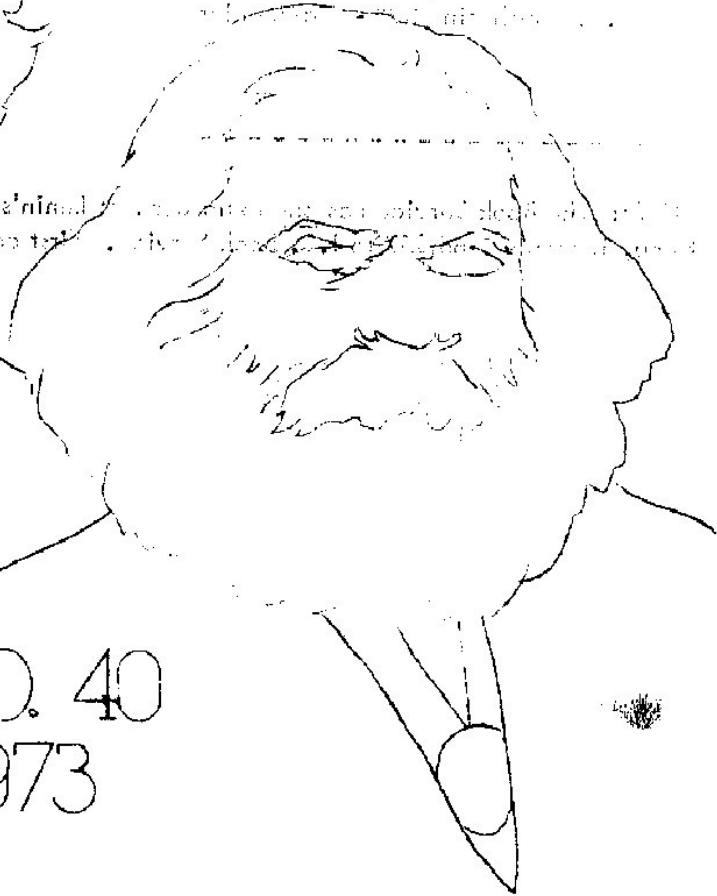
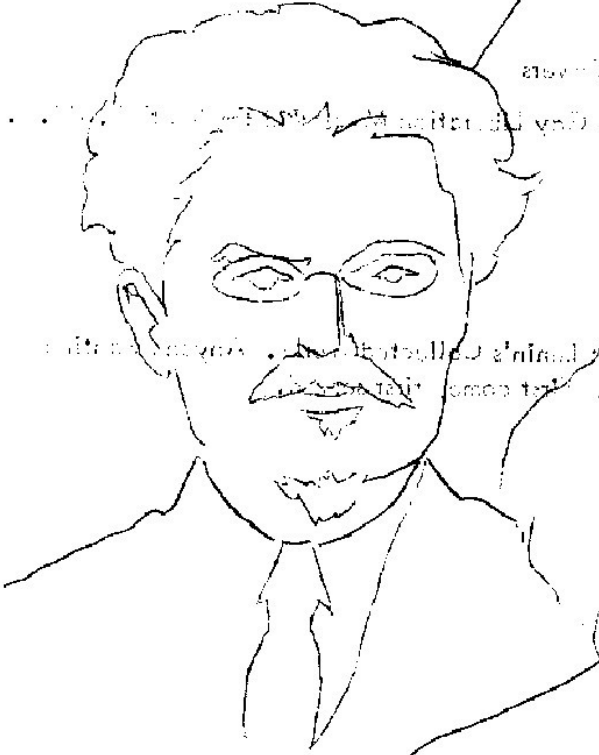
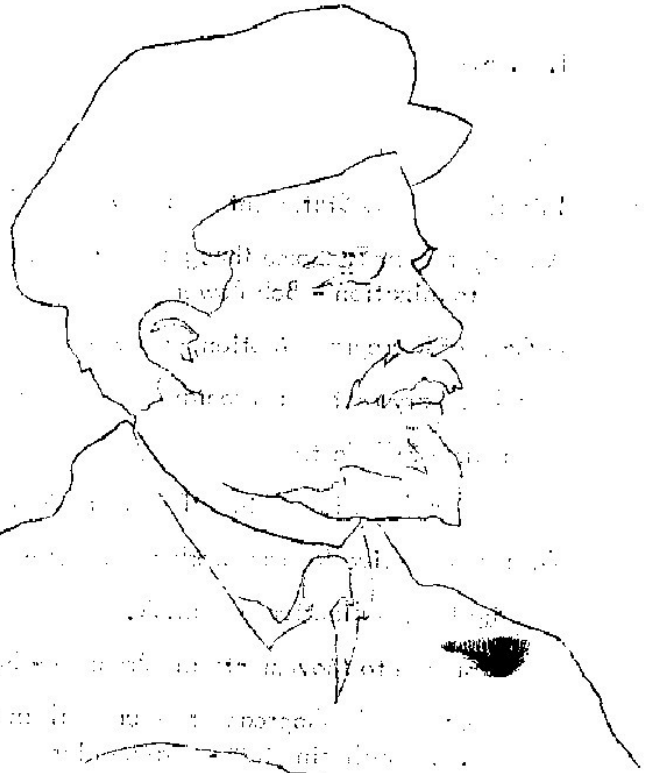


BULLETIN



NO. 40
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NOTE: The Book Service has one extra copy of Lenin's Collected Works. Anyone wanting to buy it should send \$57 to I.S. Book Service. First come, first served.

Initial Tendency Statement

I.S. IN CRISIS

The current factional explosion and crisis in the I.S. is the "dues" to be paid for the long-standing ills of the organization. Due to a vacuum of leadership, for which leading comrades in all tendencies are responsible, the I.S. has failed to politically define itself clearly enough to allow the membership to function on the basis of known and commonly shared assumptions. Following from this is the failure of the I.S. and its leaders to educate the membership in the method of Marxist politics.

The Third Camp world view which is the basis of our political outlook, and which distinguishes us from other political groups, has lain essentially dormant for years in our organization, becoming tradition instead of a live and vital body of theory to be elaborated and the basis of our work. In the movements of the 1960's, the high level of activity and the political nature of the movements meant that the connection between our revolutionary socialist politics and our day to day work was fairly clear, at least to ourselves. Today, however, the isolation imposed by the low level of working class activity generally, and the lull in the rank and file movement, has revealed the inadequacy of our previous approach. The crisis was felt first by our industrialized comrades who had to carry out the establishment of a direct socialist presence in the working class. It is the political meaning of this task and of the role of socialists in the labor movement, that has been brought into question.

As a result, the current factional debate is over fundamentals of Marxism as much as over more immediate perspectives. Furthermore, since the I.S. and its predecessors have been isolated from the working class for over a generation, the debate is necessarily abstract. Both of these facts make it harder to grasp the content and extent of differences. The tendency is for intensity to replace depth and anger to substitute for conviction.

The formation of political tendencies and caucuses, a democratic right, carries with it the obligation to recognize the dangers of such formations. We take seriously the dangers posed: that a multi-tendency organization cannot long exist; that factionalism tends artificially to force hard differences on questions; and that factionalism can severely inhibit the external activity of the organization. The I.S. has already developed the seeds of most of these problems. The blame for this falls on practically everyone. It falls on members of our tendency to the degree that we have not taken up fully the task of leadership in the past. It falls more heavily on the Transformation Caucus (TC) which while maintaining a formal caucus since the last convention has consistently failed to put forward a political perspective for the I.S. It falls on the leadership of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) for demanding leadership of the organization on the basis of a set of politics that it had not publicly discussed--even with other members of the past "majority"--and many of which do not seem to be shared or even understood by all RT members.

That differences have emerged over fundamentals before a leadership could be developed is a tragedy. Nonetheless, the differences are there and must be clarified and resolved. The very crisis of the I.S. is the first real test of our leadership elements: The tests that are posed are to pull the organization through the "factior fight," to clarify the fundamentals of our Third Camp world view, and

to continue and expand the external work of the I.S. in the working class following the Convention while maintaining our activity, especially in industry, to the fullest possible extent before the Convention. It is to these ends that this tendency, and other comrades some of whom are sympathetic to us, have formed an alliance with the TC to lead the I.S. in the pre-Convention period. It is our view that the success of this joint leadership in defending the basic assumptions that divide the I.S. from other tendencies in the radical and the labor movement is crucial to the survival of the organization and to its future. This joint leadership will maintain our industrialization program, organize the Convention and submit to the Convention a joint document on the Third Camp world view. This leadership is further committed to the maintenance of the I.S. as a functional organization, the expansion of its presence in the working class, and the energetic measures needed to create the responsible leadership the I.S. has not had in the past.

No attempt will be made to hide or minimize the differences on perspectives that exist between ourselves and the TC. We will propose our own Convention documents on all major perspective discussions. Further, we intend to fight for the leadership of the I.S. on the basis of those documents. In this regard, we do not pretend to offer any magic formulas for "transforming" or "revolutionizing" the organization over night. Rather we propose the difficult task of rooting our ideas in the working class, testing them--and our leadership--in the real struggles of the class, and in this manner forging a genuine cadre. Though time is short and this task of the greatest urgency, it remains a fact of history that there are no short cuts. The tragedy is that the I.S. has wasted so much of the past four years.

In spite of our past failings, however, the I.S. does not approach this Convention with only negative accomplishments and lessons. While all too slow and uncertain, our industrialization program has laid the basis for a deepening and expanding of our roots in the working class. Equally important, it has given us some small experience against which to test our ideas. In drawing up our labor perspectives we are able to move away from the heights of abstraction that characterized them in the past. We have, to put it another way, come a long way from the "struggle group" concept we created from the vantage point of "outsiders" and neophytes. Even the thorny question of "program" should be susceptible to a less metaphysical and academic treatment. In our Convention documents we will try to sort out and assess the gains and failures of the I.S., as well as where our own positions have moved since the last Convention.

WHERE WE STAND

The initial basis for our tendency is general and substantial agreement with the following documents: the April 1973 NC statement by Joel G. and Dave F.; the 1972 Tasks and Perspectives as amended; the 1972 Labor Perspectives; the Womens' Liberation perspective passed at the Nov. 1972 NC; and the political approach of the Coleman-Finkel amendments on Black Liberation and the analytical thrust of the Mackenzie discussion document on the same topic (Bulletin 27). (We do not specify agreement with the Lendy Black Liberation document as a whole, amended or unamended, as a basis for the tendency, given the ambiguity to which it has given rise.) Naturally, most of these documents require drastic rewriting and revision. The current debate (particularly the abandonment of the "majority" documents by the RT) cast many past formulations in a new light. Additionally, there were mistakes of analysis, prediction, and perspective that will be assessed and corrected in our new documents.

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Although a full statement of position is not possible here, two areas of controversy in the I.S. require some elaboration. One is the matter of the Third Camp world view, which divides us from the RT. The other is the question of transitional program and its method, which distinguishes us from both the RT and the TC.

The Third Camp -

The Third Camp world view is the continuation and revision of the Trotskyist movement since 1940, carried out largely by the revolutionary current within the Workers Party, ISL, YPSL, Left Wing, ISC's and the I.S. in the United States; the two "third camp" tendencies with the Zengakuren in Japan; and the British I.S. (there may be other groups we are not familiar with). Although important differences exist within and among these groups and their various histories, we recognize as arising from their intervention and experience in the international class struggle since 1940 the Marxist world view we characterize as "Third Camp."

We see the contribution of the Workers Party in the U.S., initiated by the Schachtman tendency of 1939-40 to the class analysis of Stalinist societies as an important historic step forward--a step in advance of Trotsky's first approximation of the nature of Stalinism and of various other theories extant at that time.

Similarly, we defend the critical reassessment of the revolutionary party, and its relationship to the working class and its self-activity, developed internationally since the death of Trotsky and summarized largely in the writings of the British I.S. While these ideas are thoroughly grounded in the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky, and others, they represent a synthesis of the full, rounded ideas of these great revolutionaries--not a scholastic reiteration of this or that text.

In particular, the notion that the party is to be created and led by intellectuals, who bring socialist politics to a working class incapable of drawing socialist conclusions on its own, is both a distortion of Lenin and often an apology for Stalinism, especially in its Castroist and Maoist forms, that needs to be discredited.

"What Is To Be Done?" must be seen in its context--as a "bending of the stick"--and weighed against the later views of Lenin and others and against world experience since the death of Lenin.

In the backward Tsarist Russia of 1903, it might have been argued that workers were isolated to such an extent that their self-activity could not lead to socialist conclusions. In today's world, with today's level of education among the masses, such a separation of politics and self-activity is unlikely.

No revolutionary socialist party can be born in or based on the petit bourgeois intelligentsia. Indeed the rise of Stalinism and fascism, as Trotsky recognized, have shown that in the absence of a working class revolutionary movement capable of carrying through the socialist revolution, anti-capitalist sentiment within the petit bourgeoisie and intelligentsia is far more likely to lead to totalitarian rather than socialist conclusions. The task of the past 25 years has been to break socialist ideas out of their isolation in the intelligentsia not to deify it as "Leninism." While Trotsky knew this and consistently addressed

himself to the isolation of the Trotskyists from the workers' organizations and struggles, the "trotskyists" since 1940 have buried this concept of the party--as one born in the heart of the class struggle--in a sea of "orthodox" formulas, scholastic quotations, and a practice ranging from left Social Democracy to byzantine sectarian cultism. It has remained for those with a "Third Camp" view to resurrect, codify, and advance the notion of the revolutionary party as one rooted and grown within the working class.

Related to the degeneration of the Trotskyist movement on the question of the party, is the ossification of Trotsky's revolutionary method of arriving at and applying program into the static idea that it is "program" that defines the vanguard party. In particular, the absurd proposition (gaining adherence in the I.S. and implicit in the views of the CP) that any grouplet or sect, regardless of class composition or experience in the class struggle, can be a, or even the, "vanguard" by virtue of its supposedly Marxist program, represents another "orthodox" departure from Marxism.

In fact, the "vanguard", the revolutionary party, or any other political formation is defined, for Marxists, by a number of conditions: class composition, relation to the working class as a whole, relationship to major ruling classes, stated program, "hidden" program, actual practice, etc. Indeed, the rise of Stalinism and the subsequent complication of what is and what is not a part of the socialist or workers movement has taught us to look beyond program and even class composition to determine the reality of any party or organization. Even Trotsky did not grasp this fully. Any attempt to define a working class organization, much less a political sect or tendency, simply by its program, i.e., by its "common understanding of the events, of the tasks" facing the workers, is inadequate. Is the NLF bourgeois democratic because its program is bourgeois democratic, or because its social base is petit bourgeois? No! Nor is the French CP simply a reformist workers party because its current program and practice are reformist and its base working class.

No less rigorous a view must be taken of what defines the vanguard of the working class at any given time. In our view this requires a critical assessment of program, class composition, political position and experience in the working class (it is not enough simply to have worker members--they must be leaders in the class), relationship to various ruling classes (e.g., no "Maoist" group can be a real vanguard until it breaks with Maoism, the ideology of the Chinese ruling class), and actual practice. By these criteria no group in the U.S. yet has the right to call itself the vanguard. The fact that so many do is an indication of the problem of sectarian illusion-mongering that exists in this country.. A socialist organization can play a role in building a genuine workers' vanguard only insofar as it exposes these fraudulent "theories" of the vanguard. The fact that the I.S., today, is still largely (though no longer exclusively) an organization of petit bourgeois intellectuals attempting to bring socialist ideas to the working class is precisely the proof that we are not the vanguard. It is to the degree that we succeed in our present task as a propaganda group--and thereby not reinforce but transcend our present nature and isolation from struggle--that we can play a crucial role in creating a real proletarian vanguard.

Program -

The confusion now reigning in the I.S. on the question of program is too great

to be sorted out in a short statement of this sort. Instead, we will try to state our views on certain fundamental aspects of transitional program as simply as possible.

Marxist program is derived, in the first instance, from an analysis of world objective conditions. These include not only "economics" but also (and most decisively) the impact of economic forces on the relationship of class forces, the levels of struggle, organization and consciousness of the working class, etc. Such an analysis is impossible for an organization--or even a small and loose international clustering of groups--that has been isolated from the world working class for many years. Formulating a full Marxist program is not a simple matter of will, but of experience in the international class struggle.

This does not mean that we can have no program. Rather it means that our program will be unfortunately narrow and necessarily full of errors. These faults can only be corrected through experience on a world scale. To put all of this another way, a socialist propaganda organization cannot pretend to have and to be competent to wield the program of a world party ("The Transitional Program"). What we can do is to prepare a first approximation of the most important elements of a Marxist program. It is to this task that the I.S. and its international co-thinkers must turn.

From the standpoint of our tendency one of the most important elements of a Marxist program is the "system of transitional demands." That is, that part of the total program that is a "bridge" from the partial and minimal demands of today (also part of the Marxist program) to the political struggles and revolutionary mobilizations of tomorrow. This aspect of program--the "system of transitional demands"--contains certain elements of method which are fundamental to us.

The first point of method is both a definition of a transitional demand (and the "system of demands") and an explanation of the fundamental attitude of revolutionaries to all working class demands. The definition is Lenin's, and is from the "Theses on Tactics" prepared for the Third Congress of the Communist International (1921):

"It is not the viability and competitive capacity of capitalist industry, nor the profitability of capitalist finance to which communist parties should pay regard, but the poverty which the proletariat cannot and should not endure any longer. If the demands correspond to the vital needs of broad proletarian masses and if these masses feel that they cannot exist unless these demands are met, then the struggle for these demands will become the starting point of the struggle for power. In place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International puts the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which in their totality disintegrate the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat, represent stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and each of which expresses in itself the need of the broadest masses, even if the masses themselves are not yet consciously in favor of the proletarian dictatorship."

The main points of method here are: 1) that revolutionaries pay no regard to the limits of capitalism; and 2) that a consistent fight for these demands by the workers would lead to revolutionary struggle. The former point is always the attitude of revolutionaries. The latter becomes true in so far as the masses feel driven to a fight, that is, in so far as a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary

period prevails. Thus, a transitional demand is based on the objective needs of the class, and may or may not be achievable under capitalism itself. The "system of demands," however, is certainly not achievable under capitalism.

As for as the applicability of the "system of demands" goes, it seems clear that in a period such as 1948-50 in the advanced industrial countries, no party could have mobilized the masses to struggle for the "system of demands," because the workers were, on the whole, able to win increases in real income by fighting for more modest partial demands. Even in such a period, however, our attitude is to fight for the needs of the class (e.g., 30 for 40, national health insurance, jobs for all, etc.) regardless of the needs of capital. This aspect of the method of transitional program holds true for revolutionaries even during periods of boom and reformist consciousness in the working class. Today, the importance of transitional demands is even greater as the international working class prepares itself for a more severe fight in which the limits of the system stand in a more direct relationship to the immediate needs of the working class. The fight for transitional demands will become revolutionary in so far as the masses fight for them and the capitalists resist, or are unable to, grant them. This "transition" may be a long haul or a short one, but the method is not undermined by the timetable.

Another major element of the method underlying the "system of transitional demands" is the concept of the "bridge" from today's struggles and consciousness to the seizure of power. To quote Trotsky:

"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. 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."

This is not a statement of prediction or of timing, but of method. Nonetheless, tasks and conditions to which this statement of programmatic method can be applied are different than they were in 1938, when Trotsky wrote his draft program. Thus the analysis, strategic and tactical ideas that would surround a "system of transitional demands" today would be different than there were in the 1938 draft, or in Lenin's 1921 "Theses on Tactics"--just as those two documents are different. But the method of the "bridge" remains a valid advance over the chaos left by the old "minimal-maximal" approach. Of course, when objective conditions produce reformist consciousness, as they did in the 1950's and 60's, the masses will not be interested in crossing at all. The importance of the "bridge" in consciousness, however, becomes central as new material conditions begin to undermine that reformist consciousness, i.e., as the class becomes combative about defending itself against attacks on its living standards.

The crisis of capitalism has sufficiently sharpened to force the ruling class to attack the living standards of the working class. This is already producing an elemental and uneven response. The question begins to arise: around what demands will the workers organize to defend themselves and how will they organize? We can approach the question of developing program by putting forth, in the course of struggle, through the various methods at our disposal, transitional demands and tactical ideas around which broader groups of workers can fight. That the first groups of workers who respond to our ideas will be small only indicates that we are at the beginning of our tasks and that, as we know, consciousness is uneven.

It is, in our view, absurd to think that transitional program can be either produced automatically from "the analysis of world objective conditions" (RT) or that it is to be carefully reserved until virtually the eve of a mass upheaval (TC). We believe that the objective needs of the international working class are emerging clearly and the specific objective tasks required to fight for these needs are, in general, locatable. That is, first approximations are now possible.

The first tentative transitional demands arise from the nature of attack on the workers of the most advanced industrial countries. These would relate to unemployment, inflation, "productivity," state intervention, and the erosion of public services. Additionally, demands of a transitional character arise from the needs of specially oppressed sections of the working class, e.g. women and, in the U.S., blacks. Overlapping with the demands themselves, such as 30 for 40, wage increases with no price increases, cost of living clauses, jobs for all, free health care for all, etc., are tactical vehicles through which the workers can fight for their needs. Almost everywhere, some form of rank and file committee is relevant. In the U.S., we see the importance of national rank and file oppositions in the unions and a labor party. These are vehicles which can fight, mobilizing broader and broader sections of the class, for partial and transitional demands.

Part of our role in this fight is to educate for those demands that can rally the greatest number of workers for the most serious fight and to propose the means of fighting for them. The fight for transitional demands is itself educational, in so far as it is the workers themselves who wage that fight.

The technique of introducing such programmatic ideas is secondary. The primary means of introducing transitional demands and tactical ideas is not a matter of "pedagogy" or "propaganda" versus "agitation" but of responsible participation in the actual struggles of today. This includes initiating organizations, ideas, tactics or demands and taking responsibility for them. In no way must program be viewed as a condition for participation in struggle. Without this we would participate only as followers, and the workers do not take their program from followers. In initiating and participating in struggles and worker organizations we can point the direction; that is, we can introduce and apply transitional program. In initiating even a modest rank and file group in a local union we can simultaneously point to the need for a national opposition, explain how we fight for our needs and how best to formulate those needs (transitional demands), we can point to a labor party. Whether this is done agitationally or propagandistically, it is not done abstractly if the struggle is the means used to explain the ideas.

As with the entire history of the working class movement, the question of program--even at the modest level of today--is largely a matter of drawing lessons, some in advance, others after the fact. There is no formula for when and how to raise this or that demand or tactic. In general, we say as much as possible as soon as possible, but with the understanding that demands fought for can raise consciousness, whereas demands that stay on paper are just that--paper. We reject both the idea that program is unfolded step by step as the workers' consciousness is ready to swallow it, and the idea that we simply tell all or "say what is" to the workers--which, pretensions and rhetoric to the contrary, not even the leaders of the RT really propose to do.

In general such demands as 30 for 40, jobs for all, health care for all, tax the corporations, various anti-racist and sexist demands, open the books, and in some cases nationalization under workers control, along with the idea of a labor

party can be raised in most unions and movements today--though not all at once or as a shopping list. More advanced demands such as armed self-defense guards, factory committees, and a workers government (unless we perpetuate the notion that we don't mean by this the Dictatorship of the Proletariat) can be discussed educationally in Workers' Power or I.S. pamphlets, but are not useful in a program for the labor movement--they would tend to cut us off from the other workers and, in any case, are not yet applicable given the objective state of the workers movement today.

No "system of demands", or even single demand, has much value if the workers lack the self-confidence and combativity to fight for it. As we participate in and even lead struggles today we must be concerned with winning--in so far as possible--and building the workers confidence in their power. If we are able to lead and take responsibility for the struggle for minimal or partial demands, our more advanced notions will seem, and indeed will be, less abstract. In summary, our tendency stands for an interventionist and programmatic approach to the working class that attempts to meet both the objective criteria of program and the organizational and educational tasks of today. We will spell out the program itself in greater detail in the perspective documents. We will mention here just two more aspects of program.

