

THE CONCEPT OF "SOCIAL FASCISM" AND

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND FASCISM

<u>I. Fourth Comintern Congress (1922)</u>	194
<p>Zinoviev and Zetkin Connect Social Democracy and Fascism. Zetkin: Social Democracy -- "The Main Factor of the International Counter-Revolution."</p>	
<u>II. Fifth Comintern Congress (1924)</u>	195
<p>Zinoviev and Trotsky: Democracy, Social Democracy and Fascism as Figures on the Bourgeois Stage. Fifth Congress Resolution on Fascism: Fascism and Social Democracy "Two Sides of the Same Instrument of Capitalist Dictatorship." Stalin: Fascism and Social Democracy as "Twins"; Why the Bourgeoisie Always Needs Fascism.</p>	
<u>III. A Review and Examination of the Above Views (1922-1925)</u>	197
<u>IV. The Communist Movement No Longer Identifies Social Democracy with Fascism (1926-1927)</u>	201
<u>V. Sixth Comintern Congress (1928)</u>	202
<p>No Reference to "Social Fascism," But Social Democracy and Fascism Are Again Linked.</p>	
<u>VI. The Comintern Reveals German "Social Fascism" (May 1929)</u>	202
<u>VII. Tenth ECCI Plenum (July 1929)</u>	203
<p>Where There Are Strong Social Democratic Parties, Fascism Assumes the Form of Social Fascism. Resistance in the Communist Movement to the New "Left" line, Particularly in Regard to Social Fascism.</p>	
<u>VIII. Thirteenth ECCI Plenum (December 1933)</u>	205
<p>Social Democracy Is Still "Social Fascism."</p>	
<u>IX. France: 1934 -- The United Front. Seventh Comintern Congress (1935): Pieck's Report on the Activities of the ECCI</u>	206
<u>X. A Review and Examination of the Above Views (1926-1935)</u>	209
<u>XI. Books Used</u>	212

THE CONCEPT OF "SOCIAL-FASCISM" AND

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In this paper, I will trace the development of the Comintern's view of the relationship between social-democracy and fascism and, in doing so, examine the concept of "social-fascism." This is part of our effort to find the root causes for the decline of the Communist movement -- with the end of helping reverse it.

I. Fourth Comintern Congress, 1922: Zinoviev and Zetkin Connect Social Democracy and Fascism. Zetkin: Social-Democracy -- "The Main Factor of the International Counter-Revolution"

Zinoviev, the Russian President of the Comintern, in a speech at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International November/December 1922, made the following connection between social-democracy and fascism:

The union of the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals means two things: first of all it means the preparation of the White Terror against the Communists. The fascist coup is connected with the world political situation... Not by chance is Mussolini, a renegade from the Second International, a sometime Social-Democrat, now at the head of the counter-revolutionary movement in Italy; not by chance are such as Ebert and Noske at the head of the government in Germany, nor such as Pilsudsky at the head of the government in Poland. Nor is it a chance matter that the Second International should be playing a decisive role in such countries as Britain and Germany.

Zetkin, a leader of the German Party and member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), said much the same thing:

It should be shouted from the housetops that the amalgamation of the Second and Second-and-a-Half Internationals signifies among other things a new conspiracy of white terror against the workers who are struggling for their freedom...

The amalgamation of the Second and Second-and-a-Half Internationals is nothing but artillery preparation for a new onslaught of the international bourgeoisie against the revolutionary workers, an onslaught of unprecedented brutality. It paves the way for a new Galliffet, Noske, Mussolini, for new executioners of the working class.

One may say without exaggeration that the most central task of our days (nay, perhaps even of our entire epoch) is to defeat Social Democracy, the main factor of the International counter-revolution. (Fourth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings held at Petrograd & Moscow Nov. 7-Dec. 3, 1922, pp. 30-33)

The above views seemed to represent the majority view at the Congress regarding the role of social-democracy, although Radek, a Polish-German Comintern functionary, held that the only way of "rallying the masses under

the banner of Communism" was to compel the Second International, through negotiating with its leaders, "to march with us." (p. 142) Also, Zinoviev, in another speech, said it was the "wish of the Comintern to see a rapid reunion of both (Communist and Socialist) parties (in Italy) in the near future. The majority of the Communist Party oppose this reunion. This is easily understandable. The atmosphere is much too loaded with enmity; too much has been lost; too much anger has remained. But we must not allow ourselves to be guided by emotions. It takes much courage and decision to be a Communist today." (p. 277)

One does not know if Zinoviev considered social-democracy in Italy to be an exception in the social-democratic movement which he had earlier characterized as counter-revolutionary, perhaps because of fascism's being in power there, or he had simply forgotten, or disregarded, what he had said earlier. Zinoviev was notorious for his inability to maintain a consistent position.

II. Fifth Comintern Congress, 1924: Zinoviev and Trotsky: Democracy, Social-Democracy and Fascism as Figures on the Bourgeois Stage. Fifth Congress Resolution on Fascism: Fascism and Social Democracy "Two Sides of the Same Instrument of Capitalist Dictatorship." Stalin: Fascism and Social Democracy as "Twins"; Why the Bourgeoisie Always Needs Fascism

At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, June/July 1924, Zinoviev gave the following estimation of the relationship between social-democracy and fascism:

But as the Social-Democrats did not fight the Fascists and were not defeated by them, the Communists must follow tactics different from those advocated by Radek. The most important factor in all this is -- that the Social-Democratic Party has been converted into a wing of fascism. This is a great political fact. For what is the French Socialist Party if not the left wing of the bourgeoisie? (Fifth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings held at Moscow June 17th to July 8th, 1924, p. 22)

The statement "the Social-Democratic Party has been converted into a wing of fascism" is clear enough. But how does the French Socialist Party's being the "left wing" of the bourgeoisie confirm that thesis? It is possible that Zinoviev holds that social-democracy's becoming part of the bourgeois system gives it a fascist character. But if that is so, he hasn't told us why.

