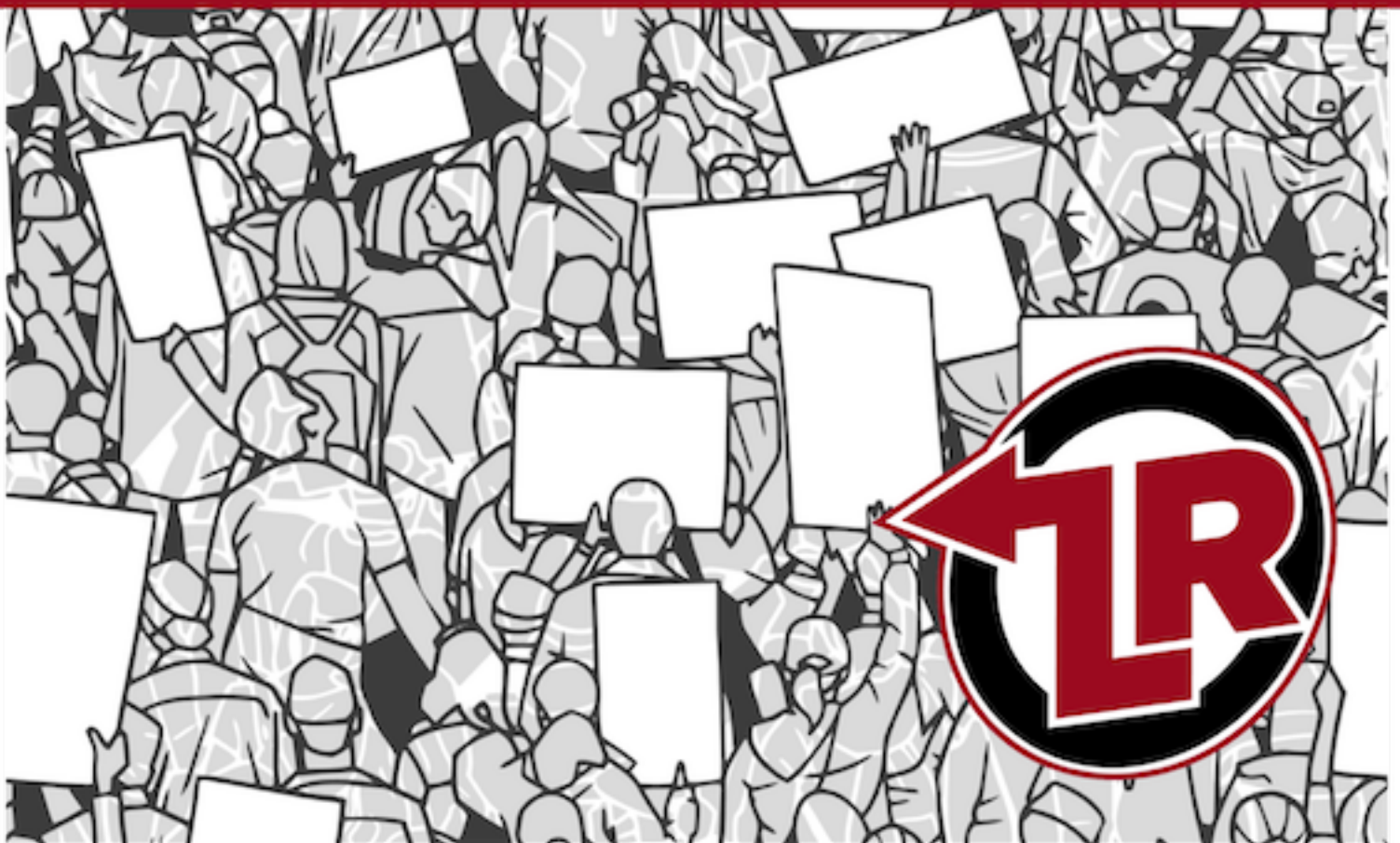


**LEFTRoots'**

# ***Case Study on Left Organizational Culture***



## INTRODUCTION: A LEFTROOTS CASE STUDY

Hello comrade! Thank you for reading LeftRoot's Case Study on Left Organizational Culture. In this document, we're sharing some of the challenges, successes, and lessons learned in building a left organizational culture to support our members to overcome challenges, transform, and develop into cadres capable of crafting and carrying out liberatory strategy<sup>1</sup>. We describe our organizational trajectory, the methodologies and traditions that we drew from, and some of the practices that we developed. ***Ultimately, this is the story of how we learned to tend to the social-emotional needs, conditions, and capacities of our members, and to do so with a clear purpose and a rigorous approach, for the sake of socialist liberation. When we were able to do this, we found that it made healing and transformation possible, and that, instead of sacrificing or hindering our organization's political purpose, this work in fact made that purpose more possible.***

### ***Who is LeftRoots?***

LeftRoots is a group of leftists coming out of social movements organizing oppressed and working-class people, who came together over the past ten years with a shared purpose of developing strategy and developing ourselves as strategists. We are mostly people of color and gender oppressed, and we range in age from our 20's to our 70's. We are organizers who yearn for socialist liberation, working every day on the frontlines of struggles for housing justice, Black liberation, environmental justice, abolition, immigrant rights, in the labor movement, and in movement capacity building. We joined and built LeftRoots because, after years or decades in movement leadership, our experiences told us that we needed a new approach.

LeftRoots officially launched in 2013 as a time-limited cadre-fication organization with the purpose of developing the ideological, political, organizational, and social/emotional capacities of a crucial layer of social movement leftists and developing socialist liberatory strategy. From its launch, we were clear on the necessity of liberatory strategy, as many of us had experienced the limitations of a lack of strategy in our base-building work. And we knew we needed new skills to be able to develop and

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<sup>1</sup> *LeftRoots defines Liberatory Strategy as a hypothesis of how political forces can build capacities and shift the balance of power on ever-changing terrain to defeat opposing forces so that they can carry out revolutionary change. See [LeftRoot's Liberatory Strategy Toolkit](https://leftroots.net/liberatory-strategy-toolkit/) [<https://leftroots.net/liberatory-strategy-toolkit/>] for more.*

implement such a strategy. We also knew we needed new social-emotional capacities to be able to work together. Many of us had experienced or witnessed different forms of harmful organizational and movement culture.

In 2023, after assessing that we have accomplished our founding purpose, we are convening the Process for Socialist Organization and Strategy (SOS)<sup>2</sup>[2], a process to launch new or renewed cadre organizations in the United States. We initiated this process and are now holding it in co-partnership with Liberation Road. The SOS is a multi-tendency, non-sectarian process to support the launch or renewal of one or more (ideally two) strategically unique cadre organizations in the US. We also will sunset and close LeftRoots at the end of 2023, and we are sharing this case study as the first part of a summation of our experience as an organization.

### ***Why Cadre Organization?***

Our shared commitment in LeftRoots has been to strengthen the U.S. Left so we can build the kind of movements needed to move beyond short-term gains, and towards winning socialism. Our study of successful left movements tells us we need revolutionary organizations that can articulate, carry out, and evaluate strategy at the scale of our overlapping crises, build our capacities as a movement, and identify and act on opportunities to shift the balance of power so we can defeat opposing forces and carry out revolutionary change. Our assessment is that in today's movement conditions, most social movement leftists, and our organizations, don't have clarity and unity on what liberatory strategy we are advancing, and we do not have organizational infrastructure capable of supporting us to act alongside a broader set of movement forces to carry out a common strategy. We believe new or renewed cadre organizations are a critical intervention towards changing these conditions and thus making liberation more possible.

Cadre organizations are left formations whose members have unity on a liberatory strategy, and who work to carry out that strategy in a disciplined way, earning leadership in movement organizations through principled and effective practice. The lack of strong 21st century cadre organizations with liberatory strategy is a missing component of the U.S. movement ecosystem currently, and a key weakness of the US left. Cadre organizations are not the only type of organization our movement needs – in a healthy movement ecosystem we would have various types of organizations, each

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<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the SOS Process and how to connect with us, visit <https://www.sos2023.org/>

playing distinct and, ideally, complimentary roles. But its where we have chosen to focus our energy because we think they can support the development of a robust movement ecosystem, and because of the pivotal role they have played throughout history.

## ***A case study for the left***

We originally wrote this case study as part of a toolkit for comrades taking leadership in the SOS Process, specifically the group of initiators leading the building of new or renewed cadre organizations. When reading this case study, please keep in mind that it was written for this purpose, and that it is not intended to be an example of how to build left organizational culture in base-building organizations, nonprofits, political parties, or other types of movement organizations. We are sharing our specific experiences, lessons, and successes, not a general model for how all movement organizations should structure their organizational culture practices.

Despite these limitations, we decided to share this case study because we know the challenges that we faced in our organizational trajectory are not unique to us. They are the product of our collective time, place and conditions. While challenging and imperfect, our organizational trajectory leaves us hopeful about what's possible with skilled leadership, grounded assessments, and a collective commitment to working towards becoming the people and the organizations that we have been waiting for.

## ***Our unique context***

LeftRoots is, as far as we know, the only temporary cadre development project operating in the US movement ecosystem today. We think it's important to say this, not because we think it makes us special, or some kind of experts, but because it means that our organizational conditions and context is somewhat unique. Because of this, and because this case study was originally written for an audience of comrades building cadre organizations, there are some things we ask you as the reader to keep in mind. We know internal conflict and disorganization is all too common in our movements right now, and there is a great need for tools, models and training to help us build resilient social movement organizations. This case study isn't that. We hope that there are lessons in our experience that can be useful to you, and we ask that you also rigorously assess your specific organizational context when considering how to apply any ideas you take from this case study.

One of the most important, and most challenging, lessons we learned in building LeftRoots was about the foundational importance of having collective clarity and unity about our organizational purpose. We had to make big course corrections when we realized that we had insufficient unity and clarity, which we share more about in section 1 of the case study. In fact, this was a prerequisite for all the successes that we were able to build after. Clarity and unity unlocked the willingness of our members to engage in transforming our organizational culture. In other words, we found that our members were most willing to try on new practices, take risks, and do things that could initially feel uncomfortable, when they were clear and aligned about why, and for the sake of what, they were being asked to do so. If your organization doesn't have high clarity and unity on its political purpose, this is a necessary first step to address before focusing solely on shifting organizational culture.

LeftRoots is not a nonprofit. We are a membership organization with an elected leadership. We have paid staff, and our orientation is that 'staff are members first'. We have hired almost exclusively from our membership base, ensuring that paid staff come in with a high degree of pre-existing commitment to our organizational purpose. LeftRoots has traditional HR policies for staff, but our expectations for staff conduct, discipline and accountability are primarily shaped by the expectations for all LeftRoots members. This collective unity has made it possible for members (and staff) to support each other to overcome challenges that would be considered "personal" or "private" in most workplace settings, like physical or mental health crises or family emergencies. We can do this with our staff with mutual clarity about where individual and collective responsibility lies, because our basis of unity is our membership in LeftRoots, and any employment relationships are secondary to this. Many of the practices that we carry out in LeftRoots would be difficult, or even detrimental, to try on in employment contexts where there is not already a high degree of collective political unity and commitment.

In LeftRoots we've sought to have a very high degree of political clarity, unity and discipline across all of our members, with a closed membership and a high bar for entry. For us, this is necessary since we're preparing ourselves to be cadres and build cadre organization. In a base-building organization or a people's organization, it's very appropriate for different groups of people to have varying levels of clarity, political unity, discipline or commitment, since the political purpose is to develop new leaders and engage large numbers of people in movement struggles. If you're in this type of

organization and you're trying on any of the ideas or practices in this case study, please do so with your organization's political purpose in mind.

There's a few other material factors that are important to note. While these are not necessarily unique to us, we think they do significantly shape the conditions that led to the experiences shared in this case study, and our capacity to overcome challenges.

- Our membership is spread across the United States, and our members spend most of their time building mass organizations, running campaigns, and doing movement work that is not LeftRoots work, and that is not directed by LeftRoots or accountable to LeftRoots.
- Most of our members hold a high degree of responsibility in their lives, which includes caring for children, elders, or other family members, and running organizations and/or leading campaigns.
- We are not funded by foundation grants, and our core purpose is developing cadres and strategy. This has meant we have had a very high degree of control over our organizational priorities, timelines and activities.
- In the last three years of LeftRoots, which is the focus of this case study, over a dozen people acted as either paid full-time or part-time staff or made a part-time unpaid staff-like leadership commitment.

### ***What you'll find in this case study***

This case study is both an attempt to support new cadre organizations in becoming, and it is also part of what grounds our thinking on the kind of capacities and conditions needed to cohere a critical layer of revolutionaries that can transform the Left in the United States. In these movement conditions and in this conjuncture, we need a cohered layer of leftists with high strategic AND social-emotional development, who can exert grounded and emotionally intelligent leadership, and build and sustain organizations that operate from grounded assessments of their internal capacity and development, while engaging in the struggle to develop new collective capacities. Regardless of whether you embark on the work of launching a new cadre organization, which we hope many will do, we think it's crucial for the future of all of us and our organizational forms in the social movement left that we take seriously the task of transforming ourselves and our ways of being in-organization with each other in service of our shared revolutionary commitment.

