

REFORM AND REVOLUTION*

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1. *Towards a Socialist Strategy of Reforms*

THE working class will neither unite politically, nor man the barricades, for a 10 per cent rise in wages or 50,000 more council flats. In the foreseeable future there will be no crisis of European capitalism so dramatic as to drive the mass of workers to revolutionary general strikes or armed insurrection in defence of their vital interests.

But the bourgeoisie will never surrender its power without struggle, without being forced to do so by the revolutionary action of the masses.

It follows that the principal problem of a socialist strategy is to *create* the objective and subjective *conditions* which will make mass revolutionary action and engagement in a successful trial of strength with the bourgeoisie possible.

There may be disagreement with the terms in which I have posed the problem; some may think socialism unnecessary for the liberation and fulfilment of men. But vast numbers of those working with hands or brains think or feel in some confused way that capitalism is no more acceptable today than it was yesterday as a type of economic and social development; as a mode of life; as a system of relations of men with each other, with their work, with nature, and with the peoples of the rest of the world; in the use it makes—or does not make—of its technical and scientific resources, of the potential or actual creative capacities of each individual. If this feeling or decision leads one to opt for socialism, these are the terms in which the problem of its realization must be posed.

This realization can never be the result of a gradual reform of the capitalist system, designed to rationalize its operation and to institutionalize class antagonisms: nor of its crises and irrationalities: capitalism can eliminate neither their causes nor their consequences, but it has now learnt how to prevent their becoming explosively acute. Nor will socialism be achieved as a result of a spontaneous rising of the discontented or by the annihilation of social-traitors and revisionists by means of anathema and quotations. Socialism can only come about through *long term and conscious* action, which *starts* with the gradual

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application of a coherent programme of reforms, but which can only proceed by way of a succession of more or less violent, sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful, trials of strength; and which will as a whole contribute to the formation and organization of the socialist will and consciousness of the working classes. In this way, the struggle will advance, on condition that within the capitalist system each battle reinforces the positions of strength, the weapons, and also *the reasons* which workers have for repelling the attacks of the conservative forces, and for preventing capitalism from regaining lost positions.

There is not and cannot be an imperceptible "gradual transition" from capitalism to socialism. The economic and political power of the bourgeoisie will not be whittled away by a slow process of erosion, nor destroyed by a succession of partial reforms, each one apparently innocuous and acceptable to capitalism, but which cumulatively would amount to a discreet siege of the enemy by a secret and masked socialist army, advancing soundlessly, under cover of night, until one fine morning it would find itself in power.

This cannot be the real issue. What can and must be gradual and cumulative in a socialist strategy is the preparatory phase which sets in motion a process leading to the edge of the crisis and the final trial of strength.¹ The choice of this road, incorrectly called "the peaceful road to socialism", is not the consequence of an *a priori* option for gradualism; nor of an *a priori* refusal of violent revolution or armed insurrection. It is a consequence of the latter's actual impossibility in the European context. It is a consequence of the necessity to create the objective and subjective conditions, to prepare the social and political positions of strength, on the basis of which a working class conquest of political power will become possible.

It may perhaps be objected that there can be no reforms of a socialist character as long as power remains in fact in the hands of the bourgeoisie, as long as the capitalist state continues to exist. This is true. A socialist strategy of progressive reforms does not mean the installation of islands of socialism in a capitalist ocean. But it does mean the conquest of popular and working class powers, the creation of centres of social control and direct democracy (notably in great industrial enterprises and production co-operatives); the conquest of positions of strength in representative assemblies; the abstraction from the domination of the market of goods and services answering to collective needs, with the inevitable consequence of an intensification and deepening of the antagonism between the logic of social production according to the needs and aspirations of men, and the logic of capitalist accumulation and the power of management.

It is essential that this antagonism should never be institutionalized,

as it usually is in neo-capitalist and social-democratic regimes, by the integration of working class organizations in the state and their subordination to it, by compulsory negotiation and arbitration. The autonomy of trade union and political organizations must bring the antagonisms into the open and allow them to develop freely, and then bring the existing organization of power into question and into crisis, and upset the balance of social forces and of the capitalist economy—a balance which tends to reconstitute itself at a higher level after every initiation of partial reforms, a point which will be taken up presently.

A socialist strategy of gradual reforms can neither be conceived as a simple electoral conquest of a majority, nor as the promulgation of a series of reforms by a chance coalition of social-democrats and socialists.² The electoral struggle, even when it is ultimately victorious, has never enabled the working classes to forge a collective will or real political power. As Marx and Engels wrote, "suffrage gives the right, not the power to govern. It makes possible an assessment of a multiplicity of individual wishes, expressed in the secrecy of the polling booth, of men and women whose convergence of demands does not yet make at all possible their organization and unification for the purpose of common action.

This is one of the mystifications of bourgeois democracy. Its institutions are so conceived as to perpetuate the separation of individuals and their molecular dispersion, to deny them all *collective* power over the organization of society, leaving them merely with the possibility, as a substitute for popular power, of a *permanent delegation of power* every four or five years to representatives with no direct relations with the masses, to parties which are only considered "acceptable partners" on condition that they represent vis-a-vis their electors the superior interests of the capitalist state, rather than the interests of their electors vis-à-vis the capitalist state.

In short, electoral victory does not give power: electoral victory acquired on the basis of a programme of reforms, however timid, does not give the power to initiate these reforms. This is one of the profound reasons for the persistence of conservative majorities except in periods of grave crisis and conflict, and for the regular re-election of the government in office, whatever its policies. For in their general tendency, if not in detail, these policies reflect the existing relation of forces in the given situation.

