

A Transitional Program for Black Liberation



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The document presented here, 'A Transitional Program for the Black Liberation Movement,' is a draft resolution presented by the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party to the members of the party for discussion and adoption by the Party's convention to be held this fall.

Along with other resolutions and documents, this resolution is being considered by the Party membership as part of its pre-convention discussion which is now taking place. We publish it here with the view that it will prove of interest and value to our readers, particularly those involved in the black liberation struggle.

Our pages will be open to discussion of the resolution and we welcome comments on it, either about the specific proposals included in the program or about its general conceptions. Needless to say, pro and con views are equally welcome.

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A transitional program for black liberation

It is becoming more and more clear to increasing numbers of Afro-Americans that nothing less than a revolution in this country will bring about the liberation of black people. As a result, a great deal of discussion is going on over how to make a revolution and how to relate present-day struggles and demands to the goal of changing society as a whole. In providing answers to these questions, the experiences of the rest of the world revolutionary movement can be immensely helpful. They teach that the most effective road to revolutionary victory is through developing a rounded program of mass struggle—and organizing a mass political party around militant action on that program.

How can these lessons best be applied at the present stage of the struggle for black liberation in the United States? That is the all-important question this document proposes to discuss and answer.

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What do the developments of the past 15 years demonstrate? The struggle for black liberation has taken giant steps forward since the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott touched off the contemporary phase of the movement. It has given Afro-Americans a heightened sense of dignity, worth and destiny as a people. It has made the claims of the black masses into a paramount and unpostponable issue in American life and politics. It has acquainted the whole world with the intolerable conditions of the more than 22 million Afro-Americans and their determination to end the racist system and to win self-determination.

More recently, it has propelled black nationalism from deeply felt resentment against injustice and inequality into a powerful and ascending force in the Afro-American communities.

In the conclusion to his biography of Sammy Younge, Jr., the first black college student to die in the black liberation movement, SNCC leader James Forman sum-

med up the situation in the following terms: "The history of resistance to the most unique colonization experience known to mankind shows that the '60s must be recorded as an accelerating generation, a generation of black people determined that they will survive, a generation aware that resistance is the agenda for today and that **action** by people is necessary to quicken the steps of history."

Black Americans have participated in plenty of actions since 1955—and these struggles have been responsible for whatever advances have been achieved. But it is painfully evident that all the struggles over the past decade and a half have not succeeded in improving the living and working conditions of the masses of black people or eliminating the worst abuses inflicted daily upon them. Only a few favored individuals from the black upper crust have benefited from the tokenism through which the white possessors of power and wealth have tried to dampen or buy off the militancy of the masses.

A pile of economic statistics confirms what almost every Afro-American knows from personal experience. Blacks are subjected to many forms of discrimination, have much lower incomes and fewer job opportunities, get lower wages, live in rotten housing, have bigger rates of unemployment and receive inferior education. Just one figure from the bottom of the heap shows what the score is. Forty percent of the nation's 9,500,000 citizens on welfare are black. In some states monthly welfare payments amount to as little as \$40 for a family of four. In New York City, 80 percent on welfare are blacks or Puerto Ricans.

Despite the heightened consciousness of the nature of this oppression and the awareness of the failure of the policies pursued in the past, no clear alternative conception has yet emerged from the black community on what has to be done to bring better results. Although repeated uprisings

in the black communities have indicated time and again the existence of a deep-going mass radicalization, little headway has been made in organizing the ghetto masses into an effective force for struggle. Instead, the gunning down of black leaders, the assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., the repression of the Black Panther Party and the lack of mass agencies of struggle have bred a widespread feeling of frustration which exists in the black community on all levels.

The fraud of black capitalism

Meanwhile the chief political representatives of American capitalism are not silent or inactive. They have no intention of removing the causes of discrimination, poverty and misery. These are built into their system of racist oppression and economic exploitation. They have shown by the use of police, state and federal troops over the recent years that they are ready to resort to the most brutal and bloody repression to put down black protest. In order to maintain their rule they strive to keep black people divided themselves and separated from potential allies among the whites. They expect to keep blacks in their place by alternating cheap concessions ("tokenism") with repressions.

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations banked on the passage of a few civil-rights bills and a fake war-on-poverty to calm and appease the growing militancy. These have not worked. Now the more conservative Nixon administration has announced the development of a "black capitalism."