We believe that the success of new cadre organizations capable of meeting this moment requires well-crafted liberatory strategy, but that's not all. We believe that it will also require us to build organizational cultures that can account for and sufficiently counter the historical and daily ways that capitalism (and all the isms) shapes, deforms and atrophies our development.

We don't believe we are the only ones with lessons about building political organizations where the work gets done, and gets done well, without harming the humans involved. Yet, we also believe we have lessons worth sharing. As we considered the gaps in the left ecosystem and executed rigorous tests to build frameworks for and then craft liberatory strategy, we also dedicated major organizational resources to assessing how we as people needed to transform to become the strategists and practitioners of strategy our movement needs. We dedicated a national team solely to the work of organizational culture in LeftRoots. This team conducted mini-experiments on how to strengthen or shift pieces of our organizational culture at different stages, with hypotheses about what outcomes would be achieved. These experiments required thorough measurement and assessment of relevant indicators and variables, through different forms of evaluation, reporting, and data analysis. In some ways, this case study is a synthesis of all the lessons we drew from those mini-experiments. In a nutshell, those lessons could be broken down like this:

**If we effectively design, build, and sustain an organizational culture that:**

- accounts for, and sufficiently counters, the historical and daily ways that capitalism (+all the isms) shapes the perceptions, needs, ideas, values, reactions and actions of its members.
- grounds its methodology in scientific, materialist findings and theories on human development and transformation.
- fosters connection among members grounded in three shared commitments: to the **socialist liberation** of all peoples and the planet, to the **purpose of the organization** in building the potential to launch cadre organizations in support of helping achieve such liberation, and to the **individual and collective work necessary** to carry out those commitments with competency.
- has a Socialist-Feminist approach to its division of labor and leadership
- uplifts the legacies and cultures of resistance & liberation we come from, are inspired by, and are committed to advancing

- is supported by all members and reproduced in all aspects of organizational life

By:

- Continuously **Cadrefying** (transforming and developing) members in the skills and capacities needed to carry out the organization's work, including organization-building and organizational culture.
- Practicing **Dialectical Materialism** as the standard method of analysis that all members operate from
- Practicing **Principled Struggle** as the standard method to reach collective clarity and support collective unity
- Practicing **Resilient Protagonism** as the standard method to prepare for, face, and overcome individual and organizational adversity
- Practicing loving, grounded, generative **Self and Peer Criticism** as the standard method to evaluate and improve our practice
- Practicing **Collective Support & Accountability** as the standard method to consistently collectivize barriers getting in the way of meeting our commitments to the organization and collectivizing resources and support
- Practicing **Culture As A Weapon**, or embodied group activities like singing, that uplift the legacies and cultures of resistance & liberation we come from, are inspired by, and are committed to advancing for the generations to come

**Then, we will have:**

- Contributed to building and sustaining sufficient trust, grounded connection, and unity (**cohesion**) among members, for the sake of making it more possible for the organization to achieve its goals
- Contributed to the development of the ideological, political, organizational, and social-emotional capacities of a key layer of socialists, while fostering long-lasting principled relationships and a "big revolutionary we" that can transcend strategic misalignment
- Created new cultural practices of resistance & liberation that respond to our time-place-conditions, and that can serve as a spark across the movement ecosystem and as a point of reference and inspiration for future generations



- Carried out the labor required to sustain, grow, maintain, and lead the organization and its work in alignment with our Socialist-Feminist commitment

This doesn't mean we should shape our organizations to be scaled-down versions of whatever we pre-figure socialism to be, and it also doesn't mean that we should throw our values out the window in the name of pragmatism or prioritize individual or collective healing at the expense of organizational purpose. We realize that comrades coming from different backgrounds may have different reactions to this content. For some who are coming from the organizational Left, the emphasis on human transformation may seem ungrounded or "touchy feely," while for those coming from more recent social movement organizing, the grounding in Marxist tools of analysis may be new and challenging. It is our experience that meeting the challenges before us requires both the sharp ability to craft and evaluate strategy, and advanced social-emotional capacities. Our approach has been to be firmly grounded in revolutionary theory and practice, while also drawing on newer lessons in human development. We find these approaches to be complementary and encourage readers to stretch yourselves to embrace the newer elements.

**Section 1** of this document shares, in broad and chronological strokes, the particular conditions from which the lessons shared in this case study emerged. **Section 2** offers a summary of the key theoretical frameworks and concepts that ground LeftRoots's approach to organizational culture. There are other experiences, beliefs, and theories that shape our cadre members' approach to organizational culture, for example, for some, spirituality. We are naming the frameworks and methodologies that we've dedicated organizational capacity to studying and applying collectively in our organizational programs. **Section 3** is a breakdown of the methodologies LeftRoots considers fundamental to building and sustaining organizational culture.

We extend our gratitude towards everyone that contributed their time, labor, love, lessons, and heartbreak to making it possible for LeftRoots to carry out its purpose and for the lessons it allow us to draw and share. We acknowledge and thank our comrades, partners, co-parents, children, families, co-workers, elders, and friends, for all the support and care labor that allowed us to take the time to write this document. We hope we didn't give you too many headaches!

We acknowledge and honor the revolutionary lineages and traditions that have shaped us, paved the way for us, and inspire us. We thank them for all the headaches they endured.

And to you, comrades fighting for liberation for people and the planet, we offer this case study with the utmost humility. May we continue to build organizations and movements that are too resilient, too cohered, too disciplined, and too strategic to fail. May all of us find ways to alleviate the headaches, collectively.

*Hasta La Victoria, Siempre!*

*Till Victory, Always!*

## **On Headaches**

*It's great being a communist  
although it gives you many headaches.  
Because a communist's headaches  
are historical, that is  
they won't go away with painkillers  
only with the realization of Paradise on Earth.*

*That's how it is.*

*Under capitalism our heads hurt  
and our heads are ripped off.  
In the struggle for Revolution the head is a delayed-action bomb.*

*In the construction of socialism  
we plan for the headache  
which doesn't alleviate it—quite the contrary.*

*Communism will be, among other things,  
an aspirin the size of the sun.*

**- Roque Dalton**

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## SECTION 1

# DOIN' IT FOR THE CULTURE

### ***An (incomplete) history of LeftRoots' organizational culture trajectory***

*"Remember that history may leave an important trace. Remember that being and becoming are dual aspects of nature."*

— *Levins & Lewontin, in 'The Dialectical Biologist'*

This section summarizes the general trajectory of LeftRoot's organizational culture, highlighting a few key conditions, for the purposes of contextualizing the rest of the case study. It is not a comprehensive history of the organization. As we are finishing this document, LeftRoots is on its official trajectory to sunset by the end of 2023. One key task of our sunseting plans is to write a comprehensive summation of our experience.

LeftRoots officially launched in 2013 as a time-limited cadreification organization with the purpose of cadreifying a crucial layer of social movement leftists and developing liberatory strategy. This dual purpose was grounded in the assessment that new or renewed cadre organizations were needed to advance the struggle for 21st century socialism, and that the existing ones had strengths but were insufficient for different reasons. We also recognized that we were not sufficiently developed to start or join a cadre organization, and so we embarked on building LeftRoots as aspiring cadres committed to developing ourselves in political, ideological, organizational, and socio-emotional capacities, while contributing to creating conditions in the movement ecosystem for an eventual independent process to launch one or more new cadre organizations.

In the last 9 years of building and sustaining LeftRoots, we faced a variety of internal and external challenges, made a lot of mistakes, and experienced and caused heartbreak. We didn't start out knowing how to face and navigate all these challenges. Some of our early attempts to do so were insufficient and/or inefficient, and some caused serious harm to members of the organization, some of whom left the project without sufficient resolution. While we think errors were primarily the result of our collective underdevelopment in the face of movement-wide contradictions, the

particular underdevelopment of elected leaders and leadership bodies at times led them to incorrect approaches and decisions that lacked sufficient insight into other cadres' development and social-emotional conditions.

In the early years of LeftRoots, we experienced a rapid national expansion, with 6 in-person and 2 virtual branches starting across the country. This distributed model, along with uneven clarity about the purpose of the organization across our membership, meant that we needed to pilot multiple methods of connection, support, and accountability amongst the membership in order to execute the work of the organization, and to try to ensure that our cadre members were clear and committed to that work. Between the years of 2014 and 2018, we tested a few different organizing and support structures for cadre members, including a triad and buddy system. In each branch, we had Cadre Care and Culture Committees (a.k.a. C4s) responsible for leading their respective branch in building and practicing a revolutionary culture and supporting cadre members that were struggling to meet their LeftRoots commitments.

There was a range of successes and failures with these structures. In some branches, the C4 was functional and effectively led the branch's cadre care and culture work; something we could measure in the clear and effective leadership practice of cadre members and the high level of attendance and participation of those members in our programs. In other branches, the C4 wasn't functional or wasn't able to adequately lead the branch in cadre care and culture based on the conditions in that branch. This meant that cadre members were experiencing many different versions of "LeftRoots" depending on their particular branch and the specific conditions of that branch. To advance our cadre care and culture work more effectively, a team of cadre members carried out a collective process of study, discussion, and writing on revolutionary culture. This team explored a wide range of theories and historical examples related to culture which, along with their lived experience as LeftRoots members, allowed them to draft *'Doin' it for the Culture: Principles of Cadre Care'* (2018). This document laid out our best thinking at that time on the frameworks and principles of internal organizational culture. Another key result of that team's work was the articulation of a set of "social-emotional capacities" as part of our cadreification framework, adding to the more traditional ideological, political, and organizational (IPO) capacities. Since that time, LeftRoots' Cadreification Framework has been anchored by an "IPSO" framework, and it shapes our approach to all cadreification & cadre-development work.

LeftRoots began facing a number of internal challenges as we grew. By 2019, our National Coordinating Committee assessed that the internal challenges we were facing,

particularly the level of different conflicts across the organization, were rooted in insufficient clarity and alignment –in both theory and in practice– with the stated purpose and approach of the organization, and insufficient capacity to engage in generative and principled struggle with one another. Organizational leadership's need to tend to individual conflicts was preventing us from moving the organizational mission forward. To address this, we designed and implemented an organization-wide realignment process that lasted 6 months called 'Keep it 100'.

At its core, Keep It 100 was about reasserting and recommitting to LeftRoots's purpose and approach. About 80% of cadre members recommitted to the organization and created plans about how they would align their practice with their commitments moving forward.

From the 20% that did not recommit, some were clear and theoretically aligned with the organization and its purpose, but unable or unwilling to recommit. Those unable to recommit, identified lack of bandwidth or capacity as the primary barrier. Others were able to reach sufficient clarity with our purpose, and that clarity allowed them to recognize that they were not sufficiently aligned. Also from that 20%, the majority engaged in respectful principled struggle with another member of the organization, and while their exits caused sadness, we experienced them as dignified and grounded and were able to stay in relationship to them.

A small minority opted for open-letter-style resignation emails sent to all members, despite having access to the choice to engage in principled struggle. Some of these letters included ungrounded assessments with kernels of truth, which, in another period of the organization, might have been disruptive or disorganizing for our members. However, these open letters didn't have such impact, which we interpreted as an indicator that Keep It 100 had been successful in consolidating a supermajority of members around our purpose and approach to building the organization.

At the time, a cadre member shared this reflection:

***G**oing through Keep it 100 I felt uncomfortable/nervous at times because I kept thinking of previous experiences when groups didn't handle conflict well, people get hurt, and it causes ripples beyond the group, and sometimes it can last long after the conflict, without advancing nothing, but more confusion and fragmentation. I was also nervous because I've always questioned how "revolutionary" I am, and if I really understand what LeftRoots is trying to do. The [Keep It 100] leadership institute was one of the best experiences in principled struggle that I've seen. There was room for my, and many others' discomfort, nervousness, sadness, frustration, fear, etc. The facilitators modeled*

*a high level of emotional intelligence and also firmness in protecting the purpose which was to increase our clarity on LeftRoots's purpose and approach. This allowed me (and many others) to have the space to really dig into my clarity and then my alignment. It was sad and a little demoralizing to see members of our branch not be fully aligned and resign, but those of us left felt a renewed sense of clarity and commitment that pushed us forward.*  
- LeftRoots cadre member reflection during org-wide evaluation in January of 2020

Keep It 100 was a pivotal point for the organization. Increasing collective clarity and alignment with our purpose, the practice of formulating and communicating grounded assessments, and the experience of being in principled struggle with one another, among other things, made it possible for us to practice and refine our newly emerging culture. Most of the methodologies and practices we share about in this document were established after Keep It 100, and have been sharpened through practice.

To ensure the even growth of this emerging culture, we created a new national team in charge of organizational culture. We dissolved local and online branches, reorganized cadre members into smaller units called cadre circles, and renewed the purpose and approach to our monthly all-cadres meeting. This new awesome team, (whose attributes led to its name: Team Awesome) was responsible for leading us in our efforts to consolidate our emerging culture through theory and practice by testing hypotheses about what pieces of our culture and structures needed to shift, how we would implement that shift and why, and what outcomes we were expecting. This team was also responsible for producing monthly "State of Membership Reports", which included attendance and participation data, as well as assessments on regular externally measured and self-reported indicators of connection, trust, unity in action, and resilient protagonism for each cadre circle.

