

1983 - Fundamentals of our programme

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Introduction

In the last decades of the twentieth century humanity faces a stark alternative-either socialism or the obliteration of civilisation, and perhaps life itself, from the face of the planet. Capitalism has created the productive forces-the technology, the scientific control over nature-capable of creating measureless abundance, social equality and unbounded freedom for all. Instead, two thirds of humanity struggle for the barest existence against famine, disease and war. Even in the industrialised countries millions either directly experience the misery of unemployment or the insecurity that the repeated economic crises bring. Since the last general imperialist war. horrific wars have wracked the globe. As imperialism passes into a new period of deeper crises the threat of a third, immeasurably destructive imperialist world war hangs over humanity. The overwhelming majority in all countries suffer the blows of imperialism and fear the approaching catastrophe. Yet only one class - the modern proletariat - has the power to uproot decadent, moribund capitalism and with it its crises and wars.

Time and time again the twentieth century has proved itself the epoch of wars and revolutions; time and again the proletariat has hurled the bourgeoisie to the ground, only to see its own leaders, parties and trade unions help the class enemy to its feet again. The decisive issue now - as forty years ago - is the crisis of leadership within the working class. Only if the revolutionary communist programme triumphs within the ranks of the working class, only if a disciplined cadre unified in each state by a party and internationally in a world party of socialist revolution can the imperialist obstacle to human progress be removed.

Capitalism

Capitalism is the mode of production in which both the forces of production including labour power, and the products themselves, take the form of commodities; it is generalised commodity production. Within capitalism two fundamental social classes face one another-the proletariat or working class, and the bourgeoisie, the class of capitalists.

Capitalism was once a progressive system which vastly expanded the forces of social production, swept away the rubbish of decaying feudalism, with its motley patchwork of privileged and parasitic castes, orders and estates, and its hierarchy of subdivided and localised political units. The bourgeois revolution created - in Europe, North America and parts of Asia - modern nation states and the democratic or republican forms of government with their proclamations of equal political rights for all citizens. It created a world market and world economy. Yet capitalism contradicted, at the level of social production, the equality it emphasised in the political sphere. More than in any previous mode of production it concentrated the ownership of the means of production in the hands 'of an ever-narrowing minority class. Thus, in the realm of politics, the worker and the capitalist appear as fellow citizens. In the labour market, where labour power exchanges for wages, the bargain is formally one between equals, between commodity owners. In the

realm of production however, the proletarian, who has no means of production at his/her disposal and is propertyless in that sense, confronts the concentrated social power of the owners of the land, the factories, the offices and the banks-in a word capitalist property. In sharp contrast the proletarian possesses only his/her ability to work. Thus the formal equality of political life and of the wage bargain is an empty one. The 'democratic state' is a bourgeois dictatorship. The proletarian is a wage slave. Yet on the labour of the proletariat rests the whole edifice of bourgeois society.

The uniqueness of the workers' commodity -labour power - is that it creates more value than is needed to replace itself. Part of this value, surplus value, is retained by the capitalist. This systematic exploitation leads to the creation of profit. It is the source of the constant self-expansion of capital. It is the very motor of production under capitalism. Competition between capitalists drives each to increase the size of unpaid labour. Capital exerts a constant pressure on the proletariat seeking to intensify exploitation, and calls forth a constant systematic resistance. It compels the single proletarian to unite in order to be able to wage this fight with other proletarians. This warfare, now partial and fragmented, now generalised, now over wages and conditions, now erupting into a struggle in the political field and ultimately for state power, is the class struggle - the sharpest, clearest form of class struggle in human history.

The laws of capitalism find their expression in the competition between capitals. New rounds of accumulated capital flows to the sector that will yield the greatest return. Thus, blind production for profit contradicts the vital needs of the mass of the population and so condemns the vast majority of mankind to poverty and insecurity. Capitalism is torn with internal contradictions.

The most general is the conflict between the tremendous expansive powers of modern large-scale industrial production, and the fetters imposed on it by production for profit, national barriers and the planless rivalry of the world market. More specifically, driving ever forward to greater levels of exploitation, the capitalists ensure the appearance of periodic, more or less sharp, economic crises of over-production; of goods people may want and need, but at a profitable price no one can afford.

These regular crises have as their backcloth and driving force a more general tendency for the system as a whole to stagnate and decline, due to the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall. Investment and production grinds to a halt as a result; unemployment and hunger is the consequent lot of millions. Despite the constant revolutionising of science and technology. The potential this holds for improving the lot of mankind is never realised under capitalism. Millions starve in a world of abundance. Indeed, although workers' living conditions have improved under capitalism the concentration of new wealth at the top outstrips these advances, and each new crisis threatens to eradicate all past conquests in the material, political and cultural spheres.

Imperialism

Imperialism represents the highest and last stage of capitalism. It represents an epoch distinct from that of capitalism in its youthful ascendant development. With the imperialist epoch, huge monopolies dominate all the leading branches of production and are fused with enormously developed and concentrated banking capital, to form finance capital. The smaller, less developed or underdeveloped countries are converted into colonies, semi-colonies (formally independent but subordinate states), or subordinate imperialisms (old colonial powers and dynastic empires from the late feudal and mercantile capital era). This system is based on the export of capital to the colonial, semi colonial and subordinate imperialist sphere from the metropolitan imperialisms. By this means super profits are obtained. Imperialism was and is the epoch in which the export of capital predominates over the export of commodities. The imperialist epoch is one of decaying, parasitic capitalism. Yet the very tendency of imperialism to constrain and choke the development of the productive forces has been uneven. On the one hand, imperialism has witnessed

periods of feverish growth in the productive forces (1895-1914; 1948-71). In such periods capitalism develops, as a whole, faster than ever before. The booms are longer and more pronounced than the slumps in the cycle, lending an upward character to the economic curve. In these periods the tendency to decay is unevenly expressed

The older and dominant powers experience declining profit rates, low productivity and the growth of the non-productive over the productive sectors. The "younger" imperialisms on the other hand experience a feverish growth which threatens to upset the former division of the world market. A similar unevenness is manifested in the semi-colonial world. Feverish investment in certain areas; stagnation, decay and retardation of development in others. However, compared to the epoch of capitalist ascendancy, even in a prolonged boom period, the development is one sided, feverish and morbid. No new imperialist powers have emerged. Semi-colonial countries retain economies marked by a lop-sided development attuned to the interests of their imperialist exploiters, rather than undergoing a balanced and even development. Super-profit extraction leaves the native bourgeoisies weak and chronically dependent.

On the other hand, imperialism has experienced, and is now experiencing, extensive periods of profound stagnation (1920-39; 1971 onwards). Such periods are marked by short and shallow booms and long and ever-deeper slumps, giving the whole of world capitalism a strong tendency to stagnation. Its economic convulsions are transmitted into the political sphere as social revolutionary crises and wars; imperialism is and remains an "epoch of wars and revolutions": The flows of exported capital have changed sharply within the imperialist epoch.

In the first phase of this epoch, capital exports to colonial possessions expanded dramatically. The Second World War, with its widespread destruction of the productive forces in the defeated imperialisms - and in Europe in general- accentuated the uneven profit rates between imperialist powers. This period saw huge capital flows from the USA to Europe and Japan. The replacement of the colonial empires of Britain and France with a semi-colonial system dominated by the USA has created formally independent states. Yet they remain utterly dependent on the large monopolies that own or control large sections of their industry, agriculture or mineral extractive production. Even where state capitalist nationalisations have deprived imperialism of formal ownership these semi-colonies' indebtedness to the great institutions of US finance capital- the IMF and the World Bank - renders their formal independence hollow.

During the imperialist epoch, the role of the leading power has been different in different periods. During the era of free competition capitalism, Great Britain was hegemonic, and despite major challenges to its position, this remained the case during the first period of imperialist expansion. The First World War deprived Britain of this absolute hegemony, and introduced a period of interregnum in which American imperialism was the chief rival. The result of the second imperialist war placed the United States in the position of the dominant world power.

In the aftermath of the destruction of World War II it was US capitalism that restructured the world economy in its own image and under its domination. The massive export of US capital laid the basis for the expansion and relative stability of the 1950s and 1960s. This period was marked by the hegemony of US capital and the eclipse of its traditional imperialist rivals. The stability of the workers' states, the success of a series of anti-imperialist struggles and the tendency towards crisis within US capitalism itself, placed severe limits on the period of US hegemony. Since the early 1970s the post-war stability has been shattered and there exists no alternative imperialist power capable of sculpting the world economic order in its image, of re-establishing order and dynamism in the world imperialist economy.

The imperialist epoch has not put an end to competitive capitalism. It has given a more fierce and frenzied edge to that competition. Through their struggle for supremacy, the imperialist powers turn this epoch into

one of wars and revolutions. From proxy conflicts to world war the thirst for new profitable outlets, new markets and new raw materials has inflicted the most awful human misery in the history of mankind.

In all imperialist wars revolutionary Marxists stand for the defeat of imperialism. In the imperialist heartlands we fight to turn the imperialist war into a class war to overthrow the exploiters. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed and exploited in the colonies and semi-colonies, when they struggle to throw off the yoke of imperialist exploitation. In the renewed period of stagnation, imperialism will supplement its militarism with ever-deeper forms of political reaction. As the small spurts of renewed life in the capitalist cycle give way to deeper crises, the international bourgeoisie will feel itself incapable of granting the masses it governs the benefits of even its narrow democracy. As in the great depression between the imperialist wars, the charade of parliamentary rule gives way to a succession of bonapartist regimes in which the executive and military wings of the state gathers political power to itself, under the pretence of "saving the nation". In reality it is a tool for denying workers basic rights, to dampen struggle and exact a huge social and economic cost from the proletariat to resurrect capitalism. If the state forces of bonapartism prove insufficient, the bourgeoisie will not hesitate to turn to the fascist gangs to atomise the working class, liquidate its organisations completely, as under Hitler. For this they will build and arm gangs of petit bourgeois and unemployed to act as shock troops.

