



REVOLUTIONARY METHOD: PROGRAM AND LEADERSHIP

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This article was originally produced in the middle of an intense faction fight within the International Socialists. The fight ultimately culminated in a split. The opposition group, called the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), left the IS to join the graveyard which is strewn with the corpses of sects which call themselves Orthodox Trotskyist. This article was a response to the ideas of the RT – ideas presented under the mantle of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, but really representing their negation. The response, however, stands as the best concise statement of which we are aware delineating the relation between class struggle, class consciousness, revolutionary leadership and program, and the role of revolutionaries. Although it contains some errors and although it is marked by references to the faction fight, it is an important guide to revolutionary action and can be read and understood by those who are not familiar with the intricacies of the faction fight.

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INTRODUCTION

The current debate in the organization on program and revolutionary leadership raises no less than the questions for the reasons for the existence of the IS and the nature of our tasks. Our activity in the large world outside our small organization has been severely hampered while the debate rages. Without a clear political resolution of these questions, understood and internalized by our membership, the faction fight will result only in further demoralization and disorientation.

The debate has pointed up a series of major failures in the I.S. We have failed to put to writing much of the common political assumptions and methods which have defined our activity so that these could be systematically analyzed and re-evaluated. We have failed to develop an organization and leadership firmly grounded in common political conceptions. Instead, the organization has hopped from one political arena to the next, looking for "the action". Similarly, because the organization lacked a firm political cohesiveness into which new members could be integrated and educated, large sections of the organization have been mesmerized by gimmicks and slogans which become the rage one day and were forgotten the next as a newer gimmick came along. Most of these gimmicks (separate women's I.S., "reconversion", "unity of the class", Labor Committee economics) reflected the milieu of the student movement and a petit bourgeois impatience with the working class. All that was needed was to find the right slogans which would tie all the disparate struggles together, and simultaneously overcome the false consciousness which divided the working class.

With the decline in the student movement and in the absence of stable mass working class movements, this tendency has been accentuated. The latest get-rich quick scheme to avoid facing the real difficulties is the caricature of Trotskyism drawn on the "unstained banner" of the so-called Revolutionary Tendency.

That so many excellent comrades have been drawn to the bankrupt politics of the Revolutionary Tendency is a most damning demonstration of the failures of the I.S. Still another is that it took the attack on our politics by the R.T. to force the I.S. to begin to analyze, defend, and ^{put} atopaper our political conceptions.

There were some mitigating circumstances: the transition from a largely student-based discussion group to a cadre organization based in the working class; the building of a national organization out of a loose federation of "clubs"; the relocation and industrialization of significant numbers of members to establish a presence, branch and national office in the industrial midwest; the disorientation that resulted from the collapse of the student movement; and the loss of our most theoretically developed comrades ("Reorient") whose politics were moving in a different direction.

While these provide explanations of our failures, the fact of our failures remains. But just as our politics can not be defended by providing excuses for our failures, neither can the Revolutionary Tendency seriously defend its own politics by pointing to our failures.

Despite the chest beating and posturing about program and method, the only real program and method contained in the RT theoretical statement is that of sectarian abstentionism.

We are told in Ron T's draft auto perspective (Labor Bulletin #3) that we "propose a program" as the basic minimum for local caucuses consisting of general trade union economic issues, union democracy, against state intervention, and for a labor party. But we are then told in speeches by both Ron and Sy that raising the demand of a labor party without stating that the labor party should be based on a (or The) transitional program is reformist and we do not call for a reformist party. So what is left of Ron's method? Presumably we "propose a program" -- as the minimum basis for a caucus --

for a labor party based on the transitional program. And since for Ron the transitional program is the revolutionary socialist program, then our "basic minimum program" we propose for organizing caucuses turns out to be a revolutionary socialist program.

This same theme comes up over and over in RT theory. In one RT presentation (East Bay), we were told:

A) Every program other than our transitional program is reformist (definition).

We were also told:

B) We do not initiate or take the lead of reformist organizations (method).

The only reasonable conclusion we can draw then is that the only organizations or caucuses in which we take the lead are revolutionary ones . . . if we take the lead in anything at all.

Luckily the RT, unlike the "Leninist" Tendency, is still better than its theories and therefore stops considerably short of the conclusions to which their theory leads. So, for example, the practice of RT members in AFT, IBT, and CWA doesn't look at all like RT theory. When it is necessary to describe the real world, the RT "method" is of no use. According to RT theory, working class leaders outside the U.S. are reformists to whom we may give critical support "like a rope supports a hanged man." So when the RT encounters a certain Los Angeles Teamster leader or a St. Louis worker whom they do not wish to hang, these can only be characterized as "exceptions". (Ron, statement in S.F.)

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We could go on exploring the contradiction and the bankrupt sectarian conclusions of the Revolutionary Tendency documents and presentations. Such work is necessary, but it is not sufficient. With so many basic questions in dispute, polemics picking apart other documents cannot be a substitute for the attempt to clearly elaborate an analysis and methodology.

We wish to begin such a task with this document taking up several of the questions in dispute. In doing this, we have mainly limited our comments on the Revolutionary Tendency to footnotes. Many of the points made are definitional in nature or are considered basic assumptions of our politics. This is necessary because the debate has become so deep that there are few definitions and basic political assumptions that are now held in common.

PROGRAM

The program of any organization is a summary of its goals and strategy, focused on its immediate tasks, all of which reflect an interaction between the organization and the world around it. Most programs are rarely internally consistent -- again a reflection of the composition, coherence, and consciousness of the organization.

Programs are often put to paper in whole or in part. But, just as often such written programs have little to do with the real program of the organization. Take 5 examples:

1) Although the United Action Caucus (AFT) adopted a number of excellent demands as its "program", its real program was concretized and symbolized in its support for Miesen, its opportunist pandering to the anti-merger forces as its focus, and its organization as a convention caucus for the out-bureaucrats.

2) The Democratic Party and its sub-groupings, including the McCarthy, Kennedy, and McGovern campaigns, often have very nice platform planks about aiding working people and oppressed groups, taxing corporations, ending war, etc. Part of our political task is to expose the real program of the Democratic Party as reflected in its organization and actions even if not consciously understood by the Party itself -- to defend capitalism by keeping in check possible opposition movements.

3) European Social Democratic organizations claimed to have both a maximal program -- socialism -- and a minimal program -- immediate reforms under capitalism. The maximal program was increasingly reserved for nostalgic purposes. The real program turned out to be not even consistent struggle for reforms, but maintenance of the trade union and party bureaucracy in power within the context of those reforms which did not threaten the bases of capitalism.

4) The paper programs of Stalinist parties vary according to time and place. Bourgeois nationalism, defeatism, super patriotism, left adventurism, and workers revolution have all been programs of Stalinist parties. Yet despite these paper programs and the motivations of individual members, the real program has always been the defense of stalinist states and the social conquest for a bureaucratic collectivist ruling class.

5) Sectarians like the Spartacist League claim to put forward a program for the working class. But the paper program is just window dressing for their real program which is to effectively isolate themselves from being tainted by working class struggles while they agitate other Trotskyist sects.

A revolutionary organization seeks to be as self-conscious as possible in establishing its program. [We seek not to have a paper program which will provide us with some kind of cover from attack while we carry on our real program. Instead we formulate, debate and adopt our program so that it can more accurately guide, evaluate and redirect our work. In turn we use the results of our work to re-evaluate our program.]

Our program thus starts out from our goal: proletarian revolution. It develops long and short term strategies, and focuses on the immediate tasks that face the organization. Because they are immediate, and because we will modify the program as the struggle develops and as the situation changes, the most immediate tasks are most concretized and detailed. Our longer range conceptions and strategy which guide us are by necessity more generalized and abstract.]

We do not offer a blueprint for socialism or even a blueprint for the proletarian revolution. We reject these essentially substitutionist, elitist notions of the vanguard taking power itself using the working class as a battering ram. In our view, socialist revolution can only be made by a working class self-conscious of its own interests as a class and the need to take state power to overturn capitalism with its own mass institutions. The role of the revolutionary vanguard organized as a party is to develop that self consciousness in the working class as a whole by providing leadership, direction and education. [Our program is directed toward building a revolutionary party in the context of developing a self-conscious working class. Our program and organization therefore exist in interaction with the developing class struggle.]