However eloquently it may be advocated by the opposition, a different policy will neither convince nor appear possible *unless there has already been a virtual demonstration of the power of promulgating it*, unless the relation of social forces has been modified by direct mass action which, organized and led by the working class parties, has created a crisis for the policies of the government in office.³ In other

words, the power to initiate a policy of reforms is not conquered in Parliament, but by the previous demonstration of a capacity to mobilize the working classes against current policies; and this capacity of mobilization can itself only be durable and fruitful if the forces of opposition can not only effectively challenge current policies, but also resolve the ensuing crisis; not only attack these policies, but also define other policies which correspond to the new balance of forces: or rather—since a relation of forces is never a static thing—to the new dynamic of struggle that this new relation of forces makes possible.

Without a change in the balance of forces between classes; without a shift in the economic and social balance of the system through the struggle of the masses for their demands, there is a fatal tendency for electoral logic to play into the hands of those political leaders for whom the role of the "left" is reduced to carrying out "better than the right" *the same policies as the right*: and for whom interparty competition reduces itself, in Lelio Basso's words, "to the competition between cliques of political leaders who present their credentials for a more efficient administration of power within the framework of a common political choice". If, on the other hand, mass struggles succeed in upsetting the balance of the system and in precipitating a crisis without being accompanied at the party level by the definition of a really new economic policy capable of resolving the crisis to the political and material advantage of the working classes (as has happened in the recent past in most of the countries of Western Europe), then the situation rapidly decays and despite their victories the working classes are soon thrown back by the bourgeoisie to their starting point. Famous precedents for this are France (1937, 1947 and 1957), Belgium (1961). Italy (1962–1964), etc.

At the present time there is a danger that this same process of decay of a situation favourable to the working class will be reproduced every time a coalition coming to power on a programme of reforms is a heterogeneous alliance of neo-capitalist reformists and socialists. This touches on the strictly political conditions of a socialist strategy of reforms.

Such a strategy, it is worth repeating, cannot, in present-day Europe, aim at the immediate installation of socialism. Neither can it aim at the immediate realization of anti-capitalist reforms which are *directly* incompatible with the survival of the system, such as the nationalization of all important industrial enterprises or of all sectors with monopolistic or oligopolistic structures. Such reforms, included within a short-term programme, would not constitute the *setting in motion* of a revolutionary ~~process~~ during which class antagonisms would steadily intensify to the point of a decisive trial of strength. They would constitute directly the destruction of capitalist structures

and would *already* demand sufficient maturity of the working class for the immediate revolutionary conquest of political power. If the socialist revolution is not *immediately possible*, neither is the realization of reforms immediately destructive of capitalism. Those who reject any other kind of reforms in fact reject the very possibility of a *strategy of transition* and a process of transition to socialism.

We should not conclude from the impossibility, failing a pre-revolutionary situation, of passing directly to reforms destructive of the system, that a socialist strategy of reforms can or must be limited to isolated or partial reforms, called "democratic" because they have not only no socialist content, but no socialist perspective or revolutionary dynamic. In practice, what distinguishes a socialist strategy of reforms from a neo-capitalist reformism of a social-democratic type is less *each* of the reforms proposed and *each* programmatic objective than: 1. the presence or absence of *organic ties* between the various reforms; 2. the rhythm and modalities of their initiation; 3. the presence or absence of a will to profit by the collapse in the balance provoked by the first reforming actions for new disruptive action."

The fact that social-democratic leaders and socialist forces may find themselves in agreement on the necessity of *certain* reforms must never be allowed to confuse the basic difference between their respective goals and perspectives. If a socialist strategy of reforms is to be possible, this basic difference must not be masked, nor dismissed to a lower level by tactical agreements at the summit. On the contrary, it must be placed at the centre of political debate. If not, the socialist movement, by seeming to give a totally unmerited "socialist" warrant to the social-democratic leaders through tactical agreements at the summit, will have prepared the rout in ideological and political confusion of the whole of the working-class movement and particularly of its avant-garde.

These remarks are particularly applicable to the present European situation, in which the precarious economic balance no longer allows as it did in other periods the financing by inflation of social programmes and public intervention. It follows from this situation that a programme with a "social" character—concerning the raising of low wages; the development of social construction and backward regions; the improvement of education and public services, etc.—must *either* use a coherent set of reforms to attack the logic and the core of capitalist accumulation; or retreat precipitately before the lightning response of capitalist forces whose interests are threatened or adversely affected.

If it is proposed that a popular front coalition should be brought to power on the basis of an agreement as to a minimum common programme, entailing several partial reforms, and excluding by the very terms of the alliance reforming actions going beyond the limits of the

programme, then the fate of the coalition and its government is virtually sealed in advance.

In fact, the very essence of a minimum programme is that, unlike a programme of transition or a strategy of reforms, it debars the socialist forces, on pain of breaking the pact, from profiting by the dynamic of the process set in motion by the initial measures, and even from responding by counter-offensive to the offensive of the capitalist forces.

