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Bourgeois Democracy and Fascism

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**“Social Democracy objectively represents
the moderate wing of Fascism”**

Stalin

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On May 21, 2000, Harpal Brar, made a presentation to the Stalin Society based on an article written by him entitled 'Bourgeois Democracy and Fascism'. The complete article is reproduced in this pamphlet.

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BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY AND FASCISM

Fascism – the sudden growth?

To those who have accepted as unquestioned the existing social forms and their continuity, and those who have looked to the possibility of peaceful progressive advance within these existing social forms, and those who have dismissed the revolutionary outlook as the fantasy of a minority, the victory of fascism in an advanced industrial country such as Germany came as a brutal shock.

To make a proper assessment, it is essential to see fascism in relation to the whole character of modern social development, of which fascism is an expression, and to get down to the basic movement and driving forces of economy and technique, which have reached a point at which the existing capitalist forms are increasingly incompatible with the further development of production and utilisation of technique.

There is war between them – one must end the other. Either the advance of the productive forces must put an end to capitalism. Or the continued existence of capitalism must bring the advance of production and technique to a grinding halt and plunge billions of people on this planet even further into poverty, misery and war.

These are the only two paths – capitalism or socialism. There is no third alternative. All hopes of a third alternative, which will guarantee the realisation of peaceful and harmonious development without class struggle, through the forms of capitalist 'democracy', 'planned capitalism', etc. are nothing but pipe dreams. These dreams of peaceful development are merely the echo of past conceptions, belonging to the era of liberal free-competition capitalism, an era which disappeared a whole hundred years ago, never to

return. Free-competition capitalism made for "... the epoch of finance capital and monopolies, which introduce everywhere the striving for domination, not for freedom. Whatever the political system, the result of these tendencies is everywhere reaction and an extreme intensification of antagonisms in the field" (Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, p.113-114).

In our own day, even in the leading imperialist countries which, owing to a period of unprecedented economic expansion and prosperity in the wake of the peculiar conditions (which for reasons of shortage of time and space cannot be gone into here) following the Second World War, are not threatened by serious revolutionary upheavals, and where, thanks to the export of oppression and violence abroad, democratic forms of rule are still maintained, the deepening crisis of imperialism is forcing the ruling monopoly capitalist class increasingly to supplement these democratic forms with new dictatorial and repressive methods – further concentration of executive powers, reduction of parliament to a farcical talking shop, increasing use of emergency powers and police violence, restrictions on freedom of speech, draconian anti-trade union legislation and violent suppression of strikes (e.g., the miners' strike of 1984-1985) and of demonstrations. This is not fascism yet, but it is an unmistakable trend in the direction of fascist forms of rule in all capitalist countries.

"The development of the production forces of social labour," observed Marx, "is the historical task and privilege of capital. It is precisely in this way that it unconsciously creates the material requirements of a higher mode of production" (*Capital*, Vol III, Kerr Education, p.203).

While recognising this progressive historical role of capitalism, Marx went on to lay bare the inner laws of capitalist development which, he pointed out more than a century ago, would arrive at a stage at which capitalism, far from being able to organise and develop further the productive forces, would merely plunge them into an increasingly vicious cycle of violent crises, stagnation and decay, from which they could only be rescued by the proletariat. This is the essence of Marxism. And its political expression is the dictatorship of the proletariat as the condition precedent for the solution of the problems of our epoch.

Already before the end of the First World War, Lord Leverhulme, the leading trust magnate, wrote:

"With the means that science has already placed at our disposal, we might provide for all the wants of each of us in food, shelter and clothing by one hour's work per week for each of us from school age to dotage" (Lord

Leverhulme, Preface to Professor Spooner's *Wealth for Waste*, Routledge, 1918).

That was eight decades ago. In the period since then productivity has increased several-fold. And yet, humanity is confronted with mass starvation and misery; lack of basic hygiene and access to clean water; death and disease.

Whereas in previous epochs, human beings died as a result of food shortage, in our epoch they die because there is too much food. Capitalism is the first system of production which brings society "face to face with the contradiction that the producers have nothing to consume because the consumers are wanting" (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p.387).

Capitalism long ago became historically outmoded. There could be no better expression of the utter bankruptcy of this system than the fact that, in the midst of unprecedented wealth and unexampled productive power, it is unable to find the means to exploit a growing proportion of the working class, and is compelled to condemn tens of millions of able-bodied human beings who are willing and able to work as so much disposable scrap. Faced with such a system, cruel as it is absurd, the proletariat "... has no other choice than to starve or to rebel" (Engels, *Condition of the working class in England*).

The objective conditions for this proletarian rebellion were already ripe from the beginning of the period of imperialism – monopoly capitalism – and especially since the commencement of the general crisis of capitalism in 1914, which directly led to the First World War. However, with the sole honourable exception of the Russian proletariat, led by the Bolshevik Party under the inspiring banner of Marxism-Leninism, the working class of Europe proved unequal to the task. World capitalism used three main weapons to defeat the proletarian revolution in Europe and achieve its own temporary stabilisation:

The first of these weapons was direct civil and counter-revolutionary intervention – the imperialist war of intervention against the young proletarian Russian Republic, the White Terror in Finland, Hungary and Poland.

The second weapon used by the bourgeoisie to defeat the workers' advance to power was none other than Social Democracy, which had already betrayed the working class by embracing the slogan of 'Defence of the Fatherland' at the commencement of the imperialist butchery of the First World War. In the aftermath of that war, the working class, too powerful to be defeated in a frontal battle, was subdued and crushed through the device

of Social Democracy, which sadly still had a mass base. The bourgeoisie, while firmly holding on to the levers of power, gave the appearance of surrendering power to the working class by placing in office social-democratic governments which then went on to do capitalism's dirty work for it, as intended all along. Concessions in the form of wage rises, nationalisation proposals, social security schemes, reduced working hours, etc., were granted to the workers. No sooner had the power of capitalism been securely established than these concessions were wiped out through the capitalist offensive which drove back the workers' living conditions even below pre-war levels.

The third and last weapon in the stabilisation of capitalist power was the ability of European capitalism to draw on the gigantic, and still unshaken, reserves of international imperialism – US imperialism. American loans and credits poured in, just as they were to do following the Second World War, in the form of Marshall Aid, to renovate and reconstruct the shattered fabric of European capitalism.

This stabilisation, built as it was on a shaky foundation, could not last long. Social Democracy, far from leading the fight, as it had promised to do, for socialism (albeit by peaceful, gradual, 'democratic' and parliamentary means), was in reality the instrument for carrying out the capitalist offensive – and by means far from democratic. By its disciplinary and coercive measures against the working class, Social Democracy increasingly alienated the masses and caused widespread disillusionment among the latter. In doing so, it exposed itself as the agent of the bourgeoisie in the working class, and thus rendered itself less effective as a weapon of capitalism. No wonder, then, that during this period, while the influence and the electoral base of Social Democracy declined in the European countries, that of communism increased. Secondly, just as the strength of US capitalism had furnished the base for the reconstruction of capitalism on a global scale, likewise the American Crash brought the whole structure of capitalist stabilisation tumbling down. Even the successes of the period of stabilisation, with their expansion of production and productive capacity, merely served to intensify all the contradictions of capitalism by bringing in their train an unprecedented crisis of overproduction and glutted markets. What is more, the conditions of monopoly capitalism retarded the 'normal' working-out of the crisis. While the giant monopolies were in a position to maintain big profits, even in the midst of the worst depression, the working class, the petty bourgeoisie and the colonial peoples, who bore the brunt of the crisis, were driven to despair. The poverty of the masses, in the imperialist heartlands

and in the colonies, could not but further exacerbate the devastating effects of the Depression, which forced themselves on the consciousness of even certain sectors of the bourgeoisie. Informed capitalist quarters began to recognise that the entire attempt at restoration during the 1920s had been a chase after a mirage.

The spread of this recognition within the capitalist world marked the change in the conscious direction of capitalist policy in the direction of fascism.

The transient period of 'stabilisation' had produced a whole host of myths and illusions (just as the buoyant imperialist stock markets are at present giving rise to equally unfounded assertions, illusions and myths) concerning a new era (new paradigm in the current jargon) of 'perpetual' capitalist prosperity, 'harmonious' capitalist development and 'organised capitalism', all finding their ultimate expression in 'ultra-imperialism', according to which conception capitalist development inexorably proceeds towards the creation of a single world trust, leading to the elimination of inter-imperialist rivalry and the ushering in of an era of rational production and universal prosperity. According to the theory of 'ultra-imperialism' first put forward in the early part of the 20th century, American capitalism was a 'new type' of capitalism which had managed to get shot of the crises and contradictions of the old capitalism, had "*ironed out the trade cycle*" and had found the secret of everlasting prosperity for the workers hand-in-hand with ever-rising profits for the capitalists.