Zinoviev also proposed another thesis:

In my report I declared that fascism and bourgeois reaction on an international scale reached their apogee at the time of the Fourth World Congress. The Congress already at that time foretold that this movement would give way to a different "era" -- the pacifist-democratic era.

This forecast has now proved correct, but this period will not be of long duration. In a number of countries the situation will again

become aggravated, emergency measures and martial law will once more be introduced. Fascism will reappear, etc.

What was the situation during the imperialist war? It was incredibly difficult; almost everywhere martial law was introduced. At the end of the war there was a certain blossoming out of democracy; in a number of countries there were bourgeois-democratic revolutions. However fascism very quickly replaced this period, and the most severe bourgeois reaction swept a number of countries with very important results. It was inevitable that the Communist Party should appear as the only group which could lead the working class to battle and seize the victory from the bourgeoisie. After this, the wave of the pacifist-democratic era rose again. Messieurs the Social-Democrats consider it all a very simple matter: after martial law -- democracy, then again martial law, and then again democracy as if there had never been a change at all... (p. 100)

A Manifesto written by Trotsky from the Fifth Congress ("On the Tenth Anniversary of the Outbreak of War") held the same view:

Once the bourgeoisie are convinced that the revolutionary surge has been beaten back by the united efforts of fascism and social democracy, they think it expedient to restore a less bloody, less exacting, more normal regime, one clothed in the rags of legality. Only yesterday the fascists occupied the foreground, flourishing revolver and dagger, while the social-democrats acted as assistants behind the scenes. Today, when the immediate danger seems to be past, the bourgeoisie hurry the fascists off the stage, lead out from behind the curtain the radicals, reformists, and mensheviks, the apostles of legality, democracy, and peace, and advance them to the front... (Jane Degras, The Communist International: Documents, V. 2, pp. 107-109)

After the Manifesto written by Trotsky, the Fifth Comintern Congress' "Resolution on Fascism" stated:

As bourgeois society continues to decay, all bourgeois parties, particularly social-democracy, take on a more or less fascist character... Fascism and social-democracy are the two sides of the same instrument of capitalist dictatorship. In the fight against fascism, therefore, social-democracy can never be a reliable ally of the fighting proletariat. (Degras, V. 2, p. 139)

Stalin, as a counter to the arguments of Zinoviev and Trotsky regarding the bourgeoisie's use of fascism, wrote his estimate of fascism in an article entitled "Concerning the International Situation" which appeared in the Soviet Party journal Bolshevik, September 1924. In it, he polemicized against the thesis that, in his words, "while the decisive battles were in progress, the bourgeoisie needed a fighting organization, needed fascism; but now that the proletariat is defeated, the bourgeoisie no longer needs fascism and can afford to use 'democracy' instead, as a better method of consolidating its victory":

Firstly, it is not true that fascism is only the fighting organi-

sation of the bourgeoisie. Fascism is not only a military-technical category. Fascism is the bourgeoisie's fighting organization that relies on the active support of Social Democracy. Social-Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism. There is no ground for assuming that the fighting organisation of the bourgeoisie can achieve decisive successes in battles, or in governing the country, without the active support of Social-Democracy. There is just as little ground for thinking that Social-Democracy can achieve decisive successes in battles, or in governing the country, without the active support of the fighting organisations of the bourgeoisie. These organisations do not negate, but supplement each other. They are not antipodes, they are twins. Fascism is an informal political bloc of these two chief organisations; a bloc which arose in the circumstances of the post-war crisis of imperialism, and which is intended for combating the proletarian revolution. The bourgeoisie can not retain power without such a bloc. It would therefore be a mistake to think that 'pacifism' signifies the liquidation of fascism. In the present situation, 'pacifism' is the strengthening of fascism with its moderate, Social-Democratic wing pushed into the forefront. (J.V. Stalin, Works, V. 6, pp. 294-295)

Stalin's argument that fascism and social-democracy are "twins" is similar to that of the Fifth Congress' "Resolution on Fascism," cited above.

III. A Review and Examination of the Above Views (1922-1925)

(1) At the Fourth Comintern Congress, November/December 1922, Zinoviev and Zetkin saw the union of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals as a prelude to "White Terror." (Actually, it was more of a reunion, as the Two-and-a-Half had split from the Second in February 1921 with a program which "upheld" such things as the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviets, but which refused to endorse the Bolshevik Revolution or the Comintern's Program (particularly, the Twenty-one Conditions). Its purpose seems to have been to keep revolutionary-minded workers from going to the Communists, with its left-sounding program.)

In the paper "The Bourgeois State in Crisis: Fascism," it was shown that social-democracy in Germany created fascist-like terror organizations (the free corps) to crush proletarian revolution (p. 93): in Italy it made a "non-violence" treaty with the fascists (p. 98); in both places, through its influence on the working class, it was able to prevent that class from making revolution, and was able to keep that class within the bounds of bourgeois democracy and thus, objectively, pave the way for fascism.