The nature of this offensive is now well known, as it always follows the pattern of France in 1936. The bourgeoisie reacts to the actions which threaten its prerogatives and powers by a flight of capital, an investment strike, and selective dismissals, aimed first of all at trade union militants; in short, by unleashing an economic crisis whose effects penalize the working classes. This crisis—which is not merely the result of a deliberate and concerted action by the bourgeoisie, but also of the objective impossibility of making capitalism work while attacking its internal resources—finally allows the bourgeoisie to negotiate from a position of strength the revision of the government programme and the postponement in time (i.e. in practice, indefinitely) of its objectives. The bourgeoisie is the more insistent the more negotiation brings out the internal division of the coalition between partisans of intransigence and partisans of compromise. As the weeks pass and the economic and monetary crisis deepens, the former inevitably lose ground to the latter. For from this moment on the situation has already changed. The original minimum programme has already become inapplicable. To apply it would now demand draconian measures which did not figure in the original common minimum programme—e.g. exchange, controls, price ceilings, import quotas, nationalization of financial or industrial monopolies—and which could only be attempted by a government "striking while the iron is hot", at the moment of maximum popular support and mobilization.

But the weeks which have passed in sterile bargaining; the economic crisis; the dissensions within the coalition produce a reflux of combativity in the working classes. The partisans of intransigence are already fighting a rearguard action. Confusion ensues, and the capitalist forces, conscious that time is on their side, harden their stand. The history of the coalition thus becomes that of a long retreating struggle. To regain the confidence of capital it multiplies concessions. When finally it is succeeded by a moderate government, better suited to appease the bourgeoisie and "cure" the economy, the popular front coalition has to its credit only the measures and partial reforms carried out in its first weeks of power, and which have been distorted, deprived of all real significance and even put to the service of the capitalist system.

The repetition of a similar process—which occurred in France after 1936 and 1945; in Great Britain after 1945 and 1964; in Italy after 1947 and 1963—can only be prevented if the coalition is sufficiently homogeneous and conscious of the trials awaiting it to respond to the offensive of the capitalist forces by a lightning reaction in the country of the working masses, and by governmental measures prepared preventively in advance, well before the victory.⁷

But an effective reaction from the working class movement presupposes that the reforming action is not conceived as an action centralized in the state, in support of which the coalition demands of the masses a permanent and disciplined delegation of powers; rather it presupposes that the promulgation of the economic programme goes hand in hand from the beginning with democratic reforms allowing the development in factories, co-operatives, regions and local councils of centres of popular power and initiatives adapted to local circumstances.

On the other hand, preventative measures against the offensive of the capitalist forces presupposes that from the start the coalition had no illusions about the possibility of appeasing the bourgeoisie and reconciling it with a loyal collaboration with the new state.⁸ But social-democratic leaders are supporters of a popular front. According to them, initially there should be a sincere attempt at a policy resting on indirect controls and freely accepted managerial prerogatives. It would be incorrect to reject this method of approach *a priori* if its supporters were conscious from the start that it *cannot constitute a lasting policy*, but must inevitably lead to an acute conflict *which must be prepared for*. In other words, a policy of indirect public control of the mechanisms of accumulation and circulation of capital should not necessarily be rejected, on condition that it must only be conceived as a *transition* towards the policy of direct control which it will inevitably demand as its logical continuation under pain of a blockage in the system and retaliations on the part of the economic forces.

To believe that the state can *in the long term* contain, orientate and regulate the activity of the economic forces without encroaching on the régime of private property is in fact to abstract from the political and psychological dynamic of capitalism. No doubt it is technically true that a selective policy in fiscal, price and credit matters can imprint qualitative social and geographical orientations on production, differentiate the growth of its sectors, services and regions according to social criteria and a global economic rationality. But what is technically possible⁹ is not for long politically possible.

The public desire to reduce the cost of growth; to eliminate waste (in the form of artificially expanded costs of marketing, management, advertising, display and so on); to prevent the use of the resources of

enterprises for private purposes; to prevent investment in new installations and new models which contribute neither to technical progress nor to the improvement of products but are rather aimed primarily at justifying the rates of amortisation allowed by the Inland Revenue, all this is rigorously technically possible through the tightening of controls and the establishment of strict administrative rules: e.g. the limitation of advertising costs accepted by the Inland Revenue; the determination by sectors, or single cases (where monopolies are concerned), of an acceptable rate of profit, of the use which may be made of profit, of the direction and nature of investments which can be made, etc., under pain of stiff tax penalties.

But the promulgation of such public directives¹¹ quickly comes up against the logic of capitalist activity and destroys its dynamic. In fact, it amounts to the destruction of managerial authority, to the factual socialization of the activity of the entrepreneur, to indirect public direction of firms. It would include as a sanction the confiscation (or very severe taxation) of supra-normal profits. It would thus remove any reason why a private company should seek a rationalization or innovation which would increase its profits beyond the rate reckoned as normal, thereby destroying one of the major incentives to technical progress. In short, by controlling management, by weighing it down at the top with bureaucracy, by attacking the profit motive, the state would be attacking the very dynamic of the capitalist system, and would encourage its paralysis or sclerosis.

There is no sense in attacking the mechanisms and dynamic of the capitalist system *unless one intends to abolish it, not conserve it*. To attack the consequences of the system's logic is necessarily to attack this logic itself and to threaten the system. If this crisis is not to turn against those who provoked it, it must be resolved by the transfer of centres of accumulation under public control. In default of more extreme measures of socialization following initial reforms and tending to remove those very obstacles raised by the promulgation of the programme, the reforming coalition will be the victim of a war of attrition and of the process of decay we have just described.