As the struggle of the working class develops, we revise our program and fill out and make concrete that which was previously more general to provide leadership and direction to working class struggle.

Our program then, outlines our strategy in the context of our overall perspective. Industrialization, organizing caucuses, use of our newspaper, etc., are all part of our program. Programmatic demands -- immediate, democratic, and transitional -- are included in our program. But how and in what situations or periods we raise these demands -- that is, our method of relating to the working class -- is also part of our program, and makes the demands a part of our program rather than a grab bag of slogans attached to it.

In so far as we succeed in accurately writing out our program, it is manifested as our tasks and perspectives documents. When we develop our "perspectives" for work in any area we are develop our program for that work whether or not there is a single slogan. The slogans themselves are derived from our program -- they are not a

a substitute for it.*

The program gives coherence and meaning to the work that we do so that the whole points in the direction outlined by our program.

THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

The strategic tasks of the next period -- a prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda, and organization -- consists in overcoming the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard. . . . It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution."

(Trotsky, The Death Agony of Capitalism, p. 7)

The old "minimal program" is superceded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution." (Trotsky, Death Agony, p. 8)

The Draft Transitional Program of Trotsky was formulated for a pre-revolutionary period. Capitalism was in a state of crisis. There was no organic expansion of capital for a decade. Fascism had already triumphed in several major capitalist countries as a result of the crisis. Simultaneously, the period saw major mass working class movements. There was every reason to believe that the coming world war would at first dampen the class struggle. But because it would also exacerbate the underlying crisis in capitalism, the crisis would manifest itself even more deeply at the war's conclusion.

The objective conditions demanded a revolutionary solution. The proletariat was responding:

In all countries the proletariat is wracked by a deep disquiet. The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machine.

(Trotsky, Death Agony)

The main roadblock to the class consciousness of the masses advancing to revolutionary consciousness was the reformist leadership of the masses. The main strategic task of revolutionaries was to win the masses away from this reformist leadership which was committed to maintaining capitalism and win the masses to a revolutionary leadership which could lead in carrying through the struggle for taking state power. Transitional demands and slogans were the main tools for accomplishing this. Transitional demands were insolubly linked to the task of winning the mass struggles to revolutionary leadership.

This is what made Trotsky's program as a whole "Transitional". The immediate tasks were directed to the question of consciousness of masses of workers who were in struggle around reformist demands to the consciousness of revolutionary struggle. The method used was the raising of programmatic demands for the mass struggle which if fought for would direct the struggle against the bases of capitalism.

The method had been developed earlier. The Third Congress of the Communist International explained it well in its "Theses on Tactics." Communists should take

There is a definitional confusion in the political debate within the I.S. Some comrades use the term program as I have described it here. Others use the term to mean narrowly the programmatic demands alone. How the term is used makes little difference so long as the conceptions are clear. The problem occurs when the two meanings are confused as by Ron T. in his "On the Transitional Program" (I.S. Bulletin #37) who then uses his own confuses in definition to make political arguments. For examples, and a fuller discussion of this, see Bob Powers, "A Reply to Ron T."

as their starting point not "what reforms capitalism could grant" -- which was the starting point for the Social Democrats' minimal program. Rather the starting point should be the needs of the working class. Communists should advance demands

whose fulfillment is an immediate and urgent working class need, and they must fight for these demands in mass struggle, regardless of whether they are compatible with the profit economy of capitalism or not. (Theses on Tactics)

Workers would begin to struggle for these demands. Those that could be won under capitalism would be victories for the working class and as such would advance its self-confidence and sense of power and encourage it to advance and deepen the struggle. Workers might continue to struggle for further demands with the illusion that capitalism could grant them. But consistent struggle for these demands would reveal that capitalism could not grant significant reforms to meet the needs of the working class and this would open the working class to revolutionary ideas and leadership and the recognition that only a society organized by the working class could meet its needs.

Trotsky's transitional program was an elaboration of this method for what he saw as a pre-revolutionary period-which was to him undoubtedly the last period in the epoch of capitalist decay.² Trotsky's full program contained more than transitional demands and the method of their application. But the building of this bridge for the masses to move from mass struggle under reformist leadership around partial and democratic demands to revolutionary consciousness and the struggle to take state power was the central immediate task of revolutionaries.

This is what made Trotsky's program transitional. The immediate tasks were directed to this question of the transition of the consciousness of masses of workers in struggle around reformist demands to a struggle for state power.

But the period we face today is not the period that Trotsky described. Despite the underlying crisis in capitalism, its organic expansion continues if at an increasingly slower rate. Rather than collapse following World War II, capitalism has experienced a long period of relative stability as a result of the permanent arms economy. Reforms are possible and have been won. The working class is not involved in mass struggle around reformist demands. Our general immediate task is not to win away masses of workers struggling under bureaucratic reformist leadership around the transitional program moving towards taking state power. It is not our immediate task not just because we are small, but because these mass movements do not generally exist. This characterization does not exclude episodic upsurges in the working class, in large scale in France and Italy, and many more smaller scale developments. But in the main this period in the advanced capitalist nations is characterized by a restlessness within the working class which is not organized for even elementary struggle.³

²Given this view, Trotsky's confusion in the use of period and epoch was understandable since the period marked the end of the epoch. Given that Trotsky's assessment of the end of the epoch proved clearly wrong, the use of quotes taking advantage of this confusion is indefensible.

³Obviously a much deeper analysis of the period is required. Unfortunately Marxist economic tools are not well developed and require sharpening before they can produce what we believe to be an adequate analysis. We are presently preparing a piece we hope can be the beginning of the discussion.

The so-called analysis of the nature of the period put forward by the Rev. Tendency are little more than rhetoric to try to make reality fit their program rather than the other way around. They deny statistical evidence about the development of the productive forces which contradicts their own view as "empiricism". See Emmet Casey's "A Case of Retrograde Motion". (continue on next page)

As a result our program is not a transitional in the sense that our immediate tasks are not centered around the transition from mass reformist struggle to the struggle for state power. Our full program includes the transitional method with transitional demands because it is a key method of revolutionaries in developing the consciousness of mass movements. But with this as a guide our program focuses on the present tasks of revolutionaries in relating to a low level or fragmented consciousness--advancing the class struggle through increasing the organization and self-consciousness of the working class and building a revolutionary leadership.

One important consequence for our program due to the lack of mass working class struggle is that our program focuses heavily on the specially oppressed sections of the working class -- particularly oppressed national minorities and women. We put forward strategy and demands for these which do not depend on the developed class consciousness of the working class generally which does not presently exist. Our program for these groups is to advance their own struggles based on their own needs and not to subordinate these to the backward consciousness of the working class as a whole. Within these struggles we point in the direction of class wide struggles (partially by the demands we raise) but we do not counterpose these demands to the immediate struggles based around the genuine needs of these oppressed groups, but attempt to build from them.

Similarly, since mass working class struggle does not exist, our program also includes our strategy towards non-working class "issue-oriented" movements. (We will discuss this in a separate document with particular attention given to the Peace and Freedom experience).

All of our immediate tasks are interrelated and guided by our perspective which places them in context.

Does this mean that the transitional program is irrelevant in this period? No, it doesn't mean that at all. First the transitional program fills in a critical part of our perspective -- how we see going from the mass struggles we hope to participate in building, to the struggle for state power itself.

Secondly, individual demands from the transitional program can be raised in an educational way to concretize our propaganda about the inability of capitalism to meet the needs of workers and to help lay the basis for future mass struggles.

Thirdly, despite the necessity of general characterization of the nature of the period and working class consciousness, it is equally necessary to understand the unevenness that also exists. As mass struggles develop, transitional demands are among our major tools for advancing these struggles and raising political consciousness.