Nationalism and national struggles

Nation states are the normal expression of bourgeois political power. Nationalism is an essential element and limitation of bourgeois ideology. The proletariat in contrast "has no fatherland", i.e. both its immediate and historic interests transcend national barriers, dictating the need for unity with the workers of all countries. The class-conscious proletariat is internationalist or it is nothing. In the measure to which it is tied to a common fatherland with its bourgeois exploiters it is itself enslaved.

However, within the nation state each proletariat faces "its own" bourgeoisie as its immediate foe, although behind it stands the world bourgeoisie. When it has overthrown the bourgeoisie within the national framework it defends the "socialist fatherland" against both the foreign interventionists and native counterrevolution. However, even here only the form of the proletariat's struggle is national. The working class seeks unity with its class brothers and sisters at every level- in trade union struggle and in the political struggle within capitalism in its overthrow, which must have the character of a world revolution.

Yet there is no contradiction between this internationalism and the defence of the national rights of oppressed peoples. Whilst clearly recognising these as bourgeois democratic freedoms, the proletariat takes up these tasks which belonged to the revolution of its direct class enemy. In the epoch of the bourgeois revolutions, the proletariat correctly took up the struggle against feudal divisions and localism in favour of national unity. It also took the front ranks in the attack on the great dynastic empires- the prison houses of nationalities. Yet capitalism, which promised to fulfil the right of all peoples to national independence and self-determination, violated it in practice from the outset.

With the imperialist epoch the great capitalist powers became wholesale oppressors of peoples- either through direct colonial or indirect semi-colonial means. The anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements have won the dismantling of the British and French colonial empires only to see them replaced by the semi-colonial world dominance of the USA.

To rule for them, the imperialist powers suborn bourgeois "nationalist" politicians, the military elite or even decayed semi-feudal classes. Hence the predominance of bonapartist regimes resting on military force in the semi-colonial world. Imperialism supports them economically and militarily, and has repeatedly intervened directly to support or install them.

Imperialism has perpetrated and perpetuated the Balkanisation of strategic areas of the globe. The fragmentation caused by colonial seizures from the 1880s to the 1920s initiated this process. In the most sensitive areas, colonial settler states (Israel and South Africa) are maintained to perpetuate division, to exacerbate rivalries and weaken any united action against imperialism. Military and naval bases, often in extra-territorial enclaves, garrison the globe for imperialism. Thus, in the semi-colonial countries, the "national struggle" against imperialism is an integral task of the proletariat's revolution which it must take up. The nationalistic petit-bourgeoisie can be its ally in this struggle, but is also a dangerous rival for the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. The proletariat must seek to lead this struggle on the basis of its own class methods of struggle and organisation - which in the form of soviets it can and must extend to the peasantry, the petit-bourgeoisie and the armed forces. If the proletariat becomes poisoned with nationalism, then it will be ready to sacrifice its class interests to petit-bourgeois demagogues and "anti-imperialist" bonapartes. The semi-colonial proletariat also needs its own class party, which ages relentless struggle against nationalist and populist ideology, against the petit-bourgeois strategies of guerrilla warfare, individual terrorism or passive resistance. Whilst the proletariat does not rule out any action or method as a tactic, it subordinates and combines them with those actions of the proletariat which heighten its class-consciousness and prepare it for power. The class independence and leadership (hegemony) of the proletariat do not stand in contradiction to the anti-imperialist or national struggle; they are the sole basis for its victorious conclusion.

Struggles of the exploited and oppressed

With the development of the first class societies came the class struggle. The earliest class societies represented an enormous leap forward in humanity's control over its environment, over nature, whilst at one and the same time representing the birth of systematic servitude and oppression for the direct producers, the most numerous class.

The inner motor of each of these societies was a specific mode of exploitative production. politically, this dynamic antagonism expressed itself in class struggles and in wars and conflicts between different states. In the states based on slavery, Asiatic despotism and feudalism, the course of the class struggle, the conflict between rival ruling classes, was the locomotive of human progress. The means of social production were developed and on this basis, the wealth and culture of society, albeit very unequally distributed, developed. Capitalism is the most developed and universal form of class society. It has developed social production more dynamically than all previous social systems. Its crises (economic and social) are sharper and more frequent. Correspondingly its inner class struggle is more sharply developed than any previous class struggle.

The proletariat-owning no part of the means of production-the waged/salaried sellers of labour power, constitute a great and increasing majority of the population in all developed capitalist countries. The core of the working class, the industrial proletariat whose unpaid production of surplus value is the bedrock of capitalist society, is nevertheless the grave-digger of this society. Historically speaking, it has nothing to lose from the overthrow of capitalism but its chains. Its concentration in large scale units at the point of production enables it to halt the process of capital accumulation-of profit making. Its social organisation within production drives the proletariat to collective organisation and collective action. Its revolutionary class struggles have rocked capitalism for 150 years, resulting in its overthrow over a vast area of the planet. It has conquered legal and political rights for itself and for all the oppressed within capitalist society. It alone is capable of overthrowing capitalism and in leading the whole of oppressed humanity to liberation from all forms of exploitation and servitude. All other oppressed classes or strata retain links with capitalist society or contradictions which make them unable to lead a successful struggle against their capitalist, imperialist exploiters.

The small scale property of the urban or rural petit-bourgeoisie or the small landowning peasantry can be cruelly exploited by semi-feudal or capitalist landlords, by the banks and by imperialist monopolies. All suffer the grinding pressure of the large scale capitalist which drives them to cruelly intensified labour, to debt and ruin. Where the peasantry has survived both numerically and as a large part of the population-exploited in this way by landlord and usurer - it has proved an enormously strong revolutionary force. Yet these classes social fragmentation, their absence from large scale capitalist production means that neither politically nor ideologically can they take up an independent position as a class. The peasantry and the petit-bourgeoisie follow, in the last analysis, either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, i.e. there can be no peasant or petit-bourgeois class rule- no state power expressing this. In the class struggle however, the petit-bourgeoisie can and does express it-self as a mixture of elements drawn from the bourgeois and proletarian? programmes" as well as reactionary throwbacks to pre-capitalist ideologies and social ideals. Hence the widely varying forms of populism, nationalism or "anti-imperialism" which express this. Here are compounded and confused elements drawn from bourgeois democratic ideals. as well as backward looking utopias and a socialism robbed of its specifically proletarian class struggle methods and class power goal.

Within capitalist society exist strata, other than nationalities or classes, who experience various forms of oppression and often super exploitation. Women, because the burden of child-rearing and domestic labour falls exclusively on them, are either excluded from social labour or restricted to those occupations which least conflict with their "primary task". This is the root of their overwhelming concentration in the low-paid "caring" or service industries and to the lower grades of clerical employment. Not recognised as a full or permanent part of the labour force, they are either driven out of production and back into the home in times of crisis or used to undercut full male pay-rates as cheap labour.

Without the abolition of the family as an economic base unit of capitalist society the liberation of women from their servitude is impossible. Therefore, women have a fundamental interest which is absolutely integral with the achievement of socialism. This does not mean "waiting for socialism": but drawing in women as a vital element without whom that struggle cannot reach victory.

However all women are not oppressed equally, nor can a common feminine interest or consciousness override class differences. Bourgeois women, whilst oppressed by the men of their class, participate in the exploitation of their proletarian "sisters" and, of course, of the male workers. Thus, whilst there can be a bourgeois women's movement claiming equal rights, its claim to represent all women must be contested by communists. This all-class women's movement represents more often the politics of the petit-bourgeoisie. It seeks to disguise its class identity - here under "feminism" - because of its political impotence. Petit-bourgeois feminism is a form of utopianism. Whilst many of its descriptions of women's oppression are biting and accurate, hitting at the hypocrisy and male arrogance and oppression in all classes - not least amongst the proletariat, its prescription - its programme - is unrealisable and can even assume reactionary forms.

The working class woman, especially the organised woman proletarian, is the essential leader of any effective movement against women's oppression. Only a mass proletarian women's movement-led by communists can rouse the great mass of women out of the "backwardness" to which their oppression consigns them. With such a movement, and by conducting special work and agitation amongst women, they can become, once they escape from the atomisation and passivity to which bourgeois society condemns them, the most militant vanguard fighters for freedom, as has been shown in every social revolution, bourgeois and proletarian.

The apparently age-old character of women's oppression - in fact dating back to the emergence of private

property and classes - has of necessity strengthened a patriarchal ideology, one which succeeding modes of production have inherited and transformed. Bourgeois society sanctifies and defends its family, the nuclear family, with a series of hypocritical moral norms and taboos against "un-natural" forms of sexuality. In particular it stigmatises, persecutes or legally terrorises homosexuality. Marxists, as consistent materialists and atheists denounce transcendent moral injunctions, revealing their hidden class purpose. Homosexuality is not a vice, but one form of human sexual expression, denied and excoriated because it appears to challenge the child-rearing nuclear family ideal. Marxists have from the 1860s denied and opposed the right of the state to interfere in the private lives of citizens. They oppose all discrimination, persecution or oppression of gays, whether this comes from the state or from the ignorant and backward elements of the masses. Likewise Marxists oppose all restrictions on, or interference in, the personal sexual life of all, especially the young.

Capitalism, especially in its imperialist epoch, converts nationalism of the oppressor peoples into chauvinism. Its most venomous form is racism. Anti-Semitism claimed six million victims. The persecution and oppression of negroes in the USA dates back to the earliest days of colonisation. The waves of immigrant labour drawn in from the colonies to Britain and France, and from the Balkan countries to Germany during the mid-century boom period, created oppressed and super-exploited strata in these countries. Always subject to racist state harassment, in the crises of the 1970s and 80s they have become the target of fascism. It is the class duty of the proletariat of the metropolitan capitalist countries to fight all state measures aimed at the ethnic minorities- immigration controls, repatriation measures, police harassment, legal frame-ups, discrimination in jobs, housing, education or union rights. It is imperative for the proletarian vanguard to offer practical fighting unity to black or immigrant workers, to defend them and aid their self-defence. Again special methods and organisation - caucuses in the unions, defence groups in immigrant or black areas-are vital, must be encouraged and supported by the workers organisations. They will, in turn, be a powerful addition to the united struggle of the working class against state attack and against fascism.

