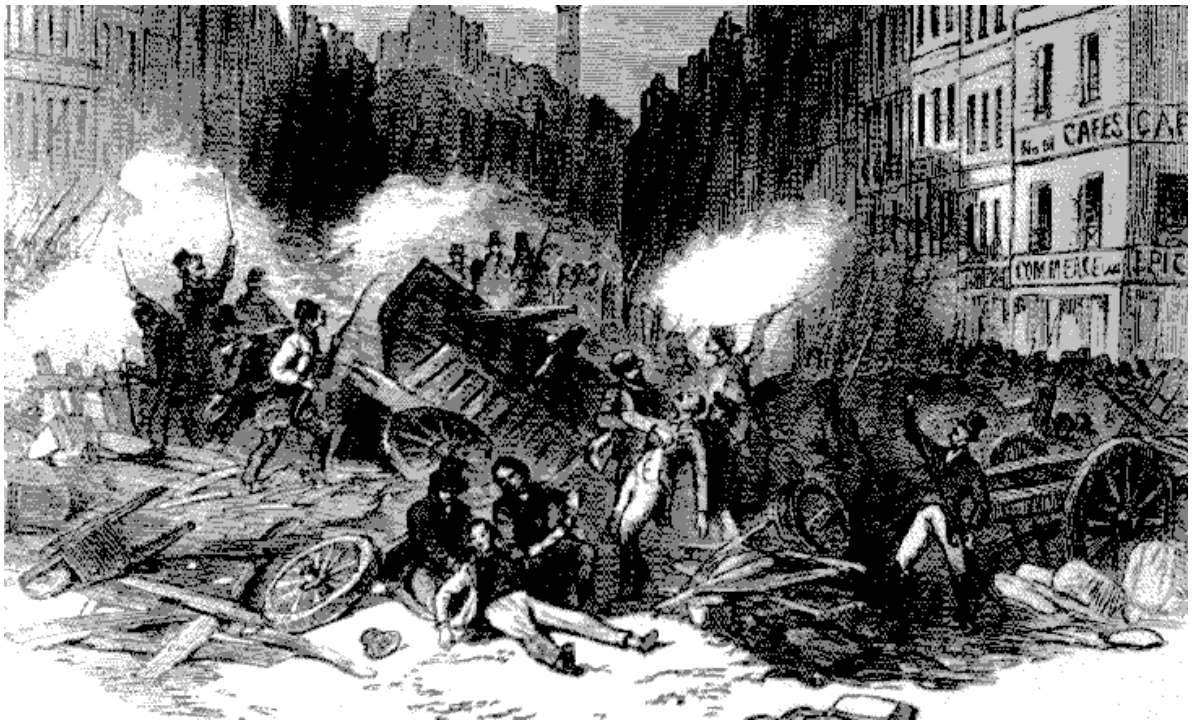
Internationalist Group

League for the Fourth International

Marxism vs. Bonapartism



On the barricades in Paris, fighting against Louis Napoleon's coup d'état of 2 December 1851.

Internationalist Group Class Readings

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Introduction

The Internationalist No. 19 (Summer 2004) includes an article titled "American Gestapo" dealing with the repressive measures pointing in the direction of a police state, above all since the attack of 11 September 2001. However, as the article points out, these are not "reprisals" nor a response to indiscriminate terror, but rather a long-range program planned some years ago, designed by "bipartisan" commissions – i.e., by both bourgeois parties, Republicans and Democrats. They accompany a change in the social structure of the United States, marked by a growing concentration of wealth in the capitalist higher echelons and the expansion of the sector of impoverished workers (many of them immigrants) who barely receive the minimum wage, if that. As the country that ever since De Tocqueville boasted of its middle class now becomes more like Latin American capitalist countries, its repressive apparatus changes as well.

The tendency toward a "strong state" also corresponds to the "New World Order" proclaimed by Washington at the time of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the first war on Iraq (1990-91), and to the present terrorist "war on terror" launched by U.S. imperialism in its entirety. It seeks to firm up the "home front" by regimenting the population for this "war without end." In general terms, the tendency toward what we have called "institutional Bonapartism" in the U.S. goes hand in hand with the increasing world domination and hegemony of Yankee imperialism (the FBI was formed out of the "red hunts" after the First World War, the CIA is born with the anti-Soviet "Cold War"). As noted in the article in *The Internationalist*, new U.S. laws such as the "U.S.A. PATRIOT Act" which authorize a host of measures such as "preventive" detention (the counterpart of "preventive war") have been imitated by countries as diverse as Britain, Mexico and India.

The tendency toward police state type measures and regimes is nothing new. *Bonapartism* was an important theme in the writings of Leon Trotsky during the 1930s, a prewar period leading up to the second imperialist world war, a period marked by a severe capitalist economic crisis (the Great Depression) and the consequent growth both of "official" (Stalinist) Communist parties and of fascism, as a civil war measure aimed at heading off the "revolutionary danger." Trotsky generalized the term coined by Karl Marx in his essay, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis-Napoléon*, referring to the French emperor (the nephew of Napoléon Bonaparte) who governed France from 1848 to 1871. Bonapartism refers to a regime resting on the state apparatus (military and police) that seeks to raise itself above the different classes to act as an arbiter, sweeping away "democratic" norms in order to defend the "higher" interests of the whole of the ruling class in periods of acute danger (war, potentially revolutionary crisis, etc.)

Consequently, bonapartist regimes can have different political signs. As Trotsky wrote, the sword by itself does not have a policy. Thus, Trotsky pointed out that both the Nazi-fascist Hitler regime in capitalist Germany and the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically deformed workers state, had a bonapartist character, although they were separated by an abyss by their class character. He also referred to the regime of General Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico as a kind of "Bonapartism *sui generis*" (of a unique sort) that sought to balance between the weight of imperialism and the pressure of the proletariat. The Stalinists, on the other hand, place an equal sign between fascism (a movement marked by the mobilization of an enraged petty bourgeoisie) and military dictatorships such as that of Pinochet in Chile and the Videla junta in Argentina. They respond to the bonapartist danger by trimming their own program to the measure of the supposedly "democratic" bourgeoisie, embodied in the "anti-fascist" *popular front* which chains the proletariat to bourgeois forces.

Following the popular-front model of the Stalinists, various pseudo-Trotskyist tendencies have responded to Bonapartism with a purely (bourgeois) "democratic" program. However, historical experience, from the failed Revolution of 1848 to the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 to the experience of the Chilean Unidad Popular of 1970-73 demonstrate that capitalist Bonapartism comes about with the support of virtually all bourgeois forces. Thus popular-frontism and fascism are the ultimate measures of the ruling class to prevent a proletarian revolution. As shown in the materials reprinted here, both Marx and Trotsky answered Bonapartism with a program, not for a mythical democratic bourgeoisie but for international workers revolution. The Paris Commune, arising on the ashes of the collapsed Empire of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, is the archetype of the proletarian answer to Bonapartism.

