

Anti-fascism: formula for confusion - Bilan



This article from Bilan, the journal of the Italian communist left in exile in France and Belgium, examines what they consider the disorienting and stifling effect on the proletarian movement, of co-operation with bourgeois forces (liberals and reformist-socialists) in the name of 'anti-fascism'. Bilan argue that the result of such collaboration is the moderation/liquidation of the working-class as a revolutionary force, the co-option of its organs of struggle, and the dissipation of the movement, ultimately taking the view that 'anti-fascism' is self-defeating.

In the ebb of the revolution, the present situation is very likely to be more confused than any before it. This is the result, on the one hand, of the counter-revolutionary development of all the bases that the proletariat conquered in bitter struggle after the war (the Russian state, the 3rd International), and on the other, of the workers' inability to oppose this development with an ideological and revolutionary front of resistance. The workers have reacted through struggle, and sometimes with magnificent battles (Austria) to the combination of this phenomenon and the brutal offensive of capitalism, oriented towards the formation of alliances for war. But these battles have failed to shake the power of centrism, the only mass political organisation, and one which has henceforth gone over to the forces of the world counter-revolution.

In such a moment of defeat, confusion is only a result obtained by capitalism, incorporating the workers' state and centrism for the needs of its own preservation, orienting them onto the same terrain occupied since 1914 by the insidious forces of social-democracy, the principal agent of the disintegration of the masses' consciousness and spokesman for the slogans of proletarian defeat and capitalist victory.

In this article, we will examine a typical confusionist formula: something that is called – even amongst workers who consider themselves on the left – "anti-fascism".

Our aim here is not to analyse the situation in countries like France or Belgium (where the problem is posed especially acutely), to determine whether or not a fascist attack is imminent; nor will we examine the idea that a perspective is opening of a spread of fascism to every country. Moreover, we will not consider here the theoretical problems linked to the significance of fascism, or to the attitude that the proletariat should adopt towards democratic institutions in the event of a fascist attack. We will study all these questions in later articles. For the purposes of clarity, we will limit ourselves here to one problem: anti-fascism and the struggle front that it is supposedly possible to create around this slogan.

It is elementary – or rather it used to be – to say that before engaging in a class battle, it is necessary to establish the goals we are aiming for, the methods to use, and the class forces which can intervene in our favour. There is nothing "theoretical" about these considerations, and by that we mean that they are not open to facile criticism by all those elements, indifferent to "theory", whose rule is to ignore all theoretical clarity and to get into bed with anybody, in any movement, on the basis of any programme, as long as there is "action". Obviously, we are amongst those who think that action springs not from outbursts of anger, or the goodwill of individuals, but from the situation itself. Moreover, for action, theoretical work is vital in order to guard the working class against new defeats. And we need to understand the significance of the contempt that so many militants show for theoretical work, for in reality this always comes down to replacing proletarian positions – without saying so – with the principles of the enemy social-democracy, amongst those revolutionary milieus while at the same time calling for action at all costs in the "race" against fascism.

As far as the problem of anti-fascism is concerned, its numerous supporters are guided not only by a contempt for theoretical work, but by the stupid mania for creating and spreading the confusion necessary to build a broad front of resistance. There must be no demarcation which might put off a single ally, or lose any opportunity for struggle: this is the slogan of anti-fascism. Here we can see that for the latter **confusion is idealised and considered as an element of victory**. Here we should remember that more than half a century ago Marx said to Weitling that ignorance has never done any service to the workers' movement.

Today, instead of establishing the aim of the struggle, the methods to use, and the necessary programme, the quintessence of Marxist strategy (which Marx would have described as ignorance) is presented thus: adopt an adjective – the most common today being "Leninist" of course – and talk endlessly, and completely out of context, about the situation in Russia in 1917, and Kornilov's September offensive. Alas! there used to be a time when revolutionaries had heads on their shoulders and analysed historical experience. Then, before trying to make an analogy between the situations of their own epoch and these experiences, they tried first to determine whether it was possible to draw a political parallel between past and present; but those times are gone, especially if we look just at the usual phraseology of proletarian groups.

We are told that there is no point in establishing a comparison between the situation of the class struggle in Russia in 1917, and that today in other countries; likewise, there is no point in trying to determine whether the balance of class forces then bore certain similarities to that of today. The victory of October 1917 is a historical fact, so all we need to do is copy the tactics of the

Russian Bolsheviks, and above all to make a very poor copy which varies depending on the different milieus that interpret events on the basis of radically opposing conceptions.

