

*The*  
**PEOPLE'S  
FRONT**

**THE NEW  
BETRAYAL**

By **JAMES BURNHAM**

**15 cents**

**PIONEER PUBLISHERS**  
**100 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK**

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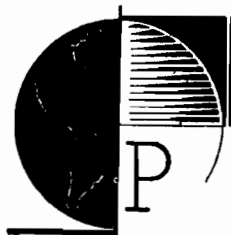
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# The Peoples' Front:

The New Betrayal

*by*

**James Burnham**



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# The Peoples' Front

## I

### Origin and Theory of the Peoples' Front

#### 1

THE slogans of the Peoples' Front were first advanced by the Communist International and its sections. They began to appear toward the end of 1933; moved forward slowly for some while; and received official sanction and theoretical expression at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held during the summer of 1935. From then on they spread out at a headlong pace, and now present themselves as the key question of proletarian strategy throughout the world.

For some time these policies and slogans met with frantic resistance from those outside of the ranks of the Comintern and its sympathizers. This resistance, however, was largely based on a misunderstanding. Reformists and social-patriots could not at first convince themselves of the Comintern's "sincerity." They thought still in terms of the preceding strategy of the Comintern, the strategy of the so-called "Third Period." Their minds were filled with memories of "social-fascism," "united front from below," and dual "red unions." But the resistance was steadily overcome. The Comintern no longer even mentioned social-fascism; the united front from below went into the discard; the red unions were liquidated.

And, one after another, the reformist parties went over to the slogans of the Peoples' Front. In France the Peoples' Front was formally established; soon afterwards, in Spain. Throughout the world it made headway in giant strides. Soon liberals and "progressives" began to

come over, in addition to the reformists and social-patriots. In this country, for example, *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, the leading liberal periodicals, became wholehearted Peoples' Fronters. By now, within the labor movement, and among the social groups sympathetic to the labor movement, only one firm opposition to the Peoples' Front remains: the opposition, namely, of the revolutionary socialists.

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The Peoples' Front movement began under certain special international conditions; and it is necessary to review these, at least briefly.

First: The series of defeats of the working class, following the post-war revolutionary wave, had reached a climax in the triumph of Hitler. Hitler came to power without a blow struck against him by either of the great mass working-class parties of Germany. Fascism seemed irresistibly on the ascendant.

Second: The threat of the new imperialist war, enhanced by the victory of Hitler, was growing ever more menacing.

Third: Within the Soviet Union itself, where the Peoples' Front has its origin, great changes have been taking place during these years since 1933. The First Five Year Plan, with its forced and ruthlessly carried through collectivization of the peasantry, and its almost exclusive emphasis on the building up of heavy industry, gave way to the Second Five Year Plan. Among the important characteristics of the new Plan, we find more emphasis on "consumers' goods" as against heavy industry; conciliation of the peasantry; the introduction of Stakhanovism, with its stimulus to increased differentiation of wages and salaries, leading to the rise of a labor aristocracy economically far removed from the mass of the workers; abolition of the special economic and social privileges of the urban proletariat. All of these and a multitude of other similar changes are most strikingly summed up in the New Constitution, adopted in November, 1936, which puts the legal finish to the Soviet foundation of political power in favor of a plebiscite form of parliamentarism.

Fourth: During these years the "Litvinov period" of Soviet diplomacy reached its climax. The Soviet Union entered the League of Nations; and its series of treaties and alliances found culmination in the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact of military assistance.

As I shall show later on, these four major features of the recent past provide a background necessary to any understanding of the policy of the Peoples' Front.



The most authoritative statements on the theory and justification of the Peoples' Front are contained in the speeches of Dimitroff, new Secretary of the Comintern, to the Seventh Congress; and in a short book, *The Work of the Seventh Congress*, written by the Comintern theoretician, Manuilsky. I shall, therefore, base my presentation of the theory of the Peoples' Front on these works.

We begin, then, with an alleged "analysis" of the nature of the present historical period. In this period, according to these new oracles of the Stalinist Delphi, "the main danger is Fascism"—from whence the Peoples' Front is ordinarily known as the "anti-fascist" Peoples' Front. The Seventh Congress, Manuilsky remarks on page 16, "turned its fire mainly against fascism." But, it seems, there are many varieties of fascism, "good" and "bad" fascisms. And much the worst kind of fascism is German fascism, Nazism. Dimitroff explains: "The most reactionary variety of fascism is the *German type* of fascism. . . . German fascism is acting as *the spearhead of international counter-revolution*, as *the chief incendiary of imperialist war*, as *the initiator of a crusade against the Soviet Union, the great fatherland of the toilers of the whole world.*" (The italics are all Dimitroff's.)

Now fascism, we are told, threatens not only the working class, but also the peasantry, the middle classes generally, and even certain sections of the bourgeoisie, especially the "small business man." Indeed, fascism in actuality is nothing else than a plot or conspiracy on the part of a small and vicious clique among the ruling class ("the two hundred families," as the clique is known in France, from the fact that two hundred large stockholders guide the destiny of the Bank of France). Let us hear again from Dimitroff: ". . . fascism in power is *the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.* . . . Fascism acts in the interests of the extreme imperialists. . . . It is in the interests of the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie that fascism intercepts the disappointed masses as they leave the old bourgeois parties." Manuilsky repeats virtually the same words, though adding a psychological adjective of his own: ". . . fascism is the open and cynical form of the dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, most imperialist [this matter of "degrees" of imperialism is a most subtle point] elements of finance capital."

It is, moreover, fascism that makes war. Manuilsky: "The growing menace of world imperialist war is causing all class, national and state forces to separate into two camps: *the camp of war and the camp of*

*peace*. The center of the forces which are operating to bring about war, to accelerate its outbreak, is *fascism*. . . ." This idea has been repeated and reinforced until it is now a Stalinist commonplace.

From these various premises, it follows, according to the Comintern logic, that the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship and for socialism is in the present period definitely removed from the agenda. "The situation is different today," writes Manuilsky. "Today, the proletariat in most capitalist countries are not confronted with the alternative of bourgeois democracy or proletarian democracy; they are confronted with the alternative of bourgeois democracy or fascism." Dimitroff amplifies: "Our attitude towards bourgeois democracy is not the same under all conditions. For instance, at the time of the October Revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks engaged in a life-and-death struggle against all political parties which opposed the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship under the slogan of the defense of bourgeois democracy. The Bolsheviks fought these parties because the banner of bourgeois democracy had at that time become the standard around which all counter-revolutionary forces mobilized to challenge the victory of the proletariat. The situation is quite different in the capitalist countries at present. Now the fascist counter-revolution is attacking bourgeois democracy in an effort to establish a most barbaric regime of exploitation and suppression of the toiling masses. Now the toiling masses in a number of capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a *definite* choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism."

This, then, is the theoretical foundation which provides the justification for the policy and tactics of the Peoples' Front. And, in point of fact, the Peoples' Front does follow legitimately enough from this foundation. There is only one difficulty: the foundation itself is entirely false.

By their definition of the nature of the present historical period, our Comintern scholars have already implied the proper strategy for the proletariat. The task of the proletariat is, quite flatly, to defend bourgeois democracy. And, in accomplishing this task, the proletariat must aim to ally itself with all other social groups which are threatened by the encroachments of fascism. These include, we have seen, the peasants, the middle classes generally, and likewise the non-fascist or rather "anti-fascist" sections of the bourgeoisie. All of these social groups, from proletariat to "anti-fascist bourgeoisie," can, it is claimed, unite in a common program for the defense of bourgeois democracy against fascism. "We must," Dimitroff advises, "strive everywhere for a broad anti-fascist people's front of struggle against fascism."

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This, then, is what the Peoples' Front is, as defined and advocated by its most authoritative sponsors: the broad union of these various social classes and groups on the basis of a common program for the defense of bourgeois democracy against fascism. } P.F.

It is the avowed aim of such a Peoples' Front not merely to carry on the day-by-day struggle and agitation; but, when conditions are favorable, to accept governmental power. "If we Communists are asked," says Dimitroff, "whether we advocate the united front [and, as is shown by the next sentence, the Peoples' Front] *only* in the struggle for partial demands, or whether we are prepared to share the responsibility even when it will be a question of forming a *government* on the basis of the united front then we say with a full sense of our responsibility: Yes, we recognize that a situation may arise in which the formation of a *government of the proletarian united front*, or of the *anti-fascist people's front*, will become not only possible but necessary in the interests of the proletariat. And in that case we shall declare for the formation of such a government without the slightest hesitation."

What is such a Peoples' Front movement and such a Peoples' Front government able to accomplish? Our teachers will once again provide the answers.

(1) The Peoples' Front can win the middle classes to the side of the proletariat, can win even the actual organizations and parties of the non-proletarian groups. Dimitroff: "In the mobilization of the toiling masses for the struggle against fascism, the formation of a *broad people's anti-fascist front on the basis of the proletarian united front* is a particularly important task. The success of the entire struggle of the proletariat is closely connected with the establishment of a fighting alliance between the proletariat on the one hand and the toiling peasantry and the basic mass of the urban petty bourgeoisie constituting a majority in the population of even industrially developed countries, on the other. . . . In forming the anti-fascist people's front, a correct approach to those organizations and parties to which a considerable number of the toiling peasantry and the mass of the urban petty bourgeoisie belong is of great importance. In the capitalist countries the majority of these parties and organizations, political as well as economic, are still under the influence of the bourgeoisie and follow it. The social composition of these parties and organizations is heterogeneous. . . . This makes it our duty to *approach* these organizations in *different ways*, taking into consideration that not infrequently the bulk of the membership does not know anything about the real political character of its leadership. Under certain conditions, we can and must bend our efforts to the task of drawing these parties and organizations or certain sections of them to the side of the anti-fascist people's front, despite

their bourgeois leadership. Such, for instance, is today the situation in France with the Radical Party. . . .”

(2) The Peoples' Front can prevent war (the claims, we see, are by no means modest). Dimitroff: “The extent to which this world-wide front is realized and put into action will determine whether the fascist and other imperialist war incendiaries will be able in the near future to kindle a new imperialist war, or whether their fiendish hands will be hacked off by the ax of a powerful anti-war front.” Or Manuilsky: “We now have greater opportunities for waging a successful struggle against imperialist wars than we had on the eve of 1914. . . . Today, relying on the U.S.S.R., taking advantage of the antagonism among the capitalist states, the world proletariat has the opportunity of creating a broad people's anti-war front, which should not only include other classes, but also weak nations and peoples whose independence is menaced by war.”

(3) The Peoples' Front can stop fascism. Dimitroff: “Will the movement of the united proletarian front and the anti-fascist people's front at the particular stage be in a position only to suppress or overthrow fascism [Note: This is the *minimum* claim which Dimitroff makes for it.—J. B.], without directly proceeding to abolish the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie?” Or Manuilsky: “By its experience [in setting up the Peoples' Front], the French proletariat enriched the whole of the world working class movement and demonstrated to it that *timely* action against fascism (unlike what happened in Austria and Spain) can avert heavy sacrifices and the bitterness of defeat.” Or from our own Earl Browder, in his pamphlet, *The Peoples' Front in America*: “There is a tremendous need for the united front of progressives [i.e., the Peoples' Front] which can awake the country to the danger of fascism, and organize the country to defeat this danger.”

(4) Lastly, the Peoples' Front government can provide a transitional step to the proletarian dictatorship. Manuilsky sums up what he pretends to be the differences between the “old-fashioned” type of Social-Democratic coalition government and the new-fashioned Peoples' Front government, as follows: “One government [the Social-Democratic coalition] paved the way for the fascist dictatorship; the other government [of the Peoples' Front] *must pave the way for the victory of the working class.*”

\* \* \*

Here, then, in summary, is the ideological structure through which the Soviet bureaucracy and the Communist International throughout the world attempt to deceive and betray the masses in the present historical crisis.

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## II

### Analysis of the Theory of the Peoples' Front

#### 1

IT would be a great mistake to imagine that the Peoples' Front is a new policy. It is, it is true, a new *slogan*; but, in actual content, it is simply an old policy in a new disguise, an old strategy dressed up for the new occasion.

The words of its defenders make entirely clear what the real content of the policy of the Peoples' Front is; and it is, therefore, not necessary to give elaborate external proof. The Peoples' Front is merely a re-wording of the theories and practises of class collaboration and coalition government, as these have been advocated by reformists since the beginning of the modern labor movement. Class collaboration is what the Peoples' Front specifically proposes: the union of organizations and parties representing various classes and sections of classes on the basis of a common program to defend bourgeois democracy. A Peoples' Front government means, as defined by Dimitroff and Manuilsky, the assumption of governmental responsibility in a capitalist state by the coalition of these organizations and parties.

It is not profitable to argue about words. There are many honest supporters of the Peoples' Front who will dislike and try to reject the realization that it is identical with class collaboration and coalition government. This is because they have previously been trained in an attitude of hostility toward class collaboration and coalition government as betrayals of Marxism. Indeed, this training is one of the reasons why the Comintern invented the new phrase, "Peoples' Front," thereby hoping to make the policy acceptable to those who would have been suspicious of the old phrases. However, if we examine the actual content, there can be no dispute. The Peoples' Front proposes, quite openly and explicitly, the collaboration of classes and a coalition form of government. Naturally it does so in the name of the proletariat, on the alleged grounds that this strategy will under present conditions best serve the interests of the proletariat. But reformism has always tried to

justify itself on such grounds—otherwise the proletariat would not be influenced by it.

A striking indication of the fundamental identity between the Peoples' Front and the traditional policies of class collaboration and coalition government is provided by the ease with which reformists and liberals in every country (who have always stood for these latter policies and stand for them today) have gone over to the slogans of the Peoples' Front. They have done so because they have recognized that in the Peoples' Front, Stalinism—for its own reasons—has gone over to their own policies, that is, to reformism. And, of course, they welcome this; though they are still shy of the Comintern, fearing that Stalin offers his reformist gifts only for the chance to swallow them up.

