

“The Thirties”

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I CANNOT recognise my lecture from Alick West's description. My opening remarks placed the British situation in the opening years of the Thirties in the context of the world situation. The New York Stock Exchange crash, which touched off the world economic crisis, the introduction of the Soviet Five-Year Plan, the awakening in India were mentioned in my opening remarks.

The application of the term “social fascist” to the right-wing leaders preceded the coming to power of Hitler in 1933. It was in vogue between 1928 and the beginning of 1933 when our propaganda was, of course, not oriented on the defence of bourgeois democracy but on a revolutionary way out of the rapidly developing crisis, though we did include the defence of democratic rights in all our propaganda.

Alick believes that we called the Labour leaders “social fascists” because we failed to fight fascism as Dimitrov said it must be fought, but Dimitrov's remarks were made long after the use of the term “social fascist” had been abandoned. The use of this term was a mistake, even when it was in vogue. It gave the right-wing Social Democrats, who were in co-operation with the capitalist class everywhere, an excuse for rejecting common action in the developing capitalist crisis, and it in some measure alienated their rank and file. It should not be forgotten, however, that the right-wing Social Democratic leaders on the Continent were sometimes in and sometimes supporting bourgeois

governments that were after 1930 putting the cost of the crisis on to the shoulders of the workers, as the Labour Government in Britain was doing in the year before its downfall in 1931.

We cannot understand the success of fascist demagoguery in Germany and elsewhere unless we understand the extent to which bourgeois parliamentary governments were using emergency powers to subvert democracy and attack the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. Any picture which suggests that the bourgeoisie and social democrats were defending the “achievements of the bourgeois revolution” while we were on the sidelines calling them “social fascists” is wildly out of focus.

After 1935 it is wrong to say that “we defended it [bourgeois democracy] as realised in the existing British parliament” and that “those whom we should have made our allies we called ‘social fascists’ as if none but ourselves were defending democracy”.

It would be helpful if Alick made clear what period of the Thirties he has in mind. His remarks could have some relevance to the period before 1933. They have no relevance to what happened afterwards. From 1933 on the Communists and the left generally were the driving force of a very broad anti-fascist movement which I described in my lecture, but at the same time were engaged in very powerful propaganda and education showing the socialist way forward.