

**Fascism:  
What It Is  
& How to  
Fight It**

**Leon Trotsky**

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## **Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It**

*By Leon Trotsky*

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# Introduction

*By Doug Lorimer*

Liberals, petty-bourgeois leftists and even some Marxists use the word *fascist* as an epithet or political swearword against right-wing figures whom they despise, or reactionaries in general. Indiscriminate use of the term reflects vagueness about its meaning. That so many leftists cannot define fascism in any more exact terms than reactionary dictatorship is not wholly their fault. Whether they are aware of it or not, much of their intellectual heritage comes from the social-democratic and Stalinist movements, which dominated the left in the 1930s when fascism rose to power in Germany. These movements permitted the victory of German fascism (Nazism) without a shot being fired against it. They displayed an utterly inadequate understanding of the nature and dynamics of fascism or the way to defeat it. After the Nazis had come to power, the social-democrats and Stalinists had much to hide and so refrained from making a scientific analysis of this new socio-political phenomenon which would, at least, have educated subsequent generations of radical workers.

But there is a scientific analysis of fascism. It was made by the exiled Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky not as a postmortem, but during the rise of fascism. This was — along with his analysis of the nature of Stalinism — Trotsky's greatest contribution to Marxist theory. He began the task after Mussolini's victory in Italy in 1922 and brought it to a high point in the years preceding Hitler's triumph in Germany in 1933.

In his attempts to awaken the German Communist Party and the Communist International (Comintern) to the mortal danger that Nazism posed to the German workers' movement and to the Soviet Union, Trotsky made a point-by-point critique of the policies of the social-democratic and Stalinist parties.

In his writings on Germany (and France) in the 1930s, Trotsky pointed out that the specific nature of fascism that makes it different from all other forms of antilabour

reaction is that it does not rely primarily upon police-state methods of repression. The distinguishing characteristic of fascism is that it recruits desperate middle-class, lumpen and backward working-class elements into a *mass movement* to demoralise, intimidate and atomise the workers' movement through a *campaign of assassination and terror*.

Flowing from this analysis Trotsky argued that the only effective way in which the workers' movement could defeat a fascist movement was to draw the mass of workers into a unified campaign of countermobilisations, including armed self-defence by a workers' militia involving "tens and later hundreds of thousands of fighters". He counterposed this strategy both to liberal-reformist passivity, with its reliance on appeals to the capitalist state to disarm and suppress the fascist gangs, and to ultraleft adventurism, with its infantile illusion that fascism can be defeated by an isolated militant minority carrying out physical attacks on fascist meetings and rallies.

During the rise of the fascist movement in Germany the Comintern's orientation was dominated by ultraleft phrasemongering — aimed at frightening the ruling circles of the imperialist "democracies" (Britain, France and the United States) into coming to a diplomatic deal with the Soviet bureaucracy. After the Nazis came to power in Germany and the real magnitude of the defeat suffered by the workers' movement and the threat to the Soviet Union by a rearmed German imperialism became apparent to the ruling clique in the Kremlin, the Stalinists swung over to a policy of collaboration with "democratic" bourgeois forces to counter the fascist regimes. In both cases, though, their policy was hostile to a strategy of mass, independent working-class political action.

The military defeat of Italian and German fascism in World War II led most people to conclude that fascism was finished once and for all. However, ever since then, fascist groups and tendencies have arisen from time to time in almost every capitalist country. The germ of fascism is endemic in capitalism and a crisis can raise it to epidemic proportions unless drastic countermeasures are applied by the workers' movement.

Since *forewarned is forearmed*, we are publishing this small selection of Trotsky's writings on the subject as a weapon for the antifascist arsenal.

This compilation largely follows earlier editions under the same title but we have slightly altered the selection, adding two items and subtracting one. ■

# 1. What Is Fascism?

What is fascism? The name originated in Italy. Were all the forms of counterrevolutionary dictatorship fascist or not (that is, prior to the advent of fascism in Italy)?

The former dictatorship in Spain of Primo de Rivera [1923-30] is called a fascist dictatorship by the Comintern. Is this correct or not? We believe that it is incorrect.

The fascist movement in Italy was a spontaneous movement of large masses, with new leaders from the rank and file. It is a plebeian movement in origin, directed and financed by big capitalist powers. It issued forth from the petty bourgeoisie, the lumpenproletariat, and even to a certain extent from the proletarian masses; Mussolini, a former socialist, is a “self-made” man arising from this movement.

Primo de Rivera was an aristocrat. He occupied a high military and bureaucratic post and was chief governor of Catalonia. He accomplished his overthrow with the aid of state and military forces. The dictatorships of Spain and Italy are two totally different forms of dictatorship. It is necessary to distinguish between them. Mussolini had difficulty in reconciling many old military institutions with the fascist militia. This problem did not exist for Primo de Rivera.

The movement in Germany is most analogous to the Italian. It is a mass movement, with its leaders employing a great deal of socialist demagogy. This is necessary for the creation of the mass movement.

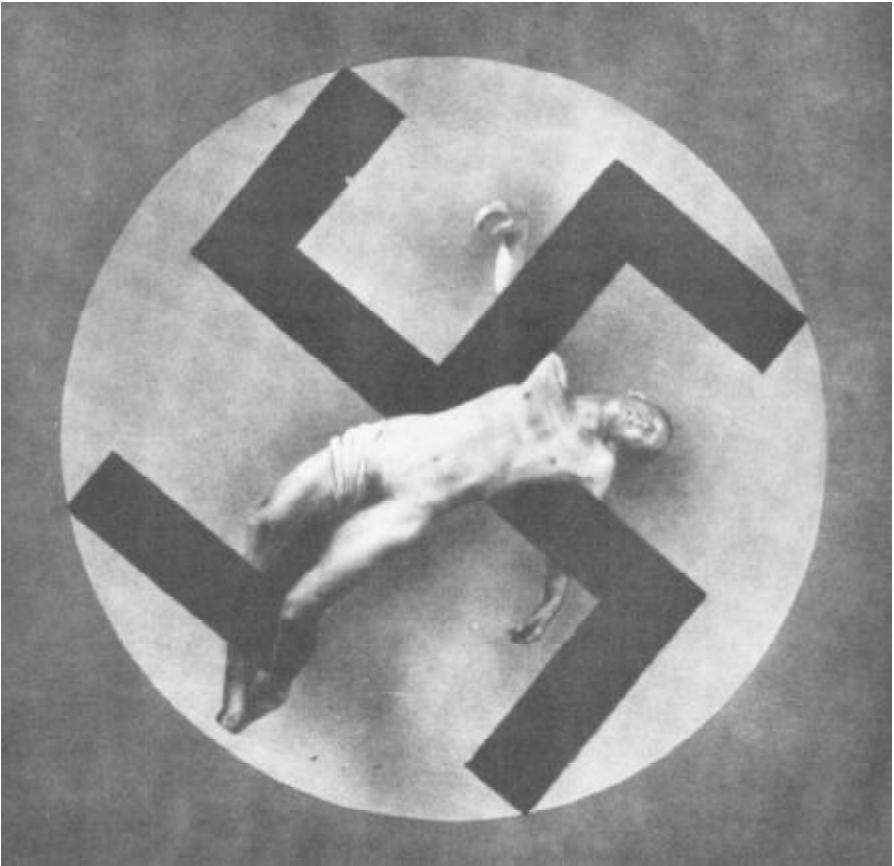
The genuine basis [for fascism] is the petty bourgeoisie. In Italy it has a very large base — the petty bourgeoisie of the towns and cities, and the peasantry. In Germany, likewise, there is a large base for fascism. [...]

It may be said, and this is true to a certain extent, that the new middle class, the functionaries of the state, the private administrators, etc., etc., can form such a base. But this is a new question that must be analysed. [...]

In order to be capable of foreseeing anything with regard to fascism, it is necessary

to have a definition of that idea. What is fascism? What are its base, its form, and its characteristics? How will its development take place? [...]

It is necessary to proceed in a scientific and Marxist manner. ■



Broken on the wheel of fascism. From a 1934 photomontage by John Heartfield entitled "As in the Middle Ages, so in the Third Reich".

## 2. How Mussolini Triumphed

At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium — the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie and the bands of declassed and demoralised lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. From fascism the bourgeoisie demands a thorough job; once it has resorted to methods of civil war, it insists on having peace for a period of years. And the fascist agency, by utilising the petty bourgeoisie as a battering ram, by overwhelming all obstacles in its path, does a thorough job. After fascism is victorious, finance capital gathers into its hands, as in a vice of steel, directly and immediately, all the organs and institutions of sovereignty, the executive, administrative, and educational powers of the state: the entire state apparatus together with the army, the municipalities, the universities, the schools, the press, the trade unions, and the cooperatives. When a state turns fascist, it doesn't mean only that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance with the patterns set by Mussolini — the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role — but it means, primarily and above all, that the workers' organisations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallisation of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism. [...]

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Italian fascism was the immediate outgrowth of the betrayal by the reformists of the uprising of the Italian proletariat. From the time the [first world] war ended, there was an upward trend in the revolutionary movement in Italy, and in September 1920 it

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From *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, January 1932.

resulted in the seizure of factories and industries by the workers. The dictatorship of the proletariat was an actual fact; all that was lacking was to organise it and to draw from it all the necessary conclusions. The social-democracy took fright and sprang back. After its bold and heroic exertions, the proletariat was left facing the void. The disruption of the revolutionary movement became the most important factor in the growth of fascism. In September, the revolutionary advance came to a standstill; and November already witnessed the first major demonstration of the fascists (the seizure of Bologna).

True, the proletariat, even after the September catastrophe, was capable of waging defensive battles. But the social-democracy was concerned with only one thing: to withdraw the workers from under fire at the cost of one concession after the other. The social-democracy hoped that the docile conduct of the workers would restore the “public opinion” of the bourgeoisie against the fascists. Moreover, the reformists even banked strongly upon the help of Victor Emmanuel. To the last hour, they restrained the workers with might and main from giving battle to Mussolini’s bands. It availed them nothing. The crown, along with the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, swung over to the side of fascism. Convinced at the last moment that fascism was not to be checked by obedience, the social-democrats issued a call to the workers for a general strike. But their proclamation suffered a fiasco. The reformists had dampened the powder so long, in their fear lest it should explode, that when they finally and with a trembling hand applied a burning fuse to it, the powder did not catch.

Two years after its inception, fascism was in power. It entrenched itself thanks to the fact that the first period of its overlordship coincided with a favourable economic conjuncture, which followed the depression of 1921-22. The fascists crushed the retreating proletariat beneath the offensive power of the petty bourgeoisie. But this was not achieved at a single blow. Even after he assumed power, Mussolini proceeded on his course with due caution: he lacked as yet ready-made models. During the first two years, not even the constitution was altered. The fascist government took on the character of a coalition. In the meantime, the fascist bands were busy at work with clubs, knives, and pistols. Thus, slowly the fascist government was created that meant the complete strangulation of all independent mass organisations.

