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## Divisions, disruptions and polarizations



Sources: University of the Poor Magazine / Revista de la Universidad de los Pobres

Unity of the poor people or identity politics of the rich?

Everywhere we look, serious divisions, disruptions and polarizations are emerging throughout society. The way we analyze these ruptures and schisms has a critical impact on how we organize ourselves in our struggle for the basic necessities of life. As revolutionary political organizers, it is necessary that the trees do not cover the forest; don't lose sight of the big picture. To organize and build power effectively, we must develop a deep understanding of the conditions we face.

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The basic concept paper of the University of the Poor points out how societies develop and change. The economic basis of society shapes and conditions events throughout society. Politics and political crises, then, are a concentrated expression of this economic base. The amazing technological innovations of the present moment are transforming the way things are produced and the way we work. The stable jobs of the past "industrial" period are gone forever and are being replaced by low-wage jobs and by mass unemployment and growing homelessness.

As a result of these economic transformations marking a new epoch, it is becoming increasingly clear that the dominant polarization in today's life is fantastic wealth growth for the few and growing poverty for the vast majority. This is the economic crisis of global capitalism that underlies the divisions, disruptions and polarizations occurring today in this country and in the world at large.

#### Epochs of polarization

In different periods of history there have been different polarizations that characterize the class struggles of each epoch. In recent history, these polarizations have transformed and changed quite rapidly, by historical standards, as capitalist modes of production have rapidly transformed. In the United States, during the 1930s, the growth of large-scale industrial production generated class struggles to organize unions and workers in the big factories. Workers fought against the corporations and banks that owned these factories, and this labor movement became the center of gravity of the class struggle at that time.

In the post-World War II period, economically advanced countries extended capitalist production and intensified colonial oppression throughout the world. A part of the workers of the advanced countries benefited from the wealth generated. This led to the class struggle being concentrated in the colonial world and expressed in the national liberation struggles against imperialism.

Today, conditions have changed again. Capitalism is truly global (not just "international") and the capitalist class is global, led by American capital. Similarly, the working class is increasingly developing as a global class of poor and dispossessed people. New production methods are giving rise to a massive population surplus globally. While members of the

working class sometimes work for capitalists, this class is beginning to find itself peripheral to the capitalist system of production as a whole. They, increasingly, no longer have a permanent relationship with production. They enter and leave employment and are pushed into the illegal or semi-legal underground economy and permanent unemployment. More than 60 percent of the world's workforce is considered "precarious" or atypical employment.

The organization of today's poor people

What are the conditions we face in the United States today? New conditions lead to new forms of struggle and new organizations of our class, so this is a question we must prioritize. Over the past 50 years, with the replacement of large-scale industrial production in which factories employed tens of thousands of workers, the importance of the workplace in the class struggle has been further and further reduced. Today, the main struggles of poor and dispossessed people are not just about the fight against employers, but they are facing the government and the entire state apparatus (police, government agencies, courts, etc.).

These struggles are potentially explosive, but largely incipient, in part because poor people today have few organizations and are the least organized sector of society. Indeed, the urgent call to build substantial and lasting organizations of the poor is a task of the utmost importance today. Technological advances have produced a permanent and increasingly intense economic crisis with widespread and growing poverty. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 140 million working poor and low-wage workers in the U.S. It is likely that these numbers have only increased and will continue to do so. Our class faces an urgent need to build political power to transform the conditions in which we suffer. At all times, we face the influence and control of the ruling class.

It may seem that the thousands of nonprofits funded by major corporations and banks that limit and divert our struggles are "on our side." There are also many organizations and institutions that, without understanding the strategy and tactics of our enemies, end up unconsciously supporting their goals. Often, when "liberals" and "conservatives" fight, these various organizations end up supporting those who appear to be "progressives." However, these organizations end up taking positions that actually represent the dominant

sector of the ruling class, without understanding whether or not it is appropriate to negotiate. For example, supporting any Democrat against Republican politicians will often strengthen our enemies within the Democratic Party.

### The electoral field

The struggle for political power and political independence begins objectively within the electoral terrain, but should not be limited to it. In fact, the strength of any activity of poor and dispossessed people in the electoral field depends on their organized relations with the life-and-death struggles carried out by the poor and dispossessed. The influence of an elected official is directly related to that individual's organized base in the community. Maneuvering within the electoral terrain in isolation from the current class struggle has historically proven to be a serious failure, with "victories" conceded and then snatched away by the whims of the politically powerful. This is the cost of an electoral strategy disconnected from the broad and independent movements of poor people, and the inevitable consequence of an era defined by the lack of independent organizations of it.

