WHAT IS A REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME?

INTRODUCTION

One of the organisations that has emphasised the importance of programme has been the League for the Fifth International. In 1989, when they were the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, they produced a programme which was meant to be a guide to the class struggle for the forthcoming period. (1) They contended that: “The Marxist programme is based on the principles of scientific socialism..... It asserts that the class struggle is the motor force of history and it recognises the working class as the only consistently revolutionary class.”(2) Thus on this basis the strategy and principles of a programme are developed like the Transitional Programme of Trotsky. But whilst this seems to be a sufficient basis of a programme, we would also suggest that it should be able to recognise the difficulties involved in relation to the task of overthrowing capitalism. Thus, does this programme of the LRCI sufficiently recognise the importance of the offensive of capital against labour which started in 1980 in order to end the gains of the welfare state? In other words what have been the problems which have undermined the ability of the working class to mobilise in defence of its interests, and so be able to challenge the domination of the capitalist system? We would suggest that a major issue in this regard is that of class consciousness, because the influence of bourgeois ideology has led to the view that capitalism is a natural and eternal system that cannot be overcome. Indeed this standpoint was reinforced by the demise of Stalinism in 1989. It was considered that a socialist alternative to capitalism was not historically possible, and indeed was economically irrational. In contrast the aim of capital to undermine the gains of the working class acquired legitimacy because this development was considered to be an expression of the imperatives of economic efficiency. The result of this situation was that many of the Social Democratic organisations, such as the British Labour party, adapted to the agenda of what became known as neo-liberalism. Thus the alternative of socialism became considered to be irrelevant. Instead the approach of the representatives of capital became hegemonic. Thus it will be interesting to consider whether the programme of the LRCI does provide answers to this challenge of resurgent neo-liberalism. In this context it cannot be adequate to merely outline a restatement of the views of the Transitional Programme. Instead it necessary to develop a genuinely new perspective that is able to tackle the challenges for the class struggle in the 1980's.

In relation to the above point, the programme makes a promising start. It outlines how the traditional minimum programme of Social Democracy had become untenable in the present situation of the offensive of capital against labour: “Whether in its Stalinist or Social Democratic garb the minimum-maximum programme has outlived its progressive role and has been transformed into a means of obstructing not only the fight for socialism, but even an effective fight to win or defend reforms. Capitalism can provide neither permanent systematic social reforms nor lasting and fully fledged bourgeois democracy. To solve its recurrent crisis the bourgeoisie is obliged to attack every serious economic gain together with the political rights of the working class. The struggle to accommodate to such a system by the bureaucracy can only mean sacrificing even the minimum programme to the needs of the profit system. The defence of the working class interests demands economic and political warfare against capitalism, even to achieve a decent wage or to secure a job.”(3) This comment describes eloquently how the economic requirements of capital have undermined the political integrity of the role of Social Democracy. But this situation has also had a retrogressive effect on the ability of the working class to organise to defend its interests. It has suffered serious defeats such as the miners’ strike in the UK during 1984-85. Hence it is problematical to suggest that the working class primarily needs an action programme to link its struggles with the aim of political power. Instead it also needs to elaborate a form of political economy which would provide an alternative to the aims of capital. Crucially this theoretical task would be connected to the elaboration of what could be a valid and progressive alternative to capitalism. In other words the possibility to transform defensive struggles into an offensive against the system requires that ideological renewal occurred within the working class. It is not sufficient to propagate a collection of action demands. These will not in and of themselves promote the development of class consciousness which is a prior condition for mass action. The point is that the decline of Social Democracy in the 1980's did not immediately promote the possibilities for the generation of the influence of revolutionary Marxism. Instead to some extent this political crisis also undermined the class consciousness of the working class. This meant the aim of defending the welfare state seemed to have been seriously undermined by the offensive of capital. The very gains of the post-war period for working people seemed to be in jeopardy. In this context the successful defence of the welfare state would have been an important victory for workers and the trade unions. But the problem was that nobody had an effective strategy to maintain these gains in the context of the attempts of capital to end the importance of the welfare state. Therefore the minimum programme was important to the interests of the working class because it concretely meant maintaining the welfare state. To have successfully opposed the attempts of capital to end the importance of the welfare state would have been an important victory that would have then generated the possibility to strive to realise more ambitious demands by means of the class struggle. But instead of this development, the forces of social democracy adapted to the neo-liberal agenda of capital. The result was that the remnants of the welfare state were reduced to the expression of the interests of the economic system. This situation led to demoralisation within the working class movement, and as a result there was a general shift towards supporting the influence of reactionary views within society.

Consequently we have to ask ourselves whether the re-elaborated transitional and action programme of the LRCI sufficiently recognised the importance of defending the welfare state in the reactionary period of the 1980's? Was its action programme sufficiently aware of this issue? The point is that it is one thing to argue that the programme created is in the continuity with the principles of the Marxists of the past. But it is another thing to have been successful in developing a perspective and strategy that was relevant for the tasks of the present moment. In Western Europe and the USA the primary aim was to defend the social gains of the post-war period. This meant defensive tasks were a crucial aspect, and it could be argued still are, of the ability to be successful in the class struggle and to then go onto the more ambitious attempt to challenge the dominant power of capitalism. Instead in what seems to be a complacent manner it is argued that: “Even the proletariats of the most highly developed countries increasingly needs a programme that links the most immediate defensive struggles with the main task of the epoch, the struggle for working class power. To advance the spontaneous struggle towards socialist goals a bridge is needed. The programme of transitional demands is such a bridge.”(4) We can formally agree with this view, but we have to ask does this approach sufficiently address the issue of the actual balance of class forces? What is being suggested is that immediate tasks are not merely of secondary significance, or a prelude to more ambitious struggles based on the role of transitional demands, but instead unless the defensive struggles can have some form of success, such as effectively defending the public services, and realising a pay rise, it will not be possible to raise transitional demands which culminate in the aim of workers control. Indeed it could be argued that if the labour movement can force a reactionary government to actually implement measures to promote the role of the welfare state, this would be a great victory. This means that the minimum programme is not irrelevant, but instead upholding the minimum aims will promote the development of a class consciousness that is able to facilitate a struggle around the implementation of transitional demands. It is this point which seems to be ignored by the emphasis of the LRCI on the role of the action programme. Hence they do not sufficiently recognise the connections between the defensive and offensive within the class struggle.

However it would be unfair to suggest that the programme does not have some understanding of the above point. Thus it comments: “The proletariat worldwide does not yet face the stark alternative of either taking power or seeing the destruction of all of its past gains. Nevertheless in many countries, and indeed whole continents, the crisis of leadership does reach such a level of acuteness. Even in countries where this is not so a chronic crisis afflicts the workers organisations, bringing about defeat, stagnation and even decline as a result of the repeated betrayals of the reformist leaders. Capitalism's inability to meet the basic needs of millions makes it both possible and necessary to transform the defensive struggles of the workers and poor peasants into the struggle for power.”(5) But the problem with this comment is that its emphasis is on the role of the opportunist leaders of the working class means that what is underestimated are the present difficulties of developing class struggle. The point is that whilst the reformists have undermined the generation of mass opposition to the ruling class, there is also an ideological problem. This means the ruling class are winning the ideological struggle to imply that the welfare state is a luxury that can no longer be afforded. The role of Social Democracy, and many of the trade union leaders, was to accommodate to this view. In this situation the ability of the workers to mobilise against capitalism was undermined. Therefore it was vital that Marxism promote the arguments that the welfare state was a vital aspect of society. The advance of this argument would then have led, as it does now, to the possibility for militant action to defend the public services. The success of this defensive perspective would then create the basis for more ambitious mobilisation to support transitional demands. But the LRCI does not seem to recognise this practical logic and instead underestimates the importance of defensive tasks.

Such a problem is indicated by the following comment: “By the onset of the second recession, that of 1979-82, the existing leaderships had successfully demobilised working class resistance, opening the proletariat of the imperialist countries to a decade of austerity, anti-union laws and attacks on democratic rights. In government the traitors were only too happy to preside over and to initiate these attacks. Thus in the 1980's the crisis of working class leadership took the form of the inability of the working class to resist the attacks of the Thatcher-Reaganite economic liberals with its own existing parties, unions and politics. With the discrediting of Keynesian, social-liberal welfarism, with its “mixed economy” and state intervention in the economy, the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties are thrown into ideological and policy crisis. The bourgeoisie does not want their old programme, and at the same time, that programme is pitifully inadequate to meet the needs of a working class hit by austerity and unemployment. The trade union bureaucracy cannot mount effective resistance to the attacks.”(6) This analysis of the situation was generally accurate, but what it underestimates was the significance of the progressive gain of the welfare state. One of the most important aims of the working class should have been its defence. This does not mean promoting illusions about the importance of Keynesian economics, but instead the working class should have and still should, utilise militant action in order to defend the role of what remains of the welfare state. Hence successful struggle in this regard would promote the possibility to develop more ambitious struggles that aim to end capitalism. This dynamics is not recognised by the LRCI. Instead they blur the distinction between defensive and offensive struggles in terms of implying that what is required is revolutionary leadership of the working class. Thus it is not understood that only if important defensive tasks are resolved will the morale and the consciousness of the working class improve. If defensive struggles lead to victories of the working class this will mean that confidence in its social power will be generated. The balance of class forces will start to favour the workers and against the interests of capital. In this context, the Marxist forces will gain support for an action programme of transitional demands. But this dynamic of the class struggle is not recognised by the LRCI. Instead they effectively ignore the importance of defensive tasks, and consider them part of a reactionary minimum programme. In other words what is not understood is how the minimum and maximum programmes relate and connect to each other. In this context the defence of the welfare state by the working class against its undermining by the representatives of capital would be a significant victory in the class struggle. Only then would it be possible to advance towards the realisation of the overthrow of capitalism.

