis and leadership are at the center. A critical part of this strategy is strengthening our capacity for transformative
justice to address the harm caused by violence. As adrienne maree brown reminds us in *Emergent Strategy*, “how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale. The pattern of the universe repeats at scale” (p. 52).

**CONCLUSION**

Although our Unicorn Collective has begun developing our analysis of cisgender patriarchy, we call on all of us in LeftRoots and the broader Left to collectively engage in this work. We need the work of dismantling cisgender patriarchy not to be left to a small group, but to be held as core work. Like many organizing and movement-building groups around the country, LeftRoots is majority gender-oppressed cadre, in our case intentionally constructed to be so. But that is not enough. Our work for twenty-first century socialism can only progress if we are willing and able to begin a rigorous and disciplined commitment to address heterosexism, sexism and cissexism, in an intersectional way. Strategically, if we believe that Black and Brown gender oppressed people are driving forces in a strategy for liberation, we are compelled to strengthen both our race and gender analysis and practice in order to engage and mobilize that group.

We ask that all of us engage collectively with these questions: How do class, race, gender, sexuality, and planet connect with each other and our vision, assessment, and strategy? What questions do we need to ask? What further study needs to be done? What traditions are not represented or underrepresented?

A lot remains to be answered. We hope to share more soon as a collective, and we hope you join the reflection and dialogue.
THE ROLE OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER MOVEMENTS: RACE, NATIONALITY OPPRESSION AND REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

Carolyn Chou, Cecilia Lim, Lydia Lowe, Don Misumi, Sian Miranda Singh ÓFaoláin, Jensine Raihan, Helena Wong.

PREFACE

WHO WE ARE

We are LeftRoots members whose identities fall largely under Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) categories. We joined LeftRoots because we are excited to build a Left organization together with other cadre from the ground up and to develop strategy together.

AAPI cadre showed a lot of interest in responding to We Believe That We Can Win (WBTWCW) as soon as it came out. The writers of this document wanted to uplift AAPI communities’ role in revolutionary strategy. In February 2018, a group of LeftRoots cadre and compas (Pam Tau Lee, Michael Liu, May Louie, Lydia Lowe, Don Misumi, and David Monkawa) wrote a paper that was used as a starting point for this one.

The following individuals are the principal authors of this journal contribution. This is not a comprehensive document, but rather a response to WBTWCW. We thank the many cadre who have given feedback to this piece and acknowledge that not all points of view of AAPI cadre were included here, but key differences are footnoted at the end. Please take our sincerest apologies for mistakes, omissions, and things we just got wrong. We see this as a continuation of conversations, not as an endpoint, and hope to continue engaging with people moving forward.

WHAT WE ARE SAYING

Due to the fundamental role that slavery, land theft, and the particular exploitation of peoples of color played in developing US racial monopoly capitalism, we believe that communities of color have a particularly strategic role to play in building the US left and social movements.

We think that WBTWCW, the document that a few of our comrades developed last year, underplayed the role of AAPI communities and fails to distinguish AAPIs from whites in the discussion of the historic bloc. WBTWCW identifies Black, Latinx and Indigenous Peoples but excludes AAPI communities as part of the driving forces. This creates the impression that work in AAPI communities is less important both historically and in today’s movement. While we appreciate the work that went into WBTWCW, and the importance of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Peoples’ struggles, it is important to recognize that
this document was the productive of a collective process by a small number of people to jump-start a conversation. Strategy still needs to emerge from collective practice, analysis, and struggle, so it is premature for LeftRoots to name specific “driving forces” at this moment.

We believe that social movement activists, including LR cadre, need to learn more about the role of AAPIs in the US. As activists who are deeply rooted in AAPI struggles for justice, we understand the complexities of the AAPI communities, which are characterized by both class polarization and a wide range of experiences with colonialism, imperialism, militarism, and migration from the homelands.

Despite this complexity and diversity, we believe that the vast majority of AAPIs of all classes have a stake in the struggle against racial monopoly capitalism and that the struggles of the most exploited sectors of the AAPI working class have particularly advanced and continue to advance the interests of the entire working class and benefit all of US society.

Finally, we argue that both historically and today AAPI movements for justice and equality make important contributions to social movements and the struggle for socialism. Our communities have led and continue to lead important struggles to fight the Right, organize the working class, and unite communities of color. AAPI communities have also played important roles in socialism, historically and currently. We seek to build the AAPI struggle in solidarity with other POC (people of color) communities and the working class as a whole. We strive to lead a multi-class united front that moves our people in a revolutionary direction by building our base and the leadership of the AAPI working class, particularly the lower strata, women, and young people.

THE ROLE OF AAPI MOVEMENTS

RACE AND NATIONALITY-BASED OPPRESSION

What is the connection between the history of people of color in the U.S. and their role in the struggle for 21st century socialism? (This has historically been an important theoretical debate in the Left, known by Marxists as the “national question.”) Exploitation, oppression, and theft from communities of color, rooted in the history of colonialism and imperialism, was central to the development of the US economy and society; today’s inequality and super-exploitation is the result of a western legacy of racial capitalism. The issue of race or nationality oppression plays an exceptional role in U.S. society and its resolution is critical to achieving a fundamentally different one. Unifying working class struggles with the movements of peoples of color is critical to achieving a fundamentally different society.

The roles of people of color are fundamental to the development of the U.S. as a national economy and as an imperialist power. This process began with the near-genocide of indigenous peoples and the successive
theft of their lands as the U.S. expanded westward. The U.S. then appropriated or stole land, and oppressed the Mexican people who occupied the Southwest—the Chicano people. The development of a slave-based agricultural economy, as described in WBTWCW, provided much of the initial development of the country, as well as the capital accumulation needed for industrial development. The ideology of white supremacy was fundamental to both colonialism abroad and the oppression of different peoples of color in the creation of the US and the building of its economy.

Because of the reliance of U.S. racial monopoly capitalism and imperialism on exploitation and oppression of communities of color, the multi-class struggles of AAPI communities play a significant role in creating change. While clearly affecting the hyper-exploited and “excluded” layers the most, this multifaceted oppression affects nearly all class strata of AAPIs. AAPIs have an objective stake in opposing racial monopoly capitalism, and AAPIs from every socioeconomic class can be rallied to fight it.

AAPIs have a rich history of organizing and resistance in militant sectors of the labor movement and the U.S. left. AAPIs were early members of the Communist Party U.S.A. and other early socialist organizations, formed revolutionary nationalist organizations in the 1960s, and were important leaders of the New Left in the 1970s and beyond. AAPI movements played a leading role in raising anti-imperialist demands during the U.S. War in Southeast Asia (often referred to as the Vietnam War) and were at the core of struggles to open up college and university admissions and make education serve the communities. AAPIs led one of the most significant urban anti-displacement struggles in recent history (San Francisco’s I-Hotel), inspiring a tenant rights and rent control movement across the country, won a decades-long nationwide fight for redress and reparations for Japanese Americans interned during WWII, and continue to be an important progressive force in service sector unions as well as community-based labor organizing. AAPI movement leftists have led movement building in the electoral arena, from Jesse Jackson and Mel King’s Rainbow Coalitions to current political organizing on both coasts and in the South. From 1965-1970, Filipinx and Latinx farm workers united to win the first union contracts for table grape farm workers in California, granting workers better pay, benefits, and protections. Struggles for preservation of low-income AAPI

THE ROLE OF AAPIs IN THE BUILDING OF THE U.S.
Super-exploitation of Asian labor and their simultaneous legal exclusion from the United States formed an important foundation for the growth of US monopoly capitalism and was linked to the growth of US imperialism in Asia and the Pacific. This was particularly true in the West, following the end of the Civil War, where AAPIs contributed to reclamation of vast amounts of farmland, development of construction, mining, manufacturing and fishing, and completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. Racist laws, physical violence, and many forms of structural exclusion (such as the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) shaped the development and under-development of these communities and kept AAPIs in the hyper-exploited layer of the working class.

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF AAPI COMMUNITIES
Because of the reliance of U.S. racial monopoly capital-
ism and imperialism on exploitation and oppression of communities of color, the multi-class struggles of AAPI communities play a significant role in creating change.
neighborhoods have united residents and activists across sectors.

Through our organizing work, we have noted that the history of revolutionary movements in different Asian nations (and despite what may have happened in the aftermath of those revolutions), results in a higher level of class-consciousness among many AAPI immigrants than among the average U.S.-born citizen. Many progressive AAPI organizing groups rally their bases with explicit slogans about fighting for the working class. AAPI ties to global struggles can also play an important role in “defeating the neoliberal bloc and animating the left,” linking these struggles to a broader analysis of imperialism and global hegemony.

Possibly because AAPIs were overlooked as a small sector of the population, AAPI leftists and radical organizing groups like the Red Guard, East Wind, Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) [Union of Democratic Filipinos], and I Wor Kuen (IWK) [Righteous and Harmonious Fists] escaped much of the state repression and violent attacks suffered by the Black Liberation Movement under programs like COINTELPRO.

In later parts of this paper, we will talk more about AAPIs’ leadership in today’s movements. First, we will provide some context and background information on a selection of AAPI communities.

### INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF SELECT AAPI COMMUNITIES IN THE U.S.

AAPI communities in the U.S. are representative of many national origins, languages, skin colors, and religions, and exist in multiple socioeconomic classes, but are often homogenized and overlooked within the Left as an integral part of the working-class base.

The post-World War II position of the U.S. as the dominant superpower and global enforcer and leader of anti-communist capitalist forces ushered in the rise of neo-imperialism and created new channels for migration into the U.S., leading to profound changes in existing AAPI communities and creating new ones. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act lifted the national quotas that favored European countries, increasing family immigration for the AAPI working class, and also gave preference to highly educated professionals and managers. These events have resulted in both increased class polarization and ethnic diversity in the AAPI population. Since the end of World War II, the ruling classes have also tried to use AAPIs as a wedge to divide and weaken movements for racial justice and working-class power.

In this section we will highlight some experiences within the AAPI community that are often left out of the history and narrative of the AAPI experience. It is important to note that this is not a thorough summary, as there are many other distinct AAPI communities whose history we do not go into in this paper.

### SOUTHEAST ASIA: WAR, U.S. MILITARIZATION, AND THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

The first wave of refugee migration to the U.S. was the direct result of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia, defined in this section as, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and ethnic minority groups. From 1964-1973, the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of ordnance on Laos during 580,000 bombing missions. Much of the “Vietnam War” was fought on Cambodian soil, at the same time that Cambodians were dying in the “killing fields” of the Khmer Rouge.

In 1975, just after the fall of Saigon, the Khmer Rouge gained control in Cambodia and the U.S. authorized the entry of 130,000 people from Southeast Asia. Beginning in 1979, the second wave of immigration followed an escalation in oppressive government policies in Vietnam and the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia.
Between 1980 and 2000, the U.S. accepted 531,310 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees and over 140,000 from Laos (including Hmong people).

The third wave of migration occurred in the 1990s, as the U.S. allowed former political prisoners in Vietnam to leave, and the more comprehensive “Family Reunification” program, which allowed refugees living in the U.S. to petition their relatives from Vietnam to join them.

Once established in the U.S., many Southeast Asian refugees were resettled in cities like New Orleans, Seattle, San Jose, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Houston, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Though finally away from the war and the refugee camps, transition to life in the U.S. created further hardship for Southeast Asian refugees. Many experienced discrimination and racist violence, particularly in the years immediately following the U.S. War in Southeast Asia. Many were resettled in primarily African American and Latinx communities, in areas that were already experiencing high poverty, chronic unemployment, and poor housing conditions. Southeast Asian Americans have some of the highest family poverty rates of all AAPI communities.

**PHILIPPINES: COLONIZATION, FORCED MIGRATION, AND FAMILY SEPARATION**

400 years of colonialism, including the last 100 years of U.S. direct and indirect imperialist rule, have put the Philippines in a state of chronic economic crisis; the vast majority of the population live in absolute poverty. Because of this chronic economic crisis, more than 10% of the Filipinx population is forced to leave their families behind to seek work abroad. The U.S. has the largest Filipinx community outside of the Philippines.

The first wave of Filipinx migration was migrant workers who were recruited as cheap labor from 1906-1934, and worked on Hawaiian plantations, California farms, and Alaska fishing docks. Upon arrival in the US, Filipinx have experienced systemic racism and discrimination, segregat-ed from white facilities and blamed for taking U.S. citizens’ jobs and women. Perceived as a social problem, disease carriers, and an economic threat, Filipinx immigration was limited to 50 people per year through the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934.

