

Liberalism and Fascism: The Dutt Thesis

"We killed the bastard, but the bitch that bore him is in heat again."—the working class in Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*

The battle lines of class war are constantly changing. The working class is under the gun on a number of fronts: continuing economic recession (depression?), inflation, curtailment of government services, growing militarism and threat of war, ideological preparation for "austerity" and "strong" political leadership,¹ and a new wave of racism and anti-Semitism spearheaded by vigilante shock troops. These troops are organized into small fascist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis, the most infamous of the racist, nativist and anti-labor organizations. There are also lesser fascist groups such as Lyndon LaRouche's U.S. Labor Party and militaristic Christian sects of fundamentalist and/or "born-again" persuasion, the "survivalists."

The recent resurgence of the Klan and the Nazis is no secret and has caused alarm among leftists. Preparation of an adequate defense and an eventual victory for the working class over these fascists depends upon the answers to these two questions: Why are these fascist squads re-emerging? What is the most effective strategy for destroying them? The answer to the latter question hinges a great deal upon the answer to the former one. Fortunately for us, these questions have been asked and answered before. We do not have to start from scratch.

The question of fascist resurgence is, at bottom, a question of the nature of fascism itself. In this article, we offer not a comprehensive overview of theories of fascism but rather a brief look at a very much neglected *communist* explanation of fascism—the thesis of R. Palme Dutt as expressed in his book, *Fascism and Social Revolution*. We will compare Dutt's explanation of fascism to the more widely accepted explanation offered by Georgi Dimitrov, highlight the relationship between liberalism and fascism, discuss the concept of social fascism and, finally, deal with strategies against fascism in the current political situation.

Our essay is all too brief and does not deal with certain important questions such as the theses of Guerin and Poulantzas, the apparent similarity between some of Dutt's central ideas and those of Gramsci and Bordiga, the correspondence between Dimitrov's definition of fascism and that of Otto Bauer,² and other issues which we shall identify later.

Dutt vs. Dimitrov

Though few articles or books on fascism even make reference to Dutt's publication, it is an essential work in gaining an understanding of right-wing movements for at least two reasons. First, it is one of the most comprehensive treatments of fascism ever written from a Marxist perspective. Dutt was a leader of the international communist movement and, when the book was written, head of the British Communist Party. Secondly, the book was written after the details of fascism had emerged but before completion of the strategy and theoretical justification of the United Peoples Front Against Fascism (i.e., the formation of antifascist alliances between communists and the liberal bourgeoisie).

This latter position, quite familiar in content if not in origin, is most closely identified with Georgi Dimitrov, the famous Bulgarian communist and General Secretary of the Communist International. It was worked out at about the same time as Dutt's thesis and was first presented to and adopted by the Seventh Comintern Congress in Moscow in 1935. It then became the official line of the international communist movement and guided communist parties throughout the world in the fight against fascism from 1935 to the present. In its wake, Dutt's work was unfortunately forgotten.

Dimitrov's position clearly contradicts Dutt's, and from a Leninist perspective it represents the victory of a social democratic line over a communist line, a Menshevik line over a Bolshevik line, an empiricist approach over a dialectical approach. It not only represented the victory of a perspective that had been rejected previously by the Soviet Communist Party but also generated enormous

theoretical and strategic errors which have plagued the international left ever since.

The theoretical underpinnings of the United Peoples Front Against Fascism—also known as the Popular Front in France and Spain—are as follows:

1. The bourgeoisie is divided into two opposed camps: The right (i.e., reactionaries, conservatives) and the left (i.e., liberals, humanitarians, progressives and laborites).

2. Though we do live in an age of imperialism, imperialist contradictions only lead to war and to fascism when the right wing of the bourgeoisie dominates the left wing of the bourgeoisie and succeeds in taking over the state.

3. Fascism, with its attacks on minorities and communists, ultimately represents the political practices of the right when it obtains state power.

4. It is within the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie and communists, therefore, to unite to oppose the right and thereby prevent war and fascism.

5. To forge this union, communists should replace their call for the dictatorship of the proletariat with support of a bourgeois democratic platform. The working class should be rallied, not to fight fascism for the purpose of establishing its own rule, but to support the broad "national interest." In other words, nationalism rather than communism should be presented as the slogan around which the working class is mobilized to fight fascism. Why unity with the liberals? Because the working class is too weak to defeat fascism by itself. This is the dominant aspect of Dimitrov's line.

6. Those who oppose the line of participation in alliances with the liberal bourgeoisie because it is an abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat should be attacked as *ultra-leftists*. In other words, *communists who remain communists are no longer communists*.

