

**"The future belongs to those
who prepare for it today."**

- Malcolm X

The question remains, however, how do we make this vision, the Towards Land, Work & Power Platform, a reality? Because even the most well-intentioned ideas fall short if there are no plans to carry them out. Vision is not enough. In this section we'll begin a preliminary discussion on the question of strategy. We will touch on long-term strategies and delve into what we see as objectives of the current period, highlighting positive trends developing within the movement in the U.S. First, a recount of our understanding of fundamental characteristics and current conditions of imperialism:

- Capitalism has three core needs: to constantly revolutionize the means of production, to expand to new markets and ever-expanding profits. Internal to the system, two fundamental problems arise. They are the crisis of overproduction and the crisis of the falling rate of profit. The core needs and crisis define the logic of capitalism and have driven it towards the monopoly stage of capitalism, imperialism. The system then takes on a global character.
- Capitalism is an inherently exploitative system based upon socialized production of commodities and the private appropriation of profit, reorganizing classes into two camps – working class and capitalists. The system's development has been fueled by patriarchy and white supremacy. Under imperialism, the system functions on a global scale. Whole nations and people, specifically those formally colonized or enslaved, are subjugated economically, politically and culturally.
- Localities play particular roles within the global imperialist system. Understanding these roles clarifies strategic points of struggle to better position ourselves to bring about change. Within San Francisco, the ruling class agenda for the Manhattanization of the city drives the enactment of neo-liberal policy and continuous

waves of gentrification of working class industries and communities of color.

- The current period is characterized by U.S. imperialist hegemony. The United States holds disproportionate power within the G8 and international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and NATO. This domination is largely held through the U.S.'s monopolistic control over weapons of mass destruction, technology, worldwide financial markets, communication and the planet's natural resources.
- The global economy has been struggling with a crisis of a lack of areas for productive investment since 1970. Neo-liberalism, aggressive militarism, and the fabrication of a casino economy have been the economic and political strategy enacted to manage the crisis. Within these strategies the U.S. state apparatus has taken on an increased role as manager for capital.

There are whispers of doubt coming from the once seemingly insurmountable U.S. Empire. The United States is importing more, exporting less. The almighty dollar is shaky. To balance things out, the U.S. continues to borrow from foreign financiers. As a result, the United States, once a creditor nation, is now a debtor nation.¹ Americans are no different - spending more, with stagnant wages and employment, borrowing to finance it all. Anyone who has binged on credit cards can testify, what you owe always comes back to haunt you. For consumers and the U.S. economy something's gotta give and the stakes are high. Dramatic shifts in the U.S. economy could cause a worldwide recession. Can the U.S. pull up from this decline?²

¹ For more information the current crisis and economic decline of the U.S. see "U.S. Hegemony: Continuing Decline, Enduring Danger." Richard B. Du Boff. Monthly Review, December 2003.

² It has been done before. During the Reagan administration, "America borrowed furiously from foreigners, pushing up the current-account deficit to over 3% of GDP...that deficit came down again without causing a global recession, thanks to a big but controlled drop in the dollar and especially to booming economies in Germany and Japan." This time around, "the imbalances are much bigger and

These conditions and the need to manage the decline have evoked drastic measures on the part of imperialist elites. But that carries costs and risks as well, both globally and locally. Neo-liberalism and aggressive militarism on the part of the United States have escalated resistance to its policy and are eroding worldwide consent of the U.S. as the world leader. U.S. diplomats are met with protests wherever they turn. Ally nations are withdrawing troops from the occupation of Iraq. And all the while stagnation, debt and economic imbalance persist.

Defenders of empire rattle off the feats of capitalism as proof that there is no better alternative. The advances the world has seen under capitalism are undeniable. Medicine. Communications. Transportation. Science. At a glance, capitalism has demonstrated a capacity to meet the needs of humanity. You would expect, however, that such advancements would elevate living standards and take care of people's basic needs. Instead, in a period where the world has witnessed unprecedented advances, we see unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment, displacement, disease, and environmental degradation. And in periods of trouble, such as now, the exploitation necessary to extract profit takes on an even more grotesque character. Just like a freezer can't bake a cake, capitalism's fundamental function and nature don't produce happiness or a society with its needs met. Innovations are commodities to make profit, not to better society or serve humanity.

