

# How Solidarity Can Change The World

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Articles by Frederick Engels, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky

With an introduction by Sean Matgamna.

## Introduction

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*"Can the (socialists) be against reform? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the [socialists] the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal - the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reform and revolution there is then for the [socialists] an indissoluble tie."*

Rosa Luxemburg

*"It is necessary to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all our strength in order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link."*

V I Lenin

As we rush towards the 21st century the state of the world testifies to the truth that working-class socialism is not only a good idea, but a stark necessity for humankind. Capitalism is still a system of waste, irrationality and savage inhumanity. Wage slavery and exploitation are at the heart and root of capitalism. Every year tens of

millions of "Third World" children die needlessly and horribly under this system ruled by bankers, factory owners and self-righteous media magnates. In some Latin American cities unemployment is 40%, in Europe now over 15 million are unemployed. Socialism is necessary.

Yet the credibility of socialism is buried under the debris of Stalinism, that savage and malign pseudo-socialism. That Stalinism was the "socialism that failed" is now the conventional wisdom. The ideas of socialism are everywhere under attack. They are at the nadir of influence and prestige. Socialism is reduced to a vague word. Most people haven't a clue what real socialism is about or what it would look like.

The reformist counterfeit of socialism is in a state of collapse scarcely less complete than that of Stalinist socialism. In Britain, the best fruits of reform socialism, the Health Service and the Welfare State, are in ruins. In many countries, working-class organisations now have less weight and are less self-confident than they were in the decades when they forced welfare and other reforms on the bourgeoisie. In Britain, the labour movement - without which socialism can never be more than "good ideas" - bears the scars and mutilations of two decades of defeat, and of structural changes in industry forced through on the bosses' terms.

The labour movement has been curbed and is half-stifled. The trade unions are tied up by what New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair himself has called, "the most restrictive laws in the western world." Everything that makes for effective trade unionism is illegal in Britain - solidarity strikes, for example - actions, to take one of the finest examples of what the Tories outlawed, like the miners' strikes to back the demands of hospital workers. Wide swathes of British industry are no longer unionised. The Labour Party, organised by the trade unions a hundred years ago so that there could be an independent working-class force to fight and bargain in Parliament on our behalf, is in the process of being hijacked by cliques of lawyers, journalists, and practising capitalists, whose political outlook is closer to Thatcherism and Reaganism than to socialism - or even the drive for reform characteristic of the old Labour Party in its best days. The organised working class is being driven out of politics.

Socialists and labour movement activists are thus faced with a series of battles to remake and rebuild the labour movement and to win back the freedom for trade union action destroyed by the Thatcherites and still banned under New Labour. The unorganised must be organised into trade unions. Class must be restored to its proper place as the measure for the labour movement of everything in political and public life. The possibility of a workers' government, a government that will minimally do for the working class and its movement what the Tories in power do for the bourgeoisie, must be restored. These problems should not dishearten but energise those who understand the reason why the working class has to fight once again basic battles that were won by our parents and their parents - and then lost. It is in the nature of capitalism.

History tells us that the working class and its movement are repeatedly made, re-made, and made over again by the never-ending changes in capitalist production and technology and by the outcome of the struggles between labour and capital. The working class pays dearly for missed chances and defeats. The working-class movement is forced again and again to resurrect, remake and redefine itself. To keep their bearings, its militants are forced to probe the past for lessons, parallels, examples and precedents. The socialists are the memory of the class, the curators of its historical experiences, and the harbingers of revival.

Tremendous transformations in the consciousness and organisation of the working class can happen quickly - so quickly that they seem miraculous to those who do not comprehend why they happen. The everyday consciousness of the workers under capitalism does not correspond to their objective needs. When an event - a strike for example - makes that clear to many workers, they can be catapulted forward. In 1968 in France 9 million workers who had seemed dormant and politically depressed suddenly seized the factories. Another example: the events that launched the modern labour movement at the end of the last century. The docks had armies of casual workers employed on a short-time basis as ships came and went. They were typically brutalised and degraded men who drifted down from better work into docking. Docker competed with docker, sometimes in physical fights, to gain a few hours' work. No group of workers was more distant from the ideal and practice of working-class solidarity.

Then they were influenced by the agitation of Marxian socialists like Tom Mann, John Burns, Eleanor Marx, Harry Quelch and others, who were not themselves dockers. They struck for a wage rise and suddenly organised themselves into a trade union. Over time, these dockers, who had seemed to be the most degraded and unorganisable of workers, created a splendid working-class culture of solidarity, animated by the idea that a blow against one is a blow against all. They lived in their workaday lives by an ethic - solidarity - at stark odds with the dog-eat-dog principle of capitalism, an ethic which, generalised to society as a whole, is the seed of a higher and better civilisation. Their solidarity was legendary in the labour movement. Miracles happen!

In that case the work of socialist agitators, propagandists and organisers made it happen. Things like that can be made to happen again. There are vast stifled reserves of anger, resentment and energy in the British working class. The trade unions are still potentially a tremendous power. The possibilities for reviving genuine socialism are greater and more favourable than at any time since the rise, three quarters of a century ago, of Stalinism, which Leon Trotsky rightly called the leprosy of the labour movement. The collapse of Stalinism has opened the road for a mass rebirth of genuine socialism.

How quickly the labour movement unshackles and rebuilds itself, and once more goes on the offensive; how soon socialism is again erected into a force to challenge the domination over us of the rich and their political agents - that, to an appreciable degree, depends on the socialists. What can we do? What approaches are suggested

to us by the long history of the international labour movement? How can the elemental working-class struggle for palliatives, amelioration and reform be tied to the fight for socialist consciousness and for socialism? That is the subject of this collection of texts.

## **How "reform" struggles can revolutionise the labour movement**

Nothing is more obvious than that the duty of socialists - those who are worth anything - now is to go to the working class and into the working-class movement to help organise, reorganise and regenerate it, and to plant the seeds of unfalsified socialism once more, especially amongst the youth. Yet this work is scarcely being done.

The space that should be occupied by serious Marxist socialists doing this work is filled instead by a raucous tribe of middle-class sects impotently shouting about "revolution" and conducting catchpenny pseudo-campaigns of agitation on issues calculated to "fit the mood", advertise militancy, and attract recruits. A socialism that immerses itself in the working class and in working-class immediate concerns and, while advocating revolutionary socialist politics and perspectives, avoids becoming a toy-town "Bolshevik" sect - that today is the property of only a minority of the socialists.

Because that is so, objective possibilities for socialist renewal are being let go by unfructified. Great chances are being missed. A vastly destructive polarisation exists between the concerns of reform socialists and labour movement activists on one side and would-be revolutionary socialists on the other. The polarisation is, psychologically, a natural tendency. If it had not been overcome in the past, then the mass socialist labour movements would never have been built. How can we bridge the gap now? The burning question of the welfare state illustrates our point.

There is mass hostility to what the Tories have done and New Labour now do to the NHS, and to the Welfare State in general. They are "reforming" it out of existence. New Labour no longer believes in the underlying principle of the Health Service Labour established in the 1940s: universal state-of-the-art health care, free at the point of delivery. They accept and apply the monstrous Tory argument that Britain cannot afford the best health care for the sick poor - that on this most fundamental question, an equal right to life, people are not equal, that the right to adequate health care exists for those in need of it only if they can pay for it. Labour's leaders have set their faces against restoring the Health Service to the principle Nye Bevan proclaimed at its inception: comprehensive state-of-the-art health care, free at the point of delivery, as a basic right of equal citizenship. Under democracy all are equal, but in the chances of life the rich are very much more equal!

The leaders of New Labour thus betray the best traditions of their own reform-socialist current of labour movement opinion. The reformist leaders of the 1940s would have responded to the ideas which the Tories proclaimed and acted upon,

and Tory Blair and Frank Field dogmatically embrace, as people stung to action in defence of their most cherished and most basic beliefs - the belief in human equality, in human solidarity and in social justice. But they were convinced reformists. New Labour's leaders are not for reform in the interests of the working class and the mass of the people: they accept the gruesomely Tory elitist argument that "we" cannot afford proper health care for the poor.

Ideas are central here. You cannot fight the Tories or New Labour if you accept their basic premises and do not know how to refute their ideas, if you believe that the commercial imperatives and ethics of capitalism and not the needs of the working class are the highest court of appeal. Without the acceptance by the Labour leaders of the basic premise of what the Tories did - that "we" cannot afford the Health Service or a proper Welfare State - the labour movement's fight against the Tories in the 1980s and '90s would have been fuelled by righteous, invigorating anger and determination, and propelled forward by the determination of millions of people. If only some of the union leaders, for example, had refused to accept the Tory line, the fight against the New Labour Government would be more advanced than it is.

The opposition to the Tories was ineffective - and the opposition to New Labour may, if we do not change things, also be ineffective - because the natural spinal column around which resistance could organise, a labour movement confidently in possession of a vigorous culture and a solid philosophy of its own, did not exist. That takes us to the heart of our subject: how can the day-to-day concerns of the working class, and struggles for palliatives and reforms, be linked to the fight for a fundamental change, that is, for socialism?

The demand for "state-of-the-art health care, free at the point of delivery" is, in the prevailing circumstances, the demand for the establishment of values, priorities, and recognised working-class rights that are starkly at odds with the values, priorities and interests of those who control the wealth in our society and the politicians who serve them - the Thatchers, Blairs and the renegade one-time leftists like Blunkett and Beckett and Cook. It is implicitly to demand the re-allocation of social resources and the reorganisation of society so that we can establish equality in the right to life. It is a clear assertion, in terms of the felt needs of millions of people, of human solidarity, counterposed to the exploitative and cannibalistic, that is, capitalistic, practices dominant in our society and glorified in its governing ideas as expressed by politicians, newspapers and television. It demands and can mobilise people to fight for, the reorganisation of our society.

The idea of free state-of-the-art health care for all proposes a struggle for immediate felt needs which can in principle be achieved even under capitalism, if enough people organise and mobilise, lobby and act - by strikes, occupations of public buildings, and other forms of direct action. At the same time, even though it can be won under capitalism, it challenges the fundamentals of the capitalist system - its ideas, values, priorities, and distribution of resources. People drawn into action around the one demand will, especially if socialists explain it to them, begin to make the connection between this question and the way society is organised. They will

think about society and their place in it. We "can't afford" modern health care for all? Then tax the rich! Reallocate resources! Remake society! Put human needs first.

If workers organise, mobilise and agitate even on this one issue, then other "adjacent" social issues will also be brought to the fore - for example, the right of trade unionists to take industrial action for the Health Service. Action and success generates confidence and combativity that brings things near which, a short time ago, were far off and seemingly impossible. A big energising mass campaign on the Health Service - a campaign of the scale and scope of the old Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and that is surely possible, given the mass feeling that exists - would help prepare and generate mass working-class action for free trade unions and many other things.

Free state-of-the-art health care is therefore an explosive demand. It is no wonder the time-serving trade union leaders and the neo-Thatcherite Labour politicians have no time for it. It is what Marxists have called a "transitional demand". Such transitional demands, of which there are many - and which can be joined into a linked chain from here to the socialist transformation of society - form the bridge between reform and revolutionary socialist politics.

Such demands help call into existence the living bridge between reform and socialist politics. The working class mobilises, organises, develops combativity and confidence, learning in action and struggle. The socialists who do not engage with the concerns of the real working class, and content themselves with shouting socialist abstractions and calls for revolution are sterile; so are the socialists who bury themselves in labour movement routines or the fight for one particular reform. The "to be or not to be" question for socialism is to link immediate battles and the goal of transforming capitalist society through revolution. If we do not do that, we will miss the tremendous opportunities opened by the collapse of Stalinism and, in Britain, by the election of a neo-Thatcherite Labour Government whose conflicts with the basic labour movement will help forward the necessary recomposition of working-class politics.

## **From Karl Marx to Rosa Luxemburg**

The first programme of "transitional demands" was in the 1848 Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, in the form of a ten-point programme on which to mobilise a mass movement and, once the workers had won power, to begin the transformation from capitalism to socialism. Principles of Communism, by Engels, included in this book, was a first draft for the Manifesto, and sums up the basic ideas of communism in question-and-answer form. The Communist League, for which Marx and Engels wrote the Manifesto, collapsed after the defeat of the revolutions of 1848. When mass workers' socialist parties emerged, from the 1880s, they divided their programme into two parts: a minimum programme and a maximum programme. The classic programme of this type was the German socialists' Erfurt Programme of 1891. The excerpt we include in this book from German Marxist Karl Kautsky's commentary on that programme communicates both some of the

strengths of the socialist movement of that time - which laid foundations which all subsequent Marxists and socialists have built on - and its weaknesses.

The maximum programme was the great socialist goal in the far distance, the abolition of wage-slavery and the elimination of all exploitation. It was the intellectual property of an elite within the loose workers' parties of the time, known as "social democracy" and organised together in the "Socialist International", also called the "Second International". The minimum programme consisted of more immediate, limited, practical goals such as wage demands, the right to free trade unions, the right to vote, the building up of trade unions.

What was the link between the two? The party and the trade unions would be built in the struggles for minimum demands and through propaganda. As time went on, the party would grow stronger and capitalism would move nearer to its pre-ordained economic downfall. At the culminating point, the party would be strong enough to take the helm when capitalist disintegration threw affairs into its hands. Then the "maximum programme" would come into its own.

In the vision of the Marxists before 1914, progressive capitalism was advancing organically; so was the labour movement. One key measure of capitalist progress was that it made possible a labour movement: that capitalism bred and in day to day struggles trained its own gravedigger. The right-wing social democrats saw this process continuing indefinitely - the labour movement would win reform after reform, and thus over a long time transform society bit by bit. "The movement is everything, the goal nothing," said their theoretician, Eduard Bernstein. Kautsky and the mainstream left believed evolution involved qualitative breaks and leaps, and that the evolutionary process would have to culminate in a revolutionary proletarian seizure of power.

Both failed to link the daily class struggle with the goal of socialism. Control of the movement was left in the hands of those whose practice corresponded accurately to the separation between the minimum and the maximum programme. In practice the ultimate goal of socialism was no real part of what they did. They were reformists, and socialism was a matter of festival speeches and spiritual uplift. In turn, this overweening reality of the labour movement increasingly led the "orthodox" left to turn their Marxism into dry formulas. Kautsky and the "orthodox" left won verbal victories in debate, but in practice what the labour movement did was shaped by the right wing. The left accepted the cautious tactics of the right "for now", promising that they would be revolutionary in the more favourable future circumstances sure to be brought along by social evolution. World War One shattered this movement. The reformist practice tied the socialist parties to their own bourgeoisies. The International collapsed.

Both wings of mainstream social democracy failed to see in the creative self-controlling activity of the working class the central force for socialism. Left and right had in common a bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. Their operational image of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the revolutionary class tended



towards one of pedagogic teacher to passive pupil, or self-substituting bureaucratic instrument to inert mass.

The Marxists reorganised themselves during and immediately after World War 1. They resolved to have done with the minimum/maximum division. Aiming to mobilise the working class to fight immediately for socialism, they reverted to the model of Marx and Engels in 1848. They re-elaborated the conception of a transitional programme and the practice of linking the everyday struggles of the working class with a socialist challenge to the dominant capitalist ideas and prerogatives and with the goal of socialist revolution. They tried to focus every struggle so as to rouse workers and direct their struggles, even if in only a limited way, against the pillars of capitalist society. The great Polish socialist Rosa Luxemburg wrote the Spartacus Programme for the founding of the German Communist Party in 1918. It is the classic text of this Marxist renaissance.

The Communist Parties, founded from the revolutionaries of the old socialist parties and newly roused workers after the Russian Revolution of 1917, attempted to bring socialist propaganda down from the cloudy skies and harness it to the hard daily grind of working-class efforts at self-defence and self-betterment. The full socialist programme was broken down into a linked chain, each link of which might successfully be grasped, and the movement hauled forward, dependent on the degree of mobilisation, intensity of struggles, and relationship of forces.

Everyday demands, as on wages, were expressed not as of old within the framework of acceptance of a capitalism that the socialists believed to be maturing towards some optimum time of ripeness, when it would fall. They were expressed against capitalism, so as to challenge capitalist prerogatives on a day-to-day basis.

Central to the new Marxism was: mobilisation and involvement of the broadest layers of the working class in immediate conflict with capitalism; a break with elitism, propagandism, and waiting upon an evolution driven by abstract, mechanical forces of History; the integration of the various fronts of the class struggle, ideological, political, economic, into one strategic drive.

## **Luxemburg and Trotsky**

Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacus Programme was written in the perspective of almost-immediate revolution. Germany's Emperor had just been overthrown, workers' councils had sprung up in all the major cities, the government was in the hands of a "Council of People's Commissars" led by politicians who called themselves social-democrats but were secretly working with the army's high command to stifle the workers' movement. But Rosa Luxemburg here outlines a whole approach to politics, valuable even when the immediate conditions are nowhere near revolutionary.

In 1918, at the same time that she advocated an end to the old "social-democratic" step-by-step policy, Luxemburg told the impatient young activists of the new Communist Party that revolutionary victory would become possible only after



patient, persistent work to win the majority in the workers' councils and to give reliable leadership in strikes on the most modest issues. She argued with them that they should not boycott the elections for the National Assembly being called by the Social Democrats, but use them as a platform for revolutionary explanation.

The Communist International began to discuss transitional demands systematically in 1921, at about the same time as it accepted that capitalism had survived the post-World War 1 earthquake and reached temporary stabilisation. Fighting against those many within its own ranks who reduced tactics to a permanent revolutionary "offensive", the International declared: "The alternative offered by the Communist International in place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists is: the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for demands which in their application undermine the power of the bourgeoisies, which organise the proletariat, and which form the transition to the proletarian dictatorship, even if certain groups of the masses have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship" (3rd Congress of the Communist International, 1921). Dictatorship meant the dictatorship over the old ruling classes by the working-class organised in democratic soviets.

By 1938 Leon Trotsky was the only leader from the great days of the Communist International who remained at his post, neither struck down by capitalist or Stalinist repression, nor corrupted by the slave-driving bureaucratic class which had seized power from the workers in the USSR. He restated the idea of transitional demands, in a pamphlet, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (known usually as the *Transitional Programme*), which is also included in this book.

The *Transitional Programme* covers a range of slogans up to the most directly revolutionary, and it was written with the hope that the then-coming World War would within a few years produce revolutionary working class explosions. But the programme was designed not for the Trotskyists to keep it in a cupboard and bring it out at the time of the revolutionary explosion, but for use there and then.

The *Transitional Programme* was written, in 1938, at a time when authentic revolutionary socialism was not only terribly isolated but eclipsed by the ascendancy of Stalinism. The most militant and would-be revolutionary workers followed and were controlled by the Communist Parties, which in turn were controlled by the Russian bureaucratic ruling class and its agents. The Central Committees of all the Communist Parties included representatives of the Russian secret political police, the GPU. Since 1934, the Communist Parties had swung their members solidly behind "Popular Front" politics - coalitions of working class organisations with outright bourgeois parties, supposedly against fascism. Fascism had triumphed in Germany and Austria and was about to triumph in the Spanish Civil War. The Stalinist police had already crushed working-class revolution in the Republican areas, in Barcelona in May 1937. The revolutionary impulse from the French general strike of 1936 and the CIO trade union movement in the USA had petered out.

In the USA - the country Trotsky had most in mind when writing the Transitional Programme - the situation was summed up thus: "The workers seem absolutely apathetic about a labour party [there was discussion at the time about the US trade unions forming a labour party in opposition to the Republicans and Democrats]; their leaders are doing nothing, and the Stalinists are for [president] Roosevelt". To that comment, from an American comrade, Trotsky replied: "But this is characteristic of a certain period when there is no programme, when they don't see the new road. It is absolutely necessary to overcome this apathy. It is absolutely necessary to give a new slogan".

In the Transitional Programme itself, he wrote: "Even among the workers who had at one time risen to the first ranks... There are not a few tired and disillusioned ones. They will remain, at least for the next period, as bystanders. When a programme or an organisation wears out, the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it... Only the fresh enthusiasm and aggressive spirit of the youth can guarantee the preliminary successes in the struggle; only these successes can return the best elements of the older generation to the road of revolution."

We are now again in a period when "a programme or an organisation wears out, [and] the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it." The collapse of Stalinism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, coupled with the recent defeats of the working class in the West, has "worn out" the Stalinist or Stalinist-influenced mainstream left wing of the West European labour movements. Yet the "apathy" and disorientation comes together with a reassertion of the most nakedly brutal exploitative and oppressive capitalism, a sharpening of the objective conflict of interest between bosses and workers, and deep-seated mass disgust at the established capitalist regimes. The working-class movement needs now, as then, to be reorganised and rallied on a new basis. In Britain the labour movement needs to recompose itself in conflict with the neo-Thatcherite "New Labour" Government. The Transitional Programme was intended to be a tool for such work.

Trotsky argued that in America the revolutionaries should initially concentrate the attention of the workers on "one point" - "the sliding scale of wages and hours", or automatic inflation-protection for wages and creation of jobs through cutting work hours.

"We can present [a slogan] which is honest, part of our entire programme, not demagogic, but which corresponds totally to the situation.... We ask that Mr Roosevelt [the president]... propose such a programme of public works that everyone capable of working can work at decent wages. This is possible with a sliding scale of wages and hours. What is this slogan? In reality it is the system of work in socialist society - the total number of workers divided into the total number of hours. But if we present the whole socialist system it will appear to the average American as utopian, as something from Europe. We present it as a solution to this crisis which must assure their right to eat, drink, and live in decent apartments. It is the programme of socialism, but in a very popular and simple form".

