
WHAT WE NEED IS A REVOLUTION!¹

Just look at the conditions we live under!

- chronically high unemployment;
- a stagnant economy;
- declining real wages;
- long hours at jobs that are stunting and demeaning, with bosses breathing down our neck; and
- innumerable social ills such as neuroses, substance abuse and brutality arising from poverty and alienation.

- all These conditions are appalling and unnecessary. Changing them requires a revolution that replaces the present social system based on private ownership of economic resources with one based on collective ownership.

Eliminating unemployment

Attempts to solve the problem of unemployment by tinkering with the present system are futile. The cycle of booms and recessions is an unavoidable part of capitalism.

We need a revolutionary government that takes over private industry and uses control over its revenue to ensure sufficient spending to fully employ economic resources. This takeover would begin with existing large scale industry and eventually cover the entire economy.

Process of continuing revolution

With the capitalists deprived of power and ownership, a process of continuing revolution can begin which will eventually transform the nature of work, the purpose of production, and the average individual's position in society as a whole.

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Workers will come to control production rather than being controlled by it. They will change their work from a form of slavery into an activity that is satisfying and fully exercises their creative powers. It will become an end in itself rather than an irksome means to an income. At the same time the purpose of production will change from profit making to serving the common good. Also the average individual will become a part of the political, intellectual and cultural life of society, and cease to be an alienated outsider.

Transforming work

On coming to power a revolutionary government, together with a mass movement of workers, will undertake a number of immediate major changes to the nature of work. These include:

- security of employment;
- the elimination of petty bossing and authoritarianism;
- greater democratic involvement in workplace decisionmaking, and worker supervision and scrutiny of management decisions and actions;
- the reorganisation of work to provide greater variety and a more equitable sharing of the thinking and creating;
- shorter and more flexible working hours to fit in better with the rest of people's lives;
- more time for training and education; and
- an increase in the pace at which menial tasks are eliminated by new technology.

More fundamental changes in the nature of work will develop as the average worker acquires the skills and ability needed to perform work that is diverse, interesting and empowering. In particular these include organisation and communication skills, and technical and administrative knowledge.

The ground is being prepared for these changes even now under capitalism. The average worker is better educated than in the past; and the division of labour that confines people to narrow tasks is being undermined by new technologies. These have

eliminated many menial jobs and require a broad range of abilities based on a general education rather than the old narrow craft skills.

A critical feature of the transformation of work will be the elimination of the managerial hierarchy that we presently take for granted. A lot of what managers do stems from the fact that work is performed by alienated 'wages slaves'. This requires a hierarchy of petty bosses whose job it is to tell those beneath them what to do and to make sure they do it. These people are also responsible for ensuring that production processes are working smoothly and that the quality of output is up to standard.

To the extent that workers experience work as a something they want to do and are willing to use society's resources responsibly (as discussed below), the need for supervision vanishes. This changing attitude to work plus the acquisition of the requisite skills and abilities also means that they can take on the monitoring of processes they are involved in and of product quality.

Once the abilities are acquired and the division of labour eliminated, much of the intellectual labour that is monopolised by management such as the planning and organisation of production can become integrated into the activities of the average worker,

This process of changing the nature of work will be protracted and involve much trial and error. It will also require a struggle against conservative habits and those who actively oppose change.

Production for use rather than profit

The revolution will transform the purpose of production from profit to use. Resources will not only be fully employed, they will be used far more efficiently to meet people's needs. This will result from such factors as: the replacement of competition with coordination and cooperation; greater commitment to meeting consumer needs; an orientation towards consumption rather than accumulation; and the use of more efficient technology once there is no longer an average rate of profit pushing up the cost of machinery relative to that of labour.

While unemployment and the business cycle can be eliminated simply by government control over revenue, the development of a new impetus to production to replace the profit motive will depend both on the transformation of work into something people want to do for its own sake (as discussed above) and on the desire to serve the common good.

A new relationship to society and a change in human nature

This desire to serve the common good will result from a basic change in 'human nature' and the individual's relationship to society. This in turn will stem from both the new empowering role in production plus a fundamental change in all other areas of life which will see people becoming full participants in the political, intellectual and cultural life of society. While they were wage slaves this was not possible both because of their limited level of personal and intellectual development, and their subordinate mentality. And of course it was ruled out by elites maintaining a stranglehold on these areas of life. There will also be more leisure time to engage in these activities, both because of on-going increases in productivity and a greater freedom to choose shorter working hours than was the case under capitalism.