Undoubtedly the leaders and statesmen of capitalism, dazzled by the advance in production during the stabilisation period, shared these illusions. No wonder, then, that President Hoover should proclaim, on 27 July 1928, that: "*The outlook of the world today is far the greatest era of commercial expansion in history*". He followed this up on 11 August 1928, in his speech accepting the Republican re-nomination for President, with the following words:

"Unemployment in the sense of distress is widely disappearing. We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, and we shall soon with the help of God be within sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation" (New York Nation, 15 June 1932).

As one would expect, the principal channel for transmitting these illusions to the masses of Europe and America was none other than Social

Democracy. Labour delegations, whose expenses were paid by the capitalist governments, were sent from Britain, Germany and many other European countries to the US with the sole object of bringing back the new gospel from the Holy Land of Capitalism. This Social Democratic gentry, on their return, dutifully pronounced the triumph of capitalism over Marxism. With its stranglehold over the organisations of the working class, especially trade unions, the Social Democratic 'machine', backed by the powerful and all-pervasive instruments of bourgeois propaganda, sang in adoration of American capitalism, Fordism, rationalisation, the capitalist era, and so on and so forth – with the sole aim of demoralising the working class, destroying the latter's faith in a socialist future, and sowing illusions among them of a bright future under the conditions of capitalism.

The subsequent economic collapse, and with it the collapse of all the theories and illusions of the stabilisation period, produced great disillusionment among the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat who had allowed themselves to be led up the garden path by Social Democracy. It was this disillusion which, inter alia, created the conditions for the advance of fascism among the petty bourgeoisie and in certain strata of the working class.

Meanwhile, confronted with the basic contradiction of capitalism, namely, that between the social productive forces on the one hand and the relations of production on the other, and being forced to recognise the reality of the advance of technique outstripping the existing forms of social organisation, the leaders of capitalism were faced with a stark choice: either get rid of the existing forms of social organisation (i.e., private ownership of the means of production) since they are incompatible with the whole advance of technique; or, in the interests of the maintenance of the system, long outmoded historically, suppress technique, restrict productive capacity downwards to the level of consumption of the impoverished masses, suppress class struggle, intensify class oppression, and resort to war as the only way out of the quagmire. This amounts, in other words, to destruction of productive forces and revolt against the machine, against science, against parliamentary democracy, and trade war followed by a real war as the final 'solution'. We know which choice the bourgeoisie made – and was bound to make – in its selfish class interests. It opted for the second of these alternatives. The end of the period of stabilisation made way for the new phase, the most complete and consistent expression of which is fascism. *"Such is the bed of Procrustes ...to which modern capitalism in its extreme stage of decay seeks to fit the tortured body of humanity"* (R Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution*, Martin Lawrence Ltd, London, 1934, pp. 47-48).

What is fascism?

Far from being an independent theory and system born in opposition to capitalism, far from being an independent ideology of the petty bourgeoisie hostile to the proletariat and monopoly capital alike, fascism is, on the contrary, the most consummate expression, in certain conditions of extreme decay, of the chief tendencies and policies of capitalism in its imperialist stage. Fascism is the response in practice of the imperialist bourgeoisie faced with the threat of proletarian revolution. It is a counter-revolutionary mass movement which, while enjoying the full support of the bourgeoisie, deploys a mixture of social demagoguery and terrorist methods in order to crush the revolution and strengthen the dictatorship of finance capital. In order to define fascism and place it in its concrete reality, one must expose its class basis, the system of class relations which give birth to it and within which it operates, and the class role assigned by finance capital to it and which it duly performs. Any attempt to separate fascism from its progenitor – the bourgeois dictatorship – can only result in absurd assertions, of the type uttered by the Daily Herald, the official organ of the Labour Party and the TUC, on the very day that the Nazis seized and shut down the trade unions in Germany:

"The 'National-Socialists', it is essential to remember, call themselves 'Socialist' as well as 'National'. Their 'Socialism' is not the Socialism of the Labour Party, or that of any recognised Socialist Party in other countries. But in many ways it is a creed that is anathema to the big landlords, the big industrialists and the big financiers.

"And the Nazi leaders are bound to go forward with the 'Socialist' side of their programme."

The lines quoted above, while not saying anything about the 'socialism' of the Nazis, are very revealing about the 'socialism' of the Labour Party and the TUC, as well as of the entire thrust of this leadership's imperialist line, according to which fascism is merely a wing of socialism – of a rather unorthodox variety, but nevertheless an *"anathema to the big landlords, the big industrialists and the big financiers,"* who, strange though it may sound, lavishly funded it before finally placing it in power in the period leading to the assumption of government office by the fascists, as well as during the period of fascist dictatorship. In no country has fascism ever conquered power. It was nurtured and enabled to grow, saved from extinction in its early stages at the hands of the working-class movement, and finally put into power, thanks to the direct support of the bourgeoisie. It was able to rely on the assistance of the greater part of the state machinery – the

army officer corps, the police and the judiciary who, while meting out the utmost of severity to the proletarian opposition, treated the fascists with benign leniency.

Through its social demagoguery fascism was able to build a somewhat broader mass base by appealing preponderantly to the petty bourgeoisie (also crushed by monopoly capital), as well as the lumpen proletariat and the demoralised sections of the working class, helped along by the robber barons of finance and industry, as well as the big landed magnates, all of whom supported it financially and directed it politically. Once in power, however, fascism carried out the ruthless behests of monopoly capital, and mercilessly turned the state machinery against those of its supporters who had been gullible enough to expect anti-capitalist measures from it.

Once in power, casting aside its anti-capitalist rhetoric, fascism revealed itself in its true colours as *"a terrorist dictatorship of big capital"* (Programme of the Comintern, 1928).

"Fascism arises where a powerful working-class movement reaches a stage of growth which inevitably raises revolutionary issues, but is held in from decisive action by reformist leadership ... Fascism is the child of reformism" (R Palme Dutt, Labour Monthly, July 1925).

Italy – then a backward country

The transfer from the policy and methods of liberalism and concessions to that of fascism is no sudden volte face. They are the two halves of a single policy. So long as the forces of the bourgeoisie are inadequate and unprepared, it resorts to concessions and reliance on the reformist leadership to weaken and break the revolutionary offensive, while making furious undercover preparations for a direct armed suppression of the proletarian movement at a suitable time. While fooling the masses with sham concessions, breaking their unity through the good offices of Social Democracy, the 'liberal' and 'democratic' governments secretly equipped and armed fascism. With the completion of this stage, and with the proletarian forces sufficiently weakened, the violent counter revolution was let loose. The violent offensive of fascism (in Italy as elsewhere) was executed under the benevolent protection of the bourgeois liberal and Social Democratic governments (Giolitti and his successors in Italy).

The Italian experience furnishes a classic demonstration of the transition of bourgeois democracy to fascism, from which three principal conclusions stand out in sharp relief:

- 1 The sweep of the revolutionary movement in Italy was broken, not by

the bourgeoisie, nor by fascism, but by its own internal weakness and lack of revolutionary leadership – by reformism.

- 2 Fascism appeared on the scene to play the hero (under police and military protection) to harass and slaughter an already-retreating army, AFTER the proletarian advance had already been broken from within and widespread disillusion set in, thanks to the Turatis and D'Aragonas of Italian reformism.
- 3 The transition to open fascist dictatorship, far from being a sudden and abrupt break and a reversal of bourgeois policy, was, on the contrary, a continuation of bourgeois policy into novel forms in the new conditions.

Fascism was begotten, nurtured and prepared within the conditions of bourgeois democracy; and when the conditions were ripe, it was placed in power to exercise the naked terrorist dictatorship of big capital over the working class and the intermediate strata.

Germany - the treachery of Social Democracy

In November 1918, the German working class overthrew the old state and its victory was total:

"In November, 1918, the Revolution was the work of the proletariat alone. The proletariat won so powerful a position that the bourgeois elements at first did not dare to attempt any resistance" (Kautsky, Introduction to the third edition of The Proletarian Revolution, 1931).

How was this victory of the proletariat turned, in the course of the following 15 years, into its exact opposite? Social Democracy is the answer.

Although German Social Democracy had originated on the basis of the revolutionary programme of Marxism and had a long and glorious tradition, in the imperialist era opportunism, parliamentary cretinism and corruption, and the economist politics of trade-unionism, had made increasing inroads into the Party. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 completed this process, with the Social Democratic Party openly and unashamedly siding with Kaiser Wilhelm, German militarism and the bourgeoisie. Adopting the slogan of 'defence of the fatherland' in an imperialist predatory war, German Social Democracy, like its counterparts in other European countries (the sole honourable exception being the Bolsheviks in Russia), betrayed the working class and trampled underfoot the banner of proletarian internationalism. The November 1918 revolution was organised by scattered revolutionary elements who had gathered, in the very difficult

conditions of war censorship and Party censorship, in the illegal Spartacus League (founded in 1916) and the Independent Socialist Party (founded in 1917).

The Social Democratic Party played no part in the victorious 1918 revolution. On the contrary, it was opposed to the revolution from the start. In his libel lawsuit in Berlin in 1922, Scheidemann declared:

"The imputation that Social Democracy wanted or prepared the November revolution is a ridiculous, stupid lie of our opponents" (quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op.cit.* p.109).