The essence of this program is that the principal lending institutions, backed by government loan guarantees, are supposed to help set up and encourage different sorts of small business enterprise by black individuals or groups. Not much has yet been done along this line. But the idea of creating a puny black capitalism alongside the gigantic edifice of white capitalism and in competition with it is a pure fantasy and a cruel hoax. While it may benefit a few black businessmen, it will fool very few black people.

Today almost all black businesses are tiny family operations, catering to a ghetto clientele and providing a meager income for their owners and a few jobs for others. About 25 percent of black firms are barber

shops and beauty parlors. One out of every 40 Americans is a proprietor, while only one black in 1,000 is.

For show-window purposes, Nixon and his henchmen may aid and establish a few more black-operated enterprises — which will remain in debt to their financiers. But they will not narrow the colossal discrepancy between white capitalist ownership and the layer of black proprietors. The predominant trend of American economy is toward accelerated concentration of business and industry in fewer and bigger monopolies. This cuts down small white business as well as blocking the growth of black business. A sprinkling of new black firms cannot alter or reverse this process. They will remain petty and shaky marginal enterprises while the major banks, industries, insurance companies, chain stores and real estate interests stay in white hands and keep on fleecing the black communities.

Nor do the corporations which control the job market have any compelling reasons to better wages or working conditions for their black wage-slaves or eliminate the higher rate of unemployment among black workers and youth.

So long as the capitalist system prevails, Afro-Americans have the right to demand equal, if not greater, access to capital resources, credits and loans so they can go into business on their own as well as into factories, offices and government positions. Cooperatives may help some black communities to lessen the parasitic grip of the white bloodsuckers and acquire a larger measure of autonomy over minor aspects of their economic life. But this is quite different from expecting that the present owners and controllers of the United States will satisfy the needs of the black community or that black capitalism will solve or even alleviate the most pressing problems of black people, such as housing, education, employment, and poverty. A fundamental transformation of the whole economic, social and political system is required for this.

The liberal approach

The liberal black leaders, from Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins to Ralph Abernathy and Bayard Rustin, advocate extensive reforms for the benefit of black people. The trouble is that they expect to see these concessions come from Demo-

cratic and Republican party politicians, the very agents of the capitalist ruling class which has bred racism for centuries, upholds it and is its main beneficiary at home and abroad.

These gradualists and reformists keep their ideas and activities within the limits of the established order which they are committed to serve. They resemble the house-slaves and handkerchief-heads who came cap in hand begging "massa" for favors.

The more astute white capitalist politicians and their black stooges are aware that any breakaway from the two-party system to the left is a danger to them. That is why they back the campaigns and build up the reputations of black Democrats like Mayor Carl Stokes of Cleveland and Mayor Richard Hatcher of Gary. Such black men are nominated and put in office, not to serve the welfare of the black community, but to head off the mounting demands for change, to co-opt and corrupt black nationalist sentiment if possible, and turn it back into channels which are safe and secure for the white supremacists.

The first major action of Mayor Stokes was to increase payroll taxes to raise money so that more cops could be hired to maintain control over the black community. And Mayor Hatcher admitted his administration has little control over what happens to black people in Gary. "There is much talk about black control of the ghetto," he said. "What does it mean? I am mayor of a city of roughly 90,000 black people—but we do not control the possibilities of jobs for them, of money for their schools, or state-funded social institutions. These things are in the hands of U. S. Steel Corporation, the county department of welfare and the State of Indiana."

The positions of the revolutionary nationalists

To one degree or another almost every Afro-American shares the sentiments if not the ideology of black nationalism. The spectrum of the black nationalist movement comprises a wide variety of political positions and trends, ranging from those on the extreme right, who want to build black business, through the purely cultural nationalists, to the revolutionary left wing.

Today hundreds of thousands of black men and women look forward to the black revolution as the road to liberation. In the vanguard are the rebellious black youth in the ghettos, the streets and the campuses who are absorbing ideas and inspirations from the "Third World" revolutions, the teachings of Malcolm X, and their own experiences in struggle. The most advanced recognize that capitalism is the source and support of racism and that it is necessary to abolish capitalism in order to attack racism at its roots.