Dutt's argument, on the other hand, extends rather than denies key Leninist principles:

1. Imperialism exacerbates class contradictions within both major and minor capitalist states. These contradictions, however severe, do not in themselves spontaneously cause capitalist societies to "self-destruct." Capitalist crises may cause rebellions and militant trade unionism, but neither of these will destroy capitalism without the organized leadership of revolutionary communists. It is concerted political struggle, not eco-

nomic contradictions, which will ultimately end capitalism.

2. Inter-imperialist rivalry inevitably leads to war between the major imperialist powers. Its class interest inevitably forces the entire bourgeoisie to support a policy of war.

3. Social democrats work in concert with the bourgeoisie to defeat the one force which could transform these crises into the defeat of capitalism and hence prevent war: a communist-led workers' movement. Whether it is their sparking of reform movements to thwart militancy, or redbaiting, or calling on the direct police power of the bourgeois state, the social democrats have a long and consistent history of anticommunism. In the long run, they are an equally treacherous, though less obvious, enemy of the working class.

In applying these principles to the phenomenon of fascism, Dutt observes that fascism is the only policy available to the bourgeoisie for overcoming the internal and external contradictions of capitalism. In his analysis, fascism is *not* an aberration of capitalism (e.g., a revolution of the radical right), nor one of several logical outcomes of capitalism (e.g., the victory of the conservative bourgeoisie), nor the political expression of mass sentiments (e.g., working class and middle class authoritarianism). Rather, fascism is the logical culmination of monopoly capitalism decaying in the age of imperialism. To prevent economic collapse and political defeat at home and in the empire, capitalists—of all stripes—have no alternative but to fall back on domestic totalitarianism and foreign war. As forces for revolution build at home, and anticolonial or inter-imperialist wars emerge abroad, the bourgeoisie hopes this strategy will allow it to eliminate all barriers to maximum exploitation of the working class and full mobilization for total war. The bourgeoisie proceeds by surreptitiously fostering conservative, nationalist movements which also mouth anticapitalist slogans. Once in power, however, they faithfully serve their masters' interests. It is these movements which allow the bourgeoisie to contain the working class while the plans for war are set and implemented. In essence, then, *fascism is the direct dictatorship of the bourgeoisie unfettered by the constraints of liberal bourgeois democracy or trade unionism*.

Dutt's point about the *creation* of fascist movements *from above* cannot be overemphasized since it bears so heavily on the correct understand-

ing of the growth of right-wing movements in periods when economic crisis intensifies because of inter-imperialist contradictions. Evidently, some bourgeois elements see the inevitability of war and the necessity of fascism earlier than others, and they prepare for both accordingly. In Europe, no fascist movement became a spontaneous mass movement, or achieved state power, without the active intervention of the country's ruling class and its foreign colleagues. In some cases, police and army intelligence operatives (e.g., Hitler) created prefascist movements, and in all cases the movements were given substantial secret funding, liberal "exposés" in major newspapers and sympathetic treatment by the legal system. In Italy and Germany, most of the shock troops were not volunteers rallied to the cause of extreme national chauvinism, but unemployed World War I veterans hired by the hundreds of thousands into private armies. And, when the working class became aware of the danger of these prefascist and paramilitary groups and organized defensive operations, the force of the state—which either ignored the fascists or gave them gentle treatment—was used to physically stop the left. Dutt particularly singles out the role of social democratic officials in Austria and the Weimar Republic in these acts of repression.

We would further add that the theory of fascism which attributes its rise to the spontaneous frustration of the middle classes actually borrows a leaf from the functionalist analysis offered by fascists. They claim that the nation rallies to its own defense when it undergoes crisis, and that fascism is the natural expression of this concern.

In evaluating the contributions of liberals and social democrats to this process, Dutt argues that not only did their continued misdirection of workers' movements prevent the revolution from succeeding in Europe after World War I, and hence allow inter-imperialist rivalries to well up into war again, but their innumerable reform efforts produced the swollen state apparatus required by fascists to fully monopolize economic and political life. He offers no surprise in noting that many fascist leaders had their origins within social democratic parties—specifically Dolfuss in Austria, Mussolini in Italy and Mosely in England. He views it as the logical end point of their anticommunism.

In our view, Dutt did not draw enough attention to the ideological sphere—that is, the

role of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism in the building of fascism and the waging of war. Fascist movements did not simply win on the streets; they derived much of their power from a systematic and highly functional ideology. Dutt views fascist ideology as eclectic, while we view it as the single, cogent worldview which those movements could present as an alternative to Marxism. For example, the racist myth of Aryanism studiously developed by German academics from earlier work in England, France and the United States provides not only a rationale for foreign wars (i.e., Social Darwinism at the international level) but also a pretext for domestic repression and even the extermination of minorities and dissidents. This is because fascists hold "the unity of the nation" as sacred and, therefore, reason that anything which blocks its path can be justly eliminated. Class struggle is liquidated and social equilibrium regained, quite literally *at the barrel of a gun*.

