

Amendment on Applying the Transitional Method

Proposed by the U District Branch, Ramy Khalil, and Whitney James Kahn

Paragraph 76:

76. A central task to inspire such confidence will be uniting the broadest possible forces into common struggle around bold transformative demands, and winning smaller victories along the way that point toward what is possible... **ADD THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES: By “transformative demands,” we mean demands that express the needs of working people beyond what capitalism can offer. We put forward concrete demands, that draw wider sections of working people and youth into struggle, and through those struggles we want to raise consciousness about the type of world we need, how we get there, and who/what is standing in our way. A revolutionary party needs to raise the expectations of our class about what’s possible, not be tethered to the limitations of workers’ current consciousness. A revolutionary party must raise ordinary people’s sights and promote more than what can be won in this or that struggle.**

We may be able to win a \$150 million Employee Head Tax rather than only \$75 million by arguing that we actually deserve much more than \$150 million/year – which would pay for only 750 homes/year. We should argue that the crisis of skyrocketing rents actually calls for a much higher tax on big business and the rich to fund an emergency plan to build many more homes, for example, a figure closer to 50,000 homes. A tax of \$150 million/year is an important first step, but revolutionaries need to explain that more far-reaching changes will be needed.

In our housing work we need to consistently point out that the lack of affordable housing is not accidental; it is an inevitable outcome of the workings of the *private*, for-profit, housing market. We need to use the platform of our campaigns and our positions in the movement to advance bold socialist ideas, explaining that providing sufficient affordable housing will require building *publicly* owned housing.

Due to the limitations of existing laws and the political strength of non-profit and other reformist leaders, we may sometimes need to agree to build affordable housing through non-profits, but SA should make the case for high-quality publicly owned and maintained housing -- with tenants’ rights upheld by renters organized into tenants unions.

We should also explain how rent control is a socialist policy which challenges the framework of the private, for-profit housing market.

In the course of fighting for housing and other reforms, SA members and our council office need to openly advocate tackling the root cause of the crisis – capitalism – and explain the need for the socialist transformation of society. And we need to educate people about what we mean by “socialism,” of a fundamentally different social order, of taking the top 500 corporations in the U.S. into public ownership to be run on a democratic, planned basis.

Finally, given our focus on housing, we should produce a Seattle SA pamphlet on renters’ struggles as a key tool to explain a Marxist strategy to fight for housing, drawing out why the housing crisis cannot be solved under capitalism and why a socialist transformation of society is necessary. A draft of the pamphlet was started in the fall through collaboration between the Paper Organizer team under the direction of the SEC and Editorial Board. This process should be completed. Organizing a city-wide day school to discuss the pamphlet would be hugely educational for our housing work. The SEC and Editorial Board would be responsible for finalizing the pamphlet.

~~Our Starting point, linked to our goal of building a left alliance in 2019, should be an effort to unite Seattle's independent left into a joint campaign, around which we can attract wider forces.~~

BACKGROUND MOTIVATION -- NOT FOR A VOTE

Motivation not agreed to by the U District branch. Motivated submitted only by Ramy and Whitney.

We should look to improve how we use our SA material, our elected office, and our interventions to promote anti-capitalist ideas and socialist ideas and policies. As we decided in our Seattle 2017 Convention document: "We have a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to raise the class and revolutionary consciousness of Seattle workers and youth (as well as workers and youth nationally) with our position on the Seattle City Council."

And later on: "We need to have more and better material. In general we need to develop more socialist propaganda - material/speeches that aim to raise the awareness among workers and students that we live in a class society and to end our misery we need a socialist alternative. Our leaflets and statements sometimes lack a lively, understandable bridge from today's struggles for reforms to the fight to end capitalism. We need to develop the transitional method in action, linking the struggle for today's demands to a fundamental transformation of society."

Whenever socialists achieve a leadership position in a broad campaign, a mass organization like a union, or an elected position in the capitalist state, there is an inevitable pressure to dilute our socialist and revolutionary politics and to focus on immediate struggles and reforms.

Sectarians avoid this pressure very simply – by refusing to take responsibility for providing a lead to the working class and instead merely criticizing from the sidelines. Opportunists, on the other hand, adapt to these pressures in the name of being practical, being realistic, making compromises, the need to maintain hard-won positions, etc.

Revolutionary Marxists have a duty to reject both these pitfalls. We seek to win elected office and leadership positions in movements, not as ends in themselves, but as a tool, as a platform, to popularize socialist ideas and build a revolutionary organization.

Marxists cannot truly develop the political capacity to resist opportunist pressures by abstract denunciations or avoiding being put in a position of responsibility just because those responsibilities bring dangers and pressures with them. It is only by actually going through the experience of leading broad movements and learning how to combat opportunist pressures as they concretely arise that a genuine, deeply rooted political capacity to combat opportunism can be achieved.

This requires a strong revolutionary and Marxist consciousness among our members to fight against the inevitable pressures to adapt to bourgeois consciousness, to popular trends on the left, ultra-left moods, etc. Our members need a deep understanding of the history of the socialist movement and a fierce determination to apply its lessons to today's challenges. To measure up to our historic responsibilities, SA needs an informed and self-confident membership which is willing and able to hold its leadership accountable through robust internal discussion and debate. History shows that the pressure of capitalist society is felt most acutely on the leadership of the workers movement, including the leadership of revolutionary parties.

Our organizational methods and practices flow from these political considerations. The organization as a whole, through its democratic structures, needs to oversee and direct the work of our public representatives. For example, to properly carry out revolutionary work in unions, it is essential that our union members – especially those elected to leadership positions in their union – do not work in an independent fashion, working out their demands in isolation from our party in their trade union where they inevitably feel pressure from other political trends. History has shown again

and again that such an approach eventually leads away from the path of revolutionary politics. Instead, revolutionaries need to consciously and democratically work out their demands and tactics in discussion as part of a revolutionary collective. While taking into account the actual level of consciousness and balance of forces within a union, Marxists have a duty to also point towards the objectively necessary tasks posed before the working class.

Whatever organizational method is used, there are no guarantees of success. But historical experience shows that we have a better shot when this work is collectively and democratically discussed by the party, and its elected leadership bodies, rather than worked out by the comrades most under the pressures of focusing on immediate struggles at hand.

The most important development for Marxists over the past period has been a whole new generation turning to the ideas of socialism and building movements to change society. It's critical we engage with these layers and the debates that are opening up among Sanders supporters and DSA members about how to win reforms, how we link the fight for reforms to revolution, what socialism is, etc. We want to position ourselves to engage with these freshly radicalizing layers and to positively make the case about the socialist transformation of society.

In our housing work, we need to link the fight for reforms to the need for a fundamental transformation of society which breaks the power of capital and establishes a new social order based on mass, democratic institutions of workers and the oppressed. In general, a call for socialism should not just be an extra bonus we tack on at the end of speeches without really making the case for socialism. We raise socialism not for the purpose of maintaining a formal "orthodoxy" but as an integral part of our program. We should strive to find every opportunity to do this, and especially use our highest profile platforms, such as our city council office, to set an example for others to follow.