–League for the Fourth International, 21 September 2004

Karl Marx

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon

(December 1851-March 1852)

(Excerpts)

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like an nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue. …

The French, so long as they were engaged in revolution, could not get rid of the memory of Napoleon, as the election of December 10 [1848, when Louis Bonaparte was elected President of the French Republic by plebiscite] was proved. They longed to return from the perils of revolution to the fleshpots of Egypt, and December 2, 1851 [the date of the coup d'état by Louis Bonaparte], was the answer. Now they have not only a caricature of the old Napoleon, but the old Napoleon himself, caricatured as he would have to be in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.

The February Revolution was a surprise attack, a seizing of the old society unaware, and the people proclaimed this unexpected stroke a deed of world importance, ushering in a new epoch. On December 2 the February Revolution is conjured away as a cardsharp's trick, and what seems overthrown is no longer the monarchy but the liberal concessions that had been wrung from it through centuries of struggle. …

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm more swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds, ecstasy is the order of the day — but they are short-lived, soon they have reached their zenith, and a long *Katzenjammer* [hangover] takes hold of society before it learns to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period soberly. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals — until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta! [Here is the rose, dance here!][1]

…

Legitimists and Orleanists, as we have said, formed the two great factions of the party of Order[2]. Was what held these factions fast to their pretenders and kept them

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[1] A challenge, taken by Hegel and repeated by Marx, from the punch line of one of Aesop's fables, "The Braggart." An athlete boasts that he once performed a tremendous jump on the island of Rhodes, and the skeptical bystander says, in effect, let's say this rose is Rhodes, so perform the jump right here.

[2] The party of Order was the name of the coalition representing the conservative big bourgeoisie in 1848, made up of the two monarchist factions.

apart from each other nothing but fleur-de-lis[3] and tricolor, the House of Bourbon [the "legitimists"] and House of Orleans, different shades of royalism — was it at all the confession of faith of royalism? Under the Bourbons, big landed property had governed, with its priests and lackeys; under Orleans, high finance, large-scale industry, large-scale trade, that is, capital, with its retinue of lawyers, professors, and smooth-tongued orators. The Legitimate Monarchy was merely the political expression of the hereditary rule of the lords of the soil, as the July Monarchy[4] was only the political expression of the usurped rule of the bourgeois parvenus. What kept the two factions apart, therefore, was not any so-called principles, it was their material conditions of existence, two different kinds of property; it was the old contrast between town and country, the rivalry between capital and landed property. That at the same time old memories, personal enmities, fears and hopes, prejudices and illusions, sympathies and antipathies, convictions, articles of faith and principles bound them to one or the other royal house, who denies this? Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity. While each faction, Orleanists and Legitimists, sought to make itself and the other believe that it was loyalty to the two royal houses which separated them, facts later proved that it was rather their divided interests which forbade the uniting of the two royal houses. And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality. Orleanists and Legitimists found themselves side by side in the republic, with equal claims. If each side wished to effect the restoration of its own royal house against the other, that merely signified that each of the two great interests into which the bourgeoisie is split — landed property and capital - sought to restore its own supremacy and the subordination of the other. We speak of two interests of the bourgeoisie, for large landed property, despite its feudal coquetry and pride of race, has been rendered thoroughly bourgeois by the development of modern society. Thus the Tories[5] in England long imagined that they were enthusiastic about monarchy, the church, and the beauties of the old English Constitution, until the day of danger wrung from them the confession that they are enthusiastic only about ground rent.

The royalists in coalition carried on their intrigues against one another in the press, in Ems, in Claremont[6], outside parliament. Behind the scenes they donned their old Orleanist and Legitimist liveries again and once more engaged in their old tourneys. But on the public stage, in their grand performances of state as a great parliamentary party, they put off their respective royal houses with mere obeisances and adjourn the restoration of the monarchy in infinitum. They do their real business as the party of Order, that is, under a social, not under a political title; as representatives of the bourgeois world order, not as knights of errant princesses; as the bourgeois class against other classes, not as royalists against the republicans. And as the party of Order they exercised more unrestricted and sterner domination over the other classes of society than ever previously under the Restoration or under the July Monarchy, a domination which, in general, was possible only under the form of the parliamentary republic, for only under this form could the two great divisions of the French bourgeoisie unite, and thus put the rule of their class instead of the regime of a privileged faction of it on the order of the day. If they nevertheless, as the party of Order, also insulted the republic and expressed their repugnance to it, this happened not merely from royalist memories. Instinct taught them that the republic, true enough, makes their political rule complete, but at the same time undermines its social foundation, since they must now confront the subjugated classes and contend against them without mediation, without the concealment afforded by the crown, without being able to divert the national interest by their subordinate struggles among themselves and with the monarchy. It was a feeling of weakness that caused them to recoil from

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[3] *Fleur-de-lis*, the lily, heraldic emblem of the Bourbon dynasty.

[4] The rule of Orleanist king Louis-Philippe, who was installed by the revolution of July 1830, which ousted the restored Bourbon monarch, Charles X.

[5] Tories, a political party in England founded at the end of the 17th century; it defended the interests of the landed aristocracy and upper Church hierarchy, upheld feudal traditions and fought against liberal and progressive demands. In the mid-19th century, the Conservative Party evolved from it and is today often referred to as Tories.

[6] The town of Ems in West Germany was one of the residences of the Count of Chambord (1820-1883), descendant of a branch of the Bourbon dynasty and pretender to the French throne (under the name Charles V). Louis-Philippe (1773-1850), the Duke of Orleans and King of France from 1830 until the Revolution of 1848, went into exile, living in Claremont Castle near London.

the pure conditions of their own class rule and to yearn for the former more incomplete, more undeveloped, and precisely on that account less dangerous forms of this rule. On the other hand, every time the royalists in coalition come in conflict with the pretender who confronts them, with Bonaparte, every time they believe their parliamentary omnipotence endangered by the executive power — every time, therefore, that they must produce their political title to their rule — they come forward as republicans and not as royalists, from the Orleanist Thiers[7], who warns the National Assembly that the republic divides them least, to the Legitimist Berryer[8], who on December 2, 1851, as a tribune swathed in a tricolored sash, harangues the people assembled before the town hall of the Tenth Arrondissement in the name of the republic. To be sure, a mocking echo calls back to him: Henry V! Henry V!

