Critique of the Transitional Programme

"The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind’s productive forces stagnate".

This is the famous statement that sounds like a thunderclap from the first lines of the programmatic document that Trotsky wrote in 1938 for the founding conference of the Fourth International.

The productive forces have reached the highest point they can reach under capitalism; the masses tend to become more and more revolutionary, but are held back by opportunist leadership; capitalism being in permanent crisis, it can no longer be a question of any rise in the standard of living of the masses. This is the diagnosis of the first three chapters of this programme which lead to the conclusion that from now on, for the whole era of the decline of capitalism, the role of the Marxists is to present to the masses a transitional programme.

"The strategic task of the next period – pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat".

No one could sum up the demonstration better than Trotsky himself.

Before setting out the details of the objectives, both economic and political, which constitute the "system of transitional demands" as such, the head of the Fourth International, in a very consistent manner, was anxious to ensure its foundations; only then did he develop point by point the content of his programme: we shall follow the same approach, we shall not approach the detailed study of the programme either before being assured of the solidity of the theses on which it is based. And we will proceed with the same methodical spirit as Trotsky, albeit in a completely different sense. For it must be said right away: of the transitional programme, Marxist criticism will not leave stone on stone.

The decline of productive forces

It is necessary to understand the meaning of Trotsky’s fundamental assertion that "Mankind’s productive forces stagnate"; it is not a question for him of noting a particular crisis at a given moment in the history of capitalism, but of supporting the thesis according to which this mode of production has exhausted its possibilities and has now entered an era of continuous and irremediable decline. Moreover, the title of the programme, "The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International", is sufficiently explicit.

The classical Marxist programs generally began, in one way or another, by defining capitalist society as based on wage labour, and thus traced the framework within which the protagonists had to confront each other until the proletariat, establishing its dictatorship, could destroy the old society by abolishing wage labour. The programme left all situations open and did not decide on the tactics to follow in each particular case. The transitional programme, on the other hand, begins by defining a situation: that of the "hopeless crisis" of capitalism; and it is on the basis of this theory of permanent crisis that the system of transitional demands are constructed, which are supposed to lead the masses to revolution; if the process is abnormal, it is precisely because, for Trotsky, capitalism can no longer experience other situations: it is gradually sinking into its death agony.
The idea that capitalism regularly progresses to a climax and then finds itself, from a certain mysterious limit of its history, precipitated into a period of irresistible decline is widespread among the pseudo-Marxist worshippers of economic progress. It was powerfully supported by the chorus of Russian state ideologists who, comparing their industrial victories with the spectacle offered by Western economies before the war, deduced that "socialist production" was on an upward curve, and capitalism on a downward curve. This thesis is extremely simple and quite compatible with the belief in the existence of any socialism in Russia, which ensured its full success in an era of counter-revolution.

It has nothing to do with Marxism. For this doctrine, capitalism is neither a sinful city, having to collapse one day at the trumpet of an angel, to atone for its vices, nor an idea rushing into the philosophical ether to meet its dialectical negation, but a determined mode of production, obeying certain laws.

And these laws, Marx studied them with the greatest care; since the Manifesto of 1847, he affirms with force that capitalism cannot exist without constantly upending production, and he celebrates its revolutionary role. And he proclaims this empirically verifiable truth: capitalism is the victim of an extraordinary curse; it has "the devil in its body", it is condemned not to stagnate.

The whole of social capital acts as a power that transcends the different individual capitals, and dictates its laws to them with an iron necessity: either accumulate, and accumulate in ever-increasing proportions, or perish; or advance ever faster, or crumble. It is from this perpetual race of different capitals between themselves and social capital with itself, real "fuite en avant", that crises arise during which capital comes up against its own limits. The enormous mass of commodities in its form can no longer be transformed into money, production slows down or stops until a new balance is found, preparing for further expansion. This is the mechanism described by Marx.

And this mechanism continues to work the civilised societies, even if the XXth century which saw the organisation of whole branches of industry by the capitalists, and sometimes of the whole industry by the capitalist State, gave to the phenomenon new forms: it is not any more the commodities of the individual capitalists which remain unsold, but the order books of the trusts which are emptied; instead of being with unusable commodity capital, one is forced to not use productive capital. The result is the same: stagnation of business, layoffs of some workers, increased exploitation of others, and preparation for further expansion. The pendulum movement of production continues: expansion, contraction; diastole, systole.

Capital is a value that increases, in pursuit of value, of abstract social wealth, and that cannot fail to increase. The idea of an irremediable decline, or of a definitive stagnation, is in contradiction with the very concept of capital, and the movement of capitalist production, during which the mass of values produced grows prodigiously, in an upward movement, interrupted by crises.

The very history of capitalist development, in conformity with Marxist theory, replied to Trotsky: on the ruins of the Second World War, capitalism has recovered, having broken the obstacles to its own development that it had constituted. It has seized more and more masses of wage labourers, has increasingly hunted down social activities still spared from commodification, and has spread ever more over the surface of the planet.

A single figure will suffice to illustrate its fantastic expansion: the gross national product of the U.S.A., the largest contemporary state mastodon, was 300 billion dollars in 1952; twenty years later, it had more than tripled: it reached a thousand billion dollars.

Just as capitalist productive forces cannot stop growing permanently, the economic premise of proletarian revolution cannot have long since "achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism". What does Trotsky mean by the premise of proletarian revolution, which - incidentally - is more the premise of socialism than of political revolution itself? It is the socialisation of labour, carried out by capital, which is becoming more and more concentrated and is creating in front of it an ever-increasing army of wage labourers. However, this socialisation of work, making the activity of each branch of industry increasingly dependent on that of the others and creating links of universal interdependence between all
social activities, is progressing day by day: capital accumulation cannot occur unless the division of labour and the number of wage labourers are increased; in such a way that, apart from periods of crisis when capital prepares the conditions for new progress, but where it is more likely than ever to be destroyed by the communist revolution, capitalism has never been anything other than a perpetual overcoming of the "highest point" previously reached from the premises of proletarian revolution.

The Proletariat and its Leadership

Having inscribed in his programme a thesis that contradicts the whole Marxist conception, Trotsky is led to pose problems in terms that make them insoluble within the framework of Marxism: how is it that the conditions of the revolution are more than ripe, and that the revolution is slow to come? Trotsky's answer is simple, and radically idealistic: "The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunistic character of proletarian leadership: its petty bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony".

Trotsky filled the abyss between his desires and reality in two ways: on the one hand, by attributing to the traditional workers' "bureaucracies" the extraordinary power to curb history by their forces alone, on the other hand by imagining that the masses, on a global scale, were about to take the path of revolution: In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution."

This extraordinary capacity to rock itself with revolutionary illusions appears in all its splendour in its interpretation of the strikes of June 1936: In France, the great wave of “sit down” strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the wholehearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. However, the leading organizations (Socialists, Stalinists, Syndicalists) under the label of the Popular Front succeeded in canalizing and damming, at least temporarily, the revolutionary stream".

Thus was born the contradiction between the "maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions" (the stagnating productive forces) and the immaturity of the subjective conditions (the masses were potentially revolutionary, but hampered by bureaucracies).

The thesis proclaiming the definitive stagnation of the forces of production constitutes the basis of Trotsky's political vision which, in 1938, believed the world revolution still on the immediate agenda of history. The thing is paradoxical, because not only does Marxism not establish a mechanical link between economic stagnation and revolutionary struggle, but, more generally, it postulates that it is by incessantly and spasmodically revolutionising the productive forces - among which the producers themselves and their needs must be considered in the first place - that capitalism "creates its own gravediggers", that is, a working class no longer considering "the demands of this mode of production as laws of nature", but aspiring to socialist emancipation. If then the thesis of stagnation is nothing less than an unconvincing theoretical justification of Trotsky's belief in a near revolutionary boom, it bases it in the sense that it completely blinded its author to the counter-revolution which quickly followed the jolts of the immediate post-war period, but which he could not recognise. And if, while all the fires lit by October had long since been extinguished and capital was preparing to launch a politically annihilated proletariat into a second world war, Trotsky continued to proclaim that revolution was near, it was because he believed not only in this stagnation, but also to some transcendent law of history that would have commanded the proletariat not to deliver itself from bourgeois oppression, but to deliver the material productive forces imprisoned in the vice of capitalism for a new economic expansion, a conception of "socialism" modelled on the bourgeois mission that fell to the Russian revolution.