The Nationality Act of 1940 allowed non-citizens who joined the military to seek citizenship. Close to 10,000 Filipinx applied. The Rescission Act of 1946 denied Filipinx veterans their rights to benefits. Of the 66 countries allied with the U.S. during WWII, only Filipinx were denied military benefits.

By 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act changed the character of Filipinx labor flowing to the U.S. “Relative-selective immigration” allowed Filipinx to immigrate as petitioned relatives of previous migrants who became US citizens. On the other hand, “occupational immigration” allowed the entry of mostly middle-level professionals—nurses, medical technologists, doctors, teachers, managers and engineers.

Since the 1990s, the migration of Filipinx abroad to find work has been feminized, with women making up to 80% of migrants, a vast majority working as domestic workers. Many of these migrant women end up in the global human trafficking industry, tricked by deceptive contracts, their communications and movements monitored and restricted.

**SOUTH ASIANS, MUSLIMS, AND PALESTINE**

South Asian is a general term used for people from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and other countries in the region, and can also include Indo-African and Indo-Caribbean people. South Asians are divided by caste, religion, class, nationality, and ethnicity and their immigration patterns to the U.S. are also diverse. South Asians have been in the U.S. since the 18th century and have been denied and stripped of citizenship, barred from entering the country, prohibited from owning property, (alongside Japanese-Americans in 1913), have been excluded from becoming permanent residents, (alongside black folks in Oregon in 1907) and suffered from mob attacks by vigilante white groups. Early South Asian migrant
men often married into and assimilated with Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other communities of color when they settled.

The first significant wave of South Asian migration came after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that lifted the ban against Asian immigration. The Act brought in many of the professional Indian-Americans that consist of the managerial class. More recently corporate lobbying has resulted in H-1B professional work visas. Indian Americans make up most South Asians living in the U.S. and constitute predominantly upper-caste and professional class families. Low-income South Asians comprise some of the most exploited groups in the U.S. They occupy low-wage jobs such as gas station workers, taxi cab drivers, domestic workers, and food vendors.

Since September 11, 2001, low-income South Asians have experienced severe discrimination in the form of Islamophobia and xenophobia. Muslims, South Asians, and people from West and Central Asia have been targeted by the U.S. through surveillance and other forms of criminalization. Police target and frame the most vulnerable in entrapment cases and those who are “read” as Muslims are painted as threatening and likely-terrorists. This image is used to justify the hyper-criminalization of the community and the wars the U.S. continues to wage in West and Central Asia.

Muslim communities have not only faced discrimination domestically but abroad as well at the hands of the U.S.’s war machine. Additionally, the U.S. invests in the systemic genocide of Palestinians through its political, financial, and military support of Israel. Palestinians have a decades-long history of resisting occupation and the Palestinian cause has gained prominence in the U.S. Many easily draw parallels with the occupation and the criminalization of poor Black people in the U.S.

UNDOCUMENTED MEMBERS OF AAPI COMMUNITIES

The Pew Research Center reported that AAPIs comprise 13% of the 11.1 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., with Indians comprising 500,000 of that number, Chinese comprising 325,000 immigrants, Filipinxs comprising 180,000 immigrants, and Koreans comprising 160,000 immigrants. The numbers may also be significant for other Asian populations that are not reported including Bangladeshi, Burmese, and Nepali immigrants: the fastest growing AAPI immigrant populations.

AAPIs in the U.S. Today

AAPIs, currently about 19 million in population, are the fastest-growing population by percentage in the country and are a particularly important force in many major cities. By 2055, AAPIs are predicted to be the largest immigrant population in the U.S. AAPIs also have one of the fastest-growing populations in poverty, with the highest growth in poverty among native-born AAPIs. Half of poor AAPIs live in just 10 major cities.1

The “Model Minority” Myth

Popularized after the Cold War, the “Model Minority” Myth has been used to pit AAPI communities against Black and Latinx communities, as well as to erase the different experiences within AAPI communities. The Model Minority Myth is part of the capitalist ideological offensive that attempts to divide people of color from each other and the multiracial U.S. working class as whole.

AAPIs have a larger sector in the professional managerial class and higher-paid levels of the working class than other oppressed nationalities, but the class composition is highly polarized, with a big concentration of AAPI workers in the hyper-exploited layers of the workforce as low-wage and contingent workers. AAPIs also are disproportionately represented in high median income categories, due to the above average number of wage earners per household and geographic concentration in high-cost cities and regions.

More information can be found at aapidata.com.

1. More information can be found at aapidata.com.
Figure 1: U.S. Asians have a wide range of income levels (does not include Cambodians, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Laotian communities who are primarily below the poverty line)

Figure 2: Median income charts show class polarization in the AAPI community
Globalization has complicated class structures in communities of color, particularly AAPI communities. Global managers of color like Ken Chenault of American Express and Sundar Pichai of Google, move within and manage transnational corporations, as a modern comprador class of relative privilege.

The model minority myth over-emphasizes individual AAPI ‘success’ stories of certain Asian groups (primarily Chinese, Korean, Indian people), making it seem like anyone who works hard can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. It is used as a tool of white supremacy to absolve racism and inequality, to dismantle reforms like affirmative action and give cover to racist policies.

We do not discount the existence of racism within our communities. But we should be clear that different forms of racism, whether white supremacy, anti-Blackness, colorism, or xenophobia, are all manifestations of a capitalist system that seeks to exploit and profit from the divisions it creates. Racial division is the financial backbone of capitalism and, as revolutionaries, we must combat it in all its forms.

**RISE OF THE ASIAN RIGHT WING**

Today, the Right is making a concerted effort to infiltrate and divide the AAPI movement by appealing to the narrowest forms of ethnic nationalism.

We have seen this with the evangelical Christian Right within the Korean American community which mobilizes against Korean reunification. The Right wing danger has been strengthened by the influx of a new sector of global capitalists from China who are investing in U.S. real estate and corporations and sending their children to study at elite universities. An increasingly visible Chinese Right wing led by an elite class of foreign nationals is attacking the Movement for Black Lives, the Census, ethnic data collection, transgender rights, and affirmative action in education in collusion with the Tea Party. The Hindu Right plays a similar role in Indian communities, with global capitalists living in the US playing a role both here and in India.

While this sector has little relationship to the lives of most AAPI native-born and immigrant workers, the ideological struggle in the AAPI movements will continue to intensify in the years ahead, especially as the Right wing within AAPI communities continues to co-opt civil rights language. LeftRoots’ strategy for 21st century socialism should include a plan to fight the Right and win over the majority of the AAPI people.

**IMPERIALISM, NEO-IMPERIALISM, AND MILITARISM**

AAPI immigrant communities, as a result of firsthand experiences with U.S. imperialism, neo-imperialism, and militarism in their homelands, often have more developed internationalist politics that will be critical in our struggle for 21st century socialism.

WBTWCW point 47 describes the period of US imperialist expansion during the late 1800s that began a pattern of aggression and established it as the world's leading military and imperialist power. This included overthrowing the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893, and the invasion of Guam and the Philippines as part of the Spanish American War of 1898. The Asian and Pacific lands of Hawaii, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa and the Philippines were used as military testing grounds, and continue to be occupied at varying levels today. The Philippines recently agreed to the use of five military bases by the U.S., and the military occupies a full third of Guam’s land. The entire population of indigenous Pacific Islanders were evicted by force in the early 1970s from their homes on the Cocos Island atoll to make way for a U.S. naval base.

U.S. imperialism propagated the ideology of American exceptionalism—that the U.S. is uniquely positioned to, and has a duty to, spread “liberty” and “democracy” throughout the world, and protect our individual and
collective freedom domestically—to justify imperialist domination overseas and the super-exploitation of people of color throughout the Global South.

For decades, countries in the Global South have been exploited and provided raw materials and cheap labor for the “core” of the Global North. The resulting super profits are used to buy off politicians, labor leaders and white workers.

Imperialism and racial monopoly capitalism today do not primarily depend on occupying foreign territory. The anti-colonial struggles that began after World War II through the 1970s led imperialist powers to search for alternative methods to manage and control the exploitation of wealth and resources of its subject countries.

Transnational corporate expansion evolved as the primary instrument of modern imperialism. A few world powers, led by the U.S., have dominated the global financial system, with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund at the center of this domination. These institutions keep poor countries in debt and impose austerity measures by cutting social services, while they promote free trade and privatization (neoliberalism). They use their powerful industries and economies to overwhelm and subordinate the economies of developing countries and governments.

The current phase of monopoly capitalism is based on the financialization of capital, in which big companies no longer profit from producing things, but instead financial institutions (banks, hedge funds, private equity firms, asset management companies) profit through high interest rates, creating debt, and increasing fees, etc. As the U.S. faces greater competition for global domination, it has fewer resources to buy off white workers, so that intensifying racist ideas becomes even more important.

This neo-imperialist system forces API and other migrant workers out of their homelands and into the hyper-exploited sectors of the U.S. working class. The U.S. ruling class instigates fear of these migrants and criminalizes them, invoking xenophobia and white supremacy, to both create divisions within the working-class and coerce migrants to accept abysmal conditions. The struggles of countries in the Global South are an important factor in charting the battle against U.S. monopoly capitalism. We also must consider and support the struggle of workers in the Global South against transnational corporations.

**AAPI ORGANIZING AND THE MOVEMENT FOR 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

AAPI organizing today draws upon a long and rich organizing history and is strategically important for the left in certain regions. AAPI communities have some of the strongest progressive mass organizations, particularly in important coastal cities in the U.S. Some more established communities build upon an intergenerational core of left activists with deep organizing roots. Newer mass organizations from Filipinx, Southeast Asian, South Asian and Muslim communities continue to make the linkages between U.S. imperialism and their home countries.

In such cities, AAPI organizations are core anchors of progressive coalitions and leaders of intersectional organizing, waging important struggles around workers’ rights and economic justice, detentions and deportations, housing and land, local electoral power, and racial profiling.

AAPI workers have high concentrations in and are leading important struggles of the “hyper-exploited sectors” of the working class, particularly in coastal cities, in which fighting for their own interests expands the rights of the entire working class and society. In the early 2000s, immigrant women from the Philippines, Haiti, the Caribbean Islands, Nepal, and other South Asian countries worked together in a six-year-long campaign to win recognition, rights, and protections for domestic workers in New York City.
Immigrant Filipinas have continued to lead domestic worker movements from California to New York through the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Chinese immigrant restaurant workers’ fight in San Francisco led to a regional industry transformation that advanced and benefitted all workers. Similarly, Chinese home health care workers led the first unionization of a private home health care agency in Massachusetts, and Chinese workers played a lead role in the recent hotel worker strikes in Boston and Chicago. The fight for people’s right to the historic Chinatown community has been a key anchor to build a broader Right to the City and anti-displacement movement in Boston and elsewhere. Organizations like the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, whose membership is largely Muslim and immigrant, continue to build local working class power with national implications in the fight against companies like Uber and Lyft.

AAPI organizations and leaders are playing important roles in fighting the Right wing around critical wedge issues, from deportation to criminalization to affirmative action. For over two decades, Southeast Asian activists have been fighting deportations of refugees who now face deportation due to U.S. criminal convictions. This organizing has sharply linked the current struggle to U.S. imperialism and the criminalization of people of color.

Working-class South Asians have also participated and led immigrant communities to be in solidarity with black and indigenous people, who have been targets of police brutality. Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), a membership-based organization of working-class South Asians, for example, challenges anti-blackness in its own and other immigrant communities by consistently prioritizing solidarity with the black community. The organization has been at the forefront of pro-people movements including anti-war, anti-police brutality, and racial justice forces in the country.

AAPIs’ courageous core role in the fight for justice for Akai Gurley in New York City, directly challenging the Right wing’s wedge strategy to pit the Chinese community against the Black community, is an example of why LeftRoots should not buy into the Model Minority Myth and de-prioritize work in the AAPI movements. AAPI youth have played a particularly key role in building solidarity across communities of color. Importantly, this work has not come from a perspective of passive “allyship” with the Black movement. Instead, in the spirit of the Black Panthers, who developed the concept of “revolutionary nationalism as applied internationalism,” we uphold the revolutionary nature of the AAPI struggles for equality and see our interests as integrally linked to the struggles of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples.