Mussolini attained this at the cost of bureaucratising the fascist party itself. After utilising the onrushing forces of the petty bourgeoisie, fascism strangled it within the vice of the bourgeois state. He couldn’t have done otherwise, for the disillusionment of the masses he had united was transforming itself into the most immediate danger ahead. Fascism, become bureaucratic, approaches very closely to other forms of military and police dictatorship. It no longer possesses its former social support. The



chief reserve of fascism — the petty bourgeoisie — has been spent. Only historical inertia enables the fascist government to keep the proletariat in a state of dispersion and helplessness. [...]

In its politics as regards Hitler, the German social-democracy has not been able to add a single word: all it does is repeat more ponderously whatever the Italian reformists in their own time performed with greater flights of temperament. The latter explained fascism as a postwar psychosis; the German social-democracy sees in it a “Versailles” or crisis psychosis. In both instances, the reformists shut their eyes to the organic character of fascism as a mass movement growing out of the collapse of capitalism.

Fearful of the revolutionary mobilisation of the workers, the Italian reformists banked all their hopes on “the state”. Their slogan was, “Victor Emmanuel! Help! Intervene!” The German social-democracy lacks such a democratic bulwark as a monarch loyal to the constitution. So they must be content with a president: “Hindenburg! Help! Intervene!”

While waging battle against Mussolini, that is, while retreating before him, Turati let loose his dazzling motto: “One must have the manhood to be a coward.” The German reformists are less frisky with their slogans. They demand “Courage under unpopularity” (*Mut zur Unpopularität*), which amounts to the same thing. One must not be afraid of the unpopularity which has been aroused by one’s own cowardly temporising with the enemy.

Identical causes produce identical effects. Were the march of events dependent upon the Social-Democratic Party leadership, Hitler’s career would be assured.

One must admit, however, that the German Communist Party has also learned little from the Italian experience.

The Italian Communist Party came into being almost simultaneously with fascism. But the same conditions of revolutionary ebb tide which carried the fascists to power, served to deter the development of the Communist Party. It did not take account of the full sweep of the fascist danger; it lulled itself with revolutionary illusions; it was irreconcilably antagonistic to the policy of the united front; in short it ailed from all the infantile diseases. Small wonder! It was only two years old. In its eyes, fascism appeared to be only “capitalist reaction”. The *particular* traits of fascism which spring from the mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat, the Communist Party was unable to discern. Italian comrades inform me that with the sole exception of Gramsci, the Communist Party wouldn’t even allow for the possibility of the fascists seizing power. Once the proletarian revolution had suffered defeat, and capitalism had held its ground and the counterrevolution had triumphed, how could there be any further kind of counterrevolutionary upheaval? The bourgeoisie cannot rise up

against itself! Such was the gist of the political orientation of the Italian Communist Party. Moreover, one must not let out of sight the fact that Italian fascism was then a new phenomenon, and only in the process of formation; it wouldn't have been an easy task even for a more experienced party to distinguish its specific traits.

The leadership of the German Communist Party reproduces today almost literally the position from which the Italian communists took their point of departure: fascism is nothing else but capitalist reaction; from the point of view of the proletariat, the differences between diverse types of capitalist reaction are meaningless. This vulgar radicalism is the less excusable because the German party is much older than the Italian was at a corresponding period; in addition, Marxism has been enriched now by the tragic experience in Italy. To insist that fascism is already here, or to deny the very possibility of its coming to power, amounts politically to one and the same thing. By ignoring the specific nature of fascism, the will to fight against it inevitably becomes paralysed.

The brunt of the blame must be borne, of course, by the leadership of the Comintern. Italian communists above all others were duty-bound to raise their voices in alarm. But Stalin, with Manuilsky, compelled them to disavow the most important lessons of their own annihilation. We have already observed with what diligent alacrity Ercoli switched over to the position of social-fascism, i.e., to the position of passively waiting for the fascist victory in Germany. ■

### 3. The Fascist Danger Looms in Germany

The official press of the Comintern is now depicting the results of the [September 1930] German elections as a prodigious victory of communism, which places the slogan of a Soviet Germany on the order of the day. The bureaucratic optimists do not want to reflect upon the meaning of the relationship of forces which is disclosed by the election statistics. They examine the figure of communist votes gained independently of the revolutionary tasks created by the situation and the obstacles it sets up.

The Communist Party received around 4,600,000 votes as against 3,300,000 in 1928. From the viewpoint of “normal” parliamentary mechanics, the gain of 1,300,000 votes is considerable even if we take into consideration the rise in the total number of voters. But the gain of the party pales completely beside the leap of fascism from 800,000 to 6,400,000 votes. Of no less significance for evaluating the elections is the fact that the social-democracy, in spite of substantial losses, retained its basic cadres and still received a considerably greater number of workers’ votes [8,600,000] than the Communist Party.

Meanwhile, if we should ask ourselves what combination of international and domestic circumstances could be capable of turning the working class towards communism with greater velocity, we could not find an example of more favourable circumstances for such a turn than the situation in present-day Germany: Young’s noose, the economic crisis, the disintegration of the rulers, the crisis of parliamentarism, the terrific self-exposure of the social-democracy in power. From the viewpoint of these concrete historical circumstances, the specific gravity of the German Communist Party in the social life of the country, in spite of the gain of 1,300,000 votes, remains proportionately small.

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From *The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany*, September 26, 1930.

The weakness of the positions of communism, inextricably bound up with the policy and regime of the Comintern, is revealed more clearly if we compare the present social weight of the Communist Party with those concrete and unpostponable tasks which the present historical circumstances put before it.

It is true that the Communist Party itself did not expect such a gain. But this proves that under the blows of mistakes and defeats, the leadership of the communist parties has become unaccustomed to big aims and perspectives. If yesterday it underestimated its own possibilities, then today it once more underestimates the difficulties. In this way, one danger is multiplied by another.

In the meantime, the first characteristic of a really revolutionary party is — to be able to look reality in the face. [...]

\* \* \*

For the social crisis to bring about the proletarian revolution, it is necessary that, besides other conditions, a decisive shift of the petty-bourgeois classes occur in the direction of the proletariat. This will give the proletariat a chance to put itself at the head of the nation as its leader.

The last election revealed — and this is its principal symptomatic significance — a shift in the opposite direction. Under the blow of the crisis, the petty bourgeoisie swung, not in the direction of the proletarian revolution, but in the direction of the most extreme imperialist reaction, pulling behind it considerable sections of the proletariat.

The gigantic growth of National Socialism is an expression of two factors: a deep social crisis, throwing the petty-bourgeois masses off balance, and the lack of a revolutionary party that would today be regarded by the masses of the people as the acknowledged revolutionary leader. If the Communist Party is the *party of revolutionary hope*, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the *party of counterrevolutionary despair*. When revolutionary hope embraces the whole proletarian mass, it inevitably pulls behind it on the road of revolution considerable and growing sections of the petty bourgeoisie. Precisely in this sphere the election revealed the opposite picture: counterrevolutionary despair embraced the petty-bourgeois mass with such force that it drew behind it many sections of the proletariat. [...]

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*Fascism in Germany has become a real danger*, as an acute expression of the helpless position of the bourgeois regime, the conservative role of the social-democracy in this regime, and the accumulated powerlessness of the Communist Party to abolish it.

Whoever denies this is either blind or a braggart. [...]

The danger becomes especially acute in connection with the question of the *tempo* of development, which does not depend upon us alone. The malarial character of the political curve revealed by the election speaks for the fact that the tempo of development of the national crisis may turn out to be very speedy. In other words, the course of events in the very near future may resurrect in Germany, on a new historical plane, the old tragic contradiction between the maturity of a revolutionary situation on the one hand and the weakness and strategical impotence of the revolutionary party on the other. This must be said clearly, openly and above all, in time. [...]

From Moscow, the signal has already been given for a policy of bureaucratic prestige which covers up yesterday's mistakes and prepares tomorrow's through false cries about the new triumph of the line. Monstrously exaggerating the victory of the [German Communist] party, monstrously underestimating the difficulties, interpreting even the success of fascism as a positive factor for the proletarian revolution, *Pravda* necessarily makes one small stipulation: "The successes of the party should not make us dizzy." The treacherous policy of the Stalinist leadership is true to itself even here. An analysis of the situation is given in the spirit of uncritical ultraleftism. The party is thus deliberately pushed onto the road of adventurism. At the same time, Stalin prepares his alibi in advance with the aid of the ritualistic phrase about "dizziness". It is precisely this policy, shortsighted, unscrupulous, that may ruin the German revolution. [...]

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Can the strength of the conservative resistance of the social-democratic workers be calculated beforehand? It cannot. In the light of the events of the past years this strength seems to be gigantic. But the truth is that what helped most of all to weld together social-democracy was the wrong policy of the Communist Party, which found its highest generalisation in the absurd theory of social-fascism. To measure the real resistance of the social-democratic ranks, a different measuring instrument is required, that is, a correct communist tactic. Given this condition — and it is not a small condition — the degree of internal corrosion of the social-democracy can be revealed in a comparatively brief period.

In a different form, what has been said above also applies to fascism: It arose among the other conditions present from the tremblings of the Zinoviev-Stalin strategy. What is its offensive power? What is its stability? Has it reached its culminating point, as the optimists *ex-officio* [Comintern and Communist Party officials] assure us, or is it only on the first step of the ladder? This cannot be foretold mechanically. It can be

determined only through action. Precisely in regard to fascism, which is a razor in the hands of the class enemy, the wrong policy of the Comintern may produce fatal results in a brief period. On the other hand, a correct policy — not in such a short period, it is true — can undermine the positions of fascism. [...]

If the Communist Party, in spite of the exceptionally favourable circumstances, has proved powerless seriously to shake the structure of the social-democracy with the aid of the formula of “social-fascism”, then real fascism now threatens this structure, no longer with wordy formulas of so-called radicalism, but with the chemical formulas of explosives. No matter how true it is that the social-democracy prepared the blossoming of fascism by its whole policy, it is no less true that fascism comes forward as a deadly threat primarily to that same social-democracy, all of whose magnificence is inextricably bound with parliamentary-democratic-pacifist forms and methods of government. [...]

The policy of a united front of the workers against fascism flows from this whole situation. It opens up tremendous possibilities for the Communist Party. A condition for success, however, is the rejection of the theory and practice of “social-fascism”, the harm of which becomes a positive menace under the present circumstances.

The social crisis will inevitably produce deep cleavages within the social-democracy. The radicalisation of the masses will affect the social-democratic workers long before they cease to be social-democratic. We will inevitably have to make agreements against fascism with the various social-democratic organisations and factions, putting definite conditions to the leaders, in full view of the masses. [...] We must return from the official's empty phrase about the united front to the policy of the united front as it was formulated by Lenin and always applied by the Bolsheviks in 1917. ■

## 4. An Aesop Fable

A cattle dealer once drove some bulls to the slaughterhouse. And the butcher came nigh with his sharp knife.