All these groupings of the oppressed need specific organisations to militantly press their own needs-within the general movement of the working class and amongst the particular grouping. However, exclusivist ideologies which seek liberation outside of the battle against capitalism are sterile utopias. By separating the specific struggle of the oppressed from the class war, and opting for an all-class "autonomous movement", these ideologies collapse into abject reformism, or even outright anti-communism. Thus for example feminism, or black nationalism, remain petit-bourgeois ideologies despite their being linked to progressive and justified causes. Zionism was once - before it became the ideology of a colonial settler state - a petit-bourgeois ideology of the oppressed. As such communists fought it. So today communists must fight for proletarian and communist leadership in the struggles of the oppressed. This struggle is three-fold: against indifference and backwardness towards the oppressed within the proletariat; against petit bourgeois separatist ideologies; and for communist-led movements of the oppressed integrally linked to the mass organs of the working class.

Permanent revolution

The development of capitalism has revealed that it is unable to harmoniously develop the forces of production on a world scale- to raise the backward countries "to the level of the largest and earliest capitalist powers. On the contrary, whilst the countries of most of Asia, Africa and South America have been irrevocably drawn into the world economy of capitalism, they remain underdeveloped or 'backward'. This phenomenon can be understood only by means of Lenin's theory of imperialism and by Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development. Out of the unevenness of capitalist development - creating backward and advanced capitalist powers-arises the phenomenon of combined development. The

backward country does not simply follow the stages of development pioneered by the advanced, but is compelled to 'leap over' stages of slow gradual change. It does not thus overcome its backwardness, but combines it within a new formation. On the basis of economies which combine small but modern manufacturing industrial sectors with primitive subsistence agriculture or huge latifundia, arises a class structure where the proletariat is a minority of the population. The remainder of the popular masses consists of the peasantry, the rural proletariat, an urban petit-bourgeoisie or a sub-proletariat.

The very development and world dominance of the major imperialist powers, their extraction of super-profits from the backward countries, has obstructed the development of powerful and independent national bourgeoisies within the backward countries. These weak bourgeoisies oscillate between acting as agents for imperialism in the exploitation and oppression of their own countries and episodic resistance to the worst excesses of imperialism. The experience of the whole twentieth century has shown that whilst a given bourgeoisie, or an important sector thereof, may for a period act in defence of "national" interests (meaning thereby national capitalist development of course) these bourgeoisies are altogether incapable of a consistent and victorious struggle against imperialism.

On the basis of the theory of uneven and combined development and the relationship of class forces in the backward countries, Trotsky developed the theory of permanent revolution, first in the years 1904-1907 as a specific analysis of Tsarist Russia, then in the late 1920s as "a question of the character, the inner connections and methods of the international revolution in general". Starting from the uneven and combined development of imperialist capitalism, it understands the interlinked (permanent) nature of the bourgeois and socialist revolutions. The tasks of the bourgeois revolution, the dissolution of semi-feudal and even pre-feudal agrarian relations, national unity and independence and democracy, can no longer be attained on the basis of capitalist property relations or under bourgeois leadership. Whilst these tasks are the immediate foreground questions in the "backward" semi-colonial countries, they can only be realised in a workers' state - a proletarian dictatorship which has the organised support of the peasants and other oppressed strata. Otherwise imperialism dominates, distorts and exploits the national economy rendering the formal state independence an empty shell.

Politically and militarily it intervenes to impose reactionary bourgeois, military-bonapartist, or even semi-feudal monarchical regimes. The effects of this situation upon the classes means that the peasantry and the oppressed urban petit-bourgeois and sub-proletarian classes display a powerful anti-imperialist and even anti-bourgeois dynamic. Nevertheless these classes lack of concentration in modern production, their lack of social homogeneity and their ties to small scale private property, their (at best) national horizons, all render them unfit for a successful leading role in the anti-imperialist struggle. Without proletarian influence and leadership they fall under the influence and sway of petit-bourgeois nationalist demagogues or bonapartists who tie them to the interests of the national bourgeoisie, and ultimately to imperialism.

The theory of permanent revolution recognised that there was a law that propelled the struggle in the under-developed countries towards a break with capitalism in order to overcome the historic problems of backwardness, and in order to achieve even elementary democratic rights. But it also recognised that the realisation of the potential of permanent revolution required the conscious intervention of the proletariat to head the struggles of all the oppressed and exploited as part of its own struggle for power. Permanent revolution is not an historic process that performs the work of revolutionary Marxists, regardless of their will and actions.

Thus the programme in the semi-colonial, under-developed countries must be based on a struggle against the imperialist exploiters and their local class allies bourgeois or semi-feudal. The strategy of permanent revolution is based on an alliance first and foremost with the peasantry and with other oppressed strata.

This forms the necessary and sufficient basis of the anti-imperialist united front. Where the local bourgeoisie, in whole or in parts, or even more backward social classes, enter into real (not merely verbal) conflict with imperialism, then critical military support of them against imperialism—a united front against both the imperialists and against domestic counter-revolution—is permissible on certain conditions: not to tie the proletariat's hands, not to give political support to, or take political responsibility for a bourgeois regime and in no circumstances to enter a bourgeois government i.e. one resting on and within the framework of the bourgeois state. This possibility, however, is not a necessity. Any attempt to reserve a place for the "national bourgeoisie" within an anti-imperialist united front is Menshevik schematism. The anti-imperialist united front could only attain governmental power as a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government—i.e. one resting on workers' and peasants' mass organs of struggle (councils, commissions, unions; the forms are varied but their soviet content is essential for the final assault on disintegrating bourgeois state power). From this basis, the fundamental task of the workers' and peasants' government is the expulsion of imperialist troops, the dissolution or destruction of the bourgeois state forces, the arming of the workers and peasants, the economic expropriation of imperialist holdings, the banks, large scale industry and mining, and the granting of the land to those who work it. It is therefore self-evident that such a government could not contain capitalist ministers. Whenever the workers' or peasants' representatives fall into this trap—the popular front—they are irrevocably lost. Revolutionaries, whilst implacably opposed to the popular front, attempt to mobilise the masses around the slogans addressed to the reformist and centrist workers parties: break with the bourgeoisie, kick out the capitalist ministers, mobilise, organise and arm the masses. These tactics can open the road to a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government.

But final victory can only be achieved where the proletariat, led by a vanguard party, achieves a solid alliance with the peasantry and, after conquering foreign and domestic reaction, installs the proletarian dictatorship in alliance with the peasantry. Since the proletariat's horizons are international, despite its taking up of the justified national struggle against imperialism, it seeks the constant aid of other oppressed nations and of the proletariat of the imperialist powers. The proletarian dictatorship isolated in a backward country, is doomed to degeneration or destruction unless it spreads the revolution beyond its borders. The Stalinist nostrum of "socialism in one country" is a recipe for both. Its stages theory cripples and stifles the anti-imperialist struggle in its earliest stage, subordinating the proletariat to the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie.

Most often, this leads to bloody disaster and triumphant counter-revolution, as in China 1926-28, Indonesia 1966, or Chile 1973 (to name but three of the dozens of examples). Exceptionally, the combination of Stalinist leadership and the military and economic support of degenerate workers' states, can lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a new degenerate workers' state, as happened in China, Vietnam and Cuba. The precondition for this overthrow is the political expropriation of the proletariat by a bureaucratic caste, in order to prevent it from taking the lead in the fight. The result is isolation, degeneration and the blocking of the impetus to international revolution and socialism. The coming into being of such states is a distorted expression of the objective impetus of permanent revolution. Whilst such states have to be defended unconditionally against imperialism, their bureaucratic leaders and their apparatus of repression constitute an obstacle on the road to socialism. The programme of permanent revolution here takes the form of the anti-bureaucratic political revolution.

The capitalist state

The state is the apparatus of coercion used by every ruling class to defend their economic domination in society. States have existed since the development of private property in the surplus product. The first states came into being with the dissolution of primitive communist societies. The development of classes and their division into exploiters and exploited, required an instrument, an institution which secured the

riches of the exploiters and protected them against the revolts of the exploited. Despite the appearance of neutrality, the appearance of standing impartially above society, the institution that developed the state - stood as the guarantor of the rights of the exploiters. The essential characteristic of this state, and a characteristic that has remained essential to all forms of state within class society, was the development of a public force differentiated from the mass of the people-armed bodies of men - to defend property.

Under capitalism the state is a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie, against the working class. It exists to defend bourgeois property relations in the means of production and exchange. We define the class character of a state by the economic regime it defends. Thus a capitalist state is one that defends the capitalist mode of production. The form of capitalist states can vary tremendously, depending on the degree of economic development and political stability in particular countries. Hitler's fascist Germany, Britain's constitutional monarchy, the United States' democratic republic and the military, bonapartist states that exist throughout the semi-colonial world, are all capitalist states. The apparatus of coercion in each case exists with the primary function of defending capitalism.

The bourgeois state developed out of pre-existing types of state. Clearly all social revolutions involve the passing of state power from one class to another. In the case of the bourgeoisie, during its revolutionary struggle against feudalism, it was not necessary for it to smash the feudal state. By virtue of its economic strength prior to its achievement of full political power, it was possible for the bourgeoisie to capture the allegiance of the armed bodies of men and of the whole state machine. In other words, the bourgeoisie captured and then perfected and enlarged the state machine. It did not smash it. The bourgeoisie, driven by the need to contain and continue to freely exploit the proletariat, expanded the military and bureaucratic machine that it had inherited. The armed forces, judiciary, civil service, professional politicians and police are the key elements of the capitalist state machine. They are the "parasitic excrescence" on the body of society, required by capitalism. The existence of this excrescence faces the proletariat, in its revolution, with qualitatively different tasks to those which faced the bourgeoisie.