The Question of the Liberal Bourgeoisie

As we have indicated, one of the salient features of Dutt's explanation of fascism is his interpretation of the role of the liberal bourgeoisie. Unlike Dimitrov, who restricts the class basis of fascism in his definition, Dutt sees the liberal bourgeoisie as instrumental in creating the fascist state. And, although Dutt was apparently not alone in his interpretation of bourgeois liberalism (Gramsci and Bordiga may have shared similar views), Dimitrov's interpretation prevailed then and now. Thus it is quite opportune to comment on the relationship between bourgeois liberalism and fascism.

However, before we can comment on the relationship between liberalism and fascism, we must know what these two terms mean. Dutt's definition of fascism has already been given. How should we define "liberalism"? Any definition of a social phenomenon should be both political and dialectical. That is, it should express both the class basis and the contradictions of the thing being defined. What, then, are the contradictions which together make up the political practice of liberalism?

A reading of classical liberal theory (J.S. Mill, Thomas Green) shows us that two opposing ideas make up liberal doctrine. First is the notion of individual freedom, the idea that every citizen

should enjoy basic civil liberties. Second, however, is the idea that the state should regulate social order and extend its powers as far as necessary in order to ensure social stability. This latter idea seems to be the dominant aspect of liberal theory and practice.

Far too many people on the left appear to take liberalism at face value—i.e., as a bulwark protecting civil liberties, as a practice of extending or building state power to protect individual freedoms. We should note, however, that the main concern of liberalism is to expand state power in order to regulate the social system. Even liberals admit that social stability is their first priority; democracy comes later. For example, the classical theorist, J.S. Mill, had quite an elitist view of the masses and viewed people as ignorant and, hence, unable to make politically informed decisions. The state must guide them. Today, we find contemporary American liberals such as Samuel P. Huntington talking about “democratic distemper”—that is, how modern democracy has become unworkable because there is too much individual freedom and how, consequently, democracy and civil liberties should be curtailed in order to preserve social stability. Similarly, we hear Robert Heilbroner, Felix Rohatyn, and the emerging school of post-Keynesian economists telling us (typically in the *New York Review of Books*) that since there is no tendency toward equilibrium in a capitalist market economy, the state must intervene to assure economic and political order.

Now, any time the state does anything, we must ask: in whose class interest does it act? If the state is to guarantee social stability at the price of democracy, which class is having its democracy eliminated? Of course, for Leninists the answer to the question is obvious. However, we emphasize the point because the widely accepted Dimitrov line is premised on the claim that the fight against fascism transcends the class conflict between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie.

How Do Liberals Act in Political And Economic Crises?

Even more instructive than what liberal theory says is the *behavior* of liberals in times of crisis. If fascism is the response of the bourgeoisie to severe political-economic crisis, then the

behavior of liberals in times of crisis should give us a measure of their affinity (or lack of it) for fascist policies. Bourgeois democracies contain a number of proto-fascist elements: racism, statism, terrorism, anticommunism, anti-labor policies. The tendency of liberal capitalists to use these elements freely in times of crisis is instructive. Although we do not have time to write a history of twentieth-century America, let us recall the position of liberals regarding repression since World War I.

Liberals and Racism

It was the famous liberal, Woodrow Wilson, who said that the pro-Ku Klux Klan film, *Birth of a Nation*, was like “history written with lightning” and who urged the widespread screening of the film. And, during his administration, black troops who fought to “make the world safe for democracy” did so in segregated units and then came home to beatings and lynchings. During the KKK revival of the 1920's, many Democrats thought it politically opportune to join that terroristic goon squad. For many years northern Democrats openly aligned themselves with segregationist Dixiecrats.

It was under the regimes of liberals Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman (and after Truman, Republican Eisenhower) that more than 1½ million Mexican immigrants and Mexican-American citizens were deported to Mexico.

Finally let us not forget Executive Order 9066, issued by F.D.R. and enforced in California under the administration of liberal Governor Earl Warren. Although U.S. intelligence reported that there was “no Japanese problem,” the roundup into concentration camps was ordered anyway. Under liberal democracy, Japanese-Americans suffered not only physical hardship but also social stigma, ruined careers and incredible financial losses.

