

Discussions with Leon Trotsky on the Transitional Program

SWP

1969-03

Foreword

The Transitional Program of the Fourth International, entitled “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International,” was adopted at its Founding Conference held in September 1938.

This document was drafted by Leon Trotsky who was then living in Mexico. During and after its composition, Trotsky held discussions with American comrades who visited him on the method of approach animating the Transitional Program and various other problems connected with it.

This publication includes three of these discussions held in the consecutive months of May and June, 1938, which were designed to clarify some of the questions raised at that time by the Transitional Program. They have been reproduced, unedited, from the Internal Bulletins of the Socialist Workers Party during that period.

Discussion With Leon Trotsky on “The Death Agony of Capitalism”

May 1938

Cruz: It is very important to make precise some points of view concerning the program in general. How can a program be built consistently? Some comrades say that this program draft in some parts is not sufficiently adequate to the state of mentality, the mood of the American workers. Here we must ask ourselves if the program should be adapted to the mentality of the workers or to the present objective economic and social conditions of the country. This is the most important question.

We know that the mentality of every class of society is determined by objective conditions, by the productive forces, by the economic state of the country, but this determination is not immediately reflected. The mentality is in general

backward, delayed, in relation to the economic development. This delay can be short or long. In normal times when the development is slow, in a long line, this delay cannot produce catastrophic results.

To a great extent this delay signifies that the workers are not equal to the tasks put before them by objective conditions, but in times of crisis this delay may be catastrophic. In Europe, for example, it took the form of fascism. Fascism is the punishment for the workers when they fail to take power.

Now the United States enters into an analogous situation with analogous dangers of catastrophe. The objective situation of the country is in every respect and even more than in Europe ripe for Socialist Revolution and Socialism, more ripe than any other country in the world. The political backwardness of the American working class is very great. This signifies that the danger of a fascist catastrophe is very great. This is the point of departure for all our activity. The program must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness. That is why we must express in our program the whole acuteness of the social crisis of the capitalist society, including in the first line the United States. We cannot postpone, modify objective conditions which don't depend upon us. We cannot guarantee that the masses will solve the crisis, but we must express the situation as it is, and that is the task of the program.

Another question is how to present this program to the workers. It is more a pedagogical task and question of terminology in presenting the actual situation to the workers. Politics must be adapted to the productive forces, that is, the high development of the productive forces, the paralyzing of these productive forces by capitalist forms of property, the increasing unemployment which is becoming deeper and deeper—the greatest social plague. The productive forces cannot develop any longer. Scientific technology develops, but the material forces are declining. It signifies that society becomes poorer and poorer, the number of unemployed greater and greater. The misery of the masses deepens, the difficulties become greater and greater for the bourgeoisie and the workers: the bourgeoisie has no other solution except fascism, and the deepening of the crisis will force the bourgeoisie to abolish the remnants of democracy and replace them with fascism.

The American proletariat will be punished for their lack of cohesion, will power, courage, by a fascist school for twenty or thirty years. With an iron whip the bourgeoisie will teach the American workers their tasks. America is only a tremendous repetition of European experience. We must understand this.

This is serious, comrades. It is the perspective for the American workers. After the victory of Hitler when Trotsky wrote a pamphlet, "Whither France?" the French Social-Democrats laughed. "France is not Germany." But before the victory of Hitler he wrote pamphlets warning the German workers and the Social-Democrats laughed, "Germany is different from Italy." They paid no attention,

Now France comes nearer each day to a fascist regime. The same is absolutely true for the United States. America is fat. This fat from the past permits Roosevelt his experiments, but this is only for a time. The general situation is totally analogous; the danger is the same. It is a fact that the American working class has a petty bourgeois spirit, lacks revolutionary solidarity, is used to a high standard of life, and the mentality of the American working class corresponds not to the realities of today but to memories of yesterday.

Now the situation is radically changed. What can a revolutionary party do in this situation? In the first line give a clear honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation irrespective as to whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the worker. That is what the program should formulate and present before the advanced workers. Some will say: good, the program is a scientific program; it corresponds to the objective situation but if the workers won't accept this program, it will be sterile. Possibly. But this signifies only that the workers will be crushed since the crisis can't be solved any other way but by the Socialist Revolution. If the American worker will not accept the program in time he will be forced to accept the program of fascism. And when we appear with our program before the working class we cannot give any guarantees that they will accept our program. We cannot take responsibility for this... we can only take the responsibility for ourselves. We must tell the workers the truth, then we will win the best elements. Whether these best elements will be capable of guiding the working class, leading it to power, I don't know. I hope that they will be able, but I cannot give the guarantee, But even in the worst case, if the working class doesn't sufficiently mobilize its mind and its strength at present for the Socialist Revolution—even in the worst case, if this working class falls as a victim to fascism, the best elements will say, "We were warned by this party; it was a good party." And a great tradition will remain in the working class.

