

Anti-Fascism Against the Working Class

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Faced with economic collapse the bourgeoisie can no longer pretend that there is no crisis. In the face of skyrocketing trade and payments deficits, the bourgeoisie of each country must seek to make its national capital competitive on the world market again.

Everywhere events impose one policy and only one policy on the bourgeoisie: draconian austerity programs. To make the national capital competitive, to take away markets from rivals, and to restore an adequate rate of profit for capital, requires drastic cuts in "social" spending (education, health care, public transportation, housing) and the installation of controls over wages.

In addition to the galloping inflation which has already sharply eroded the standards of living of the working class, a spectre of sharply rising unemployment has been added. In recent weeks and months in the U.S. the government of President Ford has swung from urging tax surcharges to fight inflation to talk of tax cuts to fight recession and to increased talk of government subsidies for wages and government funded employment programs.

In addition to the mighty auto industry, home construction and its associated appliance industries and even the city of New York are laying off large numbers of workers. The present unemployment rates surpass everything except the tail of the 1929 depression. By all forecasts these rates will get worse.

There is growing concern about the reaction of the working class, which was voiced by the New York Times on December 30, 1974 in a feature article titled: "Detroit in Recession Reflects Fear and Strength:

"...it is being suggested that a more general revolutionary atmosphere might develop if the recession is too severe and too long. Expectations among workers have been heightened, it is said ... there is the precedent, and the legacy, of the student and black rebellions of the nineteen-sixties. People in general are more sophisticated and less docile than they were during the Depression. It is a major concern among Detroiters who think about such things."

Caught between "the devil and the deep blue sea," the bourgeoisie, while accelerating its attack on the living standards of the working class, is also desperately trying to avoid provoking resistance.

Although there is relative calm in the U.S., in other countries this conundrum is actively being faced. In Greece and Portugal, where the crisis has been the deepest, the bourgeoisie has already acted; in Denmark and Italy, which face national bankruptcy, the bourgeoisie is frantically preparing its attack on the working class.

In Spain, Italy, and Britain, the tempo of the crisis leaves the bourgeoisie little room for manoeuvre, and the time for a concerted attack on the proletariat approaches. For the bourgeoisie what is necessary is—to use the words of Costa-Gomes, the President installed by Portugal's "democratic" junta—"work, order, and unity!"

The necessity for imposing labor discipline is not a new problem. The bourgeoisie faced it in the 1920's and 1930's. The question now as then is which method should be used to impose these policies on the workers.

Two Policies for Workers

Historically, the two basic alternatives are: (1) violence, the direct and brutal assault which is associated with fascism, or (2) making the workers believe that their interests and the interests of national capital are identical—the

hallmark of democratic or left regimes. For this latter alternative, the participation of the capitalist organizations of workers—unions and “workers” parties—in the state apparatus is essential.

Whichever method is chosen is determined by the relative strength or weakness of the national capital on the world market and by the militancy or passivity of the working class. However, what formula of bourgeois rule is adopted—democratic, stalinist, fascist, social democratic—the end result will be the same for the proletariat: austerity and labor discipline in the short run; ideological and physical mobilization for imperialist war in the not-so-long run.

The similarity between what on the surface appears to be diametrically opposed regimes was brought out during an inquiry into the conduct of Leon Blum undertaken by a committee of the French national assembly shortly after World War II.

In speaking of his popular front government of the '30's, Blum admitted that one of the objectives of his rearmament program had been to “provide” aid to the war industry by means similar to those that Dr. Schacht (the Nazi Minister for Economic Affairs) has utilized in Germany: the rearmament plan was, according to Blum, similar to Stalin's 5-year plan and to the Goering plan in Nazi Germany.

We are not saying that the question of which formula the bourgeoisie will utilize in order to crush the proletariat and mobilize it for war, is a matter of indifference to marxists. Indeed we must ask if, under present conditions, in the capitalist metropolises, fascism is imminent. To this question our answer is an unequivocal no.

Given the present balance of forces and the growing combativity of the working class, the bourgeoisie cannot now attack the workers directly. Historically fascism has never been used by the bourgeoisie to break a nascent and growing revolutionary workers' movement; it is the way in which—under particular historical conditions—the bourgeoisie imposes its austerity and war programs on the proletariat already defeated and fragmented by the left.

Thus in Germany the road to fascism was prepared by Noske, Ebert, and the Social Democrats who first diverted and then crushed the proletariat in 1919–1921. In Italy the upsurge of the working class in 1920 was led into a dead end by the democratic Giolitti regime.

In Spain in 1936 when the uprising of workers in the industrial centers indicated that the proletariat had not been sufficiently fragmented and made passive even by its bloody defeats at the hands of left governments (the latest of which had taken place in Asturias in 1934), a popular front government was necessary to completely shatter and crush the proletariat before France and the Falange could take over.

This model is by no means confined to pre-WW II Europe. The recent example of Chile, where the road for the “fascist” Pinochet was cleared by Allende and the left, is a classic case. However, the fascist movements of the petty bourgeoisie—which even today flourish in many countries—can only come to power with the support of and under the control of big capital.

