

Revolutionary Socialism

The Minimum Theoretical, Political and Organisational Platform

A Proposal for Discussion

The following is an English translation of a document in Farsi which was published almost three years ago in London by a group of Iranian socialists. They have come from differing (and sometimes even opposing) political backgrounds and are involved in a regroupment project. The document proposes a set of principles/ideas as a basis for launching a joint discussion bulletin of revolutionary socialists. Non-Iranian comrades should bear in mind that the points raised in this paper relate closely to the issues that have been debated within the broader Iranian left and do not necessarily reflect all the important concerns of the International left. We, hope, nevertheless, that it may be of interest to those who wish to keep informed about all the attempts at tackling the current crisis of the left and all the efforts at rethinking the basics.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that the Iranian left is facing a serious crisis similar to other groupings and tendencies of the left throughout the world. In our opinion the way out of the present crisis lies in a complete break with traditional organisations and the regroupment of the revolutionary socialist left. We believe that all socialist circles, currents or tendencies must review and clarify their position on essential theoretical and political issues and then set in motion decisions towards such a regroupment. First and foremost in these activities they must produce and publish a journal where various existing affiliations can discuss and debate the most important political and theoretical issues. The formation of such a journal, however, requires agreement on a number of general principles that will clarify the minimum positions of this spectrum at the outset.

In the present paper we will discuss the theoretical, political and organisational positions which in our opinion form the minimum platform for starting such a project. Such "minimums" are understandably not sufficient for the formation of a new political force, however, they do indicate a theoretical, political and practical direction for the initial alliance. The other two alternatives are that we either dispense with a minimum platform altogether and start such a journal with anyone who is willing to co-operate or we emphasise the inadequacy of a minimum platform and insist on agreement around a full programme before we can start.

We disagree with the first alternative because practice has shown us that one cannot work with everyone. We also believe that under the current political climate, the revolutionary socialist tendency must first attempt to distinguish itself from reformist, revisionist and opportunist currents, albeit on the basis of some basic or minimum positions. In addition, the individuals and groupings that form the various currents of this nascent tendency have gone through specific experiences and before they can willingly start any new project they must in their own mind accept and appreciate a set of principles that highlights the salient aspects of these experiences. The second option is simply not practical because precisely as a result of the absence of an organised revolutionary socialist tendency and the dispersion of its potential forces, there is no single program or platform which can define it or be acceptable to all its parts. Such a program cannot be formulated in the mind of this or that individual but must be the result of the joint efforts of all in this tendency in the process of reshaping itself.

These minimums will allow us to take the initial steps in distinguishing this tendency from others and will also help us to discover and assemble its likely members. We firmly believe that such an agreement is possible and that by co-operation and discussion we can collectively reconstruct this alternative and develop its programme. During this process, some of those who presently agree on these minimums will inevitably develop differences. Some of these differences may even lead to splits. Starting with some general points makes such a process inevitable. We cannot, however, postpone embarking on the difficult path of regroupment for ever, we must start from somewhere.

Frankly, we ourselves believe that those who do not accept even these minimum positions have not clearly broken with reformism and opportunism. However, this does not mean that we are not willing to discuss or question the minimums themselves. We have reached these positions simply on the basis of our own experience. Others will probably emphasise other issues or the same issues in different ways. These minimums do not represent all the political positions of all or some of us, nor do they express the common denominator in our political stances. As far as it was possible within a given time we have tried to formulate our own understanding of the most essential issues necessary for the initial unity of this tendency as a whole. If others do the same and specify the issues not only essential to them but also necessary for the unification of the whole spectrum of the revolutionary left, on

the one hand we can clarify the points that should be discussed by all of us, and on the other hand, similar tendencies recognising their closest allies can achieve higher forms of alliance and co-operation. It is only after such a discussion that we can decide on those essential issues on the basis of which we can unite and also decide on the range of issues which remain to be discussed in the journal. We on our part will reply to any contribution we receive on this subject and we will also make all such contributions available to others.

It is important to note that the present paper is indeed only a summary of a series of long discussions amongst its contributors. It is, therefore, rather brief and presented in a very schematic form, mainly because we intended to place it under public scrutiny as soon as possible. We can only judge the sufficiency or soundness of these minimum positions after an open debate. Recordings of most of the discussions are available and when possible could be passed to others or published later. On issues where we thought the revolutionary left had basic agreements, we have stopped at stating the bare minimum, and on issues where we know there was considerable disagreement, we have tried to provide a fuller explanation of our position.

We confess that this is not sufficient. However, let us agree that the publication of this summary conclusion is better than silence. In our experience, most of the comrades are familiar with the discussions and have better access to the original sources, we have therefore tried to avoid repeating the obvious. In addition, if any section is unclear or more explanation is required, if and when we are told about it we will provide more details.

We don't think any one will criticise us for requesting that all comrades should distribute this paper and let us know their opinions however brief this might be.

The Meaning of Socialism

The socialist program is inevitably defined by its socialist goal. We cannot expect tendencies who disagree on the basic goals of socialism to unite and establish a new alliance of revolutionary left. As a major section of the left wrongly considered the Soviet Union and its satellites (including those that left the alliance earlier, e.g., China and Albania) to be socialist and insisted on calling it the "Socialist Camp", it is essential to clarify the extent of the differences on this issue prior to any other discussions.

Briefly, in our opinion those who called this block "socialist" and have not yet revised this position, have proved in practice that they have no place inside the revolutionary left. Today the discussion is not longer about whether or not these countries were socialist, the issue is which conditions and circumstances led so many groups of the left to become puppets in the hands of the foreign policy of these countries and to betray the proletariat and social-

ism under the pretence of defending this camp. Those groups that were swearing to the flags of this camp until yesterday, and are now claiming to have realised their mistakes, have to first clarify their position on this issue if they are to be taken seriously.

We must, of course, continue to discuss extensively the nature of these societies. However, the revolutionary left has no longer any interest in carrying such a discussion with those who still believe that this was indeed socialism. All that needs to be said is that such individuals had better travel to these countries to witness the effects of 70 years of their kind of socialism. No one can hide behind the lack of knowledge or information as an excuse. The most basic and commonly agreed goals of socialism contradict such a conclusion and during this entire period there have been currents who pointed all these out and wrote volumes about it.

