

Discussion Bulletin

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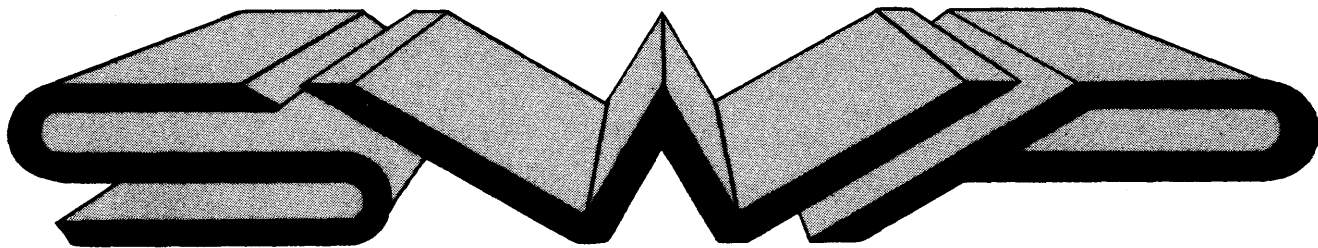
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CONTENTS

	Page
A PROPOSED CHANGE IN TRANSITIONAL SLOGANS	1
Adopted by the Political Committee Sept. 28, 1967	
RECENT FARM STATISTICS	4
by Dick Roberts	

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	Page
A PROPOSED CHANGE IN TRANSITIONAL SLOGANS	1
Adopted by the Political Committee Sept. 28, 1967	
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A Proposed Change in Transitional Slogans

The Political Committee recommends that the party change the transitional slogan "For a Workers and Farmers Government" to "For a Workers Government."

Before explaining the reasons for the recommended change, it seems useful to review briefly the background of the two slogans. Both are designed for common use as a bridge to the idea of a revolutionary government of the workers and their allies. This transitional concept was developed by the early Comintern then led by Lenin and Trotsky. Its purpose was to initiate mass consciousness of the need for class struggle politics, as against the social democratic line of political coalition with capitalists, and to develop that consciousness to the logical revolutionary conclusions.

In 1938 this Bolshevik propaganda device was adopted by the Fourth International and by the Socialist Workers Party. Under Trotsky's leadership the theses involved were brought up to date by including historic experience with the Stalinist variety of political class collaboration.

The call for a government of the workers and their allies is intended to lead toward mass recognition of the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat, as conceived by the Bolsheviks and as brought into being by the October 1917 revolution in Russia. That class dictatorship had nothing in common with the dictatorial bureaucratic regime that later evolved out of the Stalinist degeneration in the Soviet Union. It represented genuine workers democracy and it was the only effective way in which capitalist rule could be displaced by working class rule. The workers and their allies were armed, the counterrevolutionary capitalists defeated and disarmed. All power was taken into the hands of the toilers through the soviets, spearheaded by the working class under the leadership of the Bolshevik party. Capitalism was abolished and new foundations laid from which to proceed toward the construction of a socialist order.

The slogan for a government of the workers and their allies -- counterposed to the false course of crossing class lines in politics and seeking a governmental coalition with capitalists -- can get a hearing among militants who have not yet recognized the necessity for a proletarian dictatorship. They can be influenced by the concept of a government by and in the interests of the workers and the masses generally. In embracing that concept they take a forward step, even if they retain illusions that their basic problems can be solved through the electoral process and parliamentary action.

Their struggle for a genuine workers government will teach them that the capitalists won't allow the issue of political rule to be decided peacefully by a simple majority decision. The capitalist class will resist any attempt to break its monopoly over political control of the country which, although dressed in bourgeois-democratic trappings, constitutes an actual class dictatorship. History teaches that -- while prepared to use a reformist labor facade as an instrument for its own domination -- the capitalist minority will plunge the nation into civil war rather than yield to actual majority rule by the workers and their allies. It follows that under the impact of events illusions about peaceful social change through majority decision will have to give way to preparation for fierce class battles. Consciousness will grow that in order to establish a genuine workers government it is necessary to defeat the capitalists in all-out struggle.

Although we advocate anti-capitalist electoral activity, we do not project the concept of parliamentary action alone. Our aim is to use the electoral sphere as a means to advance a platform for mobilization of the masses in all-sided class struggle. As mass radicalization is deepened and class battles grow sharper, the way is opened in turn to project the essential concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In this longer-range sense the slogan for a government of the workers and their allies becomes a pseudonym for the concept of the proletarian dictatorship. As such it helps to get around prejudices against the concept of a class dictatorship that have arisen due to the hateful image of Stalinist totalitarianism. Minds can be opened to an explanation of the need for the toilers to take the power into their own hands and of the necessary measures toward that end. The class treachery of misleaders can be exposed and support won for our revolutionary-socialist program.

In considering the question of working class allies relative to the phrasing of transitional slogans the Bolsheviks gave special prominence to the peasants. Economically the peasants represent a survival of the productive system under feudalism. They are not a social class but a series of layers of social strata ranging from semi-proletarians to landed proprietors. Consequently the peasants can have no guiding role in politics but can follow only one or the other of the two major contenders for power, i.e., the capitalists or the workers. Capitalists have traditionally used the peasants as a buffer against the workers and the Bolsheviks set out to change that situation.