Also, Hitler's movement had antecedents in German social-democracy, Mussolini came out of social-democracy, as did Pilsudsky in Poland, who was certainly reactionary, if not fascist. It is my opinion that Zinoviev and Zetkin had every reason to connect a strengthened social-democracy with the advent of a new "White Terror," which could very well be fascism. Zetkin, with what she could have known in 1922, was not wrong in saying the "most central task" of the Communist movement was to defeat social-democracy, "the main factor of the international counter-revolution." In post-war Europe, certainly, social-democracy was the only device through

which the bourgeoisie could reach the working class with its ideology.

(2) At the Fifth Comintern Congress, June/July 1924, Zinoviev declared "the Social-Democratic Party has been converted into a wing of fascism," but does not, and in my mind, can not, substantiate this. If we accept the (1934) ECCI definition of fascism:

the openly terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinist, and most imperialist elements of finance capital,

as correct, and I do, then we can not accept that social-democracy had become a part of, "a wing," of fascism. History demonstrates that social democracy and fascism were two entirely distinct entities, the former essentially accepting the tenets of bourgeois democracy, the latter rejecting them. Zinoviev (and Stalin) had no reason not to have known this. Zinoviev has disregarded his own advice to the Italian Party (p. 195); he has allowed himself "to be guided by emotions." While Comintern hostility towards social-democracy was well-deserved, there was no excuse for it, or any of its leaders, to confuse it with fascism.

At the Fifth Congress, Zinoviev declares that, in a time of crisis, the bourgeoisie resorts to reaction; when the crisis is over, "democracy" is allowed to reappear. (He seems to have social-democracy collaborating with the bourgeoisie in this.) Trotsky, at the same Congress, says the same thing. (He has the Social-Democrats acting as "assistants behind the scenes" -- to the fascists.)

Both say that the bourgeoisie, when it so chooses, when the crisis is over, can replace fascism with bourgeois democracy. In fact, in a statement which I have not cited here, Zinoviev says this is definitely possible in Italy; Mussolini seems ready to abdicate. (Fifth Congress..., p. 100, *passim*)

It is necessary to make a distinction here, one which Zinoviev and Trotsky have apparently failed to make. And that is between fascism as an instrument of the bourgeoisie (e.g., the free corps) and fascism as a political stage of capitalism.

There is no question in my mind that when fascism comes to power, that represents a new political development or stage in capitalism. The fact that its state terror is so all-permeating makes it exceedingly difficult for it to be "pulled off the stage" to be replaced by a milder form of bourgeois dictatorship. Concomitant with this is the fact that "the most imperialist elements of finance capital" are in power, which means the nation is being prepared for imperialist aggression, war. This provides (at least it did in Germany, Italy and Japan) a certain upsurge in the economy, and the rationalization for maintaining terror against all class forces which might oppose imperialist expansion, and that includes the "moderate" bourgeoisie, who might want fascism "pulled off the stage."

While Zinoviev and Trotsky, in 1925, had no reason to know of the relative durability of fascism as a political stage of capitalism, I believe enough had occurred, was known, for them to have made this distinction.

Stalin, too, in his criticism of Zinoviev and Trotsky's thesis, seems to consider fascism only from the viewpoint of its being an instrument of the bourgeoisie, not a political stage of capitalism.

Historically, the bourgeoisie has resorted to fascist organization and, ultimately, fascist power, when necessary, in crisis. But it has also repressed fascist organization when it felt that organization was threatening stability. I think it is true, that in time of relative stability, capitalism opts for bourgeois democracy. Dutt, whose view represented that of the Comintern in 1934, when he wrote Fascism and Social Revolution, said that the collaboration of the bourgeois state was a prerequisite for fascism's coming to power. It would follow that if the bourgeois state, and the bourgeoisie that controlled it did not want fascism to come to power, it could not come to power, and would be suppressed, if necessary.

In reviewing the Comintern estimations of fascism in the 1920s, nowhere can I find it characterized as a political stage of capitalism; rather it is characterized as "the strongest expression of the bourgeois offensive." To elaborate, fascism serves as an instrument of the bourgeoisie in two ways:

The first is as an instrument to crush revolutionary opposition, but not to replace the bourgeois-democratic state as a political system. The Free Corps and other military/terror organizations that were created by and/or thrived under the German social-democratic government in 1919-1920 are an example of this first instance. ("The Bourgeois State in Crisis: Fascism", pp. 92 - 93) It is apparent that the bourgeoisie, in the main, did not want a fascist political system, did not think it the most effective way of protecting German capitalism. When Hitler attempted his "march" in 1923, the bourgeoisie was not prepared to replace the bourgeois-democratic dictatorship with a fascist one. ("The Bourgeois State in Crisis...", p. 99) It was not until the end of 1932 that the German bourgeoisie indicated willingness to accept a government under National Socialist direction," i.e., opted for fascism as the form of bourgeois dictatorship under which German capitalism would be conducted. (Karl Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship, p. 194)

The second way in which fascism is used by the bourgeoisie is as an instrument of state power. When the bourgeoisie believe that the bourgeois-democratic political system is no longer adequate for the preservation and maintenance of capitalism, they invite the fascist organization to take state power (or impose fascism from above, as in Japan). The same forces that invited Hitler to power in 1933 had repressed his movement by force of arms ten years earlier, when it threatened the bourgeois democratic state. There is the example of Romania, where the fascist Iron Guard movement became powerful because it had the support of the monarchy and the bourgeoisie, but was crushed at least twice when it tried to seize power. (F.L. Carsten, The Rise of Fascism, pp. 187-193, 235)

(3) In his September 1925 article, Stalin, like Zinoviev at the Fifth Comintern Congress, characterized social-democracy as a "wing" of fascism. As already stated in (2), it is apparent that social-democracy and fascism are two distinct entities; the former is in no way a "wing" of the latter. While the two may indeed have "supplemented" each other in that both were

used as instruments of the bourgeoisie, social-democracy to win the workers away from revolution, and fascism to terrorize those who had chosen it, they still were very distinct entities, each having its own -- quite different -- program and leadership. That they were both anti-Communist and that, objectively, social-democratic policy paved the way for fascism (in Italy) did not make them a "political bloc," informal or otherwise. (And how can social-democracy be both a "wing" of fascism, which means it is dominated by fascism, and part of a "political bloc" with fascism, which means it is an independent party in alliance (the dictionary says 'often temporary') with another party?)