Those who call themselves "Leninists" today are not in the least bothered by the fact that in Russia in 1917 capitalism was undergoing its first experience of state power, whereas fascism on the contrary has emerged from a capitalism that has been in power for decades, and that the volcanic revolutionary situation in Russia 1917 was the opposite of today's reactionary one. On the contrary, their marvellous serenity cannot be so much as ruffled by a comparison of the 1917 events with those of today, based on a serious examination of the Italian and German experience. Kornilov is the answer to everything. The victories of Mussolini and Hitler are supposedly due solely to deviations by the communist parties from the classic tactics of the Bolsheviks in 1917, thanks to political acrobatics that assimilate two opposing situations: the revolutionary and the reactionary.

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As far as anti-fascism is concerned, political considerations don't come into it. Its aim is to regroup all those threatened by fascist attack into a sort of *"trade union of the threatened"*.

The social-democrats tell the radical-socialists to look to their own security, and to take immediate defensive measures against the fascist threat, since Herriot and Daladier could also fall victim to a fascist victory. Léon Blum goes even further, solemnly warning Doumergue that unless he watches out for fascism, he can expect the same fate as Brüning. Centrism addresses "the socialist rank and file", or alternatively the SFIO addresses centrism, in order to create a united front, since both socialists and communists are threatened by fascism. Finally there are the Bolshevik-Leninists who get their hackles up to proclaim grandiloquently to all and sundry that they are ready to create a struggle front devoid of any political consideration, on the basis of a permanent solidarity amongst all the "working class"(?) formations, against the activity of the fascists.

The idea underlying all these speculations is certainly very simple – too simple to be true: bring together all those under threat, driven by the same desire to avoid death, into a common anti-fascist front. But even the most superficial analysis will show that the idyllic simplicity of this proposal in reality hides a complete abandonment of the fundamental positions of Marxism, the negation of past events and of the significance of events today. Of course, it is easy enough to proclaim that Herriot was wrong to join the government that came out of the "riot" of 6th February, and that he should remember that Amendola, a member of the government that handed over power to the fascists, was assassinated by the latter. It is equally easy to assert that the radical socialist party in Clermont-Ferrand has behaved suicidally in agreeing to a "truce of parties", since the German experience shows that Brüning's "truce" admirably served the purposes of fascism, and that fascism on the other hand didn't spare the democratic parties. And finally, with the same nonchalance, to conclude by declaring that the French and Belgian socialists should learn from the events in Germany and Austria and adopt a revolutionary policy in order to save themselves from certain death. The centrists in turn – still according to the same bible – should learn, from the fate of Thälmann and the concentration camps,

the need for an "honest" United Front tactic instead of instead of one aimed not to help the working class struggle but to "destroy the socialist party": this is the demand of the right-wing social-democratophile Doriot, who uses the support of the workers of Saint-Denis to channel their desire for struggle and their reaction against centrism, into the dead-end of confusion.

But all these sermons about what the radicals, socialists, and centrists ought to do in order to save their own skins and their institutions will change nothing in the course of events, since the real problem comes down to this: *how is it possible to transform radicals, socialists, and centrists into communists, since the struggle against fascism can only be based on a front of struggle for the proletarian revolution.* And no matter how many sermons are preached, the Belgian social democracy will still launch its plans for the preservation of capitalism, will not hesitate to torpedo every class conflict, in a word will not hesitate to hand the unions over to capitalism. Doumergue will copy Brüning, Blum will follow in the steps of Bauer, and Cachin in those of Thälmann.

We repeat, our aim in this article is not to determine whether the situation in France or Belgium can be compared to the circumstances which allowed the rise to power of fascism in Italy and Germany. Our analogy is concerned above all with the fact that Doumergue is a copy of Brüning, from the point of view of their function in two quite different capitalist countries, and that this function is – as it is for Blum and Cachin – to immobilise the proletariat, to disintegrate its class consciousness, and to make it possible to adapt the state apparatus to the new circumstances of inter-imperialist struggle. There is good reason to think that in France especially, the experience of Thiers, Clémenceau and Poincaré will be repeated under Doumergue, and that we will see a concentration of capitalism around its right-wing forces, without that meaning the strangulation of the bourgeoisie's socialist and radical-socialist forces. Moreover, it is profoundly wrong to base proletarian tactics on political positions derived from a mere perspective.

The problem is not therefore that fascism threatens, so we should set up a "united anti-fascist front". On the contrary, it is necessary to determine the positions around which the proletariat will gather for its struggle against capitalism. Posing the problem this way means excluding the anti-fascist forces from the front for the struggle against capitalism. It means – paradoxical though this may seem – that if capitalism should turn definitively towards fascism, then the condition for success is the inalterability of the programme and the workers' class demands, whereas the condition for certain defeat is the dissolution of the proletariat in the anti-fascist swamp.

