

Unity Statement

Freedom Road Socialist Organization

Introduction

Comrades and friends.

This is a statement of the principles that will help to unite the members of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization and the Socialist Organizing Network. It is a brief overview of the political bond that we have developed over the past two years, a bond which will help us to unite and make greater contributions to the struggle for social progress in the United States.

This statement is not the "final word" on anything. Rather, it represents our best understanding at this time of the important issues facing socialists in the United States. We present this as a work in progress that will be more fully developed by you, by friends of our organization, and by the rich experience of people in a struggle for a better world.

We near the end of the 20th century. The world has changed drastically in the last 10 years, making this one of the most challenging periods in the history of the international left. We have seen the downfall of self-proclaimed socialist governments in Eastern Europe and a spreading crisis of revolutionary movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We've seen socialism itself fall into a deep world-wide crisis.

Despite these setbacks, we continue the struggle. In this tumultuous period, many left forces around the world have retreated from revolutionary politics. We could have reacted to the crisis by giving up on the revolutionary struggle and becoming a reformist organization. But we believe that capitalism and imperialism threaten any hope for social justice, peace, and human dignity. We look out on a world-wide crisis of hunger, disease, environmental destruction, poverty, and economic collapse. The system of global imperialism threatens the survival of all life on this planet. Nothing short of revolution can answer this threat.

Now is the time to build revolutionary organization; not only to rebuild the struggle for progressive social change in this country, but to conduct a "refoundation" of Marxist theory. The challenge is ours to apply the hard lessons that we have learned in the last decade to the body of Marxist knowledge; to build a wiser and better socialist movement that can carry us through the next century.

A Brief History

Our organizations share both similar and dissimilar roots. Both FRSO and SON emerged originally out of the tremendous social ferment and revolutionary struggle of the 1960s and

1970s, as people of color, women, and young people sought to bring genuine equality, justice, and peace to the United States. Our organizations, and their immediate forerunners, arose in that section of the new revolutionary movement which looked to the People's Republic of China for inspiration and guidance.

FRSO grew out of an initial merger of the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters, followed by later mergers with the Organization for Revolutionary Unity and the Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective. FRSO's roots are primarily in the labor movement, the African American struggle, the gay and lesbian movements, and the student movement.

SON emerged initially out of the dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), which itself was formed by the unity of the August 29th Movement, I Wor Kuen, and the Revolutionary Communist League. SON today includes members who were not part of the LRS. SON's roots are primarily in the liberation movements of people of color (Chicano/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander American, African American), and the labor movement.

What We Stand For

1. We exist to organize for socialism.

We are revolutionary socialists who believe that capitalism — as a system centered on private accumulation and profit — is inherently a system of inequality, injustice, and war. We want a social system where social wealth is not in the hands of a few billionaires, but is controlled by the people. We seek both economic and political democracy.

However, genuine democracy is not possible unless the people have real access to the media, to higher education, as well as to the resources that make participation and informed decision-making possible. Human needs cannot replace profit as the driving force of society unless the people control their workplaces, their schools, their neighborhoods, and the institutions of government.

All revolutionaries today live in the shadow of the collapse of the Soviet bloc and its failed model for building socialism. The crisis of Marxist parties and governments throughout the world weighs on all of us. Our identity as revolutionary socialists should never rest on the fortunes of any socialist or so-called socialist country or party. We have never looked to the Soviet bloc as a viable model for socialist society. We depend instead on our ability to develop revolutionary socialist theory and practice that guide us in making revolutionary change here in the United States. We are about building a socialism indigenous to this country with a deep commitment to the self-determination of oppressed nations within it. In view of the experience of Soviet Union, China, and other socialist or self-proclaimed socialist countries, we stand for a "democratic" and "revolutionary" vision of socialism; a socialism that is not represented by the development of a new ruling clique or exploitative class, but is represented by the actual empowerment of the working class and all oppressed people.

Marxist theory guides our participation in the people's struggles, but it does not dictate what needs to be done moment to moment. The roots of our theory are based on Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, and other revolutionaries, such as Amilcar Cabral, Malcolm X, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. It is our responsibility to branch out, learning from feminism, environmentalism, and national liberation struggles at home and abroad. We seek to grow from every new lesson our activism teaches us. We believe that every comrade has a role to play in building the new socialism of tomorrow.