The nature of the proletariat as a class and the tasks of its revolution-the conscious construction of a communist society-require that the proletariat organise itself as a ruling class with unique and particular state forms. Unlike all hitherto existing revolutionary classes, the proletariat cannot achieve its historical objective by laying hold of the existing machinery and form of state-its army. its bureaucracy and officialdom-and use it to implement its programme. The working class has to smash the capitalist state and establish its own state power. The "political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation." (Marx).

The dictatorship of the proletariat and the transition to communism

The pre-condition for the establishment of proletarian property forms is the destruction of the machine used by the capitalists to defend their property forms-the state. The proletariat must smash and destroy the capitalist state by defeating the armed power of the bourgeoisie. The armed bodies of men-armed forces, police, special squads and services-must be rendered powerless and dispersed by the proletariat if the revolution is to succeed. In the first place this means breaking bourgeois control of the army. The rank and file soldiers must be won, with their arms, to the side of the proletariat. This can be done by: the proletariat showing itself willing to fight to the end, fraternising with the soldiers, supporting the creation of rank and file soldiers councils, calls for the election of officers, and finally the placing of the soldiers committees under the discipline of workers organisations. Who wins the army, wins the revolution. With armed force the proletariat can take on and destroy those more likely to remain defenders of the old regime-privileged regiments, the police. With the victory of the revolution. the standing army must be progressively replaced with the arming of the entire people.

The task of revolution, of winning the rank and file soldiers, of smashing the political power and apparatus of the capitalist state, is unthinkable without the workers themselves creating their own organs of struggle—armed, directly elected workplace organisations, workers' militia and soviets, or workers' councils.

These organs of struggle are, however, also potential organs of working class power. With the conquest of political power they must become the military and administrative bedrock of the workers' state, the organs of the state of a new type. This state will be the instrument of the proletariat's revolutionary dictatorship. Such a centralised instrument is absolutely necessary. The inevitable counterrevolutionary military resistance of the bourgeoisie, their economic sabotage, the parlous economic inheritance from the bourgeoisie, all point to the need for a state, a dictatorship, capable of prosecuting the class struggle after the proletarian revolution. Class struggle will exist for as long as classes exist. Classes can not be abolished overnight, nor can the proletarian state. However, just as the goal of the proletarian revolution is a classless society, so the goal of the proletarian state is to create the conditions whereby no state, no arbiter between classes, is necessary. Without classes, there will be no need for a state. Until that time a state of a new, special type, will be necessary.

The special features of this state can be deduced from two historical experiences, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. In Paris, after the bourgeois rulers fled the city following its surrender to Prussia, the working people, organised in an armed national guard, took political power. As Marx noted, the Commune gave a real example of the political form in which working class emancipation would be carried through. Building on this experience and enriching it with the experience of soviets—committees of workers? directly elected deputies—the Bolsheviks, and Lenin in particular, codified the defining features of a workers' state. Most vitally, the proletarian dictatorship will be based on: the abolition of the standing army and its eventual replacement by a popular militia; a centralised state based on the deputies of workers' councils directly elected in the workplaces, that is, a soviet state; the recallability of all officials as well as their regular election; no material privileges for officials, who should receive the average wage of a skilled worker; the introduction of control in all spheres of social life, "so that all may become 'bureaucrats' for a time, and that therefore nobody may be able to become a 'bureaucrat' " (Lenin).

This new type of state, unlike all others, contains within itself the mechanics for its own withering away. The widest extension of democracy to the toilers conceivable will be necessary for the erosion of class society. More and more people are brought into the administration of society, and the state loses its separate existence. In other words, the proletarian state is only a semi-state. With the social emancipation of the working class and the dissolution of classes this semi-state will disappear, rather than be abolished: "The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of the processes of production" (Engels).

The Paris Commune and the October Revolution demonstrated as well that class society and the legacy of capitalism cannot be abolished overnight. Between the proletarian revolution and communism lies a period of transition. The political form of the transition is, as we have said, the proletarian dictatorship. The economic tasks of the transition are: the expropriation of the capitalists; the centralisation of the means of production in the hands of the workers' state and the eradication of the laws and norms of capitalist production and distribution.

These tasks can be fulfilled only with the construction of a consciously and democratically planned economy. Only with the complete victory of the planned economy over the laws of capitalism, most especially the operation of the law of value, will the material abundance necessary to facilitate the granting of "each according to his needs" (Marx) be possible. Prior to that, the continued existence of remuneration

for labour will take place on the basis, by necessity, of bourgeois right, and therefore inequality will exist. But the whole drive of the planned economy will be to eradicate this remnant of bourgeois society and mitigate inequality. The transition, therefore, can be best characterised as the period in which the proletarian state strives to subordinate the continuing existence of aspects of the capitalist mode of production, distribution and exchange, to the new economic order-the planned economy-and gradually to abolish those non-socialist aspects of the economy altogether.

The building of a classless and stateless society cannot be achieved in one country or even group of countries. So long as capitalism retains a grip on the world's productive forces, and maintains, as it will, an arsenal of destruction, the complete triumph of the proletariat will be curtailed, its existing gains threatened. To assure the final victory of the proletarian revolution the bourgeoisie must be defeated world wide. This can begin in one country, but the transition will then, inevitably, involve as an absolute priority the internationalisation of the proletarian revolution.

Stalinism

The USSR and the other states ruled by parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies in East Europe, China, Indo-China and Cuba are bureaucratically degenerate workers' states. In the USSR the workers' state was created by the October revolution and degenerated as the working class was politically expropriated and its vanguard was physically destroyed by the Stalinists. All of the other states were politically degenerate at birth.

The expropriation of the capitalists in those countries has made it possible to subordinate the operation of the fundamental law governing capitalist production - the law of value - to the principle of planning. To this extent the states are based on a proletarian property form. But in each state the proletariat is deprived of political power; the potential of that property form to lay the basis for the transition to communism is effectively undermined by bureaucratic rule.

The bureaucracy's own material interests conflict with the programme of socialist transition. Its massive repressive apparatus is aimed at preventing the working class from taking the planned property into its own hands. The bureaucracy's political expropriation of the working class means that the transition to socialism is blocked in all of the degenerate workers' states. The only force that could guarantee the rounded development of the productive forces to meet human need-the creative power of the self-organised toilers-is strangled by bureaucratic tyranny. The bureaucracy's own planning mechanisms are inefficient

and irrational. Increasingly the bureaucracies seek to overcome the inadequacies of their own forms of planning by strengthening the operation of capitalist forms of distribution and exchange. Bureaucratic rule requires a massive police apparatus to intimidate the working class. And it maintains enormous privileges not only for the top bureaucracy but also for other privileged strata in the workers' states. In no sense therefore are these societies moving towards socialism. These societies can only advance towards communism after the proletariat has destroyed bureaucratic power through political revolution. Because they play no essential role in the planned property relations over which they preside, the bureaucracy is not a ruling class in these states. It is a caste that is parasitic on the property relations of the workers' states.

The theories which assert that the bureaucracy is a new class fail to specify what new mode of production this class might be the essential expression of. Thus they are unable to settle the question of whether these societies are progressive or reactionary relative to capitalism. Do they inaugurate a whole new epoch that renders socialism a utopia? If they are reactionary relative to capitalism, does this mean that the latter has not yet outlived its historically progressive role? Starting from a break with historical materialism by defining the bureaucracy as a class on the basis of authority relations in state and factory

rather than on the basis of its relationship to the means of production, the new class theorists like Burnham and Shachtman progressively dismantled the whole Marxist programme. The theory of state capitalism attempts to cut the Gordian knot of the new class theory by insisting that no new mode of production exists, but that the bureaucracy constitutes a collective capitalist class.

Alas this "capitalism" exists without competing capitals and without the operation of the law of value internally to itself. Externally it "competes" in the production of use values-i.e. armaments. This eclectic theory makes a complete muddle of Marxist political economy. fails to comprehend the transition period and threatens to collapse into either social democratic or libertarian theories, just as its adherents oscillate between economic minimalism and preaching the ideal of socialism.

Ever since the Stalin group came to power under the reactionary slogan of "socialism in one country"; the Stalinists have aimed at a strategic alliance with world imperialism as a means of stabilising their national bureaucratic rule. In a series of revolutionary situations since the 1930s the Stalinists have played an indispensable role in maintaining or restabilising capitalist rule for the world bourgeoisie.

While the Stalinists are committed to a strategic alliance with imperialism their economic base in post-capitalist property relations constitutes an obstacle to world imperialism's drive for global domination. Hence world imperialism's strategic drive to break up the planned economies.

In order to preserve their Own power and privileges, the bureaucracy is therefore forced to defend the planned property relations in their own manner. It can materially aid forces that are struggling against imperialism. Stalinism can even-in specific circumstances-overthrow capitalist property relations and extend the sway of bureaucratically degenerate planned property relations. But in each case they do so as a means of stabilising their own bureaucratic rule. They support national liberation movements only to the extent that this strengthens Stalinism's global power and with the clear intention of preventing those struggles leading to the creation of healthy workers' states. In all cases where the Stalinists have created workers' states they have only done so once they have ensured that they have prevented the creation of the organs of a healthy workers' state - workers' councils and a workers' militia. Stalinism always allies with imperialism against revolutionary working class organisation and leadership.

