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Black Autonomy Federation: Let's Organize the Hood!

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Let's Organize the 'Hood: Inner City Organizing Projects.

By word or deed, we are being told that revolution is not possible, that we must accept whatever crumbs the white power structure gives us, or that we must join the power elite ourselves. Indeed, both the Left and large segments of the Black nationalist movements are joining the white government by becoming Mayors, U.S. Congressmen, and local politicians who work through the system for reforms. These "radical politicians" tell us that there is no longer any reason to struggle in the streets, that in fact we now can have power under the system itself. That their elections ensure that we are on the road to revolution.

Yet, even after the election of tens of thousands of Black and POC politicians since the 1964 Voting Rights Act, the inner city poor are still desperately poor, there is still substandard housing, police brutality is worse, and the quality of life for millions, even the Black middle class, is eroding. Poverty

is at 25% and unemployment is rising in our communities to over 15%, even though it may be improving for the white middle class. Now there is mass imprisonment of millions and tens of thousands have been killed by the police just since the end of the Black Power era (1965-1975). So, in such an environment, running for political office is clearly mis-leadership, if not outright treachery. We will not get free under this system, and we must continue to organize for our survival and liberation. No politician can give you your freedom, even the President, you must take it!

We must rebuild inner city neighborhoods as a community survival program, even while we work to fight racism and capitalism, along with internal colonialism. We need to build a new society, but until then we need to organize and empower poor folks living in deteriorating inner city communities to rebuild substandard housing and create jobs, food and housing cooperatives. Capitalism is a social system with inherent economic inequalities. Not only do the poor pay more for basic amenities, but also they are made the scapegoat of this corrupt system. They are called a “criminal underclass”, “layabouts,” “welfare queens” and other garbage by the rich and their ideological agents; even part of the Black working class echoes this propaganda. Then after they have told their lies, the rich fashion new laws to ensure their unjust rule by starving, humiliating, killing, imprisoning, torturing, policing and otherwise keeping the pressure to survive on the poor themselves.

First, we must recognize that we need a new way of confronting our oppressed situation. How do we get started at this?

This period of widespread social repression is extremely dangerous: one of every three young Black men and almost 60 percent of all female prison inmates are in the so-called “American criminal justice system” (prison, jail, or on parole), high unemployment and social disinvestments are destroying the economic base of many inner city neighborhoods; chemical warfare (drugs) is being used to destabilize our communities and keep us from fighting back; and an epidemic of police violence takes place each day to beat, kill and torture Black men, woman and children and to intimidate the community into fearing white authority—all these and worse are the daily life experiences of poor Black people under this system.

The Poor People’s Survival Movement, (part of a broader program called “Let’s Organize The Hood”), which was first devised by the Black Autonomy Network of Community Organizers, is what is needed in this period for poor and working class Black people. With it as a component part of our Anarchist federation and our political program, we will ultimately build a sociopolitical infrastructure to intervene in every area of Black life: food and housing cooperatives, Black Liberation schools, people’s banks

and community mutual aid funds, free medical clinics and hospitals, rodent control and pest extermination programs, cooperative factories, a Black Partisan militia to patrol our communities, the establishment of a Black inter-continental electronic communications network, land and building reclamation projects, public works brigades to rebuild the cities, youth projects, drug clinics, a Black alternate currency and many other programs can be made possible with a mass supported Poor Peoples' Survival Movement, because it can potentially mobilize millions of our people around specific obtainable objectives, instead of pie in the sky rhetoric by national leaders.

All of these programs in part can satisfy the deep social needs of the Black community, but they are not solutions to our problems, because although we can build a survival economy now, we have to realize it will take a social revolution to overthrow capitalism and obtain full economic self-sufficiency. We will have to fight to obtain full freedom. For instance, we will have to demand money for rebuilding the cities at community and government expense. We will create community public works brigades to rebuild inner city areas, made up of community residents.

One way to raise money for such a project is to demand an end to taxes of workers and the poor, increased taxation of rich and major corporations to finance our social programs.

Even though that would be part of a mass program for the poor, the reality is that this will not happen right away. We just have to build a mass membership group to represent the poor and serve as their organization. Small amounts of donations and other fundraising can serve as the seed money. But then what?