Transitional demands are generally demands that can unify the broadest layers of the working class in struggle. In this sense they are usually thought of as those demands that apply to all workers, such as "jobs for all." On the other hand, demands associated with the needs of oppressed sections of the class are usually termed "partial"--though these terms have very little scientific merit. Yet, it has been the point of view of the I.S. in the past, and still is the point of view of this tendency, that unity in struggle can only be achieved in so far as oppressed people struggle for their own needs and those struggles are recognized as legitimate in themselves and are supported by broad layers of the class. In other words, unity cannot, in reality, be achieved on the lowest common denominator (i.e., subordination of the needs of the oppressed), but only on the highest. In our minds, this gives certain of the demands of the oppressed a transitional character, and an important place in any "system of transitional demands." Additionally, it goes without saying that many of the demands of the oppressed groups cannot be achieved under capitalism and in connection with other demands would certainly "disintegrate the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat, represent stages in the struggle for proletarian dictatorship...."

Finally, as Trotsky's own draft "system of transitional demands" shows, such a program must include the basic tactical elements of a strategy for winning the workers to the revolutionary party, indeed, for building that party. We pose as the road to that party the perspective of building national rank and file opposition in the unions which can fight for the formation of a labor party. We see the movement for a labor party as a necessary step in building class independence on the road to a revolutionary party. The revolutionary party will most likely be born by a fusion of organized socialists and rank and file militants who come to socialist ideas in the process of building national opposition caucuses and fighting for a labor party in cooperation with the already organized socialists. Whether the revolutionary party will germinate inside a labor party, or before its formation, or even by-pass a labor party cannot be predicted. Nevertheless, this strategy ties together today's caucus work with the task of building the revolutionary party. The program we are developing today, particularly our "system of transitional demands," expresses this strategy and therefore expresses our approach to socialist activity in the labor movement as a whole.

JOIN US TO BUILD THE I.S.

We intend to wage a fight for leadership of the I.S. While the members of the RT have not subjectively abandoned a Third Camp outlook, their one-sided and dangerously sectarian formulations of such central questions as party and program, vanguard and class, class and the specially oppressed, is rapidly leading them to reject the experience of our movement and to move empirically and impressionistically toward the graveyard of "orthodox Trotskyism." Furthermore, the refusal to take responsibility for traditions and predecessors of the I.S., and to present a critical assessment of that past--rather than their arrogant dismissal of the movement since 1940--precludes, in our view, any support to their claims for leadership.

Unfortunately, the TC suffers from almost the opposite problem: not humility, but a hesitance to formulate its politics at all. The body of TC politics on major issues, with the notable exception of the black and women's liberation documents, exists in the form of amendments. Further, some of those amendments, particularly those dealing with what they call "the industrialization of the organization," are more concerned with certain organizational aspects of industrialization than with the politics of our actual work in the labor movement. We think this is a backward approach. We believe that industrialization will proceed faster when comrades understand more clearly the tasks we are to carry out in the working class, which includes the question of program.

In spite of our dissatisfaction and disagreement with the TC on questions of perspectives, we do know where they stand on the most fundamental matter of world view. For this reason we will, if necessary, block to give the TC a majority in the event we are unable to obtain a majority. To put matters bluntly, we have no desire to belong to another "orthodox Trotskyist" sect. In addition, there are other comrades who we expect will be in substantial agreement with our tendency on many questions, especially those of method, with differences on specific political questions (e.g., black liberation or specific labor questions). We hope to establish close collaboration and joint work with these comrades, who play extremely valuable roles in the leadership of the I.S., on all questions where we agree.

We urge the members of the I.S. to read carefully this statement and the other documents we put forth. If you feel general agreement with us, please get in touch and help us build a new majority tendency that can provide clear leadership on labor questions, make the newspaper a useful tool, put forth a revolutionary and non-sectarian approach to program, and build the I.S. in the working class.

Initial statement issued by: Ilene W.; Rose V.; Brian M.; Bill H.; Dave F.

[Statement by Mike U.: I consider myself in solidarity with this tendency although I disagree with the position on Black Liberation.]

May 29, 1970

Dear Comrades:

The following is the initial statement of political viewpoint of a tendency which we are forming inside the I.S.. as an initial statement it will, of course, be subject to amendment and elaboration through discussion, especially during the pre-Convention debates over the documents for the Convention which will soon be appearing. Nonetheless, we believe it is clear that the political viewpoint and positions outlined in the document, including our attitude toward the faction fight now occurring in the I.S., constitute a clear basis and indeed indicate the necessity for the formation of a political tendency at this time. A listing of the documents which form the basis of the tendency is given at the beginning of the section of the document entitled "Here We Stand" (p.2).

One point on which we have not yet reached agreement is the formal name for this tendency, although we will adopt one as soon as a generally satisfactory one is proposed. While we reject the grandiose claims implied by the names assumed by certain other tendencies in the I.S., our fight for our politics and for political leadership will be a thorough, vigorous and aggressive one. We believe that our political standpoint represents the only visible long-run direction for the I.S., and take with according seriousness the current political debates. This standpoint, the main aspects of which are outlined here, will be elaborated and to the fullest possible extent concretized in the documents we prepare for the Convention.

We request that comrades in agreement with the statement, who wish to play an active role in organizing for the politics of this tendency, get in touch with us and add their names to the list of signers. Comrades who would like to discuss any specific or general points of difference are also encouraged to correspond with us. Correspondence can be sent to either Bill H. or myself.

As members of one wing of the current leadership of the I.S. constituted by the April NC, we feel that the resolution of the fundamental issues in dispute in the organization is the first and most essential pre-condition for the future of the I.S. We look forward to participating jointly with all comrades in the pre-Convention discussions toward that end.

Yours for the Revolution,

Dave F.

[Issued on behalf of the following NC and NAC members: Ilene ; Rose V; Brian M;
Bill H; Dave F.]

A REPLY TO RON T: Some thoughts on the place of the transitional program in a revolutionary organization. -- Bob Powers*

This article is not a complete critique of Ron's position.** In Ron's 27 pages, there is covered a wide range of material that it would be impossible to cover in this document, despite its unfortunate length. Also, Ron has a number of snide remarks directed at Joel that don't merit answer. But the biggest problem is that the document (as well as things that Ron or others with his approach have said) is ambiguous in many places. Thus, if it seems that I am misinterpreting what Ron says in one part of his document, it is because I am putting stress on what he says elsewhere, which, I believe, is the main thrust of his approach.

I also want to point out here that there are some very important things that I agree with that Ron is raising. For example, Ron is right that our entire strategy should not be geared to "the next step" because there are times that consciousness grows in leaps. Moreover, Ron (p. 22) is right when he says it is the task of revolutionaries to raise the interests of the working class as a whole. For those people who disagree with Ron's conception of the transitional program, it is important not to bend the twig too far and reject or ignore these fundamental conceptions of Marxism.

Another point: I do not intend in this article to state what Trotsky "really" meant. The question is what is correct for us today. Of course we should not have a dilligentist attitude toward what our revolutionary heritage is. History is a laboratory. Through studying history we can learn lessons for our strategy today. But we should not confuse the method with the purpose. The purpose is to learn and apply a scientific socialist approach to our practice. The method is to study history. We should not become slaves to textbooks, trying to win arguments by proving that the texts are on the right side.

But I do have some general comments to make about Trotsky and the transitional program. In doing research for this article, I tried to look up additional writings that Trotsky did on this subject. I found that the SWP has collected together Trotsky's writings on this subject, and they are part of the contents of "The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution". However, in looking through that book, I found that besides for "The Death Agony", written for the founding conference of the 4th International in 1938, the book includes a few excerpts from Trotsky on the Labor Party, Trotsky on the Trade Unions, and the 1938-1939 writings of Trotsky. Very, very skimpy

*with a little help from my friends, April 1973

**This article is written as a partial critique of the document "On the Transitional Program" by Ron T. in U.S. Bulletin #37 (all references to "Ron, p. ___" refer to this document. I also at times will refer to "Ron MFD, p. ___" which means "Reply to Brian 1. on the MFD" in Bulletin #38. I am in general sympathy with Joel Geier and his article "Motivation and discussion document on the amendment on the socialist program and the development of a social presence for the IS" which appeared in Bulletin #28 (abbreviated as "Joel p. ___"), although I have certain differences with his approach. In particular I don't accept the ideas that 1) the transitional program was the program in a pre-revolutionary period, but 2) it was not useful at all in another period.

I am sympathetic to, but not a member of the Transformation Caucus (This article is not meant to be a defense of Joel's document; I do urge all comrades to reread it however.)

The document by L. Trotsky often referred to as "The Transitional Program" I refer to by its original title "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the 4th International" (or for short "The Death Agony"), so as not to confuse "The Transitional Program" with a transitional program.

compared to the amount of writing that Trotsky did on other subjects. Not only that, but many of the "writings" on the transitional program are unedited stenographers' recordings of discussions held with Trotsky. Thus, things that Trotsky said in the course of a conversation have now become part of infallible text.

The problem with trying to determine exactly what Trotsky said is that he was somewhat contradictory. Ron T. uses a lot of quotes from Trotsky to aid in what he calls the growth of Trotskyist ideas in the U.S. But there are a number of quotes that he conveniently leaves out. Since I disagree with Ron, but also want people to think that I am the true disciple of Trotsky in this discussion, you will see sprinkled throughout this article quotes from Trotsky that support my view.

In all seriousness, however, I will repeat that Trotsky's writings on the transitional program were inadequate, and not entirely consistent. I plead guilty to disagreeing with certain of Trotsky's statements.

* * * * *

I

EPOCH VS. PERIOD

Ron (p. 6) distinguishes "epoch" from "period" (and also "period" from "situation"). He is very insistent on this distinction, and the fact that the transitional program is applicable for the whole epoch. This forms one of the cores of his whole argument, so I will take some time to explain what's wrong with it.

The progressive epoch of capitalism ended by World War I. The second epoch, the epoch of imperialist decay, or the transitional epoch, is what we are presently in, according to Ron's schema. He also states that "The Transitional Program was meant to be the program for the entire epoch" (Ron, p. 5). Perhaps it is merely my ignorance that explains why I have never seen such a clear distinction between epoch and period (and the application of the transitional program for the entire epoch) in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky. Perhaps Lenin, who died in the first few years of "our epoch" might have said something similar, not having the knowledge of the last 50 years. However, I doubt this was his position, or Trotsky's either. Here are some statements from "The Death Agony" by Trotsky:

- 1) (opening sentence) "The world political SITUATION as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." (emphasis added; note that Trotsky did not say "epoch")
- 2) (p. 5) "In all countries the proletariat is wracked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution." There follow examples of Spain, France, and the CIO of how the masses are in motion. (Trotsky here does not content himself with saying that we are in the "transitional epoch", but feels it important to discuss the "situation.")
- 3) (pp. 6-7) "The strategic task of the next PERIOD -- a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda, and organization -- consists in overcoming the contradictions between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard." (note how Trotsky does not say, "The strategic task of this epoch . . .")

Another example of this is found in Trotsky's discussion "On the Labor Party" (p. 18). Shachtman asks the following question:

SHACHTMAN: I believe it is not correct as you say to put forth the slogan of workers' control of production nor the other transitional slogan of workers' militia -- the slogan for the examination of the books of the capitalist class is more appropriate for the present period and can be made popular . . .

On the basis of Ron's document, we could predict that Ron would advise Trotsky to answer as follows:

RON'S TROTSKY: My dear Max, how can you make so elementary a mistake as to confuse "period" with "epoch"? We are in the transitional epoch. In this epoch, the transitional program as a whole applies.

As it turns out, Trotsky didn't respond with anything like this at all. Trotsky did disagree with Shachtman, but the nature of the disagreement was on what the "situation" and the "period" were at the time, and not over the confusion between epoch and period:

THE REAL TROTSKY: How can we in such a critical situation as now exists in the whole world, in the U.S. measure the stage of development of the workers' movement? . . . We are in a period of declining capitalism, of crises that become more turbulent and terrible, and approach war. (emphasis added)

Trotsky titled his document "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the 4th International." Trotsky really believed that capitalism was in its last years, that the next war would bring on the new revolution. (I wonder if Ron thinks capitalism has been in its death agony for the last 60 years). Now, Trotsky's assessment was wrong. Both capitalism and Stalinism survived the second world war. The "epoch" did not end. Yet Trotsky expected it to end soon, so his program for the rest of the epoch (a relatively small number of years in his mind) was not designed for an epoch that would continue to last for at least 35 more years, and have still other periods. One reason Trotsky could confuse epoch and period was that to him, the end of the period would also be the end of the epoch. This is not a valid approach today.

I believe this to be Trotsky's opinion despite Ron's assertion (Ron, pp. 10-11) that Trotsky meant the transitional program as the program regardless of the immediacy of revolution. Ron somehow seems to ignore Trotsky's writings about revolution occurring as a result of the next war.

As Ron says, and also as Joel says, we have gone beyond the progressive stage of capitalism. In this sense the objective conditions are ripe for socialist revolution, and as socialist revolutionaries, we must clearly state this. But to go from this to state that the transitional program is the program of the entire "epoch" from World War I till the end of capitalism is unwarranted.

WHAT IS A PROGRAM?

"The program is . . . a statement, in summary (based on the full body of revolutionary Marxism), of the principles, goals, and strategy of a political organization, . . . (Ron, p. 2)

According to this definition of Ron's (and incidentally, the way the word "program" is used in the English language by most people) the program of the organization is more than a set of demands. It encompasses the analysis, strategy and goals of the organization. I agree with this conception of program. I will sometimes refer to this as "program, broad sense". When you ask what someone's program is, you will not likely get only a list of demands, (program, narrow sense).

Not, that is, unless you are talking to an orthodox Trotskyist. There are a number

of indications, despite Ron's (p. 17) assertions to the contrary, that Ron and many other people have, in practice, the view that the program is the set of demands to be raised, not the strategy to be followed. For example, in Workers Power #75, there is "A Program to Meet The Price Crisis". The program contains 5 points. Only two of them could in any way be considered strategy, and that would be strategy for the entire labor movement. As for any individual rank and file grouping, those two points are demands to be raised on the labor movement. This program then is not program in the broad sense. It is mainly a list of demands that we think it would be good education to raise.

Let me quote from a section of Ron's document that illustrates his confusion about the nature of program (p. 17):

In this propaganda, we must do more than discuss our conception of socialism on the one hand, and argue for the need for rank and file caucuses and a labor party on the other. What must be conveyed, which hasn't been up until now, is our conception of the nature of the period and the tasks that it requires of the class as a whole and of revolutionaries. In other words, it must communicate our strategy. OUR PROGRAM, A SERIES OF DEMANDS AND SLOGANS ADDRESSED TO THE NEEDS OF THE CLASS WHICH TOGETHER SUMMARIZE THE SOLUTION TO THE EMERGING CRISIS THROUGH REVOLUTION, will be the major vehicle for this." (emphasis added)

Note that the capitalized section -- what Ron describes as program -- is not a strategy, but demands which are a solution to the social crisis. This description of program is different from the quote at the beginning of this section on program in the broad sense of the term. This sloppiness allows Ron to criticize others for not raising program, while at the same time insisting that the program is not a list of demands.

Another way to look at Ron's position is to examine the part which says that we must communicate what tasks are required both of the working class and of revolutionaries. Right on. But what are the tasks as Ron sees them? For the class, it is to fight for its real needs (i.e., the program of demands). For the revolutionaries, the task is to raise these demands. The only (!) think missing is the link -- how we go from raising the demands on the one hand, to getting them accepted on the other.

Or take another example. In discussing the Miners For Democracy, Ron explains why he thinks the MFD is relying on the liberal wing of the capitalist class. But then he says (Ron MFD, p. 4) "The real question, however, is not the MFD's origins nor its ties to, or dependence on, the liberals. It is its program, and it is our approach to this that is really at issue . . ."

Now it seems to me that reliance on liberals falls in the category of strategy. And, as Ron stated in the quote at the beginning of this section, he considers that strategy is part of program. Yet why does he state that reliance on liberals is different from their program?

The answer, I believe, is that despite statements to the contrary, he is mainly concerned with program being a list of demands that we raise. And as he says in the MFD quote above, this is what he is mainly concerned about. But he can't have it both ways. Either program is simply a list of demands; or if it is more than that, when we raise program, for example in Workers Power, it must include a strategy that our readers can follow.

Ron (p. 2) also states that "the program is not primarily an agitational or propagandistic tool." (emphasis Ron's) Yet this is how Trotsky, in at least one place describes the program:

"Just as modern workers any more than the barbarian cannot work without tools, so in the party the program is the instrument. Without the program every worker must improvise his tool, find improvised tools, and one contradicts the other." Trotsky, 1938-39 Writings, p. 48.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS?

The establishment through socialist revolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(This program is elaborated on in our Program in Brief, in our Labor Perspectives, and in our Tasks and Perspectives documents, which discuss in part how we raise demands, and how we intend to achieve our full goal, socialist revolution. Our program includes the need for self-activity of the working class, the need for a revolutionary party, and the use of various transitional demands in mass movements as well as a strategy for intervening in struggles for partial and democratic demands.)

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM AND MAXIMAL PROGRAM (SOCIALIST PROGRAM)

The transitional demands themselves were not designed as the program for conscious socialists, but for the struggles of mass movements which did not have socialist consciousness.

Our "maximal" program is socialist revolution including the various aspects of socialism that we could describe. Maximal program and socialist program are the same thing. A maximal program (or socialist program) is distinguished from a transitional program however. The transitional program is "the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution." (Trotsky, "Death Agony of Capitalism", p. 7). The transitional program is not a complete program for us:

"The draft [transitional] program is not a complete program. . . . we don't speak here about social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of capitalist society into the dictatorship, the dictatorship into socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a program for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution." (Trotsky, 1938-1939 Writings, p. 49) Note that "today" for Trotsky was a different period than for us.

In Workers' Power #73, there appears an article by Roger Cid (who I believe tends to be in political agreement with Ron T) on "The Rail Crisis: a Socialist Answer/" The article contains an analysis of the relationship of the rail crisis to capitalism; and in the end gives the socialist answer, a workers' government. Is this the socialist program or the transitional program? I think Roger and Ron are confused on this point. Ron, for example, refers to "the Transitional Program, the program for socialist revolution" (Ron, p. 9).

In another place (Ron WFD, p. 5) Ron says, "the only program that can bring rank and file control is a revolutionary program." (emphasis added). But by "revolutionary", does he mean a transitional program, a socialist program, or both? or either one?

Or when Ron (p. 2) says: "The draft Transitional Program was not meant to be an 'agitational program' or a 'propaganda program' but the program of the Fourth International." (emphasis Ron's). Is this transitional program of the 4th International a socialist program? If Ron's answer is no, then how would the 4th International expect to achieve socialism without a program to achieve it? If Ron's answer is yes, then what is the difference between transitional program and maximal or socialist program?

(Here lies some of the confusion: In one sense the document called "the Transitional Program", originally titled "the Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth

"International" is not a transitional program at all, but a socialist program in the broad sense of the word program. Most of it explains to revolutionaries why it is important to raise transitional demands, how to do it, and which demands are appropriate. Near the end of the "Transitional Program" (last page) Trotsky sums up what's facing the 4th International: "Its task--the abolition of capitalism's domination. Its aim--socialism. Its method--the proletarian revolution." Are these transitional demands? Of course not. They are in summary form the socialist program of the 4th International. "The Transitional Program" (i.e., the document "The Death Agony of Capitalism") is not really a transitional program itself, but deserves the name insofar as it describes the approach of the transitional program. But Trotsky's program -- and ours -- is socialism.

(Thus when someone says that the program of the 4th International was the Transitional Program, I ask: are you referring to:

- a) the particular document that Trotsky wrote ("The Death Agony") which includes transitional demands, but also includes an analysis of the nature of capitalism and of the particular period, a discussion of the role and strategy for revolutionaries, and a call for the overthrow of capitalism?
- b. the particular transitional demands that are in "the Death Agony", or all the demands taken together?
- c. both a. and b.?)

It is interesting how Ron criticizes the "minimal/maximal" approach of Joel, and that he says we must relate advanced ideas to day-to-day struggles "through more than abstract calls for the need for socialism" (Ron, p. 23). Note the difference between explaining socialism here and raising transitional demands, in his document only 2 pages earlier:

"transitional demands represent aspects of the economy of a workers' state . . . These demands are transitional then not only because they cannot be won under capitalism, but because they represent aspects of the workers' state formulated as demands and slogans directed against capitalism, and point in that direction." (Ron p. 21, emphasis added)

In other words, the difference according to Ron between his approach and Joel's is that when Joel is explaining the limits of reform under capitalism, he would merely explain the alternative, what socialism is, what are aspects of a workers' economy; whereas Ron would do the same thing, BUT do so in the form of demands on capitalism! For these reasons, then "Comrade Geier's method has nothing in common with Trotsky's method . . . Comrade Geier has a method in search of an epoch." (Ron, p. 25)

The example referred to above, about the slogan "for a workers' government" is a good illustration of this problem. At certain places and times, the slogan "for a workers' government" is a transitional demand. We know that there is no parliamentary road to a workers' government, but not all workers do. At certain times, such as during popular front governments, where workers clearly have class representatives in the government, the slogan "for a workers' government" is a transitional demand that stems from the consciousness of the masses and is the bridge to socialist revolution. It exposes the workers' representatives who are unwilling to take power for the working class and points the way to revolutionary struggle.

At the present time, the slogan, "for a workers' government" is a socialist slogan and not a transitional slogan at all. A workers' government is another way of saying socialism, so that people won't confuse what we mean by socialism with so many perversions of that term.

Of course, as socialists, we should naturally be raising the call for a workers' government. That's what we are fighting for, and that's what we want to win people to.

But when we call for "a workers' government" we are raising a socialist demand, and we should be clear about that. That it is raised as a "slogan directed against"

capitalism" (Ron p. 21) does not somehow change it into a transitional demand, and therefore allow us to pretend that we are following the approach of the transitional program.*

INTERNATIONAL CONDITIONS:

"In short, Comrade Geier's method reflects a narrow, national parochial outlook, not an international standpoint. The logic (such that it has) of his position is that today the Transitional Program, its general approach, would be applicable in, say, Chile and Bolivia, but not in the U.S. Is this because Chile and Bolivia, "backward" nations that they be, are still in the 1930's? Clearly not; the situations in these countries are manifestations of the processes of the international capitalist system. The Program is an international one, that is, a program for the international working class."
(Ron T, p. 17; emphasis Ron's)

It is Ron's method that is the narrow, parochial one; however, his narrowness is of a different kind. Part of what he says is correct: "The Program is an international one, that is, program for the international working class." This program (broad sense), the program of socialist revolution stems from the objective situation internationally. Ron is quite right in stressing this.

But Ron is going one step further than this: He wants to show that international conditions prove that we are in the transitional epoch, and therefore we need the Transitional Program. In order for Ron to show that his approach is the correct one, he keeps pointing out that his is the internationalist approach, whereas his opponents are national chauvinists. Thus, for example, in order to prove Trotsky's point that capitalism could not raise the living standards of the international working class have not risen. This may or may not be true. Ron has shown no statistics which prove that the international proletariat (as opposed to the international masses) has had a decline in living standards. Certainly, though, the conditions of the international working class must be an important consideration in developing our program.**

*Because this is an analytic section on the difference between transitional program and socialist program, I am spending time on whether a certain demand qualifies as one type of demand or another. However, ordinarily I do not think that we should spend a great deal of time trying to determine whether a particular demand is "minimal", "transitional", "maximal" etc., as a basis for determining whether we raise it.

First, in the course of a real struggle, a demand that we thought was transitional, for example, might be achieved because of the balance of forces, and greater flexibility on the part of the ruling class. Secondly, our approach is not based on a sleight-of-hand trick -- where our method of winning people to revolutionary socialism is based on getting people to fight for a demand that is not achievable, after which they will suddenly realize that they will have to fight for socialism.

Since in the present period, a large part of demands that we raise and strategy we present is determined by existing consciousness, there will not be any formulas that we can follow. In a certain sense, the discussion about whether the demand "for a workers' government" is a transitional or socialist demand is beside the point. It can in no way act as a bridge between existing consciousness and socialist revolution in the present period. It should not be raised in an agitational way by our rank and file caucuses regardless of whether we decide that it is a transitional or socialist demand, any more than we would presently raise "soviets" in an agitational way.