Liberals and Terrorism

As regards domestic policy, terror has long been approved and used by liberals. Much of the racism mentioned in the preceding paragraphs was terroristic. We might also recall domestic police surveillance, the COINTELPRO effort and the use of fear-inspiring investigative committees, such as HUAC and HISC, which operated equally well under liberal Democratic and conservative

oppose the drive toward war and fascism. Those who talked of social democracy but who aided the bourgeoisie in their efforts were thus *social fascists*. Dutt devoted quite a few remarks to the topic of social fascism. We will briefly summarize his thoughts.

According to Dutt, social democrats help prepare the way for fascism through both ideological and practical assistance. The strategies followed by social democrats include the following:

1. Abandonment or corruption of Marxism (such as the CPUSA giving up revolution for electoral politics).

2. Abandonment of internationalism; espousal of patriotism (such as AFL-CIO cooperation with the CIA and Cesar Chavez's attacks on immigrant labor).

3. Anticommunism: communists are rejected because they allegedly split the working class with their sectarianism. (Union bureaucrats openly assisted the government in the purge of communists from the unions after World War II; today, communist organizers within unions are called "splitters" and "dual unionists.")

4. The distortion of "socialism" or the use of vaguely socialist phrases to disguise their service to monopoly capital (such as Winpisinger of IAM advocating socialism to fine-tune capitalism, or Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, which seeks more democratic and social control of business investment).

5. The advocacy of class collaboration with the unification of working class organizations with the state—such as Victor Gotbaum of AFSCME persuading union members and other labor leaders to accept wage freezes, cuts in benefits, and the firing of 60,000 city workers in order to help New York City through its fiscal crisis. Gotbaum is the man Felix Rohatyn, head of "Big MAC," described as "probably my closest personal friend." Or Douglas Fraser negotiating a UAW contract with Volkswagen which paid workers \$1.00 per hour less than at the Big Three plants.

Social democrats may be thought of as the *fifth column* of the fascist movement, operating within the working class. They work to disorganize the proletariat by preaching opposition to class struggle, expelling militant elements, breaking "unauthorized" strikes, ignoring racism and sexism, attacking immigrant labor, and accepting long-term contracts with no-strike pledges.

Current Political Trends in the United States: Right-Wing Extremism or Prelude to Fascism?

It would be trite to observe that antidemocratic movements and fascist terror squads are growing once again. The important question is: Why? Are these movements simply the political accompaniment to the usual recurrent political-economic crises of capitalism? We know that the Bolshevik Revolution and the organizing efforts of American socialists within a labor force swollen by returning veterans of World War I called forth the Red Scare, the Palmer raids and the growth of the KKK. We know that the 1930's Depression called forth the "repatriation" and Father Coughlin, the Silvershirts and war. We know that the Soviet victory over Hitler, the Chinese Revolution and the growth of the American Communist Party called forth the Truman era purge—popularly misnamed "McCarthyism." We know that the civil rights and anti-war movements called forth widespread use of COINTELPRO and the use of National Guard and U.S. Army troops to put down open rebellion.

Is the current crisis of American capitalism-imperialism more or less an "ordinary" crisis? That is, can it be met or solved without resort to full-blown fascism and war? Or do we have an extraordinary crisis of capitalism—a crisis which reveals a capitalist society in "extreme decay," as Dutt would say? We have no crystal ball and cannot say for sure. However, we would suggest that *in this crisis there are qualitative differences* which point in the direction of war and fascism. Consider the following facts:

1. The state bureaucracy is now a swollen behemoth, primarily due to the reformist approach of the "good" bourgeoisie and its left supporters. Massive state control of the economy and unimaginable police repression are now, for the first time, technically possible and increasingly prevalent.

2. The United States is an imperial power in decline and, as we know from Korea and Vietnam, the country's ruling class is not a graceful loser. The "allies" out-perform the American economy by almost all indicators. Most recently, the Japanese joined the Swiss, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Germans in exceeding the real U.S. per capita income. The gap is increasing.

As for the Russians, despite their economic inefficiencies, especially in agriculture, their

military achievements and geopolitical gains are traumatizing most of the American ruling class.

3. Bourgeois democracy is on shaky legs. Poll after poll reveals massive disillusionment with electoral politics. Election after election has a lower voter turnout and, to prop up the facade, the bourgeoisie now has its state dole out money directly to its candidates. The realignment of bourgeois political parties, suggested by left-liberals like Barry Commoner and Douglas Fraser through the proposed Citizen's Party, is not only a will-o'-the-wisp, it is also a well-timed effort to head off non-electoral (read: *nonbourgeois*) politics.

4. Keynesian economic props, such as deficit spending and interest rate manipulation, have been ineffective for nearly a decade.

