

DIALECTICS AND TRANSITIONS INTO THE OPPOSITE

In the last issue we discussed the dialectical concept of opposition, and its relation to contradiction. In order to be opposites, things have to meet two conditions: they have to be exclusive, and they have to interact. Opposites are called supplementary when they work together and support each other. Opposites like parent and child or discussion and action are supplementary at least some of the time.

Opposites that struggle and interfere with each other are contradictions. Some opposites, like workers and capitalists, are always contradictory. Many political debates are precisely about whether an opposition is contradictory or not. Revisionists, people who claim to be communists but say that workers cannot win by fighting directly for communism, often claim that the opposition between reform and revolution are supplementary, that reforms and revolutionary political activity can work together. The truth is that reform and revolution are always contradictory, and that all oppositions are contradictory in at least some circumstances.

Opposites Have a Dominant Side

When opposites interact, one side is almost always stronger than the other. Practice, for example, is richer than theory and often corrects it. The capitalist class is dominant until a successful revolution and then the working class has the upper hand.

In each relation of opposites, the side that is dominant determines the quality of the system or process

that the opposites form. When parents have small children, the adults are the dominant side. When the parents grow old or become ill, however, the quality of the opposite relationship changes and grown children often make decisions for their parents. This shift of the dominant side is called a transition into its opposite, or as we described it in an earlier column, a dialectical negation.

Transition into its Opposite

It is an important idea of dialectics that under specific conditions, things can make a transition into their opposites. This transition does not mean, for example, that the working class will turn into capitalists after the revolution. It means that in its relation with the capitalist class, the working class will make the transition from being dominated to being in the more powerful position, and will use that power to set up communism.

Some people refer to the transition into its opposite as a law, but this may not be appropriate, since the specific conditions required are different for different opposite relationships, and might never occur for some of them. For example, in the nucleus of many atoms, attraction is dominant over repulsion, and it may stay that way indefinitely. In atoms that are radioactive, however, repulsion can become dominant and make the atom split apart.

How to Make a Transition Happen

A transition happens when a weaker opposite gets

stronger or a dominant one gets weaker. In some opposite relations, like the relationship between parents and children, the transition is inevitable. In other cases, the transition isn't inevitable, but something can be done to make it happen. At work places, campuses, and military bases the bosses' ideas are dominant, because the capitalists have a near monopoly on the means to distribute ideas. But distribution of *Red Flag*, communist political discussion, and involvement in practical struggles can spread communist ideas that make sense to many workers, students and soldiers. This means that consistent communist political work can eventually make communist ideas dominant in most areas.

This should be the goal of our work wherever it is possible. Even in areas where communist ideas don't eventually become dominant, their acceptance by some will weaken capitalist control and help advance the fight for communism. Of course there are circumstances where we know that communist ideas will never be dominant, like the management of big corporations or inside the leadership of capitalist governments, which means that those institutions have to be destroyed. All this is in line with the idea of transition into an opposite, since that only happens in appropriate circumstances. Transition into the opposite is not rare, however, but occurs often and illustrates that importance of understanding dialectics to understand how to change the world.