We must begin to go into the poorest, most economically depressed Black and ethnic neighborhoods and not just begin to define the problems, but to feed, clothe and even house people to the limits of our resources, in other ways, build survival collectives as the grassroots basis of the PPSM. This means starting food co-ops, doing insurrectionary squatting to reclaim buildings for community cultural centers and for housing the poor and homeless, building local coalitions against police brutality, starting an underground newspaper or other grassroots media.

This also means that we must join with the people to fight their slumlords, local governments, unemployment and welfare offices, their employers and other exploiters who fleece and oppress the working poor. The particular neighborhood, the city and the region, means that the nature of the struggle in different parts of the country will be different, but what I want to emphasize is we must start out with a perspective from day one to be part of the people, on the very scale of their problems,

instead of a middle class “revolutionary study society” like most Left wing and Black nationalist formations are today.

Working out a strategy and tactics that can realistically hasten a revolutionary showdown means it is necessary first to understand where the Black liberation struggle actually stands today. What stage is it in? The truth is that it is in a reactionary period, where opportunist national leaders and politicians still have a hold on the minds of the people. At best we can say that our revolutionary forces are a rebuilding stage and once this is understood, the solutions begin to fall in place for all its problems. Our task is to create a movement that will bring into the struggle large numbers of the most despised sectors of the Black working class.

In truth, before we can build an effective revolutionary movement, we must rebuild the foundations of a mass movement of the urban Black poor and their non-white allies in the barrios, reservations, prisons, ghettos and other poverty pits. This in turn has the effect of throwing other class sectors into battle; students, industrial workers, clerical workers, the unemployed generally and we can even split the white working class. This process actually started in the 1960s in the wake of the civil rights/Black Power and other ethnic liberation movements, but the conservatives have seized the agenda in recent years.

If we can mobilize the Black poor in the urban ghettos as a force against capitalist reaction and the misleadership of the Negroisie, we become a serious movement at an early stage of our organizational development. Otherwise, we get sucked into the trap of ‘navel gazing’, issuing grand proclamations, and manifestoes and so on that nobody pays attention to but group members. So the task is to clearly link struggles for the pressing immediate needs of Black people with the revolutionary goal of overturning the whole racist system.

That is why the ideas of the PPSM assume such great importance today. The solution lies in formulating and fighting for a program that can help transform the general discontent and militancy of the urban Black masses into an organized, cohesive, consciously revolutionary force. By presenting and fighting for such a program, a small movement can transform itself into an influential power among the masses of people. Although it is not possible to give an “operating manual” for how to organize the PPSM in each city, here is a simple way to look at it: the main strategic and tactical demand is for Black control of the Black community, (leading to a large scale social revolution in the future). This is nothing new, others have written about it and the demand for Black control has been raised spontaneously in thousands of struggles around the U.S. over the last 50 years. It is obviously a demand

that speaks directly to the needs and present understanding of Black people: they want an end to white domination and control over their lives.

At the same time, the struggle for Black control is profoundly revolutionary, because it poses the question of who will have decision-making power over Black people; will we begin to rule ourselves or continue to be under the white capitalist rulers. The realization of this aim of Black autonomy can build the cities into Black fortresses that will be centers of Black counter-power to the entire white power structure of North America. Our aim has to be to make ourselves ungovernable to the white power structure. Make it impossible for the police to patrol our neighborhood, make it impossible for politicians to assume control on the local level and begin to take over the schools and other government resources and use them for the people. We can't do as the nationalists do, just advocate for reparations or a future nation-state, or now just running for office and administering cities on behalf of the capitalist state.

As they develop within the Black communities, struggles targeted to win control over specific institutions and agencies can pave the way and prepare increasing numbers of people for the all-inclusive goal of total control of their community and of the existing political system. These partial struggles, carried out around issues such as Black control of neighborhood control of the schools, an end to police brutality, decent hospitals under community control and other issues, can be extremely important because through them encouraging victories can be won. We must realize that most Black people don't belong to social or civic organizations, except for their church or union. They need to feel that they can now belong to something that can produce tangible victories now.