However when discussing the dynamics of the transitional method the formal importance of defending gains is outlined: “Only such a programme can ensure that the gains made by the masses in this or that partial struggle, are built upon and consolidated …..Only such a programme can resolve the fundamental contradiction that afflicts the international workers movement: on the one hand the readiness of the masses to defend their gains, and even take the revolutionary offensive; whilst on the other, established leaders are still capable of demobilising and betraying these same struggles.”(7) The problem with this comment is not that it is wrong about the dynamics of the class struggle, but instead it still underestimates the scope and importance of the role of defensive gains. What is crucial in this context is the prospect for undermining the very influence of the labour movement within society if the ruling class can undermine the gains it has made within capitalism. Thus the working class should begin from a position in which its defence of the welfare state should be more effective than in the past. The slogan should be 'Defend the NHS and the other public services, and force the government to maintain the welfare state'. In this context the following comment of the programme is welcome because it appears to accept the importance of immediate and defensive struggles: “A Transitional programme strives to address this subjective weakness by building a bridge for the masses between their immediate defensive struggles and the struggle for socialist revolution. This bridge takes the form of an interlinked series of demands which, in their entirety, constitute an overt and direct challenge to capitalist rule. But revolutionaries are not sectarians. They fight for minimum demands, and in every partial struggle revolutionaries are the most thorough and most meticulous tacticians and organisers. We stand in the front line trenches of every struggle of the working class, no matter how partial. For this reason it would be false to counterpose the transitional programme to the existing struggles of the masses as an ultimatum.”(8) But whatever the merits of this comment in terms of its strategic clarity, it still does not recognise the importance of the role of the defensive in relation to the possibilities of the class struggle. If the welfare state could be maintained despite the attempts of capital to undermine it and establish the complete logic of the market, this would represent an immense victory. Such a situation would change the balance of class forces in favour of the proletariat. Only then would the working class become receptive to the validity of transitional demands which posed the importance of a revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Thus the LRCI programme is wrong to define structural reforms of capitalism as being an opportunist illusion. Instead the very mass action of the working class can realise the ability to confirm the modification of capitalism in a progressive manner in terms of the consolidation of the role of the welfare state. It could be argued that the very offensive of capital since the early 1980's has meant that the defence of the welfare state has become an illusion. Thus we can only defend public services by the overthrow of the very domination of capitalism. But reality does not have this dynamic. Instead we know that the very erosion of the achievements of the welfare state has demoralised the working class. This situation has meant that militant action in order to defend the interests of working people becomes less likely in these unfavourable circumstances. What would truly improve the prospects of the class struggle would be a militant campaign to defend the NHS and the public services in general. The demand should be the expenditure of billions in order to defend the NHS. We should also call for the NHS and the public services to be administered by their workers and those who have to use their services. Hence what begins as an immediate and modest defensive demand acquires transitional qualities. The realisation of the stability of the welfare state becomes the beginning of the raising of the issue about who should administer and organise society – the forces of capital or labour? In this context the issue of workers control becomes a practical and no longer an abstract issue. The very balance of class forces has been changed in a manner in which it is possible to promote transitional demands in a credible manner. In this context what has become a militant mass movement can demand of any future Social Democratic government that it provides the funds to develop and improve the welfare state. Furthermore, in this situation of the advance and success of the working class it will be possible to raise the aim of socialism in order to fully realise the promise of the welfare state.

But, in contrast, the programme of the LRCI outlines the logic of transitional demands in a manner that is in advance of the existing consciousness of the working class: “The demands do not depend for their correctness on their acceptability to the reformist consciousness of the masses; nor are they invalidated if the capitalists...are forced to grant such demands. Secondly, transitional demands seek to organise the masses independently of the open political representatives of the bourgeoisie and their reformist agents within the labour bureaucracy.”(9) This view is an abstract schema. What is more important, and yet practical but not unprincipled, is to put our leaders to the test. We should demand that they lead the struggle to defend the welfare state. If they reject such a role the situation becomes receptive to the development of a more independent and principled leadership, which would emerge from within the working class. The point being made is that the role of the defensive struggle is of strategic importance. It has been the inability of the working class to defend past gains which has enabled the forces of capital to reinforce their domination over society. In this context the working class has become demoralised and trade union influence has declined. What would transform this situation would be a successful struggle to defend the welfare state. More people would join the unions, and the working class would develop its level of self-esteem and confidence. In this context people would become receptive to the role of transitional demands. There would be a mass audience for this perspective. But this dynamic seems to have been underestimated by the writers of the LRC programme. Instead they still present the significance of transitional demands in terms of an abstract schema that is not connected to the economic and political situation which developed in the 1980's. There is no convincing elaboration of the empirical reality of the class struggle despite the outline of some important principles of how to develop opposition to the present system.

Nevertheless despite these criticisms the programme does outline what should be the strategic aim of transitional demands, the struggle for workers control: “Mobilised around these demands..... the working class challenges the rule of the capitalists...To this end each transitional demand embodies the fight for some element of direct workers control over the capitalists.”(10) This situation is of strategic importance because it establishes the issue of who should control the workplace: the forces of capital or labour. The programme also makes the point that the realisation of workers control prepares the working class for its ability to organise production under socialism. Thus the realisation of this demand is what is truly transitional to socialism. By effectively undermining the domination of capital the forces of labour indicate an alternative and emancipatory basis for organising the economy. This situation indicates that the working class has become genuinely revolutionary and is receptive to the task of replacing capitalism with the alternative of socialism. This is why workers control should be the major aspect of a strategy of transitional demands. But we have also made the point that such a development is not likely to occur unless the working class becomes sufficiently conscious to organise to defend the welfare state. Such an important success will make it receptive to the task of increasing its ambitions and to therefore strive for transitional demands such as workers control. But only the success of the initial defensive aim will make workers receptive to recognising the relevance of transitional demands. Thus we can argue that the recent historical experience of capitalism has indicated that there is important period in the class struggle which occurs before it is possible to raise transitional demands in a relevant manner. The character of the offensive of capital against labour has indicated the primary necessity to defend and improve the welfare state. Success in this regard will create more favourable conditions in which it is possible to gain support for transitional demands.

The programme of the LRCI does make some immediate demands such as defending the right to work and enactment of a minimum wage. It also argues that wage increases should be sought for in order to protect workers from the effects of inflation, and it is necessary to fight for full pay as an unavoidable alternative if work is not possible. It also calls for free education and health service and public works in order to provide jobs. It calls for progressive taxation in order to provide the funds for these services. This is a welcome recognition of the necessity of advocating reforms, but unfortunately the aim of defence of the welfare state is not systematically recognised in this analysis. Hence these reforms are presented in an ad hoc manner, and not as an integral aspect of the development of the strength of the working class and of its ability to oppose the aims of capital. What is not understood is that if the working class was able to promote public works, and enforce a progressive system of taxation, this would mean that the situation had changed in their favour. The balance of class forces would favour the working class. On this basis it would be possible to advance towards the attempt to realise transitional demands.

The section on the trade union is detailed within the LRCI programme. It is outlined how the unions are generally dominated by a labour bureaucracy which attempts to mediate and compromise with the employers, but that the rank and file who are exploited by capital constantly attempt to go beyond the limitations imposed by their leaders. The role of the revolutionary party is to encourage the formation of rank and file organisation that can challenge the role of the bureaucracy. However, it is argued that the trade unions cannot replace the leading importance of the party: “Trade union organizations, by their very nature, must seek to unite the broadest layers. They are heterogeneous, including backward as well as advanced workers. They cannot replace the politically selected vanguard – the revolutionary party. Unlike syndicalists or industrial unionists we do not see the unions as end in themselves or as substitutes for the party and for workers councils. Only the party can represent the strategic interests of the entire proletariat. Only the party can channel the many rivers through which the class struggle flows towards the defeat of the capitalist system itself. Trade unions, even ones led by revolutionaries are but one of the many instruments for achieving our end – the socialist revolution. Only the triumph of the party and its programme in the unions, as in all other mass organisations of struggle, can guarantee a lasting victory for the proletariat against the profit system.”(11) However, this comment can be one-sided and dogmatic about the role of the trade unions. At various times the unions have a crucial role in the class struggle. For example, it has been the general inability of the unions to act effectively in the present period which has led to the serious undermining of the welfare state. The limitations of the union bureaucracy have enabled the offensive of capital against labour to be effectively victorious. Thus one of the most important tasks of the present is to strive to develop the influence of the rank and file of the unions. Only in this manner will it be possible to develop militant action to defend the interests of the working class. Indeed it could be argued that without this progressive transformation of the unions, the task of proletarian revolution will be immensely more difficult. Indeed it could be argued that the union bureaucracy is the most reactionary influence within the working class. It is this stratum that has accommodated to the policies of neo-liberalism and prevented any possibility of militant action by the working class, except in a few rare situations. Revolutionary Marxism is primarily weak because of its lack of influence within the Unions. But if a militant leadership of the unions could be created this would transform the situation. It would be possible to agitate more favourably for transitional demands, especially workers control.

In other words the most important task of the Marxists is to strive to advance the possibility of rank and file control of the unions. This development would not provide a guarantee of transition to socialism, but it would mean that this prospect had been immensely advanced. In this context the potential for militant action against capitalism would make considerable progress. A situation would be created in which the role of the unions would become an instrument of the process of the overthrow of capitalism. In this situation the importance of the party would not be to instruct the unions in their strategy but instead to provide ideological influence such as providing reasons to advance the aim of workers control of production. Hence it would not be an ideological aberration for the party to support the unions in the task of being the hegemonic agency of transition to socialism in the context of them having realised rank and file control. Obviously if this task is not realised, it may be necessary to develop an alternative perspective of how the process of proletarian revolution is to be achieved. The point is that the tactics of the revolutionary party have to be flexible, even if it is intransigent about its socialist aims.

For example, it could also become relevant to support the election of a genuine left wing influenced Social Democratic party like the Labour party of the UK under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. However, if the Labour party is to be true to its promises to regenerate the welfare state and to realise the aspirations of the people, it will still be necessary to have strong unions that promote the realisation of these aims. Furthermore, it will necessary to develop the role of revolutionary Marxism which can argue that reforms are not sufficient to improve society in an egalitarian manner, and that we should also progress towards the attainment of socialism. But how will the aim of the transformation of capitalism be realised? The programme of the LRCI makes the valid point that workers control should be the primary transitional demand. The realisation of this possibility, beginning with the veto by the workers of the aims of the capitalists, and including access to the business secrets of the bosses, is the basis to establish workers control which should be the prelude to the development of production in these terms under a workers government.