5. Bureaucratic pretexts now exist through which minorities can be blamed for hard times. Ineffective affirmative action programs have been turned on themselves very effectively to create the myth of "reverse discrimination." Groups as seemingly disparate as the KKK and the Anti-Defamation League now mouth the same rhetoric of whites having to pay the price for black gains.

In conclusion, at least five simultaneous, all new, conditions now exist which put the examination of right-wing resurgence in a new light. *Where others see a repetitive American cycle, we suggest the prelude to fascism.*

To be fair to our readers, a balanced assessment of the likelihood of fascism requires a detailed analysis of the United States economy and polity in both its domestic and inter-imperialist aspects. Specifically, it would focus on two interrelated questions:

1. The question of the current economic crisis in its most important aspects: the falling rate of profit, overproduction, the viability of Keynesian policy, and so forth.

2. The question of inter-imperialist rivalry: is war necessary as the solution to the current crisis? If so, do Lenin's theses on imperialism and war still hold in the 1980's? What is the real relationship between the USA and the U.S.S.R.? Is the Soviet Union now a state capitalist and imperialist power?

The answers to these questions bear directly upon the applicability of the Dutt thesis to the current U.S. situation. The analysis which would give us the answers to these questions is beyond the limits of this article. However, we do wish to

suggest that the Dutt thesis merits serious consideration and should be used in Marxist analysis of the contemporary United States.

Although we cannot offer a detailed analysis of the current political-economic situation, consider the trends in the following areas:

1. Economics: in the current recession, unemployment figures are approaching Depression era levels, the housing industry has come to a near standstill, the auto industry and its feeder industries are still on the ropes, and wage cuts and inflation have reduced real income and living standards for millions of Americans. Economist Robert Heilbroner urges the government to manage the economy to insure some sort of stability. Banker Felix Rohatyn urges a nationwide "austerity" program and a new social contract between business and labor in order to effectively rebuild American industry.

2. Racial and ethnic minorities are once again being subjected to "blame the victim" ideology. The ruling class has mounted both ideological and physical assaults on minorities. Ideologically, they have promulgated sociobiology, the myth of reverse discrimination because of affirmative action, and the notion of a hereditary basis for intelligence. Physically, the government now has joined the anti-busing effort—thus opting for segregation. Furthermore, federal and local officials are known to aid the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis in their efforts to gain publicity and in their attacks on anti-Klan organizers and activities.

3. Social services in health, welfare, education and housing are rapidly being cut back.

4. There is a new effort to rebuild patriotism and to prepare the population for war. Recall Carter's consideration of the possibility of a pre-emptive nuclear strike against the U.S.S.R. as a strategic necessity; or Rostow's comment at Congressional hearings that nuclear war was not unthinkable since the human race is "very resilient." Both the Carter and Reagan regimes have heightened anti-Soviet policy through their public statements and trade embargoes.

None of these trends (taken separately or together) "proves" that fascism is "on the way." However, if the economic crisis is severe enough, the structural conditions (large state bureaucracy, widespread political disbelief and apathy toward the bourgeois democratic government, the existence of goon squads) would permit a move in that direction by the bourgeoisie.

Strategies for Fighting Fascism: United Fronts or Revolution?

The question of fighting fascism gives practical significance to the theoretical debate between the Dutt and Dimitrov theses. Rather than discuss hypothetical strategies in the abstract, let us discuss concrete choices. The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan has led to the development by progressive groups of two differing strategies for defeating this terror squad. Interestingly, one strategy appears to be based on Dimitrov while the other appears to follow Dutt. Let us compare the two.

The Dimitrov Strategy

According to this strategy, the fight against the Klan should: 1) Make use of united fronts with all willing leftist, social democratic and liberal organizations; 2) rely on the state to effectively (violently) suppress the Klan; 3) conduct a widespread education program on the danger of the KKK to civil liberties and democracy; and 4) organize nonconfrontational counter-demonstrations, peaceful rallies and public forums.

These are the elements of the strategy of the National Anti-Klan Network (which serves as an umbrella organization for many groups opposing the KKK and Nazis) and its member organizations. The anti-Klan defense advocated by individual groups adopts the elements of a Dimitrov strategy.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, for example, espouses:

a. Nonviolence. "Street brawls have contributed nothing to the solution of the problem of the KKK."

b. Education. "...strengthen education on the substance and application of American democratic values."

c. Reliance on state authorities. "...the answer to the challenge laid down by the Klan's hoodlumism is firm political leadership and strict law enforcement. . . . There is also the need for a greater FBI and Justice Department presence wherever Klan growth and activity present a threat. . . ."

d. Anticommunism. Most of the people opposing the Klan with physical violence "have been members of far-left groups seeking to exploit the issue of right-wing extremism in

order to strengthen the forces of left-wing extremism. . . . Their aim in confronting the Klan, clearly, is not to strengthen American constitutional democracy, but to weaken it in order to further their own political goals." (All quotes are from the ADL's newsletter, *Facts*, November 1979, Vol. 25, No. 3.)