At the time of the outbreak of the revolution, Social Democratic leaders occupied ministerial positions in the Coalition Government of Prince Max. In the critical period, their executive called upon the population not to support the revolution. But the moment the revolution had triumphed on 9 November, Social Democratic leaders rushed to Liebknecht and the Independents begging to be included in the leadership of the victorious revolution and form a joint government. Ignoring Liebknecht's advice, the Independents fell for the bait in the name of 'unity' and formed a coalition with the Social Democrats, i.e., with the enemies of the revolution, the open agents of the bourgeoisie. Thus, where all other means had proved useless, bourgeois influence was restored at the heart of the new regime through the treacherous Social Democracy.

Far from destroying the old state machine – the army, police, judiciary and the reactionary bureaucracy – the Social Democratic government protected the old regime at every step. Instead of arming the proletariat for the defence of the revolution, it not only ordered the disarming of the workers but also armed and equipped special counter-revolutionary corps under the command of the ultra-reactionary monarchist officers. And it is these White Guard troops who thus went on to drown the proletarian revolution in blood. Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were brutally murdered, their murderers going unpunished and openly gloating in their crime under the Social Democratic government. Steadily and systematically, with the application of limitless terror, the resistance of the workers was broken from the end of 1918 through to 1919. With the defeat of the 1918 revolution by Social Democracy, the basis was laid for the subsequent rise of fascism.

Far from acting out of blindness, folly and stupidity, as their apologists would have us believe, the Social Democratic leadership were driven solely by a burning desire to *"save Germany from Bolshevism"*, that is, to save capitalism. To achieve this aim, Social Democracy was prepared to

commit any crime, perpetrate any outrage, against the proletariat.

While the illegal armed counter-revolutionary formations were protected and tolerated by Social Democracy and by the Entente, the attempt of the workers at self-defence through the formation of the Red Front was brutally suppressed by Social Democratic Interior Minister in 1929. Thus was built the Weimar Republic, which existed from 1918 to 1932, on the basis of a coalition between the bourgeoisie and Social Democracy. The latter was in power throughout this period. During the greater part of these years it was part of the Federal Government (from 1918 to 1925, under the presidency of Ebert, and from 1928 to 1930 in the Müller cabinet). The principal police President posts were held by Social Democrats. In view of this, it is not an exaggeration to say that fascism grew to power under the protection of Social Democracy.

While on paper the Weimar Republic was *"the finest democracy in the world"*, in truth it was a figleaf for the maintenance of the reactionary institutions of the old regime. It appealed to the old-time monarchists and generals to defend it against the communists, and it indulged in the indiscriminate violent suppression of the workers, with frequent recourse to martial law and emergency powers against the proletariat. This is what the eminent American bourgeois journalist, Mowrer, who harboured no revolutionary sentiments, had to say of this 'democratic republic':

"A virgin Republic that appeals to old-time monarchists and generals to defend it against Communists! Inevitably it falls into the enemy's hands ..."

"What can be said for a republic that allows its laws to be interpreted by monarchist judges, its government to be administered by old-time functionaries brought up in fidelity to the old regime; that watches passively while reactionary school teachers and professors teach its children to despise the present freedom in favour of a glorified feudal past; that permits and encourages the revival of militarism which was chiefly responsible for the country's previous humiliation?"

"What can be said for democrats who subsidise ex-princes who attack the regime; who make the exiled ex-Emperor the richest man in deference to supposed property rights ... This remarkable Republic paid generous pensions to thousands of ex-officers and civil servants who made no bones of their desire to overthrow it." (E A Mowrer, 'Germany puts the clock back', quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op.cit.* pp.114-115).

These were precisely the conditions within which, fascism utilised the

widespread discontent, economic hardship and universal anger against the humiliating treaty of Versailles with its crippling tribute. It was only able to do so, however, because German Social Democracy, which had leadership of the majority of the working class, far from giving leadership on these issues, had completely identified itself with capitalism and the regime of Versailles and with wholesale repression of the proletarian masses. To crown it all, the bourgeois 'democratic' regime helped fascism to build up its armed formations by protecting it from above and giving it assistance through the state machine – the police, the judiciary, the army and the big capitalists – right up to the moment of finally placing it in power.

German fascism stood no chance of attracting the masses and building for itself a mass base without pretending to stand for 'socialism'. So Nazi propaganda was characterised by an eclectic mix of contradictory and unscrupulous demagoguery, with its frenzied anti-Semitism, wild anti-capitalist rhetoric, and chauvinist denunciations of the treaty of Versailles. In his *Mein Kampf*, in a sentence deleted since the 12th edition in 1932, Hitler wrote:

"The German has not the slightest notion how a people must be misled, if adherence of the masses is to be sought". Hitler's model was the British war-time propaganda, which was the object of his admiration as the finest example of the art of demagogic lying.

The dramatic expansion of German fascism from 1930 to 1932 is explained by the fact that the world economic crisis not only undermined the whole basis of stabilisation and of the Weimar Republic, but it also undermined the position of Social Democracy, which was very closely associated with them. The economic crisis and the Brüning hunger-regime finally exposed the utter bankruptcy of all the promises and fairy tales of Social Democracy about peaceful democratic progress and ever-rising prosperity under the conditions of capitalism. With the progress of the spread of disillusionment with Social Democracy, the class-conscious workers passed to communism, the politically backward elements crossed to the camp of fascism. Between 1930 and 1932, while Social Democracy lost 1,338,000 votes, the Communist Party gained 1,384,000. With the undermining of Social Democracy, with this weakened and discredited Social Democracy no longer able to check the growing advance of communism, and the consequent polarisation of society into two clearly-defined hostile camps, German capitalism required new methods and new tools. Faced with an unprecedented economic crisis, the bourgeoisie was in desperate need and in a hurry to wipe out the social gains of the 1918 Revolution in the field of wages, hours and social legislation, which had hitherto furnished the main basis for

the influence of Social Democracy among the proletariat. Instead of the concessions of the first few years of the revolution, capitalism now had to put the workers into the straitjacket of Draconian measures of economic hardship. To achieve this aim, in view of the existence of a powerful Communist Party, with a strong and rising influence in the working class, and the declining influence of Social Democracy, German capitalism needed new – and naked – forms of dictatorship. Unceremoniously Social Democracy was pushed aside from the Federal Government, and replaced in the summer of 1930 by the Brüning dictatorship, which ruled without parliament by emergency decree, but with Social Democratic support. It was from this period – from the time of the Brüning dictatorship – that the overwhelming majority of German capitalists and landlords completely transferred their allegiance to National Socialism, hitherto only partly supported, as the instrument of their terrorist dictatorship. Had Social Democracy been prepared to ally with communism for a joint resistance to the hunger offensive of the Brüning dictatorship, it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that the capitalist offensive need not have succeeded. But, in the name of the policy of the 'lesser evil', Social Democracy supported the Brüning dictatorship's hunger decrees and attacks on the workers. In so doing it strengthened capitalism, weakened the workers' front, disorganised the proletarian ranks, and played right into the hands of fascism. This disorganisation of proletarian forces in the critical period of 1930-1932 meant that the initiative, and the gains from widespread hunger and want, which ought to have strengthened the proletarian camp, passed instead to fascism.

Before the Nazis came to power the Communist Party and the Red Trade Union opposition issued calls to the Social Democratic Party and the General Trade Union Confederation for joint action of all labour organisations against the then impending wage offensive (April 1932 appeal) and for the organisation of a general strike for the repeal of emergency decrees and the disbanding of Storm Troops (20 July 1932 appeal). Both these appeals were rejected, the second on the spurious ground that the call for a general strike was provocative and that the ballot box was the only instrument for opposing fascism. A third appeal for a united front was issued by the Communist Party on 30 January 1933 after the installation of Hitler as Chancellor. There was such a groundswell of support for this call that, although it did not respond officially, the leadership of the Social Democratic Party was compelled to explain its refusal in its own publications. While specifically rejecting any joint action against Hitler on the spurious ground that, as he had assumed power legally he should not be opposed, it proposed a 'non-aggression pact' with the Communist Party, i.e., abstention from mutual verbal criticism. The

fourth call for a united front, made on 1 March 1933, after the burning of the Reichstag and the unleashing of unbridled Nazi terror, was also left unanswered by the Social Democratic leadership, as the latter was busy at the time trying to come to an understanding with the Hitlerites for the toleration of Social Democracy under fascism. Ignorant quarters have levelled the criticism that the Communist Party's emphasis on the 'united front from below', and its failure to appeal directly to the leadership of German Social Democracy and the trade unions earlier than 1932, contributed to the failure of the working class to frustrate the fascist advance to power. This criticism is totally groundless, failing as it does to take into account the actual conditions then prevailing in Germany. When the Social Democrat, Severing, in his capacity as Minister of the Interior, was shooting down the workers' May Day demonstrations in 1929, it would have been pointless to have appealed to the leadership of Social Democracy for a united front against the attack on the workers. However, with the expulsion of the Braun-Severing government by Von Papen, an opportunity for such an appeal presented itself, and the Communist Party sent its proposal to the Executives of the Social Democratic Party and the General Trade Union Federation for a united front. The firm rejection of the Communist proposal by these two bodies ensured the victory of fascism.

