

# Demand and reform<sup>1</sup>

The identification between demand and reform has been for a long time a key in the dominant ideology and an always present confusion in proletarian ranks. It's quite normal because it allows fooling us; it allows presenting what is interesting for the dominant classes as similar to what the exploited and oppressed demand; it allows presenting the necessities of value's valorization as human needs.

Let's spell things out and define the socially opposed content of both demand and reform.

The demand is ALWAYS an expression of what the exploited/oppressed needs. In most of the cases the demand is clear and appears under the form of expectations based on a balance of forces. In other cases it's much more confused and takes the form of a request made to the oppressors. In some cases it's direct and straight, in others it's confused and respectful. Sometimes one insists directly on what is needed; sometimes one asks the class enemy as if it's about a favor, but beyond the way to do, the balance of force always exists and the demand always expresses a necessity.

The reform is on the contrary ALWAYS the modification of something so that everything stays the same; by definition it's the reform of exploitation and domination with the sole purpose that the whole cannot be brought into question.

The more the demands are put forward as requirements in terms of enjoyment of use values (a roof over one's head, food, reduction of intensity and length of work...), the more it's difficult for the dominant class to take them over and to transform them into simple reforms without having to really give up things resulting in a real increase of the relative wage (reduction of the exploitation rate), which of course will be always momentary if the struggle doesn't continue. If on the contrary, demands are about the mediations inherent to the bourgeois society (e.g. more money, wages, allowances, subsidies...), it's always simpler for the dominant class to integrate them into a process of reforms and to immediately compensate them through the inflation or an increase of the productivity. If since the beginning of a movement the real necessities of the proletariat in struggle are expressed in the language of reformism and unionism (more work, defense of the company, defense of national economy...), we could not talk anymore about demands but about workerist or populist policies of capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

The transformation of the demand into reform has always been a key in the reproduction of exploitation and domination. The more the demand is clear and direct, the more it's difficult for the bourgeoisie to make accepting a reform as a solution. The more the demand is respectful, obscure and full of mediations, the more the reform can be easy to present as "the solution", the final point to that request.

All demand, as a formulation of a human necessity, is a formalized expression of something that doesn't have a form; it's the expression in a given moment of interests that because of their own nature are in process, it's the verbalization of a reality in motion. For that reason the demand tends to change, tends to be overcome, tends to be generalized, because those who formulate it or insist on it tend to be more and more, and its content tends to become more radical, in the sense that it's going to the roots of the things.

All proletarian movement worthy of the name, although it expresses concrete demands, holds the possibility to spread, because it's the product of limitless and always unsatis-

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<sup>1</sup> Draft translation from Spanish in "Comunismo" No.60 – July 2010 and from French in "Communisme" No.62 – December 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For more details about this takeover, see our text "Slogans foreign to the proletariat, alienated workers' consciousness", in "Communism" No.13 – June 2002.

fied human needs in this world of deprivation and shortage. If the enemy (reformism, progressivism<sup>3</sup>) isn't able to transform the first demands into mere reforms, the demands will definitely tend to grow richer, other demands will be expressed by the movement, other proletarian sectors will be attracted by the movement and its demands, and it will be each time more undoubted that to impose them, we will have to answer to the violence of the rulers with the violence of "the lower orders", what always holds the possibility to put into question the government and beyond the power itself. Hence the importance for the bourgeoisie to put a stop to demands as soon as possible.

The spread of the demands and of the movement tends inexorably to question the whole of the system of exploitation and oppression. In the course of this spreading, of this generalization, the consolidating of the proletariat as an active force inevitably clashes with the power of the dominant class and puts on the agenda the social revolution as the only alternative. The social revolution is in fact the spreading and centralization of all those struggles and demands and as such it isn't of a different nature than these demands.

The bourgeois trap faced with this reality, the ideology that best preserves domination and capitalist oppression, consists in fact in presenting the revolution as something different from the spreading of all the demands. According to the ideologists and the Social Democrats, some demands would be political, and others would be economic, some would be historical, and others would be immediate. Actually the demands can be trapped in that way, while separating what is humanly inseparable, while separating the immediate human needs from the human need of revolution, while separating the necessity to solve something economically from the struggle against the oppressors and exploiters, while separating what we need now (for example bread or a roof over one's head) from what would also be needed now (to destroy the oppressors and their States)... This can be done not because the separation is in the nature of the thing itself, but because the reformists transform the demands into reforms or, what is the same thing, because the reformists have more force than the revolutionaries, that is to say because the bourgeoisie imposes its representation of the world to the proletarians, because the counter-revolution keeps on ruling and making the bourgeois interests look like the interests of all, to make the reforms and progresses of capitalism look like good for the exploited.

Therefore from the proletarian and revolutionary point of view, if a reform can fulfill such or such partial demand, if a pseudo-improvement can meet certain expectations of people, it's unquestionable that demand and reform are not at all the same thing, that it's about realities which are not only different but fundamentally opposing each other, that the reform is the bourgeoisie answer to the demand. In other words, it's about what the oppressing class is doing to "adjust" its oppressive system so that everything keeps on as before, while convincing the oppressed that "it's the maximum they can get". The fact that most of the time the proposed reform meets in its shape the demand, or that it's unionists or even the oppressed themselves who expresses the human necessities in terms of simple reforms, doesn't detract anything from this fundamental antagonism but on the contrary reveals how centuries of oppression and alienation have limited the horizon and the human needs to some remnants granted by capitalism.

It's then obvious that the reform is always and in all the cases the weapon of the enemies, the exploiters and the oppressors against the human needs.

In the same way it should be clear that the human needs contain the necessity to destroy this society of oppression, that the social revolution is the spreading of the necessities of the whole humanity.

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<sup>3</sup> We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the essence of the capitalist system is progress and reform, that the whole dominant class is interested in transforming the human necessities into mere progresses and reforms of exploitation and domination.