This is the worst variant. That is why all the arguments that we cannot present such a program because the program doesn't correspond to the mentality of the workers are false. They express only fear before the situation. Naturally if I close my eyes I can write a good rosy program that everybody will accept. But it will not correspond to the situation; and the program must correspond to the situation. I believe that this elementary argument is of the utmost importance. The mentality of the class of the proletariat is backward but the mentality is not such a substance as the factories, the mines, the railroads, but is more mobile and under the blows of the objective crisis, the millions of unemployed, it can change rapidly. At present the American proletariat also enjoy some advantages because of their political backwardness. It seems a bit paradoxical but nevertheless it is absolutely correct. The European workers have had a long past of social-democratic and Comintern tradition and these traditions are a conservative force. Even after different party betrayals the worker remains loyal because he has a feeling of gratitude to that party which awakened him for the first time and gave him a political education. This is a handicap for

a new orientation. The American workers have the advantage that in their great majority they were not politically organized, and are only beginning now to be organized into trade unions. This gives to the revolutionary party the possibility of mobilizing them under the blows of the crisis. What will the speed be? Nobody can foresee. We can only see the direction. Nobody denies that the direction is a correct one. Then we have the question, how to present the program to the workers? It is naturally very important. We must combine politics with mass psychology and pedagogy, build the bridge to their minds. Only experience can show us how to advance in this or that part of the country. For some time we must try to concentrate the attention of the workers on one slogan: sliding scale of wages and hours.

The empiricism of the American workers has given political parties great success with one or two slogans, single tax, bimetallism, they spread like wild fire in the masses. When they see the panacea fail then they wait for a new one. Now we can present one which is honest, part of our entire program, not demagogic, but which corresponds totally to the situation. Officially we now have 13, may 14 million of unemployed, in reality about 16 to 20 million, and the youth are totally abandoned to misery. Mr. Roosevelt insists on public works. But we insist that this, together with mines, railroads, etc., absorb all the people. And that every person should have the possibility to live in a decent manner not lower than now, and we ask that Mr. Roosevelt with his brain trust propose such a program of public works that everyone capable of working can work at decent wages. This is possible with a sliding scale of wages and hours. Everywhere we must discuss how to present this idea, in all localities. Then we must begin a concentrated campaign of agitation so that everybody knows that this is the program of the Socialist Workers Party. I believe that we can concentrate the attention of the workers on this point. Naturally this is only one point. In the beginning this slogan is totally adequate for the situation. But the other can be added as the development proceeds. The bureaucrats will oppose it. Then if this slogan becomes popular with the masses, fascist tendencies will develop in opposition. We will say that we need to develop defense squads. I think in the beginning this slogan (Sliding Scale of Wages and Hours) will be adopted. What is this slogan? In reality it is the system of work in socialist society. The total number of workers divided into the total number of hours. But if we present the whole socialist system it will appear to the average American as Utopian, as something from Europe. We present it as a solution to this crisis which must assure their right to eat, drink, and live in decent apartments. It is the program of socialism, but in very popular and simple form.

Question: How will the campaign be conducted?

Cruz: The campaign will go somewhat in this fashion: You begin agitation, say, in Minneapolis. You win one or two unions to the program. You send delegates to other towns to the respective unions. When you have come out with this idea from the party to the unions you have won half of the fight. You send it to New York, to Chicago, etc., to the corresponding unions. When you have some

success you convoke a special congress. Then you agitate that they force the bureaucrats of the trade union to take a position for or against. A wonderful opportunity for propaganda opens up.

Question: Can we actually realize the slogan?

Crux: It is easier to overthrow capitalism than to realize this demand under capitalism. Not one of our demands will be realized under capitalism. That is why we are calling them transitional demands. It creates a bridge to the mentality of the workers and then a material bridge to the Socialist revolution. The whole question is how to mobilize the masses for struggle. The question of the division between the employed and the unemployed comes up. We must find ways to overcome this division. The idea of a fixed class of unemployed, a class of pariahs – such an idea is absolutely the psychological preparation for fascism. Unless this division is overcome in the trade unions the working class is doomed.

Question: Many of our comrades fail to understand that the slogans cannot be realized.

Crux: It is a very important question. This program is not a new invention of one man, It is derived from the long experience of the Bolsheviks. I want to emphasize that it is not one man's invention, that it comes from long collective experience of the revolutionaries. It is the application of old principles to this situation. It should not be considered as fixed like iron but flexible to the situation.

The revolutionaries always consider that the reforms and acquisitions are only a by-product of the revolutionary struggle. If we say that we will only demand what they can give, the ruling class will give only one-tenth or none of what we demand. When we demand more and can impose our demands, the capitalists are compelled to give the maximum. The more extended and militant the spirit of the workers, the more is demanded and won. They are not sterile slogans; they are means of pressure on the bourgeoisie, and will give the greatest possible material results immediately. In the past during an ascending period of American capital the American workers won on no more than the basis of empirical struggle, strikes, etc. They were very militant. Given the fact that capital was ascending, capitalism was interested in satisfying the American workers. Now the situation is totally different. Now the capitalists have no prospect of prosperity. They are not afraid of strikes due to the large number of unemployed. That is why the program must embrace and unite both parts of the working class. The sliding scale of wages and hours does just that.

Discussion With Crux (Trotsky) on the Labor Party

May 1938

Question: In the ranks of our party the question which seems most disputed in relation to accepting the program of Transitional Demands is that dealing with the Labor Party in the United States. Some comrades maintain that it is incorrect to advocate the formation of a Labor Party, holding that there is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party, that even if there were such a party in process of formation, or even widespread sentiment, then we would meet it with a program that would give to this movement a revolutionary content – but in view of the lack of such objective factors this part of the thesis is opportunistic. Could you clarify this point further?

Cruix: I believe that it is necessary to remind ourselves of the most elementary facts from the history of the development of the workers' movement in general and the trade unions in particular. In this respect we find different types of development of the working class in different countries. Every country has a specific type of development but we classify them in general.