Thus the united working-class front, which alone stood any chance of defeating the Hitlerites, was made impossible by the stubborn refusal of Social Democracy to co-operate with the communists – a refusal which paved the way for the victory of fascism. This attitude of Social Democracy's flowed directly from its line of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie and reliance on the bourgeois state – a line which it pursued even in the conditions of dictatorship, in the name of the 'lesser evil' under Hindenburg, Brüning and Von Papen, declaring that they were a 'lesser evil' than the outright victory of fascism. Far from being a lesser evil, these forms of dictatorship were merely preparing the ground for the complete victory of fascism and destroying, step by step, the resistance of the working class. Their work completed, they handed over state power to the Hitlerites. Hindenburg was installed as President with the support of Social Democracy. Within a year he had had installed Hitler as Chancellor. And even after the victory of the Hitlerites Social Democracy refused to oppose it for the reason that, having come to power 'legally', it was a 'lesser evil' than an 'illegal' Nazi terror.

Failing in their efforts to secure the co-operation of Social Democracy for a united working-class front against the encroachments of capital and the dictatorial regimes, the Communist Party succeeded in bringing about at least

a partial united front from below, resulting in increased working-class resistance, which culminated in the Berlin transport strike of November 1932. The strike was led by the Red Trade Union opposition after the trade-union officials had rejected a massive vote of the workers for a strike. Parallel with this, the November 1932 elections reflected the rising working-class resistance: while the Nazi vote fell by 2 million and the Social Democratic vote fell by 700,000, that of the Communist Party rose by 700,000 to nearly 6 million. Von Papen was forced to resign on 17 November, and his resignation was followed by long negotiations between Hindenburg and Hitler. In view of rising working-class militancy, it was considered inopportune to instal Hitler in the Chancellery. Accordingly, Von Schleicher was made the Chancellor. He, by granting a few concessions to the working class, for which he received the plaudits of the Social Democratic and official trade-union leadership, duly succeeded in lulling the resistance of the working class who were under the malignant influence of Social Democracy. Once the necessary conditions were prepared, Hitler was installed as Chancellor, on 30 January 1933. The ebbing of the fascist tide, as reflected in the November 1932 election, far from marking its annihilation, as was being trumpeted from every roof-top by Social Democracy, merely convinced the bourgeoisie to hasten fascism's rise to power before the latter's stock should have irretrievably sunk and that of communism have risen to dominance.

"After the losses of the National Socialists in the Reichstag elections of November, German 'Big Business' decided that the immediate danger was that the National Socialist Party might disintegrate too rapidly" (C B Hoover *Germany Enters the Third Reich*, 1933, p.64 – quoted in R Palme Dutt *op. cit.* p.125).

So Big Business decided to instal fascism in power with the sole aim of enabling the latter to use the state for rebuilding its strength and shattering all opposition.

The sapping of the German working-class will to resist had been effected not by fascism but by Social Democracy, whose leadership was treating the prospect of a Nazi government in a favourable light. Thus, in April 1932, Severing went on record as saying: *"The Social Democratic Party no less than the Catholic Party, is strongly inclined to see Herr Hitler's Nazis share the government responsibility"* (quoted in R Palme Dutt, p.127).

On coming to power, Hitler armed the Storm Troops and incorporated them into the state's 'auxiliary police' with special responsibility for the

policing of the elections due to be held on 5 March. He suppressed the whole of the Social Democratic and Communist press, arrested leading militants, banned all working-class gatherings and propaganda, unleashed a reign of terror, and held elections in these conditions. These elections, held under "*the shackles of vile terrorism*", as the *Daily Herald* of 4 March 1933 correctly stated, and accompanied by gross irregularities (in some districts the polling figures exceeded the electorate), could hardly reflect the wishes of the German people. Ignoring all this, Social Democracy eagerly resorted to the plea that now Hitler had a "*democratic mandate*" it was not justifiable to oppose him save as a "*loyal parliamentary opposition*". Taking parliamentary cretinism to its logical absurdity of supporting a fascist terrorist regime because it had a majority in Parliament, albeit a rigged majority secured at the point of a bayonet in elections held under terror, Stampfen, the former editor of *Vorwärts*, wrote:

"The victory of the government parties makes it possible to govern strictly in accordance with the Constitution.

"They have only to act as a legal government, and it will follow naturally that we shall be a legal opposition; if they choose to use their majority for measures that remain within the framework of the Constitution, we shall confine ourselves to the role of their fair critics."

For his part, Kautsky, at one time the leader of the Second International and considered the best theoretician of Marxism after Engels' death, but long since degenerated and gone totally rotten, wrote:

"The dictatorship has the mass of the population behind it."

Kautsky had travelled a long way since he wrote his famous *Road to Power* in 1906. Beginning with opportunism on the questions of the tasks of the proletarian revolution in regard to the bourgeois state, through his support for the imperialist First World War and his opposition to the proletarian revolution in Russia, he had rolled down to the bottom and into the gutter, writing pieces embellishing the Hitlerite regime as founded on mass support.

W N Ewer, diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, wrote that Hitler's triumph was "... a victory for democracy," for he had "come to power by the most strictly constitutional means ... Of course there was a certain amount of intimidation. There always is ... The figures indeed are proof that the election was practically free" ('Why Hitler Triumphed', *Plebs*, April 1933, quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p.128).

An exactly similar view was expressed by Maxton, the Chairman of

the Independent Labour Party:

In this way Social Democracy attempted to cover its subservience to fascism by the barely-disguised device of first ignoring the conditions of terror under which the election of 5 March was held, and then use this mockery of an election as providing a legitimate mandate for the fascist regime.

Social Democracy's disgraceful, degrading and despicable line was to continue after the election in a vain attempt to curry favour with fascism. The speech of the Social Democratic leader, Wels, at the opening of the Reichstag on 23 March, was an important expression of this line. He, as the leader of the party, openly resigned from the Executive Committee of the Second International, accusing the latter of spreading "*atrocities stories*" against the fascists. The leadership of the trade unions declared its readiness to co-operate with the Nazis, hailed in their press as the fascist "*revolution*", as a triumphant "*continuation of the 1918 revolution*". It stressed that the common enemy was communism, and that their 'socialism' was a "*German affair*" (*Sozial Demokratischer Pressedient*, 9 March, 1933, quoted by R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p.129). Reaching the depths of degradation and treachery to the working class, on this basis, the central executive committee of the trade unions gave an official call to the workers to participate in Hitler's May Day.

"The trade union leaders have sealed their reconciliation with the new rulers of Germany," wrote the *Daily Herald* of 24 April 1933.

The attempt by the reformists of Social Democracy to play the role of a recognised tolerated adjunct to fascism failed, in part owing to the fact that a huge number of workers in the big factories rejected their leaders' calls and stayed away from the Nazi May Day parades. Once it was crystal clear that the Social-democratic leadership's grip on the workers was inadequate to serve fascist ends, straight away on 2 May, the Nazis seized the unions, amalgamated them into their own labour front, marched their leaders into prison, and in their place appointed Nazi functionaries.

"The Leiparts and the Grassmanns", declared Dr Ley, the leader of the Nazi Labour front, "*may profess their devotion to Hitler; but they are better in prison*" (quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p.129).

For its part, the Social Democratic Party traversed the same path of humiliation, degradation and capitulation, followed by dissolution. On 17 May all its members in the Reichstag voted for the fascist government's resolution and joined in unanimous acclamation of Hitler. Much good did

this grovelling do for them! All the property of the Social Democratic Party was confiscated, and on 22 June the organisation itself was declared 'dissolved'.

With this, Social Democracy was compelled by the bourgeoisie to continue its disruptive work in the conditions of illegality – conditions in which it could be of greater use to the ruling class in the event of a revolutionary upheaval than if it were to closely and openly identified with fascism.

The sole honour of consistent opposition to the bourgeoisie, and to fascism in particular, belongs to the Communist Party. The balance of class forces during the period under discussion did not crown its efforts with success, but the fact that its line was correct, and that it pursued this line in the working-class movement without fear or favour – of this there cannot be the slightest doubt.

In view of the above, we may list the following as the decisive causes of the temporary victory of fascism:

- 1 The strangling by Social Democracy and the trade unions of the 1918 revolution in the name of 'democracy' and the restoration of the power of capitalists, landlords and old reactionary institutions;
- 2 The support by Social Democracy and the trade unions of the successive emergency and dictatorship regimes leading up to the assumption of power by the Nazis;
- 3 The rejection by Social Democracy and the trade unions of a united working-class front;
- 4 The refusal by Social Democracy and the trade-union leadership to resist Hitler on his accession to power or on the commencement of the Nazi terror.