All of this was developing in the midst of a global pandemic and intensifying political conditions in the United States, with mass uprisings against police violence in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential election. In this period LeftRoots' leadership conducted a conjunctural assessment and concluded that external conditions were increasing the urgency of our political intervention, requiring us to 'intensify and accelerate' our cadrefication so that we could be ready to launch cadre organizations in the near future. This assessment grounded our organizational trajectory, plans, and approach to organizational culture over the next several years.

Towards the end of 2020 we operated under the hypothesis that to sustain the level of intensification of our cadrefication and strategy development work, and given the



conditions in the movement, the country, and the world, it was imperative for our internal culture and structures to focus on fostering **principled struggle, resilient protagonism and discipline**, and **non-liberal collective support & accountability** (definitions in the glossary). We knew we needed to practice this in every part of our organizational life and we also designated cadre circles as the primary 'container' to practice this.

To support this work we created a new role within cadre circles that would become a solid and crucial mid-level leadership layer for the organization. Initially, this role was called "Lab Organizers", since the role began during our Electoral Lab Initiative. In 2021 we changed the name to "Membership Organizers" (MOs).

Among other things, MOs were responsible for facilitating cadre circle meetings, making grounded assessments of the conditions of their circle and measuring its growth, and holding support and accountability one-on-ones with cadre members struggling to meet their LeftRoots commitments. To support MOs, we created and staffed the Membership Organizer Program (or MOP) which offered training on the theories, methodologies, and tools grounding our emerging culture, created intentional space to practice with one another, and offered one-on-one support to MOs that requested it.

Like cadre circles, the role and structure of MOs would also remain through our sunset. Looking back, we can point to 2021 as the year we achieved the cohesion and consolidation that would allow us to get to the homestretch of LeftRoots, and our ability to convene the SOS process with enough cadrefying people to try to accomplish our purpose. In 2022 we assessed this 'emerging' culture as sufficiently established across the organization. In early 2023, we assessed that given the strength of our internal cohesion and culture, we could "take the training wheels off" and dissolve the Membership Organizer Program, collectivizing the role previously held by Membership Organizers, and allowing us to redirect capacity to our external work.

**As a result of our cultural path-forging inside our project, over one hundred people, many still deeply tied to the organization or leading it through its homestretch at the moment of this writing, developed a marked advance in their practice in relationship to their roles as aspiring cadres and aspiring revolutionaries.** Through these models, they developed the ability to distinguish between their internal conditions and external conditions, and whether or not they were able to hold them with sufficient resilience to continue to execute their assigned labor in the project. At the same time, they

developed the skills to hold themselves and others accountable for combatting liberalism in their LeftRoots work. Time and time again, an overstretched cadre member would be able to pass rather than drop the ball, because her comrades saw her struggling and helped her name what she needed to put into their hands, without shame or fear. Time and time again, a comrade who was hanging back out of fear of taking up too much space or out of an assessment that their contributions weren't necessary was supported by their cadre circle to take up and scale their leadership.

This is by no means a comprehensive history of the organization, but rather a very condensed version of key moments in the development of our organizational culture. It was through this experience that we can now assert that we absolutely need liberatory strategy, and that liberatory strategy by itself is insufficient.

We must also face the reality of and account for the ways in which we -and all humans- have been and continue to be shaped (or even deformed) by the ravaging, alienating, and individualistic nature of racial monopoly capitalism. For us, it meant acknowledging that we needed to develop capacities that capitalism had atrophied, such as the capacity to be in loving and rigorous struggle with one another, or the capacity to face adversity with resilience, or the capacity to prioritize among competing commitments. For some of us, developing such capacities required transforming conditioned or automatic responses, attitudes, and behaviors sometimes rooted in historical individual and/or collective trauma, or at least recognize it as a need. For all of us, the practice of this culture has been humbling, imperfect, and utterly transformative.

# ***We Are Never Without Help***

*We are never without help.  
Look for it always  
to surprise you.  
There is no end to the joy  
of discovery  
just as there is no end  
to amazement.*

*Those who give their lives  
for truth and bread  
for the triumphant  
flash of a vivid  
bougainvillea  
even as they  
die  
in unspeakable  
ways  
or whose last notice  
is of a simple daisy  
still striving  
in a corner  
across  
a drying lawn  
have never taken  
their arms  
away  
never taken  
them away  
from being  
around us.*

*Alice Walker,*

*A Poem for Celia Sanchez*

## SECTION 2

# ***THEORETICAL PREMISES***

***A brief summary of the theoretical frameworks and concepts that ground LeftRoots' approach to organizational culture***

*A Marxist understanding of Culture*

*Alienation and its Manifestations*

*Human Development & Transformation*

*Cohesion and Unity*

*Socialist-Feminist Division of Labor*

*Democracy & Leadership*

## **A Marxist Understanding of Culture**

*“Culture is, perhaps, the product of history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and it reflects the organic nature of the society, which may be more or less influenced by external factors. History allows us to know the nature and extent of the imbalances and conflicts (economic, political and social) which characterize the evolution of a society; culture allows us to know the dynamic synthesis which have been developed and established by social conscience to resolve these conflicts at each stage of its evolution, in the search for survival and progress.”*

*- Amilcar Cabral*

Culture is everywhere and permeates all aspects of human life. Culture is the air that we breathe, the water in which we, the fish, swim. It's the shared set of values, beliefs, and practices that shape what we do and how and why we do it. It's what we do at meetings, at actions, at work and at home, and the ways that we relate to ourselves and to each other. Culture is constantly being produced and reproduced by individuals and at collective levels. Culture goes beyond individuals' actions, defined structures, rituals, or protocols – it's the collective expression of both the explicit and implicit, the intentional and unintentional, the formal and informal, ways of organizing our lives. It both reflects and creates ideology.

The culture of any given society emerges from that society's mode and forces of production. The United States is a capitalist society that developed through settler colonialism and chattel slavery. Our social order relies on capitalist property relationships, imperialism, racism, patriarchy, and the exploitation of nature to reproduce itself. Our dominant culture is the culture that was produced by this social order, and it is also the culture that produces and reinforces this social order.

Culture, as a phenomena, is neither good or bad. Alongside the horrendous values, beliefs, practices, and systems of domination, exploitation, dispossession and genocide, that have created and reinforced the dominant culture in the United States, there are also rich histories, and therefore cultures, of resistance and liberation.

This understanding of culture as an omnipresent yet non-monolithic phenomena that permeates all aspects of human life, that reflects and creates ideology, and that has the ability to shape and mediate human relationships makes it an unquestionable site for struggle in the construction of 21st century socialism. Among other things, it means culture will happen inside our organizations, regardless of our level of intentionality or awareness, and that it will be produced and reproduced by members of our organizations whom, for the most part, have been shaped by the dominant culture in the United States. If we aren't intentional about the culture we build, we will reproduce the alienating, warping culture of racial monopoly capitalism, which continues to grow in this country and around the world.

## ***Alienation and its manifestations***

*"I am not interested in dry economic socialism. We are fighting against misery, but we are also fighting against alienation. Marx was preoccupied both with economic factors and with their repercussions on the spirit. If communism isn't interested in this too, it may be a method of distributing goods, but it will never be a revolutionary way of life."*

*- Ernesto "Che" Guevara*

One of the most harmful and dangerous ways that the US capitalist economy shapes humans (and therefore culture), is through the process of alienation. Marx described alienation as **the severance or estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature as a consequence of living in a society where the mode of production responds to the needs of capital and the capitalist class, at the expense of human development (and the planet's sustainability)**. Alienation from the self is a consequence of living in a society of stratified social classes where the individual is a mechanistic part of a social class.

Alienation is constantly reinforced as capitalism individualizes even the most basic of human needs, privatizes the resources necessary to meet those needs, and keeps us competing with each other for the scraps. This means that despite our best efforts and socialist values, most, if not all of us, experience and reinforce alienation to some extent in our day-to-day life.

As a result, key human capacities needed to build 21st century socialism, like solidarity, are under-developed and atrophied. We do not get to practice solidarity in our day-to-day, but this doesn't mean we are not practicing something. Instead of solidarity, we practice self-sufficiency, competition, and quiet despair, to name a few, while making our life struggles private in order to survive.

Alienation also sets the stage for beliefs and practices that reinforce disunity, apathy, and hopelessness. We experience these beliefs and practices through culture, which means we should expect manifestations of them in our organizational culture.

One document that helped us understand how individualism is manifested in organizational culture and how it can impact the organization's ability to meet its purpose was *Combat Liberalism* by Mao Tse-tung. Mao used the term Liberalism to

describe manifestations of individualism and opportunism among communists of his time that he identified as “extremely harmful in a revolutionary collective ... a corrosive which eats away unity, undermines cohesion, causes apathy and creates dissension.” In LeftRoots, we experienced a variety of manifestations of beliefs and practices stemming from alienation. For the purpose of this case study, we want to highlight 3 categories: **Individualism, Idealism, and Pessimism** – all of which we see as extremely harmful threats to the internal unity of political organizations in our current time-place-conditions. These are exaggerated by the lack of a shared foundation of analytic frameworks and tools. Below are brief descriptions of each:

## ***Individualism***

Because capitalist labor relations socialize us to be competitive in most parts of our lives, we regularly and often unconsciously bring this orientation into how we relate to each other. When we are well-trained in individualism, and suffering from alienation, we are more likely to engage in unprincipled conflict with each other. There’s a spectrum from conflict avoidance that results in gossip, passive aggressive communication, and muddled strategy; to conflict aggression that results in call-outs, blow-ups, and increased fragmentation. This can bleed into how we relate to each other in organizations as well – when we choose to support unprincipled conflict and join in ourselves, out of fear of losing our place, and our real human need to belong.

At the organizational level, competitiveness is also an exaggerated feature of the nonprofit structure, which forces organizations to compete for recognition – both organizationally and as leaders - in order to secure funding and keep ships afloat. Organizations and their staff and leaders can struggle to extend trust both internally and externally. This lack of trust can manifest in fragmentation, suspicion of leadership and hierarchy, and an unwillingness to share or address personal challenges.

- **Self-care-ism:** A commodified and depoliticized version of self-care which has emerged as an attempt to counter competitiveness and grind culture. However, this approach often reinforces the individual as primary, and rejects accountability, or even frames it as a form of oppression, making it antithetical to the struggle for socialist liberation.
- **Neoliberal Identity Politics:** Mistaking the individual experience of oppression – be it racial, gender, age, sexuality, ability, community of origin, experience of poverty or migration – for the collective role of communities impacted by racial



monopoly capitalism in building a force capable of contending for governance. While the hyper-valorization of our identities emerged in part as a correction to bigotry inside social movement organizations, it is exaggerated by a lack of shared foundations of analytic frameworks, and it has harmful effects on our ability to facilitate grounded political debate, accountability, and decision-making.

## ***Idealism***

Capitalist hegemony reinforces the belief that the main driver of change is ideas, as opposed to Dialectical Materialism which sees the main driver of change as shifts in material conditions. This is not to be misunderstood as LeftRoots rejecting ideas, theories, beliefs and values, or advocating for a deterministic view of change. Rather, we understand ideas to be in dynamic relation to our material conditions. There are many different ways idealism can manifest and these are some of the ways that have been the most relevant for us:

- **Voluntarism:** Believing that will is the dominant factor in experience or in the world – basically the idea that sheer will-power can achieve anything regardless of the conditions. This is not to be misunderstood as LeftRoots rejecting will altogether. Instead, we understand will as a motivator that can make the impossible possible, if wielded collectively and with grounding in sound strategy and a materialist assessment of conditions.
- **Moralism:** Believing that expressing judgments about others' morality (which is different than having an analysis), or the moral rightness of an action or issue, creates social change.
- **Purism:** Believing the purity or correctness of an action determines its impact despite the time, place, or conditions. A less toxic, yet still problematic version, is doing work that focuses only on cultural shifts and changing hearts and minds, or focuses on radicalizing people's ideas without the necessary work of growing the material level of organization, leadership & power amongst oppressed and working class people.

## ***Pessimism***

In these times in particular, we're socialized to believe that an alternative to capitalism isn't viable now or ever ("There Is No Alternative"); that the most we can aspire for is a

'more humane' or a 'greener' capitalism, and that humanity as a whole has reached an irreversible point of no return.

Without an internalized understanding of the dialectical nature of change, and without collective and individual practices that ground us in this understanding, we can internalize these beliefs, which then shapes and limits how we orient to our movement work.

This can lead to an aversion to setting a vision of a world where human development rather than capital is the guiding logic of our society, and it can even make us scoff at the idea of long-term strategy or anything we perceive as already destined to fail. On the flip side, it can cause an ungrounded over-prioritization of urgency and short-term strategy, often within a narrow sector of the movement.

In the last period of struggle since 2010, this has become acute as millions more people become aware of the systemic roots of large-scale crises of democracy, white supremacy, global warming, gun violence, and economic inequality, but the capacity of left forces to provide alternative visions, credible solutions and hope has not matched this rising consciousness and outrage.