As against the coalesced bourgeoisie, a coalition between petty bourgeois and workers had been formed, the so-called Social-Democratic party. The petty bourgeois saw that they were badly rewarded after the June days of 1848, that their material interests were imperiled, and that the democratic guarantees which were to insure the effectuation of these interests were called in question by the counterrevolution. Accordingly they came closer to the workers. On the other hand, their parliamentary representation, the *Montagne*[9], thrust aside during the dictatorship of the bourgeois republicans, had in the last half of the life of the Constituent Assembly reconquered its lost popularity through the struggle with Bonaparte and the royalist ministers. It had concluded an alliance with the socialist leaders. In February, 1849, banquets celebrated the reconciliation. A joint program was drafted, joint election committees were set up and joint candidates put forward. The revolutionary point was broken off and a democratic turn given to the social demands of the proletariat; the purely political form was stripped off the democratic claims of the petty bourgeoisie and their socialist point thrust forward. Thus arose social-democracy. The new *Montagne*, the result of this combination, contained, apart from some supernumeraries from the working class and some socialist sectarians, the same elements as the old *Montagne*, but numerically stronger. However, in the course of development it had changed with the class that it represented. The peculiar character of social-democracy is epitomized in the fact that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as a means, not of doing away with two extremes, capital and wage labor, but of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony. However different the means proposed for the attainment of this end may be, however much it may be trimmed with more or less revolutionary notions, the content remains the same. This content is the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petty bourgeoisie. Only one must not get the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the special conditions of its emancipation are the general conditions within whose frame alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven and earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent. …

On the pretext of founding a benevolent society, the lumpenproletariat of Paris had been organized into secret sections, each section led by Bonapartist agents, with a Bonapartist general at the head of the whole. Alongside decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzaroni*[10], pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux [pimps], brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars — in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call

[7] Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was a historian and Orleanist deputy in the Legislative Assembly between 1849 and 1851; he later became president of the French Republic from 1871 to 1873, and the butcher of the Paris Commune.

[8] Pierre Antoine Berryer (1790-1868) was a Legitimist politician.

[9] *Montagne*, the "Mountain," originally referred to the revolutionary democratic wing, led by Robespierre and Danton, of the National Convention during the French Revolution. Closely allied with the Jacobin Club, the *Montagnards*, so-called because they occupied the highest seats at the back of the hall where the Convention met, controlled the government from June 1793 until July 1794. In 1848, the "moderate" Social Democrats led by Louis Blanc put on revolutionary airs by referring to themselves as the *Montagne*.

[10] *Lazzaroni*, the nickname given to lumpenproletarian elements in Italy who were mobilized by the monarchists against the bourgeois liberals and democrats.

la bohème; from this kindred element Bonaparte formed the core of the Society of December 10. A "benevolent society" - insofar as, like Bonaparte, all its members felt the need of benefiting themselves at the expense of the laboring nation. This Bonaparte, who constitutes himself chief of the lumpen proletariat, who here alone rediscovers in mass form the interests which he personally pursues, who recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class upon which he can base himself unconditionally, is the real Bonaparte, the Bonaparte *sans phrase* [without a qualifier]. An old, crafty *roué* [debauched], he conceives the historical life of the nations and their performances of state as comedy in the most vulgar sense, as a masquerade in which the grand costumes, words, and postures merely serve to mask the pettiest knavery….

The social republic appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy, on the threshold of the February Revolution[11]. In the June days of 1848[12], it was drowned in the blood of the Paris proletariat, but it haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost. The democratic republic announces its appearance. It is dissipated on June 13, 1849, together with its deserting petty bourgeois, but in its flight it redoubles its boastfulness. The parliamentary republic together with the bourgeoisie takes possession of the entire state; it enjoys its existence to the full, but December 2, 1851, buries it to the accompaniment of the anguished cry of the coalesced royalists: "Long live the Republic!"

The French bourgeoisie balked at the domination of the working proletariat; it has brought the lumpen proletariat to domination, with the Chief of the Society of December 10 at the head. The bourgeoisie kept France in breathless fear of the future terrors of red anarchy — Bonaparte discounted this future for it when, on December 4, he had the eminent bourgeois of the Boulevard Montmartre and the Boulevard des Italiens shot down at their windows by the drunken army of law and order. The bourgeoisie apotheosized the sword; the sword rules it. It destroyed the revolutionary press; its own press is destroyed. It placed popular meetings under police surveillance; its salons are placed under police supervision. It disbanded the democratic National Guard, its own National Guard is disbanded. It imposed a state of siege; a state of siege is imposed upon it. It supplanted the juries by military commissions; its juries are supplanted by military commissions. It subjected public education to the sway of the priests; the priests subject it to their own education. It jailed people without trial, it is being jailed without trial. It suppressed every stirring in society by means of state power; every stirring in its society is suppressed by means of state power. Out of enthusiasm for its moneybags it rebelled against its own politicians and literary men; its politicians and literary men are swept aside, but its moneybag is being plundered now that its mouth has been gagged and its pen broken. The bourgeoisie never tired of crying out to the revolution what St. Arsenius cried out to the Christians: "Fuge, tace, quiesce!" ["Flee, be silent, keep still!"] Bonaparte cries to the bourgeoisie: "Fuge, tace, quiesce!"

The French bourgeoisie had long ago found the solution to Napoleon's dilemma: "In fifty years Europe will be republican or Cossack." It solved it in the "Cossack republic." No Circe[13] using black magic has distorted that work of art, the bourgeois republic, into a monstrous shape. That republic has lost nothing but the semblance of respectability. Present-day France was already contained in the parliamentary republic. It required only a bayonet thrust for the bubble to burst and the monster to leap forth before our eyes.

Why did the Paris proletariat not rise in revolt after December 2 [1851]?

The overthrow of the bourgeoisie had as yet been only decreed; the decree was not carried out. Any serious insurrection of the proletariat would at once have put new life into the bourgeoisie, reconciled it with the army, and insured a second June defeat for the workers.

On December 4 the proletariat was incited by bourgeois and shopkeeper to fight. On the evening of that day several legions of the National Guard promised to appear, armed and uniformed, on the scene of battle. For the bourgeois and the shopkeeper had learned that in one of his decrees of December 2 Bonaparte had abolished the secret ballot and had ordered them to put a "yes" or "no" after their names on the official registers. The resistance of December 4 intimidated Bonaparte. During the night he had placards posted on all the street corners of Paris announcing the restoration of the secret ballot. The bourgeois and the shopkeeper believed they had gained their objective. Those who failed to appear next morning were the bourgeois and the shopkeeper.