So far, many different positions have been taken on the nature of the Soviet Union and the discussion on these analyses has not yet been resolved. In the light of the experience of the last few years and the complete disintegration of these societies it should be possible to launch a more serious discussion and reach a more conclusive position. Were these societies examples of a degenerated workers state or were they forms of state capitalism? Or did we witness the formation of a new mode of production unforeseen by Marxism? These three positions and their variations more or less summarise the more serious analyses of the last 70 years. We neither claim to have reached any particularly new conclusions nor do we agree with any of the above positions, although it is possible that some of us may be closer to one or the other.

Briefly, we believe that the October revolution was indeed a socialist revolution that transferred power to the proletariat and started an era of transition to socialism. For reasons beyond the scope of the present paper, this power was taken away from the proletariat in the early stages and during Stalin's era under the cover of a party enjoying the prestige of its role in the revolution was transferred to the hands of a congealed cast/collective of bureaucrats based on a program of state planned economy. Although this order arose from within the October revolution it was fundamentally different from it. Furthermore, although this order maintained a more or less uniform format from the time of its establishment in Stalin's era to the time of its disintegration, one cannot deny that it went through various stages of degeneration.

This order was neither a workers' state nor a form of state capitalism. Nor was it a new mode of production. The Russian revolution was more or less defeated by 1924; however, the victorious counter revolution could not roll back the events to such a point so as to revive capitalism. As a result it continued the collective exploitation of the proletariat under the name of socialism and planned economy. Thus, the period of transition rather than moving towards socialism got caught in a backward bureau-

cratic spiral which was, step by step, returning it to capitalism. Gradually material and financial incentives grew in production and eventually the conditions for the return of capitalism prevailed.

It would be a mistake if we were to consider a consensus about this descriptive definition as a pre-condition for cooperation. Such a discussion will undoubtedly continue in the journal. However, if we do not agree on the most general concepts and cannot even jointly define socialism such a discussion will not only fail to reach a conclusion, it will inevitably remain useless. We accept Marx's own positions on these issues and consider agreement about them as the necessary and sufficient condition for starting the discussion. It is precisely these fundamental principles that were forgotten by the Iranian left.

According to Marx, socialism does not represent the ideals of this or that philanthropist. Socialist society is the inevitable rational consequence of the development of capitalist society and takes shape on the basis of negating this society through revolutionary-critical activity. Therefore, one cannot talk about what socialism will be like prior to its formation, a formation which is itself influenced by class struggle and the particular praxis of specific social beings under specific conditions. One can however decide what it will not be like and on this basis express some general principles.

According to Marx, at a certain stage in the development of capitalism and the rise of class struggle between the two main camps of labour and capital, one section of society (labour) will realise in practice that private ownership of the means of production contradicts the social production of needs and that in order to win the battle for democracy (and in this Marx was not simply considering participation in election, but also the right to self-determination of the producers in the economic sphere), it must conquer political power, overthrow capitalist relations and establish social ownership. Socialist consciousness is the realisation of the above facts. This awareness arises from within the class struggle and exists today in more or less all societies.

The social movement formed on the basis of this awareness has been called the socialist (or communist) movement and the struggles stemming from this awareness will inevitably lead to the establishment of a workers' state and eventually a socialist society. In such a society ownership of the means of production will take a social form and the division of society into classes will end. In such a society social production is not based on the need to accumulate capital but in order to respond to social needs; human labour will not be due to economic compulsion will express free creative activity.

Maybe others do not disagree with this definition, which is just fine. However, from this very same general definition one must arrive at conclusions with some of which a lot of "socialists" do not necessarily agree.

The Concept of the Transitional Society

The experience of the Paris Commune proved that in order to achieve such a society we cannot utilise the existing state apparatus. The present state must be removed and a state of a new kind established. In this way, according to Marx, there is a period of transition between capitalist and communist society identified by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on all the oppressed and toiling masses. This dictatorship does not imply a despotic form of government, but a necessary phase to allow the working class to establish its rule and start the transition period through the abolition of private property. This will be in reality the first truly democratic form of government based on the will of the majority of the population and is therefore a new form of state which from its onset is trying to pave the way for its own dissolution. This is not a state above society, this is in fact a "non-state". However, it must also be a revolutionary state as the socialist society will not appear gradually and by itself. This state must consciously follow a radical program capable of transforming one by one all of the capitalist relations. The only guarantee in achieving this transition and reaching communist society lies in the political nature of the state. Precisely for this reason one cannot talk of a transitional society when this power has been taken away from the proletariat. Such a society can only return to capitalism.

Marx also emphasises that the communist society has two stages. In the first stage although classes and the state have disappeared and social ownership is established, aspects of the bourgeois mode of distribution still persist. For example, at this early stage the social distribution of the results of labour are based on the amount of social labour rather than need. The producers will gradually put aside this form reminiscent of the bourgeois era and in practice reach the conclusion that anyone should only work according to capabilities and take according to needs.

In some Marxist books and socialist literature, this first stage has been called socialism. Although this name is confusing, as long as one distinguishes between socialism and the transition period we have no serious disagreement, however, we prefer to use communism and socialism as synonyms. And here we witness one major criticism of "traditionalist" organisations. When we refer to the writings of many of the defenders of the "socialist camp" we see a systematic attempt at confusing the period of transition with the first phase of communist society.

For example, many of these groups claim that during socialism or the first phase of communism, the dictatorship of the proletariat has not yet withered away, or they claim that although communism cannot be established in one country, achieving socialism in one country is a possibility. They also claim that social ownership based on the self-management of the producers is only achieved during the second phase and in the first phase one cannot go

beyond state ownership. These tendencies forget that when Marx referred to these two phases he considered them simply as different stages within a single mode of production. Therefore, the determining characteristics of this mode must be apparent in both phases, i.e., social classes must have disappeared in both periods and social forms of ownership should exist. In both phases, the state as the defender of the interests of one or more social classes against others does not exist any more.