A better upbringing will be an important part of the individual's new relationship with society. Children will be surrounded by adults with healthier personalities and a greater range of abilities. They will no longer be segregated into schools, which sever the link between thinking and doing. Instead they will participate actively in production and in society.

Withering away of the state

The supreme reflection of the revolutionary transformation of society, and the individual's place in it, will be the withering away of the state. This will occur over a number of generations. With social ownership there will no longer be mountains of legislation relating to private property rights and the regulation of industry. Where rules and standards are needed they will be voluntarily agreed to without the sanctions of law. The economic and social development accompanying the revolution will create a global society, so there will be no national wars and no armies. Police forces will become a thing of the past. With people no longer

alienated from society and with an automatic right to a share of output, theft and misuse of property will be rare. For the same reasons anti-social and pathological behaviour will be far less common. Where somebody needs to be restrained this can be achieved through informal measures without a standing police force.

Drawing on past experience of revolution

Modern history has seen a number of working class revolutions. The main ones were the Paris Commune, and the Soviet and Chinese revolutions. Each took the struggle further than the previous one before being overcome by the strength of the counter-revolution and by unfavourable socio-economic conditions (particularly the backwardness of the countries involved). In the case of the Soviet and Chinese revolutions these defeats were inflicted by concealed reactionaries holding high office in the revolutionary government.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, capitalism was restored in the 1950s with the rise to power of Khrushchov. The conservative regimes established at that time are the ones we saw crumble a few years ago. Despite empty talk to the contrary, no one can seriously argue that these regimes were communist or that their demise represented the 'death of communism'. Revolutionaries welcome their overthrow – it has increased the pace of change in these countries and assists the eventual reemergence in them of revolutionary movements.

This past experience is not a reason to be pessimistic about the eventual victory of revolution. There is nothing surprising about long term historical processes meeting short term setbacks. Nothing in this world develops smoothly. Take for instance, the long and arduous transition from feudalism to modern capitalism. Feudal ideas and practices turned out to be very resilient indeed.

It also needs to be emphasised that these defeats were not the result of an inherent flaw in the revolutionary agenda. They were defeats of a fragile and immature process taking place under the unfavourable conditions of socio-economic backwardness and limited experience. They were not defeats of developed and robust communism.

Mainly through the work of Mao tsetung, the revolutionary movement has drawn the appropriate conclusions from the danger of capitalist restoration. Mao greatly developed our understanding of how socialism in its early period is still essentially a capitalist society. As he often pointed out there is inevitably a new bourgeoisie within the political leadership. These people do not want to push society forward; instead they want to preserve and even strengthen the capitalist aspects of the new society.

Mao discovered that the key to combating the capitalist roaders was to mobilise the people to struggle against them and push forward the process of revolutionary transformation - hence the Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This struggle affected every area of life, in particular the workplace, the communes, the schools and universities, and culture. Factories were reorganised so as to involve workers in decisionmaking. Measures were taken to reduce the division between mental and manual labour, and the initiative and enthusiasm of the average worker was tapped for the first time. Selection for university (a rare privilege in an underdeveloped country) was now based on evidence that the applicant would use her learning to serve the revolution rather than to become a career minded bureaucrat. Revolutionary plays, operas and other works of art were developed in the struggle against the conservative domination of culture.

Despite the eventual defeat of the Chinese revolution after his death in 1976, Mao left us with a better understanding of the problem of capitalist restoration and how to fight it.

Where to from here?

As economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate we are sure to see a resurgence of rebellion against capitalism. For the moment conditions are quiet and the immediate task ahead for revolutionaries is to introduce radical ideas into the public arena. This will provide the basis upon which to create a revolutionary movement and eventually a revolutionary party that will contend for power with the capitalists. Victory will depend on winning popular support and defeating conservative resistance.

The Australian revolution will be part of a world revolution. This country is very much part of the world at large and is subject to the same economic and political crises. Furthermore, a revolution could not succeed in Australia in isolation from a similar worldwide upheaval.