



BRILL

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 26.4 (2018) 87–117

historical materialism
research in critical marxist theory

brill.com/hima

The Origins of the Transitional Programme

Daniel Gaido

National Research Council (Conicet), Argentina

danielgaid@gmail.com

Abstract

The origins of the Transitional Programme in Trotsky's writings have been traced in the secondary literature. Much less attention has been paid to the earlier origins of the Transitional Programme in the debates of the Communist International between its Third and Fourth Congress, and in particular to the contribution of its largest national section outside Russia, the German Communist Party, which had been the origin of the turn to the united-front tactic in 1921. This article attempts to uncover the roots of the Transitional Programme in the debates of the Communist International. This task is important because it shows that the Transitional Programme's slogans are not sectarian shibboleths, but the result of the collective revolutionary experience of the working class during the period under consideration, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the founding conference of the Fourth International (1917–38).

Keywords

Transitional Programme – Communist International – Fourth International – Communist Party of Germany (KPD) – Leon Trotsky – Paul Levi – Karl Radek – August Thalheimer

The united-front tactic found its first formulation at the initiative of the Stuttgart metalworkers in December 1920, and became the official policy of the KPD with the publication of the 'Open Letter' of the *Zentrale* of the United Communist Party of Germany, drafted by Paul Levi, on 8 January 1921. The 'Theses on the United Front' were adopted by the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI) in December 1921¹ and were then presented to an expanded

1 Adler (ed.) 1980, p. 400, and Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 1164.

plenum of that body in February–March 1922. After an extended debate, they were adopted by a divided vote. In the ECCI Debate on the ‘Open Letter’, held on 22 February 1921, Karl Radek, who was involved in the drafting of the ‘Open Letter’ with Paul Levi, stated: ‘The Open Letter is a partial action for transitional demands.’² Further discussion took place at a second expanded plenum in June 1922.³ Finally, the ‘Theses on the United Front’ were officially adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International,⁴ with a very important addendum not mentioned in Broué’s otherwise-masterful history of the Communist International:⁵ the anti-imperialist united front, prescribed as a tactic for the Communist parties of the colonial and semi-colonial countries in the ‘Theses on the Eastern Question’.⁶

The method of transitional demands originated in the KPD in the period immediately following the expulsion of Paul Levi, after his open criticism of the putsch known as the ‘March Action’ of 1921,⁷ and was intimately linked with the development of the united-front tactic. According to the main historian of the German revolution, Pierre Broué:

It was the initiative of the metalworkers of Stuttgart in their struggle against the left Social Democrat [Robert] Dissmann which inspired the *Open Letter* of January 1921. Here we find for the first time the policy of the workers’ united front clearly formulated. It had been applied in Russia in 1917, but was not yet an integral part of Bolshevik doctrine, and *it was the struggle to organise the united front of the workers, Communist and non-Communist alike, in Germany, which was to lead to the appearance, first in the debates in the International and then in its programme, of the idea of transitional slogans and demands*, the purpose of which was to fill, in the arsenal of Communist theory, the place which had been left empty by the collapse of the old separation between maximum and minimum programmes, which went back to the SPD’s Erfurt Programme of 1891.⁸

2 Riddell (ed.) 2015, p. 1066.

3 The proceedings of these ECCI expanded plena – which Rosmer called ‘in fact, small-scale congresses’ (Rosmer 1972, p. 150) – have been published in English under the editorship of Michael Taber as *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads: Plenums of the Communist International’s Executive Committee, 1922–1923* (Taber (ed.) 2018).

4 Adler (ed.) 1980, pp. 400–8.

5 Broué 1997.

6 Adler (ed.) 1980, pp. 415–17.

7 Paul Levi, ‘Our Path: Against Putschism’, in Fernbach (ed.) 2011, pp. 119–65.

8 Broué 2005, p. 855; emphasis mine.

The Third Congress of the Communist International (22 June–12 July 1921)

The Third Congress of the Communist International centred around the debates on the putsch attempt known as the ‘March Action’ in Germany, as the outstanding English edition of the proceedings by John Riddell makes clear.⁹ In the course of debates, Lenin and Trotsky, with the help of the German minority delegates headed by Clara Zetkin, succeeded in steering the International away from its previous ultra-left course known as the ‘theory of the offensive’, initially supported by most of the delegates, including Zinoviev, Bukharin, Béla Kun, Karl Radek and August Thalheimer. The Congress reoriented its work toward winning the support of the majority of the population for the Communist Party before launching an insurrection, a strategy summarised in the congress’ slogan ‘To the Masses!’. The price that the Bolshevik leaders had to pay for this reorientation of the International’s strategy away from the suicidal course formerly followed by the KPD was to reach a compromise by which the Congress declared the ‘March Action’ (as a result of which the International lost about 200,000 workers in the industrial heartland of Europe) to be a ‘step forward’,¹⁰ though in rather incoherent terms.¹¹ The tactic of the united front, in turn, was rescued at the price of sacrificing the person who originally developed it, Paul Levi.¹²

As regards transitional demands, the ‘Theses on Tactics and Strategy’ adopted by the Third Congress, section five: ‘Partial struggles and partial demands [*Teilforderungen*]’, stated:

In place of the minimum programme of the centrists and reformists, the Communist International offers a struggle for the specific demands of the proletariat, as part of a system of demands that, in their totality, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, and mark out the different stages of the struggle for proletarian dictatorship. Each of these demands gives expression to the needs of the broad

9 Riddell (ed.) 2015.

10 Adler (ed.) 1980, p. 290.

11 ‘The debate on tactics and strategy, next on the agenda, lasted for five sessions. Radek’s lengthy report, given on 30 June, assessed the March Action as a “step forward”, accompanied by mistakes that, if repeated, would lead to “even greater defeats” (Riddell (ed.) 2015, p. 436).

12 Cf. Gaido 2017 and Levi 2017, which includes a translation of Paul Levi’s ‘Open Letter’.

masses, even when they do not yet consciously take a stand for proletarian dictatorship.¹³

And in the Report on Tactics and Strategy, Radek said:

Comrades, we realise that the parties need to compare what they are doing in this field and exchange their experiences. So far, this has not been done. So far, the parties have not forwarded their programmes to the Communist International, and the exchange of agitational and organisational experiences among us has been quite limited. When this exchange takes place, this will enable us to create a specific system of actions and transitional demands [*ein konkretes System dieser Aktionen und Uebergangsforderungen*]. Their characteristic feature is that they aim not at refashioning capitalism but at heightening the struggle against capitalism. This is not the minimum programme of the social patriots. Nor is it a specific programme regarding what our dictatorship will do on the day of its victory. It comprises all the demands that mobilise the broad masses for the struggle for this dictatorship.¹⁴

The expression reappears in Radek's Report from the Commission on Tactics and Strategy: 'the content of the transitional measures [*Übergangsmaßregeln*] as stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship'.¹⁵

Thus in the Third Congress of the Comintern we see the concept of a transitional programme in a still-fluid state, referred to in the old terminology as a system of 'partial demands [*Teilforderungen*]' for the transition period [*Übergangsperiode*] and in the new nomenclature as a programme of 'transitional demands [*Übergangsforderungen*]' or 'transitional measures [*Übergangsmaßregeln*]'.¹⁶

13 Adler (ed.) 1980, p. 286; German quote taken from *Kommunistische Internationale* 1921, p. 6.

14 Riddell (ed.) 2015, p. 442; German quote taken from *Kommunistische Internationale* 1921, p. 479.

15 Riddell (ed.) 2015, p. 801; German quote taken from *Kommunistische Internationale* 1921, p. 912. The editor of the proceedings adds: 'This sentence is incomplete in the original text' (Riddell (ed.) 2015, p. 801).