And this is why the revolution seemed to him like a lava barely covered by the Stalinist clique in Russia, whose imminent fall he foresaw, and by the workers bureaucracies of the West. A little revolutionary effort would be enough to rekindle the fire. And this could only be done by "overcoming the contradiction" between the maturity of the revolution and the crisis of revolutionary leadership.
Desperately stirring in the midst of counter-revolution, and himself a victim of counter-revolution, Trotsky contributed to further demolish the doctrinal baggage of Marxism by suggesting that revolutionary situations, or rather a revolutionary world situation, could exist, without this resulting in the regrouping of at least a fraction of the working masses around the Party. The Party, instead of being the necessary product of class struggles, thus became a historical "deus ex machina" which was finally to overcome the historical crisis of humanity by its own efforts alone. Such a conception was sinking into the most dishevelled idealism. For not having understood that it was the masses themselves who had been irremediably beaten with the opportunist debacle of the 3rd International, and that the Stalinist parties were finally only the expression of their democratic and nationalist illusions, Trotsky, defending a completely voluntarist conception of the party, became an obstacle to the reorganisation of the rare revolutionary forces which had survived the disaster.

The productive forces have stopped growing; the masses are therefore potentially revolutionary, and it is only a question of creating a party. This party will defend a programme of transition, made necessary by the particular character of the period of decline of capitalism. "The Comintern has set out to follow the path of Social Democracy in an epoch of decaying capitalism: when, in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses' living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state".

Defending the masses against the decadence imposed on them by capitalism, the Fourth International at the same time fulfilled its revolutionary task.

For Trotsky, the simple resolute defence of the masses leads "inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property", because capitalism can no longer grant anything.

This conception obviously has its logic, but it is based on false premises and simply contradicts the facts. Contemporary capitalism, far from being able to grant nothing to the masses, is itself reformist and tries, as long as prosperity permits, to remedy the most unbearable evils it generates. When, then, in the history of capitalism, did the regime have such extensive "labour legislation" on welfare (social security), assistance (unemployment, housing, maternity, etc.) and on the regulation of relations between entrepreneurs and employees (notice periods, contracts of all kinds, including... the de facto sliding scale) except, in Trotsky's time, in fascist Germany and, after the Second World War, in most advanced countries? It is not a question here of embellishing all these measures of "social protection" which, aiming essentially at protecting... capital itself from the assaults of the working class, bear the mark of the irremediable meanness and bourgeois narrowness. It is even less a question of forgetting their counter-revolutionary character as material counterparts to the workers' renunciation of their freedom of economic struggle (to say nothing of their revolutionary aspirations) and thus as pillars of bourgeois domination. It is only a question of establishing that the definition of imperialist capitalism as a regime which, after a golden age of reformism coinciding with the democratic and idyllic phase of the bourgeois cycle, would be characterised by the pure and simple abandonment of the working class to the thirst for the absolute surplus value of the bosses, to the whims of the market and to the vagaries of existence is false and anti-historical.

It is therefore on the basis of this vision of the general history of capitalism that Trotsky proposes his transitional programme. Not only are the premises completely false, but the reasoning itself is not entirely logical, and is rather a paradox: at the moment when it affirms that capitalism is living its last hour, forced to oppose categorically the demands of the workers in general, Trotsky proposes an... intermediary programme! He seemingly believed that he was the victim of the historical impatience which he himself had denounced as the characteristic of opportunism, and which pushed him at all costs to seek immediate success, and thus to advance a programme of "transitional" demands. Otherwise, the author of "Terrorism and Communism" would never have let himself indulge in this lack of logic: invoking the final crisis of
capitalism to propose a programme of... transition! One wonders with perplexity what it would have taken then for the head of the Fourth International to decide to adopt the maximum programme once and for all.

The polemic of the revolutionaries against the reformists is well known: some fight for the conquest of political power by the proletariat as a sine qua non prerequisite to social transformation.

The others propose political reforms intended to facilitate the accession to power of parties supposedly determined to apply, within capitalist society, an economic and social programme that would lead it smoothly to socialism.

The transitional programme shows a certain originality: it does not propose to the proletariat to fight for constitutional reforms, but to establish, initially, a situation of dual power. And his vocabulary has little to do with that of social-democratic reformism: he keeps talking about picket lines, workers militia, Soviets, etc., and comes straight from the congresses of the Third International. However, Marxists know from experience that the most sonorous words can hide the emptiest thoughts, and revolutionary vocabulary the most moderate intentions. It is therefore appropriate to distance oneself from revolutionary evocations, and to consider coldly the political reasoning.

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist programme of the revolution" says Trotsky in the passage we have already quoted. And this bridge between the current demands and the programme of the socialist revolution, Trotsky claims to build it by proposing a "system of transitional demands". The image is attractive; but behind the image, there is this political reasoning: the transitional programme lies "between" the immediate demands and the programme of socialist revolution. For those who can read, this means: this programme, which must serve as a bridge to the programme of socialist revolution, is not the programme of socialist revolution. It lies between the immediate demands and the final goal. If the poetic vocabulary can qualify it as a bridge, then the traditional political vocabulary of Marxism designates it as an intermediate programme. And if we need an image to designate the intermediate programmes, rather than that of the bridge, we will choose that of the barrier. Our criticism will therefore focus on two points: the transitional programme is not the programme of the socialist revolution: it ignores the fundamental aspects of the communist programme, and one cannot, on reading it, get an idea of the final goal of the communists; the demands put forward by Trotsky to raise the consciousness of the masses, far from facilitating their task, mislead them on paths that lead them astray, and sow in them illusions harmful to the revolution.

The Sliding Scale of Wages
To raise the consciousness of the masses, the Trotskyists propose to continually propagandise the "sliding wage scale". How can this claim help the masses to "bridge" their immediate demands with the final goal? The least we can say is that this is not clear. Do we want to explain to the workers that no reform of the capitalist society will protect them from the perpetual wage fluctuations that are the inevitable law? But then the chosen means does not seem favourable! Do we want them to understand more clearly that it is not because capitalism periodically tends to lower wages that their situation is unsustainable, but because of the very existence of wage labour? Is it to be demonstrated that the only logical outcome of the struggle for wages is the struggle for the abolition of wage labour? But then the propaganda seems poorly adapted! Do they want the irreducible opposition between the party of the communist proletariat and all the other parties in bourgeois society to explode in their eyes? But then, since the traditional bourgeois workers parties, concerned about the "anomalies" which can disrupt the security of exploitation, also demand the sliding scale of wages, the recipe does not seem the most appropriate, all the more so as the bourgeois legislation which provides for such or such percentage of annual increase in wages in advance, i.e. without the trade union pressure of the workers having yet manifested itself by strikes, constitutes a form of sliding scale whose effectiveness for the purposes of social peace is undeniable.
The sliding scale of wages that would guarantee a perpetual status quo of the working class in bourgeois society, which would promise it as a whole a smooth, dull and continuous exploitation, is not only impossible: it is a cynical condemnation of all the past and especially future (if not present) aspirations of the proletariat to emancipation through socialism.

The propaganda of the communists must not only tend to persuade the workers that the level of their wages depends on the balance of power between their class and the enemy class and therefore on their combativeness, and that as a result of this report, it will be all the more easily called into question that they will rely more on the State to force the bosses to readjust wages according to the cost of living; it must agitate, behind the immediate demands, the supreme demand for the abolition of wage labour and not formulate the former in a way contradictory to the latter. However, the propaganda for the sliding scale of wages that some bourgeois workers parties are taking up again tends to have the opposite effects: it suggests the possibility that the capitalist state can guarantee the level of wages regardless of the pressure that the struggles exert on it and even independently of the economic situation; yet it means that in the immediate struggle opposing bosses and workers, the state can take the workers' party in principle and in a constant way, whereas in reality it only does so insofar as it is indispensable to social peace and only in phases of expansion. From whatever angle one looks at it, the claim of sliding scale, a special invention aimed at "raising" the consciousness of the masses, has no other result than to sow confusion and, supposed to lead to dual power and be situated above immediate struggles, it can perfectly be accepted by workers who are not yet willing to engage in immediate struggles.

It is unnecessary to add that the demand for a sliding wage scale, a defensive demand in a period of capitalist decline, as conceived by Trotsky, but sufficient to mobilise the masses because of this very crisis, becomes quite simply reactionary in a period of expansion.

Workers' Control
Among the "transitional" demands, Trotsky still includes "workers control". Like the previous one, this demand cannot have the effect of helping the masses to "bridge" their immediate demands with the programme of socialist revolution. On the contrary, the claim of "workers control", which has its own history, sows the most deplorable confusion. Between the immediate demands and the final goal, workers control is by no means a transition, but rather a roadblock. The experience of the proletarian movement bears witness to this: bourgeois governments have never hesitated to legalise factory committees or "soviets" confined to managerial tasks: in times of peaceful exploitation, the bourgeois are obviously not enthusiastic defenders of workers control, but they are ready to rally to this demand in times of social turmoil, because they know that it is a brake on the revolution.

When strikes of any scale are unleashed, and workers occupy factories en masse, the slogan of workers' control truly reveals its reactionary content. The productive machine being stopped, the proletarians must be in charge of organising their own supplies: this is one thing; in some places, for reasons of safety or hygiene, they may have to run this or that installation themselves: it is a second thing.

But when a proletarian party - and this is a third thing absolutely different from the first two - includes in its programme, as a proletarian claim supposed to lead to revolution, the workers control of enterprises, it is a pure and simple betrayal of revolution.