Wherever it occurs and Whatever form it takes a Stalinist bureaucratic social revolution is counter-revolutionary. Such overturns Occur on the basis of a bureaucratic-repressive limitation of the independent action of the working class and therefore devalue the very notions of "revolution", "socialism" "workers' states" and "the planned economy". in the eyes of the masses. They retard the development of a revolutionary consciousness within the world proletariat. They create congenitally bureaucratized states in which the working class is politically expropriated. The measures carried through by the Stalinists in the course of a social overturn (expropriation of the bourgeoisie, statification of the means of production) while themselves revolutionary in character are achieved in a military-bureaucratic fashion. This means that the revolutionary programme during a Stalinist-led overturn, involves support for those measures, but by an organised independent revolutionary led working class that can defeat the bureaucratic-repressive measures of the Stalinists, destroy all remnants of bourgeois power and establish genuine proletarian power. Any programme involving political support for the Stalinists will be a programme not for socialism, but for the counter-revolutionary defeat of the working class at the hands of the Stalinists.

Stalinism necessarily has a contradictory character. The Stalinist bureaucracies rest on proletarian formations -either workers' states or workers' parties. For that reason they can be forced, despite themselves, to act against the bourgeoisie. However, if their leadership is not broken, then either the workers' state or organisation will be destroyed or it will be defended, and even extended, in a counter-revolutionary way. The contradictory character of Stalinism means that it can carry out progressive acts in

a manner which is counter-revolutionary, and with results that remain counter-revolutionary.

We reject the undialectical characterisation of Stalinism as "counter-revolutionary through and through", and the view that Stalinism has a "dual character" embracing separable "progressive" and "reactionary elements".

Born under the reactionary slogan of "Socialism in One Country", Stalinism has inevitably fragmented along national lines. The ruling bureaucracies have proved incapable of achieving the effective coordination of their economic and political mechanisms. Either they have remained in enforced subjugation to the Kremlin bureaucracy or they have struck their own strategic alliances with imperialism which - as is the case with both Yugoslavia and China - have run counter to the interests of other Stalinist bureaucracies and even to the very existence of other workers' states.

In the imperialised world, Stalinism has accommodated itself to the labour bureaucracy and nationalist petit-bourgeoisie. It does so with the reactionary programme of a democratic revolution aimed at national independence and bourgeois democracy. It fights in all these struggles to prevent the realisation of the programme of permanent revolution.

In the imperialist countries, Stalinism has accommodated itself to the labour bureaucracy. It advances the reformist programme of a reactionary alliance with "progressive" elements of the bourgeois class, to achieve a new form of democracy, transitional to the implementation of socialist measures. This reformist road to socialism in alliance with the bourgeoisie was historically projected by the Stalinists as having been made possible by the consolidation of "socialism" and the strength of "the socialist camp" as a force for world peace. Pursuit of that programme has seen successive "Eurocommunist" Stalinist parties distance themselves from and criticise the ruling Stalinist parties. However, unless they effectively deny that the USSR and the other workers' states are some form of historic gain for the working class - albeit only a "force for peace" - they will remain Stalinist parties. Should they make that break, they will finally become indistinguishable from the social democratic parties.

Against world imperialism we defend the workers' states as historic gains.

Against the Stalinist bureaucracies we fight for proletarian political revolution, for the creation of workers' councils and a workers' militia as the basis of a healthy workers' state based on democratically centralised planning. We fight to internationalise the political revolution as a means of overthrowing Stalinist tyranny, and in order to break with the crippling, narrow, nationalist programmes that have served as a fetter on the development of the productive forces of the degenerate workers' states. We fight to build revolutionary parties in all the degenerate workers' states. Without them, the mobilisations of the working class against the bureaucracy cannot be led to victory.

Internationalism

Despite the creation of a world market and a world division of labour dominated by the law of value, capital itself remains nationally based. This is reflected in the division of the world working class along national lines.

Ever since the Communist Manifesto raised the slogan "Workers of all countries unite!", internationalism, the recognition that the proletariat must overcome this division by uniting internationally to achieve its historic mission, has been the keystone of the communist programme.

The First International, the first practical attempt to forge this unity, formulated the fundamental need for international proletarian political independence and gave it organisational expression in the form of an

international party.

The Second International, building on the heritage of the First, led the formation of mass working class parties committed programmatically to the international overthrow of capitalism. However, the programme and practice of the major parties of the Second International, developed in the pre-imperialist epoch of capitalism, was inadequate to the tasks, and insufficient to guard against the dangers created by the development of imperialism. The leaders of these parties were bought off by the super-profits of their respective imperialisms and sided with "their" bourgeoisies in the first imperialist World War. Nonetheless, the Second International, as well as organising millions of workers in class-based parties, also carried within it the seeds of internationalism which were to develop in the form, above all, of the Russian Bolsheviks and the German Spartacusbund.

The victory of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, led by the Bolsheviks, once again raised the banner of internationalism against that of social chauvinism raised by the leaders of the Second International. The Third, or Communist International, in the period of its first four congresses, began the necessary task of systematising and codifying the lessons of the collapse of the Second International, the experience of the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary upsurge of 1918-23. However, this work of re-elaborating the communist programme for the imperialist epoch was never finished. The isolation of the young Soviet state and the consolidation of the political power of a counter-revolutionary bureaucratic caste in that state, destroyed the revolutionary character of the Communist International. Significantly, the first step in the programmatic degeneration of the Communist International was the retreat from internationalism contained in the reactionary theory of "Socialism in One Country".

Of the several political currents who opposed the various twists and turns of the Stalinised Communist International (each zigzag ultimately justified by "Socialism in One Country"), only one tendency, the Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky, upheld the revolutionary internationalist banner of the Communist programme. On the basis of the achievements of the first four congresses of the Communist International, and its own experience in combating the policies of the degenerated international in, for example, Britain, China, Germany and Spain, this current continued the work of programmatic re-elaboration begun by the Communist International. This work culminated in the Transitional Programme of 1938, the programmatic basis for the foundation of the Fourth International.

The Fourth International was not a mass revolutionary international. Its fundamental strength was its programme, its continuity of revolutionary Marxism and its dedicated cadre - the best class fighters of the 1930s. As such, the Fourth International had the potential of transforming itself, through the Transitional Programme becoming a guide to action for millions, rapidly and in the heat of an expected revolutionary upsurge as a result of the imperialist war, into a mass International.

This perspective was not realised. The period from 1938-43 saw the physical decimation of the FI's finest cadres (including Trotsky) by the combined forces of the Stalinists and imperialists on both sides of the war. Moreover, after the war, the expected revolutionary upsurge in Europe and America did not materialise. The post-war world saw two developments that the heirs of Trotsky were unable to understand and therefore unable to programmatically equip themselves to deal with. These were the democratic counter-revolution in the West under the auspices of a hegemonic US imperialism, followed by a long boom and not an economic collapse (as predicted by Trotsky), and the counterrevolutionary expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Faced with these unexpected developments, the FI failed to develop new perspectives and instead began to progressively adapt and tailor its programme to non-revolutionary leaderships in different areas of the international class struggle: the Stalinist bureaucracy in Yugoslavia, petit-bourgeois nationalism in the

imperialised world, and the Stalinist and social democratic parties in the imperialist countries. These programmatic adaptations, dating from 1948, after the Second World Congress of the FI, corroded the FI's revolutionary politics and caused its collapse into centrism. At the 1951 World Congress of the FI, this centrism was codified, in particular with regard to Stalinism, when the FI declared that no political revolution or Trotskyist party were necessary for Titoite Yugoslavia.

No section of the FI fought this degeneration into centrism on a revolutionary basis. The crisis that this degeneration caused in the ranks of the FI, led to a split in 1953. On the one side stood the International Secretariat of Pablo and Mandel. On the other side stood the "orthodox" International Committee of the SWP(US), Gerry Healy in Britain and Pierre Lambert in France. The conflict between these two sides was primarily organisational. Both sides declared total loyalty to the centrist positions of the 1951 Congress. As such, neither side represented the continuity of Trotskyism. There has been no continuity on an international scale since 1951. Neither the "Pabloites" nor the "anti-Pabloites" represented a break from centrism. We do not regard ourselves as standing within either of these traditions. We regard them and their principal offshoots (USFI, FI(ICR), IC, etc) as the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International. Forward to the refounding of a Leninist-Trotskyist International! For a new world party of socialist revolution!

We stand by the revolutionary positions, traditions and methods of each of the four Internationals in their revolutionary periods. We recognise that the primary objective of revolutionaries throughout the world is the re-creation of a revolutionary International, based firmly on the achievements of the previous Internationals, and on a re-elaborated international programme.

Democratic demands

The imperialist countries

In the imperialist countries, bourgeois democracy is principally a mechanism for subordinating the proletariat to the interests of finance capital and the monopolies. It is the masked form of the bourgeoisie's dictatorship. Parliament is a secondary forum for debate between bourgeois politicians. Secondary because real decisions are taken behind this façade by a small stratum of bankers, industrialists, generals, bureaucrats and judges. In the imperialist epoch, the tendency for real power to lie with these representatives of the executive the tendency of bonapartism - grows ever sharper, especially in periods of imperialist stagnation.

The democratic programme once had explosive revolutionary potential. "Universal suffrage"; "the Republic"; these slogans cut to the quick not only the feudalists, but also the bourgeoisie, who even during the epoch of bourgeois revolutions, feared and hated the masses. Imperialism created the basis for a colonial slave-owners' "democracy" in the metropolitan countries. In the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy, the capitalists found the means to make the masses "safe for democracy". Yet the very convulsions of imperialism threaten to make, and indeed have made, these concessions unendurable for the ruling class. The democratic rights - unionisation and political organisation of the working class; freedom of assembly, speech and press; all are enormous gains for the proletariat.

Thus the working class must defend these gains against the constant encroachment of the class enemy. These attacks are most constant upon the trade unions, which the bourgeoisie consider to be their major obstacle. Nor can the working class abandon any of the democratic demands which strike at the concealed elements of dictatorship and bonapartism within the "democracies" - the hereditary monarchy; the disguised elective monarchy of the Presidency; unelected or indirectly elected second chambers; unequal electoral systems which misrepresent the popular will; the unelected judiciary; clerical tutelage over the

state. AU these must be attacked. Where the bourgeoisie have trampled on democracy (as in Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Greece during the last fifty years), democratic demands have taken on a revolutionary force once more.

