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Toward a Program of Resistance

Hacia un programa de resistencia

Program Demand Group

Kirti Baranwal

Rita Burgos

Alex Caputo-Pearl

Woodrow Coleman

Manuel Criollo

Martín Hernández

Barbara Lott-Holland

Kate Kinkade

Eric Mann

Lian Hurst Mann

Deborah Orosz

Kikanza Ramsey

Patrick Ramsey

Geoff Ray

Ted Robertson

Cynthia Rojas

Daniel Widener

Toward a Program of Resistance

INTRODUCTION

The authors of this document—the Program Demand Group—are individual left organizers who have built a substantial degree of political unity through struggles in shared practice over a long period of time. We met each other through our work in mass campaigns initiated by the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles. *Our unity as a group is based on a common commitment to antiracist organizing in the United States set within an internationalist framework.* As organizers, we have chosen to spend the majority of our energies on the exceedingly difficult tasks involved in building multiracial, multi-class, independent social movements that confront corporate and governmental elites in the arenas of civil rights, mass transportation, reforms in labor union organizing, and environmental justice. As we faced the 2000 Presidential Election, we determined that our ability to contribute to coalescing an effective antiracist tendency on the Left and among progressive organizers in the U.S. rested on clarifying our political line: *What does it mean to situate antiracist struggles within the larger strategy of building an international united front against imperialism?* A draft document was circulated nationally at the time and has been the basis of the last year's work and many productive discussions with other antiracist organizers. The struggle for clarity of political line drives our continuing efforts to consolidate our unity and communicate it to others in this version of the document.

COMPONENTS OF OUR APPROACH TO DEMAND DEVELOPMENT

The individuals in the Program Demand Group work within projects of the Labor/Community Strategy Center.

The Strategy Center was formed from day one as multi-issue, with a multinational, multiracial, multilingual grouping of women and men with roots in the working class—with black autoworkers, Chicano academics, Latino and Korean immigrant activists, white antiracist organizers, feminist labor historians, welfare reform resisters, students and workers, radicals, revolutionary nationalists, and communists within our common internationalist political orientation. The art of achieving our organizational culture is crafted through a constant balancing between respect for our differences and pursuit of our common goals. In order to achieve a culture capable of sustaining this “unstable balance,” the Strategy Center has consistently sought to achieve a certain political clarity—not necessarily agreement—to create an environment that supports experimentation, searching, learning.

From its beginning, these very different people have shared a fundamental approach to tactics aimed in a clear direction: fight to win. Through much experimentation we have built a “think tank/act tank” that is consistently integrating theory and practice in the course of everyday struggle: *social practice is the arena in which the social totality can be seen, the current conditions analyzed, the burning questions of our time theorized, and strategy and tactics conceived, tested, and imagined again.* The Strategy Center’s history rests on a practice of building a mass base of oppressed people; fundamental to this practice is the process of developing demands that link specific mass struggles to the need for broad structural changes. In this way, we strive to situate tactical campaigns within an overarching strategy.

At the Strategy Center, organizers have chosen—within the strategy to struggle against imperialism from inside the U.S. empire—to *build social movements of the multinational working class as our primary activity.* A central objective of our work has been to organize mass social movements, new organizations, and coalitions that—

in the course of waging resistance struggles against the fundamental ideals of capitalism—build leadership, consciousness and organization among oppressed nationalities, women, immigrants and the multiracial/multinational working class.

We believe in the role of the conscious organizer. That is to say, the organizer at the Strategy Center cultivates her base by contextualizing the experiences of oppressed people in an analysis that recognizes that the vast majority of peoples’ sufferings are systemic manifestations of U.S.-led imperialism. Therefore, paramount to our base building is the political education of oppressed people. Through political education we make every effort to move people from an individual outrage toward an antiimperialist politics that explains specific atrocities through the lens of a global analysis of U.S.-led transnational capitalism and institutional racism.

Our organizing model has given us the opportunity to build multiracial/multinational organizations that achieve a voluntary unity which can only be gained through the daily practice of struggle. The struggle we are talking about entails common practice in a consciously-constructed plan to join together very different people with a commitment to engage contradictions among us that have historically obstructed Left unity in the United States. Latino immigrant Spanish speakers, black revolutionary nationalists and antiracist whites, for example, deal together with questions of organizational composition on a daily basis and together formulate tactical plans that can combat the specific oppressions of different peoples as well as the attacks they suffer in common. We see our role as developing successful experiences in multinational organizing.

To be clear, we work with and support “national-in-form” organizations in their vital role of speaking directly to the specific needs of Asian/Pacific Islander, black, Latino and indigenous peoples among others and advancing their peoples’ struggle for liberation. Our strength is organizing all peoples who stand in contradiction to U.S. imperialism—building the alliance between movements of the multinational working class and national liberation movements.