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[11] At the end of February 1848, the Parisian masses overthrew the monarchical regime of King Louis-Philippe and his prime minister François Guizot, establishing a Provisional Government (or Committee of Public Safety).

[12] Between June 22 and June 26 of 1848, the Paris proletariat rose up in insurrection, fighting on barricades against the bourgeois Provisional Government, which called in General Cavaignac to drown them in blood, killing several thousand insurgents.

[13] Circe, daughter of the sun in Greek mythology, who could turn men into animals with her magic wand.

By a coup de main the night of December 1-2 Bonaparte had robbed the Paris proletariat of its leaders, the barricade commanders. An army without officers, averse to fighting under the banner of the *Montagnards* because of the memories of June, 1848 and 1849, and May, 1850, it left to its vanguard, the secret societies, the task of saving the insurrectionary honor of Paris, which the bourgeoisie had surrendered to the military so unresistingly that, subsequently, Bonaparte could disarm the National Guard with the sneering motive of his fear that its weapons would be turned against it by the anarchists!

"*This is the complete and final triumph of socialism!*" Thus Guizot characterized December 2. But if the overthrow of the parliamentary republic contains within itself the germ of the triumph of the proletarian revolution, its immediate and obvious result was *the victory of Bonaparte victory over parliament, of the executive power over the legislative power, of force without phrases over the force of phrases*. In parliament the nation made its general will the law; that is, it made the law of the ruling class its general will. It renounces all will of its own before the executive power and submits itself to the superior command of an alien, of authority. The executive power, in contrast to the legislative one, expresses the heteronomy of a nation in contrast to its autonomy. France therefore seems to have escaped the despotism of a class only to fall back under the despotism of an individual, and what is more, under the authority of an individual without authority. The struggle seems to be settled in such a way that all classes, equally powerless and equally mute, fall on their knees before the rifle butt.

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still traveling through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed half of its preparatory work; now it is completing the other half. It first completed the parliamentary power in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has achieved this, it completes the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has accomplished this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed, old mole![14]

The executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organization, with its wide-ranging and ingenious state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million — this terrifying parasitic body which enmeshes the body of French society and chokes all its pores sprang up in the time of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system which it had helped to hasten. The seignorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials, and the motley patterns of conflicting medieval plenary powers into the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralized as in a factory.

The first French Revolution, with its task of breaking all separate local, territorial, urban, and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, was bound to develop what the monarchy had begun, centralization, but at the same time the limits, the attributes, and the agents of the governmental power. Napoleon completed this state machinery. The Legitimate Monarchy and the July Monarchy added nothing to it but a greater division of labor, increasing at the same rate as the division of labor inside the bourgeois society created new groups of interests, and therefore new material for the state administration. Every common interest was immediately severed from the society, countered by a higher, general interest, snatched from the activities of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity — from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community, to the railroads, the national wealth, and the national University of France. Finally the parliamentary republic, in its struggle against the revolution, found itself compelled to strengthen the means and the centralization of governmental power with repressive measures. **All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it.** The parties, which alternately contended for domination, regarded the possession of this huge state structure as the chief spoils of the victor.

But under the absolute monarchy, during the first Revolution, and under Napoleon the bureaucracy was only the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under the Restoration, under Louis Philippe, under the parliamentary republic, it was the instrument of the ruling class, however much it strove for power of its own.

Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. The state machinery has so strengthened itself vis-a-vis civil society that the Chief of the Society of December 10 suffices for its head — an adventurer dropped in from abroad, raised on the shoulders of a drunken soldiery which he bought with whisky and sausages and to which he has to keep throwing more sausages. Hence the low-spirited despair, the feeling of monstrous humiliation and degradation that oppresses the breast of France and makes her gasp. She feels dishonored.

[14] Paraphrase from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5: "Well said, old mole!"

And yet the state power is not suspended in the air. Bonaparte represented a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding peasants.

Just as the Bourbons were the dynasty of the big landed property and the Orleans the dynasty of money, so the Bonapartes are the dynasty of the peasants, that is, the French masses. The chosen of the peasantry is not the Bonaparte who submitted to the bourgeois parliament but the Bonaparte who dismissed the bourgeois parliament. For three years the towns had succeeded in falsifying the meaning of the December 10 election and in cheating the peasants out of the restoration of the Empire. The election of December 10, 1848, has been consummated only by the coup d'etat of December 2, 1851.

The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's poor means of communication and the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department. Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself. …

Leon Trotsky

Germany: The Only Road

(September 1932)

(Excerpt)

1. BONAPARTISM AND FASCISM

Let us endeavor to analyze briefly what has occurred and where we stand.

Thanks to the Social Democracy, the Brüning[15] government had at its disposal the support of parliament for ruling with the aid of emergency decrees. The Social Democratic leaders said: "In this manner we shall block the road of fascism to power." The Stalinist bureaucracy said: "No, fascism has already triumphed; it is the Brüning regime which la fascism." Both were false. The Social Democrats palmed off a passive retreat before fascism as the struggle against fascism. The Stalinists presented the matter as if the victory of fascism was already behind them. The fighting power of the proletariat was sapped by both sides and the triumph of the enemy facilitated and brought closer.

In its time, we designated the Brüning government as Bonapartism ("a caricature of Bonapartism"), that is, as a regime of military police dictatorship. As soon as the struggle of two social strata - the haves and the havenots, the exploiters and the exploited - reaches its highest tension, the conditions are established for the domination of bureaucracy, police, soldiery. The government becomes "independent" of society. Let us once more recall: if two forks are stuck symmetrically into a cork, the latter can stand even on the head of a pin. That is precisely the schema of Bonapartism. To be sure, such a government does not cease being the clerk of the property owners. Yet the clerk sits on the back of the boss, rubs his neck raw and does not hesitate at times to dig his boots into his face.

It might have been assumed that Brüning would hold on until the final solution. Yet, in the course of events, another link inserted itself: the Papen government. Were we to be exact we should have to make a rectification of our old designation: the Brüning government was a pre-Bonapartist government. Brüning was only a precursor. In a perfected form, Bonapartism came upon the scene in the Papen-Schleicher government.

Wherein lies the difference? Brüning asserted that he knew no greater happiness than to "serve" Hindenburg and Paragraph 48[16]. Hitler "supported" Brüning's right flank with his fist. But with the left elbow Brüning rested on Wels's[17] shoulder. In the Reichstag, Brüning found a majority which relieved him of the necessity of reckoning with the Reichstag.

The more Brüning's independence from the parliament grew, the more independent did the summits of the bureaucracy feel themselves from Brüning and the political groupings standing behind him. There only remained finally to break the bonds with the Reichstag. The Papen government emerged from an immaculate bureaucratic conception. With the right elbow it rests upon Hitler's shoulder. With the police fist it wards off the proletariat on the left. Therein lies the secret of its "stability," that is of the fact that it did not collapse at the moment of its birth.