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The action of individuals and social forces is not determined by laws of preservation of individuals or forces, outside any class considerations: Brüning and Matteoti could not have acted in consideration of their own personal interests, or the ideas they defended, by taking the road to proletarian revolution which alone could have saved them from fascism. The action of an individual or force is a function of the class they belong to. This explains why the present actors of French politics are merely following in the footsteps of their predecessors, and will continue to do so even should French capitalism move towards fascism.

The basic formula of anti-fascism (the "union of the threatened") is thus revealed to be completely inconsistent. Moreover, if we examine the ideas of anti-fascism (at least as far as its programme is concerned) we find that they derive from a dissociation of fascism and capitalism. True, if we question a socialist, a centrist, or a Bolshevik-Leninist on the subject, they will all declare that fascism is indeed capitalism. But the socialist will say: *"we need to defend the Constitution and the Republic in order to prepare for socialism"*; the centrist will declare that it is much easier to unite the working class struggle around anti-fascism than around the struggle against capitalism; while according to the Bolshevik-Leninist, there is no better basis for unity and struggle than the defence of the democratic institutions which capitalism can no longer accord the working class. It thus turns out that the general assertion that "fascism is capitalism" can lead to political conclusions which can only stem from the dissociation of capitalism and fascism.

Experience has shown – and this annihilates the possibility of any distinction between fascism and capitalism, that capitalism's conversion to fascism does not depend on the will of certain groups within the bourgeois class, but on the necessities of a whole historical period, and the specificities of states which are less able to resist the crisis and the death-agony of the bourgeois regime. Insofar as it is possible to establish a complete separation, the experience of Italy and Germany shows us that when capitalism is forced to move towards a fascist organisation of society, the fascist battalions provide the shock troops that are directed against the class organisations of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie's democratic political formations then declare their opposition to fascism, with the aim of persuading the proletariat to confide the defence of these institutions to democratic laws and the Constitution. The social-democracy, which acts along the same lines as the liberal and democratic forces, also calls the proletariat to make its central demand that the state should force the fascist forces to respect the law, disarm them, or even outlaw them. The line of action of these three political forces is in complete solidarity: their origin lies in the necessity for capitalism to arrive at the triumph of fascism, wherever the capitalist state aims to raise fascism to the new form of capitalist social organisation.

Since fascism corresponds to the fundamental needs of capitalism, we have to find a possibility of struggle against it on a radically different front. It is true that, today, we often find our opponents falsifying our positions because they do not want to combat them politically. For example, we only have to oppose the anti-fascist slogan (which has no political basis), because experience proves that the anti-fascist forces are just as necessary to the victory of fascism as the fascist forces themselves, to be told: "we don't care about analysing the political and programmatic substance of anti-fascism, what matters is that Daladier is preferable to Doumergue, and that the latter is preferable to Maurras, and that consequently it is in our interest to defend Daladier against Doumergue or Doumergue against Maurras. Or, according to circumstances, to defend either Daladier or Doumergue because they are an obstacle to the victory of Maurras, and our duty is *"to use the slightest fault-line in order to win a stronger position for the proletariat"*. Obviously, the events in Germany – where the "fault-lines" first of the Prussian, than of the Hindenburg-Von Schleicher governments, were nothing but so many stepping stones to the rise of fascism – are mere bagatelles which can be ignored. Our interventions will of course be denounced as anti-Leninist or anti-Marxist: we will be told that we are indifferent to whether the government is right, left, or fascist. As far as this is concerned, we would like

once and for all to pose the following problem: *taking account of the modification in the post-war situation, isn't the position of our opponents, who want the proletariat to choose the least bad organisational form of the capitalist state, the same as that of Bernstein, who called on the proletariat to achieve the best form of capitalist state?* We will be told, perhaps, that the idea is not to demand that the proletariat espouse the cause of the government considered to be the best form of domination... from the proletarian viewpoint, but that the aim is simply to strengthen the positions of the proletariat to the point where it can impose a democratic form of government on capitalism. In this case, we need only change the words, the meaning remains the same. After all, if the proletariat is really strong enough to impose a governmental solution on the bourgeoisie, then why should it stop at this objective, rather than posing its own central demands for the destruction of the capitalist state? By contrast, if the proletariat is not yet strong enough to launch the insurrection, then doesn't pushing it towards a democratic government mean in effect spurring it down a path that will make the enemy's victory possible?