Taking all this into consideration, this system is unsustainable. It's stuck in a destructive cycle, prone to crisis, stagnation, growth, collapse – all built upon class exploitation, patriarchy and white supremacy. We cannot wait for the elites to throw up their hands in defeat. They will continue to try and patch the holes of their sinking ship, offering a globalization of despair and destruction. We then, must seek a globalization of another kind. As stated by Fidel Castro, "Globalization is inevitable and

the world economy as a whole is both more fragile and more complex." "Flying on one Engine. A Survey of the World Economy." *The Economist*, September 20th, 2003.

historical. But we must fight for a globalization of fraternity and cooperation among peoples, of sustainable development, of just distribution and rational use of the plentiful and material and spiritual wealth that men and women are capable of creating with their hands and intelligence.”³ U.S. imperialism, and all of its tentacles of oppression, must be overthrown. Another society must be constructed in its place. A society that prioritizes the needs of people, upholds the right to determine their lives and communities. One that promotes values of sustainability and cooperation over plunder and competition.

Like a playground bully, imperialism must be challenged through direct confrontation. We believe the movements of the Global South – the people of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East will comprise the leading force within an international alliance to defeat U.S. imperialism. We understand the “leading force” as the grouping with the greatest potential and material interest in advancing an agenda forward; it’s also the force that will set a counter-pole to ruling class hegemony. Radical social movements based in the Global South have gradually gained strength from decades of struggle and waning patience for neo-liberal policy from Washington. The strength and potential of these movements have been demonstrated by their success at advancing demands and winning. At points some of these movements have literally driven administrations from office or entered into alliances with political parties that swing national elections. In different parts of the world, this has resulted in a political shift to the left, at a time when the United States has taken a sharp right.⁴ The ambitions behind these alliances and other experiments have been constrained by the global situation. However, we believe that these experiments and the continued building up of these movements carry the potential of and may serve as an impetus for the development of the sort of forces that can challenge U.S. imperialist hegemony. The current situation for imperialists and the growing discontent by all those affected has the oppressed and

³ Fidel Castro, “Speech at the CARIFORUM in Santo Domingo” on 21st of August, 1998.

⁴ Laura Carleson, Left Turn, “Latin America Shifts to the Center-Left,” Feb/Mar 2005

their oppressors on a collision course. The successes or failures of these forces directly impact our aspirations for liberation within the United States.

If the Global South is to lead, what does this mean for those living inside the United States? Does this mean the two million locked up in U.S. prisons sit and wait? Do we wait till more schools close, outnumbered by detention centers? Stand and watch as the INS deports and disappears more of our brothers and sisters? No. In the belly of the beast, we too are fighting for our lives. Our active participation in this historic struggle is both our duty

and a necessity. It is our assessment that the task of the current period inside the United States is to begin building the foundations for what will be a united front against U.S. imperialism from within the United States, and looking to ally with Third World forces in an international alliance to defeat our common enemy – U.S. imperialism. Fundamentally what that means is that we begin to organize and build-up mass organizations rooted in working class communities of color. Organizations that, on top of committing to actually organize, prioritize rooting themselves in strategic constituencies, organizations

committed to developing anti-imperialist politics within their work and membership and that are willing to forge alliances that will ultimately contribute to the building of the united front. The U.S. Left, in disarray from constant upheaval must build from the ashes. The potential of networks and institutions activated in unison against empire are exponential. All of those with the interest and consciousness must find a place to contribute. If we have anything of value to offer anti-imperialist forces in the Global South, it is in the building of a vibrant militant mass movement

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This task is not an easy one. The rise of neo-liberalism and global economic shifts has changed things. Jobs have been lost to outsourcing or to mechanization. Work is contingent; temporary with workers switching jobs and sectors to keep afloat. Unemployment and underemployment has increased. At a national, state and city level, the state has gradually cut away the social wage – housing, health care, unemployment, worker's compensation, welfare, education, childcare, etc. On the other hand, deregulation permitted by the state has opened the floodgates to developers and corporations. Results are gentrification, the erosion of local economies and communities with little to no accountability to anyone. Unions have been busted. Tax laws have been gutted in favor of the wealthy.

All of these changes have an impact on the terrain in which we organize. But when a door is closed, somewhere a window of opportunity opens. The new conditions that we find ourselves in require new organizing methods, new forms of organization. They shape which groupings within society will be the revolutionary agents to forge change. By working smarter and positioning ourselves we can build in the right direction. Promising new organizing models have evolved in response to these conditions. Although still in early stages of development, we believe they are pointing and building in the right direction. In building towards an anti-imperialist movement, we think the following points are priorities for building the movement.

INDEPENDENT FIGHTING BASE-BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

First things first—you can't have a movement without organizations. The current state of organization of the working class and oppressed nationality communities in the United States is abysmally low. Why? The changes we described above – particularly the loss of jobs and fluidity of workers and employment, combined with the neo-liberal policies of the state – they have changed the face of class struggle. This change and the Left's inability to respond

to these changes with organization that speaks to the needs and interests of the people have led to the gradual decline of the state of organization. This, in addition to the violent backlash from the state following the 1960s and 1970s movements which rattled this country like never before.