This rapidly growing revolutionary consciousness means that increasing numbers of black people, especially among the youth, are ready to devote their lives to the building of a revolutionary movement to win power for the masses and overturn this system. They are now forced to grapple with the extremely complex problem of how this can be done. Without a correct and realistic perspective for carrying on the liberation struggle, based on a clear understanding of the objective conditions in the United States today, thousands of excellent revolutionary cadres run the risk of disorientation or wasting time and energy while trying to reach the goal of emancipation.

Numerous revolutionaries see the necessity and desirability of breaking away, once and for all, from both the Democratic and Republican parties and forming an independent black party which will not only enter candidates in election campaigns but mobilize the Afro-American communities in actions to attain community demands.

However, they do not yet see clearly how to link struggles for the pressing immediate needs of the black people with the revolutionary goal of overturning the whole racist capitalist system. In their search for an answer to this difficult problem they swing from one extreme to the other without finding a logical and practical connection between the two ends. Thus at one time they talk about armed struggle by small, highly disciplined, and trained groups of militants as the only really revolutionary method of action.

When they run up against the unrealism of guerrilla-type actions in the United States, where the scale of revolutionary struggles demands huge and much more

complex commitments of forces, they fall back to spasmodic and uncoordinated activities associated with the largely spontaneous struggles that flare up in the community over issues that often do not appear to be far-reaching. Many militants who have grasped the need to overturn the system as a whole feel that in participating in such battles they are merely marking time while they search for the formula that will put a successful revolution on the agenda in the United States.

In order to work out a strategy and tactics that can realistically hasten a revolutionary showdown, it is necessary first of all to understand where the black liberation struggle actually stands today. What stage is it in?

In the country as a whole, a struggle for government power by the working class is not an immediate perspective. This obviously holds true for the white workers, who remain relatively quiescent politically and still tied in with the Democratic Party machinery through the union bureaucracy.

Without the white workers, the movement for black liberation cannot realistically pose an immediate struggle for government power. It is true, of course, as the mass uprisings indicate, the black masses are far more ready to fight for their rights against the authorities than any other sector of American society. But it requires the active backing and participation of the majority of the population to achieve government power. This stage has not yet been reached in the United States. Moreover, the political understanding of the black masses today is far less advanced than their combative frame of mind. Despite their bitterness, nine-tenths of the black voters cast a ballot for the Democratic candidates for president in 1968, as they did in 1964.

The truth is that we stand in a preparatory period. Once this is thoroughly understood, the problems begin to fall into place.

The first big problem is how to break the hold of the white supremacist capitalist politicians upon Afro-Americans. The solution lies in promoting the formation of an independent mass black political party.

The second big problem is how to get Afro-Americans in their majority to move faster and farther along the road to revolution. The solution lies in formulating

and fighting for a program that can help transform the general discontent and general militancy of the black masses into an organized, cohesive, consciously revolutionary force. By presenting and fighting for such a program, a small vanguard can transform itself into an influential power among the masses.

The next section of this document presents proposals along this line, many of which have already been brought forward by various elements in the movement.

Suggested program of mass struggle

The motivation for a program of revolutionary mass struggle must be the self-determination of Afro-Americans. Like all oppressed nationalities, black people can achieve their freedom only by taking their destiny in their own hands: "Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

This means that black people must form and unify their own organizations of struggle, take control of the black communities and all the institutions within them, and conduct a consistent fight to overcome every form of economic, political and cultural servitude and inequality generated and enforced by the decadent, racist capitalist society.

A. Black control of the black community

It is a basic democratic principle that a people should have the right to decide its own affairs. Therefore the central demand of the liberation forces is for black control of the black community. This is an indispensable step towards freeing the black masses from domination by the white racists who benefit from their exploitation.

The demand for black control of the black community has a number of attributes which give it an extremely powerful potential for mobilizing the masses in a revolutionary direction.

The demand for black control has been raised spontaneously in thousands of struggles across the country. It is obviously a demand which speaks directly to the needs and present understanding of black people. At the same time, black control of the black community is a democratic demand. It is based on something which even the ruling class says it believes in—the right of people to have democratic control over their own lives and communities. Thus the resistance the power

structure puts up against this struggle will help to expose the hypocrisy of the ruling class on one of the central issues which it uses to brainwash and enslave the masses—its proclaimed adherence to democracy.