16 Rosa Luxemburg had already employed the expression 'transitional measures in the direction of socialism [*Übergangsmaßregeln im Sinne des Sozialismus*]' in her 1899 article series *Social Reform or Revolution*, but referring to measures to be adopted by the proletariat *after* the seizure of power.

The Debate in the Programme Commission (28 June 1922)

On 11 June 1922, an expanded Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) conference noted that its largest member parties had not yet adopted programmes. It established a commission of thirty-three members drawn from fifteen countries to assist them in this task. The programme commission included all five Russian Communist Party leaders assigned to Comintern work (Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek) plus Clara Zetkin, August Thalheimer and Ernst Meyer of the KPD. Zinoviev projected that the Commission might submit a draft programme to the Fourth Congress, but this hope would not be fulfilled. In any case, consideration of a programme for the Comintern and its main member parties would be 'among the most important' congress-agenda items.

When the Commission met on 28 June 1922, differences emerged regarding the appropriate scope of a Comintern programme.

Radek started his intervention by stating that the drafting of a 'an exact programme, a system of specific mandatory demands' was impossible because it required 'a certain stabilisation of the situation for a longer period', and also because the diversity in national conditions meant that Communists could not 'put forward the same demands for America and, say, Yugoslavia'. On the issue of transitional demands, he went on to say:

But regardless of that, we see that in all countries the Communist parties are unable to perform their political work only with the slogans of the final struggle: soviet government, the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc. They are obliged not just to put forward agitational demands to the bourgeoisie but, as action demands for the masses that have begun to move, they have to raise a number of slogans that are not the specific slogans of the soviet dictatorship, but levers to fight for the soviet dictatorship in the future, means of welding the masses together. The individual parties proceed spontaneously in raising these demands. We have here, I would say, no method of procedure. The Third Congress has done a lot in this regard. Nevertheless, a great chaos prevails.

Radek gave as examples of 'the methods by which we can mobilise the masses', which had been the object of debate in the Communist press, 'the question of the workers' government in Germany, in Saxony and Thuringia' and 'in England during the miners' strike, the question of the nationalisation of the mines', concluding:

For this reason, I say that the first task of the programme committee should not be to draft a programme for the Communist International, but to elaborate theses on the method of construction of our transitional demands in each country, specifically, in accordance with our assessment of the international situation as given in the resolutions of the Third Congress. Then the situation in each particular country must be approached in concrete terms. In doing so, it will turn out that a group of countries is already politically mature for the same questions, primarily the question of the workers' government, and can be taken by us in the context of this general tactical resolution.¹⁷

Bukharin seemed to aspire strongly to the writing of a programme and presented himself as someone who could write it, to the extent that he was trusted with submitting the report on this issue at the Fourth Congress. But he opposed including in the programme transitional demands such as the workers' government and the united front, which he viewed as tactical matters.

Bohumír Šmeral of the Czechoslovak Communist Party argued that the programme needed to encompass the Communists' tactical course and line of action during a possibly lengthy transitional period preceding the revolution.¹⁸

Clara Zetkin agreed with Radek that it was extremely difficult to draw up a unified programme when conditions were so fluid and often changed drastically, adding:

But of course we must have *solid fundamental guidelines for the practical daily work of our Party*. I believe that in drafting such a programme there is a danger that we have to face head-on, precisely because of the united front: that a confusion could arise in the mind of the masses between *the reform programme of the old Social-Democratic Party and our action demands*. I understand the difference in this way: the demands can often be the same, yet they are very different in nature from those of the old party. Its action and minimum programme focused explicitly on the improvement of bourgeois society, while our action programme must be designed to mobilise the masses, to bring them together and train them for the struggle.

The starting point for gathering the masses, for bringing them together for the united front, is undoubtedly the various daily needs and wants of

17 RGASPI 1922, pp. 250–1.

18 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 35.

the proletariat. Not only in the economic, not just in the political field, but in all fields of social life in general.

All those demands, that we have to raise there, get from our fundamental stance a very fixed orientation in [a] certain direction. Everything we demand economically, as socialists, must lie *in the direction of the limitation of capitalist private property*, and everything we demand politically must be directed to the *expropriation of the bourgeoisie* from political power and to *strengthening the power of the proletariat*.

I think the programme we must draft should, in so far as it concerns specific, single demands, which we have to raise as the starting point of the struggle, be *flexible enough to include the individual demands of the day and also the differing demands* which can be raised in individual countries under changed historical circumstances. The core must always be the same, but the tactical measures and the form in which they are implemented may differ according to the individual countries, and our programme should give them the freedom of movement required to encompass everything necessary in the given situation.¹⁹

Zinoviev, while accepting the meeting of the programme commission, did not at all push for its drafting (probably because he did not want his leadership, already dented at the Third Congress, to suffer still more), and moreover he did not see in the slogan of the workers' government, which he considered a simple synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the keystone to the system of transitional demands, as Radek did.

Radek's reply linked the question of transitional demands with that of the workers' government [*Arbeiterregierung*], i.e. a coalition of the Communist Party with reformist workers' parties, as a 'correlate of the dictatorship' and as the logical conclusion of the united-front policy. In his opinion, the programme should include three parts. First came a general part on the question 'from capitalism to communism'; then a second part, dealing with the characteristics of the epoch of social revolution.

Then the third part: what we have to do at the present time. Now come the transitional demands. Here must be treated the question of our relationship to the main problems of economic life, state capitalism, etc. But what shall we do with the political demands? Bukharin says: Disarm the bourgeoisie, and our French party calls for compulsory military service;

19 RGASPI 1922, pp. 252–3, emphasis in the original.

in England we have a mercenary force. The question of military demands as transitional demands in this period is a general political question.

Zinoviev rightly said that he found the issue of workers' government to be a new element that arose empirically and that could still be of importance. He says it is the link between the dictatorship and the current situation, a way out of it; [and that] even if we come to the workers' government, it will unleash struggles for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The second thing he said was that the workers' government is a pseudonym of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He was right and wrong. In many countries, we will not come to the workers' government. But in other countries he may be wrong. If elections are held, and the workers' parties have a majority, they may decide to choose a workers' government by parliamentary means. That is very possible in Germany or Czechoslovakia.

Now the question is: do we want to raise these general bridges on political grounds as correlates to our economic transitional demands or not? *Of course, we do not have to say that they should be mandatory in every country, and that we cannot arrive at the dictatorship except through compromises. But here we must examine the question of whether we see in that slogan [of the workers' government] a political transitional slogan, or whether we think there is a gaping chasm between democracy and the period of the dictatorship. These general questions must be solved in the general programme, by putting forward the method of these transitional demands, and then an exchangeable tactical platform, arising from the concrete situation, can be created for each country. But we cannot arrive at that without solving the preliminary question of the method of transitional demands.*²⁰

The Programmatic Debate in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*

The draft programmes of the national Communist parties available for discussion at the fourth congress of the Comintern were finally published in two issues of *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, the organ of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, from September to November 1922 (Nr. 22–23).