As conscious organizers we must address these changes and adapt the vehicles through which we struggle to truly speak to and ultimately attract people. That's why the priority must be building independent, fighting, base-building organizations. By independent we mean that organizations operate independently of the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO, the more traditional institutions seen as organizing or representing the working class. This is both to break from traditional structures in these institutions and the political leadership guiding these institutions. There's not much to say about the Democratic Party. They've demonstrated repeatedly that they don't fight in our interests. Their interests are with imperialism. Their perpetual position of retreat from public debate and our communities reaffirms that we cannot depend on them to represent us, much less solve our problems. The state of the AFL-CIO is complicated and in flux. It's seen its membership plummet over the past twenty years, reeling from attacks from the state and economic changes. The AFL-CIO has also continued to promote pro-imperialist positions, such as John Sweeney's tacit approval for the war in Iraq. They are not the old AFL-CIA, but this position has not won the unions better working conditions nor a larger trade union movement, leading to current internal debates as to what needs to be done to address this decline.

New forms of organization have emerged in the last period, coinciding with the rise of neo-liberalism, largely responding out of necessity to the multiple attacks from the Right. Trade unions' focus on worksite issues, engaging in conflict almost entirely with specific employers, rarely engaging with the state on issues outside of contract negotiation and organizing members largely only around contract negotiations has left out issues that people were willing to fight around. Class struggle is not only in the workplace – it's happening in prisons, in indigenous communities fighting against environmental racism. It's welfare mothers fighting for

training and education, seniors fighting for adequate health care, families fighting for better schools. It's youth fighting against police brutality. Trade unions are simply not structured to deal with all of these issues, but for people in the community they are issues that must be dealt with. These battle-fronts are central sites of class struggle where people will join the fight, leaders will develop and the movement will be built.

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Worker centers, youth organizations, activist formations – the multiple forms of organization present in the movement today have been engaged in diverse types of campaigns targeting corporations, all levels of government, all types of employers. Despite being smaller and less resourced, these new kids on the block have shown they can pack a punch. In New York City, the Taxi Worker's Alliance successfully organized a strike of taxi drivers, effectively stopping all taxi-cab service in all of New York City. Enlace, an international network of labor organizations, has successfully contributed to Mexican maquiladora workers gaining recognition for

independent labor unions they've formed. The Tenant and Workers Support Committee in Alexandria, Virginia formed a \$15,000,000 housing cooperative – the Arlandria-Chirilagua Housing Cooperative – benefiting 1,000 low-income residents of Arlandria through long-term affordable housing creation and community ownership and control. And recently in San Francisco a coalition, including the Chinese Progressive Association, the Day Laborers Program, and POWER successfully raised the minimum wage to \$8.50.

STRATEGIC CONSTITUENCIES AND KEY SITES OF STRUGGLE

Organizing takes an intense amount of resources and time. We have a finite capacity. If our objective is to build organization towards a movement that focuses its fights upon U.S. Empire we must root ourselves in constituencies who are strategic toward that objective.

What could that movement look like? Who would it be composed of? And in this period of building organization towards that movement, who is that strategic constituency? The answer to that question depends on what we think the composition of a viable vehicle to oppose imperialism from inside the U.S would have to be. We see the building of a united front as the main force. This united front will need to be broad, multi-national and multi-class. Within this united front, we think that there needs to be leadership from people with the greatest interest to drive such a movement forward.

Within the United States, as in the global situation, the brunt of exploitation falls upon people of color, in particular woman. Informal, invisible, and slave labor continues to provide the basis for the expansion of capital and profit, inside and outside the United States. We cannot ignore the role of racism and women's oppression within the framework of empire, in particular with the developments in the system we've described throughout this book. Because of this, we ultimately see the leading force within the united front to be the intersection of the multi-national working class and oppressed nationality people.⁵

Then there is the question of geography. So, where do we find the potential leading force of this united front? This question, of where to focus organizing efforts, has recently become a debated issue within the movement. The Republican victory in the 2004 elections was a kick in the stomach for progressive forces in the U.S. It left many wondering— what do we do now? Some are now advocating to "go back to the heartland" to reconnect with

⁵ Labor Community Strategy Center (LCSC), Program Demand Group, "Toward a Program of Resistance."

Middle America. Others say progressive forces must incorporate faith into their politics.

It's a long-standing debate whether or not we can actually create a majoritarian movement in the United States. We don't feel particularly hopeful. Even if it were possible, we don't believe that's the priority right now. Even if we thought we could get white, middle class folks to sign on to an anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist agenda — the central task at this time is organizing those with the most material interest in advancing that agenda. This is demonstrated easily in the election results of 2004. Oppressed communities, communities of color came out resoundingly against Bush. People understood and soundly rejected the Bush agenda, taking action in their own interests. As we build this movement, at some point all "Americans" will have to decide if they stand with empire. The united front in the United States will need to have a broad array of forces. But first things first, rooting ourselves in strategic constituencies is the primary objective.