**Similarly, it would be disastrous to fall into Ron's trap and completely disregard the question of whether the living standards of the masses in the advanced countries have risen. According to Ron's methodology, this is completely irrelevant to our program (including strategy). (footnote continued at bottom of next page)

But Ron's point here is irrelevant. Capitalism was progressive at a stage when it was helping to develop the material conditions that would allow for the establishment of socialism, regardless of whether the standards of the working class rose or fell. Once this was accomplished, capitalism was no longer progressive. Even if someone came up with statistics that showed that the living standards of the international working class has risen in the "transitional epoch", we would still not regard capitalism as progressive (or think we were in the "progressive epoch"). This is not a key point of our analysis of the progressiveness of capitalism.

Whether living standards are rising or falling may be very key, however, to our analysis of a particular period, and what it will mean about working class activity. But that is a different question from the one that Ron is addressing.

Getting back to the question of program in an international context, we have to keep in mind that one part of program (broad sense) is strategy. On an international scale, revolutionaries should naturally co-ordinate their work. But their specific strategies (i.e., this part of their programs) at different places would probably be different.

Part II will deal with strategy for revolutionaries in the United States.

* * * * *

II

WHAT ARE OUR TASKS IN THE WORKING CLASS?

Our tasks in the working class movement will vary at different times. In 1938, for example, in the midst of a mass working class movement on an international scale, it could be argued that the primary task was probably the construction of revolutionary leadership. Our tasks today cannot be so simplified. Today there are at least three things that we must do within the labor movement.

- (1) we must help to build and broaden that movement (i.e., we must be the test trade union militants)
- (2) we must help develop class consciousness on a broad scale.
- (3) we must help to build revolutionary leadership -- based not merely around the transitional program, but around the program of socialist revolution.

These are formidable tasks for our rather small organization, and we cannot ourselves accomplish these tasks all by ourselves. That is, while in some situations, for example, we will be able to influence the course of a struggle, it would certainly be incorrect to think that the activity of the I.S. will determine whether or not there will be a mass working class movement.

(FOOTNOTE CONT'D) All we have to know is that the living standards of the international working class have been falling to know that we are in a transitional epoch, and therefore the Transitional Program is our program.

Let's assume, for the moment that Ron is right on the declining living standards. Ron would also have to show us some other statistics. According to Ron's methodology, during the progressive epoch of capitalism the living standards of the international working class were increased. But were they? I'm not really sure. However, I do know this much. At the very beginning of the capitalist era (indeed when capitalism was revolutionary) the living standards of the working class did decline, as masses of peasants were forced off the land and into long hours of factory work. If this epoch is the epoch of imperialist decay because the standards of the international working class are declining, then the progressive epoch must have the epoch when the living standards for the international working class were on the rise. I think Ron should enlighten the rest of us on his sources for these insights.

This point is often made by some who feel that the only one of the three points that revolutionaries can have a decisive impact on is (3), that is on the creation of a revolutionary leadership. Therefore, they argue, we must orient toward building this leadership. If we present the right program, we will attract the "advanced" elements and be able to fulfill this task without diluting our efforts by attempting the impossible, i.e., to influence the course of mass struggle at this time. This argument is tied in with the argument that we must present a program for the solution to the social crisis.

It is absolutely correct that of the three tasks, the I.S.'s influence will be most decisive in the formation of a revolutionary party. This task is one that cannot wait until some time in the future, as this revolutionary party must be built before a revolutionary situation exists. We must attract the advanced elements of the working class toward us.

But how do we do that? And who are the "advanced elements"? This is where our program helps us. Our program includes a strategy for this purpose. Our Labor Perspectives document, which is part of our program, discusses not only demands that we raise, but also our activities. One thing should be clear:

We cannot attract the leadership merely by presenting the right program, and proving to them that we were right all along. There are people who can be attracted by that approach, but unless we define them as the "advanced elements", we will be attracting simply those people who like our approach. Any sect can claim that the people it recruits are the advanced elements.

Of the people that we most want to recruit, however, -- that is, rank and file militants -- they will not be impressed that we can present a "solution to the emerging crisis". Most of them will realize that the particular struggle they are engaged in (whether it be a strike, job action, etc) will not be the final one. What they will want, in part, is to see how well we can intervene in these struggles and help the working class win these partial victories. It is only by proving ourselves as leaders in the course of existing struggles that we can win revolutionary leadership in the working class. (It is also through this kind of activity that we will win over the best of the ex-movement radicals now in working class jobs)

Part, but not all, of the process of developing a revolutionary leadership is the first two tasks I listed. We have to show, in those struggles where we are involved that we can help them, and we have to be successful in raising the general level of class consciousness. Where we succeed in these, we will also be able to get more points of our program accepted.

The rank and file leaders will not be attracted to a group which merely parrots "revolutionary leadership". Rather they will look to a group that shows it is capable of leading the class in struggle and of drawing the lessons from that struggle.

HOW TO USE THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

The transitional program (that is applicable for us today -- see demands in Tasks & Perspectives and Labor Perspectives) is not our full program, then. But it is a part of our program. The demands that are raised, individually are partial solutions to the crisis facing workers, and the total transitional program, if implemented, would represent a total solution. However, the reason that we are revolutionary socialists and not revolutionary transitionalists is that we realize that socialism is more than the sum total of these demands.

Yet we still raise transitional demands, where applicable, even though they are not realizable without socialism. Why? Because they are "the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution." (Death Agony, p. 7) We want to win workers to revolutionary socialism. Some will be won in one way, some in another. But the transitional program is a part of this process. It is a way of showing workers that reasonable demands go beyond the limits of capitalism. We need to have a link between "fight harder on the shop floor" and "fight for socialism". Transitional demands provide a way to fight for political demands of the working class short of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

Since it is not the transitional program itself that we are trying to win people to, but to revolutionary socialism, it is purely a strategic question as to whether in a particular situation we raise one demand from the program, several, or the whole thing. Trotsky for example states:

"We must combine politics with mass psychology and pedagogy [17], build the bridge to their minds. Only experience can show us how to advance in this or that part of the country. For sometime we must try to concentrate the attention of the workers on one slogan: sliding scale of wages and hours." (Trotsky, 1938-39 writings; emphasis added)

Certainly Ron is correct when he says:

"In various writings, Trotsky makes it clear that the transitional demands are to be introduced "not all at once, but as the occasion arises, first one then the other" (Trotsky -- 'On the Labor Party', p. 26), that is, the demands of the program should be introduced in as concrete and relevant a manner as possible." (Ron pp. 20-21)

However, it must be clear that this approach is contradictory to the approach of having to raise the "solution to the emerging crisis" in every program (narrow sense). Once Ron agrees that we have to raise only certain aspects of the program at certain times, then he is essentially agreeing that the approach for the I.S. to follow is not one of laying out the transitional program; but of integrating our program (which is based on objective conditions) to the consciousness of the masses.

Ron (pp. 2-3) quotes Trotsky about how the program must be based on the objective conditions and not the backward consciousness of the masses. If this statement means that it is our task in rank & file groups to raise a program (narrow sense) to solve the emerging crisis, then clearly Trotsky would be wrong. If the statement implies that any program (broad sense) must start from the over-ripeness of capitalism, then it is certainly correct. By saying in the previous paragraph "integrating our program to the consciousness of the masses" I mean that our day-to-day work cannot ignore the importance of the level of working class consciousness.

The fact that the demand for a labor party (which is obviously a reformist demand in and of itself since it can be achieved under capitalism) has a central place in our program points out clearly that what we raise is not based just on the objective conditions facing the international working class. The demand for a labor party is one that is not raised in other countries and it also is one that will be dropped either a) when it occurs or b) if it becomes possible to skip over that stage (since as Ron states, consciousness sometimes grows in leaps). Also, note that the demand for a labor party is not a demand against capitalism, but a strategy for the working class.

What I am stressing here is that one of the central points of the program raised by the I.S. is the demand for a labor party which is based on the consciousness of the masses and not on the objective conditions of international capitalism.

30-for-40, to take another example, is not a total solution to the economic crisis facing capitalism. Yet it represents a substantial part of one, and for this reason, as well as for the reason that it is a demand that workers can easily understand, that we raise the slogan of 30-for-40 agitational* without necessarily tying it to the rest of our program. 30-for-40 (in the way that we raise it as opposed to the way PL raises it, since at times they explicitly state that if we fight hard we can achieve it under capitalism) is a transitional demand by itself, though not a full program. It has been, and should remain, an important part of our work. But this is so not because it is the full solution, but precisely because it functions like the transitional demands are supposed to -- "the bridge between present demands and the socialist program."

We raise these demands not because we expect to win them, but because we want to raise class consciousness (i.e., starting from the idea that workers should put forward demands that are in their own interests, rather than are acceptable to the system), and because it will help in cohering a section of workers who want to go beyond capitalism and will be a part of the revolutionary leadership.

Ron's confusion about the use of the transitional program is clearly shown in his "Reply to Brian K. on the MFD" (pp. 4-5). In the article Ron criticizes the MFD because "The MFD program implies that its goals can be won under capitalism."**

THE PURPOSE OF THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM IS TO WIN WORKERS -- WHO AT FIRST STILL ACCEPT CAPITALISM --- TO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THEIR NEEDS GO BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THAT SYSTEM. THEREFORE, WE WOULD EXPECT THAT AT ANY PERIOD OF TIME WHERE THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM IS FULFILLING ITS PURPOSE, THAT MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE SUPPORTING THE DEMANDS WILL THINK THEY CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED UNDER CAPITALISM.

IT IS IN THE COURSE OF THE STRUGGLE THAT THE WORKERS SEE THAT MOST OF THE DEMANDS CAN NOT BE WON UNDER CAPITALISM, AND THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE NEEDS OF THE WORKING CLASS AND THE NEEDS OF CAPITALISM. BUT INITIALLY WE CANNOT EXPECT THAT THE WORKERS UNDERSTAND THAT THE DEMAND CANNOT BE WON UNDER CAPITALISM. IF THAT WERE THE CASE, THEN THERE WOULD BE NO POINT IN RAISING TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS. WE MIGHT JUST AS WELL BE MINIMAL/MAXIMALISTS, OR SIMPLY ULTIMATISTS.

Ron (MFD, p. 5) states that

"Rank and file control of the unions can only be won under a leadership that is prepared to fight to the end for the needs of the workers. Any leadership that accepts capitalism must be prepared to mediate between the needs of the rank and file and the needs of capital. . . ."

Now what Ron says here is perfectly true, with one important exception. There are some rank-and-filers and leaders who will accept both capitalism and the transitional demands. (If the workers didn't accept capitalism, there would be no need for these transitional demands). Some of course will have their greatest loyalty to capitalism; these will negotiate away the interests of the rank and file. But others who have initial loyalty to both capitalism and to the transitional demands will basically hold up the interests of the working class. Thus when the transitional demands conflict with capitalism, they will stay with the interests of the working class, and see the need for socialism.

The transitional program then does not demand that the workers first accept socialism

*in the correct usage of the term as described by Ron, p. 11

**In his previous paragraph, Ron stated that the biggest problem with the MFD was not its ties with liberals, but its program (narrow sense) so let's concentrate on that aspect. (see page 4 of this article)

before they can adopt the transitional program. Rather it helps to explain why the interests of the working class are counterposed to the capitalist system. Thus we demand that workers fight consistently for these demands, not that they first give up capitalism before fighting for these demands.

DOES ACCEPTANCE OF THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM AUTOMATICALLY LEAD TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEED FOR SOCIALIST REVOLUTION?

We use the transitional program as a bridge from minimal demands to socialist revolution because it is one important way of making that connection. But that bridge is not an automatic one for every worker. If we win workers to a particular demand, say 30-for-40, or nationalize _____ under workers' control, we still have not yet succeeded in making them revolutionaries. Once we have convinced them of the desirability of these demands -- and convinced them that the demand cannot be won under capitalism, but only under socialism -- we must still convince them they should fight for socialism. Yet there is no guarantee that this last step will take place. How do we use the transitional program to answer someone who says "I sure think nationalization under workers' control would be a nice idea, but I don't think other workers can be organized for the long struggle to overthrow capitalism."?

STRUGGLE & CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FIGHT FOR REFORMS

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class. He takes part in mass trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy. He fights uncompromisingly against any attempt to subordinate the unions to the bourgeois state and bind the proletariat to "compulsory arbitration" and every other form of police guardianship -- not only the fascist, but also 'democratic'. Only on the basis of such work within the trade unions is successful struggle possible against the reformists. . . ." Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism*, p. 10.

Another aspect of the relationship between winning people to the socialist program and struggle is that it is in the course of struggle that people are most open to new ideas, especially from those who are posing a correct strategy for that particular. (Ron, p. 22, has a brief discussion on the importance of struggle, but does not go into it very much). In the course of a struggle, people can see who are the most consistent fighters, who are the enemies, and who are the vacillators. At the same time we make a connection between the need to always fight for even the most minimal of demands and the long run goal of socialism. Or to cite an example of Joel's (p. 5) "showing the connection between a struggle over working conditions and workers control of production." Generally in an educational way we will raise one or more transitional demands, such as 30-for-40, but this depends on the situation.

There are different ways of getting reforms, and we as revolutionaries don't necessarily support all such methods. For example, we oppose Democratic Party politicians who, even though they might bring about a few more reforms, would do so at the expense of developing class consciousness in the working class.

Some reform struggles are won by bureaucratic means, where backroom deals are used to replace militant rank and file action. In such cases, where the lesson learned is to trust the bureaucrats, we oppose such type of reform struggles. But other struggles are won by militant rank and file action, help build up and strengthen existing rank and file organization, and reinforce consciousness among workers that they have real social power. These struggles are extremely important in themselves, even if there are no transitional demands raised. Of course, in such struggles, it will be easier to

raise political ideas precisely because it is during these times that people will be more open to what we have to say. But our ideas will have a better chance of getting a hearing if we are actively involved in the struggle contributing both our work and our ideas for its success, than if our major role is to present the program (narrow sense) while only giving a token amount of attention to the struggle itself.

An example of an important struggle is the Shell strike. In this strike, the question is one of the workers having a voice in their working conditions, a challenge to traditional management prerogatives. As revolutionaries, we should be raising the notion that workers should have full control, and make the connection (the "bridge" if you will) between the struggle and the goal. However, if our activity in the Shell strike were limited to mainly voicing this sentiment, then the response of workers to it would probably be "oh! that's nice"; maybe some wouldn't like it. But they certainly would not say "with suggestions like that, you should be in the leadership of our struggle."

In a struggle like this, if we are to have a serious involvement in it, we would not only have to be doing serious strike support work, but we would have to be making suggestions as to strategy for rank and filers. Perhaps we should be suggesting and helping carry out the stopping of scabs. Here is a case where raising transitional demands would only be a secondary role of revolutionaries. We should instead be arguing for a particular strategy that would accomplish the winning of the strike and the strengthening of rank and file organizations. Revolutionaries who can only present solutions to the social crisis of capitalism, but cannot help militant rank and filers win their struggles will not become the leadership of the working class.

A classic example for the Trotskyist movement is the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strike. If we follow Ron's approach, and look merely at the program of the strike, which was mainly for union recognition and a modest pay increase, we can see that it was very minimal and reformist. How embarrassed Ron must be to be associated with an outfit which led such a reformist operation! Fortunately for Ron, the Trotskyists of the 1930's didn't have any more mass involvements on that scale, and were able to devote their time to discussing the correct program.

In actuality, however, the Minneapolis strike was extremely significant and was an important development for the CIO. Although fighting for union recognition, the Trotskyists did not hesitate to make the connection of who was on the side of the workers, and who they could not trust. They stressed the importance of democratic rank and file organizations relying on their own strength. They emphasized not transitional demands, but methods of struggle -- mass picketing, flying squads, self defense, mass meetings, etc. (The transitional demands would become more applicable as more advanced methods of struggle, such as sit-ins were used by masses of workers later on) The role of the capitalist state was exposed. The reforms were a part of a process, not the end in themselves. In the next few years of the CIO, the CP and others subordinated the needs of the workers to the popular front alliance with Roosevelt, and sidetracked the workers movement wherever possible.

PROGRAM FOR RANK AND FILE GROUPS

The U.S., as I have indicated, has a program for socialist revolution based on the objective conditions, in particular the overripeness of capitalism. Now at the same time we propose programs for the various rank and file groups we are in, or for movements in struggle (e.g., the "price crisis"). What kind of program should we present? Are such programs based solely on the objective conditions of capitalism? Are these programs to be a list of demands against capitalism that will solve the emerging crisis?

The programs that we propose derive from our over-all program (broad sense), which includes analysis, goals, and strategy for relating goals to day-to-day work. The program that we raise for a particular rank and file group to adopt at any particular

time should flow from this. There is nothing automatic that says that such a program should be a full program, or even necessarily a transitional one. At some points we may decide to fight solely for pure and simple reformist demands. However, this would be in the context of our overall work where transitional demands are an important part, but where the self-activity of the working class is equally important.

At the same time, we seek to explain that we/revolutionaries and why the particular program we are proposing is not the "final solution". We can be clear on stating why a particular program is the best one at a given time, although at the same time, we relate it to the larger issues and tasks facing the working class.

* * * * * III

My article here is not, and was not meant to be, a systematic explanation of the role of program in our work. My purpose was to show that Ron's understanding of the transitional program is at best no guide (and at worst, misguides us). His document is eclectic in too many places. I must cite one more example here.

Joel (p. 2) writes: "Trotsky insisted that revolutionaries must not tailor their program to the subjective, backward moods and consciousness of the masses -- instead they must start from the tasks posed by objective necessity. Two cautions, often disregarded by revolutionary groups, must be introduced. . . . revolutionaries are not able to base their approach solely on this, but must take into account cyclical ups and downs, the relationship of class forces, and the 'moods' of the masses."

Ron quotes from Joel's document here, and says that Joel is reversing the argument, that his "sentiment is indeed laudable, but is a mere cover for the opposite approach [1]". (Ron, p. 8) At this place, then Ron is specifically criticizing a comrade who does not want to just lay out a program, but whose approach would include taking into consideration the consciousness of the working class.

But then there is another Ron. There is the Ron who insists that the "demands of the program should be introduced in as concrete and relevant manner as possible". Or "In our agitational work, our job is to initiate and intervene in the workers' struggles around trade union, partial, and democratic demands, seeking to relate these to class wide demands." Or "While the method of exposition will change from place to place and time to time, the content must reflect a consistent program based on a scientific assessment of the objective conditions." (all these quotes from Ron, pp. 21-2, with emphasis added). Thus after criticizing Joel for giving up Trotskyism by gearing his approach to the consciousness of the masses, Ron then proceeds to say the same thing.

Of course Ron qualifies his position by stating that "the content must reflect a consistent program based on a scientific assessment of the objective conditions." 100% correct! But what is our "consistent program based on a scientific assessment"? Our program is socialist revolution and a coherent strategy for achieving it. Thus if all Ron is saying is that our day-to-day work should not be empiricist and opportunist, but rather should be part of the overall program of a revolutionary organization, he is simply setting up a straw-person. I am in complete solidarity with Ron in opposing such straw-people.

But I think Ron is saying much more than that. He is trying to introduce within the I.S. the idea that our primary task lies in getting rank and file groups and movements to, as their primary task, accept and raise certain demands which solve the social crisis. It is this which is the thrust of his document, and it is this thrust that I have been criticizing in general. The idea that the major task of the I.S. is to think up the correct demands to raise within the working class must be rooted out of the I.S. if we are to get on with the tasks before us.

* * * * *

ADDENDUM

TO BOB POWERS' "A REPLY TO RON T: on program"

(this section was inadvertently left off of page 12. It belongs before the section on struggle.

THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM AND CYNICISM

Ron's document is more than 3 times as long as Joel's document to which he is replying, yet nowhere does he address himself to one of Joel's most important points. Joel's argument is worth quoting at length because of its importance in our work.

"Where the most difficult task we face is to convince workers (and those in the caucuses as well) of the necessity of the self-organization and self-activity of the class against the current cynicism which abounds given the absence of class organization. "IT IS REGRETFULLY TRUE THAT IT IS EASIER TO CONVINCING A RANK AND FILE CAUCUS OF A GOOD PROGRAM THAN IT IS TO CONVINCING IT THAT ORGANIZING THE SELF-ACTIVITY OF THE WORKING CLASS IS MORE IMPORTANT A GOAL THAN ELECTING BETTER UNION OFFICIALS RUNNING ON A BETTER PROGRAM." (Joel, p. 7, emphasis added)

It is not coincidental that in 27 pages of Ron's opus he doesn't deal with questions like the self-activity of the working class, or that it is harder in most cases to convince workers that "you can fight city hall and win" than that workers' control of their industry would be a nice thing.

Winning people to some program (i.e., narrow sense) is not sufficient. We must also win people to the realization that that program can be achieved.

A CASE OF RETROGRADE MOTION

A response to Ron T.

(by Emmet Casey, San Francisco Branch)

For most of human history, it has been an accepted scientific fact that the earth was the center of the universe. For an observer on the face of the planet, looking up at the stars in the sky, this is indeed the most plausible explanation. The other planets, including the sun, revolve about the sky in circular orbits, at varying speeds according to their distances from the earth.

Occasionally, however, certain planets would engage in a most embarrassing peculiarity: they would suddenly appear to back up in their orbits for a while before straightening out. This phenomenon, of "retrograde motion," has been observed for thousands of years. But how to interpret it? Should one throw out a perfectly good theory, one that had seen years of service, that explains most phenomena perfectly adequately, and is based upon traditional knowledge and common sense?

It was in this way that the theory of epicycles was born; the classical astronomer Ptolemy hypothesized that, instead of the planets all rotating around the earth in circular orbits, some of them, that is Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, who indulge in this unorthodox "retrograde motion," revolve around a point, which then revolves about the earth. Thus by the introduction of epicycles, the theory was saved.

When in 1543, Copernicus introduced the opposite view, that the earth revolves the sun, the phenomenon of retrograde motion was much more easily explained. All planets have equal, roughly circular motions, but the outer ones move much more slowly. Thus when a fast inner planet like the earth passes a slow outer planet like Jupiter, Jupiter appears to back up.

The importance of Copernicus' theory was not merely that it was a simpler, hence better explanation of the motions of the seven planets then known to human science. It had a predictive element. It cleared the path of dead brush and made possible further advances in astronomy upon the development of the telescope. Thus, the outer planets were discovered, based on predictions derived from a scientifically exact study of the motions of the inner planets.

More importantly, the realization that the earth was itself not fixed in space, but moving in an orbit about the sun, led to the discovery that some stars changed position from one end of the year to the next. By measuring this phenomenon, called parallax, some notion of the distance of nearby stars was established, leading eventually to our current theories of the universe. (Peter Van de Camp, Basic Astronomy, pp 89-91.)

We believe now that there is no fixed, immovable center to the universe; that the stars, galaxies, and even groups of galaxies are all in motion with respect to one another. The standpoint of the observer has been introduced for good or ill as a necessary factor to take into account in attempting to deduce the motions of physical bodies. Physical science, in attempting to explain the universe in purely empirical terms, has been forced to drop its outmoded positivism and adopt a more dialectical outline.

If such is the case with regard to physical science, how much more true is it with regard to social science. If Marxism is to truly earn its label

of scientific socialism, it must investigate the laws of motion of society with at least as much rigor and care as the physical scientists have done. And this is all the more true since the movements of bodies of men, each possessing their own individual consciousness, is not nearly as subject to exact mathematical analysis as are the motions of physical bodies. Men make their own history, even if not always exactly as they please.

In order to do this, it is necessary to analyze and classify the stages of historical development, in order to prepare the ground for a higher synthesis. Synthetic reason itself is not enough, especially when the grounds of systems of thought are themselves being questioned. We are forced again to ask, not just "What is the correct policy of Marxists?" but also, "Is a Marxist perspective in 1973 possible?" Even if we, by adhering to an avowedly Marxist organization, have already answered "yes" to this question in our own minds, what about the millions who have gone through the movement in past decades, and apparently answered "no" by their refusal to stay in the movement? We believe in a unity of theory and practice, and our ability to build a genuine Marxist tendency in the working class is rooted in our ability to develop a genuine Marxist analysis of post-World War II society.