2

It is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the Peoples' Front and the United Front. The Stalinist spokesmen are anxious to lump the two together, and to claim that the Peoples' Front is nothing more than the logical extension of the United Front "to a higher plane." Similarly, they attempt to confuse the workers by trying to make it appear that revolutionary socialists, in their consistent opposition to the Peoples' Front, are attacking the United Front. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Revolutionary socialists have consistently stood for, and fought for, the united front, and continue to do so. Indeed, during the years of Hitler's rise to power, one of the chief criticisms levelled against the Comintern by the revolutionary Marxists was that by failing to adopt a united front tactic in Germany, the Comintern guaranteed the victory of Hitler. For this criticism, at that time, the Comintern branded the Marxists as capitulators to the Social-Democracy, and as social-fascists. The most elaborate defense ever made of the united front is to be found in the pamphlets written about Germany during that time by Trotsky.

The united front, however, has nothing at all in common with the Peoples' Front. The united front consists in an agreement reached between two or more parties and organizations, which have *different programs*, for joint action on specific issues. In this agreement there is absolutely no question of a common political program. Each organization retains intact its entire program; retains the right to put it forward; retains the right to criticize the other organizations in the united front agreement, either in general, or for failure to carry out properly the united front agreement. Thus, in the united front each organization guards its full independence; while at the same time the

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widest possible unity can be achieved for carrying through some action accepted as desirable by all of the constituent organizations of the united front.

The united front is possible because various organizations differing in complete program or in final social aim may nevertheless all be in favor of some specific action or set of actions. For example, united fronts are readily possible on such issues as defense cases, support of a strike, resistance to attack on civil liberties and other democratic rights, breaking of injunctions, holding of demonstrations, etc. At more advanced stages of social crisis, they must be formed on such issues as the building of a workers' militia, defense against fascist gangs, the founding of workers' and peasants' and soldiers' committees. The united front on such issues is in fact not merely possible but indispensable for successful struggle. Through it the widest possible forces are organized; and at the same time the masses are given a chance to compare in action the worth and dependability of the ideas and methods of the various organizations and parties which strive for their allegiance.

Revolutionary socialists do not merely accept the united front passively. They are the most active and the only consistent advocates of the united front; whereas reformists always resist the united front and must be forced into it—just as the Stalinists now, in basing their policy on the reformist Peoples' Front, resist and fight against the genuine united front of action. How could it be otherwise? The ideas and principles of the revolutionary Marxists represent the historical interests of the proletariat. Consequently, any joint struggle by specific actions to the advantage of the proletariat will be welcomed by the Marxists; and the broader the basis, the better. At the same time the Marxists are anxious to have an ever broader mass arena for the presentation of their own ideas and a demonstration of their own methods, confident that a true understanding of them will turn the masses away from the reformists toward the revolutionists.

The Peoples' Front, on the other hand, is not merely, not even primarily, an agreement for joint action on specific issues. It first and foremost involves the acceptance by all members of the Peoples' Front of a *common program*. This difference is the key to the gulf which separates the Peoples' Front from the united front.

What program? We have already seen the answer. The program of the Peoples' Front is a program for the defense of bourgeois democracy: that is, for the defense of one form of capitalism.

Whose program is this? It is obviously *not* the program of the proletariat. The program of the proletariat, accepted by revolutionists since the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, can be summed up in two slogans: for workers' power and for socialism. Naturally the

immediate tactic of the proletariat is not on all occasions the struggle for state power: that is possible only in a revolutionary crisis. But at all times and on all occasions the fundamental program remains the same—for the overthrow of capitalism, for workers' power and for socialism. This program expresses the basic class conflict in modern society; records the Marxist understanding that the problems of society can be solved only by socialism, and that socialism can be achieved only through the conquest of power by the proletariat. The duty of the revolutionary party, the conscious vanguard of the proletariat, is to keep this full and fundamental program always to the fore and always uncompromised. In its program, the revolutionary party thus sums up the independence of the proletariat as a class, and asserts its independent historical destiny.

For the proletariat, through its parties, to give up its own independent program means to give up its independent functioning as a class. And this is precisely the meaning of the Peoples' Front. In the Peoples' Front the proletariat renounces its *class* independence, gives up its *class* aims—the *only* aims, as Marxism teaches, which can serve its interests. By accepting the program of the Peoples' Front, it thereby accepts the aims of another section of society; it accepts the aim of the defense of capitalism when all history demonstrates that the interests of the proletariat can be served only by the overthrow of capitalism. It subordinates itself to a middle-class version of how best and most comfortably to preserve the capitalist order. The Peoples' Front is thus thoroughly and irrevocably non-proletarian, anti-proletarian.

By its very nature, the Peoples' Front *must* be so. The establishment of the Peoples' Front, by definition, requires agreement on a common program between the working-class parties and non-working-class parties. But the non-proletarian parties cannot agree to the proletarian program—the program of revolutionary socialism—without ceasing to be what they are, without becoming themselves revolutionary workers' parties. But if that should happen, then there would be no basis left for a Peoples' Front: there would be only revolutionary proletarian unity. Consequently, the Peoples' Front must *always* be an abandonment of the proletarian program, a subordination of the proletariat to non-proletarian social interests. In the Peoples' Front, it is the proletariat and the proletariat alone that loses. Earl Browder, in his report to his Central Committee on December 4th, 1936, summed up the whole matter: "We can organize and rouse them [the majority of "the people"] provided we do not demand of them that they agree with our socialist program, but unite with them on the basis of their program *which we make also our own.*" [My italics.—J. B.]



The attempt of the Comintern apologists to find a theoretical foundation which will justify the Peoples' Front compels them to make a completely anti-Marxist analysis of the present historical situation. They must corrupt Marxism with respect to every single important issue: bourgeois democracy; fascism; war; the problem and task of the proletariat.

Let us summarize briefly the analysis which Marxists make of the present period, so that it may be compared with the Dimitroff-Manuisky analysis outlined in the preceding chapter:

Marxism always approaches every social, political, and historical question from the point of view of the class struggle. The basic conflict in modern society—capitalist society—is, according to Marxism, the conflict and struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This conflict must continue, and progressively deepen, until capitalism, on a world scale, is overthrown, and the bourgeoisie defeated, and liquidated as a class. Only the two basic classes of modern society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—are capable of independent historical action, and thus of formulating independent social and political programs. Reduced to simplest terms, the program of the bourgeoisie is the defense of the capitalist order; the program of the proletariat, its overthrow. The intermediary classes, however they may try to escape it, always in actuality support one side or another in the basic conflict.

In the light of these elementary first principles of Marxism, the Comintern division of the world into "war makers" and "peace lovers," its statement that the two great hostile camps are "democracy" and "fascism," its contention that the issue is "between democracy and fascism," are seen to have nothing in common with Marxism. Its propagation of a program for the defense of capitalist democracy represents merely the extension of one type of bourgeois ideology into the ranks of the working class.

Capitalism, Marxism teaches, went through a great progressive phase. It was the bourgeoisie, the builders of capitalist society, who broke through the fetters of feudal society, who developed modern science and technic, who completely revolutionized industry and communication, who laid the material basis for the adequate fulfillment of human needs. During its progressive phase, capitalism was marked by terrible and devastating conflicts, and by the periodic ravages of the business crises. But after each crisis, capitalism rose stronger than ever, and went to new heights.

Now, however, capitalism, in the advanced period of imperialism, has entered the phase of its general decline as a world system. It is strangling itself. The very factors which once made it a progressive force now act as a brake and obstacle to its further progress. The capitalist system can no longer handle the things which it has itself created. And, as a consequence, the conflicts and crises redouble in intensity. After each periodic crisis, capitalism rises weaker, not stronger. Permanent unemployment, insecurity, hunger, mass discontent progressively grow. Great social upheavals multiply and increase in scope and intensity. Wars and revolutions, on an unprecedented scale, become the general rule instead of the exception, quieting down only long enough to prepare for new world-wide outbreaks.

In the face of this perspective, in the general decline of the capitalist order, the proletarian revolution on a world scale, the building of socialism, presents itself as the *only* solution. Nothing else whatever can alter the perspective, nothing else can halt the progressive degeneration if not the utter destruction of civilization.

Bourgeois democracy, Marxism teaches further, is a form of capitalism, one of the political forms through which the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat is exercised. It is, in a sense, the "normal" form of bourgeois dictatorship during the progressive phase of capitalism. But Marxism is as unalterably opposed to *bourgeois* democracy as to any other form of capitalist rule; it is opposed because it is opposed in general to capitalism and to bourgeois rule, and aims at the overthrow of capitalism and the defeat of the bourgeoisie.

During the decline of capitalism, the bourgeoisie finds greater and greater difficulty in keeping the deepening social conflicts within the basic framework of democratic parliamentarism. Democracy becomes too awkward, too clumsy, slow, inefficient, unreliable, as a mechanism for class rule. Consequently, manipulating middle-class discontent through a demagogic pseudo-radicalism, the bourgeoisie is compelled to resort to the iron strait-jacket of fascism to insure its continuance in power. Fascism, that is to say, is not a conspiracy or plot on the part of anybody. It is nothing accidental; nothing that results from any peculiar ill-will or viciousness. Fascism, or a fascist type of government, is, on the contrary, a wholly normal development: the normal (though not necessarily universal) mechanism for capitalist rule as the decline and disintegration of the capitalist order deepens, just as bourgeois democracy, parliamentarism, is the normal (though not necessarily universal) mechanism during the progressive phase of capitalism.

It may thus be seen that there is no basic *social* conflict between bourgeois democracy and fascism. If we examine social questions historically, as Marxism does, we find in a sense the contrary: fascism is

the resultant of bourgeois democracy in the period of capitalist decline; bourgeois democracy is the precursor of and the preparation for fascism.

A similar analysis applies in the question of war. War, imperialist war, is caused by the basic conflicts of capitalist society, by the struggle to which every capitalist power is forced for cheap raw materials, additional markets, opportunities for the export of capital. These causes operate within democratic capitalist nations as fully as in fascist nations. Fascism, though it may be a stimulus to war, is not at all the cause of war; war and fascism are both the results of capitalism. War, or the approach of war, may, on the other hand, be an immediate stimulus to fascism: since a nation faced by war, or the prospect of war, may well require the totalitarian state in order to prosecute the war successfully.

It follows with full certainty that fascism and war can be defeated only by the overthrow of capitalism. The attempt of the Peoples' Front to preserve bourgeois democracy, any attempt to base a strategy on such a conception, is not merely helpless in the struggle against war and fascism. It makes both inevitable.

### III

## History and the Peoples' Front

#### 1

WE have seen that the Peoples' Front is in content equivalent to class collaboration and coalition government. Consequently, the lessons of history with respect to class collaboration and coalition government apply with full force to the Peoples' Front. It is not my intention to examine these lessons in detail; but some brief reference is necessary.

The policies of class collaboration are based upon the assumption that socialism can be achieved by peaceful and orderly evolution within the framework of capitalist society. By education and organization, it is argued, a majority of the people can be won to the side of socialism; and a socialist society can then be introduced by the ballot. The War of 1917, the Russian Revolution, and the triumph of Hitler have proved that assumption to be utterly and grotesquely false; but it has, nevertheless, dominated the reformist parties of the world from shortly after the founding of the Second International, and still continues to guide their actions.

The influence of class collaboration spread throughout the world labor movement because it was over a comparatively long period of time able to show certain concrete achievements. And it could do so, so long as capitalism as a whole was still in its progressive phase. During the last decades of the Nineteenth Century, and up to 1914 in this century, capitalism was still a great expansive force. The trend of capitalist production, in spite of the recurrent business crises, was upward to ever new heights. As a consequence, the bourgeoisie was in a position to grant considerable concessions to the proletariat, for the sake of avoiding an intensification of the class struggle. Class collaboration was a method of bargaining for these concessions. And through it, the reformists were able to establish at least to some degree such benefits for certain strata of the workers (the "labor aristocracy") as social insur-

ance, cheap municipal housing, recreation centers, etc.; and to concentrate on "good government" campaigns which eliminated the grosser forms of governmental corruption.

However, in actuality, these concessions were simply bribes paid by the bourgeoisie through the reformist working class leaders in return for a renunciation of the revolutionary class struggle for workers' power. These bribes were accepted at the expense of the independence of the proletariat; and it could not have been otherwise. The policy of class collaboration made the workers dependent, not on their own independent class strength, but on the bourgeoisie; tied them to the bourgeoisie through the bourgeois state. The reformist leaders became, and could not help becoming, agents of the bourgeoisie within the working class.

The results became openly apparent in 1914. At the outbreak of the War, the reformists were confronted with the choice: for or against the imperialist war; proletarian internationalism or social-patriotism. And since their whole past policy had bound them within each country to "their own" bourgeoisie, the reformists went over to the side of the war, and led the masses to slaughter.

The same process went on during the post-war boom in the 1920's; and led, and could not help leading, to capitulation before Hitler as soon as the ruling class decided that the time for fascism had arrived.

Thus class collaboration has always been anti-revolutionary, anti-Marxist. But now, with the world decline of capitalism as a system, even the feeble excuse that once was made for it no longer holds. Capitalist production is no longer expanding, but is progressively drying up. The bourgeoisie is no longer in a position to make major concessions to the masses. In order to maintain capitalism and the domination of the bourgeoisie, the concessions and the "privileges" must be one by one withdrawn; real wages must be lowered; social benefits cut off. And the methods of class collaboration are no longer capable even of obtaining the petty bribes. Even immediate demands and elementary rights can be won and defended by the workers only by the methods of militant and sharp class struggle. The advance of fascism, the opening up of a new series of wars and revolutions, have shattered the last remaining "justification" for the structure of class collaboration.

