

FRSO Program: Class in the U.S. and Our Strategy for Revolution

(The following document is a portion of the political program of Freedom Road Socialist Organization. It was adopted at our 5th Congress. Other parts of the program are still in the process of development.)

To change society and end oppression, we need a plan to get from where we are now to liberation - a strategy that will work. Any successful revolutionary strategy must address the fundamental issue of who are our friends and who are our enemies and explain how we will go about uniting all who can be united to end the existing order of things.

We live in an era where capitalism has reached its final stage: monopoly capitalism, also known as imperialism. Monopoly capitalism is a doomed system whose continued existence stands in the way of all social progress. Huge corporations and financial institutions are headed by a wealthy oligarchy that dominates the political and economic life of this country, blocking the path to prosperity for the vast majority. U.S. companies are closing down factories here and exporting capital around the globe, to the detriment of all but themselves.

Our ruling class (the big capitalists and their hangers-on) has built an empire that spans the earth. Like vampires, they stand at the apex of a parasitic system that makes its home on Wall Street and sucks the blood of the Main Streets in the cities of the U.S. and villages of the developing world. They live on the labor, land and natural resources of others. Neither distance nor decency is a barrier to their drive to achieve the highest possible rate of profit. The world has been divided up between the big capitalist powers, which will stop at nothing to expand their spheres of influence and control.

Within our borders the monopoly capitalists have accumulated untold wealth based on the exploitation of the multinational working class and the systematic discrimination and robbery that is visited upon the oppressed nationalities.

We need to turn things upside down. This means revolution, a radical break that advances the cause of the exploited, that employs, in the words of Malcolm X, any means necessary. Working and oppressed peoples need political power. This power is the means to reorganize society in our own interests and dictate our terms to all who stand in the way. The seizure of power by the working class and its allies is the beginning of a great change, a transformation that continues until the end of all classes and all oppression.

United Front Against Monopoly Capitalism

Our basic strategy for revolution and socialism is building a united front against the monopoly capitalist class, under the leadership of the working class and its political

party, with a strategic alliance between the multinational working class and the oppressed nationalities at the core of this united front.

Identifying our real friends and our real enemies is a first step towards building a united front against monopoly capitalism. To carry out this analysis we need to understand the different classes, nationalities and social groups in U.S. society, identify those forces whose interests are in the main opposed to the monopoly capitalists, and take a look at the specific features of our society.

Of paramount importance is grasping the fact that the United States is a country where entire nationalities - African Americans, Chicanos and Latinos, Asian Americans, Native peoples including native Hawaiians, Arab Americans and others within U.S borders - are bound by the chains of national oppression. Real and full equality, liberation and self-determination become possible with the destruction of monopoly capitalism. Thus the struggle to end national oppression has a revolutionary significance. One cannot understand the U.S. past, present or future without firmly grasping this point.

Strategic Alliance

Revolutionary change in the United States will bring together two powerful currents: the struggles of oppressed nationalities for equality and liberation, and the fight of the multinational working class to end exploitation and eliminate all oppression. Building the unity of these two forces is what we mean by building a strategic alliance. This long-term alliance is the foundation for a much broader united front of classes and social groups who can and will unite against the monopoly capitalists.

The real work to build this strategic alliance requires carrying out a set of interrelated and at times difficult tasks. White workers, especially those who are active and forward-looking, have the responsibility to take the lead in opposing white chauvinism or racism among whites and play an active role in building the fight against all manifestations of national oppression. By doing so they help build the unity and strength of the multinational working class and help create more favorable terrain for the development of the national movements.

Revolutionary minded oppressed nationality workers have the responsibility to oppose narrow nationalism among workers of their own nationality. This contributes to overcoming distrust and division between the respective nationalities, raising the fighting capacity of the multinational working class, and helps to create a situation where the national movements of African Americans, Chicanos and Latinos, Asian Americans, Native peoples and other oppressed nationalities can build the respective national movements, cooperating to achieve common goals, while building the strategic alliance.

Within the movements of the oppressed nationalities, which by definition bring together a number of classes and social groups, there is the issue of which class will lead. The stronger the working class leadership of the national movements, the stronger the

national movements will be (especially in a country like the U.S., where the overwhelming majority of the oppressed nationalities are workers) and the more durable will be the alliance with the multi-national working class.

Classes in the U.S.

There is a lot of confusion about class in the United States. Politicians, academics, media pundits and even trade union leaders, have obscured the issue. As a result many think the main classes in the United States are the rich, poor and middle class. This view has problems. It pits the employed section of the working class against the unemployed sections of the working class, by suggesting that the working class is the middle class and has different interests from the unemployed sections of the working class. Another variant is to think that everyone who owns a cabin or lives in the suburbs is "rich." The effect of this kind of analysis is to pit the working class against itself, confounding friends and enemies and deadening class consciousness.

