

The Present Day Relevance of the *Transitional Programme* by **Balazs Nagy** Paris, October 1966

Ten years ago, when the Hungarian Revolution broke the power of the bureaucracy, the workers, toiling peasants, intellectuals and youth knew nothing of the Fourth International. Its programme was unknown to them. Hence the resemblance, even identity, between this programme and their spontaneous demands is astonishing.

“A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR”, says the Transitional Programme, “will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression. Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy! Down with Stakhanovism! Down with the Soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! Greater equality of wages for all forms of labour!” In fact, that is just how the ferment began that resulted in the revolution of 1956. Already since 1953 protests had arisen more and more openly against the big shops and sanatoria destined for the use of the leading caste, against all its privileges, against work norms, Stakhanovism and work emulation. The first act of the Revolution was the augmentation of the lowest wages. An entire series of the demands of 1956 was to echo the programme drawn up 20 years before. If we go on to quote it, the agreement between the principles of the Fourth International and the practice of the Hungarian revolution becomes even more striking.

The Programme demands: “... it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the Soviets. In the Soviets there is room only for the representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers, peasants and Red Army men. Democratisation of the Soviets is impossible without legalisation of Soviet parties. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognise as soviet parties.”

The Hungarian Revolution created a system of councils without bureaucrats in which the majority of the Hungarian workers adopted a position for the legalisation of the parties which recognised Hungary’s decisive transformation of a Socialist type and the council system, the greatest conquest of 1956.

In the Programme we read: “revision of the planned economy from top to bottom in the interests of producers and consumers!” And equally we find this demand, practically word for word, in the programme of all the councils, committees and popular organs of the revolution of 1956.

“Reorganisation of the collective farms in accordance with the will and in the interests of the workers there engaged!” the programme continues. In the same way since 1953 the opposition has expressed the interest of the peasants in the reorganisation of the collectivised agriculture, which was realised by the peasants in 1956 in the most natural way: they liquidated the collective farms organised by force that had failed, but maintained those which were “in accordance with their will” and that functioned “in their interests”.

What is the origin of this singular and astonishing agreement between Hungary ’56 and the Programme of the Fourth International drawn up by Leon Trotsky who was murdered by Stalin in 1940, well before the birth of the Hungarian ‘people’s democracy’, and even before the Second World War, in 1938?

The programme of a party cannot be compared with the programme of a government. A political programme is not a programme of work, but a summary of the political experience of a class accumulated in the course of its struggles, the systematisation of its basic principles and its essential aims. On this basis it fixes the principles of its struggle and its aims during a given historical period.

The Hungarian workers may well ask the question: Why do we need this programme, seeing as the formula of Social Democracy has been the political programme of the workers for a long time? In fact, the Programme of the Fourth International summarises the experiences of the working class as regards Social Democracy as well, when it shows that it has become an organic part of the capitalist system since 1914. Its programme has given up the independent aims of the working class, since under the pretext of defending democracy it appeals to the workers to accept the bourgeois system. Is there any need to furnish any clearer examples of this than the anti-working-class policy of the Wilson government in Britain, or the programme and practice of the German Social Democracy or the SFIO in France?

Others might maintain that seeing as the Communist parties themselves are opposed to capitalism, a new programme is not needed. It is true that the Leninist programme formulates the experiences and aims of the struggle for the overthrow of the world capitalism. But the working class has acquired political experiences of historic importance since the death of Lenin. The Soviet Union that was created by the Revolution of October 1917 remained alone, and the first workers' state of soviets degenerated in that isolated and backward country. The power of a privileged bureaucratic caste took shape, which in the form of Stalinism erected a reactionary anti-working-class regime inside the country, and on the international level delivered the working class over to the bourgeoisie, betraying its revolutions. The programmes elaborated by Lenin's Bolshevik Party and by the first four congresses of the Communist International could not have foreseen this development. It was necessary to summarise the experiences of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Communist parties, experiences that were to show that the policy of the Communist parties had become anti-working class inside the USSR as well as within the capitalist system, helping to maintain it. This is the fundamental point of departure for the Programme of the Fourth International, which thus formulates the main conclusion of the experiences of the last 40 years: "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat".

'Leninism' and 'Trotskyism' differ only from each other by the fact that the latter draws the lessons of the utter bankruptcy of Stalinism as a whole, analyses its roots, causes and methods, and sets out to make war on it in order to resolve "the crisis of the leadership of the proletariat". Both of them are the Marxist analyses of their time, or, to be more exact, the Marxism. But the aim of the programme elaborated by Trotsky was not only to cleanse the Leninist programme of all Stalinist falsifications and betrayals, but to apply Marxism to the Soviet Union as well.