Every bourgeois knows perfectly well that it is possible to tolerate, in times of crisis, the greatest upheavals in the ordinary life of companies and the economic apparatus as a whole. The management conferences, the speeches on workers' production do not make him forget that he still holds in his hands a decisive guarantee, the State, and he is ready to support and encourage all initiatives that are capable of diverting the masses from insurrection. Marxists, on the other hand, know perfectly well that their duty is to excite the revolutionary energy of the masses and to enable it to achieve its goal: the destruction of the State apparatus.
Any illusion about the possibility of managing or reorganising society before the conquest of political power must be fought with the utmost energy: first the insurrection, and everything for the insurrection.

"The working out of even the most elementary economic plan – from the point of view of the exploited, not the exploiters – is impossible without workers’ control, that is, without the penetration of the workers’ eye into all open and concealed springs of capitalist economy. Committees representing individual business enterprises should meet at conference to choose corresponding committees of trusts, whole branches of industry, economic regions and finally, of national industry as a whole. Thus, workers’ control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalized industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes”.

How can one believe that by hearing the complaints of their bosses or by discovering some small scams within the great historical scam that is capitalism, the workers will learn to manage the planned economy? By managing capitalist factories, workers can learn nothing preparatory to socialism, for socialism is nothing more than the destruction of the economy by enterprises and it will annihilate precisely the economic mechanisms that they should spend their time learning.

As the "statutes" of the Fourth International testify, Trotsky believed that his platform summarised the "international experience" of the communist movement, "especially that which derives from the socialist conquests of October". It is true that workers control was among the immediate measures taken by the Bolshevik party after the victory of the insurrection in Russia. To transplant this measure purely and simply into a programme valid for a pre-insurrectional period on the one hand and for countries of advanced capitalism on the other, was not to use the grandiose revolutionary experience of the Bolsheviks, but to turn it into a gross double misinterpretation. In the Bolshevik revolution, workers control was part of a general programme of industrial and commercial reorganisation (compulsory unionisation), requisitions and confiscations and, above all, an attempt to regulate the economy as a whole, which, although very modest in relation to the supreme socialist goals, was nonetheless the programme of proletarian power and not some unstable "dual power". That is the first point. The second point is that this programme defines not immediate socialist goals, but the limited goals of the dual revolution, which cannot destroy capitalist relations of production, but simply proposes to "control" them in order to "ward off imminent catastrophe" pending the reinforcement of the international revolution. In Russia, "workers control" went hand in hand with the maintenance of entrepreneurs at the head of companies on one side and, on the other, with at least principled state centralism which prohibits considering it as anarcho-syndicalist "enterprise socialism". The need to keep entrepreneurs at the head of companies disappears, as in Russia; the centralist principle, which is a principle of socialism at some stage of economic development, is obliterated by the other, but which finds application of conditions all the more favourable at this stage, as in the West, is more advanced; Finally, concealed by the fact that the establishment of the political dictatorship is a precondition for the application of the slightest measure (even not directly socialist) of economic reorganisation, the demand for "workers' control" could only lose all consistency and, worse, promote the worst illusions on the political and economic tasks of the proletariat in the countries of advanced capitalism, of pure socialist revolution. This is the sad role it plays in the "transitional programme'.

Expropriation

If it were necessary to point out how ruinous the adoption of a transitional programme is and how the measures that seem to lead to the final goal can, on the contrary, constitute obstacles in its path, one could not find a better illustration than Trotsky's passage to "the expropriation of private banks" and to "the stateisation of the credit system". As a "transitional measure" intended to raise the consciousness of the masses, Trotsky proposed the demand for "the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie". In reality, such a demand is not in the least a means of "helping the masses" to understand the need for socialism. To claim from the bourgeois state that it itself assumes the capitalist management of the enterprises "vital for national existence" is to
contribute to whatever one wishes, except to help the masses "bridge the gap between their immediate demands and the final goal". The measure is so... transitional that it does not come out of one iota... of the ordinary framework of bourgeois reforms or, as these gentlemen say, of the policy of extending the state sector. Better still: the adoption of such a measure accompanied by the "necessary rationalisations" that the bourgeoisie would organise would be the best way of discrediting in the eyes of the masses what would have been presented to them as a "transitional" demand towards socialism.

"Only a general revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat can place the complete expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the order of the day. The task of transitional demands is to prepare the proletariat to solve this problem". How can the passage of certain branches of industry into the hands of the capitalist state - a passage which will often be accompanied by increased exploitation and which only "socialises" the passive - "prepare the proletariat" to solve the problem of the general expropriation of the bourgeoisie, this is what we absolutely cannot understand. What is clear, on the other hand, is the danger posed by opportunist reasoning, which thinks it is clever to shout haro at the "most parasitic capitalists" in order to raise the consciousness of the masses and which can have no other result than to rid capitalism of its most apparent flaws (speculation and "abuse") by allowing exploitation to persist.

"In order to create a unified system of investments and credits, along a rational plan corresponding to the interests of the entire people, it is necessary to merge all the banks into a single national institution. Only the expropriation of the private banks and the concentration of the entire credit system in the hands of the state will provide the latter with the necessary actual, i.e., material resources – and not merely paper and bureaucratic resources – for economic planning. The expropriation of the banks in no case implies the expropriation of bank deposits. On the contrary, the single state bank will be able to create much more favourable conditions for the small depositors than could the private banks. In the same way, only the state bank can establish for farmers, tradesmen and small merchants conditions of favourable, that is, cheap credit. Even more important, however, is the circumstance that the entire economy – first and foremost large-scale industry and transport directed by a single financial staff, will serve the vital interests of the workers and all other toilers". This time, it is true, Trotsky believes that for the realisation of this extraordinary programme, the takeover of power by the workers is absolutely necessary.

By dint of proposing intermediate transitions between the immediate struggles and the final goal, Trotsky ends up advancing demands which not only do not go beyond the framework of capitalism, but which destroy the analysis of this mode of production by debiting a disgusting propaganda of mercantile and national well-being. These transitional measures towards socialism offer the image of the most complete, the most popular and therefore the most barbaric state capitalism. "In order to create a unified system of investments and credits, along a rational plan corresponding to the interests of the entire people ["people" is rendered as "nation" in the French edition - Ed.].": one would think to hear any specimen of the political fauna of bourgeois society speak, anyone but a communist. For the communists - and they are willing to repeat it until they are exhausted - there can never and anywhere exist any "rational plan" based on credit. Credit in particular and money in general are not "tools" that the planning proletariat could use, even under the direction of a "single financial staff", but production relations; the existence of money and credit is absolutely incompatible with any rational plan; it shows that society is not organised according to a conscious plan, that men do not dominate their social relations, but are dominated by them. This is an elementary and at the same time fundamental point of Marxist doctrine, trampled underfoot by all of the contemporary counter-revolution, of which Trotsky is here a fellow traveller.

For communists, not only is there no rational plan for the state's use of credit - except in the bourgeois propaganda of modern democratic and fascist states - but they also consider it a pure and simple disgrace to propose to do anything that corresponds to the "interests of the people [nation]". Nations were formed in Europe on the ruins of the feudal system and are a product of the bourgeois era. The nation is a mercantile group whose interests are those of the bourgeoisie and not those of the proletariat. The interests of the proletariat transcend the various competing and hostile national interests and that is why it is internationalist
and aims at the destruction of nations. This is the ABC of Marxism. The proletariat can only assign the role of "defending the interests of the whole nation" to the one who has rolled to the bottom of the abyss of opportunism.

The Alliance of Workers and Peasants

Nothing more natural, since the task of the proletariat is to defend the interests of the entire nation, than for the transitional programme to devote a chapter to the alliance of workers and peasants. After having correctly established the distinction between the urban and rural proletariat on the one hand and the petty bourgeoisie on the other, but without drawing the consequences, Trotsky adds: "The sections of the Fourth International should work out with all possible concreteness a programme of transitional demands concerning the peasants (farmers) and urban petty bourgeoisie, in conformity with the conditions of each country". The term "transitional" is here of an extraordinary... elasticity. By proposing a workers control, the sliding scale of wages, it was towards "socialism" that one proposed to "transit"; but by proposing to the petty bourgeoisie a cheap credit programme, one "transits" just as much, but without any doubt in the direction completely opposite to socialism, even if this was only an equivalent for "state capitalism". "While the farmer remains an “independent” petty producer he is in need of cheap credit, of agricultural machines and fertilizer at prices he can afford to pay, favourable conditions of transport, and conscientious organization of the market for his agricultural products. But the banks, the trusts, the merchants rob the farmer from every side. Only the farmers themselves with the help of the workers can curb this robbery. Committees elected by small farmers should make their appearance on the national scene and jointly with the workers’ committees and committees of bank employees take into their hands control of transport, credit, and mercantile operations affecting agriculture". Trotsky clearly sees the "appropriation" of credit and other capitalist production relations by the "democracy of producers" as presenting fantastic or at least unsuspected possibilities in the classical doctrine.