But it must be clear: a program of transitional demands is a program of fighting demands "for the revolutionary action of millions" in a pre-revolutionary period. While the transitional program is a part of our perspective and as such informs our immediate work, and while we begin to raise some of the demands of the tran-

36 cont.)
 Despite all their talk about "starting from the objective situation", the objective situation is largely irrelevant to their politics. The same program according to Ron T. is basically correct for the 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's (with some modifications to be sure). All we really have to know, we are told, is that we are in an epoch when capitalism is no longer progressive. Having established this, the program for Ron is established. The only thing objective conditions have to do with anything is possibly to provide some modifications to the program, but mainly to provide the basis for our "pedagogical" interpretation. Once we have established our program including our strategy and immediate tasks, then shouldn't our conventions consist primarily of pedagogy?

sitional program as fighting demands as mass struggles develop, the full program of transitional demands only takes on its real significance as a program for revolutionary struggle in a pre-revolutionary period.

Unfortunately, our lack of involvement in mass struggles means that our transitional program can only exist now in broad outline. For that purpose, Trotsky's original draft with some modifications will do as a first approximation. A transitional program will not be filled in and concretized by today assigning a committee to draft a new set of demands. Rather it will happen as a result of our experience and analysis of developments in capitalism and the experience of the mass struggles of the working class.

Trotsky recognized this interrelationship between the party and program:⁴

Its [transitional program] significance lies in this, that instead of providing a-priori/theoretical plan, it draws the balance of the already accumulated experience of our national sections and on the basis of this experience opens up broader international perspectives.

(Trotsky, 1938-39 Writings, p. 57)

We should constantly be re-examing and developing our program. When events take place such as mass struggles which are clearly in advance of the working class generally, we should pay special attention to these. We have to examine how adequate our program is (or was) in relating to and advancing these struggles and learn lessons for the revision and elaboration of our program.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

What is the focus of our program? What is our role in the development of revolutionary consciousness within the working class? How do you build revolutionary leadership? Given the questions under debate within the I.S., we can not begin to answer these questions without first examining and establishing the contributions of the Marxist movement on the relationship of class struggle and political consciousness.

The key to Marxism which distinguished it from every utopian socialist scheme was an understanding that the class struggle was built into capitalism. Marx's

⁴Trotsky's writings like those of every other political figure contain contradictions. In the first place, he was always writing for a specific purpose -- to make certain points. As a result, the twig was frequently bent. In addition, Trotsky had every reason to believe that the final crisis of capitalism was at hand and that the immediate choice was Fascism or Socialism. Further Trotsky believed that major reforms were no longer possible and as a result only transitional demands could speak to the immediate needs of the working class. Trotsky was wrong and this wrong analysis created a sense of urgency which produced a number of incorrect formulations. The task for revolutionaries who attempt to scientifically analyze history and especially the work of revolutionary leaders is to attempt to understand their writings in their historical context. To extract a few sentences or even an entire document from the historical situation as scripture to prove a point is a retreat from scientific Marxism and the methods of Trotsky. Trotsky made great contributions. The task is to discern and understand his methodology and to understand which methods and conclusions are generally true, which are valid for the specific situations we face and which are invalid.

⁵This does not mean that we re-write our full program at every convention. On the contrary, this tendency has retarded our development of a program. While it may be occasionally necessary to discard previous programs and begin anew, our development of program will be best served by re-evaluating and amending our previous programs. This will allow us to go into portions of our program in depth and improve upon them.

painstaking analysis of the contradictions of capitalism was to show that the working class would be forced by the conditions of existence into even more intense struggle.

And it was this struggle itself which would develop in the working class the consciousness of the necessity and desirability of overthrowing capitalism.

Marx & Engels describe the process as an almost mechanical one. After describing how the development of industry forces workers to form combinations -- trade unions -- they go on:

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies not in the immediate results but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communications that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.... This organization of the proletarians into a class and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it rises up again stronger, firmer, mightier. (Communist Manifesto, p. 18)

The Manifesto is explicit on the relationship between the Communists and the proletariat:

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles by which to shape or mold the proletarian movement. (C.M., p. 22)

For Marx the proletariat was on the inevitable road to socialism as a result of the class struggle. The role of Communists was to push them on that road and to represent the interests of the movement as a whole. (C.M., p. 22)

The key task was to participate in organizing the working class. The organization of the First International -- the International Workingmen's Association in 1864 was on a program much broader than the principles of the Manifesto and devoted much of its work to simple trade union organization. It was the unfolding class struggle which would lead the working class to revolutionary consciousness.

To be sure, Marx's writings and actions themselves hint at another important role for the Communists. In many ways because of his huge talents and influence, Marx and his personal following were able to function as a small party fighting inside the working class movement, for example, continually calling on the I.W.A. to move from just trade union struggles to general political struggles against exploitation.

Marx fought quite bitterly as the trade unions gained some measures of legality, became increasingly bureaucratic, dealt only with narrow trade union issues and in Britain linked up to the Liberal Party. Marx gives ad hoc reasons why the trade union struggles of the working class did not carry over into a revolutionary movement: the unions tended to represent privileged workers (a problem which would be corrected by organizing the unskilled); there were corrupt leaders; in the case of Britain, the proletariat had become bourgeoisified as a result of imperialism.

But Marx never offered a serious analysis of why the class struggle could be so easily derailed and the implications of this for revolutionaries.

Lenin, in the early years also held that working class struggle tended inevitably toward socialist consciousness.

The mass of the working people learn from this struggle firstly, how to

recognize and to examine one by one the methods of capitalist exploitation, to compare them with the law, with their living conditions, and with the interests of the capitalist class. . . learn to understand the social system based on exploitation of labor by capital. Secondly, in the process of this struggle, the workers learn to test their strength, learn to organize, learn to understand the significance of organization. The extension of this struggle and the increasing frequency of clashes inevitably lead to a further extension of the struggle, to the development of a sense of unity, a sense of solidarity -- at first among workers of a particular locality, and then among the workers of the entire country, among the entire working class. Thirdly, this struggle develops the workers' political consciousness. . . . The workers struggle against the factory owners for their daily needs automatically and inevitably spurs the workers on to think of state, political questions. . .

(Lenin, Works, Vol. II, p. 115, 1895)

For Marx and for Lenin, the Class Struggle was not just a series of events which marked time until the socialist revolution. It was by the nature of capitalism inevitable in capitalist society -- it was also the dynamic which produced socialist consciousness. It was this understanding which distinguished Marxism from Utopian idealism.

There are many barriers to stripping away the false consciousness of the working class and achieving socialist consciousness. These include bourgeois supported or imposed ideologies (e.g., religion), the lack of education and knowledge, nationalism, racism, and sexism.

But inter-related with all of these is the most critical -- that the working class was unaware of its power to challenge capitalist hegemony and remake society. Workers like all people tend to limit their consciousness about what is desirable to what they can reasonably expect to win, which in turn reflects their sense of power. Workers who are isolated have no sense of the power of the working class. Their consciousness reflects this and manifests itself by attempts to get ahead within the system by such means as dealing individually with the bosses, or dreams about escaping from the working class to a glorified petit bourgeois existence (e.g., small shop keeper).

Working class struggle changes the objective conditions which from consciousness is shaped by changing the context from the powerlessness of the individual to the power of worker solidarity. This in turn opens new possibilities - which in the context of powerlessness were impossibilities allowed only as idealist dreams.

From a different class viewpoint, de Tocqueville understood the phenomenon well:

Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men's minds. For the mere fact that certain abuses have been remedied draws attention to the others and they now appear more galling . . .

(The Old Regime and the French Revolution)

In the course of the struggle, workers gain a self-confidence and begin to learn all the lessons described by Lenin in the above quote.

But while this dynamic always seemed to be at work, it did not, as Marx and the early Lenin seemed to conclude, inevitably lead to socialist consciousness. A recognition of this limitation was implicit in the functioning of Marx and Lenin.

But it was not until the struggle with the economists that Lenin was forced to deal theoretically with this problem. In brief, Lenin argued that the working class as a class could not develop beyond trade union consciousness simply as a result of its trade union struggles. Class and revolutionary consciousness

required understanding beyond the worker's own direct experiences. For this, the worker had to rely on what he/she was taught, read and heard. Therefore he/she was even more at the mercy of the bourgeoisie which controlled the schools, press, etc., as well as constantly attempted to impress its (bourgeois) ideology (framework of interpretation) on the working class.

To counter this influence so that the working class could continue to advance on the road to socialism, it was necessary for there to be self-conscious revolutionary leadership which worked untiringly to explain and interpret events and move the working class beyond trade union consciousness.