Nr. 22 of *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, published on 13 September 1922, carried three items under the heading *Diskussion zur Frage des Programms*

²⁰ RGASPI 1922, pp. 254–5, emphasis in the original.

der Kommunistischen Internationale: an article by Varga on ‘How Should the Programme of the Communist International Be Drafted?’, which polemicised against Bukharin’s refusal to include ‘tactical’ questions in the programme, an article by the Czechoslovak Communist leader Bohumír Šmeral ‘On the Programme Discussion’, and finally another by the French writer Charles L. Rappoport called ‘Thoughts about the Programme’.²¹

Of these three contributions, the best as well as the most relevant to our subject is Bohumír Šmeral’s, who led one of the largest Communist parties in the world.²² Šmeral argued that the programme should include ‘concrete demands which the individual Communist parties consider as the most important for their immediate struggle’, adding:

This part of the programme will be the expression of what already is the content of the general practice of the Communist parties. The practice of taking up the daily struggles of the masses for partial demands and making them the starting point for a further increase in the activity of the proletarian masses got its first stimulus from the Open Letter in Germany. A further step in its development was the United Front. In the programme this practice should be methodically and systematically worked through. The Congress shall therefore lay down the plan of action of the Communist parties in the transition period until the moment of the decisive showdown for direct takeover of power.²³

Then Šmeral explained how the idea of transitional demands originated:

Our practice of starting from the concrete partial demands of the day began to form empirically. We took it for granted that we should take part in the struggles of the working class against the offensive of big business, for the eight-hour day, against the reduction of wages, for the right of association. Should we transfer our activity to other areas, should we advance

21 Eugen Varga, ‘Wie soll das Programm der Kommunistischen Internationale beschaffen sein?’, *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 22, 13 September 1922, pp. 80–4; Bohumír Šmeral, ‘Zur Programmdiskussion’, *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 22, 13 September 1922, pp. 84–92; Charles L. Rappoport, ‘Gedanken über das Programm’, *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 22, 13 September 1922, pp. 92–6. Cf. Bukharin’s remark: ‘As for the article by Comrade Rappoport, despite my best efforts, I have not been able to make any sense of it whatsoever’ (Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 500).

22 According to Broué: *Le PC tchécoslovaque comptait alors plus de 130,000 membres, dont presque 90% d’ouvriers d’industrie* (Broué 2005, p. 372).

23 Šmeral 1922, p. 87.

demands that are not our programmatically maximum demands, but demands for the transitional period, for the period of existence of democratic states, concrete demands in the field of taxation and finance, the judiciary, public administration, food supply, civil rights? All these things are now sharply posed in Germany's practical political life. In my view, these transitional demands could and should be formulated in specific parts of the programme. As regards fiscal issues, by the way, the theses in question have already been prepared by the Executive,²⁴ and mere logical consequence requires that also the other questions, even those associated with the expansion of reaction, should be given space as transitional demands in a special part of the Communist programme.²⁵

Even the old democratic demands of the Erfurt programme had taken on a new revolutionary significance, because postwar capitalism was unable to satisfy them. The main point, however, was the way in which the Communist parties advanced them: 'The purpose of our partial demands, even of those which are almost identical with the earlier demands of Social Democracy, is that for us they are not the road to democracy, but the road from democracy to the dictatorship of the proletariat.'²⁶

The pre-congress issue of *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (No. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 114–55), again under the heading *Diskussion zur Frage des Programms der Kommunistischen Internationale*, included the draft programmes of the Italian and German Parties, the ECCI's criticisms of the Italian CP draft, plus contributions to the discussion by Varga, Thalheimer, and Wera Kostrzewa of the Polish CP on the agrarian question.²⁷ The main contribution from the point of view of the development of a transitional programme was

24 Varga 1921, reprinted as Varga 1922a.

25 Šmeral 1922, p. 88.

26 Šmeral 1922, p. 92.

27 Eugen Varga, 'Entwurf des theoretischen Teils des Programms der K.I. (Die Nachkriegszeit)', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 114–17; August Thalheimer, 'Zum Kommunistischen Programm', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 118–22; 'Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Sektion der Kommunistischen Internationale) (Entwurf)', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 122–42; Das Präsidium des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale, 'Zum Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Italiens', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 142–6; Wera Kostrzewa, 'Thesen zur Agrarfrage', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23, 1 November 1922, pp. 146–55.

August Thalheimer's article 'On the Communist Programme', which has been added as Appendix I to the present article.²⁸

The Draft Programme of the German Communist Party (15 October 1922)

In the journal, Thalheimer's text appears as an introduction to the 'Programme of the Communist Party of Germany (Section of the Communist International) (Draft)'.²⁹ The KPD's *Zentrale* believed that the party required a new programme, which would draw on the experiences of the years 1919–22 and would replace the Spartacus League's programme adopted at the party's Founding Congress. A special commission comprising August Brandler, Wilhelm Koenen, Emil Ludwig, Clara Zetkin and Thalheimer was charged with drafting it. The draft was presented to the Central Committee on 15–16 October 1922, and adopted by 24 votes to 23, with the Left voting against what they regarded as an opportunist and revisionist document. The party leaders then agreed to submit it for discussion to the Communist International.³⁰

The draft programme of the German Communist Party began with a section dealing with the 'Rise and decline of capitalism', which included the subsections 'The age of imperialism', 'The World War', 'The imperialist peace treaties', 'The age of the world revolution' and 'The crisis of capitalism'. Section II, dealing with 'The conquest of political power', included 'The proletariat as the active power and the leading class of the socialist revolution', 'The role of the Communist Party and its relationship with the trade unions, cooperatives and other proletarian organisations', 'The role of violence', 'Bourgeois democracy' and 'The proletarian dictatorship'. The most relevant part for the purposes of the present article is subsection VI, called 'Transitional measures before the conquest of political power [*Übergangsmaßregeln vor Eroberung der politischen Macht*]'.

After pointing out the incompatibility between workers' councils and parliament, the draft programme argued that the transition from one system of government to the other would be marked by a period of dual power. The Communist Party would have to counter the bourgeois-socialist coalition government with the slogan of the united front of the working-class parties, whose precondition was full freedom of criticism and propaganda and the

28 Thalheimer 1922.

29 KPD 1922.

30 Broué 2005, p. 648.

unconditional organisational independence of the KPD. To this stage would correspond the slogan of the workers' government [*Arbeiterregierung*], whose main role would be the arming of the proletariat and the strengthening of the workers' councils. This workers' government would implement 'a series of economic and financial revolutionary measures':

These transitional measures still move formally within the framework of the bourgeois system of property and production relations and of the bourgeois financial system, but they are *actually* already encroachments of the proletarian state power constituted as a workers' government, which consciously and ruthlessly limits the capitalists' right to dispose of their property and the capitalist profit motive, in the interest and for the benefit of the proletariat and the broad toiling masses.³¹

The draft programme then listed a series of economic transitional measures to be carried out by the workers' government, such as the confiscation of real values and majority participation by the state in every firm; the unionisation or trustification of industry under workers' control through the factory committees; the abolition of banking, technical and commercial secrecy; the establishment of a state monopoly of the food supply, and the introduction of rationing under workers' control; and a state monopoly of foreign trade and of banking under workers' control, exercised particularly by bank employees.