Such a strategy as this is bankrupt. First, the price of the united front is high: you must trade socialism for nationalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat for American constitutional democracy. Second, the concern for civil liberty and free speech reveals an extreme naiveté. More often than not the Klan is protected by such a concern. For example, the *KLANWATCH Intelligence Report* (March 1981) reported that after Florida police arrested Klansman B.W. Robinson at a Pensacola rally for refusing to remove his mask, "the ACLU handled Robinson's appeal on the ground the wearing of the mask was a symbolic expression of speech. The court ruled that the [anti-mask] law was too broad." Third, the reliance on state authorities and law enforcement officers to handle the Klan simply lets the bourgeoisie have free rein in directing the activities of their terror squads without fear of working class reprisals. If anything, dependence upon authorities of the state means that we can depend on them to protect the Klan and to attack militant anti-Klan forces. Recall, for example, the Klan shootings of anti-Klan demonstrators in Greensboro, North Carolina, on November 3, 1979:

- Police gave information to a Klan representative about the starting point of the anti-KKK march.

- Police told Communist Workers Party demonstrators to leave their guns at home.

- On the day of the march, police sat two blocks away.

- A police informer led the Klan caravan into Greensboro on the day of the shootings.

- An agent of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms attended planning meetings before the November 3 demonstration.

- A "conciliation" team from the Community Relations Service (CRS) of the United States Justice Department came to Greensboro after the November 3 shootings. "The team's mission, ostensibly, was to help maintain civil order, but the actual effect of its activity was to sow seeds of dissension among the organizations trying to provide a nonviolent alternative to the CWP's

armed funeral march."³ (This is the same CRS which the Anti-Defamation League has praised for its "useful contribution" to race relations in southern communities.) Although pressure was growing in Greensboro for the police and city officials to explain their failure to stop the Klan, "within two days, following the arrival of the CRS 'conciliators,' the focus of attention shifted [away from police and city officials] to the violent rhetoric of the Communist Workers Party. . . . Increasingly, anyone critical of the Klan murders or the city's handling of the event was linked to the CWP. . . ." ⁴ The net effect of this activity was to destroy unity among various anti-Klan forces, thereby sabotaging a number of planned marches and crippling future anti-KKK efforts.

So much for reliance on state authorities. Given historical facts, the Dimitrov strategy of the National Anti-Klan Network will backfire: the left and the working class have already begun to suffer.

The Dutt Strategy

Generally speaking, a strategy against fascism which bases itself on Dutt contains at least six elements:

1. No united front from above. No collaboration with any social democratic or liberal organization.
2. Internationalism. Patriotism only equals class collaboration.
3. Multiracial unity within organizations. This differs from the tactic of separate, nationalist ethnic organizations working together on an ad hoc basis. Without intra-organizational integration, the fight against racism is considerably weakened since minorities remain divided into their own ethnic enclaves and group ghettos.
4. An *illegal underground* party organizing in key industries. If the ruling class does move toward fascism, parties unprepared for illegal, secret work will be paralyzed.
5. As the ruling class prepares for war, communists should prepare for *civil war* by organizing within the armed forces.
6. The use of *mass force* or violence against fascist squads. This tactic is between the extremes of adventurism/terrorism and pacifism/avoidance. Terrorism places no faith in the working class (hence the reliance on individual adventurism).

Avoidance and pacifistic united fronts place no faith in the working class (hence the reliance on state authorities). The Klan will not go away if we ignore it. Confronting Klansmen with mass force impedes the ability of the ruling class to employ them as terrorists against us. Few organizations have adopted such a program. One example is the Committee Against Racism.

Conclusion

In closing, we note several questions and issues relevant to developing a fuller understanding of fascism—questions which we did not have time to touch on:

1. What is the role of the petty bourgeoisie and middle strata in the development and operation of fascism?
2. Does fascism need a mass base?
3. Why has Britain (an imperialist power in decline) escaped fascism? How does this fact bear upon R. Palme Dutt's theory of fascism?
4. What is the theoretical and practical significance of conceiving of fascism as Bonapartism or as Caesarism?