The economic struggle merely brings the workers "up against" questions concerning the attitude of the government toward the working class. Consequently, however much we may try to "give to the economic [i.e., narrow trade union] struggle itself a political character", we shall never be able to develop the political consciousness of the workers (to the degree of Social Democratic consciousness) by confining ourselves to the economic struggle for the limits of this task are too narrow." (What Is To Be Done?, p. 76)

This did not mean that Lenin gave up the previous insights of Marxism on the dynamics of struggle. On the contrary, he continued to insist on it while also insisting that Revolutionaries had a special role to play in the process. He summed it up:

. . . The working class spontaneously gravitates toward socialism, never the less the more widespread (and continuously revived in the most diverse forms) bourgeois ideology imposes itself spontaneously upon the working class more than any other. (WITBD, p. 42)

While Lenin advocated political education and propaganda, his solution to the problem continued to lie in struggle. He argued that the Social Democrats should "emphasize general democratic tasks before the whole people, without for a moment concealing our Socialist convictions . . ." (WITBD, p. 80)

We must train our Social Democratic practical workers to become political leaders, able to guide all the manifestations of this universal struggle, able at the right time to "dictate a positive program of action" for the discontented students, for the discontented Zemstvo, for the discontented religious sects, for the offended elementary school teachers, etc. etc. (WITBD, p. 82)

In other words, Lenin's solution to the problem of moving the working class beyond narrow trade union consciousness was to involve the working class in general democratic and social struggles which by their nature were directed against the state. This reflected Lenin's understanding that political consciousness is mainly advanced not by abstractions but by a relationship to struggle. One of Lenin's contributions to Marxism was the understanding of the necessity of revolutionary leadership for the working class to advance in political consciousness. This was not a denial of the importance of struggle for working class consciousness, but a critical expansion of this understanding.⁶

⁶Lenin is of course arguing in a concrete situation which is relevant here for establishing his understanding of raising consciousness. How the Social Democrats committed their organizational resources were subject to other considerations. In discussing an earlier period, Lenin says:

At that time, indeed, we had astonishingly few forces, and it was perfectly natural and legitimate then to resolve to go exclusively among the workers, and severely condemn any deviation from this. The whole task then was to consolidate our position in the working class. (WITBD, p. 83)

Lenin's views on consciousness were modified somewhat after the 1905 Revolution when workers had seized the initiative and engaged in massive political strikes:

The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than 10 years of work by Social Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness. . . . The initiative of the workers themselves will now display itself on a scale that we the underground and circle workers of yesterday did not even dare dream of . . ."
(Collected Works, Vol X, pp. 32-36)

Lenin proposed the immediate recruitment of masses of workers into the party.

Despite this modification, Lenin's basic views in What Is To Be Done? remained correct as a general description of the development of consciousness. In a revolutionary period the masses do engage in "spontaneous" actions as consciousness develops rapidly. But even here without leadership, without a vanguard trained in the understanding of the tasks of the working class, these "spontaneous" outbursts may be too far ahead of the working class as a whole, or not sustained or not co-ordinated. As such, they are revolutionary outbursts, but they are not effectively directed against the state for a working class revolution.

Another of Lenin's important contributions in WITBD derived from his understanding of the role of a conscious vanguard and the limitations of working class trade union organizations. Contrary to Marx, it was a necessity that the revolutionary organization be distinct from the mass organization of the working class.

"The political struggle carried on by the Social Democrats is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle that the workers carry on against the employers and the government. Similarly (and indeed for that reason), the organization of revolutionary Social Democrats must inevitably differ from the organizations of the workers designed for the latter struggle. The workers organizations must in the first place be trade organizations; secondly, they must be as wide as possible; and thirdly, they must be as public as conditions will allow." (WITBD, p. 105)

By necessity, the basis for being in a revolutionary organization was an understanding and agreement with the full range of revolutionary politics. But trade unions were organs of working class struggle at the level of consciousness of the working class. His criteria for the basis of trade unions is instructive -- as wide as possible a basis which will still allow for struggle.⁷

Let every worker who understands the necessity for organization in order to carry out the struggle against the employers and the government join the trade unions. The very objects of the trade unions would be unattainable unless they united all who have attained at least this elementary level of understanding, and unless they were extremely wide organizations." (WITBD, p107)

(This clear separation of the organization of revolutionaries (the vanguard of the class) and trade unionists did not mean that the role of revolutionaries was merely to raise the advanced political questions. The separation was one of the functions of the organization. Revolutionaries were expected to be the leaders and organizers of these trade unions on the minimal basis described above (WITBD, pp. 107-112).

It is in this way that Social-Democrats were to become the leaders of the working class and effectively bring the politics of Social-Democracy "from without" to advance

⁷It is Lenin's method which is important here. The ability to struggle was his basic criterion. Because trade unions were illegal at this time, Lenin could not propose that they be open to all workers because this would effectively prevent them from being organizations of struggle.

the consciousness of the working class. There was no contradiction for Lenin for a revolutionary to be a leader of a trade union. The question was whether he/she limited his/her self to simple trade union issues or attempted to relate to broader political struggles, i.e., advance the consciousness of the working class beyond narrow trade union struggles.⁸

The method of the transitional program developed by the Bolsheviks in the period 1917-23 was based in the synthesis of the Marxist analysis of the dynamic of class struggle and Lenin's contribution on the relationship of the revolutionary vanguard to that struggle. With capitalist society so clearly in a state of crisis with the working class involved in mass struggle, socialism was on the immediate agenda, i.e., it was a pre-revolutionary period. Why didn't revolutionaries restrict themselves to calling on the working class to take state power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat? Why did revolutionaries concern themselves with continuing to raise democratic, partial, and transitional demands?

The reason was the understanding that revolutionary ideas put forward by a revolutionary organization only had real meaning to the mass of the working class in the course of struggle for the reasons that Marx and Lenin understood. The Third Congress of the Communist International posed it well:

Every objection to the putting forward of such partial demands, every charge of reformism on this account, is an emanation of the same inability to grasp the essential conditions of revolutionary action as was expressed in the hostility of some Communist groups to participation in the trade unions or to making use of parliament. It is not a question of proclaiming the final goal to the proletariat, but of intensifying the practical struggle which is the only way of leading the proletariat to the struggle for the final goal. ("Theses on Tactics" my emphasis)

Trotsky's "Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International" was an attempt to accumulate the experience and contributions of the Bolsheviks in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods. Throughout the document, and over and over Trotsky makes clear that transitional demands have their real importance as vehicles for mass struggle. —

It is necessary to help the masses in the process of daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat." Death Agony, p. 7

The old 'minimal program' is superseded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in the systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution. (p. 8)

⁸One of the reasons that Lenin could hold this view was precisely because trade unions were illegal and leadership meant something much different than present day legal trade unions with collective bargaining contracts which are partially integrated into the capitalist state. Lenin did not fully understand the implications of his own observation that trade unions were organized around lines (industries, trades) created by capitalist society and as such were organized for the purpose of fighting with the context of acceptance of capitalism rather than for the purpose of overthrowing it. He maintained some illusions about the potential of trade unions as institutions of revolutionary struggle until shortly before the 1917 Revolution.

A program is formulated not for the editorial board or for the leaders of discussion clubs, but for the revolutionary action of millions. (p. 44)

[Transitional demands create] a bridge to the mentality of the workers and then a material bridge to the socialist revolution. The whole question is how to mobilize the masses for struggle. (Writings 1938-34, p.44)

Again, Trotsky's method for the use of transitional demands was a conception of advancing the struggle. In his conversations on the transitional program, Trotsky gives an example:

For some time we must try to concentrate the attention of the workers on one slogan: the sliding scale of wages and hours I believe that we can concentrate the attention of the workers on this point. Naturally this is only one point. In the beginning this slogan is totally adequate for the situation. But for others can be added as the development proceeds. The bureaucrats will oppose it. Then if the slogan becomes popular with the masses, fascist tendencies will develop in opposition. We will say that we need to develop defense squads.