As we noted above, agitation now to tax the rich to rebuild the welfare state is a close parallel to agitation then for the "sliding scale of wages and hours". In capitalist prosperity, inflation-protection for wages or full employment on the basis of a decreasing work-week may be possible as harmless reforms. In 1938 they were revolutionary proposals. Today, a fight for the welfare state is a challenge to capitalism and to all the parties which defend capitalism.

The call to rebuild the welfare state now, like the "sliding scale of wages and hours" then, connects with a series of other slogans, from the more petty, detailed and local to the more advanced and revolutionary. It points the way to uniting the working class in a fight for control over social wealth and the organisation of the economy. It goes hand-in-hand with a fight to "re-found" the labour movement, to reclaim the right of political representation of labour which the Blairites seek to abolish, and for a workers' government - just as in 1938 in the USA the agitation for a "sliding scale of wages and hours" went hand-in-hand with a fight for the trade unions to form their own labour party.

The essence of transitional demands is not - as both hostile and friendly caricature have it - that they cannot be realised under capitalism. As Trotsky put it, "realisability" or "unrealisability" is in the last instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle.

Each demand or proposition in the programme gains its value from its relation to the whole and to the all-round activity of the working class and the Marxist organisation. If demands from a transitional programme are conceded without the bourgeoisie being overthrown, they will either be taken back by the bourgeoisie once the moment of danger is passed, or they will be robbed of their revolutionary content and neutralised within the structure of capitalist society.

Even workers' councils (soviets) can be neutralised this way. After the failure of the working class to seize power in the German Revolution of 1918-9, the councils (organs of workers' struggle and self rule based on factories and working-class neighbourhoods and set up during the first throes of the battle) were given a legal position as organs of "co-determination" within the framework of normal factory life. They were thus gutted, minimalised and later abolished.

The concept of transitional demands was closely and logically linked with that of the united front of working-class organisations. In the fight for partial demands, Marxists struggle for the involvement in united action of the broadest sections of the labour movement, including the reformist and bureaucratic leaderships. Broader and more extensive mobilisation both corresponds to the immediate need for maximum strength in the struggle, and opens the way for the growth of more radical demands and mobilisations, and thus for the verification, fructification, and development by workers, through their own experience, of the ideas of the Marxist programme. Essential to the concept of transitional demands and of the united front is an orientation to the logic of class struggle and the potentialities of mass direct action. It is the opposite of all conceptions which offer the working class no

role other than to join the organisation which will in its own good time see to their liberation.

In history the idea of transitional demands summed up a break with bureaucratic conceptions of socialism, whether those of the pre-1914 socialist mainstream, with their idea of cautious step-by-step evolution towards the final goal, or those of the sects, with their declamatory irresponsibility towards the inner processes of the labour movement. That is what it means for us.

## **Transitional demands and "maximalism" today**

There will be no revolution without the organised working class. Very few workers can be won to abstract calls for "revolution." Those young workers won by such calls, or by one-off shows of militant activism, will grow rapidly disillusioned unless they are set to systematic activity in the working-class movement to revive it for socialism.

The struggle for reforms and transitional demands is now the indicated way the British working class - but not only the British - and the labour movement can revive: it is the tool socialists have for use in the work of reviving it.

Reforms - restoring the Health Service, repealing the anti-union laws, for example - are not enough? No, but the focus on reforms does not, in logic or in reality, set prior limits to the march of the workers who fight for them. It does not rule out rapid and even explosive advances in that combativity which in turn can lead to the development of mass militant action and the development of revolutionary consciousness.

Far from ruling it out, it can help it to develop. In terms of things the revolutionaries can do at will, building movements to fight for reforms - like proper health care - is the right and necessary thing to do for socialism now.

Workers who began to fight for their own and their neighbours' and workmates' felt needs can be drawn into escalating battle, to mass demonstrations, to occupying hospitals, or to (illegal) protest strikes. In the course of such a struggle they will have to think about all sorts of related issues - the nature of society, of bourgeois politics, of Labour leaders who won't fight for their members' interests, of a Labour Government that is shamelessly a bosses' government, of the social, philosophical and political implications of such a seemingly modest and limited reform demand as "state-of-the-art, universal, free health care for everyone."

To convince workers and the labour movement to fight for this single demand is to convince them to embrace the rudiments, or at least one potent and fecund element, of the socialist or worker-solidarist outlook on the world - what Marx, speaking of laws to limit exploitation, called "the political economy of the working class". They will learn as the fight develops - helped by the propaganda and all-round explanations of the socialists - and be recruited, at first, in ones or small groups, to the ranks of organised socialists.

At issue here are questions Marxists first confronted nearly a century and a half ago: what is "revolutionary" and who are the revolutionaries? It isn't enough to shout for "revolution"; just wanting "a revolution" does not make you effectually a revolutionary in relation to the world around you. In history, the Marxists have more than once had to insist, against anarchists and sectarian socialist shouters for "revolution now", on the need to step back from talk about the "ultimate goal" so as to prepare for it in the only way it can consciously be prepared - by convincing workers to organise and struggle for their own interests on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis, and in the course of this helping them to realise the need for socialist goals.

A little after the Communist Manifesto was written, Marx and Engels were the minority in a bitter struggle within the Communist League against people who said it was either "revolution now", or all would be lost. Marx told them, with not a little scorn, that these revolutionaries themselves needed 10 or 20 years to make them fit for revolution. Revolutions are not made by raw rage, or pure willpower, but only by a complex process of working-class self-organisation and self-development. The process includes sudden leaps forward as well as periods of slow, patient, grinding work - but it cannot be skipped over.

So also the experience of the Russian Marxists. Against the vaguely defined but very "revolutionary" terrorist populists - most of whom said that they were socialists - the Marxists were the "right" wing insisting on patient, unspectacular work to prepare the working class. It was not, as Trotsky later put it, those who started with bombs, but those who started with the weighty books of Marx and Plekhanov, who buried Tsarism.

## **Socialism and democracy**

The Health Service; welfare; jobs; trade union rights; restoration against the Blairites of the political representation of labour; a workers' government - all these issues call for activity by Marxists to help the working-class movement revive and reorientate, using the method of transitional demands. So does the issue of democracy. For decades Stalinism drummed into the heads of revolutionary-minded workers the idea that a serious concern for democracy was the mark of the middle class and the "rotten liberal" reformist. Democracy came to be only an empty word, to be used as and when convenient to adorn tyrannies like the so-called "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe. Even before Stalinism, the Russian revolutionaries and their comrades in the West had suffered slippage on the question, because they tended to make virtue out of the cruel exigencies of the terrible civil war that followed the 1917 revolution.

That corruption of working-class thought has made easier the operation whereby politicians like Tony Blair have transformed official democracy - institutions and rights which generations of working-class activists, from the Chartist of 1838-50s and even earlier, fought to establish against entrenched privilege and hierarchy - into little more than a branch of advertising and show business. We live in an era

of the immense bureaucratisation of politics and of the growth of the power of the unelected civil service. Yet democracy is basic to working-class needs. The working class can only own the means of production collectively, that is, democratically; the working class can liberate itself through democracy or not at all. Socialism is democratic self-rule or it is not socialism. We must reorient the labour movement to the cause of winning genuine democracy as the labour movement pioneers understood it and fought for it.

Trotsky outlined an approach to this question in the Action Programme for France, a sort of first draft of the Transitional Programme written in 1934. France was then a parliamentary democracy threatened by a powerful fascist movement. Parliamentary leaders sought special ("Bonapartist") powers in the name of defending the status quo against both the fascists and the revolutionary-minded workers. Trotsky wrote:

"As long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie. However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic [the regime from 1870 to World War 2] but of the Convention of 1793 [the high point of the great bourgeois French Revolution]. Down with the Senate [the upper house of parliament], which is elected by limited suffrage, and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion! Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction! A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker. This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power. We want to attain our objective not by armed conflicts between the various groups of toilers, but by real workers' democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism."

From historical experience, we believe that workers' councils - created outside the bureaucratic framework of the existing state, free of official privilege, flexible, responsive, kept accountable by the right to recall representatives at any time - are the proper democratic form of workers' rule. To try to establish socialism through parliamentary action alone leads to disasters like the massacre of the labour movement in Chile in 1973, when the army overthrew a parliamentary reform government which had told its socialist and communist worker supporters to subordinate their struggles to parliamentary schedules and to a tempo acceptable to the military elite. That same military elite would strike the labour movement down.

Is this Marxist view counterposed to the basic labour movement commitment to parliamentary democracy? Not at all. Socialism is not possible until the mass of workers want it and are prepared to realise it - neither is an extension of democracy beyond the level already attained. It is in the direct interests of the working class to defend the existing system against anti-democratic attacks. It is in our interest to extend it and better it. Marxists have much in common with people in the labour movement whose best notion of democracy is parliamentary democracy. We can agree to fight to rejuvenate the existing system; we could agree to defend it with guns against any threat from fascists or from Armed Forces officers of the type who in 1974 discussed a military coup in Britain (the then Chief of Staff, Michael Carver, admitted it publicly much later). Marxists can and do form such alliances with honest "non-soviet" democrats. The reason why we cannot and do not ally right now, to extend democracy, with New Labour and the soft left, is not because we are not democrats, but because they are very bad democrats. They worship the miserably inadequate system that exists, whereas we favour greater democracy.

They have, in successive Labour governments, and especially recently, done more than anyone else to discredit parliamentary democracy and render cynical large sections of the labour movement - to move back in the direction of the USA, where a majority of the electorate don't even bother to vote. This cynicism has corroded not only democracy but the political consciousness of the labour movement. Marxists, while we tell the workers who listen to us that they should rely only on their own strength, see no advantage or gain in cynicism about politics, or even about the existing parliament. While small groups can advance to a higher understanding by way of such disillusionment, the great mass of the labour movement is thrown back by it. The mass of the labour movement will advance to a better understanding of the limits of parliamentary democracy, not by pure disgust with the Labour right - that is a passive, powerless response - but most likely by class struggle which includes attempts to use to the very maximum the existing institutions of the labour movement and of British bourgeois democracy.

## **The "Transitional Programme" and its misuse**

"The significance of the programme is the significance of the party", said Trotsky, discussing the Transitional Programme of 1938. A Marxist programme of action is not a blueprint. We need written summaries and codifications of experience, of course, but also more - a living and fluid inter-relation of those summaries with conjunctural analyses and concrete responses on the part of a revolutionary organisation whose members educate themselves to know the background and meaning of slogans like, say, "workers' government" and to be able to work out what to say - and when, and how - according to the needs of the class struggle. The programme is a living thing, not just a document. It can only live and develop in and through the practice of the revolutionary organisation.

Alfred Rosmer, in his book *Lenin's Moscow*, reports the comment of one Marxist when Lenin's pamphlet *Left Wing Communism* appeared in 1920 - "It is a dangerous



book", meaning that people would take from it only recipes and license for artful dodges and "flexibility" of a type altogether different from that which Lenin was trying to teach the ultra-lefts. Through the decades of Stalinist misuse of that pamphlet as a cover for their shameful tactics he would, of course, be proved right.

Leon Trotsky's Transitional Programme is also a "dangerous book". When he wrote it in 1938, Trotsky proceeded by assuming a large background of socialist culture inside the revolutionary groups for whom he wrote and among left-wing workers around them. In 1938 the great debates of the early Communist International were still living and recent memory (16 to 18 years back) for many of the activists. In the pamphlet, on the workers' government slogan for example, Trotsky could limit himself to a very telegraphic summary of the ideas of the Communist International, adding only a brief warning about the mis-use of the slogan by the Stalinists.

For decades, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the Transitional Programme was used as a political recipe book - as the political recipe book - by neo-Trotskyist groups who had no living memory of the revolutionary Marxist culture in which the Programme was embedded, and often did not even have access to the major texts of that culture. Many of the slogans in the Transitional Programme were put about in bowdlerised form - "workers' control" to mean blueprint-mongering for trade-union influence on management, "nationalisation of the monopolies" as if its enactment by parliament would amount to full socialism, "workers' government" in the flaccid illusion-spreading and essentially ridiculous form of "Labour to power with socialist policies!".

In the Middle Ages physicians worked from anatomical textbooks by Galen, which they inherited from the ancient world. In a period when it was deemed degrading for such people to do manual work, the doctor would sit in the operating room on a high stool, with Galen's book open, giving directions to minions and apprentices who actually carried out the operations. Eventually the textbook was discovered to deal not with the anatomy of men and women, but of monkeys! Much of the use of the Transitional Programme by the "orthodox" neo-Trotskyist sects was painfully close to that! Many, or most, of the demands were made into fetish-objects, outside of and above rational judgment and critical and concrete assessment. This made it impossible to use them as Trotsky intended them to be used. Neo-Trotskyists would pride themselves on "not having departed from the Transitional Programme". The appropriate response was that made by Trotsky in 1930 to some Italian comrades, followers of the jailed communist leader Amadeo Bordiga, who remonstrated with him that they had "not departed from" their programme of 1925, which in 1925 Trotsky had approved. He said that the purpose of a programme is not "not to be departed from", but to be "applied and developed".

The debauch of the fetishists and the vandals inevitably generated reaction. The tone today is set by the SWP, who long ago rejected the idea of a systematic, connected political programme as a dogmatic relic of a bygone era. They are entirely confined to the minimum/maximum conception of a programme - minimum demands to "fit the mood", the maximum demand of "revolution" to enthuse the activists.

Hindsight makes it plain that the Transitional Programme was in error on some points. Capitalism had not, in 1938, reached a dead end. There were, in fact, ways out for the bourgeoisie. In World War 2 it bombed and bled its way out of the impasse. The "economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution" has been developed much further, and more widely across the world, since 1938. Trotsky was right to declare that the government of the USSR had been "transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class," and that politically it differed from the pre-Holocaust Nazi regime only "in more unbridled savagery." He proposed a working-class programme against that tyranny to which nothing need be added. But he also sustained the false idea that the USSR was still a "degenerated workers' state" - with some considerable doubts, as the other writings of his last years make clear - by the false notion that the whole foul Stalinist system was on the brink of a collapse. The bureaucracy would disintegrate and working-class revolutionaries could utilise a united front with those bureaucrats tied to nationalised property in order to promote the overthrow of the whole bureaucracy and "the regeneration of Soviet democracy". He was wrong about that. The Stalinist system proved more solid, and capable of expanding enormously. Beginning in 1939 it erupted into an expanding bureaucratic imperialism that by 1945 had turned Eastern Europe and half of Germany into its protectorates and satellites. The "property wrenched away from the capitalists and transformed into state property" had long before 1938 been wrenched away from the workers and transformed into bureaucratic property, as the basis of a new exploiting class.

Trotsky, as it turned out, was also wrong to hope that there was enough common socialist culture in the labour movement of 1938 for the small revolutionary groups to hope to find ways radically and quickly to "switch the points" for the "train" of an already-existing revolutionary-minded workers' movement. Perhaps Trotsky was "compelled" to make this "error" - or else abandon all short-term revolutionary perspectives in a situation where the labour movement faced dramatic short-term choices: mobilise for revolution or be crushed - as in fact, within two years of his writing, it was crushed right across Europe, except in Britain, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland. But the bureaucratic grip and ideological corruption of Stalinism in the labour movement was such that no quick "switching of the points" was ever a realistic hope. Trotsky had underestimated the solidity of the USSR bureaucracy; he was also wrong to postulate "the definite passing over of [Stalin's] Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order".

Just before his death in August 1940, Trotsky would correct himself by writing that the "ideal" of the Communist Party leaders was, "to attain in their own country the same position that the Kremlin oligarchy gained in the USSR. They are not the revolutionary leaders of the proletariat but aspirants to totalitarian rule." In the 1940s and after, Stalinist leaders in several Third World countries would fight to make reality those aspirations to totalitarian rule; they would indeed be revolutionary leaders, though not of the proletariat, whom they enslaved along with whole peoples. The consequent anti-bourgeois though reactionary vigour of

Stalinism would maintain the mass influence of the Communist Parties for decades yet.

In the five years before writing the Transitional Programme, Trotsky had made several attempts at a broad regroupment of revolutionary forces in the working class. Because of the repeated defeats of the working class, those attempts failed. Trotsky was left, in the Transitional Programme, postulating a revolutionary recomposition of the workers' movement without being able to point to any practical way that it could be achieved. In some passages of the Transitional Programme, therefore, the prospect of revolution appears in rather mystical form, almost as a sudden apocalyptic coming-together of elemental mass working-class rage and a revolutionary leadership prepared by pure willpower. As Trotsky put it in another article around the same time: "The harsh and tragic dialectic of our epoch is working in our favour. Brought to the extreme pitch of exasperation and indignation, the masses will find no other leadership than that offered to them by the Fourth International." This vision, abstracted, crudified and dogmatised, would contribute to much sectarian posturing in later years.

Despite all that, the Transitional Programme remains the most brilliant summary in the whole Marxist literature of the method of transitional demands and of the experience of socialist struggle on a vast range of issues - unemployment, trade unions, anti-fascist battles, war... Its current neglect by many revolutionary groups comes not from reasoned critiques, but from demoralisation and catchpenny opportunism. Its approach and many of its basic ideas are those we need today. "The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class. He takes active part in mass trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy... To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives - these are the rules of the Fourth International."

## **Agitate for socialism!**

We are faced with rebuilding socialism almost from the ground up, and with rebuilding, regenerating and politically rearming the labour movement. This introduction is, therefore, best rounded off by a basic account of the whole activity of socialists, within which the method of transitional demands is an essential element.

What we do was long ago summed up in these three words - "Agitate! Educate! Organise!". We in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty do this in our magazine Workers' Liberty, in factory bulletins, and through broader publications in which we collaborate with other left groups and individuals such as the newspaper Action. You will find those three words - agitate, educate, organise - emblazoned on labour

movement banners today. You will find them in files of old socialist newspapers, decade after decade, back for 150 years.

You will find them spread in socialist literature across the world, in the writings of the Russian Marxist, Lenin, for example. These words sum up what a socialist does and what socialist organisations exist to do. What do they mean? Take them one at a time.

Agitate means to move, to stir up. It means:

- that you object to the way people are treated, and that you urge them to fight back;
- that you expose and show up in detail the human meaning of capitalist exploitation, oppression and indifference;
- that you expose and bring to light conditions in factories, offices, colleges, housing estates;
- that you expose the brutalities and injustices of the police and the law courts; and
- that you point out the exploitation and corruption at the heart of the capitalist economic system on which all our lives depend.

It means, in short, that you, as a socialist, hold a mirror up to the world around you, draw people's attention to the details of capitalist exploitation and oppression, show them their situation, and urge them to act. You stir them up. You tell them not to accept this state of affairs. You move things out of the congealed social inertia that holds the capitalist wage-slave system in place.

But don't people already know their own situation? Don't they know that they are badly treated and oppressed?

Of course they do! They know it in the pores of their daily lives. They feel it minute by minute doing jobs that do not interest them; when they are driven into degrading drudgery for money which too often does not even buy them all they need; when they are forced to live on the dole, or made homeless and forced onto the streets; when they experience the countless grades and degrees of humiliation and exploitation that working-class people must endure. Of course they know!

But it is not as simple as that. People get used to terrible conditions, even when they directly experience them as terrible. Things are now accepted in Britain that would, not so long ago, have provoked outrage and spurred the labour movement into vigorous action to end them. The hordes of young people sleeping out on the pavements of our cities are one example; the vast growth of a cheap-labour, sweatshop, un-unionised economy is another. If enough people had kicked up a fuss, if the trade union leaders or Labour leaders had done their job, these things would not have come to be so widely and fatalistically accepted. The shout of anger,

protest, outrage - even if for the moment it changes little - is a great creative force in human life.

Learn from history! One of the most important strikes in British working-class history was the famous "matchgirls" strike at Bryant and May's works in the East End of London in 1888. It was the start of mass trade unionism. It was sparked by left-wing agitation.

Annie Besant wrote an account of the conditions in which the women worked producing matches, of their poverty, their exploitation, and the terrible diseases they contracted working with sulphur without protection. Reading Besant's account of their own lives, those women were spurred into action. Their strike was the first of a wave of strikes - the following year the London dockers struck - that led to the creation of the great general trade unions, that is, to the creation of the modern labour movement and, indirectly, of the Labour Party.

The women had suffered for years. They had seen their sisters sicken and die young from sulphur poisoning. Of course they knew all about their own conditions!

They had experienced what Besant wrote about, and knew it in a way that Besant never could know it; but the mirror held up by Besant's articles sharpened their perception, clarified the way they saw their conditions, and let them see their lives through the eyes of someone coming fresh upon conditions to which they had had to grow accustomed. They were stirred up - agitated.

Just as in a personal quarrel or conflict of opinion you can be vastly strengthened in your intuition, feeling or conviction by a friendly voice of agreement, so also workers who already feel oppressed can be roused by agitation to do something about it. They can be shown their conditions starkly and freshly by comparison with others more fortunate. They can be encouraged by a show of anger to raise their own voices. Agitation can free them from the hypnosis of familiarity, the submission generated by hopelessness and the inability to see an alternative, even if only a slightly better one.

Experiences like the matchgirls' strike are likely to be repeated in Britain today, where traditional trade unionism has been uprooted across large swathes of industry to make way for casual working and very intense exploitation.

The agitating socialist is the probing, implacable accuser and prosecutor of capitalism as it impinges on particular lives and specific groups of people - in the first place before its victims, our class. As James Connolly once defined this work of ours: "The men and women of your class, show them their wrongs and yours/ Plant in their hearts that hatred deep that suffers and endures."