## **Human Development & Transformation**

*“Human development, though, doesn't drop from the sky. It doesn't come as the result of a gift from above.. We change ourselves through our activity—through our struggles and through everything we do. The way we produce (in the workplace, in the community, and in the home), the way we relate to others in our activity, the way we govern ourselves (or are governed by others)—all these make us the people that we are. We are, in short, the product of all our activities.” - Michael Lebowitz, The Path To Human Development*

If we are to build organizational cultures that account for and sufficiently counter manifestations of capitalist-driven alienation, and idealism, pessimism, liberalism, and individualism, we need to understand how human development and transformation works, so that we may foster conditions and practices that develop the capacities needed to transform ourselves in service of transforming reality to build 21st century socialism. For hundreds of generations, humans have developed various ways to adapt and survive. Around the world, oppressed peoples have found ways to resist and engage in collective struggles for emancipation, with results that seemed impossible years before. LeftRoots's orientation to human development and transformation is built on this stunning inheritance and legacy.

While we have been influenced by a wide range of experiences, theories and practices, here we will highlight the contribution of four that have been key in shaping our understanding of human development and transformation and therefore influence our approach and methodology for organizational culture and cadreification:

### **Marxist Theory of Human Development**

For Marx, the whole point of socialism is to create a society where all can develop their human potential. As stated in the Communist Manifesto the goal is “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Implicit in this theory is the idea that human beings are social in nature and that we need each other to achieve our potential. Marx understood that capitalism, through alienated labor and consumption, develops people who are “in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society.” He also believed that people could be transformed through what he termed “revolutionary practice”. Through our activity in our communities, workplaces, and

social institutions and our efforts to change the world we would also change ourselves into the agents of a new society.

## ***Pedagogy Of The Oppressed***

*It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation. - Paulo Freire*

Developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, this offers us a tried and proven approach to creating and facilitating collective processes for transforming and developing skills and capacities needed to struggle for liberation, and in particular the capacity for critical thinking, reflection-evaluation, and problem-solving. It asserts oppressed people as simultaneous protagonists and subjects of the learning process. It also names a set of conditions needed for the learning process to happen, which include the role of the facilitator, the physical setting and ability to connect, and the broader socio-economic context in which the process develops.

## ***Neuroscience***

It would make sense that our approach to organizational culture is grounded in a Marxist understanding of human development and pedagogy of the oppressed. But how did we get to neuroscience? Well, because we wanted to be able to comprehend the internal mechanics of our bodies responsible for learning, stress, and adaptation to change. Doing so helps us demystify the process of transformation, preventing the possible pitfalls in our approach to transformation, like resorting to subjective, un-methodological approaches that can't be replicated, or thinking that transformation merely requires individual will. Demystification also makes it more possible to build an organizational culture that creates concrete opportunities for members to choose to transform themselves in service of our shared commitments. When members are actively engaged in transforming themselves in service of their shared political commitments, and show up to the organization striving to embody the transformation they're committed to, conditions for transformation are reinforced while strengthening political unity.

Neuroscience is a relatively new developing field, that through technology and the scientific method studies the actions of molecules, genes, and cells in relation to bodily function, thinking, decision-making, emotion, learning, etc. Neuroscience tells us that

the entire nervous system, and not just the brain, is responsible for making sense of the world. Physically, the nervous system reaches virtually all corners of our bodies. The nervous system uses electrical and chemical means to facilitate communication between all parts of the body, so in a way you could say it is the body's command center. It gathers all available information, including senses, emotions, instincts and remembered experiences. It learns from experiences and makes predictions about best actions in response to present and future challenges.

It's now accepted biological science and medical knowledge that life trauma and chronic stress (i.e. the conditions produced by oppression and exploitation) materially shape our body's neural organization, impacting our degree of neuroplasticity, our resilience, our capacity to take on challenges and learn new skills & habits, to give and receive feedback, and therefore to transform into the humans needed to change the world as it is. At the same time, neuroscience gives us material grounding for how human beings can change and transform. We've found the following concepts helpful in comprehending the science behind the process of human transformation:

- **Neuroplasticity** refers to the brain's ability to change and develop in response to its environment and the demands being placed on it. Essentially, our brains develop by organizing themselves, creating and shaping neural connections and networks in response to the environment and our particular experience. Brain development and specific patterns of neural connections are not genetically predetermined the way hair or eye color are determined. While intellect and learning ability are guided by our genetic code, they arise in significant part through the process of brain development. The plasticity of the brain is greater during childhood, but the brain exhibits the ability to change and develop throughout life.
- **Resilience** refers to the process of adapting in the face of adversity, tragedy, trauma, threats, or other significant sources of stress. Resilience is an innate human capacity that can be developed. Resilient people have greater connectivity between areas of the brain linked to emotions and those linked to reasoning and decision-making. Resilience does not imply a reduction in the response to stress. Nor is it just surrendering to or merely surviving in the presence of stress. Instead, more of our brain is involved in adapting to stress. Agency, connection, and emotional regulation all play a critical role in the process of resilience.

- ***Repetition and Intensity.*** Our brains can only perform one skill consciously at a time. When a skill becomes automatic and does not require conscious thought, it is possible for an individual to perform that skill at the same time as other skills. Repeating a single skill over and over can lead to improvement in that skill and ultimately to automaticity, but the integration of multiple skills is what pushes critical skills more quickly to the unconscious level. Development occurs at the outer edges of our competence. If a task is too far above our current state of development, we will become frustrated and may not persist. If tasks are too easy, we become bored. Development of any physical or mental function requires the discipline of repeated challenge over time at an appropriate level of intensity. The brains of experts consume less energy to perform a practiced activity and, in fact, can often do the activity without thinking or without conscious evaluation. We may talk about “muscle memory” but we are actually describing the development of procedural memory in the brain. Frequent practice with intensity leads to mastery, which is essential for leadership capacities.
- ***Feedback.*** Immediate, regular feedback is necessary to enable error correction and faster, more accurate learning. Giving and receiving regular feedback also helps us build curiosity and gratitude around it, rather than triggering responses of trauma from when feedback was used as a weapon, to withhold belonging or connection, or to mask personal conflict in political disagreement. The speed of feedback also enables more repetitions to be executed in a given amount of time.

### ***Politicized Somatics***

While we have not studied politicized somatics as we have the three fields above, we think it's important to name, because many LeftRoots cadre members, mostly black and brown and gender oppressed, who have been instrumental in building and sustaining our organizational culture, also happened to have attended Generative Somatics and/or Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) trainings. Politicized Somatics provides an approach and methodology for individual and collective transformation that uplifts embodiment as crucial, and therefore engages the whole body in the process of transformation.

## **Cohesion and unity**

*"I call you 'comrades' rather than 'brothers and sisters' because if we are brothers and sisters it's not from choice, it's no commitment, but if you are my comrades I am your comrade too and that's a commitment and a responsibility." - Amilcar Cabral*

One of the key objectives of LeftRoots' organizational culture was to create the conditions to constantly advance our internal unity or cohesion. In the process, we sharpened our understanding of what we needed that "unity" to do, what skills were needed to build it, and what conditions made it more possible.

In this case study we use cohesion and unity interchangeably, and in broad strokes define this as: the collective capacity of a group's members to carry out the work with discipline and respect for organizational decisions.

This doesn't mean that we need to agree 100% on every aspect and decision, although there are things we must be highly aligned around. Rather, effective cohesion makes room for non-antagonistic differences to exist without hiding them, or over-exaggerating them, and without letting them become a barrier to carrying out the work. Cohesion can be the "make-it-or-break-it" variable that determines the functionality of a group, particularly in the face of adversity, shifts or crises.

Cohesion is not a place of arrival, it is built and sustained through multi-faceted and dynamic processes. Connection, meaning when two or more people interact with each other in a way that creates a sense of closeness and belonging, is fundamental in these processes. Connection is an innate need and capacity that can be observed across many mammal species. It can increase our sense of hope and motivate us to overcome adversity. Capitalist alienation deprives us of connection, while simultaneously under-developing the many skills required for us to build and experience connection. One skill required to engage in connection is the ability to extend trust. Connection and trust are in dialectical relationship. We need some level of connection to build trust and we need some level or extension of trust in order to engage in connection that produces a sense of closeness and belonging.

Trust is central to all human relationships. For an organization to achieve unity, its members must be able to trust each other's goodwill and commitment to the organization and its purpose, and through practice, offer each other evidence that reinforces that trust. We understand trust partially as a brain process that binds

representations of ourselves, of others, and of situations, with an inextricable emotional dimension. We experience trust as a firm belief in the character, ability, reliability, goodwill, or truthfulness of something or someone. Trust isn't absolute. We may trust someone to do a task (wash dishes) but not trust them to do another (perform surgery). Mistrusting someone is not just a prediction of betrayal, it often rings internal safety alarms and can trigger defense mechanisms that make it less possible for us to engage in connection. Although trust/mistrust may involve predictions about how someone will behave, we often feel trust or mistrust without having done a grounded assessment that gathers objective information to form such a prediction.

Because we are wired to seek connection and because under capitalist alienation we're constantly deprived of this need, it's possible (and common) that despite our honest commitment to revolutionary change, we inadvertently seek to meet our needs for connection through our political work. If we are successful in connecting with one another in meaningful ways, we are likely to experience a deepening of our interpersonal bonds and an overall sense of camaraderie among the group. While this can serve as a powerful motivator for people to stay members of an organization and carry out the work, if our connection is not grounded in our shared political commitments and if it's not in service of our ability to carry out those commitments, it's possible (and common) for us to default to affinity-based connection, insularity, and the relaxing of our accountability practices. This doesn't mean we should avoid connection altogether. Instead, our approach proposes that we lean into our innate need for connection in a conscious way, and intentionally shape embodied experiences of connection rooted in our shared commitment to the socialist liberation of all peoples and the planet, in our shared commitment to the organization, and in our shared commitment to each other's development.

This is also not to say that friendship is bad and we shouldn't be friends. We understand friendship as an affinity-based unity that is primary over shared revolutionary commitments. Instead, we think the type connection that's needed in order to sustain unity in an organization, is the connection of comrades rather than that of friends. This means that organizations should prioritize fostering conditions for comradeship grounded in our shared revolutionary commitments.

Comradeship, at its core, requires a very high level of trust in one another; a trust that comes from our participation in collective practice. Regardless of personal or even political differences, a comrade should always be primarily invested in the collective political project and, in service to that project, invested in her comrades' development



so they may have the ability to carry out the purpose of the project. While friends can certainly strive to become comrades with one another, an existing friendship is not a prerequisite for a strong and healthy comradeship. In fact, we know there are challenges that arise when moving from simply being friends to being comrades, as comradeship may require a level of honesty and accountability that friends may not commonly hold each other to in social spaces. It is also possible to become good friends with someone who was first our comrade.

***I**n my cadre circle, when cadres have pushed past liberal, people-pleasing tendencies to name tensions they are feeling/experiencing, we can then assess the situation together, identify which challenges are personal/individual and which signal political misalignment. Cadres' vulnerability can build trust and collectivity in the group, as well as correct any ungrounded assessments people may make individually. - LeftRoots cadre member*

To effectively ground our connection in our shared commitment to the organization, we must be sufficiently clear and aligned with the organization's purpose, approach, and the fundamental premises grounding them. Often, organizations don't have sufficient clarity and/or unity around some or all of those things. We think this is in big part a result of movement-wide fragmentation and lack of liberatory strategy. The gaps that fragmentation and lack of strategy create are often filled by the legitimate urgency to respond to the multiple crises our peoples and the planet face. This means many organizations end up playing multiple overlapping functions, often without sufficient bandwidth. In a robust and functioning movement ecosystem, that is intentionally cohered by cadres in cadre organizations guided by liberatory strategies, organizations would be more able to define their purpose in relation to the function they are best positioned to play in sustaining the ecosystem and implementing and evaluating strategy. This would in turn mean that organizations would be more able to prioritize and clearly articulate their purpose. And this in turn would make the basis of comradeship and connection between members of that same organization more clear.

In LeftRoots, we aimed to build an internal culture that fostered grounded trust, comradeship, and unity in action, for the sake of achieving the organizational cohesion needed to accomplish the purpose of the project. In practice, we did this by:

- ***Carrying out an organization-wide process and program (Keep It 100) to re-clarify and recommit to LeftRoot's purpose and approach.*** This required us to redirect all our capacity and resources to this process, temporarily pausing all

other programmatic work. It also required us to engage in principled struggle with one another and exert a high level of rigor and emotional intelligence.

- ***Prioritizing collective clarity on the organization's purpose*** and articulating a clear throughline between that purpose and the function of each and every program or initiative. This required us to develop hypotheses about how each program and initiative advanced our purpose, and work on internalizing that clarity. When people actively participated in the discussions leading up to and informing the hypothesis for new programs and initiatives, they were more able to internalize that throughline. At the same time, there were many moments when it wasn't feasible to involve members beyond the democratically elected leadership body (vested with the power to do so). In these cases, this leadership body was responsible for ensuring that they collectivized the assessments grounding the new decisions being implemented among all members. Other techniques we found helpful in internalizing clarity included: having people practice articulating something in their own words or explain it to others; when presenting a new decision explaining not only what the decision means but also what it doesn't mean and what it is taking care of or responding to, and how members might experience it concretely.
- ***Expecting members to take responsibility for their own clarity*** by constantly self-assessing it and seeking support to increase it when insufficient, and making it a responsibility for members to support each other in increasing their clarity.
- ***Tracking and assessing indicators of cohesion.*** As part of assessing our cohesion we constantly tracked clarity on the throughline between the overall purpose and approach and specific programs, initiatives, and organization-wide decisions. This required us to conduct consistent (and sometimes inconveniently long) evaluations and reporting practices, along with the necessary infrastructure and human bandwidth to hold that work.
- ***Uplifting our commitment to "win" over the satisfaction of "being right".*** For us this meant respecting and implementing organizational decisions even if we were not aligned with the assessments leading to the decision, the decision itself, or the predicted outcome. However, we also sought to make room to name and hold misalignment, respecting the ideas and positions of minorities, and letting the results of our work clarify the truth.