As R Palme Dutt correctly pointed out: "*The experience of Germany from 1918 to 1933 is the classic demonstration before the international working class of how a working-class revolution can be destroyed and squandered and brought to the deepest abyss of working-class subjection. It is the classic demonstration before the international working class of where the path of bourgeois 'democracy' leads, step by step to its inexorable conclusion*" (op. cit. pp. 131-132).

In Austria too "*The victory of the proletarian revolution ... was fully in the grasp of the workers in 1918-1919, and was only prevented by Social Democracy. This is common ground, and is admitted by the Social Democratic leaders themselves. Otto Bauer describes the situation at the end of*

the war in his book 'The Austrian revolution of 1918':

"*'There was deep ferment in the barracks of the people's army. The people's army felt that it was the bearer of the revolution, the vanguard of the proletariat ... The soldiers with arms in hand hoped for a victory of the proletariat ... 'Dictatorship of the proletariat!' 'All Power to the Soviets!' was all that could be heard in the streets.'*

"He continues:

"*'No bourgeois government could have coped with such a task. It would have been disarmed by the distrust and contempt of the masses. It would have been overthrown in a week by a street uprising and disarmed by its own soldiers.*

"*'Only the Social Democrats could have safely handled such an unprecedentedly difficult situation, because they enjoyed the confidence of the working masses Only the Social Democrats could have stopped peacefully the stormy demonstrations by negotiation and persuasion. Only the Social Democrats could have guided the people's army and curbed the revolutionary adventures of the working masses ... The profound shake-up of the bourgeois social order was expressed in that a bourgeois government, a government without participation in it of the Social Democrats, had simply become unthinkable.'*

"The role of Austrian Social Democracy was thus in fact exactly parallel to that of the German. The power of the workers' revolution was deliberately destroyed by Social Democracy in the name of bourgeois 'democracy'" (R Palme Dutt, op. cit. p.137).

The development of fascism in Italy, Germany and Austria reveals all too clearly that the role of Social Democracy is crucial in the accession of fascism to power. Without understanding of this inter-relationship between Social Democracy and fascism, it is impossible to understand capitalist politics since the end of the First World War, which marked the open desertion of Social Democracy, representing significant sections of the working-class movement, especially of the trade-union and parliamentary leadership, in all the imperialist countries to the side of the bourgeoisie.

The further evolution of Social-democratic parties since then has played a big part in defeating working-class revolutions in the years immediately following the first world war, in the growth of fascism in the subsequent years, and in the fight against communism since the Second World War.

Finance capital's view of Social Democracy

In order to obtain a clear, thoroughly rational and hard-headed glimpse of how finance capital views the role of Social Democracy and that of fascism in the maintenance of capitalism, we must make a brief reference to the *Deutsche Führerbriefe* ('Letters to Leaders'), the confidential bulletin of the Federation of German Industry during the crucial year, 1932. Issued for confidential circulation to the chiefs of finance capital grouped in the FGI, numbers 72 and 75 incorporated a study of *'The Social Reconsolidation of Capitalism'*. These letters are remarkable for their clarity and candour alike.

The basic proposition of the writer of these confidential communications is that continuance of capitalist rule rests on the splitting of the working class; that the single most important danger to capitalism is a united working class, against which no amount of armed force is of any avail; that, therefore, capitalism needs a social basis beyond its own narrow ranks, which are "*too small ... to uphold their rule alone*"; that in the aftermath of the First World War, this social basis was provided by Social Democracy, which rendered capitalism the "*indispensable service of anchoring their rule in the people, and thereby being the actual and final bearers of this rule.*"

If Social Democracy had furnished the basis of the continuance of capitalist rule by dividing and splitting the working class, what precisely enabled Social Democracy to achieve this split? What, in other words, is the social basis of Social Democracy? The answer to this extremely important question given by the representative of finance capital bears a striking resemblance to the Leninist analysis as to the reasons for the split in the working class of the imperialist countries, namely, the privileged conditions, based on concessions, of the upper layers of the working class – the labour aristocracy. Through its influence and control over the trade unions, Social Democracy, while paralysing their revolutionary energy, "*chained them fast to the bourgeois state*". In doing so, Social Democracy helped to keep communism out by a "*sluice mechanism*". The end of stabilisation with the outset of the economic crisis, however, which compelled the bourgeoisie to wipe out the earlier concessions to the working class, and with this to undermine Social Democracy, carried the danger of opening the sluice gates for the influence and victory of communism. With the undermining of Social Democracy, thanks to the crisis of capitalism, "*...the bourgeois rule will be faced with the necessity of setting up a military dictatorship. This stage would mark the beginning of the phase of the incurable sickness of bourgeois rule. As the old*

sluice mechanism can no longer be sufficiently restored, the only possible means of saving bourgeois rule from this abyss is to effect the splitting of the working class and its tying to the State apparatus by other and more direct means. Herein lie the positive possibilities and the tasks of National Socialism."

In other words, the changed conditions necessitated a change of the form of state. If the chaining of the organised working class to the bourgeois state through Social Democracy requires a parliamentary form of government, the destruction of the basis of Social Democracy, consequent upon the crisis and the withdrawal of concessions to the working class, compels capitalism to go over to a non-parliamentary, coercive form of rule – fascism.

"A bourgeois regime based on a liberal constitution must not only be parliamentary; it must rely for support on Social Democracy and allow Social Democracy adequate achievements. A bourgeois regime which destroys these regimes must sacrifice Social Democracy and parliamentarism, must create a substitute for Social Democracy, and must go over to a restricted social constitution" – fascism, in plain language.

The writer of the Letters find a striking parallel between the role of Social Democracy during 1918-1930 and that of fascism after 1930:

"The parallelism is indeed really striking. The then Social Democracy (from 1918-1930) and present-day National Socialism both perform similar functions in that they both were grave diggers of the preceding system, and then, instead of leading the masses to the revolution proclaimed by them, led them to the new formation of bourgeois rule. The comparison which has often been drawn between Ebert and Hitler is also valid in this respect. Both appeal to the anti-capitalist yearnings for emancipation; both promise a new 'social' or 'national' commonwealth."

His conclusion is: *"The parallelism itself shows that National Socialism has taken over from Social Democracy the task of providing the mass support for the rule of the bourgeoisie in Germany."*

The above analysis, though it contains much that is valid, needs to be corrected and supplemented. The writer of the letters speaks as if fascism takes over the role (that of providing mass support for bourgeois rule) which was earlier performed by Social Democracy, with fascism and Social Democracy performing identical roles in different periods and conditions, and consequently with differing methods and governmental forms. This is far too simplistic. The fact is that they exist together, with each performing a definitive role, each supplementing the other. Whereas fascism relies for

its social base on mainly the petty bourgeois strata, the declassed elements and backward workers, Social Democracy bases itself on the privileged strata of the organised working class. Even after the victory of fascism, the influence, ideology and traditions of Social Democracy continue their baleful and disorganising role, preventing the emergence of a united working class front to confront and defeat fascism. Further, if fascist dictatorship's grip on power weakens, then Social Democracy stands in wait to come to the rescue of capitalism.

What is beyond doubt is that both Social Democracy and fascism are agents of monopoly capitalism; both fight tooth and nail against the struggle of the working class for its social emancipation. With this as their aim, both disrupt and weaken working-class organisations.

Their methods are, however, different. While fascism smashes the class organisations of the working class from without and opposes their whole basis and counters them with an alternative 'national' ideology, Social Democracy undermines them from within by diverting them along reformist bourgeois channels. Whereas fascism relies mainly on coercion, along with deception, Social Democracy relies mainly on deception, along with coercion. Their aims are identical; only their methods differ. In view of the identity of their aims and differing methods, one cannot but agree with Stalin's observation, made as early as 1924, that "*Social Democracy objectively represents the moderate wing of Fascism.*" (*Concerning the International Situation*, Collected Works, vol 6, p.294)

Fascism is a product of the post-First World War general crisis of capitalism. In fact it is "*an abortion consequent on the miscarriage of the proletarian social revolution*" (R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 157).

Beginning with 1914, when Social Democracy abandoned Marxism and internationalism (with the exception of the British Labour Party, which was never Marxist and was always chauvinist to the core), it too began to develop strands of ideology akin to fascism. Advocacy of the unity of the class interests of the working class and monopoly capitalism, total abandonment of internationalism, 'socialist' – even 'revolutionary' phrases as a cover for total social subservience in the service of capitalism, determined opposition to wars of the oppressed people for national liberation against imperialist exploitation and oppression, and irreconcilable hostility to Marxism, the ideology of the modern proletariat. The above basic principles of Social Democracy are not very dissimilar to the basic principles of fascism. What is more, they prepare the ideological ground for the ascendancy of fascism.