To rouse, "agitate", people into action even for a small change or a petty reform is to help them start down the road to outright opposition to capital and all its works.

## Educate for socialism!

Take the second big word, educate. What is education? Agitation is education. But it is not rounded, deep, broad education. And that education is needed, too. For socialism, as distinct from trade unionism, it is irreplaceable.

To urge revolt against particular conditions is good. Hatred of the conditions which add up to much of the reality of working class life under capitalism - that is the beginning of wisdom for the socialists themselves. If they lack that hatred, if they let it fade, if they do not keep in their minds all the time the bitter details of capitalist reality, then they themselves will soon wither and die as socialists.

Yet it is not enough. It is also necessary to understand why things are as they are, how and why capitalism oppresses people. For this you must educate yourself and educate others, who will then educate yet others. Workers react against particular outrages. They fight. They strike, demonstrate, lobby MPs. They feel burning indignation. But unless they are educated to see how their concern - what "agitates" them - fits into the whole capitalist system, and educated, too, to see capitalism for what it is, a temporary phase in history, then they will never go beyond blind reaction to this or that aspect of capitalism. No matter how violent and spectacular that reaction may be - think of the inner-city riots of the early 1980s or the Poll Tax riot, for example - it cannot change society fundamentally, even where it wins partial concessions.

The workers will get what they want, or fail to get it, or get some of it, and that, perhaps, only temporarily. They will never understand the system. They will never fight capitalism, as capitalism, in all its aspects, but only in one. And they will never fight to replace it. Militants in one cause will not "make the connection" between their concerns and the concerns of others of the oppressed. They will not become socialists.

For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some of the most consistently militant workers in Britain, London dockers, marched through London in support of racism and racist politicians. They were militant on wages and conditions, and even on broader questions like asserting a high degree of day-to-day workers' control in their industry. But they were politically backward, they were not educated - though their day-to-day leaders were members of the Communist Party - in the general socialist view that matched their outlook on immediate industrial issues.

Worse, they were poisonously miseducated. They lacked an adequate overall view. They were part of a widespread wave of working-class militancy that had neither active hope nor a realistic strategy for the transformation of society. Ultimately because of that, the dockers were unable to defend themselves even industrially. They were crushed in the 1980s. The other side of such phenomena as militant workers who hate the Tories but who are also racists is that very often black militants, seeing only their own large concern, are one-sided too, lacking both an overall view and a view of where they fit into the capitalist social system. They do

not orient to the working class or labour movement to change it and make it serve their needs.

Without rounded socialist education, all the agitation in the world will not change capitalism or replace it. Blind agitation on particular issues, separated off from other agitation, and not integrated into a coherent outlook on the world, can even strengthen capitalism by pitting one group of disaffected people against another.

Most people involved in direct action of the sort that occurs spontaneously and which we try by agitation to evoke, tragically never attain any overview. It is the job of socialist education to help them develop such an overview. Socialist education is necessary not only to help workers make sense of the overall position but also to help militants avoid what is often the nonsensical picture they would get by extrapolating from immediate impressions.

It is not enough to urge people to be guided by mere instinct - by such rules of thumb as siding with the oppressed, opposing what the ruling class wants, supporting militancy, and being sympathetic to our rulers' enemies. Of course you should side with the oppressed! As James Connolly once rightly said: "Impartiality as between the strong and the weak is the virtue of the slave". But what does it mean to side with oppressed people? Do you adopt their views? But their views may be, and usually are, sectional, one-sided, narrow-minded, or even blindly self-centred and chauvinist.

For example: the Palestinian Arabs are oppressed. History has dealt with them very harshly, and, in general socialists should support them. But for decades their leaders proposed a solution to their condition based on destroying the state of Israel and subjugating its Jewish inhabitants. That was to be done by the surrounding Arab states.

Until the late 1960s, this was expressed in the crudest terms by Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader, and Yasser Arafat's predecessor, Ahmed Shukhairy: "Drive the Jews into the sea!" Thereafter it was proposed in the disguised form of calling on Israel to abolish itself and cede its territory to a new Arab state of Palestine, in which the Jews were to be guaranteed religious, but not national, rights. That too could only be achieved by Arab subjugation and conquest, but it sounded better. It was not only an Arab chauvinist programme; it was, in the circumstances, so unrealistic that it helped Israel's chauvinists isolate the Palestinians for decades. Whatever that position did, it did not serve the interests of the Palestinian people.

We in the AWL advocate two states for the two peoples living in the area - as the PLO has done since 1988. The point is that without all-round socialist education in the history of the conflict and in the general principles and politics which Marxists bring to bear in all such conflicts - consistent democracy and compromise where the conflict is one of right as against right - you could not make sense of the issues. You could not arrive at rational solutions. To endorse the old PLO programme because it was the programme of the oppressed would have been to substitute other concerns



and principles for socialist and democratic concerns and principles. Many socialists - including ourselves for a time - did exactly that.

The same follows for all the other crude rules of thumb. Support militancy? Yes; but the most militant in a national or communal conflict are likely to be the reckless chauvinists.

Side against the ruling class? Yes, but if we just say yes when the ruling class says no, and no when it says yes, then we surrender all independence and become a negative imprint of the ruling class. We abandon all objectivity and all attempts at an independent working-class outlook on the world. We implicitly surrender the fight for working class independence.

For example, large sections of the British left have responded to the fact of European semi-unity, organised by the capitalists, with the kneejerk slogans "Britain Out!", "No to the European Union! No to the single currency!" - when they should instead have been fomenting cross-Europe unity of the working class.

All-round Marxist education is as essential as the independent working-class outlook it helps produce.

## **Organise for socialism!**

What about the third big word, organise? So we expose, pillory, and point the finger of accusation at the horrors of life under capitalism and missed chances for a better, more civilised exploitation-free, collective life. So we educate young people and militants into a rounded view of society, fitting the things we denounce into the whole picture of capitalism, and fitting capitalism itself into a conception of history and the role of the working class in history. We urge the need to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism. What then? We urge people to organise alongside us to achieve these things. Without organisation the rest is diffuse, incomplete and likely in the long term to be without lasting consequence.

Socialists organise on many levels. We organise trade unions that fight to get the best price for our labour-power. We organise broad trade-union-based parties like the Labour Party. We organise for specific goals in society, in the Labour Party and in the unions - for example, to defend the welfare state or fight for free trade unions. We organise the rank and file for trade union democracy. We organise ourselves, the hard-core socialists, in our own organisation.

Workers' Liberty, the industrial bulletins Workers' Liberty supporters produce, and Action, the paper we, alongside other socialists, support, are the means by which we organise or help organise these things. So are meetings, pickets, demonstrations.

Persuasion, discussion and debate are the essential tools of socialism. Without them, without dialogue and debate, the left will never advance beyond its present tragic fragmentation. Free debate is essential. The left itself is still marked by the scars of the Stalinist ice age. We live in a world where the left, after so many decades

of Stalinism and after so many defeats, is in a condition of corruption and decay; so we must regenerate the left by way of honest debate and polemic.

The precondition for effective socialist activity is the existence of a distinct working-class world outlook. This has not only to be propagated. It has to be tested against reality, and developed in line with reality. Our socialist movement is first of all a movement of ideas, proposals, memory and perspective of history. That is why the polemical and discussion element in the magazine Workers' Liberty is irreplaceable for our work.

For, of course, what we argue for in the working-class movement, and the ideas in which we educate those who respond to our agitation, are not entirely given and fixed in advance. They are never frozen, or "finished". Not everything is known, or can be known. Marx died over 100 years ago, Trotsky over 50 years ago. An essential part of the work socialists do is to keep reality under review, to register, discuss, and assess new things in society and in the continuing experience of our class.

We argue our views as sharply as we think necessary, and, while advocating left unity in action, we debate with other socialists. But we aspire to be neither Popes, Cardinals nor the one true Church of the left. Workers' Liberty is not a closed monopoly but an open vehicle for honest and free discussion.

We organise ourselves as tightly as necessary, but all our work is aimed ultimately at serving the broad movement of our class. We teach the working class, and try to be "the memory of the class" - but we also learn from the working class and codify that learning. Thus we work to prepare the future by fighting in the struggles of the working class now and by socialist education.

We are, we believe, the bearers of a socialist culture and of a Marxist outlook on the world, and therefore we believe that our magazine, like our work in general, is of great importance for the future of the labour movement.

In a letter appealing to a Spanish anarchist trade union to join the Communist International, in 1919, the Chairman of the International, Gregory Zinoviev said: if we miss this chance at overthrowing capitalism, it may go now and not come again for decades. He was absolutely right. The chance was missed. Now is not 1919. But it may be a major turning point. This book, we hope, will help ensure that fewer chances are missed, and help speed the revival of a clear-cut, working-class, revolutionary socialism, untainted by Stalinism, reformism or the sectarianism and cultism that deform most of the neo-Trotskyist tendencies.

London, April 1998

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# Frederick Engels: The principles of communism

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/engels.htm>

## 1. What is Communism?

Communism is a theoretical statement of the conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

## 2. What is the proletariat?

The proletariat is that class in society which obtains its livelihood wholly and solely from the sale of its labour, and not from the profit of any capital [\[b\]](#); whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose whole existence depends upon the demand for labour, and therefore upon the variations of anarchical competition, with its alternations of good and bad periods of trade. The proletariat, in a word, is the working class of the 19th century. [And also of the present time].

## 3. Has there not, then, been a proletariat always?

No. There have always been poor and working classes - and the working classes have usually been poor. But never before have there been poor men or workers living under such condition as those just mentioned; and there has not, therefore, been a proletariat always, any more than there has been free and unchecked competition.

## 4. How did the proletariat originate?

The proletariat originated with the Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the later half of the 18th century, and which has since been repeated in every civilised country in the world. The Industrial Revolution was caused by the invention of the steam engine, the various spinning machines, the mechanical loom, and a whole host of other mechanical contrivances. These machines, which being very expensive could only be purchased by men with considerable capital, changed the whole method of production; and supplanted the workers of that day, because they could produce commodities much more cheaply and efficiently than the workers, with their imperfect spinning wheels and looms. The machines, therefore, placed industry entirely in the hands of the capitalists, making the former property of the workers - tools, hand-loom, etc., - useless, and thus leaving them propertyless. The factory system had first been introduced in the textile industry. Work was more and more divided among individual workers, so that he who formerly had completed a whole piece of work, now worked at only one part of it.

This division of labour made it possible for products to be turned out more rapidly, and therefore more cheaply. It reduced the activity of each worker to a very simple operation, constantly repeated, which could therefore be performed as well, or even better, by a machine.

Once the impulse was given to the factory system by the installation of machinery, this system quickly assumed the mastery of other branches of industry, e.g. printing, pottery, metal ware. In this way, various branches of industry, one after the other, were dominated by steam power, machinery, and the factory system, as had already happened in the textile industries. But at the same time these industries necessarily passed into the control of capitalists. In addition to actual manufactures [\[c\]](#) , handicrafts also gradually came under the domination of the factory system; since here as well capitalists supplanted the small producers by the establishment of the greater workshop, which saved time and expense, and permitted an increasing division of labour. Thus, in civilised countries, all branches of work and manufacture were replaced by the great industry.

The former status of the workers was entirely revolutionised, and the middle class of the period - particularly the master-craftsmen - ruined; and thus arose two new classes, gradually absorbing all the rest, namely: (i) the capitalist class, which everywhere is in possession of the means of subsistence - the raw materials and tools, machines, factories, etc., necessary for the production of the means of life. This is the class of the bourgeois, or the bourgeoisie; (ii) the working class who, being propertyless, are compelled to sell their labour to the bourgeoisie, in order to obtain the means of subsistence. This class is called the proletariat.

## **5. Under what conditions does the proletariat sell its labour to the bourgeoisie?**

Labour is a commodity, and its price is therefore determined by the same laws as other commodities. Under the system of large-scale industry or of free competition - which, as we shall see, amount to the same thing - the price of a commodity is, on the average, determined by its labour-cost of production. The cost of production of labour, however, is in reality just as much of the means of subsistence as is necessary to keep the worker physically fit, and to enable him to reproduce his kind. The worker will thus receive for this work no more than is necessary for this purpose. The price of labour, or wage, will therefore be the lowest, the minimum, necessary for subsistence [\[d\]](#) .

But trade being at one time good, at another bad, the wage of the worker will vary accordingly, just as the manufacturer receives more or less for his commodities. Just as the manufacturer, however, receives on the average neither more nor less for his commodities than the equivalent of their cost of production, so the worker

will, on the average, receive neither more nor less than this minimum of wages. And the more large-scale industry conquers all branches of industry, the more definitely will this economic law of wages assert itself.

## **6. What was the position of the working classes before the Industrial Revolution?**

At different stages of the evolution of society, the working class has occupied different positions in relation to the owning and ruling classes. In ancient times the workers were the slaves of the landowner, as they still are in many backward countries, and even in the Southern part of the United States. In the Middle Ages they were the serfs of the landowning noble, as they are yet in Hungary, Poland and Russia. In the Middle Ages also, and until the Industrial Revolution, there were handicraft guilds in the towns under the control of small masters, out of which developed manufacture, the factory system, and the wage-worker employed by a capitalist.

## **7. What distinguishes the proletarian from the slave?**

The slave was sold outright. The proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly. It is to the interest of the slave-owner that his property, the slave, should have an assured existence, however wretched that may be. The individual proletarian, the property, so to speak, of the whole capitalist class, has no assured existence; since his labour will only be purchased for just the period when someone has need of it. Existence is only assured to the workers as a class. The slave stands outside competition; the proletarian stands within it and suffers all its variations. The slave is regarded as a thing, and not as a member of society; the proletarian is regarded as a human being, and is acknowledged as a member of bourgeois society. The slave may enjoy a more assured existence, but the proletarian belongs to a higher stage of the development of society - stands indeed on a higher level than the slave. The slave can free himself because, of all the private property relations, he need only abolish the single relation of slavery - in this way, indeed, becoming a proletarian; the proletarian, on the other hand, can only free himself on condition that he abolishes private property in general.

## **8. What distinguishes the proletarian from the serf?**

The serf has the possession and use of a means of production - a piece of land - in exchange for a tribute of a part of the produce, or for the performance of work for his lord. The proletarian works with another's implements of production, for the

benefit of this other, in exchange for a part of his produce. The serf, therefore, pays; whereas payment is made to the proletarian. The serf has an assured existence; the proletarian has not. The serf stands outside competition; the proletarian within it. The serf frees himself either by running away to the town, and there becoming a handicraftsman; or by making payments in money to his lord instead of labour or payments in kind, thereby becoming a free farmer; or by forcibly ridding himself of his feudal lord, and becoming himself a private owner; in short, by one or other of these means, entering either the ranks of the owners or of the competing workers. The proletarian can only free himself by abolishing competition, private property, and all class distinction.

## **9. What distinguishes the proletarian from the handicraftsman?**

In the old handicraft industries, the workman, after his apprenticeship was served, became a wage worker for a time, but only in order that he might become an employer later. The proletarian is almost always a wage-worker all his life. The handicraftsman who had not yet become an employer was the companion of his master, lived in his house, and ate at his table. The proletarian stands solely in a money relation to his employer. The handicraftsman was a member of the same class of society as his master, and shared the same mode of life. The proletarian is separated from his master, the capitalist, by a whole world of class distinctions; he lives in a totally different environment, and his outlook is totally different. The tools used by the handicraftsman were usually his own property, and he could carry them with him. The machine worked by the proletarian is neither his own property, nor is it ever likely to become such. The handicraftsman usually made a complete object, and his skill in the use of his tools was always an important factor in the making of the product. The proletarian as a rule makes only one part of an article, or even contributes only to one process in the making of a single part, and his personal skill is in inverse ratio to the work done by the machine. The handicraftsman, like his master, was secured throughout his life against hurtful competition by means of guild regulations and trade customs. The proletarian must combine with his fellows, or seek the aid of legislation, in order to avoid being crushed by competition; if he is outbid by other sellers of labour-power, he - and never his employer - is crushed. The handicraftsman, like his master, had a narrow outlook, was thrifty, and disliked new inventions or ideas. The proletarian becomes daily more convinced that the interests of his class are fundamentally opposed to those of his employer; thrift gives place to class-consciousness and the conviction that an improvement in his position can come only by general social progress. The handicraftsman was a conservative even when he rebelled - it was indeed his desire for reaction that usually made him a rebel. The proletarian must inevitably be a revolutionary. The first step in social progress to which the reactionary handicraft spirit opposed itself was manufacture

- the subjection of handicraft, master as well as worker, to mercantile capital, which developed later into commercial and industrial capital [\[e\]](#) .

## **10. What distinguishes the proletarian from the early factory worker?**

The factory worker of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries had usually some implement of production as his own property - his loom or spinning wheels, or a piece of land which he cultivated in his leisure time. The proletarian has none of these things. The factory worker usually lived on the land, in more or less patriarchal [\[f\]](#) relations with his landlord or employer. The proletarian lives mostly in large towns, and stands to his employer solely in a money relation. The factory worker's more personal relations with his master were destroyed by the coming of large-scale industries; he lost what little he still had, and became the first proletarian.

## **11. What were the immediate consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the resulting division of society into bourgeoisie and proletariat?**

Firstly, in consequence of the universal cheapening of all the products of industry following on the use of machinery, the old system of manufacture, depending on hand labour, was completely destroyed. Semi-barbaric countries which had previously remained more or less outside the influence of historical development were now forced out of their seclusion. They purchased the cheaper commodities from England, and allowed their own hand workers to be ruined. So countries which for centuries had made no progress, e.g., India, were completely revolutionised; and even China now advances towards revolution. It has thus come to pass that a new machine, invented today in England, results in less than a year in millions of workers in China being without bread. In this way have large-scale industries brought all the peoples of the earth into close touch with one another; small local markets have been lumped together into a great world market. The path has been prepared for civilisation and progress, since whatever takes place in civilised countries nowadays must react on all other countries; and if today the workers of France or England were to free themselves, revolutions must inevitably follow in other lands.

Secondly, the Industrial Revolution has developed the wealth and power of the bourgeoisie to the greatest possible extent, making it the most powerful class everywhere. It proceeded to get political power into its own hands, superseding the classes which had been predominant previously - the aristocracy, the townsmen of the guilds, and the absolute monarchy representing both. It destroyed the power



of the aristocracy by abolishing the right of primogeniture [\[g\]](#), or the unsaleable character of real property, as well as the various privileges of the nobility. It destroyed the power of the townsmen of the guilds by abolishing all the guild and handicraft privileges. In place of these it established free competition - i.e., a state of society, in which any individual is free to carry on any branch of industry agreeable to him, and in which there is no hindrance to his so doing but the need of the required capital. With the introduction of free competition, therefore, the individual members of society are only unequal in so far as their capitals are unequal; capital is the determining factor, and the capitalists, the bourgeoisie, have become the real ruling class.

Free competition is necessary for the establishment of large-scale industry, since it is the only state of society in which large-scale industry can develop. The bourgeoisie, after it had thus abolished the social privileges of the aristocracy, and the guildsmen, next abolished their political power. Since it had raised itself to the position of the chief class in society, it proceeded to proclaim itself, in political form, as the chief class. It accomplished this by the introduction of the representative system, which depends on civic equality and the legal recognition of free competition. This was bound up in European countries with a constitutional monarchy. In these countries, electors had to possess a certain amount of capital - and were therefore confined to the bourgeoisie. These bourgeois voters elect bourgeois representatives; and these in turn ensure a bourgeois regime [\[h\]](#). Thirdly, the Industrial Revolution has developed the proletariat to the same extent that it has developed the bourgeoisie. Just in the same ratio as the bourgeoisie has become richer, the proletariat has grown more numerous [\[i\]](#). The proletariat could only come into being through the power of capital, and capital only increases when it is increasing the number of workers. An increase of the proletariat has therefore gone hand in hand with the increase of capital. At the same time, bourgeoisie and proletariat have both been concentrated in large towns, and this massing of the workers in large numbers has given them a consciousness of their power.

Further, the more this process develops, the more labour-saving machines are invented and utilised, and in this way, as has already been pointed out, wages are reduced to a minimum, and the position of the proletariat becomes more and more unendurable. Thus, by means on the one hand of the growing discontent, and on the other of the increasing consciousness of the proletariat, the way is made ready for a revolution of society.

## **12. What were the wider consequences of the Industrial Revolution?**

By means of the steam engine and other machines, large-scale industry created the means of indefinitely increasing the industrial output, at a diminishing cost both of

time and money. The free competition which followed this accelerated production soon produced definite results; a crowd of capitalists seized upon industry, and in a short time far more was produced than was actually needed. The commodities manufactured could not be sold, and a so-called trade crisis occurred. Factories had to be closed, employers became bankrupt, and the workers starved. After a time the surplus products were sold, the factories opened again, wages rose, and trade gradually became more prosperous than before.

But this could not last long. Again, too many commodities were produced, and another crisis occurred, with all the effects of the first. Thus, since the beginning of the 19th century the condition of industry has constantly fluctuated between periods of prosperity and periods of crisis. Such crises have recurred almost regularly every five or seven years; each time resulting in the greatest misery for the workers, and each time stimulating revolutionary tendencies and threatening shipwreck of the whole existing state of society.