Completely forgotten, and in any case flouted, the position so clearly formulated by Engels in "The Peasant Question in France and on Germany": "Let us say it outright: in view of the prejudices arising out of their entire economic position, their uprising and their isolated mode of life, prejudices nurtured by the bourgeois press and the big land-owners, we can win the mass of the small peasants forthwith only if we can make them a promise which we ourselves know we shall not be able to keep. That is, we must promise them not only to protect their property in any event against all economic forces sweeping upon them, but also to relieve them of the burdens which already now oppress them: to transform the tenant into a free owner and to pay the debts of the owner succumbing to the weight of his mortgage. If we could do this, we should again arrive at the point from which the present situation would necessarily develop anew. We shall not have emancipated the peasant but only given him a reprieve".

That said, we are stunned by the pure and simple solicitation of the petty bourgeoisie that we find under his pen. It would be absolutely impossible for any bourgeois party to deny the demagogy that is that of the transitional programme aimed at the peasant petty bourgeoisie, the cheap credit, the good conditions of sale, the serious and honest market, nothing is missing from the arsenal of the politician eager to win votes.

However, Marxism has always explained that petty bourgeoisie was reactionary when it defended its immediate interests and that it could only become revolutionary by going against its immediate interests, in consideration of its future interests, because of its imminent passage in the camp of the proletariat. Either cheap credit is a claim to which any petty bourgeois in any situation will adhere, because that claim is an immediate claim of the petty bourgeoisie, or we do not know what its immediate claims are. Instead of patiently explaining to the petty bourgeoisie that, even if fraud is added to it, it is to the mechanism of the laws of the market that it must fall into the proletariat, the transitional programme suggests that this is the consequence of the malfeasance of the trusts; instead of fighting to convince it - which only has a chance of success in a revolutionary period - that only the destruction of the mercantile economy can represent a solution to the miseries of the whole society at the same time as to its particular miseries, Trotsky offers him
the reinforcement of the workers to fight against bankruptcy! But Trotsky did not address himself only to the small peasantry; his prodigality of cheap credit, undoubtedly "popular", no longer had any limits: "workers' control of banks and trusts – even more, the nationalisation of these concerns, can create for the urban petty bourgeoisie incomparably more favourable conditions of credit purchase, and sale than is possible under the unchecked domination of the monopolies". However, Trotsky intends to clear himself of the accusation of anti-monopolism, but he does so in a way that can only confirm our condemnation. "The alliance proposed by the proletariat – not to the "middle classes in general but to the exploited layers of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, against all exploiters, including those of the "middle classes” – can be based not on compulsion but only on free consent, which should be consolidated in a special "contract.” This “contract” is the programme of transitional demands voluntarily accepted by both sides. Either the middle classes pass on the programme of the proletariat, at least in part, because they are forced by the revolutionary crisis, or they sign a pact freely, without any constraint, and can only defend their own class interests in this case. A pact “freely accepted by both parties”, between the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat, actually means the passage of the proletariat on to the programme of the petty-bourgeoisie.

The Workers and Peasants Government

Proposals for alliances with the exploited layers of the countryside had led us into the marsh of anti-monopolism. We are now in the swamps of the united front: the transitional programme recommends that the Trotskyists, to make it easier for the masses to understand the need for communism, propagandise for a workers and peasants government. The workers' resolute struggle against capitalism, forcing the petty bourgeoisie to take sides by ignoring its immediate interests, seemed too bold to the transitional programme theorist. Now the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" seems too crude to him. He proposes to use the expression "workers and peasants government" in propaganda. As is often the case, the desire to change the label is only an expression of the desire to change the contents of the bottle as well. "This formula, "workers’ and farmers’ government,” first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October Revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat. The significance of this designation comes mainly from the that it underscored the idea of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry upon which the Soviet power rests". The fact that it took a popular name for the dictatorship of the proletariat proves that we were dealing with a dual revolution, during which the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants was taking place. Therefore, to write that "agitation around the slogan of a workers’-farmers’ government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value" is to crown the anti-monopolistic edifice of socialist revolution in general with a worthy opportunist tent. We can do no better here than to report the speech of the representative of the Marxist left of Italy to the Fifth Congress when he criticised the formula of the "workers government": "The dictatorship of the proletariat, this marvellous expression of Marx, it is deplorable that we want to sneak it out the window of a communist congress. These few words express our entire political conception, our entire programme. Dictatorship of the proletariat, this tells me that proletarian power will be exercised without any political representation of the bourgeoisie. It also tells me that proletarian power can only be conquered by revolutionary action, an armed insurrection of the masses. When I say "workers government", we can hear all that, if we want; but if we do not want to hear it, we can also hear something else".

As the Third International had already done, the transitional programme obviously means by "workers government" anything other than dictatorship of the proletariat: the workers government formula serves to introduce the united front; Trotsky's aggravated formula, workers and peasants government, adds anti-monopolism: "Of all parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against

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1 Because, obviously, it amounts to supporting petty bourgeoisie against big bourgeoisie, whereas the relations of production implied by its existence are further from socialism than full capitalism.
capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the programme of the "workers' and farmers' government."

Who should therefore be forced to demand the sliding scale, the stateisation of capital and popular credit? The parties that are not communist, that is, in the advanced countries, the different parties of the counter-revolution; it is a question of asking the different bourgeois parties to "break with the bourgeoisie"! In short, it is once again united-front politics: I ask counter-revolutionary parties to carry out a programme that is not socialist in order to raise the consciousness of the masses; or again, I act as if I had illusions about the nature of these parties, in order to allow the masses to dissipate theirs more easily. And what is the result of this contortion? It is the party that claims to be revolutionary itself that ends up "deluding itself". Let us judge instead: "Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers’ organizations possible? Past experience shows, as has already been stated, that this is, to say the least, highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie". The trick is done: the biter is bit. It is now accepted that a petty-bourgeois party, i.e. a party materialising the influence of the bourgeoisie in the workers movement, may break with the bourgeoisie. Who is deluding himself? Trotsky, the "dissipater" of illusions. The whole history of the proletarian movement has shown us whole fractions of so-called "workers parties" breaking with communism, but never bourgeois workers parties moving closer to it.

The Goal of the Communists
Under the pretext of helping the masses "bridge the gap" between their immediate demands and the final goal, the transitional programme actually conceals the final goal from them. Whoever reads this document cannot have the slightest idea of what socialism will be; the "transitional" programme that is supposed to mobilise the masses offers them the image of repulsive state capitalism. Nothing can better underline the ignominy of this programme than the presentation of the first economic measures that would be adopted, after the seizure of power in an advanced country, a truly proletarian party, and of which we quote below the main ones

(a) 'Divestment of capital', i.e. a significant reduction in the part of the proceeds consisting of instrumental rather than consumer goods.

b) "Raising production costs" to be able, as long as wages, market and currency remain, to give higher wages for less working time.

c) 'Draconian reduction of the working day' at least to half its current duration, thanks to the absorption of the unemployed and the population now occupied by anti-social activities.

d) After reducing the volume of production through an "under-production" plan that concentrates it in the most necessary areas, "authoritarian control of consumption" by fighting the advertising vogue for useless, voluptuous and harmful goods, and by forcibly abolishing the activities used to propagate a reactionary ideology.

e) Rapid "abolition of company limits" with authoritarian transfer not of personnel, but of means of work in view of the new consumption plan.

(f) Rapid "abolition of insurance" of the commodity type to replace it with social welfare for non-workers, at least at a minimum level at the beginning.

(g)'Stop construction' of dwellings and workplaces on the outskirts of large cities and even small towns, as a means of transport towards a uniform distribution of the population throughout the territory.

Reduction of congestion, speed and volume of traffic by prohibiting unnecessary traffic.
(h) 'Decided fight against professional specialisation' and the social division of labour through the abolition of careers and titles.

i) Closer to the political domain, obvious immediate measures to submit to the communist state the school, the press, all means of dissemination and information as well as the entire network of shows and entertainment.

The worshippers of general-economic-progress who believe that capital is destroyed in the "degenerated proletarian state" while all its "categories" and "laws" have not ceased to manifest themselves there will be for their pseudo-Marxist dialectic costs on "property" and "capital": here, the immediate programme of the communists is presented as it should be, as a reversal of the economic dynamics proper to capital. It is precisely in this that it is on the way to the final goal - the abolition of classes and communism - while all the chattering programs of "state ownership" and "planning", while proposing the same economic objectives (increased investment, lower production costs, increased employment through industrialisation, increased consumption through lower prices, increased housing policy - and (political democracy!) remain miserably locked into the capitalist vision and thus define parties that are only the flanks of the established order!