Exactly how to formulate a demand so that it is most understandable and exactly how to tactically introduce it are "pedagogical" tasks. But the general notion of how transitional demands in general are to be used is not a pedagogical question but a deeply political one. It is the question of understanding that the working class learns in struggle and that programmatic demands are one means by which the vanguard advances that struggle and thereby advances consciousness. (1933-39 Writings, p. 49)

To make the focus of revolutionary activity the use of transitional demands as the basis for propaganda or educational work outside of the context of struggle and to counterpose these demands to the real and immediate potential struggles of the working class is not pedagogy -- it is a retreat from Marxism.

For Trotsky, transitional demands were not counterposed to the struggle over partial and democratic demands. Transitional demands were a means to extend these struggles. Where struggles did not exist Trotsky understood that the masses would be mobilized initially around their partial and democratic demands and it was the struggle around these demands which opened up the possibilities for the use of transitional demands.

. . . The Fourth International supports every, even if insufficient, demand if it can draw the masses to a certain extent into active politics, awaken their criticism and strengthen their control over the machinations of the bourgeoisie. (Death Agony, p. 23)

The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their

 9Once again it is necessary to state that Trotsky's writings in the late '30's contained contradictions -- a result we suggest of his mistaken analysis of the period and his incorrect predictions. In the same discussion Trotsky suggests that the mentality of the workers was not relevant in the formulation of demands. What is relevant is the objective conditions (crisis in capitalism).

Trotsky's views of the period led him to the conclusion that the working class had to accept this program or it would be crushed by fascism. An element of a kind of moralistic fatalism enters Trotsky's writings:

. . . if the working class falls as a victim to fascism, the best elements will say, "we were warned by this party; it was a good party." And a great tradition will remain in the working class.

We believe that the views of Trotsky we have quoted in the main body of this paper represent the core of the politics of Bolshevism and the core of Trotsky's politics. (cont. p. 14)

vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is revolutionary perspective. (Death Agony, pp. 7-8)

In discussing struggle in Fascist countries, Trotsky notes the difficulty in workers adopting the transitional program:

A program is verified by experience and it is precisely experience in mass movements which is lacking in countries of totalitarian despotism.

(Death Agony, p. 34)

He goes on to insist that "the Fourth International does not reject democratic slogans as a means of mobilizing the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role." (p. 35) The difference with "People's Fronts" is that revolutionaries would insist on the necessity to go beyond these demands.

As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones . . .

(Death Agony)

Trotsky makes a similar point in discussing transitional demands in backward countries in The Death Agony.

The Death Agony of Capitalism is only a small part of Trotsky's contributions to revolutionary theory. Trotsky wrote volumes analyzing in depth the class struggle around the world during the 1920's and 30's. His genius was his ability to analyze the concrete situation and then establish immediate tasks. The tasks did not simply flow from the nature of the period, let alone the epoch. In an earlier period, for example, Trotsky analyzed the situation in France.

The party's most pressing task is to organize the resistance of the proletariat against the capitalist offensive which is underway in France as in every other major industrial country. The defense of the 8-hour working day, the maintenance and the increase of prevailing wage scales, the struggle for all the immediate economic demands -- all this is the best possible platform for reuniting the disorganized proletariat and restoring its confidence in its own strength and future. The party must immediately take the initiative in every united mass action that is capable of halting the offensive of capitalism and instilling the working class with the spirit of unity. (First Five Years of the Comintern, p. 285, my emphasis)

In analyzing the struggle in Spain, Trotsky warned against relying on abstract slogans or on an a-priori set of demands. It was necessary for revolutionaries

to put forward at the right moment sharp, specific, fighting slogans that by themselves don't derive from the "program", but are dictated by the circumstances of the day and lead the masses forward . . .

Simply counterposing the slogan of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" or "workers' and peasants' republic" to the present regime is entirely inadequate because these slogans do not move the masses. (Spanish Revolution, 1931-1939, pp. 143, 144)

(footnote 9 cont'd:) Further, we believe them to be correct. The conversations of Trotsky taking on various opponents on specific points which contain remarks in contradiction to these core politics are a result we believe in part of "bending the twig" in the context of a discussion, in part the result of his mistaken analysis of the period, and in part a reflection of his frustration with the weakness of revolutionary forces compared to the world crisis.

In discussing the application of the united front concept in Germany, Trotsky found it necessary to explain that the simple call for the United Front (the "open letter") was not what would win the masses to revolutionary leadership or expose the reformist leadership. It was a mistake, he said, to formulate the call for a United Front in the hopes that the call itself would separate the masses from their reformist leadership. If this were possible, Trotsky argued, then there would be no need in the first place for the United Front tactic. All that would be required would be a simple call on the masses to break with their old leadership and follow the revolutionary leadership. But this was just sectarian fantasy. Trotsky insisted that it was the United Front struggle which would advance the consciousness of the working class and expose the reformists. The fundamental purpose of the united front was to move the working class in struggle.

In most cases the leading organs of the Communist party approached the reformists with an offer of joining in a common struggle for radical slogans which were alien to the situation and which found no response in the masses. These proposals partook of the nature of blank shots. The masses remained indifferent, the reformist leaders interpreted these proposals of the Communists as as a trick to destroy the social democracy. In each of these instances only a purely formal, declamatory application of the policy of united front was inaugurated; whereas by its very nature, it can prove fruitful only on the basis of a realistic appraisal of the situation and of the condition of the masses. (Trotsky: What Next (1932), in International Socialism 38/39, p. 33)

It was because Trotsky understood the United Front as a means of developing mass struggles that it was also necessary to warn against the tendency to submerge the revolutionary organization into the United Front. Precisely because he expected the level of the United Front struggle to be of such a limited nature compared to the program of the revolutionary organization, Trotsky insisted on the necessity for revolutionaries to maintain their independence -- to put forward their program independently outside the United Front while struggling around the demands of the United Front.

Class struggle and its effect on consciousness is not some 'metaphysical abstraction' as members of the Revolutionary Tendency have charged. The concept is the core of Marxism analyzed and reanalyzed by every Marxist since the beginning. Some of the most important contributions to Marxism by Lenin and Trotsky were built on and elaborated on the understanding of class struggle as the dynamic which develops socialist consciousness in the working class. The class struggle is the core around which our program is built. Removing this core as the Revolutionary Tendency does transforms the program and organization into utopian idealism.

Building Revolutionary Leadership in the Working Class

It should go without saying that all revolutionaries are concerned with building revolutionary leadership in the working class. The real question is how this is accomplished. Something more is needed than repeated chants and chest beatings. The idea of revolutionary leadership includes two parts. The first is the development of cadres who have revolutionary politics and organization, who understand the main moving forces in society and have a clear understanding of the road to overthrowing capitalism.

But this does not make them working class leaders. The most well-trained political cadres with the best of ideas are not leaders if significant portions of the working class do not follow their lead. Self-proclaimed leaders lead only themselves.

It is not enough to call ourselves the 'vanguard', the advanced contingent; we must act in such a way that all the other contingents recognize and are obliged to admit that we are marching in the vanguard. We ask the

reader: Are the representatives of the other "contingents" such fools as to take our word for it when we say we are the "vanguard"? (Lenin: WITBD)

Despite some internal confusion, the essential notion advanced by the Revolutionary Tendency is that the task of revolutionaries is to develop the advanced ideas and have them in readiness so that when the working class reaches a sufficiently high level of consciousness, they (the working class) will recognize the correctness of our (the vanguard's) ideas. Once having recognized the correctness of our ideas and appreciating the fact that it is we who have been saying them all along, the working class will now look to us for leadership. This method has nothing in common with Marxist-Leninist understanding of false consciousness and everything in common with the bourgeois political notion of people electing leaders on the basis of their ideas (i.e., the belief that what happens in elections is (at least among the most advanced) that the masses examine the ideas of candidates and chose the candidate according to whose ideas come closest to their own.)¹⁰

Worker consciousness and leadership are dialectically interrelated. Workers do choose leaders on the basis of ideas presented to them. But the range of ideas that are considered reasonably acceptable is the result of the leadership they have. There are millions of ideas floating around in the world. One of the main functions that political leadership serves is to interpret and therefore sort out these ideas. That is, which ideas the working class will come to accept will be partly determined by which leadership it has already come to respect in their struggles.