If intermediate reforms (in the sense that they do not reveal their anti-capitalist logic *directly*) must certainly not be rejected in the perspective of a socialist strategy, this is only on the basic condition that they must be conceived as means not as ends, as dynamic phases in a process of struggle, not as resting stages. Their function is to educate and unite the actually or potentially anti-capitalist social forces by the struggle for undeniable social and economic objectives—above all, for a new direction for social and economic development—by adopting initially the method of peaceful and democratic reforms. But this method must be adopted *not because it is viable or intrinsically pre-*

*ferable, but on the contrary because the resistance, the limits and the impossibilities which it will inevitably come up against after a short while are suitable simply for the demonstration of the necessity of socialist transformation to social forces not yet ready for it.*¹¹

2. *Socialists and Reformists. The Problem of a Programme*

Obviously, such a strategy cannot be realized in the framework of a summit-alliance with neo-capitalist formations, i.e. Social Democrats and centrists, who would immediately set out to limit reforming action to measures acceptable to the bourgeoisie and demand strict programmatic adherence to this principle from their partners. It presupposes that there is a clear consciousness of the nature of the process of transition to socialism at the level of the political leaders, a consciousness of its mechanisms, its dynamic, of the aspirations of the working masses who support it, and of *the relatively short respite* in which the success or failure of the undertaking is determined.

To summarize, a socialist strategy of reforms must aim at disturbing the balance of the system, and profit by this disturbance to prepare the (revolutionary) process of the transition to socialism, which, as we have seen, can only be done at white heat. A strategy of this type is only practicable in periods of movement, on the basis of open conflicts and large-scale political and social movements. It cannot be conceived as a battle of attrition in a war of position. For once the social front is stabilized, once a balance of forces is set up, the battle of rupture—which it is precisely the function of a socialist strategy to prepare for—is postponed. Of course, the new balance of forces may be more favourable to the working classes than the old one, the contradictions and elements antagonistic to capitalist logic more marked. But these contradictions, once the struggle for reforms has reached a new level—i.e. in practice, once its dynamism has been arrested—are muffled in the form of constant attempts by one side and the other to whittle away the opposing position. These essentially *tactical* skirmishes no longer allow the intervention of a *strategy*. For however precarious the balance of forces, it rests on the recognized impossibility for either side to force a decision.

It is thus unrealistic to assimilate these muffled tactical conflicts, which may be spread over a long period, to a "revolutionary process" which ripens over one or more decades.¹² However precarious the balance set up when the struggle for reforms reaches a level may objectively be, it is a balance; for the socialist and workers' movement it is a lean period. The contradictions introduced into the system by the reforms imposed previously no longer gnaw at its substance, and do not weaken it like a chronic malady. They do not retain their original disruptive potential. On the contrary, they lose it. There are no anti-

capitalist institutions or conquests which cannot in the long run be whittled down, denatured, absorbed and emptied of all or part of their content if the imbalance created by their initiation is not exploited by new offensives as soon as it manifests itself. Constrained to coexist with institutions which originally opposed its logic and limited its sphere of authority, capitalism learns to subordinate them to itself without a frontal attack; insofar as it dominates the crucial sectors of capitalist accumulation and development and particularly those new activities imposed by technical progress and growth, it can regain all or part of the lost territory.¹³

This means that it is impossible to conceive the period of transition, or even the period preparing the transition, as a long period, of the order of a decade. If the transition is not begun after the disruption of the balance which provokes the struggle for reforms, then it will not take place in that period. The reforms will be disjointed, checked and digested by the system, and a balance re-established at a higher level. A new period of preparatory struggles, comprising in their objectives new contradictions will be necessary to create the conditions for a new offensive. The discontinuity of socialist strategy is that of history itself.

We should not conclude from this that the democratic reforms of the past were vain, which would amount to asserting the sterility of a century of working-class struggles. Even emptied of all or part of their content, the conquests of the past enable working-class and socialist forces in a new phase of their offensive to reach out for more advanced objectives. In this sense, Lenin considered state monopoly capitalism, the most advanced phase of the capitalist socialization of the productive forces which has already set up certain levers which the socialist state will be able to use, as the "antechamber to socialism".

Given this, it must still be stressed that if past conquests make the domination of the capitalist class more precarious, the balance of the system more fragile, *for this very reason* they make new partial reforms and new displacements of the balance *politically more difficult*. Precisely when new anti-capitalist reforms risk compromising the survival of the system, the resistance of the bourgeoisie to any new reform becomes ferocious. *The shorter the step to the disruption of the system, or the closer it has been approached in the past, the more difficult it becomes to approach it again or to go beyond it*. For the bourgeoisie is now on guard: the working-class movement runs the risk of political and economic failure in its undertaking: a higher degree of preparation, resolution and consciousness is now necessary to engage in a new battle.

The idea of "creeping socialism", gaining ground thanks to reforms achieved one by one until a "qualitative leap" is provoked, corresponds to nothing real except the very real vigilance of the bourgeoisie

which this idea reflects. There can be no *cumulative effect* of reforms successively imposed over a long period, without a sharp trial of strength based on a strategy. Particularly in those societies where the mechanisms of capitalist accumulation are already objectively at the mercy of public intervention: where institutional reforms presenting no intrinsic difficulties would suffice to break the power of the bourgeoisie—even though the state does not use these instruments *against* the monopolies, quite the contrary—there above all do the capitalist forces use all their strength in every field (ideological, political and social) to hinder the formation of a political will able to impose these reforms.