AAPI movements will continue to play an important role in the movement for peace and global justice. AAPI communities in the US have varying experiences with 20th century socialist experiments in our home countries, which have implications for left organizing among AAPIs in the U.S. Many AAPI leftists are intimately familiar with the U.S.’s role as an imperialist force today and bring a global consciousness to domestic struggles. AAPI immigrants bring practical experience with socialist movements in their homelands, both positive and negative. AAPI ties to global struggles can also play an important role in “defeating the neoliberal bloc and animating the left,” linking these struggles to a broader analysis of imperialism and global hegemony.

Increasingly, most political leaders locate the growing danger of war in the Pacific region, due to both instability in the region and the intensifying competition between the U.S. and China. This underscores the important role that AAPIs in the U.S. will play in the struggle for peace and internationalism, as well as in the fight against racial profiling and hate crimes, which will continue to rise and increasingly target AAPIs as spies or “the enemy.”

In short, the work of building a broad-based left movement in the U.S. should include work in AAPI movements and communities. It is not a coincidence that AAPIs are proportionally over-represented within the ranks of LeftRoots. The continued growth of left-leaning AAPI activists is an outgrowth of the left’s relative
strength in this movement. The left has enough of a mass base in parts of the AAPI movements and in a few cities (like San Francisco, Oakland, and Boston) to contend for leadership of broader cross-class coalitions on a local or regional scale. This base and level of influence should not be abandoned, as was done in some instances by the 20th century New Left; we should recognize its importance as we focus on the overall task of building 21st century socialism.

While our communities continue to struggle against capitalist hegemonies of anti-Black racism, colorism, heteropatriarchy, and exploitation from our own small and middle capitalist classes, we are building a new ideology and culture based on equality and self-determination for all people. We have a rich history of resistance against oppression and solidarity with other peoples of color and working-class struggles. From our ranks have developed strong organizations that continue to be in the forefront of the major movements of the day. Any path forward to 21st century socialism must be a path that draws upon the strengths of all our movements and AAPIs will continue to have much to contribute.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do the authors argue that there are both historical and present-day reasons that AAPIs play a significant role in the US left movement?

2. Is it important for the left to both unify the multiracial working class and to organize different class sectors of AAPIs and other people of color, as the authors propose? What are some examples of when those interests might be in conflict?

3. How have US social movements been impacted by the Model Minority Myth?

4. How does global conflict affect the role of AAPIs in the US social movements?

**POINTS OF DIFFERENCE AND DEBATE**

In the process of writing this paper, we realized that even among AAPI cadre there were important questions and differences of opinions which are important to note. One of the main questions/differences was around the use of the terms ‘driving forces’ and ‘historic bloc,’ including questions about whether this type of analysis is important.

Key points of view not reflected in this paper include:

- We should not divide and define the historic bloc in racial categories but instead need a stronger multiracial politic that includes a diverse set of people including whites.
- AAPIs should not be isolated as the only problematic question about “driving interests” or “leading forces.” We should focus on local and regional assessments based on the specific time, place and conditions and identify the relationship between different class segments and global capital before we say who should be in the historic bloc.
THE NONPROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX IS A MASTER’S TOOL

By the Nonprofits and Revolutionary Strategy Study Team

ORIENTATION

Many of us active in social movements work closely with nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit system is the way much of our movement infrastructure is organized in the U.S. We take a critical look at the nonprofit system, arguing that reproduces practices, ideologies and material conditions that are in opposition to our goal of a socialist society. We argue that the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) is not a neutral tool, but one that is structurally and ideologically aligned with racial monopoly capitalism.

Moved by the Black Feminist principle that the personal is political, our decision to write this response to the strategy document was informed by our need to make sense of our experiences doing social movement work within nonprofit structures. We have done our best to practice emotional intelligence throughout this process. Boldly confronting the questions we tackle in this article is scary, but we try to be as direct as we can with our arguments.

Within LeftRoots, we are guided by Mao’s conception of unity-struggle-unity as a means of principled engagement as we grow toward the goal of winning 21st century socialism. Engaging criticism about the NPIC challenges much of the work and the material security that many social movement leftists depend on. As such, we expect that reading this will bring up feelings and reactions. As you read, we invite you to breathe and ground yourself in your body, notice what comes up for you and engage with those thoughts and emotions. What do they mean for your work and for our goal of achieving 21st century socialism?

We offer this piece to invite an assessment of the NPIC’s influence on our collective imagination, our prefigurative practice of 21st century socialism, and our day-to-day material reality. We believe that developing this analysis allows us to create strategy that is responsive to the conditions in the NPIC. We look forward to collectively strategizing about what this means for our ambitious plans to achieve 21st century socialism.
Every day? Maybe every month this year, a friend, comrade, fellow fighter
Kicked to the curb of the industry that dons the lingo and calls itself The Movement.
A wolf in sheep’s clothing.
Talk about being “let go”, fired, severance maybe, push out, union busting, contract not renewed, blocking unemployment really? funding dried up, too loud, too black, not enough
Some bullshit.

Cuts to the core
Of who we are, what we stand for,
Ties severed.
Irreparable.
Harm.

As vicious as the corporation that extracts profit from the worker,
Worker’s body discarded
Disposable, worthless.
We sit for years, trying to put the pieces back together, regain a sense of ourselves, wonder where we went wrong.
Devastation, breakdown, relapse, collapse.

It sounded too good to be true. A paycheck to fight for our collective liberation?
Lulled into complacency, trust
Mission, vision, values sounded right
Thought our relationships were tight.
Trusted that we were in this together, that all of us includes us.
Capitalist logic, hierarchy and control, quieting dissent, targeting and tokenizing the vulnerable.
Turns out,

“The collective liberation” is just what the funders want to see in the proposals.
Empty, hollow, full of shit.
This is not the movement.
The movement is not separate from us, is not something we need to apply for, interview for, get exploited by.
It’s not a secret club for Harvard grads or social enterprise fads.

The movement is ours. All of our deepest longings for freedom, for wholeness, for justice, for truth
Bound together in an unbreakable trust, a forgiving trust, a friendship that is conditioned on realness, loving accountability, not on titles and frequent flyer miles.
Connection to each other, to the planet, to ourselves.

Outside those walls there is magic blooming,
Tears of joy rolling,
Songs raising,
Healing, dignity, and action.
Familiarity, awkwardness.
Action every day. Toward survival, toward resistance, toward love.

There is another way.
Deepening community, relationship, connection.
Taking action. Together.
On the street, at home, when the garbage man passes by, in the Lyft, on the bus, at school, at work
At work.

This is our work:
To be the movement
Our humanity in tact
Everywhere we go.
INTRODUCTION

We formed the Nonprofits and Revolutionary Strategy study team to deepen the analysis presented in We Believe That We Can Win, with a focus on the role of the nonprofit sector within the U.S. left. Given that so many LeftRoots cadre do their movement work through nonprofit organizations and the majority of movement infrastructure is housed in nonprofits, we felt it was essential to deepen our collective analysis of the role of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) within racial monopoly capitalism. Our study group wrote this piece in an attempt to bring our lived experience as social movement leftists in the U.S. together with our tools for Marxist theory and analysis into conversation with We Believe That We Can Win.

This piece consists of a poem written by one of our members during this process, a case study of patterns within social justice nonprofits that expose the tensions of doing social justice work within the NPIC, a response to We Believe That We Can Win grounded in Marxist theory, reflection questions, and an annotated bibliography of the resources we used in the development of this analysis.

We use the term Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) as described in Incite! Women of Color Against Violence’s book The Revolution Will Not Be Funded. The book defines the nonprofit industrial complex as a system of relationships between the state, the owning classes, foundations, and nonprofits that links together political technologies of the state and the financial power of the ruling class, in order to surveil and control public political ideology, especially emergent progressive and left social movements.

The nonprofit industry includes a wide range of tax-exempt charitable organizations as designated by the Internal Revenue Service. Within this system are nonprofit organizations of various sizes in terms of budget, staff, and capacity. It also includes public and private foundations and the families and boards that run them, intermediaries and movement support organizations, and the banks and asset managers that manage the wealth of foundations and large nonprofit organizations.

For the purposes of this piece, we focus on social movement nonprofits within the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, who would describe their work as doing or supporting community organizing, social justice, or social change work. These organizations are severely limited from doing political work. Even within this segment, this is a wide variety of organizations, from the foundations that fund progressive organizing to the grassroots organizations that do “on the ground” base-building work, and the intermediaries, consultants, and capacity building organizations that often work between funders and the work on the ground.

Following the destruction of many left organizations and leaders through COINTELPRO, organizers and activists used nonprofit organizations to do mass work, capacity building, and political development to advance and support social movements in the U.S. since the 1980’s. Nonprofit organizations are often the entryway for individuals looking to serve their community or transform society, and have offered social justice movements important opportunities for networking, political education, and training. People who have been trained by or work in social justice nonprofits play key leadership roles in today’s leftist social movements in the U.S. However, we argue that the function of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) in racial monopoly capitalism is to leverage resources to advance neoliberal ideology and the interest of the ruling class in opposition to socialist liberation. The NPIC developed at a political moment when the state had succeeded in destroying left organizations and leaders in the 1960s and 1970s and has since been under the control of capitalist classes to shore up racial monopoly capitalism. The development of the NPIC as we know it today, was a reaction by the capitalist class to contain and liberalize radical movement forces from the 1960’s and 70’s. Alongside the prison industrial complex,
The development of the NPIC as we know it today, was a reaction by the capitalist class to contain and liberalize radical movement forces from the 1960’s and 70’s. Alongside the prison industrial complex, the NPIC plays a social control function. With the growing financialization of late stage capitalism, the NPIC is another tool to contain the dispossessed masses.

The NPIC plays a social control function. With the growing financialization of late stage capitalism, the NPIC is another tool to contain the dispossessed masses. There is a close relationship between the rise of the NPIC and the rise of neoliberal capitalism. As a former League of Revolutionary Struggle cadre and current LeftRoots cadre argued, the response of the ruling class to intense revolutionary upheaval in the 1960s “was to create non-profit organizations, to show that the systems could take care of people... and to tamp down the rebellion...” Since tools and technologies are never ideologically neutral it is crucial to understand the work of social justice nonprofit management in upholding racial monopoly capitalism. The logic of neoliberalism is clear in the form of income and status maintenance for NPIC bosses and in the dissemination of meager resources that appear more substantial in an era of austerity. The NPIC consists of organizations driven by inherited wealth and replaces the mass membership organizations of earlier eras. The NPIC is a material result of the owning class capturing government power beginning in the 1970s and then destroying government along with mass based, member driven organization (i.e., unions) in order to amplify the power of capital.

The principle contradiction of doing social movement work within the NPIC structure is that the capitalist class will not fund their own demise. As social movement leftists, we must understand the function of the NPIC within the system of racial monopoly capitalism, and have no illusions that this tool is neutral. In fact, the NPIC structure is a key way that the ruling class maintains hegemony within U.S. social movements, limiting our ability to vision a future beyond capitalism. A secondary impediment is that many social movement organizations are seeking to do inherently political work in a system that bans or severely limits their ability to engage in the electoral and political processes. Another barrier is the cooptation of capitalist logic, models, terminology, and other elements of corporate practice within social movement nonprofits in an attempt to be more professional and efficient, leading to a stifling of revolutionary imagination and practice. Furthermore, social movement nonprofits, in their acceptance of this form of organization, cause harm to the workers and members, and weaken radical social movements.
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Privatization is a key element of neoliberalism, and an analysis of the NPIC reveals how deeply the system is implicated in providing private solutions to social problems. In Decolonizing Wealth Edgar Villanueva argues that: “The basis of traditional philanthropy is to preserve wealth, and that wealth is fundamentally money that’s been twice stolen, once through the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor, and the second time, through tax evasion.” Foundations keep the wealth of the 1% under private control to avoid the redistributive role of public taxation. In fact, foundations are a tool for concentrating capital by transforming surplus value into additional capital: the majority of foundation assets are reinvested in the stock market, generating an average of 8% in investment income, while only 5-6% total goes toward their operating costs, staff salaries, and a meager percentage to grants. Nonprofit organizations are limited in their political work in order to maintain their tax-deductible status granted by the state. For example, 501(c)(3) organizations cannot engage in explicit electoral work, endorse candidates, and can only educate lawmakers on issues. Foundations and nonprofits are structurally unaccountable to the base that they purport to serve or organize. Operating within this privatized system based on tax avoidance limits our ability to make demands on the state, or envision the role of a socialist state as a tool for wealth redistribution.