## **13 What is apparent from these regularly recurring business crises?**

In the first place, that large-scale industry - although in its earlier stages it had itself given birth to free competition - has now reached a stage at which free competition, so far from being useful to it, is actually a hindrance - a fetter from which it must break free. So long as it is organised on this basis of free competition, large-scale industry can only exist at the cost of a general upheaval every few years, an upheaval which each time threatens the whole fabric of civilisation, thrusting not only the proletariat into misery, but also ruining some section of the bourgeoisie itself. It is plain, therefore, either that large-scale industry must be abolished - which is an absolute impossibility - or that it must develop into a new organisation of society, in which industrial production shall no longer be in the hands of individual owners all competing one against the other, but shall be owned and controlled by society as a whole and shall satisfy the needs of all.

In the second place, it is apparent that large-scale industry, and the tremendous increase in the production made possible thereby, now makes practicable a new order of society in which such a sufficiency of the necessities of life will be assured, that every member of that society will have leisure and opportunity to develop his natural powers and abilities in comparative freedom: in fact, that those same qualities or aspects of large-scale industry which under our existing social organisation result in misery and instability, could, under another social system, have exactly opposite consequences. It is obvious, therefore:

1. That from now onwards all our social problems and evils are simply the result of a social system which is no longer adapted to social needs; and

2. That the only means by which these evils can be abolished, viz., a new order of society, is now close at hand.

## **14. Of what nature must this new order of society be?**

First and foremost, it will take all industry and all branches of production out of the hands of individual competitive owners; carrying on industry by the active participation of all the members of society. It will abolish competition, and put association in its place. Further, since production for individual profit is based upon private property, this latter must also be abolished, and its place taken by the use of all instruments of production, and the division of all products - by communism, in short. The abolition of private property in itself sums up the new order of society, which in itself is the inevitable result of industrial development.

## **15. Was not the abolition of private property possible at an earlier date?**

No. Every change in the social order, every revolution as regards property relations, has been the necessary consequence of new productive powers, which could no longer be adapted to the existing property relations.

Private property itself arose in this way. For private property has not always existed; towards the end of the Middle Ages a new means of production - manufacture - was evolved, which could not be adapted to feudal or guild relations, and which accordingly outgrew and overwhelmed them, producing a new form of property - private property. But for the first stages of development of large-scale industry, no other form of property but private property was possible - no other order of society than one based upon private property. So long as the productive powers only produce enough to satisfy the needs of a given time, without a surplus being available for the augmentation of social capital and the further development of the forces of production, so long must there inevitably be a ruling class controlling and an oppressed class subject to the social productive powers. The creation of these classes depends upon the development of these productive powers. The Middle Ages - the period of agriculture - gave us the baron and the serf; the towns of the later Middle Ages, the guild master, the journeyman, and the day-labourer; the 17th century evolves the manufacturer and the mechanic; the 19th century, the great manufacturer and the proletarian. Up to that time the productive powers were not so widely developed that private property in them were a fetter or restraint upon them. But now, when, owing to the development of large-scale industry, the powers of production are constantly increasing by leaps and bounds; when, moreover, these powers are in the hands of a constantly decreasing number of bourgeois owners, while the great mass of the people become ever more firmly fixed as proletarians, and their condition becomes ever more unbearable; when, finally, these colossal

productive powers have grown so far beyond the control of the bourgeois private property owners that they threaten to over-balance the whole social order, now surely, the abolition of private property has become not only possible, but absolutely necessary.

## **16. Will the abolition of private property be achieved by peaceful means?**

That it may be is much to be wished, and the Communists are certainly the last people likely to wish otherwise. But they know that revolutions are not planned arbitrarily and deliberately, having always been the inevitable results of circumstances, and to that extent independent of the will and guidance of individuals or even of whole classes. They see the growing oppression of the proletariat in all civilised countries, and they foresee that sooner or later the proletariat will be forced into active revolution. And in that day Communists will be prepared to defend the interests of the proletariat with deeds as well as with words.

## **17. Will it be possible to abolish private property at one stroke?**

No. Since the existing mode of production must be allowed to develop to a degree at which it can meet the demands of the whole community, it is more probable that even after the revolution has begun the proletariat will only be able to transform society gradually. It can only abolish private property entirely when the mode of production is sufficiently developed to make this possible.

## **18. What course of development will the revolution have?**

First and foremost, it will set up a democratic political constitution, thereby ensuring, directly or indirectly, the political sovereignty of the proletariat [\[h\]](#).

Directly in England, where the proletariat already form the majority of the people. Indirectly in France and Germany, where the majority consists not wholly of the proletariat proper, but also of peasants and small bourgeois, whose political interests, however, must depend more and more upon those of the proletariat, and who must therefore inevitably submit themselves to the proletarian will. This may indeed involve a second struggle, but the ultimate victory of the proletariat would not be long delayed. A democratic constitution, of course, would be entirely useless to the proletariat if it did not immediately take further measures aimed directly at private property and thereby making the existence of the proletariat more secure.

The most important of these measures, as suggested by existing relations, are as follows:

1. The gradual limitation of private property by means of progressive taxation, heavy estate duties, the abolition of inheritance by collaterals (brothers, nephews, etc.), forced loans, and so forth.
2. The gradual expropriation of ground landlords, manufacturers, railroad and ship owners, partly through the competition of State industry, partly directly in exchange for assignats (state paper money).
3. The confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels against the majority of the people.
4. The organisation of work for all the proletariat upon national estates or in factories and workshops, in order that the competition of the workers amongst themselves may be abolished. Private owners, so long as they are allowed to remain so, will be compelled to pay the State rate of wages.
5. The compulsion of every member of society to work, and the organisation of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
6. The centralisation of the credit system and the money market under the control of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital; and the suppression of all private banks and bankers.
7. The extension of State factories, railroads, and shipping; the bringing into cultivation of all waste land; and the improvement of all land already cultivated in proportion to the increased capital and greater number of workers at the disposal of the nation.
8. The education of every child in national institutions at the national expense.
9. The erection of large buildings on national estates as communal dwellings for groups of citizens following industrial as well as agricultural pursuits.
10. The destruction of all insanitary and badly built slums and dwellings.
11. Equal opportunities for all children.
12. The concentration of all means of transport in the hands of the State.

Obviously, all these measures cannot be carried through at once. But one will necessitate another. Once the first attack on private property has taken place, the proletariat will find itself compelled to go ever further, until finally all capital, all agriculture, all industry, all transport, and all exchange are in the hands of the State. All the above measures inevitably lead in that direction, and will be practicable enough as they are proceeded with. Then, if all capital production, and exchange are in the hands of the State, private property has not so much been abolished as been enabled to disappear of itself, money has become superfluous, production so

far changed, and mankind so far altered that all remaining forms of the old society can also be permitted to perish.

## **19. Will this revolution be confined to a single country?**

No. Large-scale industry, by creating the world market, has already brought the people of every country (and particularly of civilised countries), into such close touch with each other, that each separate nation is affected by events in any other one. It has further so far levelled social development, that in every country the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has become the most important matter of the day. The communist revolution will not merely be national: it will take place simultaneously in every civilised country, that is, in England, France, America, and Germany, at least. It will develop in each country more quickly or more slowly according as that country possesses a more highly developed industry, greater wealth, or more perfected productive forces. It will, therefore, probably come about most slowly in Germany, most quickly and easily in England. It will at once have an important reaction on other countries, altering or accelerating their development. It is a universal revolution, and must have, therefore, a universal sphere of action.

## **20. What will be the consequences of the abolition of private property?**

First, that as society will have taken out of the hands of the capitalists the entire forces of production and means of transport, administering them according to the actual needs of the whole community, all the evils which are at present inseparably bound up with large-scale industries will be done away with. Crises will end; an increased production, which under the existing order would mean overproduction - a very fruitful source of misery - will then not even be adequate, and would need to be increased yet more, since production over and above the immediate necessities of society would assure the satisfaction of the needs of all, and also beget new necessities and the means of satisfying them. It will be the condition and occasion of further stages of progress, and it will bring about their accomplishment without, as hitherto, society having to go through a period of disorder and disorganisation at every new stage. Large-scale industry, freed from the shackles of private ownership, will develop to an extent compared to which its present development will appear as feeble as does the stage of manufacture compared to large-scale industry of today. Agriculture, too, which is hampered by private ownership and the accompanying parceling-out of land, will be improved and developed by the scientific methods already discovered.

Society will be able to regulate production so that the needs of all its members will be satisfied. The division of society into classes with antagonistic interests ceases automatically. The existence of classes has resulted from the division of labour, and the division of labour to which we are accustomed today will come to an end. For in order to raise industrial and agricultural production to the standards already suggested, mechanical and chemical forces will not of themselves be sufficient. The capacities of the men setting those forces in motion will have to be developed in corresponding measure. Just as the peasants and artisans of the past century altered their whole mode of life, and became quite other men, when they were forced into large-scale industry, so will the common pursuit of production throughout the whole of society, and the new developments of production following thereon, necessitate - and produce - a new type of man. Today men are confined to a single branch of production; they are forced to develop one talent at the expense of all the rest, and know only one process, or even one part of a process. But an industrial commonwealth presupposes men whose talents have been developed on all sides, men who will have an intelligent knowledge of the whole business of production. That division of labour which now makes one man a peasant, another a shoemaker a third a mechanic, and a fourth a stock-market speculator, will entirely vanish. Education will aim at enabling young people to go through the whole system of production, so that they can be transferred from one branch to another according as the necessities of the community demand. A communist society will in this way give far more scope for individual development than does the capitalist society of today.

And along with antagonistic classes, the opposition between town and country will disappear [1]. The pursuit of agriculture and industry by the same men, instead of by two different classes, is already a necessary condition of communistic association. The dispersion of the agricultural population, side by side with the growth of the industrial population in the great towns, is the result of an incompletely developed stage both of agriculture and industry, and is, moreover, an obstacle in the way of further development.

The association of all the members of society in a regulated system of production; the increase of production to an extent at which the needs of all will be satisfied; the cessation of a state of things in which the needs of one are satisfied at the cost of another; the abolition of classes; and the full development of the abilities of all the members of society by the abolition of the present division of labour, by industrial education, and by the blending together of town and country - these will be the results of the abolition of private property.

## 21. How will Communism affect the family?

It will make the relation of the two sexes a purely private relation, which concerns the interested parties and them alone. It can do this because it puts an end to private property and cares for all children alike, thereby doing away with two



fundamental characteristics of present-day marriage - the dependence of the wife on the husband, and of the children on their parents. This is the answer to the shrieks of those highly moral philistines who rave about "community of wives." Community of wives is a relation pertaining to bourgeois society, and exists today, in prostitution. Prostitution, however, is based on private property, and falls with it. Communism, therefore, so far from introducing community of wives, abolishes it.

## **22. How will Communism affect existing nationalities?**

"National differences and antagonisms between peoples," says the Communist Manifesto, "already tend to disappear owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, the freedom of commerce, the world market, and uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto. The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to disappear still more quickly. United action, on the part of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the primary conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end." [\[k\]](#)

## **23. How will Communism affect existing religions?**

"Does it require deep intuition," asks the Communist Manifesto, "to comprehend the fact that man's ideas, views, conceptions, in a word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?.. When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely proclaimed the sway of free competition in the realm of knowledge. The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder, then, that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas." [\[l\]](#)

## **24. How do Communists differ from Socialists?** [\[m\]](#)

The so-called Socialists are divided into three classes.

The first class consists of hangers-on of that feudal and patriarchal society which has already been largely abolished by the development of large-scale industry, and the consequent creation of bourgeois society.

This class, pointing to the evils of existing society, declared that the feudal, patriarchal form of society must be re-established, since it was free from these particular evils. All their proposals are aimed, directly or indirectly, at this object. And these reactionary "Socialists," in spite of the hot tears they shed over the misery of the proletariat, will always be energetically opposed by the Communists, because (1) they strive for something absolutely impossible; (2) they seek to establish the sovereignty of the aristocracy and the guildmasters, with all their retinue of absolute or feudal kings, officials, soldiers and priests - a form of society which was certainly free from the evils of present-day society, but had just as many evils of its own, and held out, moreover, much less hope for the proletariat; and (3) because they reveal themselves in their true colours every time the proletariat revolts, by immediately uniting themselves with the bourgeoisie against the forces of revolution.

The second class of so-called Socialists consists of hangers-on of present-day society, who, being fully alive to the evils of that society, are full of fears for its stability. Accordingly they try to strengthen and maintain the existing form of society by getting rid of its more obvious evils. Their watchword is Reform. And these bourgeois Socialists will also be constantly opposed by the Communists, since they seek to defend the society which the Communists aim at overthrowing.

The third class consists of "democratic" Socialists, who, along with the Communists, are in favour of certain of the reforms outlined in the answer to Question 18; but regard these, not as means of transition to Communism, but as measures adequate in themselves to abolish poverty and misery, and all the other evils of present-day society. These democratic Socialists are either proletarians who have not yet realised the conditions necessary to the emancipation of their class, or they are members of the petty bourgeoisie, a class which, up to a certain point, has the same interests as the proletariat. The Communists will therefore avail themselves of the assistance of this class for the moment, but will not lose sight of the difference of interests which will prevent that assistance being depended upon when the time for action comes.

## **25. Where do the Communists stand in relation to the other political parties of our times?**

The relationship varies in different countries. In England, France and Belgium, where the bourgeoisie is in power, the Communists have many interests in common with the various democratic parties - with the Chartists [\[n\]](#) in England, for instance, who stand much nearer to the Communists than do the democratic petty bourgeoisie, the so-called Radicals. In America, where democratic conditions

already exist, the Communists will work with the party which applies these conditions against the bourgeoisie - i.e., with the Land Reformers [\[o\]](#) .

In Switzerland there are various Radical parties, some of which have progressed further than others, and with which, although they are still somewhat confused in their aims and interests, the Communists can temporarily ally themselves.

Finally, in Germany, a determined struggle between the bourgeoisie and the absolute monarchies is imminent; and since the Communists cannot make their reckoning with the bourgeoisie until the latter has attained power, it is thus to their interest to assist the bourgeoisie in the struggle in order to attack them again as soon as possible on their own account. The Communists will therefore side with the Liberals in opposition to the Government, remembering, however, that the only advantages which the victory of the bourgeoisie would win for the proletariat are (1) greater freedom of discussion and propaganda, thus facilitating the organisation of the proletariat, and (2) the fact that on the day when absolutism fails, the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat takes front place. From that day onwards the policy of the Communists will be the same as in the countries where the bourgeoisie already rules.

## Notes:

[\[a\]](#)

In 1847 Engels wrote two draft programmes for the Communist League in the form of a catechism, one in June and the other in October. The latter, which is known as Principles of Communism, was first published in 1914. The earlier document, Draft of the Communist Confession of Faith, was only found in 1968. It was first published in 1969 in Hamburg, together with four other documents pertaining to the first congress of the Communist League, in a booklet entitled Gründungs Dokumente des Bundes der Kommunisten (Juni bis September 1847) (Founding Documents of the Communist League).

At the June 1847 Congress of the League of the Just, which was also the founding conference of the Communist League, it was decided to issue a draft "confession of faith" to be submitted for discussion to the sections of the League. The document which has now come to light is almost certainly this draft. Comparison of the two documents shows that Principles of Communism is a revised edition of this earlier draft. In Principles of Communism, Engels left three questions unanswered, in two cases with the notation "unchanged" (bleibt); this clearly refers to the answers provided in the earlier draft.

The new draft for the programme was worked out by Engels on the instructions of the leading body of the Paris circle of the Communist League. The instructions were decided on after Engels' sharp criticism at the committee meeting, on October 22,

1847, of the draft programme drawn up by the "true socialist" Moses Hess, which was then rejected.

Still considering Principles of Communism as a preliminary draft, Engels expressed the view, in a letter to Marx dated November 23-24, 1847, that it would be best to drop the old catechistic form and draw up a programme in the form of a manifesto. At the second congress of the Communist League (November 29-December 8, 1847) Marx and Engels defended the fundamental scientific principles of communism and were trusted with drafting a programme in the form of a manifesto of the Communist Party. In writing the manifesto the founders of Marxism made use of the propositions enunciated in Principles of Communism.

[b]

In their works written in later periods, Marx and Engels substituted the more accurate concepts of "sale of labour power", "value of labour power" and "price of labour power" (first introduced by Marx) for "sale of labour", value of labour" and "price of labour".

[c]

By "manufacture" Engels means hand-production in capitalist workshops, or by home-workers employed by a merchant capitalist, as distinct from both independent handicrafts and factory production.

[d]

The idea of an "iron law" forcing wages down to starvation level was widespread at the time among both radicals and conservatives. After Marx's economic studies he and Engels concluded that the commodity sold was labour-power - ability to labour - not labour. They argued that exploitation arose from the peculiar nature of the exchange between worker and capitalist, formally equal but really unequal. The worker sells a commodity, labour-power, for a limited price, while the capitalist gets, when he "consumes" that commodity, command over the general, open-ended, human power to create new wealth. Marx and Engels then rejected the "iron law of wages". Marx wrote that it was "as if to inscribe on the programme of [a slave rebellion]: Slavery must be abolished because the feeding of slaves in the system of slavery cannot exceed a certain low maximum!" See also Marx's pamphlet Wages, Price and Profit on this question.

[e]

In the Draft of the Communist Confession of Faith, the answer to the same question (Number 12) reads as follows: "In contrast to the proletarian, the so-called handicraftsman, as he still existed almost everywhere in the past (eighteenth) century and still exists here and there at present, is a proletarian at most temporarily. His goal is to acquire capital himself wherewith to exploit other workers. He can often achieve this goal where guilds still exist or where freedom

from guild restrictions has not yet led to the introduction of factory-style methods into the crafts nor yet to fierce competition. But as soon as the factory system has been introduced into the crafts and competition flourishes fully, this perspective dwindles away and the handicraftsman becomes more and more a proletarian. The handicraftsman therefore frees himself by becoming either bourgeois or entering the middle class in general, or becoming a proletarian because of competition (as is now more often the case). In which case he can free himself by joining the proletarian movement, i.e., the more or less communist movement."

[f]  
"Patriarchal" here means a family-type relationship, with the worker being tied to the employer like a child to a father.

[g]  
That is, legal requirements that land could pass only to the owner's oldest son. It could not be freely bought and sold.

[h]  
Property qualifications for voting were universal in Europe before 1848, and common well into the 20th century. The demands of the Chartist movement, the world's first mass workers' political party, which flourished in England between 1838 and 1848 were for universal suffrage (for men, and, its more radical elements, for women too), for payment for MPs so that workers could be MPs, and for new elections to Parliament each year. At that time, when the permanent, unelected state machine was far less bulky than it is today, and the bourgeoisie had no mass media or mass political parties dominating the working class, such democratic demands meant - to friend and foe alike - working-class power. See Lenin's *State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*.

[i]  
Marx later corrected this view, arguing that capital tended to increase faster than the number of workers: see *Capital*, volume 1, chapter 25.

[j]  
The abolition of the opposition between town and country was an idea very widespread among radicals of many sorts at the time. The Garden Cities in Britain were a bourgeois-reformist attempt to put it into practice. For the city conditions that provoked this idea, see Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1845.

[k]  
Engels' notation in the manuscript here, "unchanged", obviously refers to the answer in the June draft under No. 21 which read as follows: "The nationalities of the peoples associating themselves in accordance with the principle of community will

be compelled to mingle with each other as a result of this association and thereby to dissolve themselves, just as the various estate and class distinctions must disappear through the abolition of their basis, private property."

[l]

Similarly, there is a reference here to the answer to Question 23 in the June draft which reads: "All religions so far have been the expression of historical stages of development of individual peoples or groups of peoples. But communism is the stage of historical development which makes all existing religions superfluous and brings about their disappearance."

[m]

In the 1890 preface to an edition of the Communist Manifesto, Engels wrote: "When it appeared we could not have called it a Socialist Manifesto. In 1847 two kinds of people were considered Socialists. On the one hand were the adherents of the various Utopian systems, notably the Owenites in England and the Fourierists in France, both of whom at that date had already dwindled to mere sects gradually dying out. On the other hand, the manifold types of social quacks who wanted to eliminate social abuses through their various universal panaceas and all kinds of patchwork, without hurting capital and profit in the least. In both cases, people who stood outside the labour movement and who looked for support rather to the 'educated' classes. The section of the working class, however, which demanded a radical reconstruction of society... Then called itself Communist. It was still a rough-hewn, only instinctive, and frequently somewhat crude communism. Yet... since we were very decidedly of the opinion as early as then that 'the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself', we could have no hesitations as to which of the two names we should choose."

[n]

The Chartists were the participants in the political movement of the British workers which lasted from the 1830s to the middle 1850s and had as its slogan the adoption of a People's Charter, demanding universal franchise and a series of conditions guaranteeing voting rights for all workers. Lenin defined Chartism as the world's "first broad, truly mass and politically organized proletarian revolutionary movement" (Collected Works, Eng. ed., Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 29, p. 309).

[o]

Probably a references to the National Reform Association, founded during the 1840s by George H. Evans, with headquarters in New York City, which had for its motto, "Vote Yourself a Farm".