These victories, even if limited to specific areas and issues at first, can help raise the confidence of the community in its own power and lay the basis for broader future struggles. For instance, the following demands could help to promote this process generally:

End police brutality by replacing police occupation forces with a community controlled Black Partisan militia drawn from residents of the community. This Partisan Militia force would not just do "policing," but deal with civil defense, fire safety, food distribution, youth training, community military preparedness, military communications and a host of other neighborhood safety issues. It would not be a colonial force, a repressive guard force for the downtown white merchants, or any other tool of the oppressor, it would be a true community defense guard made up of neighborhood residents.

The creation of a Black Partisan Militia, not only for purposes of dealing with our own internal

oppression and crimes against the people, but to create conditions for defense of the community against racist cops and politicians, feeding and building houses for the poor, holding community meetings, training the community in military tactics, and patrolling the community.

Black grassroots control of all funds allocated to the Black community and control over all plans for renovating and constructing housing and other communal facilities and improvements. The Black community can only get decent housing, end urban homelessness, start to house families on project waiting lists when it gets access to massive capital.

Only the government and major corporations now have access to such resources, we must fight to win these funds for the people, rather than let the bureaucrats and “community development” poverty pimps decide what they want to do with the money to ‘help’ business people and real estate developers.

Beat back layoffs by the corporations who are cutting jobs, running to low wage areas of the world, by fighting budget cuts by politicians and rich capitalists. We have got to build local movements that educate the people to these economic crimes and mobilize them to fight back and stop it. We need to sit-in at the offices of corporation meetings, government hearings and other functions to disrupt local life and be willing to take any other action necessary to win our demands.

We should establish Black community General Assemblies to create dual power and start to make policy decisions and administer the affairs of the Black community. These assemblies should be composed of representatives elected by poor and working class Black people in various community institutions: such as hospitals, welfare centers, libraries, factories — as well as delegates elected on a block basis. They would then be federated into a local Community-wide Assembly for citywide or regional coordination. This would be the beginning of building dual power institutions to challenge and dismantle the government itself.

Educate, agitate and organize the Black community around the issues of the prisons and the mass lockup of Black youth. Show how police brutality, homelessness, poverty, unemployment and the drug economy are brought on by the exploitative system of capitalism is what’s causing the problems in our community. We must certainly down the idea that police and prisons exist in any way keep the Black community safe, or that the police are there to protect us from a criminal class of poor people. We need to show that this government is willing to spend more money to put our kids in prison than send them to college and that we are being confined at a rate ten times that of whites. We must create a mass coalition around this issue, which includes other peoples of color and progressives.

Establish a Black community controlled food system for self-sufficiency and as a way of fighting to end hunger and malnutrition, including a cooperative trucking network, food warehouses, communal farms, farmers' cooperatives and agricultural unions, inner-city food cooperatives and neighborhood unions and other collective associations. However, this will also include a mass protest campaign challenging the theft of Black farmland by agribusiness corporations and rich white "land barons" and reclaiming it for our projects. This is especially important now that the U.S. government has entered an economic crisis during which it will not longer be able to provide for our needs. We must force the government and the corporations to provide the money for many of these projects, to be administered under our total control.

We must mobilize poor people to be a potent class force in this country and disrupt the system until our demands are met. We are not sectarian or vanguardist, and we may need to join with any authentic organization fighting for the poor to build a mass campaign, whether it's the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, Kensington Welfare Rights Organization, or the countless Black grassroots anti-poverty groups in every city and state, but the main thing is that we must build our own.

We must have an independent self-sustaining survival economy to guarantee full employment to our people, even while we fight the racist and exploitative government and its corporate backers. We demand that the government provide massive economic aid to rebuild the cities, under the control of the people of those communities and we will create public works and building brigades out of the inhabitants of the community. Ghetto housing has to be rebuilt and turned over to the occupants.

Adequate jobs and services must be provided to all community residents, including first preference for all construction jobs in the Black community, instead of the racist job trust system of white-dominated labor unions. We have to unite with progressive unions, poor people's movements and others to build a broad coalition, but we have to push it beyond reformism and conventional politics. We have to demand reparations for the poor who have been ignored by the government and its rich backers, as well as the middle class Black nationalists.