“Let us close ranks and jack up this executioner on our horns”, suggested one of the bulls.

“If you please, in what way is the butcher any worse than the dealer who drove us hither with his cudgel?” replied the bulls, who had received their political education in Manuilsky’s institute.

“But we shall be able to attend to the dealer as well afterwards!”

“Nothing doing”, replied the bulls, firm in their principles, to the counsellor. “You are trying to shield our enemies from the left; you are a social-butcher yourself.”

And they refused to close ranks. ■

## 5. The German Cops & Army

In case of actual danger, the social-democracy banks not on the “Iron Front” but on the Prussian police. It is reckoning without its host! The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among social-democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.

In its New Year’s issue, the theoretical organ of the social-democracy, *Das Freie Wort* (what a wretched sheet!), prints an article in which the policy of “toleration” is expounded in its highest sense. Hitler, it appears, can never come into power against the police and the Reichswehr [German army]. Now, according to the constitution, the Reichswehr is under the command of the president of the republic. Therefore fascism, it follows, is not dangerous so long as a president faithful to the constitution remains at the head of the government. Brüning’s regime must be supported until the presidential elections, so that a constitutional president may then be elected through an alliance with the parliamentary bourgeoisie; and thus Hitler’s road to power will be blocked for another seven years. [...]

The politicians of reformism, these dexterous wire-pullers, artful intriguers and careerists, expert parliamentary and ministerial manoeuvrers, are no sooner thrown out of their habitual sphere by the course of events, no sooner placed face to face with momentous contingencies than they reveal themselves to be — there is no milder expression for it — utter and complete fools.

To rely upon a president is to rely upon “the state”! Faced with the impending



clash between the proletariat and the fascist petty bourgeoisie — two camps which together comprise the crushing majority of the German nation — these Marxists from the *Vorwärts* yelp for the night watchman to come to their aid. They say to the state: “Help! Intervene!” (*Staat, greif zu!*) ■



Communist demonstration in Berlin. The banner reads: “Break with the social-fascist course, fight with the KJVD [Communist Youth]”.

## 6. Bourgeoisie, Petty Bourgeoisie & Proletariat

Any serious analysis of the political situation must take as its point of departure the mutual relations among the three classes: the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie (including the peasantry) and the proletariat.

The economically powerful big bourgeoisie, in itself, represents an infinitesimal minority of the nation. To enforce its domination, it must ensure a definite mutual relationship with the petty bourgeoisie and, through its mediation, with the proletariat.

To understand the dialectics of these interrelations, we must distinguish three historical stages: the dawn of capitalistic development, when the bourgeoisie required revolutionary methods to solve its tasks; the period of bloom and maturity of the capitalist regime, when the bourgeoisie endowed its domination with orderly, pacific, conservative, democratic forms; finally, the decline of capitalism, when the bourgeoisie is forced to resort to methods of civil war against the proletariat to protect its right of exploitation.

The political programs characteristic of these three stages — *Jacobinism*, reformist *democracy* (social-democracy included), and *fascism* — are basically programs of petty-bourgeois currents. This fact alone, more than anything else, shows of what tremendous — rather, of what decisive — importance the self-determination of the petty-bourgeois masses of the people is for the whole fate of bourgeois society.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the bourgeoisie and its basic social support, the petty bourgeoisie, does not at all rest upon reciprocal confidence and pacific collaboration. In its mass, the petty bourgeoisie is an exploited and oppressed class. It regards the bourgeoisie with envy and often with hatred. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, while utilising the support of the petty bourgeoisie, distrusts the latter, for it very correctly fears its tendency to break down the barriers set up for it from above.

While they were laying out and clearing the road for bourgeois development, the Jacobins engaged, at every step, in sharp clashes with the bourgeoisie. They served it in intransigent struggle against it. After they had culminated their limited historical role, the Jacobins fell, for the rule of capital was predetermined.

For a whole series of stages, the bourgeoisie asserted its power under the form of parliamentary democracy. But again, not peacefully and not voluntarily. The bourgeoisie was mortally afraid of universal suffrage. But in the long run, it succeeded, with the aid of a combination of repressions and concessions, with the threat of starvation coupled with measures of reform, in subordinating within the framework of formal democracy not only the old petty bourgeoisie, but in considerable measure also the proletariat, by means of the new petty bourgeoisie — the labour aristocracy. In August 1914 the imperialist bourgeoisie was able, by means of parliamentary democracy, to lead millions of workers and peasants to the slaughter.

But precisely with the war there begins the distinct decline of capitalism and, above all of its democratic form of domination. It is now no longer a matter of new reforms and alms, but of cutting down and abolishing the old ones. Therewith the bourgeoisie comes into conflict not only with the institutions of proletarian democracy (trade unions and political parties) but also with parliamentary democracy, within the framework of which the workers' organisations arose. Hence, the campaign against "Marxism" on the one hand and against democratic parliamentarism on the other.

But just as the summits of the liberal bourgeoisie in their time were unable, by their own force alone, to get rid of feudalism, monarchy and the church, so the magnates of finance capital are unable, by *their* force alone, to cope with the proletariat. They need the support of the petty bourgeoisie. For this purpose, it must be whipped up, put on its feet, mobilised, armed. But this method has its dangers. While it makes use of fascism, the bourgeoisie nevertheless fears it. Pilsudski was forced in May 1926 to save bourgeois society by a *coup d'état* directed against the traditional parties of the Polish bourgeoisie. The matter went so far that the official leader of the Polish Communist Party, Warski, who came over from Rosa Luxemburg not to Lenin, but to Stalin, took the *coup d'état* of Pilsudski to be the road of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship" and called upon the workers to support Pilsudski.

At the session of the Polish Commission of the Executive Committee of the Communist International on July 2, 1926, the author of these lines said on the subject of the events in Poland:

Taken as a whole, the Pilsudski overthrow is the petty-bourgeois, "plebeian" manner of solving the burning problems of bourgeois society in its state of decomposition and decline. We have here already a direct resemblance to Italian fascism.

These two currents indubitably possess common features: they recruit their shock troops first of all from the petty bourgeoisie; Pilsudski as well as Mussolini worked with extraparliamentary means, with open violence, with the methods of civil war; both were concerned not with the destruction but with the preservation of bourgeois society. While they raised the petty bourgeoisie on its feet, they openly aligned themselves, after the seizure of power, with the big bourgeoisie. Involuntarily, an historical generalisation comes up here, recalling the evaluation given by Marx of Jacobinism as the plebeian method of settling accounts with the feudal enemies of the bourgeoisie ... That was in the *period of the rise* of the bourgeoisie. Now we must say, in the *period of the decline* of bourgeois society, the bourgeoisie again needs the “plebeian” method of resolving its no longer progressive but entirely reactionary tasks. In this sense, *fascism is a caricature of Jacobinism*.

The bourgeoisie is incapable of maintaining itself in power by the means and methods of the parliamentary state created by itself, it needs fascism as a weapon of self-defence, at least in critical instances. Nevertheless, the bourgeoisie does not like the “plebeian” method of resolving its tasks. It was always hostile to Jacobinism, which cleared the road for the development of bourgeois society with its blood. The fascists are immeasurably closer to the decadent bourgeoisie than the Jacobins were to the rising bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the sober bourgeoisie does not look very favourably even upon the fascist mode of resolving its tasks, for the concussions, although they are brought forth in the interests of bourgeois society, are linked up with dangers to it. Therefore, the opposition between fascism and the bourgeois parties.

The big bourgeoisie likes fascism as little as a man with aching molars likes to have his teeth pulled. The sober circles of bourgeois society have followed with misgivings the work of the dentist Pilsudski, but in the last analysis they have become reconciled to the inevitable, though with threats, with horse-trades and all sorts of bargaining. Thus the petty bourgeoisie’s idol of yesterday becomes transformed into the gendarme of capital.

To this attempt at defining the historical place of fascism as the political replacement for the social-democracy, there was counterposed the theory of social-fascism. At first it could appear as a pretentious, blustering, but harmless stupidity. Subsequent events have shown what a pernicious influence the Stalinist theory actually exercised on the entire development of the Communist International.

Does it follow from the historical role of Jacobinism, of democracy, and of fascism that the petty bourgeoisie is condemned to remain a tool in the hands of capital to the end of its days? If things were so, then the dictatorship of the proletariat would be impossible in a number of countries in which the petty bourgeoisie constitutes the

majority of the nation and, more than that, it would be rendered extremely difficult in other countries in which the petty bourgeoisie represents an important minority. Fortunately, things are not so. The experience of the Paris Commune first showed, at least within the limits of one city, just as the experience of the October Revolution has shown after it on a much larger scale and over an incomparably longer period, that the alliance of the petty bourgeoisie and the big bourgeoisie is not indissoluble. Since the petty bourgeoisie is incapable of an *independent* policy (that is also why the petty-bourgeois “democratic dictatorship” is unrealisable), no other choice is left for it other than that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In the epoch of the rise, the sprouting and blooming of capitalism, the petty bourgeoisie, despite acute outbreaks of discontent, generally marched obediently in the capitalist harness. Nor could it do anything else. But under the conditions of capitalist disintegration and of the impasse in the economic situation, the petty bourgeoisie strives, seeks and attempts to tear itself loose from the fetters of the old masters and rulers of society. It is quite capable of linking its fate with that of the proletariat. For that, only one thing is needed: the petty bourgeoisie must acquire faith in the ability of the proletariat to lead society onto a new road. The proletariat can inspire this faith only by its strength, by the firmness of its actions, by a skilful offensive against the enemy, by the success of its revolutionary policy.

But, woe if the revolutionary party does not measure up to the situation! The daily struggle of the proletariat sharpens the instability of bourgeois society. The strikes and the political disturbances aggravate the economic situation of the country. The petty bourgeoisie could reconcile itself temporarily to the growing privations, if it came through experience to the conviction that the proletariat is in a position to lead it onto a new road. But if the revolutionary party, in spite of a class struggle becoming incessantly more accentuated, proves time and again to be incapable of uniting the working class behind it; if it vacillates, becomes confused, contradicts itself, then the petty bourgeoisie loses patience and begins to look upon the revolutionary workers as those responsible for its own misery. All the bourgeois parties, including the social-democracy, turn its thoughts in this very direction. When the social crisis takes on an intolerable acuteness, a particular party appears on the scene with the direct aim of agitating the petty bourgeoisie to a white heat and of directing its hatred and its despair against the proletariat. In Germany, this historical function is fulfilled by National Socialism [Nazism], a broad current whose ideology is composed of all the putrid vapours of decomposing bourgeois society. ■

## 7. The German Catastrophe. The Responsibility of the Leadership

The unparalleled defeat of the German proletariat is the most important event since the conquest of power by the Russian proletariat. The first task on the morrow of the defeat is to analyse the policy of the leadership. The most responsible leaders (who are, heaven be praised, safe and sound) point with pathos to the imprisoned rank-and-file executors of their policies in order to suppress all criticism. We can only meet such a spuriously sentimental argument with contempt. Our solidarity with those whom Hitler has imprisoned is unassailable, but this solidarity does not extend to accepting the mistakes of the leaders. The losses sustained will be justified only if the ideas of the vanquished are advanced. The preliminary condition for this is courageous criticism.

