

FASCISM OR NATIONALISM?

It is all too fashionable to declare one's political opponents "fascists", especially in cases of national questions. If one didn't know better, it would seem the specter of fascism lurks at every corner, waiting to penetrate the impenetrable working movement and consume it from within.

But what is fascism? Attempts by liberals to define it ultimately boil down to vague descriptions of the strictly ideological side of fascism, disconnected entirely from its material base.

The result is a mystical, upside-down idea of "fascism" wherein all things, from Ancient Rome to modern Zambia, are all in some way or another "fascist"; ultimately, the liberal's conception of fascism boils down to "fascism is nationalism".

Slightly less detached is the still-vague: "fascism is reaction". Correct, but correct in a most useless way. The true material essence is still left in the murk, and the ideological form of fascism is thrust to the front and presented as the essence.

To conceive, adequately, a picture of fascism which does not fall into the trap of sophistry, one must study the *material* base of fascism, the *source* of the ideological reflection pointed at by liberals.

Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian theorist and General Secretary of the 3rd International, stated:

Fascism... [is] the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and **most imperialist elements of finance capital. (Dimitrov, *The Fascist Offensive*, 1935).**

And this definition, while still acknowledging ideological implications, thrusts to the forefront the *material essence* of fascism. Fascism, ultimately, is the *logical conclusion of the rule of finance capital*, and cannot be separated at its base from finance capital. It is not something separate from imperialism, an ideological position existing independently of it – rather, it is the most open ideological expression of finance capital.

Dimitrov says, on no uncertain terms:

Fascism... is not a power standing above class, nor government of the petty bourgeoisie or the lumpen-proletariat over finance capital.

Thus, the rule of the petty-bourgeoisie, or even of the lumpen-proletariat, *cannot also be fascism*, for in such cases finance occupies a subordinate position, and the full expression of imperialism – the absolute rule of finance capital – is muted, diffused.

Fascism is the power of finance capital itself. In foreign policy, fascism is jingoism in its most brutal form, fomenting bestial hatred of other nations.

Fascism also cannot, in any case, be nationalism, unless it is the “nationalism” of finance capital – not nationalism, but *imperialism*. A state cannot be a fascist state if it is not predicated on the rule of finance capital, on constant expansion and imperialism, land-grabbing, annexation, and integration.

This, the true character of fascism, must be particularly stressed because in a number of countries, under cover of social demagogic, fascism has managed to gain the following of the mass of the petty bourgeoisie that has been dislocated by the crisis, and even of certain sections of the most backward strata of the proletariat. These would never have supported fascism if they had understood its real character and its true nature.

How could fascism – which supposedly would “never have [been] supported” if its “real character and its true nature” were understood – have gained such a prominent following among the masses? It is only by the concentrated effort of social-democrats, liberals, “Marxists”, who insist that fascism, at its essence, *is the ideological expression of nationalism*, that the masses – who in every regard hold the defense and development of their nation above all else – *are already fascistic*, whether they mean to imply this or not. And this, at its core, enables the fascists to seize upon the identity the “communists” have created for them, and portray themselves as the saviors of nations, of culture, from the brink of degeneracy and destruction.

Dimitrov says:

What is the source of the influence of fascism over the masses? Fascism is able to attract the masses because it demagogically appeals to their most urgent needs and demands. **Fascism not only inflames prejudices that are deeply ingrained in the masses, but also plays on the better sentiments of the masses, on their sense of justice and sometimes even on their revolutionary traditions.**

Fascism acts in the interests of the extreme imperialists, but it presents itself to the masses in the guise of champion of an ill-treated nation, and appeals to outraged national sentiments, as German fascism did, for instance, when it won the support of the masses of the petty bourgeoisie by the slogan "Down with the Versailles Treaty."

It is in the interests of the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie that fascism intercepts the disappointed masses who desert the old bourgeois parties. But **it impresses these masses by the vehemence of its attacks on the bourgeois governments and its irreconcilable attitude to the old bourgeois parties.¹**

...Fascism adapts its demagogic to the national peculiarities of each country, and even to the peculiarities of the various social strata in one and the same country.² ...