At the same time, the struggle for black control is profoundly revolutionary, because it poses the question of who will have decision-making power over black people: themselves or the capitalist rulers. The realization of this aim can build black fortresses which will be centers of black counterpower to the white power structure in the principal cities of the United States.

As they develop within the black communities, struggles targeted to win control over specific institutions and agencies can pave the way and prepare increasing numbers of people for the all-inclusive goal of total control of their community. These partial struggles, carried out around issues such as black control of the schools, can be extremely important because through them encouraging victories can be won. These victories, even if limited to specific areas, can help to raise the confidence of the community in its own power and lay the basis for broader future struggles.

The following demands can help promote this process:

1. Replace police occupation of the black community with a community-controlled police force drawn from residents of the community.

2. Black control of all government funds allocated to the black community and control over all plans for renovating and constructing housing and other communal facilities and improvements.

3. Community control over all institutions in the black community, such as hospitals, welfare centers, libraries, etc.

4. Establish community councils to make policy decisions and administer the affairs of the black community. These councils should be composed of representatives elected by workers in various community institutions—factories, hospitals, educational institutions—as well as delegates elected on a block basis.

The local councils or boards of control should be joined together on regional, state and national levels, the aim being to create a National Council of Black Communities. This should be composed

of elected, not appointed, delegates representing the local constituencies.

Such a National Council could work out common policies and speak with one voice on all matters affecting the communities as a whole and their relations with all other forces and agencies. It would thus exercise far more authority than any single community could. To prevent the National Council from bureaucratic usurpation of power, elections should be held regularly and delegates should be subject to recall at any time so that they remain under the control of the local committees they represent.

B. Formation of a black political party

The indispensable instrument for organizing and carrying on effective struggle for such demands, achieving complete control over the black community, and moving forward to black liberation is an independent black political party. Its program would be designed to use the immense wealth created by working people, black and white, not for imperialist war and the enrichment of a few but for the needs of the majority.

The main purpose of a black party is to lead Afro-Americans in political and mass action. But its progressive proposals would attract support from other sections of the population which suffer from the evils of capitalist rule.

A black party would expose and challenge the do-nothing policies of the Democrats and Republicans and present an alternative to them not only by participating in elections but by organizing effective community actions. It would take the initiative in promoting the self-mobilization of the black people and forming alliances with students, poor white people, workers and all other forces interested in radical change. It could play a vanguard role in bringing revolutionary ideas to all sections of the country.

C. Key planks in a party program

Domestic policy

1. It is the duty of society to provide well-paid jobs for all. A shorter work week with no loss in pay to spread the available work. Unemployment insurance at full wages for everyone 18 or over whether or not they have held jobs before.

2. Transfer the funds from the war budget to launch a multi-billion-dollar crash

program of public works to build schools, hospitals, better public transport, parks and recreation facilities, nurseries, libraries, and housing. Give black workers priority on all jobs connected with the construction program.

3. A \$3 an hour minimum wage with guaranteed protection of this minimum against increases in the cost of living.

4. Put an immediate end to hunger and malnutrition through a guaranteed annual income which can assure everyone, including the old, sick and disabled, adequate living standards.

5. Abolish all taxes on incomes of \$7,500 and under. Abolish all sales taxes which discriminate against the poor.

6. Make free quality medical care available to all citizens. Expropriate the drug monopolies and medicine profiteers. Undertake a large-scale program to train black people as doctors and nurses.

7. Organize self-defense units to protect the black community and its organizations. Oppose guns laws which leave black people defenseless and unarmed while white cops and racists assault members of the black community.

8. Investigate the financial records of all landlords and businesses operating in the black community and tax their superprofits to help finance improvement projects for the community.

9. Extend credits to black cooperatives and small businesses.

10. Enforce and tighten all existing housing codes. No tenants to pay rent exceeding ten percent of his total income.

11. Expropriate any firm which discriminates against black people.

12. Elect price committees to inspect and police prices in the neighborhoods.

13. Review the cases of and release all black prisoners because they have not received fair trials. All black people to be tried by a jury of their peers as guaranteed by the Constitution, that is, by other black people.

Military and foreign policy

1. End the draft. Exempt black youth from military service.

2. Bring the GIs home from Vietnam immediately. The black man's struggle is here at home.

3. Take a referendum on the attitude of the black community toward the Viet-

nam war and all foreign wars.