Thus, socialism, as the first stage of communist society, can only be achieved after a period of transition, however short or long this may be. This transition, i.e. the beginning of the socialist construction, cannot end until major productive forces on an international scale have come under social control. Under the conditions of the international division of labour, the thesis of socialism in one country is as ridiculous as the theory of socialism in one factory or one town. In the final analysis, socialism will only win when it can achieve a higher productivity of labour than capitalist society. Under the present circumstances when major multinational monopolies control the majority of the productive and technological forces in the world, one cannot achieve such a higher productivity prior to the control of all such monopolies.

In the same way that a workers' state in its struggle against the old order must deepen the socialist revolution, it must never forget that in its efforts for the construction of socialism the only way to a conclusive victory is indeed the international extension of the socialist revolution. By its very nature if this revolution is not extended it will be destroyed. In the era of imperialism it is possible to put in place the first bricks of a socialist revolution in a single country, be it an underdeveloped one. However, its final victory necessitates the joint efforts of the world proletariat. The state that puts the theory of socialism in one country as part of its program, even if it starts off as a more or less genuine proletarian state will not only fail to reach this stage but will itself end up inside the camp of world counter revolution. Such a state, instead of strengthening and deepening the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat will attempt to suppress the vanguard and depoliticise the whole class; and instead of aiming for the external expansion of the revolution will use the international movement for the protection of its borders. For this reason one cannot analyse the likes of the Iranian Tudeh Party simply on the basis of local conditions. Before anything else, they were merely the conscious or unconscious tools of this counter revolution.

The other mistake is to define a society in transition on the basis of relations of production. Relations of production constantly change during the transition period; hence its name. To nationalise is not the same as to socialise. Social ownership only starts with state ownership of the essential means of production. However, its qualitative growth and the transformation of the first to the second continues only gradually. One cannot therefore determine the nature of such a society according to its constantly

changing relations of production. Those tendencies who have argued that according to the high percentage of growth of state ownership, due to the increasing role of the state plan in the economy or because of low inflation or low unemployment this or that country is closer to socialism, forget that in the period of transition to socialism, priority lies with politics. What guarantees this transition is not the percentage of state ownership but the rule of the organs for the self-government of the producers, i.e., the soviets.

Democracy and Socialism

Democracy and socialism are not two separate phenomena where the first is merely a means of achieving the second (a means that can sometimes be put aside). For workers and toilers, democracy means securing the right to self determination in all areas of social life, including the economic arena. Therefore, the struggle for this form of democracy cannot be victorious before abolishing classes (in other words prior to socialism). For Marx, the struggle for socialism without fighting for democracy is meaningless. For us socialism means the democratic organisation of society.

During the period of transition, state ownership must gradually and consciously move towards social ownership. The level of this growth is directly related to the level of democracy in the councils. Without the widest democratic rights in the councils state ownership will not only fail to show any signs of transition to socialism but it will strengthen a collective bureaucracy. If the producing masses who form the vast majority of society are not allowed to democratically control and supervise the planned economy, no other authority in that society will have the willingness to produce for social needs.

Furthermore, if during the period of transition, the incentive for increasing production cannot be profit it can only be the reduction of the working day. It is only the producers themselves who because they are keen to get involved in social self determination benefit from shorter working hours. If power is taken away from them, this incentive will also disappear. The ruling bureaucracy will not only fail to reduce working hours; it will adopt a policy of fast growth, a policy which is not necessarily the optimum form of growth. Let us not forget that under Stalin during the first 5 year plan, the title of hero worker was given to those who worked over 12 hours a day.

It is for this reason that we must insist that the leading role of the party should not be confused with the political power of the state during this period of transition. Democracy within the councils is inversely proportional to party dictatorship. The one party system is no more than a denial of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Freedom of political parties must be the epigraph of the Soviet state. Having dispossessed the bourgeoisie of its means of production of subsistence and ideology, it is clear that the

workers' state has nothing to fear from bourgeois political thought. If during the era of its domination the bourgeoisie can impose its ideas on society, this is not due to their attractiveness but simply due to the fact that it is more or less the sole controller of all means of producing ideas. During the period of transition, one cannot ban any party under the excuse that it is still supporting the interests of the bourgeoisie. Such powers will allow the ruling party to also ban workers organisations and parties with the same excuse.

In addition, intervention in the destiny of society cannot be limited to the proletariat. The workers' state must be able to allow the participation of all social layers in this process. The socialist individuals will not come about by force. It is true that the main power is in the hands of the workers soviets, however this does not mean that the role of all others in politics is reduced to zero. The working class wants to disappear as a class, it wants to transform all individuals in society into socialist human beings. How can we expect the development of such individuals under the circumstances in which political democracy is even more limited than under capitalism?

We can discuss the exact forms of this participation; a discussion that can continue in the journal. We are certain about two essential points: firstly, one cannot negate the power of the soviets under the pretext of "democracy", secondly, one cannot deny the need for other democratic elected organs representing other sections and layers of the society beside the workers soviets. One solution might be the creation of an elected parliament, however this needs further discussion. There is no doubt that in order to get the majority of the society involved in the transition to socialism other organs elected by the entire population are needed.

The Revolutionary Party

In order to achieve the transition to socialism there is need for a socialist revolution and in order to lead the working class in this revolution there is a need for a revolutionary party. Therefore, the strategy of revolutionary socialism is the strategy of forming the revolutionary party. During the period of domination of capitalism one cannot expect such a party to involve the majority of the working class. The dominant ideology is that of the ruling class, therefore up to the period of a revolutionary crisis, i.e., the eve of the overthrow of the bourgeois state, only a minority of workers will be attracted to a revolutionary socialist program. The experience of social democracy has shown that the mass workers party can only be a bourgeois workers party.

Hence, the revolutionary party of the working class is in fact the vanguard workers party. It is a party combining the revolutionary socialist program and the vanguard layers of the workers movement. Such a party is, of course, always trying to attract the mass of the workers to revolu-

tionary struggles, and will base its orientation on an action program that can emphasise at any particular stage in the development of consciousness those demands that can raise the level of the activities of the majority of this class towards a socialist revolution.