All these transitional measures – although formally still in the framework of bourgeois property ownership – are actually in sharp contradiction to the capitalist class interests, and can be enforced only by means of the sharpest and widest struggle against the bourgeoisie. The bitter and systematic resistance of the bourgeoisie will naturally force the workers' government, in the end, to go beyond these contradictory half-measures and, instead of the partial seizure of bourgeois property and the mere restriction of the capitalist right of disposal over it, to undertake the full abolition of bourgeois property on the means of production (including raw materials) and the total abolition of capitalist property-rights.³²

Finally, the last two chapters of the draft programme of the KPD dealt with 'The transformation of the capitalist into a socialist economic order' and with the party's international tasks.

³¹ KPD 1922, p. 140.

³² *Ibid.*

The Fourth Congress of the Communist International (5 November–5 December 1922)

The Fourth Congress discussion on the programme opened with reports by Bukharin and Thalheimer, presenting the two counterposed viewpoints voiced in the ECCI. Bukharin condemned the idea that ‘tactical issues like the seizure of material assets in Germany, the united-front tactic, or the workers’ government question should also be taken up in the programme’, adding that Šmeral was wrong ‘when, together with Varga and Radek, he asks that such issues, like that of the workers’ government and the “Open Letter”, be built into the programme.’³³ For Bukharin, the workers’ government was a vulgar tactical problem and the ‘programme’ was something else: a kind of grandiose catechism containing a description of the transition to communism. Bukharin’s texts (his interventions at the Programme Committee and his report to the Fourth Congress) therefore have a general theoretical interest, but they contributed nothing to the development of a transitional programme. And since his interventions implied a rejection of the method of transitional demands, he was to be rebuked by Lenin himself.

Thalheimer, by contrast, argued that ‘the question of transitional measures, demands for stages, or however one may term them, prior to the conquest of power’ was ‘the central issue in successfully working out the programme both on a general level and in terms of the individual parties,’³⁴ though he immediately proceed to spoil his argument by adding a Luxemburgist criticism of Lenin’s theory of imperialism.³⁵ Thalheimer, supported by Radek, regarded it as ‘a serious error’ to ‘separate tactical principles from the other principles and goals’, which opened the door to a relapse into reformism.³⁶ He stressed the need ‘to lay down tactical guidelines’ out of which all the ‘specific individual demands can be safely and unambiguously derived’, mentioning among those ‘transitional issues’ belonging in a communist programme ‘the question of control of production, of state capitalism, of guidelines for each party’s tax and financial policy’.³⁷

Three days later, Bukharin read a short statement of the Russian delegation essentially endorsing the Thalheimer-Radek position. It read:

33 Riddell (ed.) 2011, pp. 497, 500.

34 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 504.

35 On this issue, see Gaido and Quiroga 2013.

36 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 510.

37 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 515.

Given that the dispute over how to formulate transitional demands and where to place them in the programme has given an entirely erroneous impression of a disagreement on principle, the Russian delegation unanimously confirms that it cannot be considered opportunism to include transitional demands in the programmes of the national sections and to formulate them in general terms and motivate them theoretically in the overall segment of the programme. Representing the Russian delegation: Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin.³⁸

Delegates then adopted, against the dissenting vote of the Italian delegation (representing the sectarian views of Bordiga's tendency), a 'Resolution on the Programme' which urged 'the national sections of the Communist International that do not yet have national programmes' to 'begin work on them immediately, so that they may be submitted to the Executive no later than three months before the Fifth Congress, in order to be approved by the next congress' (this material was eventually published in *Kommunistische Internationale* in 1924). The last three points of the resolution dealt specifically with the question of transitional demands, they read:

3.) The programmes of the national sections must motivate clearly and decisively the need to struggle for transitional demands [*Übergangsforderungen*], with the appropriate proviso that these demands are derived from the specific conditions of place and time.

4.) The overall programme must definitely provide a theoretical framework for all transitional or partial demands [*Übergangs- oder Teilforderungen*]. At the same time, the Fourth Congress strongly condemns efforts to portray as opportunism the inclusion of transitional demands [*Teilforderungen*: partial demands] in the programme, as well as attempts to employ partial demands to conceal or supplant our fundamental revolutionary tasks.

5.) The overall programme must clearly portray the basic historical variants of transitional demands [*Übergangsforderungen*] raised by the national sections, corresponding to the fundamental differences in the economic and political structure of each country, such as in Britain as against in India, and so on.³⁹

38 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 631.

39 Riddell (ed.) 2011, p. 632; German quotes are from Lenin 1973, pp. 450–1, English translation is in Lenin 1971, pp. 427b–428a.

The Fourth Congress of the Communist International was also the occasion for the formulation of Radek's draft transitional programme. According to Pierre Broué, 'Radek drafted some preliminary remarks for the delegates' which 'were originally not intended for publication, but were nonetheless to appear in *Bulletin communiste*, no. 14, 5 April 1923, pp. 126–8, under the heading "La Question du programme de l'Internationale Communiste."' Radek 'suggested that a transitional programme be drafted. This would lay down slogans which would help to mobilise the working masses with the prospect of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat'.⁴⁰ This document has been added as Appendix II to the present article.

The main political and historical problem posed by the programmatic debates in 1922 is that they did not lead to the drafting of a programme, not because that was impossible (Radek was certainly able to write a draft) but because of the existence of political obstacles within the Communist International. The political obstacles were represented by the two most important figures in the Russian Communist Party after Lenin and Trotsky, which were also two of the most important leaders of the Communist International itself: its chairman Zinoviev and its 'theoretician' Bukharin, although their positions and methods were very different.

The discussions also showed the difficulties of Thalheimer and the KPD in developing Radek's proposed method fully, against the blocking tactics of Zinoviev and Bukharin. Indeed, the text adopted by the KPD *Zentrale* by a majority of a single vote on October 15–16, 1922, is more akin to a mural depiction of capitalism and the revolution than to an organised list of demands converging on the issue of the workers' government and the seizure of power by the proletariat. The simple list of chapter headings shows that Thalheimer, paradoxically, shared a certain similarity of method and plan with Bukharin – who, however, opposed the method of transitional demands. Moreover, Thalheimer was then shifting from his 'leftist' position in 1921, when he had supported the 'theory of the offensive', to his later role as the theoretician of Brandler's right wing of the KPD.