Such an analysis does not exist at this time, but some important beginnings have been made, and they represent a structure upon which we can build. The theory of the permanent arms economy, as developed by T.N. Vance in the New Internationalist, and elaborated and extended by Michael Kidron and Tony Cliff in the magazine of our British comrades International Socialism provides the theoretical underpinnings for a more detailed analysis of class relations in contemporary society.

It is upon this basis, and in contradistinction to the dogmatic conservatism of "orthodox trotskysts," that we have developed the conception that modern capitalism represents a new stage in the development of capitalism, one anticipated only in rough outlines by the great Marxists of the past, and only if capitalism was not supplanted by social revolution in the advanced capitalist countries.

The greatest benefit deriving to us from these theories has been a re-evaluation and rediscovery of Marx's analysis of capitalism, and its application to the development of Stalinism as a new exploitative class society. To the vulgarized and enervated Marxism of stalinist and reformist apologists for exploitation, Cliff and Kidron made of Marxism once again that which it was intended to be: revolutionary criticism in the service of the working class.

In order to accomplish this, they could not simply go back to the old classics, dust them off, and reprint them with new covers. There is no unmoving center in the Einsteinian universe from which one can stand and contemplate the motions of the spheres. It was necessary to reestablish the Marxist standpoint on a revolutionary basis before it was possible to analyze capitalism in the new period, where it is and where it is going. "Ruthless criticism of everything that exists," was Marx's motto, and it is our byword again today.

However, there now exists a significant tendency within the organization that rejects in essence the theory of the permanent arms economy and substitutes for it an eclectic analysis which emphasizes the role of credit circulation and the monetary crisis. While this theory has the great agitational advantage

that it predicts impending crisis very neatly (the British SLL for example has been predicting the final crisis since at least 1962 on the basis of a very similar analysis), it does so at the expense of throwing overboard a very basic principle of Marxism: that capitalism is first and foremost a system of production relations, whereby commodities are manufactured and offered for sale on the market.

Vance's theory locates the heart of capitalist crisis where it has always resided for Marxists: in the process of production. Ron's convention document (and Jack G.'s also) locates the crisis in circulation processes exterior to production. Now Ron has traveled a few more steps down this weary road in his document ON THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM, Bulletin #37. While giving lip service to the role of arms production on occasion, he sees it only as one stabilizing factor among others. He misses the point that arms production is not only a stabilizer, but also a powerful incentive to production and technical innovation. Therefore, he clearly denies that capitalism has entered a new period on the undeniably correct grounds that Lenin in 1915 and Trotsky in 1938 denied that such a new period was then an immediate perspective. Elementary theoretical honesty would demand that Ron begin without delay a critical analysis of the views of Vance, Cliff and Kidron, explaining why these views are incorrect and unmarxist. Yet he has not done this. This paper is being written to remind Ron that he must begin to do this if his views are to be taken seriously within our organization.

This is why we characterize Ron T. as a modern Ptolemaist, more concerned with preserving the theories of Lenin and Trotsky as an unchanging monument to the past by the addition of a few epicycles than in rethinking his own standpoint in order to make better sense of his observations.

If he persists in this course, Ron will find himself faced with two equally unenviable choices; the open empiricism of Comrade Landy, who believes that Daum's economic analysis, which is a logical exposition of Vance's analysis of the permanent arms economy, can just be lifted out of its context and married to Ron's views on program and the nature of the period, like running a Cadillac with a Volkswagon engine, or the dogmatic sectarianism of the Workers' League, which substitutes worship of Leon Trotsky and political banditry for analysis of the objective conditions.

But it was precisely the failure of Trotsky's perspective to be viable in the post-war world that led to the re-evaluation of Marxism that became the theoretical basis of the International Socialist tendency. That this tendency is still very weak, that it confined to a few countries, and still has much work, of both a practical and theoretical nature before it, is unfortunately true. We wish it were otherwise, but wishing does not make it so.

"Discussing domestic strategy prior to reaching agreement on International Perspectives is a backward and pragmatic way of approaching our tasks," he writes, and indeed this is so. But in a movement as small as ours, where the formation of a new International is still a long way off, any real discussion of international perspectives would be futile. Analyses which are international in scope can and have been written (see Kidron's Western Capitalism Since the War) but without an agency in the form of an international party, these perspectives can at best be extremely articulate cries into the wind. Ron can legislate discussions onto agendas by virtue of his position, but the real actionable

discussions which arouse the emotions and interest of the membership will be the national perspectives as long as we remain an isolated national grouping.

Ron himself, in order to be able to judge the movements of others, must realize that he himself is in motion. But alas, it is retrograde motion. Cut off from any real grasp of the nature of the period, he drifts backward in time to 1938, when the movement had an authoritative leader and a clear perspective, including the foundation of a new International. He is uneasy, and unsure of himself, but he attempts to apply the solid, old, proven theory to a new set of objective conditions. An epicycle here, a temporary stabilization there, which, he hastens to add, "Lenin and Trotsky never excluded" and we are on our way.

But it is impossible to create a new international from an office in Detroit. And it is dogmatic to apply the programs and strategies of Marxists in one period to the needs of Marxists in another. In the Theses on Feuerbach, Marx states, "The question of whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or the non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." It is the Marxist method which is decisive, not the individual conclusions which even the greatest Marxists have reached in the past. Ron thinks that he is moving others, but in reality, it is he himself who is being moved.

WHAT IS AN EPOCH?

The big question for Ron has become, what is the nature of our epoch? Insofar as he answers this question, it is purely a matter of terminology. There are two epochs in the history of capitalism, the epoch of its growth and development, and the epoch of its decay. Now we are certainly not in the epoch of imperialist growth; therefore we must be in the epoch of imperialist decay.

But not everything decays at the same rate, or in the same way. Meat in an icebox, or meat that has been cooked with spices, decays much more slowly than fresh raw meat under a hot sun. In order to determine what stage of decay a thing is at, we measure it in some way with our senses. Comrade Ron states as much by quoting Trotsky that a program must proceed from the objective conditions. But he fails to prove the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking by testing this thought in practice.

Instead, he spends a great deal of time in a futile discussion of whether or not consciousness deserves the exalted status of an "objective condition" and then proceeds to discuss what is meant by a "pre-revolutionary situation" as distinct from a "pre-revolutionary period." I have read Ron's document through diligently several times and gathered up as much as possible all the scattered references to the objective conditions, which exist mainly as asides to polemics against Comrade Geier, and never on their own terms. Taken all together, they could not be said to amount to the basis of our program, or even 1/10th of a program. The document begins however with an extended discussion of the function of the Transitional Program of Trotsky in 1938, which is assumed to be our program on the basis of general analysis of the nature of the period.

This is the Ptolemaic method of Comrade Ron: after making the proper obeisance to the well-known Objective Conditions, we begin with -- The Program -- and then tailor reality to fit. Furthermore absolutely no attempt is made to provide any empirical data to justify any of the bold assertions made in his document.

Thus, on page 7: "The post-war stabilization (that is, the best that capitalism had been able to do in 35 years) was based on the war-devastation of Europe, the nearly complete hegemony of U.S. capital, expanded production of arms and other waste, and the tremendous expansion of public and private debt was hardly an organic expansion. And perhaps most significant was capitalism's failure to expand on a world scale. It is precisely this inability to generate sufficient capital to capitalize Underdeveloped sectors that has led, along with the failure of the working class to make its revolution, to the growth and expansion of Stalinist class societies."

Now, the post-war stabilization of capitalism has lasted 25 years, based on the expanded production of arms and other waste, to which the expansion of public and private debt is clearly related. Kidron quotes a 1962 United Nations study which shows that even then \$120 billion, or about 8-9% of the world's total output of goods and services, was being spent on armaments. Its effect on production is even greater than can be given in such figures. Nearly fifty per cent of gross capital formation was accounted for by arms production. Thus arms production does more than simply correct the tendency to overproduction inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Arms production is also a powerful stimulus to manufacturing. It increases the demand for all sorts of goods which do have a market value, such as steel, petroleum products, and electronic hardware. Whole industries, such as aircraft, non-ferrous metals, chemicals, and scientific instruments depend on arms spending organized through the government, to remain solvent.

This means that arms production has a significant effect on the ability of capitalism to expand on a world scale. It is today the most powerful motive force of capitalist production.

This is particularly true when viewed on a world scale. The following table shows how world steel production has developed since 1929:

WORLD STEEL PRODUCTION, 1929-1970 (in 000 metric tons)

YEAR	WORLD	US	USSR	JAPAN	GERMANY
1929	121,000	59,000	9,000	--	--
1932	50,727	13,901	5,927	2,398	5,771
1937	117,500	31,380	17,730	5,801	19,849
1943	147,900	80,592	--	7,820	20,758
1948	155,800	80,413	18,639	1,715	7,195
1953	234,700	101,250	38,128	7,662	20,266
1958	273,500	77,342	54,920	12,570	29,308
1962	360,100	89,202	76,307	27,546	36,611
1966	475,800	121,654	96,907	47,784	39,801
1970	592,700	119,308	115,889	93,322	50,093

Source: UN Statistical Yearbook

The difference could hardly be more striking. In the 1930's, that is in the epoch of imperialist decay, world steel production declined in absolute terms. Even in 1937, which is included in the table because it was the high point of the depression, total production had declined by some 3½ million metric tons. Today under the powerful impetus of the world arms economy, production has more than tripled in 22 years! Although the U.S. steel industry is clearly moribund in comparison with its rivals, the advance of the Japanese steel industry is truly staggering. Obviously, "Mankind's productive forces no longer stagnate." (Trotsky, Death Agony of Capitalism.) Something is at work here which is far more pervasive than a mere stabilization.

Is capitalism then, on the way to solving its contradictions, through massive state intervention? First, could not steel be an exception? Perhaps other industries are developing at a less rapid pace? How does the expansion of production relate to population growth? In the following table I have attempted to deal with both these problems.

All advanced industry consumes energy in one form or another. Thus, figures on energy consumption, give the most accurate possible picture of overall industrial development. Per capita energy consumption corrects these figures to account for population growth. Like steel production, energy consumption figures deal with physical quantities, so currency devaluation and conversion can be disregarded.

Once again, the results are most graphic:

PER	CAPITA ENERGY CONSUMPTION (in tons of coal or equivalents)				
	1929	1937	1952	1960	1970
World	....	0.94	1.15	1.41	1.89
US	6.57	5.89	7.82	8.01	11.14
USSR	....	0.87	1.58	2.85	4.45
Germany	2.94	3.02	(W)2.97 (E)2.74	3.65	5.11
Japan	0.74	0.83	0.89	1.16	3.21
Chile	0.74	0.67	0.84	0.88	1.21
Mexico	0.29	0.44	0.69	1.01	1.21
Brazil	0.10	0.13	0.32	0.37	0.47
Egypt	0.14	0.13	0.23	0.28	0.27
China	....	0.07	0.11	(0.60)	(0.53)
(Figures in parenthesis are given under Asia, not accounted for)					
India	0.07	0.09	0.11	0.14	0.19
Zaire (belg. Congo)	0.07	0.03	0.08	0.06	0.07
Tanzania (Tanganyika)	0.01	0.01	0.03	....	0.07

(UN Statistical yearbooks 1951, 1956, 1961, 1971)

World-wide energy consumption also stagnated in the 1930's, but has doubled since then. It has even increased in most, but not all, underdeveloped countries. The gap between rich and poor countries is becoming more and more insurmountable. A terrible weakness is revealed, even as capitalism flexes its muscles to show off its new strength. The permanent arms economy

is as incapable of solving the antagonisms inherent in the capitalist mode of production as was imperialism before it. Both have raised capitalism to a new stage of productivity and rapacity. Both will perish of their own internal contradictions.

But how false is Ron's analysis of the objective conditions! Capitalism has expanded on a world scale, in both the stalinist and bourgeois guises. Yet, it cannot move the masses of humanity into an enjoyment of the benefits of its vast productivity. Indeed, in that very dynamism lies the seed of its future crisis.

A HIGHER STAGE

To see why Ron is wrong about the nature of the period, we must take a closer look at Lenin's theory of imperialism. It must be remembered that for Marx, the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation was to centralize the means of production in fewer and fewer hands. In so doing, the tendency is to socialize the process of labor. The independent artisan who possesses his own tools, his own labor, and the product thereof (until he decides to sell it), is transformed into the modern proletarian, who owns neither his tools, his labor, or the product of that labor. Marx calls that "the transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labor, into capitalist private property." Thus the capitalist mode of production produces capitalist private property as the first negation of individual private property. The negation of this negation, that is, communism, does not give back to the producer his private property, "but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and possession in common of the land and of the means of production.

"The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter on the means of production which has sprung up and flourished along with and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."

Lenin's great service to the movement for human liberation was to show how this process was made manifest in the era of monopoly capitalism. For Marx, it was not necessary that an entire historical epoch be devoted to exposing before the eyes of the working class the fundamental irrationality of monopoly. The historical tendency of primitive accumulation revealed within itself all the proletariat needed to know to end "die ganze alte Scheisse" once and for all.

Yet the revolution did not come in the epoch of industrial capitalism; the mass parties of the proletariat, united in the Second International, adapted to capitalism and became reformist. This in itself should be sufficient warning to all Marxists who attempt to deny or denigrate the crucial importance of the subjective factor for the perspectives of Marxists organizations.

Lenin, far from denying this factor, showed how it was rooted in specific material conditions pertaining to the monopoly stage of capitalism. In so doing, it was necessary for him to borrow from the theories of the British liberal economist J.A. Hobson. Of necessity he was "revising" Marx's theories to fit changed objective circumstances. Yet, unlike Bernstein, another noted "revisor" of Marx, Lenin retained the revolutionary kernel in Marx's thought,

and rewrapped it with a strategy and organizational conception consistent with the tasks of Marxists in the epoch of imperialism and its decay.

As Lenin points out, "Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental attributes of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development, when certain of its fundamental attributes began to be transformed into their opposites, when the features of a period of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system began to take shape and reveal themselves all along the line."

What were the specific features of capitalist imperialism at its height? Lenin gives these five:

- 1) The concentration of production and capital developed to such a high stage that it created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.
- 2) The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital" of a "financial oligarchy."
- 3) The export of capital, which has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities.
- 4) The formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves.
- 5) The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed."

The tremendous export of capital to underdeveloped countries enabled monopoly capitalism to realize tremendous super-profits which were able to counteract the tendency to overproduction in the advanced countries. Wages rose and working conditions improved for the workers in the advanced countries. This was the objective basis for reformist movements and explains their abject surrender to imperialism in the first world war and ever since. But Lenin was wrong on one crucial point: imperialist super-profits did not flow only to the "labor aristocracy"; the general consumption level of the entire class was raised, albeit unevenly and contradictorily. As Tony Cliff has shown (in Cliff, The Economic Roots of Reformism), not only did the real wages of workers rise generally during the period of imperialist consolidation, but thanks to the breathing-room granted by imperialism for the reformist trade-unions to work, the differentials between skilled workers and unskilled workers actually decreased during this period. The failure to recognize this fact, and the effect that it had on the consciousness of workers, was one crucial factor in the failure of the Communist International to win over the great mass of workers in advanced countries to its banner.

This does not detract from Lenin's theory. As Kidron states, "If good theory is operational -- and this is how it should be -- Lenin's Imperialism was supremely good theory in its day. It picked out the enemy, determined the crucial alliance, and explained what the battle was about. But the lines of battle have been redrawn and Lenin, however superb an example of the right approach to theory, is no more the complete manual," (Imperialism, Highest Stage but One, in I.S. #9)

In order to understand why Lenin is no longer the complete manual, we must pick up the tools he laid down and put them to work again. We must start, not from Lenin's theory, but from the objective conditions of world capitalist

economy today. Two of Lenin's five features not only retain their force, but are even more applicable today. Lenin quotes figures from 1904 and 1909 in the United States to prove that production is centralized:

	Large-scale enterprises as % of total enterprises	% of workers	% of output
1904	0.9	25.6	38
1909	1.1	30.5	43.8

(Lenin, Imperialism, page 17)

Figures for the current epoch show that

YEAR	% of enterprises with assets over 100 million	% of assets
1950	0.1	50.8
1966	0.1	60.8

(Source: U.S. Statistical Abstract)

Likewise, with the formation of international capitalist monopolies. Of total U.S. investment, fully one-fourth is invested outside the United States. The formation of large, multi-national cartels has gained in importance as the scramble for the greatest share of the world market takes on new significance.

The question of domination by finance capital is a bit more complicated, however. The growth and concentration of bank capital has certainly grown apace with that of industrial capital. Robert Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, in Who Rules the Corporations? have admirably demonstrated, on the basis of empirical data, the truth of Lenin's propositions in this respect for the U.S. economy. The following table shows the growth of financial intermediaries in the U.S. economy:

YEAR	TOTAL ASSETS (billion \$)	Assets as % of National Wealth
1860	1.2	8
1890	9	14
1912	34	30
1929	133	30
1939	167	42
1948	380	42
1965	1128	47

(Source: Raymond W. Goldsmith, Financial Institutions, cited in F&O)

Similarly, in 1967, the U.S. government surveyed banks' trust assets and discovered that the 25 largest banks held 55.65% of all trust assets. As a result of a series of mergers, in 1967 the top six New York banks (Chase Manhattan, First National City, Manufacturers Hanover, Morgan Guaranty Trust, Chemical, and Bankers Trust) held 15% of all deposits in the nation! This is a qualitative leap even from 1922, the glorious heyday of finance capital, when the top five New York banks controlled only 30% of deposits in New York City.

Fitch and Oppenheimer go on to destroy the thesis that inside managers, not outside financiers, control the investment decisions in large corporations. They demonstrate that outsider control, organized through the trust departments of large commercial banks, is the dominant feature of corporate life today.

This has fundamental significance for the development of capitalism as a world system. It means the days are gone when individual capitals compete with each other to maximize their individual profit. Instead corporations who hold each other's stock, and the banks and insurance companies that loan them money, make reciprocal arrangements with others, which are part of broader strategies for maximizing the power and influence of large conglomerations of capital which swim to gether and trade stocks, directors, and commodities to benefit the group capital, not the individual corporation.

Since such reciprocal agreements are illegal, corporations are definitely reticent to talk about them. But in 1962 when a federal court ordered the DuPont-Wilmington Trust group to divest itself of 23% of General Motors common stock, the details of one such arrangement came to light.

It worked this way: the DuPonts, in addition to their institutional holdings, also held another 5% of GM and 10% of U.S. Rubber. U.S. Rubber makes tires at .9 each. GM buys 10 million tires a year. If U.S. Rubber sells its tires to GM at \$1.0 each, U.S. Rubber earns 10 million in profits, and the DuPonts collect \$1 million as their share. But if U.S. Rubber decided to sell its tires to GM at cost, U.S. Rubber makes no profit, but GM saves 10 million. The DuPonts share of this is about 2.8 million. (Socialist Revolution #6, pp. 89-91)

Fitch and Oppenheimer comment, "As giants increasingly sell to other giants, the economic need for co-ordination of sales and purchases has become manifest. The financial institutions cannot allow billion-dollar corporations to go bankrupt merely because their product sells for a few cents more than that of another giant. Inevitably the market becomes mere ideological grillework masking the engine of monopoly profit-making. By operating under the artificial and apologetic assumptions of bourgeois microeconomic theory, economists can only polish up the chrome a bit. The point is to rip it off." (Socialist Revolution #6, pp. 91-92)

The workings of reciprocity become even more clear when we look at the relations of industrial and financial capital in the presence of a new factor that was insignificant in Lenin's day: state capital in the form of armaments spending. The crucial weakness of finance capital, not seen in Lenin's day, comes into view. While Fitch and Oppenheimer have clearly refuted the liberal-reformist views of Galbraith and Baran-Sweezy as to outsider vs. insider control of the large corporations, at least in the U.S., they have not extended this theory to deal with the point Lenin was talking about: the merging of industrial and financial capital into a financial oligarchy represented in America by the DuPonts, the Rockefellers, the Morgans, or the Hellons.

Kidron goes beyond this framework to suggest that industrial corporations are net suppliers of funds to financial institutions. Despite their vast increase in assets, banks are investing less and less in corporate stocks and bonds and in loans and bills to industrial firms. The reason for this is the liquidity crisis caused by arms spending. Stocks are now less profitable investments for large financial institutions to hold. In order to avoid taxation, dividend

payments are reduced. (Imperialism, Highest Stage but One, in I.S. #9) Instead, industrial corporations, at the behest of outsider-controlled Directors, invest their own profits in other corporations to secure leverage for reciprocal agreements, as in the DuPont case.

An even better example is the case of Penn Central, quoted by Fitch and Oppenheimer without seeming to realize its full significance. Penn Central was a relatively pure creature of the financial oligarchy. Its twenty-three directors had 19 interlocks with 14 commercial banks. Yet Penn Central went bankrupt. Why? It appears that the directors of Penn Central, who included important representatives of both the Morgan and Rockefeller groups, were systematically stripping Penn Central of capital in order to feed it to Boeing, another corporation with interlocks to both groups, which was also in financial trouble.

In one celebrated case, Penn Central directors voted to spend \$21 million to buy Boeing 707 and 727 jets for Executive Jet Aviation, Inc., a venture in which David Bevan, Penn Central's chief financial officer and executive vice-president, and Gloire Forgan Staats, Penn Central's investment banker, both had considerable interest. (Socialist Revolution #6, pp. 111-112) Boeing of course was worth saving because it is a leader in an industry which is 90% dependent on government arms financing.

Despite their massive financial holdings, neither the Morgans nor the Rockefellers could keep Boeing afloat without the state capital supplied through the arms budget. The voluntary savings of the middle class, which used to oil the machine of finance capital, have given way to the forced savings of the working class, collected with all the force of the tax agents mighty club.

Thus arms spending has created a whole new set of financial relationships which have scarcely been analyzed to any real extent. It is our historical duty as revolutionary Marxists to deepen this sketchy analysis, test it with more empirical data, and explain it to the advanced sections of the working class. What is clear is that the realization of Lenin's prediction of a new financial oligarchy has brought forth its own negation in the form of a permanent arms economy. The vast financial power of this oligarchy is now too weak to raise \$300 million for a supersonic transport without the intervention of the state. The market apparatus has all but broken down, leaving us with whole new modes of capital accumulation, of which Marx had only an inkling.

The organic weakness of finance capital is even more clearly seen when we look at another feature of Lenin's analysis. Lenin showed empirically how imperialism differed from earlier forms of capitalist domination of the world through mercantile and industrial capital: through capital export, not the export of goods. In modern arms-economy capitalism, the export of both goods and capital is losing its significance on the world market.

2

WORLD TRADE DEVELOPMENT

(Source: UN Yearbook of International Trade Statistics)

In millions of dollars: EXPORTS TO:

Year	Total World	Developed Economies	"Developing" Economies	Centrally Planned Economies
1958	107,880	67,950	27,430	11,710

	TW	D.E.	W.D.E	CPE
1963	153,860	102,810	32,400	16,580
1969	272,710	191,240	52,260	35,320

In fact, in 1969, 147,900 million, or 54.2% of all world trade, was developed capitalist countries trading with each other. This compares to 44.4% in 1958.

Taking U.S. capital exports as typical shows the same trend.

US DIRECT INVESTMENTS ABROAD			
(Source: US Statistical Abstract) In millions of dollars:			
	1960	1965	1970
Developed countries	19,319	32,313	53,111
Less developed	11,129	15,177	21,417
TOTAL	31,865	49,474	78,999

In the modern permanent arms economy, capital export to underdeveloped countries still exists and grows. But it is becoming less and less significant as a proportion of all capital exports. The character of the modern arms race leads to the production of commodities outside the needs and financial reach of the underdeveloped countries. Also, the dependence of modern capitalism on a high level of consumer spending which most consumers in underdeveloped countries cannot afford adds impetus to this trend.

This situation results in a heightened international struggle of the advanced capitalist countries for each others markets. This fuels the accumulation machine, the driving force of capitalism, to frenzy. In the boom days of the fifties, it produced rising consumption for all classes (although consumption of workers rose more slowly than that of other classes, believing the theory of white-skin privilege.)