For a whole month not a single communist organ, the Moscow *Pravda* not excepted, offered a word on the catastrophe of March 5. They all waited to hear what the presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International would say. For its part the presidium oscillated between two contradictory variants: "The German Central Committee led us astray", and "The German Central Committee pursued a correct policy". The first variant was ruled out: the preparation of the catastrophe had taken place under the eyes of everybody, and the controversy with the Left Opposition that preceded the catastrophe had too clearly committed the leaders of the Communist International. At last, on April 7, the decision was announced: "The political line ... of the Central Committee [of the German Communist Party], with Thälmann at its head, was completely correct up to and during Hitler's *coup d'état*." It is only to be regretted that all those who were dispatched into the beyond by the fascists did not learn of this consoling affirmation before they died.

The resolution of the presidium does not attempt to analyse the policy of the

German Communist Party — which might have been expected, above all else — but is another in the long series of indictments against the social-democracy. It preferred, we are told, a coalition with the bourgeoisie to a coalition with the communists; it evaded a real struggle against fascism; it fettered the initiative of the masses; and as it had in its hands the “leadership of the mass labour organisations”, it succeeded in preventing a general strike. All this is true. But it is nothing new. The social-democracy, as the party of social reform, exhausted the progressiveness of its mission as capitalism was transforming itself into imperialism. During the [first world] war the social-democracy functioned as a direct instrument of imperialism. After the war it hired itself out officially as the family doctor of capitalism. The Communist Party strove to be its gravedigger. On whose side was the whole course of development? The chaotic state of international relations, the collapse of pacifist illusions, the unparalleled crisis which is tantamount to a great war with its aftermath of epidemics — all this, it would seem, revealed the decadent character of European capitalism and the hopelessness of reformism.

Then what happened to the Communist Party? In reality the Communist International is ignoring one of its own sections, even though that section rallied some six million votes in the election. That is no longer a mere vanguard; it is a great independent army. Why, then, did it take part in the events only as a victim of repression and pogroms? Why, at the decisive hour, did it prove to be stricken with paralysis? There are circumstances under which one cannot withdraw without giving battle. A defeat may result from the superiority of the enemy forces; after defeat one may recover. The passive surrender of all the decisive positions reveals an organic incapacity to fight which does not go unpunished.

The presidium tells us that the policy of the Communist Party was correct “before as well as during the *coup d'état*”. A correct policy, however, begins with a correct appraisal of the situation. Yet for the last four years, in fact up to March 5, 1933, we heard day in and day out that a mighty antifascist front was growing uninterruptedly in Germany, that National Socialism was retreating and disintegrating, and that the whole situation was under the aegis of the revolutionary offensive. *How could a policy have been correct when the whole analysis on which it was based was knocked over like a house of cards?*

The presidium justifies the passive retreat by the fact that the Communist Party, “lacking the support of the majority of the working class”, could not engage in a decisive battle without committing a crime. Nevertheless, the same resolution considers the July 20 [1932] call for a general political strike as deserving special praise, though for some unknown reason it neglects to mention an identical call of March 5 [1933]. Is

not the general strike a “decisive struggle”? The two strike calls wholly corresponded to the obligations of a “leading role” in the “antifascist united front” under the conditions of the “revolutionary offensive”. Unfortunately, the strike calls fell on deaf ears; nobody came out and answered them. But if, between the official interpretation of events and the strike calls on the one hand, and the facts and deeds on the other, there arises such a crying contradiction, it is hard to understand wherein a correct policy can be distinguished from a disastrous one. In any case, the presidium has forgotten to explain which was correct — the two strike calls or the indifference of the workers to them.

But perhaps the division in the ranks of the proletariat was the cause of the defeat? Such an explanation is created especially for lazy minds. The unity of the proletariat, as a universal slogan, is a myth. The proletariat is not homogeneous. The split begins with the political awakening of the proletariat, and constitutes the mechanics of its growth. Only under the conditions of a ripened social crisis, when it is faced with the seizure of power as an immediate task, can the vanguard of the proletariat, provided with a correct policy, rally around itself the overwhelming majority of its class. But the rise to this revolutionary peak is accomplished on the steps of successive splits.

It was not Lenin who invented the policy of the united front; like the split within the proletariat, it is imposed by the dialectics of the class struggle. No successes would be possible without temporary agreements, for the sake of fulfilling immediate tasks, among various sections, organisations, and groups of the proletariat. Strikes, trade unions, journals, parliamentary elections, street demonstrations, demand that the split be bridged in practice from time to time as the need arises; that is, they demand an *ad hoc* united front, even if it does not always take on the form of one. In the first stages of a movement unity arises episodically and spontaneously from below, but when the masses are accustomed to fighting through their organisations, unity must also be established at the top. Under the conditions existing in advanced capitalist countries, the slogan of “only from below” is a gross anachronism, fostered by memories of the first stages of the revolutionary movement especially in tsarist Russia.

At a certain level, the struggle for unity of action is converted from an elementary fact into a tactical task. The simple formula of the united front solves nothing. It is not only communists who appeal for unity, but also reformists, and even fascists. The tactical application of the united front is subordinated, in every given period, to a definite strategic conception. In preparing the revolutionary unification of the workers, without and against reformism, a long, persistent, and patient experience in applying the united front with the reformists is necessary; always, of course, from the point of view of the final revolutionary goal. It is precisely in this field that Lenin gave us



incomparable examples.

The strategic conception of the Communist International was false from beginning to end. The point of departure of the German Communist Party was that there is nothing but a mere division of labour between the social-democracy and fascism; that their interests are similar, if not identical. Instead of helping to aggravate the discord between communism's principal political adversary and its mortal foe — for which it would have been sufficient to proclaim the truth aloud instead of violating it — the Communist International convinced the reformists and the fascists that they were twins; it predicted their conciliation, embittered and repulsed the social-democratic workers, and consolidated their reformist leaders. Worse yet: in every case where, despite the obstacles presented by the leadership, local unity committees for workers' defence were created, the [Stalinist] bureaucracy forced its representatives to withdraw under threat of expulsion. It displayed persistence and perseverance only in sabotaging the united front, from above as well as from below. All this it did, to be sure, with the best of intentions.

No policy of the Communist Party could, of course, have transformed the social-democracy into a party of the revolution. But neither was that the aim. It was necessary to exploit to the limit the contradiction between reformism and fascism — in order to weaken fascism, at the same time weakening reformism by exposing to the workers the incapacity of the social-democratic leadership. These two tasks fused naturally into one. The policy of the Comintern bureaucracy led to the opposite result: the capitulation of the reformists served the interests of fascism and not of communism; the social-democratic workers remained with their leaders; the communist workers lost faith in themselves and in the leadership.

The masses wanted to fight, but they were obstinately prevented from doing so by the leaders. Tension, uneasiness, and finally disorientation disrupted the proletariat from within. It is dangerous to keep molten metal too long on the fire; it is still more dangerous to keep society too long in a state of revolutionary crisis. The petty bourgeoisie swung over in its overwhelming majority to the side of National Socialism only because the proletariat, paralysed from above, proved powerless to lead it along a different road. The absence of resistance on the part of the workers heightened the self-assurance of fascism and diminished the fear of the big bourgeoisie confronted by the risk of civil war. The inevitable demoralisation of the communist detachment, increasingly isolated from the proletariat, rendered impossible even a partial resistance. Thus the triumphal procession of Hitler over the bones of the proletarian organisations was assured.

The false strategic conception of the Communist International collided with reality

at every stage, thereby leading to a course of incomprehensible and inexplicable zigzags. The fundamental principle of the Communist International was: *a united front with the reformist leaders cannot be permitted!* Then, at the most critical hour, the Central Committee of the German Communist Party, without explanation or preparation, appealed to the leaders of the social-democracy, proposing the united front as an ultimatum: today or never! Both leaders and workers in the reformist camp interpreted this step, not as the product of fear, but, on the contrary, as a diabolical trap. After the inevitable failure of an attempt at compromise, the Communist International ordered that the appeal be ignored and the very idea of a united front was once more proclaimed counterrevolutionary. Such an insult to the political consciousness of the masses could not pass with impunity. If up to March 5 one could, with some difficulty, still imagine that the Communist International in its fear of the enemy, might possibly call upon the social-democracy, at the last moment, under the club of the enemy — then the appeal of the presidium on March 5 proposing joint action to the social-democratic parties of the entire world, independent of the internal conditions of each country, made even this explanation impossible. In this belated and worldwide proposal for a united front, when Germany was revealed by the flames of the Reichstag fire, there was no longer a word about social-fascism. The Communist International was even prepared — it is hard to believe this, but it was printed in black and white! — *to refrain from criticism of the social-democracy* during the whole period of the joint struggle.

The waves of this panic-stricken capitulation to reformism had hardly had time to subside when Wels swore fealty to Hitler, and Leipart offered fascism his assistance and support. “The communists”, the presidium of the Communist International immediately declared, “were right in calling the social-democrats social fascists”. These people are always right. Then why did they themselves abandon the theory of social-fascism a few days before this unmistakable confirmation of it? Luckily, nobody dares to put embarrassing questions to the leaders. But the misfortunes do not stop there: the bureaucracy thinks too slowly to keep pace with the present tempo of events. Hardly had the presidium fallen back upon the famous revelation: “Fascism and social-democracy are twins”, than Hitler accomplished the complete destruction of the Free Trade Unions and, incidentally, arrested Leipart and Co. The relations between the twin brothers are not entirely brotherly.

Instead of taking reformism as a historic reality, with its interests and its contradictions, with all its oscillations to the right and left, the [Comintern] bureaucracy operates with mechanical models. Leipart’s readiness to crawl on all fours *after* the defeat is offered as an argument against the united front *before* the defeat *for the purpose of avoiding* the defeat. As if the policy of making fighting agreements with the

reformists were based upon the valour of the reformist leaders and not upon the incompatibility of the organs of the proletarian democracy and the fascist bands. [...]

That the reformists, after the defeat, would be happy if Hitler were to permit them to vegetate legally until better times return, cannot be doubted. But unfortunately for them, Hitler — the experience of Italy has not been in vain for him — realises that the labour organisations, even if their leaders accept a muzzle, would inevitably become a threatening danger at the first political crisis. ■



Hitler reviews SA (Brownshirt) units shortly after taking power, Leipzig, 1933.