Social Democracy emerged from the First World War with the twin

aims of defeating the working-class revolution and helping to reconstruct the badly-battered structure of capitalism. It performed both these shameful tasks very well indeed. No crime was too much for it, no depths too low for it to stoop to, in defeating the revolution – the murder of leading revolutionaries, the incarceration of thousands of others, the wholesale repression of many more thousands still. It assumed governmental responsibility and undertook the shooting down of the most militant workers, secured some concessions and pacified large sections in the interests of saving the skin of finance capital.

Once the revolution had been defeated and the period of reconstruction and stabilisation begun, Social Democracy added a new theoretical strand to its existing counter-revolutionary ideological stock-in-trade. It argued that the collapse of capitalism was not in the interests of the working class; that, on the contrary, the working class needed a prosperous and prospering capitalism as a means for its advance to socialism ("*it is useless to socialise misery*", wrote Kautsky); that, far from being at its end, capitalist development was advancing in the direction of a new era of "*organised capitalism*"; and that, therefore, it was the duty of the working class to co-operate and help in this development by participating economically, through the unions (Mondism, etc.), and politically, through Social-democratic parties, in forming or joining capitalist governments.

Tarnov, the leading German trade-union theoretician, declared:

"Marxism as a leading ideology of the working-class movement has outlived itself. But as a real great mass movement cannot exist without a corresponding ideology, therefore, the leaders of the trade unions must create that new ideology."

This new ideology, spoken of by Tarnov, was in fact very old and pre-Marxian, i.e., that of the unity of interests of the working class and the exploiting capitalist class.

The General Council of the TUC, in its Report to the Swansea Congress in 1928, came out openly in favour of Mondism and class collaboration, saying:

"The ultimate policy of the movement can find more use for an efficient industry than for a derelict one, and the unions can use their power to promote and guide the scientific organisation of industry as well as to obtain material advantages from the reorganisation" (quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op.cit.* p.159).

"Social Democracy today is an indispensable element of the state,"

declared Hilferding at the Kiel Congress of the German Social Democratic Party.

The whole wretched thing boils down to incorporating Social Democracy and the trade unions under its control into the state structure of monopoly capitalism, with the sole purpose of strengthening the latter while continuing to acclaim this shameful activity as the advance of 'socialism'.

On this basis, the German Social-democratic leader, Diffmann, went on to proclaim at the Magdeburg Congress of his Party:

"We are no longer living under capitalism; we are living in the transition period to socialism, economically, politically, socially ... In Germany we have ten times as many socialist achievements to defend as they have in Russia."

And when the world economic crisis delivered a shattering blow to this cosy fantasy, far from jettisoning it, Social Democracy adapted itself to the crisis by further additions to its opportunist theory, declaring that it was now the job of the working class to rescue capitalism from the danger of chaos and proletarian revolution.

"We must be the physicians of ailing capitalism", was the call of the 1931 Leipzig Congress of the German Social Democratic Party. Vandervelde, the Chairman of the Second International, made this desperate plea on behalf of imperialism in the Belgian Chamber of Deputies in 1932:

"The capitalist system is cracking in all its parts. It can only be saved by serious and urgent measures. We are at the eleventh hour. Take care that the proletariat, like Samson, does not bring crashing down the columns of the temple."

Montel, the French socialist, had already in 1928, before the onset of the crisis, proclaimed: *"The Socialist Party will present itself as the only party capable of saving bourgeois society"* (quoted in R Palme Dutt, op. cit. p.161).

The above line of theoretical reasoning and propaganda makes it abundantly clear that Social Democracy was objectively making all the necessary preparations for the ideology of fascism and easing the latter's rise to state power. Even after the fascist victory in Germany, the leader of German trade unionism, Leipart, offered an alliance to the bloody Hitlerite dictatorship.

The essence of Social Democracy is the conception and practice of class collaboration with capitalism and with the capitalist state. Further, it is the presentation of this line as the safe, peaceful, harmonious, 'democratic'

and progressive advance to socialism – in contrast to the dangers of violent proletarian revolution. Experience, however, proves beyond a shred of doubt that, far from being an advance to socialism, this line of reasoning and practice leads to unprecedented violence against the proletariat, strengthens capitalist dictatorship in general, and its final culmination in certain circumstances in the victory of fascism – and to imperialist war.

Communism and proletarian revolution offer the way out of this imperialist hell and carnage, capitalist exploitation and oppression.

Communism or fascism? – This is the choice that confronts the working class. The third way offered by Social Democracy only leads, in the final analysis, to the cul-de-sac of fascism.

Fascism and demagogy

Shorn of all the verbiage and subterfuge, of all its nonsensical mystic wrappings, fascism is the violent attempt of decaying capitalism to defeat the proletarian revolution and forcibly retard its own demise. Fascism uses demagogy as a science for it dare not declare its aims openly, for it could build no mass support on the basis of its real aims.

"Bolshevism is knocking at our gates. We can't afford to let it in. We have got to organise ourselves against it, and put our shoulders together and hold fast. We must keep America whole and safe and unspoiled. We must keep the worker away from red literature and red ruses; we must see that his mind remains healthy" (Al Capone).

This appeal of a thief and gangster for the maintenance of the "existing" social order against the menace of Bolshevism – proletarian revolution – is an apt introduction to the ideology of fascism. Neither can the fascists, like thieves and gangsters, for obvious reasons, openly and honestly proclaim their true aims, which are solely concerned with protecting the interests of monopoly capitalism. So they indulge in hypocritical moralist cant about keeping present-day society 'unspoiled' and keeping 'healthy' the workers' minds. Gangster exploits accompanied by propaganda stuffed full of high moral tones is characteristic of a dominant class in a decadent society which has outlived its historical usefulness. Plekhanov correctly observed:

"Marx said very truly that the greater the development of antagonism between the growing forces of production and the extant social order, the more does the ideology of the ruling class become permeated with hypocrisy. In addition, the more effectively life unveils the mendacious character of this ideology, the more does the language used by the dominant class become sublime and virtuous ..." (Fundamental Problems of Marxism,

English edition, 1929, p.82).

With the advent of fascism, the hypocrisy and mendacity noted by Marx reaches extreme demagogic proportions. As the task of fascism is to build a mass movement, popular in form and reactionary in content, it is characterised by its manipulation of every backward feeling and base instinct in human feeling, by the unscrupulousness of its programme, which is put together to appeal to every section of society without the slightest regard to consistency, and by the shamelessness of its abrupt changes of front and repudiation of its own platform.

"Demagogy", correctly remarked R Palme Dutt, "*is the art of playing on the hopes and fears, the emotions and ignorance of the poor and the suffering FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL. It is the meanest of the arts. This is the art of fascism*" (op. cit. p.188).

One has only to compare the fascist programme with fascism in action to realise the meaning of demagogy. We confine ourselves to Germany. Here, in the concrete circumstances, fascism had to appeal to 'socialism' and the anti-capitalist sentiments of the working class in order to be able to come to power in order to serve finance capital. Thus the Krupps, the Thyssens, the Deterdings and the Hohenzollerns doled out large amounts of money to the Nazis for conducting 'socialist' propaganda, knowing full well its deceptive nature. Thus, the 25-point Nazi programme included such items as the abolition of unearned income, breaking of interest-slavery, confiscation of all war profits, nationalisation of all trust, confiscation of land without compensation for communal purposes, profit-sharing in all large concerns, and the death penalty for usurers and profiteers.

It is said that when two gullible devotees of National Socialism, believers in every word of the Nazi programme, approached Goebbels for an explanation of how the point on the "*breaking of interest-slavery*" would be implemented, they received the brutal reply that the only "*breaking*" likely to happen would be of the skulls of those who endeavoured to understand it.

While the wily chiefs of finance capital remained wholly unperturbed by the Nazi programme's threat to "*nationalise all trusts*", the more stupid of the large landowners were evidently alarmed by the point in the programme about "*the confiscation of land without compensation*". To allay the unfounded fears of such dullards, the Nazis inserted explanations in their programme rendering the latter totally harmless to large capitalists and landlords alike.

From time to time assurances had to be given to capitalists who

hesitated to give their support to the Nazis because of the latter's 'anti-capitalist' propaganda. An exceptionally clear, but typical, example of Nazi duplicity and demagogy is provided by a letter written by the party leadership in Dresden to a Weimar capitalist. This letter fell into the hands of the opponents of the Nazis in 1930 and was published. This is what it said: "*Do not let yourself be confused by the text of our posters ... Of course there are catchwords like 'Down with Capitalism!', etc.; but these are unquestionably necessary, for under the flag of 'German national', or 'national' alone, you must know, we should never reach our goal, we should have no future. We must talk the language of the embittered socialist workmen. ... or else they wouldn't feel at home with us. We don't come out with a direct programme for reasons of diplomacy*" (Letter of Dresden Nazi Party leader to the industrialist Fritsche in Weimar, reprinted in Mowrer, *Germany puts the clock back*, p.150, cited in R Palme Dutt, op.cit. p.191).