It could be argued that the adjournment of the debate on the programme at the Fourth Congress was compensated for by the adoption in this congress of the workers' government slogan. But this adoption took place in the Resolution on Tactics and in a confused form, at a level of generality that did not really clarify the function of the slogan beyond an overall formula. Only a real programmatic debate, as demanded by Radek at the June 1922 plenum of the ECCI, would have allowed such clarification. With the consent of all the

⁴⁰ Broué 2005, pp. 648–50 and note 1.

protagonists, including Radek, this debate did not take place, although the concrete question had already arisen in Saxony and would dominate the fatal year 1923 in Germany, when Communists joined coalition governments with the Social Democrats in the German states of Saxony and Thuringia, and when an enormously important revolutionary opportunity was missed because of the hesitations of the Comintern and the KPD leadership.⁴¹

**From the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922)
to the Founding Conference of the Fourth International (1938)**

The Left Opposition to the Stalinist regime led by Trotsky, which emerged in 1923 against the ‘troika’ Zinoviev–Kamenev–Stalin,⁴² received an elaborate programmatic basis in the ‘Eleven Points’ of December 1932. The Left Opposition considered erroneous the resolutions adopted by the fifth and sixth congresses, and wanted to rewrite the programme drafted by Bukharin and approved at the sixth congress. Therefore, its programmatic bases were the decisions taken by the first four congresses of the Communist International. Adopted during the Stalinist bureaucracy’s ultra-left ‘third period’ policy, the ‘Eleven Points’ demanded an active presence of communists in the mass organisations, especially in the reformist trade unions, and denounced the nefarious role of the ‘red unions’. It condemned the sectarian slogan of ‘united front from below’ as well as the denunciation of Social Democracy as ‘social fascism’. Section seven of the ‘Eleven Points’ reads:

Recognition of the necessity to mobilise the masses under *transitional slogans* corresponding to the concrete situation in each country, and particularly under *democratic slogans* insofar as it is a question of struggle against feudal relations, national oppression, or different varieties of openly imperialistic dictatorship (fascism, Bonapartism, etc.).⁴³

The method of transitional demands was codified by Trotsky in his ‘Programme of Action for France’ of June 1934, which was designed to provide the political contents and goals of a proposed united front against fascism.⁴⁴ On 6 February 1934, an armed demonstration by fascist and reactionary groups

41 On the ‘German October’, see the documents in Bayerlein *et al.* (eds.) 2003.

42 See the documents in Jeffries (ed.) 1975.

43 Trotsky 1972, p. 53; emphasis in the original.

44 Trotsky 1974.

had overthrown the Radical government of Édouard Daladier and replaced it with the right-wing government of Gaston Doumergue. The French workers had answered on 12 February 1934 with a general strike, demonstrations and a call for unity against the fascist offensive. In the pamphlet *Whither France?*, written in late October 1934, Trotsky described the 'Programme of Action for France' as a draft transitional programme: 'The political campaign of the united front must base itself upon a well-elaborated *transitional program*, i.e., on a system of measures that, with a workers' and peasants' government, can assure the transition from capitalism to socialism'.⁴⁵ And in a footnote untranslated in the English editions of *Whither France?*, he added: 'We will not elaborate here on the contents of the programme itself, but refer the reader to the Programme of Action published by the Communist League in 1934, which represents the project of such a transitional programme'.⁴⁶

Trotsky returned to this idea of the transitional programme as an action programme in a letter to Rudolf Klement, dated 12 April 1938, and not included in the English version on of his *Writings*, which reads:

I send you the draft transitional programme. [...] I stress that this is not yet the programme of the Fourth International. The text does not contain the theoretical part, that is to say the analysis of capitalist society and its imperialist stage, or the programme of the Socialist Revolution itself. This is an action programme for the interim period. It seems to me that it is precisely such a document that our sections need.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The origins of the Transitional Programme in Trotsky's writings have been traced in the secondary literature.⁴⁸ Much less attention has been paid to the earlier origins of the Transitional Programme in the debates of the Communist International between its Third and Fourth Congress, and in particular to the contribution of its largest national section outside Russia, the German Communist Party, which had been the origin of the turn to the united-front tactic in 1921. This article has attempted to uncover the roots of the Transitional

45 Trotsky 1979, p. 60.

46 'Sur le contenu du programme lui-même nous ne nous arrêtons pas ici et renvoyons le lecteur au Programme d'action édité par la Ligue communiste en 1934, qui représente le projet d'un tel programme de transition' (Trotsky 1936, p. 51, note 1).

47 Trotsky 1984.

48 Alexander 1991, pp. 251–81.

Programme in the debates of the Communist International. This task is important because it shows that the Transitional Programme's slogans are not sectarian shibboleths, but the result of the collective revolutionary experience of the working class during the period under consideration, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the founding conference of the Fourth International (1917–38).

Appendix I On the Communist Programme

August Thalheimer
October 1922

Source: August Thalheimer, 'Zum Kommunistischen Programm', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, Nr. 23 (1 November 1922), pp. 118–22.

I

The *Communist Manifesto* developed the historical objectives and principles of communism, but also contains in short and loose form transitional demands (no minimal demands) together with some demands for the protection of the workers (protection of child labour).⁴⁹

-
- 49 A reference to the *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter II: 'Proletarians and Communists':
1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
 2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
 3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
 4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
 5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
 6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
 7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
 8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
 9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the populace over the country.
 10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c. &c.' (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 505).

In the *Erfurt Programme* the practical emphasis is on demands for democratic and social reform. The basic text sets out the objectives only in an abstract and general manner. No hint either of the concrete form of the exercise of the proletarian dictatorship (its form of government), or of transitional measures to socialism.

The *Spartacus programme* is limited to the formulation of the concrete forms and methods of the proletarian dictatorship and the socialist transformation. That is its focus. The democratic demands of the Erfurt programme naturally fall away completely. What remains is only the summary demand 'radical social legislation', etc. The Spartacus programme contains neither a minimum programme nor 'transitional demands'.

The Communist programme we must now draft should return in its form (in the basic plan), but not in its content, to the model of the *Communist Manifesto*, in that it should contain, next to the specification and substantiation of the communist objectives and principles, *transitional demands* [*Übergangsforderungen*], political and economic transitional measures which, following from bourgeois democracy and the capitalist production and property system, 'outstrip themselves'.⁵⁰ These 'transitional demands', in their general character, coincide with those of the *Communist Manifesto*, although naturally not as to their content, because (1.) the starting point is different, and (2.) the end point can be grasped in a much more concrete fashion in light of the past experiences of proletarian revolutions.

These transitional demands differ sharply in their general character from the democratic minimum demands of the Erfurt programme. The aim of the minimum demands of the Erfurt programme was to *flesh out* bourgeois democracy, i.e. to eliminate the military-bureaucratic-feudal remnants of absolutism in Germany and to relieve the pressure of capitalist exploitation. The transitional demands of the Communist programme are aimed at the overthrow of bourgeois democracy, which in more-or-less developed form is the actual precondition [for the proletarian revolution], and of the capitalist system, whose pressure is to be removed not by mere reforms, but only by

50 Another reference to the *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter II, 'Proletarians and Communists': 'Of course, in the beginning, this [the centralisation of all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class] cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production' (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 504).

already-revolutionary partial measures [*Teilmaßregeln*]. The Spartacus programme disregarded those transitional demands, because its starting point was not the bourgeois republic but the workers' and soldiers' councils and the deep shock experienced by the capitalist order [after the November revolution of 1918], and its *immediate objective* was the expansion and strengthening of the council system and the socialist transformation, etc.

Should the programme contain extensive notes, as well as propaganda and polemical material? The *Communist Manifesto* also developed, from concrete material, a presentation of the materialist conception of history and polemics (against 'true' socialism, petty-bourgeois socialism, etc.). This was necessary because at the time of the *Communist Manifesto* a comprehensive unified presentation of the communist conception of history and historical method was lacking. (The works of Marx and Engels from the period before the *Communist Manifesto* are preparatory works.) On the other hand, there are now available in the theses of the congresses of the Comintern detailed propagandistic and polemical-critical presentations of the principles and goals of communism. The programme [of the Communist International] and the programmes [of the individual Communist parties] should therefore be limited, as the classical Social-Democratic party programmes were (the Erfurt programme, the programme of French Social Democracy), to summarising the results in a concise and striking form.