The necessity for a vanguard party arises from the fact that the process of self-consciousness of the masses is not a linear and steadily ascending process. Every day in the production process the working class does not just achieve consciousness but also accepts many bourgeois illusions. The awareness reached in one process becomes illusions during another. The vanguard party is in fact the accumulated consciousness of the class. Here the vanguard party combats bourgeois illusions and guards the collective consciousness gained.

Such a party cannot be built overnight and it must go through its own specific stages. First and foremost it requires a revolutionary program, a program not as a souvenir from this or that world experience, as those brought by many organisations of the left in Iran, but a programme arisen from inside the specific class struggles and already crystallised in the mind of the vanguard of these struggles. This is not a vanguard so-called because of its association with this or that organisation but a vanguard which has come out of specific struggles and in these has represented those demands and activities which at that stage have served the socialist goal rather than reform of the existing order.

For example, during the February uprising the proletarian vanguard was not necessarily those who had joined some organisation of the left and become known as "communists" but those who in practical struggles defended the democratic gains of the revolution against the savage attacks of the counter-revolutionary Islamic regime, even though they may have never joined any particular party of the left. Or, during the time of repression the vanguard worker was not the one following the seemingly fiery slogans of this or that organisation of the left but those who were quietly building the underground factory committees. As long as the socialist program is not closely tied up to the decisive sections of this vanguard, the proletarian party will not be built.

The most ridiculous form of sectarianism is displayed by those intellectuals who having read a few so-called Marxist books and having gathered a few supporters, call themselves the nucleus of the revolutionary party and then in philistine arrogance start telling the working class how to conduct itself. Tens of cliques and sects have been busy building such "Leninist" parties for decades, whilst the first stage in building this party, i.e., the process of developing a revolutionary socialist program and its integration with the real struggles of the working class and its vanguard has not even started. These are the same people who have only learnt one slogan from Lenin: consciousness comes from outside the workers movement. In reality, this has always been a cover for substituting the work-

ing class with a clique of a few power-hungry petty bourgeois individuals.

Without this or that party, the proletarian vanguard can exist but without the proletarian vanguard the party is irrelevant. Revolutionary socialist program is no more than a concentrated generalisation of the experiences of the vanguard (on the international scale) and its comprehension. Marx did not make the workers movement socialist, it was the working class that converted the liberal Marx to communism. Lenin and Trotsky did not put forward the idea of building workers Soviets, but with the establishment of such Soviets by the workers themselves they realised the significance of such structures. The proletarian vanguard soon grasps the revolutionary program, often faster and deeper than the “intellectual” from outside the class. If our understanding of the sentence “consciousness comes from outside the class” is that the working class cannot understand revolutionary theory we must remind everyone that in the latter part of the 20th century, the vanguard of the proletariat is well educated and can read the Communist Manifesto. Intellectuals are nothing special, they should demand no special privileges from the proletariat. On the contrary, if they have no science or knowledge to contribute, they might as well stay “outside” and not infect the movement with their inevitable prejudices. In fact the term “intellectual” itself has lost the significance it may have had in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and is today merely an excuse for power seeking petty bourgeois elements wishing to sound off inside the communist movement. It is from this layer that the most important sections of the bureaucracy arise.

Democratic Centralism

Perhaps no issue has been as important a cause of engulfing the Iranian communist left in the dreadful internal spirals of organisational bureaucracy as the notion of “democratic centralism”. Most organisations’ interpretation of this concept is extremely administrative. All party members can, according to regulations in the constitution of the party, occasionally express some ideas, sometimes even differing ones, however they are duty bound to obey all decisions taken by the leadership with a strict iron discipline. Democratic centralism is thus taken to consist of a series of administrative regulations that one can copy from the Russian Communist party. For us, democratic centralism has a direct relationship with the notion of the vanguard revolutionary party and its specific shape at any stage is determined by the stage of the development of this party. For example, one cannot imagine that the principles of democratic centralism at the present stage in Iran when even the nucleus of the party has not yet taken shape will be the same as those governing the party, ten years after its formation.

During the process of establishing this party and in its attempts to intervene in the working class movement, the revolutionary program will be constantly tried and tested.

If the program is to improve by this experience and its understanding, it must initially be based on a common approach to this experience. Centralism means the voluntary efforts of every single communist for the creation of the conditions necessary for this common experience. And this does not take shape because of written regulations but is learnt in practice and in struggle. This experience, once understood, gradually becomes transformed into a series of general organisational principles. The reverse is not, however, true. The need for a common and centralised experience will not be felt because of a series of predetermined administrative regulations.

The second point is that this common experience, does not necessarily lead to a common understanding. Revolutionary vanguards can reach different conclusions from the same experience according to their own practice and awareness. If there is no place inside the party for the encounter of these ideas, these important experiences, often gained at the cost of the flesh and blood of the proletariat, are lost forever and fail to lead to any conclusive summaries. On the other hand, if the interpretations of this or that “leader” from the events is not to be questioned, the revolutionary party becomes a sterile sect deprived of any content and centralism becomes the justification for the cult of personality. Democracy inside the party facilitates the establishment of the conditions where this creative clash of opinions can take place freely and unconditionally. Such conditions can lead to the most realistic appraisal of the experience of the vanguard so that this experience can jointly be taken forward into the next struggle.

Of course, if these democratic principles are not understood by the party cadres and simply become a series of organisational rights, they can metamorphose into their opposite, becoming an excuse for justifying discussion for the sake of discussion. The fact that the majority of the debates within the so-called “democratic” Iranian left appears artificial is not due to the fact that their party constitution is wrong, but mainly because they are not vanguard organisations and their entire political structure is artificial. The right to form tendencies or factions, or indeed its absence in an organisation which has still not taken the first steps for becoming even a nucleus of a party is in reality irrelevant and has more to do with a thousand and one unrelated personal and historical factors than anything else.