4. Support the constitutional right of GIs to speak out against the war and discrimination in the armed forces. An immediate end to all discrimination in the armed forces.

5. Self-determination for the Vietnamese and all Third World peoples. Solidarity with the liberation struggles of all oppressed nationalities.

6. End government assistance to all oppressive regimes from South Africa to South Vietnam. Dismantle all foreign military bases.

Black education

The black community should have control of its entire educational system from the nursery school through college. This can be accomplished in the following ways:

The educational system

1. Election of community control boards to supervise schools in the black community.

2. The establishment of an educational system and curriculum which meets the needs of black children, prepares them for future economic security, gives them a knowledge of themselves and an understanding of the true history and culture of black people.

3. Parent involvement in every phase of school life.

4. Institute a crash program to train black administrators and teachers. Preferential hiring of black teachers and administrators.

5. Community groups should be entitled to use school facilities to promote activities of benefit to the community and the black liberation struggle.

6. Offer a full program of adult education.

7. Dismiss all school officials who victimize or insult students on racial grounds.

8. Introduce special tutoring programs for all students who have fallen behind in their studies.

High schools

1. Establish student policy-making boards to run student activities in the high schools, handle disciplinary problems and participate in the general supervision of the schools.

2. Hold regular full assemblies to discuss school problems and ascertain the will of the students.

3. Maintain the rights of all students and teachers. These should include: freedom of expression, freedom to organize, to pass out literature, freedom from censorship of school newspapers, freedom of assembly and the right to invite any outside speakers regardless of their political views.

4. An end to disciplinary expulsions.

5. An end to the tracking system—special tutoring for all students who fall behind.

6. A rounded black studies program which will teach Afro-American history and literature truthfully and throw light on the real nature of capitalist racism.

7. Upgraded job training programs. Adequate preparation for all students desiring to attend college.

8. A guaranteed job for all high school graduates.

A black university

The black community should have universities which are related to the needs of black people, to their struggle against oppression, and to their development as a nationality. Third-world university students and faculty should be able to shape their own educational destiny and provide training in all the skills and professions required by the black community. The following demands to accomplish these ends have already been raised in the campus struggles:

1. Autonomous black studies and third-world studies departments, adequately financed and with complete control of curriculum, facilities and policies in the hands of third-world students and faculty.

2. Representatives of third-world groups on all policy-making bodies.

3. Availability of university facilities for use by the community and their expansion in the black community.

4. Free university education for all third-world students who desire it, with full expenses paid by the government and scholarships available to all who need them.

5. Guaranteed jobs for all graduates.

The black workers

Because of the role they play in production, black workers are potentially the most powerful sector of the black community in the struggle for liberation. As the victims of inequality in the economy, black

workers have already begun to organize separately on the job to advance their interests and protect their rights.

The unity of black and white workers is indispensable to combat and overthrow capitalism. But where white workers are privileged and black workers are penalized, black unity in action must precede and prepare the ground for black-white unity on a broad scale. Black caucuses in the unions can fight against discrimination in hiring, firing and upgrading and for equality of treatment in the unions themselves, as DRUM and other black caucuses in Detroit and elsewhere are undertaking to do. Where they are part of organized labor, they should strive to democratize the unions, regenerate their progressivism, and eliminate white job-trust conceptions and practices.

These aims can be furthered through the following demands:

1. Rank and file democratic control of the unions. Elimination of all racist practices in the labor movement.

2. Preferential hiring and advancement of black workers and free access to apprentice training programs, the skilled trades and higher-paying supervisory posts.

3. For an escalator clause in all union contracts to assure automatic wage adjustments to keep up with the rising costs of living.

4. For a 30-hour week with no reduction in pay.

5. For speedier grievance procedures. No restrictions on the right to strike.

6. Equal rights and treatment for all black union members.

7. Complete independence of the unions from government interference. Repeal of all antilabor laws.

8. Workers control of industry through factory committees elected by the workers on the job.

* * *

Most of the proposals listed above have been brought forward at one time or another in the course of the black liberation struggle over the past years; others are taken from the experiences of the masses elsewhere in fighting against capitalist domination. A program of this sort cannot be fully finalized or frozen. It has to remain flexible and open-ended with

plenty of room for additions and improvements as the struggle develops and new problems come to the fore.