In Austria and in Russia especially the workers' movement began as a political movement, as a party movement. That was the first step. The Social Democracy in its first stage hoped that the socialist reconstruction of society was near but it happened that capitalism was strong enough to last for a time. A long period of prosperity passed and the Social Democracy was forced to organize trade unions. In such countries as Germany, Austria, and especially in Russia where trade unions were unknown, they were initiated, constructed, and guided by a political party, the Social Democracy.

Another type of development is that disclosed in the Latin countries, in France, and especially in Spain. Here the party movement and the trade union movement are almost independent of one another and under different banners, even to a certain degree antagonistic to one another. The party is a parliamentary machine. The trade unions are to a certain degree in France – more in Spain – under the leadership of anarchists.

The third type is provided by Great Britain, the United States, and more or less by the dominions. England is the classic country of trade unions. They began to build trade unions at the end of the 18th century, before the French Revolution, and during the so-called industrial revolution. (In the United States during the rise of the manufacturing system.) In England the working class didn't have its independent party. The trade unions were the organizations of the working class, in reality the organization of the labor aristocrats, the higher strata. In England there was an aristocratic proletariat, at least in its upper strata, because the British bourgeoisie, enjoying almost monopoly control of the world market, could give a small part of the wealth to the working class and so absorb part of the national income. The trade unions were adequate to abstract that from the bourgeoisie. Only after a hundred years did the trade unions begin to build up a political party. This is absolutely contrary to Germany or Austria. There the party awakened the working class and built up the trade unions. In England the trade unions after centuries of existence and struggle were forced to build up a political party.

What were the reasons for this change? It was due to the complete decline of English capitalism which began very sharply. The English party is only a couple of decades old, coming into prominence especially after the World War. What is the reason for this change? It is well known that it was due to the abolishing of England's monopoly control of the world market. It began in the eighties of the 19th century with the competition of Germany and the United States. The bourgeoisie lost its ability to give the leading strata of the proletariat a privileged position. The trade unions lost the possibility to improve the situation of the workers and they were pushed onto the road of political action because political action is the generalization of economic action. Political action generalizes the needs of the workers and addresses them not to the parts of the bourgeoisie but to the bourgeoisie as a whole organized in the state.

Now in the United States we can say that the characteristic features of English development are presented in even more concentrated form in a shorter period because the whole history of the United States is shorter. Practically, the development of the trade unions in the United States began after the Civil War but these trade unions were very backward even compared with the trade unions of Great Britain. To a great degree they were mixed trade unions of employers and employees, not fighting, militant trade unions. They were sectional and tiny. They were based on the craft system not according to industry, and see that it is only during the last two or three years that the genuine trade unions developed in the United States. This new movement is the C.I.O.

What is the reason for the appearance of the C.I.O.? It is the decay of American capitalism. In Great Britain the beginning of the decay of the capitalist system forced the existing trade unions to unite into a political party. In the United States the same phenomenon – the beginning of the decline – produced only the industrial trade unions, but these trade unions appeared on the scene only in time to meet the new chapter of the decline of capitalism or – more correctly – we can say that the first crisis of 1929-1933 gave the push and ended in the organization of the C.I.O. But scarcely organized, the C.I.O. meets the second crisis, 1937-1938, which continues and deepens.

What does this fact signify? That it was a long time in the United States before the organization of trade unions but now that genuine trade unions exist, they must make the same evolution as the English trade unions. That is, on the basis of declining capital, they are forced to turn to political action. I believe that this is the most important fact of the whole matter.

The question reads, "there is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party." You will remember that when we discussed this question with other comrades there were some divergences on this question. I cannot judge whether sentiment for a Labor Party exists or not because I have no personal observations or impressions, but I do not find it decisive as to what degree the leaders of the trade unions or the rank and file are ready or inclined to build a political party. It is very difficult to establish objective information. We have no machine to take a referendum. We can measure the mood only by action if the

slogan is put on the agenda.

But what we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive, The trade unions as trade unions can have only a defensive activity, losing members and becoming more and more weak as the crisis deepens, creating more and more unemployed. The treasury becomes poorer and poorer, the tasks bigger and bigger while their means smaller and smaller. It is a fact; we cannot change it. The trade union bureaucracy becomes more and more disoriented, the rank and file more and more dissatisfied and this dissatisfaction becomes greater and greater the higher were their hopes in the C.I.O., and especially in view of the unprecedented growth of the C.I.O. – in two or three years 4,000,000 fresh people on the field facing objective handicaps which cannot be eliminated by the trade unions. In this situation we must give an answer. If the trade union leaders are not ready for political action we must ask them to develop a new political orientation. If they refuse we denounce them. That is the objective situation.

I say here what I said about the whole program of transitional demands. The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question on the Labor Party. If the class struggle is not to be crushed, replaced by demoralization then the movement must find a new channel and this channel is political. That is the fundamental argument in favor of this slogan.

We claim to have Marxism or Scientific Socialism. What does “Scientific Socialism” signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science departs, as every science, not from subjective wishes, tendencies, or moods, but from objective facts; from the material situation of the different classes and their relationships. Only by this method can we establish demands adequate to the objective situation and only after this can we adapt these demands and slogans to the given mentality of the masses. But to begin with this mentality as the fundamental fact would signify not a scientific but a conjunctural, demagogic, or adventuristic policy.