See Engels's criticism of the draft of the Erfurt programme of 1891:

1. Preamble in Ten Paragraphs: In general it suffers from the attempt to combine two things that are uncombinable: a programme and a *commentary* on the programme as well. The fear that a short, pointed exposition would not be intelligible enough, has caused explanations to be added, which make it verbose and drawn out. To my view the programme should be as short and precise as possible. No harm is done even if it contains the occasional foreign word, or a sentence whose full significance cannot be understood at first sight. Verbal exposition at meetings and written commentaries in the press take care of all that, and the short, precise phrase, once understood, takes root in the memory, and becomes a slogan, a thing that never happens with verbose explanations. Too much should not be sacrificed for the sake of popularity, and the mental ability and educational level of our workers should not be underestimated. They have understood much more difficult things than the shortest, most concise programme can offer them; and if the period of the Anti-Socialist Law has made more difficult, and here and there even prevented the spreading of comprehensive knowledge among the masses joining the

movement, now that our propagandist literature can again be kept and read without risking trouble, lost time will soon be made up for under the old leadership.

FRIEDRICH ENGELS, 'Zur Kritik des sozialdemokratischen Programmentwurfs 1891', *Die Neue Zeit*, xx. 1, 1902, pp. 5, 6⁵¹

The comments to a Communist programme are already present in the theses. The programme itself should be memorised, and must therefore be 'short and concise'.

II

The question is: should a Communist programme include transitional demands? We opposed the ex-KAG⁵² people, who wanted to include in the programme the slogans for the workers' government, etc. But here there is a fundamental difference. They had in mind minimum demands in the sense of the Erfurt programme, as the only demands coming into consideration for the foreseeable future, while the objectives and principles of communism appeared only theoretically, ideally, otherworldly, i.e. they had no practical significance. We want to formulate the transitional demands exclusively in the sense of transitional demands, i.e. as potential crossing points [*Durchgangspunkte*], not as stopping points [*Haltpunkte*] for the foreseeable future, i.e. we want to formulate them in the same sense as the transitional demands of the *Communist Manifesto*. That is a principled difference.

The KAG, by joining the USPD, by showing by their willingness to enter into a bourgeois-socialist coalition government, by previously covering the anonymous coalition politics of the USPD, by finally joining in the merger of the USPD with the SPD, proved that it had abandoned the Communist principles and objectives, as we correctly foresaw.

Are not the Communist parties threatened by a similar risk if they include transitional demands in their programmes? Not in the least, if they strictly adhere to their transitional character.

51 English translation in Engels 1990, pp. 219–20.

52 A reference to the *Kommunistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (KAG), a split from the Communist Party of Germany that developed in 1921 as a result of the putsch known as the 'March Action'. It was led by former Communist Party Chairman Paul Levi and eventually joined the Independent Social-Democratic Party in 1922.

III

Another question: Is it possible to formulate *general* transitional demands (valid for all countries) in general, and to what extent can a universal communist programme be valid?

Here what the *Communist Manifesto* states applies absolutely: 'These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.' However, the *Communist Manifesto* formulated transitional demands for the then 'advanced countries'.

Today we are dealing with a much wider and more colourful circle of countries where the revolutionary movement plays a role. We find, in addition to the developed capitalist countries – with different state forms, located at various stages of development of the class struggle, at different stages of economic decline –, countries at different stages of early capitalism, simple commodity production, patriarchal forms of production, colonial and semi-colonial countries with more-or-less absolutist constitutions, etc.

The most appropriate course to follow seems to us, therefore:

1. The general programme should include a fundamental part together with transitional demands by groups of countries divided by kindred type: Countries should be classified in the following main groups:
 - a) Countries where the proletariat has conquered power.
 - b) Developed capitalist countries with more-or-less developed bourgeois democracy and facing strong economic and financial disruption, like Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Switzerland, Italy, France, the Balkans countries.
 - c) Capitalist countries with, for the time being, more stable regimes: England, America.
 - d) Countries like Japan, with a developed capitalism, but still more-or-less absolutist states.
 - e) Colonial and semi-colonial countries: India, Egypt, Persia, China, etc.

The general transitional demands for the individual groups must of course, as in the *Communist Manifesto*, be elastic, leaving enough scope for actual differences.

2. The programmes of individual countries should include the basic part of the general programme, together with transitional demands specifically tailored to the country concerned.

The transitional demands of the general programme should serve as a starting point, as a general framework for the transitional demands of the individual countries.

Appendix II

The Question of the Programme of the Communist International

Karl Radek

November 1922

Source: Karl Radek, 'La Question du programme de l'I.C.', *Bulletin communiste*, Nr. 14 (5 April 1923), pp. 126–8.

[Note by the editor of *Bulletin communiste*, Boris Souvarine:] Contrary to what some fools believe, Bolshevik Party members are not subject to the rule *perinde ac cadaver* [(well-disciplined) like a corpse]; instead they discuss passionately all the questions posed by the revolutionary movement. At the Fourth World Congress, Bukharin and Radek found themselves momentarily in disagreement on whether the 'transitional programme' should find a place in the general and theoretical programme of the International: the Russian delegation, after a hearty debate, decided that Bukharin (who took it with very good humour) was wrong. These 'preliminary remarks' by Radek, written for the intimacy of Congress and not destined for publication, will help our comrades orient themselves in the discussion.

At the first meeting of the Programme Commission, a general discussion took place on whether a programme of the Communist International is possible and necessary, as well as on the points that it should contain. I tried to present my views in the introductory remarks. Naturally, they could not have the precise form of a written statement. The following explanations are more accurate than a speech could possibly be, but the argument is still not sufficiently developed, a defect that will be repaired in an article to be published in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*. I send these comments to members of the Programme Commission and to those comrades who had asked the editorial board of *Die Kommunistische Internationale* to give an opinion as soon as possible on this issue of the utmost importance. These remarks were not destined for publication; they should rather accelerate and facilitate the discussion of the Programme Commission by formulating clearly the different positions.

A Programme of the International: Is it Possible and Necessary?

The International has not hitherto had a written programme, that is to say, it has not formulated in general terms its views on the active forces in the evolution

of capitalism to communism and on the path the Comintern intends to follow, although it has clearly defined its point of view in many separate resolutions. Suffice it to recall Lenin's theses [on bourgeois democracy and dictatorship of the proletariat] in the first Congress of the Comintern, the programmatic appeal of the same Congress, the theses of the second Congress on parliamentarism, the unions and the role of the Party, the theses of the third Congress on tactics. Insofar as it is a question of the general conception of the evolution from capitalism to communism, we only have to codify, to bring together; that work is necessary and must be done. It is moreover easy, because the questions on the general character of the epoch of the social revolution do not bring out the slightest difference in our ranks.