Marxists approach the matter differently, and we believe that to be a part of the working class is something to be proud of. When socialists look at the issue of class we see that every kind of society, from ancient times until now, is organized around its tools - it means of producing things that satisfy people's needs and wants. Ownership of the means of production is basic. Classes are large groups of people, who have a defined relationship to the means of production, such as ownership. They also have a defined place in the social division of labor, for example some people are supervisors or managers. The result of these differences in who owns what and where one fits into the social division of labor, means a difference in who gets how much wealth.

The following are the principal classes in the United States. When it is stated that a given class or social group thinks or acts in a given way, it is based on the understanding that nothing is uniform and more can be learned on one hand, but that it is vital that we understand the general motion of something on the other.

Monopoly capitalists

The monopoly capitalist class is the dominant class the United States. They own and control the big corporations like Citicorp, General Motors and Wal-Mart. This class of billionaires, multimillionaires and those in their immediate circles are real rulers of the U.S.

Some of the family names in this class are familiar - they have been there for generations - such as the DuPonts and Rockefellers. Others are comparative newcomers such as the Waltons or Bill Gates. All of them are parasites that live off the labor of the working class.

This class has several specific features. First, they rule not only the United States; they control an empire that spans the globe. This means they quite literally have friends and

allies on every continent. Every blow that weakens U.S. imperialism assists those of us here in fighting our common enemy.

Secondly, they control the political and cultural life of this country, from Congress and the judiciary, the media and military to institutions of education and the arts. They finance a host of institutions and think tanks that actively consider and promote their strategic interests, including the Heritage Foundation, the Rand Corporation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, and others. They also utilize a host of business associations, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

They are tied - like puppet masters to their puppets - in a thousand and one ways to the main political parties - the Republicans and the Democrats. This control is maintained through a host of laws that ensure that the electoral process favors the rich, direct and indirect campaign contributions, outright bribery, cheating, and corruption, and by an army of lobbyists who are guardians of their interests on a day-to-day basis.

As a practical matter this class includes the upper stratum of politicians, military figures, and some intellectuals.

Finally, this class has shown time and time again that it will stop at nothing to maintain its power and privilege.

This class of monopoly capitalist is the principal target of revolution in the United States.

Non-monopoly capitalists

These are the capitalists who are important on a local or regional level. They include some of the smaller banking and finance groups and some of the smaller manufactures, for example in furniture building and food processing, the owners of large farms and ranches, with a larger section centered in the service sector - for example the owners of smaller restaurant chains.

This group also includes a section of large local land developers and real estate speculators, a section of well-off intellectuals, some big entertainers and cultural figures, and a section of politicians, including some big city mayors.

Their distinguishing feature is that they have not made it into the monopoly capitalist class, and they face a constant competitive pressure from the corporations with great resources. Because of that pressure they frequently attempt to compensate by obtaining higher than normal rates of exploitation, and they are often extremely hostile to trade unions and workers' rights.

While they have some independence from, and at times some are hostile to, some of the agenda advanced by the monopoly capitalists (for example, some resent paying for tax-funded projects that benefit their larger competitors and others are concerned about

trade issues), as a whole this is not a progressive class. The non-monopoly capitalists are also a target of revolution in the United States.

That said, there are individuals within this class who have the potential to be favorable or at least not hostile to revolutionary change. Given the multinational character of the United States, we note there are also non-monopoly capitalists based in the oppressed nationalities, who at times are hostile to national oppression, and under favorable conditions can be brought into the united front against monopoly capitalism.

Petty Bourgeoisie

In the U.S. the petty bourgeoisie is a large and varied class that includes most professionals, like doctors and lawyers, and supervisory personnel. It encompasses the majority of intellectuals, such as college professors and scientists. It also includes the owners of small businesses that produce or sell goods and services, small farmers, and small landlords who get the majority of their income from rent.

Those who make up the petty bourgeoisie either have some specialized skill or knowledge or are owners of the means of production or distribution. As a class they value what independence they have. The upper stratum of this class hopes to join the capitalists, and lower stratum fears being pushed into the working class.

Some petty bourgeoisie get a part of their income by exploiting the labor of others, for example most restaurant owners or owners of small auto shops. Others do not, like most doctors employed by hospitals.

Based on their relationship to other classes and their income, the petty bourgeoisie can be broken down into three groups or strata: upper, middle and lower.

The upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie has a rising standard of living. For them life is getting better. And for those in this group who produce or sell goods and services - they would like to join the ranks of the big capitalists. They live in well-to-do suburbs, condominiums and gated communities. The upper stratum includes many of those who practice law, doctors, small business owners who are doing well and hire workers, accountants, scientists, local media personalities, some landlords and others. They see themselves as the middle class and many want "government to get off their backs" or view themselves as "fiscal conservatives." This section of the people tends to be active in politics on a state and local level and at present time it is an important social base for the political right wing. Given that, some sections are more progressive than others, for example college professors.

The middle section of the petty bourgeoisie is treading water. They want to move on up, but capitalism is pulling them down. For them, things seem to be stagnating. They feel okay about their economic well-being but fear the future. This group includes a section of management and administrators, small business owners who have some employees but they still have to do some of the actual work, and small time landlords

who maintain a few buildings. This group includes professionals who are not doing as well as some of their peers. They tend to own nice homes. Politically this group tends to be a mixed bag. The small business owners hate government regulation. Professionals employed by government tend to have a very different view.

The lower section of the petty bourgeoisie is a step away from the working class and many have an income that is lower than the upper or even middle sections of the working class. They own small neighborhood businesses that frequently fail. Small farmers, owner operators of trucks, some small building contractors and working supervisors with the power to fire are all part of this group. Many in this section of the petty bourgeoisie have their roots in the working class, and really like being their own boss. This section of the people frequently places demands on government, as is the case with many farm movements. They use small business loans, and are as a group hostile to big business and would like to see the power of the monopolies curbed.

Over the long run, the petty bourgeoisie as a whole has no future as a class. It cannot realistically compete with the big capitalists and there is a tendency in many of the professions towards less independence - for example the decline of small medical practices.

It is important that as many people as possible within this class be brought into the united front against monopoly capitalism. In some cases, this will be done based on the economic interests of sections of this class. For example, building farm protest movements or uniting with small storeowners to oppose a Wal-Mart in the community. In other cases work will be done by building progressive political centers in a certain profession for example, for example building the organizations of progressive lawyers.

Working Class

The working class constitutes the majority of the American people and it will be both the main and leading force for revolutionary change in this country. It is composed of women and men of all nationalities who labor to create goods and services, be it in factories, offices or the fields. It encompasses the employed and the unemployed, those who do manual labor or mental labor, people working in the service sector or manufacturing and transportation. It includes the organized and the unorganized.

The working class makes its living by selling its ability to work. The capitalists own the places and things that are used to create goods and services. They appropriate for themselves all that is produced by the collective labor of the working class. This gives rise to an irrepressible conflict, a clash of basic interests that can be solved by the working class taking all power into its own hands.

The U.S. working class has a proud history of struggle. From the fight for the 8-hour day in the 1880's to the heroic battles against concessions that have been waged over the past 20 years and the inspiring movement of undocumented workers for full equality,

the capacity of the working class to take its destiny into its own hands has been repeatedly shown.

In the U.S. today the working class as a whole is characterized by a low level of class consciousness. While it's true that many workers are dissatisfied with the existing order of things, there is not a widespread understanding that the working class has a distinct set of interests that can only be addressed by the collective action of the class. In fact, while there is a widespread perception among working people that life for them and their children might well get harder, many workers, particularly the sections of the working class which are better off or more stable, either do not view themselves as a part of the working class or have hopes of leaving it altogether.

Broadly speaking, the working class can be divided into upper, middle and lower sections.

The upper sections of the working class have both the largest income and the highest social status within the class as a whole. It includes those in the skilled trades, such as electricians, plumbers, some carpenters, some tool and die makers and those who do specialized repair and maintenance. Teachers and nurses are a part of this group. It also includes a section of organized workers in basic industries such as mining, auto and steel, and some government workers.

In the building and skilled trades, this section of the working class is disproportionately white due to discrimination and national oppression. Depending on the region of the country, and whether the production facility is based in an urban or rural area, this is less true in the unionized sections of basic industry.

At times the upper section of the working class has shown itself to be extremely militant when it comes to defending its class interests.

Some parts of the upper sections of the working class are influenced by white and national chauvinism; hence, these elements at times exercise a conservative influence in the labor movement and society as a whole.

Over the past thirty years, this section of the working class has been hit hard by changes in the productive forces and the departure of factories to other countries - particularly in the basic industries. As a result, it is less of a force in the working class as a whole.

In a similar vein, some of the skilled trades have gone through a process whereby the degree of skills required has declined (machinists) or where the degree of unionization has declined (carpenters) and as a result, larger and larger sections of these professions have found themselves in the middle or lower sections of the working class.

In the private sector, this is the most organized section of the working class. This section of the working class often sees itself as a part of the "middle class," and in many ways believes that their whole way of life is disappearing.

The most important section of the upper section of the working class are those concentrated in basic industries, where there are still many large, multinational workplaces.