The Brüning government bore a clerical-bureaucratic-police character. The Reichswehr [German army] still remained in reserve. The "Iron Front" [18]served as a direct prop of order. The essence of the Hindenburg-Papen coup d'etat lay precisely in elimi-

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[15] Heinrich Brüning (1885-1970) was the head of the conservative Center Party and chancellor of Germany from 1930 until May 1932. Lacking a majority in the Reichstag (parliament), he governed by decree. At the beginning of June 1932, German president Paul von Hindenburg (1874-1934) replaced Brüning with the Catholic monarchist Franz von Papen (1879-1969). Subsequently, in December 1932, von Papen was replaced by Kurt von Schleicher (1882-1934), a military bureaucrat whose brief career as chancellor lasted only utnil January 1933, when he was replaced by Adolf Hitler. Von Hindenburg was president of Germany from 1925 to 1934. Although he claimed to be an adversary of the Nazis when he defeated Hitler in the 1932 elections with support from the Social Democrats, he named Hitler chancellor a few months later.

[16] The article of the Weimar German constitution permitting the president to rule by decree through the armed forces.

[17] Otto Wels (1873-1939) was the head of the Social Democrat Party of Germany (SPD). Earlier, in 1919, as military commander of Berlin under the Social Democratic government, Wels crushed the Spartakist uprising on order from Gustav Noske.

[18] "Iron Front," the coalition of the Social Democrats and Catholic Center Party that was supposed to bar the way to the victory of Hitler's fascists.

nating dependence on the Iron Front. The generals moved up automatically to first place.

The Social Democratic leaders turned out to be completely duped. And this is no more than is proper for them in periods of social crisis. These petty-bourgeois intriguers appear to be clever only under those conditions where cleverness is not necessary. Now they pull the covers over their heads at night, sweat, and hope for a miracle: perhaps in the end we may yet be able to save not only our necks, but also the overstuffed furniture and the little, innocent savings. But there will be no more miracles ...

Unfortunately, however, the Communist Party has also been completely taken by surprise by the events. The Stalinist bureaucracy was unable to foresee a thing. Today Thaelmann[19], Remmele[20], and others speak on every occasion of "the coup d'etat of July 20[21]." How is that? At first they contended that fascism had already arrived and that only "counterrevolutionary Trotskyists" could speak of it as something in the future. Now it turns out that to pass over from Brüning to Papen - for the present not to Hitler but only to Papen - a whole "coup d'etat" was necessary. Yet the class content of Severing, Brüning, and Hitler, these sages taught us, is "one and the same thing." Then whence and wherefore the coup d'etat?

But the confusion doesn't come to an end with this. Even though the difference between Bonapartism and fascism has now been revealed plainly enough, Thaelmann, Remmele, and others speak of the fascist coup d'état of July 20. At the same time, they warn the workers against the approaching danger of the Hitlerite, that is, the equally fascist, overturn. Finally, the Social Democracy is designated just as before as social fascist. The unfolding events are in this way reduced to this, that species of fascism take the power from each other with the aid of "fascist" coups d'état. Isn't it clear that the whole Stalinist theory was created only for the purpose of gumming up the human brain?

The less prepared the workers were, the more the advent of the Papen government was bound to produce the impression of strength: complete ignoring of the parties, new emergency decrees, dissolution of the Reichstag, reprisals, state of siege in the capital, abolition of the Prussian "democracy." And with what ease! A lion you kill with a shot; the flea you squash between the fingernails; Social Democratic ministers are finished off with a fillip.

However, in spite of the visibility of concentrated forces, the Papen government as such is weaker yet than its predecessor. The Bonapartist regime can attain a comparatively stable and durable character only in the event that it brings a revolutionary epoch to a close; when the relationship of forces has already been tested in battles; when the revolutionary classes are already spent, but the possessing classes have not yet freed themselves from the fear: will not tomorrow bring new convulsions? Without this basic condition that is, without a preceding exhaustion of the mass energies in battles, the Bonapartist regime is in no position to develop.

Through the Papen government, the barons, the magnates of capital, and the bankers have made an attempt to safeguard their interests by means of the police and the regular army. The idea of giving up all power to Hitler, who supports himself upon the greedy and unbridled bands of the petty bourgeoisie, is a far from pleasant one to them. They do not, of course, doubt that in the long run

Hitler will be a submissive instrument of their domination. Yet this is bound up with convulsions, with the risk of a long and weary civil war and great expense. To be sure, fascism, as the Italian example shows, leads in the end to a military bureaucratic dictatorship of the Bonapartist type. But for that it requires a number of years even in the event of a complete victory: a longer span of years in Germany than in Italy. It is clear that the possessing classes would prefer a more economical path, that is, the path of Schleicher and not of Hitler, not to speak of the fact that Schleicher himself prefers it that way.

The fact that the basis for the existence of the Papen government is rooted in the neutralization of the irreconcilable camps in no way signifies, of course, that the forces of the revolutionary proletariat and of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie weigh equally on the scales of history. The whole question shifts here onto the field of politics. Through the mechanism Of the Iron Front the Social Democracy paralyzes the proletariat. By the policy of brainless ultimatism the Stalinist bureaucracy blocks the revolutionary way out for the workers. With correct leadership of the proletariat, fascism would be exterminated without difficulty and not a chink could remain open for Bonapartism. Unfortunately that is not the situation. The paralyzed strength of the proletariat has assumed the deceptive form of the "strength" of the Bonapartist clique. Therein lies the political formula of the present day.

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[19] Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944), head of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) from 1925 until his arrest by Hitler's police in 1933.

[20] Hermann Remmele (1886-1939), together with Thälmann and Heinz Neumann part of the triumvirate leading the KPD. Remmele was one of the authors of the Stalinist thesis that the Social Democrats were "social fascists."

[21] On 20 July 1932, imperial chancellor von Papen deposed the government of Prussia.

The Papen government is the featureless point of intersection of great historical forces. Its independent weight is next to nil. Therefore it can do nothing but take fright at its own gesticulations and grow dizzy at the vacuum unfolding on all sides of it. Thus and only thus can it be explained that in the deeds of the government up to now there have been two parts of cowardice to one part of audacity. In Prussia, that is, with the Social Democracy, the government played a sure game: it knew that these gentlemen would offer no resistance. But after it had dissolved the Reichstag, it announced new elections and did not dare to postpone them. After proclaiming the state of martial law, it hastened to explain: this is only in order to facilitate the capitulation without a struggle of the Social Democratic leaders.