One can ask why we didn’t foresee this development five, six, seven years ago? Why did we declare during the past period that we were not willing to fight for this slogan of the Labor Party? The explanation is very simple. We were absolutely sure, we Marxists, the initiators of the American movement for the Fourth International, that world capitalism had entered into a period of decline. That is the period when the working class is objectively educated and moves subjectively, preparing for the social revolution. The direction was the same in the United States, but the question of direction is not sufficient.

The other question is the speed of its development; and in this respect, in view of the strength of American capitalism, some of us, and myself among them, imagined that the ability of American capitalism to resist against the destructive inner contradictions would be greater and that for a certain period

American capitalism might use the decline of European capital to cover a period of prosperity before its own decline. How long a period? Ten to thirty years one could say? Anyway I personally didn't see that this sharp crisis or series of crises would begin in the next period and become deeper and deeper. That is why eight years ago when I discussed this question with American comrades I was very cautious; I was very cautious in my prognosis.

My opinion was that we couldn't foresee when the American trade unions would come into a period where they would be forced into political action. If this critical period started in ten to fifteen years, then we, the revolutionary organization, could become a great power directly influencing the trade unions and becoming the leading force. That is why it would be absolutely pedantic, abstract, artificial, to proclaim the necessity for the Labor Party in 1930 and this abstract slogan would be a handicap to our own party. That was at the beginning of the preceding crisis. Then that this period would be followed by a new crisis even more deep with an influence five to ten times more profound because it is a repetition!

Now we must not reckon by our prognosis of yesterday but by the situation of today. American capitalism is very strong but its contradictions are stronger than capitalism itself. The speed of decline came at American speed and this created a new situation for the new trade unions, the C.I.O. even more than the A.F.L. In this situation it is worse for the C.I.O. than the A.F.L. because the A.F.L. is more capable of resistance due to its aristocratic base. We must change our program because the objective situation is totally different from our former prognosis.

What does this signify? That we are sure the working class – the trade unions will adhere to the slogan of the Labor Party? No, we are not sure that the workers will adhere to the slogan of the Labor Party. When we begin the fight we cannot be sure of being victorious. We can only say that our slogan corresponds to the objective situation and the best elements will understand and the most backward elements who don't understand will be compromised.

In Minneapolis we cannot say to the trade unions you should adhere to the Socialist Workers Party. It would be a joke even in Minneapolis. Why? Because the decline of capitalism develops ten – a hundred times faster than the speed of our party. It is a new discrepancy. The necessity of a political party for the workers is given by the objective conditions, but our party is too small with too little authority in order to organize the workers into its own ranks. That is why we must say to the workers, the masses, you must have a party. But we cannot say immediately to those masses, you must join our party. In a mass meeting 500 would agree on the need for a labor party, only five agree to join our party, which shows that the slogan of a Labor Party is an agitational slogan. The second slogan is for the more advanced.

Should we use both slogans or one? I say both. The first, independent Labor Party, prepares the arena for our party. The first slogan prepares and helps the

workers to advance and prepares the path for our party. That is the sense of the slogan. We say that we will not be satisfied with this abstract slogan which even today is not so abstract as ten years ago because the objective situation is different. It is not concrete enough. We must show to the workers what this party should be, an independent party, not for Roosevelt or LaFollette, a machine for the workers themselves, That is why on the field of election it must have its own candidates.

Then we must introduce our transitional slogans, not all at once, but as occasion arises, first one and then the other. That is why I see absolutely no justification for not accepting this slogan; I see only a psychological reason, Our comrades in fighting against Lovestoneites wanted our own party and not this abstract party. Now it is disagreeable. Naturally, the Stalinists will say we are Fascists, etc. but it is not a principled question; it is a tactical question. To Lovestone it will seem that we lose face before the Lovestoneites, but this is nothing. We orient not according to Lovestone but according to the needs of the working class. I believe that even from the point of view of our competition with the Lovestoneites it is a plus and not a minus. In a meeting against a Lovestonite I would explain what our position was and why we changed. "At that time you Lovestoneites attacked us. Good. Now in this question which was so important to you we have changed our mind. Now what do you have against the Fourth International?" I am sure we will prepare a split in this manner among the Lovestoneites. In this sense I see no obstacles,

Before finishing – a correction in the formulation of the question: the Labor Party proposal is not a part of the program of transitional demands, but is a special motion.

Question: In a trade union does one advocate a "labor party," vote for it?

Crux: Why not? In the case of a trade union where the question comes up I will get up and say that the need for a Labor Party is absolutely proved by all the events. It is proved that economic action is not enough. We need political action.

In a union I will say what counts is the content of the Labor Party, that is why I reserve something to say about the program, but I will vote for it.

Question: The workers seem absolutely apathetic toward a Labor party; their leaders are doing nothing and the Stalinists are for Roosevelt.

Crux: But this is characteristic of a certain period where there is no program. Where they don't see the new road. It is absolutely necessary to overcome this apathy. It is absolutely necessary to give a new slogan.

Question: Some comrades have even collected figures tending to prove that the Labor Party movement is actually declining among the workers.

Crux: There is a major line and then minor oscillations, as for example the moods in the C.I.O. First aggressiveness. Now in the crisis the C.I.O. appears a

thousand time more dangerous than before to the capitalists, but the leaders are afraid to break with Roosevelt, The masses wait. They are disoriented, unemployment is increasing., It is possible to prove that the sentiment has decreased since a year ago. Possibly the Stalinist influence adds to this but this is only a secondary oscillation and it is very dangerous to base ourselves upon the secondary oscillations since in a short time the major movement becomes more imperative and this objective necessity will find its subjective expression in the heads of the workers, especially if we help them. The party is a historic instrument to help the workers.