The middle sections of the working class include most workers in the public sector, unionized workers in light industry, transportation and communications and a large section of the office workers in finance, insurance and real estate. While public employees have a higher rate of unionization than the working class as a whole, the middle section of the working class is less organized than the upper and many tend to work under less socialized conditions.

This section of the working class is under serious pressure, and is seeing its standard of living erode. While public sector workers face real pressures, many in this section of the class are in danger of being pushed into the lower sections of the class in times of economic crisis or restructuring. This is particularly true where households have fewer resources to fall back on, for example, oppressed nationality workers who face 'last hired and first fired.'

The middle section of the class has been where most new union members have come from in the past forty years. This is partly because of the growth of the service and healthcare industries. It is also because of the motion of public sector workers into joining unions.

The civil rights movement had a large impact on the union movement among the public sector because of the significant employment of Black workers. When Martin Luther King Jr. died in Memphis, he was there supporting a strike of sanitation workers.

The requirements of organizing new members made unions change, and in turn led to struggles against the failures of the old union leadership.

Organizing new members is in the interests of the class, and in the main, organizing the unorganized has contributed to the class struggle.

The lower section of the working class is growing, labors under the most difficult conditions and is disproportionately made up of women and oppressed nationalities. It includes many who work in agriculture, retail, and the food processing industries, the less unionized sections of light industry, prison laborers, and temporary workers - especially those who do not receive benefits. Workers without jobs are a part of this section of the working class.

The employed section of this group of workers has no illusions about being part of the "middle class." As a group, homelessness is just a few lost paychecks away. Issues like

health care and childcare affect the entire working class and parts of the petty bourgeoisie as well, but for the lower sections of working class their importance cannot be overstated. No childcare can well mean no job. No health care coverage means long waits in hospital emergency rooms for basic care.

Many undocumented workers are in the lower section of the working class, and a portion of this section of the class would like to see radical change.

The urban poor is the stratum of the lower section of the working class who are without jobs or who lack stable employment. It includes people on public assistance and day laborers. The urban poor is extremely dissatisfied with conditions, and it is the only stratum of the working class that as a whole, is open to revolutionary ideas about changing society.

Lumpen Proletariat

The lumpen proletariat is made up of those who make their living primarily by criminal means, including drug dealing, street cons and theft. It is mainly made up of former members of the working class who have turned to anti-social means to get by.

While in the main it is the working class that suffers from its behavior, sections of this group can change and become allies of the working class.

Working Class Leadership and the Need for a New Communist Party

For revolutionary change to take place in the United States, three conditions need to be in place. First, the broad masses of people - workers, the oppressed nationalities and others who are held down by the monopoly capitalists - need to arrive at the conclusion that they are unable to live in the old way, and need to be willing to fight to bring the old order to an end. Second, the ruling class needs to be in real crisis, where it is divided against itself and unable to continue with business as usual. And, finally, there needs to be a strong revolutionary organization, a communist party that is capable of navigating complex political situations and that can lead the fight to establish working class political power.

In the U.S. today, none of these conditions exist. In our view, it is the central task of revolutionaries to create a new communist party - a political party that is serious about revolution in this country. Such a party cannot be proclaimed or declared into being. It will be the product of bringing together or fusing Marxism with the workers movement. In a practical sense this means that a substantial section of the activists, organizers, and leaders need to take up the science of revolution, Marxism-Leninism, in order to build a communist party, that is in fact the advanced and organized detachment of the multi-national working class. This process will be the result of an organized effort, and it cannot come about spontaneously.

Building a new revolutionary party is a long-term project that requires perseverance and determination. It is not something that can be done in isolation from the people's struggle and movements. Our party building work should be placed in the context of our three objectives: To win all that can be won while weakening our enemies; Raise the general level of consciousness, struggle, and organization in our immediate battles; and Win the advanced to Marxism-Leninism, thus building revolutionary organization.

The tasks of revolutionaries in relationship to building revolutionary organization change based on the development of the objective situation. Right now there are very few Marxist-Leninists in the U.S. While the job of uniting them is an important one, this is not key to party building. Finding new socialists in the course of the struggle is the thing to do.

It is possible that an upsurge of the national movements will lead to the creation of Marxist organizations based among a specific nationality, as happened in the late 60's and early 70's. If this takes place again, it would mean prioritizing the principled unity of communist organizations. Likewise if polarization in society due to the decline of U.S imperialism, or radicalization of a section of one or more social movements creates a layer of activists who are revolutionary minded, this in turn will affect the content of party building efforts.

Expanding the scale and scope of revolutionary organization with the long term goal of building a new communist party is closely linked with the construction of a united front against monopoly capitalism. The organizational capacity and political understanding a Marxist Leninist party provides is the vehicle for working class leadership, and the scaffolding for the united front against monopoly capitalism.