The need for the right to form tendencies and factions (wrongly called “fraction” inside the Iranian left) is due to the fact that the process of intervention of the party in the struggles of the class through the vanguard inevitably and constantly leads to disagreements, the deepening of these disagreements, and even splits, and then again the resolution of differences and creation of new ones. If it was anything but this, one must question the health of that party. Without such rights, instead of organising a rational and natural process for the development of these discussions, necessary for the education of the entire party,

one would witness destructive sectarianism on all sides and the formations of unhealthy cliques.

In general, differences within the party usually have two different sources: they are either subjective or class related. Subjective differences are usually due to the fact that one or all sides of the argument remain inconclusive or reach subjective conclusions due to insufficient political experience or due to the lack of development of the struggle itself. The starting point for most differences in the party is subjective. For example, many tactical differences are of this nature (of course, it must be added that occasionally class differences are first presented as tactical differences). Such differences, although at first may appear to be serious or may last for a long time, given a proper and rational framework for discussion can in reality be eventually resolved. The formation of tendencies is the only rational method for regulating such discussions.

All individuals within the party must have the right to declare a tendency on the basis of a written platform and organise like minded individuals for advancing their arguments within the party. Tendencies usually dissolve themselves after the end of discussions in a congress and once decisions on various issues have been taken. Because, by forming a tendency the members accept that their differences are no more than tactical differences and therefore they accept that the party has to eventually take a definite tactical position in order to intervene in class struggles. However, this does not mean that discussions on the subject are finished. Firstly, written discussions must always continue in the party. Every party member must have the right to express his/her opinions about any subject in a written format (as a discussion bulletins) within the party. When we talk of the dissolution of the tendency, we refer to a situation when after the clarification of the opinion of the majority and the clear decision of the party, the continuation of verbal discussion in various branches of the party becomes futile. Although, representatives of various tendencies must participate in the party's leading organs proportional to their strength and will continue the verbal discussions in various meetings of these organs. If these arguments continue until the next congress, it is usual that these tendencies are recreated during the pre-congress discussions.

The formation of official tendencies in an organisation is not a negative point, on the contrary it is the pre-condition for the healthy evolution of the party. Differences cannot be resolved by suppression. Firstly, as the experience of many revolutionary organisations has shown, the correctness of a position is not necessarily reflected in the number of votes it attracts. By stopping the formation of a tendency, the party will gradually become a dead organisation incapable of correcting itself. Secondly, by blocking the expression of the differences within the party, these differences do not go away. On the contrary, instead of being presented as rational discussions, they continue in secret behind closed doors and may lead to disintegration and wholly unnecessary splits; organisational splits of the

type where the membership and the entire vanguard have absolutely no ideas about the reasons behind them or their content.

The second category of differences stems from the influence of non-proletarian layers inside the Party. In the course of class struggle, the vanguard constantly faces the threat of being influenced by non-proletarian ideas in the same way that the entire class faces this threat. At times, the acceptance of these ideological influences not only go unnoticed but are reflected in the party as factional political differences. This phenomenon can happen both to a minority or the majority of a party. With the formation of a faction, one section of the party is in reality declaring war on another. It is usually rare that without prior indications, the level of arguments reaches such a critical stage overnight. One has to doubt the seriousness of members who suddenly form factions without having previously declared a tendency. Of course, it is only after a period of discussion that one can recognise that the differences are indeed non-tactical and realise that the party is threatened with non-proletarian ideas. On the other hand, one should also doubt the sincerity of a majority which labels any discussion proposed by a minority as non-proletarian.

If the issues are not resolved, the faction remains after the congress and discussions continue in a written format. In the same manner as in the case of tendencies, representatives from factions should be elected to all committees and to the leadership proportional to their degree of support. If such differences are not resolved in practice there would be no alternative but to publicly announce the differences and this in turn will eventually lead to splits. However, at least everyone will know what the differences are about.

As we mentioned earlier details of the process for operating democratic centralism, including the precise shape of tendencies and factions, cannot be decided at this stage. What is obvious is that from the very beginning socialists must emphasise that they will defend these rights.

Revolutionary Strategy

The revolutionary party is organised on the basis of the revolutionary program fighting for the realisation of a revolutionary strategy. In general, where the capitalist mode of production is dominant and the state is a bourgeois state, our strategy is nothing but a socialist revolution. Of course, this general thesis stemming from the most basic principles of theoretical Marxism is rarely disputed; at least not rationally. However, what is amazing is the fact that there are still many socialists who openly disagree with this obvious statement of facts; the reasons for which should be sought in the history of the workers' movement.

During the second International, this elementary principle was abandoned by the deterministic evolutionism of

the reformist tendencies and all forms of stagist theories of revolution were derived from it. During the proletarian revolution in Russia the *mensheviks* became the defenders of stagism and after the degeneration of this revolution during Stalin's rule, the Comintern and the communist parties following its line, not only revived this deviation but deepened it even further. The vast majority of the Iranian and International left were fed by these "theories". Some, abusing Lenin or Trotsky's name replaced revolutionary socialism with class collaboration whilst others proudly defended Stalin and the Comintern. Even if we assume that some such groupings really did have differences with the Stalinists, today such ideas are all outdated and must be reviewed and changed.

Lenin's theory of "uninterrupted revolution" and Trotsky's notion of "permanent revolution" were both attempts by Russian socialists to break with the reformist strategies of the Second International. The Second International (as well as Lenin, Trotsky and the *mensheviks*) all believed that the imminent revolution in Russia was a bourgeois democratic revolution simply because such a revolution had not yet taken place in Russia and thus the driving force for the revolution was said to be the contradiction between the new capitalist forces of production and Tsarist dictatorship. The *mensheviks* concluded from this that the Russian Proletariat must play the role of the left opposition in the coming revolution and stop short of tasks that will alienate the bourgeoisie from leading this revolution. Lenin believed that as the Russian bourgeoisie was more scared of the proletariat than Tsar and as the bourgeoisie had many common interests with feudalism, it will ultimately not be able to play a progressive role. He thought therefore that the Russian proletariat must seek an alliance with the peasantry to lead the democratic revolution and then if conditions in the industrial Europe allowed it, to ally itself with the European proletariat and move towards socialism. Trotsky too thought that the bourgeoisie cannot lead this revolution, however he argued on the other hand that although the proletariat must rely on the peasantry, it is the only class that is capable of holding a majority position in the future government and hence in the struggle against the bourgeoisie it cannot tie itself to the minimum program. In his opinion the victory of the democratic revolution with proletarian leadership meant nothing but its continuation to the socialist revolution.