Question: Some of the members who came from the Socialist Party complain that at that time they were for a Labor Party and were convinced in arguing with the Trotskyists that they were wrong. Now they must switch back.

Crux: Yes, it is a pedagogical question, but it is a good school for the comrades. Now they can see dialectical development better than before.

(Stenographer's note: The above transcript is a rough draft, unchecked by the participants)

Discussion With Crux (Trotsky) on the Transitional Program

June 1938

Crux: The significance of the program is the significance of the party. The party is the vanguard of the class. The party is formed by selection from the most conscious, most advanced, most devoted elements and the party can play an important historical political role not in direct relation to its numerical strength. It can be a small party and play a great part. For example, in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the Bolsheviks fraction had not more than 10,000 members, the Mensheviks 10,000 to 12,000; that is the maximum., At that time they belonged to the same party, so that the party as a whole had not more than 20,000 to 22,000 workers.

The party guided the Soviets throughout the whole country thanks to correct policy and to cohesion, It can be objected that the difference between the Russians and the Americans, or any other old capitalist country, was that the Russian proletariat was a totally fresh, virgin proletariat without any tradition of trade unions, conservative reformism. It was a young, fresh, virgin working class which needed direction and looked for this direction, and in spite of the fact that the party as a whole had not more than 20,000 workers, this party guided two to three million workers in the fight.

Now, what is the party? In what does the cohesion consist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events, of the tasks, and this common under-

standing – that is the program of the party. Just as modern workers more than the barbarian cannot work without tools so in the party the program is the instrument. Without the program every worker must improvise his tool, find improvised tools, and one contradicts another. Only when we have the vanguard organized upon the basis of common conceptions then can we act.

One can say that we didn't have a program until this day. Yet we acted. But this program was formulated under different articles, different motions, etc. In this sense the draft program doesn't presage a new invention, it is not the writing of one man. It is the summation of collective work up until today. But such a summation is absolutely necessary in order to give to the comrades an idea of the situation, a common understanding. Petty bourgeois anarchists, and intellectuals are afraid to subscribe to giving a party common ideas, a common attitude. In opposition they wish moral programs. But for us this program is the result of common experience. It is not imposed upon anybody for whoever joins the party does so voluntarily.

I believe it is important in this connection to underline what we mean by freedom in contradiction to necessity. It is very often a petty bourgeois conception that we should have a free individuality. It is only a fiction, an error. We are not free. We have no free will in the sense of metaphysical philosophy. When I wish to drink a glass of beer I act as a free man but I don't invent the need for beer. That comes from my body. I am only the executor. But insofar as I understand the needs of my body and can satisfy them consciously then I have the sensation of freedom; freedom through understanding the necessity. Here the correct understanding of the necessity of my body is the only real freedom given to animals in any question and man is an animal. The same holds true for the class. The program for the class cannot fall from heaven. We can arrive only at an understanding of the necessity. In one case it was my body, in the other it is the necessity of society. The program is the articulation of the necessity, that we learned to understand, and since the necessity is the same for all members of the class, we can reach a common understanding of the tasks and the understanding of this necessity is the program.

We can go further and say that the discipline of our party must be very severe because we are a revolutionary party against a tremendous bloc of enemies conscious of their interests, and now we are attacked not only by the bourgeoisie but by the Stalinists, the most venomous of the bourgeois agents. Absolute discipline is necessary but it must come from common understanding. If it is imposed from without it is a yoke. If it comes from understanding it is an expression of personality, but otherwise it is a yoke. Then discipline is an expression of my free individuality. It is not opposition between personal will and the party because I entered of my free will. The program too is on this basis and this program can be upon a sure political and moral basis only if we understand it very well.

The draft program is not a complete program. We can say that in this draft program there are things which are lacking and there are things which by their

nature don't belong to the program. Things which don't belong to the program are the comments. This program contains not only slogans but also comments and polemics against the adversaries. But it is not a complete program. A complete program should have a theoretical expression of the modern capitalist society in its imperialist stage. The reasons of the crisis, the growth of unemployed, and so on, and in this draft this analysis is briefly summarized only in the first chapter because we have written about these things in articles, books, and so on. We will write more and better. But for practical purposes what is said here is enough because we are all of the same opinion.

The beginning of the program is not complete. The first chapter is only a hint and not a complete expression. Also the end of the program is not complete because we don't speak here about the social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of the capitalist society into the dictatorship, the dictatorship into the socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a program for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution. And from the practical point of view what is now the most important is how can we guide the different strata of the proletariat in the direction of the social revolution. I have heard that now the New York comrades are beginning to organize circles with the purpose of not only studying and criticizing the draft program but also elaborating the ways and means in order to present the program to the masses and I believe that it is the best method which our party can utilize.

The program is only the first approximation. It is too general in the sense in which it is presented to the international conference in the next period. It expresses the general tendency of development in the whole world. We have here a short chapter devoted to the semi-colonial and colonial countries. We have here a chapter devoted to the fascist countries, a chapter on the Soviet Union and so on. It is clear that the general characteristics of the world situation are common because they are all under the pressure of the imperialist economy, but every country has its peculiar conditions and real live politics must begin with these peculiar conditions in each country and even in each part of the country. That is why a very serious approach to the program is the first duty of every comrade in the United States.