As long as the path leading from a society divided into classes to a communist society must be, where they will have disappeared, and the stages that lead to them, there are two certain things: first, economic reorganisation cannot begin before the proletariat takes political power, contrary to what Trotskyist and other immediateism believes; second, this reorganisation will manifest itself not by the appearance of some new "property right", but by the change of real economic imperatives.

All the dynamics of capital which, on the one hand, constantly increases the number of unreserved2 (general law of capitalist accumulation) and, on the other hand, continuously increases the share of the social product intended not for immediate consumption but for production (law of the reproduction of capital), derives from the fact that it seeks not the use value, but the exchange value; not "true wealth" which "is measured in disposable time", says Marx, but surplus value, which, as a fraction of value, "is measured in working time".

Dialectically, therefore, the transition to the natural economy that is socialism seeking use value (and not exchange value) and disposable time for all (and not surplus value and profit) can only be done by rationalising the production of the means of consumption, by reducing working time, by the reintegration into social activity of all the members of society that the demands of capital development had excluded from it, by a redistribution of social work between the production of the means of consumption and that of the means of production capable of ensuring disposable time for all (and last but not least by the abolition of political democracy and.... culture!). Since it is the search for value and surplus value that drives capitalism to continually diversify the production of consumer goods in order to "create a need for production" since it does not "produce for needs", the break with the pursuit of value and surplus value is already manifested in the destruction of useless and harmful branches of production that it has widely developed in recent decades and that make fools talk of "consumer society". Since it is the same search for value and surplus value that forces capitalism on the one hand to save as much living labour as possible by increasing its productivity thanks to huge fixed capital investments and, on the other hand, to throw surplus labour forces onto the pavement, it is already a break with the production of value and surplus value to curb the monopolisation of a growing fraction of workers by the means of production industry, to reintegrate the unemployed into social activity, and to determine the working time according to the consumption and reserve needs of society on the one hand and, on the other, according to labour productivity, instead of "investing" in the aim of "employing".

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2 This does not mean that it is not obliged to reconstitute the reserve in another form, which is no longer that of private ownership of means of production, but of a social insurance system of the mercantile type.
This is the only way to destroy capital, its monopoly, its categories and its laws. Apart from these very simple measures, there is no march towards socialism and classless society, and therefore no salvation for the proletarian class and the human species martyred by the dictatorship of capital.

Immediate Demands and Final Goal

If Marxists reject intermediate programs, it is not only because they mask the final goal, but also because, pretending to be a bridge to it, they actually play the role of obstacle. This is obvious for the reformism of the traditional bourgeois workers parties, which propose, between capitalism and "socialism", an intermediate stage on the institutional level, a stage towards which the only accepted way is obviously that which passes through elections. This is also true for the Trotskyist transitional programme, which claims to have as its initial goal the constitution of a "dual power" and which cannot have any other practical results than to slow down the revolution with supposedly "skilful" recipes by assigning to the workers tasks which can only weaken their revolutionary capacities, and by advancing demands which can only sow confusion in their ranks. The communists fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat; they are the sworn enemies of all the good apostles who claim to "facilitate" the revolution, and who begin by cutting it into "stages", that is, to tear it to pieces. Whether this division is on the constitutional level, or whether it claims to determine a "step" towards the seizure of power, the result is the same, the process is simply more pernicious when one claims to fight initially for a "dual power", as preparation for the struggle for power as a whole; in all cases, the conscious or unconscious conclusion is the same: refusal of the revolution.

From the fact that the communists reject the intermediate programs, it should not be concluded that they refuse to consider any action that is not directly the conquest of political power. Postponing any transitional programme does not mean postponing intermediate demands, quite the contrary. Being neither utopians nor doctrinaires, the communists know perfectly well that participation in the immediate struggles of the proletariat is absolutely indispensable to the communist vanguard, which is nothing other than the most advanced fraction of the proletariat itself, in order to be able to guide the class on the path of revolution. They are neither reformists who would want to contain workers' action in the peaceful frameworks of very democratic elections and who pour their hatred on the revolution when it manifests its disorderly violence, nor superb "tacticians" like the Trotskyists who insist at all costs on pushing the revolution across their transitional bridge, and who are determined to mislead it in the most equivocal companies. They are materialists.

Pushing back the "struggle for dual power" as much as open reformism, they do not exclude a priori any particular combination of the power relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and do not bind themselves to any particular forecast on the course of the revolutionary struggle.

The class struggle of the proletariat, which is born from its exploitation, can take extremely diverse forms, according to the environment and the time, the age or the habits of such or such fraction of the proletariat, its professional qualification, etc.... From the broken machines of the early ages of capitalism to picket lines, from the reading of political newspapers to the preparation of the insurrection by communist workers, the action of the proletariat can be infinitely diverse, and use very varied forms of struggle.

The communists do not choose once and for all a historical period, as the Trotskyists do with their workers control, modelled on the era of the dual revolution, nor a particular form of struggle; nor do they concentrate their propaganda for an entire historical period on an objective supposed to lie between the immediate struggles and the final goal. They take into account all the real forms of struggle of the working class, and all the degrees of revolutionary energy that they translate and formulate their watchwords accordingly; there is no absolute rule in this field that can be applied to all particular cases.

Marxists do not invent forms of struggle; they limit themselves, as Lenin says, to "generalising, organising, making conscious the revolutionary forms of class struggle that arise spontaneously in the very course of the movement". Their role is therefore to lead the struggling masses in the offensive and defensive, without ever
losing sight of the ultimate goal: the conquest of political power. Their perspective is therefore: partial economic strike, general strike, general political strike, armed insurrection. On this line, there can be and there are advances and setbacks, but the perspective can never be different. To propose to make propaganda first for the institution of a dual power is to divert the proletariat from the master path, it is to sabotage the revolution. It is impossible to know in advance what will be the rhythms and the vicissitudes of the revolutions to come; but the proletariat, out of any gradualist or managerial perspective or (who knows?) of constitution of a workers government which would "break with the bourgeoisie without revolutionary jolts" must be educated by the true communists in the desire to strike its enemy in the heart, aiming at insurrection.

Party, Insurrection and Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Now - a programme is often as interesting by what it does not say as by what it says - the "transitional programme" does not speak anywhere of the insurrection and it only mentions the dictatorship of the proletariat once, in an incident, without giving the slightest political definition, but only a formal definition: the Soviets.

The "transitional programme" is thus completely silent about what, in classical Marxism, constitutes the supreme and distinctive political tasks of the communist party: 1) The organisation of the insurrection of the proletariat without which there is neither the overthrow of bourgeois power, nor the establishment of revolutionary power, nor thus the possibility for the party to apply its programme; 2) This principle, which does not correspond to a "political ideal" (a notion completely foreign to communism), but which results first of all from the fatal alignment of all parties, both "workers" and bourgeois, against the insurrectionist and communist party on the front lines of the civil war, is already valid in the dual revolution which does not, however, propose a direct transition to communism, even at an inferior stage; but as it also results from the fact that communist transformation aims at abolishing classes and therefore cannot - at the very least - receive any useful contribution from any party aiming at defending such or such "prior rights", such or such "acquired advantages", and thus the existence of such or such particular class, this principle is even more valid in pure socialist revolution.

An "oversight" of this size is obviously not the result of chance: it stems from a political construction that can and must be examined in itself (although it is obviously not independent of the "social" conceptions examined above): all the parties are in solidarity and it is impossible to refute even one without the whole edifice collapsing.

This construction was born from the theoretical and practical questions put to the communists by the bankruptcy of the Communist International. It responds by pushing to their last extremes the errors of principle of this one. The basis for this is the repudiation of what the transitional programme calls "sectarianism". It does not matter here which of the currents in this category deserve or do not deserve the negative characteristics attributed to it by Trotskyism. What interests us is that they define a contrario the positive characteristics which, according to Trotsky, distinguish the revolutionary party.

Reading the 18th paragraph directed "Against sectarianism", we see that all these negative characteristics are finally reduced to a single one: "political prostration of sectarianism serves to complement, shadow-like, the prostration of opportunism", i.e. the Communist International parties.

So what, in the conditions created by the catastrophic victory of Stalinism, distinguishes, according to Trotsky, the revolutionary current, the characteristic that prevails over everything is the refusal to admit defeat.

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3 They are, following the order of the text: indifference to the basic interests and needs of the masses; indifference to the struggle within reformist organizations; incomprehension of the fact that the conquest of the masses derives from intervention in this struggle; inability to find access to the masses camouflaged in aristocratic disdain towards them; abdication of revolutionary aims.
Such a starting point placed "historical Trotskyism" before a cruel alternative: either, by renouncing materialism, it reduced all the objective characteristics of the revolutionary party to a single subjective characteristic: the unshakable will to accelerate the real movement of the proletariat; or it tried to give an objective scope to its criticism of "sectarianism", but then it could only mean one thing: the bankruptcy of the CI is not the manifestation of the collapse of the real movement of the proletariat; it is not the defeat of an attempt still too weak and contradictory to pass from the old social democracy of before 1914 to communism; it does not mark the end of a whole historical epoch; a whole new epoch is not necessary for the resumption of the revolutionary struggle and the rebirth of the party; these are not subject to the dual condition defined by Marx after 1848, the Commune and the dissolution of the First International: that the working class itself transforms itself in subsequent historical development and that, even reduced to a handful of men, the party knows how to learn the lessons of the counter-revolution. This disaster is just an accident in history. The initial body of positions of the now bankrupt movement has been betrayed, but it is entirely sufficient to the needs of the new movement; the proletariat remains revolutionary; the tasks of the party thus remain the same as in the early years of the CI: the conquest of the working class to communism. And this is indeed the developed meaning of the formula Trotsky uses to justify the constitution of the Fourth International, but which is a blatant counter truth: "Class struggle does not tolerate an interruption".  