2. As revolutionary socialists, we make our home in the working class.

The multinational working class has an objective interest in ending capitalism in this country. The working class looks very different today than it did when large-scale domestic manufacturing dominated the U.S. economy. Nevertheless, workers are just as exploited and alienated from the wealth they produce as ever.

To combat exploitation, the working class needs to struggle for its own interests. We organize in the trade unions to fight for workers' rights, for higher wages, and for an end to racist, sexist, and homophobic discrimination in the workplace. We believe in the organization of all workers, including the unemployed, the homeless, undocumented immigrants, and prisoners. We dedicate ourselves to the struggle of unorganized workers to form unions that truly represent and protect the interests of the new, multinational workplace. We organize in neighborhoods and communities of working people to struggle for a better life, for better housing, schools, and health care. In all of this work, socialists fight for the organization of oppressed nationality workers, as a means to further self-determination and working class unity.

3. We seek unity with all forces who are in struggle against imperialist rule in the United States.

World and domestic events have caused a great deal of confusion, demoralization, and rethinking among the left. They have also provided us with greater opportunities to put aside past sectarianism and to build a greater level of unity. Ultimately, fundamental social change is impossible without a united left which represents a strong force in U.S. politics. The merger of our two organizations testifies to our commitment to principled left unity. We will continue on this path of seeking unity with other revolutionary organizations, including the revolutionary nationalist forces.

We are equally serious about building links with progressive, non-revolutionary movements and organizations. Building united fronts is critical to our struggle. We do not believe that we have all of the answers. Revolutionary nationalists and other forces on the left have rich and varied experiences from which we can all learn. We believe that a multi-tendenced left can bring strength to the mass movements for progressive change in our country, movements that are crucial to the struggle for socialism.

4. Capitalism is the enemy.

Our main enemy is capitalism. In order to fight the enemy and win, we have to understand the enemy. Capitalism dominates our economic system. Under capitalism, a handful who own the factories, the mines, corporate farms, and the banks control the wealth that the majority of the people produce. It is this system that we are fighting.

Capitalism organizes globally. Blocs of capital compete intensely for growth and profits. Under capitalism you either destroy the competition, or are destroyed yourself. This drive sends the giant corporations around the world, seeking cheaper raw materials and corrupt local governments that will insure a "friendly investment climate." Capitalism continuously seeks cheaper labor costs. This is why we see so many plants closing down and moving "off-shore," i.e., into the Third World.

The capitalist class rules this country. We are told that this is a democracy, where the people rule. It is, however, "their" democracy. It is not just that it takes millions of dollars to run for high office. The state – the government and the legal system – were set up and developed to serve the interests of capitalism, to uphold the rights of property over of the people.

Capitalism is a system of violence. Poverty is built into its operation. The capitalist class needs to maintain its grip on the levers of power. History has shown again and again that the capitalists will stop at nothing to maintain their wealth and power. Capitalist democracy is protected by the threat of force. We know that the U.S. government doesn't go to war just to protect its profits overseas. It will send the armed forces of the state out against its own people as well – to end militant strikes, student demonstrations, or urban rebellions against injustice.

Capitalism is also a social system. U.S. capitalism is not capitalism in the abstract: it is racist capitalism, based on white supremacy. The U.S. was built on land stolen from indigenous peoples and by the labor of enslaved Africans. The capitalist class has kept the working class of this country divided along racial lines since colonial times. The racist view of the world promoted among white people is constantly reinforced by the institutional racism of U.S. society.

An important element in structural or institutional racism was the imposition of a relative differential in the treatment of white people over people of color. This system allocated small but real privileges to white people and to the extent to which this system is either protected or ignored, no real unity among the working class and the national movements can be sustained. Due to institutional racism and national oppression, people of color suffer politically, socially, and economically. The white supremacist world view is often internalized among people of color, producing self-hatred and self-destructive behavior.

White workers need to be educated to the fact that racism and white supremacy ultimately hurt all workers and that the unity of all workers will benefit them as well. While the majority of white workers do not significantly benefit from the oppression of people of color, racism has been used to successfully divide progressive social movements throughout U.S. history. Racism intensifies and prolongs the oppression of people of color. It is also a particular danger because, should fascism come to power in the U.S., it will do so by exploiting racial fears and divisions. A socialist revolution will require the unity of the working class with the revolutionary movements of oppressed nationalities, and this united front will be the primary social force to lead the charge and usher in socialism.