# Karl Kautsky: The Class Struggle

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/kautsky.htm>

The conditions of labour under capitalist production themselves point the workers to the necessity of standing by each other, the necessity that the individual should be subservient to the collective body. While in handicraft, in its classic form, each individual himself created a complete whole, capitalist industry is based upon working together, upon co-operation. The capitalist industry worker can accomplish nothing without his comrades. If they attack the work unitedly and according to plan, the productivity of each one of them is doubled and trebled. Thus their work makes them realise the force of united action, and develops in them a voluntary joyful discipline which is the first condition of co-operative socialist production, but which is also a primary condition of any successful struggle of the proletariat against exploitation under capitalist production. The latter itself in this way educates the proletariat to overthrow it and to work under Socialist production. Capitalist production throws the most different trades together. In a capitalist institution workers of various trades work for the most part side by side and together towards the attainment of a common object. On the other side there is the tendency to obliterate altogether the idea of the special trade in production. The machine shortens the apprenticeship of the workers which formerly extended over years, to a training of a few weeks or often even days. It makes it possible for the individual worker to change over from one trade to another without too great difficulty. It often forces him to do so, by rendering him superfluous in that branch in which he was hitherto employed, throwing him into the street, and forcing him to look round for a new trade. The freedom of the choice of occupation, which the Philistine fears so greatly to lose in Socialist society, has today already lost all meaning for the worker. Under these circumstances it is easy for him to overstep the barrier before which the handicraftsman halted. The feeling of solidarity in the modern proletarian is not only international but it includes the whole working class.

Various forms of wage work existed already in ancient and medieval times. Neither are the struggles between wage workers and their exploiters anything new. But it is not until the dominion of capitalist large industry that we see a united class of wage-workers arise, who are quite conscious of the unity of their interests, and who make their special interests (not only personal, but also local and - as far as they still exist - trade interests) more and more subservient to the larger interests of the class as a whole. It was not until the nineteenth century that the struggles of the wage workers against exploitation assumed the character of a class struggle. And this is the only means of giving these struggles a broader and higher goal than the liberation from momentary evils, of converting the labour movement into a revolutionary movement.

Thus from among the despised, ill-treated, downtrodden proletariat arise a new historic world-power, before which the old powers are beginning to tremble; a new



class is growing up with a new morality and a new philosophy, and increasing daily in numbers, in solidarity, economic indispensability, self-confidence and insight.

The upraising of the proletariat from its degradation is an unavoidable process, based on natural necessity. But it is by no means a peaceful or steady process. The capitalist method of production tends to crush down the working population more and more. The moral regeneration of the proletariat is only possible by means of the reaction against this tendency and the capitalists who are the representatives of it. It is only possible by means of the sufficient strengthening of the reaction, the contrary tendencies which are engendered among the proletarians by the new conditions under which they work and live. The debasing tendencies of the capitalist method of production, however, vary extremely at different times, in different localities and in the different branches of industry; they depend upon the state of the market, on the competition between the individual undertakings, on the degree to which the machine system has developed in any given branch, on the amount of insight possessed by the capitalists into their more permanent interests, etc., etc. The opposing tendencies, which are developing among the individual categories of proletarians, depend also upon various circumstances, upon the habits and requirements of the classes of the population from which these particular proletarians are for the most part drawn; on the degree of skill or strength demanded by the labour in that branch of industry in which they are engaged; on the extension of women's and children's labour; on the size of the industrial reserve army, which is by no means equal in every trade; on the insight of the workers, and, finally, upon whether the nature of the work tends to disperse and cut off the workers from each other, or to unite and draw them together, etc.

Each of these conditions varies very much in different branches of industry and among different categories of workers, and is subject to constant changes as the technical and economic revolution uninterruptedly progresses. Every day fresh districts and fresh trades are subjected to exploitation and proletarianisation through capital; every day new branches of industry are created, while the present ones are incessantly revolutionised. As in the early days of capitalism, so today we see ever new categories of the population sinking into the proletariat, perishing among the outcasts of society, while new categories are also continually rising out of it; among the working proletariat itself, a continual rise and fall may be seen, some strata moving in an upward, others in a downward direction, according as the elevating or degrading conditions happen to preponderate among them.

But happily for the development of human society, the moment arrives, sooner or later with most categories of proletarians, when the elevating tendencies decidedly get the upper hand, and when these tendencies have once become so effectual among any such category as to awaken in it self-confidence, class consciousness, the consciousness of the solidarity of all its members with each other and with the whole working class, the consciousness of the strength which springs from unity of action; as soon as they have aroused in this category of proletarians self respect and the consciousness of their economic indispensability, and the

conviction that the working class is moving on towards a better future, as soon as a category of proletarians has once risen so far then it becomes immensely difficult to crush them down again to the level of the indifferent masses of those degenerate existences, who, indeed, hate, but without being able to band themselves together to a prolonged struggle, who despair of themselves and their future and seek oblivion in drink, who, from their sufferings do not draw the spirit of defiant revolt, but of timid submission. It is almost impossible to destroy class-consciousness in any category of proletarian when it has once become deeply rooted there.

## **The Political Struggle**

Just in the same way as the proletariat, in forming its organisations of self-defence, imitated those of the journeymen, so its original weapons in the struggle are, wherever it is compactly organised, the same as those the journeymen made use of: the boycott, and, above all, the strike. But the proletariat cannot continue to limit itself to these two weapons. The more that the single categories of which it consists become welded together into one united working class, the more must its struggle assume a political character, for, as the Communist Manifesto points out, every class struggle is a political struggle.

Already the needs of the pure trade union movement, as such, force the workers to make demands of a political nature. We have seen how the modern State looks upon it as its principal function with regard to the workers, to render their organisations impossible. But a secret organisation can never be anything but an insufficient substitute for an open one, and that is all the more the case the greater the masses that have to be united in one body. The more the proletariat develops itself, the more does it require freedom to unite, freedom of coalition.

Today thousands of workers are employed in the great centres of industry, each of whom is only acquainted with some few of his fellow workers, and quite out of nearer personal touch with the great mass of his comrades. In order to bring these masses into communication with each other, to awaken within them the consciousness of the unity of the interests, and to win them over to the organisations which serve to protect those interests, it is necessary to be able to speak freely to great masses; it is necessary therefore to have the right of free assembly and a free press. The journeymen had no need of the Press. In the small circle in which they moved, verbal communication was sufficient. But to unite the enormous masses of the present-day wage workers in organisation and in united action, is, without the help of the Press, quite impossible.

This applies all the more in proportion as the modern means of communication develop. These constitute a forcible weapon for the capitalists in their struggles with the workers. They enable them, for instance, to procure great numbers of workers quickly from a long distance. If they are embroiled in a conflict with their own workers the latter can easily be replaced by others - always presupposing that the two sets are not in communication with each other. The development

of communication thus makes it more and more necessary for the single local movements of the workers in the different trades to unite into one single movement, embracing the whole militant working class of the whole country - yes, indeed, of all the industrial lands. But this national and international union of the wage-workers needs, still more than the local organising work, the aid of the Press.

Thus, wherever the working class is stirring, where it is making the first attempts to elevate its economic position, we see that besides demands of a purely economic nature, it formulates others of a political nature, especially those concerning freedom of coalition, the right of public meeting and the freedom of the Press. These liberties are of the greatest importance to the working class; they belong to the conditions of its life which are absolutely necessary for their development. They are to the proletariat as light and air, and whoever deprives the former of them, or tries to hold back the workers from the struggle to win or extend these liberties, belongs to the worst enemies of the proletariat, however great the love he may feel, or pretend to feel, for them. And whether he calls himself Anarchist, Christian-Socialist, or anything else, he injures the workers just as their open enemy does, and whether he does so from malice aforethought, or from mere ignorance, is indifferent - he must be fought just as much as the recognised opponents of the proletariat.

Sometimes the political struggle has been represented as opposed to the economic struggle, and it has been said to be necessary that the proletariat should turn only to the one or the other. The truth is that the two are inseparable from each other. The economic struggle requires the above-mentioned political rights, which, however, do not fall from heaven, but which, to be acquired and retained, demand the most rigorous of political action. But the political struggle itself is in the last instance also an economic struggle; often, indeed, it is directly so, for instance in questions of taxation, protection of labour, and similar matters. The political struggle is only a particular form - the most all-embracing and generally most intense form - of the economic struggle.

Not only those laws which directly concern the working class, but also the great majority of the others, touch their interests more or less. Therefore the working class, like every other class, must aspire to political influence and political power, must seek to get the State power under its control.

Where the proletariat approaches the parliamentary struggles (especially election campaigns) and takes part as a conscious class in parliamentary life, the nature of parliamentarism begins to change. It ceases to be a mere means towards bourgeois rule. It is just these struggles that constitute so effectual a means of arousing the still indifferent categories of proletarians, of inspiring them with confidence and enthusiasm; they prove the most powerful means of welding the various categories of proletarians together into a united working class, and, finally, also, the most powerful means which is at present at the disposal of the proletariat of influencing the State force in its favour, and of wresting from it such concessions as it is possible, under present circumstances, to wrest from it; in short these struggles are among

the most powerful levers for raising the proletariat from its economic, social and moral debasement.

The working class has, then, not only no reason to abstain from parliamentarism, it has every reason for taking active part in everything that tends to strengthen parliamentarism as against the administration of the State, and to strengthen its own representation in Parliament. Alongside of the right of coalition and the freedom of the Press, adult suffrage constitutes a necessity of life for the proper development of the proletariat.

## **The Labour Movement and Socialism**

The socialists did not always, from the beginning, recognise the part which the militant proletariat is called upon to play in the socialist movement. They could not do so as long as there was no such thing as a militant proletariat, for socialism is older than the proletarian class struggle. Socialism dates back to the first appearance of the proletariat in the mass. But the proletariat existed a long time without its showing the slightest stirring of independent thought within it. The first, and at that time the only, root of socialism was the pity which the philanthropists of the higher classes felt for the poor and miserable. The socialists were the most intrepid and far-seeing of these friends of humanity, those who recognised most clearly that the proletariat was rooted in the private ownership of the means of production, and who did not hesitate to draw the fullest conclusions from this realisation. Socialism was, of all the expressions of middle-class philanthropy, the one most full of character, most far-seeing and magnificent. There was no class interest to spur on the socialists of that time in the struggle towards their goal; they could only appeal to the enthusiasm and sympathy of the idealists among the upper classes. These they sought to win by means of, on the one side, seductive pictures of a socialist commonwealth, and, on the other, by forcible representations of the existing misery. Not by fighting, but by peaceful persuasion, were the rich and mighty to be moved to provide the means towards a thorough amelioration of this misery, toward the formation of an ideal state of society. The socialists of this period, as is well known, waited in vain for the princes and millionaires whose generosity was to deliver mankind.

In the first decades of the last century the proletariat began to show some signs of independent life. We find in the thirties, in France, and especially in England, a strong labour movement.

But the socialists did not understand this movement. They did not think it possible that the poor, ignorant, crude proletarians could ever reach that moral elevation and social power which would be needed in order to realise the socialist aspirations. But it was not mistrust alone that they felt towards the working-class movement. They began to find it awkward, as it threatened to deprive them of a forcible argument, for the middle-class socialists could only hope to make the sensitive bourgeois see the necessity for socialism if they could prove that it was the only hope of even keeping

the distress within bounds, that any attempt to mitigate the misery or to elevate the propertyless class under existing conditions would prove futile and that it was impossible for the proletarians to help themselves. The labour movement, on the other hand, was based on assumptions which contradicted this train of thought. There was also another circumstance. The class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie naturally embittered the latter against the rising proletariat, who, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, instead of pitiable unfortunates who must be assisted, became vicious, dangerous miscreants who must be beaten and kept down. The chief root of socialism in bourgeois circles, pity for the poor and miserable, began to wither. The socialist doctrine itself no longer appeared to the frightened bourgeoisie as a harmless plaything, but as a highly dangerous weapon which might get into the hands of the mob, thereby causing unspeakable disaster. In short, the stronger the labour movement became, the more difficult became the propagation of socialism among the ruling classes, and the more antagonistic they became towards it.

As long as the socialists were of the opinion that the means of reaching the socialist goal could only come from among the upper classes, they naturally viewed the labour movement not only with distrust, but sometimes even with decided animosity, as they inclined to the idea that nothing was more injurious to the cause of socialism than the class struggle.

This unsympathetic attitude of the middle-class socialists towards the labour movement naturally did not fail to react on the attitude of the latter towards socialism. If the rising portion of the proletariat not only met with no support from the socialists, but even with opposition, if the teachings of the latter threatened to discourage them, it was all too easy for mistrust and dislike of the whole socialist doctrine itself, not only of its application to the struggles of the times, to arise among them. The mistrust was increased by the thoughtlessness and want of education which, in the early days of the labour movement, were rife even among the masses of militant proletarians. The narrowness of their horizon made it very difficult for them to understand the ultimate objects of socialism, and they had as yet no clear and far-seeing consciousness of the social position and function of their class, they only felt a dim class-instinct, which taught them distrust of everyone who came from the bourgeoisie, thus also of the middle-class socialism, just as of middle-class philanthropy in general.

Among many categories of workers, especially in England, this mistrust of socialism at that time took deep root. To the after-effects of this - combined with many other causes - it is partially to be ascribed that until about twenty-five years ago England was practically impregnable to socialist aspirations, even though the newer socialism takes up a completely different attitude towards the labour movement from that of the middle-class Utopians.

All the same, however great the gulf between socialism and the militant proletariat might at times become, the former is nevertheless so perfectly adapted to the needs of those proletarians who think for the future, that even when the masses were in opposition to socialism, the best intellects among the working class soon turned

towards it in so far as they had the opportunity of getting acquainted with its teachings. And it was through their agency that the views of the Utopian socialists underwent an important metamorphosis. They were not like the latter, obliged to respect the ideas of the bourgeoisie, whom they hated and bitterly opposed. The peaceful socialism of the bourgeois Utopians, who wanted to bring about the deliverance of mankind by means of the action of the best elements among the upper classes, changed among the workers into a forcible, revolutionary socialism, which was to be carried out by the efforts of the proletarians themselves.

But even this primitive working-class socialism had no comprehension of the labour movement; it, also, was opposed to the class struggle - at least, to its highest form, the political form - for other reasons, it is true, than the middle-class Utopians. In a scientific sense it was impossible for it to get beyond them. At the best, the proletarian can but appropriate a part of the knowledge which the learning of the middle classes has brought to light and adapt it to his desires and needs. As long as he remains a proletarian he has no leisure nor means to carry on science independently beyond the point attained by the bourgeois thinkers. Therefore the primitive working-class socialism bore all the characteristic marks of Utopianism; it had no idea of economic development, which creates the material elements of socialist production, and nurtures and ripens, by means of the class struggle, that class which is called to take possession of those elements and build up out of them the new state of society. Like the bourgeois Utopians, these proletarians also believed a form of society to be a structure which could be voluntarily erected according to a previously worked out plan once one had the means and the site for it. The proletarian Utopians, who were as bold and as energetic as they were naive, credited themselves with the strength to manage the building up; it was only a question of procuring the necessary site and means. They did not, of course, expect these to be placed at their disposal by a prince or a millionaire; the Revolution was to demolish the old structure, break up the old powers, and give the dictatorship to the little group who had discovered the new plan of building, which would enable the new Messiah to erect the structure of socialist society.

In this train of thought the class struggle found no place. The proletarian Utopians were feeling too keenly the misery in which they lived not to wish impatiently for its immediate abolition. Even if they had considered it possible for the class struggle to elevate the proletariat and make it capable of assisting in the further development of society, this process would have appeared to them far too complicated. But they had no faith in such an elevation. They were only at the beginning of the labour movement, the categories of proletarians taking part in it were but few and small, and even among these militant proletarians there were very few individuals who had more in view than the protection of their immediate interests. To educate the mass of the population in socialist thought appeared hopeless. The only thing this mass was capable of was an outbreak of despair, in which everything existing might be destroyed, thereby clearing the path for the socialists. The worse the condition of the masses the nearer - so thought the primitive working-class socialist - must the moment be when their lot would become so unendurable to them that they would

demolish the upper part of the social structure which was crushing them. A struggle for the gradual elevation of the working class was, in the opinion of these socialists, not only hopeless, but decidedly injurious, because the trivial improvements which such a struggle might temporarily attain, would make the existing order more tolerable to the masses, thereby putting off the moment of their rising and of the destruction of this order, and therewith also the moment of the thorough abolition of their misery. Every form of the class struggle which had not the immediate and complete overthrow of the existing order as its goal - that is, every effectual form which is to be taken seriously - was, in the eyes of these socialists, nothing less than treason to the cause of humanity.

It is more than half a century ago that this line of thought, which probably found its most brilliant exponent in Weitling, appeared among the working class. It has not yet died out. The inclination towards it is apparent in every category of the working class who are about to enter the ranks of the militant proletariat; it shows itself in every country the proletariat of which is beginning to be conscious of its unworthy and unbearable position, and to become filled with socialist tendencies, without having yet gained a clear insight into the social conditions and without crediting itself with the strength for a prolonged class struggle; and as new categories of proletarians are ever lifting themselves up from the quagmire into which economic development has pressed them down, and new lands are ever becoming invaded by the capitalist method of production, and the resulting proletarianisation of the masses, this train of thought of the primitive Utopian workmen-socialists may yet reappear many times. It is a disease of childhood, which threatens every young proletarian socialist movement that has not yet advanced beyond Utopianism.

It is usual today to describe these kind of Socialist views as Anarchism, but they are on no account necessarily akin to the latter. As they do not arise from clear insight into things, but only from an instinct of revolt, they are compatible with very diverse theoretical standpoints. But it is true that lately the rough and violent socialism of the primitive proletarian and the often very sensitive, highly strung and peaceful anarchism of the over-refined petty bourgeois are often in alliance with each other, because, in spite of all the far-reaching differences between them, there is one thing that they have in common, the disinclination for, indeed the hatred of, the prolonged class struggle, especially in its highest form - the political struggle.

The Utopian Socialism of the proletarians was quite as unable as that of the middle classes to overcome the antagonism between socialism and the labour movement. It is true the proletarian Utopians were at times forced by circumstances to take part in the class struggle, but, owing to their instability on the theoretical side, the participation did not tend towards a final union between socialism and the labour movement, but towards the crowding out of the former by the latter. It is well known that the anarchist movement (the word is used here in the sense of this proletarian Utopianism), wherever it has become a mass movement, a real class struggle, has, in spite of its apparent radicalism, sooner or later ended either in



narrow trades unionism pure and simple, or in an equally narrow exclusive co-operative movement.

## **Social-Democracy: the union of the labour movement and socialism**

In order for the socialist and labour movements to be reconciled and welded into one united movement, it was necessary for socialism to rise above the Utopian line of thought. The accomplishment of this is the historic work of Marx and Engels, who, in 1847, in their Communist Manifesto laid the scientific foundations of the new modern socialism or, as it is called today, social-democracy. They thereby gave a backbone to socialism, which had until then been but a beautiful dream of a few well-meaning enthusiasts, and converted it into a serious goal to be fought for, and proved it to be the necessary result of economic development. To the militant proletariat they gave a clear consciousness of its historic mission, and placed it in the position to proceed towards its great goal as quickly and with as little sacrifice as possible. The function of the socialists is no longer to invent a new state of society according to desire, but to discover its composite elements within present day society. They no longer have to bring it upon the proletariat deliverance out of their misery from above, but to support their class struggle by increasing their insight and assisting their economic and political organisations, so that they may ripen faster and less painfully towards the time when they will be able to deliver themselves. To make the class struggle of the proletariat as conscious and as practical as possible, that is the function of the Social-Democracy.

A further exposition of the line of thought in the teaching of Marx and Engels is unnecessary, for all that we have already said is founded upon it, and is nothing more or less than an exposition and working out of this teaching.

The class struggle of the proletariat receives, through this teaching, a new character. As long as it has not Socialist production for its goal, as long as the aspirations of the militant proletariat do not extend beyond the framework of the present method of production, the class struggle appears only to move in a circle without leaving the spot, and the struggles of the proletariat for a satisfactory existence seem to be Sisyphean labour. For the degrading tendencies of the capitalist method of production are not destroyed but at the utmost, only held somewhat in check by the class struggle and its achievements. The proletarianising of the middle classes of society continues unbrokenly; fresh members and whole categories of the working-classes are ceaselessly being forced into the ranks of the outcast class, while the capitalists' greed for gain is ever threatening the destruction of even the little that the better-situated workers have already attained. Each shortening of the working day, whether attained through economic or political struggles, is made the occasion for the introduction of labour-saving machines, for intensifying the labour of the workers; every improvement in the proletarian organisations is answered by an improvement in the capitalist organisations, etc., and at the same time

unemployment is increasing; the crises are becoming extended both in dimensions and intensity and the precariousness of existence is becoming even greater and more tormenting. The elevation of the working class, which the class struggle brings about is less an economic than a moral one. The economic conditions of the proletarians in general only improve slightly and slowly - if at all - as a result of the class struggle. But the self-respect of the proletarians increases and also the respect that other classes of society give them; they are beginning to feel themselves equal to those who are better situated than they are, and to compare their circumstances with their own; they are beginning to expect more from themselves, from their housing and clothing, their knowledge, the education of their children, etc., and to demand participation in the acquisitions of culture. And they are ever becoming more sensitive towards every slight and every oppression.

This moral elevation of the proletariat is synonymous with the awakening and steady growth of their demands. This is growing much too rapidly for those improvements in their economic position, which are compatible with the present-day method of exploitation, to keep pace with it. All these improvements, which some hope and others fear will make the workers contented, must always be less than the demands of the latter, which are the natural result of their moral elevation. The result of the class struggle then can only be to increase the discontent of the proletarian with his lot, a discontent which naturally makes itself specially felt wherever the economic elevation of the proletariat remains farthest behind moral elevation, the increase of which, however, is nowhere, in the long run, to be hindered. And so the class struggle appears, after all, objectless and fruitless if its aspirations do not extend beyond the existing method of production. The higher it elevates the proletarian, the further he finds himself from the goal of his aspirations, namely, a contented existence, answering to his ideas of human dignity.

