

SOCIALIST APPEAL: CONFUSING THE SOCIAL FUND WITH PLANNING.

It is always invigorating talking to new converts to Marxism. What is equally distressing is discovering they believe they are “Marx’s gift to the working class”. By this I mean the belief that their group and their programme has all the answers. This is always and without exception the hallmark of a sect. In fact, Socialist Appeal’s programme as it appears under the heading *WHO ARE WE? and WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?* is confused and not well thought out.

In discussion it soon became clear these members did not appreciate the distinction between deductions from the social product for the social fund, and, the question of planning. That in fact they were collapsing the two.

For those familiar with my DRAFT 21st CENTURY PROGRAMME, Principle 2 deals with “Deductions from the Social Product” and Principle 6 deals with “Consumer led Planning”. <https://theplanningmotivedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/abridged-draft-20th-century-programme-pdf.pdf> This follows in the footsteps of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The deductions from the social product finances the social fund which provides the allocations needed to repair the planet and other insurance, education, healthcare, social care, childcare, administration, additional investment and so on. Deciding on the scale of these deductions and their specific allocations is the heart of working-class democracy in a socialist society.

But this function does not belong to planning. Socialist Appeal is quite wrong in this regard. “*Draw up a democratic plan of production overseen by committees of workers, pensioners, students, technicians and others to fulfil the needs of society and protect the environment*”. (Issue 308, 16th May 2019) Taken literally this means that workers cannot decide individually what they want to consume. Instead what they will consume is decided by a committee of pensioners, students, technicians (sic) and so on.

I am sure that most readers of the paper wouldn’t appreciate a committee filtering out what they are free to consume. Compared to today, provided they have money in their pocket or on their card as they freely roam the shops, this would be regressive. Thus, Socialist Appeal, unthinkingly is closer to the Stalinist view of tomorrow than a genuine liberated socialist view.

Moreover, why stop at workers, pensioners and students. What about women’s groups, or the youth, or the disabled. Surely they have an interest in where and how the social fund is allocated. What about workers in poorer countries? Would they not have an interest in how the investment fund is allocated globally? Of course they would. For all these reasons, and embracing every worker, the discussion over the social fund has to be inclusive. Were Socialist Appeal to admit they are actually addressing the social fund rather than planning, then the problem would be diminished.

Now let us turn to consumer led planning. Planning cannot be done from the side of production but only from the side of consumption. It is the aggregated consumer choices that steers production and not the other way around. Once workers have agreed the deductions, let us say it is 20% for the fund plus 5% for additional investment, they are left with 75% of their contribution to production. In reality, because the recipients of the social funds are also consumers, we are talking of 95% of the social product being consumed this way. The balance of 5% of course is the element added to the existing means of production and inventories.

It is this 95% of output that is individually consumed and governed by consumer led planning. The scope of the plan is therefore universal. And what is consumed will be determined by individual producers both inside production and outside of it. This is their absolute right. It is a higher right than capitalism, because not only does it imply the freedom to consume, but involvement in what is to be

produced. No longer is this the domain of marketing departments and boards of directors, but it now extends into the domain of the consumer who will be informed, not only about what is being produced, but what can be produced, allowing them to make informed decisions to guide planning in the future.

Consumer led planning rewards workers for their labour with the products of their choice. Neither the state nor committees can play a role. Why is this so important? Workers rights' are equal rights for unequal workers. This inequality is inherent in the class as it emerges from capitalism. The purpose of workers' rights is to unite this unequal working class by rewarding workers equally creating a unity of effort. Thus, when workers receive back from production in proportion to their contribution, it is the reward for their individual effort. Thus, when workers enjoy falling prices due to the general rise in their productivity and efficiency, this is a reward for their collective effort. Thus, workers control of production which sets the common intensity of labour, ensures fairness of effort. Finally, consumer led planning rewards workers with choice. Together they ensure all workers have the same interest in production, no less no more.

In turn this dynamic economy makes possible, that which is latent in these workers rights, the ending of the inequality that made them necessary in the first place. How, by providing more and more resources for the social fund. At first, what is possible will restrict this fund. Later, when abundance flows more freely, the social fund can and will grow both relatively and absolutely. At this point there will be the resources to raise every worker to the level of the highest thus ending the inequalities inherited from capitalism and with it the basis for these rights.

By failing to understand the social fund, by conflating it with planning, *Socialist Appeal* demonstrate they do not understand socialism as a transitional stage towards the full emancipation of the human race. Instead of workers being attracted to a socialist programme they would be repelled by it because in this instance, provided they have money, they enjoy more freedom to spend under capitalism, than would be the case under socialism.

On other matters.

It is not my intention to deal with the other demands in their programme. However, I am not sure that a 20-hour week that yields £500 or a minimum wage of £25 per hour is transitional. I am not sure that retirement at 55 is transitional either, especially when there is no mention of whether this is voluntary or mandatory. I would argue that the slogan, *share the work without loss of pay*, is the actual transitional demand.

Better still, instead of heaping demands on Labour's Manifesto and engaging in a beauty parade, let us fight unconditionally for the ones that already appear there. Whatever McDonald says, most of the demands in the 2016 Manifesto were not affordable in full. By supporting the Manifesto this way two things happen. Firstly, we engage in united front work by fighting for the demands contained in it. Secondly, we render them transitional when we fight for them unconditionally, not as accountants, but as political activists.

Unconditional support for these demands turns matters the right way around. Now it is no longer the case of it being unaffordable for the capitalist class but unaffordable for the working class not to have them. Workers cannot afford an NHS that is not fully funded and/or being stripped by the privateers. Workers cannot afford the current housing crisis because housing has been financialised. And so on.

This is the way to raise class consciousness, which means the working class becoming a class for itself. A class which no longer considers the finances of the capitalist class when it comes to determining its

own needs, just as the capitalists do not consider the working class when they pay themselves bonuses and dividends or when they refuse to pay taxes on these sources of income. If we succeed in this task then it is but a short step to convince workers that if the system cannot provide these basic services, it needs to be replaced by a system which can, a democratic socialist society based on the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, distribution, information and the land.

Finally, by the time these “bold measures” are being enabled in a parliament surrounded by hundreds of thousands of aroused workers, it is likely Parliament would have been dissolved by the stroke of a King’s pen and a state of emergency could be in place. Not necessarily a Kornilov moment, but a coup d’état honed by experiences gained by the bourgeoisie since the Second World War. In short, a programme needs to consider not only what we are going to do, but the riposte from our enemies, and to prepare the class to overcome it.

Brian Green, June 2019.