There are two dangers in the elaboration of the program. The first is to remain on general abstract lines and to repeat the general slogan without real connection with the trade unions in the locality. That is the direction of sectarian abstraction. The other danger is the contrary, to adapt too much to the local conditions, to the specific conditions, to lose the general revolutionary line, I believe that in the United States the second danger is the more immediate. I remember it most especially in the matter of militarization, armed pickets, etc. Some comrades were afraid that it is not real for the workers, etc.

In the last few days I read a French book written by an Italian worker about the rise of Fascism in Italy. The writer is opportunistic. He was a Socialist, but it is not his conclusions which are interesting but the facts which he presents.

He gives the picture of the Italian proletariat in 1920-1921 especially. It was a powerful organization. They had 160 socialist parliamentary deputies. They had more than one-third of the communities in their hands, the most important sections of Italy were in the hands of the socialists, the center of the power of the workers. No capitalist could hire or fire without union consent and this applied to agricultural workers as well as industrial.

It seemed to be 49% of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the reaction of the small bourgeoisie, the demobilized officers was terrible against this situation. Then the author tells how they organized small bands under the guidance of officers and sent them in buses in every direction. In cities of 10,000 in the hands of the Socialists thirty organized men came into the town, burned up the municipality, burned the houses, shot the leaders, imposed on them the conditions of working for capitalists, then they went elsewhere and repeated the same in hundreds and hundreds of towns, one after the other. With terrible terror and these systematic acts they totally destroyed the trade unions and thus became bosses of Italy. They were a tiny minority.

The workers declared a general strike. The Fascists sent their buses and destroyed every local strike and with a small organized minority wiped out the workers' organizations. After this came elections and the workers under the terror elected the same number of deputies. They protested in parliament until it was dissolved. That is the difference between formal and actual power. All the deputies were sure that they would have power, yet this tremendous movement with its spirit of sacrifice was smashed, crushed, abolished by some 10,000 fascists well-organized with a spirit of sacrifice and good military leaders.

In the United States it might be different but the fundamental tasks are the same. I read about the tactics of Hague. It is a rehearsal of a Fascist overthrow. He represents small bosses who became infuriated because the crisis deepened. He has his gang which is absolutely unconstitutional. This is very very contagious. With the deepening of the crisis it will spread all over the country and Roosevelt who is a very very good Democrat will say, "Perhaps it is the only solution."

It was the same in Italy. They had a minister who invited the Socialists. The Socialists refused. He admitted the Fascists. He thought he could balance them against the Socialists, but they smashed the minister too. Now I think the example of New Jersey is very important. We should utilize everything, but this especially. I will propose a special series of articles on how the Fascists became victorious. We can become victorious the same way but we must have a small armed body with the support of the big body of workers. We must have the best discipline, organized workers, defense committees, otherwise we will be crushed and I believe that our comrades in the United States don't realize the importance of this question. A Fascist wave can spread in two or three years and the best workers' leaders will be lynched in the worst possible way like the Negroes in the South. I believe that the terror in the United States will be the most terrible of all. That is why we must begin very modestly, that is, with defense groups but it should be launched immediately.

Question: How do we go about launching the defense groups practically?

Cruix: It is very simple. Do you have a picket line in a strike? When the strike is over we say we must defend our union by making this picket line permanent.

Question: Does the party itself create the defense group with its own members?

Cruix: The slogans of the party must be placed in quarters where we have sympathizers and workers who will defend us. But a party cannot create an independent defense organization. The task is to create such a body in the trade unions. We must have these groups of comrades with very good discipline, with good cautious leaders not easily provoked because such groups can be provoked easily. The main task for the next year would be to avoid conflicts and bloody clashes. We must reduce them to a minimum with a minority organization during strikes, during peaceful times. In order to prevent fascist meetings it is a question of the relationship of forces. We alone are not strong, but we propose a united front.

Hitler explains his success in his book. The Social-Democracy was extremely powerful. To a meeting of the Social-Democracy he sent a band with Rudolf Hess. He says that at the end of the meeting his thirty boys evicted all the workers and they were incapable of opposing them. Then he knew he would be victorious. The workers were only organized to pay dues. No preparation at all for other tasks. Now we must do what Hitler did except in reverse. Send forty to fifty men to dissolve the meeting. This has tremendous importance. The workers become steeled, fighting elements. They become trumpets. The petty-bourgeoisie think these are serious people. Such a success. This has tremendous importance as so much of the populace is blind, backward, oppressed, they can be aroused only by success. We can only arouse the vanguard but this vanguard must then arouse the others. That is why I repeat it is a very important question. In Minneapolis where we have very skilled powerful comrades we can begin and show the entire country. I believe that even these enigmatic murders of Corcoran and Brown can be used for this.

I believe that it would be useful to discuss a little this part of the draft which is not sufficiently developed in our text. It is the general theoretical part. In the last discussion I remarked that the theoretical part of the program as a general analysis of society is not given completely in this draft but is replaced by some short hints. On the other side it does not contain the parts dealing with the revolution, the dictatorship, and the construction of society after the revolution. Only the transitory period is covered. We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward; then the political task of the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand the objective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers, the

mentality, the mood is a secondary factor – the prime factor is the objective situation. That is why we have heard these criticisms or these appreciations that some parts of the program do not conform to the situation.