Only socialist production can put an end to the want of proportion between the demands of the worker and the means of satisfying them, by abolishing all exploitation and class differences; it will, by this means, abolish that powerful incentive to the worker to be discontented with his lot, which is today roused in him by the sight of luxury. Once this incentive is removed, the workers will, of their own accord, limit their demands to the bounds of possibility, that is, of the available means for satisfying the wants of all.

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## Rosa Luxemburg: The Spartacus Programme

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/spartac.htm>

Comrades: Our task today is to discuss and adopt a programme. In undertaking this task we are not actuated solely by the consideration that yesterday we founded a new party<sup>1</sup> and that a new party must formulate a programme. Great historical

movements have been the determining causes of today's deliberations. The time has arrived when the entire socialist programme of the proletariat has to be established upon a new foundation. We are faced with a position similar to that which was faced by Marx and Engels when they wrote the Communist Manifesto seventy years ago. As you all know, the Communist Manifesto dealt with socialism, with the realisation of the aims of socialism, as the immediate task of the proletarian revolution. This was the idea represented by Marx and Engels in the revolution of 1848<sup>2</sup>: it was thus, likewise, that they conceived the basis for proletarian action in the international field. In common with all the leading spirits in the working class movement, both Marx and Engels then believed that the immediate introduction of socialism was at hand. All that was necessary was to bring about a political revolution, to seize the political power of the state, and socialism would then immediately pass from the realm of thought to the realm of flesh and blood. Subsequently, as you are aware, Marx and Engels undertook a thoroughgoing revision of this outlook. In the joint preface to the re-issue of the Communist Manifesto in the year 1872, we find the following passage:

"No special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section Two. That passage would, in many respects, be differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of modern industry during the last twenty-five years and of the accompanying improved and extended organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution<sup>3</sup>, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune<sup>4</sup>, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz: that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

What is the actual wording of the passage thus declared to be out of date? It runs as follows: "The proletariat will use its political supremacy: to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie; to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

"Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.

"The measures will, of course, be different in different countries. Nevertheless, in the most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all land rents to public purposes.

2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of the right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state: the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally, in accordance with a concerted plan.
8. Equal obligation upon all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Coordination of agriculture with manufacturing industries: gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population throughout the rural areas.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc., etc."

With a few trifling variations, these, as you know, are the tasks that confront us today. It is by such measures that we shall have to realise socialism. Between the day when the above programme was formulated, and the present hour, there have intervened seventy years of capitalist development, and the historical evolutionary process has brought us back to the standpoint which Marx and Engels had in 1872 abandoned as erroneous. At that time there were excellent reasons for believing that their earlier views had been wrong. The further evolution of capital has, however, resulted in this, that what was error in 1872 has become truth today, so that it is our immediate objective to fulfil what Marx and Engels thought they would have to fulfil in the year 1848. But between that point of development, that beginning in the year 1848, and our own views and our immediate task, there lies the whole evolution, not only of capitalism, but in addition of the socialist labour movement. Above all, there have intervened the aforesaid developments in Germany as the leading land of the modern proletariat. This working class evolution has taken a peculiar form. When, after the disillusionments of 1848, Marx and Engels had given up the idea that the proletariat could immediately realise socialism, there came into existence in all countries socialist parties inspired with very different aims. The immediate objective of these parties was declared to be detail work, the petty daily struggle in the political and industrial fields. Thus, by degrees, would proletarian armies be formed, and these armies would be ready to realise socialism when capitalist development had matured. The socialist programme was thereby established upon an utterly different foundation, and in Germany the change took a peculiarly typical

form. Down to the collapse of August 4th, 1914<sup>5</sup>, the German Social Democracy took its stand upon the Erfurt programme<sup>6</sup>, and by this programme the so-called immediate minimal aims were placed in the foreground, whilst socialism was no more than a distant guiding star. Far more important, however, than what is written in a programme is the way in which that programme is interpreted in action. From this point of view, great importance must be attached to one of the historical documents of the German labour movement, to the Preface written by Friedrich Engels<sup>7</sup> for the 1895 re-issue of Marx's *Class Struggles in France*.

It is not merely upon historical grounds that I now reopen this question. The matter is one of extreme actuality. It has become our urgent duty today to replace our programme upon the foundation laid by Marx and Engels in 1848. In view of the changes effected since then by the historical process of development, it is incumbent upon us to undertake a deliberate revision of the views that guided the German Social Democracy down to the collapse of August 4th. Upon such a revision we are officially engaged today. How did Engels envisage the question in that celebrated Preface to the *Class Struggles in France*, composed by him in 1895, twelve years after the death of Marx? First of all, looking back upon the year 1848, he showed that the belief that the socialist revolution was imminent had become obsolete. He continued as follows:

"History has shown that we were all mistaken in holding such a belief. It has shown that the state of economic evolution upon the Continent was then far from being ripe for the abolition of capitalist production. This has been proved by the economic revolution which since 1848 has taken place all over the continent. Large-scale industry has been established in France, Austria-Hungary, Poland and, of late, Russia. Germany has become a manufacturing country of first rank. All these changes have taken place upon a capitalist foundation, a foundation which in the year 1848 still had to undergo an enormous extension."

After summing up the changes which had occurred in the intervening period, Engels turned to consider the immediate tasks of the German Social-Democratic Party.

"As Marx had predicted, the war of 1870-71<sup>8</sup> and the fall of the Commune shifted the centre of gravity of the European labour movement from France to Germany. Many years had naturally to elapse ere France could recover from the blood-letting of May 1871<sup>9</sup>. In Germany, on the other hand, manufacturing industry was developing by leaps and bounds, in the forcing-house atmosphere produced by the influx of the French billions<sup>10</sup>. Even more rapid and more enduring was the growth of Social Democracy. Thanks to the agreement in virtue of which the German workers have been able to avail themselves of the universal (male) suffrage introduced in 1869, the astounding growth of the party has been demonstrated to all the world by the testimony of figures whose significance no one can deny."

Thereupon followed the famous enumeration, showing the growth of the party vote in election after election until the figures swelled to millions. From this progress Engels drew the following conclusion:

"The successful employment of the parliamentary vote entailed the acceptance of an entirely new tactic by the proletariat and this new method has undergone rapid development. It has been realised that the political institutions in which the dominion of the bourgeoisie is incorporated offer a fulcrum whereby the proletariat can work for the over-throw of these very political institutions. The Social Democrats have participated in the elections to the various Diets, to Municipal Councils, and to Industrial Courts. Wherever the proletariat could secure an effective voice the occupation of these electoral strongholds by the bourgeoisie has been contested. Consequently, the bourgeoisie and the government have become much more alarmed at the constitutional than at the unconstitutional activities of the workers, dreading the results of elections far more than they dread the results of rebellion."

Engels appends a detailed criticism of the illusion that under modern capitalist conditions the proletariat can possibly expect to effect anything for the revolution by street fighting. It seems to me, however, that today we are in the midst of a revolution, a revolution characterised by street fighting and all that it entails, that it is time to shake ourselves free of the views which have guided the official policy of the German Social Democracy down to our own day, of the views which share responsibility for what happened on August 4th, 1914. (*Hear! Hear!*)

I do not mean to imply that, on account of these utterances, Engels must share personal responsibility for the whole course of socialist evolution in Germany. I merely draw your attention to one of the classical pieces of evidence of the opinions prevailing in the German Social Democracy - opinions which proved fatal to the movement. In this Preface Engels demonstrated, as an expert in military science, that it was a pure illusion to believe that the workers could, in the existing state of military technique and of industry, and in view of the characteristics of the great towns of today, successfully bring about a revolution by street fighting. Two important conclusions were drawn from this reasoning. In the first place, the parliamentary struggle was counterposed to direct revolutionary action by the proletariat, and the former was indicated as the only practical way of carrying on the class struggle. Parliamentarism, and nothing but parliamentarism, was the logical sequel of this criticism. Secondly, the whole military machine, the most powerful organisation in the class state, the entire body of proletarians in military uniform, was declared on a priori grounds to be absolutely inaccessible to socialist influence. When Engels' Preface declares that, owing to the modern development of gigantic armies, it is positively insane to suppose that proletarians can ever stand up against soldiers armed with machine guns and equipped with all the other latest technical devices? The assertion is obviously based upon the assumption that anyone who becomes a soldier becomes thereby once and for all one of the props of the ruling class.

It would be absolutely incomprehensible, in the light of contemporary experience, that so noted a leader as Engels could have committed such a blunder did we not know the circumstances in which this historical document was composed. For the credit of our two great masters, and especially for the credit of Engels, who died twelve years later than Marx, and was always a faithful champion of his great collaborator's theories and reputation I must remind you of the well-known fact that the Preface in question was written by Engels under strong pressure on the part of the parliamentary group. At that date in Germany, during the early 'nineties after the Anti-Socialist Law<sup>11</sup> had been annulled, there was a strong movement toward the left, the movement of those who wished to save the party from becoming completely absorbed in the parliamentary struggle. Bebel and his associates wished for convincing arguments, backed up by Engels' great authority; they wished for an utterance which would help them to keep a tight hand upon the revolutionary elements. It was characteristic of party conditions at the time that the socialist parliamentarians should have the decisive word alike in theory and in practice. They assured Engels, who lived abroad and naturally accepted the assurance at its face value, that it was absolutely essential to safeguard the German labour movement from a lapse into anarchism and in this way they constrained him to write in the tone they wished. Thenceforward the tactics expounded by Engels in 1895 guided the German Social Democrats in everything they did and in everything they left undone, down to the appropriate finish of August 4th, 1914. The Preface was the formal proclamation of the nothing-but-parliamentarism tactic. Engels died the same year and had, therefore, no opportunity for studying the practical consequences of his theory.

Those who know the works of Marx and Engels, those who are familiarly acquainted with the genuinely revolutionary spirit that inspired all their teachings and all their writings, will feel positively certain that Engels would have been one of the first to protest against the debauch of parliamentarism, against the frittering away of the energies of the labour movement, which was characteristic of Germany during the decades before the war. The 4th of August did not come like thunder out of a clear sky, what happened on the 4th of August was not a chance turn of affairs, but was the logical outcome of all that the German Socialists had been doing day after day for many years. (*Hear! Hear!*) Engels and Marx, had it been possible for them to live on into our own times, would, I am convinced, have protested with the utmost energy, and would have used all the forces at their disposal to keep the party from hurling itself into the abyss.

But after Engels' death in 1895, in the theoretical field the leadership of the party passed into the hands of Kautsky<sup>12</sup>. The upshot of this change was that at every annual congress the energetic protests of the left-wing against a purely parliamentarist policy, its urgent warnings against the sterility and the danger of such a policy, were stigmatised as anarchism, anarchising socialism, or at least anti-Marxism. What passed officially for Marxism became a cloak for all possible kinds of opportunism, for persistent shirking of the revolutionary class struggle,



for every conceivable half-measure. Thus the German Social Democracy and the labour movement, the trade union movement as well, were condemned to pine away within the framework of capitalist society. No longer did German socialists and trade unionists make any serious attempts to overthrow capitalist institutions or put the capitalist machine out of gear.

But we have now reached the point, comrades, when we are able to say that we have rejoined Marx, that we are once more advancing under his flag. If today we declare that the immediate task of the proletariat is to make socialism a living reality and to destroy capitalism root and branch, in saying this we take our stand upon the ground occupied by Marx and Engels in 1848; we adopt a position from which in principle they never moved. It has at length become plain what true Marxism is, and what substitute Marxism has been. (*Applause*) I mean the substitute Marxism which has so long been the official Marxism of the Social Democracy. You see what Marxism of this sort leads to, the Marxism of those who are the henchmen of Ebert, David<sup>13</sup> and the rest of them. These are the official representatives of the doctrine which has been trumpeted for decades as Marxism undefiled. But in reality Marxism could not lead in this direction, could not lead Marxists to engage in counter-revolutionary activities side by side with such as Scheidemann. Genuine Marxism turns its weapons against those also who seek to falsify it. Burrowing like a mole beneath the foundations of capitalist society, it has worked so well that the larger half of the German proletariat is marching today under our banner, the storm-riding standard of revolution. Even in the opposite camp, even where the counter-revolution still seems to rule, we have adherents and future comrades-in-arms.

Let me repeat, then, that the course of historical evolution has led us back to the point at which Marx and Engels stood in 1848 when they first hoisted the flag of international socialism. We stand where they stood, but with the advantage that seventy additional years of capitalist development lie behind us. Seventy years ago, to those who reviewed the errors and illusions of 1848, it seemed as if the proletariat had still an interminable distance to traverse before it could hope to realise socialism. I need hardly say that no serious thinker has ever been inclined to fix upon a definite date for the collapse of capitalism; but after the failures of 1848, the day for that collapse seemed to lie in the distant future. Such a belief, too, can be read in every line of the Preface which Engels wrote in 1895. We are now in a position to cast up the account, and we are able to see that the time has really been short in comparison with that occupied by the sequence of class-struggles throughout history. The progress of large-scale capitalist development during seventy years has brought us so far that today we can seriously set about destroying capitalism once and for all. Nay more; not merely are we today in a position to perform this task, not merely is its performance a duty toward the proletariat, but our solution offers the only means of saving human society from destruction. (*Loud applause.*) What has the war left of bourgeois society beyond a gigantic rubbish heap? Formally, of course, all the means of production and most of the instruments of power, practically all the decisive instruments of power, are still

in the hands of the dominant classes. We are under no illusions here. But what our rulers will be able to achieve with the powers they possess, over and above frantic attempts to re-establish their system of spoliation through blood and slaughter, will be nothing more than chaos.

Matters have reached such a pitch that today mankind is faced with two alternatives: it may perish amid chaos; or it may find salvation in socialism. The outcome of the Great War makes it impossible for the capitalist classes to find any release from their difficulties while they maintain class rule. We now realise the absolute truth of the statement formulated for the first time by Marx and Engels as the scientific basis of socialism in the great charter of our movement, in the Communist Manifesto. Socialism will become an historical necessity. Socialism is inevitable not merely because the proletarians are no longer willing to live under the conditions imposed by the capitalist class, but, further, because if the proletariat fails to fulfil its duties as a class, if it fails to realise socialism, we shall crash down together to a common doom. (*Prolonged applause.*)

Here you have the general foundation of the programme we are officially adopting today, a draft of which you have all read in the pamphlet, Was will der Spartakusbund? [[What does Spartacus Want](#)]. Our programme is deliberately opposed to the leading principle of the Erfurt programme; it is deliberately opposed to the separation of the immediate and so-called minimal demands formulated for the political and economic struggle, from the socialist goal regarded as a maximal programme. It is in deliberate opposition to the Erfurt programme that we liquidate the results of seventy years' evolution, that we liquidate, above all, the primary results of the war, saying we know nothing of minimal and maximal programmes; we know only one thing, socialism; this is the minimum we are going to secure. (*Hear! Hear!*)

I do not propose to discuss the details of our programme. This would take too long, and you will form your own opinions upon matters of detail. The task that devolves upon me is merely to sketch the broad lines wherein our programme is distinguished from what has hitherto been the official programme of the German Social Democracy. I regard it, however, as of the utmost importance that we should come to an understanding in our estimate of the concrete circumstances of the hour, of the tactics we have to adopt, of the practical measures which must be undertaken, in view of the probable lines of further development. We have to judge the political situation from the outlook I have just characterised, from the outlook of those who aim at the immediate realisation of socialism, of those to subordinate everything else to that end.

Our Congress, the Congress of what I may proudly call the only revolutionary socialist party of The German proletariat happens to coincide in point of time with the crisis in the development of the German revolution. "Happens to coincide," I say; but in truth the coincidence is no chance matter. We may assert that after the occurrences of the last few days the curtain has gone down upon the first act of the German revolution. We are now in the opening of the second act, and it is our

common duty to undertake self-examination and self-criticism. We shall be guided more wisely in the future, and we shall gain additional impetus for further advances, if we study all that we have done and all that we have left undone. Let us, then carefully scrutinise the events of the first act in the revolution.

The movement began on November 9th 1918. The revolution of November 9th was characterised by inadequacy and weakness. This need not surprise us. The revolution followed four years of war, four years during which, schooled by the Social Democracy and the trade unions, the German proletariat had behaved with intolerable ignominy: and had repudiated its socialist obligations to an extent unparalleled in any other land. We Marxists, whose guiding principle is a recognition of historical evolution, could hardly expect that in the Germany which had known the terrible spectacle of August 4th, and which during more than four years had reaped the harvest sown on that day, there should suddenly occur on November 9th, 1918, a glorious revolution inspired with definite class-consciousness, and directed toward a clearly conceived aim. What happened on November 9th was to a very small extent the victory of a new principle; it was little more than a collapse of the extant system of imperialism. (*Hear! Hear!*)

The moment had come for the collapse of imperialism, a colossus with feet of clay, crumbling from within. The sequel of this collapse was a more or less chaotic movement, one practically devoid of reasoned plan. The only source of union, the only persistent and saving principle, was the watchword "Form Workers' and Soldiers' Councils." Such was the slogan of this revolution, whereby, in spite of the inadequacy and weakness of the opening phases, it immediately established its claim to be numbered among proletarian socialist revolutions. To those who participated in the revolution of November 9th, and who nonetheless shower calumnies upon the Russian Bolsheviks, we should never cease to reply with the question: "Where did you learn the alphabet of your revolution? Was it not from the Russians that you learned to ask for workers' and soldiers' councils?" (*Applause*)

These pygmies who today make it one of their chief tasks, as heads of what they falsely term a socialist government, to join with the imperialists of Britain in a murderous attack upon the Bolsheviks, were then taking their seats as deputies upon the workers' and soldiers' councils, thereby formally admitting that the Russian revolution created the first watchwords for the world revolution. A study of the existing situation enables us to predict with certainty that in whatever country, after Germany, the proletarian revolution may next break out, the first step will be the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils. (*Murmurs of assent.*) Herein is to be found the tie that unites our movement internationally. This is the motto which distinguishes our revolution utterly from all earlier revolutions, bourgeois revolutions. On November 9th, the first cry of the revolution as instinctive as the cry of a new-born child, was for workers' and soldiers' councils. This was our common rallying cry, and it is through the councils alone that we can hope to realise socialism. But it is characteristic of the contradictory aspects of our revolution, characteristic of the contradictions which attend every revolution, that at the very time when

this great, stirring, and instinctive cry was being uttered, the revolution was so inadequate, so feeble, so devoid of initiative, so lacking in clearness as to its own aims, that on November 10th our revolutionists allowed to slip from their grasp nearly half the instruments of power they had seized on November 9th.

We learn from this, on the one hand, that our revolution is subject to the prepotent law of historical determinism, a law which guarantees that, despite all difficulties and complications notwithstanding all our own errors, we shall nevertheless advance step by step toward our goal. On the other hand, we have to recognise, comparing this splendid battle-cry with the paucity of the results practically achieved, we have to recognise that these were no more than the first childish and faltering footsteps of the revolution, which has many arduous tasks to perform and a long road to travel before the promise of the first watchwords can be fully realised. The weeks that have elapsed between November 9th and the present day have been weeks filled with multiform illusions. The primary illusion of the workers and soldiers who made the revolution was their belief in the possibility of unity under the banner of what passes by the name of socialism. What could be more characteristic of the internal weakness of the revolution of November 9th than the fact that at the very outset the leadership passed in no small part into the hands of the persons who a few hours before the revolution broke out had regarded it as their chief duty to issue warnings against revolution (*Hear! Hear!*) - to attempt to make revolution impossible - into the hands of such as Ebert, Scheidemann, and Haase<sup>14</sup>.

One of the leading ideas of the revolution of November 9th was that of uniting the various socialist trends. The union was to be effected by acclamation. This was an illusion which had to be bloodily avenged, and the events of the last few days have brought a bitter awakening from our dreams; but the self-deception was universal, affecting the Ebert and Scheidemann groups and affecting the bourgeoisie no less than ourselves.

Another illusion was that affecting the bourgeoisie during this opening act of the revolution. They believed that by means of the Ebert-Haase combination, by means of the so-called socialist government, they would really be able to bridle the proletarian masses and to strangle the socialist revolution. Yet another illusion was that from which the members of the Ebert-Scheidemann government suffered when they believed that with the aid of the soldiers returned from the front they would be able to hold down the workers and to curb all manifestations of the socialist class struggle. Such were the multifarious illusions which explain recent occurrences. One and all, they have now been dissipated. It has been plainly proved that the union between Haase and Ebert-Scheidemann under the banner of "socialism" serves merely as a fig-leaf for the decent veiling of a counter-revolutionary policy. We ourselves, as always happens, in revolutions, have been cured by our self-deceptions. There is a definite revolutionary procedure whereby the popular mind can be freed from illusion, but, unfortunately, the cure involves that the people must be blooded. In revolutionary Germany, events have followed the course characteristic of all revolutions. The bloodshed in Chausseestrasse on December

6th, the massacre of December 24th<sup>15</sup>, brought the truth home to the broad masses of the people. Through these occurrences they came to realise that what passes by the name of a socialist government is a government representing the counter-revolution. They came to realise that anyone who continues to tolerate such a state of affairs is working against the proletariat and against socialism. (*Applause.*)

Vanished, likewise, are the illusions cherished by Messrs. Ebert, Scheidemann & Co., that with the aid of soldiers from the front they will be able forever to keep the workers in subjection. What has been the effect of the experiences of December 6th and 24th? There has been obvious of late a profound disillusionment among the soldiery. The men begin to look with a critical eye upon those who have used them as cannon-fodder against the socialist proletariat. Herein we see once more the working of the law that the socialist revolution undergoes a determined objective development, a law in accordance with which the battalions of the labour movement gradually learn through bitter experience to recognise the true path of revolution. Fresh bodies of soldiers have been brought to Berlin, new detachments of cannon-fodder, additional forces for the subjection of socialist proletarians - with the result that, from barrack after barrack, there comes a demand for the pamphlets and leaflets of the Spartacus group.

