SOCIALISM: A TRANSITIONAL POLICY

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A Sydney Labor Party member and alderman discusses the concept of a transitional policy towards socialism, and makes proposals on what such a policy might be.

LEFTWING CADRES in Australia and throughout the world have been educated to the idea of an inevitable and catastrophic crisis through which the masses will turn to revolutionary struggle for socialism. Yet in the last hundred years capitalism has experienced only one major economic crisis, that of 1929-33. Between 1860 and 1914 there were recessions, but nothing comparable to 1929. And by contrast, in the last twenty years in the advanced capitalist countries the development of new productive forces has far outstripped that of thousands of years of human history, endowing mankind’s collective power over nature with new and fantastic capacities. We need only cite atomic energy, electronics, automation and cybernetics, synthetic chemistry (“plastics”), and the exploration of outer space.

Thus history has amended Marx’s perspective for the evolution of capitalism: “stagnation and decline of world economy”, “the tendency to reduce the workers’ standards of living and even pauperise them”, “increasingly frequent and deep economic crises”, in a word, transformation of capitalism from a relatively reactionary social system to an absolutely reactionary system.

Since 1945, the economy of Europe and (to some extent) of the world has been substantially reconstructed, and this has supplied the main driving force behind world economic development for a whole epoch. It has done so by a ceaseless renovation of the productive apparatus, which has been marked by technical progress calling for a high rate of investment. This in turn maintains and stimulates enlarged production.

We may for the purpose of this analysis divide the world economy into two sectors: one, the advanced industrial sector of
capitalist economies; the other, the non-capitalist areas in the 'third world', the workers' states and, within the advanced capitalist countries themselves, areas such as the independent producers in agriculture, in handicrafts, and even small and medium scale industry. The increased trade between these sectors has allowed the surplus value in the enlarged production to be realised—to the overwhelming advantage of the advanced capitalist industrial sector, it might be added, where it trades with less developed areas.

A further influence strengthening this sector is its continuous monopolist concentration. On behalf of this sector, moreover, the State has increasingly regulated, stimulated and 'planned' economic life as a whole, both on the national and international level. Monopolist concentration and its continuous subjection of the State has certainly not produced a super-capitalism, lying beyond imperialism. The two fundamental processes characterising post-war capitalism are: accentuated concentration and centralisation of capital; and the new role of the State in the management, control and orientation of the capitalist economy. We may designate it 'state monopoly capitalism'.

Scientific and technical progress has demanded massive investment, both to create and develop new, ultra-modern branches of activity, and to modernise existing ones. Hence a raising of the rate of investment. We see quicker replacement of equipment because of an obsolescence which occurs well in advance of its physical wearing out, and thus replacement proceeds without interruption, though its rhythm fluctuates. All this has considerable influence on the circulation of the total social product and the lengthening of the economic cycle.

The development of the productive forces demands enormous capital because, contrary to the 19th century and even part of the 20th, the process of production in some branches (more particularly machinery) comprises three stages instead of one: pre-production (scientific research and construction of prototypes—for example, developing the American supersonic plane to the prototype stage cost an estimated 1,000 million dollars); production properly so-called; and post-production (after-sale service, etc.).

The optimum use of vanguard techniques and automation demands production units of very great dimensions: for example, some years ago a modern steel-works had to produce a minimum of 4 million tons of steel to withstand unrestricted competition—today the figure is an estimated 7 to 12 million tons.

Today we need take barely more than 50 of the largest American corporations to reach a total of 128 billion dollars turnover, the share of each exceeding the billion (one thousand million) mark.
Some of these giants of industry are vaster and have more resources than some governments, and the tendency towards still greater concentration continues, strengthened by the insatiable demand of automated industries for raw materials and bigger markets.

*The Working Class and Automation*

We have to be concerned with the social consequences of automation on the proletariat directly engaged in production, on the whole worker population and on society as a whole. It is plain that automation leads in the long run to a great reduction in the number directly engaged in production, and that, on the other hand, the operatives are being transformed from specialised workers into technicians of a higher technological level. Thus the process of automation means quantitative and qualitative transformation of the proletariat.