But the perspective of the LRCI does not recognise that this development begins within capitalism. It is suggested that viable workers control can only flourish in a situation in which the domination of capital over labour is ended: “The tendencies towards increasing state regulation in the epoch of imperialism has led various reformists and centrists to advance schemes for alternative production within capitalism. Workers have even been called upon to “manage” certain enterprises under the auspices of reformist or nationalist governments. Alternative planning under capitalism is a utopia. Of course in deep economic and social crisis we advance a plan of action for a revolutionary workers government as a solution to the crisis. But even this elementary plan, if it is to make headway against capitalist chaos and sabotage, must be grounded in workers control of production on a nationwide scale. To dislocate such a plan from a revolutionary struggle for workers control, to advocate workers management on the terrain of capitalist society, is to play the role of meek advisors to the bankrupt capitalist system. Workers control is not a means to achieve the socialist planned economy by stealth. It must rather fuel the revolutionary struggle for power in society as a whole and so serve as a pre-requisite for workers management once the revolution has triumphed.”(12)

This approach represents a rigid understanding of the strategic role of workers control. Primarily it is vital to recognise that the possibilities and momentum for workers control initially develops within capitalism. The increasingly militant possibilities of the class struggle lead the trade unions and the working class in general to question the continued domination of the enterprise by the capitalists. In this situation the workers can establish forms of control, and restrictions on the power of the capitalists, even though the economic system of private enterprise still remains in a dominant situation. Increasingly, the workers will attempt to promote greater controls on the process of production, and so will try to impose their aims within the enterprise. Only the successful realisation of this type of workers control will raise the possibility of the logical next development which is to promote the ultimate end of the lingering and increasingly formal domination of capital. All of these developments will occur within capital. Only if the workers are successful in these increasingly ambitious aims will the significance of the transformation of capitalism and its replacement by the creation of a workers government become apparent. Hence the character of workers control is that it is a process of increasingly ambitious moves within capitalism to replace the domination of the capitalist within the relations of production. Only when effectively new relations of production have been established will it be possible to consolidate this situation in terms of the connected development of the political power of a workers government. Thus it would be illogical to suggest that workers control is merely important in conjunction with revolutionary struggle. Instead it could be the vital prelude to the dynamics of an increasingly ambitious form of class conflict. Initially within capitalism the workers ask the crucial question: who should be the dominant economic power within the relations of production? If the capitalist is able to reassert domination then the process towards workers control will be defeated. But if instead the workers are able to establish their increasing influence over production the momentum will be created towards realisation of the ability to displace the importance of capital within economic activity. Only this gradual and increasingly ambitious process will determine the success of the attempt to establish workers control. Ultimately if success is achieved the role of the capitalist will become superfluous. But even in these conditions the bourgeois state may still be politically dominant. Hence the establishment of workers control has to be consolidated by the act of revolution and the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the formation of a workers government. In contrast to this perspective, the LRCI seem to minimise the importance of workers control and effectively consider it to be merely a secondary aspect of the creation of the workers government. Instead of this standpoint, it is vital to consider that the dynamics of workers control can be the crucial aspect of the realisation of successful class struggle.

However the approach of the LRCI seems to be contradicted by the fact that they also advocate the formation of factory committees within capitalism in order to promote the possibility of occupation of the enterprise and a challenge to the economic power of the capitalist: “They represent – as the factory occupation does – a challenge to the mangement's right to manage, to the sacrosanct nature of private property and to the power of the union officials over the workers. They establish a regime of dual power within the factory and their presence demands an answer to the question of who rules the factories, the workers or the bosses? The factory committee is compelled to advance, ever more consciously the fight for workers control.”(13) This perspective is a more realistic understanding of the possibility for the development of workers control within capitalism. The very militancy and democracy of the factory committee means that it has increasing aspirations for workers control. Either progress is made in these terms, or else the domination of the capitalist becomes reinforced. However, unlike the apparent ambiguity of the LRCI concerning the strategic importance of workers control, we can suggest that it is a vital development if the class struggle is to go beyond defensive limitations. Workers control is of strategic primacy in the class struggle because it represents the most important challenge to the domination of capital within the relations of production. Hence it is a vital precondition for transition to a different type of society, or facilitating the political power of a workers government. However, because of the ambiguity of the LCRI's view this recognition of the strategic importance of workers control is not consistently acknowledged. This is possibly because they consider that the process of proletarian revolution can only be successful under the leadership of the party.

The LRCI does outline a minimum programme in the sense that it is for the nationalisation of important industries within capitalism, and against privatisation. It also suggests that this development should occur under workers control. Hence implicitly, we have the outlines of a policy for a left reformist government to implement. If such an administration was to nationalise important industries, and to accept the possibility of workers control, the basis for transition to socialism would be created. Hence we could argue that this should be the strategic emphasis of our programme. It would represent how we could generate the possibility of genuine advance towards socialism under a left reformist government: “Nor do we shrink from the call to expropriate whole sectors of industry and of key utilities (transport, fuel and water production) as a means of combating the anarchy of capitalist production. Every gain made by the workers in forcing through such expropriation poses to them the need for the expropriation of further sections of the economy, to prevent those industries seized by the workers from being sabotaged by the capitalists.”(14) This development has never seriously occurred because of the limitations of left reformist governments. But it is a possibility if they were prepared to nationalise strategic sections of the economy. We should argue as Marxists that such a development could express the potential of promoting socialism if it is connected to the realisation of workers control. In this context, Marxists would suggest that the economic plans of the Corbyn led Labour Party could acquire this dynamic if their plans for increasing state intervention in the economy were connected to the role of workers control. But it is still necessary to contend that the possibility of the realisation of socialism itself cannot be confirmed by a collection of reforms but instead requires that a workers government is formed. Only then can a planned and socialised economy be established.

The LRCI programme advocates the formation of armed militias in order to ensure that the revolutionary forces can overcome the repressive actions of the ruling class trying to defend its system. This measure represents a cautious necessity, but we have to emphasise that the aim of the class struggle is that the process of revolutionary change should be peaceful. We believe that people accustomed to the traditions of bourgeois democracy would not support any change that was generally not of a peaceful character. This aspect should go alongside the view that the process of transition to a new society should be as democratic as possible. Hence in this context it is to be hoped that the forces of the bourgeois state could accept the process of change. It would be detrimental if civil war was to occur. In other words a situation is reached in which the organs of revolutionary power have acquired popular and democratic legitimacy, and it would be possible to realise peaceful change in this context. This possibility would be advanced if the process of workers control has reached an advanced stage which means that the ability to displace the economic power of capital is occurring. Thus a situation is realised which would mean that the credibility of capitalism is being replaced by the imperatives and requirements of the increasingly powerful socialist system that has emerged from within the present economic system. In this context, the ability of the bourgeois state to repress the forces of change has been undermined and instead the transition to the hegemony of a revolutionary government is occurring. Obviously nothing can be guaranteed, and a smooth process of change might not occur. But the aim should be to realise a process of peaceful change to socialism. This development will still be revolutionary in its consequences.

 The LRCI argues that opposition to imperialist war should be defined in the following manner: “Revolutionary defeatism is based on the principle that the main enemy of the working class is the bourgeoisie in its own country. The defeat of its own imperialist bourgeoisie as a result of the revolutionary struggle of the working class for power, is a lesser evil than the victory of ruling class as a result of class collaboration and the sacrificing of proletarian independence during the war.”(15) This view has become dogmatic. What has generally been the aim of anti-war movement's has been to promote the aim of peace. Indeed we can suggest that the militaristic aims of the imperialist powers can best be opposed if opposition aspires to establish a situation of peace. In practice no-one supports the rigid standpoint of revolutionary defeatism, and the preferred victory of the opponent of the given imperialist power. Instead we can suggest that the realisation of peace as the alternative to imperialist inspired war can promote the radicalisation of society and the advance of the struggle for socialism. However, this approach does not mean that we should reject support for the defence of an oppressed country if war does occur. But the point is that if peace is established the horrors of war are avoided. This can only be to the interests of the oppressed nation. Furthermore, the progress of peace can only be to advantage of the process of trying to realise socialism.

It is also not opportunist to support the aim of disarmament. We should advocate that the major powers engage in a process of nuclear disarmament. To the LRCI this perspective represents illusions that the bourgeoisie will agree to reduction of their military arsenals. But the point is that we should support mass campaigns for disarmament which attempt to apply popular pressure on various powerful countries in favour of this approach. This aim may not succeed, but it still can have an ideological usefulness in that it indicates that only socialism is based on a commitment to world peace. Thus it is not merely the aim of pacifists to promote a world based on peace. Instead this aim should be part of the programme of socialism. Indeed this point is accepted by the LRCI, but they indicate it in a contradictory manner: “We must use the progressive desire of workers for peace to fight for such demands within the workers movement, whilst constantly warning against the bankrupt strategy of pacifism.”(16) The point is that we do not have to share the views of pacifists in order to co-operate with them in a struggle for peace. We can establish a united front in these terms. Nor do we deny the actuality of the inherent militarism of the imperialist powers if we struggle for peace. Instead it will be the effectiveness of mass movements that will determine if the aspiration of peace is able to realise any level of success in international terms. In contrast the LRCI seems to have a pessimistic view that peace is not possible under the imperialist form of capitalism. But we should argue that this issue is not rigidly decided in favour of militarism and instead successful struggles for peace can be realised.

The LRCI programme also has a very critical view of bourgeois democracy. It contends that this political system is mainly an expression of the aims of ensuring the domination of capitalism in political terms. Hence: “Through parliament a democratic facade is erected to disguise the actual dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. By means of parliamentary democracy the bourgeoisie throws sops to the working class, grants it the right to vote every so often and incorporates its leadership into the administration of the bourgeois state.”(17) This point can certainly be confirmed in normal times, and the process of election to the various Parliaments is usually based on ensuring that bourgeois or reformist parties become the government. Only in exceptional situations do genuinely left wing parties achieve victory, as in relation to that of Chavez in Venezuela. Nevertheless bourgeois democracy, despite its inherent limitations, is not a charade. It means that people have freedom of expression and the right to form political parties. Thus it is possible to agitate in favour of socialism despite the bias of the political system. Thus the rights of bourgeois democracy should be defended and extended in terms of developing what could become a favourable terrain to organise in favour of a revolutionary alternative. It is also necessary to remember that the major reason that the political system upholds capitalism is not because of the role of bourgeois democracy but is instead the influence of bourgeois ideology, which promotes a conception of political economy that suggests that what is permitted are measures to uphold and defend the present economic system. Thus the importance of bourgeois democracy is that it enables the open promotion of ideas in favour of socialism. In this context, Marxists should defend the continuation of bourgeois democracy against any reactionary attempt to end it and replace it by a system of repressive dictatorship. However, it is also unlikely that a genuinely revolutionary party will be elected to power within the present political system. Instead the most likely manner in which the advance of the forces of socialism will occur within capitalism is in terms of the growing influence of the process of workers control and the formation of workers councils. In this context Marxists should promote the influence of these revolutionary organs of power, and advocate that they seize power and establish a workers government. But in order to establish the validity of this new revolutionary administration it will become necessary to hold elections to a Constituent Assembly based on the role of universal suffrage. This will mean that the process of the revolutionary transformation of society is provided with the credentials of democratic vindication. Thus the process of bourgeois democracy will become an aspect of what is socialist democracy. Consequently the character of bourgeois democracy will be transformed under these new conditions rather than ended.