5. We must conduct a consistent struggle against racist and national oppression.

For five hundred years, capitalism has everywhere rested on colonization without and racist oppression of its minority nationalities within its borders. In turn, the freedom struggles of the African American, Chicano, Native American, Asian/Pacific, and Puerto Rican peoples have been the driving force of the people's struggles in the U.S. These revolutionary movements have led the fight against national oppression, and struggled for complete equality and national freedom.

One consistent tendency in the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations has been the demand for self-determination: the rights of oppressed nations to control their land and determine their national destiny free of imperialist domination. We stand in complete defense of this right and the ability of the oppressed nations to exercise it.

The course of struggle in the U.S. forged a new nation among African Americans based in the Black Belt agricultural region of the U.S. South. Since before the Civil War, African American fighters for liberation have asserted the demand for land and justice, as well as the demand for complete equality throughout the United States. We stand in that tradition. We support self-determination for the African American nation. As this struggle gains momentum, this may

eventually include the establishment of an independent African American nation based in the South. We defend the right to independent African American organization necessary to achieve this liberation, including the right to separate African American revolutionary parties.

As a result of historical developments since the annexation of Mexicano land by the United States, there emerged an oppressed Chicano/Mexicano nation of Aztlan. Since annexation, there has been a continuous struggle for land and justice (*tierra y libertad*). We support the right to self-determination up to and including secession for that nation. We defend the right to independent Chicano/Mexicano organization necessary to achieve this liberation, including the right to separate Chicano/Mexicano revolutionary parties.

We support struggles of national liberation for all other nations brutalized by imperialist oppression whose homelands are within the borders of the United States, such as the Native American nations of the U.S., and the Hawai'ian nation. We support the Puerto Rican struggle for national independence.

It is hypocritical for the U.S. government to demand self-determination of nations in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and to deny that same right to nations within its own borders. It is a strength of the national liberation movements in the U.S. that they include many different classes. In each movement, however, the overwhelming majority are from the working class. We believe that the working class of each movement has essential contributions to make to the freedom struggle and its leadership should be encouraged, fought for, and respected within the context of a broad united front for liberation.

6. Revolutionary socialists must be leaders in the fight for women's liberation and against all forms of male supremacy.

The oppression of women predates the rise of capitalism. Capitalism, together with male supremacy, intensified the subordination and degradation of women. Capitalism also manipulates family life and sexuality to ensure its control over the working class.

The fight for women's genuine liberation and equality is one of the central components of our movement. Unfortunately, even in many revolutionary movements and societies, issues of women's equality have often been put on the back burner. Women's equality must be an integral, everyday part of our organization and of the movement for social change. This must be reflected in the leadership, orientation, and priorities of our organization, as well as in the work we do in mass movements. We must especially respect and support the demands of working women and women of color, as well as the basic demands of the women's liberation movement for equal rights, equal pay for comparable work, quality and affordable child care, affirmative action, and full reproductive rights.

We believe that the women's liberation movement can only achieve its objectives through the full participation and leadership of working class women and women of color. Because women's oppression is entrenched in the class system, the struggle for women's liberation will surely continue under socialism. Male supremacy will not magically disappear when workers' hegemony is established. We struggle now against patterns of male domination within the left, including our own organization. We are committed to advancing women's leadership in our own organization as well as in the mass movements.

7. Revolutionary socialists must uphold lesbian, gay, and bisexual liberation and the fight against all forms of homophobia and heterosexism.

The struggle for the rights of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals is a struggle for basic human rights – to live where one chooses, for job opportunity, to be free of harassment and violence, and for the opportunity to participate equally in all aspects of our society. The right wing has

mounted a full-scale assault on the rights of gays and lesbians, seeking to dehumanize them in order to justify persecution and the denial of basic human rights. We must actively oppose homophobia and heterosexism in all of their forms, in society and within our organization. We work for the construction of a socialist society that will continue to fight for lesbian, gay, and bisexual liberation in all of its institutions.

Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals have effectively challenged social oppression and, by winning the freedom to come out, have expanded the possibilities of human sexuality in this society. This movement has led the way in fighting AIDS, one of the most devastating health crises of our time. Inspiring the entire progressive movement with its courage and militancy, this movement has fought for and won real gains and freedoms for all people. It is a progressive movement, and revolutionaries should encourage and help lead it. As in all the mass movements where we organize, we strive for the leadership and empowerment of oppressed nationalities and working class people within the lesbian, gay, and bisexual liberation movement.