Normally, under capitalism, this would be expected to involve an increase in technological unemployment, but experience shows that the process is in fact more complex. The new productive apparatus of advanced capitalism increases the number of jobs in the pre-production sectors (the United States is spending 68.4 dollars per inhabitant, about 2.8% of the gross national income, on research), as well as in the sale of an increased mass of products and a range of new products and after-sale service. On the other hand, to the extent that society is enriched by the increased productivity of the automated productive apparatus, the services sector develops, as well as the budget appropriations for public and social services (while remaining very backward in proportion to the increase in private profits). The overall result in an economy in expansion is the reduction of real unemployment.

The modernisation of the productive apparatus in this age of automation has exposed significant layers of workers to ordeals of displacement and reclassification. This process is inevitable, and objectively speaking, it prepares the way for socialism. But this is not to accept that the workers ought to suffer. To defend themselves, however, requires a strategy of confrontation of neo-capitalism itself, based on the achievements, the present objective possibilities and the new needs of the working masses.

Will Australia experience automation to the same extent as the bigger metropolitan countries? Probably not. It is held back by a small population and limited home market which do not justify the huge pre-production capital expenditure. Australia's relative stability will continue to attract foreign capital investment, but rather for extractive industry and to equip it as an outpost of
imperialism to play a counter-revolutionary role against the Asian national and social revolutions.

A Program for the Transition to Socialism

The transition to socialism will not come about within the framework of bourgeois democracy, nor will it come along an exclusively parliamentary path. Nothing is more dangerous or futile than to blind oneself to this. Rather it involves the struggle for the establishment of a labor government, basing itself on the socialist forces politically organised, supported on the democratic organisations of the workers in the workshops and offices, and on their unions.

The struggle for socialism will be grounded on the struggle against inflationary pressures, against the disadvantages that modernisation of the productive apparatus involves under capitalism, and against the crying disproportion between the workers' part of the increased productivity and the enrichment of society, and the part cornered by the monopolies.

Scientific socialists should stress not only the increased socialisation of the economy, the increased importance of public and social services, and the increased necessity for planning of social life generally, but also the manifold inequalities, disproportions, waste, and bottle-necks, still marking capitalist production.

On the social level the objective of *self-management* must be counterposed to the increasingly anti-democratic evolution of state monopoly capitalism, which concentrates the power of management and decision in the economy and the state into the hands of a very limited number. Self-management means direct participation of the producers and citizens in the management of the economy and the state.

On the cultural level, this increasingly technical and automated society aggravates the alienation of man, increasing his relative cultural impoverishment at the very time it becomes necessary both for him in his productive work, his role as a citizen and in his leisure time, to have the responsibility of a continuing education, both specialised and general.

Neo-capitalism, still engaged in the exclusive pursuit of the maximum profit, seriously distorts the "model" of the kind of life suitable to the possibilities and needs of our century.

A socialist *transitional program*, extending and eclipsing a program of reforms envisaged within capitalist social relations (i.e. *reformism*), would include:
1 Higher wages and shorter working hours, with the time to and from work included in the working day.

2 Defence of the increased wages against inflation by way of price control, realisable only by committees on prices possessing the right to have the books of big business investigated by independent accountants to reveal the actual profit, including the capital gains.

3 Office and workshop organisation embracing all categories, concerned not only with defence and improvement of conditions, but also with the management’s regime, policy decisions, organisational procedures and introduction of new production techniques.

The struggle against man’s alienation is truly transitional, establishing the basis of “dual power”, and of the kind of democratic organisations of the workers in the factories, offices and workshops necessary, together with the unions, for the future socialist government. The concept that management is the province of the millionaire anti-social minority must be jettisoned. Here the unions and their research staffs, and socialist academics, have an important role to play.

4 Nationalisation of the major branches of industry, which, in line with the above appears as increasingly reasonable in that “private enterprise” is more plainly revealed as a misnomer, buttressed as it is by public money and funds, through subsidisation, protection, favorable freight and power rates, harbor installations, etc. (e.g. Ansett Industries, GMH, BHP, shipping combines, chemicals, minerals, oil).

5 Elimination of wage and salary discrimination against women, youth and Aborigines; full adult status at 18 years of age, including the adult wage for apprentices; implementation of measures directed to providing the basis for real equal status for women, permitting her integration in economic life and independence—creches, kindergartens, restaurants at or handy to, places of employment.