## 8. The Collapse of Bourgeois Democracy

After the war a series of revolutions occurred, winning brilliant victories: in Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and later in Spain. But it is only in Russia that the proletariat took all the power into its own hands, expropriated its exploiters and thus understood how to create and maintain a workers' state. In all the other cases, despite its victory, the proletariat stopped in its tracks because of a lack of leadership. And as a result, power slipped through its hands and, moving from left to right, became the prey of fascism. In a series of other countries power fell into the hands of military dictatorships. In none of these countries did the parliament have the strength to reconcile the class contradictions or to ensure a peaceful way forward. The conflict was resolved arms in hand.

To be sure, the French have thought for a long time that fascism had nothing to do with their country — because France is a republic, in which every question is settled by the sovereign people by means of universal suffrage. But on February 6 [1934], a few thousand fascists and royalists, armed with revolvers, clubs and razors, imposed on the country the reactionary Doumergue government, under the protection of which the fascist gangs continue to grow and arm themselves. What does tomorrow hold?

Of course, in France, as in certain other European countries (England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries), there still exist parliaments, elections and democratic freedoms or their remains. But in all these countries the class struggle pushes forward along the same path as it followed earlier in Italy and Germany. Whoever consoles himself with the phrase “France is not Germany” is a hopeless imbecile. In every country the same laws are now operating — the laws of capitalist decline. If the means of production continue to be held in the hands of a small number

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From *Where is France Going?* [*Whither France?*], October 1934. Translated for this edition from the French by Josephine Hunt.

of capitalists, there will be no salvation for society. It will be condemned to go from crisis to crisis, from misery to misery, from bad to worse. In the different countries the consequences of capitalism's decrepitude and decay express themselves in diverse forms and develop with unequal rhythms. But the basic process is the same everywhere. The bourgeoisie has brought its society to complete bankruptcy. It is incapable of securing for the people either bread or peace. This is precisely why it cannot much longer tolerate the democratic order. It is forced to crush the workers by means of physical violence. But the disaffection of the workers and peasants cannot be ended by the police alone. And making the army march against the people is too often impossible — it starts falling to pieces and in the end a large number of soldiers go over to the side of the people. That is why big capital is forced to create special armed gangs, specifically trained to fight workers, like certain breeds of dog are trained to hunt game. The historical role of fascism is to crush the working class, destroy its organisations and stifle political freedom, at a time when the capitalists are conscious that they have become incapable of governing or dominating through the democratic system.

Fascism finds its human resources principally in the petty bourgeoisie. Ultimately it is ruined by big capital. It will find no salvation within the present social structure, but it knows no other way out. Its disaffection, its rebellion and its despair are directed by the fascists away from big capital and against the workers. Fascism could be described as an operation involving the dislocation of the brains of the petty bourgeoisie in the interests of its worst enemies. Thus, big capital ruins the middle classes, then, with the help of its mercenary agents, the fascist demagogues, turns the despairing petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat. It is only by such swindling practices that the bourgeois regime is still able to maintain itself. For how long? Until it is overthrown by the proletarian revolution. ■

## 9. Does the Petty Bourgeoisie Fear Revolution?

Parliamentary routinists, who see themselves as experts on the people, like to repeat: “We must not frighten the middle classes with revolution. They do not like extremes”. In this general form, this assertion is absolutely false. Naturally, the small proprietor wants order, so long as his business is good and for as long as he hopes it will be still better tomorrow. But when this hope is lost, he easily gets into a rage and is ready to take the most extreme measures. Otherwise, how could he have overthrown the democratic state and brought fascism to power in Italy and in Germany? Above all, the despairing petty bourgeois sees in fascism a force to fight big capital and a force which they believe, unlike the workers’ parties, will use fists rather than just words to establish more “justice”. The peasant and the artisan are, in their way, realists; they understand that they will need to use fists. It is false, thrice false, to assert that it is due to a fear of “extreme measures” that the petty bourgeoisie does not turn to the workers’ parties. Very much the contrary. The lower layer of the petty bourgeoisie, in its great mass, sees the workers’ parties only as parliamentary apparatuses, and does not believe in their strength, their ability to struggle, or their readiness to take the struggle all the way. And if that is how things are, why bother replacing Radicalism with its parliamentary colleagues on the left? There you see the reasoning of the semi-expropriated, ruined and rebellious proprietor. Without an understanding of this psychology, which is shared by peasants, artisans, employees, lower functionaries, etc. — a psychology which follows from the social crisis — it is impossible to elaborate a correct policy.

The petty bourgeoisie is economically dependent and politically fragmented. That is why it will never have its own politics. It needs a “leader” to inspire its confidence. This collective or individual leader, i.e., a personage or a party, can be given to it by

either of the basic classes, either by the big bourgeoisie or by the proletariat. Fascism unites and arms the scattered masses and out of this “human dust”, so to speak, makes combat units. Thus it gives the petty bourgeoisie the illusion of being an independent force. It begins to imagine that it could actually take charge of the state. It is no surprise that these hopes and illusions go to its head.

The petty bourgeoisie can also find a leader in the form of the proletariat. This has been shown in Russia, and partially in Spain. Italy, Germany and Austria were heading in the same direction. But the parties of the proletariat did not rise to their historic task. To win the petty bourgeoisie to its side, the proletariat has to gain its confidence. And for this, it must have confidence in its own strength. It must have a clear program of action and be ready to struggle for power by all available means. Welded by its revolutionary party for a decisive and relentless struggle, the proletariat says to the peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie: “We are struggling to take power. Here is our program. We are ready to discuss changes to it if you wish. We will use force only against big capital and its lackeys, and with you, fellow toilers, we want to form an alliance on the basis of a specific program”. This is the sort of language the peasants will understand. Only they must have confidence in the ability of the proletariat to seize power. But for that the united front must be cleansed of all ambiguity, indecision and empty rhetoric; it is necessary to understand the situation and set ourselves seriously on the path of revolutionary struggle. ■

# 10. The Danger of Ultraleft Tactics in Fighting Fascists

Dear friends,

Being in Switzerland,<sup>a</sup> I cannot follow events in France from up close. I can make judgements only on the basis of newspapers and letters. However, let me say that before emigrating to Switzerland, I accumulated a good deal of experience in these matters whilst in Germany, and the Ménilmontant affair fills me with the worst sense of foreboding. If things continue to develop along this line, catastrophe is inevitable.

What is our aim, not only in an immediate sense, but over the whole of the next period? We must involve the workers in a struggle against the fascists before they have become the dominant force in the state. We must accustom the workers to facing the fascists without fear, teach them to strike the fascists and persuade them that it is they who are more numerous, more audacious, etc. ...

In this period we must clearly distinguish between the fascists and the state, which does not yet wish to give in to the fascists; it wants to be an “arbiter”. We know what this means from a sociological point of view, but this is not about sociology. It is about striking blows and receiving them. Politically, we can see that the pre-Bonapartist, “arbiter” state is one in which the police are hesitating, manoeuvring, vacillating, and in short, are far from identifying themselves with the fascist gangs. It is our strategic task to deepen every hesitation and apprehension of this “arbiter”, and of its army and police. How? By showing that we are stronger than the fascists — in other words, by giving them a good thrashing under the gaze of this “arbiter”, without directly involving the state as long as this is not forced upon us. This is the crucial point.

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A letter sent by Trotsky to the leadership of the Ligue Communiste in France, March 2, 1934. Translated for this edition from the French by Josephine Hunt.

<sup>a</sup> A security deception: At the time Trotsky was in exile in France, forbidden to intervene in French politics.



Now, at Ménilmontant [a suburb of Paris], as far as I can tell from here, things were done entirely differently. According to *L'Humanité*, there were no more than 60 fascists, in a solid working-class area! The tactical, or “technical”, task was really very simple — to grab each fascist or each isolated group of them by the collar, to confront them several times with the pavement, deprive them of their insignia and their fascist papers, and without further aggravating the conflict, leave them there with their tattered nerves and a few good bruises. The “arbiter” defended freedom of assembly in this case (for the moment, it also defends workers’ meetings from the fascists). Thus it was absolutely stupid to want to provoke an armed conflict with the police. Yet this is precisely what was done. *L'Humanité* exults: “They built a barricade!” But what for? There were no fascists on the other side of the barricade, and it was precisely the fascists people had come to fight. Or was this an armed insurrection? To establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in Ménilmontant? This is utter nonsense. Marx said: “One does not play with insurrection.” That means: “One does not play with barricades.” Even in the case of insurrection, you can’t build barricades wherever or whenever you feel like it. (Something can be learnt from Blanqui on this count — see the documents published in *La Critique Social*.)

This is what was achieved: (a) Papa’s boys all got home safely; (b) a worker was killed in the clash with the police; (c) the fascists gained an important argument — “the communists are putting up barricades”.

The idiot bureaucrats will say: “So, it’s for fear of the fascists and love of the police that we’re supposed to renounce barricades?”. To refuse to erect barricades when the political situation requires them, and when you are strong enough to build and defend them, is a betrayal. But it is a disgusting provocation to make mock barricades because of some little fascist meeting and to completely distort the political proportions of it and to disorient the proletariat.

We must *involve* increasing numbers of workers in the struggle against fascism. These exploits at Ménilmontant can only isolate a small combative minority. After that experience, a hundred or a thousand workers, who would be quite ready to fight arrogant bourgeois youths, will say: “No way! I’m not getting beaten up for nothing.” The result of the whole exercise is completely the opposite of its aim. In fact, to be honest, I wouldn’t be surprised if we found out down the track that the loudest cries for barricades had come from fascist agents in the ranks of the Stalinists, who wanted to extricate their friends by provoking a conflict with the police. If that’s true, then they were very successful.

So what should the most active and astute forces have done on the ground? They should have improvised a small general staff, including another socialist and if possible,

a Stalinist. (At the same time it should have been explained to the workers that the neighbourhood general staff should have been operating as a permanent organisation the day before the demonstration.) The improvised staff, with the help of a map of the locality, should have drawn up the simplest plan in the world — to divide 100 or 200 protesters into teams of 3-5 fellows, a leader for each team, and let them do their work. Afterwards, the leaders should meet to draw out the results of the exercise and the necessary lessons for the future. This second meeting would form a good core for a permanent general staff, and a mainstay for a workers' militia in the area. Of course, we should also have had leaflets explaining the necessity of a permanent general staff.

The conclusions for astute revolutionary elements are:

- a. Have your own small general staff for occasions like this.
- b. Anticipate the possibility and the likely outcome of conflicts.
- c. Make some approximate plans (with several variations).
- d. Have a map of the area.
- e. Have leaflets appropriate to the situation.