Both these theories were revolutionary and the experience of the Russian Revolution itself proved the correctness of a combination of them. We believe, however, that these theories are on the one hand both outdated today and on the other hand even in their own era they did not express a complete break with the positions of the Second International.

The shortcoming of both theories is that they do not go beyond the evolutionary framework of the Second International. It is not true to say that because a bourgeois revolution has not happened in a country the impending revolution is inevitably a bourgeois democratic one. There is

no such compulsion in history that all countries must go through the bourgeois democratic revolution. Under specific conditions a country can become capitalist from above (without going through a bourgeois democratic revolution) and can pass through to the dictatorship of the proletariat without having first established a bourgeois state. This Marxist position must be dug out of decades of deviation.

In Marxist tradition the revolutionary strategy was determined by the analysis of three main factors: the class nature of the state, the social/historical tasks of the revolution, the character of the revolutionary class or classes. In all societies and at all stages, the above three factors do not simultaneously correspond with each other.

For example, one can envisage a society where political power is in the hands of a pre-capitalist class or classes whilst a powerful proletariat has already taken shape prior to the bourgeoisie conquering political power. Germany in 1948 and Russia in 1905 are clear examples. In such a society, there are inevitably unfinished democratic tasks of great significance, however these are not necessarily more important than directly anti-capitalist tasks. At its outset the social revolution may even concentrate on these democratic issues, however, it will soon have to put anti-capitalist tasks on its agenda. In addition, in many cases the resolution of the first depends on solving the second. For example, in such a society how can one solve the land issue without first dealing with the nationalisation of banks?

In such societies even if the bourgeoisie is against the existing state, it would prefer a gradual transfer of power rather than a revolution, so that it can effectively stop the progress of the socialist revolution. The extent of bourgeois class collaboration depends on the level of its fear of the proletariat and the depth of its common interests with pre-capitalist classes. In the case of the petty bourgeoisie, the situation can be very different for different layers. In many cases this class can maintain its radicalism until the overthrow of the old regime and this is the phenomenon that has convinced many forces to ally themselves to the whole of the petty bourgeoisie. However, as soon as the proletariat takes serious steps towards the resolution of its anti-capitalist tasks, the upper layers of this class join the counter revolution.

Therefore, in such societies there can be no revolutionary strategy but that of a socialist revolution led by the proletariat relying on the lower sections of the petty bourgeoisie with combined democratic and socialist tasks. This classical approach of Marx is in our opinion much clearer than the one adopted by the Russian revolution. Although Lenin and Trotsky's opinion during the October Revolution represented a revolutionary position as opposed to a reformist one, in reality it was still ideologically tied up with the evolutionism of the Second International and this paved the way for justifying future deviations.

In any case, such arguments were only necessary or valid in older societies. Perhaps during the first world war one could argue that in Iran or India permanent or uninterrupted revolution presented a valid solution for the question of revolutionary strategy, but today, where can we find such pre-capitalist states? Is there a country where capitalist relations have not become dominant? If the state is a bourgeois state it is clear that one cannot unite with sections of the bourgeoisie or the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie. The bourgeois state is, by definition, a state based on these two groups. If the capitalist mode of production dominates, how can one deny the predominance of anti-capitalist tasks over bourgeois democratic ones? Therefore, in the majority if not all present day societies there can be no revolutionary strategy but that of a socialist revolution; and one does not need to constantly refer to the discussions of Russian social democracy to prove this.

Furthermore, one cannot use the excuse of imperialism to justify the fall into class collaborationism. It is perfectly possible that sections of the bourgeoisie and the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie participate in some anti-imperialist tasks, however, never at the expense of the overthrow of the capitalist system and eventually not at the expense of complete separation from imperialism; as the experience of Iran proves once and for all.

As a result we can continue discussions on the various theories written so far about the Iranian Revolution, however, revolutionary socialists must be clear on one issue: capitalism is the dominant mode of production in Iran and the ruling state is a capitalist one. Although many democratic tasks await the revolution, this can only be a socialist revolution starting with the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat relying on all the toilers. All of the bourgeoisie and the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie are in the camp of reaction. The middle layers of the petty bourgeoisie are not allies of the proletariat. However, with the correct tactic the proletariat must neutralise this group. Without such an understanding of the strategy and such a conception of the socialist revolution any attempt to form the party of the working class is in essence futile. As we witnessed in the course of the Iranian Revolution, even if such a party could have hundreds of thousands of followers, without the correct strategy it would lose its head in the whirlwinds of class struggle.

The Revolutionary Programme

The party establishes itself around a programme. Here we must distinguish ourselves from all those who assume party unity can be based on anything else. The party in its contemporary meaning refers to a political organisation formed under specific conditions under the geographic jurisdiction of a specific political state. What distinguishes this party from other similar organisations is not the ideas of its membership but the programme it offers for the entire society. This program stems from a realistic recogni-

tion of the present situation and then on the basis of a clear critique of this state highlights the prominent tasks facing society in order to change the status quo.

In the socialist movement, the partitioning of this programme into a minimum and a maximum section is a distinguishing characteristic of reformist tendencies. Marx never recognised such a distinction in the Communist Manifesto and in the programmes of the First International. In the Second International, this distinction represented its abandonment of the ideals of fundamental and revolutionary change and its contentment with the idea of reforming capitalist society. In the Third International, before the defeat of the Russian revolution and the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, this division had been put aside. During Stalin's time and later this notion was revived by organisations who supported the "socialist camp". Revolutionary socialism distinguishes itself by rejecting this distinction.