¹ If only Western communists – who, upon the petit-bourgeois raid on the US Capitol, cried to Biden in terror – understood the profundity of this message from Dimitrov!

² Is this not the basis of Lenin’s class-alliance between the petit-bourgeoisie, peasantry, and proletariat? Or Mao’s alliance between the national bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie, peasantry, and proletariat?

Fascism... stages its accession to power as a "revolutionary" movement against the bourgeoisie on behalf of "the whole nation" and for the "salvation" of the nation. One recalls Mussolini's "march" on Rome, Pilsudski's "march" on Warsaw, Hitler's National-Socialist "revolution" in Germany, and so forth.

We Communists are the irreconcilable opponents, in principle, of bourgeois nationalism in all its forms. But we are not supporters of national nihilism, and should never act as such. The task of educating the workers and all working people in the spirit of proletarian internationalism is one of the fundamental tasks of every Communist Party. But **anyone who thinks that this permits him, or even compels him, to sneer at all the national sentiments of the broad masses of working people is far from being a genuine Bolshevik**, and has understood nothing of the teaching of Lenin on the national question.

Dimitrov – and with him, the 3rd Comintern – criticize pointedly the anti-national attitude of some “communists”, their sneering at the national sentiments of the broad masses of people, which the fascists have seized upon to mobilize in the name of finance capital.

Are we not seeing this same thing play out today? Have Leninists not warned, again and again, of the fatal conclusion such an anti-national and cosmopolitan policy leads to?

Dimitrov offers a new path to take, one which our “internationalist” friends could do well to learn:

Comrades, proletarian internationalism must, so to speak, "acclimatize itself" in each country in order to strike deep roots in its native land. National forms of the proletarian class struggle and of the labor movement in the individual countries are in no contradiction to proletarian internationalism; on the contrary, it is precisely in these forms that the international interests of the proletariat can be successfully defended.

It is necessary everywhere... to expose before the masses and prove to them concretely that the fascist bourgeoisie, on the pretext of defending general national interests, is conducting its selfish policy of oppressing and exploiting its own people... We must at the same time prove by the very struggle of the working class and the actions of the Communist Parties that **the proletariat, in rising against every manner of bondage and national oppression, is the only true fighter for national freedom and the independence of the people.**

It is the proletariat – and the proletariat alone, the great masses of industrial workers – which can form the backbone of a strong and living nation, one capable of defending itself from the cultural and economic degeneration of finance capital.

Dimitrov warns:

The fascists are rummaging through the entire history of every nation so as to be able to pose as the heirs and continuators of all that was exalted and heroic in its past...

Mussolini does his utmost to make capital for himself out of the heroic figure of Garibaldi. The French fascists bring to the fore as their heroine Joan of Arc. The American fascists appeal to the traditions of the American War of Independence, the traditions of Washington and Lincoln. The Bulgarian fascists make use of the national-liberation movement of the [1870s] and its heroes beloved by the people, Vassil Levsky, Stephan Karaj and others.

Communists who suppose that all this has nothing to do with the cause of the working class, who do nothing to enlighten the masses on the past of their people in a historically correct fashion, in a genuinely Marxist-Leninist spirit, who do nothing to link up the present struggle with the people's revolutionary traditions and past -- voluntarily hand over to the fascist falsifiers all that is valuable in the historical past of the nation, so that the fascists may fool the masses.

A damning condemnation of our anti-nationalist “comrades”, straight from the halls of the 3rd International. Those who sneer at the nationalist sentiments of the masses, and decry these sentiments as fascism, should be shown for who they are. Either they despise fascists, and must be blushing every shade of red to find that they are helping these same fascists; or they do not despise fascists, and should cease pretending to.

Either way, it is clear: their drivel serves the reaction, and nobody else.

J. VOLKER

7/2/21