It may well have been that the bourgeoisie could not retain power without both forces; but that, in itself, neither created a bloc nor made one the wing of the other.

The Fifth Comintern Congress' "Resolution on Fascism," cited on pp. 198-199 of this paper, held that social-democracy was a bourgeois party, that all bourgeois parties "take on a more or less fascist character," "particularly social-democracy." But the fact that social-democracy had indeed been a prop for the bourgeoisie, entering its governments, etc.. did not automatically make it a bourgeois party. I suspect that the workers who were attracted to social-democracy in the 1920s did not come to it because it was a "bourgeois party" but rather because it had a program for "socialism," albeit a socialism that could be attained without revolution. In my opinion, social-democracy was still a part of the working class movement, notwithstanding, a very corrupted part.

Lenin, in a preface to the French and German editions of Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, which was first published as a separate article in October 1921, describes the basis for this corruption in part of the working-class movement, and the role that corrupted part played:

The international split of the whole working-class movement is now quite evident (the Second and Third Internationals). The fact that armed struggle and civil war is now raging between the two trends is also evident; the support given to Kolchak and Denikin in Russia by the Mensheviks and 'Socialist-Revolutionaries' against the Bolsheviks; the fight the Scheidemanns, Noskes and Co. have conducted in conjunction with the bourgeoisie against the Spartacists in Germany; the same thing in Finland, Poland, Hungary, etc. What is the economic basis of this world-historic phenomenon?

Precisely the parasitism and decay of capitalism which are characteristic of its highest historical stage of development, i.e., imperialism. As is proved in this pamphlet, capitalism has now singled out a handful (less than one-tenth of the inhabitants of the globe; less than one-fifth at a most 'generous' and liberal calculation) of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by 'clipping coupons.' Capital exports yield an income of eight to ten billion francs per annum, at prewar prices and according to prewar bourgeois statistics. Now, of course, they yield much more.

Obviously, out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of

the workers of their 'own' country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And the capitalists of the 'advanced' countries are bribing them; they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the 'labour aristocracy,' who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and, in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real channels of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the 'Versaillese' against the 'Communards.' (Foreign Languages Press ed., Peking, 1965, pp. 9-10)

This passage demonstrates:

(1) that Lenin did consider social-democracy, as rotten as it was, part of the working-class movement -- serving the bourgeoisie.

(2) that the hostility of the Comintern towards social-democracy in the 1920s was justified; that social-democracy, outside of the power of the bourgeois state itself, was the greatest obstacle to proletarian revolution.

(3) the basis for the corruption -- the superprofits from imperialism.

To say that all bourgeois parties were "taking on a more or less fascist character" is to fail to make the distinction between bourgeois democracy and fascism, a distinction it was necessary to make in order to develop correct strategy and tactics for the world Communist movement.

Apparently, neither Stalin nor the "Resolution on Fascism" felt that it was necessary to prove, to demonstrate their contentions; they should have. Because it is those contentions which are to be the basis of Communist policy from 1929-1933.

IV. The Communist Movement No Longer Identifies Social Democracy with Fascism (1926-1927)

From 1926-1928, no reference by the international Communist movement can be found repeating the above identification of social-democracy with fascism. In fact, according to the revisionist Outline History of the Communist International, the ECCI, in November 1925, urged the leadership of the Italian Communist Party to develop the united front from below, and also not preclude "the usefulness of making simultaneous offers to the leading bodies of other parties." (which, it is safe to assume, included the Socialist Party.) (p. 233)

V. Sixth Comintern Congress, 1928: No Reference to "Social-Fascism,"
but Social-Democracy and Fascism are Again Linked

The Program of the Sixth Comintern Congress (held July/September 1928) said the following about the relationship between social democracy and fascism:

According to changing political circumstances, the bourgeoisie resort either to fascist methods or to coalitions with social-democracy, while social-democracy itself, particularly at critical moments for capitalism, not infrequently plays a fascist part. In its development social-democracy displays fascist tendencies, which does not, however, prevent it, when the political situation changes, from coming out against the bourgeois government as an opposition party. For normal capitalism both fascism and coalition with social-democracy are extraordinary methods. They indicate the existence of a general capitalist crisis and are used by the bourgeoisie to halt the advance of the revolution.

The same Program, after reviewing the historic betrayals of the working class by social-democracy, gives the following characterization of social-democracy:

In systematically carrying out this counter-revolutionary policy, social democracy makes use of its two wings: the right, overtly counter-revolutionary wing is indispensable for negotiations and direct contacts with the bourgeoisie, while the 'left' is used to execute particularly subtle manoeuvres for deceiving the working class. While playing with pacifist and sometimes even with revolutionary phrases, 'left' social-democracy turns against the workers, particularly at critical moments...; it is therefore the most dangerous fraction in the social-democratic parties... (Degras, V. 2, p. 485,483-484)

I can find no reference to "social-fascism," or any characterization of social-democracy as a "twin" of fascism in the available material from the Sixth Congress. The references to social-democracy playing a "fascist part" and its "fascist tendencies" that have been cited above do not, in my opinion, essentially identify social-democracy with fascism, as do the Fifth Congress and Stalin statements.

