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Antifascist Movement

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Antifascist Movement

born in the early 1920's, when the bourgeoisie in a number of countries began to resort to fascism to preserve their domination, which was threatened by the revolutionary upsurge that began after World War I and the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The leading force in the antifascist movement, which embraced broad masses of toilers, was the working class, which took an active part in the antifascist struggle in a number of countries from the first appearance of fascism in the political arena. The working class of the Soviet Union, which was the only section of the international proletariat in power until the end of World War II, constantly gave active assistance to the antifascists of capitalist countries. Analysis of the class roots of fascism and of the trends and methods in its activities was important for the antifascist movement, and this analysis was reflected in summary reports of the Central Committee and resolutions of the congresses of the CPSU. The successes of the Soviet socialist state in economic and cultural construction and the world historical victories of the USSR in the struggle against fascism on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–45, inspired participants in the antifascist movement throughout the world. From the moment of inception of the international antifascist movement, the Soviet Union was its recognized stronghold.

In response to the fascist offensive, the antifascist movement unfolded in Italy in 1921. Beginning with antifascist strikes and demonstrations, the Italian workers later moved to armed resistance against the Blackshirts. The high point of the antifascist movement in Italy in this period was the bloody battles that accompanied the general national strike declared in August 1922. The movement did not cease with the establishment of the Fascist regime in Italy (October 1922); it became ever more active in time. As early as 1924 the Italian Communist Party, which stood in the forefront of the antifascist movement, called for the unification of all enemies of fascism.

The antifascist movement also developed in a number of other countries where terrorist dictatorial regimes were established (Hungary and Bulgaria). The September Antifascist Uprising of 1923 in Bulgaria enriched the experience of the antifascist movement in other countries. The antifascist movement arose in Germany in 1920. It was directed against the National Socialist Party and other extreme right-wing terrorist groups. Somewhat later (from 1926) a movement unfolded in Poland against Pilsudski's "cleaning" regime.

The onslaught of fascism in a number of countries confronted democratic forces with the task of developing more effective forms and methods in the antifascist movement. The tactic of a united labor front, first worked out by the Third Comintern Congress (1921) under the guidance of V. I. Lenin, played an important role in the expansion of the antifascist movement. The Fourth Comintern Congress (1922) recognized the organization of resistance to world fascism as one of the most important tasks of communist parties; it pointed to the tactic of a united labor front as the main means of struggle against fascism. A conference of revolutionary workers was held in Frankfurt-am-Main in March 1923. It elected the International Committee for Action Against the Military Threat and Fascism, headed by K. Zetkin, F. Heck-ert, and H. Barbusse. The Third Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (IKKI) in June 1923 devoted much attention to the antifascist movement; K. Zetkin delivered a report on the "Fight Against Fascism." The threat posed by fascism and the means to struggle against it were discussed at the fifth (1924) and sixth (1928) congresses of the Comintern and at the plenums of IKKI.

Viewing the struggle against fascism as the concern of the entire proletariat, the Comintern called upon the communist parties to conduct a policy that would permit the isolation of fascism and the consolidation of the broadest strata of the population against it. However, the activities of a number of communist parties strongly demonstrated a sectarianism that hindered this consolidation and a lack of precision in evaluating the essence of fascism; a denial of the serious distinction between fascism and bourgeois-democratic regimes also took place. In the late 1920's the term "social fascism" came into currency in some documents of the Comintern and the communist parties; it was accepted as a designation for social democracy, a fact that contradicted the definition of fascism as the weapon of the most reactionary forces of the bourgeoisie and which made it more difficult to unite all the democratic forces of the antifascist movement. This mistaken term became widespread during the period of the world economic crisis of 1929–33, at which time the revolutionary movement, entering a new upsurge, again shook the foundations of bourgeois rule in a number of countries, including Germany. In Germany the interests of big capital in establishing a dictatorial regime reinforced the

striving toward the preparation of a revanchist war; meanwhile, the fascists' opportunity to gain mass influence was particularly favorable, thanks to the extensive use of nationalistic demagoguery.

The antifascist movement in Germany was a bright page in the history of the German workers' movement. At the forefront of the movement was the Communist Party of Germany, which made enormous efforts to create a united labor front. The antifascist movement attained maximum scope during those years with the start of a campaign of "Antifascist Action" (1932), during which workers of differing political convictions began to create committees of the united front and self-defense groups in local areas. By the end of 1932 the fascist movement in Germany had fallen into decline under the blows of the working class and all antifascist forces. However, the split in the working class—primarily the result of the reluctance of the leadership of social democracy to cooperate with the communists—impeded the creation of a broad, firm united labor and popular front. The German monopolists exploited this situation to deliver power to Hitler in January 1933.