But as the crisis of the permanent arms economy matures, as the tendency of rate of profit to fall begins to reassert itself, this boom gives way to stagnation. Rising incomes give way to a generalized attack on the consumption of workers. Every advanced nation adopts official policies of wage restraint, wage freeze, or concentrated action. Social-Democratic parties are called to power to enforce productivity deals. New popular fronts offer their services to the bourgeoisie to restrict workers' self-activity. Thus, the permanent arms economy has its own internal contradictions, its own dynamic of -- not boom or bust -- but inflationary expansion or inflationary stagnation.

Lenin's theory of imperialism most clearly shows its limits when confronted with the so-called "colonial revolution." Lenin states, "For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only (Lenin's emphasis) redivision is possible." (Imperialism, page 76) Not only did colonial independence prove possible under capitalism, but capitalism's resistance was relatively feeble.

Kidron states, "There can be no doubt that changes in mature capitalism have had a lot to do with this feebleness. The decline in foreign investment and its change from labor-using extractive industries to more capital-using manufacturing industries reduced the intake of colonial labor precisely when

the impact of modern techniques was resulting in explosive increases in the colonial populations and labor forces. The old imperialist investments had probably reached their zenith by the first world war and have since contributed little, if anything, to solving the colonies' mounting economic problems. In the meantime, their stagnation and decline focused the colonial labor movements' attacks on foreign rule, and, by negative example, sharpened their demand for an expanding economy and for the political status that might engender it. They found a potent ally in some places (like India) in the local bourgeoisie which hastened to fill the vacuum created, and which found its further development hampered by foreign rule. (Imperialism, Highest Stage But One, in I.S. #9.)

The inability of the Indian or other colonial bourgeoisies to develop the productive forces, or do more than shop about amongst new-style imperialists for the best terms, shows that capital knew how to make a virtue of weakness in the epoch of the permanent arms economy. The cold war and its partner, the domino theory, have made national independence and economic development into the side-effects of a global struggle for domination.

Imperialism still exists, in the broad sense of a world system where large nations exert their domination over smaller ones. The demand for national self-determination retains its potency as a democratic demand. But it becomes our duty to make clear that the terms of the game have changed and old methods of struggle must be re-examined. In an essay on Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution, Tony Cliff states, "For revolutionary socialists in the advanced countries, the shift in strategy means that while they will have to continue to oppose any national oppression of the colonial peoples unconditionally, they must cease to argue over the national identity of the future ruling classes of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and instead investigate the class conflicts and future social structures of these continents. The slogan of "class against class" will become more and more a reality. The central theme of Trotsky's theory remains as valid as ever; the proletariat must continue its revolutionary struggle until it is triumphant the world over. Short of this target it cannot achieve freedom." (Cliff, Permanent Revolution, in I.S. #12, page 21.)

Thus we are in a position to answer Ron T.'s question; what is the nature of the new epoch? We call it the epoch of the permanent arms economy. It is the epoch of seemingly endless inflation and gradual stagnation of the means of production. It is the epoch of unbridled arms competition, unparalleled in scope in the history of mankind. It leads mankind one step further down the road to war and the common ruin of the contending classes. It is the epoch when the "government's expenditures for war (or "national defense") become a legitimate and significant end purpose of economic activity." Thus it is not an end to the decay of capitalism, but a further stage in capitalism's decay. It does not overcome the contradictions of capitalism, but is a further intensification of them.

That Lenin did not foresee this new epoch and argued that imperialism was the last and highest stage of capitalism was thoroughly justified from his own perspective. But our standpoint shows the objective conditions have changed. And the constellations formed by the great Marxist stars of the past have rearranged themselves and are no longer intelligible even to the most clever theoretician of epicycles.

To those who accuse us of not distinguishing between a "period" and an "epoch," we plead guilty. We're not even trying. We have better things to do with our time than play pedantic word-games. For lovers of linguistic analysis we point out that Lenin was able to refer to Imperialism at different times as an "epoch," a "stage," a "phase," and an "era." Maybe he had a bad translator?

To those who claim that a new phase of capitalism is impossible and those who put it forward opportunists, we quote Lenin: "Can it be denied, however, that a new phase of capitalism is "imagineable" in the abstract, after imperialism, namely ultra-imperialism? No it cannot. Such a phase can be imagined. But in practice this means becoming an opportunist, turning away from the acute problems of the day to dream of the unacute problems of the future. In theory this means refusing to be guided by actual developments, forsaking them arbitrarily for such dreams. There is no doubt that the trend of development is towards a single world trust absorbing all enterprises without exception and all states without exception. But this development proceeds in such circumstances, at such a pace, through such contradictions, conflicts and upheavals -- not only economic but political, national, etc. -- that inevitably imperialism will burst and capitalism will be transformed into its opposite long before one world trust materializes, before the "ultra-imperialist" world-wide amalgamation of national finance capitals takes place." (Preface to N. Bukharin's pamphlet, Imperialism and the World Economy, Collected Works, Vol. 22, p.107.)

Tragically, Lenin's perspective was not realized in practice. Imperialism burst but capitalism was not transformed into its opposite. A new phase arose, not the phase of "ultra-imperialism" which remains the liberals' pipe-dream, but the phase of the permanent arms economy, which restates the contradictions of capitalism on a higher plane. Today, it is the dogmatic epigones of Lenin and Trotsky who turn away from the Marxist method and "the acute problems" of the present to dream of the unacute problems of the past.

Trotsky, too, with his prophetic genius for espying trends far ahead of their time, dealt with the question of what would happen if his predictions should prove untrue. He wrote: "If, contrary to all probabilities, the October Revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts -- then we should doubtless have to revise our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copybook label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of reevaluating the world historical perspectives for the next decades if not centuries: have we entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or, on the contrary, the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?" (quoted in Schachtman, The Bureaucratic Revolution, page 81.)

Trotsky's perspective was taken quite literally by the Pabloites and the current United Secretariat of the Fourth International; they posit "centuries of deformed workers' states," and give up, in practice, the struggle for a revolutionary party, in favor of chasing after the latest trend in middle-class revolt. Only the International Socialist tendency -- the Schachtman group in America (Workers' party - Independent Socialist League) and the Cliff group in Britain (Socialist Review - International Socialism) reapplied the tools of revolutionary Marxism to the new objective conditions. Now the various

remnants of the Fourth International(s) who cling to Trotsky's tattered garments in the hope of disguising their own theoretical nudity, must choose between the revolutionary theory of the permanent arms economy and the capitulationism of the United Secretariat and its various and shifting eclectic theories.

We know too little about the parameters of the permanent arms economy, and we should begin studying the question in more detail, in order to come up with precise analyses of the state of the economy which we can translate into sound tactical advice and political training for the layers of politically advanced workers we can expect to attract in the coming period. The following political conclusions should therefore be recognized as tentative.

The permanent arms economy has represented a powerful stabilizing and expanding force for world capitalist economy for a period of some 25 years, which is only now beginning to come to an end. This force was irrational and contradictory to its very core, being based as it was on the production of waste in the form of implements of war. Thus even the health of the permanent arms economy was a form of illness, an illness which is now beginning to take on an acute form. However, the acute form of this illness is clearly distinct, in its broad outlines, from the illness of capitalism in the epoch of imperialist decay. A general collapse of the system, and massive unemployment, and a decline in the total forces of production seem unlikely in the years ahead. What seems probable, instead, is a general slowing-down and bottoming-out of growth rates, producing greater inflation, stagnating real wages, and a general attack on consumption of the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries. This, coupled with the decline of old-style finance capitalism, capital export, and direct imperial domination of underdeveloped countries, makes the prospect of a revival of the classical reformist movement, as opposed to isolated reform struggles, more and more unlikely.

It's difficult to see how such a period can be classified as "pre-revolutionary," in the sense that the transitional epoch of the thirties was. The crisis of the revolutionary proletariat is no longer solely the crisis of revolutionary leadership. In fact, no revolutionary party or leadership worthy of the name exists in any country that we know of today. That revolutionary party, international in scope and perspective, needs to be built again from scattered nuclei, atoms, and molecules, of which we are one. Splits and fusions cannot be ruled out. In fact, they are more likely than gradual accretion to one particular groupuscule.

Today, the crisis of the revolutionary proletariat is more than ever the crisis of revolutionary consciousness. We must go through a long process of winnowing, before the cadres of the future party will emerge, but we dedicate ourselves to go through that process and emerge with them. We cannot succeed with "the master key of an historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue lies in being suprahistorical" (marx, quoted in Shachtman, op cit, page 76), but only by "going to school in the working class," testing our ideas in practice, and cohering our work through industrial concentrations that will make meaningful experimentation possible.

If we do not concentrate our organization around industrial work, but instead continue our present policy of "everybody gets to do his own thing," the tendency to seek security in repetitions of familiar programs will increase

as the frustration of our comrades with this small-group mentality increases. "It is far more difficult -- and far more useful -- when the conditions for direct open, really mass, and really revolutionary struggles do not yet exist, to defend the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation, and organization) in non-revolutionary bodies and even downright reactionary bodies, in non-revolutionary circumstances, among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action. The main task of contemporary Communism in Western Europe and America is to learn to seek, to find, to correctly determine the specific path or particular turn of events that will bring the masses bight up against the real, last, decisive, and great revolutionary struggle." These words of Lenin (Left-Wing Communism, pp. 77-78) were written for a period in which revolutionary struggle was in the air, in a definite pre-revolutionary period for the advanced countries, on the heels of the greatest proletarian revolution of our time. How much truer are they today, when the masses have not yet shown their willingness to struggle as a class except in isolated incidents and for short periods?

We must therefore honestly differ with the Transitional Program, whose epoch is not our epoch, whose tasks are not our tasks, and whose program is therefore not our program. It remains an inspiring demonstration of the method of Marxists in dealing with the question of program and its relation to our tasks and perspectives. We hope to do it all the more honor by applying its method to reject its conclusions; more honor than can ever be done it by turning it into a fetish inscribed with the words "for good, and against evil."

Ron T. states that the Transitional Program was meant to be the program of the Fourth International. So far, so good. But what are the concrete tasks of the Fourth International? It is an indisputable fact that the mouth is the organ of speech. But what does the mouth say?

Ron says our tasks are mainly propagandistic. What does the Transitional Program say? "A program is formulated not for the editorial board or for the leaders of discussion clubs but for the revolutionary action of millions." Trotsky expected these millions not from one day to the next, but he did expect them within a definite historical period, which he bounded approximately at the end of World War II. This is why one of the Socialist Workers' Party's more amusing forays with the Transitional Program was when they claimed for several months after V-J Day that the war was not over.

The task of developing a new program is a necessary one, but that task has just begun. We believe it would be misleading to suppose that in a period where we must function mainly as a propaganda group, trying to implant revolutionary militants and ideas in the working class, and at the same time learn the working class' methods of day-to-day struggle, that we can cohere our work around a program, particularly one which has been superseded by objective conditions. Of course mistakes will be made. Of course we will be subject to all kinds of vagrant influences from the class. Any genuinely revolutionary party is constantly exposed to pressure from the class. The difference is that it knows how to press back to develop strategies that overcome the backwardness of the class, not succumb to it.

It is instructive to note that two leading Bolsheviks, on the eve of the seizure of power, broke party discipline, and published in a non-party publication (which agreed with their factional point of view) a warning to the

Russian bourgeoisie that a seizure of power was being planned. Although Lenin called them some nasty names, like "strikebreaker," Kamenev and Zinoviev were not even relieved of their seats on the central committee, let alone be expelled, as they clearly deserved! There is no formula, program, or talisman, that can guard us from opportunism. For Leninists, only revolutionary struggle, contact with the masses, and a firm unshakable belief in the method of revolutionary Marxism, has ever provided an antidote, and so it must be today.

We believe that a two-level struggle for a program must be waged today. On the one level, a militant, rank-and-file oriented program should be discussed by the various industrial fractions, oriented to concrete situations at that workplace and in that union, and put into practice and the results evaluated. Then corrections can be made, experiences be compared, and the eventual basis of a program for a nationwide rank-and-file movement can be laid. Obviously such a program will make use of some demands which can easily be described as transitional, such as sliding scale of wages and hours (30 for 40) or nationalization under workers' control. But we must content ourselves with the fact at our present modest place in history, such demands may differ from industry to industry. For example, in Telephone, nationalization under workers' control obviously has high priority, while 30 for 40 or control of line speed may be more relevant in Auto. But only in practice can we prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of our thinking.

At the same time, for Workers' Power and our organizational work generally, we need a maximal propaganda program, which clearly and succinctly puts forward the basic concepts and principles of revolutionary Marxism in a way that will be intelligible to the most advanced layer of workers, which we aim to recruit.

We believe that any other approach would be dishonest. If we attempt to apply a full program in our trade union work, we will be obscuring the need for a revolutionary party, and raising the illusion that such a program can be fought for and applied in practice without building such a party, no matter how many times we shout, "the party, the party, and once again the party!" as the Spartacists are pleased to do.

To attempt to apply the minimal trade union program as the only program for our organization would be equally dishonest. We are not merely the best militants, who take the class one step forward. We are revolutionary Communists who fight for the destruction of the entire capitalist social order, the capitalist state, and all of its entwined quasi-state institutions. We seek to build a new revolutionary party, a new revolutionary international, and break the unions from the sway of capitalist politics and lead them with proletarian politics.

Thus the tasks of revolutionary Marxists take on a contradictory two-fold character in this epoch. To find the right path, to unite the opposites of maximum and minimum in practice will not be easy. If the road ahead were easy, we would not be walking down it so alone. In this epoch, which has neither the character of a pre-revolutionary period, nor the character of a truly reformist one, we need to arm ourselves with the revolutionary method of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Cliff, while not becoming slavish adherents of the conclusions of any one. There are guides, but no Great Helmsman is waiting to steer us to shore. That patriarchal myth must die along with all the other

oppressive social relations of capitalism. We want no condescending saviors to free us from a judgement hall. We must ourselves decide our duty. Let us consult for all. Now we're the big kids at last.

"Every opinion based on scientific criticism I welcome. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now as aforetime the maxim of the great Florentine is mine:

"Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti." (Karl Marx, preface to Das Kapital.)

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(The roughness in wording and typing is due to our wish to have this contribution available in time for the National Committee meeting of April.)

REVOLUTIONARY METHOD: PROGRAM AND LEADERSHIP

Mike P.
6/1/73

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 to paper 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.)

* * * * *

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 (UAC) adopted a number of excellent demands as its "program", its real program was concretized and symbolized in its support for Miesner, 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 developing 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

 1 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 confused 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-

 31.0005
 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 pedagogs?

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

 Lenin 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. 3)

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.

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. 10)

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 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 consistantly 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 Weymans 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.

* * * * *

Wildcats

--Bill Hastings

Recently in the NAC minutes there appeared a motion by myself and amendments with motivation by Chris H. Since the amendments and motivation provide us with some idea of the direction of the comrades of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), it is worth taking a few minutes to deal with the problems that are raised in the short statements in the minutes.

To begin with, Chris leaves out any mention of the original motion by Ron T. Like, for example, why he chose not to re-introduce that motion. And that is really where this discussion must start from. In that motion Ron makes it quite clear that at the time he believed that there was a significant capitalist offensive on, in the form of a forcing of wildcat actions in order to isolate and fire the militants. He says *

"There is increasing evidence that in preparation for the upcoming round of contract negotiations management is seeking to fire and discipline the most militant workers. The recent wildcats in the Jefferson Ave., Hamtramck Assembly and the Fenton, Mo. Chrysler plants suggest that management may be provoking these basically spontaneous wildcats and other job actions as a means to 1) dissipate the pent up anger and frustration of the auto workers in a series of isolated actions relatively easily controlled and defeated. 2) thereby demoralize the ranks and convince them that taking things in their own hands is no solution to force them to rely on their housebroken "leaders". 3) to isolate the most militant workers from the rank and file to discipline them and fire them when possible."

Continuing, Ron says

"Although it is too soon to tell the details of management's strategy an intent can be divined. In the context of the present "upturn" based largely on the success of the wage controls and the cooperation of the labor bureaucrats, management is hoping that the upcoming bargaining round will be a peaceful one. A serious breakthrough on the part of any important sector can seriously hamper the capitalists program. They have, therefore, no intention of allowing this to happen. Instead they seek to be prepared to grant moderate wage increases, say in the 7-8% category, while granting no respite on the productivity end of things. One of their chief worries is the trend in price increases which can only add fuel to the fires and build up sentiment for a real fight for a fat wage increase on the part of the rank and file. It is in this context that management may be seeking to provoke unorganized reactions as a means to demoralize the ranks and pick off the militants."

This is fundamentally a mis-assessment of what is going on in industry at present (or for that matter at the time the motion was written). And it is an assessment that could lead us to have disastrous conclusions in terms of the work of our members in industry.

At various times the capitalists feel if necessary to do just what Ron says. However, looking historically at the times when that was the policy actually carried out, they were by and large

*These quotes are from the original presented to the NAC.

times when the strength of the working class and in particular its organized sections (the unions) was at its peak while the capitalist class faced a potential crisis. Thus we see that in the thirties when there was an organized attack to fire militants in the process of organizing industrial unions, it was an attempt to force them to take actions too early, before their strength for a planned fight with the capitalists could reach its peak. In the war years, where many of the corporations tried to pick off militants with the full cooperation of the union bureaucrats, it was at a time when the strength and level of working class activity was at a height. Even so, the response to firings and harassment was to take "unauthorized" actions--wildcats--if necessary. In the late forties, when the companies tried to force certain actions on the shop floor it was again to force the unions to act prior to the time of planned action.

Now, however, we face an entirely different situation. Coming out of the late sixties in which various forms of rank and file rebellion had taken place, the 1970-71 contract round and the period immediately surrounding it was a highpoint in the struggle in recent years. But beginning with Phase 1 and the clear intervention of the state into collective bargaining a noticeable change took place. The number of strikes was far less following August 15, 1971 than for several years before. (Even taking into account the fact that the freeze came just at the end of the contract round.) In particular, the number of wildcats and "unauthorized" job actions declined. This continued through Phase 2. And a general mood was discernible of pessimism, cynicism, etc.

This decline in working class militancy and combativity is also detectable through other indicators. For example, the black movement recently, on all political levels, has suffered a severe setback. Nixon's cutbacks were just the most recent examples of a stopping of government funds for programs that had required militant actions to even initiate. While black organization in the unions is still going on in virtually every part of the country, the level of black activity in the unions and in industry is also well lower than before.

What these signs add up to is that the level of working class activity as a whole sharply declined, reaching a low point, a lull if you like, around the end of 1972. But at that time several factors began to change the general attitude of the class. One was the inflation that clearly was increasing at a fairly rapid pace and which had an impact, while delayed in coming, on working class consciousness. Those workers who had settled their contracts without cost-of-living clauses found that although they were in fact partly keeping up with the rise in the cost of living, there was also the clear indication that inflation was about to rise at an unprecedented rate. The meat boycott, while not the best of tactics, was important for its indication of the consciousness of the working class on this issue, and of their desire to take action around it.

The other important factor which affected working class consciousness around this time was the apparent boom in certain key industries. A slight drop in unemployment, record sales in various industries, record profits, etc. all led to the awareness that we were in for a boom, temporary to be sure, but a boom none the less. And as in most periods when the working class senses an "upturn" in the economy the level of activity picked up as their aspirations rose.

Hence in March, when Ron wrote his motion on wildcat strikes, what we were witnessing was workers just coming out of a temporary lull, once again taking on the corporations in a low-level, isolated fashion, and a new mood developing producing a slight increase in their combativity.

One indication of this was a slight rise in the number of wildcats. However, the rise was not sufficient for us to call it a wave or to see it yet as any developing trend. That is, unlike any other time when there has been a concerted effort by the capitalist class to destroy the militants in the trade unions, this "offensive" was coming at a period when the unions as a whole had accepted Nixon's policies and the ranks were only just beginning to wage a struggle against the

Was it essential, then, to the capitalists to drive out the militants at that point? The unions had made it clear through the actions of the bureaucracy that they were not going to make any real struggle against the wage guidelines at this time. There had been much talk about the need to fight for fringe benefits, working conditions, etc., but not much about wages. The bureaucrats had made it perfectly clear that they were not going to wage a fight against Phase 3 and the capitalists' profits. Even the actions of the ranks, when they did occur earlier this year, were not over wages. The development of their self-confidence and combativity did not directly offer a direct challenge to the record profits of the capitalists.

Prior to virtually every pre-determined conflict between the unions and the companies, the latter attempt to determine the mood of the ranks, their level of militancy and combativity, the ability of their leaders to lead (or mis-lead) etc. That was precisely what was going on in the last few months including the time when Ron wrote his motion. That is, the purpose of the companies actions in general was to determine the mood of labor, both the ranks and the labor bureaucracy. As a by-product of this, militants were fired. But this is nothing new. Do Ron and Chris and the RT think that there are times when the companies don't try to isolate and fire militants? What is important to note here is that the question of whether or not they can get away with harassment and firings is often determined by other factors (the degree of organization, the economy, the mood of the ranks, etc). The idea that Ron puts forward that this "offensive" by the capitalist class had as its general purpose the goal of attacking the militants is all wrong.

The reason it is important to recognize that that was not the purpose is in terms of why wildcats take place following the firing of militants or firings in general. One of the few genuine shows of solidarity that the American working class has demonstrated time after time is the defense of their militant leaders. This defense takes various forms obviously, but it is important to understand that it does take place. And in fact, it was precisely as a part of that solidarity that many wildcat actions took place with the purpose of isolating of the wildcats that Ron mentions took place. That is, it was not the situation in which wildcats were provoked with the purpose of isolating and firing militants. Rather actions were taken by the companies to test the mood of the ranks, part of which were responded to by wildcats. Ron clearly does not understand what is behind all of this.

My motion stated that our general attitude toward wildcats is to work to make them official and as a part of the fight to build a real movement in the unions. But we do not counterpose the strategy of building a rank and file movement, of fighting for democratic reforms in the unions, etc., to these actions. There are not at present other major developments to which the wildcats represent a misleading direction. Were that the case our attitude towards them would be different.

It is merely an abstraction to attempt to lay down a general guideline on wildcats, as Ron's does

by implication, without an analysis of what is going on, what our attitudes towards wildcats are, etc. Furthermore, there can be no such general attitude. Our relationship to the struggles of the workers is a dynamic one not a static one. The very conception that our general line should be one of telling the workers that they must choose when they will attack and when they will hold back is a static one which implies a linear development from unorganized, isolated struggles to fully organized, conscious battles. This, of course, is a pipe dream.

The first of Chris' amendments seeks to delete the following from my motion:

"Whether or not we call for a specific wildcat strike which we feel cannot be won is based on our conception of whether not striking would be more of a defeat for the workers. This is very often the case, where the lack of action indicates to the capitalists that they can continue to fire the militants and demoralizes the workers. We must understand that there are different levels of defeat. We seek that form of struggle which best defends the workers and advances their struggle."

The meaning of this is fairly clear--that given the choice between taking an action which will produce some form of defeat or not taking an action at that moment which will produce a bigger defeat, we in most cases chose the former. This in no sense means that we counterpose other strategies to wildcats; rather it is a recognition of what these wildcats are--the reactions of the workers to provocation sufficient to warrant an action which carries with it the possibility of defeat or counter-attack. In fact, the only way to counterpose the two (wildcats and further organizing) is to say don't wildcat unless you are sure that you will win. Spend all your time organizing until you have the sufficient strength to be reasonably certain of a victory. Sigh. If only the capitalists would be so kind as to wait for such times before stepping up harassment, instituting productivity drives, firings, etc.

In fact, the general approach outlined in Ron's and Chris's documents is similar to that put forward by various other elements in the unions today. Many say that it is necessary to prepare ourselves first before taking any actions to avoid defeats--the bureaucrats, social-democrats, reactionary elements in general. The RT's approach shares certain elements in common with these, namely a fundamentally conservative approach towards them.

Most workers, at present, do not see their struggle as part of a broader one. While we have to put forward the conceptions of organization and fight that I discussed above, it is not a substitute for rank and file activity. Again, our criteria is what we feel will be the strategy that leads to victory or the least defeat. When we oppose a particular wildcat, slowdown, etc., it is not because we oppose that tactic, but because we oppose it at that time. Nonetheless, we believe that these actions are an important part of developing organized rank and file activity.