Marxism is a universal method. Class analysis and criticism must be applied to the USSR as well as to the so-called 'People's Democracies'. This programme codifies the experiences of the international working class amid the fresh conditions of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Communist parties, of the development, causes and consequences of Stalinism – that is how it was able to formulate the demands of the revolution of 1956 – 20 years before!

The spontaneous movement of the Hungarian working class took the same route as the conscious Marxist analysis summarised in the Programme. This is because it expressed the historic and immediate interests of the international working class one and indivisible, because it is a Marxist programme, in other words. It becomes clear in the light of this that the Communist Opposition grouped around Imre Nagy – on account of its Stalinist training – was not Marxist, for it only took account of the 'given situation' created by Stalinism itself, and did not base its activity upon the historic and immediate interests of the working class. The Hungarian vanguard workers and Socialists had to re-examine, in practice, in the struggle, the experiences of this past (and of the present) by a Marxist analysis of the real problems of Socialism and of the tasks that flow from it. This is why we arrive at a single method – there could only be one of them – that of the assimilation and application of the Programme with an analysis of our past weaknesses and the elimination of them.

The Hungarian Communist Opposition that was formed between 1953 and 1956, and the writer of these lines along with it, thought that it could realise its aims gradually, by successive reforms. But among the important lessons of 1956 that were learned by the Hungarian working class was that we understood that for the realisation of these demands, the revolution of the workers and all the toilers was indispensable. 1956 showed how confused was the activity of the Opposition in the course of the revolution, to which its own programme, however inconsequential it was, led it. The reason for this confusion was that the Opposition did not make clear what Trotsky had formulated 20 years previously, and what was to become the most important lesson of 1956: it is impossible to realise this programme, we read in the Programme itself, without the overthrow of the bureaucracy: "Only the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses can revive the Soviet regime and guarantee its further development toward Socialism". What the Hungarian Communist Opposition did not know how to clarify, which resulted in the revolution catching it unawares, was clearly laid out in the Marxist Programme of the international working class.

The policy provided by the Programme of the Fourth International as a central task for the working class flowing from its experiences is to resolve the crisis of its leadership – in other words, to build the Marxist workers' party over against the Stalinist and Social Democratic 'leading' parties in order to replace them. Given that the 1956 Opposition – lacking a Marxist preparation – could not elaborate a

correct revolutionary programme, neither could it subordinate its activity to the only decisive task, the construction of an independent Marxist working class party. For 1956 showed clearly that its greatest weakness was precisely the absence of such a party effectively organising the best revolutionary forces.

But the outcome and the irrelevance of the Opposition also had another origin. It also looked at the Western countries through the distorting lenses of its Stalinist education, as at best the unchallenged rule of the bourgeoisie, or at worst in accordance with the activity of the western Stalinist parties. Thus it did not see that if the Marxist method is universal, the international working class is also one and indivisible, and that the universality of Marxism is indissolubly linked with the international unity of the working class. The Opposition did not know how to define its role and tasks, any more than it understood that its ally was the international working class, which is confronted by the Holy Alliance of world imperialism and Stalinism on account of its fundamental position. It lacked the fundamental idea of the Programme in its conceptions, in understanding that there aren't blocs marked off by frontiers, but on the one side the international working class, and on the other the bourgeoisie along with its Stalinist ally. Such is the fundamental antagonism of our epoch taught us by Marxism. Any other assertion serves to oppress the masses.

There is no Marxism without revolutionary practice. There is therefore no international working class without an international. The Programme elaborated by Leon Trotsky is the expression of the unity of the world struggle of the working class, because it links organically the struggle of the workers of the capitalist countries for the Socialist revolution with that of the workers of the countries under the domination of the bureaucracy for the overthrow of its power, for the power of the councils, and for Socialism. This unity is not a mere theoretical understanding, but the Programme of the World Party of the working class, the Fourth International.

The lessons of 1956 as well as the experiences of today demonstrate the necessity for the construction of the Hungarian Marxist workers' party. But this struggle must be carried on at the same time as the struggle carried on for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The advanced workers and the Hungarian Socialist workers can only accomplish this difficult task successfully to the extent that they understand the experiences, situation and historic and immediate tasks of the international, and hence the Hungarian, working class, and adapt their struggle to them. The means of this understanding is the Programme.

Balazs Nagy (Michel Varga)

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