However, never again will the democratic programme take on the relative autonomy it possessed in the nineteenth century. In all imperialist countries it is immediately entwined with the class goals and transitional demands of the proletariat. All attempts to create a "democratic" road to socialism are stale and reactionary utopias. Stalinism constantly pushes forward its Popular Front _ an alliance between the proletariat and the phantom liberal bourgeoisie as a "defence of democracy". Despite its talk of "hegemony" and "broad democratic alliances", it converts democracy into a fatal trap for the proletariat - one which prevents it settling accounts with its class enemy. The social democratic and Stalinist "democratic" programmes have repeatedly allowed the bourgeoisie to live to fight another day when the workers' struggles had brought it to death's door.

The semi-colonial countries

In the semi-colonial countries, their de facto political subordination and their economic exploitation have prevented or aborted any prolonged "democratic" era. Colonial rule has generally given way to military-bonapartist tyranny, with but short interludes of bourgeois-nationalist demagogy. The political and social tasks of the bourgeois revolution remain unfulfilled or empty of the greater part of their progressive content. Land to the tillers, national independence; political freedom; industrialisation; universal literacy; equal rights for women; separation of church and state - all these remain demands with an enormous revolutionary force. Yet the decisive tasks of the democratic programme cannot be resolved within the framework of capitalism in the epoch of imperialism.

The class links with the bourgeoisie (based on private property) and the repeated denial or violation of democratic rights by imperialism and its local agents, strengthens the democratic illusions of the peasantry and the petit bourgeoisie. In order to combat these illusions, the insufficiency of bourgeois democracy must be demonstrated in practice. The proletariat must therefore place these revolutionary-democratic tasks in the very forefront of its programme. It must mobilise all the exploited and oppressed masses - above all the peasantry - for a struggle to overthrow the imperialist dominion and its local agents. Despite its willingness to undertake joint actions against imperialism with the bourgeois nationalist parties, the proletariat's party must expose in words and deeds the falsity of the claims of the so-called national bourgeoisie.

The culmination of the revolutionary-democratic programme is the call for a National or Constituent Assembly. This retains considerable progressive force as a slogan, wherever the major tasks of the programme remain unfulfilled. Wherever the masses suffer the economic domination of imperialism, wherever they face military juntas armed to the teeth by imperialism, wherever they follow the deceitful "national" bourgeoisie, the demand "For a sovereign Constituent Assembly" has a sharp revolutionary edge. It has, of course, vital pre-conditions, essentially associated with such demands as the freedom of political organisation, press, speech and assembly during the elections to it. All the exploited and oppressed must organise to press their demands upon it. They must transform their existing organisations or create new ones which democratically express their views, and can direct their struggles. The creation of councils (soviets) of workers, peasants and the urban poor, together with the extension of such bodies into the armed forces and the creation of a popular militia, can alone guarantee the expression of the popular will, free of the coercion and blackmail of the imperialist powers and the generals.

Only through the creation of soviets and a people's militia can the revolutionary democratic tasks hope to be fulfilled. They are guarantors of the Constituent Assembly - of its democratic election, convocation, and its defence against reaction. The revolutionary party of the proletariat must fight throughout not only for a

programme of revolutionary democratic and transitional demands, but must also clearly pose the goal of a workers' and peasants' government - a state based on soviets - not a bourgeois republic.

When the worker-peasant masses are won to this goal, then the soviets can and must dispense with the bourgeois democracy. This becomes important where the Constituent Assembly becomes a forum for counter-revolution. Clearly, the balance and inter-relation of democratic and transitional demands, the applicability of specific governmental slogans, and the order of deployment of tactics depends on a concrete analysis of a given revolution. Phases or stages in revolutionary struggle exist, and disaster awaits the party which seriously mistakes one for the other.

Nonetheless, there are no a priori, watertight "stages" - democratic and then socialist, each with its governmental form. In the 1920s and 1930s, the degeneration of the Comintern saw successive "developments" of the stages theory. Starting from the "bloc of four classes" which predicated a strategic alliance with the national bourgeoisie for the "national democratic" revolution against imperialism. Stalin moved through false left zig-zags to a bloc with "democratic" imperialism against fascism.

Since the degeneration of the Fourth International, a similar process of stage-ism has nullified the programme of permanent revolution. Scandalously, in the name of the "anti-imperialist united front", they reserve a place therein for the national bourgeoisie. They confine their programme to democratic tasks, by giving political support to bourgeois nationalist governments. In short, these "Trotskyists" have travelled the road back to the Menshevik-Stalinist popular front. They have relegated agitation for soviets, an armed militia and a workers' and peasants' government to a later stage, which never arrives. They thereby bolster bourgeois democracy by asserting its self-sufficiency for the whole of a mythical "democratic stage".

The degenerate workers' states

In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, bureaucratic counterrevolution has thwarted the fulfilment of many of the historic tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The political revolution must take up and fight for the progressive elements of these democratic tasks. It must provide the arena for the mobilisation of the proletariat itself, and the means whereby it rallies all the oppressed strata around it. It must do this despite, or rather because of, the fact that bourgeois social counter-revolution itself attempts to use democratic slogans as mobilising factors. Furthermore, the Stalinists' crushing of proletarian democracy - the democracy of the soviets - itself fuels and regenerates bourgeois democratic illusions, and illusions in the parties of petit bourgeois democracy (social democracy, peasant and nationalist parties).

In different countries, different elements of the unfulfilled tasks of the bourgeois revolution exist - national oppression, the oppression of women and gays. Revolutionaries must, in certain circumstances, raise the demand for an independent workers' council republic, thus preventing nationalist grievances from being exploited by bourgeois counter-revolution. Likewise, we raise demands against the oppression of women and gays.

Because the Stalinist bureaucracy has crushed the organs of proletarian political power, replacing them with a lifeless imitation of bourgeois democratic forms (parliament, elections by universal suffrage), the call for free elections, for a multiplicity of parties, for the secret ballot, all find a powerful resonance amongst the masses themselves. Our programme is for proletarian soviet democracy, with freedom for soviet parties, for all power to the soviets. The existence of a parliament with bourgeois (counter-revolutionary) parties in it would be a rallying point for all the forces of bourgeois reaction.

Therefore, the demand for a freely elected parliament is not our demand.

Should, nevertheless, the masses take up this slogan, should the workers' councils (as in Hungary in 1956) espouse it, we would fight for the following measures to guard the proletarian dictatorship, and expose in practice the reactionary essence of parliamentarianism.

- i) Fight to strengthen and centralise the soviets themselves into a national congress of soviets.
- ii) Ensure that any elections to a parliamentary body were conducted under soviet control, debarring any candidates actively seeking the overthrow of the proletarian property forms, or workers' and peasants' power.
- iii) Place before the "constituent" parliament or assembly, the project of a purely soviet republic.
- iv) Seek, on the authority of the soviets and with the use of a genuine workers' militia, the dissolution of the assembly, either when it had ratified soviet power, or should it fail to do so, to disperse it as a tool of counter-revolution.

This method of fighting for democratic demands in countries where capitalism has been overthrown, ensures that democratic illusions are superseded by the triumph of proletarian democracy and the defeat of bureaucratic tyranny.

The transitional programme

The programme of revolutionary communism - Trotskyism - is a transitional programme. Its scientific character stems from the recognition of the imperialist epoch as one of transition between capitalism and socialism. In periods of imperialist crises, such as the present one opened up in the 1970s and 1980s, the immediate demands of the working class clash with capitalist priorities. Hence, direct action for such demands poses the possibility of developing into a struggle for power.

At the heart of the programme is a system of interlinked transitional demands. Every demand is linked to the struggle for workers' control and the formation of independent, class-fighting bodies. In and through these, each partial solution, each concession wrenched from the bourgeoisie, raises the political stakes. Each gain deepens the confrontation between the classes, exacerbates the crisis and poses more sharply the need to struggle for total victory.

Workers Power seeks to develop its programme in line with the method employed by Leon Trotsky. The 1938 "Transitional Programme" of the Fourth International was both a culmination and a summation of the programmatic work of previous generations of revolutionary Marxists. In its turn, the 1938 programme stood upon and enriched the earlier Marxist programmes; the Communist Manifesto, the declarations of the Bolshevik Party and the theses of the revolutionary Comintern in its first four Congresses.

The historic advance of the Transitional Programme was that it successfully resolved the programmatic problems inherited from the Second International. These problems involved the gap between the struggle over immediate and partial demands and the struggle for full working class power. The old "minimum" programme was limited to demands which did not transcend the concessions possible within the framework of bourgeois society. This programme became the property of trade union functionaries and the leaders of social democracy. The perspective of proletarian power was separated off. This "final goal" was the subject of abstract propaganda and was replaced in practical terms by the isolated tactic of social reform.

The 1938 programme bridged the gap of the minimum and maximum programmes. In developing our programme, we affirm this method. We therefore reject attempts to plunder individual demands, rip them

from their place in the programme, and treat them as isolated trade union demands, robbed of their transitional content and their role as steps towards workers' control. We also affirm the premise of the 1938 programme - the crisis of proletarian leadership. For that reason we, like Trotsky, consider it essential to start from today's needs, not from the current consciousness of the working class. We also affirm the international character of the Transitional Programme. The proletarian revolution cannot be successful if isolated within the framework of national barriers.

The Transitional Programme was not a catalogue of truisms, good for all times and situations. Rather, it corresponded to a situation of acute economic crisis, impending war, the rise of fascism and the collapse of the Communist International under the dead weight of Stalinism. Thus the 1938 programme was focussed upon the tasks facing the working class in the pre-revolutionary situation that would soon open up as a result of these objective circumstances. In focussing was only possible because the Transitional Programme embodied the lessons of the successes and defeats of the proletariat during the previous twenty years.