It would be well to recall that the Program of the Sixth Congress was largely the creation of Bukharin, the right-wing Soviet leader and President of the Comintern, and, as explained by Degras:

It appears that the Russian delegation were dissatisfied with Bukharin's draft theses, and amended them to emphasize the international significance of the Soviet economic plan and the contradictions of capitalist stabilization, and to sharpen the attacks on the left social-democrats. (V. 2, p. 455, my emphasis)

VI. The Comintern Reveals German "Social-Fascism," May 1929

Borkenau claims that the term "social-fascist" was first openly used

by the Communist movement as a characterization of the German Social-Democratic Party after the Socialist police chief of Berlin brutally crushed a Communist-led May Day demonstration in 1929. (World Communism, pp. 340-341) The first open references I could find were in an ECCI statement dated May 18, 1929, which followed both the crushing of the Berlin demonstration and the Twelfth Congress of the German Communist Party. Some of those references:

The conference (to prepare an international anti-war day) further demanded of all parties that they systematically continue the international campaign of enlightenment regarding the bloody terror of German social-fascism in the May days...

The parties are confronted with the following tasks in agitation, propaganda, and organization:

Sharpest struggle against social-democracy, exposing its role as organizers of the war against the Soviet Union, especially stigmatizing the 'left' social-democracy. Proof of the most rapid development of social-democracy towards social-fascism... (Degras, V. 3, pp. 29-30)

Degras indicates there was resistance in the various parties to the new "left" line that came out of the Sixth Congress and/or its application. She cites the argument of a speaker at the German Party's Twelfth Congress, Ewert, who was on the ECCI, and was to be expelled from the Party later in the year. He argued, in Degras' words:

It was un-Marxist to describe all measures of oppression used by the bourgeois State against the proletariat as fascism, and all participation by social-democracy in those measures as social fascism. (V. 3, p. 28)

VII. Tenth ECCI Plenum, July 1929: Where There are Strong Social-Democratic Parties, Fascism Assumes the Form of Social-Fascism. Resistance in the Communist Movement to the New "Left" Line, Particularly in Regard to "Social-Fascism."

The Comintern's social-fascist concept continued to develop. In July 1929, the Tenth ECCI Plenum declared:

In this situation of growing imperialist contradictions and sharpening of the class struggle, fascism becomes more and more the dominant method of bourgeois rule. In countries where there are strong social-democratic parties, fascism assumes the particular form of social-fascism, which to an ever-increasing extent serves the bourgeoisie as an instrument for the paralyzing of the activity of the masses in the struggle against the regime of fascist dictatorship... (Degras, V. 3, p. 44)

and

Just as social-democracy is evolving through social-imperialism to

social-fascism, joining the ranks of the vanguard of the contemporary capitalist State in the suppression of the rising revolutionary movement of the working class (Zorgiebel's, the Berlin police chief, May Day atrocities), the social-fascist trade union bureaucracy is, during the period of sharpening economic battles, completely going over to the side of the big bourgeoisie, defending compulsory arbitration, endeavouring to harness the working class to the yoke of capitalist rationalization, transforming the reformist trade union apparatus into a strike-breaking organization... (Degras, V. 3, p. 55)

The Tenth Plenum also enjoined the Communist Parties to, in Degras' words:

fight (in this order) social-fascism, fascism, and pacifism... (V. 3, p. 64)

In speeches at that Plenum, Kuusinen, Finnish Comintern leader, said, in Degras' words:

There was a parallel development of the bourgeois State and social-democracy towards fascism, as the class struggle became more acute; the social-democrats had the same aims and did the same work as the fascists, but behind a smokescreen.

Manuilsky, Russian Comintern leader, declared, again as paraphrased by Degras:

What stood in the way of winning a working-class majority was social-democracy and the opportunists and conciliators in the communist ranks who denied that social-democracy was becoming fascist,... (V. 3, pp. 40-41)

As stated earlier, there was opposition to the new line that had come out of the Sixth Comintern Congress, a line that had become increasingly more hostile to social-democracy by the time of the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI. The new line included not only the concept of social-fascism, but also held that: capitalist crisis and a revolutionary situation in the capitalist countries was fast approaching; there was a growing danger of war against the Soviet Union, and a growing danger of imperialist war in general. It is difficult to determine if those who opposed the new line opposed all its features, or just some of them. In the Swedish, Dutch and Polish Parties, at least, there was strong opposition to the social-fascist concept. Degras tells us:

In the Polish CP, too, there was strong opposition to the new line. Stefanski, said a resolution of its central committee, actually adopted the standpoint that there was a fundamental antagonism between fascism and the reformist parties in the ideological, political and organizational sphere; in attacking parliamentary democracy, fascism was attacking the essential foundation of the socialist party, which was therefore genuinely resisting fascism. Stefanski's views were shared by Kostrzewa and Brand among the Polish CP leaders.

In Poland, Lenski said in the opening debate, many local communist

organizations had agreed to united front proposals made by the Polish Socialist Party; this was the result of the position taken by Kostrzewa and Stefanski, that the fascists were a threat to the social-democrats, not their allies; Stefanski had recanted, and Kostrzewa had been removed from the central committee, but they still had a large following.

The Plenum criticized the Dutch CP for, among other things, holding that:

there had been no marked change in the nature of the class struggle in Holland; that the social-democrats were still waging genuine industrial battles...