Ideologically, the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) has emerged as a neoliberal approach to social change, prioritizing ‘return on philanthropic investment’. As the NPIC has grown in the last few decades (there were 1.41 million nonprofits in 2013 and 1.6 million in 2016), the sector has been increasingly legitimized by the ruling classes as a career. In parallel, the sector has been increasingly legitimized by the movement left, as the ‘organizer’ career is institutionalized. As the sector is professionalized, some of the movement left’s base are excluded from nonprofits (e.g., due to low wages, mismatched skills). Without a nonprofit badge, ideological leftists and radical activists are sometimes pushed to the fringe in a political moment when we need to recruit and sustain a much broader base.

Nonprofits are currently a dominant vehicle for movement leftists to engage in politics, capacity-building, and relationship-building in the United States. Yet, that vehicle is also serving as a gatekeeper to social justice movements, one that is specifically shaped to advance neoliberal goals (e.g., short-term reforms) and entrench neoliberal management structures (e.g., executive and managerial hierarchies). A market-based solution to activism not only compromises our outcomes, but also
the underpinning ideologies. These tensions limit our revolutionary potential.

The NPIC produces the cultural and ideological conditions that maintain racial monopoly capitalism by limiting the vision of the social movement left that is organized within this system. In arguing against simplistic notions of base and superstructure in the process of production, Raymond Williams analyzes a “footnote in the Grundrisse [by Marx] in which it is argued that a piano-maker is a worker, engaged in productive labor, but that a pianist is not, since his labour is not labour which reproduces capital.” Highlighting the inadequacy of “industrial materialism,” Williams points to the material production of culture “with “specific conditions and intentions.” Marx’s inability to see the work of the piano player as productive reflects a slippage between notions of production in general and capitalist production in particular. With the example of the piano player, Williams points out that Marx ignores the ways the pianist’s labor can reproduce capital depending on how it is commodified. We find this discussion of cultural and ideological production useful for our analysis of the US Nonprofit Industrial Complex. Williams argues that the piano player is no less a producer of commodities and that ignoring the role of cultural production obscures the “whole material process” and the myriad ways in which racial monopoly capitalism sustains itself.

**REPRODUCING POWER THROUGH CLASS STRUCTURE**

The class structure in We Believe That We Can Win alludes to the nonprofit system by locating philanthropic foundation officers in the operative layer of the professional managerial class. Below we describe how the class structure is reproduced within the nonprofit system and how power of different class sectors plays out within this structure. As with any sector within capitalism, the goal of the NPIC is to extract as much from workers as possible. Each level of the class structure is reflected in and reproduced within the Nonprofit Industrial Complex:

The capitalist class engages in the nonprofit system as founders, donors, and trustees of tax-exempt foundations, which, alongside individual donations from this class, provide the vast majority of funding to social justice nonprofits. The capitalist class acts as the funders for social movement nonprofits within the NPIC, often shaping movement strategy through their investments. Funders co-opt movement language to draw in movement leaders to believe that their financial resources are a necessary ingredient to build working class power.

Within the operative layer of the professional managerial class are organizations that act as political operatives, such as the Center for American Progress which serves as a think tank closely aligned with the Democratic Party. This layer also includes political strategists and NPIC lobbyists who see major donors and funders as their key targets, and seek to influence the financial investments of the capitalist class in their issue areas. Within the executive layer of the professional managerial class are foundation program officers, lobbyists, think tank intellectuals, and the board members of large nonprofit organizations. Within upwardly mobile segments, this class sector derives from many different class origins, including the most and least privileged layers of the working class. In the U.S. there is a privileged layer identified in WBTWCW as the professional managerial class working in the non-profit sector. In the social justice wing of the NPIC, these managerial professionals have elevated status and relatively comfortable incomes and must operate within the narrow confines of a 501(c)3 and (c)4 structure. The managerial class in nonprofits earn disproportionate income derived from the intellectual and emotional labor of nonprofit workers and unpaid members within the working class tier.

Together, the capitalist and professional managerial classes comprise “the exploiting classes of racial monopoly capitalism, and represent the core opposition to socialist liberation”. The exploiting classes that fund nonprofits and drive their strategy are acting in the interests of maintaining capitalism. This class drives the ideological agenda of left social movements through nonprofits. These entities are the main source for studies
and reports on the organizing landscape and they seek to drive strategy by encouraging or requiring collaboration among their grantees. No wonder WBTW CW assesses that, “Overall, there is not a coherent national left strategy, leaving people to do their own thing either as individuals or as organizations and networks that are overly shaped by philanthropy.” In fact, the hegemony of the social justice nonprofit system means that the most coherent strategy on the left is coming from the exploiting classes of racial monopoly capitalism.

Within the social movement nonprofit sector, the small scale capitalist class is represented by consultants through firms or independently who contract their work to nonprofits doing anything from strategic planning, grant writing, facilitation, communications, or organizing work. As in the broader economy, the conditions of this class may be very similar to the working class, and is defined by the selling of their labor.

In the upper layer of the working class are professional salaried nonprofit staff at organizations that rely on foundation funding. The middle layer of the working class includes paid organizers and administrative staff and the lower levels of the organization, often working on an hourly, temporary, or contract basis. The least paid layer of the nonprofit sector includes temporary workers, volunteers, and service clients and members of the base who often contribute significant unpaid time to organizing and movement work. There is a trend toward paying members to do work for these organizations through investments in travel, leadership development programs, stipends, short-term contracts, or hourly pay for work like canvassing. However, the majority of members of the base, who are often within the hyper exploited layer of the working class and the least class privileged within the NPIC, do their movement work without pay.

CASE STUDY: BEING A WORKER INSIDE A SOCIAL MOVEMENT NONPROFIT

We were drawn to a study of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex by our lived experiences as workers in social movement nonprofits. We want to be explicit about the harm that nonprofits are capable of within our movement. We argue that this harm is unavoidable under the current nonprofit environment and that our experience reveal symptoms of a system rotted by its relationship to the ruling class and the state. We recognize that some nonprofits are reducing harm and doing good work by making hard choices towards accountability and self-awareness over financial sustainability and growth, but this has not been our experience. While many of these dynamics around bosses and workers are the same as with any job in capitalism, the “mission-driven” set up of social movement nonprofits obscures power relations and encourages social justice nonprofit employees not to think of themselves as workers.

This case study is based on two authors’ experiences working for social movement nonprofits. It includes our observations and experiences after working at three different social justice nonprofits in California, with annual organizational budgets of under $3 million and staff sizes ranging from nine to thirty people. The nuanced narrative exemplifies the contradictions we explore throughout the larger piece and how they play out in real life, harming nonprofit workers, members, and our collective power for revolutionary change. As workers who entered the full-time workforce after the 2008 recession, at a time when the nonprofit sector is at its largest in history, we argue that our experiences in social movement nonprofits offer important insight to understanding our current conjuncture. We are also carrying experiences of struggle within nonprofit organizations including unionizing and other forms of opposing oppressive dynamics.
Trigger Warning: we uncover some hard and ugly shit that might resonate with you if you’ve ever worked for a social justice nonprofit.

**DID YOU EXPERIENCE COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING AT YOUR SOCIAL JUSTICE NONPROFIT JOB?**
In the organizations we’ve worked for, hiring, campaigns, actions, and budget tend to be decided by Board of Directors or Executive Director.

**DID YOU FEEL THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT YOUR LAST NONPROFIT JOB FELT ACCOUNTABLE TO THE BASE OF THE ORGANIZATION?**
Some Board of Directors members, because appointed, feel unaccountable to a base. We have seen them make decisions based on their knowledge without consulting with staff or the base. On more than one occasion, Board members chose to conduct feedback sessions with leaders without consulting or involving the organizers who developed and executed the program they sought to evaluate.

**TALK TO ME ABOUT WHO GETS HIRED FOR THE TYPE OF WORK YOU DO AND THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT YOU FELT.**
The last organization I worked for put anti-oppressive hiring practices in place. However, when it came time to apply these practices there was no accountability. The Executive Director exerted her power to make a hiring decision that a majority of staff were in disagreement with, hiring a white woman with class and educational privilege at a housing justice organization with a leader base of predominantly poor Black women.

Additionally, the women of color on staff were not offered opportunities to move up in the organization. The only time the organization diligently applied anti-oppressive hiring practices was when hiring for community organizer positions because it was understood that those working directly with the base should reflect the base. Once hired, there was little to no mentorship for these staff members. The diverse staff members in lower-level positions and their ‘commitment to hire from the base’ were flaunted to funders and ally organizations while not meeting these staff’s basic needs much less supporting them to thrive (financially and otherwise).

**DID YOU EVER CONSIDER UNIONIZING?**
We have witnessed many unionizing efforts shut down by management. In our own inquiry effort with people we knew at these organizations, we learned that employees seeking to unionize were gaslighted and eventually pushed out of the organization. Employees are sold this idea that self-sacrifice for the sake of the non-profit’s work is necessary for the movement and that their desire for better working conditions are selfish, immature and not grounded in revolutionary strategy. We full-heartedly believe that the self-determination of non-profit employees should be uplifted and respected and that unionizing is a key strategy for this within our current context.

**TALK TO ME ABOUT THE LIMITATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE.**
At the last non-profit organization I worked for, big campaign decisions had to go through our Board of Directors. Our Board of Directors was made up of high-level staff at other non-profit organizations with more centrist politics than ours. Often they would curtail staff and member leader efforts to push for more radical measures and to make bolder strategic moves to move our campaigns forward. For example, we couldn’t take up a fight that the base wanted (tenant rights) because it was a challenge to the work of Board members (some of whom were landlords).

**WHAT WAS THE MOST FRUSTRATING PART ABOUT RELYING ON FUNDERS TO DO THE WORK?**
During our time in the organization there were times when the leadership pushed to be part of coalition efforts not because the spaces were transformative or would get us closer to making necessary shifts in the systems that we were targeting but rather because funders were looking at the issue at hand as the new thing to fund. This led to organizations working together to ac-
cess funds and to show funders that they were working together. This creates a tear and halts the work that is needed to envision and it even more so, we witnessed leadership losing track of the organization's vision that then impacted the overall work of the organization. It leads to a cooptation of the work, tokenizing member leaders, and overall hurting the fights we take on because there is no grounding in purpose.

We saw that once there was a small win the funders move on to funding something else and this creates more harm to our member leaders and staff as well because that win doesn't really create the impact that it needs to. There is often a lack of follow through on implementation because that work is often not funded.

**WHAT DID YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT WHAT IT TOOK TO BE VALUED IN THE ORGANIZATION? DID YOU FEEL VALUED IN THE ORGANIZATION?**

During my time as a community organizer I often got feedback about the timeliness of my emails. During evaluations, I was always assessed on emails, spreadsheets, how I implemented tasks in general but seldomly was I checked-in about my visions and strategies. This told me that if I respond to emails right away meant that I was doing my job well, that sending emails was more of a priority than spending time thinking about the vision of the organization.

This also extends to how black and brown staff's behavior is policed and regulated. I remember one of my co-workers constantly being asked if she was upset because she wasn't smiling and wouldn't extend friendship to others on staff. I along with her were not taken seriously because of the ways we would speak, communicate and ultimately not fit in the organization's culture which was rooted in white professionalism.

**WHAT WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE WORK THAT REALLY SURPRISED YOU?**

The emotional labor required of organizers is not often detailed in the job description, much less compensated. It is however an implicit expectation and is essential to win campaigns and increase the base. Organizations exploit employees’ commitment to larger societal transformation to squeeze out this labor.

I realized that because I care about the issue and also the leadership of member leaders because they are my community I was putting in more than 40 hours of work, had late night meetings, worked evenings in the weekends and threw down in whatever else the organization needed because I believed in the work. I began to notice that it was becoming hard to say no and personal/professional boundaries were blurred and not respected.

**WHAT STIFLED YOUR GROWTH?**

Because all the energy is focused on winning campaigns and reaching the mission of the organization there was no focus on dealing with and setting structures to engage in the trauma that members and staff that are impacted by the issues have. This created a culture where staff and members are exploiting the experiences that have been traumatic to reach others and add passion to the work and the organization benefits at that expense.