Consequently, the task of revolutionaries today is not to fetishise the 1938 programme, but to utilise its method to re-elaborate and re-focus the programme of revolutionary communism to deal with the renewed period of imperialist crisis which opened up some fifteen years ago.

The degeneration of the Fourth International resulted from the failure to re-elaborate the 1938 programme in the light of the changed conditions after the Second World War. Simple affirmation of the validity of the 1938 program is insufficient. A new programme is needed, one which is both a continuation and a development of the Transitional Programme. An adequate programme today must accomplish several tasks. It must develop clear positions on the expansion of imperialism after the war; on the strengthening of, and renewed crises within Stalinism; it must extend and enrich the Transitional Programme's condensed conclusion on tactics and strategy of permanent revolution in the semi-colonial world; it must re-state and further the tradition of communist work in the trade unions and reformist parties; it should excavate and develop the Bolshevik positions on the movements of the oppressed. Last but not least, today's programme must embody the conclusion of a careful analysis of the key revolutionary situations of the last period and the use and misuse of revolutionary tactics within them.

Of course, this does not mean that communists cannot intervene and give leadership to the class struggle until all programmatic work is complete. This would mean waiting forever since the communist programme is, in a sense, never complete: it is tested and corrected in the light of experience. The Comintern was able to lead mighty struggles without a finished programme. The movement for the FI attempted to shape the course of events in Spain in the 1930s before the Transitional Programme had been written. The class struggle does not wait for a finished programme. Rather, it is a constant spur to develop the programme. In no sense does this mean that revolutionaries should abandon their programmatic work - far from it. Even while attempting to chart a victorious course in Spain, Trotsky worked untiringly to re-elaborate the communist programme and lay the basis for the Transitional Programme.

Following this method, we recognise the centrality of programmatic work but constantly focus that work and the legacy of tactics and demands, that we have from the Marxist tradition, into specific Action Programmes for particular periods of class struggle, or particular sections of the working class.

In producing and attempting to utilise such programmes in the class struggle, we are using the method applied by Trotsky when he produced the Action Programme for France in 1934. We apply our overall strategy - the Marxist programme for proletarian power - to particular areas of work. An Action Programme must therefore include all the major elements of the full programme, charting the strategy from present conditions and struggles to the struggle for state power. But it is sharply focussed to the specific

circumstances facing a given section of the proletariat, or facing the whole proletariat at a given time.

It is based on a careful appraisal of the needs, political strengths and weaknesses of the proletariat.

In this way we enrich our work and practice through testing the vital programmatic work we are carrying out in the class struggle. Indeed, it is only along this path that genuine revolutionaries can construct a programme which stands upon the shoulders of Trotsky, Lenin and Marx. Only this way will it be possible to put an end to the foraging among the ruins of the Transitional Programme so characteristic of the centrist epigones of Trotsky's Fourth International.

Major tactics in the Class struggle

The Marxist strategy - for the achievement of communism via proletarian revolution, the destruction of the bourgeois state and its replacement by a workers' state based on soviets and a workers' militia - requires tactics for its implementation. By tactics we mean the methods used for winning particular battles in the class war. Principled revolutionary tactics are therefore subordinate to the revolutionary strategy. They are those which raise the political class consciousness of the proletariat, consolidate its vanguard and prepare it organisationally for the seizure and exercise of state power.

Since the degeneration of the Comintern, the working class movement has been dominated by reformism. Since the collapse of the Fourth International, there has been no organised revolutionary cadre on an international scale. This has meant that at least two generations of proletarian militants have been educated in an incorrect, falsified understanding of the communist arsenal of tactics and their principled application as developed and codified by the first four congresses of the Comintern and the FI in its revolutionary period before the end of the 1940s.

Because incorrect tactics can lead to strategic defeat, it is of paramount importance that the tactical lessons learnt by the communist movement be re-asserted. Because the immediate practice of political groupings consists of tactical operations it is at this level that underlying strategic conceptions are first visible. For this reason the regroupment of revolutionary forces must proceed as much from agreement on the major tactical questions as from agreement on the axioms of revolutionary theory or strategy. In this category of "major tactical" questions we include those tactics which, while they can never be programmatically imperative in the manner of strategic questions such as the seizure of state power through insurrection will, necessarily, have to be included in the operations of a revolutionary party.

The united front

This tactic is applicable where revolutionaries do not yet constitute the majority of the proletarian vanguard. Its aim is to mobilise workers to gain necessary objectives and, in so doing, break them from their reformist or centrist leaders, by exposing these leaders' inadequacy even in defending elementary class interests. The method of the united front is the proposal for joint action by communists and non-communists to achieve goals which meet the felt needs of the masses. Crucially it can be used in periods of capitalist offensive against the workers, when established leaders come under intense pressure from their supporters to defend workers' interests.

To be operated in a principled fashion, the following guidelines must be observed:

- ? The demands of the united front are addressed to the established leaderships of the working class and to the rank and file.
- ? The demands must be for joint action, not propaganda.

? The communists must retain, and use, the right to criticise their "allies" at all times during the united front as well as after it, and must campaign for their own communist programme.

? The communists must break the united front wherever their "allies" shrink from or sabotage the demands and struggle for the united front.

These criteria govern all usages of the united front, from the level of the isolated local action to that of government. They govern the anti-imperialist united front, as dealt with in a previous section, and the workers' united front in the imperialist countries.

The workers' government

As well as being a description of the revolutionary government communists strive to achieve, the "workers' government" (or workers' and peasants' government) can be operated as a united front tactic in circumstances in which the question of power is posed, but when the working class remains under the leadership of reformists or centrists.

Revolutionaries would demand the formation of a government of the workers and demand that the reformists break with the bourgeoisie. We would call for a workers' government that would arm the workers, base itself on and be answerable to their councils of action and to other rank and file organisations. It would also take steps to expropriate the major capitalists and introduce workers' control of production. Only if a "united front" government took such measures could it be designated as a "workers' government"; that is, one which communists would give political support to, and under certain conditions (e.g. retaining complete independence of agitation), enter. Under no circumstances do we designate as "workers'" governments, governments of social democratic and labour parties (or coalitions with Stalinist or petit-bourgeois nationalist parties) which fail to carry out the above measures.

These "fake" or "bourgeois workers' governments" are merely tolerated by the bourgeoisie to undermine and ward off the revolutionary offensive of the proletariat. To designate such governments as "workers' governments" is to dilute and confuse the communist programme and to become left apologists for the reformists.

We regard it as most improbable that reformists would form a workers' government, in a period of acute revolutionary crisis, except under the greatest pressure from an aroused working class, organised in soviets. However, as a united front demand in a critical situation, the workers' government slogan would expose the misleaders, and prepare the working class for power. In this sense, the slogan has an "algebraic" character. By this we mean that the composition of such a government is not declared as fixed in advance. If, in the unlikely event, a workers' government other than the dictatorship of the proletariat came into being, then it would merely be a prelude or bridge to such a dictatorship. In no sense is the workers' government a necessary historical stage that has to be gone through, prior to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The general strike

The general strike is the second most powerful weapon, after the insurrection, available to the working class. It is qualitatively different from other forms of strike action in that it objectively poses the question of state power; it paralyses the functioning of society, requiring the proletariat to go beyond its normal forms of organisation. A general strike calls down the full force of the state machine on the working class which, consequently, must develop its own military capacities, its own ability to organise food supplies etc., While the general strike puts the question of insurrection on the order of the day, it is not itself the insurrection.

The slogan of the general strike has to be raised where the issues confronting the working class go beyond partial or sectional questions. The initial objective of the general strike must have a class-wide relevance, even if this consists of supporting a key section of workers against a government (as happened in Britain in 1926).

However, the logic and dynamic of a general strike can take it rapidly beyond its initial objectives. Revolutionaries seek to develop this dynamic and prevent any attempts to limit the scope of a general strike once it is mobilised. This dynamic is precisely to pose the question - who shall be master of the house, who shall rule in society? While it does not, in itself, resolve this question, the importance of the general strike for Marxists is that in posing it, it can potentially open up the road to the insurrection and the seizure of state power. This is the goal revolutionaries strive for in every general strike. For this reason the general strike slogan must always be accompanied by slogans for the creation or mobilisation of the workers' organisations - militias, councils of action necessary to allow for the revolutionary development of the potential of the general strike.

Whether or not it is preceded by a general strike, working class revolution must take the form of insurrection, the armed seizure of power by the workers' organisations, under the leadership of a revolutionary party. A central component of all tactics deployed by revolutionaries, therefore, must be the preparation of the military capacity of the working class. From the first formation of picket defence squads to the creation of armed workers' detachments and the winning over of key sections of the regular armed forces, the arming of the working class is not an option but a necessity.

The organisations of the working class

The trade unions are the bedrock organisations created by the working class to defend and improve their living standards and working conditions under capitalism. To this extent they are instruments for domesticating the working class within capitalism. They are imbued with narrow divisions between crafts and skills. They are the base of a privileged trade union bureaucracy which has a material interest in maintaining the wage contract between capital and labour. This contract gives the bureaucracy its reason for being. It arbitrates and negotiates within the framework of capitalism. As such, the bureaucracy can be characterised as a caste, with interests distinct from the rank and file and counterposed to them.

As organisations that mobilise large numbers of workers against the employing class, the unions also have the potential of being transformed into organs of struggle against capitalism. Their C.T. and bureaucratisation can be transcended. In all major battles between the proletariat and capitalism, the interests of rank and file trades unionists conflict sharply with those of bureaucrats. Only through struggle against the trade union bureaucracy can the trade unions themselves be taken into the hands of rank and file workers and their directly elected and accountable leaders, and turned into effective organs of class struggle.