Coalition government is simply the general policy of class collaboration carried into the parliamentary and governmental sphere. By entering into a coalition government, or equally by accepting office under

capitalism as a "labor government," the proletarian parties undertake to administer the bourgeois state. That is, they become the political executives for capitalism. There is no way to avoid this; and the intentions and wishes—however sincere—of the reformist leaders have nothing to do with the political reality. The state, the governmental mechanism, is, according to Marxism, the chief executive committee for the dominant class in society; its function is to ensure the rule of the dominant class, and to uphold the basic social relations upon which that rule is based. At certain times this function cannot be carried out when an openly bourgeois party is in office; the masses may have lost confidence in the bourgeois parties, and be ready to rise in revolt against a government administered by them. The bourgeoisie then permits the working-class parties to enter the government to forestall a revolutionary assault on the capitalist state itself. The working class is thus turned aside from its proper business of the struggle for power, and deceived by its leaders into believing that the bourgeois state has become its own government. The bourgeoisie allows its working-class agents to do its business and maintain its rule.

The whole meaning of a coalition or "labor" government is clearly described in a remarkable article which appeared in a private bulletin of the Union of German Industry (the organization of the big German industrialists) during the Autumn of 1932, six months before the German bourgeoisie placed Hitler in power. This article discusses the problem of whether the time has come for Nazism to be allowed to take over the business of administering German capitalism. I give the quotation (which I take from *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror*) at some length not merely because of its clarification of the present point, but because of its further bearing on the whole problem of the nature and meaning of fascism:

"The problem of consolidating the capitalist regime in post-war Germany is governed by the fact that the leading section, that is, the capitalists controlling industry, has become too small to maintain its rule alone. Unless recourse is to be had to the extremely dangerous weapon of purely military force, it is necessary for it to link itself with sections which do not belong to it from a social standpoint, but which can render it the essential service of anchoring its rule among the people, and thereby becoming its special or last defender. This last or 'outermost' defender of bourgeois rule, in the first period after the war, was Social Democracy.

"National Socialism has to succeed Social Democracy in providing a mass support for capitalist rule in Germany. . . . Social Democracy had a special qualification for this task, which up to the present National Socialism lacks. . . . Thanks to its character as the original

party of the workers, Social Democracy, in addition to its purely political force, also had the much more valuable and permanent advantage of control over organized labor, and by paralyzing its revolutionary energies chained it firmly to the capitalist State. . . .

“In the first period of re-consolidation of the capitalist regime after the war, the working class was divided by the wages, victories and social-political measures through which the Social Democrats canalized the revolutionary movement. . . . The deflection of the revolution into social-political measures corresponded with the transference of the struggle from the factories and the streets into Parliament and Cabinets, that is, with the transformation of the struggle ‘from below’ into concessions ‘from above.’

“From then onwards, therefore, the Social Democratic and trade union bureaucracy, and with them also the section of the workers whom they led, were closely tied to the capitalist State and participation in its administration—at least so long as there was anything left of their post-war victories to defend by these means, and so long as the workers followed their leadership.

“This analysis leads to four important conclusions:

“1. The policy of ‘the lesser evil’ is not merely tactical, it is the political essence of Social Democracy.

“2. The cords which bind the trade union bureaucracy to the State method ‘from above’ are more compelling than those which bind them to Marxism, and therefore to Social Democracy; and this holds in relation to the bourgeois State which wants to draw in this bureaucracy.

“3. The links between the trade union bureaucracy and Social Democracy stand or fall, from a political standpoint, with parliamentarism.

“4. The possibility of a Liberal social policy for monopoly capitalism is conditioned by the existence of an automatic mechanism for the creation of divisions in the working class. A capitalist regime which adopts a Liberal social policy must not only be entirely parliamentary, it must also be based on Social Democracy and must allow Social Democracy to have sufficient gains to record; a capitalist regime which puts an end to these gains must also sacrifice parliamentarism and Social Democracy, must create a *substitute* for Social Democracy and pass over to a social policy of constraint.

“The process of this transition, in which we are at the moment, for the reason that the economic crisis has perforce blotted out the gains referred to, has to pass through the acutely dangerous stage, when, with the wiping out of these gains, the mechanism for the creation of divisions in the working class which depended on them also ceases to function, the working class moves in the direction of Communism,

and the capitalist rule approaches the emergency stage of military dictatorship. . . . The only safeguard from this acute stage is if the division and holding back of the working class, which the former mechanism can no longer adequately maintain, is carried out by other and more direct methods. In this lie the positive opportunities and tasks of National Socialism. . . .

“If National Socialism succeeds in bringing the trade unions into a social policy of constraint, as Social Democracy formerly succeeded in bringing them into a Liberal policy, then National Socialism would become the bearer of one of the functions essential to the future of capitalist rule, and must necessarily find its place in the State and social system. The danger of a State capitalist or even socialistic development, which is often urged against such an incorporation of the trade unions under National Socialist leadership, will in fact be avoided precisely by these means. . . . There is no third course between a re-consolidation of capitalist rule and the Communist revolution.”

There is no avoiding the harsh logic of history. When the workers' parties enter a coalition government, or form a labor government on the basis of the bourgeois state, they thereby necessarily become the administrators of capitalism. And they must, therefore, act to maintain and uphold capitalism. In peaceful times, they do this as described in the quotation, by canalizing the energies of the workers into peaceful paths which do not threaten the overthrow of the capitalist order. In this way, the coalition and labor governments of the Scandinavian countries have functioned. Similarly in the case of the two Labor Party governments formed in Great Britain: neither was able to take a single step toward socialism; they had to carry out the mandate of British finance-capital, even to the extent of upholding the extreme Tory policy in connection with India. It is interesting to recall a comment of one of the Comintern theoreticians writing in the days just preceding the Peoples' Front era:

“When the Labor Party first took over the administration of the affairs of British imperialism, the MacDonalld ‘Labor’ government allowed the laws passed by the Conservatives and directed against the miners to remain in force; it also set the seal of its whole authority to the law providing for the lengthening of hours in the mines. When, for the second time, it became the administrator of the British bourgeoisie, it at once understood the latter's program in the matter of ‘a standard of life for the workers of Great Britain worthy of human beings’ in the same way as German Social Democracy understood the program of its own bourgeoisie in regard to this; it promoted capitalist rationalization at the expense of the workers with all its might; through its peace-makers it permitted the miserable wages of the whole of the textile



workers to be cut in the interest of making the textile industry capable of competition; by rapid rationalization it increased unemployment to an unprecedented extent, and prepared the wage cuts of the sailors and the civil servants, as well as a reduction in the unemployed dole." (Bela Kun, *The Second Internation in Dissolution.*)

But in times of crisis, much more than this must be done. The coalition or labor government, as the administrator of capitalism, must defend capitalism if capitalism is attacked. Consequently, it must uphold the imperialist war policy of the bourgeoisie. And, against the threat of proletarian revolution, which would overthrow capitalism, it must take steps to smash the revolution. This is precisely what happens. We discover, for example, in the post-war revolutions in Germany and Austria, that it is the Social Democratic parliamentarians who shoot down the revolutionary workers. Quite literally shoot them down, as the blood of Luxemburg and Liebknecht so unanswerably testifies.

The reason why a coalition or labor government can *never* serve the interests of the proletariat, and must *always* serve the interests of the bourgeoisie, is, from the point of view of Marxism, easy enough to understand. The bourgeois state, its entire apparatus and mechanism, exists to enforce the rule of the bourgeoisie; and arose historically, out of the ruins of feudal society, for just that purpose. Consequently, being designed solely to uphold capitalist property relations and the domination of the bourgeoisie, the workers can enforce their power politically and achieve socialism, only through smashing the bourgeois state in its entirety, and building another type of state, a state based on different historical and social roots. The proletarian state, since the Russian Revolution, has been known as a Soviet State: that is, a state based on democratically elected soviets or councils or committees of the workers and peasants. Exactly what form these will take in any given country cannot be predicted with certainty beforehand. But it can be stated with complete assurance that only such a political structure, involving the complete overthrow of the bourgeois state machinery, can uphold and enforce the power of the workers.

The classic proofs of the impossibility of the utilization by the workers of the bourgeois state are to be found in the analyses of the Paris Commune by Marx and Engels, and in Lenin's *State and Revolution*. The latter work, read today, seems very much like a contemporary polemic against the entire Peoples' Front policy.

Lenin quotes Marx and Engels: "One thing especially was proved by the Commune, *viz.*, that the 'working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'." Lenin continues: "Marx's idea is that the working class must *break up, shatter* the 'ready-made state machinery,' and not confine itself merely

to taking possession of it." And Lenin goes on to outline the kind of state which will replace the "ready-made state machinery." Lenin's whole attack on Kautsky, which occupies a decisive section of this pamphlet, is focused on Kautsky's admission of the possibility of the utilization of the bourgeois state for the benefit of the workers and to achieve workers' power. "Kautsky may enjoy the pleasant company of the Legiens, Davids, Plekhanovs, Potresovs, Tseretelis and Chernovs, who are quite willing to work for the 'shifting of the relation of forces within the state,' for 'gaining a majority in parliament, and the conversion of parliament into the master of the government.' A most worthy object, wholly acceptable to the opportunists, in which everything remains within the framework of a bourgeois parliamentary republic. We shall go forward to a break with the opportunists; and the whole of the class-conscious proletariat will be with us—not for a 'shifting of the relation of forces,' but for the *overthrow of the bourgeoisie*, the *destruction* of bourgeois parliamentarism, for a democratic republic after the type of the [Paris] Commune, or a republic of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." And he concludes his broadside against the reformists of the Second International: "Far from inculcating into the workers' minds the idea that the time is near when they are to rise up and smash the old *state* machinery and substitute for it a new one, thereby making their political domination the foundation for a Socialist reconstruction of society, they have actually taught the workers the direct opposite of this, and represented the 'conquest of power' in a way that left thousands of loopholes for opportunism."

3

The crucial historical example of a Peoples' Front government, up until the recent past, was none other than the Provisional Government of Kerensky in Russia in 1917. Kerensky's government in every respect conformed to the definition of a genuine Peoples' Front government. In it were to be found all of the parties of the workers and peasants, with the exception, of course, of the Bolshevik Party. It was a government sworn to uphold democracy. And, in August, 1917, it was attacked by the troops of Kornilov, the then equivalent of a fascist.

Nevertheless, the policy of Lenin, the policy which led to the success of the first proletarian revolution, was never for one moment based on political support of the Provisional Government. From the instant of his arrival in Russia, he fought against all those who in any way gave the Provisional Government such support (among whom, when Lenin

arrived, was to be found Stalin). Lenin's policy was based upon the transfer of state power to the Soviets; and in the final analysis this had to be accomplished not through, but directly *against* the Provisional Government. The Provisional Government had to be smashed in order that proletarian power could be achieved.

The decisive test of Lenin's policy came in August, during the days of Kornilov's attempted counter-revolution. But, even though the object of Kornilov's attack seemed on the surface to be the Kerensky regime, nevertheless Lenin maintained throughout his position of "non-confidence" in the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks pursued an *independent* class policy in organizing to meet the immediate threat of Kornilov, placed no reliance whatever on the government, and kept the workers and troops under their influence from being subordinated to the government and its policies. They did this because they knew that the government would try to betray the workers and the revolution (as indeed Kerensky did in fact try to do, in negotiating for an agreement with Kornilov), and that the progress of the revolution would have to go on, after the defeat of Kornilov, to the overthrow of the government and the transfer of power to the Soviets. "It is no wonder," writes Trotsky in his *History*, "that the masses led by the Bolsheviks in fighting against Kornilov did not place a moment of trust in Kerensky. For them it was not a case of defending the government, but of defending the revolution. So much the more resolute and devoted was their struggle. . . ." During their hours off duty the sailors came to the prison for a visit with the imprisoned Kronstadters, and with Trotsky, Raskolnikov and others. "Isn't it time to arrest the government?" asked the visitors. "No, not yet," was the answer. "Use Kerensky as a gun-rest to shoot Kornilov. Afterward we will settle with Kerensky." In June and July these sailors had not been inclined to pay much attention to revolutionary strategy, but they had learned much in a short two months. They raised this question of the arrest of the government rather to test themselves and clear their own consciences. They themselves were beginning to grasp the inexorable consecutiveness of events. "In the first half of July, beaten, condemned, slandered; at the end of August, the trusted defenders of the Winter Palace [the seat of the Provisional Government] against Kornilovists; at the end of October, they will be shooting at the Winter Palace with the guns of the *Aurora*."

How absolute a gulf between Lenin's policy, and the policy of the Stalinists and Socialists today in Spain—the gulf between revolutionary Marxism and reformist betrayal!

## IV

### Can the Peoples' Front Win the Middle Classes?

#### 1

ONE of the chief arguments made in favor of the Peoples' Front is that through it there can be brought about an alliance between the working class and the middle classes against the onslaught of extreme reaction, of fascism. If this argument were true, it would be of great importance; and we must, therefore, examine it with care.

The middle classes consist of those social groups intermediary between the two basic classes of modern society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Though it is difficult to define exactly the boundaries of the middle classes, they evidently include: peasants and small independent farmers; shop-keepers and small business men; many types of professional workers; independent artisans; artists and intellectuals; minor executives; etc. These groups lead in capitalist society an unstable and precarious existence, because of the ambiguity of their relation to the means of production—they are not in the full sense either workers or capitalists. They seek, naturally, their self-preservation, the defense and, if possible, the betterment of their economic fortunes. But the nature of their social position makes it impossible for them to develop any *independent* program for the fulfillment of their own interests. At bottom, there are only two programs for modern society: capitalism, the program of the bourgeoisie; and socialism, the program of the proletariat. There is no third alternative.

Since they can have no independent program of their own, the middle classes are forced to adopt, after their fashion, the social program of one or another of the two basic classes. So long as capitalism is progressive and relatively stable, the middle classes accept capitalism without much question; and strive only to gain for themselves as large a percentage as possible of the material benefits of capitalism. But the evolution of capitalism into its monopoly-imperialist phase, and the

recurrent crises, constantly undermine the economic foundations of the middle classes. Shop keepers are forced down into employees of chain stores; independent farmers become share-croppers or farm laborers; various categories of professional workers are changed into wage workers; artists and intellectuals are put to work for wages by the government, big corporations, advertising agencies; the small business men are driven out of business by the big trusts; taxes grow heavier. The middle classes protest in their feeble and fruitless manner. They call for anti-monopoly laws; beg for moratoria on farm loans; ask for anti-chain store legislation; request protection for small enterprises; look for a shift in taxes to other backs than their own. All their complaints are of no avail whatever, since the inexorable development of capitalism contains within itself the extension of monopoly and the ever heavier crushing of the middle classes.