**DID YOU FEEL LIMITED IN THE WORK THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO DO AT YOUR NON-PROFIT?**

Because of the role that the organization held in movement and policy spaces we were often asked to take clear stances on the side of justice and join left-leaning coalitions. However, stances and some of the coalitions we were asked to join were seen as a threat to our donors and their goals so we had to refuse to participate or take a stand. When we refused we were not allowed to be honest about why and often hid behind “strategy”.

**DID YOU FEEL THE ORGANIZATION WAS ACCOUNTABLE TO THE BASE THEY ORGANIZED?**

During one of our coalition meetings, facilitated by a staff member at an ally organization that provided funding to the non-profit I worked for, I noticed that member-leaders were continuously shut down when expressing their ideas and offering solutions that should have been prioritized in our struggle. The member-leaders that I worked with continued to share their strategy proposals...
and eventually got yelled at and made to feel that their knowledge was of no value to the coalition. Following that meeting, I requested a meeting with my supervisor to propose that we leave that space because of the harmful way leaders were treated. The response that I received was that because they funded our organization we couldn’t step down from the coalition.

As a community organizer I experienced the difficulty of devoting time and energy to supporting the continuous growth of our leaders. There was an expectation that our member base would multiply in size year after year, and resources for a leadership program for new members, but we had to advocate to create leadership programs for existing leaders and resources to our staff time in supporting cadre development. Money flowed in to support recruitment but not retention of member leaders.

**Talk to me about what you learned from how social justice nonprofits compensate workers?**

The organizations we’ve worked with have huge wage gaps between program staff (organizers, direct service providers) and higher level staff (managers, directors) and don’t put resources where their values are at. They pay organizers below living wage salaries while managers and directors take home 10-50k more.

**What was something about the way that resources get allocated that really surprised you?**

We often got resources allocated for specific campaigns, like passing a ballot measure or a legislative effort, but not for general political education or member development. Campaign timelines and the inconsistent flow of resources meant that we couldn’t focus on intersectional social justice efforts with other organizations, our work was often siloed and coalition efforts that pushed our work to the left was often underfunded and understaffed. For example, because we worked on housing justice issues, our political education focused on housing justice and there was little room for connecting the dots or working on efforts that were just as relevant as tenant rights to the struggle for housing justice.

**How did this impact members?**

It contributed to the underdevelopment of leaders was that organizations sometimes hogged leaders, wanting their full capacity to be dedicated to their organization because of the ‘investment in their leadership’. Signaling a scarcity vs. abundance mindset as well as ownership/exploitation of member leaders.

**In your experience, what is the expectation that your nonprofit organization had around work hours?**

One of our directors came in to speak with me. Someone had just been fired and as her direct supervisor the director was making the rounds talking with staff in an attempt to explain, and assuage fear of this happening to them. She explained to me that there were no bad feelings towards this person, and that she simply wasn’t a good fit. She went on to tell me that a good employee does the work of five people, and letting someone go because they didn’t meet this standard was the right thing to do for the organization’s long-term sustainability. I pondered on this, knowing that although I probably do the work of five people it’s not fair to hold people to this standard. I smiled and gave her my appreciation for taking the time to speak with me on the matter.

Additionally, the last organization I worked for had a two-person organizing team. I learned that after my coworker and I left (the two organizers on the team) they hired one person to do our job. The leaders I keep in touch with reach out constantly to express their dismay at the lack of support and some have decided to drop out after feeling that the lack of capacity keeps them uninformed and feeling like they are no longer a priority.

**What do you feel that the expectation to work as if you were multiple people was rooted in?**

At the non-profits I have worked for we often have funding deliverables that require us to work uncompensated overtime. As salaried employees we come in on the weekends to meet the numbers or simply have to work long hours to meet deadlines. We meet promises but the resources don’t cover staff time.
“Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support.” -Audre Lorde

One of the defenses of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex from leftists who run nonprofits is that nonprofits are just a tool we can use to do revolutionary work. We argue that the NPIC is not a neutral tool, but rather a master’s tool as Lorde describes it. Working in a social movement nonprofit puts us squarely in a neoliberal institution, within the master’s house, where our interests as a working-class are obscured and our strategies and practices become aligned with the capitalist class interests that drive the system. For those in professionalized movement work, the NPIC may feed pessimism that there is no alternative social and economic system.

We argue that the class sector of the professional managerial class and small-scale capitalists within nonprofit management and consulting is most strongly correlated with Cabral’s notion of the petty bourgeoisie. Like Cabral’s nationalist petty bourgeoisie, the nonprofit managerial class is closely connected with the ruling class and plays a mediating role between capital and the working class within a structure that ultimately serves to keep the capitalist classes in power. In Cabral’s view, in order to align with the working classes to achieve national liberation and ultimately socialism, the petty bourgeoisie had “to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, reject the temptations of becoming more bourgeois and the natural concerns of its class mentality.” To not betray the revolution, the task of the petty bourgeoisie was to identify with the working classes to such an extent that they committed class suicide. Cabral said that committing class suicide was necessary for the petty bourgeoisie to be reborn as revolutionary workers, “completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong.” Because many cadre within LeftRoots exist within this class position in the nonprofit system, the issues raised by Cabral in “The Weapon of Theory” are relevant to the development of strategy and the process of cadrefication toward the goal of winning 21st century socialism.

To choose class suicide, the development of our class analysis and class consciousness is necessary. We have little practice doing grounded assessments or analysis of our class positions and the interests of our class. Class in the U.S. is complicated, but as social movement leftists it is necessary for us to have a strong class analysis. This also means understanding our own class position, interests, and influences. In many cases our revolutionary work and vision of a 21st century socialist society goes against the self-interest of our class position. Our current class position may be different from the way we were raised, or even during childhood our class experience may have changed due to a parent losing a job or getting a new job. For example, someone raised in a working class household who attended an elite private university and works as a staff organizer at a nonprofit with a budget of $1 million is likely navigating multiple class interests and influences within their own life and thinking on a daily basis. Similarly, someone raised working class or poor who is now in a role of Executive Director of an organization and spends time fundraising from wealthy donors and professional foundation representatives is also navigating multiple interests and influences. Of course class experience and position is compounded by our experience of white supremacy, class oppression, cis-heteropatriarchy and other oppressions.

It is crucial to question the function of the NPIC in the development of revolutionary strategy. What is the
effect of NPIC structures, which mimic the structures of corporations, on our revolutionary potential? In what ways does doing social movement work within the NPIC limit our ability to develop leadership and capacities to enhance our chances of winning 21st century socialism? As cadre argues, truly revolutionary work will not be funded in the long run within this system “if it’s independent and if it’s really pushing against things in the way it needs to. So, there will be fewer and fewer of those jobs and we have to transition into an understanding of our organizing work as what we do, without our jobs at the center.”

**WHAT’S NEXT**

Many of us are engaged in movement work within the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, and this system is an integral part of objective conditions in our conjuncture. We argue that the NPIC is a master's tool that reinforces class hierarchies, and we recognize that there is much more analysis to be done to tease out the strategic implications of this argument. Developing our analysis of these issues will develop our capacities as cadre, strengthen our development of revolutionary strategy toward the goal of 21st century socialism in the U.S.

In the short-term, we believe that there are opportunities to use social movement nonprofits that we work within to test radical governance, develop political analysis and strategy development, and build revolutionary capacities. At a minimum, nonprofits aligned with social movements should support and encourage unionization, limit unpaid overtime, pay a living wage, establish equitable pay scales and invest in collective care resources and practices that support the hard work of staff organizers.

Different organizational models such as organizer co-ops and voluntary associations should be explored as viable substitutes for the 501(c)(3) as new social movement groups are forming. It is crucial to explore grassroots fundraising and other ways of leveraging resources outside of foundations. It is also important that organizations develop strategy about what foundation funding to seek and to be clear about the tensions between organizational growth and sustainability, on one hand, and the advancement of revolutionary work on the other.

It is our hope that this piece will generate debate and strengthen our collective analysis of racial monopoly capitalism. The Nonprofits and Revolutionary Strategy Study Team will continue to meet to further explore contradictions and tensions. We are heartened by the interest LeftRoots cadre have expressed in this question and we look forward to engaging cadre with different experiences within and outside of nonprofits on these questions.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What emotional reactions did you have as you read this piece and what meaning do you make of these emotional reactions?
2. Where does this case study speak to your own movement and/or work experience? Where does it differ?
3. If the NPIC is a tool for suppressing radical movement, what does this mean for how we struggle within this system?
4. What can we learn from formations organizing outside of state-recognized NGO structures in the U.S. and Global South in the past and present?
5. How do leftists currently use nonprofit organizations to build revolutionary capacities? What are the possibilities and limitations?
6. Where have you been positioned in this class hierarchy? Does this argument challenge your material reality or source of income? How has your positionality impacted how you navigate the NPIC?
1 Since The Revolution Will Not Be Funded was written in 2007, conditions have changed significantly: we have seen the housing crisis and recession of 2008, increased hoarding of wealth by the capitalist class and growing inequality, the subsequent growth of the nonprofit industry to unprecedented levels in numbers of organizations and share of the economy, and the rise of movements like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and many others. The role of the NPIC in racial monopoly capitalism may be even more apparent now than it was 12 years ago.

2 The nonprofit sector is a significant part of the economy making up 10% of the U.S. workforce, and 5.4% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product. With 11.4 million jobs, it is the third largest workforce after retail and manufacturing. As of 2016, there are 1.6 million tax-exempt organizations in the U.S. Foundations hold assets of $798.2 billion and give out $55.3 billion in grants.

3 Keynesian economics generally refers to the idea that the government should intervene in the market and provide for basic social welfare.

4 While we can’t ignore how music is commodified within capitalism, some music-making supports and sustains resistance and struggle such as Black freedom spirituals and movement songs from the labor and Civil Rights Movements.

5 “Even people who wonder whether the capitalist dream isn’t the wrong dream see no way of realizing a life beyond capitalism, or fear that any attempt to do so can only result in another nightmare. Overcoming this debilitating political pessimism is the most important question anyone seriously interested in social change must confront.” Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, Transcending Pessimism

An annotated bibliography of works cited and consulted is available on request. The purposes of this annotated bibliography are to 1) share the theoretical underpinnings of our argument, 2) list the many sources we engaged in the writing process, and 3) to show the burgeoning debate on the center and left about how different sectors understand the nonprofit industrial complex and advocate for resolutions to its contradictions.
THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF A REVIVED UNION MOVEMENT
by members of the LeftRoots Labor Praxis Circle

We want to begin by saying that this article addresses only one aspect of the labor movement: unions. For this article we have decided to focus on unions, because they have occupied, and continue to occupy, a core and foundational role within the labor movement. Before discussing unions, we want to clarify that we do not view unions and the labor movement as one and the same, as is common. From our perspective labor movements, or the movements of working or laboring class people, are not unique to the modern capitalism. Slave rebellions and peasant uprisings have been some of the most dramatic forms labor struggle in colonial era of capitalist expansion throughout the Caribbean, North, Central, and South America. Given this, we understand the labor movement to consist of a constellation of working-class and pro-working-class formations. These formations include unions, worker centers, community-labor coalitions, working-class community organizations and churches that provide political and/or economic support to workers, working-class think-tanks, workers’ rights education centers, and pro-labor lawyers to name a few.

We think it is important to acknowledge the breadth of the labor movement, because doing so allows us to more accurately consider the necessary long-term work of revitalizing the labor movement. Specifically, by understanding the historic and current relationships between these different movement formations, as well as the conditions of each, we can develop interventions that may be more fruitful to labor movement revitalization. For example, in recent years, there have been powerful demonstrations of the immigrant rights movement’s ability to disrupt capital. We see struggle of working-class immigrants as part of the labor movement. Understanding how different struggles within the movement relate to each other will be critical for our collective liberation. For the purposes of this article we have elected to focus on the union movement, because it has played a substantial role in the general organization of the working-class for struggle under modern capitalism. We argue that the features of the unions make the union movement critical to the labor movement, and the labor movement as a whole is vital to (a) the defeat of Trumpism and (b) our ability to build a 21st-century socialist movement to scale. In what follows, we discuss some of the reasons we think unions are critical to social and political project of 21st-century socialism.
CONTRADICTIONS & CHALLENGES IN THE UNION MOVEMENT

1. Capital has always determined the structure of the working-class and work. Capital has organized the working-class through immigration, slavery, and settler colonialism. All these processes are racial and gendered, such that white supremacy and patriarchal relations and ideologies shape them. Trade unions are not separate from the rest of society. Therefore, the history of unions is rife with the contradictions of race and gender relations.