We fight for the construction of democratic industrial unions in which all officials are elected, accountable and recallable, and are paid no more than the average rate of pay of their members. We fight for the formation of factory committees in every plant and workplace, representing all unions and all workers in the workplace. These factory committees need to fight to defend the interests of all workers in the workplace, and crucially, they must struggle to impose workers' control of production, as part of the struggle for socialist revolution. The struggle for control poses the question of which class rules - a question that cannot be resolved within the confines of one factory or industry. Hence we struggle to commit the unions to the struggle to overthrow capitalism and fight against those who would wish to give the unions an unpolitical, neutral or reformist character.

To co-ordinate such a struggle, and to work for the defeat and replacement of the bureaucrats with genuine representatives of the rank and file, an opposition is needed in every union and across unions. We fight to build a united front of militants against the bureaucrats. Within the trade unions, the form of the united front, in present conditions, will be a rank and file movement, a fighting alliance of rank and file militants. By this we mean that revolutionary communists must fight alongside reformist and centrist workers, in all their struggles to defend or extend the interests of the class, placing no conditions on our involvement. However, at all times we counterpose to the methods, slogans and goals of the reformists and centrists, those of our own revolutionary action programme. In this way, we seek to build a revolutionary communist leadership in the rank and file movement, with the avowed aim of turning the trade unions into organs of struggle against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the working class must break out of the confines of industrial trade union organisation if it is to succeed in smashing the capitalist state. To this end, in all major struggles, we call for and try to build, councils of action comprising delegates from workers in struggle and workers supporting them. Such delegates should be directly elected deputies and should be recallable. They must be authoritative representatives of the workplace. To ensure victory in any generalised strike action against the bosses, we urge these councils to be organised in every locality and for them to organise the armed defence of the working class through a workers' militia. In circumstances of class wide struggle, we call for the creation of a national central council of delegates from all local workers' councils to co-ordinate and lead the struggle. Conflict that has reached such a level will, of necessity, pose the question of which class rules in society. We answer that the workers must rule. They must seize power and rule through workers' councils.

Soviets can arise only at a time when the masses enter onto the road of revolutionary struggle. They can survive only on the basis of a revolutionary situation. In all the major revolutionary struggles of the exploited and oppressed, embryos of soviet-type organisation have been created. The task of revolutionaries is to extend those fighting organisations of the masses into a fully-developed soviet form.

Soviets unite the representatives of all fighting groups, and throw open their doors to all the oppressed and exploited. All proletarian political currents compete within them on the basis of the widest possible democracy. Individual delegates must be responsible to and recallable by the base units of the exploited and oppressed. The leading bodies of the soviets, in their turn, must be recallable by the soviets themselves. Only thus can the soviets be protected against bureaucratisation or incorporation into the bourgeois state.

The very existence of soviets immediately creates a Dual Power situation. By their nature, they pose the potential of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist re-construction of society. But only revolutionary communists have a programme for the final victory of the soviets. Reformists and Stalinists will seek to stamp out the embryos of soviet-type organisation, turning them either into means for re-establishing bourgeois rule (as in Russia after the February revolution and Germany in 1918), into trade union type negotiating bodies (as was the case with the leadership of Solidarnosc after the formation of the inter-factory committees), or into stage-managed adjuncts to the Stalinists as organs of so-called "Popular Power". We fight to prevent any of these forms of demobilising the masses. Soviets without revolutionary leadership will not bring about the socialist revolution. For this reason, we fight to build a revolutionary communist party with deep roots in the working class. Only with such a party at its head will the creation and consolidation of the class rule of the proletariat be possible.

The crisis of leadership in the working class

The world is ripe for revolution. Socialism is on the agenda. There can be no question that in a world in

which millions starve, and are deprived of the right to work, while capitalism stunts the development of the productive forces and indeed threatens the destruction of the planet in order to safeguard profits for a handful of people, that the objective pre-requisites for socialism exist. The working class, the only force that can destroy capitalism, is held back from victory over capitalism by its bureaucratic and reformist leaderships. The working masses have, time and again, moved into action against the bosses - France 1968, Chile 1973 and Portugal 1974/75 are but the most recent examples. Yet, in each case, the masses have been held in check, or treacherously turned upon, by their existing leaderships. The workers have been outflanked because within their own ranks there has not been an alternative revolutionary leadership.

Despite willingly engaging in ferocious struggles with the class enemy, on a world scale the working class has remained politically weak. It is dominated politically by agents of the class enemy, and it has not been able to defeat these agents. This political weakness creates the conditions in which bureaucracies have been able to get away with betrayals. However, in the face of attacks from the employing class, the masses have shown a repeated willingness to fightback with direct action. This creates the possibility of transcending the political weakness of the working class, by pitting the rank and file against the leaders. It creates the best conditions for smashing all bureaucratic obstacles to revolutionary struggles. The inevitable conflicts with capital that erupt are the conflicts within which a revolutionary party can and must be forged.

The mortal enemy of that party will be reformism in either its Stalinist or social democratic guise. In the imperialised world, petit-bourgeois nationalists will also prove to be the enemy of the revolutionary communist party. We have demonstrated the nature of Stalinism and petit-bourgeois nationalism and their threat to the victory of revolution. Social democratic reformism - for example the Labour Party in Britain or the Socialist Party in France - is no less an enemy of the struggle for genuine workers' power.

Social democratic reformism is the political expression of trade union negotiation with capital. and has its origins in the Second International. It has a contradictory nature; it is socially rooted in the working class - in particular its privileged strata, the labour aristocracy - but it is committed to the bourgeois state and the defence of bourgeois property relations. Social democratic parties are, therefore, "bourgeois workers' parties". The highest aspiration of social democracy is to manage capitalism in the interests of "the people". Its political strategy, therefore, is the creation and maintenance of a bourgeois democracy within which it can be elected into government. A social democratic government is totally committed to the defence of capitalism against the interests of the proletariat. Such a government is a "bourgeois workers' government".

It will drown the working class in blood either by carrying out the counterrevolution itself, as in Germany in 1918, or by politically and physically disarming the proletariat in the face of the counter-revolution, as in Chile in 1973. We reject the idea that there can be a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. This tenet of social democratic reformism has proved itself time and time again disastrous for the working class. The working class must rid itself of reformism if it is to avoid future catastrophic defeats.

In all its forms, reformism is politically consistently bourgeois. Centrism, by contrast, is characterised by inconsistency, wavering between the needs of the proletariat and those of the bourgeoisie. In this it reflects the social position of the petit-bourgeoisie.

Centrism's vacillations mean that it can never be a stable force. It is incapable of building or evolving into a revolutionary party, because it can never develop a revolutionary programme. Faced with a decisive test of the class struggle, most especially the test of power, the choice of either/or, centrism will shatter into a thousand pieces. Insulated from this choice, centrism can enjoy long periods of existence, but in doing so it does not cease to be an unstable, vacillating force entirely capable of going over in whole or in parts to the

camp of reformism and the class enemy. To become a revolutionary communist organisation, a centrist group must make a decisive break, or series of breaks, with its past centrist politics and practice.

An understanding of the direction in which a centrist organisation is moving is vital for Marxists. Is it moving to the left - in which case we should encourage it, or is it moving to the right - in which case we should denounce it? The direction and pace of its movement, of course, depends on the tempo of class struggle. Under all circumstances, Marxists make no concessions to the politics of centrism, though the tone of criticism may vary depending on the direction in which a centrist group is moving.

Centrism's fatal flaw is its faith that the historical process absolves it of the task of consciously leading revolutions. But fatalism, faith in the historical process, always leads to defeat. That is why neither left nor right centrism can ever adopt a correct, systematic revolutionary course. There can be no question that a broad centrist group is in any way a substitute for the revolutionary party.

While the working class remains under the leadership of reformism, centrism or petit-bourgeois nationalism, it will be defeated. It will remain trapped by a crisis of leadership. The socialist revolution cannot be victorious spontaneously. It is a conscious act, requiring a proletariat conscious of what it is fighting to achieve. Only if the crisis of leadership is resolved by winning the vanguard of the international proletariat to a revolutionary party, will the victory of socialism be assured. For this reason revolutionaries direct all their efforts to building a party rooted in the most class-conscious layers of the working class, those constantly renewed in struggles as they break out - who lead the rank and file in action against capitalism and the reformist bureaucracies.

The revolutionary party is not an optional extra in the struggle for power.

It is the key weapon of the working class. Countless revolutionary situations have turned into their opposite - bloody counter-revolution - thanks to the absence of a party based on the programme of communism, grouping under its banner the most class conscious working class militants. The party sets as its tasks overcoming the unevenness of working class experience and consciousness, the fighting of bourgeois ideas within the working class, the presentation of the lessons of past struggles and the bonding together of all the fragmented struggles that spontaneously occur under capitalism. It carries out these tasks with the aim of developing a conscious and coherent offensive against capitalism.

A revolutionary party must consist predominantly of revolutionary working class militants. It must be the real vanguard of the class. Building such a party in Britain and internationally is the primary task of the Workers Power group in Britain, and of our fraternal organisation in Ireland, the Irish Workers Group.

Our programmatic work on Stalinism, social democratic reformism, centrism, the trade unions, women, and imperialism, is geared towards providing rock solid foundations for such a party. Without such foundations, all talk of a party is nonsense. As we have repeated many times, however, foundations without anything built upon them are useless. Our programmatic work is designed to win us recruits from the working class. Passive propaganda, however will not achieve this. A vigorous intervention into the actual struggles of the working class, the focussing of our programme and propaganda to those struggles, an active commitment to the victory of those struggles, however partial they may be, will win us recruits. We are a fighting, not a passive, propaganda group - fighting to pass beyond our present limitations of size and resources and to develop into becoming a factor in events in the class struggle. To help us achieve this goal, we urge all revolutionary-minded militants to contact us, discuss our activities and our ideas with us, and join us.