Everywhere I ask what should we do? Make our program fit the objective situation or the mentality of the workers? And I believe that this question must be put before every comrade who says that this program is not fit for the American situation. This program is a scientific program. It is based on an objective analysis of the objective situation. It cannot be understood by the workers as a whole. It would be very good if the vanguard would understand it in the next period and that they would then turn and say to the workers, “You must save yourselves from fascism.”

What do we understand by objective situation? Here we must analyze the objective conditions for a social revolution. These conditions are given in the works of Marx-Engels and remain in their essence unchanged today. First, Marx one time said that no one society leaves its place until it totally exhausts its possibilities. What does this signify? That we cannot eliminate a society by subjective will, that we cannot organize an insurrection like the Blanquists. What do “possibilities” signify? That a “society cannot leave?”

So long as society is capable of developing the productive forces and make the nation richer it remains strong, stable. That was the condition with slave society, with feudal, and with capitalist society. Here we come to a very interesting point which I analyzed previously in my introduction to the Communist Manifesto. Marx and Engels waited for a revolution during their lifetime. Especially in the years 1848-1850 did they expect a social revolution. Why? They said that the capitalist system based on private profit had become a brake upon the development of the productive forces. Was this correct? Yes and no.

It was correct in the sense that if the workers had been capable of meeting the needs of the 19th century and seizing power, the development of the productive forces would have been more rapid and the nation richer. But given that the workers were not capable, the capitalist system remained with its crisis, etc.

Yet the general line ascended. The last war (1914-1918) was a result of the fact that the world market became too narrow for the development of the productive forces and each nation tried to repulse all the others and to seize the world market for its own purposes. They could not succeed and now we see that capitalist society enters into a new stage. Many say it was a result of the war, but the war was a result of the fact that the society had exhausted its possibilities.

The war was only an expression of its inability to further expand. We have after the war the historic crisis becoming deeper and deeper. Capitalist development everywhere was prosperity and crisis but the summation of the crises and prosperity was an ascendancy. Beginning with the war we see the cycles of crisis and prosperity forming a declining line. It signifies now that this society exhausted totally its inner possibilities and must be replaced by a new society or

the old society will go into barbarism just as the civilization of Greece and Rome because they had exhausted their possibilities and no class could replace them.

That is the question now and especially in the United States. The first requisite now for a new society is that the productive forces must be sufficiently developed in order to give birth to a higher. Are the productive forces sufficiently developed for this? Yes, they were developed sufficiently in the 19th century – not as well as now, but sufficiently. Now especially in the United States it would be very easy for some good statistician to prove that if the American productive forces were unleashed that even now today they could be doubled or tripled. I believe that our comrades should make such statistical survey.

The second condition – there must be a new progressive class which is sufficiently numerous and economically influential in order to impose its will upon society. This class is the proletariat. It must be the majority of the nation or must have the possibility to lead the majority. In England the working class is the absolute majority. In Russia it was a minority but it had the possibility to lead the poor peasants. In the United States it is at least half of the population but it has the possibility to lead the farmers.

The third condition is the subjective factor. This class must understand its position in society and have its own organizations. That is the condition which is now lacking from the historic point of view. Socially it is not only possible but an absolute necessity in the sense that it is either socialism or barbarism. That is the historical alternative.

We mentioned in the discussion that Mr. Hague is not some stupid old man who imagines some medieval system exists in his town. He is an advance scout of the American capitalist class.

Jack London wrote a book, *The Iron Heel*, I recommend it now. It was written in 1907. At that time it seemed a terrible dream but now it is absolute reality. He gives the development of the class struggle in the United States with the capitalist class retaining power through terrible repressions. It is the picture of the fascism. The ideology he gives even corresponds with Hitler. It is very interesting.

In Newark the Mayor begins to imitate Hague and they are all inspired by Hague and by the big bosses. It is absolutely certain that Roosevelt will observe that now in the crisis he can do nothing with democratic means. He is not a fascist as the Stalinists claimed in 1932. But his initiative will be paralyzed. What can he do? The workers are dissatisfied. The big bosses are dissatisfied. He can only maneuver until the end of his term and then say goodbye. A third term for Roosevelt is absolutely excluded.

The imitation of the Newark mayor has tremendous importance. In two or three years you can have a powerful fascist movement of American character. What is Hague? He has nothing to do with Mussolini or Hitler, but he is an American fascist. Why is he aroused? Because the society can no longer be run

on democratic means. It would be of course impermissible to fall into a hysteria. The danger of the working class being out-run by events is indisputable, but we can combat this danger only by energetic, systematic development of our own activity under adequate revolutionary slogans and not by fantastic efforts to spring over our own heads.

Democracy is only the rule of big bosses. We must well understand what Lundberg showed in his book, that 60 families govern the United States. But how? By democratic means up until today. They are a small minority surrounded by middle classes, petty bourgeoisie, workers. They must have the possibility of interesting the middle classes in this society. They must not be desperate. The same holds true for the workers. At the least for the higher strata. If they are opposed they can break the revolutionary possibilities of the lower strata, and this is the only way of working democracy.