Becoming the vanguard of the working class (i.e., winning masses of workers to follow the lead of a revolutionary organization) involves much more than explaining to workers that there can be no ultimate solution to their problems until certain demands (such as 30-for-40, nationalization of industry under workers' control, a workers' government, etc) are accepted. The reason is that even if the workers agree abstractly that all their problems would be solved if those demands were put into effect, they have to deal with immediate problems and crisis.

Thus, one of the important tasks of revolutionaries is to provide leadership of on going struggles, even those that involve only partial and democratic demands. The revolutionaries will be judged by the workers for their ability to both 1) lead the immediate struggles as effectively as possible; and 2) draw the political lessons as clearly as possible, showing how the revolutionary' analysis of capitalism and socialism is tied in to the concrete situation, and in this way helping to advance class consciousness generally.

As Lenin so well understood, the working class requires leadership in order to understand and interpret especially those event which are beyond their immediate

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By ignoring the dialectical interrelationship between leaders and followers the Revolutionary Tendency is led in the direction of sectarian abstention which actually leaves the bureaucratic leadership of the trade unions unchallenged (except by irrelevant slogans). The same misconception led Reorient comrades to a seemingly opposite conclusion -- which turned out to be the same: that the trade union leadership were simple reflections of the ranks' consciousness and therefore do not have to be challenged. See my "Reply to Reorient".

The Revolutionary Tendency does not propose abstaining from real struggle. They say that they will propose their revolutionary program. Then when that is rejected they will say that they will actively support whatever struggle the masses wish to engage in. That is the Revolutionary Tendency proposes to abstain for leadership of mass struggles and hence from following a strategy which will lead to building the revolutionary leadership.

Their conception is just another example of how sectarianism and opportunism are just the two heads of Janus. They objectively act like economists assuming that the trade union struggle inevitably will lead workers to their politics. Their strategy is worse than the maximalist-minimalist program: the RT has its maximal program -- the Transitional Program, but its real minimal program is tail ending the masses

day to day experience. Leadership with special skills and perspectives are required to pose solutions to problems and the means to achieve these solutions. This "leadership" may or may not exist in the form of individuals. It may be exerted through institutions, press, generally accepted myths, etc.

In this sense, there is always leadership present. The absence of revolutionary leadership only insures that the leadership provided to the working class will be bourgeois -- that is it will interpret the world from a bourgeois point of view and block the working class from struggles which will lead in the direction which challenges capitalism.

The day to day experience of exploitation and oppression, struggles, cataclysmic changes in the society, major political events, all open the working class to changes in consciousness and new leadership. But there are 57 different varieties of leadership which put themselves forward. Which to choose?

Especially in time of struggle or crisis, the working class does not have the time or resources to sit down and critically analyze all the ideas put before it, most of which were ignored as irrelevant the day before. In part the working class will choose its leaders on the basis of which ideas make the most sense at the given moment. But the main weight will be given to those who had previously established themselves as leaders in past struggles.

But even if there was time for the working class in a period of crisis to carefully examine the programs put forth by all 57 varieties of leadership, it would do little good. To the untrained eye, most of the programs look the same. Any political group not totally dense will adopt whatever rhetoric, mantle, and even paper program to attempt to win or maintain mass support. Just as Lyndon Johnson could say, "We shall overcome," the advertising media can discover psychodellic art, and the Democratic Party pose as the party of working people. So will every rotten reformist leader as well as every isolated sect adopt revolutionary rhetoric and a revolutionary paper program. But who means it and who doesn't? Who can best lead the working class and who are the misleaders? These will be the real questions.

Sects like the Leninist Tendency and the Spartacist League -- who openly state that they are waiting for the masses to come up to the level of their program -- have an answer. Their main task today is to attack and destroy all possible alternative leaderships. Since they are not strong enough to challenge the trade union bureaucracy, they turn their attention to attacking and destroying those groups closest to them politically so that the working class will not be confused during a revolutionary crisis.

Then there is also the woodpecker theory. "The masses will choose us because we have been raising the same slogans consistently all along." But what the masses are really choosing is leadership, not slogans. As Trotsky puts it,

They condemn themselves when they cite the fact that they have been repeating for a number of years the slogan which is suitable only for a revolutionary period. The woodpecker who has drilled away at the bark of an oak tree, year in and year out, in all probability at the bottom of his heart, also holds to the conviction that the woodman, who had chopped down the tree with the blows of his axe, has criminally plagiarized from him, the woodpecker. (Trotsky, What Next, in I.S. 38/39, p. 42)

That is why revolutionaries attempt to actively take the lead in every struggle of the working class, no matter how minimal and inadequate the demands are, so long as the struggle represents a real advance for the working class. The working class does not come to accept revolutionary leadership in one burst of consciousness. The basis for that leadership must be laid through long and patient involvement throughout the course of class struggle.

One of the main accomplishments of the U.S. Trotskyist movement in the 1930's was

the leadership of the Minneapolis Teamsters Strike for union recognition. It was because of this political leadership won by the Trotskyists in the Minneapolis working class that specific suggestions that Trotsky had in implementing the transitional program began with raising them first in Minneapolis.

Because we understand the central importance of the class struggle in developing revolutionary consciousness, one of our tasks is leading the working class into struggle.

Because we understand that struggle does not automatically raise the consciousness of the working class, our task is to educate, explain, and interpret events from a socialist perspective, challenge the illusions of the working class, and point the direction for further advances of the working class.

These two tasks are fused with the third -- the building of a revolutionary organization which can organize the work of its members, recruit, and build a larger revolutionary leadership in the working class. Most importantly, the revolutionary organization develops, as a whole, a perspective to guide the work of the individual members. Revolutionaries within the working class are subject to the same political and social pressures as are other workers. The revolutionary organization and its perspective provide the basic outlook so that revolutionaries can maintain a correct world view and total perspective and not succumb to the pressures to interpret the world from the viewpoint of immediate surroundings and events. But the revolutionary organization does this, not to insulate its members from the class struggle, but to enable them to carry on the class struggle and to more effectively advance it.

In order to win leadership in the working class, revolutionaries aim to be "the best militants", the most consistent fighters for the working class at every level. It is our perspective or program which enables us to fill that role. It is not that our program provides us in some mechanical way with the issues to fight over or the slogans to be raised. It is that our program enables us to better analyze the meaning of events and struggles and provides us with the direction to move. We become known as "the best militants" not because we subordinate ourselves to the consciousness of the working class or the bureaucracy, but because our program provides us with the means to be in advance.¹¹ Our perspective enables us to consistently point the way for expanding and advancing the struggle.

Secondly, we also attempt to develop the respect of the working class by demonstrating our ability to deal with even the most trivial or on-the-job problems facing working class organization. We study contracts, we handle grievances, we learn health and safety questions in order to pose political struggle and raise political demands from the basis of a full knowledge of the concrete situation. We learn

¹¹That is, we are constantly pressing for the next step. This does not mean that there is a series of preordained stages or phases through which the masses must move one at a time. The process of combined and uneven development exists within the working class. We attempt to characterize and understand different stages of development so that we can understand when the next step is to skip stages.

We do not just sit at the end of the road waving our "unstained banner" hoping that the masses will choose our road instead of the 57 other roads (with 57 other "unstained banners") which also present themselves.

We attempt to lead the masses every step of the way demonstrating that we can lead better because of our understanding and because we are not committed to capitalism. Steps may be taken many at a time. We do not tell the working class to wait after each step, while we have a convention to determine what the next step is. We develop a program so that we have a general sense of what the next step is, and the one after that, etc. We attempt to develop a cadre which is trained in a method so that it can immediately respond by pointing the next step down the road.

organizational skills -- meeting rules of order, union constitutions, operating mimeo machines -- so that we can even in detail demonstrate the means of implementing the demands we raise. This does not mean that every revolutionary must learn all of these skills. Revolutionary organization makes a division of labor possible. These skills are not substitutes for a political program; they are a means to make our program more effective by making it more concrete and by winning the respect of fellow workers.

We do not, however, take positions of leadership on the basis of our organizational skills. We do attempt to take leadership on the basis of our immediate program. We have no a priori specific demands which constitute the minimum basis for our immediate program. Our immediate program in any situation is the immediate tasks necessary to advance the class struggle and can only be formulated by examining the specific situation from the vantage of our general perspective.