Several countries of Western Europe (France, the Scandinavian countries and Italy in particular) have today reached this threshold where, because of the structural vulnerability of the system, the bourgeoisie is defending its power positions tooth and nail, and posing an implacable opposition to the everyday claims of the workers' movement as much as to its struggle for partial reforms. This means that it is necessary to raise the struggle to the higher level of a global strategy, based on a general vision, and not to attack just the immediately intolerable effects of capitalism, but the very nature of the relations of production, social relations and the civilization which has given birth to them.¹⁴

This elevation and "globalization" of the objects of struggle is imperative for the simple reason that the very survival of the system has now been objectively threatened even by the conquest of partial reforms, and the bourgeoisie knows it. It globally resists partial attacks. Winning a trial of strength is now inconceivable for the workers' movement unless it can achieve the subjective appreciation of the global character of what is at stake in the course of struggle; unless it succeeds in opposing its own global political will to the global resistance of its adversary. A battle in which *everything* is at stake for the enemy cannot be won unless the partial objectives which one is committed to imply a goal deserving *total* commitment.

Thus there is some truth and some error in the "maximalist" tendencies which are at present developing in the face of the degeneration of European Social-Democracy and the increasing difficulty of achieving partial victories and reforms. The error is to postulate that any struggle must now be entered into only with a clearly stated socialist intention and for aims which imply the destruction of the system. This amounts to claiming that the revolutionary intention *predates* the struggle which gives it strength. This undialectical position evades the problem by supposing it to have been solved. For in reality, the socialist intention of the masses never emerges *ex nihilo*, nor is it formed by political propaganda or scientific proof. A socialist intention is *con-*

structured in and through the struggle for plausible objectives corresponding to the experience, needs and aspirations of the workers.

Further, it demands that the goals be articulated together in a strategic vision, and that as the struggle progresses, pressing on to the structural limits of the system, it gains not only in breadth, but also in depth. Such a dialectical development of the struggle presupposes a pre-existent socialist intention among the masses. This intention is not manifested by polemic and revolutionary propaganda, but by the ability to order the goals, to raise the struggle to a higher level, to give it "intermediate" goals prefiguring workers' power, which must necessarily be transcended once they are obtained.

Nevertheless, there is some truth in the "maximalist" position, for the workers' movement will only advance towards socialism if the latter is the objective sense of its actions in pursuit of its aims, the sense that is destined to become conscious ("subjective"). Any protest or demand whatsoever, if it is presented in general, i.e. abstract terms (e.g. a general increase in wages and pensions, a growth in public housing, etc.) cannot have this objective sense; if only because the realization of the goal is not in the power of those who demand it and will not be achieved directly through their action, even when they succeed. Furthermore, this kind of demand has no internal anti-capitalist logic necessitating the transcendence of its objectives once they have been obtained. These objectives are presented as new levels whose realization could be the result of government action based on technical (or technocratic) reforms. Their content exhausts them.

In present conditions, the workers' movement will only acquire the political maturity and strength necessary to destroy the accumulated resistance of the system if its demands are a living critique of the social relations and the relations of production, of capitalist rationality and civilization, in content, but also in the way they are pursued.

This critique, deepening the themes of the struggle, is particularly important in the neo-capitalist context, where the workers' socialist movement has to measure up against the subaltern reformism of Social-Democratic and Centrist formations. In fact, these latter often advance *the same kind* of objectives as the forces of the left (council housing, education, public amenities, "social justice", etc.)—but they subordinate their realization to the possibility of obtaining them without producing a "breakdown of the machine" of capitalism, i.e. without disturbing the economic balance or weakening the power positions of the bourgeoisie.

The great speciality of Social-Democratic formations is to demonstrate that all problems can be resolved or made tolerable, all material needs satisfied within the framework of the system, given time and discipline. There is no call to "rock the boat" or engage in a trial of

strength; be patient, realistic and responsible and have confidence in the leadership. Let everyone keep to his place, and the neo-capitalist state will act in the best interests of all.

It may well be useful for the socialist forces to show that the Social-Democratic formations refuse to give themselves the means to carry out their programme; that this programme is either unrealizable, or requires such a long delay that its solution will be overtaken half-way by a change in the terms of the problem; or even that more and better can be expected and obtained if one is prepared to go further in transforming the structures. But however useful it may be, this kind of demonstration is insufficient. Essentially, it opposes promises of relative improvement by promises of more rapid or marked relative improvement. What it fails to say, and what the reformists are careful to shout at the top of their voices, is that these more rapid and more marked improvements would provoke a major crisis of the system: "You just want to break the machine, but we want to make it work better."

The socialist movement is ill-equipped to shake off this objection so long as it remains on the terrain of *relative*, general improvements. If it lets it be believed that there is only a *relative* difference, a difference *of degree* between its policy and that of the reformists; that basically it is seeking the same kind of objectives, but uncompromisingly and energetically, and is prepared if necessary to bring the matter to a trial of strength with capital, it is hardly likely to eat away the electoral support of Social-Democracy and become the hegemonic force in the workers' movement. A relative difference or a difference of degree is not, in fact, enough to make the masses prefer the perilous and arduous road of confrontation with the forces of capital to the slow but "sure" road of subordinate reformism.

No one will take the risks of a political and monetary crisis or engage in a trial of strength with the bourgeoisie just to secure the building of 250,000 council houses a year rather than 200,000, an increase of 10 per cent rather than 5 per cent for lower paid workers, a 42 hour week rather than a 44 hour week, etc. The game is not worth the candle; if only because a more ambitious policy on the part of the socialist movement will initially provoke a brutal reaction on the part of the system, a major upheaval in the economy, and in all probability a deterioration in the material situation of the masses, at least for a short period.

Social-Democratic and Centrist propaganda is thus very telling when it asks "What's the hurry? Why try to force the pace when a little patience and discipline will give you what you are asking for at the appropriate time and in calm and order? Is it worth risking a serious crisis to obtain in five years what could be obtained in seven or eight without great changes?"