As we have pointed out, being the victims of extreme inequality in the economy, Black and non-white workers have already begun to organize caucuses in the unions against discrimination against racist hiring and firing and also demanding upgrading and promotions. Also because of high unemployment in their communities and general poverty, they have had to create movements to demand basic services for the poor and homeless instead of on the job issues alone. History has proven that the government

will not respond to either workers or the poor until they organize to demand a change and disrupt the system. That is certainly the case where a Black President ignores the distressing conditions of the Black community.

We need only to look at the severity of the problem: In the first six months of 2011, the U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics listed official unemployment rates at just over 10 percent of the labor force, in the Black community it is 15-25% +. Under Capitalism, since the 1960's, half that 10% figure is "normal" and nonsensically considered by Capitalist economists as "full employment" even though this is millions of people consigned to economic poverty of the worst sort. But the government figures are intentionally conservative and do not include those millions who have given up actively searching for jobs, the under-employed (who can't make enough to live on), the part-time workers (who can't find a full time or steady job) and the homeless (now between 4-5 million alone).

Of the millions of people that the government does count as jobless now, only about 5-7 million are now given any unemployment compensation or other federal or state aid; the rest are left to starve, steal or hustle for their survival, and many who are receiving benefits face the prospect of having them cut off at any time, due to government austerity policies.

A person without a job under the Capitalist system is counted as nothing. Yet, every worker has the human right to a job or an income benefit. It is only under Capitalism where workers are dismissed from employment in times of business crisis, overproduction, and depression or just to save labor costs through less workers and more speed-up. And some workers cannot find jobs in the Capitalist labor market because of lack of skills, or racial and other social discrimination.

But the government's official figures lie; private researchers state that the total number of people who want full time jobs and thus cannot find them, along with the official statistics amounts to nearly 17.3 million persons, an even truer figure is 20 million unemployed people in the USA at this time. Clearly then this is a crisis situation of broad proportions, but all the government is doing is juggling and hiding figures. Yet the figures do show that Blacks, Latinos and women are bearing the brunt of the current depression. The National Urban League in its "Hidden Unemployment Index" (included as part of its annual "State of Black America" report) reports levels of almost 17 percent for Black adults 25 and older and incredible levels of 25-30 percent for Black teens and young adults 17-24 years of age. In fact, Black youth unemployment has not declined much since the 1974-1975 recession.

It has stayed at an official level of 15-20 percent, but in some inner city neighborhoods of the major

cities like Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, the real unemployment rate for young people is more like 30-40 percent. For Black youth the unemployment rate is at least two to three times higher than that of white youth. Capitalism is making economic exiles of Black people as a whole. In fact, some researchers report that there are almost 2 million homeless youth, most of them Black and Latino. Conditions in the inner city are destabilizing whole neighborhoods and cities.

According to economic researchers, while making up 12-15 percent of the total population, Black America represents nearly 40 percent of the United States of America's poorest population.

The fact is that unemployment is concentrated in the Black and Latino communities and is greatly responsible for the most destructive tendencies in human relations and deteriorating neighborhoods. Crime, prostitution, suicide, drug addiction, gang fighting, mental illness, alcoholism and the break-up of Black families and other social ills are rooted in the lack of jobs and the denial of essential social services in their communities. Since so many die in the streets or in prison, it is actually racial genocide in the form of social neglect.

Unemployment is profitable for the bosses because it drives down the wages of all workers and helps the employers to keep the workforce under control through this "reserve army of labor," which are allegedly always ready to scab, according to union bureaucrats. Because of pervasive discrimination against Blacks, Latinos and other nationally oppressed workers, including higher levels of unemployment, the jobs they do get are generally on the bottom rung. This is also profitable for the boss and divides the working class to their benefit.

Homelessness is just the most intensified form of unemployment, where in addition to loss of jobs or income, there is loss of housing and lack of access to social services. There are now millions of people who are or have been homeless over the last 15-25 years, because of the deindustrialization of the economy, the Capitalist and government offensive to destroy the unions, to beat back the gains of the civil rights struggle and do away with the affordable housing sector in favor of yuppie gentrification in the cities.