As the general crisis deepens, the discontent and turmoil in the middle classes grows ever more turbulent. The middle classes toss back and forth with increasing restlessness. Hare-brained ideas and theories, fantastic groups and movements and parties, give expression to the dreams and wishes and prejudices of the middle-class theoreticians. We know dozens of them in this country: Utopia, Townsend, Huey Long, back-to-the-land, Humanism, neo-feudalism, Union Party. . . . The middle classes are seeking a way out of their impasse. But they have no possible way out of their own. And at last they must, in whole or in a division, face the ultimate choice: to line up behind one of the two basic classes and its program, to swing to the side of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

The mere statement of the position of the middle classes in modern society makes obvious the answer to the problem of "winning" them. They are looking for a solution, for a "way out," and they have none of their own to offer. They grow gradually disgusted and despairing of the pseudo-solutions proposed by their own ideologists. They are then ready to turn sharply, and to follow that side which will give them bold, decisive, vigorous leadership, which in firm accent will show them a way out and a solution. How could it be otherwise? They themselves are timid, frightened, hesitating; and they would not turn to a timid and hesitating leadership as a substitute. They themselves have discovered that bourgeois democracy has merely led them deeper and deeper into the abyss, and they are searching for something to take its place, not something to bolster it up again. They do not want a leadership and a program which will pander to their own prejudices; they have tasted the bitter fruits of these prejudices, and they look for a new set of ideas, a new direction. The "alliance between the working class and the middle classes" can be formed only if the working class holds

the leading position in that alliance, only if the alliance is founded on the clear, frank, unafraid assertion of the *proletarian* program—for workers' power and for socialism. If, on the contrary, it is the bourgeoisie or their agents that give clear and uncompromising leadership, while the working class hides its program and gives way to middle-class prejudices, the middle classes are certain to go over to the side of the bourgeoisie, to the side that demonstrates that it means business, that it knows what it wants and is determined to go and get it.

These conclusions are confirmed time after time in every-day experience. For example, nearly every big strike is an object lesson in the relation between the proletariat and the middle classes. The newspapers, as mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie, try always to make the strikers believe that if they conduct a militantly fought strike, especially if there is any violence, the "public" (i.e., the middle classes) will be antagonized, and its sympathies alienated from the strike. The origin of this "friendly" advice, repeated in every strike situation, should be enough to make it suspect. And, in truth, exactly the contrary is what normally happens. When the "public" is confronted with militant, fighting strikers, who make clear that they mean business and intend to win, the public lines up with the strikers. And why not? The public naturally wants to be on the winning side; when it sees the strikers acting like winners, conscious of their own power, it draws appropriate conclusions. Nor does violence, so long as it does not result in a complete rout of the strike, change the picture in the least. It may offend the moral feelings of the public; but when the middle classes see the workers ready to defend their rights by force as well as by argument, this becomes an additional and compelling reason for the middle classes to line up alongside them. After all, they do not want to see proletarian violence turned against themselves. The 1934 strikes of the Toledo Auto-Lite workers and the Minneapolis truck drivers—both fought with uncompromising militancy—are admirable test cases for this method of assuring at least sufficient support from the "public."

It is when the strikers, under the influence of reformist leaders, begin vacillating, backing down, avoiding struggle, that the public turns its back on them and swings to the other side. And once again, how natural! When the public sees that the strikers are not sure of themselves, do not know exactly what they want or how to get it, the public concludes that it will be best for its own skin to line up with the bosses—who make no bones about where *they* stand. The middle classes love truth and justice, no doubt; but when it is a question of their own pocketbooks and their own skins, they will always take care to discover truth and justice and what looks to them like the winning side.

Great social crises only confirm the same lesson. Above all, the experience of the Russian Revolution is decisive in teaching us how the middle classes can be won. Who, indeed, won the middle classes (that is, above all, the peasantry) in the Russian Revolution? Not at all the Peoples' Front parties of the Provisional Government. They—the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks—had the middle classes to begin with; they formulated their policies and programs in accordance with middle-class prejudices; and precisely for that reason, during the course of 1917, they lost the middle classes. The peasants went over, in their overwhelming majority, to the Bolsheviks. They did so because the Bolsheviks made clear that they meant business. The Bolsheviks did not waste time on “the defense of bourgeois democracy” against the counter-revolution, or about middle-class fear of violence. From start to finish, in sharp and uncompromising manner, the Bolsheviks put forward the political program of the *proletariat*: for Soviet power and for socialism. They showed the peasants that their needs—peace and land—could be fulfilled only by adherence to the proletarian program and proletarian leadership. And the middle classes decided that their best bet was to come along under the banner of that program.

2

We are thus able to see that the Peoples' Front conception is the opposite of Marxism in its approach to the middle classes. Far from winning the middle classes to the side of the workers, the Peoples' Front subordinates the workers to middle-class prejudices. It accepts a program built out of middle-class illusions—illusions which the middle classes themselves are beginning to discard, and accepts the leadership of middle-class politicians. It gives up the independent class action of the workers, through which alone the revolution can be won, in return for—nothing at all. The temporary “alliance” superficially achieved in the Peoples' Front cannot possibly hold together for any length of time. The middle classes are looking for a way out; they are unable to find one of their own; the proletariat, by adopting the Peoples' Front policy, declines to offer them its socialist way out; and the middle classes are left ripe for picking by the fascist demagogues. The fascists are not modest or conciliatory in their approach, nor do they have any qualms about violence. They shout for the “true revolution,” condemn bourgeois democracy with contempt, preach a religion of blood and iron and violence, announce openly their drive for power. However false the doctrines of the fascists may be, the leadership they offer is

bold and decisive; and the middle classes will follow it unless the leadership offered by the proletariat is even more bold and more decisive.

Exactly this happened in Germany. It was the class collaborationist policy of German Social Democracy (combined with the suicidal sectarianism of the German Communist Party) which left the German middle classes easy prey for Hitler. The Social Democracy called for defense of the Weimar Republic exactly when the middle classes had come to learn that they had nothing further to hope from the Weimar Republic. Hitler called for "revolution"; and he was, in desperation, believed and followed. Exactly this is now happening in France. The despairing middle classes of France, their economic and social position progressively undermined by the French bourgeois democracy—are instructed by the Peoples' Front to defend that democracy with their very lives. As a result, as they learn now that Blum's government is just one more version of the same government that has failed them for so many decades, in increasing numbers they pass over to the camp of the fascists. The fascists, at any rate, have a program and are not afraid to state it; they demand and promise a *change*, a "revolution" even if they are not too clear as to just what kind it will be.

### 3

Marxism recognizes, and has always recognized, the crucial character of this problem of winning the middle classes—not the middle classes as a whole, which is impossible, but the bulk of their lower strata. Indeed, Marxism declare that without the support of allies drawn from non-proletarian social groups, as well as through the aid of anti-imperialist colonial revolts, the working class cannot succeed and the proletarian revolution is impossible. But Marxism insists that this alliance can be formed only on the basis of the independent leadership of the working class, only on the basis of the class struggle and the proletarian program for workers' power and for socialism.

There is nothing hypocritical or dishonest about this conception. What Marxism says in effect to the middle classes, or at any rate the lower middle classes, is: you have grave and increasing problems in modern society; you are unable to solve them through any independent program of your own; they can be solved only through the proletarian program, only through socialism. You want jobs, food, security. Through a continuance of capitalism, in whatever form, you will have less of all of them. Through the workers' revolution and through socialism, all of these can be guaranteed, and your basic interests ful-



filled to an ever increasing degree. These claims can be made, and must be made, because they are true; and because they are the only foundation on which the middle classes can be won to the side of the proletariat.

The Peoples' Front is, on the other hand, completely false in all of its claims. And the Marxist analysis shows that the Peoples' Front, far from being able to win the middle classes, must necessarily lose them, will simply turn over to fascism the mass base which it requires.

## V

### Can the Peoples' Front Stop Fascism?

#### 1

WE have already seen, in general, the answer to this question. The answer requires further amplification. The Peoples' Front cannot stop fascism. The theory of the Peoples' Front rests upon a false account of the nature of fascism. It explains fascism as a plot by a small group of extreme reactionaries, instead of as a normal development of capitalism in its period of decline, a development conditioned not by the wills or wishes of any individuals or group of individuals (indeed, finance-capital itself accepts fascism *unwillingly*—it is a far more costly and dangerous method of rule than parliamentarism) but by the inner nature of capitalist society. Consequently, fascism can be stopped in only one way: by the overthrow of capitalism. So long as capitalism remains, the causes of fascism remain; and from the causes, the effect will follow. But the Peoples' Front gives up, explicitly, the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, and, therefore, cannot conceivably stop fascism.

The Peoples' Front justifies its policy by stating that the fundamental issue at the present time is "Bourgeois democracy vs. Fascism." We have seen that there is no such issue, that the only issue is "Socialism vs. Capitalism." Considered from a historical point of view—which is invariably the view of Marxism—there is no fundamental social opposition between bourgeois democracy and fascism. In the period of capitalist decline, bourgeois democracy, one form of capitalist rule, goes by a natural and necessary transition into fascism, another form of capitalist rule. Bourgeois democracy prepares the ground for fascism; fascism takes root, grows and matures, within the ground of bourgeois democracy. No basic transfer of power is involved in the transition from democracy to fascism; the same class continues to rule by other means; fascism, in spite of its demagogic radical language, constitutes

no genuine social revolution. It is of the utmost significance to remember that Hitler came to power in Germany *within the framework of the Weimar Constitution*—the Constitution described by Social Democracy as “the most democratic in the world.”

There is no more basic opposition between bourgeois democracy and fascism than between middle age and old age. Old age is different, certainly, from middle age; but one turns into the other by an unavoidable historical process. Unavoidable, except by one means: by death before old age is reached. The analogy is accurate: bourgeois democracy will give way to fascism—unless bourgeois democracy is itself destroyed by the proletarian revolution. The whole process is clearly described in the long quotation given in Chapter III. When the ruling class can no longer maintain its power by “creating divisions within the working class” through making concessions to the working class, it must abandon a liberal policy in favor of a “social policy of constraint” in order to continue its rule. That is, it must pass from democratic rule to fascist rule. It would be fortunate if working-class leaders thought and wrote with even one-half the clear-eyed objectivity of this spokesman for German finance-capital.

We have seen more than this: the Peoples’ Front is not merely powerless to stop fascism. This policy, if unchecked, makes the victory of fascism inevitable. It does so because it is based on the continuance of capitalism; and if capitalism continues, fascism will conquer. It does so, furthermore, because it turns the middle classes over to the fascist demagogues.

## 2

But, it is objected, is not bourgeois democracy, for all its failings, preferable to fascism? Does not the working class have a real stake in bourgeois democracy in contrast to fascism? After all, the working class has at least some rights under capitalist democracy—some chance to organize, agitate, defend itself. Whereas fascism destroys its organizations and all of its rights.

This is, to many persons, perhaps the most persuasive of all arguments in favor of the Peoples’ Front. And in this argument lies one of the most dangerous and subtle of all the confusions through which the proponents of the Peoples’ Front hope to be able to deceive the masses into following their leadership.

The truth is simply this: the working class has no stake whatever in bourgeois democracy, considered in the abstract, any more than in any other form of capitalist dictatorship. Its stake is in *proletarian* democracy, in the socialist revolution. However, in the process of

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achieving the socialist revolution, the working class has a genuine interest in—not bourgeois democracy—but *concrete democratic rights*, some of which exist under the regime of bourgeois democracy.

“Democracy,” as the word is used at the present time, has either one or two entirely different meanings. In the first place, it is used to refer to *a particular form of state organization*: the capitalist parliamentary regime. As such, it stands for a specific social institution—the bourgeois state. This institution is the executive arm of the ruling class, whereby it exploits the masses, keeps them in check, and assures the continuance of its own power and privilege. As such, it is in all respects the enemy of the exploited class, of the proletariat. The central object of the proletariat is to overthrow this institution, this state, and to substitute for it a proletarian state, which will be the political arm of proletarian power, and the instrument for the building of socialism. To “defend democracy” in the sense of defending the capitalist state is simply to defend the class enemy. Never, at any time, in this period of the decline of capitalism, could this be a correct strategy for the proletariat.

In the second place, the word “democracy” is used to refer to certain concrete “democratic” rights. These rights differ widely in historical origin and social function, and the attitude of the proletariat toward them must differ correspondingly. Let us divide them roughly into three broad groups:

(1) The first group consists of those special “rights” which embody and enforce bourgeois property relations. These include the right to hold property in the basic means of production; the right to employ wage labor; the right to monopolize for the sake of private profit; the right of individuals and private corporations to control the instruments of propaganda—press and telephone and radio; the right to suppress the products of science and invention in the interest of profit; and many similar “democratic rights.” Such rights as these it is the aim of the proletariat to *destroy*, in exactly the same way that the bourgeoisie itself destroyed the special feudal and slave-holding rights.

The bourgeois-democratic state, however, has as its primary function the defense and maintenance of just these “democratic” rights. Thus the struggle against these rights is identical with the struggle against the bourgeois state.

(2) There is a second group of democratic rights which, though likewise having its historical origin in the struggle for power of the bourgeoisie, has a different social status. These include many of the so-called “civil liberties”: the rights of free speech, free assembly, *habeas corpus*, petition, public secular education, etc. In bourgeois society these rights are manipulated by the ruling class to its own ends.

For example, we discover that the campaign of the newspaper owners against unionization of their employees proceeds under the slogan of defense of free speech; or that the right of *habeas corpus* is used by skilled lawyers to evade investigation and criminal punishment.