All European Social-Democrats ask this question in one way and another, and the socialist movement can only respond by stressing that there is a *basic* difference between its policies and those of reformism.¹⁵ Not a difference of degree, delay or method of realizing the same thing as Social-Democracy, only better and quicker. But a *total* difference justifying a total risk. *Only to the extent that it can convey the fact that its actions and objectives are not of the same kind as those of subordinate reformism; that what is at stake is not a greater relative or partial improvement, but an absolute and global improvement, can the socialist movement advance and establish itself as the hegemonic force in the workers' movement.*

Absolute and global amelioration should not, of course, be understood to mean that the earthly paradise and the installation of socialism can be promised overnight. Rather, each partial improvement, each reform demanded should be articulated into a general project aiming at producing a global change. The scope of this change must transcend each partial objective which illustrates one of its determined aspects: the absolute improvement at stake is the emancipation of all those who are exploited, oppressed, degraded and crippled by capitalist relations of production in what is their social value and individual pride: their social labour.

Reformists and socialists do have some wishes in common; but not for the same purposes or in the same way. For reformism, at stake in the reforming action is merely "things"^w—wages, public amenities, pensions, etc.—which the state is to dispense from on high to individuals maintained in their dispersion and impotent with respect to the process of production and relations of production. For the socialist movement, the workers' sovereign power to determine for themselves the conditions of their social participation, to submit to their collective intent the content, development and social division of their labour is as important, if not more so, than "things".

Hence the profound difference between reformism and socialism. It is the difference between granting reforms which perpetuate the subordination of the working class in factory and society; and reforms imposed, applied and controlled by the masses themselves, based on their capacity for self-organization and their initiative. In the last analysis, it is the difference between technical, state reforms and democratic reforms; it being understood that the latter are *necessarily* anti-capitalist: "The struggle for an authentic democracy, for any form of real participation in the management of collective interests, for any form of collective control, in particular for the workers' control of all aspects of the process of production . . . is to challenge in practice capitalism's power of decision. . . . An essential aspect of this struggle is the struggle of the working class for the right to man-

age for itself the patrimony of labour power, with all the consequences which follow from this as to the organization of labour in the factories and the autonomous management of deferred payments (social insurance, etc.)”¹⁸

Thus there is necessarily a **difference** in method corresponding to the **difference** in content separating neo-capitalist reforms and anti-capitalist reforms. The liberating value of reforms can only manifest itself if it is already present in the mass actions aiming to establish them. At the level of method, the difference between technical reforms and democratic reforms is that separating a bureaucratically applied institutional reform and a reform imposed in the heat of collective action. From a formal point of view, any reform **whatsoever**—**including** workers' control—may be emptied of its revolutionary significance and re-absorbed by capitalism if it is merely instituted by government fiat and administered by bureaucratic controls, **i.e.** reduced to a “**thing**”.

Certain “maximalists” conclude from this that all reforms are vain as long as the capitalist state survives. They are right if they mean reforms granted from on high and institutionalized. They are wrong if they mean reforms imposed from below in the heat of struggle. A reform cannot be separated from the action which produces it. Democratic and anti-capitalist reforms cannot be achieved by action which is neither the one nor the other. The emancipation of the working class can only constitute for the workers a total stake justifying a total risk if the action of struggle has already been an experiment for them in self-organization, in initiative and collective decision-making, in short, an experiment in the possibility of their own emancipation.

3. ~~The~~ *Global Alternative. The Problem of Alliances*

Whenever the socialist movement works alongside a strong Social-Democracy or a dynamic **neo-capitalism**, it is necessary for it to shift the emphasis from partial, immediate, quantitative and disparate demands to the presentation of the policies and programme of a **global and qualitative change**. This is what is implied by the **many** references to the “**global** alternative”, to the “**model**” of development, civilization and social organization whose elaboration has been presented as the most urgent, nay, the principal task by the most advanced flank of the European Marxist movement.

- Hold-all programmes which take into account all demands and all subjects of discontent are no longer merely implausible: they lack a general perspective; they have none of the coherence necessary—not only economically and logically but above all politically and ideologically—to constitute a “**global** alternative”, to forge the unity between objectively anti-capitalist forces which can only be the synthesis at a

higher level (not just the sum) of their demands, interests and immediate aspirations.

In this respect, Sweden offers a particularly pertinent illustration. The significance of the Swedish experience extends well beyond the case of Sweden itself, so frequently held up as a model by European Social-Democracy, and as the forerunner of the type of society toward which most European neo-capitalist states are evolving.

Swedish Social-Democracy postulated the possibility of pursuing a policy of social welfare, public amenities and high wages linked to high productivity within the framework of capitalism and without rejecting its mechanisms. Past development of social allowances, amenities and services was based on direct taxation which increased with the level of income. But this development went hand in hand with that of a civilization of individual consumption. Eventually, an acute double contradiction manifested itself.

On the one hand, the development of social services and amenities financed by direct taxation was obtained by what was in effect the socialization of the major part of private saving. The result was a grave crisis in the capitalist mechanisms of accumulation: a decline in the capital market (the Stock Exchange) without any increase in the self-financing power of enterprise (in fact there was a decrease). But on the other hand, this crisis in the accumulation mechanisms was not offset by opulence in the social sector; on the contrary, there is an acute crisis in housing and town-planning, an acute shortage of medical and educational personnel, an accelerated drift from the country to the towns, etc.

Thus the expansion of social services and public intervention, subordinated to the expansion of industrial capitalism, was not adequate to satisfy the social needs engendered by the development of the latter. But it was sufficient to make difficulties for it, by tapping certain of its sources of finance.