The revolutionary program is a programme that at every stage of the class struggle can point towards the socialist aims of this struggle and indicates the tasks that have to be carried out in order to achieve these aims. In other words, at any stage of consciousness, the party programme must be able to show the practical and inseparable connection between current demands and the aims of the socialist revolution. Such a programme must analyse the specific local and international conditions to show the relationship between, for example, the struggle for an 8 hour day, and the struggle against long term unemployment, whilst demonstrating the historical significance of this struggle in the context of the task to socialise the means of production. As a result, the revolutionary party must simultaneously and at every stage of the struggle present a programme encompassing both the minimum and maximum demands as well as the connection between the first and the second (the so-called the transitional demands).

In our opinion this is the only acceptable notion of a programme for revolutionary socialists. Democratic demands (demands that do not necessarily question the political domination of the bourgeoisie but increase the rights of workers and other toilers), minimum demands (demands that do not question the capitalist mode of production but create reforms benefiting the proletariat), transitional demands (demands that are not directly socialist yet but logically question the capitalist system) and maximum demands (i.e., directly socialist demands) are presented side by side and the propaganda and political work of the party at any stage is based on a combination of the above.

For example, in Iran, in the conditions just after the revolution, one should have concentrated equally on the fight for the consolidation and extension of democratic rights, confiscation of the land of large landowners, establishment of a social security system, or the demands for an end to discrimination against women, national and religious minorities, as well as the fight for the development and unity of workers and peasants councils and the estab-

lishment of producers control over the means of production and distribution. Yet at the same time, the epigraph of all our propaganda should have remained the demands to nationalise all major capitalist concerns and the establishment of a Soviet Republic and workers self management. We all know what happened to those who divided this into minimum and maximum demands.

Following the discussions of the Comintern concerning transitional demands during the era of workers revolutions, and later, Trotsky's comments about transitional demands during the struggle against fascism and the formation of the Fourth International, some revolutionary communists came to the conclusion that the name of such a program is the "transitional" program. This too is in our opinion a narrow interpretation contradicting not only the meaning of the programme but also the understanding of Trotsky and the Comintern themselves. The "transitional programme" can only be that section of the programme that can be considered practical in a particular stage of the struggle. In fact Trotsky himself originally called this programme the programme of action. At any stage of the struggle, depending on the existing level of awareness and the depth and dimension of that struggle, the revolutionary party must present a collection of demands that although stemming from the current levels of consciousness and demands, in practice and in the course of struggle itself come into contradiction with the capitalist rule and demonstrates the need for a transition to socialism.

For example, in the period before the Second World War, when unemployment and inflation prevailed, it was not only practical to put forward the sliding scale of wages and working hours (practical in the sense that the working class could have accepted these demands, and if their reformist leaders allowed it, they were achievable) but it was also necessary from a revolutionary perspective (because the realisation of these demands questioned the very existence of the capitalist order). Or for example, in the 1920s when in many European countries the working class could have obtained electoral majority, the slogan "workers' government" was not only appropriate, because during those difficult conditions it showed the workers that if they put their minds to it they can take control of their own destiny, but it also put pressure on reformist parties to unite with other proletarian parties instead of forming coalitions with the bourgeoisie.

In this way the program of action is a concrete and short term programme. One cannot talk of the transitional programme as a single programme for a particular historic period from now until the socialist revolution. The same programme of action that was valid before the second world war could not be repeated immediately after the war. The programme of action that was correct for the period after the uprising in Iran, cannot be repeated today. However the programme of the party is not simply a programme of action, it is a historical programme and therefore must consist of more than a transitory programme of action.

The Organisation of Socialist Revolutionaries

In our opinion, the formation of such a trend is not a difficult task at present. Either every one agrees with the above minimums as the starting point or they don't. If others present a different starting point we must then discuss this and if the aim is co-operation and agreement, we would arrive at such a common platform. Any one who agrees with this platform and accepts to work for the realisation of this project, can become a member of this alliance. In other words, a member is someone who accepts the aims of the project and in the effort to realise it is committed to a certain level of activity.

The form of membership is both individually and by groups. A group of people can maintain their own alliance whilst joining this project. The shape of the relationship between individuals or groups with others can only be determined by the consent of both sides. All members have equal rights and they can all express their opinions in the bulletin. If the decision was taken to have an editorial board or a co-ordinating committee for this bulletin, such a board/committee can be changed at all times and they must continuously inform everyone of all information concerning the journal. At present even if all the elements of the revolutionary socialist tendency accept all the above minimums or unite around another summary of these basic principles and accept to work within a single organisation, we must emphasise that this would still be a special alliance very different from a party alliance.

Elements who join such an alliance were inevitably members of other forms of organisations in the past representing varying experiences and traditions. It is very likely that on the basis of these experiences they are still involved in one form or other in the current political struggles. It is unreasonable to expect that all these people, prior to spending a period of common political activity and co-operation suddenly unite and express similar views on class struggle. Therefore, any form of organisational principles that attempts under the present circumstances to question this relative independence and dispersion which exist in reality, not only will embark on an impractical task, but insisting on it will question the initial alliance itself.

As long as revolutionary socialists intervene in present struggles they can discuss their positions in a joint bulletin. Others are not, however, obliged to follow this line and can organise their own independent activities. They can even organise their own independent journal if that was necessary, whilst continuing the debate with others in the common bulletin. As a result, and gradually through these discussions and possible common work, some will probably reach agreement on more than the above minimums. However, this is not directed from anywhere and depends on the individuals concerned. They can put forward any such agreement for public discussion and try to gain support from others.

Political Struggles

The political interventions of revolutionary socialists in the current political scene must essentially be based on two central issues; the struggle to overthrow the clerical capitalist state and the organisation of the working class vanguard in independent (organisationally independent of political parties) and underground committees. By emphasising the first we distinguish ourselves from all reformist and opportunist tendencies who somehow or other are propagating the possibility of the transformation of the regime from within. By insisting on the second, we emphasise the need to organise the working class as the only force capable of overthrowing the regime distinguishing it from all bourgeois and petty bourgeois alternatives.