- **Utilizing Culture As A Weapon practices** like singing, sharing poetry and swag that uplifts the legacies and cultures of resistance & liberation we come from, are inspired by, and are committed to advancing, and as a concrete way to ground our connection in our shared revolutionary commitments.
- Recognizing all meeting containers, gatherings, etc, as **opportunities for connection** and doing our best to design these containers in a way that advanced our cohesion as well as the particular purpose of the meeting, gathering, etc.

## ***Socialist-Feminist Division of Labor***

While LeftRoots is a multi-tendency organization, we share strong alignment with socialist traditions that have understood the centrality of feminism in the struggle against capitalism and for socialist liberation. These traditions offer us a framework to understand how patriarchy and capitalism developed an inextricable relationship over time. We draw inspiration from those struggles and aimed to make visible and collectivize the labor needed to sustain our organization, without falling into the pitfall of prefigurative politics.

At the movement level, we often see a gendered and racialized division of labor in which gender oppressed people, mostly racially oppressed and from middle to lower layers of the working class, disproportionately assume responsibility for the wellbeing of the organization through administrative and organizational development tasks, while their (non-gender oppressed, mostly white) counterparts disproportionately assume responsibility for the strategy development and implementation tasks.

Often, these roles and tasks that are critical to the success of the organization are also not collectively acknowledged as such, and are excluded from a democratic division of labor. This could look like all those 1on1s we take on unofficially to support and/or struggle with a comrade in need, or the emotional labor it takes to offer grounded leadership. For the individuals carrying out these tasks, it means they're doing so without support or accountability. For the organization, it means a gap in its intentional planning, which if left unresolved, could lead to internal capacity crises. It is also a missed opportunity to collectivize these tasks among more members, so more people learn how to do those tasks.

At times, we experienced both of these in LeftRoots; a gendered division of labor and an insufficient acknowledgement and collectivization of these critical tasks. We also observed that the primary reason why gender oppressed members resigned throughout the 9 years of the project, had to do with insufficient bandwidth or capacity due to increased reproductive labor in their households, produced by financial and health crisis conditions. We also noticed a general tendency to approach these difficulties as a "private burden" that the individual must figure out alone, which we think is another manifestation of capitalist alienation.

Instead of getting stuck in moralistic reproaches of one another, we tried to understand our conditions within the context of the dominant culture in the movement and the country, and tried our best to counter these dynamics in practice by:

- **Implementing demographic quotas** in order to prioritize the membership of people who were gender oppressed, racially oppressed and from mid to low layers of the working class
- **Formally acknowledging the wellbeing of the organization as a collective responsibility**, and pledging to be pro-active in carrying out this responsibility. We did so through our constitution, membership expectation protocols, and periodic self, peer, and group assessments about the conditions of the organization and our contributions, or lack thereof, to its wellbeing.
- **Prioritizing assigning roles and tasks to gender oppressed, racially oppressed members that provide development opportunities in strategic and leadership capacities.** It's important to note that there were times when the task or role at hand needed to be executed with precision in order to meet its purpose with no room for error, and we did not have the time or resources to offer sufficient training. In these cases, we re-prioritized our division of labor criteria to make current level of competency in the task primary.
- **Creating and resourcing a national team (Team Awesome) to lead the work of our internal organizational culture** (or our internal production and reproduction). This included ensuring sufficient staffing and financial resources. Among other tasks, this team identified the key social-emotional and organizational capacities needed to ensure the production and reproduction of the internal organization conditions we needed, and created programs supporting members to develop and practice such capacities.
- **Creating a methodology and container offering members the choice to share "personal" challenges** or barriers getting in the way of meeting their commitments, make requests for support, and receive offers of support from peers. We ended up calling this (non-liberal) Collective Support & Accountability (see section 3). This also required us to develop a training program and structures to ensure the right conditions for the ongoing and effective collectivization of support & accountability.

○ *ur retreat served as one laboratory for putting our ideology into transformative practice. To start the retreat, we had a specific orientation and experience with reproductive labor that led to this retreat approach: to share the reproductive work and take collective responsibility for the success of*

*the gathering. Before the retreat commenced, everyone prepped for some bit of facilitation based on their study groups. Throughout the retreat, everyone took on food prep, cooking, and cleaning shifts. We all brought cultural work to offer throughout the day, and shared responsibility for groundings. These were all initial retreat plans, but they opened new pathways as unexpected issues arose. Note-taking and documentation was divided as we realized exactly how much work that would be. Despite our planning, the labor required for cooking and cleaning was cutting into our work time, so we self-assigned crews to help manage the load; we even moved a discussion space into the kitchen to ensure all forms of labor were managed and all of us could fully participate. - LeftRoots cadre member describing how a team of LeftRoots members approached division of labor during a retreat.*

## ***Democracy & Leadership***

Another set of tasks and skills that are critical to the success of organizations, and that are often underdeveloped and unevenly approached, are those related to democratic decision-making and leadership. For example, our capacity to engage in rigorous and loving principled struggle, which makes it possible to engage in generative debate and decision-making. Or our capacity to hold and name difference and still carry out organizational work, which makes it possible to both exert leadership and to follow another's leadership. Not to mention our social-emotional capacities, like regulating our emotions when we feel triggered during a meeting. As if that wasn't enough, capitalist alienation often shapes our orientation to leadership and decision-making, making even the most committed revolutionary susceptible to the influences of liberalism and individualism.

However, a key premise of our approach to decision-making and leadership is that through cadreification and shared practice it is possible to develop the individual and collective capacities we need in order to design and implement efficient, generative, and democratic decision-making practices, processes, and structures. Another key premise is that leadership is needed in all aspects, meetings, teams, etc, of the organization, and that it is possible to develop the individual and collective capacities needed to exert and follow grounded leadership.

Building on lessons from 20th century socialist projects and our own experience as organizers in social movements, our approach is explicitly pro-democracy and pro-leadership. At the end of the day, our power is in numbers and our organizations will always need sufficient members who are actively building the organization and carrying out its purpose. This means organizations must develop decision-making processes that balance democratic principles with the concrete limitations of our time-place-conditions. For example, there might be decisions that we determine require input from all members and an all-cadres vote, and there might be decisions that we empower a group of members to make on behalf of all members. It also means we need members to be able to exert and follow leadership, grounded in objective assessments of the contributions they're positioned to make. Underneath or alongside that, we must be able to see ourselves as the protagonists of our organizational present and future, not spectators waiting to be told what to do, or criticizing what is not working without offering solutions or putting in the work to implement them.

Most people in the social movement left do not have an ideological disagreement with the previous paragraph, but in practice we often experience, and sometimes cause, unhelpful practices that undermine democracy and leadership in organizations across the movement. In LeftRoots, this manifested in the early years of the organization (2013-2019), and included things like “third-partying” of democratically elected leadership bodies (forgetting sometimes that members of those bodies were cadres just like them offering their time and labor to the organization on top of their non-LeftRoots movement work and family commitments). This fomented a culture of ungrounded mistrust for leadership, and aversion to exerting leadership in public ways. Another manifestation was sharing assessments and criticisms of decision-making processes, leadership bodies, and members in leadership bodies, in the form of gossip, while choosing not to engage in available channels for communication or principled struggle with the relevant body or member. To be clear, problems didn’t arise because these members had a grievance or disagreement, problems arose when members chose not to share them directly with the relevant parties by engaging in principled struggle. These practices of sharing or venting with other members further exaggerated a culture of ungrounded mistrust in leadership.

We now name Keep It 100 as the point when we began the successful collective pivot away from these manifestations and into a renewed orientation towards leadership. This renewed orientation was one of respecting and uplifting the leadership labor needed to sustain the organization and to fulfill its purpose. As such, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that there is a sufficient number of members trained and supported to take turns in exerting and following leadership, grounded in an objective and often peer-reviewed assessment of their bandwidth and competency. This also means that our organizational and cadre-fication priorities must account for and respond to these needs.

Clarity on organizational purpose is also key in our approach to organizational democracy and leadership. Without clarity on organizational purpose, people are left battling for their own interpretations of that purpose, or mistaking connection and affinity for clarity, and the organization as a whole cannot advance its larger goals. This clarity must extend beyond the general purpose and approach of the organization and into the throughline between this purpose and all organizational programs, initiatives, and organization-wide decisions.

In LeftRoots, we strived to practice this “pro-democracy, pro-leadership” approach by:



- ***Having explicit decision-making guidelines and structures that facilitate their implementation.*** For us this meant naming “all-cadres” as the primary decision-making body with the ability, at any point, to call for a recall of any decision made by any group of members on behalf of all-cadres. As a formal body, all-cadres met once a month for 4 hours over zoom, and once a year for a multi-day congress where we held discussion, debate, and decision-making on items that required all-cadres’ approval. A body of democratically elected members served as the National Coordinating Committee (NCC). The NCC, elected by and accountable to all-cadres, was charged with ensuring the execution of the organizations’ programs, initiatives, evaluations, and reports to all-cadres. Given that all NCC members, except for the national secretary, had full-time jobs outside LeftRoots, the NCC was empowered to hire staff to run the daily operations of the organization. Staff were expected to be cadre members first and foremost and abide by cadre membership expectations and the code of conduct.
- ***Encouraging members to actively build the organization and ensuring leadership bodies have the individual and collective capacity to exert leadership.*** While LeftRoots’ staff team remained relatively small throughout the 9 years of the project, it played a key role in advancing the clarity of the NCC and the organization as a whole, especially at the beginning of the project. Staff spent 40+ hours actively building the organization each week, literally dreamed LeftRoots in their sleep, and they approach their work with rigor, often engaging in generative principled struggle with one another, so of course they would develop the clarity necessary to offer leadership. And, recognizing this dynamic, the organization made intentional efforts to increase and make visible the existing pathways for members to engage in consistent organizational work with other members. This included staff working to increase the capacity of NCC members to exert leadership in practice, by supporting their clarity, deepening NCC members’ involvement in organizational planning, and implementing an internal division of labor so members could specialize and exert leadership over particular areas of work. Eventually, this also led to the creation of a new team, the Core Team, made up of 4 director-level staff and 4 NCC members (including the National Secretary). Those 4 NCC members made significant shifts and compromises in their personal and movement work outside LeftRoots in order to contribute between 15-25 hours per week to the organization. In each major initiative, we developed a temporary leadership body (the NLT or National

Leadership Team) overseeing that initiative, which offered opportunities for more members to be involved in the highest levels of organizational leadership. Finally, we developed a mid-layer of organizational leaders through the Membership Organizer Program. As the NCC achieved greater cohesion and development, and as more members were organized into national teams, staff members continued to play key roles, but the production of new clarity and exertion of leadership moved out of the staff team, and more into the NCC, the Core Team, and (during the writing of this) over 15 national teams with 60% of members carrying out weekly work.

- ***Ensuring sufficient clarity before (and during) struggling for alignment.*** This required us to dedicate resources to developing the NCC's capacity to exert organization-wide leadership. This required us to make it a responsibility and expectation of members to ensure their own clarity, and a commitment to supporting others in increasing their clarity. Implicit in this task is the understanding of clarity and alignment not as fixed positions but as something that can increase or decrease over time, influenced by a variety of conditions. A concrete practice that emerged during the Keep It 100 process and continued through the sunset, was that of stating our clarity and alignment on the organizational assessments and premises grounding any new key decisions, as well as on the decisions themselves. During zoom meetings we would ask members to "using a scale of 1-5, put in the chat how clear you currently are with X decision and how aligned you currently are with it". We also used in-person or virtual spectrograms that asked people to state their clarity and alignment along a spectrum and express shifts as the collective discussion shifted their clarity or alignment.
- ***Practicing Unity in Action.*** For us this meant that once sufficient clarity was reached, we engaged in debate to make new decisions, once a decision was reached, all of us, even if during the discussion were not in alignment with the decision, were expected to carry out the new decision. Not all debates will be able to produce 100% alignment on the assessments and premises grounding new decisions, or even consensus on the decisions themselves. When this is the case, and for the sake of advancing the collective clarity and work of the organization, we moved to a vote in accordance to pre-established guidelines. This doesn't mean that any registered misalignment or dissent is forgotten or swept under the rug, rather we respect and support minority tendencies, clearly

name difference, and let the results of our shared work settle inconclusive debates, or prove/disprove conclusive ones. For this approach, we studied and drew inspiration from the lessons of Marta Harnecker on organizational democracy (see section 5, non-LR resources).