The problem is certainly not the one posed by the partisans of the "best choice": the proletariat has its own solution to the problem of the state, *and has no influence on the solutions that capitalism adopts to the problems of its own power*. Logically, it is obvious that it would be to its advantage to have very weak bourgeois governments that allowed the evolution of the proletariat's revolutionary struggle; but it is equally obvious that capitalism will only form left or far-left governments if these latter are its best line of defence in a given situation. In 1917-21, the social-democracy came to power to defend the bourgeois regime, and was the only form of government that made it possible to crush the proletarian revolution. *Given that a right-wing government would have pushed the working masses towards insurrection, should the Marxists have recommended a reactionary government?* We put forward this hypothesis to show that there is no such thing as a governmental form which is in general better or worse for the proletariat. These notions exist only for capitalism, and depend on the situation. By contrast, the working class has an absolute duty to regroup around its class positions to fight capitalism in whatever concrete form it may take: fascist, democratic, or social-democratic.

The first essential consideration in today's situation is to say openly that the problem of power is not immediately posed to the working class, and that one of the cruellest expressions of this situation is the unleashing of the fascist attack, or the movement of democracy towards emergency powers. Hence we need to determine the basis on which the working class could regroup. And here a really curious conception separates the Marxists from all the confusionists and enemy agents at work within the working class. For us, the workers' regroupment is a problem of quantity: since it cannot pose the problem of power, the proletariat has to regroup for more limited, but still class objectives, in partial struggles. The others, whose extremism is a mere bluff, alter the proletariat's class substance to say that it can struggle for power in any period. Unable to pose the problem on a class – i.e. proletarian – basis, they emasculate it by posing the problem of an anti-fascist government. We would add that the partisans of dissolving the proletariat in the anti-fascist swamp are of course the same who prevent the formation of a proletarian class front to fight for its economic demands.

In France, the last few months have seen an extraordinary flowering of anti-fascist programmes, plans, and organisms. This has absolutely not prevented

Doumergue from carrying through a massive reduction in pay and pensions, a signal for the wage reductions which French capitalism has absolutely the intention of generalising. If only a hundredth of the energy spent on anti-fascism had been directed towards the formation of a solid working class front for a general strike in defence of immediate economic demands, it is absolutely certain that on the one hand the threat of repression would not have been carried out and on the other that the proletariat, once regrouped, would have recovered its self-confidence. This would in turn have created a changed situation where the problem of power could once again be posed in the only form it can take for the working class: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It follows from all these elementary considerations, that the only justification of anti-fascism would be the existence of an anti-fascist class: an anti-fascist programme would follow on from the programme inherent to such a class. Our inability to reach such a conclusion is not due only to the simplest formulations of Marxism, but to the elements of the situation in France. In the immediate, we are posed with the problem of how far to the right anti-fascism stops: with Doumergue, who is there to defend the Republic? with Herriot, who takes part in the "truce" to save France from fascism, or with Marquet who claims to represent the "eye of socialism" in the National Union, or with the Young Turks of the Radical Party, or just with the socialists? Or with the devil himself, provided only that hell is paved over with anti-fascism? Posing the problem concretely proves that the slogan of anti-fascism only serves the interests of confusion and prepares the certain defeat of the working class.

Instead of engaging in large-scale changes to the workers' demands, the imperative duty of communists is to determine the regroupment of the working class around its class demands and within its class organisations: the unions. As far as the CGT is concerned (the CGTU having altogether ceased to be a union since it became a mere appendage of centrism), it is in the process – and this is another characteristic expression of the disintegration of the proletarian class – of a fundamental change, to become just another political party with the aim of modifying society on an inter-classist basis. We can thus see that anti-fascist ideology is leading to the disappearance of the union, the very organ which could have regrouped the proletariat in the present situation, where only its immediate demands could rebuild the working class' unity in struggle. To conclude, we would also say that the necessity of relying on the union organisations is the result of a historical fact which cannot be denied simply on the grounds of the weakness of the unions' influence in France. We are not basing ourselves on the formal idea of the trade union, but on the fundamental consideration – as we have already said – that since the problem of power is not posed today, it is necessary to aim for more limited objectives, but which are still class objectives for the struggle against capitalism. And anti-fascism is creating the conditions where not only will the least of the working class' political and economic demands be drowned, but where its chances of revolutionary struggle will be compromised, and it will find itself exposed to becoming a prey to capitalist war, before it can recover its ability to wage the revolutionary battle to build the society of tomorrow.

Bilan, May 1934.