Chris says:

"We press for a winning strategy. This may mean a wildcat strike, but we recognize that poorly prepared and isolated strikes are often defeated with demoralizing results. We urge the workers to prepare their forces and build support, even if this means holding fire today in order to fight more effectively tomorrow."

We certainly do not advocate defeats for the working class. But since it has been alleged that my motion on wildcats in some sense means that we call for actions which we know will be defeated, some further explanation is called for. There will in fact be times when we tell the workers not to take a particular action at that time. But if we believe that one action will mean less of a defeat, it is in a sense a victory in that it prevents a larger defeat and potential disaster for the workers. Even though they may mean (temporary) setbacks there will be times when we do call for such actions--because unlike conservative elements in the unions we see the implications of not taking those actions. We clearly point out the limits of all actions we engage in, but we do not have an attitude that we will only take responsibility for actions that will win. Additionally, it is important to note once again that wildcats often play an important role in leading up to larger struggles around, often times, issues other than those that sparked the wildcats. As such, they can not be looked at by themselves, independent of the overall struggle.

Chris' position is fundamentally a conservative attitude towards working class activity. Are wildcats something which can be prepared for in advance? Are they something which can be organized around a program? The answer, of course, is that some can and some can't. But the wildcats that Ron mentions in his motion and Chris spoke to during the NAC discussion are wildcats which developed as a reaction to harassment or firings. Wildcats, just like every other aspect of the class struggle, do not take place totally "spontaneously". In all struggles there are people involved who have some sense of what they want to accomplish, how they want to do so and what their longer range goals are. Nonetheless, many of the wildcats that do take place are not planned for ahead of time. Some, of course, are. Either way, we support such actions. Our attitude towards defensive actions by the working class is that these struggles are essential as part of the building of a conscious workers movement. But we do not make a distinction between what we are for and what we take responsibility for. In situations in which we believe that wildcats or other actions provide the best defensive fight because they mean less of a defeat, then we organize them if necessary and possible.

Beyond this, though, it is important to discuss the relationship between wildcats and other similar actions today and the rank and file movement we wish to build. It is not just, as I say above, that there are no other struggles developing in large degrees today in relation to which the wildcats are leading the workers in a wrong direction. It is just the opposite. These wildcats are just one early indication of growing rank and file militancy. Out of these struggles the basis for the sorts of organizations and movements that we seek to build can be laid. Political rank and file developments cannot be built by a solely intellectual approach and propaganda. Rather they must be built out of the struggles that take place, as organizations seeking to lead those struggles.

This is hardly the adventurist attitude that Chris alleges. In fact, his snipe at the end about the charge of the light brigade shows only his inability to deal with an issue like wildcats in any but the most abstract terms. The motion I put forward is by no means adventurist. Instead it attempts to come to grips with a very serious problem that some of our members in industry have already had to face and which will confront us in increasing degrees as the struggle intensifies. The motion clearly discusses our general attitude toward wildcats and our orientation towards organizing in preparation for struggles so that the maximum victory may be obtained. But it rejects the conservatism of the RT motion.

Chris' second amendment is taken directly from Ron's original motion, the one that mis-assessed what was going on in industry today. Ron (and Chris) say, "We must be able to tell them that they have to learn when to strike and when to resist provocation." Fine. But we believe that a response must be forthcoming to the actions of the capitalists or it will lead to larger defeats. What form this response takes must, again, be determined from the individual situation and not from a general attitude. Put in the context of Ron's analysis, this statement is indicative of his general conservative attitude of hold back and wait until you are ready. Unfortunately, that just as adventurist actions can be a disastrous policy.

But beyond that the motion goes further to describe our role in these sorts of actions. "This is not a blanket statement; obviously there will be times when we do not participate. We do not want to expose our own people needlessly. They too must learn to protect themselves." (Ron and Chris) What does this represent? Clearly there is no one in the IS who is for participating in every working class action regardless of the content. The best example of this is a racist strike or wildcat. We would not only not take part and argue against it, we would actively organize against and oppose it. But that is not what is in question. What is in question is our general attitude towards our activity in working class struggles. We do not make a distinction between what we ourselves would do and what we believe is necessary for the workers in that situation. We don't stick our necks out, but we don't stick out as the tail either. (Clearly, where people's jobs are in a peculiar situation -- such as before getting into the union -- that is a different story.) Our job is not solely the preservation of our cadre in industry today. We need to build firm roots in the working class. But that means in the living struggles of the class and not just getting more people into jobs. To make a distinction, as Ron and Chris do, between what actions we will lead, take responsibility for and engage in and what the militants actually do leads them to a bankrupt position of isolation and looking at the working class struggles from the vantage point of outsiders instead of participants. From this can only come a "cadre" of diehard sectarians incapable of doing anything more than lecturing the class, whether from the inside of the outside. And that is counterposed to the development of a proletarian Marxist party capable of leading the class.

It would be of interest, I believe, to hear a potential conversation between Chris and a worker on the shop floor:

--w: Hey Chris! They just fired one of our militants. Most of us think we should strike about it now.

--C. Well, this is part of a campaign by the capitalist class to isolate militants and fire them thereby weakening our organizations and preventing us from making a real fight against the pay board.

--w: But what should we do about the guy who was fired. If we don't do anything about it they will use it as an excuse to fire more of us in the future.

--C: We should use this firing as a start to build a rank and file movement for democratic reforms of the unions and for a labor party for a workers government. So we shouldn't take any action now, since we are not organized well enough and if we lose it will demoralize you.

--w: You always talk about leadership. Don't you think that we will be demoralized by having one of our leaders fired?

--C: We must learn to pick carefully our times to take action and not let the company force us to act too soon. So I don't think we should take any direct action yet. We must organize ourselves first.

--W: Okay. We won't take any action around this firing but use it to build our movement. By the way, you were the one they fired.

Abstractions are not valuable in dealing with the class struggle. The RT's method of dealing with this problem is completely from that point of view. First, because the wildcats are pulled out of their context in which they occur. Ron and Chris cannot analyse them as part of the developing class struggle. They apparently are not aware of simple facts about wildcats such as why they are often called around one issue when there is something else in mind. They are not aware of the basic dynamics involved in shop floor struggles. Secondly, the only way they can deal with the question of spontaneous actions is to see it as part of a concerted plan of action by the capitalists. (See second quote on page one.) Okay. Let us suppose that two months ago the capitalists were engaged in a significant offensive action against the workers. They provoked wildcats in order to pick off workers (something I have shown is wrong) and they attempted to disparte rank and file anger (is this new?). The purpose of all this, we are told, is to prevent a real fight for wages in this contract round. Well, what happened? Did the offensive end? It seems to be over since Ron's motion was not re-introduced by Chris. In fact, Chris even said at the NAC meeting the offensive was over. Very good. Did they win? Well, some militants have been fired and it is quite likely that their will not be a major working class response in this contract round. So, I guess the capitalists must have won. Or maybe they didn't.

Of course, as the capitalists, the workers and hopefully ourselves recognize there was no such major capitalist offensive with Ron's description during the last few months which ended between March and May. Instead the only changes that have taken place are in some people's minds.

In the beginning of this I said that this discussion indicated the direction of the RT. It is not just one of conservatism, but it is also interesting to observe their own course. The RT is a group or groups in retreat on labor questions. The discussion on wildcats is not the only one but the clearest in which their line has been shown to be abstract, irrelevant and sectarian. As a result they are forced, in part, to retreat, such as the withdrawal of Ron's motion. From my point of view that is a victory since the putting forward of their line on this and other questions could mean the thorough destruction of our political tendency as well as the working class movement today.

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The Tactical Wisdom of the IJ
Brian Mackenzie

Recently, Ron T. wrote a motion on wildcat strikes and how to deal with them. Though surrounded by unobjectionable ideas, the core of the motion, the ideas that obviously impelled Ron to put forth such a motion in the first place, were that the employers were attempting to provoke wildcats for the purpose of getting rid of rank and file militants and demoralizing the ranks. The motion urges ISers to counsel caution to the militants and particular care to the ISers. This motion was withdrawn. In its place Chris H. put forward a couple of amendments to Bill H.'s motion -- which was written in opposition to Ron T.'s. As Bill H.'s motion was superior to Ron's this displayed some tactical wisdom. But it is there the tactical wisdom ends. The amendments by Chris, simply restate Ron's mistakes and magnify them for all to see.

Chris, in his motivation has two major objections to the Bill H. motion: 1) that it denies "altogether that management may at this time in some cases intentionally be provoking wildcats"; and 2) "the romanticism and disorienting nature of its position on favoring wildcats." As to the first matter, what Bill says on that is, of course, in response to Ron who sees company provocation as a possible general tactic of the employers in this immediate period. In answer to that notion, Bill H. says, "These (wildcats) are not, as a whole, an attempt by the capitalist class to force actions which cannot be defended by the workers in order to isolate and pick-off the militants and dissipate pent-up anger." This is hardly a denial "altogether" that "in some cases" employers "may" provoke wildcats. It is rather a statement in opposition to the real position put forward, a few weeks ago, and then withdrawn (probably because it was indefensible), that this provoking of wildcats was a strategy, or at least a general tactic of the employers now, "at this time".

In opposition, Bill H. puts forward a brief description of what is really happening, and what anyone who is familiar with what generally goes on today would recognize as fact. That is, the employers, now in a bargaining round, are testing the militancy and resistance of the ranks, as they almost always do before a contract expiration. "In some cases" they provoke a wildcat, but their purpose is to find out how the workers will respond. How do they do this? They have many ways of doing it: sudden speed-up of work, firing a known militant, giving irrational and contradictory orders, etc. In general, the employers today are aware of the enormous dissatisfaction of their workers, but they are not sure about what this means in immediate terms. So they provoke something as a way of finding out. Chris and Ron see this as a more specific provocation, one designed to produce wildcats to drain the workers of morale, fighting energy, etc. This must mean that under today's conditions, the employers in big industry -- which is what the motions are about -- want a general wave of wildcats before the contracts expire. Let's examine this closely.

The present conditions for all of the major industries with pending contracts are conditions of near full capacity production with orders well through this year, and in the case of steel, well into next year (WSJ, 5/24/73). Under such conditions are the employers likely to want wildcats? Obviously, not! For one thing, wildcats in these industries are interruptions in production. In so far as they become general, they would cause problems with meeting orders. For another thing, pre-contract interruptions in production (wildcats, strikes, slow-downs, etc) undermine stock-piling which is one of the employers most important tactics in weakening strike movements. Thus, from the employers point of view, a strategy of provoking wildcats on

a general scale would be dysfunctional. Related to this is the fact, of which the employers are fully aware, that contract strikes -- in the industries under discussion -- do not depend, anymore, on the shop floor militants, but on the international union bureaucracy. The militants can pressure from below to get action. Militants who are fired, but still in the grievance procedure (which takes many months in these sorts of cases), are still members of the union. Not only can they be gad-flies, but they can be full time ones so far as pressuring the bureaucracy is concerned (Jordan Sims, for one example, Nate Mosley, when he was "out" for another). If Ron and Chris were right, the employers have certainly opted for a losing strategy this year. Unfortunately, this year the employers have much more going for them -- the state and the labor bureaucracy. And you can be sure that the bureaucracy does not want a lot of heat stirred up just before they sign this year's and next year's contracts.

The real point of Ron's withdrawn motion and Chris' amendments is to show that we revolutionaries know when to be cool. We are very tactically wise and will not be duped into knee-jerk actions like other militants. Like Lenin in the July Days, we know when to counsel caution or even retreat. Unlike the romantic Bill H. the very vanguardish vanguardists of the RT know that there will be times when, are you ready, "We must be able to tell them (militants) that they have to learn when to strike and when to resist provocation." Whether or not the workers, hot-heads that they are, turn their backs on us, we advance this spine-tingling bit of sage tactical wisdom. We can even lay it on the line and tell them "that in most cases isolated wildcats in one plant will not be sufficient to buck a well armed and coordinated drive on the part of management." There is no end to what we can teach the militant workers. This is all very Bolshevik, but like some other aspects of Bolshevism, it is also part of the common wisdom of those workers who take responsibility for the day to day prosecution of the class struggle; those workers we call militants. Furthermore, that these meager tactical ideas could be put forth with such insistence by the RT, as though they really amounted to something, in themselves, shows how poorly the leaders of the RT understand what goes on at the work place and where wildcats fit in.

Wildcats are not things in themselves that burst forth from the least provocation, and without forethought. Wildcats, like half a dozen other tactics, occur as a part of the process of day to day resistance. Contrary to the opinion of sociologists and other "experts" wildcats are almost always planned. Even when they occur as a result of a quick decision by de facto leaders, they are invariably weighed against other tactics and against present circumstances. Militants, stewards, even bureaucrats know -- from continuous experience -- what the relative relationship of forces are at a given time. Even if their estimates are wrong at times, their assessment of things is at least as sophisticated in outline as that offered by the RT. This is not a glorification of "workers" or a eulogy to the inborn wisdom of the class. It is rather a fact that flows from the actual conditions of work and class relations at work, itself. Workers are not naturally prone to strike, slow down, dump grievances or anything else. These are tactics that they choose, largely through their leaders, from time to time to deal with situations. Each and every wildcat can be shown to have a history. The leadership of each and every wildcat can be shown to have weighed the pros and cons of the strike.

Chris sees as romanticism, Bill H.'s statement that under some circumstances we might actually "call for a wildcat strike which we feel cannot be won." (Chris excludes only times

when "other alternatives are fully exhausted, and not always then.") But what Bill is pointing out is that there are different kinds of defeats. For example, there are times when a strike is ended without achieving any of the demands of the strike and, yet, it is still a morale booster. That the opposite is also true does not exclude this fact. Let us suppose for a moment that Chris is right, that the employers are out to provoke strikes. How do they do this? No secret. They speed-up work, give irrational orders, fire people, insult people, etc. How do we, the workers, respond to all this? If we know it is provocation does that mean that it is time to "resist provocation", which can only mean don't strike because they'll get you? Maybe, maybe not. But it certainly is not time to sit around remembering Lenin in the July Days. Rather it is time to devise a way to fight back. Because if the company really does succeed in speeding up work, giving irrational orders, firing people, and insulting the workers continuously, then the workers will sense, quite correctly, that their leaders are useless.

If management does think it is best for the company to have a bunch of short strikes, are they right? Suppose management does think that they can use these strikes to get rid of a few militants; are they right? But, let's make it even a little more complicated, and elevate the RT's tactical wisdom to that of the ordinary shop steward. Suppose even that you know you can not save "Jonas'" job with this strike. Is it true that by striking you may be able to enhance the fighting will of the workers? Or, is it true that by a brief show of strength you may save the job of the next militant, even though you lost this one? Doesn't every steward worth his or her salt know that some of the time you put up a fight on one issue, because you want to draw the line for management on another. Again and once again, is it not possible that it is better to fight and lose than simply to lose -- at least some of the time? In other words, comrades of the RT, there are many different kinds of defeats. Chris is baffled by how to argue for a strike that you think may well lose. That is only because he does not begin to understand what "winning" and "losing" means in the process of the day to day class struggle. You may win your demands and lose the strike, or vice versa, it depends on what your highest goals are. You can argue honestly for or against an action by telling the truth: "Brothers and sisters, we can't win so and so his or her job back, but if we strike for a couple of days we can show these bastards we mean business. If we don't fight back, now, they will go after others." A thousand other speeches are possible, depending on the actual circumstances. The real situation that will face us, most often, is not so cut and dried. In most cases, we will have to say: "If we do this, that and the other thing, we can win. If we don't, or our leaders sell us out -- as they usually do -- we won't win. In that case, we can do such and such, to get the most out of this strike." Very indefinite, not a simple yes or no to this or that strike, but the reality of things nonetheless.

Even more disturbing, however, than the RT's utterly removed perspective for dealing with wildcats, is their proposal for how we, the revolutionary socialists of the IS, behave in this context. Chris' amendments, like the Lon T. document, propose even greater caution for us, the ISers. After telling the workers to "pick their opportunities carefully" (what would they do without us?), Chris says:

"Taking all due precautions to protect themselves, our people (ISers) should seek to broaden and deepen actions when they do occur in order to minimize the losses and protect the militants. This is not a blanket statement; obviously there will be times

when we do not participate. We do not expose our own people needlessly. They too must learn to protect themselves."

While it should be obvious that we do not "needlessly" expose ourselves, it is a regrettable fact that to lead the class struggle, even its most mundane forms, one will expose oneself. Yes, we must take precautions. But they cannot be of the sort that inhibit our full, aggressive participation in the struggle. As far as strikes go, it is by no means obvious that "there will be times when we do not participate." Such times are, in fact, great and very particular exceptions. In general, comrades, as even the ordinary militant victimized by layers of bourgeois ideology knows, to "not participate" in a strike is popularly known -- not as preserving the cadre -- but as scabbing! In discussing the question of military duty in WW II, Trotsky expressed the opinion on the idea of preserving the cadre (even more relevant in our industrial work) that:

"If the leaders seek only to preserve themselves, that is what they become; preserves -- dried preserves. If they enter the movement, they give impulse to five, ten, twenty others."

Draft

5/16/73

PERSPECTIVES FOR FARMWORKER SUPPORT

- Mike P.
- Ken P.

The significance of the current farmworker struggle goes far beyond the question of representation at particular farms. Most immediately in question is the continued existence of the farmworkers union (UFW). The sweetheart agreements between the Teamsters and the grape growers, who were previously under contract to the UFW, represents open warfare by attacking the UFW in areas it had already organized. The Teamster bureaucracy is fully committed to take jurisdiction in the fields and smash the UFW in the process. The growers are fully willing to accept sweetheart agreements with the IBT as a much lesser evil to dealing with the UFW. (For more background see the report by Ken P. in IS Bulletin #39. This report also contains a brief analysis of why the Teamsters are raiding the UFW.) At the present the struggle is going on in the vineyards of the Coachella and Arvin Valleys and will soon be focused on Delano. But the struggle exists in muted form throughout the giant California agribusiness as growers, IBT bureaucracy and farmworkers prepare themselves for the likely open conflict.

The UFW-Teamster struggle in agriculture represents two different directions for the labor movement. The UFW represents the direction of fighting militant unionism in the interests of its rank and file. It poses the direction for the labor movement of labor solidarity, organizing the unorganized, winning of oppressed minorities, fighting for their special needs, and involvement in more general political and social struggles. The IBT presence in agriculture represents the crudest form of collaboration with employers against the workers.

The UFW has actively taken up job protection, union hiring hall, job health and safety (e.g. pesticides), as well as other special needs of a migrant work force and wages. These represent a real threat to the prerogatives of the farm bosses in organizing the work force for the intensive productivity built into the short season structure of agricultural crop economies. Agribusiness especially desires a docile work force. Worker slowdown or resistance at particular times (e.g. during the short harvesting seasons) can be extremely damaging to profits. The UFW has consistently protected workers on the job and that is why the growers are so willing to meet the sometimes higher wage terms of the IBT contracts, although even on wages the sweetheart agreements only match the pattern fought for and won by the UFW. Although they undoubtedly would prefer no union at all, the higher wages are a relatively small cost to the growers in exchange for maintaining virtually complete control over hiring, firing, working conditions and organization of production that the IBT allows.

IBT contracts reinforce the hated system of labor contractors. Contractors are being made "Teamster Organizers" who automatically enroll the scabs they recruit into the Teamsters. Further, despite the inclusion of a number of benefits in the Teamster Contract, they mean no more than what the union is willing to fight for. Once the IBT has a contract its only presence on the farm is its union bug on grower packaging. Given a migrant labor force few farmworkers will ever see their contribution to the pension fund.

The UFW also represents a breakthrough in "organizing the unorganized." For a long time many in the trade union movement argued that they had not organized the unorganized because the unorganized just couldn't be organized. Farmworkers were thought to be perhaps the toughest. In addition to all other problems farm work was done by predominantly migrant labor and large portions were non-English speaking. The successes of Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) among Filipino workers and the (National Farmworkers Association (NFWA) among Chicano workers (which merged to form the UFW) were accomplished by insisting on their dignity, the dignity of their work and by directing appeals to the national consciousness and traditions of these workers. The success in organizing particularly among Chicanos and Filipinos and resultant contracts was in turn appealing to other workers. The UFW has become a symbol and model for struggles to organize the unorganized. Especially in the West and Southwest its methods are directly copied as in the Farah strike. A defeat for the UFW will increase the already high level of oppressed minority cynicism toward and distrust of unions and the white working class generally.

The methods of the UFW were born of necessity. Lacking anything but token support from the organized Labor Movement and facing extremely powerful and determined growers resistance, the UFW was forced to build community support on its own. The boycott became one of the union's most powerful weapons. But to make the boycott successful the union had to build support committees and politically fight the image of trade unions as being narrow parochial struggles. That is, adopting some from the CIO organizing period and some from the civil rights movement they have been able to attract significant outside support by making the trade union struggle "la Causa."

Despite its important accomplishments in organizing farm workers and a high level of rank and file involvement, the UFW is run from the top down. While there is organized discussion among UFW members, and local-level democracy such as elected ranch negotiating committees, the overall direction of the union is by top leadership with little discussion or opposition. The union also is negligent in training and maintaining a cadre of indigenous field workers as leaders. There are no opposition movements in the union. So long as the question remains the life and death struggle against the Teamsters and Chavez is therefore forced to wage a militant struggle we do not expect any significant rank and file opposition groups to form.

There are, however, important questions involving the political direction of the UFW which must be raised even in the absence of such a rank and file grouping. Most critically is the reliance of the UFW on the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and foot-dragging on the mobilization of farmworkers and Chicano and labor support.

We have already mentioned that one of the progressive features of the UFW was in its attempts to build community support and the use of the mass boycott to bring pressure on the growers. When used as an aid in the primary task of organizing farmworkers at the point of production into self-conscious fighting organization, these community tactics increase the strength of the farmworkers and begin to develop important links to other sections of the working class, and provide a working class focus for middle class activists disoriented by the social crisis. However,

the boycott has tended to become the main focus of UFW organizing rather than mass actions of the field workers. The 1970 Salinas Valley strike has over 7000 workers. Many of the farms were organized for the strike by the UFW. Once the strike began, it spread semi-spontaneously to other farms. After the first week of mass struggle and a court injunction against mass picketing, the UFW top leadership chose to focus on the boycott rather than continued mass action to bring pressure on the growers to sign.

Part of this over-reliance on "community support" has been the UFW heavy ties to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and the Catholic Church. One result has been a timidity in mass action and opposing self-defense in the name of non-violence long after this tactic became counter productive in organizing farmworkers.

Similarly, the UFW's fear of antagonizing the AFL-CIO officialdom has kept them from making any kind of fight or giving any real support to sections of the labor movement which could make the fight for real labor support to the farmworkers. When the left wing bureaucrats in the SF Bay Area organized a United Labor Action Coalition against Phase III, the UFW was cut out. The UFW was not even included in the repeated lists of labor struggles given at the rally. The labor bureaucracy, we were told, wanted a "united" labor demonstration and the Farmworker struggle was "divisive." The UFW made no attempt to challenge this conception of "unity" which also meant unity with the growers. At the recent ILWU convention Chavez had been invited to speak but Bridges "uninvited" him later to keep on good terms with the IBT leaders. Chavez should have appeared anyway and made a fight among the delegates, but chose not to.

The UFW has held back in spreading the struggle preferring the strategy of a single area focal point to establish precedent. But the growers and the Teamsters are clearly united. Growers in one area are not being played off against those in others but are openly and heavily supporting each other. IBT is committing huge resources to this struggle. The power of the farmworkers on the other hand does not lie as much in their ability to provide support as in their ability to stop agricultural production. A mass agricultural strike, possibly even spreading to the canneries is one of the most powerful weapons the farmworkers have and should be the direction of organizing efforts. The UFW won contracts in the grape vineyards through a national boycott. And in 1970 there was a partial victory in the Salinas lettuce fields as a result of both a mass strike and a threat of a boycott. But now the situation is changed and the UFW strategy of reliance on the boycott and liberal support is inadequate to maintain the union (let alone win new victories). The growers are now united in a solid effort to bust the union. Their magazines report it. They have financed Proposition 22 in California, and similar laws in Arizona (successfully) and now in Florida. Their attack on the grape contract means they are now willing to face years of boycotts, probably the smaller grape growers are to be subsidized from other growers (some like Tenneco are conglomerates that can probably afford it).