In its appeal to the workers of all countries on Mar. 5, 1933, IKKI proposed a concrete program for antifascist struggle on the basis of cooperation between the two Internationals, the communist and the socialist. However, the latter, while agreeing in words to negotiations, sabotaged common action. Nonetheless, the communists continued to seek paths toward the creation of a united antifascist front. To this end, the European Antifascist Workers' Congress was convened in Paris in 1933. The congress, which was held in Pleyel Hall, initiated the Pleyel movement, which played a definite role in the development of the antifascist movement. The speeches of G. M. Dimitrov at the Leipzig Trial of 1933 and the international campaign in his defense were important for the mobilization of laboring people in the struggle against fascism.

The antifascist movement included the best representatives of the intelligentsia. The antifascist activities of Soviet cultural figures, in particular M. Gorky, played a large role in the development of the movement. The writers H. Barbusse, R. Rolland, T. Mann, H. Mann, M. Andersen-Nexö, and H. Wells, the artist P. Picasso, and others demonstrated their opposition to fascism. In 1935 the International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture was held in Paris.

The fascists encountered organized, effective resistance in a number of countries. The fascist putsch attempted in France in February 1934 failed because of the decisive actions of the antifascists. In the course of the struggle, antifascist unity was forged among the French working class and subsequently among other strata of the population whose interests did not lie in the establishment of a fascist regime. In 1935 the Popular Front was created in France. It included both communist and socialist parties, as well as leftist bourgeois political organizations. February 1934 was marked by a violent upsurge of the antifascist movement in Austria, where a particular form of clerical fascism was gaining strength. The armed struggle of Austrian workers against the fascists, even though it ended in defeat, was inscribed for all times in the chronicle of the antifascist movement.

The working people of the Soviet Union ardently came to the defense of the victims of fascism and the heroes of the antifascist movement (meetings of solidarity with the antifascists of Austria and Spain were held everywhere in 1934). They collected money to aid the victims of fascism—in 1934, for example, about 1 million shillings was given to the fund to aid Austrian workers. The USSR offered asylum to antifascists: Soviet citizenship was granted to G. M. Dimitrov, who was imprisoned in fascist jails after the Leipzig trial; about 600 Austrian Schutzbundists who had participated in the February battles against the fascists in 1934 emigrated to the Soviet Union. In 1932 about 10 million people belonged to the Soviet section of the International Organization for Aid to the Fighters of the Revolution; one of its most important tasks was to provide aid to victims of fascism.

The resolutions of the Seventh Comintern Congress (July-August 1935) were of exceptional importance to the fate of the antifascist movement. They made the struggle against fascism the center of activity of the communist parties and elaborated the tactics of a united labor and antifascist popular front. These resolutions marked a break with the sectarian errors that had helped the leaders of the socialist parties to sabotage antifascist unity. The importance for the antifascist movement of the victory of socialism in the USSR was noted at that congress. The construction of socialism resulted in the increased international authority of the Soviet Union and the increased importance of its role as a powerful bulwark of the working people in their struggle against fascism and a power actively struggling for the creation of a system of collective security as a means of curbing fascist aggression.

The implementation of the "Trojan horse" tactic proposed by G. M. Dimitrov in his report "On the Offensive of Fascism and the Tasks of the Communist International" was important in stimulating the antifascist movement in countries with fascist regimes. It proposed that antifascists participate in all legal fascist organizations in order to draw the broad masses into the antifascist struggle.

The combination of underground and legal methods of struggle had an especially beneficial influence on the antifascist movement in Italy, where by 1934 the communist and socialist parties had already concluded an agreement on unity of action in the struggle to overthrow the fascist dictatorship. Despite government repression of unprecedented violence, the antifascist movement did not cease in Germany. German antifascists printed and distributed illegal newspapers, pamphlets, and leaflets; they conducted anti-Hitler propaganda in the mass organizations created by the Nazis, exposing the country's frenzied military preparations; and they managed to slow the tempo of work in factories, and so on. The antifascists of the underground were aided greatly by Hitler's enemies outside Germany. Many German émigré communists crossed the border on a number of occasions, obtaining illegal literature and carrying out the instructions of fighters against fascism.

One of the brightest pages of the history of the antifascist movement was the national revolutionary war of the Spanish

people of 1936–39, which was supported by the toilers of many countries. The three-year struggle of Spain's toilers, led by the Communist Party, demonstrated the tremendous power of the antifascist movement, the social goals of which were not limited to crushing fascism but also included profound democratic reforms. During the national revolutionary war, international proletarian solidarity was displayed with tremendous force. The workers of many countries came to the defense of the Spanish Republic in the international brigades (they arrived in Spain from 54 countries); they did not spare their lives in their fight against fascism.