This marks the close of the first act. The hopes of Ebert and Scheidemann that they would be able to rule the proletariat with aid of reactionary elements among the soldiery have already to a large extent been frustrated. What they have to expect within the very near future is an increasing development of definite revolutionary trends within the barracks. Thereby the army of the fighting proletariat will be augmented, and correspondingly the forces of the counterrevolutionists will dwindle. In consequence of these changes, yet another illusion will have to go, the illusion that animates the bourgeoisie, the dominant class. If you read the newspapers of the last few days, the newspapers issued since the incidents of December 24th, you cannot fail to perceive plain manifestations of disillusionment conjoined with indignation, both due to the fact that the henchmen of the bourgeoisie, those who sit in the seats of the mighty, have proved inefficient. (*Hear! Hear!*)

It has been expected of Ebert and Scheidemann that they would prove themselves strong men, successful lion tamers. But what have they achieved? They have suppressed a couple of trifling disturbances, and as a sequel the hydra of revolution has raised its head more resolutely than ever.

Thus disillusionment is mutual, nay universal. The workers have completely lost the illusion which had led them to believe that a union between Haase and Ebert-Scheidemann would amount to a socialist government. Ebert and Scheidemann have lost the illusion which had led them to imagine that with the aid of proletarians in military uniform they could permanently keep down proletarians in civilian dress. The members of the middle class have lost the illusion that, through the instrumentality of Ebert, Scheidemann and Haase, they can humbug the entire

socialist revolution of Germany as to the ends it desires. All these things have a merely negative force, and there remains from them nothing but the rags and tatters of destroyed illusions. But it is in truth a great gain for the proletariat that naught beyond these rags and tatters remains from the first phase of the revolution, for there is nothing so destructive as illusion, whereas nothing can be of greater use to the revolution than naked truth. I may appropriately recall the words of one of our classical writers, a man who was no proletarian revolutionary, but a revolutionary spirit nurtured in the middle class. I refer to Lessing, and quote a passage which has always aroused my sympathetic interest:

"I do not know whether it be a duty to sacrifice happiness and life to truth... But this much I know, that it is our duty, if we desire to teach truth, to teach it wholly or not at all, to teach it clearly and bluntly, unenigmatically, unreservedly, inspired with full confidence in its powers... The cruder an error, the shorter and more direct is the path leading to truth. But a highly refined error is likely to keep us permanently estranged from truth, and will do so all the more readily in proportion as we find it difficult to realise that it is an error... One who thinks of conveying to mankind truths masked and rouged, may be truth's pimp, but has never been truth's lover."

Comrades, Messrs. Haase, Dittmann, etc., have wished to bring us the revolution, to introduce socialism, covered with a mask, smeared with rouge; they have thus shown themselves to be the pimps of the counter-revolution. Today these concealments have been discarded, and what was offered is disclosed in the brutal and sturdy lineaments of Messrs. Ebert and Scheidemann. Today the dullest among us can make no mistake. What is offered is the counter-revolution in all its repulsive nudity.

The first act is over. What are the subsequent possibilities? There is, of course, no question of prophecy. We can only hope to deduce the logical consequences of what has already happened, and thus to draw conclusions as to the probabilities of the future, in order that we may adapt our tactics to these probabilities. Whither does the road seem to lead? Some indications are given by the latest utterances of the Ebert-Scheidemann government, utterances free from ambiguity.

What is likely to be done by this so-called socialist government now that, as I have shown, all illusions have been dispelled? Day by day the government loses increasingly the support of the broad masses for the proletariat. In addition to the petty bourgeoisie there stand behind it no more than poor remnants from among the workers, and as regards these last it is extremely dubious whether they will long continue to lend any aid to Ebert and Scheidemann. More and more, too, the government is losing the support of the army, for the soldiers have entered upon the path of self-examination and self-criticism. The effects of this process may seem slow at first, but it will lead irresistibly to their acquiring a thoroughgoing socialist mentality. As for the bourgeoisie, Ebert and Scheidemann have lost credit in this quarter too, for they have not shown themselves strong enough. What can they do? They will soon make an end of the comedy of socialist policy. When you read these gentlemen's new programme you will see that they are steaming under forced

draught into the second phase, that of the declared counter-revolution, or, as I may even say the restoration of the pre-existent, pre-revolutionary conditions.

What is the programme of the new government? It proposes the election of a President, who is to have a position intermediate between that of the King of England and that of the President of the United States. (*Hear! Hear!*). He is to be, as it were, King Ebert. In the second place they propose to re-establish the Federal Council<sup>16</sup>. You may read today the independently formulated demands of the South German governments, demands which emphasise the federal character of the German realm. The re-establishment of the good old federal council, in conjunction, naturally, with that of its appendage, the German Reichstag<sup>17</sup>, is now a question of a few weeks only. Comrades, Ebert and Scheidemann are moving in this way toward the simple restoration of the conditions that obtained prior to November 9th. But therewith they have entered upon a steep declivity and are likely ere long to find themselves lying with broken limbs at the bottom of the abyss.

For by the 9th of November the re-establishment of the condition that had existed prior to the 9th of November had already become out of date, and today Germany is miles from such a possibility. In order to secure support from the only class whose class interests the government really represents, in order to secure support from the bourgeoisie - a support which has in fact been withdrawn owing to recent occurrences - Ebert and Scheidemann will be compelled to pursue an increasingly counter-revolutionary policy. The demands of the South German states, as published today in the Berlin newspapers, give frank expression to the wish to secure "enhanced safety" for the German realm. In plain language, this means that they desire the declaration of a state of siege against "anarchist, disorderly and Bolshevik" elements, that is to say against socialists. By the pressure of circumstance, Ebert and Schiedemann will be constrained to the expedient of dictatorship, with or without the declaration of a state of siege. Thus, as an outcome of the previous course of development, by the mere logic of events and through the operation of the forces which control Ebert and Scheidemann, there will ensue during the second act of the revolution a much more pronounced opposition of tendencies and a greatly accentuated class struggle. (*Hear! Hear!*) This intensification of conflict will arise, not merely because the political influences I have already enumerated, dispelling all illusion, will lead to a declared hand-to-hand fight between the revolution and the counter-revolution; but in addition because the flames of a new fire are spreading upward from the depths, the flames of the economic struggle.

It was typical of the first period of the revolution down to December 24th that the revolution remained exclusively political. Hence the infantile character, the inadequacy, the half-heartedness, the aimlessness, of this revolution. Such was the first stage of a revolutionary transformation whose main objective lies in the economic field, whose main purpose it is to secure a fundamental change in economic conditions. Its steps were as uncertain as those of a child groping its way without knowing whither it is going; for at this stage, I repeat, the revolution had



a purely political stamp. But within the last two or three weeks a number of strikes have broken out quite spontaneously. Now, I regard it as the very essence of this revolution that strikes will become more and more extensive, until they constitute at last the focus of the revolution. (*Applause.*) Thus we shall have an economic revolution, and therewith a socialist revolution. The struggle for socialism has to be fought out by the masses, by the masses alone, breast to breast against capitalism; it has to be fought out by those in every occupation, by every proletarian against his employer. Thus only can it be a socialist revolution.

The thoughtless had a very different picture of the course of affairs. They imagined it would merely be necessary to overthrow the old government, to set up a socialist government at the head of affairs, and then to inaugurate socialism by decree. Another illusion? Socialism will not be and cannot be inaugurated by decrees; it cannot be established by any government, however admirably socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, must be made by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there must the chains be broken. That only is socialism, and thus only can socialism be brought into being.

What is the external form of struggle for socialism? The strike, and that is why the economic phase of development has come to the front in the second act of the revolution. This is something on which we may pride ourselves, for no one will dispute with us the honour. We of the Spartacus Group, we of the Communist Party of Germany, are the only ones in all Germany who are on the side of the striking and fighting workers. (Hear! Hear!) You have read and witnessed again and again the attitude of the Independent Socialists towards strikes. There was no difference between the outlook of Vorwaerts and the outlook of Freiheit.<sup>18</sup> Both journals sang the same tune. Be diligent, socialism means hard work. Such was their utterance while capitalism was still in control! Socialism cannot be established thuswise, but only by carrying on an unrelenting struggle against capitalism. Yet we see the claims of the capitalists defended, not only by the most outrageous profit-snatchers, but also by the Independent Socialists and by their organ, Freiheit; we find that our Communist Party stands alone in supporting the workers against the exactions of capital. This suffices to show that all are today persistent and unsparing enemies of the strike, except only those who have taken their stand with us upon the platform of revolutionary communism.

The conclusion to be drawn is not only that during the second act of the revolution strikes will become increasingly prevalent; but, further, that strikes will become the central feature and the decisive factors of the revolution, thrusting purely political questions into the background. The inevitable consequence of this will be that the struggle in the economic field will be enormously intensified. The revolution will therewith assume aspects that will be no joke to the bourgeoisie. The members of the capitalist class are quite agreeable to mystifications in the political domain, where masquerades are still possible, where such creatures as Ebert and Scheidemann can pose off as socialists; but they are horror-stricken directly profits are touched. To the Ebert-Scheidemann government, therefore, the capitalists will present these

alternatives. Either, they will say, you must put an end to strikes, you must stop this strike movement which threatens to destroy us; or else, we have no more use for you. I believe, indeed that the government has already damned itself pretty thoroughly by its political measures. Ebert and Scheidemann are distressed to find that the bourgeoisie no longer reposes confidence in them. The capitalists will think twice before they decide to cloak in ermine the rough upstart, Ebert. If matters go so far that a monarch is needed, they will say: "It does not suffice a king to have blood upon his hand; he must also have blue blood in his veins." (*Hear! Hear!*) Should matters reach this pass, they will say: "If we needs must have a king, we will not have a parvenu who does not know how to comport himself in kingly fashion." (*Laughter.*)

Thus Ebert and Scheidemann are coming to the point when a counter-revolutionary movement will display itself. They will be unable to quench the fires of the economic class struggle, and at the same time with their best endeavours they will fail to satisfy the bourgeoisie. There will be a desperate attempt at counter-revolution, perhaps an unqualified militarist dictatorship under Hindenburg<sup>19</sup>, or perhaps the counter-revolution will manifest itself in some other form; but in any case, our heroes will take to the woods. (*Laughter.*)

It is impossible to speak positively as to details. But we are not concerned with matters of detail, with the question precisely what will happen or precisely when it will happen. Enough that we know the broadlines of coming developments. Enough that we know that to the first act of the revolution, to the phase in which the political struggle has been the leading figure, there will succeed a phase predominantly characterised by an intensification of the economic struggle, and that sooner or later the government of Ebert and Scheidemann will take its place among the shades. It is far from easy to say what will happen to the National Assembly<sup>20</sup> during the second act of the revolution. Perchance, should the Assembly come into existence, it may prove a new school of education for the working class. But it seems just as likely that the National Assembly will never come into existence. Let me say parenthetically to help you to understand the grounds upon which we were defending our position yesterday, that our only objection was to limiting our tactics to a single alternative. I will not reopen the whole discussion, but will merely say a word or two lest any of you should falsely imagine that I am blowing hot and cold with the same breath. Our position today is precisely that of yesterday. We do not propose to base our tactics in relation to the National Assembly upon what is a possibility but not a certainty. We refuse to stake everything upon the belief that the National Assembly will never come into existence. We wish to be prepared for all possibilities, including the possibility of utilising the National Assembly for revolutionary purposes should the assembly ever come into being. Whether it comes into being or not is a matter of indifference, for whatever happens the success of the revolution is assured.

What general tactical considerations must we deduce from this? How can we best deal with the situation with which we are likely to be confronted in the immediate future? Your first conclusion will doubtless be a hope that the fall of the Ebert-

Scheidemann government is at hand, and that its place will be taken by a declared socialist proletarian revolutionary government.

For my part, I would ask you to direct your attention, not to the apex, but to the base. We must not again fall into the illusion of the first phase of the revolution that of November 9th; we must not think that when we wish to bring about a socialist revolution it will suffice to overthrow the capitalist government and to set up another in its place. There is only one way of achieving the victory of the proletarian revolution. We must begin by undermining the Ebert-Scheidemann government, by destroying its foundations through a revolutionary mass struggle on the part of the proletariat. Moreover, let me remind you of some of the inadequacies of the German revolution, inadequacies which have not been overcome with the close of the first act of the revolution.

We are far from having reached a point when the overthrow of the government can ensure the victory of socialism. I have endeavoured to show you that the revolution of November 9th was, before all, a political revolution; whereas the revolution which is to fulfil our aims must, in addition, and mainly, be an economic revolution. But further, the revolutionary movement was confined to the towns, and even up to the present date the rural districts remain practically untouched. Socialism would prove illusory if it were to leave our present agricultural system unchanged. From the broad outlook of socialist economics, manufacturing industry cannot be remodelled unless it be quickened through a socialist transformation of agriculture. The leading idea of the economic transformation that will realise socialism is an abolition of the contrast and the division between town and country. This separation, this conflict, this contradiction, is a purely capitalist phenomenon, and it must disappear as soon as we place ourselves upon the socialist standpoint. If socialist reconstruction is to be undertaken in real earnest, we must direct attention just as much to the open country as to the industrial centres, and yet as regards the former we have not even taken the first steps. This is essential, not merely because we cannot bring about socialism without socialising agriculture; but also because, while we may think we have reckoned to the last reserves of the counter-revolution against us and our endeavours, there remains another important reserve which has not yet been taken into account. I refer to the peasantry. Precisely because the peasants are still untouched by socialism, they constitute an additional reserve for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. The first thing our enemies will do when the flames of the socialist strikes begin to scorch their heels will be to mobilise the peasants, who are fanatical devotees of private property. There is only one way of making headway against this threatening counter-revolutionary power. We must carry the class struggle into the country districts; we must mobilise the landless proletariat and the poorer peasants against the richer peasants. (*Loud applause.*)

From this consideration we must deduce what we have to do to insure the success of the revolution. First and foremost, we have to extend in all directions the system of workers' councils. What we have taken over from November 9th are mere weak beginnings, and we have not wholly taken over even these. During the

first phase of the revolution we actually lost extensive forces that were acquired at the very outset. You are aware that the counter-revolution has been engaged in the systematic destruction of the system of workers' and soldiers' councils. In Hesse, these councils have been definitely abolished by the counter-revolutionary government; elsewhere, power has been wrenched from their hands. Not merely, then, have we to develop the system of workers' and soldiers' councils, but we have to induce the agricultural labourers and the poorer peasants to adopt this system. We have to seize power, and the problem of the seizure of power assumes this aspect; what, throughout Germany, can each workers' and soldiers' council achieve? (Bravo!). There lies the source of power. We must mine the bourgeois state and we must do so by putting an end everywhere to the cleavage in public powers, to the cleavage between legislative and executive powers. These powers must be united in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

Comrades, we have here an extensive field to till. We must build from below upward, until the workers' and soldiers' councils gather so much strength that the overthrow of the Ebert-Scheidemann or any similar government will be merely the final act in the drama. For us the conquest of power will not be effected at one blow. It will be a progressive act, for we shall progressively occupy all the positions of the capitalist state, defending tooth and nail each one that we seize. Moreover, in my view and in that of my most intimate associates in the party, the economic struggle, likewise, will be carried on by the workers' councils. The settlement of economic affairs, and the continued expansion of the area of this settlement, must be in the hands of the workers' councils. The councils must have all power in the state.

To these ends must we direct our activities in the immediate future, and it is obvious that, if we pursue this line, there cannot fail to be an enormous and immediate intensification of the struggle. For step by step, by hand to hand fighting, in every province, in every town, in every village, in every commune, all the powers of the state have to be transferred bit by bit from the bourgeoisie to the workers' and soldiers' councils. But before these steps can be taken, the members of our own party and the proletarians in general, must be schooled and disciplined. Even where workers' and soldiers councils already exist, these councils are as yet far from understanding the purposes for which they exist. (*Hear! Hear!*)

We must make the masses realise that the workers' and soldiers' council has to be the central feature of the machinery of state, that it must concentrate all power within itself, and must utilise all powers for the one great purpose of bringing about the socialist revolution. Those workers who are already organised to form workers' and soldiers' councils are still very far from having adopted such an outlook, and only isolated proletarian minorities are as yet clear as to the tasks that devolve upon them. But there is no reason to complain of this, for it is a normal state of affairs. The masses must learn how to use power by using power. There is no other way. We have, happily, advanced since the days when it was proposed to "educate" the proletariat socialistically. Marxists of Kautsky's school are, it would seem, still living in those vanished days. To educate the proletarian masses socialistically meant to

deliver lectures to them, to circulate leaflets and pamphlets among them. But it is not by such means that the proletarians will be schooled. The workers today will learn in the school of action. (*Hear! Hear!*)

Our Scripture reads: In the beginning was the deed. Action for us means that the workers' and soldiers' councils must realise their mission and must learn how to become the sole public authorities throughout the realm. Thus only can we mine the ground so effectively as to make everything ready for the revolution which will crown our work. Quite deliberately, and with a clear sense of the significance of our words, did some of us say to you yesterday, did I in particular say to you: "Do not imagine that you are going to have an easy time in the future!" Some of the comrades have falsely imagined me to assume that we can boycott the National Assembly and then simply fold our arms. It is impossible, in the time that remains, to discuss this matter fully, but let me say that I never dreamed of anything of the kind. My meaning was that history is not going to make our revolution an easy matter like the bourgeois revolutions. In those revolutions it sufficed to overthrow that official power at the centre and to replace a dozen or so of persons in authority. But we have to work from beneath. Therein is displayed the mass character of our revolution, one which aims at transforming the whole structure of society. It is thus characteristic of the modern proletarian revolution, that we must effect the conquest of political power, not from above, but from beneath. The 9th of November was an attempt, a weakly half-hearted, half-conscious and chaotic attempt, to overthrow the existing public authority and to put an end to ownership rule. What is now incumbent upon us is that we should deliberately concentrate all the forces of the proletariat for an attack upon the very foundations of capitalist society. There, at the root, where the individual employer confronts his wage slaves; at the root where all the executive organs of ownership rule confront the object of this rule, confront the masses; there, step by step, we must seize the means of power from the rulers, must take them into our own hands. Working by such methods it may seem that the process will be a rather more tedious one than we had imagined in our first enthusiasm. It is well, I think, that we should be perfectly clear as to all the difficulties and complications in the way of revolution. For I hope that, as in my own case, so in yours also, the augmenting tasks we have to undertake will neither abate zeal nor paralyse energy. Far from it, the greater the task, the more fervently will you gather up your forces. Nor must we forget that the revolution is able to do its work with extraordinary speed. I shall make no attempt to foretell how much time will be required. Who among us cares about the time, so long as our lives suffice to bring it to pass. Enough for us to know clearly the work we have to do, and to the best of my ability I have endeavoured to sketch, in broad outline, the work that lies before us. (*Tumultuous applause.*)

## Notes

1. [A new party](#): The German Communist Party was founded at the end of December 1918, mainly by the Spartacus group, led by Rosa Luxemburg and others, which was until then a left-wing faction in the Independent Social Democratic Party - which, in its turn, was formed by people expelled from the main Social Democratic Party in March 1916 for opposition (pacifist rather than revolutionary) to the world war.
2. [Revolution of 1848](#): uprisings and struggles across Europe (France, Austria, Germany, etc.), mainly with democratic and nationalist objectives.
3. [February revolution](#): overthrow of the French monarchy in February 1848.
4. [Paris Commune](#): the workers of Paris held power in the city for nine weeks in March-May 1871.
5. [Collapse of August 4th, 1914](#): when the leaders of the mass socialist parties (called Social Democratic) supported their "own" capitalist governments in World War 1. August 4 was the date when the Social Democratic members in the German parliament voted for the war budget.
6. [Erfurt Programme](#): programme adopted by the German Social-Democratic party in 1891, drafted by Karl Kautsky and approved with some reservations by Engels.
7. [Engel's Preface](#): Rosa Luxemburg did not know it, but a section of Engels' text - making it clear that he did not renounce revolutionary methods - had been cut on the insistence of the Social-Democratic party leaders.
8. [War of 1870-1](#): between France and Prussia. Prussia, the strongest of the then-divided German states, was able to unite Germany under its hegemony after its victory in this war.
9. [Blood-letting of May 1871](#): when the French government slaughtered 30,000 workers after overthrowing the Paris Commune.
10. [The French billions](#): money that France was forced to pay to Germany after its defeat in 1870-1.