This means that we cannot agree with the following view of the LRCI programme: “The strategic task of the revolutionary vanguard lies in the destruction of all forms of bourgeois rule, including the democratic form. To this end we strive to expose the parliamentary sham to the working class and build organisations of proletarian democracy.”(18)This view may be true for the beginning of the revolutionary period, but it cannot become the justification to reject the continued importance of universal suffrage. This is the most basic democratic right, and so must be upheld by a workers government if a valid political system with popular legitimacy is to be established. For example, the right to form political parties, which should be upheld by a workers government, ultimately implies that the popularity of these organisations will be tested by the role of the ballot box. The alternative to this situation is the formation of a single party state which will have an inherent tendency towards the realisation of the rule of a bureaucracy. In order to undermine this possibility there is no principled alternative to the role of a Constituent Assembly. Therefore the approach of the forces of revolutionary Marxism should change in accordance with the development of the class struggle. On the one hand we can agree with the LRCI when they claim: “Parliaments and elections cannot transfer power to the working class....Revolutionaries use parliaments as a tribune for addressing the masses.”(19) But once the success of the revolution has occurred, this critical attitude towards bourgeois democracy can be modified. Instead the most progressive achievements of bourgeois democracy can be incorporated into the political process of an emerging socialist democracy. Under new conditions it will be possible for democracy to flourish. It would be contradictory if democracy was restricted to the economic sphere. Instead it also has to be expressed politically in terms of a credible democratic system with open competition between parties of different views. This includes the right of bourgeois parties to stand in elections. In contrast banning of parties because they are opposed to socialism will not uphold the interests of socialism but instead could result in the tendency towards the formation of a one party state. Such a situation cannot advance the interests of the development of the interests of the working class, who require political freedom as much as anyone else.

The LRCI also contend that without having illusions in any reformist or centrist forces it may be principled to call for a critical vote to them in the following terms: “We call on you to fight to force your leaders to carry out measures clearly in the interests of the workers, to break with the bourgeoisie.”(20) However, this tactic should be clarified and made more precise. It would obviously be opportunist to advocate votes for a right wing reformist formation that only had the intention of upholding the capitalist system. Instead the tactic of critical support becomes valid in relation to a left wing type of Social Democracy which is intent on introducing serious reforms to capitalism. In this context we should call upon it to form a genuine workers government which would promote measures to end the continued domination of the present system. Thus we should not merely call for votes to reformist parties because they presently have trade union support, or the connected allegiance of the working class. Instead in these circumstances we should propose only votes for a revolutionary type organisation, or abstention. So the question of a critical vote for reformists should not be absolute, or applied in all circumstances. Thus we would not advocate a vote for the Blair led Labour Party, but we can advocate a vote for the Corbyn leadership of this same party. In this context we would suggest that the minimum programme of reforms of the present Labour party should become the basis to advance towards the promotion of a genuine workers government. However in order to effectively advance this aim we would suggest that it is vital that the working class mobilise in favour of the revolutionary transformation of society by engaging in an independent struggle for workers control. The possible progressive role of a left wing Social Democratic government does not mean that we should dilute our perspective about the urgency of the workers to mobilise to advance their class interests.

The LRCI programme is right to maintain that the forces of Social Democracy are most likely to betray the interests of the working class rather than form a genuine workers government: “Only when a government of the workers parties is forced into a real struggle against the bourgeois order by the masses and obliged to base itself upon the mass organisations up to and including arming them, can it be regarded as a revolutionary workers government.”(21) However, we should emphasise that the most important aspect of the process of the transformation of society in this context will still remain the progress of the process of workers control of production. This development is the most reliable indicator that genuine change is occurring. Hence to some extent the working class still needs to maintain its sense of independence from the 'workers government'. In the last analysis we cannot rely on the forces of Social Democracy to lead a principled struggle against capitalism. Only if the working class applies constant pressure on the workers government will it be possible to suggest that capitalism is being genuinely opposed. Thus we can say that the LRCI programme is right to suggest that a reformist led workers government is not a reliable stage towards the overthrow of capitalism. Instead what we can say is more effective is that the working class develops its own economic and political power, and in this manner is able to effectively establish its supremacy in the class struggle. In contrast even left reformism is likely to ultimately compromise with the forces of capitalism. Indeed its ideological limitations mean that its policy is one of improving the present system rather than striving for socialism. Thus we must be cautious about raising the demand for a workers government under the leadership of reformists. Instead it would be generally preferable to develop a strategy that was about promoting the principles of the self-emancipation of the working class, most crucially about the importance of workers control.

The LRCI programme contends that in periods of dual power when the proletariat challenges the ruling class for the domination of society, it is possible that workers councils develop which represent the increasingly revolutionary aspirations of the subordinated classes. It is suggested that this development should be the ultimate strategic aim of the revolutionary party because of the potential of these organisations to represent a challenge to the supremacy of the ruling class. This view seems to be valid because it has to be remembered that the Soviets in Russia expressed a tradition that was based on the experiences of the 1905 revolution. We would suggest that in general it is the struggle to generate the influence of workers control which is the most effective manner in which the domination of the capitalist class is undermined and increasingly replaced by the influence and important of the proletariat. This is not to suggest that we should be indifferent to the formation of workers councils, which represent an important expression of popular democracy, but what is then crucial is to combine the role of the workers councils with the struggle for workers control. In this manner the economic and political power of capital would be challenged and undermined. However, the question as to whether we call for all power to the workers councils depends upon the given circumstances. It may be more feasible and vital to maintain that what is primary is to strive to realise the complete logic of workers control and so displace the supremacy of capital in this manner. The point is our tactics should depend upon the circumstances.

The LRCI programme implies that workers councils are a superior expression of the will of the working class than the attempt to develop workers control; it is argued that: “They break down sectional barriers and put fighting class wide unity in its place. They have a territorial character drawing in all of the exploited and oppressed within a town or region. Through regular elections and recallability the most democratic form of representative organisation of the toilers in history is created. Free from pre-existing bureaucratic apparatuses they are immediately sensitive to the changes in mood, political outlook and militancy of the masses. Workers councils are the surest means for deciding the actual will of the struggling proletariat.”(22) This point can be true, but it does not mean that we should dogmatically advocate the formation of workers councils if there is no support for their development. Instead the spontaneous dynamism of class struggle will create its own form of democratic organisation, which may be either an expression of what has occurred in the past, or else represents new and novel forms of institutional aspirations of the imperatives of the class struggle. Hence it would be dogmatic to assume that the formation of workers councils is an inherent aspect of a militant movement. Only under certain circumstances should revolutionary Marxism advocate the formation of workers councils. What is strategically more important is to encourage the generation of the realisation of workers control. Hence it is dogmatic for the LRCI programme to effectively assume that workers councils will automatically arise in the context of dual power. Only the concrete dynamics of the given class struggle will express whether workers councils emerge. In contrast the increasing success of the promotion of workers council will be the most effective guide for expressing the level of readiness of the working class for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

The LRCI programme argues that the most effective type of insurrection is one led by the role of the revolutionary party which has won majority support in the workers councils. This was the model of the October revolution of 1917, but it would be dogmatic to suggest that it should be repeated. Instead the experiences of the class struggle indicate that the most effective expression of the maturing of the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism occurs when the workers engage in militant action to oppose the system. In this context we would advocate that the role of the revolutionary party is to provide strategic advice to an increasingly militant working class. For example, it is vital that no compromise of the attempt to realise workers control should be encouraged. Instead the role of the party should be to motivate the transformation of militancy into a conscious attempt to overthrow capitalism. This does not mean that the party instructs the working class concerning its actions. Instead guidance should be the form of leadership. The point is that without working class action any attempt to overthrow capitalism would be a coup and not a genuine revolution.

It may be argued that without revolutionary leadership the successful overthrow of capitalism cannot occur. But the problem with this view is that it has resulted in justifying the elitist standpoint that revolution should only occur with the permission of the party. This was the view of Stalinism in the 1930's, and it led to the most bureaucratic and reactionary view of what constitutes revolution. Instead we should reject any suggestion of elitism and therefore define a genuine revolution in terms of the self-activity of the working class. In this context the role of the party should be to advise and not instruct the workers. Hence the most effective form of class struggle would be one in which the workers are essentially able to create their own organisations of action. Thus we have to effectively reinvent the model of revolution and accept that the Bolshevik model may have its limitations.

The LRCI programme outlines how the era of colonial liberation has not led to genuine emancipation from the domination of imperialism. The various state capitalist regimes that were established in the post war period have not been able to assert the ability to create powerful economies. Nor has the land question been resolved, instead the rich landowners exploit an increasingly impoverished peasantry. There also has been the development of an often militant rural working class. But the conclusion made from the analysis of the agricultural situation is rigid and dogmatic: “We put forward a programme for the revolutionary expropriation of all capitalist plantations and rich peasant farms without compensation by councils of workers and poor peasants. We fight for a policy of state farms together with voluntary collectivisation for the small and middle peasant as a programme of socialist transition in agriculture.”(23) It is one thing to support the interests of the poor peasants, but this does not mean that the interests of the middle peasants should be effectively ignored. Instead it is necessary to emphasise the importance of state support for the middle peasant. This means that there will be a different policy concerning the rich peasants, middle and poor peasants. Only the latter will gain by a process of voluntary collectivisation, and the land of the rich peasants should be taxed instead of being compulsorily expropriated, whilst the middle peasants would gain from a situation of low taxation and favourable prices for their goods. In other words, the approach of a socialist society towards agriculture should be one of support and incentives for the different layers of peasants. A policy of what is compulsory expropriation will not attract the support of the peasants for the aims of the working class.