However, isn't there a Reichswehr? We are not inclined to forget it. Engels defined the state as armed bodies of men with material accessories in the form of prisons, etc. With respect to the present governmental power, it can even be said that only the Reichswehr really exists. But the Reichswehr seems by no means a submissive and reliable instrument in the hands of that group of people at whose head stands Papen. As a matter of fact, the government is rather a sort of political commission of the Reichswehr.

But for all its preponderance over the government, the Reichswehr nevertheless cannot lay claim to any independent political role. A hundred thousand soldiers, no matter how cohesive and steeled they may be (which is still to be tested), are incapable of commanding a nation of sixty-five million torn by the most profound social antagonisms. The Reichswehr represents only one element in the interplay of forces, and not the decisive one.

In its fashion, the new Reichswehr reflects rather well the political situation in the country that has led to the Bonapartist experiment. The parliament without a majority, with irreconcilable wings, offers an obvious and irrefutable argument in favor of dictatorship. Once more the limits of democracy emerge in all their obviousness. Where it is a question of the foundations of society itself, it is not parliamentary arithmetic that decides. What decides is the struggle.

We shall not undertake to counsel from afar what road the attempts at forming a government will take in the next days. Our hypotheses would come tardily in any case, and besides, it is not the possible transitional forms and combinations which decide the question. A bloc of the right wing with the Center would signify the "legalization" of a seizure of power by the National Socialists, that is, the most suitable cloak for the fascist coup d'etat. What relationships would develop in the early days between Hitler, Schleicher and the Center leaders is more important for them than it is for the German people. Politically, all the conceivable combinations with Hitler signify the dissolution of bureaucracy, courts, police, and army into fascism.

If it is assumed that the Center will not agree to a coalition in which it would have to pay by a rupture with its own workers for the role of a brake on Hitler's locomotive - then in this case only the open extraparliamentary road remains. A combination without the Center would more easily and speedily insure the predominance of the National Socialists. If the latter do not immediately unite with Papen and at the same time do not pass over to an immediate assault, then the Bonapartist character of the government will have to emerge more sharply: Schleicher would have his "hundred days" ... without the preceding Napoleonic years.

Hundred days - no, we are figuring far too generously. The Reichswehr does not decide. Schleicher does not suffice. The extraparliamentary dictatorship of the Junkers[22] and the magnates of financial capital can only be assured by the method of a wearisome and relentless civil war. Will Hitler be able to fulfill this task? That depends not only upon the evil will of fascism, but also upon the revolutionary will of the proletariat.

[22] Prussian landed gentry.

Leon Trotsky

German Bonapartism

(October 1932)

The elections to the Reichstag put the "presidential" government[23] to a new critical test. It is useful, therefore, to remind ourselves of its social and political nature. It is precisely through the analysis of such concrete and, at first glance, "sudden" political phenomena as the government of Papen-Schleicher, that the Marxist method reveals its invaluable advantages.

At one time we defined the "presidential" government as a species of Bonapartism. It would be incorrect to see in this definition the chance outcome of a desire to find a familiar name for an unfamiliar phenomenon. The decline of capitalist society places Bonapartism – side by side with fascism and coupled with it – again on the order of the day. Previously we have characterized the government of Brüning as a Bonapartist one. Then, in retrospect, we narrowed the definition to a half, or pre-Bonapartist one.

What did other Communists and in general "Ieft" groups say in this connection? To await an attempt at a scientific definition of a new political phenomenon from the present leadership of the Comintern would of course be naive, not to say foolish. The Stalinists simply place Papen in the fascist camp. If Wels and Hitler are "twins," then such a trifle as Papen is altogether not worth breaking one's head about. This is the same political literature that Marx called vulgarian and which he taught us to despise. In reality fascism represents one of the two main camps of civil war. Stretching his arm to power, Hitler first of all demanded the relinquishing of the street to him for seventy-two hours. Hindenburg refused this. The task of Papen-Schleicher: to avoid civil war by amicably disciplining the National Socialists and chaining the proletariat to police fetters. The very possibility of such a regime is determined by the relative weakness of the proletariat

The SAP rids Itself of the question of the Papen government as well as of other questions by means of general phrases. The Brandlerites preserved silence on our definition as long as the matter concerned Brüning, that is, the incubation period of Bonapartism. When, however, the Marxist characterization of Bonapartism confirmed itself fully in the theory and practice of the presidential government the Brandlerites came out with their criticism: the wise owl of Thalheimer takes flight in the late hours of the night.

The Stuttgart Arbeitertribuene teaches us that Bonapartism, raising the military-police apparatus over the bourgeoisie in order to defend its class domination against its own political parties, must be supported by the peasantry and must use methods of Social Democracy. Papen is not supported by the peasantry and does not introduce a pseudoradical program. Therefore, our attempt to define the government of Papen as Bonapartism "does not fit at all." This is severe but superficial.

How do the Brandlerites themselves define the government of Papen? In the same issue of the Arbeitertribuene there are very timely announcements of the lecture of Brandler on the subject: "Junker-monarchical, fascist or proletarian dictatorship?" In this triad the regime of Papen is presented as a Junker-monarchist dictatorship. This is most worthy of the Vorwaerts and of vulgar democrats in general That titled German Bonapartists make some sort of little private presents to the Junkers is obvious. That these gentlemen are inclined to a monarchistic turn of mind is also known. But it is purest liberal nonsense that the essence of the presidential regime is Junker monarchism.

Such terms as liberalism, Bonapartism, fascism have the character of generalizations. Historical phenomena never repeat themselves completely. It would not have been difficult to prove that even the government of Napoleon III, compared with the regime of Napoleon I, was not "Bonapartist – not only because Napoleon himself was a doubtful Bonaparte by blood, but also because his relations to the classes, especially to the peasantry and to the lumpenproletariat were not at all the same as those of Napoleon I. Moreover, classical Bonapartism grew out of the epoch of gigantic war victories, which the Second Empire[24] did not know at all. But if we should look for the repetition of all the traits of Bonapartism, we will find that Bonapartism is a one-time, unique occurrence, i.e., that Bonapartism in general does not exist but that there once was a general named Bonaparte born in Corsica. The case is no different with liberalism and with all

[23] That is, direct rule by German president von Hindenburg, rather than parliamentary rule through the chancellor.

[24] The rule of Napoléon III, from 1852 to 1870.

other generalized terms of history. When one speaks by analogy of Bonapartism, it Is necessary to state precisely which of its traits found their fullest expression under present historical conditions.