More important than the above questions, however, are certain issues central to our argument which need further clarification. By way of self-criticism, we recognize that the following topics need more elaboration:

1. Liberals. Our discussion should differentiate liberals according to their class bases and political functions. We need to distinguish among monopoly capital liberals, liberal intellectuals (policy analysts and college professors), ACLU types, trade-union liberals, social democrats and the liberal leadership of various ethnic organizations and movements.
2. The NAKN program. We need a more precise and up-to-date critique of the policies of the National Anti-Klan Network—especially its anticommunism, coalitional strategy and reliance on state authorities.
3. Nationalism. Our essay needs a discussion of the effects and causes of nationalism within ethnic organizations and movements.
4. Coalitional Strategy. We should suggest in *concrete* terms how to devise coalitional strategy, given Dutt's criticism of the United Front program.
5. The state. We need to clarify how the bourgeoisie uses the state as its executive committee. Our essay certainly implies a very *instrumental*

conception of the bourgeois state—a view which some will find too vulgar or simplistic. A complete discussion would focus on the questions of the relative autonomy of the state as a distinct entity within society and the role of bourgeois and fascist ideologies (as distinct from state coercion) as causal variables in the development of fascism.

Our neglect of these issues notwithstanding, we have attempted to offer a contribution to the question of fascism by indicating that the proper response to fascism ultimately rests on a correct theoretical understanding of the class forces which produce fascism. We have hoped to show that the debate between Dutt and Dimitrov—essentially one of theory—is no less relevant today than it was in the 1930's and 1940's. This debate is furthermore the only way to resolve the question of tactics. That is why we have proposed

that Dutt's line of class analysis and militant class struggle—still sound—should guide us in opposing the current "right-wing" resurgence. Capitalism, and not one branch of the capitalist class, remains the enemy and should therefore be the target of the left's political activity.

NOTES

1. Felix Rohatyn, "The Coming Emergency and What Can Be Done About It." *New York Review of Books* (December 4, 1980), p. 20.
2. Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (London, New Left Books, 1974), pp. 97-100.
3. Pat Bryant, "Justice vs. the Movement." *Southern Exposure* 8, 2, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32.

Comment on "Liberalism and Fascism: The Dutt Thesis"

Richard Platkin and Charles O'Connell's discussion of the "Dutt thesis" is a provocative analysis of fascism from a committed working class perspective, and a strong call to direct action. In opposition to liberal calls for unity and respect for universal civil rights, they propose "the use of *mass force* or violence against fascist squads" (i.e., the Klan and the paramilitary Right) and "... no united front from above. No collaboration with any social democratic or liberal organization." Their position deserves comment and serious debate because it highlights the necessary dilemma faced by all Marxists fighting right-wing repression, whether in Latin America, Iran, the United States or elsewhere in the capitalist world. On the one hand, the working class needs allies among the oppressed in a wide, popularly based struggle against repressive regimes. On the other hand, the ultimate goal of any class-conscious struggle is not to restore bourgeois democracy, but to establish socialist democracy in the interests of the working class, not the so-called progressive bourgeoisie, nor the petty bourgeoisie of bureaucrats and managers.

Historically, liberals have had no difficulty with this dilemma; they simply deny it. In their seductive propaganda about unity and democracy (in their class interests), they liquidate the goal of socialism and revolutionary Marxism. Is there any reason to believe that the anticommunist liberals of the 1980's will behave differently from the German social democrats of the 1920's and 1930's or the American liberals during the McCarthy era? Platkin and O'Connell know the history of liberals vs. the Left, and they also document the recent record. However, they tend to eliminate the other side of the dilemma: the need for unity. They imply that the U.S. working class can directly smash the paramilitary Right and march to socialism without alliances, without even trying to win over progressives and liberals to the cause of socialism. Though guilty of idealism and dogmatism in their application of theory to concrete practice, they nevertheless contribute to the Left debate by analyzing the capitalist ties between liberalism and fascism. Their class

analysis, like Dutt's, has an important strategic lesson for the Left today. The Left's answer to the rising Right should not be a retreat to the right—toward an already bankrupt liberalism—but a movement to the left, a forceful espousal of socialism and Marxism.

One impressive part of Platkin and O'Connell's discussion is the revival of Dutt's class analysis of fascism and its application to the United Front and Popular Front strategies which still dominate Left thinking about anti-Right struggles. According to the authors, these strategies assume the viability of an alliance between the working class and the "progressive bourgeoisie" against the "reactionary bourgeoisie," the presumed font of fascism. Following Dutt, they argue that this strategy is based on an incorrect class analysis. There is no good bourgeoisie, no good sector of capitalism. Fascism is not the policy of one stratum of the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie, but the outcome of finance capital at a stage of decay, economic crisis and inter-imperialist rivalry. Although presented rather simplistically, the direction of such an analysis is classically Marxist—fascism is viewed as the structural outcome of capitalism as a whole in the context of world imperialism.