The Plenum instructed the ECCI Presidium to send an open letter to the membership of the Swedish Party whose leaders had not recognized that:

The Swedish bourgeoisie were becoming fascist, Swedish social-democracy social-fascist; this created new tasks for the Swedish CP, which must wage 'a life and death struggle' against social-democracy, with whom there could be 'no peaceful democratic coexistence.' The majority of the CC had failed to understand this (inter alia, they urged cooperation with the socialist party on practical questions like housing...) (Degras, V. 3, pp. 36-39)

The leadership in the above-mentioned -- and other -- Parties who opposed the new line was quickly replaced by other leadership -- who did not.

The attitude of the Communist movement toward social-democracy, particularly in Germany, in the period 1930-1933 has already been described in the paper "The Bourgeois State in Crisis: Fascism."

VIII. Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, December 1933: Social-Democracy is Still "Social-Fascism"

The last references I can find to "social-fascism" from the Comintern are in speeches and documents from the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, December 1933. (The Nazis came to power January 1933.)

Kuusinen, Finnish Comintern leader, in a speech at the Plenum analyzing fascism said, as paraphrased by Degras:

There were differences between fascism and social-fascism, but they were not differences of principle; the two were still twins. (V. 3, p. 286)

In another speech he said, again, in Degras' words:

The KPD had become the only mass party of the German proletariat, though there were 'exceptional cases' when bolshevik tactics required them to make proposals to social-fascists with a mass following. It was only social-fascists who could call what had happened in Germany 'a catastrophe.' (V. 3, p. 289)

A speech by Thorez, after denouncing proposals in the French Party for a joint Communist/Socialist list in the municipal elections, said those who made them failed to:

understand the role of social-fascism as an agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie in the working class. (p. 291)

The Plenum's Thesis on "Fascism and the Maturing of the Revolutionary Crisis" recognizes a division in social-democracy (whose leaders are "social-fascists").

Social-democracy continues to play the role of the main social prop of the bourgeoisie... The radicalization of the social-democratic workers intensifies the squabbles among the leading circle of the social-fascists. (pp. 297-298)

Knorin, a German CP leader, in a speech entitled "Fascism, Social-Democracy and the Communists," which was published as a document of the Thirteenth Plenum, said:

The success of fascism is the consequence of the fascization of social-democracy, the consequence of the fact that social-democracy has become a social-fascist party, as we have already noted at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. (Workers Library Publishers, March 1934, p. 27)

IX. 1934: France -- The United Front. Seventh Comintern Congress, 1935: Pieck's Report on the Activities of the ECCI

In early 1934, there were joint Communist/Socialist demonstrations against fascism in France, and in July of that year formal agreement for a united front against fascism and war was signed by the French Communist and Socialist Parties. These and other actions, which will be described and analyzed in separate papers on the united front, signify a basic change in the Comintern attitude toward social-democracy in the light of the fascist threat and what we consider the resulting strategic changes in Comintern policy.

Below I shall discuss the Comintern's evaluation of its view of social-democracy from 1928-1933, as presented at the Seventh Comintern Congress, August 1935.

Pieck, member of the Secretariat of the ECCI and a co-leader of the German Party, delivered the "Report on the Activities of the Executive Committee of the Communist International" to the Seventh Congress. In it he said:

A mistake just as grave as the underestimation of the fascist danger was the fact that fascism was discerned even where it did not exist. This mistake was due to the fact that a number of Communist writers gave a mechanical interpretation to the declaration of the Sixth Congress that the bourgeoisie was increasingly endeavouring to resort to fascist methods of rule.

In Germany, the Communists for a long time held the view that the Social-Democratic Hermann Mueller government was carrying out fascization, that the Bruening government was already a government of fascist dictatorship. On the other hand, they underrated the Hitler movement by the assumption that in a country like Germany, where the working class was so highly organized, the Hitlerites could not possibly seize power, and the petty-bourgeois masses who were spontaneously flocking to the Hitlerites would just as rapidly turn away from them.

In Austria, as early as 1929, the Schober government was declared to be a fascist government. In Czechoslovakia, the Masaryk-Benes group was branded by the Communists as a fascist group. There are many similar instances of erroneous estimates.

These erroneous ideas of the nature of fascism, and the failure to make a serious study of Italian and Polish fascism, resulted in the Communists being unable to launch slogans at the proper time calling for the defence of the remnants of bourgeois democracy against fascism, which was assuming the offensive, and to take advantage of the antagonisms within the ranks of the bourgeoisie.

In Germany, the Communists waited until the election of the Speaker of the Prussian Diet in 1932 before they declared they would vote for the candidates of the Social-Democratic Party and the Centre in order to prevent the election of fascists.

Even in Poland, where after 1926 the Communists studied fascism more diligently than in many other countries and issued slogans to the masses calling for a struggle against the liquidation of the remnants of bourgeois-democratic liberties, the Communists, when the Centre-Left bloc was created, were unable to take advantage of the differences between the government camp and the camp of the bourgeois-democratic opposition.

These mistakes were due to the absolutely false conception that all bourgeois parties are fascist, that there are 'no two methods of bourgeois rule,' and that it was unseemly for Communists to defend the remnants of bourgeois democracy. As long as we can not replace bourgeois democracy by proletarian democracy, by the dictatorship of the proletariat, the proletariat is interested in retaining every scrap of bourgeois democracy in order to use it to prepare the masses for the overthrow of the power of capitalism and to achieve proletarian democracy.