You see the homeless sleeping on the streets in cities, big and small and what this reflects is a total breakdown in the Capitalist State's social services system, in addition to the absolute economic inequality in American society. This heating up of the class war waged by government and the major corporations shows, more than anything, that Capitalism worldwide is undergoing an international financial panic and is really in the beginning stages of a world depression.

Add to the 90 million persons who live below the poverty line and three to five million homeless in the U.S., another 3-5 million homeless in the 12 nations of the European community, along with some 80 million people living in poverty there, with millions more in the Capitalist countries of Japan, Korea and other parts of Asia barely surviving and this can only be accurately called a depression. This is on top of millions more in the Third World because of poverty, the legality of colonialism and unequal trade by the rich countries and financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization.

So although Black workers must organize and fight homeless and unemployment in the U.S., clearly there must be an international movement of workers and poor people to fight this economic deprivation, as part of the overall class struggle. It's not enough to depend on the relatively privileged unions or the middle class civil rights organizations alone.

In every city in North America, the Black and POC poor communities should organize poor peoples' organizations to fight for unemployment benefits and jobs for the jobless, the building of decent, affordable low-income housing and an end to homelessness, a universal living wage, as well as against racial discrimination in jobs and housing. Such groups would be democratic organizations, organized on a neighborhood basis, (to ensure that it would be under the control of the people and against infiltration and takeover by liberal or "radical" political parties, or co-optation by the government), which would be federated into a citywide, regional and national organization.

This is what the Poor People's Survival Movement is designed to do. It would be that mass organization that would become a national Black unemployment league to create a mass fight back movement in this depression. It would be made up of poor peoples community-based groups from all over the country, with delegates elected from all the local groups. Such a national organization could meet to map out a large-scale attack on unemployment, as well as serve as a national clearinghouse on Black unemployment conditions.

On the local level in the Black and poor neighborhoods, Poor People Survival Movement would create the local community unemployment organizations which would establish food and housing cooperatives, lead rent strikes and squatting, initiate land and building reclamation projects, establish producer and consumer cooperatives, distribute food and clothing and provide for other services: they would establish neighborhood medical clinics for free treatment of the homeless and unemployed, rodent control programs, etc. and they would deal with community social problems (brought on by unemployment) and other issues of interest They would build hunger marches and other

demonstrations and carry the people's wrath to various government offices and to the businesses of the rich.

Not only would the unemployment councils be a way of fighting for jobs and unemployment benefits, but also the local groups would be a way to obtain community self-sufficiency and direct democracy, instead of depending on city hall, Congress or the President. This radical self-reliance organizing helps lead to the kind of confidence among the masses that makes a Black municipal commune a serious possibility. Politicians speak down to the people, the PPSM carries the voice of the people upward with the demands of the people, and then the organization can fight for it.

One of the most important functions of an unemployment movement is to obtain unity between the employed and unemployed or homeless, and workers solidarity across race lines.

It is important that although we are talking about uniting the poor generally, that we want to be sure that our own Black communities, suffering more than anybody, are in the lead. We will not accept arguments that the Black poor or homeless folks should follow behind white middle class radicals, who have never been poor a day in their lives. We want unity, but not exploitation of our people, as has happened too many times in the past by so-called white radicals claiming to organize Black people.

Finally, the employed and unemployed must work together to struggle against the Boss class if they are to obtain any serious gains against low wages and poverty during this period of economic crisis. The unemployed, who would even walk the picket lines with workers and refuse to scab just to get a job, could support workers who are on strike or protesting the boss. In turn, workers would form an unemployed caucus in their trade unions to allow union representation of these workers and also force such unions to provide food and other necessities, make funds and training available to the unemployed, as well as throw the weight of the unions into the fight for decent jobs and housing for all workers. The Capitalist bosses will not be moved otherwise. **MAKE THE BOSSES PAY FOR THEIR ECONOMIC CRISIS!**

Here is what a united movement of workers and homeless must demand:

1. Full employment (zero unemployment) for all workers at union wage.
2. Establishment of a shorter workweek, so that workers would be paid at the rate for 40 hours of work for 20 hours a week on the job, expansion of job sharing so that more can be employed.