This is all I can say for the moment. I am almost certain that these suggestions will coincide entirely with your own ideas. So much the better. ■

# 11. The Workers' Militia & Its Opponents

To struggle, it is necessary to maintain and strengthen the instruments and means of struggle — the organisations, the press, meetings, etc. All these things are under direct and immediate threat from fascism. It is still too weak to take on the struggle for power directly, but is strong enough to attempt to break the workers' organisations bit by bit, harden its gangs in these attacks, and spread dejection and a lack of confidence in their own strength in the ranks of the workers. In addition, fascism finds unwitting assistants in all those who deem the "physical struggle" to be unacceptable and futile, and demand that Doumergue disarm his fascist guard. Nothing is so dangerous to the proletariat, especially in the present situation, as the sugar-coated poison of false hopes. Nothing increases the insolence of the fascists as much as the spineless "pacifism" of the workers' organisations. And nothing so effectively destroys the confidence of the middle classes in the proletariat as passive waiting and an absence of the will to struggle.

*Le Populaire*, and especially *l'Humanité*, write every day: "The united front is a barrier against fascism"; "the united front will not allow it"; "the fascists will not dare"; and so on. This is just rhetoric. It is necessary to say bluntly to the workers, the socialists and the communists: "Do not let superficial and irresponsible journalists and orators lull you with their rhetoric. It's a matter of your lives and the future of socialism." It is not us who deny the importance of the united front: we called for it when the leaders of both parties were against it. The united front opens up enormous possibilities. But nothing more. In itself, the united front decides nothing. Only the struggle of the masses decides. The united front will show its real worth when, in the event of an attack by the fascist gangs on *Le Populaire* and *l'Humanité*, the communist forces come to the aid of the socialist forces, and *vice versa*. But for that to happen, workers'

combat units must exist, and be educated, trained and armed. And without a defence organisation, i.e., a workers' militia, *Le Populaire* and *l'Humanité* can write all the articles they like about the omnipotence of the united front, but they will find themselves defenceless against the first well-prepared fascist attack. Let us try to critically examine the "arguments" and "theories" of the opponents of the workers' militia, who are very numerous and influential in both workers' parties.

"We need mass self-defence, not a militia", we are often told. But what does "mass self-defence" mean without a combat organisation, specialist cadre or arms? To charge the unorganised, unprepared masses, left to their own devices, with the defence against fascism, would be to play a role incomparably lower role than that of Pontius Pilate. To deny the role of the militia is to deny the role of the vanguard. So why have a party? The fact is the militia is nothing without the support of the masses. But without organised combat units, the most heroic masses will be crushed, bit by bit, by the fascist gangs. Opposing the militia to self-defence is absurd. *The militia is the organ of self-defence.*

Certain opponents, albeit not very serious or honest opponents, say it is "provocation" to call for the organisation of a militia. This is not an argument but an insult. If the necessity to defend the workers' organisations follows from the whole situation, then how can we not call for the creation of militias? We are meant to understand, perhaps, that the creation of a militia "provokes" the fascist attacks and the repression of the government. If so, such an argument is absolutely reactionary. Liberalism has always told the workers that their class struggle "provokes" the reaction. The reformists repeated the accusation against the Marxists, the Mensheviks against the Bolsheviks. In the end, these accusations boil down to the profound idea that if the oppressed were not restless, the oppressors would not have to beat them. This is the philosophy of Tolstoy and Gandhi, but in no way of Marx or Lenin. If *l'Humanité* henceforth wishes to advance a doctrine of "nonresistance to evil by violence", then its symbol should no longer be the hammer and sickle, the emblem of the October revolution, but rather, the pious goat whose milk fed Gandhi.

"But arming the workers is advisable only in a revolutionary situation, which does not yet exist." What this profound argument means is that the workers must let themselves be beaten until the situation becomes revolutionary. Those who yesterday preached the "third period" do not want to see what is happening right before their eyes. The question of arms has arisen in practice only because the "peaceful", "normal", "democratic" situation has given way to one which is turbulent, critical and unstable, and could as easily become revolutionary as counterrevolutionary. And the outcome depends more than anything on whether the advanced workers let themselves be

beaten bit by bit with impunity, or reply to each blow with two of their own, raise the spirits of the oppressed and unite them around themselves. A revolutionary situation does not fall from the skies. It takes form with the active participation of the revolutionary class and its party.

The French Stalinists now point to the fact that a workers' militia did not save the German proletariat from defeat. Only yesterday they denied there had been any defeat in Germany, declaring the politics of the German Stalinists to have been correct from start to finish. Today they lay all the blame on the German workers' militia (*Rote Front*). Thus they fall from one error into the opposite, which is no less monstrous. The militia by itself does not solve the question. *A correct policy is necessary*. And the politics of the Stalinists in Germany ("social-fascism is the principal enemy", the split in the unions, flirting with nationalism and putschism) led fatally to the isolation of the proletarian vanguard and to its collapse. With a worthless strategy, no militia could have saved the situation.

It is foolish to say that in itself the organisation of the militia leads to adventures, provokes the enemy, the substitution of the political struggle by the physical, etc. In all these phrases there is nothing but political cowardice. The militia, as a strong organisation of the vanguard, is actually the best safeguard against adventures, against individual terrorism, against spontaneous bloody outbreaks. At the same time, the militia is the only real means of minimising the civil war that fascism has imposed on the proletariat. If only, despite the absence of a "revolutionary situation", the workers were to occasionally chastise the "papa's boy" patriots as they saw fit, then the recruitment of new fascist gangs would suddenly become incomparably more difficult.

But here the strategists, tangled up in their own reasoning, confront us with even more stupefying arguments. We quote textually: "If we respond to the revolver shots of the fascist gangs with other revolver shots", writes *l'Humanité* on October 23 [1934], "then we will lose sight of the fact that fascism is a product of the capitalist regime, and that in fighting fascism, we are taking aim at the whole system." It would be difficult to fit more confusion and error into a few lines. It is impossible to defend ourselves against the fascists because they represent ... "a product of the capitalist regime". That is, we must renounce all struggle, because all contemporary social evils represent "products of the capitalist system".

When the fascists kill a revolutionary, or burn down the offices of a proletarian newspaper, the workers must declare philosophically: "Yes, murder and arson are products of the capitalist system", and go home with a clear conscience. The militant theory of Marx has been replaced by fatalist prostration which will benefit only the class enemy. The ruin of the petty bourgeoisie is, of course, a product of capitalism.

And in its turn, the growth of the fascist gangs is a product of the ruin of the petty bourgeoisie. But, on the other hand, the increase of the misery and the revolt of the proletariat is also a product of capitalism, and the militia in its turn is the product of the heightened class struggle. So why, for *l'Humanité's* "Marxists", are fascist gangs the legitimate product of capitalism, while the workers' militia is the illegitimate product of ... Trotskyists? Clearly, it makes no sense.

We are told to take aim at the whole "system". How? Over the heads of human beings? The fascists, for their part, started out in the different countries with revolver shots, and ended up by destroying the whole "system" of workers' organisations. How can an armed offensive by the enemy be stopped, except by an armed defence, in order, in turn, to pass to the offensive?

Of course, *l'Humanité* now admits talk of defence, but only in the form of "mass self-defence". The militia is harmful, you see, because it divides the combat detachments from the masses. But then how can armed combat units exist among the fascists, which are not cut off from the reactionary masses, but on the contrary, with their well-organised attacks, raise their spirits and embolden them. Perhaps the proletarian masses are inferior in their combative capacity to the declassed petty bourgeoisie?

In a terrible muddle, *l'Humanité* begins to hesitate: It seems that mass self-defence requires the creation of "self defence groups". The place of the repudiated militia is to be taken by special groups or units. At first glance, the only difference appears to be in the name. Certainly, the name proposed by *l'Humanité* means nothing. We can speak of "mass self-defence", but not of "self-defence groups", because is not themselves the groups aim to defend, but the workers' organisations. However, it is not, of course, the name that is important. In the view of *l'Humanité*, the "self-defence groups" must renounce the use of arms, so as not to fall into "putschism". These sages treat the working class like a child who must not be allowed to hold the razor. Anyway, as we know, the Camelots du Roi have a monopoly on razors, and being the legitimate "product of capitalism", have used them to overturn the "system" of democracy. In any case, how are the "self-defence groups" going to defend themselves against the fascists' revolvers? "Ideologically", of course. In other words: all they can do is hide. With their hands empty, they must look to their legs for "self-defence". And all the while the fascists will be sacking the workers' organisations with impunity. But although the proletariat may suffer a terrible defeat, it will not, on the other hand, be guilty of "putschism". Disgust and contempt are all that are aroused by this cowardly chatter under the banner of "Bolshevism"!

In the "third period" of happy memory, when *l'Humanité's* strategists, delirious over barricades, "conquered" the streets every day and called anyone who did not

share their fantasies a “social-fascist”, we predicted: “As soon as these people get the tips of their fingers burnt, they will become the worst opportunists.” That prediction has now been completely confirmed. As the movement for a militia grows and strengthens in the Socialist Party, the leaders of the party we call communist run for the fire-hose to dampen the aspirations of advanced workers to form combat columns. Could one imagine a more ill-fated or demoralising operation?

### **It is necessary to build the workers' militia**

In the ranks of the Socialist Party, the following objection can sometimes be heard: “We need a militia, but there’s no need to talk about it so loudly”. We can only congratulate those comrades concerned with shielding the practical side of the matter from unwelcome eyes and ears. But it would be too naive to think we could create the militia imperceptibly and secretly, between four walls. We need tens, and later hundreds of thousands of fighters. They will come to us only if millions of working-class men and women, and behind them the peasants as well, understand the necessity of the militia, and create around the volunteers an atmosphere of ardent sympathy and active support. Secrecy can and must surround only the technical side of the matter. As for the political campaign, it must develop openly — in meetings, in the factories, in the streets and in the public squares.

The basic cadre of the militia must be factory workers, grouped according to place of work, familiar to each other and able to protect their combat units against infiltration by enemy agents much better and more easily than the most elevated bureaucrats. Without the open mobilisation of the masses, conspiratorial staffs will remain suspended in midair when danger strikes. All the workers’ organisations have to take up this task. In this matter, there can be no line of demarcation between the workers’ parties and the unions. Hand in hand, they must mobilise the masses. The success of the workers’ militia will then be fully assured.

“But where will the workers get their arms?” object the sober “realists”, or in other words, frightened Philistines. “Because the class enemy has rifles, cannons, tanks, gas, and aeroplanes, and the workers have a few hundred revolvers and some pocket knives.”