Our approach to developing multinational organizations and labor/community coalitions has generated some of the most powerful social movements in Los Angeles for two decades. In the Reagan/Bush-Clinton/Gore era of lowered expectations, the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open stopped General Motors from closing down the last and largest auto plant in California for a

period of ten years; the Labor/Community Watchdog environmental justice campaign exposed Texaco and the oil giants who are poisoning the low-income, predominantly Latino community of Wilmington; and the “Billions for Buses” campaign of the Bus Riders Union/Sindicato de Pasajeros is aggressively obstructing the Los Angeles MTA’s racist destruction of the regional bus system.

There are many contradictions, crises, and atrocities that concern us as we build multiracial, multinational, multi-issue organizations of women and men who also speak different languages (in the Bus Riders Union, predominantly Spanish, Korean and English), and it is often difficult to select priorities. Over time we have evolved an approach that guides the process of demand development so that contradictions are analyzed, dilemmas addressed and priorities chosen with greater clarity. Our radical approach to reforms is reflected in campaigns, demands, mass movements of oppressed nationalities and the multinational working class, and an ideology of resistance.

The Program Demand Group, born out of this history of common work, is applying this approach in an effort to devise ideological and structural challenges to the foundations of empire. As we present the strategic demands that follow, we want to explain the framework we are using in demand development.

A. Antiimperialism. We select demands that *situate a specific campaign within an international framework of opposition to U.S. imperialism* in order to confront structural racism, national oppression, xenophobia, patriarchy and suffering from indignity that is perpetrated throughout the world by the country in which we live and work.

B. New constituencies for a strategic alliance. We select demands that *coalesce new constituencies* to expand the base of working class people of color who are capable of leading a strategic alliance of the multiracial, multinational working class and the oppressed peoples’ movements for liberation.

C. Unity in diversity. We select demands that have the potential to *build unity within the multiracial working class* in the U.S. while addressing the specificity of needs of different peoples. We select demands that *create opportunities for oppressed nationalities, women, and immigrants* to expand consciousness and lead struggles.

D. Learning through new forms of

counterhegemonic struggle. We select demands that *create new forms of struggle* that break out of a culture of accommodation to expand space for antagonistic, adversarial negotiation with corporations and the government. We select demands with counterhegemonic content that can challenge the domination of capitalist ideology. We select demands that create collective learning experiences that expose the complex interrelationships of the U.S. political system we are challenging and create the basis for ideological transformation.

E. Institution building. We select demands that *create new forms of organization* as platforms for expanding power from which to demand greater rights, power and influence.

F. Redistribution of resources/Redress and reparations. We select demands that, if won, would *radically redistribute power and resources to the oppressed.* We select demands that, if won, would *redress the wrongs of historic oppression and superexploitation* specific to peoples who have suffered from the brutality of U.S. imperialist expansion.

This document is a work-in-progress that we hope will provide a basis for discussion. We proceed with the understanding that the demands are incomplete, their scopes are different, and the distinction of categories, while useful, is fluid and ultimately artificial. There are many important single-issue demands being presented by people around the world in struggle against U.S. imperialism. Where possible, we are trying to incorporate the demands of existing social movements, while struggling to sharpen the politics that has become our basis of unity. In every category there are political differences among progressives, and at times the demands that we initially thought we embraced actually contradicted each other or we simply did not yet agree. By looking at them together we have made some sharp political choices that are reflected not only in our strategic demands but in the demands for the focus campaigns we prioritize. We have selected demands that are transitional; they do not constitute a program for a future in which the people of the world control their economic and political relationships, although our vision of the future is imbedded in our present demands. We hope to pose an *alternative set of possible political choices* that, taken together, create a vision

of a more just and humane world society. We aim to plant seeds of change in a counterhegemonic program that captures our imaginations and can motivate masses of people to envision “the possible.”

Thus, while at the present time we present the demands in outline form without extensive explanation, our immediate purpose is to *illustrate our approach* and *cohere a political unity* that will be distinct and establish a basis for debate and for the development of more elaborated writings and engagements.

The specific procedure we have undertaken in building our unity in this document involved the following steps, which correspond to the categories that organize the text that follows.

■ *Conditions.* We have attempted to analyze the *current conditions* defined by the center-right political consensus that governs U.S. imperialism.

■ *Dilemmas.* We have grappled with some of the *dilemmas for the Left* posed by the contradictions inherent in our work, dilemmas that cause disorientation and ultimately require decisions that become decisive in shaping different political trends.

■ *Strategic challenges.* We have categorized demands into *strategic challenges*, that is, structural demands that challenge the premises of U.S. imperialism so that, if won, they would advance radical, systemic change.

■ *Tactical campaigns.* We have selected and emphasized the radical demands of *campaigns we prioritize*. These demands are, at least in theory, winnable under imperialism. Yet, taken together, they create a picture of what we would propose for an alternate form of governance.

NOTE

¹ The Group of 8 includes the U.S., Japan, Italy, France, Britain, Germany, Canada, Russia—the major industrial “democracies” whose heads of state or government have been meeting annually since 1975 to address the major economic and political issues facing the international community as a whole.