The whole point of the program is to provide a guide for the organization and action of the Afro-American masses which can lead toward the goal of black liberation with the maximum of gains en route.

The black liberation movement is bound to play a vanguard role in the coming American socialist revolution both by its example of combativity against the racist power structure and by the stimulus its struggles will give to actions of other sectors thrown into opposition to the ruling capitalist class.

The strategy of the black liberation movement hinges on the achievement of two tasks. One is the unification and mobilization of the black masses for revolutionary action. The other is the weakening of the enemy forces.

Since Afro-Americans constitute a minority of the population in the United States, it will be necessary to find ways and means to take advantage of potential social divisions among the whites and thereby reduce the original unfavorable odds. This can be done by drawing one part of the poor and working class whites, as well as sympathetic students and intellectuals, into an alliance of action while some other sections of the white population are neutralized. Those parts of the program suggested above which not only correspond to the needs of the blacks but will likewise benefit prospective political allies among the white majority can serve to further these long-range aims of a realistic revolutionary strategy.

Revolutionary strategy and tactics

How does the program outlined above fit into the strategy and tactics of a socialist revolution in the United States?

At first sight most of the points appear limited in nature. Many of them concern rights and liberties guaranteed to every citizen by the Constitution. Or they propose broadening these rights, as, for example, establishing the right of black control of the black community. They can be defined as "democratic demands."

Other points concern guaranteeing jobs, hourly wages, annual income, a 30-hour week, social benefits such as adequate

medical care. Others involve independent political action, the defense of the black community, organization of black power. For reasons which will be explained below, these can be defined as "transitional demands."

Taken point by point, the program can seem modest, perhaps even feasible under capitalism if one were to take at face value the propaganda about capitalism standing for democracy, a good living, and a free world.

Particularly to be noted about the demands is that they have either already appeared in the black communities, in some instances with quite broad backing, or they are easily understood and appreciated by wide groups and, with correct leadership, could serve as rallying slogans for very massive struggles. This is a first prerequisite for any program for revolutionary struggle. That is, above all, the program must be based on the objective needs of black people.

But how does such a program tie in with the struggle to overturn capitalism and build a socialist society in America?

To understand this, it is necessary to bring in some general considerations. On a world scale, capitalism as an internationally integrated system for the production and distribution of basic necessities is in its death agony. It offers little to most of humanity but grinding poverty, hopeless insecurity, declining opportunities, increasingly repressive regimes, and endless wars, each more horrifying than the last.

A number of countries have already torn loose and set out on the road to building socialism, whatever the difficulties, hardships and setbacks caused in the final analysis by the poverty-stricken level at which they had to begin and the efforts of the capitalist powers to injure and destroy them. The relationship of forces between capitalism and socialism on a world scale has changed to such a degree in the past 50 years since the first successful socialist revolution in Russia that even the United States is, at bottom, on the defensive. That is the basic reality despite the decades of prosperity arising out of the victory in World War II and the preparations for World War III, and despite the colossal military force at the

command of the American capitalist rulers.

What is to be observed all over the world is that mass struggles of any considerable scope now tend to collide with the capitalist system and, with proper leadership, have the potential to breakthrough the barriers of capitalism and cross over into struggles for socialism.

This tendency is so strong, so deeply imbedded, that examples can be cited throughout the third world where a struggle for such democratic demands as national independence and a thoroughgoing agrarian reform has moved in the direction of a struggle for socialism. In Cuba, Vietnam, and China these struggles have culminated in actual revolutionary overturns of the capitalist system.

While the tendency for big mass struggles to move toward socialism is especially striking in the third world, it is also operative—with certain modifications—in the industrially advanced capitalist countries. Under the impulse of serious problems affecting their lives in general and standard of living, masses of working people can become engaged in struggles of a militant nature, the logic of which is to disregard the limitations of capitalism and to seek solutions that can actually be worked out only if socialism is instituted.

This gives these struggles a "transitional" nature. Beginning with a limited challenge to the rule of capitalism, they move logically toward the creation of a new revolutionary power in opposition to the capitalist government.

The key demands being raised in the black liberation struggle today, such as black control of the black community, jobs for all and self-determination of third-world peoples have this quality of being transitional in nature. They are rooted in the needs and present understanding of the black community, yet they have a revolutionary logic because the capitalist system does not have the capacity to meet them. A new, more rational, more productive system is required.