Nevertheless, the attitude of the proletariat toward this second type of "democratic rights" is not one of simple and direct opposition, as in the case of the first type. This follows for two reasons: first, because, in spite of their perversion by the bourgeoisie, these rights can be used by the proletariat also in the defense of its own class interests and in preparation for its own struggle for power. Free speech, though its chief function in capitalist society is to permit a virtual monopoly of propaganda by the owners of capital, can, nevertheless, be part of the defense of a revolutionary and labor press. The defense of the right of proletarian mass meetings can proceed at least partly under the form of the defense of free assembly. The right of *habeas corpus* can be useful as a legalistic weapon in the aid of class struggle prisoners. Secondly, the attitude of the proletariat toward this second group of rights is different because part of the historical aim of the proletariat is, by changing the social content of these rights and eliminating their class bias, to deepen and extend them as part of the structure of the true and genuine democracy of a classless society.

(3) There exists under capitalist democracy, to one or another extent, a third group of rights which are not, properly speaking, "democratic rights" at all, but rather *proletarian* rights. These are such rights as the rights to picket and to strike and to organize. The historical origin of these rights is in all cases to be found in the *independent* struggle of the proletariat *against* the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie state. There is no need to stress the incalculable importance to the proletariat of the maintenance of this third group of rights.

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We have seen, then, that it is to the interest of the working class to defend unequivocally the third group of concrete rights; and to defend the second group in so far as they aid the cause of the proletariat. The problem is: How are these rights to be defended?

The propaganda of the Peoples' Front systematically *confuses* the two conceptions of "democracy" which we have distinguished: "democracy" as meaning the bourgeois-democratic state; and "democracy" as meaning certain concrete social rights. In this way, it attempts to get the masses to believe that the defense of the concrete social rights is necessarily bound up with the defense of the bourgeois-democratic state. In this it should be noted that the Peoples' Front is exactly on a par with the liberal capitalist propaganda in this and every other

democratic country. 'This is the approach which the liberal press uses to justify its "defense of democracy" against "dictatorship whether of the Right or of the Left." To this reactionary argument, the ideology of the Peoples' Front can find no convincing answer.

The truth is the opposite of what the liberals and the Peoples' Front theorists assert. The truth is that the defense of the concrete rights is not merely, not bound up with the defense of bourgeois democracy, but can be accomplished only *against* the bourgeois democratic state, as against every form of capitalist rule. Let us examine briefly why this is so.

The only group of concrete rights which are *essential* to capitalist rule is the first, since this group sums up the basic property relations of capitalism. The second group (the "civil liberties") was useful to the bourgeoisie in its struggle to accomplish the complete defeat of the feudal aristocracy, and continues to be a pleasant social luxury so long as capitalism as a whole is vigorous and expanding. The third group was never acceptable to the bourgeoisie, was wrung from it by the class struggle of the workers, and can be tolerated by the bourgeoisie only so long as capitalism is sufficiently healthy to permit such a concession, only so long as the exercise of these "proletarian rights" does not threaten the actual existence of the capitalist order.

However, capitalism is now in decline as a world order. As the decline deepens, the bourgeoisie is forced to an ever greater extent to restrict the exercise of the second and third groups of rights (even though the second group was itself first established by the bourgeoisie). In the permanent crisis of monopoly-imperialism, the exercise of these rights is far too dangerous to capitalist rule. Concessions can no longer be afforded. Mass unrest, if the proletarian leadership is permitted to organize and express it through the exercise of these concrete rights, threatens the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Fascism completes the total abrogation of the third group of rights (the "proletarian rights"), and the virtual abrogation of the second—at least so far as the second applies to the proletariat.

The restrictions of these concrete rights, however, begin long before fascism comes to power—fascism only completes the process. In Germany, Austria, France, England, even in the United States, we have seen it and continue to see it happening. The executive arm of the government takes over more and more control, gradually introducing a "decree" form of government. Compulsory arbitration is introduced; censorship is established; free assemblage restricted. Pickets are either not allowed, or their numbers and activities limited.

It is the "democratic" state itself which in the first instance carries out these progressive restrictions on concrete "democratic" rights. Even

more: it is the democratic state administered by Social Democratic majorities, labor governments, or Peoples' Front governments, that carries it out. This is just what happened in Germany and Austria, and what is happening today in France. Blum has passed laws restricting the rights of political organization, of free press and propaganda, has instituted a form of compulsory arbitration and other types of restrictions on striking workers. Naturally he does so under the pretense of delivering "blows" at the fascists. But in actuality his government is destroying the democratic rights of the French masses—all in their name.

We reach a paradoxical sounding but none the less true conclusion: In the present period of social crisis, the defense of the bourgeois democratic state means actually a defense of the *abrogation* of concrete democratic rights. Concrete democratic rights can be defended only by independent class struggle; and such a struggle finds itself in ever greater conflict with the bourgeois democratic state which itself is the agency that undermines democratic rights. In the name of democracy, the Peoples' Front, by calling for a defense of the bourgeois democratic state, sets a trap which will bring about the destruction of all genuine democracy.

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Nevertheless, the advent of fascism on a world scale presents a new strategical problem to the proletarian movement. Fascism, the "social policy of constraint" carried to its conclusion, completes the destruction of the two second groups of democratic rights; and is able to consolidate power only by doing so. Consequently, the defense of these concrete democratic rights assumes a new and greater importance in the strategy of the proletarian movement—a considerably greater importance, for example, than it occupied during the days prior to 1914. This defense is not at all, as we have seen, for the sake of bourgeois democracy, or in alliance with or subordination to bourgeois democracy. That is the fatal error of the Peoples' Front. It must be an independent class defense; and as such will have to be conducted in the last analysis not alongside of but against the bourgeois democratic state.

The democratic rights are of inestimable advantage to the proletariat in its struggle for power. Wherever they are threatened in practice this threat must be resisted, and the revolutionary socialists may take the lead in organizing resistance. The resistance must depend first and foremost on mass action: on strong, militant picket lines, great demonstrations and mass meetings, union organization; in the end, on

a workers' militia and workers' councils. Legalistic means, pressure on the "government," are, of course, not excluded. Campaigns for the "democratization" of the state apparatus, such as the Supreme Court campaign in this country, or, more particularly, the campaigns for the re-introduction of democratic forms in the fascist nations (as attempted, for example, in Austria), are necessary. These must, however, be always subordinated to more direct forms of mass action, for it is the latter only that can in the long run defend the democratic rights. When the crisis grows more acute, and the fascist gangs appear on the scene to break up picket lines and workers' meetings, once again the workers must defend their rights first and foremost by independent organization and mass action: they, with their class forces, must settle directly with the fascists. The democratic government will not, cannot do so: as history has so conclusively proved to us, the democratic government in the end will only hand over the reins to the fascists; or if, as in Spain, it pretends to fight at all, it will be only because of the overwhelming class pressure of the workers that compels it.

The struggle for the defense of concrete democratic rights is of the utmost importance at the present time. It can rally great sections of the masses, and offers one of the most fruitful of all fields for the application of the genuine united front tactic. And, behind the leadership of the working class, it can draw middle-class as well as proletarian groups, thereby offering an "approach to the middle classes" which is in no sense capitulation. Furthermore, this struggle is at present a revolutionary struggle. Through it, and not by the treacherous and illusory "defense of bourgeois democracy," the road of the fascists will be impeded and blocked. And, since the protection of democratic rights can no longer be continued for any indefinite period of time under the capitalist order, the determined struggle to defend them will prove a compelling factor, leading to the proletarian revolution and to socialism, which alone can guarantee to men a true democracy.



## VI

### The Peoples' Front in France

#### 1

ON February 6, 1934, gangs of fascists, reactionaries and royalists—for the most part young students and irresponsible sons of noblemen—rioted in Paris, across the river from the Chamber of Deputies. Less than a week later, on the 12th, the working class replied in its own way, spontaneously, by a vast general strike.

These events were of the highest symptomatic importance. They demonstrated, beyond any shadow of doubt, that the crisis in France had reached a point where it could no longer be quieted down, much less solved, by legal and parliamentary means. They showed that the issue was leaving the halls of the Chamber of Deputies and moving out into the streets and the factories; that events in France were progressing relentlessly toward a revolutionary climax; that within the next few years the fate of France—fascist France or a workers' France—was to be decided.

The underlying causes are, of course, to be sought in the status of French economy. The peculiar conditions of French economy—the already accomplished devaluation of its currency, the comparative absence of gigantic industrial enterprises, the methods of French agriculture and the large number of well cultivated small holdings, the huge gold reserve, and the advantages still at that time accruing to France from the terms of the Versailles Treaty—had delayed the impact of the world crisis. However, when the crisis, belatedly, hit France, these same peculiar conditions, aggravated by the collapse of the Versailles system, undermined the resiliency of French economy, and made it impossible for France to share proportionately in the world upturn that began in 1933. In 1935, for example, production in France as compared with production in 1928-29 was lower than in the case of

any other great power. The truth is that France has reached an impasse. There are only two roads: the salvation of French economy through the workers' revolution and socialism; or the solidification of disintegration by the strait-jacket of Fascism.

These conclusions, so incontrovertible in the light of any objective analysis of French conditions, were, however, reached only by the bourgeoisie and by the revolutionary Marxists, the latter tragically weak in numbers and influence. The bourgeoisie drew appropriate conclusions, and began carefully and systematically to prepare for the transition to fascism, just as the German bourgeoisie had done before them; began to take steps to take the fascist movement out of the hands of the students and light-minded aristocrats, and to search for a serious mass base; and began to make ready the arms, the pistols and clubs and machine guns and airplanes through which the issue would be finally decided.

The Marxists, also, drew appropriate conclusions. They called for a direct perspective leading to the conquest of power. They called for a concentration on the work of preparing the class forces, and a reduction of parliamentary activities to a secondary level. They called for a united front of mass struggle; for the building of a workers' militia able to defend the proletarian interests; for steps to be taken toward the formation of committees in the factories and shops, on the land, and in the armed forces; for the transfer of the focus of struggle to these committees, with the aim, when the revolutionary crisis reached its climax, of the transfer of power to the committees: that is, with the aim of the transfer of power to a Soviet State. They called for broad mass actions, for boldness and decision, for the sharpening of the class struggle. These were and continue to be their slogans; and in them alone is the hope of the French working class.

The reformist leadership of the Socialist Party of France, on the other hand, and the Stalinists, just then turning reformist under the impulse of the new orientation of the Comintern, had quite different views. The depth of the crisis made no impression on their shielded eyes. The approach of a revolutionary situation? Mere fantasy. Workers' militia and factory committees? Only the delusions and idiotic provocations of sectarian minds. The real business was to defend the great French democracy, to "rehabilitate" democratic capitalism, to protect it against its enemies. And their brains were little concerned with the enemy within, with the French counter-revolution; the great enemy was without—Hitler and German Nazism.

In the summer of 1934 the Socialist and Communist Parties concluded what they called a United Front—the widely heralded "*Front Unique*." But this was in actuality at the farthest remove from the

genuine united front of action on specific issues. It was, first, a "non-aggression pact" whereby the two parties gave up the indispensable right of mutual criticism; and, second, an agreement on certain purely defensive measures whereby French "democracy" could be protected. This, however, was only the beginning.

The key to French internal politics is to be found in the Radical-Socialist Party. This is the great Center party of French capitalism, in 1934 the largest party in France, the firm and unwavering defender of capitalist property rights. Its propaganda appeal is addressed chiefly to the middle classes, and among them it has found the bulk of its membership, promising them the scraps and leavings from the capitalist table. In normal times, for many decades, the Radical Party has usually formed the government, at one period in a coalition with the right, at the next in a coalition with the left (ordinarily with the Socialist Party), balancing itself delicately between the forces. It is a party shot through and through with corruption and venality of every sort. In 1934, the measure of this corruption was beginning to be widely known through a series of scandals; and, more fundamentally, the pressure of the crisis was teaching the middle classes that the program of the Radical Party had nothing further to offer them, that they had to abandon their traditional loyalty, and seek another way out. It was a Radical government that held office on February 6th; and in the face of the disorderly demonstration of the impotent young students and aristocrats, the Radicals showed how much courage and determination *they* had in the "struggle against fascism." The Radicals turned tail and ran; they immediately resigned the government, and hid in fright their political faces.

The proper conclusions were obvious. The problem of winning the lower strata of the middle classes in France to the side of the fight against fascism and for socialism was nothing else than the problem of winning them *away* from the Radical Party. The crisis and the conduct of the Radical Party had made this, politically speaking, a comparatively simple problem. Its program and its leadership were completely discredited before the masses. A bold and independent class policy on the part of the proletarian parties would simply have destroyed the Radical Party; with the bulk of the lower strata of its former supporters going over to the side of the workers' parties, its upper strata going over to the fascists. And, in point of fact, *in spite of* the policy of the workers' parties, this has happened and is happening. The Radical Party is falling apart (as indicated by its tremendous drop in votes during 1935 and still more in 1936); but its disintegration is most dangerously delayed, and the parties of the right—their bold policies contrasting so sharply with the spineless policies of the left—derive

benefits from the disintegration out of all proportion to what might so easily be the case.

In direct opposition to the Marxist—indeed, the simple common-sense—answer to the question of strategy toward the Radical Party, the entire policies of both the Communist and Socialist Parties have been oriented toward conciliation to, bolstering up of the Radical Party. This is, in substance, the organizational form of the Peoples' Front in France established formally in 1935: the coalition of the Communist, Socialist, and Radical Parties. And, since the entire perspective of the workers' parties is directed toward the maintenance of the coalition with the Radicals, it necessarily follows that the policy of the Peoples' Front as a whole is dominated by the Radicals, since to break with the policy of the Radicals would at once bring about the breakup of the Peoples' Front. The Radicals hold the whip hand. Their own necks have been saved by the prestige loaned them through their alliance with the workers' parties; they have a time longer to fasten their prejudices on the minds of the masses—the whole Peoples' Front ideology being built out of their prejudices; while, in increasing numbers, the masses, disgusted with the emptiness of the program of the “left,” pass over to the camp of the fascists.