Unless these sectarian views are eradicated, it is impossible to establish either a united front with the Social-Democratic workers or a broad People's Front with those labouring masses who are still far from the Communists, but who, nevertheless, can join us in the struggle against fascism and war, against the offensive of capitalism, for their partial demands and for the defence of the remnants of bourgeois democracy.

Pieck goes on to relate how the German Social-Democratic leadership rejected German Communist Party proposals for a united front to repulse fascism, and how the Social-Democratic leaders urged the workers not to

resist the Nazis' coming to power.

The Communists during this period did everything in their power to mobilize the labouring masses for a revolutionary struggle to prevent the fascist dictatorship. In this the Communists achieved considerable success. But they were not able to change the relation at the time as long as the Social-Democrats did not abandon their hostile attitude to the united front and the struggle.

He tells of a basic change in social-democracy and how the "irrevocable victory of socialism in the Soviet Union" along with the "horrors of fascism in Germany" have caused that change.

Under the influence of the final and irrevocable victory of socialism in the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the horrors of fascism in Germany on the other, the whole system of views, the whole world outlook of the masses of the working people, who had only recently still believed in the unshakeable firmness of capitalism and bourgeois democracy, and in the possibility of a peaceful evolution to socialism, without revolutions and wars, began to collapse. The ideological basis upon which the program and tactics of the reformist parties had been based was caving in.

In this situation the Soviet Union is increasingly winning the minds and hearts of the working people, and is showing them the path of struggle. In this situation, the victory of socialism is inducing millions to change their views and opinions completely. In this situation a change is taking place in the sentiments of the vast numbers of workers, and especially in the sentiments of the Social-Democratic workers and the workers organized in the reformist trade unions.

The first expression of this change was, firstly the united front of the world proletariat, spontaneously created on a wide scale for the defence of the prisoners of Leipzig, where the courageous defence of Communism by Comrade Dimitrov was of great historical importance for the achievement of a united front. Secondly, the resort of the workers to active resistance to fascism in their own countries. The proletariat no longer yielded to fascism without a struggle, as was the case in Germany, but replied to the fascist attack with a general strike in France in February 1934 and an armed struggle in Austria in February 1934 and in Spain October 1934.

We acknowledge the great fact that both in Spain and in Austria some of the Social-Democratic leaders, even if under the pressure of the masses, decided in favour of the armed struggle against the bourgeoisie. In this the Communists supported them self-sacrificingly.

Pieck then speaks of the imminent demise of what had hitherto been considered the main instrument of the bourgeoisie -- social-democracy.

The era of the Second International in the ranks of the working class movement is over. The situation in the capitalist countries, the position of world capitalism, which is unable to find a way out of its difficulties or to alleviate the want and hunger of the masses, shows

that a new rise, a new blossoming of reformism is already impossible.

The Second International is in the throes of a profound political crisis. It is the crisis of world reformism, resulting from the aggravation of the entire world situation and caused by the regrouping of the masses which has begun, by their swing over to the fight against the bourgeoisie, by their swing towards revolution. (VII Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Stenographic Report, pp. 35, 38, 41-44, 62-63)

Both Pieck and other speakers at the Seventh Congress, including a German Delegate, Franz, criticize the failure of the German Communist Party, after the Sixth Comintern Congress, to differentiate between Social-Democratic leadership and rank-and-file, and of failing to build a united front from below, "a united front between the lower organizations" until "the fascist danger became acute." Franz is also critical of the German Party's failure to "take sufficient note of the leftward swing of the Social-Democratic workers." (pp. 74-75, 80)

X. A Review and Examination of the Above Views (1926-1935)

A review and examination of the development of Comintern policy towards social-democracy from 1926 through the Seventh Comintern Congress, 1935:

(1) As stated on p. 201 of this report, the Comintern from 1926-1928, i.e., until the Sixth Comintern Congress, did not identify social-democracy with fascism. Among the reasons for this is one given by E. H. Carr, which seems valid to me.

After the Fourteenth (Soviet) Party Congress (December 1925), the Soviet Union was no longer merely a source of revolutionary ferment: it could be set over against the capitalist world as an independent force in its own right. In the days of 'socialism in one country,' the Soviet Union commanded the respect and support of the workers of the world, no longer merely for its revolutionary fervour, but for its power and efficiency in the building of a socialist society. A striking passage in Stalin's report to the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925 had been devoted to the workers' delegations from western countries which had visited the Soviet Union during the past few months...

The delegates had been received as 'persons empowered by the working class of the western world to make a friendly and fraternal inspection of our constructive work and of our workers' state'; they were the living proof that 'the working class of Europe, or at least the revolutionary section of the European working class, regards our state as its own child.' The moral of this solidarity was obvious:

If the workers refuse to make war against our republic, if they regard our republic as their own child whose fate is of supreme importance to them, then war against our country becomes impossible. (in Stalin, Works, V. 7, pp. 290-293)

These workers' delegations were not composed mainly of communists. They repeated the experience already learned in Great Britain that more spectacular successes could be won, and more influence exercised, by appealing to the sympathies of a non-communist Left wing among the workers than through the direct efforts of foreign communist parties to win new recruits to communism.