On the ideological level such transitional demands constitute a means of bringing the level of understanding of the broad masses under capitalism to the higher level required to understand consciously the need for socialism. The present-day struggles around these demands for

changes in the system can lead to and become part of the overall struggle for power. The mobilization of the masses thus takes place as a process, with each struggle awakening, educating, inspiring and organizing new layers toward revolutionary consciousness and action.

Several examples will suffice to show this logical development.

Unemployment is a familiar enough phenomenon in the black communities. It is easy for a black youth, for instance, to understand why he should have a guaranteed job opportunity. When great numbers of youths face the same situation, a point can be reached where they can engage with some militancy in common action in support of jobs for all.

The problem is obviously no longer an individual problem, as the capitalists seek to picture it and to maintain it. Its true nature has come to the surface. It is a problem involving society as a whole, demanding an overall solution.

Where are the jobs to be found? One possibility is to take all the current jobs and reduce the hours on each job sufficiently to make room for everyone seeking employment. To maintain living standards, however, currently yearly incomes must be guaranteed despite the reduced work week.

What power can enforce such a solution?

Quite clearly, only the government can do this. Since the present government will resist this collective way of solving the problem, the question arises as to who it really represents, and why it should not be removed to make way for a government that will guarantee jobs for all.

More questions arise. The solution demands economic planning on a national scale and the placing of human needs above profit-making. Consideration of the socialist alternative to capitalism has thus been placed on the agenda.

Thus the demand for jobs, can, under certain circumstances have very far-reaching consequences.

The actions spearheaded by black students on campuses across the country give another indication of the potential role of struggles around transitional demands. The demand for increased or open enrollment of Third World students has already been shown to have far-reaching impli-

cations. Significant gains towards increasing black enrollment can and have been made within the present educational structure, but the struggle for open enrollment—that is, for college education for all who want it—will not be so easy for the system to fulfill.

Certain key questions are immediately raised by this demand: Where are the resources for such a vast expansion of educational facilities to come from? How will adequate jobs be found for all the students upon graduation?

If persistently pursued, struggles around this demand call into question the capitalist economic structure itself. Because of its built-in need for large pools of low-paid, unskilled labor, capitalism is not constructed to absorb the costs and consequences of higher education for the most exploited sector of the working force.

From the standpoint of moving the revolution forward, struggles such as those that have been taking place on the campuses—whether they end in victories or not—can inspire and lead to demands with more far-reaching implications than was apparent in the original issues. The black community as a whole has supported and received inspiration from the example set by the black students in struggles for self-determination.

The fight for autonomous black studies departments, for example, has helped pave the way for struggle for control of other institutions in the black community. If there can be black control of black studies departments in the universities, why not black control of the public schools, black control of the police and black control of the community?

The impact which these black student struggles have already had can be seen in the fact that they have succeeded in bringing about unprecedented unity in action between blacks and other national minorities including Chicanos, Oriental-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Indians. They have likewise attracted support from many radical white students and even, in one small but significant instance, from a progressively-led union local of oil workers in the Bay Area.

The movement of black and Third World students is a clear example of how a struggle in a limited arena under present con-

ditions can help to expose the system and lead to bigger and broader efforts. Struggle is the school of the masses and the means for clarifying their consciousness of what has to be done. All the demands that bring them into action for their own aims are worth raising, fighting for, and incorporating into an overall revolutionary strategy and program.

The strategy of advancing the black liberation struggle through the development of transitional demands is fundamentally different from both the reformist and ultraleftist concepts of what to do.

The reformists view capitalism as so powerful and entrenched that it cannot be overturned, at least for a long time to come. From this pessimistic outlook, they conclude that the best that can be accomplished is to improve the lot of the poverty-stricken masses a little, either by persuading or pressuring the rulers.

The ultralefts see capitalism as completely finished, not only as to perspectives but in capacity to survive. They see it as standing by inertia, requiring only a slight push to make it collapse. They dream of bringing this about by galvanizing the masses through clever or extremely revolutionary propaganda—which often times turns out to be mere rhetoric—or by a small heroic group undertaking a spectacular action which, by setting an example, will prove contagious, setting the masses in motion in some kind of spontaneous way.