There could be no other result from the Peoples' Front policy. The Peoples' Front is designed to “save capitalist democracy from fascism.” But to save and defend capitalist democracy is merely the traditional policy of the Radicals—a policy proved utterly untenable by history, by 1934, and half-understood as untenable by ever growing numbers among the masses. The Peoples' Front simply took over the policy of the Radicals, and offers it as a solution under the cover of a new name. The program of the Peoples' Front is just the program of the Radicals re-written (and could not be anything else, since then the Radicals would not have signed it). It is in fact somewhat to the *right* of Roosevelt's New Deal program. It features planks on “good government,” League of Nations, public works, better organization of credit and banking, “democratic reform” of taxation, “against unemployment,” rise in commodity prices, and (most revealing) “measures . . . being taken to safeguard the interests of the small shareholder.” (Doubtless the last provision is particularly appealing to the “bourgeois-minded” French proletarian.)

What lies back of this shameful capitulation to the Radicals? The reasons can be briefly stated: In return for the capitulation, the Stalinists were granted the votes of the Radicals for the Franco-Soviet Pact. The reformist Socialist Party of France has always had, at bottom, the program of the defense of capitalist democracy; it has merely propagated this program within the working class, dividing labors with the

Radical Party, which propagated it within the middle classes. In the time of crisis, therefore, the Socialist Party lines up with its natural political kin. To reformism, fascism or the proletarian revolution are equally death-blows; and through the Peoples' Front the Socialist Party, like the Communist Party, tries to avoid both the one and the other. And in the case of both of the workers' parties, they find in their coalition with the Radicals in the Peoples' Front the means of preparation for the coming war: the war in which they propose to line up the French masses for French imperialism against German imperialism—the Stalinists in order to carry out Stalin's conception of "defense of the Soviet Union," the Socialists because reformism, tied by its whole nature to the bourgeois democratic state, is on all crucial occasions the agent of the bourgeoisie.

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The fruits of the Peoples' Front policy, the policy of collaboration with the Radicals, the policy of class collaboration, have not been long in ripening. In general terms, the great crime of the Peoples' Front has been its complete disorientation of the French proletariat. The Peoples' Front has prevented the working class from preparing and carrying out its revolutionary class struggle for power—the only possible solution from the point of view of the proletariat; and instead has deceived the working class into putting reliance on class collaboration, on bourgeois democracy, on the capitalist state. That is, the Peoples' Front teaches the working class to rely on the good will of the class enemy, and to renounce the strengthening of its independent force.

In 1935, the Stalinists, with their eyes on their Radical colleagues, repudiated the great strikes at Toulon and Brest as "provocations." The Peoples' Front urges the workers to sing the Marseillaise and carry the tri-color, and not to be too forward with the Internationale and the red flag. The Peoples' Front hails the pitiful parliamentary victories in the 1935 municipal elections as a major blow against fascism; and greets the majority in the 1936 elections for the Chamber of Deputies as a triumph. Under the compulsion of the logic of their policy, the Peoples' Fronters abandon all struggle against the two-year conscription laws, and become whole-hearted supporters of the armament program of French imperialism.

But the Peoples' Front has at any rate been a great obstacle to fascism? Not in the least. Fascism has continued its development unhampered by the Peoples' Front, at the tempo dictated by finance-capital and the given relation of forces. In 1934 the fascist movement in France was not sufficiently deep and serious; it was led and composed

of the froth of society, and was not the basis of a great mass movement. The general strike of February 12th—the independent class action of the workers—struck it a blow, and it recoiled; and it was held further in check by the shipyard strikes in 1935. But it recoiled only to gather new strength and to prepare more adequately. It won serious mass leaders of consequence, like the renegade communist, Doriot. In 1936, it again received a temporary set-back: not from the elections (for the fascists are well aware that the issue will not be decided in parliament, and in any case the Right increased its vote in the same amount as did the Left, both at the expense of the Center), but from the mighty and spontaneous general strike in June. Once again fascism goes forward, this time on the main road; it laughs at the statutes passed “outlawing” its organizations, merely changing names; and it feeds delightedly off the weaknesses, contradictions, and failures of the Peoples’ Front and the Peoples’ Front government.

In the Spring of 1936 the Peoples’ Front took over the government. What is the record? In the face of the tremendous June strikes, involving 8,000,000 or more workers, and begun by the workers without a word of leadership from the Peoples’ Front parties, the Blum government, together with its Radical and Stalinist supporters, stood aghast, frightened, breathless at the sweep of the masses. They explained to the workers that “they must know how to end a strike as well as how to begin one” (to quote the words of the Stalinist leader). Like true reformists, they acted in the manner described by the theorist of German finance-capital (in the same quotation I have given in Chapter III). “The deflection of the revolution into social-political measures corresponded with the transference of the struggle from the factories and the streets into Parliament and Cabinets, that is, with the transformation of the struggle ‘from below’ into concessions ‘from above.’” They passed a series of laws, in agreement with the bourgeoisie—then in strategic retreat before the mass offensive—to show the workers that real benefits came to them not through struggle but through the beneficence of “their” government. And already, during these short months, the concessions to the workers, where not directly sabotaged by the capitalists, have been more than wiped out by the increase in the cost of living, resulting from the devaluation and other inflationary measures, which the government has been forced by economic compulsion to carry out.

The Blum government is a capitalist government, like all coalition governments; and as such it administers the affairs of French imperialism. In the interests of French imperialism, to protect the remnants of the Versailles settlement, it has undertaken an unprecedented armament

program. How revealing to read in the *New York Times* of February 3rd of this year that *all* parties of the Peoples' Front voted for the military budget. (Even at the time of the Seventh Congress, Dimitroff argued that the Communists in France would not support the military budget.) All likewise voted for the military loan to Poland, which nation is now completing its transformation to fascism. The Blum government engineered the hypocritical "Neutrality Pact" in the Spanish crisis, actively blocked aid to the Spanish workers, and is now in the forefront of the international boycott. It passes laws restricting freedom and speech and assembly, and instituting compulsory arbitration; and sends Mobile Guards against strikers. It suppressed an incipient revolt in Syria, and continues in French Indo-China a régime which jails and tortures revolutionists. It suppresses issues of revolutionary journals in France (two issues, for example, of *Lutte des Classes*) and imprisons French revolutionists. Blum cables personal congratulations to Roosevelt on his victory in November. All parties of the Peoples' Front announce the complete solidarity of all true Frenchmen against the threat of Germany; all vie with each other in super-patriotism, and the greatest scandal of the year arises when a Socialist is accused of not having been sufficiently patriotic in the last war—the charge against Salengro, which the Peoples' Front so indignantly repudiated. The Stalinists, through Thorez, call for the transformation of the Peoples' Front into a "French Front." And this last is the most revealing of all: for through the Peoples' Front, there is being prepared in France the complete "national front," once again national unity, as in 1914, behind French imperialism in the coming war.

In all these weak, docile, spineless months, the Peoples' Front has to its credit only one bold and vigorous action. This occurred in January, when French Morocco, key colony of French imperialism, was menaced by Germany. At once, without a moment's hesitation, the Peoples' Front sprang to the helm, ordered the fleet to sail, and stood by to defend with the lives of the masses the booty of the French bourgeoisie.

But underneath the façade of the Peoples' Front, deep down among the masses, the crisis continues and extends. After a lull following the June strikes, the workers are once more in motion. New strikes, not yet wide and general as in June, break out day by day; and now they are fought not in the holiday spirit of June, but in grim and bitter earnest. The great class armies are, under the impact of the impassable crisis, slowly aligning, in spite of everything the Peoples' Front can or will do. In the end, the issue will have to be met. Out of it will come either a fascist triumph, and the setting back of the European proletariat for decades to come, or the proletarian revolution. But to

achieve the latter the workers must, learning from their experience, break utterly with the false, debilitating and treacherous policy of the Peoples' Front; and take the road of revolutionary class struggle for power and for socialism. Without this, victory is impossible, fascism is inevitable.



## VII

### The Peoples' Front in Spain

THE crisis in Spain is neither new nor unexpected. After its brief and reckless period of glory at the dawn of the modern era, Spain was thrust back into obscurity by the short-sighted policies of its rulers and the advance of northern capitalism. For more than three hundred years it has wallowed in ignorance and squalor, the heavy hand of the Church combining with an odd *mélange* of semi-feudal lords, the monarchy, great landed proprietors, a small and corrupt native bourgeoisie, and foreign enterprisers, to exploit and oppress the Spanish people. The capitalist revolution was never completed in Spain; its backward economy has been a hopelessly entangled mixture of capitalism combined with the remains of another age. And at this late day, with capitalism in decline on a world scale, and the great powers struggling to the death for the possibilities of exploitation which remain, capitalism can solve not a single one of the great problems of the Spanish economy.

The land of the great estates for the millions of peasants? But the banking and credit system rests upon land mortgages, and to distribute the land would destroy the banking system, that is, destroy Spanish capitalism. The development of Spanish industry? But, on a capitalist basis, this could be accomplished only in an open and expanding world market, whereas the world market is monopolized by the great powers; and even the internal market could not long remain in native hands against the pressure of cheap goods produced by advanced techniques in the imperialist countries. Separation of Church and State, secularization of the nation, and abolition of the political power of the Church? But the Church is itself the greatest capitalist of Spain. Democratization of the army? But the army, the foundation of power, was in the hands of reaction. Freedom for Morocco and autonomy for the Basques and Catalonia? But Spanish capitalism depended upon the exploitation of Morocco and the national minorities.

No, not a single major problem of Spain can be solved by capitalism. The solutions can be discovered only through the workers' revolution and through socialism—and indeed, not through the Spanish revolution alone. Socialism, by destroying the capitalist order and doing away with the iron bands of capitalist property relations, can give the land to the peasants, expand a socialized industry, liquidate the Church as an oppressive institution, build a workers' and peasants' army, and form a free federation of Iberian Socialist Republics.

Such, however, is not the opinion of reformists. After the abdication of the King in 1931, the Socialist Party of Spain entered a coalition government of bourgeois democracy. Two years were enough to expose the hopeless weakness and completely false policy of the coalition; and in 1933, after an electoral victory, a Right coalition took over the reins of the government. The advance of reaction continued unhampered by the parliamentary maneuvers of the reformists. But the alarmed workers took things into their own hands. In 1934, strikes followed one after another in rapid succession. In October, the workers forced their leaders into acquiescence in a revolutionary general strike which developed into an attempted insurrection. The insurrection was drowned in blood by the Foreign Legion, but only after a display of the most magnificent courage and heroism. Far from being disheartened or set back, the workers were in actuality greatly strengthened by the struggle, and the forces of the counter-revolution injured. Once again not class collaboration and reformism but the methods of revolutionary class struggle proved themselves the decisive weapon to serve the interests of the masses.

The workers had suffered a temporary defeat. But their morale was high, their sense of organization strong; they had learned from their bitter experience, and were prepared to enter the path of revolutionary struggle for power and for socialism. Then: enter the Peoples' Front, putting a new face on the reformist policies that had led to the disasters of the past. In 1935, the Peoples' Front program was signed by the workers' parties and the "left" bourgeois republican parties. It is a document quite on a par with its sister document in France, a little to the right of the New Deal. It bases itself on the defense of democratic capitalism, and rejects—not merely implicitly, but in many cases flatly and explicitly—every even near-socialist demand.

Nevertheless, the Peoples' Front parties won an electoral majority (though a minority by a small margin in popular vote) and formed the government under Azaña in February, 1936. From the beginning, as in France, the policy of the Peoples' Front was, has been, and will continue to be the policy of the "republican" bourgeoisie. To break with that policy in favor of a proletarian policy would mean to break the Peoples'

Front; and that, according to our reformists, is of course "counter-revolution." How amply the nature of the Peoples' Front was displayed during the months from February to July, 1936! The masses thought they had won a victory through the election of the government, and began to act accordingly, began to take over the land, to strike, to strive for control of factories and railroads. And the government, after drawing back in alarm, then, for the sake of "order" and to avoid "antagonizing" the republican allies or "provoking" the reaction—the government naturally sent the Civil Guard against the peasants who were taking over the land, ordered the strikes to stop, arrested the strikers, broke up workers' meetings. The government even censored long columns from the papers of the parties—for example, the Communist Party—which supported it! In May, 23 peasants were killed, and 30 wounded by the Civil Guard; and the Minister of the Interior sent a telegram of congratulations—to the Civil Guard.

Meanwhile the counter-revolution, aided by support from abroad in Portugal, Great Britain, Germany and Italy, prepared its forces. It controlled the army, and the government did not dare touch the army. It controlled Morocco, and the government did not dare touch Morocco. Openly, brazenly, it laid out its campaign, and chose its time to strike. On the other side, the proletariat was blocked by the government and by the whole Peoples' Front policy, from making ready its own class forces: it could not form and arm and train its militia, could not select its factory and peasant committees to coordinate activities; its leaders tried to teach it to put all faith in the government—that is, in the political executive of the bourgeoisie—and in return the government would handle the fascists. But in spite of and against the policy of the Peoples' Front, the masses went over to direct action, and in these actions were further tested and prepared. The months between February and July witnessed a continuous series of strikes by the workers and seizures of land by the peasants.

On July 17, the counter-revolution struck. The answer of the Peoples' Front government—the defender against fascism—was: an attempt to come to an understanding with the fascists, and a refusal to arm the workers. But the proletariat took things into its own hands, began its own mobilization, began simply taking the arms from arsenals and barracks. The government was forced by the pressure of the masses to reverse its policy, distribute arms, and call for resistance to the counter-revolution. Once again direct class action, though hampered and obstructed by the treacheries of Peoples' Frontism, had proved the answer and the only answer.

The Peoples' Front was thus responsible for the untrained and unprepared condition in which the proletariat and peasantry found itself

in July. A revolutionary policy would have put the workers in a position to handle the counter-revolution with a few sharp blows, since Spanish fascism had a comparatively small and uninfluential mass base. As it is, the Civil War drags on endlessly, with hundreds of thousands already killed and many more thousands yet to die. The crime of the Peoples' Front, however, does not end in July.