6 A secular education at all levels, to be aimed at the development of a rounded human being and not of a technological cog, and syllabi remoulded accordingly (cf. the Berkeley, USA movement); the blatant class inequalities revealed by the Martin Report to be attacked, with the aim of educational opportunity being equally available to all; a complete health service unrelated to ability to pay; modern housing for all according to need; adequate, comfortable, free public transport; full living wage for pensioners and unemployed workers.

7 Present external policy is the extension of the reactionary domestic policy assigning us the shameful role of ‘big brother’
imperialism's puppet in counter-revolutionary interventions against the Asian and Pacific peoples. We must reject the lie that their struggles for national independence and first steps to a socialist society threaten Australia.

The Vietnamese continue to take the vanguard role in this struggle, and their victory can only be to Australia's advantage. This fact, the need for common humanitarianism, and the duty of internationalist solidarity—all demand that the working class adopt a policy involving all forms of aid, food, equipment, cash, medical supplies, and the offer of volunteers for civil and military duties (even if the Vietnamese should continue to decline this latter offer).

Victory for the imperialist counter-revolution in Vietnam could well be crucial for humanity's fate. The best way to show our recognition of this is to organise material aid, and offer as volunteers. This helps arouse wider and more determined opposition to current policy from sectors of the population less aware of the historic importance of this struggle, and is at the same time consonant with massive aid in all forms from the workers' states (who, after all, possess the best means of countering imperialism's aggression). This internationalist rallying cry has been sounded by North Korea and Cuba.

The more this policy is accepted, the more opposition will grow to the increasing 'defence' appropriation, and the more it will be recognised that onerous war imposts are detrimental both to Australia's economic development and to the scope of public and social services from which they detract.

We need also to take this into consideration: in view of the British trend to integration in the European Economic Community, Australia as an industrial nation needs to establish closer trading relations with the Asian and Pacific countries, and such relations are necessarily based on peaceful cooperation. How far will we get in the present hideous mask of imperialism's puppet?

8 In Australian society the urge for a new 'quality of life' is evidenced in the renewed interest in town planning, as now in Sydney. Committees of citizens are indicated, and indeed are now emerging, concerned with the amenity of the neighbourhood, the siting of industry, noise and fall-out mitigation, the most salubrious and pleasant areas for residential zoning, the quality of new constructions, land use restrictions, accessibility to waterways, open space reservation, street furniture aesthetics, traffic generation, etc.

This draft of a socialist transitional policy is not claimed to be definitive. It rather aims to set out the approach which dis-
tinguishes a viable revolutionary program from a reformist one. All political organisations with any mass allegiance in the advanced capitalist countries bear the essential characteristics of reformism. Their policies assume the continuation of capitalism, and do not envisage a revolutionary confrontation of capitalism. All the more vital, then, to establish criteria differentiating the reformist and revolutionary approaches.

To select from a socialist transitional program which proposition or propositions is most relevant at any given moment, socialists must engage in a dialogue with the people, and through this, emphasise the propositions which will take the movement forward.

The workers' states are still far from projecting a satisfactory socialist image. But under conditions of peaceful competition, the workers' states with their nationalised and planned economies would, because of their higher tempo of development, increasingly attract to their orbit the 'third world'. Eventually they would eclipse the advanced capitalist sector by restricting its sphere of operation, thus inducing the classical economic crisis.

We may also reckon on the enormous political attraction that a flowering of true socialist democracy in the workers' states would exert, through the development of institutions of self-management and the assertion of people's rights to decision-making at all levels. A stage can be thus envisaged, in which the relative strength of imperialism would have so deteriorated that it would lack any viable military or political expedients to prolong its life.

Unhappily, this stage is not yet with us; imperialism has not become defeatist, but directs its still formidable power to halting the revolutionary upsurge in the 'third world'. The longer that its aggression fails to meet with an adequate response from the anti-imperialist forces of the world, the greater grow the means of violence it deploys, and with them grows the terrible danger that the unavoidable eventual response will risk a nuclear confrontation.

In conditions such as these, it is futile to rely on any 'historic process' for a program for victory. It is our job to begin the regeneration of the socialist movement in the advanced capitalist nations.

This can be done if a leadership emerges in tune with today's needs, rather than one preoccupied with bolstering a subjective approach with irrelevent quotations from Marx, Lenin or Trotsky appropriate to other situations.