The AFL-CIO liberal Democratic support for the UFW is inadequate and in some respects potentially damaging. The 1.6 million dollars the AFL-CIO is supplying the Farmworkers seems large absolutely but is very small compared to most strike and organizing funds. The Teamsters have already committed over \$2 million to the fight plus they have unknown grower resources plus the Teamsters do not have to supply any strike benefits. Because farmworkers have no savings, strike benefits are a necessity.

The AFL-CIO has refused to support the boycotts. The UFW wants to be covered by the Wagner Act but not Taft-Hartley (which prohibits among other things "hot cargo" and the secondary boycott). Meany is pushing for the Farmworkers to be covered by Wagner and Taft-Hartley (which is also the Teamster and grower strategy) because it would be embarrassing for the Farmworkers to escape Taft-Hartley when the AFL-CIO has given up fighting against it. At this point the battle must be won in the fields. If the Meany, Teamster, grower, liberal Democrat strategy in any of its forms wins in the legislature, the Teamsters with their massive resources will be able to swamp the Farmworkers with thousands of elections.

Yet the UFW bureaucracy fears any strategy which will cut them off from the liberal Democrats and the top AFL-CIO officials. They feel themselves caught in a squeeze and as of yet have not shown any willingness to shift gears toward a strategy of spreading the strike, mass mobilization of Chicanos from East LA and elsewhere to stop scabs and IBT goons, open appeal for support from labor and intervention in the labor movement demanding it. We should not be quick to demand a "fight to the finish" unless we think we have a good chance of winning. But it is apparent that the growers have already set those terms.

One of its main political liabilities is the UFW's position on "illegals." One of the main grower weapons is the encouragement on importation of "illegal" immigrant workers from Mexico. Because of their illegal status "illegals" are at the mercy of the growers who can threaten them with exposure and resulting deportation. The UFW leadership after considerable debate adopted the position demanding that the State stop off the Border and send illegals back rather than the policy of demanding that multi-national firms have to pay equal wages abroad if they wish to operate in the U.S., immediate legalization of "illegals" open immigration and full rights to immigrants and protecting "illegals" in the meantime. Because almost every Chicano family has at least one relative who is an "illegal" this policy alienates the UFW from the ranks and particularly from the large Southern California Chicano community. The La Raza Unida Party for example, strongly opposes the UFW on its immigration policy.

Farmworker Support

Our primary orientation is toward building support for the farmworkers within the trade union movement. Many of the political tasks are obvious:

(a) Explaining the significance of the farmworkers struggle to developing the labor movement in terms of militant unions, organizing the unorganized, links to specially oppressed sections of the working class, building a politically and socially conscious labor movement and explaining the importance of significant political organizational and financial support.

(b) Exposing the IBT bureaucracy, its gangster unionism and collaboration with the employers against workers and demonstrating how this is not in the interests of the Teamster rank and file. We have to point how this Fitzsimmons-Mohn scheme is not only a dirty shaft for the farmworkers, and a blow to the general principles of labor unity on which the Teamsters like all others depend, but it is also a direct attack on the ability of the Teamster rank and file to control their union. These sweetheart deals in agriculture will turn into "rotten boroughs" which the International and Western Conference can use against rank and file opposition movements.

(c) Organizing rank and file groups within the labor movement to support the Farmworkers and not waiting for the labor bureaucrats or the UFW to move.

Beyond these there are special issues which we will be in the position to raise:

(a) The struggle against scabs. If the strike spreads the IBT-growers will try massive scab-herding to break the strike. Scabs will be recruited in large numbers from Mexico. Many not even knowing they are being recruited as scabs. Organization to effectively block mass importation of strike breakers depends primarily on the UFW giving up its reliance on the Government to stop "illegals" (which is wishful thinking) and changing its policy toward "illegals."

(b) Another focus for scab recruiting will be in the more urbanized areas particularly among blacks and welfare recipients and unemployed. We must begin now to raise the necessity for the labor movement to stop the recruitment of scabs. Part of this can be done by trying to win Chicano, black, welfare and unemployed organizations to actively fight against the recruitment of scab workers as an open attempt to pit these sections of the working class against one another. We urge instead united action with the Farmworkers for unionization and on a political level a struggle for a social program which can provide decent jobs for all.

Part of an anti-scab campaign will have to be physical. We must start now preparing people for the necessity of stopping scabs, both in the fields and at the point of dispatch if possible. The UFW principle of non-violence is a liability here although in the past it has helped the farmworkers maintain legitimacy among liberals. We must convince workers that physical defense of farmworkers jobs by physically stopping labor contractors and scabs is defense of their basic rights and they have a right to that defense. The brutality inflicted on farmworkers by the system that exploits them is the real violence that they are combatting.

Of course, this does not exclude mass demonstrations of farmworkers and Chicano and labor supporters from the cities which can have a non-violent character as tactics such as Martin Luther King type sit-ins to block scabs and Teamster goons. This type of movement against scabs will at the same time focus national attention on the role of the IBT as scab-herder and help to undercut them.

(b) The political offensive against the growers. The growers have been trying to portray themselves with some success as poor farmers caught in the middle of a jurisdictional squabble between two unions. We should be constantly exposing the growers for what they really are: giant business corporations or sections of multi-national firms most of whose farming land was stolen under the guise of land grants to the railroads, mortgage foreclosures during the depression or by pushing small farmers out; most of the irrigation water supplied at public expense in defiance of even the explicit laws of a government friendly to their interests, built on the exploitation of the most oppressed and exploited sections of the working class.

The growers are trying to use the public consciousness about food prices to gain support. In reality, wages to farm workers makes up a very small percentage of the total retail food price (e.g. it was about 5% for lettuce a few years ago according to one grower). We should demand that the growers open their books to show why food prices can not be reduced.

Additionally the political role of agribusiness in California especially is important to expose. Their domination of state government through the Republic and the Democratic Parties should be attacked. The growers have no right to exploit farmworkers and the natural resources of this land to make profits off the production of food, a basic necessity of life.

We call into question agribusiness' right to exist. We call for nationalization of the corporate farms, subsidizing food production from corporate taxes and collective operation of the farms by the field workers as a public trust. We call for the immediate end to all indirect subsidies (cheap water, U. of Calif. research, etc.) to the giant agribusiness corporations.

(c) The Democratic Party. Given the present isolation of the farmworkers and the present reign of Republican administrations it will be difficult to raise the issue of the labor movement's reliance on the Democratic Party-- yet all the more necessary. We will have to point out that when the Democratic Party was in office in California, under Brown, they too supported the growers.

Historically, the growers have been an important base of the Democrats. The UFW has closely identified with the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party.

Yet, two of the most important leaders of the Kennedy machine in California (Unruh and Tunney) have "remained neutral" or opposed the UFW. It is to the UFW's credit that it did not follow the all too often standard pattern in the labor movement and endorse Unruh and Tunney as individuals, although, it did generally support the liberal Democratic machines. We will have to show that the labor movement needs its own political party which can defend efforts to organize the unorganized. Because unemployment is built into the system of capitalism only a party which breaks from reliance on part of the capitalist class and consciously strives to represent the distinct interests of the working class can potentially wage a serious fight for social programs to provide jobs for all. And it is only by providing decent jobs for all that the source of employer scalps will be taken away.

Organizational Work

In the critical area of labor support, the UFW has exclusively assigned to and relied on the bureaucracies of the AFL-CIO unions and the IAW including local central labor council staffs. While nominally supporting the Farmworkers, these bureaucrats are unhappy about the conflict with the IBT and are unwilling to antagonize the Teamsters by organizing any serious action. The business union methods of most union bureaucrats produces an apprehension about the impact of a Farmworker victory on their own ranks. In addition, the IBT is so powerful and trucking so central to the economy that most union bureaucrats consider IBT support critical in bargaining with employers, and sometimes, even as an alternative to having to mobilize their own ranks.

So routinized by their politics of maneuver within the Democratic Party and their methods of business unionism, the liberal-labor bureaucracy finds it difficult to organize the rank and file for non-job-related action even where they want to. The poor turnout of the United Labor Action Rally again: Phase III organized by the bureaucrats is one of the latest demonstrations of their inability. And even here the bureaucrats were unwilling to allow the Farmworkers to be mentioned for fear of antagonizing the IBT.

We can therefore expect little serious support work from the labor officialdom in the immediate period. This might be changed if the arm struggle spreads creating an issue they cannot ignore and/or the development of significant rank and file labor support for the Farmworkers which forces the bureaucracy to respond.

(a) Labor Rank and File Support Committee

We should work for the establishment of a rank and file labor support committee without the official sanction of the UFW or central labor council officialdom. Such a committee would have several tasks:

- (1) Making demands for active support from the official labor movement (e.g. in Central Labor Councils, UL demonstration).

- (2) Giving active support to those groupings within the Teamsters which oppose the Farmworkers raid.
- (3) Organizing preparations for anti-scab activities through contacting other groups particularly Chicano, black unemployed and welfare groups.
- (4) Engaging in direct action demonstrations (e.g. at agribusiness corporation offices).
- (5) Coordinating and aiding farmworker support groups and actions within individual unions.

Such a committee will have to work to establish its legitimacy and bring rank and filers around it. For the beginning the focus of actions will be on boycott and food caravan work done in the name of a rank and file committee.

(b) Trade Union Committees

We should attempt to establish within trade unions, rank and file support committees. These would attempt to explain the significance of the Farmworker struggle to the trade union movement. Among other things they could:

- (1) Organize within the union locally and nationally for serious union support (resolutions, visible participation on Farmworker picket lines, financial aid, caravans, boycott activity) to the Farmworkers.
- (2) Take on Farmworker support themselves by taking responsibility for particular boycott activities, caravans and trying to draw more of the union membership into these actions.
- (3) Linking up with the labor rank and file committees

This activity is not a substitute for all other activity within the unions but a concrete way of adding to that activity in a way which goes beyond the narrow bounds of the specific trade union situation and raises the necessity and issues of class-wide struggle.

(c) Teamster Support

Because of the importance of the IBT raid on the Farmworkers, we are forced to here go a bit further than our base would normally warrant. We should initiate resolutions in locals, build committees in opposition to the raid, promote Teamster spokesmen against the raid, and coordinate our efforts with other supporters of the UFW. In our ongoing work around contracts, etc., we should attempt to continually inject the UFW issue.

(d) Boycott Committees

As a much lower priority, and for those who are not active in trade unions, we propose that they get active in boycott committees and caravans. These committees are presently highly routinized and rigidly controlled from the top, and see themselves carrying out official UFW policy. But they have attracted numbers of people who wish to do serious labor support work. We should attempt to move these committees into more aggressive action and raising the political issues described earlier. We are likely to have limited success at this time given the nature of these committees. But it should be possible for individuals from the boycott committees to work with the labor rank and file committees in activities mentioned above.

We should have no illusions about this work. The forces involved in the Farmworker-IBT-grower struggle are huge. The degree of political backwardness and lethargy of the official labor movement is equally large. We and those whom we can reach in the immediate future are not a substitute for an organized working class self-conscious of its true interests as a class. Our support work for the farmworkers can help point the way toward achieving that consciousness. But we should not have any illusions that we can mobilize the labor movement. Given the short time and the forces we are able to mobilize in this period, we can make a significant contribution to the Farmworker struggle but the decisive center remains within the Farmworker's Union itself.

This perspective, particularly the organizational proposals, are directed toward those areas which are presently the center of the Teamster - Farmworker conflict. It is also relevant to other areas but will have to be suitably modified.

ON THE FRENCH ELECTIONS

We disagree with the two motions presented at the NAC session of February 14. Our disagreement hinges on the approval of critical support of the Union of the Left by IO-IC (Lutte Ouvriere and Ligue Communiste) on the second ballot. We take note, and approve of the reservations expressed by S. Landy on the "lack of clear programmatic basis" for the IO campaign.

Our opinion is based on material covering December-February. Further information may possibly alter our judgement, but not fundamentally. The available documents give a reasonably fair image of IO-IC tactics.

Let us start with a few preliminary remarks:

(1) This year, any candidate who did not obtain 10% of the votes on the first ballot could not participate in the second ballot. This prevented - had they desired so - IO-IC from maintaining their candidates, as did the French CP in 1928 and 1932, but left them free, of course, to advocate either abstention or support of the Union of the Left.

(2) Much undue importance has been given in various circles to the presence, in the Union of the Left, of a small fraction of the old Radical Party. This is the "etc." mentioned in S. Landy's motion. Let us make clear:

- a) These elements obtained about 300,000 votes on the first ballot.
- b) The PSU, which was also party to the electoral pact, obtained about the same number of votes.

There is no reason to think that these feeble forces modified noticeably the electoral results. On the political level they had no influence on the elaboration of the Joint Program. True, in their propaganda, IO-IC made good use of the presence of these remnants of the Radical Party in the Union of the Left, but - to their credit - they did not consider it as a major political issue. Let us quote, without questions or commentaries from Rouge (Ligue Communiste) of 12/16/72, "The pact with the radicals does not change anything as to the class nature of the Joint Program." From Lutte Ouvriere (12/19/72): "Even without the Left Radicals, an alliance SP-CP, mainly on the electoral level, would not be a united workers' front."

The case is clear. We are confronted by the SP and CP, plus two small formations on the right and left. Focussing the attention on these elements would be a cheap attempt to gain a clear conscience, to avoid a genuine discussion on the role of the social-democrats and stalinists.

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We do not accuse IO-IC of imbecility. We understand their strategy: The accession to power of SP-CP is a possibility. Once in power, they will discredit themselves. We, IO-IC, will be in the background. As we have previously told the workers that we did not trust SP-CP, we will be in a good position to radicalise the masses.

A seductive perspective indeed. A good many others may be proposed. According to the Ligue Communiste, "A victory of the Union of the Left will open the situation." Absolutely. Many people have helped to open situations in History. How these situations have evolved is another matter.

Without approaching the problem of the Party - so important, even crucial for many comrades - we can state that the key to the development of any situation resides in the existence of a vanguard conscious of its goals and possibilities for action. We can only be extremely cautious in predicting the future development of the class struggle and therefore of the vanguard. The vanguard is forged through the class struggle and also through exhaustive political education. One of the tasks of the vanguard is to bring the fundamentals of this education to the bulk of the working class. The utilization of elections by revolutionaries - as rigidly defined by the Comintern theses on Parliamentarianism - is a means, among others, to this end. Faithful to the Comintern line, the French CP (the errors and weaknesses of which we are familiar with) maintained its candidates against the Socialist Party in 1928 and 1932, with dire electoral consequences for both parties.

In the present situation, we approve of the participation of the French Trotskyists in the elections. We express the strongest reservations as to the support (even if qualified or critical) for SP-CP on the second ballot, and to the political campaign of which support for SP-CP is only a logical conclusion.

There is a vanguard in France. (1) Its existence is confirmed by the growth of the leftist groups, by the resistance or suspicion that the stalinist and reformist apparatus must overcome in many shops, by the fact that the leftists may occupy the streets of Paris without the CP's approval. The CP has lost ground with the intelligentsia. Youth and women have begun a critique of the various forms of exploitation much more radical than the old gruel so often offered by the leftist groups.

No doubt also that this vanguard is poorly organized and divided into many organizations, four or five for the trotskyst camp alone. For those who think that LO, in particular, is close to our positions, and approve of its electoral tactics, it is especially important to examine what LO-LC offer to the vanguard in particular and to the class in general through this first big trotskyst campaign.

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LO and LC diverge as to the meaning of the SP-CP alliance. LO thinks that the CP has succumbed several times to the SP blackmail. LC, on the other hand, states that the CP imposed its conditions on the SP. Let us quote ROUGE (12/16/72) "In the Union of the Left, it is the CP, reformist workers party, which has the hegemony. It is it which imposed its conditions. It is the CP hegemony which gives to the whole of the alliance its class nature, and not the presence of such and such bourgeois politicians."

What gives a class nature to a party or alliance? Its social composition or its program? Why did the Comintern initiate a merciless battle against socialist parties, genuinely proletarian, and led - sometimes - by people who appear retrospectively as almost honorable by comparison with the present stalinist and social-democratic traitors and butchers?

At first sight, LO seems to take a "harder" line than LC. But let us see the LO manifesto "to the socialist and communist workers, activists and voters," LUTTE OUVRIERE, (2/6/73). This is addressed not to the backward workers: shirkers, boss-lovers, flag-followers, etc., but to the fraction of the working-class which has at least a vague and sentimental sympathy for the socialist ideal. After a violent attack against Pompidou and his regime, LO explains why the workers should not trust SP and CP to destroy him. The bad deeds of Moch, Mollet, Mitterand are exposed, but note how gently the CP is treated: a sub head reads

"To express distrust of the bankers (2), the Guy Mollets, the Jules Mochs, the Mitterands". What about Marchais? A few lines later the CP is mentioned: "let us remember that even the CP, when it was in the government..." (our emphasis) Mention is made of the sorry role of the union leaderships in recent strikes. There is not one word about the international situation, about socialism, what it means and does not mean.

We could multiply the quotations. Several facts are obvious:

(1) On the eve of an election which may "open the situation," LO-LC have nothing to say about the contents of socialism, about the road which may lead to it.

2) The fascination of the French Trotskyists for the CP is evident, and clearly reveals for LO-LC the impossibility of cutting the umbilical cord to the stalinists. Besides a few attacks on some minor aspects of the CP line, there is not one word about the counter-revolutionary role of stalinism throughout the world, not one word on the nature of Russian society, not one word about the bureaucratic and totalitarian society the CP aspires to build through state control of the economy. Is the CP a reformist party? In "The Death Agony of Capitalism," where the possibility of reform is precluded, we are now confronted with not one, but two thriving reformist parties (3). It is strange reformism, that has not brought any reforms, but has destroyed the old order and built up a new class society on half of the world.

We may ask questions ad nauseum. To the vanguard which has vomited up the SP and CP a long time ago, LO-LC do not offer anything, but an understandable reason to go fishing on election day. To the bulk of the class, LO-LC offer a justified but superficial criticism of the CP-SP and ultimately capitulate to the illusions of the workers. Their argumentation may be thus summarized: "We tell you that Mitterand (and to a lesser extent Marchais) are bad guys. Do not rely upon them to fight Pompidou. Show us that you believe in us by voting for us. After all, as we have explained at length, you do not risk hurting Mitterand (and Marchais). On the second ballot, you will be free to push them to power, and we will give a hand."

Some people will perhaps be reminded of the famous statement of the social-democrat Leon Blum who, accused of sabotage in the Riou trial on account of an old vote against the military credits, answered candidly, "but we voted against the military budget because we knew it would be voted anyhow..."

But, is there anything new in LO-LC strategy? In 1946, Privas (a PCI leader) wrote:

"The question of our political support to the SP-CP-CGT government is posed. This support is conditioned by the loyalty of this government towards the anti-capitalist program and towards the masses. If it is implemented effectively such a program, if it really calls for the action and organization of the masses, we shall trust it; as to our participation, there could only be a question of it when it has demonstrated that it deserves our trust, and will continue its work of destruction of the bourgeois apparatus. It would be totally wrong today, before having seen the leaders of the traditional parties at work, to commit ourselves. In any case, our participation in the mass struggle against the bourgeoisie and its repressive forces is secured unconditionally."

This incredible jumble of words was written in an internal bulletin (#37, Dec. '46), ostensibly for the enlightenment of the "bolshevik-Leninist cadres." Some statements are too ludicrous to be commented upon. One fact is clear: in 1946 (and the stalinists were in the capitalist government) the French B-L do not know what the SP and CP are, what they can do. They have to wait before supporting

a CP-SP government, and who knows, participating...In the meantime they will urge the voters to push to power a government which they are not ready to support.

A serious examination of these French Trotskyists' tactics - as well as other no less startling attitudes - would require a long and extensive debate. This is not our intention. Let us not speak about the OCI hopeless case, but how much has anything changed for LO-LC in 27 years?

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From what preceded, it is obvious that the LO-LC political line commanded the support of the Union of the Left on the second ballot. We cannot at the same time approve of their political campaign and ask them to preach "a plague on both your houses" on the second ballot. This would be asking for a complete flip-flop within one week. In fact, we disagree with the LO-LC political line.

Firstly, we disagree with the evaluation of stalinism presented by LO and LC. Far from being a new reformist party, the CP bureaucracy represents an alien force in the Labor movement. Since the working class is the only class which can help these new oppressors to power, we do not propose to aid the stalinists in their efforts to gain more influence over the working class.

Secondly, we disagree with the basic approach of LO and LC to the working-class vanguard. Rather than posing themselves "one step to the left" of the CP, we believe that the revolutionaries should use the elections as a forum to engage in open revolutionary propaganda that will solidify the existing vanguard currents, give them an awareness of their historic tasks, and imbue them with a determination to create a new revolutionary vanguard organization. This cannot be done without a clear understanding and denunciation of the counter-revolutionary nature of both stalinism and reformism in the world today. Being the "best militants" is only a bridge to those vanguard workers; it is not a whole political strategy. We believe that the development of that strategy is the foremost task of revolutionary marxists in the world today. We hope that our criticism, presented in a fraternal manner, will be a step towards the revolutionary regroupment of marxists on a world scale.

Peter Lane
Emmet Casey
Ann Judah
Jean Diamond
(members of San Francisco branch)

Footnotes:

- (1) The electoral strategy of LC was defined by its third congress (Dec. '72). 191 voted for the majority position of support for the Union of the Left on the second ballot, 71 votes for a motion in favor of supporting only the CP on the second ballot, and 12 votes for total abstention in the elections. In its answer to the arguments of the partisans of abstention, the majority acknowledged the existence of a "large working-class vanguard, several dozens of thousands of workers strong, effectively skeptical as to the strategy of the Union of the Left." According to the majority, this vanguard itself sees nonetheless the victory of the Union of the Left as the only way to get rid of Pompidou.
- (2) Allusion to Filippi, a leader of the left Radicals, who is a banker.
- (3) The political resolution of the Third Congress of LC states that the SP "cannot be today defined as a bourgeois party, nor as a bourgeois workers' party on account of its small working-class implantation." ????

An Approach to "An Approach to Our Work in the Gay Liberation Movement"
or some wide and varied misuses of the transitional program.

-- Bob Powers

I

In I.S. Bulletin #39 (April 14, 1973), there appears an article entitled, curiously enough, "An approach to our work in the gay liberation movement" by Judith L. of N.Y. What's curious about the title is that it has little to do with the content of the article. Out of 14 pages, only one page gives any description of the gay liberation movement. The rest of it talks about middle class movements in general, transitional movements, non-transitional movements, transitional programs, revolutionary socialist labor parties, etc., with the gay liberation movement thrown in more or less as an example.

Now, it is the job of revolutionary socialists to generalize. That is, we should have a general approach to, say, middle class movements. However, that analysis must then be supplemented by dealing with the special characteristics of any particular movement that we want to talk about. The general analysis is not sufficient alone.

But that is exactly what Comrade Judith has done. Her title would have been more accurate if it had been "An approach to our work in the _____ Movement", and wherever the words "gay liberation" were mentioned in the article, a blank should have been used.

Thus, the rest of this article will not be referring to the gay liberation movement specifically, but to middle class or declassé movements in general, and the use of the transitional program. However, I want to make clear that I don't think this type of analysis on the part of Judith L was an accident (although if she had realized it, she might have spruced it up with a few more references to the gay movement). But in general, Judith's approach is one of simply taking a ready-made program and telling the movement that they must orient toward the working class. Since we only need to worry about class wide demands and socialism, then why worry about the specific nature of, for example, gay oppression, which need only take up a small part of our work in that movement.

II

The Careful Reader will note that in the first section at one place I added "declassé" movements to those to be covered, as opposed to only middle class movements. Judith says that the gay movement is not by virtue of program or base either bourgeois or working class; therefore it must be middle class. That is not very useful analysis unless the phrase "middle class" is a catch-all which is defined as everything that is not bourgeois or working class. However, I prefer to describe the gay liberation movement, or at least certain segments of it that we would orient to more, as declassé rather than middle class.