11. [Anti-Socialist Law](#): which semi-banned the Social Democratic party in Germany from 1878 to 1890. The Social Democrats could run in elections, but almost all its other activities were illegal.
12. [Kautsky](#): Karl Kautsky was regarded as the most eminent theorist of German and world Marxism until 1914. Although he opposed the socialist right-wing who wanted to reduce the party explicitly to parliamentary reform, he did so, increasingly, by accepting the right-wing's tactics "for now" and taking his stand on support for revolutionary tactics in undefined future, more favourable, circumstances.
13. [Ebert, David](#): right-wing Social Democratic leaders. The German revolution: On 1 November 1918, sailors in Kiel, having mutinied against being sent out to battle when Germany had plainly lost the war, formed a revolutionary council. Workers', soldiers' and sailors' councils spread fast across Germany. On 9 November the Emperor abdicated, and power passed to a Council of People's Commissars led by the right-wing Social Democratic Friedrich Ebert but also including Independent Social Democrats.
14. [Scheidemann and Haase](#): Scheidemann was a right-wing Social-Democrat, Haase an Independent Social Democrat.
15. [December 6th and 24th](#): On 6 December troops called out by the right-wing Social Democrat Otto Wels fired on a workers' demonstration in Berlin, killing 16. On 24 December artillery fired on left-wing troops guarding the Palace.
16. [Federal Council](#): of representatives of the various German states unified under the Prussian monarchy in 1871. German socialists and radical democrats had long demanded a unified republic in place of the federal system.
17. [Reichstag](#): "Imperial Assembly", or Parliament.
18. [Vorwaerts and Freiheit](#): papers of the majority (right-wing) Social Democrats and the Independent Social Democrats, respectively.
19. [Hindenburg](#): head of the armed forces.
20. [National Assembly](#): The Council of People's Commissars called elections for a National Assembly to draft a new constitution. It met in January 1919. Rosa Luxemburg and her close comrades argued for the new Communist Party to



take part in the elections to the National Assembly, but the majority voted to boycott.

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## Rosa Luxemburg: What Does Spartacus Want?

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/spart2.htm>

I

On the 9th of November 1918 the workers and soldiers of Germany overthrew the old regime. The bloody dream of subjecting the world to the domination of militarism vanished like smoke on the battlefields of France. The band of criminals who kindled the world conflagration and drove Germany into the sea of blood reached on that day the end of their career. The people, who were deceived for four years, and, in the service of Moloch, forgot their duties as cultured people, lost all sense of honour and humanity and allowed themselves to be used in connection with any base act, finding themselves on the brink of an abyss, awakened from the stupor in which they were for more than four years.

On the 9th of November the German workers arose to throw off the disgraceful yoke. The Hohenzollerns<sup>1</sup> were driven out; soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies were elected.

But the Hohenzollerns were never more than the agents of the imperialist capitalists and junkers. The class rule of the capitalists - that was the real cause-of the World War in Germany and France, in Russia and England, in Europe and America. The capitalists of all countries - these are the real initiators of the slaughter of peoples. International capitalism is the insatiate Moloch into whose bloody jaws are thrown millions upon millions of fresh human sacrifices.

The World War confronted society with a choice of two alternatives; either the continued existence of capitalism, with its consequent new wars and inevitable and speedy destruction due to chaos and anarchy or the abolition of capitalist exploitation. With the end of the World War the class rule of the capitalists lost its right to existence. It is no longer capable of leading society out of the terrible economic chaos which the imperialist orgy has left in its wake.

The means of production were destroyed to a frightful extent. Millions of workers, the best and the soundest element of the working class, were slaughtered. Those left alive, upon returning home, will receive the mock welcome of poverty and unemployment. Starvation and disease threaten to sap the remaining strength of the people. Financial bankruptcy, as a consequence of the crushing burden of war debts, is inevitable.

Only socialism can save the people from this bloody chaos, this gaping abyss. There is no other way. Only the worldwide proletarian revolution can establish order in place of this anarchy, put an end to the mutual extermination of the peoples, provide work and bread for all, and bring peace, freedom, and true culture to tortured humanity. "Down with wage labour!" Such is the battle cry of the day. Wage labour and class rule must give way to work on a cooperative basis. The means of production must cease to be the monopoly of a class; they must become the common property of all. The present system of production, which is nothing but exploitation and robbery, must be abolished. No more exploiters or exploited. Production and the distribution of products must be regulated in the interests of the nation as a whole.

Instead of masters and wage slaves there will be free fellow workers! Labour will cease to be a burden for anybody when it becomes the duty of all. An existence worthy of men will be assured to all who fulfil their duty toward society. Hunger will cease to be the curse of workers; it will be the punishment for idlers.

Only in such a society can slavery and mutual hatred among nations be destroyed. Only when such a society is established will the earth cease to be outraged by fratricidal conflicts. Only then shall we be able to say: "We have seen the end of War."

## II

The establishment of the socialist order of society is the greatest task that ever fell to the lot of a class and of a revolution in the course of human history. This task involves the complete reconstruction of the state and an entire change in the social and economic foundation of society. This change and this reconstruction cannot be accomplished by a decree issued by some officials, committee, or parliament. They can only be accomplished by the mass of the people themselves.

In all preceding revolutions it was a small minority of people who conducted the revolutionary struggle. This minority determined the goal, gave direction to the fight, and used the masses only as tools to secure victory for their own interests, the interests of the minority. The socialist revolution is the first revolution which can secure victory for and through the great majority of the workers themselves.

It is the task of the proletarian mass not only clearly and consciously to determine the aim and direction of the revolution. It must also establish socialism step by step through its own activity.

The main feature of the socialist society is to be found in the fact that the great mass of workers will cease to be a governed mass, but on the contrary, will itself live the full political and economic life and direct that life in conscious and free self-determination.

Therefore the proletarian mass must substitute its own class organs - the workers' and soldiers' councils - for the inherited organs of capitalist class rule - the federal councils, municipal councils, parliament - applying this principle from the highest

authority in the state to the smallest community. The proletarian mass must fill all governmental positions, must control all functions, must test all requirements of the state on the touchstone of socialist aims and the interests of its own class.

Only by means of a constant, mutual action upon each other on the part of the masses and their organs - the service of workers' and soldiers' deputies - can their activity fill the state with a socialist spirit. Likewise, economic reconstruction can go only as a process carried on by the mass action of the working class.

Mere decrees on socialisation issued by high revolutionary authorities are of no more value than empty sounds. Only the working class, by its own efforts, can change these sounds into actuality. Only in a stubborn fight with capital, face to face in every enterprise, by their own direct pressure, by means of strikes, and by creating their permanent representative organs, can the workers secure control and, finally, the actual administration of production.

The workers must learn to transform themselves from mere machines, which the capitalist employs in the process of production, into free, active, thinking leaders of this process. They must acquire the sense of responsibility of active members of the commonwealth, which alone is the owner of all social wealth. They must develop zeal at work, without the whip of the employer, the highest productivity without the spur of capitalist drivers, discipline without yoke, and order without domination. Highest idealism in the peoples' interest, strictest self-discipline, true civic spirit of the masses - these constitute the moral basis of a socialist society, just as stupidity, egotism, and corruption are the moral basis of capitalism.

These socialist civic virtues, as also knowledge and the ability to conduct socialist industries, can be acquired by the workers only by personal activity and personal experience.

The socialisation of society can be accomplished to the fullest extent only by the persistent and uninterrupted struggle of the workers at all points where labour and capital, the people and the class rule of the bourgeoisie, meet fact to face.

The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves.



In bourgeois revolutions bloodshed, terror, and political murder were the indispensable weapons of the rising classes.

The proletarian revolution requires no terror for the realisation of its aims; it looks upon manslaughter with hatred and aversion. It has no need for such means because the struggle it conducts is not against individuals but against institutions. It enters the arena with no naive illusions, the dispersal of which would prompt it to have recourse to revenge. The proletarian revolution is not the desperate attempt of a minority forcibly to transform the world in accordance with its own ideal. On the contrary, it is the action of great masses, of millions of people, called upon to carry

out their historic mission and to make a reality of what has become an historic necessity.

But the proletarian revolution is at the same time also the death knell of all slavery and oppression. This is the reason why the capitalists, junkers, petty bourgeoisie and officers, and the beneficiaries and parasites of exploitation and class rule, are rising like one man to fight to the death against the proletarian revolution.

It is madness to suppose that the capitalists will submit voluntarily to the socialist verdict of a parliament or a national assembly, that they will calmly surrender their property, their profits, their privileges. of exploitation. All ruling classes have fought obstinately to the end for their privileges. The Roman patricians, as well as the feudal barons of the Middle Ages, the English nobles and the American slave owners, the Boyars of Wallachia and the silk manufacturers of Lyons<sup>2</sup> - all shed rivers of blood. They trampled upon corpses, they committed murder, arson, and state treason, they precipitated civil warfare the purpose of defending their privileges and power.

The imperialist capitalist class, as the last offspring of the caste of exploiters, surpasses all its predecessors as far as brutality, open cynicism, and rascality are concerned.

It will defend its "holy of holies" - its profits and privileges of exploitation - tooth and nail. It will defend them with the cold-blooded viciousness which it manifested during the history of its colonial policy and during the last World War. It will move heaven and hell against the workers. It will mobilise the peasantry against the industrial workers. It will set the backward elements of the proletariat against the vanguard of socialism. It will get its officers to commit massacres. It will attempt to nullify socialist measures by a hundred and one methods of passive resistance. It will put in the way of the revolution twenty uprisings à La Vendée<sup>3</sup>. To save itself it will invoke the assistance of the foreign enemy, the murderous armed force of a Clemenceau, a Lloyd George, or a Wilson<sup>4</sup>. It will sooner turn the country into a smoking heap of ruins than voluntarily relinquish its power to exploit the working class.

This resistance must be put down with an iron hand, with the utmost energy. The power of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be met by the revolutionary power of the working class. The plots, schemes, and intrigues of the capitalist class must be countered by the ceaseless vigilance, clearness of vision, and readiness of the proletarian mass for action at any moment. The threatening dangers of counter-revolution must be met by the arming of the people and the disarming of the ruling classes. The obstructionist manoeuvres in Parliament on behalf of the capitalist class must be met by the active organisation of the workers and soldiers.

The presence of the bourgeoisie everywhere and the thousands of means at its command must be overcome by the concentrated compact power of the working class developed to the highest possible degree. Only the united front of the entire

German proletariat - the South German with the North German, the city workers with the agricultural workers, the working men with the soldiers - and the living spiritual bond of the German revolution with the International, the elevation of the German revolution to the height of the world revolution of the proletariat, can create the granite foundation upon which the structure of the future must be based.

The struggle for socialism is the greatest civil war in history, and the proletarian revolution must prepare for this civil war the necessary weapons; it must learn to use them - to fight and to conquer.

By arming the compact mass of working people with full political power for the purposes of the revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat is established and therefore the true democracy. True democracy, democracy that does not defraud the people does not exist where the wage slave sits in would-be equality with the capitalist, or the farmhand with the landowner, in order to debate in parliamentary manner over questions most vital to them - true democracy is to be found only where the mass of the workers take the entire power of government into their toil-hardened hands in order to wield it over the heads of the ruling classes as the god Thor wielded his hammer.

To enable the proletariat to solve this problem the Spartacus Union demands:

1. As immediate means for making the revolution secure.
  - a. The disarming of the entire police force, of all officers, as well as of the non-proletarian soldiers.
  - b. The seizure of all supplies of arms and ammunition, as well as of all war industries, by the workers' and soldiers' councils.
  - c. The arming of the entire adult male population as the workers militia. The formation of a red guard of the workers as the active part of the militia, for the effective protection of the revolution against counter-revolutionary plots and risings.
  - d. Abolition of the commanding power of the officers and noncommissioned officers. The substitution of the voluntary discipline of the soldiers for the old brutal barrack discipline. Election of all superiors by the rank and file, with the right to recall these superiors at any time. Abolition of courtsmartial.
  - e. The removal of all officers and ex-officers from the soldiers' councils.
  - f. Substitution of authorised representatives (Vertrauensmaenner) of the workers' and soldiers' councils for all political organs and authorities of the old regime.
  - g. Creation of a revolutionary tribunal to try the men chiefly responsible for the war and its prolongation, namely, the two Hohenzollerns,

Ludendorff, Hindenburg, Tirpitz<sup>5</sup>, and their fellow-criminals, as well as all conspirators of the counter- revolution.

- h. Immediate seizure of all means of subsistence to secure provisions for the people.

## 2. On the political and social field.

- a. Abolition of all separate states; a united German Socialist Republic.
- b. Removal of all parliaments and municipal councils, their functions to be taken over by the workers' and soldiers' councils and only the committees and organs of the latter bodies. Election of workers' councils all over Germany by the entire adult population of working people of both sexes in cities and rural districts, along the lines of industries, and election of soldiers' councils by the soldiers, excluding the officers and ex-officers. The right of workers and soldiers to recall their representatives at any time.
- c. Election all over Germany of delegates from the workers' and soldiers' councils to the Central Council of the workers' and soldiers' councils; the Central Council to elect the Executive Council as the highest organ of legislative and executive power. For the present the Central Council is to be convened at least every three months - the delegates to be re-elected each time - for the constant control of the activity of the Executive Council and for the establishment of a living contact of the bulk of the workers' and soldiers' councils in the country with their highest organ of government.
- d. The right of local workers' and soldiers councils at any time to recall their representatives on the Central Council and send new ones in their stead in case the former do not act in accordance with the will of their constituents. The right of the Executive Council to appoint or remove the people's representatives as well as the central authorities of the land.
- e. Abolition of all class distinctions, titles, and orders; complete legal and social equality of the sexes.
- f. Radical social legislation, reduction of working hours to avoid unemployment and to conform to the physical exhaustion of the working class occasioned by the World War, limitation of the working day to six hours.
- g. Immediate, thorough change of the policy with regard to food, housing, health, and education in the spirit of the proletarian revolution.

## 3. Further Economic Demands

- a. Confiscation of all crown estates and revenues for the benefit of the people.

- b. Annulment of the state debts and other public debts, as well as all war loans, except those subscribed within a certain limited amount, this limit to be fixed by the Central Council of the workers' and soldiers' councils.
  - c. Expropriation of the land held by all large and medium-sized agricultural concerns; establishment of socialist agricultural cooperatives under a uniform central administration all over the country. Small peasant holdings to remain in possession of their present owners until they voluntarily decide to join the socialist agricultural cooperatives.
  - d. Nationalisation by the Republic of Councils of all banks, ore mines, coal mines, as well as all large industrial and commercial establishments.
  - e. Confiscation of all property exceeding a certain limit, time limit to be fixed by the Central Council.
  - f. The Republic of Councils to take over all public means of transport and communication.
  - g. Election of administrative councils in all enterprises, such councils to regulate the internal affairs of the enterprises in agreement with the workers' councils, regulate the conditions of labour, control production, and, finally, take over the administration of the enterprise.
  - h. Establishment of a Central Strike Committee which, in constant cooperation with the industrial councils, shall secure for the strike movement throughout the country uniform administration, socialist direction, and most effective support by the political power of the workers' and soldiers' councils.
4. International problems.
- a. Immediate establishment of connections with the sister parties abroad in order to place the socialist revolution upon an international basis and to secure and maintain peace through international brotherhood and the revolutionary rising of the international working class.

## IV

This is what the Spartacus Union stands for!

And because it wants this, because it calls for it, struggles for it, because it is the socialist conscience of the revolution-it is hated, persecuted, and slandered by all open and secret enemies of the revolution and of the working class.

"Crucify him!" call the capitalists, trembling for fear of losing their moneybags.

"Crucify him!" call the petty bourgeoisie, the officers, the anti-semites, the press lackeys of the capitalist class, trembling for the fleshpots of capitalist class rule.



"Crucify him!" call men like Scheidemann who, like Judas Iscariot, have sold the workers to the capitalist class and are trembling for the shekels of their political power.

"Crucify him!" repeat, like an echo, the duped, the deceived, the misled elements of workers and soldiers, who do not know that they are attacking their own flesh and blood when they attack the Spartacus Union.

In hatred and slander are united against the Spartacus Union all who are counter-revolutionists, enemies of the people, anti-socialists, all who are ambiguous, confused, afraid of light. This only proves that the heart of the revolution is beating in the Spartacus Union, that the future belongs to us.

The Spartacus Union is no party wanting to climb into power on the shoulders of the mass of workers. The Spartacus Union is only the conscious party of the proletariat. At every turn it calls the attention of the general body of workers to their historic duties. At every stage of the revolution it fights for the final goal of socialism, and in all national questions it represents the interests of the international revolutionary working class.

The Spartacus Union refuses to share government power with the lackeys of the capitalist class, the Scheidemann-Ebert element, because it sees in such cooperation an act of treason against the basic principles of socialism, an act calculated to paralyse the revolution and strengthen its enemies.

The Spartacus Union will also refuse to take over the power of government merely because the Scheidemann-Ebert element have completely discredited themselves, and the Independent Socialist Party, through cooperation with them, has reached a blind alley.

The Spartacus Union will never take over the power of government otherwise than by a clear manifestation of the unquestionable will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of Germany. It will only take over the power of government by the conscious approval by the mass of the workers of the principles, aims, and tactics of the Spartacus Union. The proletarian revolution can reach full clearness and ripeness only by struggling gradually, step by step, along the Golgotha path of the workers' own bitter experiences through defeats and victories.

The victory of the Spartacus Union is not in the beginning but at the end of the revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great mass of the socialist working class.

Arise, proletarians! To the battle! We have to struggle against a world, to conquer a world.

In this last class struggle of history for the highest aims of humanity our motto toward the enemy is: "Hand on throat and knee on the breast!"

## Notes

1. [Hohenzollerns](#): the Prussian and German royal family. Junkers: landlords.
2. [Boyars of Wallachia](#): landlords in an area now part of Rumania. Lyons: What was, by some reckonings, the first distinctively wage-workers' uprising in history, took place in the French city of Lyons in 1832.
3. [Vendee](#): In the west of France, site of big counter-revolutionary peasant uprisings for "Church and King" against the French Revolution.
4. [Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson](#): Georges Clemenceau was prime minister of France, 1917-20; David Lloyd George was prime minister of Britain, 1916-22; Woodrow Wilson was president of the USA, 1913 to 1921.
5. [Ludendorff, Tirpitz](#): Ludendorff was commander in chief of the army, Tirpitz of the navy.

## Leon Trotsky: The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/tranprog.htm>

## It will be socialism or barbarism!

Source: <http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/solid/socbarb.htm>

We live in a capitalist world. Production is social; ownership of the social means of production is private. Ownership by a state which serves those who own most of the means of production is also essentially "private".

Those who own the means of production buy the labour power of those who own nothing but their labour power and set them to work. At work they produce more than the equivalent of their wages. The difference (today in Britain it may be more than £20,000 a year per worker) is taken by the capitalist. This is exploitation of wage-labour by capital, and it is the basic cell of capitalist society, its very heartbeat.

Everything else flows from that. The relentless drive for profit and accumulation of capital decrees that all things in existence must be judged by their relationship to productivity and profitability.

From that come such horrors as the savage exploitation of Brazilian goldminers, whose life expectancy is now less than 40 years, and the working to death - it is officially admitted by the government! - of some of its employees by advanced Japanese capitalism. From this comes the economic neglect and virtual

abandonment to ruin and starvation of "unprofitable" places like Bangladesh and parts of Africa.

From that also comes the cultural blight and barbarism of our own society' forced on profitable pap. From it come products with "built-in obsolescence" in a society orientated to the grossly wasteful production and reproduction of shoddy goods, not to the development of leisure and culture.

From it come mass unemployment, the development of a vast and growing underclass, living in ghettos, and the recreation in some American cities of the worst Third World conditions.

From it comes the unfolding ecological disaster of a world crying out for planning and the rational use of resources, but which is, tragically, organised by the ruling classes around the principle of profitable anarchy and the barbarous worship of blind and humanly irrational market forces.

From it come wars and genocides: twice this century capitalist gangs possessing worldwide power have fallen on each other in quarrels over the division of the spoils, and wrecked the world economy, killing many tens of millions. From it come racism, imperialism and fascism.

The capitalist cult of icy egotism and the "cash nexus" as the decisive social tie produce societies like British society now, where vast numbers of young people are condemned to live in the streets, and societies like that of Brazil, where homeless children are hunted and killed on the streets like rodents.

From the exploitation of wage-labour comes this society of ours where the rich - who through their servants and agents hold state power - fight a relentless class struggle to maintain the people in a mental condition to accept their own exploitation and abuse, and prevent real democratic selfcontrol developing within the forms of what they call democracy. They use tabloid propaganda or - as in the 1984/85 miners' strike - savage and illegal police violence: whatever they need to use. They have used fascist gangs when they needed to, and they will use them again, if necessary.

Against this system we seek to convince the working class - the wage slaves of the capitalist system - to fight for socialism. Socialism means the abolition of wage slavery, the taking of the social economy out of private ownership into common cooperative ownership. It means the full realisation of the old demands for liberty, equality and fraternity.

Under socialism the economy will be run and planned deliberately and democratically: market mechanisms will cease to be our master, and will be cut down and reshaped to serve broadly sketched-out and planned, rational social goals.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control.

The working class can and should win reforms within capitalism, but we can only win socialism by overthrowing capitalism and by breaking the state power - that

is, the monopoly of violence and reserve violence - now held by the capitalist class. We want a democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system: a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Nevertheless, neither socialism nor even effective trade unionism can be built in one country alone. Capital is moved freely around the globe in search of cheap labour and to undercut strong labour movements. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide; we back the struggles of workers and oppressed nationalities in the ex-Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and in still-Stalinist China.

What are the alternatives now? Poverty, inequality and misery are growing. We are deep in the worst capitalist slump for 60 years. Fascism is once more a power in European politics. We may, in the years ahead, face new wars as European, Japanese and US capitalism confront each other.

Face the bitter truth: either we build a new, decent, sane, democratic world or, finally, the capitalists will ruin us all - we will be dragged down by the new fascist barbarians or new massive wars. Civilisation will be eclipsed by a new dark age. It will be socialism or barbarism.

Socialists work in the trade unions and the Labour Party to win the existing labour movement to socialism. We work with presently unorganised workers and youth and with oppressed communities.

To do that work the Marxists organise themselves in a democratic association, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

To join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, write to: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Or e-mail us at: [office@workersliberty.org](mailto:office@workersliberty.org).

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