The programme of the LRCI outlines how national emancipation has not been realised under the rule of the national bourgeoisie. It establishes the importance of support for the aims of genuinely oppressed groups, and indicates the importance of democratic demands such as the role of the Constituent Assembly as an alternative to regime of repressive dictatorship. The conclusion is that the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution can only be consistently realised when combined with the approach of the proletarian revolution. But it is argued that despite the reactionary limitations of the national bourgeoisie it may be necessary to support them in an anti-imperialist united front: “But so long as the bourgeois or petit bourgeois forces have a real mass influence in the anti-imperialist struggle it is necessary for the working class to use the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front. This involves striking tactical agreements with non-proletarian forces at both leadership and rank and file level.”(24) The problem with this tactic is that must compromise the contrasting principle of upholding the political independence of the proletariat. In a united front there are a number of agreed objectives and aims. This will mean in practice that the organisations of the working class act in agreement with the aims of the national bourgeoisie. Hence the political integrity of the working class is undermined and instead the ruling class is considered to be a principled opponent of imperialism. The only way to reject this concession to opportunism is to reject the tactics of the united front. This does not mean that in specific occasions the organisations of the working class would provide critical support for the national bourgeoisie in opposition to imperialism. But such a circumstance would still allow for the independent propaganda and politics of the revolutionary working class organisations.

In the chapter of the LRCI programme on Stalinism the counterrevolutionary process of the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism is described, and the following conclusion is made: “Nevertheless the expropriation of the capitalist class and the suppression of the law of value meant that the property relations of this state defended were proletarian ones, albeit ones controlled by the totalitarian bureaucracy.”(25) Furthermore, this development meant: “They were carried out by the Stalinist forces as a defensive reaction against imperialism and as a pre-emptive measure against a proletarian social revolution. Thus, these bureaucratic social overturns were, at the same time, political counterrevolutions against the proletariat.”(26) It is admitted that what occurred was carried out by the forces of Stalinism in a reactionary manner and with no principled regard for the interests of the working class, and yet the result was the creation of supposedly bureaucratic workers governments and the formation of degenerated workers states. Hence the standpoint of the LRCI does not principally differ from the orthodox Trotskyist view that Stalinism in a contradictory manner can carry out a bureaucratic proletarian revolution. The only manner in which this inconsistent standpoint can be avoided is to accept that what occurred was not the formation of some type of bureaucratic workers state, and instead the Stalinists acted to create a distinct social formation based on the role of nationalised property. Thus the aspect of anti-capitalism involved had nothing in common with proletarian revolution, even in some type of bureaucratic form. It is not possible to have a credible creation of a workers state unless the working class has an active role in its establishment. Instead the view that a counterrevolutionary workers state was realised by the events in Eastern Europe is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction can only be resolved theoretically by the rejection of the concept of a degenerated workers state and instead it is accepted that the reactionary and anti-working class character of Stalinism is because of its promotion of a new form of exploitation of the producers on the basis of creating a new distinct social formation, or possibly state capitalism. It is accepted by the LRCI that the economies of Stalinism are not based on the democratic participation of the producers, and that the aims of the plan is in order to meet the needs of the bureaucracy. Hence it is effectively admitted that what is a command economy cannot be considered to be a type of workers state because it is administered in terms of the distinct interests of the bureaucracy. Thus it is accepted that the creation of a 'healthy workers state', which is the only valid form of this type of society, requires the direct participation of the producers in the running of the economy. Instead of this situation it is effectively admitted that a distinct bureaucratic class organise the economy in their own interests. Empirically speaking it is accepted that the bureaucracy are a privileged group that acts against the interests of the working class, but in an inconsistent manner this situation is then defined as an expression of the role of the degenerated workers state.

The LRCI programme was reluctant to accept the political logic of the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991. Hence the programme could not accept that the ascent to power of Yeltsin indicated the effective political restoration of the conditions that resulted in the end of the bureaucratic economy and its replacement by a situation that was orientated towards capitalism. They also failed to accept that the events in Eastern Europe led to political regimes that were also committed to restoring capitalism. It was argued that the defence of the gains of the workers states still had to be upheld, and that a process of political revolution was possible. This perspective did not recognise that bourgeois politicians were in the ascendency and that the working class was confused by the ideological view that democracy and freedom had become possible in this situation. It is argued by the LRCI that: “As bureaucratic planning disintegrates, only proletarian political revolution can defend, restore and then extend the planned property relations and thereby, prevent the revitalisation of imperialism.”(27) This comment ignores the fact that the balance of class forces was in favour of the restoration of capitalism. In this sense the programme of political revolution in order to maintain supposedly degenerated workers states had become outdated. The character of the struggle had become one of opposing the aims of what had become bourgeois regimes. Therefore the continued emphasis in the LRCI programme of opposing the bureaucratic plan of production had become antiquated. For example it could not be recognised that the formation of bourgeois type parliaments was an expression of the restorationist logic of what were the actions of bourgeois governments. The domination of Stalinism had been ended in a reactionary manner, but the LRCI programme was refusing to recognise the empirical truth of this situation! Thus to continue to define the political tasks of the working class in terms of the overthrow of the bureaucracy was rendered obsolete by rapidly changing events.

However, in the latter part of the chapter on Stalinism, there is a different type of emphasis and a reluctant acceptance that the process of the restoration of capitalism is becoming dominant: “Due to the accumulated betrayals of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the prolonged crisis of revolutionary leadership a new form of transitional period has opened up – the transition from degenerated workers state to capitalism. The task of revolutionaries is to re-orient their programme to guide against the remains of bureaucratic tyranny and disorganisation and against the restoration of capitalism.”(28) Thus it is finally admitted that: “Thus far the weaknesses of the forces consciously seeking to defend the planned economy has resulted in the seizure of power by a series of bourgeois restorationist governments.”(29) But it is also maintained in an ambiguous manner that it is still necessary to undermine the economy of the workers state for the process of the restoration of capitalism to be completed. This cautious view ignores the fact that if a bourgeois restorationist government is established it will act to promote the formation of ca capitalist economy. The point is that the process of the restoration of capitalism has a crucial political aspect, which the LRCI programme continues to underestimate. Hence the LRCI programmes continues to insist that what exists in Eastern Europe and the USSR are moribund workers states which no longer defend the nationalised economy, but where the process of the restoration of capitalism has not been completed. (This view was later modified by the LRCI) But we can say against this caution that in 1989 in Eastern Europe, and in the Soviet Union of 1991, bourgeois restorationist governments were established. This new political situation indicated that the process of the return of capitalism would occur because of these developments. In this situation the tasks of the working class was to defend its interests in the new situation. In contrast, the LRCI outlines an ambitious perspective of revolutionary struggle which has no immediate relevance. They call for the formation of a workers government, which defends a planned and nationalised economy, when the immediate and urgent task is to promote the ability of the working class to organise in order to uphold its interests against the aims of the restorationist governments to introduce unemployment and undermine living standards. Hence the LRCI programme declines into being a tract of unrealistic propaganda when its emphasis should be on how to develop opposition to the aims of the bourgeois restorationist governments. In other words, on the issue of the events between 1989 and 1991 the programme of the LRCI lapses into mere propaganda and often mythical scenarios. It does not rise to the challenge of these events, and instead tries to avoid the importance of the dynamic and rapidly changing events in terms of the static approach of the concept of the moribund workers states. The result is an underestimation of the actual success of the forces of capitalist restoration. This means that they do not have a relevant action programme to offer to the working class that would be based on opposing the effective restoration of capitalism. Instead the LRCI seems to be disorientated by events.

The LRCI programme outlines in principled terms the necessity to oppose all forms of oppression. However the following view could be problematic: “The family leads to a division within the working class which is maintained by the ideology of sexism.”(30) It is true that the family can uphold relations of male domination and inequality. But it is also true that the role of the family can be an expression of love, and it provides a basis of the possibility to promote the well-being of all its members. Furthermore, it is not possible to replace the role of the family with a more emancipated form of relationships in any future society. Thus our role should not be to criticise the family in an unrealistic manner, but instead to promote its development in a progressive sense. The point is that we should strive to realise equality in all forms of relations including the family. But we have to reject the dogma that implies the family is merely a bourgeois institution. Instead it is an aspect of all forms of society and still will be present in the socialist future. Hence our aim should be to improve the family and not to imply that it should be abolished, which is a totally unrealistic view. But apart from this criticism, the LRCI outlines what seems to be a supportable and principled analysis of the necessity to struggle against all forms of oppression, and so this chapter requires no further comment.

The concluding chapter of the programme of the LRC mentions that it is often necessary to develop fighting propaganda groups when Marxist organisations are small. This perspective is realistic because the alternative is to promote activist groups in which the level of theoretical knowledge is often small. The problem is that the programme of the LRCI is generally more ambitious than the political possibilities of the fighting propaganda group. This point is indicated by the perspective of struggling for proletarian power in Eastern Europe when the actual immediate task was to defend the interests of the working class in this situation of the restoration of capitalism. Indeed it could be argued that the programme has little awareness of how to uphold the interests of the working class in the context of the offensive of capital against labour. Instead the approach of the transitional programme is often outlined and elaborated in abstract terms.

But possibly one of the most important limitations of the LRCI programme is its claim that the Fourth International no longer has any organisational form because of degeneration into centrism: “In 1951 the Fourth International ceased to exist as a revolutionary organisation. In 1953 it ceased to exist as a united organisation when it split into warring centrist factions, none of which represented a political continuity with the revolutionary Fourth International of 1938-48”(31) This comment ignores the fact that within the dominant centrist character of the remnants of the Fourth International there are continual attempts to assert the principles of the Transitional Programme and its relevance in the contemporary era. These groupings represent the possibility to reconstruct the Fourth International on a principled basis. Hence it is sectarian and premature to claim that the era of the Fourth International is over. Therefore it is dogmatic to claim that all attempts to renew Trotskyism on a principled basis have failed: “Many have tried to re-establish a revolutionary continuity and yet in every case we know of this attempt has failed. None of these groups has been able to put forward a revolutionary programme for the masses, nor to implement it in struggle on a day to day basis or in the major revolutionary situations of the last forty years.”(32) This view is an expression of national centredness and the view that the LRCI based on the UK is the centre of the revolutionary. Hence they have been indifferent to attempts within other groupings to create principled tendencies. In other words without diluting the conception of a revolutionary programme it is a responsibility of Marxists to attempt to connect with other forces in order to reconstruct a principled Fourth International.