The Spanish antifascists received particularly extensive, all-round aid from the Soviet nation. The Soviet Union aided the Spanish republic with credit and various materials, supplying it with tanks, planes, and other weapons. The volunteers from the Soviet Union who fought in Spain—fliers, tank operators, military advisers, and others—played a significant role in the formation of the people's army and participated directly in a number of military operations. The USSR resolutely defended the interests of the Spanish people in the League of Nations. Thousands of Spanish children who lost their parents during the war found refuge in the USSR. German and Italian intervention and the complicity of the aggressors, proceeding under the cover of the policy of "nonintervention" of the ruling circles of England, France, and the USA, prevented the Spanish antifascist fighters from achieving victory. However, the experience of the antifascist struggle in Spain played a large role in the subsequent development of the antifascist movement. The movement weakened fascism and retarded the military adventures of the fascist states. Nonetheless, it did not prove strong enough to prevent the ringleaders of the fascist bloc from unleashing war for world domination.

World War II initiated a new stage in the history of the antifascist movements. The anti-Hitler coalition that took shape after the Soviet Union entered the war united all states and peoples fighting against the fascist bloc. The USSR bore the main weight of the struggle against the fascist aggressors. The blows delivered by Soviet and also by Allied armed forces against the fascist hordes inspired those fighting against fascism throughout the world. The resistance movement unfolded everywhere as the direct continuation of the antifascist movement of the prewar period. In countries occupied by the fascist aggressors, the resistance was directed not only against the foreign invaders but also against their allies in the persons of local fascists, including the followers of Pétain in France, Quisling in Norway, and other puppets of the German or Italian fascists.

In many countries the strike movement of the proletariat was the most massive form of the resistance movement. Also important were antifascist actions in enterprises working for Hitler's Germany, in transportation, in the distribution of underground antifascist literature, and other activities. In occupied countries, armed partisan struggle against the invaders and their accomplices unfolded. Antifascists in Germany, Italy, Horthy's Hungary, bourgeois-landlord Rumania, and other satellite countries of Hitler's Germany struggled hand in hand with the members of the antifascist movement in occupied countries. Soviet people who had escaped from fascist concentration camps participated in the resistance movement in many European countries. The victories of the Red Army and the struggle of Soviet partisans on Soviet territory temporarily conquered by the fascists had an enormous influence on the development of the movement. Such major events as the armed uprisings in Slovakia (1944), Warsaw (1944), Paris (1944), and Prague (1945) and the armed struggle of Italian toilers against the Italian fascists and Hitlerites, who occupied part of Italy, testify to the scope of the antifascist movement during the war period. In all the countries where the resistance movement unfolded, the working masses, supporting the communist parties, made it their goal not only to reestablish national independence but also to eliminate the internal forces that had given birth to fascism—monopolistic capital and large-scale land ownership. These goals were achieved, however, only in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, where the conditions for creating popular democratic systems developed as a result of the rout of Hitler's Germany, in which the Soviet Union played a decisive part.

The utter defeat of Hitler's Germany and its allies sharply undermined the position of fascism. But capitalist monopolies survived in the Western countries, many war criminals—active Nazis and Italian fascists—remained free or else received light punishment, and a fascist regime continued in Spain. Gradually, these forces renewed their activity, assuming other masks and renovating their phraseology without altering their basic aims. Neofascist organizations arose in Italy (the Italian Social Movement, founded in 1947, and others), West Germany (the National-Democratic Party, founded in 1964, and others), and Austria (the Austrian Freedom Party, founded 1956, and others); in 1961 a terrorist military fascist organization known as the OAS was created in France; in the USA efforts have been made to consolidate the extreme right-wing movement, which is close to fascism.

The response was a new upsurge in the antifascist movement, which inflicted a number of telling defeats on the neo-fascists in Italy; in France the workers' and democratic movements forced the OAS to break off its activity. The West German democrats have struggled stubbornly against the serious threat of neofascism, which intensified after the birth of the National-Democratic Party, but in the Federal Republic of Germany the antifascist movement was confronted with particularly difficult conditions because of the support given the neo-Nazis by influential circles and emergency laws. The workers of Greece have increasingly resisted the extreme reactionary forces that established a military fascist dictatorship in 1967. The struggle of Spanish democrats against Franco's regime has been intensifying. For the antifascist movement as a whole, the outlook since World War II has been incomparably more favorable than that of the prewar period. The partisans of democracy have become considerably stronger in the present era, when the world system of socialism has been transformed into the decisive factor of social development. The correlation of forces in the world arena continues to change to the advantage of socialism and the workers' and national liberation movement.

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