In this objection, everything is piled up to frighten the workers. On the one hand, our sages identify the arms of the fascists with the arms of the state; on the other, they turn to the state, begging it to disarm the fascists. What remarkable logic! In fact, their position is false in both cases. In France, the fascists are still far from taking hold of the state. On the February 6 they entered into armed conflict with the state’s police. That is why it would be false to speak of cannons and tanks when it is a question the *immediate* armed struggle against the fascists. Of course, the fascists are richer than

we are, and can more easily buy arms. But the workers are more numerous, more resolute, more devoted, at least when they sense firm revolutionary leadership. Among other sources, the workers can arm themselves at the expense of the fascists, by systematically disarming them. This is now one of the most serious forms of the struggle against fascism. When the workers' arsenals begin to fill from the fascists' stores, the banks and trusts will become more careful about financing the armament of their murderous guards. It could even be true under these circumstances — *but only in these circumstances* — that the alarmed authorities would really begin to prevent the arming of the fascists, so as not to provide the workers with a supplementary source of arms. We have known for a long time that only revolutionary tactics engender, as a by-product, “reforms” or concessions from the government.

But how then to disarm the fascists? Naturally, it is impossible to do it solely by means of newspaper articles. Fighting squads must be created. The general staffs of the militia must be created. A good intelligence service must be established. Thousands of informants and willing assistants will come from every direction, once they know the matter has been seriously planned by us. It requires a will to proletarian action. [...]

But, of course, the fascist arsenals are not the only source of arms. In France, there are more than a million organised workers. Generally speaking, that is very few. But it is quite enough to establish the beginnings of a workers' militia. If the parties and the unions armed only a tenth of their members, that would already make a militia of 100,000 men. There is no doubt that the day after the call from the “united front” for the militia, the number of volunteers would far exceed this number. Contributions from the parties and unions, collections and voluntary donations would make it possible, in the course of a month or two, to ensure arms for 100,000 or 200,000 working-class fighters. The fascist rabble would quickly be off with their tails between their legs. The whole perspective of development would become incomparably more favourable.

To explain why we have not yet begun to create the workers' militia by referring to a lack of arms, or other objective causes, is to deceive ourselves and others. The main obstacle, indeed the only obstacle, has its roots in the conservative and passive nature of the leaders of the workers' organisations. These sceptics who are the leaders do not believe in the strength of the proletariat. They put their hopes in all types of miracles from on high, instead of giving revolutionary direction to the energy from below. The conscious workers must force their leaders immediately to move to the creation of a people's militia, or to make way for younger and fresher forces.

### **Arming the proletariat**

A strike is inconceivable without propaganda and agitation, but also without pickets



who, where they can, act by persuasion, but when necessary use physical force. The strike is the most elementary form of the class struggle, and class struggle always combines, in different proportions, "ideological" and physical methods. The struggle against fascism is, in essence, a political struggle, but nonetheless needs a militia, just as a strike needs pickets. The picket is basically the embryo of the workers' militia. Those who think that they must renounce the physical struggle, must renounce all struggle, because the spirit cannot live without flesh.

As it was magnificently expressed by the military theoretician Clausewitz, war is the continuation of politics by other means. And this definition is also entirely applicable to civil war. The physical struggle is simply "another means" of the political struggle. It is impossible to counterpose them, because it is impossible to stop at will the political struggle when it is transformed, by force of internal necessity, into a physical struggle. The duty of a revolutionary party is to predict the inevitability of the transformation of politics into open armed struggle, and with all its forces to prepare for this moment, just as the ruling classes are preparing.

Militia units for defence against fascism are the first steps on the road to arming the proletariat, but not the last. Our slogan is: *Arms for the proletariat and the revolutionary peasants*. Ultimately, the people's militia must embrace all the toilers. This program can only ever be *completely* realised in a workers' state, into whose hands will have passed all the means of production, and thus also all the means of destruction, i.e., all the arms and all the factories which produce them.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to arrive at a workers' state with empty hands. Only political invalids like Renaudel can now speak of a peaceful, constitutional road to socialism. The constitutional road is cut by trenches occupied by the fascist gangs. There are many of these trenches ahead of us. The bourgeoisie, with the help of the police and the army, will not shrink even from a dozen *coups d'état*, so long as it stops the proletariat from taking power. A socialist workers' state can only be created by means of a victorious revolution. All revolutions are prepared by the march of economic and political development, but are always decided by open armed conflict between the hostile classes. A revolutionary victory becomes possible only as a result of long political agitation, educational work and organisation of the masses. But armed conflict itself must equally be prepared long in advance. The workers must know that they will have to fight a struggle to the death. They must reach out for arms as a guarantee of their emancipation. In an epoch as crucial as the present one, the revolutionary party must unflinchingly preach to the workers the necessity of taking up arms and must do everything to ensure that at least the proletarian vanguard is armed. Without this victory is impossible. ■

## 12. Build the Revolutionary Party!

In every discussion of political topics the question invariably flares up: Shall we succeed in creating a strong party for the moment when the crisis comes? Might not fascism anticipate us? Isn't a fascist stage of development inevitable? The successes of fascism easily make people lose all perspective, lead them to forget the actual conditions which made the strengthening and the victory of fascism possible. Yet a clear understanding of these conditions is of especial importance to the workers of the United States. We may set it down as a historical law: fascism was able to conquer only in those countries where the conservative labour parties prevented the proletariat from utilising the revolutionary situation and seizing power. In Germany two revolutionary situations were involved: 1918-19 and 1923-24. Even in 1929 a direct struggle for power on the part of the proletariat was still possible. In all these three cases the social-democracy and the Comintern [the Stalinists] criminally and viciously disrupted the conquest of power and thereby placed society in an impasse. Only under these conditions and in this situation did the stormy rise of fascism and its gaining of power prove possible.

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Insofar as the proletariat proves incapable at a given stage of conquering power, imperialism begins regulating economic life with its own methods; the political mechanism is the fascist party, which becomes the state power. The productive forces are in irreconcilable contradiction not only with private property but also with national boundaries. Imperialism is the very expression of this contradiction. Imperialist capitalism seeks to solve this contradiction through an extension of boundaries, seizure of new territories, and so on. The totalitarian state, subjecting all aspects of economic, political, and cultural life to finance capital, is the instrument for creating a supranationalist state, an imperialist empire, ruling over continents, ruling over the whole world.

All these traits of fascism we have analysed, each one by itself and all of them in their totality, to the extent that they became manifest or came to the forefront.

Both theoretical analysis and the rich historical experience of the last quarter of a century have demonstrated with equal force that fascism is each time the final link of a specific political cycle composed of the following: the gravest crisis of capitalist society; the growth of the radicalisation of the working class; the growth of sympathy toward the working class and a yearning for change on the part of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie; the extreme confusion of the big bourgeoisie; its cowardly and treacherous manoeuvres aimed at avoiding the revolutionary climax; the exhaustion of the proletariat; growing confusion and indifference; the aggravation of the social crisis; the despair of the petty bourgeoisie, its yearning for change; the collective neurosis of the petty bourgeoisie, its readiness to believe in miracles, its readiness for violent measures; the growth of hostility towards the proletariat, which has deceived its expectations. These are the premises for a swift formation of a fascist party and its victory.

It is quite self-evident that the radicalisation of the working class in the United States has passed through only its initial phases, almost exclusively in the sphere of the trade union movement (the CIO). The prewar period, and then the war itself, may temporarily interrupt this process of radicalisation, especially if a considerable number of workers are absorbed into war industry. But this interruption of the process of radicalisation cannot be of a long duration. The second stage of radicalisation will assume a more sharply expressive character. The problem of forming an independent labour party will be put on the order of the day. Our transitional demands will gain great popularity. On the other hand, the fascist, reactionary tendencies will withdraw to the background, assuming a defensive position, awaiting a more favourable moment. This is the closest perspective. No occupation is more completely unworthy than that of speculating whether or not we shall succeed in creating a powerful revolutionary vanguard party. Ahead lies a favourable perspective, providing all the justification for revolutionary activism. It is necessary to utilise the opportunities which are opening up and to build the revolutionary party. ■

# Glossary

**Aesop** — Probably legendary Greek author of a collection of fables or short moral tales; one account has him as a slave born about 620BC, another as a slave in Samos in the sixth century BC who was eventually freed by his master, etc.

**Blanqui, August** (1805-81) — Revolutionary socialist prominent in French radical and workers movement of 19th century, he was associated with the idea of the seizure of power by a small, conspiratorial armed group, irrespective of objective conditions or mass consciousness. Despite being in jail during the 1871 Paris Commune, he was elected to its leadership. Although he spent almost half his life in prison, he remained devoted to the cause of ordinary people.

**Bologna, seizure of** — In Italy the fascist campaign of violence began in Bologna on November 21, 1920. As the social-democratic councillors, victorious in the municipal elections, emerged from the town hall to present the new mayor, they were met by gunfire in which 10 were killed and 100 wounded. The fascists followed up with “punitive expeditions” into the surrounding countryside, a stronghold of the “Red Leagues”. Blackshirt “action squadrons” in vehicles supplied by big landowners, took over villages in lightning raids, beating and killing leftist peasant and labour leaders, wrecking radical headquarters, and terrorising the populace. Emboldened by their easy successes, the fascists then launched large-scale attacks in the big cities.

**Bolsheviks** — Majority faction of Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party formed at 1903 Second Congress; led by Lenin; became separate party in 1912; led the 1917 October revolution that established first workers state; later changed name to Communist Party.

**Bonapartism** — Term used by Marxists to describe a dictatorial regime that governs in a period of acute crisis, due to an objective equilibrium between the opposing class forces. Such a regime bases itself upon the bureaucracy of a capitalist state (or, in the case of Stalinism, of a workers’ state), elevating one of its members to the position of a supreme, unchallengeable arbiter who seems to stand “above

parties” and “above classes”.

**Brüning, Heinrich** (1885-1970) — German politician; leader of Catholic Centre Party; represented those capitalists opposed to collaboration with Hitler; chancellor March 1930 to May 1932. From July 1930 he ruled by decree, passing repressive laws against press, freedom of assembly and trade unions.

**Camelots du Roi** — French monarchist organisation grouped around *Action Française*, the newspaper of Charles Maurras (1868-1952), jailed after World War II as a Vichyite collaborator.

**CIO** — Congress of Industrial Organisations; originally a committee of the craft-based American Federation of Labor (AFL). The conservative AFL leaders refused to respond to the demand to unionise the radicalising unskilled workers in basic industry, expelling the CIO unions in 1938. After the conservatism of the CIO unions due to the prolonged post-World War II boom and the anticommunist witch-hunt of the late 1940s and early '50s, the AFL and CIO merged in 1955.

**Clausewitz, Karl von** (1780-1831) — Prussian general and outstanding military theorist; participated in the wars against Napoleon; served in Russian army 1812-13; headed Prussian general staff 1831; wrote three-volume treatise *On War*.

**Communist International** — Third International or Comintern; founded in 1919 as the revolutionary alternative to the class-collaborationist Second International. Guided by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in its early years, it later became bureaucratized under Stalin. Following the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany without any serious opposition from the Communist Party, and the Comintern's endorsement of the ruinous policy of the German CP, Trotsky concluded that the Comintern was bankrupt as a revolutionary organisation. In 1935 the Comintern adopted the class-collaborationist Popular Front policy, supporting bourgeois coalition governments in Spain and France and the Roosevelt administration in the US. The Comintern was dissolved by Stalin in 1943 as a sign to his wartime imperialist allies of his nonrevolutionary intentions.