8. Socialism must make an effort to sustain and repair the earth, not to conquer and destroy it.

The struggle for a livable planet is a life-and-death issue. Corporate greed has polluted our air, destroyed the ozone layer, poisoned our waters, and drenched our food with dangerous chemicals. Our survival necessitates public control of technology and production and the elimination of the blind consumerism that causes us to squander so many of the world's resources needlessly.

The environmental movement has been on the cutting edge of struggle here at home and in many parts of the world. It should be an important part of our work, with special attention to the issue of environmental racism, which causes people of color to suffer disproportionately from environmental destruction, and to be skeptical of an environmental movement that has often ignored their concerns, input, and leadership. The environmental movement has powerful support from youth, determined not to pass on to their children a poisoned earth. This movement holds great revolutionary potential.

As we work to develop a new vision of socialism, we will have to deepen our understanding of the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature. People will have to change how they live and how society is organized. The threat to the environment touches everyone. Unfortunately, socialist experiments around the world have imitated capitalism in their environmental policy, by focusing too much on economic growth, increasing consumption of goods, and the "conquest" of the natural world. We believe in a socialism where fulfillment will be found in the relationships among people and not in the consumption of things. Only conscious socialist planning by all of society can make this a reality.

9. Socialists have always upheld the principle of internationalism – in today's situation, it has become a necessity.

The world situation has changed dramatically in the last several years, especially with the collapse of the socialist and self-proclaimed socialist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Where the U.S. and USSR used to be the major world powers, we now see Japan, the U.S. and Western Europe led by Germany as three imperialist rivals, all trying to expand their markets and power internationally. One thing remains constant: the overwhelming majority of the world's people live in the Third World and are suffering because of imperialism. The aspirations of those peoples for self-determination, democracy, and social justice will ultimately assert themselves with decisive force on the world stage.

We have a special responsibility, as revolutionary socialists living in the last remaining superpower, to oppose any "new world order" based on military, economic or political domination and to support national liberation struggles. We stand for peace, independence, and the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination, including the struggles of indigenous peoples throughout the world. In the post-Cold War era, the U.S. has weakened as an economic power, but it remains a dangerous, aggressive military power. We oppose the U.S. government's imperialist wars wherever they are fought. We oppose the new imperialist push to redivide the world. We stand in solidarity with people's movements in the Third World in struggle against this "new world order."

As revolutionary socialists, we have been and are actively involved in supporting many revolutionary and national liberation struggles around the world. We have been particularly active in supporting national liberation struggles in Central America; the struggle to free and unite Ireland; the battle for the Palestinian nation; the revolutionary movement of the Philippines; the struggle of the Eritrean people; and the historic and path-breaking struggle for the complete liberation of South Africa/Azania.

10. Electoral politics are a vital arena of the people's struggle.

Our organizations have extensive experience in electoral campaigns, having worked in the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns, in the Rainbow Coalition, and on local campaigns and issues. Electoral politics have been and will remain an important realm of political struggle for working people, to improve their daily lives, to gain a greater measure of political power (especially for communities of color), and to win important reforms. Ultimately U.S. electoral politics are controlled by the dollar, and we should not have any illusions about this. We must help in the struggle to transform U.S. electoral politics so that it is more inclusive, multi-party, and democratic.

Conclusions

Without revolutionary organization, we cannot advance the revolutionary movement. As working people, we need our own party or parties to fight for our interests, to help unify our struggles, to broaden our leadership, and to enable us to bring about socialism. We intend to build a party which can truly represent the interests and aspirations of workers of all nationalities, which can develop the resources for national campaigns, and which can evolve a national strategy for power. We envision a party truly led by the working class, whose leadership will be predominantly made up of oppressed nationality members and of women, with lesbian, gay, and bisexual representation as well. We desire an organization that is run democratically, with real accountability, and that has the ability to act effectively once decisions are made.

We cannot predict the exact road to socialism, but history teaches us to expect that the capitalist class will take harsh and repressive measures against any and all challenges to their control of state power. Our enemies are organized; we must be organized, too. In the spirit of Malcolm X, all serious socialists should affirm the necessity to use any means necessary to bring about socialism and the liberation of the oppressed nations and peoples in the U.S.!



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— Adopted June 1994