Calling a movement declassé instead of middle class implies two things:

- 1) The base of a declassé movement is much more in flux, rather than made up of people with more of a stable position in society.
- 2) the goals of a declassé movement (unlike those of a strict middle class movement which reflects the aspirations and needs of the middle class as middle class) are not counterposed to those of the working class.

Declassé movements tend to attract people either on an intellectual basis or because the objective conditions which produce them (e.g., women's liberation movement, gay liberation movement) reflect non-class divisions. In both these cases, however, they are a reflection of some aspect of the oppression or exploitative or anti-democratic character of capitalism. As such we support them, though not uncritically.

Not to understand the difference between middle class movements and declassé movements means not to see any difference between various women's liberation groups and N.O.W. (We also relate to middle class groupings, but in a different way.)

(more)

III

"The middle class is relatively powerless to affect basic changes . . . [and] . . . shows its feeling of powerlessness by oscillating between the ruling class and the working class -- looking towards that class most likely to 'deliver the goods' at any particular time. In other words, this is to say that the middle class lacks any historic direction." (Judith L., p. 2)

It is important to distinguish between short and long run, and also between basic changes and reforms. Thus, when Judith says (correctly) that "The middle class is relatively powerless to affect basic changes", she hasn't said anything about the ability of middle class or declassé movements to affect reforms, even meaningful reforms.

To achieve reforms, a non-working class movement has several alternatives, certainly more than two:

- a) rely on the bourgeoisie to give it crumbs;
- b) orient toward a working class movement that it can ally with;
- c) ally with other movements;
- d) go it alone, relying on militant action, or other pressure tactics.

The gay liberation movement, for example, has used a combination of strategies, but has probably relied most on (c) and (d). There is no rule that says that whenever a movement wants to accomplish something, it must go either to the bourgeoisie or the working class. It can function independently.

BUT, it can only do so for a time. The kind of reforms that a middle class or declassé movement can achieve are limited. The movement is then going to be faced with an important question. It must a) give up on its demands, or b) give up on capitalism. Which the movement, or the majority of the movement, will do will depend on various factors. But the more determined the movement is about its demands, the more likely will it hold on to its goals, and look around for alternatives to capitalism.*

To say that the middle class or declassé movement "oscillates" between the ruling class and the working class should not mean that we expect continual flip-flops on the part of these movements as they test out which of the historically decisive classes they should orient toward.

In most situations, the middle class or declassé movement can have a life of its own. Ultimately, the movement will have to choose, however. It can choose the path of limiting its goals to the kinds of reforms that are possible under capitalism; or it can decide that capitalism must go.

But this is only ultimately. While the middle class or declassé movement might not be able to affect basic change by itself, it can affect reforms, and may for a time lead an independent existence.**

*It should be clear that the demands I am talking about in this paragraph are progressive demands, not demands that are counterposed to the needs of the working class.

**In a revolutionary situation, the middle class or declassé movement could not lead an independent existence. It will have to choose: either with the working class or with the bourgeoisie. There will be no middle way. During the Bolshevik Revolution, it was impossible to take a middle position. You either sided with the working class or sided with the reactionaries. In fact, during the revolution, there were examples of "oscillations" of groups who were trying to decide which class would deliver the goods.

But revolutionary periods are not normal periods, and should not be mistaken for such.

IV

"The transitional program is a graduated program of demands, slogans, etc. which concretizes the steps necessary to achieve a socialist revolution."
(Judith L. p. 2)

What is a transitional program? Judith seems to think that it is a step by step guide of how to achieve the revolution. I wish she would be more specific about it. Does she mean, first we demand a labor, then a revolutionary party, then soviets, then all power to the soviets? Or, first we achieve a labor party, then we achieve a revolutionary party, then soviets, then all power to the soviets? Or when she says that the transitional program "concretizes the steps", does she mean that first we raise -- or perhaps achieve -- say, 3C-for-40, then open-the-books, then nationalization under workers' control, then a workers' government?

This last paragraph may sound absurd, but then that's because Judith's concept of the transitional program being a graduated program which concretizes the steps to revolution is way off base. We have as part of our over-all program the call for a revolutionary party, for mass workers' organizations, etc., but those are not part of our "transitional program", but they are simply part of our over-all program.

What about the transitional program? Trotsky, for one, in a number of places, instead of saying "transitional program" says "system of transitional demands". (E.g., Death Agony of Capitalism, p. 7, p. 8). Or in another place, Trotsky says:

"Not one of our demands will be realized under capitalism. That is why we are calling them transitional demands. It creates 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."
(Trotsky, 1938-39 Writings, p. 44)

Thus, the transitional program is not the step by step guide that we follow, but it is a way of bridging the gap between the consciousness of the masses and the task that is objectively necessary, the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.*

Thus, I don't accept Judith's concept of the transitional program. For her, it is the program of the socialist revolution, rather than one of the ways socialists bring their politics to the masses, in order to win them to "the socialist program of the revolution". (quote from Trotsky, Death Agony of Capitalism, p. 7, emphasis added)

V

"The Gay Liberation Movement has demands which are theoretically achievable under capitalism, civil rights, and demands which require socialism for their achievement, a culture of genuine freedom. This is the format of a classical minimal/maximal program." (Judith L., p. 5)

The first sentence is true, but the second sentence is false.

*Trotsky of course should not be followed as a text. One of his statements above is misleading. Where he says, "not one of our demands will be realized under capitalism", he should say, "not all of our demands will be realized under capitalism." The transitional program from which we raise demands (to the extent that a program is developed, see the Tasks and Perspectives, and Labor Perspectives documents) contain both reform demands and transitional demands. It is not our task to have to decide first that a demand cannot be achieved under capitalism before we can raise it. The point of the transitional program is that we raise demands that satisfy the needs of the working class regardless of whether or not they can be met under the capitalist system. Since in general they cannot be met, we use this as a way of pointing out that the working class's needs cannot be met without a revolution.

The format is the format of a classical transitional program (it is so in format even though it is not for a working class movement). Take the demands that the I.S. raises. Some can be achieved under capitalism (e.g., fire racist foremen), and some require socialism for their implementation (30-for-40 with jobs for all). Is this the classical minimal/maximal program? Of course not. This is a part of a transitional program, raising demands that meet the needs of the working class without regard to the needs of capitalism, in order to win people to socialism.

As for a minimal/maximal program, let's turn to Trotsky himself:

"Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program* which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program* which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word *socialism* is used only for holiday speechifying."

(Trotsky, *Death Agony of Capitalism*, p. 7, emphasis in original)

Note that Trotsky does not accuse the social democrats of mixing maximal demands with their minimal demands. On the contrary! He accused the social democrats of limiting their day-to-day work to "reforms within the framework of bourgeois society." Just the opposite of what Comrade Judith says.

* * * *

I don't want to get involved in the question of whether there is a "transitional program for black liberation", or a "transitional program for women's liberation" etc. But I do think that an aspect of the methodology of the transitional program applies. We raise demands that stem from the needs of the movement* and not from the needs of the capitalist system. Some reforms may be achieved, and some of the longer run goals of course cannot be achieved. In the course of struggles, our job is to point out that we must go beyond the limits of capitalism, and establish socialism. Those people who consistently hold to the beliefs of this movement and support the demands we raise will probably be able to accept this.

The middle class or declassé movement differs from a working class movement in that while we can tell the workers that they have the power to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism, we must tell the non-working class movement that they must ally with the working class which is the only class that can accomplish socialism. Thus, we also raise demands which stem not from the particular needs of a movement, but from the needs of the working class, so that this movement will begin to link up with the working class.

VI

"socialists intervene in a movement in order to produce a socialist consciousness within that movement. This is the unique contribution that we can make. We are not there just to add some more bodies to the movement. . ."

(Judith L., p. 8)

"It is also in this struggle that we can prove what we said - that socialists are indeed the most consistent defenders of full gay rights.

"It is at this point that we socialists -having fought consistently for civil rights for gays and having openly raised the need for a socialist perspective - will be given a hearing." (Judith L., p. 9)

These two sentiments by Judith are contradictory. On the one hand, she says, our major role is not to build a struggle, but to build socialist consciousness, i.e., to

*Here I am referring to movements which we basically support, as opposed to various middle class movements whose thrust we basically oppose.

state that full _____ liberation cannot be achieved without socialism. On the other hand, she states that we are the most consistent defenders of full gay rights, although nowhere in her document on gay liberation does she suggest what we do to be the most consistent defenders of gay rights. Now the point is, either we are the most consistent defenders of a movement, in which case we have to do our share of the work of that movement; or our major role is to let others do the work of building demonstrations, for example, while we hand out leaflets to them pointing out how the movement is limited and that it will take socialism to solve all the problems.

We are not automatically the most consistent defenders of, say, gay rights simply by pointing out that full gay rights can only be achieved under socialism (just as we are not automatically the best union militants simply because we point out that socialism is necessary for the working class; we must earn that reputation).

Now, as it turns out, there is a dialectical relationship between the activity of socialists in building a movement and their ability to raise program. If we really are, in fact, the most consistent defenders of gay rights, then supporters of gay liberation will look to us for our ideas, the kind of program we raise, our over-all strategy, etc. Our role in these movements, then, includes both on the one hand work and leadership in struggling for whatever reforms can be gained, and on the other hand analysis of the relationship between the movement and capitalism on the other. In this way, we will be able to win the most active and serious to our point of view.*

VII

"in effect we call for a revolutionary socialist labor party" (Judith L, p. 10)
 "Socialists should never advocate actions that raise illusions . . ."
 (Judith L., p. 12)

Short of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, any struggle that we are engaged in can raise illusions. The struggle for higher wages can raise illusions. The struggle for 30-for-40 can raise illusions. The struggle for childcare can raise illusions. The only way to avoid the danger that someone might have some illusions is to follow the path of the Socialist Labor Party.

Of course, we try to point out the limits of anything that we fight for. But that does not mean that we don't call for things that might raise illusions.

Illusions don't exist in the abstract. We cannot moralize them away. Illusions are often based in experience, i.e., the interrelationship of the individual to objective conditions. Therefore these illusions can not be changed in general merely by calling them illusions.

Some illusions are worse than others. The illusions that prevent people from engaging in struggles which in turn break down other illusions because struggle itself changes the objective conditions -- (the feeling of powerlessness, etc., as an individual, vs. the feeling of solidarity and power as a group). These are much worse than illusions about the limits of capitalism.

This was the point of the transitional program -- to get the masses to struggle despite their illusions.

In the context of that struggle and still other struggles, the illusions would be swept away by the interaction of the conditions of struggle with revolutionary leadership helping draw the conclusions and pointing the way.

*I am not suggesting here that we start looking around for every middle class or declassé movement, and begin helping it fight for reforms. I support our general strategy of concentrating on industrial work. But to the extent that we are involved in these movements, I would support a strategy based on what I have outlined here.

The worst illusion of all is that nothing can be won by struggle.

We are for combatting illusions. But because we understand the source of the illusions, we have a plan for attacking them rather than a moralistic preaching stance.

* * * *

Now, to get around this problem of causing illusions, Judith suggests that we don't just call for any old labor party, but one which is, in content, a revolutionary socialist labor party because it has a full transitional program.

Interestingly, even if a party came into existence that included all of the transitional demands as its program, it would not be a revolutionary *vanguard* party that is necessary to carry out the revolution. It would be lacking in two respects (unless Judith is suggesting that we raise this in our agitation):

- a) a disciplined party based on democratic centralism;
- b) a party that is prepared to overthrow capitalism and replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

I don't think Judith L. wants the U.S. to call for a labor party specifically with these two points. I have never seen in any agitation of the U.S. any call for the labor party including these points. (In some of our propaganda work, directed at a smaller audience, we raise the need for a revolutionary party. But this is not the same as having in our agitational program: "Build a Democratic centralist labor party that will fight for this program and for the dictatorship of the proletariat which will be able to carry out the program.") But without these points, even if the labor party adopts a full transitional program, it could not carry through a revolution. So, to follow Comrade Judith's logic, we couldn't call for such a party because it might raise illusions that an undisciplined party could suffice, and that a revolutionary vanguard party based on democratic centralism would not be necessary.

Today there are only a relatively small number of workers to whom we can raise a labor party based on an advanced program. Because it is small, we do not propose it in the same sense that we can win it in the immediate period, but that the working class can be won for it as a perspective.

Since no immediate struggle is possible, we put it forward by *explaining* our politics and our method:

- 1) explaining socialist politics and analysis, the role & potential of the working class, capitalist crisis, and our transitional method;
- 2) showing them in practice how we relate to the consciousness of less advanced workers.

Thus, in addition to talking with the advanced workers, we must also raise the demand for a labor party to a much broader section of workers.

We do raise a program for this labor party, because we want to distinguish ourselves from simply calling on Meany to set up a labor party. We need to stress breaking from the capitalist parties, the need to fight for the rank and file both electorally and other ways, the need for democratic control by the rank and file, as well as certain demands from the transitional program.

In the real world, we would expect a labor party would start from something less than even this, and we would give critical support to a labor party which did not meet all our criteria. But at this point, when it is so necessary for the working class to break from capitalist political parties, for us to concentrate our energies on making sure that we spread no illusions, means that we consider the mass workers' movement irrelevant to our work.

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Finally, I wish to point out that, according to Judith L.'s methodology, our tasks never change from period to period, because we should never call for something that is not a full solution, since it could raise illusions in *any* period. *****May, 1973

COMMENTS ON: 'An Approach to Our Work in the Gay Liberation Movement' (Judith L. Ny/IS Bulletin #39)

by: Wayne Pierce

On page 7 paragraph 2 of this article we find: 'However, the near future will not witness such a significant increase in the level of struggle. We will neither 1. see a strong, militant movement of the class as a whole nor, 2. see the development of a strong working class gay movement.' With these observations -- easily arrived at by empirical observation -- I agree. I find little else to agree with in this article; methodologically, analytically or programatically.

The thrust of comrade Judith's argument seems to be: the gay liberation movement is a middle class movement, there can be no transitional program for a middle class movement; hence in the gay movement we have a maximal-minimal program -- we propagandize for the socialist revolution on the one hand and call for a militant struggle for civil rights (presumably attainable under capitalism) on the other hand.

What this boils down to is that we say to the gay movement: 'We support your struggles for civil rights but we don't really think you'll get anywhere since as a middle class movement you have no historic direction and furthermore real gay liberation can't be achieved by reforming capitalism -- but we don't expect you as a movement to recognize this until you have exhausted yourselves fighting for every single reform capitalism is "capable" of providing. Of course, some of you can be won to socialism. Since, however, as middle class fighters for reforms you can't be expected to draw any conclusions from your own experience in struggle about the nature of this society, we will have to be there to present you with a "socialist perspective."'

It is of course true that in the immediate historic conjuncture there is little that we can say in an immediate programmatic sense to the gay movement. Because there is little that can realistically be done -- either in terms of a working class gay movement or in terms of a militant, action-oriented (middle class) movement.'

If by a 'socialist perspective' one means a sense of historic vision of the future potential for both an increasingly conscious, militant, open struggle by the working class, and the real potential for the self-activity of gay people organized in a movement against their oppression -- linked to, and a part of the working class movement -- together with a real sense of the positive role the gay movement thus far (despite its inherent limitations) has played in laying an initial basis for the future struggles of gay people -- if this is what is meant, then, yes, what we have to offer the gay liberation movement in the immediate sense is a 'socialist perspective.'

However, it is clear that the article by comrade Judith equates "socialist perspective" with "the need for socialism." And all the mechanical arguments about the inapplicability of the transitional program to middle class movements notwithstanding, this is pure sectarianism.

The struggle for the socialist revolution is the struggle led by the working class for the liberation of all oppressed peoples (including the middle class). Even if you leave the middle class out (although history will not), it is the struggle of the whole class against all forms of oppression. If 'the self-activity of gay people as the means of struggling around gay demands' (quoting from Judith's document) is more than empty rhetoric, then we who aspire to at least play some sort of initiating role in the development of a revolutionary socialist working class vanguard party should have some sense of the historic process necessary in the struggle for gay liberation (of course linked to, interacting with and a part of the overall struggle of the working class.)

To date, our programmatic intervention in the gay movement has been in one sense too late and in another sense premature: in that we to some extent raised the conception of linking up with the struggles of the working class as immediately implementable, we were premature; on the other hand, by the time we developed a coherent program for a militant action oriented struggle for civil rights, the movement was already too far into a state of decline to be rescued -- even if our forces had not been so limited. Nevertheless, what was needed from the outset of the gay liberation movement, -- from the point of view of a socialist perspective, and in terms of the immediate needs of the struggle, -- was a program to develop an independent action oriented movement: willing to struggle for the demands of gay liberation no matter what that required, posing the need for mass action by gay people, rather than small groups lobbying for judicial or legislative reforms, and speaking to the immediate and felt needs of gays. Most, if not all, gay IS'ers began our work in gay liberation along these lines -- based more on a gut sense of the needs of gay people together with a general perspective derived from our overall politics -- but without any coherent programmatic formulation.

If, however, we were late in developing a coherent programmatic conception for a gay civil rights movement, we were not wrong in so doing. To be sure, such a movement functioning over a period of time without a working class upsurge would inevitably become exhausted and discouraged, would recognize its own impotence, would disintegrate, move towards bourgeois reformism, look towards legislative and judicial reforms as at least better than nothing, etc. However, in the process there would have developed much more of a conscious understanding of the nature of gay oppression, a much more coherent set of demands for gay liberation and, not unimportantly, a much larger layer of people willing and able to draw general conclusions about capitalist society and join a revolutionary socialist organization. More importantly, a gay movement organized around our program could have held together much longer -- conceivably long enough for the working class movement to develop sufficient momentum for a link to that movement to be possible.

Of course socialists should not have spread illusions that a militant civil rights movement could, in and of itself, achieved gay liberation. What was necessary was to say honestly what it could do i.e.: 1) begin to meet the immediate needs of gay people both in terms of developing self-confidence (the real meaning of the call for "gay pride") and organization, and in terms of winning at least some immediate even if not permanent, reforms and 2) lay a firm basis for the future struggle that would be necessary -- linked to and a part of the developing working class movement.

To claim that it would have been wrong for socialists to organize a militant gay civil rights movement on the basis that, left to itself, it would be impotent and disintegrate, is similar to saying that the Russian revolution was a mistake because socialism can't be built in one country. Because, on the one hand the 'left to itself' is not inevitable, and on the other hand, the lessons learned from such a struggle are extremely valuable, even if the movement eventually disintegrates.

In fact, the gay movement as it was (even if it did not achieve the full potential that our correct and timely intervention might have brought about) has played an extremely important historic role in laying the basis for future struggle. We should see as our immediate task as revolutionary socialists to sift through that experience, draw the lessons from it, both positive and negative, develop a coherent analysis of gay oppression -- both its material and super-structural bases and effects -- and develop a long term perspective for the struggle against gay oppression with a good deal more substance than merely saying that what is needed is a socialist revolution. We must show not only that capitalism is the basic cause of gay oppression, and that the elimination of capitalism is essential for real gay liberation, but also how gay liberation will be achieved in the course of the struggle for socialism.

I have attempted to show, both in my analysis of the gay liberation movement and in my criticisms of comrade Judith's analysis, that it is wrong to say that the transitional program doesn't apply to middle class movements. The middle class has no independent historic potential -- it is incapable of establishing its own class rule -- it is incapable even of sustaining an independent class movement for its own interests. It does, however, have an historic direction: that direction is to gravitate towards one of the two classes which has social power. The job of revolutionary socialists in giving leadership to the working class struggle should be to develop programs which can draw the oppressed sections of the middle class to the side of the working class. The middle class constitutes essential allies in the working class struggle, with much to contribute -- and not just numerically, but in terms of challenging many of the bases of capitalism, both material and superstructural in the course of struggling against their oppression, and even to some extent in terms of essential technical skills (e.g. doctors, lawyers, intellectuals, etc.). Trotsky speaks of the need for a set of transitional demands for the urban middle classes ('38 Draft Transitional Program).

The concept of maximal and minimal demands was wrong as used by the social democracy, is wrong in any period and is wrong as applied to any movement. It was even wrong prior to the "epoch of imperialist decay." Marx, in supporting what he considered progressive bourgeois revolutions called for the independent organization of the working class -- the immediate organization of that class in preparation for the overthrow of the capitalist class whose immediate victory he supported. This was a form of transitional program as was the Communist Manifesto.

The concept of maximal-minimal program means you see no connection between the immediate struggle and the ultimate goal of socialist revolution. On the contrary, socialists seek wherever possible to utilize any form of social upheaval in the process of the ultimate destruction of capitalism -- even, I might add, a movement as limited as the movement for prison reform. The degree to which we would actually involve ourselves in any particular movement is not determined by some abstract principle regarding middle class movements, but rather a concrete analysis of a given movement's importance, or potential importance and direction and potential direction -- and the relationship of these things to our resources and priorities at a particular time.

It is also important to recognize that movements against special oppression (Black liberation, women's liberation, gay liberation, et al.) even when based in and upon middle class elements are not middle class movements in the classical sense. I.e. they are not based on the oppression of the middle class as a class (e.g. the problems of small shop keepers being squeezed out by the big capitalists, or the problems of peasants being driven from their land, etc.) Rather, they are movements against forms of oppression which meaningfully effect all members of the oppressed group with the exception of its ruling class members (excluded not because they are unaffected but because the basic class interests place them from the outset on the otherside of the barricades.) Thus a movement which is consistently struggling to end gay oppression basing itself on the need for a mass militant civil rights movement and concerning itself with the real needs of gay people (the majority of whom are, after all, workers) is potentially a working class movement, even if initially it is composed of and led by middle class people (usually students). In determining the class character of a movement we can not rely on the static criteria advanced by comrade Judith at the beginning of her document. We must rather examine these phenomena in their motion, their potential and direction.

Consider what might have been if a militant rank and file working class movement had broken out a year or so ago when the Detroit Gay Liberator and Detroit Gay Activists had been won to the program which we were advancing in those groups. That program could have been concretized in terms of real links with the working class. The program would have been developed, making concrete the concept of "economic and social justice" (the abstractness of which comrade Judith complains on pg. 13 of her document). In a context of social upheaval by the working class the militant movement movement for civil rights could have been developed. Hundreds of gay liberation groups, previously disoriented and floundering,

would have been drawn in...etc. The result could have been a gay liberation movement composed in its majority of workers and with a working class program!

Historic conjuncture, every bit as much as program and composition can determine the ultimate class character of a movement such as this.

I do not, of course, dispute the essential middle class character of the gay liberation movement -- its conservative wing based itself on judicial and legislative reform, while its "radical" wing tended to emphasize personal liberation rather than building a movement and concerned itself with abstract analyses of "sexism" as the root of all evil rather than the concrete expressions of gay oppression. I do consider that at least the small wing of the movement which we were able to influence had at least a different potential.

Finally, comrade Judith's assertions that: "Working class gays need a higher consciousness to see themselves as a doubly oppressed sector of the working class..." and "This is partly related to the unique 'ability' of gays to conceal the "cause" of their oppression, i.e. ones gayness..." (emph. added!) cannot be left without comment.

First, while I will assume it was a sloppy formulation, I have to note that one's gayness is not the cause of one's oppression.

Secondly, the so-called "ability" to hide one's gayness is not only an ability, but a necessity; and this necessity is one of the most important forms which gay oppression takes. To fail to recognize this at this late date is to have been deaf to everything that the gay movement has been saying.

The problem for gay people has not been that they did not realize that they were oppressed, but rather, that they did not have confidence in their ability to struggle against that oppression. I, a conscious revolutionary socialist, considered the idea of a gay liberation movement inconceivable five years ago. This was not, I assure you because the fact that I had to hide some of my most basic emotional feelings from my family, friends, comrades, and co-workers left me feeling that I was not oppressed.

Consciousness is a complex process, not a linear scale of recognizing how oppressed one is. Oppressed people generally know they are oppressed at least on a certain gut level. What is not always understood is why they are oppressed and what, if anything, they can do about it. One of the most important components of a socialist program and strategy has to be developing the confidence of people, of the working class, and of all oppressed people -- in their ability to struggle.

If socialist ideas are to be able to play their essential role in the unfolding of the class struggle, we must face the enormous and complex tasks of analysis, intervention, and action which lay before us. We cannot afford to hide behind mechanical formulations and congratulate ourselves on our profound understanding of "the need for socialism."