 A CRITIQUE OF THE MANIFESTO – FROM PROTEST TO POWER

In 2003, what had become the League for the Fifth International outlined a new manifesto, entitled: 'From Protest to Power'.(1) It contends, quite rightly, that the USA is the most important country and is able to dominate the world economy. But this situation is not uncontested, and people opposed American hegemony in the form of mass mobilisations against the war in Iraq. However, in a dogmatic manner it argues that it is possible to realise socialism because of technological advances, and that a perspective of revolution is needed to establish this type of society. But what is primarily ignored in this perspective is the role of class consciousness. We can only develop support for both revolutionary aims and socialism if the Marxist party is able to promote this standpoint in an effective manner within the working class. The point is that it is one thing to oppose the wars of the USA and the UK, it is still another thing entirely to develop the view that the possibility of peace requires the realisation of another type of society which is called socialism. The 'League for the Fifth International' calls for the unity of the anti-capitalist movements with the class struggle. This is a correct aim, but it will not be realised without the enhanced influence of Marxism. The role of activity will not in and of itself realise this possibility. Instead only the increased influence of Marxist theory can promote awareness of this political necessity. The problem is that the Manifesto has no sense of how to get to A to B. Hence we have to assume that the dynamics of activism will create the possibility to promote the class struggle. In this context it will be able to possible overcome the limitations represented by the forces of centrism and reformism. What is not recognised by the League for the Fifth International is that there is a new generation of activists who have little awareness of what is genuine socialism. Hence they are more inclined to oppose and protest against the limitations of the present, and yet are also reluctant to promote a genuine alternative to capitalism. The task of a Marxist party is to strive to resolve this problem in terms of promoting support for socialism. The discontent of the present can become the basis of conscious support for a revolutionary alternative, but this task will be difficult. It is possible that the Manifesto underestimates these difficulties.

The Manifesto outlines how the development of globalisation means a united world economy dominated by powerful transnational companies, and based on the expansion of trade and investment in terms of the interconnections of the world economy. But it also implies that this situation has not overcome the tensions of inter-imperialist rivalries: “Yet despite the scale of US domination, imperialism is not a system run by one power alone. It is a system of rivalry and competition for the world's markets by competing corporations. Only a few of them are fully international.... Economic rivalry forces the capitalists to use these states and blocs against each other. Trade conflicts burst out, struggles erupt over valuable economic resources. By the very nature of the system, rivalries will sharpen. Today's reluctant allies are tomorrow's bitter enemies.”(2) Thus in an ad hoc and ambiguous manner, the relationship between globalisation and imperialism is unsatisfactorily explained by the League for the Fifth International. What would be more coherent and systematic would be to outline how globalisation is increasingly the dominant trend within the world economy, but that in a secondary manner inter-imperialist tensions have not been fully resolved. However, this situation means that whilst international disputes can still occur, war between the major imperialist powers is unlikely. But the League is reluctant to clarify issues in these terms because it wants to cling to the dogma that inter-imperialist contradictions remain the major aspect of international economic and political relations. But this view cannot explain how for example the emergence of the economic power of China is connected to its economic dependency on the USA. The point is that the situation since 1945 has been based on the domination of the USA within the world economy. This development has not been contested by rival countries because to a large extent all capitalist countries benefit from globalisation. Hence it would be irrational for any of them to try and contest this situation by embarking upon war.

The Manifesto confidently outlines how the size of the working class is growing in international terms, and it’s truly a universal class that can challenge capitalism. It dismisses the view that the increasing importance of white collar workers is undermining the possibility for change in the advanced capitalist countries. Instead it contends that the dynamics of class struggle continue to promote the solidarity and collective organisation that can promote the possibility of a revolutionary challenge to capitalism: “The sharper the struggle and the higher the level of organisation achieved, the more readily the workers take up these ideas, which lay bare the real basis of capitalist society and chart the way forward to socialist revolution. While the economic struggle of the workers against the employers does not spontaneously challenge the roots of exploitation, it increases the organisation and confidence of the workers, bringing nearer the day when the communist part of the working class can succeed in uniting the workers movement in revolutionary political struggle against capital.”(3) The problem with this comment is that it underestimates the difficulties for the class struggle caused by the offensive of capital against labour since the 1980's, and the reactionary influence of bourgeois ideologies like nationalism. In this contemporary period it has been difficult to develop the solidarity described in the manifesto. It is also necessary to mention that struggle in and of itself will not be able to promote the process of advance towards socialism unless there has been an advance in class consciousness. In contrast, the Manifesto seems to imply that struggle has an inherent dynamic of progress towards socialism. This is a simplified view that ignores the actual complexities of trying to connect struggle with the aim of the overthrow of capitalism. For example, it is vital to remember that the very offensive of capital against labour raised serious questions about the capabilities of the role of the trade unions. Hence, even the task of struggle has become problematical because of this reactionary development. None of this serious situation seems to be recognised by the manifesto. Instead it dogmatically considers that struggle can promote more revolutionary aspirations.

The reactionary effects on the working class because of globalisation are mentioned in the manifesto, but mainly the emphasis is on the opportunist role of the trade union leaders in undermining struggle against this development: “The oppression that these workers suffer makes it impossible to organise them by traditional, tired, class collaborationist, bureaucratic methods. Wherever in the last two decades workers have effectively struggled against the bosses attacks, they have done it with new methods, new leaders and sometimes new trade unions.”(4) This view is optimistic because the general situation has been characterised by the ability of the union bureaucracy to undermine the very capacity of the workers to oppose the intention of the employers to challenge their existing material interests and rights. Hence the manifesto does not seem to have an understanding of the adverse balance of class forces in the period of the offensive of capital against labour. Instead in an ambiguous manner it implies that the workers are receptive to opposing the system, but have only been restricted by the role of the trade union bureaucracy. This view is a simplification of the situation, and underestimates the influence of a resigned acceptance by labour of the intentions of capital. However, the manifesto is right to suggest that the major problem in this situation is the reactionary role of the trade union bureaucracy and their perspective of class collaboration. The only principled alternative is to strive for rank and file control of the unions. Only if this aim is realised will the conditions become most favourable to the development of militant struggle against eh offensive of capital against labour.

The Manifesto outlines how the organisations of Social Democracy have accommodated themselves to the requirements of globalisation and uncritically carried out the programme of globalisation. We can only outline how this reactionary development has been slightly challenged in terms of the left wing led Labour Party of the recent period. But the Manifesto does not explain what should be the tactics of Marxists towards reformism. Instead it seems to express uncertainty on this point. In contrast, we would argue that there is generally no alternative to the promotion of Marxist ideas in an independent manner. The major thing is to have the organisational capacity to be able to advocate the ability to advocate Marxism without restriction. This means that it would only be under exceptional circumstances that the issue of joining a reformist party would be contemplated.

The Manifesto modifies previous views concerning the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which were outlined in the 1989 programme. It now accepts that the bureaucratic regimes were replaced by bourgeois administrations in 1989 in Eastern Europe, whilst in 1991 with the end of the Gorbachev regime a capitalist state was established. This modified view is an acceptance of what happened, and the hesitancy of the previous view is overcome. But there is no elaboration of the perspectives of how to oppose the new bourgeois regimes by the working class. This is a deficiency of the Manifesto.

The emergence of the anti-capitalist movement is outlined in the Manifesto. But it is explained that this movement has no coherent strategy or goals. It could become an expression of an accommodation to reformism, or in contrast become the ally of the revolutionary Marxist movement. The problem with the approach of the Manifesto is that it does not suggest how the limitations of the anti-capitalist struggle can be overcome. The major point to be made in this context is that Marxists should make the important point that the only alternative to capitalism is to aim for socialism. Hence it should be crucial to promote socialism in a constructive manner. Instead the Manifesto contends in a negative manner that: “But their programme is utterly utopian – they want to return to a localised small scale economy, based on either individual ownership or de-centralised co-operatives. Above all they reject the most important means for defeating capitalism – that the working class should take power.”(5) What this dogmatic view denies is that the genuine socialist society of the future can embrace the principle of economic variety. It will be possible to have sectors based on individual ownership and to promote the role of co-operatives. In this context these types of views could be embraced with a conception of socialism based on workers control and the extension of the principles of democracy. Hence we can reject a rigid and uniform view of socialism that would be unwilling to accept any validity to the ideas of the anti-capitalist activists. Instead in a flexible but principled manner we should try to obtain the support of anti-capitalist activists for the aim of socialism.

The perspective in the Manifesto of opposing the domination of the multinationals, the IMF, World Bank and WTO, can become the basis of a minimum action programme to unite anti-capitalist activists and the most militant sections of the working class. This approach will indicate that the capitalist system is based on the exploitation imposed by these large organisations and that the only alternative is to attempt to realise a democratic socialist society. Hence the logic of this action programme is to indicate that the only manner in which the economic power of the influential institutions of capitalism can be overcome is not by a modification of the system, but is instead by a systematic perspective for its overthrow. But the importance of this perspective cannot be realised by the Marxists merely attempting to instruct the anti-capitalists about the wisdom of our aims. Instead we attempt to establish the credibility of our aims in terms of common struggle against capitalism.

In the section, 'Fight Inflation and Deflation', the Manifesto makes the important point that the struggle for workers control should be extended to the role of consumption: “In conditions of hyper-inflation and mass unemployment, these organisations can promote the struggle to take over supermarkets and wholesale warehouses to save the poor and the unemployed from starvation. In the longer term, however, securing complete control over the necessities of life means establishing workers control over the food industry, the large farms, food processing plants, transport and the supermarket chains. In many countries, it will also mean establishing direct commercial control over the exchange of goods. It entails the building of workers and peasant committees to control food pricing and distribution.”(6) We should emphasise that such measures need not involve the abolition of the role of the market. Instead it is possible that the market be modified and transformed in terms of the interests of working people. This means that low prices of goods should be encouraged in the above situation in order that the surplus items of a typical capitalist market situation become sold. However, the market is still required in order to establish what goods are wanted by the consumer. The role of supply and demand will be vital if the continued ability to meet needs is provided in a situation in which the market is regulated by the intervention of workers and peasants committees. This means goods should still have prices, but it is to be hoped that the price level will be increasingly adapted to the incomes of the workers and peasants. In this manner the over-production of consumer goods should be overcome – there will always be a surplus – because goods will be priced in terms of the ability to meet a given level of demand.