Social-Democracy thus finds itself faced with a choice. The accelerated expansion of social and collective services and the pursuit of monopolist expansion can no longer be attempted together. There are two alternatives: either 1. the stabilization, if not the reduction of social and public expenditure (with an aggravation of the shortages listed above) so as to increase not only saving, but also private consumption, and thus give a new dynamic to capitalist accumulation; or 2. a more rapid development of social services and public intervention than in the past, demanding a much more extensive socialization of the economy. including nationalizations, collectivization of saving and the investment function. global (i.e. planned) public direction of the economy, priority of collective consumption and services rather than "luxury" consumption, etc.

The choice imposed is not a simple technical choice; it is destined to make a political impact on the modes of development, consumption and civilization, and on the style of life.

The first alternative is instinctively rejected by the majority of workers. But this does not at all mean that the second, necessary from a logical point of view even on the basis of popular demands, may automatically count on a majority.

This difficulty in passing from logical analysis to practical politics is based on the marked differentiation of the working classes (as well as on the fact that a logical analysis is never used by all the interested parties). The immediate interests of large categories of relatively highly paid manual labourers—notably building workers and those in the heavy engineering and shipbuilding industry—do not automatically coincide with the interests of workers (particularly women) in under-developed or "remote" regions, and in public service, who are badly paid; nor with the aspirations of technical and scientific workers.

At the level of consciousness and immediate interest, categories of workers with relatively high wages are not spontaneously attracted to an extreme policy of socialization. Trade-Union and Social-Democratic ideology has induced them to give priority to consumption demands and "values": labour is regarded as a daily hell; the management's norms of productivity organization and division of labour are regarded as intolerable; but they are accepted nonetheless on the pretext that they are technical necessities, and that what really counts is wages. Work is regarded as the purgatory that must be passed through so that, after work, the heaven of individual consumption may be reached. Given this ideological conditioning, the first alternative—including a reduction of very heavy direct taxation and a development of "luxury" consumption to the detriment of social consumption—is much more immediately attractive to a part of the working class than a far-reaching policy of socialization.

Therefore, demands for individual consumption and wages which remain of primary importance for poor regions and categories cannot serve as a unifying theme for the workers' movement. The political unity of the working class, an indispensable condition for the imposition of the second alternative, can only be constructed around themes which transcend immediate interests towards a synthesis at a higher level. Thus ideological and political work, the critique of the "consumption civilization" and the elaboration of a model of change become determinant.

It becomes necessary to show that the oppression and alienation of labour accepted for the sake of liberation in non-labour can only result in alienation of consumption and leisure; that to acquire the goods for the consumption and leisure which "liberate" him from the

oppression of work, the worker is led by an infernal logic to work longer and longer hours and faster and faster, to take on overtime and bonus rates to the extent that he loses all possibility, material or psychological, of any liberation whatsoever; that the man at work is *the same man* as the man not at work, and that the one cannot be liberated without the other; that the basic class interest of all workers is to put an end to their subordination in labour and in consumption, and to take over control of the organization and purposes of social production; that a rise in direct wages is a priority demand for an important mass of workers, but that satisfying it is insufficient to put an end to capitalist exploitation; that in any event there are objective limits to the wage level and objective and subjective limits to the satisfaction that can be obtained from individual income without a sufficient development of collective services and amenities.

- As long as production decisions are dominated by capital, as long as consumption, culture and life styles are dominated by bourgeois values, the only way to live better is to earn more. But if capitalist relations of production are abolished, living better will also mean working less and less intensely, adapting work to the requirements of the workers' biological and psychological equilibrium, disposing of better collective services, greater possibilities of direct communication and culture, in and out of work, for oneself and for one's children, etc.

On the other hand, the checks and limitations imposed on scientific technical and cultural development by the capitalist criterion of profitability; the sterilization of economic resources and human energies implied by the process of financial and geographical concentration; the under-utilization of human capacities and the waste of energy necessitated by the authoritarian organization of labour; the contradiction between the law of maximum returns which dominates production on the one hand, and on the other the waste constituted by a marketing policy based on continual innovations with no use value and costly "sales promotion" campaigns, etc., all these contradictions of developed capitalism are as important if the system is to be challenged as the subjects of immediately conscious discontent: they imply a critique of the capitalist life-style, of capitalist values and rationality.

Obviously, from this enumeration of themes, which it is not claimed is exhaustive, we cannot proceed to the elaboration in the abstract of absolute solutions, nor to propositions of a purely speculative "model of change". The superiority of a mass revolutionary party over parties based on apparatus and clientele, preoccupied with **gain**ing power and governing, *under existing conditions*, is that it can (and must) awaken aspirations and pose problems which presuppose the

radical transcendence of the capitalist system. The mass revolutionary party exercises its directive and educational functions without pretending to know in advance the answers to the questions it will raise. Not only because these answers cannot be found within the framework of the existing system, but because their research and elaboration by permanent confrontations and debates among the rank and file is *par excellence* the way to provoke the participation, the *prise de conscience* and the self-education of the workers, to give them a direct hand in the party and the society to be constructed, and to let them grasp, through their exercise of party democracy, the profoundly authoritarian and anti-democratic character of the society in which they live.

Animating and stimulating collective reflection and democratic debate is also the best way for the party to enrich and develop the themes of struggle it proposes, to submit its general analyses to a practical test and to detect the forms of action best suited to local conditions, to the powers of initiative and sensibility of the masses.