- ***Demystifying leadership***, by making visible the skills and competencies needed to exert and follow leadership, and supporting members in developing leadership capacities. This required us to design and implement an approach towards leadership development (*see more in section 3, cadreification*). This also meant naming explicitly what skills, level of competency, and political clarity that was needed to offer leadership and in what way. Earlier in the organization, we did not practice this, and members were encouraged to take on roles where they exerted leadership with insufficient clarity, support, or accountability. This led to negative impacts on both the organization and the member's experience exerting leadership.
- ***Ensuring commitments and practices for mutual support & accountability*** between all-cadres and leadership bodies. To do this, we developed the common practice of opening discussion and debate by recognizing any and everyone who had done the labor of producing proposals being used as a basis for the discussion, and thanking them for their labor. While simple, this was one of the unofficial practices that fostered our pro-leadership orientation. Another practice to ensure that leadership bodies remained accountable to each other and to all-cadres was having consistent communication and reporting practices. To ensure that leadership bodies made decisions grounded in the objective conditions across the organization, Team Awesome (the national team dedicated to our internal membership & culture) created monthly reports on the state of membership that were shared across the organization (see SOM report sample in the tools section). These reports were regularly reviewed and discussed at all levels of the organization: during our monthly all-cadres call, during national leadership bodies meetings, during our annual all-cadres congress, and sometimes during our cadre circle meetings. These reports and practices helped us avoid automatically assuming our subjective experience of the organization as the experience of the majority. This reinforced and enabled members in leadership bodies to remain accountable to all-cadres, especially those not aligned with us or in minority tendencies, exerting leadership in service of the collective purpose and wellbeing of the organization and its members.

- ***Balancing democratic values with objective organizational and political necessity and urgency.*** For us this meant designing and implementing decision-making processes that balanced efficiency, democratic participation through structured process, opportunities for development and cohesion, bandwidth, and competing organizational and political priorities. This required us to be nimble in adapting and creating new processes and structures that responded to shifting conditions and needs. Implicit in this, is the necessity for members to understand the conditions of the organization and the conjuncture as constantly changing, and therefore the need to develop capacities such as resiliency that can help us face expected and unexpected changes inside and outside the organization.

## **To be of use**

*The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.*

*I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

*I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.*

*The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.*

**– Marge Piercy**

## SECTION 3

# **FUNDAMENTAL METHODOLOGIES**

***A breakdown of the 7 methodologies LeftRoots considers fundamental to building and sustaining organizational culture***

*Cadrefication*

*Dialectical-Materialism*

*Principled Struggle*

*Resilient Protagonism*

*Self and Peer Criticism*

*Collective Support & Accountability*

*LeftRoots' Choir and Singing*

## **Cadrefication**

### **our organizational purpose and practice**

*“Revolutionary tasks involve conscious action, which implies that they be carried out with enthusiasm in the fulfillment of a conscientious duty and with clearly defined objectives. A cadre does not work or study for the love of it, but to contribute to the advancement of the revolutionary process. This deserves the recognition that one is part of an organization, of a collective, each contributing the best of our abilities. Each cadre is a gear that must mesh with all other gears; If one part fails, to a greater or lesser extent, the operation of the whole is affected.” - Excerpt from Historical Documents of the MST (Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement)*

From the beginning, LeftRoots declared itself a “cadrefication organization”. While we didn’t really know how to cadrefy and trusted we would figure it out in practice, we shared a strong belief that it was critical for US social movement leftists to develop cadre capacities to make it possible to rebuild a vibrant, mass US left. Because we lacked organizations that could train a significant number of us in those capacities, we created an organization dedicated to developing ourselves, so that we could be more ready to seriously contribute to going on offense to shift our conditions.

In LeftRoots, we call ourselves ‘cadres’ as an aspirational practice, but we’re not cadres of a cadre formation, because organizationally we are not dedicated to carrying out and testing a strategy together. Instead, we’re ‘getting ready’ to be cadres together in future organizations, which is why we call ourselves a ‘cadrefication organization’. Our approach to cadrefication is based on this organizational purpose, and we think there’s useful lessons from our experience that can be applied in cadre organizations, where ongoing cadre development will also be needed.

To be clear about how we cadrefy, in 2018 we developed a Cadrefication Framework that articulated capacities in four areas – Ideological, Political, Organizational, and Social/Emotional, as necessary for cadres to develop. In 2020, we also created a set of Cadrefication Benchmarks articulating the more specific capacities we were taking organizational responsibility for supporting our members to develop before the close of LeftRoots - such as Left Leadership and the Ability to Evaluate Strategy.

In our Cadreification Framework, and our cadre development programs, we have prioritized social/emotional capacities as a key piece of our cadreification. We articulated 5 capacities initially - Emotional Intelligence, Social Connection, Resilience, Accountability, and Principled Communication. Our approach has been that social/emotional capacities can be developed through practice and are not inherent personal qualities.

An honest assessment of our capacities in relationship to the cadreification framework described above reveals that we have much work to do to build the skills needed to win 21st century socialism. Capitalist conditioning, oppression, and trauma have left us under-skilled in some areas, and with habits and tendencies that limit our ability to study, organize, and build the unity we need. Yet, our experience in LeftRoots shows us that transformation is possible. Through revolutionary action, study, and regular intentional practices, we can build new skills, replace unhelpful habits and tendencies, and begin to transform ourselves into the agents needed to win a new world.

Our experience teaches us that meeting our revolutionary goals and playing the role of cadres will require each of us to transform the ways racial capitalism has underdeveloped and deformed us all. Our orientation to individual and collective transformation has been evolving over time as we learn more about how to support cadres to change ourselves to change the world. Our working definition of transformation in LeftRoots is *"the process of modifying core beliefs and long-term behaviors, or creating new ones, in order to develop new individual and collective capacities that allows us to draft, implement, and evaluate liberatory strategy to win 21st century socialism for people and the planet."* We have identified several elements as critical interconnected factors in supporting effective transformation. These include awareness of our emotional reactions and responses, a willingness to engage in generative struggle, a commitment to transformation, regular practices for building resilience, and accountability and connection to our comrades. We strive to include these elements throughout our programs.

While LeftRoots is committed to supporting comrades' transformation into effective cadres, we must also be mindful of the fact that we do not have the operational capacity to be the main site of healing for all cadres. Healing from trauma and oppression, while needed, is not LeftRoots' purpose. We have sought to build connections with complimentary or adjacent spaces that share our politics and focus on helping individuals heal, while we maintain our focus on developing cadres to win 21st century socialism.



## ***How We Built This Engine of Cadrefication***

***Being honest with each other about our own (lack of) development:*** We created positive, constructive experiences of sharing about our growth edges, and about our process of development. We did this by sharing self-assessments in our cadre circles, by sharing cadrefication stories in our member meetings, and in modeling done by leadership. This helped many of us to be braver about stepping into roles that challenged our capacities, because we could be honest about where we might need support.

***Leaning on each other's strengths:*** We have tried to emphasize our shared commitment to collective cadrefication, meaning that each person is responsible for supporting the development of the group, not just themselves. For members who came into LeftRoots with more development in a particular set of capacities, this also meant an expectation that they would contribute to supporting the development of their comrades.

***Encouraging a pro-intellectual, pro-study culture:*** Developing ourselves to be strategists has required that we combat anti-intellectual tendencies in our organization and in much of movement culture, by building effective containers for rigorous, supportive shared study. We start this process with an introductory 'bootcamp' training for prospective members, which includes reading challenging theoretical texts, and grounding ourselves in why we study.

***Little Red School:*** This was a foundational training in Marxist ideological and political concepts required for all cadre members. We studied in self-run groupings of 4-8 people, using a curriculum developed by LeftRoots. We read 50-100 pages a month, meeting for about two hours every two weeks, in two 'semesters' spanning almost a year. We covered the history of socialism, dialectical materialism, basic concepts of political economy, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, race, class, and gender, and strategy. The curriculum was oriented towards giving cadres a basic grounding in the core theoretical tools that revolutionary leftists have used to develop their strategies, rather than providing the political grounding for a particular strategic tendency.

***Cadre circles:*** We learned over time that we needed containers that were dedicated to our purpose of cadrefication. We saw how smaller groups supported members to build trust and get grounded in each other's life conditions, LeftRoots roles, and developmental trajectory. As we switched from Branches to Cadre Circles, we found that this higher level of relationship and shared context made it more possible for members to support and hold each other accountable in grounded and effective ways.

**Cadrefication stories:** In our all-member meetings, we adopted a practice of asking individuals to share their personal stories of growth, development and overcoming challenges in meeting their LeftRoots commitments and their broader revolutionary commitments. Each month, we'd ask a few people to share for about 5 minutes, responding to a specific set of prompts that were connected thematically to our collective work at the time. This practice helped us model vulnerability and extending trust to one another, it made visible the sometimes invisible work of cadrefication that so many of us were doing, while building our sense of being in a collective process of cadrefication. These stories also helped us learn about what was working, which in turn helped us sharpen our cadrefication practices.

**Assessments:** We practiced regularly assessing our own capacities and development, and sometimes also assessing each other. In each of our internal initiatives, we articulated specific developmental goals for ourselves, and we started and ended the initiative with all cadres doing a self-assessment of our own capacities. While this was not always the best way to reach a grounded assessment of our actual development, it was an effective practice in other ways. Doing self-assessments helped us remember to orient to the work with a developmental approach, it gave each of us a chance to reflect on our individual development in a given period.

At certain points in our organizational work, cadres in leadership positions also made assessments of members' capacities. We did this to ground who would be asked to take on specific roles, like coordinating a cadre circle, or facilitating strategy discussions.

**Commitments:** We used the practice of making commitments as a way to remind ourselves, and each other, how we wanted to show up in our work and how we wanted to develop. Individuals made commitments at the start of new organizational initiatives, and also when joining new teams. In our cadre circles, we would share our commitments with each other, and refer back to them as a way to ground how we gave each other feedback, support, and accountability about our practice.

## **Principled Struggle**

**the standard method to face disagreement, reach collective clarity and support unity**

*“Our earth is round, and, among other things, that means that you and I can hold completely different points of view and both be right. The difference of our positions will show stars in your window I cannot even imagine. Your sky may burn with light, while mine, at the same moment, spreads beautiful to darkness.”*

*- June Jordan*

Disagreement is natural – and it is inevitable. Disagreement happens when we experience a difference in opinions, values, or standards of practice. The difference we experience might be real or perceived, grounded or ungrounded. Regardless, when we disagree with something someone said or did, we experience it through our nervous system before our thinking brain can articulate it in words. This means we may “feel” disagreements through physical shifts in our body’s hormones, muscle contractions, emotions or moods. A disagreement that our nervous system deems as a high threat, might immediately engage our flight-or-fight response. We are wired to seek connection by looking for similarities, and we are also wired to detect and protect against threats by looking for differences, be they real or perceived. Disagreement as a phenomena is neither good nor bad. It can be an opportunity to increase the collective clarity of the group, advance its purpose, and increase political trust and unity. If mishandled, disagreement can evolve into unmanageable conflict, demoralization, mistrust, dysfunction, and even collapse of the organization.

When we first launched, we were clear about the need to approach disagreement by communicating directly, in a “clear, generous, and principled manner” as we wrote out into our code of conduct. We committed ourselves not to nurse grudges or participate in gossip. But for our first few years, this was a principle on paper more so than a standard practice in our organizational culture.

Between local movement conflict spilling into LeftRoots spaces, insufficient clarity and unity on our purpose and approach, underdevelopment of social-emotional and leadership capacities, and the standard-fare issues that come up in any organization, there were plenty of unaddressed or poorly addressed disagreements that festered

into unproductive conflict, despite our commitment to facing and resolving disagreements by communicating directly. Collectively, we lacked the capacities, bandwidth, and concrete tools to approach disagreement and conflict in ways that effectively resolved it and advanced our collective clarity and unity.

### ***How we built this***

In our attempts to bring our code of conduct alive, and drawing inspiration from struggles for liberation around the world and in particular the global south that have grounded themselves in Marxist tools of analysis, we began developing a culture of principled struggle; a culture in which members of the organization face disagreement and conflict in a timely and direct manner, with integrity, care, and respect for one-another and the organization.

Even when principled struggle was not the norm across the organization, there was principled struggle happening. Reflecting on the differences between instances of productive and unproductive disagreement and conflict, we have been able to trace the basic sequence of steps for effective struggle, and refine our thinking through practice:

1. ***Seek clarity before declaring disagreement.*** This means ensuring that we are sufficiently clear about what the other person is intending to communicate, in what context, and for what purpose. This also means seeking for kernels of truth we agree with. If, through struggling for clarity we find that we in fact have a disagreement, we then
2. ***Assess the need and urgency for the disagreement to be resolved,*** and the conditions that might be required for a successful resolution. We might have a disagreement about what someone said that does not impact or threaten our existing unity. Some disagreements can be resolved in a few minutes, while others might require a separate meeting or even a more elaborate process with external support. This assessment must include consideration and respect for the particular purpose of the meeting or container in which the disagreement first arose.
3. ***Name the disagreement, our intention in raising it, and the kernels of truth (if any), in the other person's position.***

4. **Take turns listening actively** while continuing to strive for greater clarity and resolution.
5. Often resolution is found when we **offer each other grounds, or evidence** that persuades us to shift our initial position to align with the another one, or when through our struggle for clarity, we create a new position that synthesizes the kernels of truth from both original positions.
6. **Follow up in a timely manner when needed.** This means if resolution is collectively assessed as needed, but is not possible within the given meeting or container, an additional conversation to seek resolution should be scheduled within 48 hours.