Unless he made an open profession of idealism, Trotsky could not choose the first solution. On the contrary, it is represented by the central notion of the" transitional period"; but since the second solution was just as foreign to Marxist materialism, it is at the same time represented by a logical monster. What indeed is the "transitional period"? Well, as we have seen, it is a period in which revolution must occur mathematically because of the exhaustion of capitalism and how "the class struggle irresistibly tends to transform itself into civil war", but where it does not occur, because "the orientation of the masses is determined" (!!!) "by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organisations"!

A materialistic modesty that is not so consistent with itself fails to conceal the double theoretical error of "historical Trotskyism" in the central question of the party: first, it believes that the influence of its will on the real course always remains metaphysically identical to itself, while - like everything in this world - it has its own dialectical movement, falling to zero in the phases of reflux or stagnation of the real class struggle to culminate in the rare moments of acute revolutionary crisis; banal error of activism. Secondly, it does not understand that the will of the party is never better than its conscience, that it is never exercised in favour of communism if communist political principles have been erased from this conscience, a disastrous error of opportunism.

The "transitional programme" bluntly manifests this double error. Initially, in fact, it simply proposes to hasten the realisation of the political goals of communism ("the task of the transitional programme consists in a mobilisation of the masses for proletarian revolution"); but on arrival, it no longer blows a word of these goals, which are the insurrection and dictatorship of the proletariat. Starting from the concern to hasten the real process and not to understand it is the specific approach of activism. It ends, as we can see, in denying the principles (principle is synonymous with goal), which is the fact of opportunism. But this outcome is by no means an accident: the imperative value of the principles lies entirely in the fact that they result from the intelligence of the real process. Activism, which does not care about acquiring this intelligence, and only wants to act, is not able to recognise this value. Activism is therefore opportunistic in essence.

Let us now leave it to the "transitional programme" to prove what we are saying. It speaks only once of the dictatorship of the proletariat, we said, and in an oblique fashion. Which one? Trotsky is explaining the "educational" value of the programme of transitional demands, the slogan of the workers government, and the fact of asking that this government adopt this programme; he then comes up against an obvious objection: yes, but if despite the previous experience which makes the thing unlikely, such a government would nevertheless be created (for example following exceptional circumstances) by the traditional workers'
organisations that it is precisely a question of unmasking, what would become the "educational value"? And he sweeps aside the objection by saying: "In any case one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere at some time becomes a reality and the "workers' and farmers' government" in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat".

Not only is this the only allusion of the whole programme to what is not simply a vague perspective, but a central claim of communism, but it is also such an ambiguous allusion that it suggests that there are two kinds of dictatorship of the proletariat: a false one and a real one! Let's not flinch at that political cabriole. Let us not give in to the temptation to compel Trotsky, already entangled up to his neck in his vain efforts to demonstrate that his transitional social programme is not a vulgar minimum social-democratic-style programme, to lock himself even more tightly in by asking him to distinguish one from the other by the social measures he is likely to take. Let us remain on strictly political ground. Let us find out what proper political characterisation he gives of this "true" dictatorship.

Since the Paris Commune, that is to say for a century, the only characteristic of the dictatorship of the proletariat which was not already consigned in the Manifesto of 1848, namely that it is a power resulting from an armed struggle, an insurrection, became integral part of Marxism. As for the role of the party in this armed struggle, it is defined once and for all in Lenin's famous letter, "Marxism and the Insurrection":

"One of the most vicious and probably most widespread distortions (Editor's note: it certainly is today) of Marxism resorted to by the dominant "socialist" parties is the opportunist lie that preparation for insurrection, and generally the treatment of insurrection as an art, is "Blanquism" (...). Can there be a more flagrant perversion of the truth, when not a single Marxist will deny that it was Marx who expressed himself on this score in the most definite, precise and categorical manner, referring to insurrection specifically as an art (...). To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class (Ed: underlined by us). That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish Marxism from Blanquism. Once these conditions exist, however, to refuse to treat insurrection as an art is a betrayal of Marxism and a betrayal of the revolution." (Passages underlined by Lenin.)

It is quite clear: the fact that the insurrection must rely "on the advanced class" and not, as in Blanquism, "on a party", in no way means that it must be abandoned to the "spontaneity of the masses", to the improvisation of the most determined workers groups. It in no way means that the party does not have to use

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5 The answer that seems to result from the very difficult reading of this "educational" programme (!) is that the "false" dictatorship can "expropriate" the bourgeoisie only partially, whereas only the "true" can "expropriate" it totally. We have already seen what we must think of these definitions... legalizing socialism. Add only that then the adjective "true" does not mean "true" as opposed to "false", but "complete" as opposed to "incomplete". Hence the definition: a government of traditional workers' organizations having adopted the transitional programme (Trotsky clearly says that this is not theoretically excluded, we remember) would only be an INCOMPLETE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT!

6 The rare hypotheses found in Marxist literature about the possibility of a peaceful seizure of power either relate (as in Marx's case) to the survival of non-militaristic and non-bureaucratic bourgeois states that no longer exist anywhere for a long time or constitute simple "war tricks" to deceive the enemy (as in Trotsky's speech to the Soviet of Petrograd in 1917 fully justified by Lenin).

7 Formulas of the dual revolution, which is not purely proletarian, but popular. Lenin's remarks about "the hesitations in the ranks of weak, uncertain and unresolved friends of the revolution" are only valid for pure socialist revolution.
insurrectionary technique in the service of its revolutionary policy, that is, to "consider insurrection as an art".

The continuation of the letter, addressed to the C.C. of the Bolshevik party in September 1917 confirms it: "In order to treat insurrection in a Marxist way, i.e., as an art, we must at the same time (Ed: At the same time as "we will explain our programme in the factories and barracks"), without losing a single moment, organise a headquarters of the insurgent detachments, distribute our forces, move the reliable regiments to the most important points(...), arrest the General Staff and the government (...). We must mobilise the armed workers and call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and the telephone exchange at once, move our insurrection headquarters to the central telephone exchange and connect it by telephone with all the factories, all the regiments, all the points of armed fighting, etc. (...)this is all by way of example, only to illustrate the fact that at the present moment it is impossible to remain loyal to Marxism, to remain loyal to the revolution unless insurrection is treated as an art".

It is quite clear: the insurrectional army is necessarily provided by the class; but, even insurrectional, an army cannot do without a general staff; in the literal sense, that is to say military, the term (if not in the figurative sense, that is to say political, in which this term can no longer misrepresent the real relationship), this general staff is the party.

What remains of this communist principle in the "transitional programme" for revolutionary mass education? Four lines at the end of a paragraph dealing with the need to train "self-defence workers detachments" and a "workers militia" to "inflict a series of tactical defeats upon the armed thugs of counterrevolution". Four lines which are like an aside, a discreet sign intended for the initiated: "The arming of the proletariat is an imperative concomitant element to its struggle for liberation. When the proletariat wills it, it will find the road and the means to arming. In this field, also, else leadership falls naturally to the sections of the Fourth International".

Trotsky knew the insurrectionary tasks of the party better than anyone else; but he considered it inappropriate to speak clearly "to the masses as they are" of 1938: the "transition" masked the insurrection. Only the "transition" during the last thirty-five years, the mad ardour of the time has necessarily declined and the "discreet signs" to the initiated are less and less understood by the new generations, not only of laymen, but of militants. How then could the "transitional programme" have barred the way to scepticism which, thirty-five years later, is said in petto or even proclaims that in advanced capitalist countries armed to the teeth of our atomic era, "insurrection is Blanquist folklore"? This is the kind of question that activist opportunism never asks itself: anxious to "mobilise the masses" in all circumstances, it makes a mockery of disarming the party.

The least we can say is that by reducing it to a state of allusion, the "transitional programme" treats the principle of insurrection in a cavalier manner. The misfortune is that it treats in an even worse way the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, since it replaces it purely and simply with another, as we will see.