But that is only the easiest part of the job. All Communist parties have realised during their practical activity that the general conceptions of the time are not enough, either in their agitation and propaganda or in their political action. The era of social revolution on a global scale, a period that will in all likelihood last for decades, requires, if only by its duration, more than just a general outlook. It poses before the Communist parties a number of concrete questions that they have solved until now in a purely empirical manner; for instance, economic and political issues such as the attitude toward the defence of bourgeois democracy, toward the economic and fiscal policy of the bourgeoisie, toward capitalist world politics. (See the differences between the French and German Communist parties on the issue of reparations, the question of the foreign policy of Soviet Russia). Over and above all these questions, there is the question of *the particular nature of the current phase of development of the world revolution*, the question of deciding whether we advance transitional demands which do yet not embody the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the concrete demands of the Spartacus programme did, but must lead the working class into a struggle that will have as a direct aim the dictatorship of the proletariat only after being deepened and generalised. Can we resolve these issues in a manner generally valid for all countries, or is it impossible because of the differences in conditions?

There is no doubt that, although world development follows a single general course, making it easy to characterise the general route from capitalism to communism, it takes place in practice in very special conditions in various parts of the world. Different countries find themselves *at varying degrees of development* of the world revolution; they pose before the Communist parties different tasks.

Let us recall the very different situations of the Communist parties in the United States and Great Britain, in Germany and Italy, in France, the Scandinavian countries, the Balkans and, finally, in Soviet Russia. *It is clearly*

impossible to determine every detail of the slogans of struggle for all these countries, to advance in every situation the same demands for the mobilisation of the working class. But in principle, the issues standing before the Communist parties in all countries are the same. The questions to be answered are:

1. Can we pose before the bourgeois governments transitional demands that do not correspond to what we would do if we took power in our own hands?
2. What attitude should we have toward the question of state capitalism, which arises either from the monopolistic tendencies of capitalist trusts or from our defensive struggle against new taxes (for example, the demand to confiscate real values in Germany) or, finally, from our fight against the lowering of wages? (For instance, the demand for the nationalisation of the British mines, in response to the attempt of the coal magnates to reduce wages according to the profits of each mine.)
3. What should our attitude be toward the offensive of the reaction? This raises the question of the coalition governments. We reject the coalition with the bourgeoisie, but do we also reject the peasants who struggle against the urban bourgeoisie, such as for instance in Bulgaria, although they act in no way as semi-proletarianised peasants?

The question of the united front, that is to say, politically speaking, the bloc with the Social-Democratic parties and trade unions, as well as the issue of the workers' government, falls into this category. One could list a whole series of similar questions, such as the extremely different military situations in the various countries. They all raise the question of whether, in addition to general economic demands of transition to state capitalism and control of industry by the workers' organisations, we should also advance the corresponding transitional *political demands*, such as the workers' government.

It is often said that these are *questions of tactics rather than programmatic questions*. We do not accept this answer. Such a clear-cut separation of tactical and programmatic questions was until now one of the characteristics of opportunism, which willingly watched over the 'purity' of the programme in order to allow all kinds of crap in practical work, thus making the programme illusory and powerless.

The attitude of the working class toward other classes, or of the vanguard toward the proletariat, the attitude of the Communist Party toward the working class in general, are questions of tactics. In order for the tactics not to degenerate into an empiricism full of contradictions, it must be based on a clear understanding of the *specificity of the general situation*, in which the Comintern finds itself in the *period between the second and third wave of the world revolution*.

Our programme must therefore provide the Comintern as a whole, as well as its various parties, with the opportunity of unhesitatingly adopting an attitude consistent with our principles, that is to say with the general interests of the working class, in the concrete issues, which constantly change, appearing in ever newer forms.

And it will be so only if, in addition to the general characterisation of the trends leading to communism, we presented, after characterising our first great goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet regime, *a concrete picture of the development of the world revolution and of the issues raised by it.*

This picture should characterise the contradictory trends; the types and concrete forms in the different countries or groups of countries should not only be identified by their common names, but described according to their characteristic traits. By doing so, the terrain on which the transitional issues arise would clearly be prepared and the method for their solution would be pointed out. Then, it would only remain to take a stance in the programme on the main concrete issues described above. This will be more than enough to give the Communist parties an Ariadne's thread allowing them to find their way out in the maze of conflicting trends and changing situations. This brings us to the answer: we do not merely need a characterisation of the general trends leading from capitalism to communism, but also a characterisation of the special ways of development and of the special questions that this poses before the Communist parties.

The Concrete Contents of the Transitional Programme

Once we have not only described, but also analysed the course hitherto followed by the world revolution, we will have to advance the main slogans that constitute, in this transitional period, the means for the mass mobilisation of the workers in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship.

They are, in the economic field, the watchwords of state capitalism and workers' control of production; in the political field, in agricultural countries, those of coalition governments with the peasant parties of the opposition for victory over the bourgeoisie; in industrial countries, those of the workers' government, that is to say, coalitions with the Social-Democratic parties and other parties and workers' organisations.

As to the first question, I do not have to deal with it in detail here; I refer to the 'Theses on the tax issues during the era of consolidated capitalism and during its ruin' that the commission composed of comrades Heckert, Koritschner,

Skata, Varga, Kuusinen and myself developed in autumn last year. These theses are discussed in the article by Comrade Varga on tax issues published in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, and in my pamphlet, published under the pseudonym 'Bremer', on the collapse of the German bourgeoisie and the most pressing questions of the German Communist Party, and reprinted in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*.⁵³ This brochure also discusses the relationship of the economic transitional demands with the questions of the workers' government.

Here are some brief remarks I would like to add: the industrial ruin, the growing economic chaos is accompanied by continuous cartelisation of industry in all capitalist countries. This places on the agenda the question: private capitalist monopoly or state monopoly? The state monopoly under the domination of the bourgeoisie is the capitalist state. This means, in the stabilisation period of the bourgeoisie, the consolidation of its domination, but at the same time extending the battle front of the proletariat. At the present time, where the rule of the bourgeoisie is constantly undermined, its tendency toward private monopoly is confronted by simultaneous trends to establish control of industry by the working class. If the world revolution grows slowly, if the destruction of the capitalist economy continues to take place gradually, the struggle against capitalist anarchy, even within the framework of capitalism, becomes a vital issue for the proletariat.

This struggle will be strengthened by the defence against the tax burden, and from these two sources will spring the struggle for the subordination of industry to the state and the control of industry by the workers' organisations. In countries where industry is underdeveloped, this question acquires great importance from the point of view of taxation and of the [Communist Party] influence over the farmers.

These transitional economic demands lead to the question of state power, because there is no doubt that the bourgeoisie takes in the postwar period a very strong stance on the trends to state capitalism. If it is possible in theory that, under pressure from the labour movement, capitalist or bourgeois Social-Democratic governments may be forced to move toward the policy of state capitalism; it is at least very likely that the great social struggles developing around this issue will lead in many countries to governments formed by a coalition of working-class parties, as a stage on the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet government. Without asserting abstractly that

53 Probably a reference to Karl Bremer, 'Der nahende Zusammenbruch der deutschen Bourgeoisie und die K.P.D.' (Bremer 1921).

the development in the West must necessarily pass through the stage of the workers' governments, we have many reasons to steer the struggle that way, because it facilitates for us to the highest possible degree the united-front tactics.

In this framework, it is also easy to solve the question of the attitude toward the bourgeois republic and its defence, as well as toward the armed force of the state.