Against both the reformists and ultralefts, revolutionary Marxists view capitalism as having entered the epoch of its death agony, yet as still retaining considerable capacity to defer the final showdown through violent means, through a few concessions in some instances, through keeping the masses from gaining an understanding of politics, and through blocking the organization of a revolutionary party deeply rooted among the masses and endowed with a competent leadership.

And against both the reformists and ultralefts, the revolutionary Marxists seek to take advantage of the basic weakness in the position of the ruling class. This lies in the deep-going tendency of all serious social struggles in this epoch to involve government power and to raise the question of who should exercise this power,

no matter how limited these struggles may be, or may appear to be, at the beginning.

The revolutionary Marxists propose a strategy based on this fact. The succession of transitional demands suggested above corresponds to the course of struggle repeatedly observed in the world today. To pose these demands in their logical succession, to try to organize battles along this line, helps to develop an understanding of the main existing tendency in the class struggle, thereby advancing the political understanding of the masses and hastening the stage when a final showdown with the racist capitalist system becomes a realistic possibility.

The goal of liberation: capitalism or socialism?

The program of a movement or a party is a means to an end—and for a revolutionary movement that end means the replacement of the prevailing system of racist oppression by a free and equal society. What kind of socioeconomic organization can enable the black liberation movement to achieve self-determination and a better life for all Afro-Americans?

Black nationalists have very varying attitudes on this crucial question. On the right are some who believe in building up black capitalism. To the left are those revolutionaries who have come to understand that only a socialist society can solve the fundamental problems of the black masses. Many nationalists are disinclined to take any definite position on this matter. We will settle that when we come to it, they say. However, this is not the sort of issue that a movement seriously committed to the abolishment of racist oppression can evade or leave indefinitely hanging in midair.

A realistic decision on what kind of economy can succeed the present system of exploitation in the United States cannot be made in an arbitrary manner. The possibilities have been restricted by great historical factors which have been at work over a long stretch of time. Foremost among these factors is the level of economic development which determines the character and the goals of the contending forces.

This point can be made clearer by comparing the situation which confronted the

movement for black emancipation in the mid-19th Century with that of today. At that time the main immediate oppressors of the black people were the Southern slaveholders, while the Afro-Americans in bondage were mostly cultivators of the soil. The objectives of that revolution were to destroy chattel slavery and to provide the freedmen with the economic, social and political means for their liberation and advancement.

What happened, as everyone knows, was that the slave power was smashed during the Civil War and Reconstruction and the slaves given their formal freedom. But since the Northern capitalist conquerors denied them the promised "40 acres and a mule" and other prerequisites for their economic independence and the exercise of political power, the blacks could be thrust back into a new state of servitude from which they suffer to the present day.

Today, the main oppressor of the Afro-American is the capitalist class. The vast majority of black people no longer live on plantations in the rural South or work in the fields. They are packed into city slums where they make their living—if they are not thrown on welfare—by working in capitalist enterprises. They are surrounded on all sides by the capitalist owners who fleece them as employers, loansharks, bankers, landlords and merchants.

In order to win liberation, the revolutionary movement must overthrow these exploiters whose system breeds and sustains racism and oppression. Because Afro-Americans are both an oppressed nationality and the most heavily exploited segment of the American working class, the black liberation movement has a twofold character. It is at one and the same time a nationalist movement for self-determination and a proletarian struggle against the capitalist possessors of wealth and power.

Afro-Americans have been the principal victims of the profit system at all stages of its development in North America over the past 400 years. They were enslaved and shipped across the Atlantic to raise staple crops to enrich the planters. They are still laboring for the profits of others today, although in the cities rather than the countryside and for capitalists rather than slaveholders.

The hour has struck when an end must be put to all forms of exploitation and servitude. Full and definitive liberation cannot be achieved except through abolishing the private ownership of the means of production by the corporations and banks.

This measure is mandatory whether Afro-Americans decide to exercise their right of self-determination through the creation of a separate black nation or within the context of the creation of a single socialist republic along with insurgent white workers and other anticapitalist forces.

The transitional program of a genuinely revolutionary movement must have a clear

and conscious goal which guides all its activities and lights the way for its followers. It must be designed to satisfy the needs of the working masses and place them in control of their own affairs. While promoting a transition from national oppression to self-determination, it will of necessity advance the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Through this second emancipation black America will not only have effected its own liberation, but promoted the liberation of all oppressed peoples from racism, capitalism, and imperialism.