If Marxism has always defined the revolutionary power of the proletariat as a "dictatorship", it is not according to an a priori "political" ideal, but according to its economic and social tasks. To destroy the capitalist relations of production, to abolish classes, proletarian power must intervene in the body of the old economy in a "despotic" way ("Manifesto") in the sense that it will not take into account any pre-established right, and nor, in making new interventions, any fixed law. To say that the power which will practice these despotic interventions is a "dictatorship" does not mean at all that it proposes in advance to crush by violence, or even in blood, all the resistances of the petty bourgeoisie or even of fractions of the working class (whatever they may be and whatever the circumstances) that such measures might provoke: such a principle a priori is an absurdity that the bourgeoisie only impute to communism by stupidity or hatred. This means, by contrast, that proletarian power in no way becomes a law to yield to such resistance, which only bourgeois hypocrisy and stupidity can present as a "political scandal"! But what is the regime that
theoretically makes a law to yield to the resistance of this or that fraction of the "people", as long as it has sufficient political representation? That is parliamentary democracy. Proletarian power is therefore in no sense a parliamentary democracy. The necessary despotic interventions prevent it from granting the non-proletarian classes political representation likely to influence its decisions. But the fact that these despotic interventions respond to a pre-established programme, to the programme of destruction of capital (at least in pure socialist revolution) that distinguishes the communist party from its existence excludes equally that proletarian power is founded on a workers parliament. No parliament - even a working class parliament - has a pre-established programme: the line of action it would define, if it existed, if it were possible, would be as fluctuating and unpredictable as any parliamentary opinion necessarily is. Proletarian power, on the contrary, is power that is fighting against all obstacles to the birth of a classless society in as continuous a struggle as possible. In this vision, the very notion of political "representation" loses all meaning, and at the same time the corollary notion that a division is necessary between the "legislative" and the "executive". This does not mean that the Communist Party can govern without a link with the proletarian class, or that the dictatorship of the proletariat can even take on the appearance of a "dictatorship over the proletariat" only from the outside, to take up a vulgar formula from which only the Russian counter-revolution could ensure its success: this means that the immediate political organisations of the class - for example the Soviets - cease to function as parliaments, which Marx and Lenin expressed by saying that in the organs of proletarian power, the democratic distinction between the "legislative" and the "executive" is abolished. The Soviets (for example) are not "legislative" bodies in the sense that the Communist Party does not recognise their "right" to drive them out of power; but they are not purely "executive" bodies because their relations with the party are not those of "obedience", but those of the common struggle. Likewise, the party is not an "executive" in the sense that it refuses in principle to subordinate its line of action to "majority" decisions of the Soviets; but neither is it a purely "legislative" body because its militants struggle in all mass organisations of the working class not only to explain to their members the party's decisions, but to enforce them. It is this dissolution of the fixed, abstract and false categories of bourgeois democracy by the dialectic of revolutionary Marxism that the Third International had tried to express in the common language by saying that "the dictatorship of the proletariat is a democracy for the workers". The above must show that this was only a crude approximation against which, as our current says, there would have been no objection only if it had been clear that "democracy for the workers" did not and could not mean "workers parliamentarianism".

Unfortunately, the weight of metaphysical thought and democratic tradition inherited from the bourgeoisie prevented this from being made clear, as the "transitional programme" testifies when it writes: "Not one of the transitional demands can be fully met under the conditions of preserving the bourgeois regime. At the same time, the deepening of the social crisis will increase not only the sufferings of the masses but also (...) their offensive spirit (...); all of these will seek unity and leadership (...): History has already answered this question: through soviets. These will unite the representatives of all the fighting groups. For this purpose, no one has yet proposed a different form of organization; indeed, it would hardly be possible to think up a better one. Soviets are not limited to an a priori party programme. They throw open their doors to all the exploited. Through these doors pass representatives of all strata, drawn into the general current of the struggle. The organization, broadening out together with the movement, is renewed again and again in its womb. All political currents of the proletariat can struggle for leadership of the Soviets on the basis of the widest democracy. The slogan of soviets, therefore, crowns the programme of transitional demands."

All this is only a dilution of the following syllogism: the complete realisation of the transitional programme requires the overthrow of the bourgeois regime; yet the Soviets represent the broadest democracy; therefore, the watchword of the Soviets is the political crowning of the "transitional programme".

It is not necessary to be a great cleric to notice that this syllogism lacks an essential link. Is this link: "Now the broadest democracy is the condition of this overthrow (and the Soviets are precisely this democracy)". Yes, is it: "Now the broadest democracy is the regime that will succeed the bourgeois regime (and the Soviets... etc.)"? Very clever who could decide! This, in any case, is the deadly political ambiguity that "crows" this
transitional programme with dignity, so ambiguous itself that it does not dare to call itself "maximum", but
does not want to recognise itself as "minimum" either.

In any case, "the widest democracy" takes the place which, in the communist programme, is occupied by the
"dictatorship of the proletariat". If indeed the Soviets are, in a sense, a "condition" for the overthrow of the
bourgeois regime, it is not at all because they achieve a "direct democracy" which Lenin recognised can never
be lacking in any revolution, since revolution is by nature a volcanic phenomenon: it is because they express
the revolutionary resumption of the proletariat\(^8\) whose advantage is not, contrary to what the passage above
suggests, to restore equality between the revolutionaries and the opportunist agents of the bourgeoisie
within the working class (I),\(^9\) but to prepare the victory of the former over the latter, or the crushing as little
"democratic" of the latter as possible by the former. That said, if the passage means that the regime that will
succeed the bourgeois regime after its overthrow is "the wide Soviet democracy", the break with the
principles is even greater: twenty years earlier, Trotsky himself still knew how to explicate in "Terrorism and
Communism" that without the insurrection, without the "dictatorship of the party", the Soviets would have
remained "formless workers parliaments". To be content with the Soviets' watchword when it comes to
defining the political antithesis of the bourgeois regime is therefore to replace the communist principle of
the dictatorship of the proletariat, the unparliamentary exercise of power by the Marxist party with a
formless revolutionary parliamentarism.

The governmental form of parliamentarianism is the changing coalition of several parties in the execution of
power. It must be acknowledged that Trotsky never went so far as to advocate a coalition government of his
party with others. Or rather, he never advocated it for the "bourgeois" countries, without however excluding
it for the USSR, since on the one hand, he demanded in the "transitional programme" a "legalisation of the
Soviet parties" and on the other hand refused to "deny in advance the possibility, in strictly defined instances,
of a 'united front' with the Thermidorian section of the bureaucracy".

But since the only intelligible political demand of the transitional programme is "the widest democracy",
nothing in the world could prevent Trotsky's followers from accomplishing this ultimate shift!

Thus, in a note from the "International after Lenin" (Volume 1, p. 270), Trotskyist Frank writes boldly today:
"At that time, the Left Opposition adopted the thesis of the single party in the dictatorship of the proletariat,
although in the aftermath of October, other parties claiming to be socialists would have acted legally for a
period. The single party was the product of circumstances and not the consequence of a principle. The
unfortunate is completely incapable of understanding that what was, in a certain sense, "the product of
circumstances and not the consequence of a principle", is not at all the single party in the dictatorship of the
proletariat, but the single party in the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants! As for
these "circumstances" which he treats as pure contingencies, they are in reality the necessary logical
alignment of the "other parties" in the anti-Bolshevik camp, on the military level, as on the political level! But
the height of it all is that he presents things as if the opposition of the left had "borrowed" from who knows
who (I) "the thesis of the single party in the dictatorship of the proletariat" which was common to all Marxists;
what the opposition had actually done was on the contrary to reject, from the outset, at the time of 1905,
the democratic dictatorship's claim (which did not exclude the participation of the social democrats in the
insurrectional government) to put forward that of the pure proletarian dictatorship (which really excluded
the participation of a party other than the ruling social democrats! In spite of this feat, he continues in all
serenity: "There is no doubt that in the struggle against bureaucracy, the Opposition was strongly pressured
by this bureaucracy which invoked the unity of the party and that it favoured by too categorical formulas the

\(^8\) Best case scenario. Trotsky himself said clearly in the "History of the Russian Revolution" (p. 911): "The Soviets are the
organs of preparation of the masses for insurrection, the organs of insurrection and, after victory (underlined by us),
the organs of power. However, the Soviets themselves do not decide the question (underlined by us). Depending on the
programme and management, they may serve different purposes." We say nothing else!

\(^9\) This ingenious claim is well found in the above passage, and it expresses only the nostalgia of a tiny minority cruelly
persecuted by Stalinism for a revenge as humble as it was!
idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat implied the single party (underlined by us)”. Thus, the "idea" in question is not a principle of Marxism, involved, as we have seen, in all its conception of social transformation. No: it’s Stalin's evil invention! In reality, it was the "bureaucracy" which, denying the Leninist theory of the democratic revolution of the proletariat and peasants, somehow "adopted" the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution, claiming that in Russia it was a question of "building socialism"10; but in the reversed representation that the contemporary Trotskyists make of reality, it is on the contrary the opposition which, under the pressure of the bureaucracy, would have taken back to it a "false" conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat "claiming" that it implies the single party!!! Not surprisingly, Frank noted with satisfaction: "Trotsky reacted these formulations and put forward the slogan of the plurality of Soviet parties, i.e. the recognition of parties which place themselves on the level of new production relations".