The Manifesto outlines the policy of work or full pay, for a programme of public works in order to resolve unemployment. Progressive taxation would finance these projects. The problem is how realistic is this perspective if either left wing or socialist governments are unable to come to power? Under capitalism this policy is unlikely to be realised without the role of mass pressure. There is no alternative than to mobilise a mass movement in favour of these demands, but this vital point is evaded by the Manifesto. It seems to be implied that such an approach can be realised in general economic circumstances. In actuality, only when the working class is on the ascendency would such a policy become possible. In contrast, most bourgeois governments have been based on an economic approach of austerity. Their levels of public spending are miserly. Only the advance of workers control would enable a situation of enhanced public expenditure, in the manner described, to occur. The problem is that the Manifesto lacks an approach that would connect the present situation to making progress in the class struggle. What is called for is a minimum programme in order to defend the welfare state. But the manifesto fails to make this point. Instead it vaguely suggests that society should introduce measures like work or full pay and a programme of public works. This is not connected to a definite strategy of how to realise these policies in the present. This deficiency would be overcome by a definite approach of promoting the defence of the welfare state.

Instead of this type of definite minimum programme there is the vague call in the manifesto for the maintaining of nationalisation of any enterprise against the possibility of privatisation. This demand is obviously supportable but it is not explained that the possibility for this situation to occur will be in the context of the development of the class struggle, and in particular the increased influence of the importance of workers control. However, under the situation of a working class demoralised by the offensive of capital against labour the process of privatisation of the public sector has occurred without effective resistance. This adverse situation has indicated the importance of developing the influence of Marxism, and the related undermining of the domination of the trade union bureaucracy within the labour movement. In contrast to this vagueness the Manifesto outlines the significance of workers control with more clarity. It suggests that this process can begin with the trade unions increasingly challenging the decisions of the capitalist, and the creation of factory committees can mean that the very domination of the enterprise by the entrepreneur is increasingly rejected in favour of the establishment of workers control. A dual power situation is created which must be resolved: “The factory committee is compelled to advance, ever more audaciously, in the fight for workers control. If, it does not, it risks either disintegration or incorporation. Workers control must be a launching pad for a struggle of the workers to assert their rule not just in one factory or office, but across society as a whole.”(7) This comment seems to represent the fact that the Manifesto recognises the strategic supremacy of workers control. It outlines how the local struggle to establish scrutiny over the capitalist can become generated into a nationwide attempt to transform the economy and develop new relations of production. The striving for workers control represents the promotion of the principles of socialism within capitalism. It is recognised by the manifesto that the attempt to realise workers control can represent the development of class consciousness required in order to generate the creation of a new economic system. In this manner it represents the most important strategic aim of a revolutionary programme. In other words, the struggle for workers control expresses the highest dynamics of the class struggle and in this manner the most transforming act in relation to the enhancement of the realisation of socialism within capitalism.

The manifesto also outlines how opposition to imperialism is not advanced by political collaboration between the national bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations and the working class. But this aim is obscured by the continued support for the tactic of the formation of an anti-imperialist united front with the national bourgeoisie. It is argued: “It is a tactic: a staging post on the road not only to the defeat of imperialism but to the overthrow of the national bourgeoisie itself.”(8) What is not explained is the unfortunate possibility that the domination of the bourgeoisie would inevitably become the only possible form of the anti-imperialist united front. History is full of examples where the working class and peasants have been defeated because of the acceptance of a form of the anti-imperialist united front. Instead the only principled basis to defend the independence of the working class is to maintain its organisational and political differentiation from the national bourgeoisie. The perspective of permanent revolution, and its emphasis on the revolutionary leadership of the working class in the oppressed nations, should not be compromised by illusions that an anti-imperialist united front should be justified in certain circumstances. In other words the national bourgeoisie cannot be put under pressure to support progressive political aims. Instead they are the supporters of the aims of world capitalism. Thus the working class can only uphold its revolutionary and socialist objectives by supporting the only principled type of united front, one that is with the peasantry.

The manifesto outlines a number of supportable demands in order to develop unity between the workers and poor peasants. But the problem is that this analysis is one-sided because it ignores the importance of the middle peasants. They are a significant section of the peasantry who have a small plot of land on which they produce their basic goods for internal consumption and sometimes a surplus for sale as commodities on the market. One of the tasks of the working class is to develop policies that will encourage the generation of the prosperity of the middle peasants. In this manner an important ally to the working class will be created. Hence a workers government should act to redistribute the land of large landowners to the middle peasant, as well as encouraging the creation of co-operatives. The policy should also be to pay generous prices for the goods of the middle peasants by the state and to produce agricultural items that will promote their productivity. Any measures towards co-operative type production should be entirely voluntary and of a gradual character. However, in contrast to these limitations, the manifesto makes a good argument in favour of the right of nations for self-determination and the advocacy of the voluntary federation of states.

The section on oppression in the Manifesto is principled, but it seems to repeat the view in the programme that the family should be abolished. This is an unrealistic demand. Instead we should strive to promote the view that the family should be based on the principles of genuine equality. Indeed there is widespread support within society for this view. The programme also implies that feminism cannot be supported because it does not advocate socialism. But surely Marxists can promote, and often do, the development of socialist feminism? This is the most effective manner in which we can oppose bourgeois feminism and argue that the character of capitalism upholds the oppression of women. There are a distinct number of female theorists who identify with socialist feminism, and who could express an important contribution to the development of a revolutionary perspective for the liberation of women.

The Manifesto makes an eloquent argument against the wars of the imperialist powers, but it does not advocate the alternative of peace and socialism. Instead it upholds the antiquated tactic of revolutionary defeatism. In actuality, this perspective will gain few supporters, and instead the aspiration of the mass movements against war is for the end of military action by the imperialist powers and for the restoration of a situation of peace. The forces of Marxism should adapt to this mood, not by becoming pacifists, but instead by arguing that the only genuine basis to sustain international peace and end the possibility of war is by the realisation of socialism. To this end we should develop a programme for peace, which would outline that there is a realistic alternative to the situation of constant wars. What hinders the manifesto from adopting this approach is the dogmatic adherence to the views of Lenin concerning what constitutes a principled opposition to war. We would suggest that Trotsky in the First World War had a viable alternative to Lenin's standpoint in terms of his advocacy of a peace programme. He outlined how the ending of war and the realisation of peace would advance the struggle for socialism. We believe that this approach is still appropriate in the present, and could represent the basis to develop a modern policy for peace.

In the Manifesto a welcome perspective of a minimum political programme under capitalism is outlined in terms of the realisation of a democratic republic and the formation of a Constituent Assembly. This will be based on the accountability of elected representatives to the voters, and the principle of recallability of the deputies. However, what is not apparent is whether this Assembly would remain under socialism. We would argue that it should be an integral part of the political system in the new society. This is because ultimately the political validity of the attempt to construct socialism has to be tested in terms of a system based on the role of universal suffrage. This is still the most representative manner in which the strength of the system can be established. Indeed, it would be preferable to have annual elections, and the right of a certain percentage of the electorate to petition for a new election if government policies become unpopular. This democratic development will express the ability of the system not to become an unrepresentative one party state. This constant renewal of the system ensures that the political basis to promote socialism is being upheld.

The Manifesto makes the point that under certain political circumstances it may be principled to call upon reformist organisations to form a workers government. However, they also make the vital point that such a possibility does not mean that Marxists should reject the continued importance of political independence in relation to such a left wing government. Instead without any illusions it may be appropriate to call upon any possible Corbyn led administration to form of a workers government that aimed to transform society. However, the test as to whether such a policy was becoming successful would depend on the extent to which workers control was developing and being encouraged. However, the problem with any Labour government is that they are distrustful of any attempt by the people in taking the initiative. Instead they are in favour of so-called socialism from above. In contrast, Marxists are for socialism from below. This means that the level of advance concerning workers control will be the ultimate criteria by which to express the possibilities for transition to socialism.

But in the Manifesto it is still argued in an inconsistent manner – in contrast to previously expressed views about the strategic primacy of workers control – that the development of workers councils will indicate the receptiveness of society for socialism: “Workers councils are a direct challenge to the capitalists’ right to manage and control society. They represent the potential of an alternative state – one through which the working class can rule society. As long as they co-exist with a capitalist government, they will present a rival power.”(9) We would argue that such characteristics of workers councils can be more consistently and effectively realised by the development of the influence of workers control. This would be the most important manner in which it could be suggested that the process of socialism was developing within capitalism. But possibility what motivates the views of the Manifesto is that its adherents believe that the formation of workers councils dominated by the revolutionary party is the basis to realise an insurrection and the overthrow of capitalism. This was true for the Russia of 1917, but we would question whether it is also applies to developed capitalist countries. Instead the progress of industrial democracy would be a more effective test that the possibility of socialism was emerging within capitalism. The history of the Russian revolution, of a popular conspiracy led by a party, is unlikely to be repeated.

In the Manifesto the call is made to form a new Fifth International. This is the logical conclusion of the view that the Fourth International cannot be reconstructed. But it means that the justification of sectarianism is a logical expression of this viewpoint. We can only repeat the view that we consider that the renewal of the Fourth International on the basis of an elaborated programme is possible. It cannot be that the only principled revolutionary forces are the League for the Fifth International. Indeed we have tried to outline the flaws in its approach. Only genuine discussion between organisations can clarify how we can recreate a principled Fourth International.

DOES THE LEAGUE FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL SUCEED IN RE-ELABORATING A PRINCIPLED PROGRAMME?

In an article: 'The Transitional Programme fifty years on', Mark Hoskisson discusses the reasons why it was necessary to re-elaborate the programme adopted by the Fourth International of 1938.(1) He outlines how the initial perspectives of revolutionary possibilities in the aftermath of the imminent second world war had to be modified because of the reinforced domination of Stalinism and the ability of the USA to promote the economic recovery of world capitalism. The perspective that transitional demands would become immediately relevant in relation to the world war because the class struggle would pose revolutionary possibilities had to be reassessed in relation to the stabilisation of capitalism and the continuation of the importance of Stalinism. Trotsky's perspectives of revolutionary possibilities had relevance in relation to the unstable situation produced by the Second World War itself, but: “These perspectives required extensive modification after the war. The boom in the imperialist countries, the national struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the political revolutionary crisis in those countries where capitalism had been overthrown but where Stalinists ruled, all presented a different picture to that foreseen by Trotsky. This development required two things of Marxists. First they needed to elaborate new perspectives in the new conditions as a means of refocusing their programme. Second they needed to draw up a critical balance sheet of Trotsky's own perspectives in order to isolate and overcome any errors that were contained within them. In the event post-war Trotskyists proved incapable of fulfilling either task.”(2) Instead it was argued in a dogmatic manner that capitalism was still in decline, or that it had not undergone economic recovery, in order to maintain the perspectives of the Transitional Programme.

