

Summary of areas of disagreement from the TAS 17 points (FCU meeting 8th March)
By Prometheus faction:

Present at meeting: Jack Conrad and Mike Macnair (CPGB), Ed Potts and Nick Wrack (TAS), Archie Woodrow and Cat Rylance (Prometheus faction)

Brief summary: On the whole there was a large amount of agreement on the points suggested by TAS which indicated a solid basis moving forward with the FCU process. Disagreements arose in some important areas though and our different perspectives were discussed around these. For most of these we didn't have time to settle on an alternate wording. The suggested next step with remaining disagreements was for people, on the basis of those discussions, to propose alternative wordings ahead of the next meeting. It was acknowledged, though, in some cases that we may not be able to reach agreement on these. Further detail is outlined below on the points of disagreement:

- *Point 3: "This requires a fundamental break with capitalism."*

CPGB comrades thought this seemed imprecise/vague - what is the specific claim being made? And does it imply there would be no transitional period between capitalism and full communism?

Agreement with the purpose behind the point i.e. that communism represents a fundamental systemic transformation of capitalism. But disagreement with regard to whether this looks more like a 'process' rather than a 'break' or a moment.

MM suggested this could be replaced with "*This requires a fundamental break with the political rule of capital*" indicating that the working class seizure of power would be the 'break' but that the transition to communism in terms of the transformation of the mode of production, overcoming of wage labour and the operation of the law of value would not be a moment but a process

On the transition there was agreement that everyone would want this to be as short as possible. But there was disagreement around our understanding of the factors that might influence the duration. TAS comrades argued that given the working class seizure of power would involve the working class being organised and conscious of the fight for communism, is that something that can/should be held back if, as we might expect, there is a push to move forward rapidly.

Amount of agreement that we can't be too prescriptive about this transition, particularly in terms of how long it might last - and that this kind of detail, at least on the duration, shouldn't be in the programme.

Useful discussion on the terminology for the transition also. NW argued that 'socialism' as a term is understood by many from Trotskyist tradition to mean communism - preferable to use a different term meaningful to wider traditions. MM indicated he had voted for this to be referred to as 'working class rule' in the CPGB draft programme. General agreement that this would be clear terminology.

- *Point 7: "It requires the abolition of the exploitation of labour to make a profit."*

JC raised point that the liberation of the working class requires control over the social product through democratic planning. This is important as this also then encompasses experiences like the Soviet Union in which profit did not operate but the working class was not free as it did not have control of the social product. General agreement that this would be a useful clarification.

- *Point 12: "Our party stands for the unity of the working class. We fight against all divisions that weaken that unity."*

Two points were raised on this:

CPGB comrades pointed out that the wording here could be misinterpreted e.g. to justify the suppression of dissent/criticism/disagreement within the working class movement for the sake of unity. Agreement that no one would argue this, and point may need clarifying - NW pointed to the phrasing 'all divisions that weaken unity', we would not consider expression of differences as weakening unity

AW pointed out that this is the only part that really addresses sexism/racism/transphobia etc. and that this probably warranted something clearer and more explicit. Wider discussion around the Erfurt programme formulation in terms of the working class fighting against 'every manner of exploitation and oppression without distinction of...' and whether something like this might fit

- *Point 13: "We reject nationalism. There is no national road to communism."*

Disagreement around the formulation 'we reject nationalism'. JC raised the distinction between the nationalism of the oppressor and the oppressed, and that the fight for working class hegemony must involve awareness and engagement with the national liberation/self-determination struggles of the oppressed. AW also argued that dealing with the international division of labour and how this shapes struggles globally is one of the biggest challenges we face, this needs to involve orientation to and consideration of the way that working class and anti-imperialist struggles take nationalist forms that may become more cemented due to the uneven pace of the development of the global struggle.

EP argued that in cases of the nationalism of the oppressed it is actually more important for us to be clear in advancing the point here, nationalism presents itself as a whole solution to the problems of the oppressed, we need to be able to be clear that this is not going to provide a solution to these problems of exploitation and oppression. MM argued that although he does not reject the right to national self-determination, must be clear that there is no solution in this and argued, as did NW, that the primacy for communists must be placed on emphasising the common character of the working class and its struggle.

General agreement, however, that more practically, despite these differences, this doesn't mean that we don't support many demands raised through national liberation/self-determination struggles (e.g. cancellation of debt, removal of troops from the West Bank etc.) or that we don't support movements of solidarity e.g. Palestine demonstrations

- *Point 14: "Communism is democratic. We reject the idea that what existed in the former Soviet Union and similar states, or that exists today in China or North Korea, was or is in any way communist or a transition to communism. We oppose all forms of dictatorial rule."*

Points were raised on each formulation in this:

On communism being democratic. JC advanced what he argued was the orthodox position that democracy is a form of the state and that under communism the state will have withered away, so communism cannot in that sense be understood to be democratic. MM advanced that Marx actually wasn't consistent in this argument around democracy as a form of the state. MM, along with TAS comrades, agreed with the idea of communism as democratic.

On the Soviet Union and similar states. Disagreement from AW and CR in terms of seeing these experiences/the movements behind them as being not 'in any way communist', argued that while we rightly should have critiques of USSR/China etc., it's disingenuous and unhelpful to completely disavow them as having nothing to do with the communist movement, the communist tradition etc. Argued focus should be on our positive democratic propositions, not on vague denunciations of specific historical examples - and that historical/empirical claims about specific countries seem misplaced in a list of abstract points of principle to be agreed. CPGB comrades also made the point that the specific wording implies that even the early Soviet Union had nothing to do with communism, which we wouldn't agree.

On opposing forms of dictatorial rule. Agreement from all that we don't see 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a useful slogan in current circumstances, and that dictatorship is widely understood in society as being minority rule - agreement that it therefore shouldn't be in the programme as a term. NW argued it is important for us to be unequivocal in opposition to dictatorial rule given the history of the Soviet Union etc. and the propaganda we will encounter as a result about communism being dictatorial etc. On the point of 'agreement' though JC/MM/CR argued that we would still not agree point 14 as it is, given we would still defend Marx's 'dictatorship of the proletariat' formulation in the sense of working class rule and the domination of the class interest of the working class - and that we will still have to openly explain and defend this publicly regardless of how clear our criticisms of dictatorships are.

- *Point 15: "In the struggle to end the present system our party bases itself on the working class, the only force in society that has the size, strength and potential power to change the system."*

MM argued it would be worthwhile to redraft this to emphasise that the revolutionary character of the working class emerges from its separation from the means of production resulting in its class interest/liberation being fulfilled through the transformation of private property into collective property - this is important in challenging arguments on the left (Syndicalism, SWP) that the revolutionary potential of the working class emerges from or primarily from its strength. General agreement on this clarification.