We believe urban centers are in many ways the pillars of where we need to build up the resistance among working class people of color. Cities play a critical role, functioning as centers of production, consumption and distribution within the global network. This was demonstrated recently in Argentina, where the cities were shut down with the IMF crisis in 2002.

However, we aren't saying that urban centers should be the only sites of struggle. Rural areas also carry particular importance. Some of the fiercest counter-hegemonic struggles have emerged from the rural parts of the country. For example, the struggle in indigenous nations within the United States, have fought against environmental racism and the continued theft of land and resources by the United States government. We also recognize the organizing efforts in the Black Belt South, deep in the belly of the most racist forces in the U.S. Our point is that if we don't have the capacity to organize everywhere all the time, we've got to make decisions on where to concentrate our efforts.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Leadership, regardless of your approach to it, is absolutely critical in any organization. During this period of building organizations, leadership development must be a priority. There are very few spaces for people to develop skills as leaders — ideologically or practically or interpersonally. Organizing is about people coming together to collectively resolve problems. If we say that working class folks of color should lead in resolving problems, they must be prepared to lead. If we're committed to people leading this fight, we have to put them in a position to lead and to be successful in that endeavor.

Leadership development includes practical skills pertinent to organizing such as recruitment, public speaking, campaign development, etc. But also equally important is ideological training that exposes people to the reasons why things are the way they are, and how they became that way. Then they're well-footed to imagine how they can change their situation and how we can make change in the world. If we don't engage in this process, we leave it up to ruling class hegemony to continue to shape our perspectives, history and ultimately, our future.

Many times, organizations want to do this work but have limited capacity. Capacity is always a difficulty in this work. In the development of conscious leaders, we are developing a culture of resistance in communities in which we work. Because, once a flame of activism is lit in one person, they'll spread the word to others. At POWER, we take the perspective that leadership development is involved in all of our work, not only during trainings. Every action we take, we must draw lessons and develop from them. But we also have made the sacrifices to allocate resources to do leadership development. And the truth is, it does carry costs, but we think that investing in our membership is worth it. Our success in the future depends on our willingness to invest in each other today.

CONCLUSION

Periodically we get invited to attend functions that bring together community based organizations from across the U.S. From these experiences it's become clear to us that a lot of organizations are grappling with the same questions and challenges. Essentially, we are all responding to a situation that is worsening before our eyes, and we are struggling to intervene and forge change. We wrote this document to be helpful to organizers, leaders and activists within the movement. For us, the process of developing our vision and writing this book has been positive and has strengthened our organization. It has built up our unity and our understanding of the exceedingly difficult tasks ahead. We think we are on the right path and will continue to tackle these questions and strategize in theory and in practice.

Initially we were worried about the significance of titling this book, "Charting a path of resistance to U.S. Imperialism." Because although this process has been provided some answers to the questions we'd been asking ourselves organizationally, questions remain. We hope this document sparks discussion that will lead to further development of our theory and practice as conscious organizers and towards a long-term strategy. The movement's success will be tied to our ability to both touch upon the issues that move communities in order to build mass base and to understand the local and global terrain in which we struggle; making our adversary weaker as we grow stronger. We have our work cut out for us.

A movement strong enough to challenge U.S. imperialism — one with an array of anti-imperialist organizations and millions of organized and conscious people taking action — has yet to develop. The idea of something of this magnitude forming is almost incomprehensible at times. Living in this age of reaction, where the word revolution is used to announce a new model SUV, with an abysmally low level of organization of the working class, and facing a full on attack from the right — it can all make one feel like revolutionary ideas are almost absurd! We're left to lean on each other and those who came before us to offer guidance

and support for the work ahead holding close the knowledge that change is a natural and inevitable occurrence. The question is: what kind of change will result from the current period? We must defy convention and continue to dream, as expressed by Sandinista Gioconda Bella, "I dare say, after the life I have lived, that there is nothing quixotic or romantic in wanting to change the world. It is possible. It is the age old vocation of all of humanity. I can't think of a better life than one dedicated to passion, to dreams, to the stubbornness that defies chaos and disillusionment. Our world, filled with possibilities, is and will be the result of the efforts offered by us, its inhabitants."⁶

In the constellation of movements, it is in the direction of our comrades in the South, whose inspirational struggles light our path here in the belly of the beast. Here, inside the empire we have a task at hand. We mustn't fail. We owe it to ourselves, to the world, and to future generations to chart our own path of resistance and do the necessary work so that we can become a beacon of hope, showing the empire and the entire world that within the belly of the beast, the fire of rebellion simmers.

⁶ Gioconda Bella, "The Country Under My Skin."