Toward that end they developed the transitional slogan, "For a Workers and Peasants Government." Their propaganda around the slogan was not directed to the whole peasantry, however. It was presented in such a way as to differentiate the poor peasants from the rich ones and to draw the former toward an alliance with the workers.

Since the peasantry constitute a major section of the population in most countries, outweighing all other potential working class allies, the slogan was used generally on an international scale. But an exception was made where the peasantry represents a less substantial social force. In Britain, for example, with the agrarian sector amounting to only a minor factor, the slogan was truncated to read "For a Workers Government."

When the question was taken up by the SWP in 1938 it was considered in the light of conditions then existing in the United States. Rural families constituted around one-fourth of the total population. Their relative political weight -- as compared with other potential allies of the workers -- was correspondingly substantial. In these circumstances we adopted the slogan "For a Workers and Farmers Government," using the U.S. term for those who work the land.

Since then technological change and the growth of monopoly on the land have sharply altered the situation. The farm population, including all categories, has now dropped to about one-sixteenth of the total population and the trend continues downward. Farmers no longer constitute an especially significant force to be singled out above all other potential allies of the working class. A change in the slogan is therefore indicated.

It is neither necessary nor practical to list all potential allies of the workers in the transitional slogan. The key factor is the idea of a struggle for power led by the workers and supported by all their allies. These allies can be mentioned specifically and their political roles discussed in our propaganda put forward around the central concept of a workers government.

For these reasons it is recommended that the slogan be changed to "For a Workers Government."

Adopted by the Political Committee Sept. 28, 1967

Recent Farm Statistics

By Dick Roberts

The trend of farm population to decline both absolutely, and relatively to total population, has continued unabated since the nineteen twenties, although the fall has been faster since the second world war. In 1920, the farm population totaled 32 million, representing 30.1 percent of the population; in 1945, the comparable figures were 24 million and 17.5 percent; in 1965, 12 million and 6.4 percent.

Final figures have not been released for 1966, but two articles in the January 16 and January 23, 1967, New York Times indicated that the trend was still downward. The total number of farms, according to these reports, had dropped 4 percent from 1965, to 3.258 million. This compares with 6.097 million farms in 1940.

While it is difficult to get figures which would directly reveal the class composition of the farm population, some trends can be noted.

As the number of farms has declined, the size of individual farms has increased: The January 23 Times article states, "In 1875, farms had an average of about 150 acres each. This had increased to above 160 acres by 1935 . . . The farm size had grown to an average of 288 acres by 1959, to 325 by 1963 and 359 in 1966."

At the same time, the total farm land increased to a peak in 1959 of 1.18 billion acres; it has declined very gradually since then to 1.13 billion acres.

Furthermore, total farm income has gradually increased, although more slowly and unevenly than in any other sector of the population. These factors suggest that the decrease in farm population has been accompanied by an increase in per capita income for farmers. A closer examination shows a shift towards the predominance of large farms so far as total farm sales and income is concerned.

The Department of Commerce defines commercial farms as those whose annual sale values are \$2,500 or more. Of roughly 5.5 million farms in 1949, 2.1 million fell in the commercial category. Within this category, 484,000 farms, with sales of \$10,000 or more apiece, or 23.2 percent of the total commercial farms, produced 57.8 percent of the total commercial farm sales.

In 1959, there were 3.7 million total farms with 2.1 million in the commercial category. Thus, in 10 years, the "commercial" farm category had grown from roughly 40 to

roughly 60 percent of the total farm category. Within this category in 1959, farms with sales of \$10,000 or more apiece had increased to 794,000, and accounted for 75.8 percent of the total commercial farm sales.

In the same year, 804,660 farms had total acreages of 260 acres or higher. Within this category, 136,299 farms had total acreages of 1,000 acres and over. These constituted 3.7 percent of all farms and owned 49.2 percent of all farm land.

Corresponding to the growth of large farms has been a shift within the category of "farm workers" to a predominance of "laborers and foremen" versus "farmers and managers." In 1950, there were 30.1 million "farm workers" of which 14.8 million were listed as "farmers and managers" while 15.3 million were listed as "laborers and foremen." (It should be noted that the category "farm workers" is not identical with the category of "farm population" discussed above.)

In 1965, the figures had fallen to 13.8 million "farm workers" of which 5.1 million were "farmers and managers," while 8.7 million were "foremen and laborers." It can be added that in the latter category there is an overwhelming preponderance of "nonwhite" population: 6.3 million "nonwhite" compared to 2.4 million "white."

A separate Department of Agriculture study treated the "hired farm working force" which is, of course, smaller than "foremen and laborers." In this category there were 4.3 million in 1950 and 3.1 million in 1965. Interesting here is the shift of residence of "hired farm workers" from the farm into the city.

In 1948-49, 65 percent of the "hired farm workers" lived on the farms. This had fallen to 32 percent in 1964-65.

August 1967