Present-day German Bonapartism has a very complex and, so to speak, combined character. The government of Papen would have been impossible without fascism. But fascism is not in power. And the government of Papen is not fascism. On the other hand, the government of Papen, at any rate in its present form, would have been impossible without Hindenburg who, in spite of the final prostration of Germany in the war, stands for the great victories of Germany and symbolizes the army in the memory of the popular masses. The second election of Hindenburg had all the characteristics of a plebiscite. Many millions of workers, petty bourgeois, and peasants (Social Democracy and Center) voted for Hindenburg. They did not see in him any one political program. They wanted first of all to avoid civil war, and raised Hindenburg on their shoulders as a superarbiter, as an arbitration judge of the nation. But precisely this is the most important function of Bonapartism: raising itself over the two struggling camps in order to preserve property and order. It suppresses civil war, or precedes it or does not allow it to rekindle. Speaking of Papen, we cannot forget Hindenburg, on whom rests the sanction of the Social Democracy. The combined character of German Bonapartism expressed itself in the fact that the demagogic work of catching the masses for Hindenburg was performed by two big, independent parties: the Social Democracy and National Socialism. If they are both astonished at the results of their work, that does not change the matter one whit.

The Social Democracy asserts that fascism is the product of Communism. This is correct insofar as there would have been no necessity at all for fascism without the sharpening of the class struggle, without the revolutionary proletariat without the crisis of capitalist society. The Runkeyish theory of Wels-Hilferding-Otto Bauer has no other meaning. Yes, fascism is a reaction of bourgeois society to the threat of proletarian revolution. But precisely because this threat is not an imminent one today, the ruling classes make an attempt to get along without a civil war through the medium of a Bonapartist dictatorship.

Objecting to our characterization of the government of Hindenburg-Papen-Schleicher, the Brandlerites refer to Marx and express thereby an ironic hope that his authority may also have weight with us. It is difficult to deceive oneself more pathetically. The fact is that Marx and Engels wrote not only of the Bonapartism of the two Bonapartes, but also of other species. Beginning, it seems, with the year 1864, they more than once likened the "national" regime of Bismarck to French Bonapartism. And this in spite of the fact that Bismarck was not a pseudoradical demagogue and, so far as we know, was not supported by the peasantry. The Iron Chancellor was not raised to power as the result of a plebiscite, but was duly appointed by his legitimate and hereditary king. And nevertheless Marx and Engels are right. Bismarck made use in a Bonapartist fashion of the antagonism between the propertied classes and the rising proletariat overcoming in this way the antagonism within the two propertied classes, between the Junkerdom and the bourgeoisie, and raised a military-police apparatus over the nation. The policy of Bismarck is that very tradition to which the "theoreticians" of present German Bonapartism refer. True, Bismarck solved in his fashion the problem of German unity, of the external greatness of Germany. Papen however so far only promises to obtain for Germany "equality" on the international arena. Not a small difference! But we were not trying to prove that the Bonapartism of Papen is of the same caliber as the Bonapartism of Bismarck. Napoleon III was also only a parody of his pretended uncle.

The reference to Marx, as we have seen, has an obviously imprudent character. That Thalheimer does not understand the dialectics of Marxism we suspected long ago. But we must admit we thought that at least he knew the texts of Marx and Engels. We take this opportunity to correct our mistake.

Our characterization of the presidential government rejected by the Brandlerites, received a very brilliant confirmation from a completely unexpected and in its way highly "authoritative source. With regard to the dissolution of the "five-day" Reichstag, DAZ (*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, organ of heavy industry) quoted in a long article on August 28 the work of Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* – for what purpose? No more and no less than to support the historical and political right of the president to put his boot on the neck of popular representation. The organ of heavy industry risked at a difficult moment drinking from the poisoned wells of Marxism. With a remarkable adroitness the paper takes from the immortal pamphlet a long quotation explaining how and why the French president as the incarnation of the "nation" obtained a preponderance over the split-up parliament. The same article in the DAZ reminds us most opportunely of how in the spring of 1890 Bismarck developed a plan for a most suitable governmental change. Napoleon III and Bismarck as forerunners of presidential government are called by their right name by the Berlin newspaper, which – in August at least – played the role of an official organ.

To quote The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in reference to the "July 20 of Papen" is of course very risky, since Marx characterized the re-

gime of Napoleon in the most acid terms as the regime of adventurists, crooks, and pimps. As a matter of fact, the DAZ could be liable to punishment for a malicious slander of the government But if we should leave aside this incidental inconvenience, there remains nevertheless the indubitable fact that historic instinct brought the DAZ to the proper place. Unfortunately one cannot say the same of the theoretical wisdom of Thalheimer.

The Bonapartism of the era of the decline of capitalism differs utterly from the Bonapartism of the era of the ascension of bourgeois society. German Bonapartism is not supported directly by the petty bourgeoisie of the country and village, and this is not accidental. Precisely therefore, we wrote at one time of the weakness of the government of Papen, which holds on only by the neutralization of two camps: the proletariat and the fascists.

But behind Papen stand the great landowners, finance capitalists, generals – so rejoin other "Marxists." Do not the propertied classes in themselves represent a great force? This argument proves once more that it is much easier to understand class relations in their general sociological outline than in a concrete historical form. Yes, immediately behind Papen stand the propertied heights and they only: precisely therein is contained the cause of his weakness.

Under the conditions of present-day capitalism, a government which would not be the agency of finance capital is in general impossible. But of all possible agencies, the government of Papen is the least stable one. If the ruling classes could rule directly, they would have no need either of parliamentarism, or of Social Democracy, or of fascism. The government of Papen exposes finance capital too clearly, leaving it without even the sacred figleaf ordered by the Prussian Commissioner Bracht Just because the extraparty "national" government is in fact able to speak only in the name of the social heights, capital is ever more careful not to identify itself with the government of Papen. The DAZ wants to find support for the presidential government in the National Socialist masses, and in the language of ultimatums demands of Papen a bloc with Hitler, which means capitulation to him.

In evaluating the "strength" of the presidential government we must not forget the fact that if finance capital stands behind Papen, this does not at all mean that it falls together with him. Finance capital has innumerably more possibilities than Hindenburg-Papen-Schleicher. In case of the sharpening of contradictions there remains the reserve of pure fascism. In case of the softening of contradictions, they will maneuver until the time when the proletariat puts its knee on their chests. For how long Papen will maneuver, the near future will show.

These lines will appear in the press when the new elections to the Reichstag shall already have gone by. The Bonapartist nature of the "anti-French" government of Papen will inevitably reveal itself with a new force, but also its weakness. We will take this up again in due time.