In Germany the efforts of the big Ruhr industrialists like Kirdorf, Krupp, and Thyssen and bankers like Schacht and von Schroeder were instrumental in bringing Hitler to power, while in Italy the Confindustria. (the General Federation of Industry) and leading financiers like Toeplitz of the Banca Commerciale prepared the way for Mussolini's March on Rome.

Today, however, big capital is anti-fascist. In order to control the working class, they need not opt for fascism as a solution. They can go the “opposite” way and be anti-fascist. This way they can hope to let the old World War II antagonisms work in their favor and more importantly can avoid an open confrontation with the working class. After all, haven't they also heard of “recuperation” and “repressive tolerance?”

In Italy, for example, Giovanni Agnelli, the head of the Fiat empire and President of the Confindustria whose grandfather was an ardent black shirt, today speaks of the need to bring the Communist party and the trade unions into the government. The Confindustria itself, which once so lavishly financed Mussolini, at its recent convention observed a minute of silence for the victims of the fascist bomb attack in Brescia and prepares news releases on the “glorious” record of leading industrialists like Agnelli and Cefis (the head of Montecatini-Edison) in the anti-fascist resistance during the last war.

In Greece it was big capital which played a leading role in the overthrow of the fascist junta and in the establishment of the democratic Caramanlis regime. A good example of where big capital stands today was given voice by the New York Times on January 5 in an editorial crowing with delight over the guilty verdict handed down by the jury in the recent trial of Haldeman, Mitchell, Erlichman, et al, in Judge Sirica's Federal District Court. In this

editorial they mentioned judicial procedures yet to be done involving both Shady campaign financing of Nixon and the Nixon government's "illegal use" of the CIA, FBI and horror of horrors the Internal Revenue Service:

"Despite such unfinished business, last week's verdict cuts to the heart of an evil which transcends Watergate. The case that went to the jury told much of a corruption that had enveloped the control center of American government... Now the nation asks not for vengeance or judicial harshness. The need is rather to complete a coherent documentation of that pattern of subversion that placed democratic rule in jeopardy. It was a narrow escape."

The lessons of the past are clear and unequivocal: to meet the threat of and to divert a combative proletariat a left or democratic government is needed. In 1918 in their hour of peril it was to the Social Democrats that the German bourgeoisie turned.

In the midst of the social upheavals which followed World War I in Italy, the bourgeoisie found refuge behind the left democratic regimes of Nitti and Giolitti. In 1936 in Spain it was to Negrin, Largo Caballero and a popular front of Socialists, Stalinists, -anarchists and left republicans to whom the bourgeoisie turned when the situation momentarily got out of control.

In every capitalist crisis an important component of the mobilization of the workers behind the state is nationalism. Where at the present moment is this to come from? "Anti-Communism"? No! That old shibboleth has been abandoned by everyone except the most rabid of the right capitalists.

Here the threat of lurking fascism just hits the spot. Everywhere the word "fascism" summons up fearsome images of cruelty and consummate evil: the only real tangible image of the devil remaining in this largely secular world. Anti-fascism then becomes one of the most important ideological weapons of the bourgeoisie. Already this ploy has been put to work.

In Portugal it is in the name of preventing a fascist restoration that the junta, with its Socialist and Communist supporters, demands "work, order, and unity" from the proletariat. In Greece the spectre of a fascist counter-coup is used to extract sacrifices from the proletariat and as a cover for Caramanlis' austerity program.

With respect to Italy, Agnelli and the Confindustria, as well as London's prestigious Financial Times, argue that the "historical compromise" proposed by the Stalinists may be the only alternative to a fascist coup. And low and behold the "leftists," from the Maoists, Trotskyists and anarchists to the NCLC and Weathermen are all eager to be the most fervent anti-fascists of them all. In this, as in so many other ways, they perform an invaluable service for the bourgeoisie in its moment of need.

Today the leftists, who so shrilly warn us of the fascist peril, are jockeying for a chance to become the Noskes, Eberts, Negrins and Caballeros of tomorrow.

One of these groups, the International Workers Party, itself a split from the NCLC, saw the delay in Rockefeller's nomination as a significant event for the working class. They responded with glee when the conservatives in Congress were joined by "youthful 'opportunistic liberals' (a redundancy!) who are turning the anti-corruption tide against the political leader of the liberal-fascist forces which have used the 'Watergate tactic' to take over key positions in state, local and national government." (From an October issue of the International Worker.)

Although in the same article they acknowledge that the delay and criticism of Rockefeller "will not in any sense mean a final victory for the working class," it would still constitute a major setback for the fascist family and "would buy much-needed time for the working class to organize." In their attempt to stop capitalism from turning fascist they are prepared to support and form popular fronts with any self-proclaimed socialist parties.

At the very least these groups provide an ideological cloak under which the official left-Stalinists, social democrats, the unions—can prepare to carry out a civil war against the proletariat.

In the epoch of capitalist decay, of permanent crisis and imperialist wars, there is no bourgeois form of government which is better or worse for the proletariat, no lesser of two evils. There are only different forms of the dictatorship of capital which, depending on specific conditions, are better suited to the needs of the bourgeoisie.

Support for one form of bourgeois rule over another is tantamount to support for capital in its effort to crush the proletariat and to organize a "National union" for waging imperialist war!

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