This outlook was gradually and imperceptibly at first, reflected in the attitudes of the Comintern. If the most urgent tasks of foreign Communists was to win friends and sympathizers in the non-communist Left for the Soviet cause, and thus help to paralyse the striking of their hostile governments, the emphasis naturally fell on the policies of the united front and of trade union unity. But these policies were far more likely to appeal to the Rightist or what had once been called 'opportunist' elements in the foreign parties, who had never been unwilling to cooperate with social-democrats and other radical parties than to the purists of the ultra-Left, who lay in wait to denounce any deviation from the straight and narrow path of revolution. Hence the drive against the ultra-Left, which had gathered momentum throughout 1925, now became the dominant attitude in Comintern practice. ... The admission that the enemy was to be found on the ultra-Left rather than on the Right was the real hall-mark of the sixth enlarged IKKI. (Sixth Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI. February/March 1926) (E.H. Carr, Socialism in One Country, V. 3, pp. 512-513)

In the paper "Defense of the Soviet Union," it was shown that from its inception the Comintern proclaimed "the cause of Soviet Russia as its own." (p. 150), and that concept was defended. The task of defending the Soviet Union was indeed a correct and important one for the Comintern. In a non-revolutionary situation, I said, "probably it was easier...for the leadership of the Western Communist Parties to hold up the example of the Soviet Union than to develop and promulgate revolutionary policy for their own countries." (p. 155) One of the conclusions of that paper was:

It seems to me the main task of any Communist Party at any time is to prepare for, and, if possible, make revolution. (p. 155)

The defense of the Soviet Union, as vitally important as that was, and the upholding of the Soviet example, should not have been the main criteria by which Comintern strategy and tactics were determined. The criterion for its strategy and tactics should have been -- the most effective way to prepare for and make revolution in a given time and circumstance.

It is questionable if the emphasis on a united front with social-democracy in the 1926-1928 period did much to safeguard the Soviet Union from attack (e.g., the Anglo-Russian joint Council). There was a growing anti-communism and conservatism within the Social-Democratic parties and unions. (Carr, p. 588, *passim*) In Germany certainly, the change in policy was a good thing because the sectarianism of the Left leadership in general, and particularly in regard to the trade unions was harmful to the struggle.

Again, the policy toward social-democracy should have been based on

the strategy and tactics for making revolution, of which the defense and example of the Soviet Union was only part.

(2) Regarding the Sixth Comintern Congress (1928):

Given the generally correct estimation of the coming capitalist crisis, the line adopted by the Sixth Comintern Congress was, in general, considering what could have been known or forecast, correct. However, the tying up of social democracy with fascism into the concept of social-fascism, which occurred, as far as I can determine, shortly after the Congress, was wrong, and in-so-far as it was maintained after fascism became a clear danger in Germany, disastrous.

A hostile outlook toward the Social-Democratic policy and leadership in 1928 by the Comintern was called for. There was good reason to believe that social-democracy would be the main anti-Communist influence on the working class. However, it was wrong to transfer that hostility to the Social-Democratic rank-and-file; it was wrong not to understand the fascist danger in Germany by the end of 1929; and it was wrong not to lead the struggle against it at that time, preparing the masses for revolution through an effective struggle against fascism.

I have already tried to demonstrate (pp.197 -201) the incorrectness of identifying social-democracy with fascism and some of the attitudes and mis-estimations of both social-democracy and fascism that contributed to that error.

The attitude of the Communist movement toward social-democracy, particularly in Germany in the years 1930-1933 has already been described in another paper.

(3) Regarding the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum (1934):

The failure of the Comintern leadership (present at the Plenum) to discern the difference between fascist and bourgeois-democratic dictatorship is disturbingly evident in this conference which took place a full year after Hitler had come to power. The speeches indicate a rigidity of thinking, an inflexibility that may well come from the fear of "bucking" an established line. The social-fascist concept is still being upheld.

Yet in early 1934, in France, there are joint Communist-Socialist demonstrations against fascism, and by July of that year, there is formal agreement between the two parties for a united front. Where are the Comintern deliberations that determined these new policies and the demise of social-fascism?

Because the centralism predominated over the democracy in the Comintern, the kind of criticism/self-criticism necessary for the development of a consistently principled and correct new policy does not occur. In other papers, I have suggested that the "mass party" concept was responsible for the lack of political development of membership of the parties which in turn resulted in the development of opportunism in the parties in general, and in their leadership in particular. More recent investigation

and discussion has not changed my mind.

(4) Regarding the Seventh Comintern Congress (1935):

Dimitroff's report has been discussed in the paper "Some Questions Regarding the United Front Against Fascism" and will be discussed in other papers as well. It is significant that in his speeches Dimitroff does not discuss the social-fascist concept and what has happened to social-democracy that it is no longer social-fascist. He does discuss the split in social-democracy, but does not call the Right side of that split social-fascist. What has changed?

Pieck's report is the closest approach to self-criticism on behalf of the Comintern leadership that I could find. But even Pieck, as he makes many apparently correct criticisms of the various parties for their sectarianism, particularly in regard to anti-fascist struggles, never says "in re-evaluating our policies regarding fascism and social-democracy, 1928-1934, we in the Comintern leadership find we made the following errors for the following reasons:" He does discuss "the absolutely false conception that all bourgeois parties are fascist..." as causing the sectarian errors mentioned above (p. 207) but neglects to attribute a source or sources. He neglects to do so because the Communist movement held that its policies and leadership were infallibly correct, policy changing only because the situation did. This is very good for maintaining a confident rank-and-file; it is not so good for maintaining a movement free of opportunism.

While neither Pieck, nor anyone else at the Congress, discusses social-fascism, he does predict the immediate demise of social-democracy as, in his words, the "hearts and minds" of those who have nourished it are drawn away from it by the Soviet Union (and, apparently, not by their respective Communist parties!) He assures us "a new blossoming of reformism is already impossible." (cited on pp. 208-209, this paper) A somewhat premature farewell, to say the least.

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