To be able to carry out the steps above, we identified a few key areas of development that we named the 4 pillars of principled struggle:

**Dialectical Materialism:** to be able to resolve disagreement we first need to have a shared understanding of the disagreement, its basis or grounds, its impact on our existing unity, and its impact on the collective task at hand. Dialectical materialism offers us a framework to do this.

**Resilience:** because disagreement can often cause stress and trigger the nervous system into high alert states, resilience can help us call on more of our internal strengths and external supports to face disagreement and choose to struggle with our comrade(s) for the sake of a resolution.

**Hard skills:** to struggle in principled ways with one another, we must be able to effectively engage the following skills: active listening, emotional awareness and regulation, comprehension and synthesis, and formulating and communicating grounded assessments.

**Praxis:** like any other skill and capacity, a culture of principled struggle is forged through practice, sharpened through evaluation and reflection, and advanced again in practice. By understanding the process of knowledge and skill development as “practice-reflection-practice”, we can appreciate the necessity of struggling for growth - aka that ongoing struggle is needed until we get it right. We also trained a level of leadership to model the kind of direct communication and principled struggle we seek to build, which was key to building a new culture within the organization. We built intentional programs to develop these capacities and support these leaders in holding each other accountable in this new way of being together.

## **Resilient Protagonism + Discipline**

**the standard method to prepare for, face, and overcome individual and organizational adversity**

*And who will join this standing up  
and the ones who stood without sweet company  
will sing and sing  
back into the mountains and  
if necessary  
even under the sea*

*we are the ones we have been waiting for  
- June Jordan*

In 2020, we responded to crisis conditions by sharpening LeftRoots' goals and program plan, as external conditions made the urgency of our intervention clearer to us. As part of this process, we articulated the cadre capacities we needed to focus on developing among our membership, and one of these was Resilient Protagonism + Discipline. This is how we defined it: *Cadres need to be able to advance political goals in difficult conditions without sacrificing their personal well-being or engaging in practices that lead to unnecessary destructive conflict. If we develop our capacity to combat alienation and assess and navigate internal and external contradictions in our lives and movement practice, we will be able to engage in principled struggle, and we will create a basis for shifting US movement culture towards more principled and effective practice. [from LeftRoots Cadrefication Benchmarks]*

Since then, we've gotten clearer on what Resilient Protagonism and Discipline means, and clearer that principled struggle is a related, but distinct capacity in itself, that's also key for cadres to develop. In writing this case study, we want to offer an updated definition of Resilient Protagonism and Discipline, based on what we've learned practicing this capacity over the last two years: *Resilient Protagonism and Discipline is the ability to navigate contradictions between our individual needs, and the needs of our political work, based on a grounded and evolving assessment of all relevant conditions and priorities, for the sake of making our best lifetime revolutionary contribution.*

**Resilience** means the capacity to generate a sense of hope, possibility, joy and connection even in challenging conditions, and the ability to recover from hardship, challenges or even trauma. **Protagonism** means having a sense of our individual and collective agency in shaping our circumstances, overcoming challenges, and making history. **Discipline** means having the capacity to maintain accountability to our commitments, especially when it's challenging. We came up with this long name for this capacity because we think all three capacities, in relationship to each other, are key for cadres to develop if we're going to be able to navigate the challenges of the responsibility we are taking on.

We chose to prioritize Resilient Protagonism and Discipline after experiencing two patterns among our membership. Some of our members would not meet their LeftRoots commitments consistently, or would fall out of communication with the organization for months at a time, or resign, but when approached directly, these comrades would express their political alignment with LeftRoots and a desire to contribute to our work. We also had members who would be highly accountable and take on significant leadership, while overstressing their own development and capacities for resilience, sometimes leading to burnout and resentment of the organization. We assessed that there was a disconnect in our collective capacity to align our commitments with our practice, and that we needed to address this intentionally.

Because this capacity is wrapped up in each person's daily practice and life conditions, there have been limits to what's appropriate for LeftRoots to take responsibility for. We are not therapists or life coaches, and LeftRoots is not what most of our members spend most of their time doing every day. We've relied heavily on people's commitment and self-leadership to address these limitations. Many of the things that have supported individuals to develop Resilient Protagonism and Discipline are their 'personal' practices and commitments that happen outside our organizational container – things like being more intentional about work-planning and what movement commitments people take on, or prioritizing basic needs like economic stability, family needs, sleep, exercise, or nutrition, or addressing internal social/emotional needs through connection with friends and family, therapy, or meditation, or making decisions about how people structure their lives and commitments. The feedback we've gotten and the transformation we've witnessed from many members tells us that this is a crucial capacity that we need in order to be effective cadres, and that often there's very little support for cadres to develop this capacity in our lives or in our movement work.

## ***How we built this***

***Separating people's conditions from their commitment:*** Our support and accountability practices, and our general orientation, strived to be clear that if someone is not able to meet their LeftRoots commitments, this doesn't necessarily mean they are not politically committed or aligned with our work. We aim to identify whether a challenge is due to capacity or due to alignment, and address these as such. We built this approach based on an assessment that most of our members were struggling with capacity, not with alignment, and we think this approach has opened up possibilities for our members to develop Resilient Protagonism and Discipline, because they can share and seek support and accountability without feeling like their commitment will be called into question.

***Extending trust and modeling vulnerability:*** A key element of building this capacity has been building trust with each other, and leadership's ability to model vulnerability and commitment in the midst of challenges has been key to this. We practiced this by doing opening check-ins at the start of meetings where we can share about our personal conditions. We've also practiced this in our support and accountability process, and when sharing cadreification stories. We've strived to build a culture of honesty about how we are doing and what we are struggling with, where it's ok to name if we're coming to a meeting feeling sad, or angry, or overwhelmed. At the same time, we hold each other to a high standard for accountability, which can look like someone being present in a meeting while acknowledging they are struggling, or it can be supporting someone to accountably step back for a time. We've found that for many people, being able to be more honest makes more participation possible, and allows them to see and feel voluntarism and liberalism in practice and begin to embody a new form, because we've removed the strain and sense of isolation that comes about when we feel we have to hide our struggles.

***Resilience Practices:*** As comrades have developed grounded assessments of their internal and external conditions, we have encouraged the development of resilience practices. These regular practices, such as walking in nature, meditation, exercise, or making music, help us build resilience in order to maintain our commitments during difficult times. We have found that the most effective practices are embodied through daily physical action and repetition. Cadre Circles have often been places for us to share our individual resilience practices or even engage in collective ones.



## ***Self and Peer Criticism***

***the standard (loving, grounded, generative) method to evaluate and improve our practice***

As we worked to build this new culture, we knew we had to engage our members in the practice of self and peer criticism. We needed a methodology to evaluate and give each other feedback on how our actions align or don't align with our commitments, and how much we are developing competency in the skills and capacities needed to formulate and implement strategy. For this, we drew lessons and inspiration from the long Marxist practice of "criticism/self-criticism" or C/SC for short. C/SC is a planned and structured form self and peer criticism that asks its practitioners to engage in principled struggle for the sake of each other's development.

At its best, C/SC enables us to learn from and correct our mistakes, strengthen our unity, and build our muscle for direct communication and grounded assessments. C/SC focuses not only on our mistakes and weaknesses but on our strengths and development, since our strengths should be used to help us correct our mistakes.

As we planned for the implementation of this practice, we knew we would have to create a strong program and framework to address some of the sour personal experiences our members had with criticism/self-criticism and the general fear of conflict and feedback.

From our perspective, C/SC required (in addition to the pillars of principled struggle):

- ***A clear methodology:*** essential to prevent the process from devolving into group therapy or personal attacks.
- ***Skillful facilitation:*** once a methodology is developed, it's essential to train facilitators in the methodology in order to hold it.
- ***Willingness to extend trust:*** there must be a shared commitment to principled struggle for the sake of cohesion. We should also be aware of any internal mistrust within the group.
- ***Ability to give and receive grounded assessments*** with emotional intelligence: for feedback to be effective, it must be as grounded as possible, and communicated and received with emotional intelligence.

C/SC is not group therapy, a space for personal attacks, or a method for resolving differences about the political strategy (which should happen in a debate format).

We practiced organization-wide C/SC inside our cadre circles two times, a process we affectionately named 'Pandafest'. Despite the fears going into our first round of C/SC, the majority of the organization came out feeling more confident in their capacity for struggle and more cohered. Our experience demonstrated the need for intentional and plentiful support along the way.

After our first organization-wide C/SC, we were more able to practice and standardize self and peer feedback across our organizational life. The more we were able to give each other helpful feedback, the more we were able to integrate it concretely and see a tangible value in it. The more we witnessed and experienced giving each other emotionally-intelligent feedback, the more we learned to trust each other.

### ***When 1on1 principled struggle is not enough...***

Some times, conflict is not able to be resolved through 1 on 1 principled struggle and organizational intervention is needed. For these cases, we developed Organizational Support & Accountability Protocols, which you can find in section 4. Below is an excerpt from these guidelines:

***In Level One:*** when there is no apparent threat to physical safety and no obvious grounds for disciplinary action like suspension, we aim to de-escalate conflict, offer support, and provide opportunities for cadre to remedy and support. We do this through C/SC processes or mediation.

***In Level Two:*** when we assess that a Level One intervention has failed to resolve the conflict, we aim to hold cadre(s) accountable for harm done and create an opportunity for transformation and reconciliation. We do this through a collective accountability process, that may include a more official investigation, structured processes for reflection and struggle, and concrete accountability agreements.

***In Level Three:*** if we assess that there is an apparent threat to a cadre's safety, that the allegations would constitute grounds for suspension or expulsion, and/or if other conflict resolution attempts have failed. In this case, we aim to protect individual cadre(s) and/or the organization by initiating a process to remove the accused cadre from membership temporarily or permanently. The NCC (our highest elected body of leadership) is tasked with carrying out a "disciplinary proceeding" to do this.

***P** rincipled struggle was always a part of LeftRoots as a concept. But it took years for this concept to truly be a part of the life of our organization. We had conflicts and treated them as interpersonal conflicts or a strategic battles to out-organize each other. We didn't have the individual or collective capacities to deal with these tensions in a principled way. This was a reflection of the prevailing movement culture. But we built a new culture together, one where we combat gossiping and challenge each other to speak directly to someone you have beef with or feedback to share. One where debate is approached with emotional awareness and grounded assessments. One where healthy conflict is encouraged. It took us intentional training, leadership development, at-large programming, and structures for accountability over years of practice. This work has supported us in cohering and advancing our collective work so that we could finally realize our purpose together." - LeftRoots Cadre Member*

## **Collective Support & Accountability**

***the standard method to consistently collectivize barriers getting in the way of meeting our commitments to the organization and collectivizing resources and support***

Collective Support and Accountability is the process for supporting each other to act with Resilient Protagonism and Discipline as we strive to meet our organizational purpose. It recognizes that we all face both internal and external challenges in meeting our revolutionary commitments and that resolving these challenges requires a shared orientation and non-liberal, collective support.

Throughout our work in LeftRoots, comrades routinely experienced challenges that interfered with their ability to meet their commitments. Over the years we developed a variety of practices to support comrades in navigating these challenges, but our methods and their implementation were uneven. Our assessment was that our individual and collective practices of support and accountability had been helpful but insufficient at its best, and liberal at worst. This resulted in several problems, including comrades struggling on their own to resolve their issues, comrades making decisions about leaving the organization or taking leaves without grounded assessments, or comrades sacrificing their own wellbeing to meet their commitments.

With the implementation of Cadre Circles and the Member Organizer Program, we developed a more systematic approach to supporting our comrades in addressing these challenges. Our approach was based on several core ideas:

- ***Our work required periods of intensification.*** No two cadres experienced intensification in the same way, but all of us needed support to navigate these periods with resilience.
- While we should strengthen our capacity to endure moments of hardship, our approach towards intensification leaned on ***practicing resilience rather than endurance***. Endurance is about surviving hardship and resilience is about thriving despite hardship.
- ***Cadres should take a protagonistic approach to addressing their own challenges.*** While we can seek support from others, we must also take responsibility for meeting our commitments and resolving challenges. Cadres must want and seek their own transformation.

- **Resolving challenges requires non-liberal support.** Comrades need support to make grounded assessments about their internal and external conditions on which to base a plan for resolution. This requires facilitators trained in non-liberal support.
- **To counter the capitalist orientation of individualism, our approach must be collective.** This means individuals should strive to share their challenges and assessments with the group and the group should engage in offering support.