This permanent labour of research and collective reflection, associating the rank and file of the party with the elaboration of its policy, asking it to choose amongst the various possible forms of action, must of necessity go beyond the bounds of the party structure itself. The latter cannot function in a closed circuit. Its hegemonic capacity depends on the attraction exerted by its internal life, its actions and its political positions on those working masses which are unorganized or bear the marks of different ideological or religious imprints. In an economically developed society, with a working class highly differentiated by origin (workers, peasants, petty bourgeois) and by mode of labour (manual, technical, intellectual), the party is obliged in any event to take this diversity of specific aspirations into account; it can only exercise its leading role by seeking to transcend this diversity towards a higher unity which will respect these diverse elements. in their relative autonomy.

The policy of transition to socialism, the "model" of the transitional and even of the socialist society itself, must recognize this diversity. In advanced capitalist countries, the revolutionary party can hope neither to conquer, nor to exercise, power alone. It must ally itself with all the political, social and intellectual forces which refuse capitalist rationality, and which can be won over to a transitional policy which is clear and coherent in its socialist objectives. But at the same time, the work of elaboration of its transitional policy, and notably of the political and institutional reforms it must realize, can no longer only be initiated by the leading organs of the party, even if (or particularly if) it is by far the strongest workers' party.

Even the attraction of the unorganized masses and of the rank and

file of other formations depends in intensity and potential on the attractions that the long term or even very long term options exercise on the actual or potential allies of the proletarian revolutionary party. Hence the necessity for the latter to recognize the other socialist tendencies as *permanent* partners in a *common* labour of research and elaboration into the programmatic content and the forms of transition to socialism, guaranteeing the rights of a plurality of tendencies and parties during the transition period and even during the construction of socialism.

The past and present electoral strength of these permanent partners is not the principal criterion of choice. What matters more than their numerical strength is the representativity of their militant rank and file, their authentically socialist orientation and their real autonomy.¹⁷ For the mass revolutionary party to ally itself with different, even weak, formations and to conduct a common research with them is to demonstrate in practice, not merely in declarations of principle, that its respect for political pluralism and the autonomy of allies is not simply a tactical concession. And it is also a powerful attraction on the militant rank and file and left wing of Social-Democracy and of the avant-garde Christian movements,¹⁸ as much by the working methods adopted as by the coherence of the transition policy (or of the "global alternative") elaborated in common.

Therefore, the revolutionary party must never by a doctrinaire attitude reject the masses influenced by social democracy or traditional reformist movements; but neither must it enter into negotiations or summit dialogues with them if these will be immediately blocked by ideological or doctrinal differences, or led into the impasse of bargaining for a "minimum common programme". Nor should it seek a façade of unity for the workers' movement (or for some of its components) by federating existing organizations, i.e. by *juxtaposing their party apparatus*: this attempt will rapidly exhaust itself in summit bargaining between leaders and notables, like a ghostly government or parliament, and before long it will have cut itself off from the masses or discouraged those militants who have been left without a say in the decisions and arrangements which, at the summit of the "re-grouping" will respond to criteria internal to the party machines rather than to a real collective intention of the rank and file. They should rather straightaway set in motion a process of unification of those forces which are essentially socialist, by the common elaboration of a coherent policy, affecting long term and even very long term¹⁹ solutions as much as problems of immediate concern and a medium-term programme. The consistency of this elaboration; the openness and transparency of the debate; their repercussion on the militant rank and file, destined to participate with its initiatives in the process of unifica-

tion, will have a much greater effectiveness and attraction than overtures toward traditional reformist parties which are always suspected of tactical opportunism. To destroy the subordinate reformism of Social-Democracy, a dialogue should be opened with the masses under its influence, not its party machine. And the best way to win them over is to propose to them the "alternative" of a socialist policy, consistent and clear in its options, and democratic methods of work that Social-Democracy, in its essence, cannot adopt.

4. *The Ideological Front. New Tasks of the Revolutionary Party*

This permanent labour of research and elaboration cannot be limited to the strictly political, programmatic realm. It is not policies which politicise the masses, nor action and struggle alone. Political commitment and choice are, in fact, the final position of a *prise de conscience* which never starts with politics, i.e. with the problem of the organization of society and social relations, but from the direct and fragmentary experience of a change *which is necessary because it is possible*.

The demand for change, in other words, does not arise from the *impossibility* of accepting what is, but from the *possibility* of no longer accepting what is. The revelation of this possibility (actual or not, translatable into practical action or not) in all the realms of social and individual life is one of the basic functions of the *ideological work* of a revolutionary movement."

The domination of one class over another, in fact, is not merely exerted by political and economic power, but by its perception of the possible and the impossible, of the future and the past, of the useful and the useless, the rational and the irrational, the good and the bad, etc. This perception is carried in the whole web of social relations, by the objective future which determines their persistence, their resistance to change. But it is also carried at the specific level of language (the maintool or obstacle for the *prise de conscience*), of the means of mass communication, of the ideology and values to which the ruling class submits science, technique and also *life* itself (i.e. the fundamental needs, called "instincts", and immediate relations, e.g. social relations, between individuals). In other words, the possibilities, aspirations and needs (excluded from reality by the social relations are repressed and censored (in Freud's sense, not that of the police) at the specific level of their possible *prise de conscience*, by the depth conditioning exercised on consciousness by the dominant ideology and life style.

As much as a set of "values", this is a pessimistic realism, rejecting "values", typical of conservative ideology: it is "unrealistic" to believe that a healthy economy can do without competition in trade, individual profit, disciplinary constraint of labour, or the threat of un-