The democratic regime is the most aristocratic way of ruling. It is possible only to a rich nation. Every British democrat has nine or ten slaves working in the colonies. The antique Greek society was a slave democracy. The same in a certain sense can be said today of British democracy, Holland, France, Belgium. The United States have no direct colonies but they have Latin America and the whole world is a sort of colony for the United States, not to speak about appropriating the richest continent and developing without a feudal tradition. It is a historically privileged nation but the privileged capitalist nations differ from the most "pariah" capitalist nations only from the point of view of delay. Italy the poorest of the great capitalist nations became the first fascist. Germany became the second because Germany has no colonies or rich subsidiary countries and on this poor base exhausted all the possibilities and the workers could not replace the bourgeoisie.

Now it is the turn of the United States even before Great Britain or France. The duty of our party is to seize every American worker and shake him ten times so he will understand what the situation is in the United States. That it is not a conjunctural crisis but a social crisis. Our party can play a very great role. What is difficult for a young party in a very thick atmosphere of previous traditions, hypocrisy, is to launch a revolutionary slogan. "It is fantastic," "not adequate in America," but it is possible that this will change by the time you launch the revolutionary slogans of our program. Somebody will laugh. But revolutionary courage is not only to be shot but to support the laughter of stupid people who are in the majority. But when one of them is beaten by Hague's gang he will think it is good to have a defense committee and his ironic attitude will change.

Question: Isn't the ideology of the workers a part of the objective factors?

Cruix: For us a small minority this whole thing is objective, including the mood of the workers. But we must analyze and classify those elements of the objective situation which can be changed by our paper and those which cannot be changed. That is why we say that the program is adapted to the fundamental stable elements of the objective situation and the task is to adapt the mentality of the

masses to these objective factors. To adapt the mentality is a pedagogical task. We must be patient, etc. The crisis of society is given as the base of our activity. The mentality is the political arena of our activity. We must change it. We must give a scientific explanation of society, and clearly explain it to the masses. That is the difference between Marxism and reformism.

The reformists have a good smell for what the audience wants – as Norman Thomas – he gives them that. But that is not serious revolutionary activity. We must have the courage to be unpopular, to say “you are fools,” “you are stupid,” “they betray you,” and every once in a while with a scandal launch our ideas with passion. It is necessary to shake the worker from time to time, to explain, and then shake him again – that all belongs to the art of propaganda. But it must be scientific, not bent to the moods of the masses. We are the most realistic people because we reckon with facts which cannot be changed by the eloquence of Norman Thomas. If we win immediate success we swim with the current of the masses and that current is the revolution.

Question: Sometimes I think that our own leaders don’t feel these problems.

Cruix: Possibly it is two things. One is to understand, the other feel it with muscles, fibers. It is necessary now to be penetrated by this understanding that we must change our politics. It is a question not only for the masses but for the party. It is a question not only for the party but also for the leaders. We had some discussions, some differences. It is impossible to come to the position at the same time. There are always frictions. They are inevitable and even necessary. It was the reason for this program, to provoke this discussion.

Question: How much time should we allow for this discussion among the leaders?

Cruix: It is very difficult to say. It will depend on many factors. We cannot allow too great deal of time. We must now accomplish this new orientation. It is a new and an old. It is based on all past activity but now it opens a new chapter. In spite of errors, frictions, and fights, now a new chapter opens and we must mobilize all our forces upon it in more energetic attitude. What is important, when the program is definitely established, is to know the slogans very well and to maneuver them skillfully so that in every part of the country everyone uses the same slogans at the same time. Three thousand can make the impression of fifteen thousand or fifty thousand.

Question: Comrades may agree abstractly to this program but do we have experienced comrades to carry out slogans in the masses? They agree abstractly but what can I do with the backward workers in my union?

Cruix: Our party is a party of the American working class. You must remember that a powerful proletarian movement not to speak of a powerful proletarian revolution has not occurred in the United States. In 1917 we didn’t have the possibility to win without 1905. My generation was very young. During 12 years we had a very good chance to understand our defeats and correct them and to win. But even then we lost again to the new bureaucrats. That is why

we cannot see whether our party will directly lead the American working class to victory. It is possible that the American workers, who are patriotic, whose standard of living is too high will have rebellions, strikes. On one side Hague, the other Lewis. That can last for a long period, years and years, and, during this time our people will steel themselves, become more sure of themselves, and the workers will say, "They are the only people capable of seeing the path." Only war produces war heroes. For the beginning we have excellent elements, very good men, seriously educated, a good staff, and not a small staff. In this more general sense I am totally optimistic. Then I believe that the change in the mentality of the American workers will come at very speedy rhythm. What to do? Everybody is disquieted, looking for something new. It is very favorable for revolutionary propaganda.

We must remember not only the aristocratic elements but the poorest elements. The cultivated American workers have a plus and a minus such as English sports. It is very good but also a device to demoralize the workers. All the revolutionary energy was expended in sports. It was cultivated by the British, the most intelligent of the capitalist nations. Sports should be in the hands of the trade unions as part of the revolutionary education. But you have a good part of the youth and women who are not rich enough for these things. We must have tentacles to penetrate everywhere into the deepest strata.

Question: I think the party has made great advances since the last convention.

Cruz: A very important turn has been accomplished. Now it is necessary to give this weapon a concentrated action. General dispersed agitation doesn't penetrate into the minds of the uneducated. But if you repeat the same slogans, adapting them to the situation, then repetition which is the mother of teaching will act likewise in politics. Very often it happens not only with the intellectual but with a worker that he believes that everybody understands what he has learned. It is necessary to repeat with insistence, to repeat every day and everywhere. That is the task of the draft program – to issue a homogeneous impression.