### ***How we build this***

Based on the ideas above, we developed a formal Support and Accountability process. Cadres were expected to initiate a Support and Accountability Process when they were not meeting the expectations of membership or when they foresaw not being able to do so. The cadre member engaged in assessing their internal and external conditions to identify the barriers to participation. Membership Organizers were responsible for ensuring that the process was grounded in a dialectical materialist assessments of life conditions and that it was carried out in a collective and timely manner. Except in cases where a cadre needed to request an urgent leave, the cadre would draft concrete plan for Recommitment, Transition, Resilient Protagonism and Discipline, or Leave and shares it with their cadre circle. After integrating the cadre circle's feedback and/or collective principled struggle, the cadre was responsible for sharing their updated plan with their cadre circle and requesting support from their Membership Organizer as needed. As the cadre member made progress on carrying out their plan, they would share successes, challenges, requests for support or accountability, and insights into their hypothesis learned along the way with their cadre circle. Member Organizers received training to facilitate the process and all cadres were oriented to the process and the frameworks behind it.

The following story represents one comrade's experience using the Support and Accountability process:

***D**uring the last year I faced a significant crisis that threatened my ability to show up to LeftRoots. I shared my experience with my cadre circle and got emotional support through our daily mood checks. I had a support & accountability 1:1 with Team Awesome where I was encouraged to think through my commitments and renegotiated what I was able to do. I ultimately stepped back from one of my commitments which gave me more time to attend to my personal crisis conditions. This allowed me to continue to show up in other LeftRoots containers without leaving the project altogether. The space for more personal transformation, and the accountability within LeftRoots, allowed me to*

*build resilience, stay connected, and continue to contribute to our work together. – LeftRoots Cadre member*

## ***LeftRoots' Choir and Singing***

***the standard embodied method to uplift the legacies and cultures of resistance & liberation we come from, are inspired by, and are committed to advancing***

Since the founding of LeftRoots, we have been intentional about practicing collective singing and other embodied activities in the spirit of Culture as a Weapon and as part of building our collective muscle of resistance, and deepening our connection as comrades.

The work of the Principles of Cadre Care Team in 2018 served as a basis for our formal experiment with collective singing by articulating the role of culture and its connection to building resiliency. LeftRoot's approach and thinking about Culture as a Weapon has gone from understanding that culture is an important part of any Left project to actually growing out an experiment to test out how we can build that culture within our organization. The LeftRoots Choir is one manifestation of that.

The LeftRoots choir experiment is about building a shared culture - knowing that we need a culture inside of LeftRoots that actually produces a higher level of cohesion to combat the daily alienation that people are faced with: the daily indoctrination around individualism and pessimism. We aimed to support people in having a practice and tool to build a higher level of cohesion and further the development of social emotional capacities.

### ***What is our practice around collective singing?***

We have a choir of 10-15 active cadres who meet on a regular basis to choose and/or write songs for us to sing collectively during our monthly calls. We dedicate 15 minutes of our 4-hour monthly calls to collective singing. The choir puts in at least 2 hours of rehearsal every month. They do research to find songs, chants, and music from movements of resistance and liberation, and make them more attuned and aligned with our current time-place-conditions. They work to encourage full participation of membership when they sing, so that the choir is not a performance to watch, but a collective practice for all to engage in. This is obviously much more possible and effective in-person but we found it impactful even under pandemic conditions of constant online zoom meetings.

We chose singing because there is a scientific basis as to how it impacts people, particularly collective singing. Singing individually can help shift moods; it's a stress

reliever. Collective singing does that and more - the science says that it has the ability to bring about connection. In the choir we draw from the radical traditions we come from, and it is a gift that we provide for future revolutionaries.

The LeftRoots Choir creates an opportunity for many cadre to be creative and bring their ideas; it feels incredibly accessible in a way that other elements of cadreification may not. Singing and figuring out what songs to sing is an accessible way for people to be in organization, and it supports organization building.

*"Well, friends, that's it for today. You have to live in uncertainty and get ahead no matter what it takes. A hug as always, full of dreams and hopes."*

*- Marta Harnecker*



## SECTION 4

# ***DEFINITIONS***

In this section, we offer a glossary of key concepts LeftRoots uses to ground our approach to organizational culture.

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## ***Glossary of Concepts***

### **Alienation**

the severance or estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature as a consequence of living in a society where the mode of production responds to the needs of capital and the capitalist class, at the expense of human development (and the planet's sustainability). Alienation is the process through which we become foreign to the world we are living in, under capitalism. Our society is structured in such a way that we're likely to never meet the people who grew the food we eat, or the people getting rich off our mortgage payments. Most of us don't have real decision-making power at work, at school, or in the many other institutions that shape our lives. We become separated from what we produce, our labor, and our own potential, from each other and ourselves, which includes, disconnection from our bodies and our histories. Alienation facilitates economic production while it also weakens possibilities for collective struggle.

### **Cadres**

Cadres are individuals with a high level of skills and commitment to revolutionary struggle, who take responsibility for advancing a revolutionary strategy. Cadres earn leadership in mass movements, and they are accountable to advancing a revolutionary strategy through their membership in a cadre organization. Cadres have a commitment to their own continued development and transformation. In other words, they are always willing to learn, grow and change to be more effective. While individuals can embody many of the qualities of cadres on their own, we think what they can accomplish is limited without cadre organization. This concept and practice dates back to the Russian revolution and has been adopted by revolutionary movements throughout history.

LeftRoots Cadres are members of LeftRoots who aspire to become revolutionary cadres through the process of developing as strategists and developing strategy. LeftRoots does not see itself as a fully developed revolutionary cadre organization, instead it is a time bound project that aims to develop a critical mass of social movement leftists as cadre who can create strategy and build the political instrument needed to win 21st century socialism.

### **Cadrefication Stories**

In LeftRoots, Cadrefication Stories are a practice we adopted in order to make visible to each other our process of transformation, growth, and development as aspiring cadres

– what we call “cadrefication”. In LeftRoots’ all-member meetings, Cadrefication Stories usually take the form of an individual sharing a prepared short personal story about their process of development, and the challenges they faced along the way and how they overcame them, often related to a theme or question that the organization is currently grappling with. Cadrefication Stories are a practice that has helped us to combat alienation and individualism, build trust and connection, and share insights with each other, all of which has helped to strengthen our collective cadrefication.

## **Cohesion**

In this document we use cohesion and unity interchangeably, and in broad strokes we define this as: the collective capacity of members to carry out the work with discipline and respect for organizational decisions.

## **Collective Support and Accountability**

In LeftRoots, this is the term we’ve used to describe our practices for how we help each other overcome challenges to meeting our organizational commitments. We use this term internally to remind ourselves to place support and accountability in dialectical relationship to one another, and that each of us has a responsibility to collectivize our struggles and our labor in this area, to help combat an alienated approach to our ‘personal’ challenges and make our collective cadrefication more possible.

## **Culture as a Weapon**

Left Culture/Cultural Work is the work of creating a set of practices, traditions and customs that celebrates the Left’s rich history of working-class resistance, coheres and strengthens us and can be weaponized in the struggle for 21st century socialism. This area of work is essential to cutting through alienation and pessimism by inspiring joy, hope and social connection. While elements of this work may be founded upon an idealist worldview, this does not make cultural work antagonistic to our goals. It may in fact allow us to communicate our goals more broadly.

## **Economic Base and Superstructure**

A framework used in the Marxist tradition to describe the dynamic relationship between a society’s dominant economic mode of production (base) and the social institutions (ex. states; governmental and non-governmental organizations; religious and cultural institutions and trends; labor organizations; the press; etc.) (superstructure) that are determined or fundamentally effected by the mode of production.

## Holding and Moving Containers

Containers are LeftRoots spaces where a group of cadres meets for a specific purpose(s), and they are a key material practice through which we build cohesion. Although containers might have different purposes, all LeftRoots containers are designed to advance the purpose of the organization. LeftRoots adapted language for 'moving' and 'holding' a container to describe the way facilitators maneuver and cohere a group. Moving a container is about ensuring that the group is on track to meet the purpose of the container. Holding a container is about ensuring that the group has the cohesion needed in order to meet the purpose of the container. Facilitators constantly gather information about the conditions of a container. Information can be verbal and non-verbal. Conditions include emotional conditions of self and others. Facilitators also apply dialectal materialism to make sense of conditions and make grounded assessments of the conditions, making decisions based on those assessments.

## Idealism

Idealism is a philosophy that understands ideas to be what determines the existence of the world, rather than understanding the world to be determined by material reality. While our ideas and actions can change the world, changing the world requires an understanding of the material realities that exist in a particular situation. There are many different ways idealism can manifest. These are some of the ways that have been the most relevant for us:

- **Voluntarism:** Believing that will is the dominant factor in experience or in the world – basically the idea that sheer will power can achieve anything regardless of the conditions.
- **Moralism:** Believing that expressing judgments about others' morality (which is different than having an analysis), or the moral rightness of an action or issue, creates social change.
- **Purism:** Believing the purity or correctness of an action determines its impact despite the time, place, or conditions.

## Individualism

Individualism is a moral philosophy that gives primacy to personal interests over the interests of a group or social movement. It promotes self-reliance and independence over interdependence and solidarity. We live in a social order that makes us individually responsible for securing the things we need in order to live, often in

competition with each other. Capitalists have to compete against each other to expand their capital (capital must grow or die), while workers compete against each other to be able to keep /get a job, or just for mere survival. This forced competition for survival shapes humans to be individualistic. Individualism is a prevalent characteristic of our current society which means that it influences the organizational culture of our movement organizations as well.

## **Liberalism**

Liberalism is a political philosophy that emphasizes personal and economic freedom, and it's a term that used to mean different things in different contexts. Economic liberalism refers to an economic regime that allows property owners free reign to assert their power, sometimes referred to as neoliberalism. Civic liberalism is a philosophy emphasizing and individual's autonomy from governments, institutions, or other entrenched power relations. In the United States, liberal can also refer to a set of political beliefs centered around doing good for people without challenging the status quo.

In our context, we use liberalism to describe what happens when we don't engage in principled struggle, inspired by Mao's famous text, "*Combat Liberalism*". Liberalism undermines our movements because it rejects struggle and promotes opportunism, selfishness, apathy, and conformity with the status quo. In our movement organizations, liberalism undermines our ability to build and maintain unity, or to improve our practice by learning from our successes and our failures. Liberalism might look like gossiping instead of bringing our concerns directly to each other, or making assumptions about an organizational decision instead of investigating with curiosity, or letting things slide when we don't do something we said we would do, instead of naming it and seeking clarity on how to move forward.

## **Liberatory Strategy**

LeftRoots Liberatory Strategy Toolkit defines Liberatory Strategy as "a hypothesis of how political forces can build capacities and shift the balance of power on ever-changing terrain to defeat opposing forces so that they can carry out revolutionary change."

## **Protagonism**

This is a term that LeftRoots first came across in the work of Marta Harnecker who noted its usage amongst social movement activists throughout Latin America. We have adopted the use of the term even though there is no direct translation in English

because, like no other term we've come across, 'protagonism' names an approach that has the potential to strengthen social movements inside the United States. The concept builds from the literary term 'protagonist' which refers to a character who takes ownership over her destiny and drives the narrative forward by taking action. In a similar vein, we understand protagonism to be the democratic engagement which builds our individual and collective capacities for transformative change and, in doing so, combats our fundamental alienation from the means of production, from the products of our labor, from each other, and from ourselves.

## **Principled Struggle**

The process of addressing potential and actual disagreements, for the sake of reaching collective clarity and supporting collective unity, in the context of already-existing shared political commitments. Principled struggle can happen informally, or through intentionally created processes, and it can be used to address many different types of potential disagreements, large or small. The elements of principled struggle include seeking clarity before declaring a disagreement, assessing the need and urgency for the disagreement to be resolved, and what conditions may be required for its resolution, naming our intention in raising a disagreement, naming the kernels of truth in the other person's position, listening actively, offering each other grounds, or evidence to support our position, stating the resolution or lack of resolution reached, and following up in a timely and prompt manner when necessary.

## **Resilience**

Resilience refers to our individual AND collective capacity to take on the hardships and challenges on the road to cadreification and socialist liberation. As an individual capacity it refers to the mental and emotional reservoir of strength that cadres can call on in times of crisis and/or high intensity. This doesn't mean that resilient cadres experience less distress, grief, or anxiety than other people do. It means that they use their internal and external resources to handle such difficulties in ways that foster strength, growth, and collectivity. As a collective capacity it refers to the group's capacity to sustain or regain its cohesion and thrust during/despite times of crisis. Resilience must be cultivated. The more we cultivate our individual resilience, the more expansive our reservoir becomes. The more we cultivate our collective resilience the more we are able to show up for one another and the organization. Like any capacity, we become resilient through intentional practice.

## **Resilient Protagonism and Discipline**

A capacity LeftRoots articulated as one of the necessary capacities for cadres to develop, defined as the ability to navigate contradictions between our individual needs, and the needs of our political work, based on a grounded and evolving assessment of all relevant conditions and priorities, for the sake of making our best lifetime revolutionary contribution. Resilience means the capacity to generate a sense of hope, possibility, joy and connection even in challenging conditions, and the ability to recover from hardship, challenges or even trauma. Protagonism means having a sense of our individual and collective agency in shaping our circumstances, overcoming challenges, and making history. Discipline means having the capacity to maintain accountability to our commitments, especially when it's challenging.

## **Unity**

In this document we use cohesion and unity interchangeably, and in broad strokes we define this as: the collective capacity of members to carry out the work with discipline and respect for organizational decisions.