Once in power, the fascists went on to impose draconian and military discipline on the workers, turning them into virtual slaves of monopoly capitalism. While the class war had been abolished for the workers, on the capitalist side, the class war, far from abating, continued – only at an accelerated tempo. The German labour code of 1 May 1934 enshrined the absolute autocratic power of capital over labour in the following cynically frank and brutal terms:

"In the factory the employer, as the leader of the factory, and the workers and clerical employees as his followers, work jointly to further the aims of the factory in the joint interests of the people and of the state. The decision of the leader of the factory is binding on his followers in all factory matters."

By this labour code, all previous elected Works Councils were replaced by those appointed by the employer in consultation with the Nazi representative in the factory. All collective agreements were annulled. Wages were to be fixed by each employer according to the 'profitability' of the concern. The last word on wages and labour conditions lay with the 'Labour Trustees' appointed by the Nazi government, whose character may be gauged from the fact that the big industrialist, Krupp, was appointed 'Labour Trustee' for the entire Ruhr area.

The essence of the reality of the fascist corporate state may be summarised as the total destruction of all independent organisations of the working class, the abolition of the right to strike, intensification of exploitation and the complete enslavement of the workers to the capitalists.

Fascism and war

As fascism is the violent expression of finance capital in decay and crisis, in its external policy, relying on excessively chauvinist propaganda and rousing the most obscene kind of 'nationalism', fascism means war – a war for the purpose of domination.

"Fascism believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace ... war alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it" (Mussolini, *The political and social doctrine of fascism*).

"In eternal warfare mankind has become great – in eternal peace mankind would be ruined" (Hitler, *Mein Kampf*).

From the above it must not be concluded that these tendencies are peculiar to fascism. They are, on the contrary, common to all imperialist states. From fascism they only receive their most consummate expression. In fact non-fascist states – the US, Britain and France – spent more on armaments and had far greater records of global plunder and violence than the fascist states – Germany, Italy and Japanese. In fact, one of the reasons for the development of fascist forms of government and an aggressive foreign policy in the latter group was that German imperialism was deprived of its 'rightful' share – in proportion to its actual or potential strength – of world plunder. The first group, on the other hand, was made up of relatively 'sated' imperialists, gorging on world plunder, who were bent upon holding on to their ill-gotten gains. Thus, whereas the first group showed at least some interest in questions of 'security', the latter group of 'hungry' imperialists was bent upon repartition of the world. The unfolding of the law of uneven development of capitalism, as Lenin had correctly observed in his remarkable analysis of imperialism, which had led to the First World War was, during the period under discussion, inexorably driving to the Second World War.

But, for all the danger that the fascist states represented to the non-fascist imperialist states, the latter were extraordinarily soft on them. And this for three reasons.

The first was that they regarded fascism as a bulwark against communism and proletarian revolution. A candid speech made by Lloyd George on 22 September 1933, was reported in the following terms:

"If the powers succeeded in overthrowing Nazism in Germany, what would follow? Not a Conservative, Socialist or Liberal regime, but extreme Communism. Surely that could not be their objective. A Communist

Germany would be infinitely more formidable than a Communist Russia. The Germans would know how to run their communism effectively. That was why every communist in the world from Russia to America was praying that the Western nations would bully Germany into a communist revolution. He [Lloyd George] would entreat the government to proceed cautiously." (The Times, 23 September 1933).

Second, the desire of the 'democratic' imperialist powers to use the fascist states as a tool of aggression and a battering ram against the USSR, for the twin purposes of defeating socialism in the Soviet Union and appeasing German imperialism's appetite for colonies at the expense of the USSR, rather than at the expense of the 'democratic' imperialists' states. They were greatly encouraged in this policy by Hitler himself, who had written:

"We stop the eternal march to the south and the west of Europe and turn our eyes towards the land in the east ... If we speak of land in Europe today we can only think in the first instance of Russia, and her border states" (*Mein Kampf*, p.743).

Third, by embroiling Germany and the Soviet Union in a war, the 'democratic' imperialists hoped to weaken the former two countries to the point of exhaustion, at which point the 'democratic' imperialists hoped to intervene – in the 'interests of peace', of course – and impose on them a crippling peace.

This policy did not work out quite according to plan. The inter-imperialist contradictions and rivalry proved far stronger in the end than their joint hatred of communism and the USSR. World War Two started as an inter-imperialist war. By the time it was over, fascist Germany had been smashed and People's Democracies established in a number of countries in eastern and central Europe. Soon China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam joined the socialist camp. All these gains of the people of the world were at the expense of imperialism. It is these gains which were to be criminally squandered by the victory of Khrushchevite revisionism in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which ultimately led to the fall of socialism and the disintegration of the once great and glorious USSR.

The basis of democratic freedoms in imperialist countries

The 'democratic freedoms' in the heartlands of imperialism are built on the foundation of colonial slavery and imperialist loot. But with the

undermining of this foundation, through anti-imperialist revolutionary movements and the economic crisis of capitalism, with the consequent diminution of profits, the bourgeoisie in these countries is obliged to attack the working class, withdraw the concessions, do away with genuine reforms and introduce 'reforms' which destroy the post-Second World War gains of the working class, thus contributing to the intensity of the class struggle and revolutionary awakening of the working class. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the People's Democracies of eastern Europe, the bourgeoisie feels emboldened to intensify these attacks. In many countries, for example Britain, Germany, France and Italy, these attacks are being carried out through the agency of Social-democratic governments, which is helping to expose Social Democracy, even further than before, as the agent of the bourgeoisie that it has been ever since 1914. If the deepening economic crisis of imperialism and the actions of Social Democracy in the service of imperialism help to impel the proletarian masses by causing widespread disillusionment, as they surely must at some stage, provided that there exists a genuine Marxist-Leninist vanguard, the bourgeoisie of even those imperialist states, such as Britain, which have hitherto been regarded as model 'democracies', would be compelled to look at new forms to ensure the continued existence of its rule. In the event of such circumstances arising, the bourgeoisie would, without much hesitation, move towards open, terrorist methods, towards fascism. It will turn away from parliamentary forms which, being exhausted and discredited, would not be of much use to it.

Is fascism alien to countries such as the US, Britain and France?

Those who say that fascism is alien to the traditions of such countries as the US, Britain, France, etc, that because of the deep roots of parliamentary institutions or the peculiarity of the 'national character' fascism could never succeed in these countries, display total ignorance of the system of imperialism and the contradictions inherent in it and which drive it. The underlying strength of the 'democratic' institutions, the uniqueness of the 'national character' of countries such as the US, Britain and France, is itself explained by the wealthier and privileged position that these countries occupied for a very long time. It is explained by the loot from the empire and imperialist super-exploitation, which enabled the bourgeoisie of these countries to make concessions to the working class and thus retard the growth of a revolutionary working-class movement. With the disappearance of this privileged position, the ruling classes of these countries, in appropriate circumstances, are just as likely to consign to the scrap heap their hitherto

hallowed parliamentary democratic institutions and traditions, and to embrace fascism, as were the German, Austrian, Italian and Japanese bourgeoisies. One has only to acquaint oneself with the never-ceasing campaign conducted by these governments, as well as by the opposition bourgeois parties – through the print and electronic media – of all the imperialist countries against immigrants and asylum seekers to realise that these are not the actions of 'democratic' governments and institutions, of a 'free' press, of those whose 'national character' forbids such xenophobic propaganda. These are, on the contrary, the ravings of the representatives of a dying and extremely decadent system – monopoly capitalism – who, without the slightest scruple and qualms of conscience, would drown millions of people in blood in order artificially to retard the approaching demise of this filthy system, which has for so long tormented humanity and dragged it through filth and blood, and which, during the century just closing, has claimed the lives of 100 million human beings through the slaughterhouse of imperialist wars, let alone the 20 million that it indirectly kills every year through malnutrition, disease and hunger. Besides, one has only to know the history of Britain for the past three centuries, of France and of the US for the past two centuries, to realise that in the art of the use of bloody violence, at home and abroad, the ruling classes of these countries have nothing to learn from the ruling class of any other country, fascist Germany included. The mass slaughter of the Vietnamese and Korean people by these imperialist powers, especially the US, the bombing by them last year of the tiny Yugoslav Republic, and the continued bombing of Iraq ten years after the end of the Gulf War – to confine ourselves to just three examples – make the Nazi crimes, outrageous and horrific though they were, small in comparison. To assert that the ruling classes who have committed these kinds of carnage could not resort to fascism is to live in a fool's paradise, divorced from reality.

The leading representatives of these supposedly democratic ruling classes, far from showing disdain for fascist movements and regimes, welcomed them with warmth and enthusiasm. Barely had Mussolini staged his coup d'état than he was honoured by the British crown in 1923 with the Order of the Grand Commander of the Bath by way of recognition of his services to the counter revolution. Chamberlain enjoyed fervently warm relations with Mussolini. Churchill, packaged by the myth-making bourgeois propaganda machine as a great 'anti-fascist' fighter, speaking in 1927 in the Mecca of Rome, expressed his support for fascism in the following words:

"If I had been an Italian, I am sure I would have been entirely with you from the beginning to the end of your victorious struggle against the

bestial appetites and passions of Leninism" (Churchill, Address to the Roman Fascists, January 1927, quoted in Salvemini, *The Fascist Dictatorship*, p.204 and reproduced in R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p.260).