The poor man takes for a theoretical straightening what was only a complete inconsistency! If production relations in Russia had really been "new", if the transformation under way in the economy had really been communist, then the bureaucracy would have been perfectly right to justify its one-party regime in the name of the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But then the "bureaucracy" would not have existed. The fact that it did exist proves that production relations had not ceased to be bourgeois, that social transformation was not in the direction of communism. Without realising it, Trotsky himself admitted it, when he said that only the legal situation of the worker had changed and that the function of money was not liquidated, but only transferred to the universal commercial, banker and industrial state". Paradoxically, it was this capitalist reality he observed without really recognising it that forced the theorist of the pure dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia to withdraw into the claim of Soviet democracy. But if Trotsky believed he was returning to the Leninist conception of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants", he was playing with misfortune: in the long run, this political regime was not viable; the necessities of the accumulation of state capital had already ruined it, replaced by a capitalist dictatorship, and the process was irreversible because the historical function of the democratic dictatorship had already been accomplished.

This claim was not a Menshevik battle horse of the "traitor" Trotsky against the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia since under Stalin it no longer existed and since it had only ever existed as a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants. But this does not mean at all that it was not a social-democratic way (one would almost be tempted to say "anti-fascist") to fight Stalin's capitalist dictatorship. On the contrary, the social-democratic deviation breaks out in the chapter of the "transitional programme" devoted to "The USSR and Problems of the Transitional Epoch" to say nothing of the "The Programme of Transitional Demands in Fascist Countries". It only takes shape in the chapters devoted to the other countries, thanks to the half-silences (the insurrection) and the hushed substitutions (Soviet democracy instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat); but it was more than enough for contemporary Trotskyism to believe itself authorised to liquidate the dumb remnants of communism in the "transitional programme" and to fall back into a pure social-democratism by singing to us that "the dictatorship of the proletariat does not involve the single party" and is in sum only the supreme blossoming of political democracy.

The conclusion will be as brief as it is obvious. The "historical Trotskyism" claimed to have given both in the social-economic field and in the political field a programme of transition to communism. However, a transition is never just a movement towards a goal. By altering all communist goals, "historical Trotskyism" also destroyed the movement itself. His 1938 programme was therefore "transitional" only in name: it was the maximum programme of Trotskyist opportunism. As such, it has never been "outdated" except in the sense of an increasing revision and liquidation of the true Marxist programme and revolutionary principles.

10 It is only because of this point that we can speak polemically of "adoption", because the internationalist aspects of this theory were intolerable to Stalinism.
General Conclusion

In the introduction to this work, we announced somewhat laconically: authentic communism is opposed to Trotskyism not only in the field of tactics, but also in the field of strategy, criticism of capitalism and the programme. We can now briefly summarise what has been said.

TACTICS. For Trotskyism, the tactic is determined "according to the course of events and the orientation of the state of mind of the masses", aims in all situations to open up to the party "access to the masses" in order to free their revolutionary energy from the paralysing influence of the old traditional organisations passed to the defence of the bourgeoisie.

For communism, the party's radius of influence on "the masses" cannot be changed at will by tactical manoeuvres, but is determined by the actual course of class struggle that experiences ups and downs, and notable changes in the polarisation of the middle classes around the two fundamental classes, the influence of the old traditional organisations being exerted because of revolutionary energy, and not in contradiction with it; the "march of events" can always be reduced to a limited number of typical historical situations in which it is the principles of the party and not the illusions of the masses that dictate the tactical solution to be adopted, leaving no freedom of improvisation either at the centre or at the base in this field, contrary to the demands of "democratic centralism", in the "original" version given by Trotskyism.\(^{11}\)

STRATEGY. For Trotskyism, every revolution eventually becomes a socialist revolution according to the theory of permanent revolution. For Marxism, there are two types of revolution quite distinct by their economic objectives: the democratic revolution (development of associated labour and mechanisation, creation of the internal market) and the socialist revolution (abolition of market production and wage labour).

For Trotskyism, the alliance of workers and peasants is desirable in all revolutions: in backward countries, because peasants are revolutionary-democrats; in advanced countries, because the proletariat would have a political interest in proposing to small producers a "pact" acceptable from their point of view as a small class-owner oppressed by big capital. For Marxism, the alliance of workers and peasants is desirable and necessary in the democratic revolution as the opposite solution to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and peasants against the proletariat. In the socialist revolution, it is only possible if small producers renounce their own interests, which are the reactionary interests of small production, and if they rally to the socialist and thus anti-mercantile programme of the proletariat.

CRITICISM OF CAPITALISM. For Trotskyism, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism would result from the fact that the forces of production which it has developed (and which are already "social" both in terms of the scale and concentration of the means of labour and the association of the workers and the mass character of production) remain the property of a particular class of society, the capitalist class, organised on the basis of competing national states and torn apart, even within them, by "insurmountable" rivalries. In his view, not only capitalist productive anarchy derives from this, but also the existence of an immanent limit beyond which capitalism could no longer develop productive forces, but would regress them, a limit historically reached during the First World Imperialist War.

For communism, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism results from the fact that, producing goods not for the use value they present, but for the surplus value they contain, it poses, at all stages, exploitation or ruin and in any case, the degradation and oppression not only of the direct producers of this surplus value, but of all the wage earners, and, ultimately, of all the non-capitalist members of society, as a sine qua non condition for the increase of material wealth. This contradiction is perpetuated and deepened under different forms of property (personal and family, limited companies and even state): the capitalist class is a "superfluous class" (Engels) not only for society, but at the limit, for capital itself, in the sense that all its

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\(^{11}\) The Bolshevik party, on the other hand, obeys the principles, and not at all the respect of the majority opinion. Claiming "democratic centralism", it actually operates according to the law of "organic centralism", a formula that our current preferred to the previous one.
functions can be performed, against a higher or lower remuneration, by employees or civil servants having no personal right to the product and the surplus value without the accumulation of capital being the least troubled in the world, at least as long as the proletariat does not rebel against the imperatives to which the despotic authority of capital subjects it, both in society and in the enterprise.

This fundamental contradiction takes the form of a triple paradox: First, in capitalism, the extension of production, from the means that it always was in earlier societies, becomes an end in itself of all social activity in so far as it is the necessary form of the increase in surplus value; second, as in the production of goods, the increase in production implies the extension of the market, social activity ultimately tends not to satisfy needs, but to create and multiply them; thirdly, as the increase in the mass of surplus value requires, at the same time as the longest possible working day, a reduction in production costs which is obtained, inter alia, by an increase in labour productivity (which is an economy of production time per unit of use value), all social activity is presented as an ever more spasmodic effort to reduce the necessary working time of society.\textsuperscript{12}

It is this triple paradox - and not only the crises and wars resulting from the obvious contradiction between production and market and from the universal competition inherent in commodity production - that defines the capitalist anarchy to which the proletariat will put an end by a revolution that will be the product not of economic stagnation, but quite the opposite of the forward march of capital launched to conquer the whole planet.

PROGRAMME. For Trotskyism, the task of the communist revolution is to expropriate the bourgeoisie in order to ensure both a new rise and a smooth development in the production of material wealth.

He admits that money is a means of facilitating the accounting of labour expenditure by society and wages, a means of achieving the principle of work obligation for all, and that they will only disappear in higher communism. It recognises as a transitional programme to socialism a set of demands achieving both a progress of stateisation and, within the framework of the bourgeois state, a utopian interference of the proletariat and the poor classes in the affairs of capital.

For communism, the task of the social revolution is to free all social activity from its subordination to the demands of the production and consumption of surplus-value goods; without this, the high productivity achieved under capitalism could never be used to free direct producers from the exclusive subjugation to material production which, on the one hand, reduces them to beasts of burden and, on the other hand, makes culture the monopoly of particular and privileged social strata, giving it completely negative characteristics and enclosing it within insurmountable limits.

It recognises in money and in wages relations of production proper to bourgeois society, and not means which could be employed to ensure the control of the proletariat first, of the whole society then on the means of production. For it, lower and higher communism are two phases of a natural economy, the first with quota, the second without. It therefore recognises no measures of stateisation, concentration or control under the domination of the bourgeois state as "conquests" of the working class or as necessary transitions to socialism. It does not exclude, however, that they may be taken by the bourgeois state in an attempt to curb the most superficial manifestations of capitalist anarchy with a view to conservation.

For it, the only "transition" necessary for socialist transformation lies in the centralised and concerted application of revolutionary violence to all the institutions, to all the relationships and to all the purposes of the infamous capitalist society.

\textit{Source: "Programme Communiste", No. 57, October-December 1972}

\textsuperscript{12} Under capitalist domination, this reduction does not have the effect of creating free time for employees, but the increase of overwork (and thus of surplus value) for capital.