Platkin and O'Connell also raise the important question of the relation between liberalism and fascism within the capitalist system. Here they build on another part of the Dutt thesis. Dutt wrote that "the laying bare of the civil war at the root of class-society, the explosion of all the illusions of peace and legality—that is, above all, the historical role of fascism."¹ He meant that fascism not only undermines the "democratic" apparatus of liberalism and reformism, it also exposes the role of liberals and social democrats in building the statist foundations of fascism and in weakening the working class through an institutional web of class collaboration and anticommunism. In other words, Marxists cannot depend on liberals in their fight against fascism and capitalism. Platkin and O'Connell extend Dutt's analysis of liberal and fascist ideologies and they update the recent record of liberals in

perpetuating racism, terrorism and statism in the United States.

These basic points are clearly argued. Yet, on the negative side, there is a degree of dogmatism in Platkin and O'Connell's presentation of Dutt's theory and its application to the concrete conditions of the United States. No doubt, part of the problem can be traced to the brief and provisional character of their analysis. Nevertheless, some of the problems seem to be built into their method and approach.

Dogmatism appears in the slight distortion and narrowing simplification of what Dutt actually said, a sin of omission. Certainly, Dutt never proposed an alliance with liberals and social democrats. Nevertheless, in the preface to the second edition of his book, written as the struggle over fascism deepened, he clearly called for unity: "The supreme task now is to build up the widest *United Front against Fascism and War*. . . . The all-inclusive united working-class front, drawing in its wake the mass of petit-bourgeois and unorganised elements, requires to be built up in every country."²

We can certainly quarrel about the precise meaning of "united front"; however, Platkin and O'Connell ignore the strategic point, wide unity, the necessary part of the dilemma facing Marxists struggling for socialism under conditions of right-wing repression. Today, as Marlene Dixon argues in her article in this issue of *Contemporary Marxism*, the strategic problem is still to find a way (fronts, for lack of a better term) to achieve broad unity while preserving the integrity and autonomy of working class parties and organizations.

Platkin and O'Connell also ignore, by their own admission, another aspect of the Dutt thesis. So eager are they to sharpen the struggle between worker and capitalist that they ignore the petty bourgeoisie and middle strata, although they are central to Dutt's definition of the social conditions favoring the growth of fascism. These conditions include the following:

- 1) intensification of the economic crisis and the class struggle;
- 2) widespread disillusionment with parliamentarism;
- 3) the existence of a wide petty-bourgeoisie, intermediate strata, slum proletariat, and sections of the workers

under capitalist influence;

- 4) the absence of an independent class-conscious leadership of the main body of the working class.³

According to Dutt, the petty bourgeoisie and intermediate strata have no independent political role except as allies of either the working class or the capitalists. They are profoundly affected by economic crisis and come to the political stage when the working class has been weakened by the liberal/social democratic coalition of labor and capital. Left out politically from this coalition and resentful of being taxed for the welfare of the working class (employed and, especially, unemployed), they can easily be mobilized by capital against the working class in a fascist program. All this sounds very familiar and very modern. Surely, the petty bourgeoisie cannot be ignored in analyzing the contemporary situation; they are part of the alliance which the Reaganites are making today with the so-called "silent majority."

Thus, the dogmatic character of Platkin and O'Connell's discussion rests on a simplification of Dutt's own theory, which is not itself characterized by great subtlety. Their dogmatism is also traceable to theoreticism, the lack of a concrete analysis of their central topics, fascism and liberalism. There are many distinct and different regional and historical varieties of liberalism and of right-wing political formations. Reducing everything to a formulized definition of "fascism," the authors too easily assume that classical fascism has arrived in the United States. Can we really equate what Bertram Gross calls "friendly fascism" with classical fascism? While there is every reason to share Platkin and O'Connell's sense of danger and urgency, we need to deal with the situation by having a concrete understanding of the differences between classical European fascism and the Right in the United States, to say nothing of an understanding of the differences between classical fascism and the many "exceptional states" and military dictatorships that have arisen outside of the most developed centers of capitalism. We simply cannot derive a concrete theory and strategy for our times from one simplified theory of fascism in general.

These criticisms are intended to advance the analysis which Platkin and O'Connell boldly propose. Criticisms aside, the strong point of

their essay needs to be made strongly today, as many Leftists are tempted to compromise with the Right. Liberalism is not the solution to the Right but part of the problem which got us into the contemporary crisis. Now more than ever, we need Marxist and not liberal solutions to problems posed from a Marxist viewpoint, and that is what Platkin and O'Connell attempt: "the proper response to fascism ultimately rests on a

correct theoretical understanding of the class forces which produce fascism."

NOTES

1. R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (San Francisco, Proletarian Publishers, 1974), pp. 302-03.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 256.