In the first weeks after the start of the Civil War, the proletariat and peasantry took, spontaneously, major steps toward setting up their own councils and committees in the factories and shops and villages; established their own police forces and *de facto* revolutionary courts; and began the formation of their own independent class militia, the foundation of a workers' Red Army. In this way they were laying the basis for a new state, a revolutionary workers' state, which, by drawing all power into its own hands and doing away with the existing bourgeois state and its mechanisms, could conduct a revolutionary war against the fascists, and begin the building of socialism. And only through such a state and such a war can the workers succeed in Spain. For the war against the fascists must be a revolutionary war, conducted in terms of a revolutionary perspective. This is true not merely from the point of view of military effectiveness, but, above all, politically. In order to undermine Franco's African base, and draw the Moorish masses to the side of the Spanish workers, freedom had to be given to Morocco. In order to assure full support from the Basque country and Catalonia, autonomy had to be granted the Basques and Catalonians. In order to solidify a genuine alliance between the peasantry and the workers, and thereby also to make it impossible for Franco to consolidate his lines of communication, the land had to be given outright to the peasants. In order to protect the factories against sabotage, the workers had to have control of them. In order to have an armed force that could be relied on to fight consistently for the revolution and to be protected against any utilization against the workers and peasants, a new workers' army, divorced in control from the bourgeois state machinery, had to be built.

All of these, however, are revolutionary acts; and, therefore, cannot be properly carried out by a bourgeois government, whether that government is called by the name of "Peoples' Front" or any other. The task of Marxists in Spain was to promote and lead the process of the extension of workers' power; to transform the war against Franco into a revolutionary war for workers' power and for socialism; to act along the perspective of the transfer of state power to the workers' and peasants' and soldiers' committees. The Peoples' Front leaders of the Spanish working-class parties did just the opposite. After the first weeks of the Civil War, when the Peoples' Front government had become little

more than a helpless shell—the Communist and Socialist parties entered the Peoples' Front government, and Caballero, "the Spanish Lenin," became the premier of a bourgeois coalition government. In this way, the workers were shunted aside from the revolutionary path, taught to give up confidence in their own class organs, their own committees and councils, to put reliance on the government. The struggle was thrust back into the treacherous "defense of bourgeois democracy" against Fascism; Caballero dropped all his loud talk about "Soviets" and proclaimed to Spain and to the world that he was interested only in protecting the "democratic republic."

Step by step the consequences have been drawn out. The government, as a bourgeois government, has been compelled to check the extension of proletarian class power, and progressively to liquidate the steps that had already been taken. In the name of a "unified command" it has cut off the development toward a genuine workers' army, and reconstituted the militia into a republican army. In the name of law and order, it has eliminated the workers' police in the cities, enforcing proletarian justice, and has set up a republican police force, incorporating institutions and individuals already demonstrated to be betrayers of the workers' struggle. In the name of efficient production, it breaks down genuine workers' control of the factories. Its great positive accomplishment to date, proudly hailed and announced by Caballero, is—to have balanced the budget! In this manner, the Peoples' Front government becomes a second line of defense for capitalism. If the workers succeed, in spite of the government, in defeating the armies of Franco, they will only find themselves bound to the capitalist order as enforced by the Peoples' Front. Unless they break with Popular Frontism, they will find—and this is the real tragedy of Spain—that they have given their lives and their blood *in vain*, that their selfless and heroic sacrifice, far from bringing emancipation, will have left them where they began, tied hand and foot in the property relations of capitalist exploitation.

Even more treacherous is the role of the Peoples' Front in Catalonia, for in Catalonia the process of extending workers' power had gone much further than in the rest of Spain. Nevertheless, the workers' parties in Catalonia, instead of carrying through that process to its culmination in the actual transfer of state power, likewise, under the impulsion of the ideas of the Peoples' Front, entered the Catalonian coalition government. Even the P.O.U.M., though it had abstractly maintained against the other parties that the issue in Spain was "Socialism vs. Capitalism" and not "Democracy vs. Fascism," followed along into the government. And just as in Spain proper, the consequences of this step became at once apparent. The workers were turned aside from

the revolutionary path. The government strove to gather into its own hands the organs of power that had slipped away to the proletariat: control over the army, the police, the factories. The autonomous committees of the workers became "no longer necessary"—as even the P.O.U.M. explained—because, of course, the government itself was a "workers' government." In this way, the bourgeoisie, acting through the coalition government, was preparing the re-consolidation of capitalism in the event that Franco should be defeated on the military front.

With startling suddenness, in November and December, the true character of the Catalonian government became obvious to the world. It was disclosed that representatives of the left republican parties in the government were secretly negotiating in Paris for a "separate peace." A conspiracy was unearthed through which a group from the left republican parties was aiming to assassinate the leaders of the workers' parties. A campaign against the P.O.U.M. was started by the republican parties in collaboration with the Stalinists (including the Soviet consul-general, Antonov-Ovseënko), on the grounds that the P.O.U.M. was a disruptive and counter-revolutionary force through its insistence on its slogan of socialism vs. capitalism. The campaign culminated in the P.O.U.M.'s being driven out of the government, under the threat of the withdrawal of Soviet material aid if this were not carried through. Impelled thus by necessity rather than by its own clear will, the P.O.U.M. has again turned toward the revolutionary path, and now calls for a break with the policies of the Peoples' Front, the transformation of the war into a revolutionary war, and the building of workers' power.

The reply of the Peoples' Fronters to the new turn of the P.O.U.M. toward a revolutionary course has not been long in coming. Busily re-constituting the Loyalist Army under a unified command on a bourgeois basis, the leaders of the Peoples' Front declare that the insistence of the P.O.U.M. on a revolutionary war proves it the military as well as political ally of Franco. The Madrid radio station of the P.O.U.M. is raided and shut down; its journals are suppressed; a "Peoples' Tribunal" consisting of four judges, one from the Stalinists, one Socialist, and two from the "left republican" parties, is appointed to try the P.O.U.M. leaders for treason and "counter-revolution." The campaign for the physical annihilation of the P.O.U.M., under the whip of the Stalinists, continually mounts, and is checked only by the resistance it meets from the rank and file of the militia and the workers' mass organizations. There should be no surprise. Such also was the reply of the reformists in Germany to Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The policy of class collaboration, of the Peoples' Front, can no more endure the proletarian revolution than the counter-revolution of fascism.

## VIII

### The Peoples' Front in the United States

1

THE Peoples' Front has not, of course, advanced as far in the United States as in France or Spain. In the formal sense, there is not yet in the United States an established "Peoples' Front." The United States is not faced with a developing revolutionary crisis, as is France, nor is it in the midst of a Civil War, as is Spain. Though the historical issue for the United States, as is the case for every <sup>CAPITALIST</sup> nation at the present time, is socialism vs. capitalism, though only the workers' revolution and socialism can solve even a single one of the major problems facing United States economy; nevertheless the issue is not yet posed in terms of the immediate struggle for state power. The American proletariat is still faced primarily with the more elementary immediate demands: the struggle for the right to organize, for industrial unionism, for the exercise of democratic rights generally, for a powerful trade union and unemployed movement, for relief and union conditions, for a conscious mass revolutionary party of struggle.

But just as the issue of state power can be settled in favor of the proletariat only by the independent revolutionary class struggle of the workers, and is lost for the proletariat through the reformist strategy of the Peoples' Front; in the same way, at the more elementary stages, the interests of the proletariat can be served only by the appropriate methods of class struggle, and are fatally undermined by the class collaborationist methods of the Peoples' Front. The Peoples' Front in this country, seeping into the labor movement under the sponsorship of the Communist Party, has made considerable headway; and already its disastrous effects are becoming apparent in a dozen fields.

Up to the present, the best known and most conspicuous result of the Peoples' Front strategy emerged during the 1936 election campaign. From the point of view both of the social composition of his support and likewise of the political content of his program, Roosevelt was in effect a Peoples' Front candidate. No one could doubt that he was a staunch and outstanding defender of capitalist democracy, nor that the bulk of the proletariat, the farmers, and the lower strata of the rest of the middle classes, were solidly behind him. Thus the upholders of the Peoples' Front ideology found themselves, willingly or unwillingly, driven into the Roosevelt camp: either openly, as was the case with many, or, like the Communist Party itself, through a back-handed and ambiguous formula.

The Communist Party was compelled to define the issue of the campaign as "Progress vs. Reaction," "Democracy vs. Fascism." It had to discover the forces of fascism in the "Landon-Hearst-Liberty League" combination. It was then required to raise as the central slogan, "Defeat Landon at all costs!" And the only realistic interpretation of this slogan—the interpretation which the majority of even its own sympathizers made—was to vote for Roosevelt. Browder admits quite openly that this was the central direction of the Stalinist campaign: In his post-election analysis of the elections, delivered to the Central Committee of the party, he boasts as follows: "The first objective was the defeat of Landon. This was accomplished to a degree far surpassing all expectations . . . this aim we shared with the largest number of people. . . . Without exaggerating our role in bringing about this result, we can safely say that the weight of each individual Communist in the struggle was far higher, many fold, than that of the members of any other political group in America." He apologizes at length for the nominally independent Communist Party ticket that was in the field. If only "a national Farmer-Labor party . . ." had "decided to place Roosevelt at the head of the ticket nationally. . . . Would we have refrained from putting forward our own independent tickets and supported the Farmer-Labor party ticket even with Roosevelt at the head? I venture to say that under such circumstances we would almost surely have done so."

In point of fact, this was done in many localities either by the Communist Party officially, or by individual party members. In Minnesota, Washington, California, the Stalinists supported Farmer-Labor and "progressive" coalitions with no criticism of the fact that Roosevelt headed their tickets. In New York, the Stalinists gave full support to



the American Labor Party, which entered the election campaign—as its leaders openly declared—only to gather labor votes for Roosevelt. Individual Communist Party members joined the American Labor Party, and spoke from its platforms in support of Roosevelt.

The Peoples' Front policy dictates a wholly anti-Marxist analysis of Roosevelt. He can no longer be treated as the chief executive for the dominant class. Criticism of him can only suggest that he is not responsive enough in carrying out the "peoples' mandate," that he cannot be relied on to take progressive steps unless a certain amount of pressure against him is generated. Even when, after the elections were safely under his belt, Roosevelt, at the bidding of his masters, ruthlessly cut the WPA rolls, even in the light of Roosevelt's attitude toward the auto strikes, the Stalinist criticism must remain mild and "loyal." The Communist Party, having abandoned the revolutionary aim of the overthrow of capitalist society, becomes the "party of Twentieth Century Americanism"; its purpose as defined by the Peoples' Front, is to function within the framework of democratic capitalism, as a reformist "pressure group." It must strive to become "respectable," to ingratiate itself with the class enemy; to show that in return for vague promises of friendship for the Soviet Union and polite words against fascism, it is willing to do its part in smothering the class struggle and guaranteeing the protection of bourgeois democracy against the threat of proletarian revolution.

3

A reformist political line cannot be isolated into any supra-mundane sphere of "pure politics." It must show its effects on every arena of the class struggle. We thus find during the past two years a cumulative development of the Peoples' Front strategy as applied to Communist Party activities in the trade unions and unemployed organizations. We may be sure that during the coming months this development will be carried unprecedented steps further. The basis of the Peoples' Front is class collaboration; and we know from past experience of reformism what this means on the trade union field.

Are the reactionary trade union bureaucrats agents of the class enemy within the working class? Do their policies act as the major brake to militant class consciousness within the unions? This is what Marxism has always taught, but no one could possibly learn this from the most detailed study of recent Stalinist literature. Nowhere is there any explanation of, or even reference to, the social function of the trade union bureaucracy. At the most, there is occasional personal criticism of some action too gross to ignore; but even this is kept to a minimum,

in the interests of currying favor with the maximum number of the bureaucrats.

The policy of class collaboration forces the Stalinists to abandon more and more the fighting struggle for economic demands, and through that struggle the raising of the level of class consciousness, for the attempt to come to agreements with the bureaucrats, to settle disputes through deals behind the scenes, to rely on governmental arbitration boards and mediators. The Stalinist work in the unions must be subordinated to the great aim of achieving in this country a mass, classless Peoples' Front. To secure the adherence of a union to a Negro Congress, or an American League Conference, or a Farmer-Labor-Progressive what-not, or a Social Security Assembly is far more important than to get it to prepare and win a militant strike.

The results are already widely present within the labor movement, though not yet so widely recognized. In the WPA sit-downs, the Stalinists and the supervisors together explain why the workers must be peaceful and go home. In Pennsylvania, the Stalinists declare that the new policy for the Workers' Alliance must abandon strikes as a method for "settling disputes." At the January unemployed demonstration in Washington, not a single militant slogan or banner was permitted; the whole demonstration was directed toward the achievement of a friendly chat with the relief authorities. In the Federation of Teachers, the general fight against the Boards of Education is deprecated, dual organizations (such as the Teachers' Guild in New York) are met with conciliation, and the open struggle against the A.F.of L. Executive Council and for the C.I.O. principles is shunted aside. In the Cafeteria Workers, there is disclosed an ironbound alliance between the Stalinists and the older racketeers. The furriers, the wild men of the Third Period, turn respectable, and devote their energies against the progressives and revolutionaries in the union. Ben Gold, who as leader of the furriers roared for five years like an untamable lion, now speaks like the mildest lamb. In the United Textile Workers, the Stalinists at the Convention come to the rescue of the reactionary officials. On the Pacific Coast, among the Maritime Unions, the Stalinists last year first tried to put over the I.S.U. proposals on the Sailors, then attempted to head off the strike, then insisted that it be delayed until after the elections (so as not to injure Roosevelt); and in the end were forestalled only by the militant stand of the Sailors' Union.

This trend will continue and increase. The Communist Party, under the banner of the Peoples' Front, now functions in the unions more and more as a reactionary force, and the progressive movement in the unions will have to be built not along with but in large measure against it.