This is how Sir Alfred Mond, the founder of ICI and author of the Mond-Turner Reports for class collaboration, in an interview in Rome, poured his heart out in support of fascism:

"I admire fascism because it is successful in bringing about social peace. I have been working for years towards the same peace in the industrial field in England ... Fascism is tending towards the realisation of my political ideals, namely, to make all classes collaborate loyally" (*Daily Herald*, 12 May, 1928).

It was this lover of fascism of whom the TUC leadership was so enamoured. Citrine even went to the brazen extent of not only defending Mond's right to be a fascist, but also of insisting on a trade union alliance with him.

The millionaire press baron, Lord Rothermere, supported Mosley's British Union of Fascists for the reason that it might represent *"a well-organised party of the Right ready to take over responsibility for national affairs with the same directness of purpose and energy of method as Hitler and Mussolini have displayed"* (Rothermere in the *Daily Mail*, 15 January 1934).

It is highly significant that Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF), the fascist party in Britain, had its origins directly in the Labour Party. Having left the Conservative Party, Mosley joined the Labour Party in 1924. Being possessed of vast amounts of wealth, and having influential connections, which always helps in bourgeois parties, including Labour, he had a meteoric rise. In 1927 he was elected to Labour's Executive Committee and appointed a Minister in the Labour government in 1929. In 1930 he resigned on the grounds of the Labour government's passivity in the face of steep and rising unemployment. In his ministerial capacity he had produced the Mosley Memorandum containing the first outline towards a fascist policy for the reconstruction of British capitalism.

As the government, characterised as it was by passivity – not because of the Mosley Memorandum's non-socialist content – did not respond favourably to it, Mosley appealed to the Labour Party Conference in 1930, where he secured 1,046,000 votes against 1,251,000 for the Executive. All the same, he was re-elected to the Executive, and thus passed straight from Labour's Executive to the organisation of his New Party in the spring of

1931. This party in 1932 openly embraced fascism and changed its name to the BUF. The New Party was formed with 6 Labour MPs and one Conservative MP, and it issued an appeal to the mass of patriotic men and women who are determined upon action.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was alone in warning everyone about the fascist tendencies implicit in Mosley's Memorandum. In contrast, the left Labour politicians rallied to his support. The *New Leader*, the organ of the Independent Labour Party, wrote of Mosley: *"In the main, as is known, his scheme follows ILP lines"* (10 October, 1930, quoted in R Palme Dutt, *op. cit.* p.266).

On 7 November, 1930, Fenner Brockway, a leading member of the ILP, wrote in the *Leader* thus:

"In the ideas of the ILP Group and the smaller Mosley Group there is a good deal in common ... Before long we may expect to see a revolt by the younger members of all three parties against the methods and spirit of the older generation" (*The Ferment of Ideas*).

The Mosley Manifesto of December 1930, which formally rejected socialism and called for a dictatorship of five for an aggressive policy of capitalist reconstruction, secured the signatures of no less than 17 Labour MPs, including 5 ILP MPs.

Mosley's BUF was able to gain some ground thanks to the connivance and direct support of the state, the higher echelons of the police and sections of the big bourgeoisie. This is the experience of every other imperialist country. In each case fascism is nurtured and helped to grow, in some countries to assume power, not against the wishes of the bourgeoisie and the state, but with their tender loving care and assistance. It develops through the forms of bourgeois democracy, through the systematic, methodical and step-by-step strengthening of the coercive state apparatus, the institution of emergency powers, and the restriction of the rights of the working class – this process being greatly accelerated by reformist and constitutional illusions engendered by Social Democracy, which paralyse the will of the working class to resist. When the ground has thus been fully prepared in the conditions of bourgeois democracy, and the workers' movement disrupted and disorganised, only then is the final blow delivered by the bourgeoisie, with the establishment of fascist dictatorship.

"Fascism," said Clara Zetkin in 1923, *"is the punishment of the proletariat for failing to carry on the revolution begun in Russia"*. But, however much it may try, fascism cannot resolve the contradictions of

capitalism and therefore cannot prevent the latter's collapse. The arrival of fascism on the political stage represents the extreme sharpening of the contradictions of capitalism; it is an indication of the extent of its parasitism, decadence and moribund nature. Unable to continue its rule with the aid of parliamentary forms, finance capital tears the mask off its face and, casting aside the entire parliamentary democratic façade, confronts the working class with its open, naked and terroristic dictatorship in an endeavour to prolong the life of a historically doomed system. In doing so, the bourgeoisie delivers an excellent lesson in class struggle, for it is compelled to preach to the masses contempt for the peaceful methods and legality which hitherto had been the bourgeoisie's best protection. It is compelled to reveal to all that which was formerly concealed by the bourgeoisie and its Social-democratic, Liberal and Conservative hacks, namely, that real class rule resides outside of parliament; that all honeyed, hypocritical and refined phrases about the power of reforms and parliament alike, with which the bourgeoisie had hitherto lulled the working class to sleep, were "*in fact frauds, straw men put up in order to fool the people*" (Lenin, *The Constitutional Crisis in England*, 1914), which can be abruptly torn down by the bourgeoisie in whose hands resides real power.

In view of the fact that the conditions for the institution of fascism are created by the ruling class within the shell of bourgeois 'democracy', the fight against fascism cannot be waged by the working class putting its trust in bourgeois 'democracy' as a defence against fascism. This fight can only successfully be waged by a united and determined working class against all the attacks of finance capital in the economic and political field – against anti-trade union laws and wage cuts; against the so-called anti-terrorism legislation; against racist immigration and asylum laws which are solely aimed at sowing divisions in the working class by shifting the blame for the ills of capitalism on to the backs of the unfortunate victims of imperialist plunder, brigandage and war; against restrictions on the right to free speech and assembly, and so on and so forth.

The stronger the resistance of the working class against the attacks of finance capital, the more difficult it becomes for the latter to go over to open fascism, with the added advantage that such resistance is decisive for winning over to its side the wavering petty bourgeois layers of the population. While fighting with great determination and tenacity for every democratic right to organise and agitate within the existing order, the working class must not let out of sight even for a single moment the harsh reality that bourgeois democracy is merely the mask with which the bourgeoisie disguises its dictatorship, and that it is within the forms of bourgeois democracy

that the movement to fascism is systematically pushed forward by finance capital. Bourgeois democracy, in certain circumstances and conditions, breeds fascism. The greater the faith placed by the working class in bourgeois legality and bourgeois-democratic forms, the more the sacrifices made by it in defence of the existing order as a 'lesser evil' to the menace of fascism, the more crushing the capitalist blows and the quicker the advance to fascism. This lesson of Germany and Italy, which blows sky high the fraudulent slogan of 'Democracy versus Dictatorship', should never be forgotten by the working class. The working class can, must, and will win provided that, rejecting the mentality of the beaten, fearfully trembling slave – the hallmark of the ideology of reformism – and firmly grasping the banner of revolutionary Marxism, firmly drawing close its ranks, it marches forward with determination to fulfil its historic mission – to overthrow capitalism and put in its place socialism. Thus the choice for the working class is simple and clear-cut: Dictatorship of the proletariat, or fascist barbarism.

It is the dream of the bourgeoisie, through fascism if need be, to exterminate socialism and the movement of the working class for its achievement. Over the past 150 years, there have been dozens of such attempts. Each time its opponents declared it vanquished, socialism rose up with renewed and unprecedented vigour. Notwithstanding the tremendous losses of the last decade, it will be no different this time. In the words of Marx:

"Wherever, in whatever shape, and under whatever conditions the class struggle gains any consistency, it is but natural that members of our Association [the First International] should stand in the foreground. The soil out of which it grows is modern society itself. It cannot be stamped out by any amount of carnage. To stamp it out, the government would have to stamp out the despotism of capital over labour – the condition of their own parasitic existence" (*Civil War in France*).

Whatever the tortures that the bourgeoisie inflicts on the working class, whatever the destruction it wreaks upon the lower orders, whatever the hardships of struggle, we face the future with the confidence, certainty and optimism of a rising class destined to achieve power. We approach the future with total contempt for the grotesque actions of the doomed, decadent and parasitic enemy – finance capitalism – to the battle cry of the international proletariat: "*The last fight let us face. The Internationale unites the human race*".

The Stalin Society

The aim of the Stalin Society is to defend Stalin and his work on the basis of fact and to refute capitalist, revisionist, opportunist and Trotskyist propaganda directed against him.

The activity of the Society includes (a) the study of and research upon his writings and actions; (b) the translation of material on these subjects into and from other languages; (c) the publication of material relating to such study and research; (d) the celebration and commemoration of important occasions in Stalin's life; (e) the establishment of contact with other groups and individuals with a view to taking a common stand on issues and the joint organisation of future activities (f) the establishment of contact with similar societies and groups abroad with a view to mutual benefit from experience and collaboration.

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