ADVANCING THE CLASS STRUGGLE

By "advancing the class struggle" we mean struggles which build in the working class a greater self-confidence in its own power and which raises consciousness to a higher level (eg) by new exposures of the true nature of the bosses, bourgeois parties, bourgeois police, trade union bureaucracy and the capitalist system as a whole.

The demands that we raise for immediate struggle are not tricks. We support only those demands which we are genuinely for winning. We also do not call on the working class or sections of the working class to struggles which will lead to certain defeat (unless of course the failure to struggle will mean a still greater defeat). As educational as defeats may be to the working class, every defeat is a setback in the class struggle by reinforcing in the working class a sense of powerlessness. We do not insist on certainty or near certainty of victory (most gains under these conditions are won without much struggle and generally mean very little). We only insist that there is a reasonable chance for victory and do everything we can to achieve that victory. When defeats do occur, we attempt to explain to the working class the reasons so that victory can be won the next time.

This is another reason why the use of transitional demands in struggles (which cannot be fully won without socialism) should not be counterposed to partial and democratic demands that can be won. In a concrete situation, for instance, a group of workers might have a list of things they insist on getting; for less they would not settle. However, other demands might be added because of their educational value, and because they begin to lay the basis for a broader struggle.

There can be partial victories with transitional demands. If transitional demands are contained in a platform with other demands which are partial and democratic, then a struggle can be seen as a victory that only achieves some of the demands, but allows at the same time workers to raise an important working class demand.

The important point here, then is that revolutionaries have to be careful in determining how demands are raised. If a small movement decides to struggle exclusively around a particular transitional (e.g., 30-for-40) with illusions that it can be won in the immediate future and then finds that it can not be achieved under the present conditions of capitalism, there is no guarantee that they will become socialists. It is at least as likely that they will become demoralized, internalize the idea that the working class can't make significant gains, and drop out of politics.¹¹

¹¹One aspect of the method of formulation of transitional demands should be made clear here. Transitional demands are formulated for mass struggle. Where the mass struggle does not exist we raise certain demands educationally to begin to prepare the basis for future mass struggles around them. We formulate these demands not because we believe that they can not be achieved and that the working class will learn from defeat. On the contrary. We formulate demands which can meet the needs of the working class and can be achieved given technological development (cont'd bottom of next page)

No level of working class struggle is too low for us to be actively involved in, although the level or potential level of struggle is a valid consideration in determining priorities. In a period or situation where working class consciousness is low and struggle barely exists in organized form at the shop level our immediate program will direct itself to these problems in the context of our broader perspective. As such it will usually be necessary to have separate immediate programs flowing from our general program for different industries and sometimes even for different shops within an industry.

In situations where there is widespread discontent over a specific issue but no organizational expression, we are willing to take the leadership in initiating the organization to fight around that issue. We understand that the organization of the working class for struggle is a major advance in the class struggle. Once such a group is organized, our immediate program is to broaden the scope and character of the struggle, including national caucuses within the union as well as around issues which can provide the basis for political struggle with workers in other unions.

As struggles develop beyond the shop floor level they become more generalizable and our program to advance the class struggle will more approach the general program outlined in our tasks and perspectives document.

Not all struggles of workers "advance the class struggle." Consider some examples of different types.

Some struggles are clearly reactionary. Obviously struggles over racist and sexist demands move the working class in the wrong direction and must be openly opposed all along.

Other struggles require a more complicated response.

Proposals for adventurist struggles, because they usually end in crushing defeat of the working class, must be opposed. But once such a struggle begins it will usually be necessary to actively fight with the workers to minimize the defeat while explaining the political reasons for it.

We oppose political struggles which lead the working class deeper into the Democratic Party (e.g., primary campaigns, even for a "labor candidate"). We oppose these because the net effect of such a struggle is to reinforce the illusion that the Democratic Party represents in any way a vehicle for the working class (except perhaps a hearse). As such, the struggle reinforces the hegemony of capitalist politics over the working class.

We do not take the lead in struggles over demands which fundamentally maintain or reinforce the legitimacy of capitalism. For example, we always counterposed the demand of immediate withdrawal to the demand for a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war, and would not take the lead in groups demanding the latter.

The negotiations demand was one which reinforced the imperialist notion that the U. S. had some right to negotiate something. The demand for immediate withdrawal challenged this right and pointed in the direction of a full attack on imperialism.

We do not take the lead in struggles which are in reality a substitute for, or a diversion from, a higher level of struggle. For example, the union bureaucracy may call for a strike over wages when the real issue is a full scale challenge to management prerogatives over working conditions and productivity. While we will actively support the wage struggle, we will attempt to take the lead in organizing a struggle against both the bureaucracy and company around demands which can advance the struggle.

(footnote continued from previous page) and world resources. That is why, for example, we call for 30-for-40 and not for 5-for-40 (which might sound more radical). We propose these transitional demands as the focus for mass struggle because we believe they can be won if fought for consistently, but that consistent fighting will necessitate replacing capitalism with a workers' state.

Though we attempt to take the lead in organizing struggles around our immediate program which mean a real advance in working class consciousness and organization, at no time do we limit ourselves to only raising our immediate program. At no time do we accept positions of leadership even on the basis of our immediate program if that position prevents us from raising our full perspective and program. In general, then, in this period we do not accept posts such as union president where we must serve as the single spokesperson for an organization and are limited basically to representing the position of the organization. On the other hand, we are willing to take and fight for positions of leadership such as shop steward or executive committee posts on the basis of our immediate program.

Insofar as security conditions permit, we are openly revolutionary socialists. We put forward a socialist analysis of the nature of capitalism, and attempt to explain events in terms of this analysis in our newspaper, literature, meetings and in discussions with our fellow workers individually and in worker organizations. We put forward our perspective or program for achieving socialism openly. But all of this propaganda will have its greatest impact in the context of working class struggle.

REFORMISM AND REFORMIST ILLUSIONS

Reformism is a specific political current in the working class and the term has a precise political meaning. Not every struggle for reforms is reformism. Nor is every person who struggles for reforms a reformist. By themselves, the struggles for higher wages, democratic demands, political rights, etc., are just these -- limited struggles for particular demands. When revolutionaries struggle for these reforms, they are not reformists.

Reformism as a political current is defined by a commitment to reforming capitalism. Reformism has a social base -- the bureaucratic strata of the trade union movement. The privileges of the bureaucracy are dependent on maintaining a stable capitalism while at the same time the needs of the ranks force them to continually seek those reforms capitalism will grant. Struggle is to be avoided because it opens up the possibility of the ranks getting out of control and threatening the bureaucracy itself. While the bureaucratic leadership can be forced into leading struggles for reforms by the demands of the ranks, they will use every ounce of their power to restrict the struggle to the limited demands.

Especially after a period of relative stability and prosperity in capitalism, the working class will have increased illusions in the possibilities of reforms under capitalism and large sections will loyally support reformist leaders. But the conditions of capitalism still tend to force the working class to struggle for its needs.

That part of working class consciousness which understands the necessity of struggle around its own needs is qualitatively different from and tends to be in opposition to that part of consciousness which defends the capitalist system. Total consciousness is rarely consistent -- the class struggle is reflected inside the workers head. So it is that workers who abstractly believe in the rights of private property will also engage in militant sit-in strikes if the development of the struggle around their needs demands this. Similarly, workers who abstractly defend "law and order" will violate injunctions and physically attack scabs or even police under conditions of struggle.

Thus struggles around specific reforms have a contradictory character. The degree to which the struggles are conditioned in method and demand by reformist illusions about capitalism is the degree to which they can be characterized as reformist struggles. The degree to which these struggles are conditioned by the needs of the working class is the degree to which the struggle objectively begins to challenge reformism.

All reformist illusions will have some impact on every struggle. But the same illusion can have a different meaning depending on the nature and level of the struggle. For example, illusions about the possibilities of winning thorough-going reforms under

capitalism need not decisively condition a struggle for trade union recognition or other struggle against an employer. This is so because the illusion is not central to the struggle itself. But because a labor party is organized to challenge for state power, the illusions about reforms under capitalism are both central and made operational and thereby decisively condition a labor party struggle as reformist.