**Doumergue, Gaston** (1863-1937) — French bourgeois politician; president 1924; succeeded Eduard Daladier as premier; in office February-November 1934, ruled by decree; Trotsky described his regime as Bonapartist.

**Ercoli** — Party name of Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964). A founder of Italian CP; fled to Moscow 1926; headed Comintern operations in Spain during civil war; returned to Italy 1944 and headed the PCI until his death. After Stalin's death criticised aspects of his rule and the Soviet system.

**Gandhi, Mohandas** (1869-1948) — Indian nationalist leader; advocated nonviolence as the only means of struggle. Assassinated by Hindu fanatic following

independence.

**Gramsci, Antonio** (1891-1937) — A founder of the Italian Communist Party; jailed by Mussolini in 1926 and only released 11 years later, shortly before his death. From prison he sent letter protesting Stalin's campaign against the Left Opposition but Togliatti, then Italian CP representative in Moscow, suppressed it. In prison, despite extremely difficult conditions, he wrote extensively; his writings were published after his death as the *Modern Prince* and the *Prison Notebooks*.

**Hindenburg, Paul von** (1847-1934) — Prussian militarist; fought in 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War; from 1916 (with Ludendorff) German supreme commander in World War I; elected president of the Weimar Republic 1925 and as such appointed Hitler chancellor in January 1933.

**Hitler, Adolf** (1889-1945) — From early 1920s leader of the fascist National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis); in 1923 jailed for role in attempted putsch in Bavaria; during spell in jail wrote *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) outlining his political philosophy; German dictator 1933-45; suicided in his Berlin bunker as Red Army took city.

**Iron Front** — Created by social-democrats 1931, a bloc between a number of big trade unions and bourgeois "republican" groups with little mass influence. Combat groups called the Iron Fist were set up through the unions and workers sports organisations. The Iron Front organised parades and rallies; workers believed it would be used to stop fascism but it was never seriously deployed against the Nazis.

**Jacobinism** — Radical political group in French revolution; in power 1791 until Thermidor (July 16) 1794 when Robespierre was overthrown and the conservative Directory established.

**Leipart, Theodor** (1867-1947) — Conservative German trade unionist; head of the SPD-dominated Free Trade Unions, which became the German Federation of Labour (ADGB).

**Lenin, V.I.** (1870-1924) — Founder and leader of the Bolshevik Party; principal leader of the October 1917 Russian revolution; founder of the Communist International; outstanding Marxist theorist of 20th century.

**Lumpenproletariat** — Literally: slum proletariat. Refers to those nonproducing elements thrown out by capitalism and living on the margins of society in the big cities: beggars, petty criminals and gangsters, the old and broken, the chronically unemployed, etc. Reactionary and fascist movements have often found some of their mass base in the lumpenproletariat, whose crushed and atomised condition militates against acquiring class-conscious, proletarian attitudes.

- Luxemburg, Rosa** (1871-1919) — Author of a number of important Marxist works on economic theory, politics and culture; helped initiate Polish social-democratic movement; from 1897 actively participated in the German social-democratic movement and played a leading role in the struggle against Bernstein and the revisionists; from 1910 led the revolutionary opposition within German Social-Democratic Party; played key role in formation of the Spartacus League; she was a founder of the Communist Party of Germany and the editor of its paper, *Die Rote Fahne*; in January 1919 she was arrested and murdered by counterrevolutionary troops of the right-wing social-democratic government.
- Manuilsky, Dimitri Z.** (1883-1952) — Prominent Third Period propagandist; secretary of Comintern 1931-39; then with Dimitrov headed organisation until dissolution in 1943; diplomat and member of CPSU Central Committee after World War II.
- Mensheviks** — Pseudo-Marxist petty-bourgeois reformist current within the Russian socialist movement; supported and participated in the bourgeois Provisional Government in 1917. During the civil war that followed the Bolshevik-led overthrow of the Provisional Government by the soviets (councils) of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies in November 1917, one wing of the Mensheviks supported the counterrevolutionary White armies.
- Mussolini, Benito** (1883-1945) — Founder of fascism in Italy; began his political career as a member of the Socialist Party but during World War I adopted a chauvinist position. With the blessing and assistance of the Italian bankers and big industrialists he rose to power on October 30, 1922, when a fascist government was appointed by the Italian king. He was killed by Italian resistance fighters while attempting to flee Italy in closing months of World War II.
- Paris Commune** — The first example of a workers' government. It emerged out of the defeat of the imperial regime of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The radicalised workers held power in the city from March 18-May 28, 1871. The Commune was brutally crushed: tens of thousands of workers were massacred and many more suffered harsh repression at the hands of the victorious bourgeois reaction.
- Pilsudski, Joseph** (1867-1935) — Originally a Polish socialist with nationalist views; leader of Polish Republic after independence from Russia; led Polish forces in 1920-21 war against Soviet Union; pushed out of office in 1922, in May 1926 he staged a *coup d'état* and was dictator of Poland until his death.
- Primo de Rivera, Miguel** (1870-1930) — Headed dictatorship in Spain under Alfonso XIII 1923-29, when he was ousted by the pressure of the masses.
- Renaudel, Pierre** (1871-1935) — Originally a leader of the left wing of the French Socialist Party who defected to the party's right wing at the beginning of World

War I; editor of the SP's daily paper, *l'Humanité* 1914-18; in the 1930s he and Marcel Déat led the "neo-socialist" tendency which split in 1933

**Rote Front** (Red Front) — The communist-led militia in Germany; banned by social-democratic government after the 1929 Berlin May Day riots.

**Social-fascism** — See *Third Period*.

**Stalin, Joseph** (1879-1953) — Joined the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1896 and sided with the Bolsheviks in the 1903 split. He became general secretary of the Russian Communist Party in 1922. He was the central leader and spokesperson for the privileged party-state bureaucracy that came to power in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

**Thälmann, Ernest** (1866-1945) — Unchallenged leader of the German Communist Party from 1929 to 1933. A faithful Stalinist, he carried out Stalin's policy of refusing to fight for an antifascist united front with the social-democrats (whom Stalin had branded as "the moderate wing of fascism"), thus permitting the Nazis to come to power without meeting any organised resistance. Caught by the Nazis as he was about to flee the country in 1933, he died in a concentration camp during World War II.

**Third period** — In the schema proclaimed by the Stalinists in 1928, the period of the final collapse of capitalism; followed the "first period" of revolutionary upsurge in 1917-23 and the "second period" of capitalist stabilisation in 1924-27. Following from this schema, the Comintern's tactics from 1928 to 1934 were marked by revolutionary phasemongering, sectarian "red" trade unions, and opposition to forming antifascist united fronts with the social-democrats (who were denounced as "social-fascists"). In 1934 the theory and practice of the "third period" were discarded and replaced by those of the Popular Front (1935-39). "Third period" tactics were revived during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact (1939-41) and then discarded in favour of seeking Popular Front-type governments of "national unity" during and after World War II.

**Trotsky, Leon** (1879-1940) — A leading member of the RSDLP. He aligned himself with the Mensheviks in 1903-04, after which he took an independent position within the RSDLP. In the 1905 revolution he became chairman of the St. Petersburg Soviet. During the first world war he took an antiwar position. In July 1917 he joined the Bolsheviks and became a central leader. Chief organiser of October insurrection; first commissar of foreign affairs after revolution; leader of Red Army (1918-25). After Lenin's death, led communist opposition to Stalinism; exiled in 1929; founded Fourth International in 1938; assassinated in Mexico by Stalinist agent August 21, 1940.

**Turati, Filippo** (1857-1932) — A founder of the Italian Socialist Party (1892); avowed



reformist; opposed Russian Revolution and Comintern; led right-wing split away from SP in 1922.

**Versailles, Treaty of** — Concluded World War I (1914-18); signed on June 28, 1919 by representatives of the Allied Powers (Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the USA), on the one hand, and Germany, on the other. Forced on Germany by the allied powers, it assigned Germany and its allies responsibility for the war and imposed heavy reparations, occupation and demilitarisation of the Rhineland and limitation of German armed forces; German colonies were parcelled out among victors.

The whole burden imposed by the Treaty of Versailles was borne by the German people, who had to pay huge taxes and suffer the ordeal of chronic unemployment; the capitalist industrial magnates retained their dominant position in the country and continued to pocket huge profits.

**Victor Emmanuel III** (1869-1947) — King of Italy 1900-46. Acceded to Mussolini's bid for power in 1922; played role in replacing him in 1943 with Badoglio but tarnished by association with fascism; abdicated in favour of son Umberto II in May 1946; died in exile in Egypt.

**Vorwärts** (Forward) — The central newspaper of the German Social-Democratic Party.

**Warski, Adolf** (1868-1937) — Party name of A.S. Warszawski. A founder of the Polish Social-democracy; delegate to the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP in 1906 at which he was elected to the central committee; a founder of the Communist Workers Party of Poland 1918; active in Comintern Executive Committee 1921-24; supported Stalin faction but removed from posts in 1924; elected as a communist deputy to the Polish parliament in 1926; took refuge in USSR 1929; arrested 1937 in Stalin purge of foreign communists and shot.

**Wels, Otto** (1873-1939) — Right-wing social-democrat; military commander of Berlin, responsible for crushing left in early 1919; a central leader of SPD; as Reichstag deputy, called for "lawful but nonviolent" opposition to Hitler; went into exile 1933.

**"Young's noose"** — Refers to Young plan, after US big businessman Owen D. Young, who headed Versailles Treaty committee which supervised German war reparations under the Dawes plan during 1920s. In 1929 the Young plan for reparations payments replaced the previous scheme.

**Zinoviev, Grigory** (1883-1936) — Old Bolshevik; head of Comintern 1919-26; allied with Kamenev and Stalin against Trotsky 1923-25; formed United Opposition with Kamenev and Trotsky 1926-27; capitulated to Stalin 1928; executed following August 1936 Moscow show trial ("Trial of the 16"). ■

Presented here is the Marxist explanation of fascism, one of the most horrible forms of capitalist rule. In the 1920s and 1930s, exiled Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky analysed German fascism as it developed. Through these prescient writings he tried to alert the workers' movement to the mortal danger threatening and arm it for the struggle.

For Trotsky, fascism was a response of the capitalist ruling class to a severe crisis of its system. Through fascism, capitalism attempts to create a mass movement of the desperate middle class to use as a weapon to smash all forms of working-class organisation.

Thus fascism did not die with Adolf Hitler in his Berlin bunker, but is inherent in the capitalist system. If that system is once more threatened by economic crisis and working-class revolt, the bosses may again turn to the fascist option. The threat of fascism with all its horrors can only be ended by the working class organising to get rid of capitalism and establish a socialist society.

*Resistance books*