These conclusions are impressively supported by the Stalinist policy with respect to the A.F.of L.-C.I.O. struggle. At the present time, as Marxists have made clear, the progressive movement in the unions must proceed in accordance with the basic slogans: for industrial unionism; for organization of the basic mass industries; for a class struggle policy; for trade union democracy. Every one of these slogans, taken individually or together, dictates repudiation of the policies and course of the A.F.of L. bureaucracy, and determined, though of course critical, support of the C.I.O. This follows not because the C.I.O. as at present constituted and with its present leadership is the sufficient answer to the needs of the workers (indeed, through its fundamental class collaborationism and its violation of intra-union democracy, it acts even now and will in the future increasingly act counter to the needs of the workers), but because in the light of the real and actual conditions of the present, the *direction* of the C.I.O. is the direction of advance for the labor movement, just as the direction of the A.F.of L. officialdom is the direction of decay and disintegration. *As against* the A.F.of L. bureaucracy, therefore, Marxists must, whole-heartedly and unambiguously, support the C.I.O. Only such an attitude is at present compatible with progressive trade unionism.

The Communist party policy for the next period, however, is formulated around the single slogan of "unity." "We shall," Browder says in the report already referred to, "redouble our efforts in the fight for trade union unity, for the unity of the American Federation of Labor. . . . We think that it would be harmful if any unions were divided, one section going to the C.I.O., the other to the A.F.of L. . . . under no conditions do we carry that fight on in such a way as to make a split in that union. . . . For example, in the probable organization of some sections of heavy machinery, we will have the problem of whether these new unions shall go into the Machinists or into some of the other unions, whether it be the Amalgamated Association, or what not. Generally, we have been clear on this last question. We refused to use our forces to carry sections of newly organized workers away from the jurisdictional claims of the Machinists Union over into some of the industrial unions, where there was a fear that this would intensify rivalries and sharpen the split."

No one will argue against the desirability of trade union unity, nor will anyone "advocate" splits. Nevertheless, it is always the concrete content of unity, not unity as an abstract slogan, that is important. And, under the present circumstances, in the labor movement, the fight for unity itself can be understood only as a fight under the slogans stated above, and—translated into organizational terms—for the C.I.O. movement as against the Executive Council. Such a fight

alone makes possible the re-integration of the A.F.of L. on a basis that would mean an advance and not a defeat; and such a fight is equally necessary to prevent the C.I.O. officials themselves from betraying the movement which at present they lead. Re-integration, of course, may not be possible without capitulation; and if this is the case, then the workers must be prepared to face the full consequences—prepared to face the necessity for the building of a new Federation. The conduct of a genuinely progressive campaign will have laid the basis for such an eventuality.

The “unity” campaign of the Communist Party, on the contrary, disorients the progressive struggle. It blocks the sharp and fruitful fight against the policies of the Executive Council, announcing in advance a willingness to compromise and indeed to capitulate; and at the same time it contributes to reactionary tendencies on the part of the C.I.O. officials. To an increasing extent its results will be discovered in one union after another—as, for that matter, they have already been discovered in a number of specific instances: for example, in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, at the Convention of the Federation of Teachers, and at the A.F.of L. Convention itself, in each of which instances Stalinist influence smothered clear-cut support of the C.I.O.

4

In other fields of Peoples’ Front activities, the same general trend is observable. For example, in youth work. Following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, and the subsequent Congress of the Young Communist International, proposals were made in this country—as elsewhere—for the liquidation of the proletarian political youth organizations into broad, classless, non-political” (i.e., Peoples’ Frontist) youth movements. When the position of the Young Peoples’ Socialist League made this impossible, the Y.C.L. tried to gain the same end by the creation of the American Youth Congress on the same Peoples’ Front basis. The Y.C.L. now devotes a major part of its efforts to conciliating Y.M.C.A. and religious youth groups so as to maintain a bloc with them against revolutionary socialists. In the student field, the Y.C.L. consistently attempts to manipulate the American Student Union into a straight Peoples’ Front program and organizational form.

Most significant of all is the application of the Peoples’ Front policy to “anti-war work.” Through a multitude of pacifist organizations, and especially through the directly controlled American League against War and Fascism, the Stalinists aim at the creation of a “broad, classless, Peoples’ Front of all those opposed to war.” The class collabora-

tionist character of the Peoples' Front policy is strikingly revealed through the Stalinist attitude in these organizations. They rule out in advance the Marxist analysis of war as necessarily resulting from the inner conflicts of capitalism and therefore genuinely opposed only by revolutionary class struggle against the capitalist order; and, in contrast, maintain that all persons, from whatever social class or group, whether or not opposed to capitalism, can "unite" to stop war.

What this "anti-war work" means in actuality is suggested by the fact that the Stalinists have abandoned attacks on the armament program of American imperialism; greet the Buenos Aires Conference (a mighty step forward in this country's preparations for the coming war) as a great advance toward "world peace"; and criticize revolutionary socialists as planning to sell this country out to Japan, when they call for non-support of the government in the war. The truth is, of course, that through the Peoples' Front, the Stalinists are making ready to support the government, and to recruit the masses for such support, in the new imperialist war.

## IX

### The Real Meaning of the Peoples' Front

1

EVERY important political act at the present time can be understood only in the light of the approach of the new imperialist war. This is true of the acts both of all national governments and likewise of all important political parties and organizations. No serious politician doubts that the new war is not far off. Indeed, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War constitute a kind of prelude or overture to the war, demonstrating that the conflicts within society have reached a point where they can no longer be even temporarily solved through parliamentary and diplomatic maneuvers, through the League of Nations, conferences and pacts. The coming war, which will be on a scale unprecedented in history, is at one and the same time a struggle to the death in the rivalries among the great powers; and, even more fundamentally, the crucial test for the survival possibilities of the capitalist order. Mankind will emerge from the war either still tied to capitalist social relations and, therefore, with the prospect before it of unutterable misery and the thrusting back of civilization into the depths of barbarism; or the proletariat will utilize the war crisis to throw off the yoke of capitalism, to achieve the workers' revolution, and to open out to men the mighty perspective of a socialist society.

With such stakes at issue, all governments and political parties direct their policies toward preparation for the war. For them to act in any other way would be blindness indeed.

Preparations for the war proceed simultaneously on a number of fronts. Most obvious, of course, is the accumulation of armament, which is now undertaken by all nations on a level far exceeding that of 1914. Along with this goes the internal organization of the national economy in such a way as to make it fitted to serve the war machine.

Simultaneously, each nation jockey's back and forth diplomatically in an effort to form the most favorable alliances, and to break up potentially opposing alliances.

Such means, however, are not of themselves adequate. Each government must aim to achieve within its own confines *national unity* for the conduct of the war. The war is for the bourgeois state a life or death struggle; if national unity is not achieved, the effectiveness of the nation in the war is weakened to such an extent that it will almost necessarily lose. But to achieve national unity means that within the nation the *class struggle*, which divides every nation internally, must be suppressed or suspended; that, somehow or other, national solidarity must be made to take precedence over class interest for the continuance of the war.

National unity and the suppression of the class struggle is gained in part through the very direct means of the physical elimination, by execution or imprisonment, of those who advocate the class struggle. But such means of themselves would be insufficient. Supplementing them, and even more important, are the *ideological* means, the organized propaganda whereby the masses are taught that their supreme loyalty is to the national state, that their interests are best served by defense of the national state. If some formula can be found for enforcing this lesson, the problem of the accomplishment of national unity has gone a long way toward solution.

In part this ideological preparation is carried out directly by the capitalist state and by bourgeois institutions. The schools, the press, the radio, the Church, are utilized to imprint on the masses the duties of patriotism and loyalty. But large sections of the masses, in the course of their experience, learn to distrust the bourgeoisie when its face is openly seen. And, consequently, a great part of the ideological preparation must be done by agents of the bourgeoisie operating among the masses, and pretending to speak in their name. This is the historical function of reformism. And it was the reformists, the Social-Democratic parties of Europe, which in 1914 reconciled the masses within each nation to national unity in support of the war. Within Germany, the reformists explained that the class struggle for socialism had to be delayed until Tsarism was defeated; within France, until Kaiserism was defeated; and so on. And thus, by "their own" leaders, the masses were led to imperialist slaughter.

By a judicious combination of the "physical means" and the ideological means, the fascist nations have already completed the process of achieving national unity. (It is to be expected that all nations, upon the outbreak of the war, will find themselves compelled to adopt a fascist form of government.) However, within the democratic nations

up to the present a sufficient degree of national unity has not yet been gained, and attempts to complete it increase in intensity and rapidity as the threat of the war draws closer.

The Peoples' Front, understood in its fundamentals, is the major form of the preparation among the masses for the achievement of national unity within the democratic nations in support of the coming war. Under the slogans of the Peoples' Front, the masses will march forth to fight for "their own" imperialism. The basic formula is extremely simple: Defend democracy against fascism; our nation (France, Great Britain, or the United States) is a democracy; Germany is fascist; therefore we must defend our nation against Germany.

Thus, the Peoples' Front is the contemporary version of social-patriotism, the new form in which the betrayal of 1914 is to be repeated.

2

It is easy to see why traditional reformists accept the slogans of the Peoples' Front (even where they temporarily reject, because of traditional antagonism, immediate alliance with the Stalinists on the basis of these slogans). They have always stood for these policies and practices, reformism being nothing other than an agency of the bourgeoisie within the working class. Reformism has always been ready to fight a war in defense of democratic capitalism, since its own fate is bound up with democratic capitalism. But why is it that the Comintern has this time initiated the Peoples' Front movement, and stands as its most untiring proponent?

The answer here also is not difficult. The policy of Stalinism rests upon the attempt to achieve national self-sufficiency for the Soviet Union. It is this issue which forced the break between Stalinism and Marxism, since the Marxists maintained that the Soviet Union could go forward as a proletarian state, toward socialism, only in conjunction with the struggle to extend the proletarian revolution to other nations. Now, since Stalinism conceives its problems in terms of national self-sufficiency, it looks upon the solution of the question of defending the Soviet Union as resting, first, upon a maintenance of the international *status quo* so long as this is possible (during which time self-sufficiency will be built up); and, when the war comes, an alliance with whatever bourgeois nations are willing, in order to prosecute the war successfully.

The Soviet Union believes that the coming war will witness at least Germany and Japan aligned against it, with Germany the spearhead of the attack (which is the explanation of what we noticed in the first chapter—Dimitroff's contention that German fascism is the "worst"



type of fascism). It is not sure which way Italy will swing (which explains why Italy was not brought into the Radek Trial, though Germany and Japan were). It believes it has a good chance of alliance with France and Great Britain, and a chance for at least benevolent neutrality from the United States. Above all, it counts on military alliance with France, the "traditional" enemy of Germany.

But a conflict arises. Between a workers' state and every capitalist state is a social gulf more impassable in the long run than that between any two capitalist states. And, within the capitalist states function sections of the Communist International, wholly subordinate to Stalinist policy. If the sections of the Comintern carried out policies of class struggle, they would threaten the respective bourgeois states with destruction; and would, in any case, make impossible the achievement of national unity (which requires suppression of the class struggle) within those states. From the point of view of Stalinism, twin evils would follow: the bourgeois states would then not be willing to trust the Soviet Union as an ally; and even if they became allies, they would be weakened internally through their inability to achieve national unity, and would be ineffectual as military partners.

Stalinism must, therefore, make clear to its potential allies that it *is* dependable; and must aid its potential or actual allies in their own preparation for the war. It must show, that it is to say, that in return for a military alliance it will do its part in suppressing the class struggle and the proletarian revolution, in bringing about national unity, within the allied nations.

The Peoples' Front is a major device whereby just this is done. The Peoples' Front gives up the class struggle in favor of class collaboration; it renounces the struggle for socialism in favor of the defense of democracy (a position altogether acceptable to the capitalist democracies of Great Britain, France, and the United States); it prepares the ground for the transition from a Peoples' Front to a "national front," to full national unity, as has already been brought completely into the open in France, and been made ready in Great Britain and the United States.

The Peoples' Front is part of the preparation for support of the coming war. This, in the last analysis, is its real meaning.

Throughout the world, the revolutionary Marxists also prepare for the coming war. They, however, and they alone, prepare the struggle *against* the war. They raise aloft the slogans of revolutionary defeatism,

call for *no* support of any capitalist government, democratic or fascist. They prepare, as Lenin prepared, to utilize the war crisis for the ever more relentless advance of the class struggle, for the turning of the imperialist war into a class war for the triumph of the workers.

X In this way, they prepare also the only genuine defense of the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy, through the Peoples' Front, and through its alliances with the bourgeois-democratic powers, prepares not the defense but the defeat of the Soviet Union. The defense of the first workers' state can rest only on the international working class, in the last analysis can be accomplished only through the extension of the workers' revolution to other countries. The price exacted for "aid" by French or British or American imperialism could only be: liquidation of the revolution, and restoration of capitalist property relations. The proletarian dictatorship is an infinitely more profound danger to French and British and American imperialism than the Nazi dictatorship. Fascist dictatorship is an "inconvenience" for capitalism; workers' victory is the death thrust. The Stalinist foreign policy, considered as a defense for the Soviet Union, is like asking a kidnapper to take a job as nurse-maid. The true defense of the Soviet Union is the world prosecution of the class struggle. And, since the policy of Stalinism acts to suppress the class struggle throughout the world, the defense of the Soviet Union must be undertaken not in common with but *against* the Stalinist bureaucracy. The unrelenting struggle against Stalinism is a necessary condition for the defense of the Soviet Union.

Not the least of the preparation of Marxists for the coming war, and for the defense of the Soviet Union, must be the unswerving attack against the theory and practice, the policy and slogans and methods of the Peoples' Front. The Peoples' Front condemns the workers, in advance, to defeat. As against the class collaboration of the Peoples' Front, Marxists uphold the slogans of the fighting united front of proletarian action, through which the unity of the working class will be forged, its allies gained, and its compass set toward the struggle for power. Only by breaking utterly with the policies of the Peoples' Front, and all that they signify, will the proletariat go forward to the sole solution for it and for mankind: to the proletarian revolution, and to the international socialist society.

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