3. End homelessness, build and make available decent affordable housing for all. Repeal all loitering, anti-panhandling and other laws against the homeless.
4. End the war budget and use those funds for decent, low-income housing, better schools, hospitals and clinics, libraries, parks and public transportation, and job creation.
5. End racism and sexism in job opportunities and relief benefits.
6. Jobs or a guaranteed income for all.
7. Full federal and state benefits for unemployed workers and their families, including corporate and government funds to pay the bills, rents and debts for any laid off worker and unemployment compensation at 100 percent of regular paid wage, lasting the full length of a worker's period of unemployment
8. Universal living wage and/or national minimum wage set at prevailing union entry wage, for all working people. Increase the government minimum wage to \$15-20 an hour as mandated by the workers themselves.
9. We must demand and take away government and corporate funds by any means necessary to establish a massive non-government public works program to provide jobs (with full union rights and wage scale) to rebuild the inner cities and provide needed social services. The program and its funds should be under the control of committees democratically elected from poor and Black neighborhoods, to avoid "poverty pimps" and rip off job agencies, or government bureaucrats.
10. Free all persons in prison for crimes of economic survival; jail corrupt corporate insider traders, bankers and/or racketeer business people.

These and the demands previously mentioned are merely a survival program and agenda for unemployed workers; the real answer is a social revolution, the elimination of Capitalism and workers' ownership of the economy and society. This is a vital first step however. There would be no unemployment or social need for wage labor in an Libertarian socialist society. People could live a decent life without exploiting each other and they do not have to have money to receive decent medical care or housing, it is a human right for all.

Building A Memphis Poor People's Survival Movement

Memphis, TN. was recently called the poorest big city in the nation by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is the ruling elite, with its long history of structural racism, malign neglect, and class oppression of the poor and low income workers, which has created this state of affairs which continues down to this day. As is always the case, it is the Black working class, immigrants, and the elderly that are suffering more than anyone in American society, whether it is unemployment, poverty, mass imprisonment, etc. Even with a so-called "recovery" from a depression or deep business recession, we can be sure that poor communities will remain poor and powerless. This is long-term economic apartheid, racial and economic segregation of Black people/POC, which has made our communities into a beggar class. Now, the rich ruling class is threatening to extend this same kind of impoverishment of the Black workers and poor to even more people, not just to "destroy the middle class", but to create an economic dictatorship where only the rich will have financial resources, and social program money that would go to the working and poor people will be transferred directly to the rich class. This would be an outright corporate fascist state, where only those who own corporate and the means of production will have any rights.

"Government Austerity, Sequestration...corporate downsizing..."whatever we call it, this is now the greatest threat to the economic security of both poor and working peoples in this country. It is being unleashed right now by the Capitalist state and its government flunkies, on a scale greater than anything seen since the period before the Great Depression of the 1930's. It threatens to plunge the people of the USA into the deepest poverty since before the even the "New Deal Policies" of the Roosevelt government that arose during the Great Depression to afford the people some relief, and produce Social Security as one of its lasting programs. The rich did not give in to creation of the program, it took a long fight by poor people's movements to enact Social Security and all the social programs which followed over the years, and although they are government administered programs, we should find a way to subvert them and use them to make the rich pay for this economic crisis. We realize that some so-called "radical" and Anarchists oppose this posture, but we should not starve people on narrow political principles alone. In fact, we should make the take over these programs from government bureaucrats, put them in the hands of the people themselves to administer, and should make the government convert all its billions of dollars in military spending to provide for the social needs of the people.

Yet, the which radical Occupy Wall Street movement and its local affiliate, Occupy Memphis, which came together over about two years ago, was supposed to be that radical social movement which would

take the rich on and defeat them, on behalf of all the people. However, this movement is clearly based on the white middle class, and is hostile to genuine radicals, peoples of color, and more militant political tendencies. It is stifled by its own internal racism and liberal reformism, it simply is not a true revolutionary tendency, even though the Left and even segments of the Black nationalist movement hailed its coming as “true liberation”. Black Autonomy saw through this, and raised serious criticisms, which have now been adopted by many others since the luster has worn off the new movement, and we can see it for what it is.