2. The racial and gender contradictions have historically been expressed within the conflict between craft unionism and industrial unionism. Historically, craft unions have taken reactionary political stances in which unions have advocated against immigrants, in particular, working-class immigrants of color, and women as way of protecting who do due the white supremacist patriarchal nature of U.S. capitalism receive lower wages. The reactionary perspective of many unions (especially craft unions) has been that because people of color and women drive wages down (because Capital determined the cost of their labor should be less than white men's), they should be excluded from the labor market. For unions this was a protective measure. This view was later challenged by industrial unionists who have worked to organize across racial and gender lines. To be clear, this is not to say that the contradictions of race and gender are not at work within industrial unions.

3. As capital in the US shifted to industrializing the economy, so did unions. One strand focused on elevating the status of skilled workers (predominantly white workers) by organizing by craft. The other strand, fueled by socialists and socialism, sought to organize all workers in an industry against the capital power - industrial unionism. This tension eventually led to the industrial unions being expelled from the American Federation of Labor. Later similar tensions were exploited to expel leftists from the union movement. The debates, contradictions, and tensions between business unionism or service unionism vs social justice unionism and organizing unionism is rooted in deep history and is alive and well. Black and brown labor activists have often been at the forefront of broad social justice unionism. Examples of this are dotted throughout labor history - including organizing of farm workers, restaurant workers, transportation workers, sanitation workers, and janitors.

4. Capital makes it so that workers measure their life value only in their ability to exchange their labor for money. Workers routinely sacrifice their health to work in toxic (physically and psychologically) jobs in order to earn their wages. Whether, its working on railroad tracks, working in the mines, working in toxic school buildings, or cleaning buildings and breathing in industrial cleaning supplies, workers exchange their health for a wage, because capitalism requires them to do so.

A notable way this contradiction has shown up within unions is when it comes to environmental justice and...
balancing the lives of members engaged in extractive industries and the survival of humanity as a whole. One example of this is the tension between adopting environmentally friendly policies, which on one hand will benefit the health of workers and their families, but on the other hand will result in many losing their livelihoods and thereby negatively impact their health and well-being through their inability to participate in the labor market. This tension is most clearly present in the political opposition of the United Mine Workers of America to policies that shutter coal mines. Understanding the nature of these contradictions can allow the Left to consider productive policy interventions such as “just transition” policies that guarantee workers in highly extractive industries to be trained and find employment with comparable benefits and wages. Capital has explicitly attacked the strength of organized workers through the tools of the state.

6. Lastly, we want to note the role of the capitalist political state in generating tensions within unions. The political state has enacted a series of laws and court rulings that have systematically weakened unions. It is not possible to speak on more than a few. Right to Work laws weaken unions by siphoning off financial resources by permitting individuals in a work place to opt out of union membership and paying dues. Another example are laws that restrict the kinds of strikes and boycotts unions can engage in. Unions used to engage in solidarity with other striking workers by going on strike at workplaces that had connection to the other striking workers. For example, workers at plant A meat packing factory goes on strike. Workers at meat delivery company at B would go on strike so that if the company hired replacement workers (scabs) the meat products could not be picked up and delivered to its final destination. The economic pressure forced employers to recognize unions and to negotiate dignified contracts.

The political states actions to make this kind of striking illegal has made it easier for capitalists to replace striking workers and thereby weakening unions. The political state has also made it so that some unions cannot legally strike, which means the risk of strike activity relatively substantial. Lastly, the political state has historically engaged in thorough political repression of unions. The most notable example is the passage of the Taft-Hartley bill which included anti-communist previsions which barred communist, socialists, and other radicals from being able to hold leadership positions in unions, and which resulted the expulsion of at least one million Leftists from unions, the dismantling of whole unions, and the rise of conservative business unionism.

5. Capital continues to innovate and change the organization of labor, creating new tensions and contradictions within our movements. While capital has consolidated, the organization of work has become increasingly fractured through use of technology, subcontracting, independent contracting, gig work, and privatization (to just name a few). This fracturing disproportionately impacts the driving forces identified in WBTWCW.
We believe in the central importance of the union movement in building towards 21st century socialism. However, WBTWCW can be strengthened with an understanding of the revolutionary potential of a revitalized union movement, and by extension a revitalized labor movement. Consider the following:

**Unions are key to defeating Trumpism.** While WBTWCW states that the left has limited electoral capacity, this is not true for unions. Given the unions’ volume of electoral experience, union political funds, and the size of union memberships make unions potentially powerful electoral forces. Given this, unions are an important terrain on which to advance our strategy's anti-Trump and anti-neoliberal electoral goals.

**Unionists are key to building multi-racial blocs.** The workplace is an area in which many societal contradictions converge and thus provides a starting point for building strong multi-racial solidarity. While the degree and impact of exploitation varies based on race, gender identity and other factors, workers experience a common exploitation of their labor power by capitalists, thus creating a common enemy to struggle against and an opportunity to engage around the other contradictions. We can look to labor to find both examples of how not to do this (by ignoring race or subordinating racial justice demands to economic demands) but also in some of our more progressive unions we see useful examples of how to combine fights for racial justice and economic justice.

**Unions as mass organizations that specialize in organizing people within their workplaces can help identify the kinds of economic power members of the leading forces have at their disposal, by virtue of where they are positioned within the economy.**

**Unions can help us sharpen our class analysis.** WBTWCW provides a class analysis, in which, there are multiple layers of the capitalist class and the working-class. Using that framework, WBTWCW identifies specific groups of people within these different layers of the working-class on the basis of the historic relationship to the state’s repressive and oppressive systems. However, we think it is important to develop an analysis of role of economic position in structuring working-class forms of struggle. We argue that where workers are positioned within the economy allows different groups of workers to turn their economic power into political power. Unions as mass organizations that specialize in organizing people within their workplaces can help identify the kinds of economic power members of the leading forces have at their disposal, by virtue of where they are positioned within the economy. Under Left leadership unions can also work to develop unionization campaigns in industries and occupations where members of the leading forces are employed.

**Unions provide scale.** Unions are one of the largest bases of organized working class people in the US. Although it has clear challenges as a terrain of struggle, it is an important piece of the puzzle for grounding in the left in a working class base and developing the fighting abilities and power of that base. WBTWCW alludes to a wave of workplace protests leading to a renewal of the labor movement. As we speak unions are under extreme attack from corporate forces and the Right. Nevertheless, despite the lowest the lowest percentage of union
workers in over a century, unions can mobilize massive numbers of members. As of today over 14 million people belong to unions in the US; many millions more are close to unions (retired union members, former union members, or people that would like to be in a union). Of course, not all of these people identify with or even want to be in their union, but even a fraction of this makes it one of the largest organized forces of working class people in the country. As Socialists this means that unions themselves are critical sites of struggle.

Unions facilitate the exercise of economic power and disruption of Capital at the point of production. Throughout history, strikes and other forms of militant workplace actions have played a key role in challenging the power structures of racial monopoly capitalism. Disruption of the status quo is critical to any sort of change. However, to truly realize and sustain the transformative power of strikes, organization is required at the grassroots level. When workers come face to face with the true character of raw capitalism but also realize the tremendous power built by collectively withholding their labor power, it creates a transformative moment and opportunity for deeper politicization. At their militant height, unions have throughout history demonstrated their deeply disruptive capacity to capital’s core imperative. The organizing of the sleeping car porters, the 1934 trucker and textile strikes, the Flint sit-down strikes, the grape boycott, and the 2018 - 2019 teachers strikes are just a few examples of this. A point that should be made is that unions operated as non-legal associations for many years. Therefore, workers do not need to be part of a formally recognized union to exert this kind of power. However, being a formally recognized union grants certain protections that make the condition for organizing easier.

Unions are a key space for developing working class capacities to govern. Despite the many failures in democracy that exist in practice, unions are often structured as democratic, membership-based organizations. In fact, there are no other institutions of this size that are controlled by the working class. They create a unique space for us to analyze different forms of democratic governance and leadership development and practice dealing with all the contradictions that arise in governing a mass-based organization of folks with varying degrees of consolidation. For example, the collective bargaining process can be a process through which the membership engages in debate with each other around what they collectively need, and how they can or should collectively operate within the workplace. These opportunities, though not always seized, can generate important experiences that can translate into individual and collective protagonism (i.e. workers individual and collective sense that they can and should be in control of determining how they engage in labor, and the conditions and product of their labor). Something to consider is that the existence of unions in a workplace is in direct conflict with the institution of private property, which says the owner is also the master of the workplace. Some unions due to the particular sector they are can play a more direct role in advancing working-class socialist democratic practice on a broad scale. This is specifically true of public sector and service sector unions. Union workers in these sectors are often engaged in labor that directly
connects to the needs of the broader working-class public. Therefore, unions under Left leadership could facilitate processes for community control of schools, hospitals, city planning and construction and variety of systems.

The unions of the future have the potential to facilitate the collectivization of industry. Workers have the skills to run industry. This paired with the capacity to govern and political willingness to collectivize industry will be critical to consolidating support for a movement for 21st century socialism. In our view, unions of the future can facilitate this process by becoming more than agents of worker representation for their own wages and benefits. Workers can use their unions as democratic institutions through which they can organize and coordinate their labor in ways that can support production for social needs and human solidarity. The successful collectivization of industries requires the expertise and skills learned by workers through their everyday work. For example, members of public sector and service sector unions provide critical labor to the function of communities, towns, cities, counties, etc. They include teachers, cooks, nurses, nurse technicians, doctors, sanitation workers, mass transit workers, street workers, building maintenance and cleaning workers, water department workers, communication workers, etc. At the same time, unions can provide space through which political education processes can be established and facilitated. Such processes will be important for building support among workers for the socialist project.

SO HOW DO WE REALIZE THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF THE UNION MOVEMENT?

By the 1930’s, communists and socialists had developed a shared analysis that the struggle between craft and industrial unions represented the primary contradiction within the labor movement. This allowed them to move with unity that their task was to make interventions oriented around building industrial unions, as this was a prerequisite for turning the labor movement into a revolutionary force.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE TRANSFORMATION PATHS WE (OR OTHER LEFT UNIONISTS) ARE ENGAGED IN:

1. Organizing for militancy: Increase US working class militancy through base building organizing (including strikes and disruptive action). The most powerful way for a worker to understand power and empowerment is by collectively organizing to confront it.

2. Whole worker organizing: Shift the political character of unions by engaging in whole-worker organizing. This includes bargaining for the common good and taking on issues that go beyond the bread and butter.

3. Building internal democracy within various unions.

4. Shifting worker organizing with the economy: As mentioned previously, capital's organization of work is changing. The legal framework to organize workers into unions comes from the era of industrialization and consolidation of the working class. These labor laws do not show promise for building the union movement. We must find different ways to organize the working class to confront capital. One example of this is engaging in sectoral bargaining, as opposed to single workplace or company-based organizing. Adopting a sector-wide broad-based approach to worker organization, can better position unions to confront players in the monopoly capitalist level of society.

5. Recruit more leftists into the labor movement, recruit rank and file workers into left organization.

6. Contest for power and leadership within unions by building and participating in progressive caucuses within unions.
WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Our first project was to develop this journal entry as a launching point to further our analysis of revolutionary strategy. Our praxis circle plans to do further study, which will draw from our experiences and from the experiences of other left unionists. In particular, we would ideally like to:

1. Develop a journal entry that summarizes labor movement history, attacks from the state and capital, the evolution of work, and also highlights key struggles where labor disrupted the entire social order, especially those led by workers of color and women.

2. Conduct an expanded class analysis that looks at how the driving forces are positioned within the economy and what structural power they have.

3. Analyze existing projects underway within the labor movement related to the strategies discussed above. We especially want to use the projects members of the Labor Praxis Circle are ourselves engaged in to help hone our assessment of these strategies.

4. Share our experiences doing political education within unions with the goal of recruiting more union activists, especially those from the rank-and-file, to LeftRoots.