While in countries where the situation is not yet revolutionary, where the tendency to turn the year of general compulsory military service into a mercenary army prevails in the bourgeoisie, we must uphold the mandatory military service for all, so that workers can keep the weapons; it is clear, by contrast, that we must everywhere, as a corollary of the workers' government, advance the slogan of the workers' militia.

If the current period of transition is thus characterised, if the main transitional demands are established, then the stage is set for the concrete transitional programmes of each Party of the Comintern, for which the programme of the Communist International must constitute a sort of required introduction.

Conclusions

Some comrades objected to the views outlined above that they could soon be overtaken by events, that is to say, by *the more rapid course of the world revolution*. These comrades argue that such a course would immediately render obsolete the programme, and that the programme must not stand in the way of the twists and turns of development. Thus, for example, the Russian Communist Party had turned its measures of war communism into a programme that, at this historic juncture [with the transition to the NEP], no longer formulates clearly the immediate goals of the Party.

To these arguments we can reply that, in its practice of war communism, the Communist Party of Russia needed a guiding principle, and that it would have been a greater misfortune not to have it in the struggle than to have seen it become outdated with time. That this guiding principle bore the name of a resolution on tactics does not change the fact that it was a party programme.

But that comparison, besides being unfounded, is unrelated to the issues that concern us here. The development of the world revolution can take a more rapid course in the coming time, but only in some countries; our programme should not lose sight of this fact.

The world revolution could not triumph with a single blow.

Whatever the pace of its development, we need a transitional programme.

The task of a programme consists of tracing a line of demarcation between the efforts of a given party and those of the others. We distinguish ourselves from all the other workers' parties, not merely by the slogan of the dictatorship and Soviet rule, but also by our transitional demands. Whereas the demands of the Social-Democratic parties are not only intended to be realised within capitalism, but also serve to reform it, ours aim to facilitate the struggle for the conquest of power by the working class, for the destruction of capitalism.

This is what we must express clearly in our transitional programme.

References

- Adler, Alan (ed.) 1980, *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London: Ink Links.
- Alexander, Robert J. 1991, *International Trotskyism 1929–1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bayerlein, Bernhard H. et al. (eds.) 2003, *Deutscher Oktober 1923. Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag.
- Bremer, Karl 1921, 'Der nahende Zusammenbruch der deutschen Bourgeoisie und die K.P.D.', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 19: 58–70.
- Broué, Pierre 1997, *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste, 1919–1943*, Paris: Fayard.
- Broué, Pierre 2005, *The German Revolution, 1917–1923*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.
- Das Präsidium des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale 1922, 'Zum Programmwurf der Kommunistische Partei Italiens', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 23: 142–6.
- Engels, Friedrich 1990 [1902], 'A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891', in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 27, *Engels 1890–95*, pp. 217–32, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Fayet, Jean-François 2004, *Karl Radek (1885–1939): Biographie politique*, Bern: Peter Lang.
- Fernbach, David (ed.) 2011, *In the Steps of Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Writings of Paul Levi*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.
- Gaido, Daniel 2017, 'Paul Levi and the Origins of the United-Front Policy in the Communist International', *Historical Materialism*, 25, 1: 131–74.

- Gaido, Daniel and Manuel Quiroga 2013, 'The Early Reception of Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Imperialism', *Capital & Class*, 37, 3: 437–55.
- Jeffries, Peter (ed.) 1975, *Documents of the 1923 Opposition*, London: New Park Publications.
- Kommunistische Internationale 1921, *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale (Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921)*, Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale/Carl Hoym Nachfolger.
- Kommunistische Internationale 1924, *Materialien zur Frage des Programms der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale/Carl Hoym Nachfolger.
- Kostrzewa, Wera 1922, 'Thesen zur Agrarfrage', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 23: 146–55.
- KPD 1922, 'Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Sektion der Kommunistischen Internationale) (Entwurf)', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 23: 122–42.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 1971, 'Draft Resolution for the Fourth Congress of the Comintern on the Question of the Programme of the Communist International (20 November)', in *Collected Works*, Volume 42, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 1973 [1922], 'Entwurf einer Resolution des IV. Kongresses der Komintern zur Frage des Programms der Kommunistischen Internationale. Vorschläge, angenommen auf der Beratung der Fünfergruppe des ZK (Lenin, Trotzki, Sinowjew, Radek, Bucharin) (20. November 1922)', in *Werke*, Ergänzungsband II, *Oktober 1917–März 1923*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- Levi, Paul 2017, 'Two Documents by Paul Levi (16 March 1920–8 January 1921)', *Historical Materialism*, 25, 1: 175–83.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels 1976 [1848], *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 6, *Marx and Engels 1845–48*, pp. 477–519, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Radek, Karl 1923, 'La Question du programme de l'I.C. (Remarques préliminaires)', *Bulletin communiste*, 14, 5: 126–8.
- Rappoport, Charles L. 1922, 'Gedanken über das Programm', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 22: 92–6.
- RGASPI 1922, 'Dokument 69: "Arbeiterregierung" statt Endkampf: Aus der Diskussion zur Übergangsperiode im Programm der Komintern, Sitzung der Programmkommission am 28. Juni 1922. Moskau', in Weber, Drabkin and Bayerlein (eds.) 2015.
- Riddell, John (ed.) 2011, *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.

- Riddell, John (ed.) 2015, *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.
- Rosmer, Alfred 1972, *Moscow under Lenin*, translated by Ian H. Birchall, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Šmeral, Bohumír 1922, 'Zur Programmdiskussion', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 22: 84–92.
- Taber, Michael (ed.) 2018, *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads: Plenums of the Communist International's Executive Committee, 1922–1923*, translated by John Riddell, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.
- Thalheimer, August 1922, 'Zum Kommunistischen Programm', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 23: 118–22.
- Trotsky, Léon 1936, *Où va la France? Recueil d'articles*, Paris: Librairie du travail.
- Trotsky, Leon 1972 [1932], 'The International Left Opposition, Its Tasks and Methods (December 1932)', in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1932–33*, pp. 48–63, New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Trotsky, Leon 1974 [1934], 'A Program of Action for France (June 1934)', in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934–35*, pp. 24–37, New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Trotsky, Leon 1979 [1934], *Whither France?* (October 1934), in *Leon Trotsky on France*, pp. 34–74, New York: Monad Press.
- Trotsky, Léon 1984 [1938], 'Nous sommes la IV^e Internationale: lettre à Rudolf Klement (12 avril 1938)', in *Œuvres*, Volume 17, *Mars 1938 à juin 1938*, edited by Pierre Broué, pp. 134–7, Paris: Institut Léon Trotsky.
- Varga, Eugen 1921, *Steuerfrage und Steuerpolitik*, Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale/Carl Hoym Nachfolger.
- Varga, Eugen 1922a, 'Steuerfrage und Steuerpolitik', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 22: 19–29.
- Varga, Eugen 1922b, 'Wie soll das Programm der Kommunistischen Internationale beschaffen sein?', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 22: 80–4.
- Varga, Eugen 1922c, 'Entwurf des theoretischen Teils des Programms der K.I. (Die Nachkriegszeit)', *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Organ des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 23: 114–17.
- Weber, Hermann, Jakov Drabkin and Bernhard H. Bayerlein (eds.) 2015, *Deutschland, Russland, Komintern*, Bd. 2.1, *Dokumente (1918–1943)*, Berlin/Munich/Boston: De Gruyter.