The Poor Peoples Survival Movement, created by Black Autonomy Federation, is a new radical social movement being organized that has to engage in confrontations with the city and local area governments, as well as with the economic elite, especially FedEx, (the largest employer in the city of Memphis), the Regions Bank and other investment banks, the Chamber of Commerce, and other ruling class institutions, who give orders to the gov’t administration and sets the real economic policies for this city, rather than politicians. Their city budget starves the Black community to death, while ensuring that white middle class area, tourist sites, and businesses are well take care of with corporate welfare and business contracts.

The Poor People’s Survival Movement has to challenge mass unemployment by building an activist unemployment movement of the thousands of out-of-work laborers and homeless in this area; it has to fight for more taxes on the rich and end its one-way class warfare; we have to fight to end taxation of food and the highest state sales taxes in the country, which are clearly socio-economic discrimination; we have to fight austerity measures by the gov’t to make poor and working people pay for this economic crisis by cutting their Social Security benefits and gouging Medicare and Medicaid. We have to challenge the local gov’t and mayor, who have let FedEx and other businesses get by with paying virtually no taxes, and by paying these companies hundreds of millions in corporate welfare. We have to bring a mass coalition of folks together, many of whom have never even been to a demonstration or joined a protest movement in their lives, but who have to protest now for sheer survival of themselves and their families.

Although we obviously will not turn away whites as members, we cannot get hung up with organizing the white middle class, but rather the Black working class and poor, that must be the base of our organizing, the very people who have been ignored by Occupy Memphis, and the Occupy Wall Street movement generally. Since Memphis is a majority Black city, we must put the majority of our efforts in the Black community.

So although we talk in terms of a broad sweep of organizing a people people's movement, the truth is that you must begin very modestly in our hometowns, or the place where we are located now to create the PPSM. There are very important issues, effecting millions, but we must convince just a few people first, and with these few, we can begin to change the world. Actual poor people, as opposed to white middle class organizers in their name, are the force to change the world. We are suffering greatly in this period, but we are suffering more because we are not organized to resist the rich people and their government who are starving us. So how do we start?

This means that we must build a movement from scratch, and we must do it in a very simple fashion: bring together a small group of activists and connect with the poorest communities. We must build an organization of organizers, and plan our next steps carefully. We have already built a core group, now we must build an organization, educate our members, and then mobilize. We must hold marches, street demonstrations, and protests of our own to challenge the city government and the elite of this city. We need to examine how we can subvert local government and business meetings, whether city council meetings, that of the Mayor, or the Chamber of Commerce, and turn them into a rally for the people. We need to hold mass assemblies in recreation centers, libraries, and at other public locations, as well as at street corners. Our strategy has to be different from OWS's long-term occupation, which might work in NYC, but does not appear to be the best strategy for Memphis, unless it is at the very offices of these corporations of gov't officials, not outside on the streets sleeping in tents as the guest of the government.

How should we conduct each meeting of the Poor People's Survival Movement?

1. We should have one internal strategy meeting, and one grassroots public meeting, each month for the Memphis PPSM. Each meeting should have a specific theme or focus so that we can stay grounded, not lose time to general discussions and endless debates. For, instance, power structure research, how poverty is structured in Memphis, the city budget, and other issues should dominate our discussions. We should argue over how to do it, rather than what we should do.
2. Each meeting should last no more than 2 hours, and after that we should stay in touch by email or phone calls between meetings.
3. Meetings should be held in a public library or other free space as first priority.
4. Each meeting should have a different moderator, who should be at the meeting.

5. We should respect each person's right to speak.

If we start by holding these public meetings, which are both a study group as well as an action planning meeting, we can build a winning strategy with a variety of tactics. It will not be easy, because we are a new movement and there will be tremendous opposition from the rich and their agents, but if we persevere we will succeed over the long run.

This is only part of the issue, and this is not the entire program, which covers many other areas.