We invite unionists to become part of LeftRoots and join us on this journey!
“Millions of people...fall somewhere in the middle of the political spectrum and...do not see themselves as activists, making them open to persuasion by organized forces on the left and the right. This contestable “middle” is key to building a front broad enough to engage the conjuncture and to build power effectively. This raises questions including: What is the level, scale, and quality of organization among competing class and social forces?”
—We Believe that We Can Win (WBTWCW)

LeftRoots’ basebuilding praxis circle developed two questions as part of our efforts to measure the strength of progressive and left mass organizations in the US: how wide is the circle of people who are building the base of an organization and how wide is the circle of people raising an organization’s money? Our starting point for this piece is that left organizations in the US, rooted in the working class, generally lack a protagonism of scale, what we call mass protagonism. By mass protagonism we mean large-scale organizations and movements where many people take leadership, develop their political clarity, and organize other people in order to become leading actors in the struggle to make history.

Some organizations have achieved a large scale but with a low level of participation and leadership from their base, while others have developed a small core of politically advanced leaders but seem unable to grow much beyond that. How to change this dichotomy was a question the authors of this piece had been obsessed with for some time and we jumped at the opportunity to engage with it among comrades when the basebuilding praxis circle was created within LeftRoots. What follows is the culmination of almost two years of discussion.

Our experience in our praxis circle leads us to believe that because we are anchored in basebuilding
organizations across different sectors and geography nationally, LeftRoots is in a unique position to convene movement leaders to synthesize, test out, and further develop a transformative basebuilding praxis. We offer some ideas and questions about how to align our basebuilding praxis with our developing strategy, how to adapt it to the obstacles of our objective conditions, and how, through praxis and training, we can develop the methodology and talent needed to advance on a path to power.

We examine the ways in which racial monopoly capitalism’s latest phases of rising neoliberalism and crises of US imperialism have created objective obstacles to people’s widespread participation in social movement organizations. Subjectively, it is our contention that the lack of a unifying strategy, the underdevelopment of basebuilding methodology, and a general low level of talented conscious organizers in the social movement left contributes to the low level of mass protagonism we see today. We make the case that revolutionary strategy and basebuilding shape and strengthen one another, meaning that in order for our basebuilding to achieve a higher level of mass protagonism we need to develop and integrate strategy and that in order to develop and carry out strategy we need to further develop our basebuilding praxis.

The piece you’re about to read serves as an invitation to you, the reader, to join us in the project we lay out to develop this praxis.

**ASSESSING TODAY’S ORGANIZED LEFT AND BASEBUILDING POWER**

Over the course of monthly conversations, we spent a good deal of time reflecting on our common challenge: across different geographies and sectors, we have not been able to build working class bases with both the breadth of scale and the depth of conscious leadership that’s required to shift the balance of forces in society. Given the interlocking ecological, political, and economic crises impacting the vast majority of humanity, why aren’t exploited and oppressed communities flooding into community organizations and committing their lives to overhauling society? Our passion for basebuilding on the one hand and mounting injustice on the other is not adding up to mass protagonism in our organizations and movements. What’s preventing this? We concluded that today’s low level of mass protagonism is a result of both objective factors beyond our control and subjective factors we can and must change, and we’ve made an attempt to codify these factors below.

**OBJECTIVE FACTORS**

We’ll start by laying out how aspects of racial monopoly capitalism contribute to the low level of mass protagonism among working class communities. Some of these have specifically occurred in the last few decades due to shifts in capitalism and production, the turn to neoliberalism, and technological advances. And, then, some are generalized systemic challenges that are hallmarks of racialized capitalism and imperialism. While we recognize that all powerful social movements emerge out of conditions of grave exploitation and oppression, our intention here is to explore how our current economic conditions are preventing people from participating more fully in community organizing even though it’s in their interest to do so.

1. **Financialization, globalization, and people-replacing automation has produced an intensification of poverty in working class communities.** Working class people are experiencing heightened levels of instability due to widespread unemployment, a shift to low-wage service jobs, increased debt, and the general trend of downward mobility and precarity. Forced to work multiple low-paid jobs to make ends meet, many people are experiencing
a profound loss of free time which means it’s more difficult to join a community organization.

2. **Working class people are not receiving adequate preventative healthcare and are experiencing heightened levels of health crises across their families.** Due to the shift from an industrial to a low-wage service economy that doesn’t offer health benefits and to an increasingly privatized healthcare system, our people are going without the care that they need.

3. **Increased alienation and fragmentation.** We’re living in a society where we are increasingly separated from each other in the work that we do -- where our social fabric and community networks, public life and institutions have been intentionally weakened. We’re in a period of history that’s deepening individualism and pushing hard against a spirit and culture of collectivity, creating a profound sense of hopelessness and isolation among people as they bear the weight of economic uncertainty. And in the wake of a persistent ruling class project to repress social movements since the 1970s, people have been made to believe that there is no alternative.

4. **Increased feminization of labor, economic structure of patriarchy, and invisibilized social reproduction.** As history shows, the backbone of vibrant social movements has been women, and today, many of our members are women -- often moms with children who have a deep desire to be involved in movement organizations, but find it increasingly challenging given their wage-earning responsibilities along with their unpaid home and childcare responsibilities. These women can also find themselves in family systems or relationships that are unsupportive of their desire to protect time to organize.

5. **Astronomical levels of incarceration.** As people have been made obsolete to the economic process of capital accumulation, mechanisms of technological surveillance, the militarization of policing, incarceration and other tools of social control have intensified. Along with this expansion of the prison industrial complex, Black and Brown working class communities were intentionally flooded with drugs as a part of the counter-revolutionary efforts of US imperialism to set back the gains made by social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. While there’s beautiful and fierce organizing happening inside prison walls, it’s critical to note that whole sections of our society are incarcerated instead of able to join our basebuilding organizations.

6. **Heightened levels of gentrification and displacement.** After a long phase of capital divestment in urban centers, we’re now experiencing a moment of large scale reinvestment in cities as the ruling class turns to housing and urban development to solve the structural crisis of capital overaccumulation. We’re seeing members of our base getting pushed out of the cities in which we organize. This means they are no longer able to participate or have less time to organize due to longer commutes. As our communities are increasingly moving outside of cities due to the pressures of neoliberal gentrification, we need to update our basebuilding practices, which have mainly been developed for urban settings.

7. **Racial monopoly capitalism and heteropatriarchy cause traumatic impact that blocks the agency of working class people.** The legacy of slavery, land theft, and genocide that black and indigenous communities have experienced included a profound process of dehumanization and violence that’s had significant traumatic impact over generations. Increased militarization of borders for capital’s interests has intensified the dangers of migration and immigration. Deportation and violent family separation causes trauma. The family separation that results from incarceration, police violence and killings cause trauma. Being made obsolete to an economic system that’s increasingly unstable and precarious causes trauma. Trauma caused by exploitation and oppression creates significant emotional blocks in people’s ability to be agents of change and join basebuilding
organizations. This trauma often shows up as a profound sense of worthlessness and powerlessness and is a central obstacle to working class people stepping into movement leadership.

While these conditions impact the entire working class, they hit Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities from the lower and middle layers of the working class the hardest. And women and gender oppressed people from these communities even harder. Precisely because of this these communities, as WBTWCW argues, have the least invested in racial monopoly capitalism and are positioned to be the driving forces that can lead the movement for its alternative.

Our bases are strapped for the time, energy, good health, openness in their schedules, and levels of self-worth required to join and be active members of community organizations. Working two to three jobs to make ends meet, raising children and grandchildren, caring for sick family members, attending to health crisis after health crisis, juggling unwaged reproductive labor, supporting loved ones caught up in the prison industrial complex, studying to get higher educational degrees, and paying down mounting debt takes up most waking hours.

We believe that these aspects of our objective conditions create obstacles to basebuilding in this moment, and we see a silver lining in the possibility of a tipping point leading to increased movement participation. Just as large scale industrial capitalism created a movement opportunity that we saw manifest in the labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s where so many working class people found themselves in one place together at the point of production with common vehicles with which to develop class consciousness, we need to find the opportunities that today’s economy presents to build base. These opportunities, despite the obstacles, will point us to components of a renewed basebuilding praxis.

How can these conditions, if assessed for their opportunities, guide us in growing the mass protagonism of our organizations in this period? What are the important implications for how we update our basebuilding praxis for today’s economic reality in order to maximize working class participation? What new organizational forms, organizational practices, and shifts in the culture at large are needed to meet the challenges of our time?

We must experiment with how to most effectively counter the individualism, hopelessness, and powerlessness that stops people from joining the struggle to transform our material conditions. We know that the only way people will get the time, energy, and good health they need is if significantly greater numbers become active in collective struggles for an alternative to racial monopoly capitalism. We need to see our basebuilding organizations as people-powered experiments to intervene in the blocks that these objective conditions create, offering collective care and creative interventions to free up time, get our people healthy, and provide shared reproductive labor. Good basebuilding practice will break people out of the fragmentation, alienation, and isolation created by the conditions of racial monopoly capitalism, providing embodied experiences of collective action, ownership, consciousness, and labor.

**SUBJECTIVE FACTORS**

Now, we’d like to explore how the culture of our community organizing infrastructure in its own right contributes to the low level of scale and protagonism amongst working class communities. We also offer some insight on how to shift our practice to respond to these subjective challenges.

**OVERCOMING THE STAFF PROTAGONIST MOBILIZING MODEL**

An honest assessment will reveal that in many of our organizations it’s paid staff organizers who are the primary protagonists. The key role of these staff is too often limited to mobilizing the base and doing things like writing speeches for members to read. With its
dearly held turn out equations, this mobilization model reduces would-be leaders to numbers. As McAlevey writes, “Attempts to generate movements are directed by professional highly educated staff who rely on an elite, top down theory of power that treats the masses as audiences of, rather than participants in, their own liberation.”

So where does this tendency come from and what are we going to do about it? Our basebuilding praxis circle had some disagreement on this. Some of us situated the problem inside a critique of the non-profit industrial complex, making the case that the form of the non-profit is inherently oppressive. This line of thinking emphasizes the de-radicalizing effect of foundation funding, arguing that sectors of the ruling class use this strings attached system to co-opt organizations. It suggests that the solution is to do away with the non-profit form altogether and organize all volunteer organizations.

Others in our circle made the case that a bigger factor in these organizations’ reformism stems from the fact that the leadership of these non-profits is often ideologically liberal to begin with. They continued then that the contradictions of the non-profit form can only be taken advantage of if the leadership of those organizations is firmly in the hands of revolutionaries with an unwavering class stand that place their work in a broader strategy for 21st century socialism.

This group did, however, find a different problem with foundation funding: skilled grant writers get organizers their paychecks regardless of whether those organizers are building the mass protagonism of the base. A few mobilizations a year seems to suffice. The capacities of an organizer whose salary comes from a few foundations will tend to be quite different than the capacities of an organizer whose salary depends on money from their base. After all, if the salary is paid by the base the organization literally won’t be able to afford to pay an organizer who can’t build mass protagonism.

The staff protagonist mobilizing model limits not just the protagonism, but ultimately the scale, of the base. Marshall Ganz helps us understand this when he writes, “The test of effective leadership, in turn, is not in how many hats one can wear but in how many others one can get to wear hats. This is how you get to scale.” In this way, if we hope to achieve mass protagonism, our organizing must in fact be driven by leaders who re-organize their existing relational networks, bringing the leaders they are already in relationship with into the organization. This is entirely distinct from the cherry picking of disconnected individuals that are mobilized in the staff protagonist model.

Beyond attending actions, the role of the base in the mobilizing model extends only as far as being a spokesperson. For many of us the process of developing a member into a ‘strong leader’ starts with their consistent attendance to meetings and ends with them sharing their personal testimony in a large rally. They may get better and better at sharing their story but meanwhile this same member can’t organize their neighbor into taking action against their greedy landlord, nor do they have a say in important organizational decisions. Given this, high potential leaders will decide not to bring their bases into the mobilizing organization in the first place. The staff protagonist model takes on an additional oppressive dynamic in organizations where, unlike the base, the staff is overwhelming white, upper middle class and/or male.