But Hoskisson also contends that this necessity of a reappraisal of perspectives does not mean that the methodology of the programme is flawed. He rejects any suggestion that Trotsky adapted to an objectivism that implied that history is on our side. Instead it was necessary to continue to vindicate the emphasis on the relation of transitional demands to the class struggle. The specific role of a transitional method is to indicate that it is possible to relate the immediate situation with the aim of socialist revolution, and in the context of given political crisis this approach can be expressed in action programmes: “But whatever the focus of a particular action programme, it must encompass within it the overall strategy of the TP. It must apply that method if it is to transcend the divide between the minimum and partial demands generated in every struggle and the goal of socialist revolution......For even within periods that are not in their general character revolutionary, the character of the imperialist epoch poses the possibility of taking steps, sometimes quite limited, towards the revolution.”(3)

In other words the method of the transitional programme is effectively considered to be relevant in all the various phases of the class struggle. The problem with this view is that it can underestimate the importance of defensive periods when the forces of capital may be dominant and assertive. Therefore instead of relating to these situations there will be a tendency to ignore their importance and the preference is to raise transitional demands that may not have relevance when compared to what may be more modest and limited tasks in the class struggle. Hence what could be ignored is the necessity to recognise that the class struggle has periods in which it is necessary to raise demands that are modest and yet could become the basis, if realised, in order to then raise the possibility to promote the importance of more ambitious transitional demands. For example, the present period of the offensive of capital against labour, in the form of austerity, indicates the significance of defending the welfare state and opposing effective pay restraint. If struggle around these issues was successful the balance of class forces may become more favourable. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International, whilst aware of the significance of the present offensive of capital against labour, does not have a conception of a defensive strategy. Instead in a vague manner it calls for defence of the public sector, but its emphasis is on transitional demands in its programmatic documents. Hence its continued emphasis on the strategic superiority of the transitional method means that the importance of the balance of the class forces is not understood. Ironically the dogmatism of the post-war Fourth International is being repeated under new conditions.

Consequently, the following comment is not related to the specific economic and political conditions. Instead it is argued that: “But our job as revolutionaries is not only to get the workers to act, it is to win in the course of such action to socialism. It is precisely this job of leading workers beyond their everyday demands by fighting for a transitional action programme......that we can win them to revolutionary socialism.”(4) What is not accepted is that whilst this possibility may be increasingly relevant in periods of an upsurge in the class struggle, it is not necessarily credible in more defensive situations when more modest demands may be important. But it is also vital to outline that if we did obtain victory in our defensive tasks, such as promoting the revitalisation of the welfare state, that would be a tremendous advance in the class struggle which would then make the role of transitional demands urgent and crucial in what had become an upsurge of the movement. In contrast, the dogmatism of the League of the Fifth International about the superiority of the transitional method means that they cannot connect its demands to the requirements of the class struggle as it is, as opposed to what we would like it to be. Hoskisson does outline that it is necessary to promote minimum demands that are the basis to generate support for transitional demands, but the problem is that such demands are vague and not related to the demands raised by the present offensive of capital against labour.

There is also an actual modesty in how Hoskisson considers the development of the class struggle, He considers it an accumulation of partial struggles that at some point become a general offensive against capitalism: “The ability to take partial struggles as a starting point, generalise them, and then express this generalisation through a concrete demand, is at the heart of the transitional method.”(5)

In contrast the apparently more modest struggle to defend the welfare state in order to become effective must develop as a general mass movement, and partial struggles, whilst welcome, are not sufficient. The point is that we are trying to formulate a strategy that is actually based on the conditions of class struggle in the present. In contrast, Hoskisson imposes an abstract schema onto reality. Only success in the defensive struggles in the present will create the political conditions for workers to become receptive to transitional demands. But Hoskisson dismisses this understanding as pessimism. If the working class is able to assert and impose its strength onto society in an initial defensive form, then this success will enable it to become receptive to the importance of workers control which then becomes the basis for transition to socialism. In contrast, Hoskisson raises the issue of workers control as a 'good idea' because of its importance to the transitional method. This abstraction is not related to the actual dynamics and possibilities of the class struggle at the present. He does make the point that the role of transitional demands is related to actual conditions, but this is precisely what he does not do. He does not have any analysis of the present situation in 1989, when the article was written. Hence his justification of transitional demands is based on abstract principles like: “The struggle for transitional demands, therefore has an integral logic. Each demand has as its essence this logic of propelling the working class further along the road of revolution.”(6) It would seem that the very role of the transitional method is mystical. It can because of its very revolutionary coherence somehow persuade the workers to act in an anti-capitalist manner. But a materialist view would suggest that only in specific economic and political conditions do transitional demands become significant. The task is to achieve the defensive tasks that make the situation receptive for the role of transitional demands. This requires an upsurge in the class struggle. In contrast, in order to defend the importance of the transitional method, in their various programmatic documents, the League for the Fifth International can only make the argument in their favour in terms of glossing over discussion of the actual situation. Instead in an idealist manner the argument made in favour of the role of the transitional method is that it is principled. It becomes a moral imperative rather than an expression of a strategy that becomes relevant at a certain moment in the class struggle.

The result of his idealist standpoint means that Hoskisson effectively argues that transitional demands have to be imposed onto the working class: “This spells out clearly that the job of revolutionaries is to lead the workers and not to politically adapt to their state of consciousness which in any case is not a fixed or stable thing but undergoes leaps and transformations brought about by crisis and struggle. Transitional demands have to be fought for if they are objectively necessary even though they may appear too advanced in relation to consciousness of the workers at the time.”(7) What is problematical about this comment is that the view that the primary conception of the objective situation implies that this should be expressed in terms of telling the workers what demands they should support. Instead of this elitism only a thoughtful understanding of the economic and political situation will provide a more reliable guide as to what is genuinely in the interests of the workers and so could potentially be expressed in popular support as an aim of struggle. In this context we would suggest that defence of the welfare state has this potential to motivate the development of a mass movement. Consequently, in terms of a potential genuine upsurge in the class struggle, the role of transitional demands would become relevant. Hoskisson cannot support such an approach because to him it represents an opportunist dilution of the status of the transitional method!

Hoskisson outlines how it has been necessary to re-elaborate the transitional programme in order to explain the post-war boom and other aspects that led to the stabilisation of capitalism and Stalinism. But, most crucially the League for the Fifth International have not developed in their various programmatic documents an understanding of the strategic lessons of the offensive of capital against labour which began in 1980. However, they did provide an analysis of the demise of Stalinism, even if was flawed in some important respects, and they also outline new advances in the perspectives of permanent revolution and the important issue of understanding the importance of oppression. But possibly the most important limitation of their work, as the above article of Hoskisson indicates, is the uncritical view of the transitional method itself. The League for the Fifth International does not seem to recognise that the class struggle itself establishes when transitional demands become relevant. Instead in an abstract manner it becomes an approach that is considered to be relevant for all times. Hence they are able to criticise what they consider to be the flawed perspectives of the transitional programme, but its method is considered to be immutable and omnipotent. Ultimately this idealism means that an abstract view of the class struggle is presented. It is not possible to outline the character of the class struggle in concrete terms unless it implies that the transitional approach may sometimes not be a relevant strategy. In contrast to the League the role of the transitional method has to be justified regardless of the balance of class forces. Primarily this means the League for the Fifth International ignoring the strategic lessons of the enduring offensive of capital against labour.

Consequently, we can suggest that despite the advances that the League for the Fifth International have made in the process of re-elaborating the Transitional programme, it is still necessary to conclude that this process is not complete. Instead it is especially important to develop an understanding of the strategy and tactics that is relevant in the present period when the balance of class forces have often been unfavourable for the development of mass movements. This does not mean that we should reject the relevance of the transitional programme in the manner of the British SWP. But neither should we reduce this document to being a dogma. Instead we should attempt to establish a precise understanding of the class forces which means that we are able to outline the demands that we raise in a manner that is relevant for the process of opposition to capitalism. This may mean combining the role of defensive, minimum and transitional demands. We would ultimately suggest that the most important transitional demand is that of workers control. If this aim is advanced it will represent the emergence of a genuine socialist society within capitalism, and will also mean that the working class is becoming receptive to the realisation of an alternative to capitalism. Hence we should be adamant that the major aim that we strive to advance is that of workers control.

However, despite the above and extensive criticisms of the programmatic documents of the League for the Fifth International, we suggest that they also represent a contribution towards the creation of a new programme. But we would also contend that this is true of other groupings that have emerged out of the centrist crisis of the decaying Fourth International. Hence one of our important tasks is to study other programmatic documents in relation to the task of re-elaborating the programme.

FOOTNOTES: (From the League for a Fifth International website)

(1)Programme of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International(1989)

(2)Chapter one p1

(3)ibid p2

(4)ibid p2

(5)chapter two p1

(6)ibid p3

(7)chapter three p1

(8)ibid p1

(9)ibid p1

(10)ibid p1

(11)ibid p5

(12)ibid p6

(13)ibid p6

(14)ibid p9

(15)ibid p11

(16)ibid p12

(17)ibid p12

(18)ibid p13

(19)ibid p14

(20Ibid p14

21)ibid p15

(22)ibid p17

(23)Chapter four p6

(24)ibid p10

(25)Chapter five p2

(26)ibid p3

(27)ibid p7

(28)ibid p15

(29)ibid p15

(30)Chapter six p3

(31)Chapter seven p3

(32)ibid p5

(1)League for the Fifth International: From Protest to Power: A Manifesto for World Revolution

(2)globalisation page 1

(3)The universal class p2

(4)Trade unions p1

(5)Anti-capitalist Movement p1

(6)Fight Inflation and deflation p1

(7)Workers control p1

(8)Strategy and Tactics in the Semi colonies p2

(9)Workers Councils p1

(1)Mark Hoskisson: The Transitional Programme fifty year on

(2)ibid p5

(3)ibid p9

(4)ibid p10

(5)ibid p11

(6)ibid p11

(7)ibid p13