The trade union bureaucracy attempts to avoid any struggle even around the most minimal reforms because it understands that it is the struggle itself which opens up the possibilities of developed worker consciousness and new leadership which could challenge the bureaucracy. Often the needs of the working class force the reformist bureaucracy into struggle, but even here their prime interest lies in keeping it within safe limits rather than advancing it.

That's why real struggles over even the most minimal demands are much more threatening to the reformist bureaucracy than the adoption of resolutions filled with revolutionary rhetoric. Like its social democratic ancestors, the labor bureaucracy has found that a rhetorical maximal program can be quite helpful in defending its real program. By adopting left-sounding resolutions -- 30-for-40, labor party, etc. -- the reformist leadership can provide itself with a left cover and attempt to diffuse radicals while it engages in its real immediate program. Thus, the general demand for a labor party based on whatever program is not as threatening as the specific act of refusing to endorse Democrats in the upcoming election.

Demanding 30-for-40 and reconversion of the arms economy from the state poses no threat to the bureaucracy so long as they are not actionable. But the demand on the company that the union control the line speed is actionable and therefore represents a threat.

In order to challenge the reformist illusions of the working class and its reformist leadership, we pose fighting demands for the working class and organize around them. We raise more general demands educationally in order to prepare the way for struggle around these. But, to alter an old saying, "one real step by the working class is what begins to make a thousand programs relevant."

OTHER WORKING CLASS LEADERS

By the nature of this paper, we have been forced to provide general characterizations of working class consciousness. Earlier we noted that the working class is uneven and that some sections of the working class will be more advanced than others. Within every shop there will also be individual workers or small groups which have developed more advanced consciousness. We seek to relate to these by advancing socialist ideas and explaining the method of our program. Often the very fact that consciousness of these workers on one level (e.g., an understanding of the nature of capitalism) is in advance of the working class leads to a cynicism about the working class and the possibility for building a mass working class movement. We must convince these workers not only of our socialist analysis, but we must also fight their cynical, often sectarian, abstention from working class struggles. If there were sufficient numbers of advanced workers in a situation open to revolutionary ideas, we would initiate a grouping or caucus with them. Within such a caucus, we would push for it to develop a program which would involve the mass of workers and advance the class struggle.

In the present period, there is another kind of advanced worker -- a worker who has illusions about the possibilities of reform under capitalism, but who also understands the immediate needs of the working class and the need to organize to struggle around these needs. As such he/she becomes a rank and file leader. We attempt to win over such leaders to revolutionary politics through political discussions, and by pushing such leaders to lead in class struggle on the basis of the needs of the working class. Where these come in conflict with the institutions of capitalism and ultimately the very limits of capitalism, choices will have to be made. Either the reformist illusions must be dropped or the commitment to the working class must

be dropped. Both cannot be maintained in reality.

It is only by developing a socialist perspective -- understanding the potential of the working class and the forces at work under capitalism -- that working class leaders will not be demoralized or made cynical in periods of working class quiescence and not be subject to the tremendous mechanism of cooptation and capitulation constantly at work.

Our attitude toward working class leaders who do not have revolutionary consciousness is determined by the role they play in advancing the class struggle. So long as they advance the class struggle by their leadership of the working class, we support them critically. We openly raise our differences where relevant, and organize and fight for our own positions. Simultaneously, we attempt to win such leaders to our politics.

As the struggle advances, unchanged illusions about capitalism will become more operational and our struggle against them will be intensified. A working class leader can be characterized as a reformist when his/her commitment to capitalism seriously impairs leadership of working class struggle, i.e., he/she becomes a roadblock to advancing the class struggle. We actively oppose such reformist leaderships (e.g., the trade union bureaucracy) within the working class movement. We organize against them, and organize others against them.

Where the struggle is sufficiently advanced, we put ourselves forward as the full leadership, i.e., revolutionary leadership. Where the struggle is not so advanced, we put ourselves, along with other militants, on the basis of our immediate program. Or we may even support critically working class militants who yet do not have socialist consciousness whose commitment to the working class will continue to advance the struggle.

To the extent that the reformist leadership of a struggle maintains itself because of the illusions in the working class that they are in fact carrying out the struggle, we must work to expose those illusions. These illusions are best broken in the context of struggle. Where the relation of forces makes it a real possibility, we propose United Front struggles (discussed earlier). In other situations we may use the tactic of "critical support" -- in the same way a rope supports a hanged man." (Lenin, Left-Wing Communism) That is, we may openly give our support to a reformist leader who has mass support in a struggle against the bosses (or state or even another worse reformist leader) where the struggle itself represents an advance or defeat for the working class. In other words, we are supporting the working class struggle which may be symbolized (as in elections) by a reformist leader. We strive to achieve the victory of the working class both for its own sake and so that we can expose the present leadership. We openly state that we do not believe that this reformist leader will in fact seriously carry through the struggle and that this will be exposed in the course of the struggle and succeeding events.¹²

¹²This phrase "critical support -- like a rope supports a hanged man" is now glee-fully used by the R.T. as the means by which we relate to any working class leader who does not have our politics.

Consider the context of the original quote from Lenin in Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder (near end of chapter 9). He says, "I want to support Henderson like a rope supports a hanged man."

Who was this Henderson that Lenin wanted to hang? Was he a leader of a rank and file struggle around the needs of the workers, but who thought that the platform could be achieved under capitalism? Was Henderson a rank and file worker who had formed a small caucus within a union who had raised certain demands like 30-for-40, end to racism and sexism, humanize working conditions, although not entirely without problems or sidestepping issues?

No! Henderson was the leader of the British Labor Party during World War I, who not only supported the war, but also entered the bourgeois government (cont'd next page)

BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

It is, at root, the objective conditions of the economy and society which will provide the impetus for working class struggle. We put forward our programs for struggle and attempt to establish our presence and leadership in whatever low level struggles do exist now so that when and as conditions force more massive struggles, the working class will respect and look to us for leadership.

We attempt to train our cadres now in a method and world view so that they can understand and effectively intervene in the class struggle in all its special and peculiar forms. We have a program which provides a direction -- and method -- not a list of demands good for any time or situation in this entire epoch.

The Revolutionary Party is not created by the self-proclamation of a group that it represents the true political interests of the working class. It must be a party of working class leaders who lead significant portions of the working class.

Such a party is not likely to come into being by accretion to the I.S. or any other sect. Rather we expect the developing class struggle to produce a new generation of rank and file leaders who will be moved toward socialist politics by their experience in the struggle and the influence of revolutionary groups. We plan to play an important role in this process by developing our own members as working class leaders and winning over to the I.S. or strongly influencing the new working class rank and file leaders.

The tasks ahead are hard. We prepare ourselves the best we can. Self delusions and revolutionary posturing about our influence and role today will only prevent us from carrying through in the long struggle. Sooner or later reality impinges and those who have been deluding themselves will become thoroughly demoralized and will probably drop out of politics.

Arrogance and self-confidence are not the same thing. The bourgeoisie may see our revolutionary politics as arrogance because we insist on taking their social power. In this sense we are arrogant toward the bourgeoisie -- but we are never arrogant toward the working class, which we seek to win to revolutionary politics.

(footnote cont'd from p. 23) of England during the war. He had helped to draft anti-labor legislation militarizing the economy to help fight that imperialist war. In other words, he represented chemically pure reformism. He represented in every way the commitment of the trade union bureaucracy to defend capitalism even at the expense of the working class.

But because the working class had illusions that Henderson represented its interests and because the parliamentary struggle was in some form a struggle of the working class (whatever its consciousness) against capital, Lenin was for calling for Henderson's election as against the bourgeois parties. But the support was to be in the context of explaining what was wrong with capitalism, what was wrong with Parliamentarism, and what was wrong with Henderson -- that his election would only prove his betrayal of the working class.

The methodology of the Revolutionary Tendency allows for no distinction between the Hendersons and Meanys on the one side and the rank and file leaders of TURF in L.A., UNC in St. Louis or Detroit on the other. For all of them, their methodology is to try to hang them. In practice, the R.T. has a category called "exceptions". But in their statements of method, the only indication that the R.T. might make a distinction between different kinds of working class leaders is a mention that criticisms can be done in a friendly or in a hostile way. Having started from the nature of the Epoch, the R.T. has succeeded to reducing politics to a matter of facial expressions and pedagogy.