We think that Alinskyism overemphasizes the distinction between staff organizer and leader. As WBTWCW points out, “The fight for democracy and protagonism must not be limited to demands on the state, they must also be defining features of our practice. In our work, we must constantly seek to develop the capacities of other people, as well as ourselves.” In order for the base and the leadership to develop their protagonism they must learn from each other through a dynamic relationship where they enter into praxis together, something that is rare with the staff protagonist mobilizing model.
Leaving important decisions to a few senior staff, the mobilizing model deprives the base of human development, or as Paulo Freire writes “apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.” The impact of this separation of thinking and doing mirrors a greater separation of thinking and doing and its denial of full human development that is inherent in the relations of production of racial capitalism, where workers produce and capitalists plan. Michael Lebowitz says we must “recognize that without practice, you cannot have the full development of human capacities. Without the protagonism that transforms people, you cannot produce the people who belong in the good society.”

WBTWCW shows that human development is the true goal of socialism and that the three sides of the socialist triangle work together to make it possible: 1) social ownership of the means of production, 2) production to meet the needs of the people and planet and, crucially, 3) protagonistic participation of the people. As we clarify that developing our capacities to a higher level will be necessary to advance our strategy for socialism, we see that human development must run through the center of our basebuilding efforts. Myles Horton taught us this: “I’d say if you were working with an organization and there’s a choice between the goal of that organization, or the particular program they’re working on, and educating people, developing people, helping them grow, helping them become able to analyze -- if there’s a choice, we’d sacrifice the goal of the organization for helping people to grow, because in the long run we think its a bigger contribution.” In this lesson we can see that if we want to build mass protagonism we need to go far beyond the transactional approach of mobilizing and build transformative relationships that develop all of our capacities.

Finally, Jane McAlevey also helps us better understand the connections between praxis, leadership development and mass protagonism when she writes, “The chief factor in whether or not organizational efforts grow organically into local and national movements capable of effecting major change is where and with whom the agency for change rests.”

**SPEAKING TRUTH TO PRAXIS**

“Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.” Here Amilcar Cabral brings our attention to another weakness in left organizations that is at least partially responsible for our generally weak basebuilding methodology. We have an aversion to making accurate assessments of our work, which impedes our ability to truly learn from failure and success.

The pressure we feel to impress our bosses, funders, enemies and Facebook friends is part of a dominant culture that discourages us from telling the truth, especially painful truth. Failure is seen as something to be ashamed of rather than as a necessary component of success. The property relations of racial capitalism teach us to lie to ourselves by measuring our self worth by what we produce. In turn, we seek relief in others perception of us as unproductive by inflating our accomplishments. All of these aspects of the culture at large are compounded by a movement culture that is both particularly reputation-driven and that has somehow become a kind of lefter than thou contest where the losers are often deemed disposable or worse, the enemy. All of this leads us to lie not just to our comrades but to ourselves.

All this makes collective assessments next to impossible and creates all kinds of serious problems for us: we don’t refine methodologies as conditions change; we become liberal with incompetence; we make the essential skill of leader identification much more difficult as we pretend people are who they aren’t; alienation from our peers deepens because investing in one another’s growth becomes more difficult. While there is much in the objective conditions beyond our control, a capacity for honest assessments is one that we can and must develop.

**BEYOND ALINSKY: MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE**

Saul Alinsky’s rules for radicals held sway in US community organizing for close to 50 years and continues to
hold back the development of a transformative, revolutionary community organizing tendency. As the Black, Chicano, Indigenous and Asian American liberation movements and the anti-war movement of the previous period receded in the 1970s and 1980’s, movement veterans – many of whom were actual or previous cadre of socialist organizations - began to reconstitute organizing efforts, shaping what has come to be called transformative organizing. They had clear differences with several Alinsky-influenced efforts and networks; key among these was their perspective regarding capitalism and US imperialism in the Third World.

Alinskyism is a product of the social and economic conditions it grew out of. Its initial ability to win concessions can be attributed to the super profits of the post-war period, made possible by the US ascent into the leadership of the world imperialist system. The social movements of the late ‘50s gained access to government resources; Alinskyism hitched a ride to this train. When Black and Brown urban rebellions became an ongoing reality, Alinskyism offered the system an alternative “radicalism” to that of the liberation movements growing at home and abroad. As Becky Bond writes, “Alinsky believed that the purpose of building power was not to put the people in power, but to compel negotiation. He wanted to win a seat at the 1950’s and 1960’s establishment tables for the poor and disenfranchised. Part of why this seemed like a reasonable strategy to so many good people was that, at the time, the table was overflowing.”

Key among Alinsky’s “rules” that continue to hold us back today is a professed “non-ideological” character that either explicitly or implicitly ends up re-enforcing the dominant ideology. Steve Williams points out Alinsky was never non-ideological given that he started his career by competing with the organizers of the CIO, nearly all of whom were Communists and Socialists. This was not an attempt by Alinsky to shun ideology, rather a step in the direction of efforts to improve the conditions of people without challenging racial capitalism and US Imperialism. In Alinsky’s Industrial Areas Foundation, mass meetings were initiated by the pledge to the flag.

Another key Alinsky precept our movement continues to struggle with is: only fight for what is winnable in the short term. Alinskyism is not a revolutionary project and so, free from any long-term objectives, the Alinsky-ist can focus exclusively on building the power of their organization, even when that is at the expense of the broader movement. Additionally, while issues of racism where sometimes taken up a more global analysis of white supremacy – which could call into question the very nature of capitalism – has historically been eschewed by the IAF and other formations.

The rise of neoliberalism and the crises of US imperialism has meant a diminished ability of the ruling class to buy off sections of the working class at home. Said differently the table is no longer overflowing and as a result Alinskyism is less able to compel negotiation. The multiple crises we face today have led more and more people to question the system but the community organizing model that has been dominant for decades doesn't have the answers people are looking for. Today people are increasingly open to both left and right populisms but if we don't overcome Alinsky’s legacy of “pragmatism” we’ll miss the opportunity to shift the balance of forces in our favor. In this way, developing a transformative and strategically informed basebuilding praxis that becomes hegemonic in our social movement culture, is part of leadership we need to take advantage of this period of crisis. Alinsky's sectarianism, short term, “pragmatic,” and “non-ideological” approach must be replaced with a praxis that builds mass protagonist organization and movement infrastructure, that listens and wages the battle of ideas, that “build[s] on our practice of fighting for non-reformist reforms in an effort to reshape the terrain on which we struggle...a balance of both the practical and the aspirational.”

**DEVELOPING REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY ANCHORED IN THE BASE**

Basebuilding practice will be strengthened when anchored in strategy and strategy needs to be anchored
in working class communities organized in strategically aligned mass protagonist organizations in order to bring that strategy to life.

We're lacking a shared revolutionary strategy that can cohere our basebuilding efforts. A revolutionary strategy starts with a class analysis rooted in an understanding of the key contradictions driving the development of society. This shared class analysis allows us to hypothesize and test out what sectors of society are driving forces who will be most able to organize and lead others towards a new system. It also allows us to determine what campaigns will get to the heart of different sector’s contradictions with capital. When we have a clear class analysis and have a strong enough praxis to organize around it, the mass protagonism of our organizations can grow to the full extent conditions allow for. A shared strategy then allows us to align previously distinct bases as they carry out different parts of a common strategic plan.

That said, underdeveloped basebuilding praxis also holds back strategy development. For example strategy must be informed by revolutionary leaders (also known as cadre) who, because of their skill and practice of basebuilding, have their ear to the ground in the key sectors of society. These cadre will be able to further advance strategy development by stimulating and tapping into the creative capacities of the base, and later testing and refining strategy in their practice. While the staff mobilizing model struggles to develop the kinds of leaders and strategists we need, many of the best cadre are formed in mass protagonist organizations of the working class.

In order to effectively do their work of developing and carrying out a shared strategy across a movement ecosystem of different kinds of organizations, cadre will need a broader organizational form that can give millions of people a single will, what Marta Harnecker calls a political instrument. Harnecker explains, “The history of triumphant revolutions clearly demonstrates what can be achieved when there is a political instrument capable of raising an alternative national program that unifies the struggles of diverse social actors behind a common goal; that helps to cohere them and elaborate a path forward for these actors based on an analysis of the existent balance of forces. Only in this manner can actions be carried out at the right place and right time, always seeking out the weakest link in the enemy’s chain.”

We believe that cadre engaged in basebuilding are the glue that hold this relationship between revolutionary strategy, a rich movement ecosystem, and the political instrument together. Our current political instrument-less movement ecosystem confuses this issue for us, tempting those of us in basebuilding organizations to try and play all the roles instead of appreciating the relationship between distinct organizational forms and functions.

**TOWARDS A STRATEGIC BASEBUILDING PRAXIS**

We see three mutually reinforcing objectives of strategic basebuilding practice:

1. Build mass protagonist organizations of the driving forces of the working class
2. Begin to develop cadre that emerge from these mass organizations who then
3. Orient these organizations towards a broader strategic alignment

To help us answer the question of how a shared strategy would change our basebuilding we need to experiment with taking our praxis out of Alinsky’s short-term framework and put it into Gramsci’s long-term conception of war of position and war of maneuver. WBTWCW writes “The war of position aims simultaneously to weaken
capitalist hegemony and to pave the cultural ground on which socialism can take hold. It is a long-term battle over ideas across civil society that both shifts the terrain and expedites the development of self-aware oppressed classes, who then become bases for the historic bloc. It must develop the capacities that the working class will need to lead other classes and the entire nation in the fight for socialist liberation.”

One of the key implications of this framework for our basebuilding practice is that our members must move beyond the narrow self-interest of issue campaigns, beyond individual and organizational consciousness, and into class and societal consciousness. This kind of consciousness can develop in mass protagonist organizations where members collectively decide to lead their communities into battle and then have the opportunity to reflect on their action as part of a systematic political education program. This kind of class consciousness serves as a foundation for the driving forces, who WBTWCW names as Black, Latino, Indigenous people from the lower and middle layers of the working class, women and gender oppressed people in particular, to build their capacity to lead all of society -- to project their struggles as one’s that move all of society forward, winning middle forces over in the battle of ideas and aligning forces toward a vision of a new economic and political system in the interest of all.

**PRAXIS MAKES PERFECT**

Strategy must be tested in practice and refined into a synthesis of the two towards praxis. Through basebuilding praxis, we, ourselves, are developing and transforming through the process of 1) putting theory into practice and 2) organizing among the people. We develop in relationship to those who we organize with as they develop through becoming agents of history.
EXPERIMENTATION AND TESTING IDEAS
So, to ask ourselves the organizer’s quintessential question: What are we going to do about it? We plan to bring together organizers and leaders who share our burning desire to develop basebuilding praxis in order to, 1.) Stimulate and synthesize the fragmented knowledge of strategic basebuilding that exists. 2) Systematically test our ideas in practice, then honestly evaluate and refine them.

Concretely, we plan to do this by launching a LeftRoots project where, over the course of a year, we will investigate who are the most advanced organizers in the country and internationally, study their work, and ask them to publicly dialog with us and one another. At the same time, organizers and leaders from the social movement left will develop their basebuilding praxis through a dialectical process of sharing written reflections and plans, then testing out and evaluating those ideas in their mass work. We aim for this process to happen in a circle of trusting and mutually invested comrades that is further enriched by criticism/self criticism and agitation.

There is much to be experimented with when it comes to building mass protagonism, aligning basebuilding praxis with our developing strategy, and sharpening our methodologies and talent through praxis. It is our hypothesis that working together in a team to do this while we build our capacity to make accurate and honest assessments will lead to a demonstrable increase in the mass protagonism of the organizations connected to the lab and that new revolutionary leaders and cadre will emerge from these bases. It is our aim to synthesize the knowledge that emerges from this body of practice in a way that helps to develop and carry out our strategy. If you’re interested in joining us in this experiment email us at: basebuildingpc@LeftRoots.net

TOWARDS PRINCIPLES AND A SCHOOL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANIZING
We hope that the work of this project, as one part of LeftRoots broader strategy development process, contributes to the development of principles that can inform and spread a transformative basebuilding model rooted in today’s concrete conditions. In order to do this, training institutions will need to be built, and we see this lab as a first iteration of the kind of school of praxis we hope to help build in the future.

CONCLUSION
This is our attempt to, as General Baker said, “turn thinkers into fighters and fighters into thinkers.” We hope this offering has inspired a more rigorous engagement with strategy development among those of us who’ve made basebuilding our life's work. We’re grateful to have had the opportunity to do this reflection within LeftRoots, which has brought us together as basebuilders from across geography, issue sector, and constituency.