Within the framework of the fight for the overthrow of the regime, we must of course defend all democratic demands such as the need for the separation of the state from religion, the right to organisation for all political parties, abolition of all discrimination against women, nationalities, and religious minorities, freedom of all political prisoners, the abolition of the death penalty, etc. Beside these demands and beside our calls for all the minimum demands such as social benefits, unemployment benefit, etc., our struggle around the transitional demands such as workers and peasants control of production and distribution, or the fight for opening the books of all financial enterprises has a more crucial significance.

The creation of workers trade unions (mainly put forward by reformist tendencies) or the reincarnation of the workers councils and assemblies (put forward by the phrasemongers of the infantile left), although by themselves legitimate demands, are obviously not practical under the present circumstances. Even if they become possible during some next stage, they would first go through the link of factory committees. Such committees unite workers irrespective of political or ideological tendencies around a specific class struggle programme and pave the way for the creation of mass organisations of the class. In addition, the propaganda of socialist revolutionaries today must never lack governmental slogans. Our alternative to the Islamic Republic is a soviet republic. This slogan must dominate all our other slogans. Any political slogan that in one way or the other relates to the issue of political power (such as the constitutional assembly) must not only be linked to this general slogan but it cannot in any way contradict it.

In our opinion these general principles are sufficient to distinguish revolutionary socialists. The details of the programme will only become clear when this tendency can reach a common programme after a period of discussion and co-operation in action. Until then, as we have said above, if we cannot agree on a common approach, at no stage will anyone stop others from intervening. On the contrary on the basis of the discussions in the journal we can review these experiences in order to pave the way for future common practice.

Revolutionary Theory

A revolutionary party will not be built without a revolutionary theory. This theory, we believe, is still the Marxist theory. No other theory has yet been presented to us which can guide us in resolving our current problems of revolutionary practice better than Marxism. However, this does not mean that Marxism itself has been free of the present crisis. The deviations of the Second International transformed this revolutionary theory into a dogmatic and deterministic system of belief that replaced the central role of revolutionary critical practice with a mechanical social evolutionism. The third International, influenced by the experience of Bolshevism and the First World War paved the way for a revival of this revolutionary theory. However, during the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern not only was this process blocked but under the backward spiral of the ideology of the ruling bureaucracy of the degenerated Soviet state the very same social democratic deviations deepened considerably. The different organisations which came out of the Left Opposition, having played a major role in resisting this degeneration and in safeguarding the revolutionary tradition have proved eventually to be incapable of developing this theory in correspondence with the new changing situation. A thorough review of this experience, the fight to liberate revolutionary theory from decades of decline and a serious effort in developing it in accordance with present day conditions must be in the forefront of the tasks of all socialist revolutionaries. In this relation, emphasising a few points is important in distinguishing our current.

Revolutionary Marxism as a science has no affinity with ideology. One cannot solve this basic dichotomy by saying that it is a special form of ideology, for example, a proletarian ideology. Although ideology can gain some form of material existence due to persistent historical social structures, it reflects no more than a false consciousness of these. In order to hide their special interests under the cover of defending the general interest, the ruling classes have always had to resort to this false consciousness. The proletariat believes in abolishing itself as a class and abolishing the class system altogether. It therefore does not defend any particular interests for which it has to deceive society. The proletariat wants to attain and to propagate consciousness and not to replace bourgeois ideology with its own new forms of ideology.

By agreeing that Marxism is a science, the problem isn't resolved yet. What do we mean by science? It is true that recognising reality as it really is could be said to be the distinguishing feature of science. However how is this recognition obtained? In Marxism there are many debates on this issue and the discussion will inevitably continue. In our opinion the only way to start this debate is to return to Marx himself. What has been presented during the last hundred years under the title of dialectical materialism as a proletarian world outlook has nothing to do with Marx's views. If anything it became simply the ideology of a ruling bureaucracy inside the workers movement. If one

has to give a label to Marxist philosophical methodology (and we have no particular wish to do so), then the philosophy of praxis is far more descriptive than dialectical materialism.

Marx's materialism cannot be reduced to the statement that he improved bourgeois materialism by adding Hegelian dialectics. He went beyond the metaphysical philosophical arguments between materialists and idealists. Whether spirit is primary or matter was not a question that interested Marx. In fact he thought even asking such a question itself represented a lack of break with metaphysics. What was important for him, was the realistic understanding of the activities of specific human beings in their specific socio-historic conditions and not to create a new ideology. He saw human consciousness and his conception of his situation and the outside world not as a passive reflection of matter but as a direct result of his historic/social practice in changing that situation and the outside world and in his comprehension of that practice. There is no doubt that beyond the mind of this individual there is an independent material world. But a world that has not yet entered human experience has therefore no reflection in the human mind either, and the world that encompasses this practice is no longer a world independent of the mind. Marx' dialectics were in recognising the practical link between subjective and objective conditions as a central issue in the theory of consciousness. It is not a coincidence that all reformist tendencies try to underestimate this central role of praxis. By denying the importance of revolutionary-critical practice, this liberating science becomes a closed and backward system of semi-religious belief mainly used to justify the conservative and

counter revolutionary policies of non-proletarian layers.

Such an understanding of Marxism, changes considerably the role of theory in the revolutionary party from what it has so far been considered as the accepted wisdom. For example, to say that our party is a Marxist-Leninist one (or any other such combinations) can only be done if one throws away all of Marx's ideas. If the intention is to show respect to particular leaders of the working class there is no objection, however if that is the case why limit it to a few individuals? It is clear that by identifying one or two people we are specifying the essence of party unity on the basis of their opinions. Yet how can a party in its entirety reach such common positions? In our opinion the party must unite on the basis of its programme and not Marxism or Leninism.

Just because someone knows how to multiply he does not become a mathematician. So how can we claim that members of a party become Marxist on the basis of accepting its programme? This is the method that leads members of a party to vote for this or that theory in a congress by a show of hands. Of course all party members must have opinions on all issues; and if they have not they must try to form them. However, this cannot mean that voting is a way of settling theoretical issues or a way of closing discussions on theory. Marxism like all other sciences is continually changing and evolving and the knowledge gained from it is always relative (depending on experience). Therefore, for revolutionary socialists, theoretical discussion is always open.

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