Esto ha sido así a lo largo de la historia de Estados Unidos. Por ejemplo, durante las décadas de 1930 y 1940, un período histórico al que se hace mucha referencia hoy, las diversas organizaciones de pobres y trabajadores, incapaces de construir su propio partido político y representación electoral a escala nacional, se basaron en cambio en una relación comprometida con la administración de Roosevelt, en el que siempre fueron el “socio menor”. A su vez, Roosevelt y su Coalición del New Deal se basaron en parte en la base masiva de trabajadores industriales empobrecidos de Estados Unidos para mantener el poder y reconstruir una economía en quiebra.

La Coalición del New Deal estaba dominada y dirigida por los intereses de la clase capitalista en general, y de Wall Street en particular. Al final de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, esto permitió el giro hacia la derecha del Partido Demócrata y la purga de los radicales de los sindicatos. También hizo necesaria el relanzamiento de la lucha contra la segregación de Jim Crow, debido a los compromisos de la Coalición con los demócratas racistas del sur. Como resultado, la falta de independencia política de las organizaciones de la clase trabajadora llevó al fortalecimiento de nuestros enemigos.

Las coaliciones de centro-izquierda y las tácticas de “frente amplio”, donde los revolucionarios siguen a los elementos centristas, han llevado una y otra vez a la derrota de nuestra clase. Si bien el negociar es necesario bajo ciertas condiciones, y debemos trabajar con personas con las que tenemos diferencias, esto solo puede lograrse de una manera constructiva y estratégicamente basada en principios desde una posición de fuerza frente a la independencia política de la gente pobre. Vale la pena repetirlo: nuestro poder político dentro del terreno electoral depende y se basa en la fuerza e independencia de las organizaciones y las luchas más amplias de la gente pobre y desposeída.

¿Unidad de la gente pobre o política identitaria de los ricos?

Teniendo esto en cuenta, deberíamos volver a la pregunta de las condiciones específicas a las que nos enfrentamos hoy. Durante la última década, el Partido Republicano se ha convertido en un partido populista de derecha que representa una posición minoritaria en la clase dominante. Ahora, la sección dominante de la clase dominante, los principales bancos y corporaciones, está utilizando al Partido Demócrata para rechazar a los republicanos. Para hacer esto, los demócratas están, hasta cierto punto, intentando hablar de las necesidades y demandas de la gente pobre. De hecho, las principales corporaciones y bancos están librando una campaña generalizada contra los republicanos utilizando y manipulando nuestras luchas. Vemos esto, por ejemplo, en los millones de dólares que están donando a la lucha por la justicia climática, la atención médica y campañas por las vidas negras. El objetivo de esta campaña de la clase dominante no es liberar a la gente pobre, sino hacer retroceder el auge populista de derecha y estabilizar la tumultuosa situación económica.

Sin embargo, la crisis económica que enfrentamos hoy es sistémica y crónica. En una época de pobreza endémica y altas tasas de desigualdad que se incorporan al sistema, solo puede haber recuperaciones económicas parciales y, en el mediano y largo plazo, la clase dominante no puede estabilizar el país. Con esto en mente, la gente pobre y desposeída necesitamos desarrollar nuestra propia campaña que sea plenamente consciente de lo que intenta lograr la “campaña de la clase dominante”. Además, debemos tomar conciencia de que, a medida que la clase dominante intenta abordar parcialmente nuestras demandas involucrándonos en su campaña, impulsa simultánea y consistentemente las “políticas identitarias” para evitar la unidad real de nuestra clase. Nuestro enemigo de clase siempre

ha oprimido a diversos grupos de forma diversa. Han usado la diversidad de opresiones para mantenernos divididos y pelear entre nosotros por las migajas que reparten. La política de identidad unifica a ricos y pobres dentro de identidades discretas y bloquea la unidad de la gente pobre en donde pueda. Nuestro poder de clase fluye de la unidad de las personas de abajo.

It is the case, then, that one of the major ideological battles in the United States today is the "unity of poor people" versus "identity politics." As poverty, hunger, rampant disease and more continue to expand, this is a battle we cannot put aside. The ideological weapon of identity politics employed by the rich demands that poor and dispossessed people promote our interests through our own campaigns, independent of the ruling class. The need for these campaigns is an expression of the class struggle. And the class struggle is a political struggle, a struggle for political power.

*Lenny Brody has been politically active since the 1960s. During that decade he volunteered with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights organization led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in South Carolina. As part of his war protest activities in Vietnam, he refused to participate in the Army. He was a founding member of the Communist Labor Party and has studied economics and theories of political change as he militates politically. He is currently one of the coordinators of the University of the Poor Think Tank and participates with the journal of the University of the Poor.*

Source: <https://universityofthepoor.org/es/divisiones-disrupciones-y-polarizaciones/>

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