Leon Trotsky

A Program of Action for France

(June 1934)

(Excerpt)

14. Down with the Bourgeois "Authoritarian State"! For Workers' and Peasants' Power

The bourgeoisie is starting to carry out its plan of the transformation of state power, to eliminate once and for all the resistance of the workers: decreasing the rights of elected democratic institutions (parliament and the communes), and even complete suppression of these rights, for the proletarian pressure is felt there even though in a perverted way.

The bourgeoisie is trying to concentrate the executive power in the hands of a few men who impose their decisions by means of an administrative, military and police apparatus, which is brutal, uncontrolled, costly.

The bourgeois plan of the "authoritarian state", directed against the exploited, must be ruthlessly attacked by the toiling masses.

Only the laboring masses, taking their future into their own hands, in one powerful revolutionary thrust, can energetically and with iron will create the necessary great power to save society from the capitalist oligarchy that corrupts it and leads it to ruin.

The task is to replace the capitalist state, which functions for the profit of the big exploiters, by the workers' and peasants' proletarian state. The task is to establish in this country the rule of the working people. To all we declare that it is not a matter of secondary 'modification,' but rather that the domination of

the small minority of the bourgeois class must be replaced by the leadership and power of the immense majority of the laboring people.

The alliance of the peasants and the workers is necessary for this. Reaction tries to frighten the peasants with the specter of a proletarian dictatorship that subjugates the peasants to the workers. But in reality the proletarian state cannot be achieved as long as the proletariat is isolated from the peasantry.

The example of the October Revolution, of Soviet Russia, helps us. However, in France we can do better than our Russian brothers and avoid some of their mistakes. France's economic level is higher, and we intend to act in conformity with the actual conditions of our country. It is on the basis of a clear and precise program and a close understanding between the proletariat and the exploited peasants that the dictatorship of the proletariat can be established.

The peasantry is scattered. This is one of the reasons for its political impotence, in spite of its numbers and its importance in production. The peasants can only gain power by making common cause with the workers against the bourgeoisie.

15. The Struggle for the Workers' and Peasants' Commune

The alliance of the peasantry and the workers will be achieved only if the working class shows its strength, its decided initiative and its ability to carry out this program. This is why we must, above all, create conditions for unity of action.

The workers' alliance of parties and trade unions must be organized, uniting all the forces of the laboring people without exception.

A national committee of the workers' alliance, regional committees, local committees, should be organized. Creation of shop committees elected by the workers.

The impulse given by these workers' alliance committees, their authority among the masses, will inspire the laboring people of the countryside to organize themselves into peasant committees.

In the struggle against fascism, reaction and war, the proletariat accepts the aid of petty-bourgeois groupings (pacifists, League for the Rights of Man, the Common Front, etc.), but such alliances can be only of secondary importance. Above all, the task is to secure the united action of the working class itself in the factories and the workers' neighborhoods of industrial centers. The alliance of the important workers' organizations (Communist Party, Socialist Party, CGT, CGTU,[25] Communist League) will have no revolutionary value unless it is oriented toward the creation of:

1. Committees of struggle representing the mass itself (embryo soviets);
2. Workers' militia, always united in action, even though organized by various parties and organizations.

To reinforce the struggle of both the workers and peasants, the workers' committees should establish close collaboration with the peasant committees. Constituted as organs of popular defense against fascism, these workers' alliance committees and these peasant committees must become, during the course of the struggle, organisms directly elected by the masses, organs of power of the workers and peasants. On this basis the proletarian power will be erected in opposition to the capitalist power, and the Workers' and Peasants' Commune will triumph.

16. For a Single Assembly

We are thus firm partisans of a Workers' and Peasants' State, which will take the power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working-class allies to this program is our primary aim.

Meanwhile, as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist[26] and fascist bourgeoisie.

However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic" socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793.[27]

Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

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[25] The General Federation of Labor (CGT) was the major union federation in France, dominated by a reformist leadership. A split in 1921 resulted in the formation of a more radical but smaller rival, the Unitary General Federation of Labor (CGTU), which lasted until the two were reunified in 1936.

[26] Bonapartism was a central concept in Trotsky's writings during the 1930's. A concise explanation of what he meant by bourgeois Bonapartism will be found in the article Bonapartism and Fascism (July 1934). His analysis of Soviet Bonapartism will be found in the article The Worker's State, Thermidor and Bonapartism (February 1935).

[27] The Third Republic of France, extending from 1871 to the French defeat by Germany in 1940, was viewed as the epitome of bourgeois corruption and hypocrisy. Trotsky is contrasting it here with 1793, when the French bourgeoisie was still revolutionary.

A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power.

If, during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of "democratic" socialism (SFIO),[28] from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie.

We want to attain our objective not by armed conflicts between the various groups of toilers but by real workers' democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism.

Workers adhering to democratic socialism must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy; democracy must be regained. The moving of the political center of gravity from parliament towards the cabinet, from the cabinet towards the oligarchy of finance capital, generals, police, is an accomplished fact. Neither the present parliament nor the new elections can change this. We can defend the sorry remains of democracy, and especially we can enlarge the democratic arena for the activity of the masses only by annihilating the armed fascist forces that, on February 6, 1934, started moving the axis of the state and are still doing so.

17. The Bourgeoisie Will Never Give Up Voluntarily

The bourgeoisie will never willingly consent to measures that can pull society out of chaos. It wants to perpetuate all its privileges, and in order to protect them it is starting to use fascist gangs.

Our slogan is not the disarming of the fascist gangs of finance capital by finance capital's own police. We refuse to spread the criminal illusion that a capitalist government can actually proceed to the disarming of the capitalist bands. The exploited must defend themselves against the capitalists.

Arming of the proletariat, arming of the poor peasants!

People's Antifascist Militia!

The exploiters, who are but a tiny minority, will recoil before the unleashing of civil war; the fascist and reactionary bands will lose their audacity only if the workers are armed and lead the masses.

Only if the workers proceed in this way will the greater part of the soldiers and sailors, children of laboring people to whom our propaganda must unceasingly recall their origins and their class duty, be won to the cause of the workers and take the side of the working masses against the reactionary and fascist officers who would use them against their class.

The task is enormous, but it is the only road to salvation! The Communist League shows the way.

Society, which can only exist by your labor, is rotting away because the ruling bourgeoisie will not give up a single one of its odious privileges. To retain them, the bourgeoisie is preparing fascist bands which threaten your existence.

On February 12[29] you displayed your power and your determination not to submit to this violence. But on that day your leaders betrayed you; they outlined no concrete slogan, no serious perspective of struggle for you. To attain your strength, to defend your right to live, to work no more for the enrichment of a minority of shameless exploiters-prepare your revolution, join the action of the Communist League!

[28] SFIO stands for the French section of the Workers (Socialist) International, the formal name of the Socialist Party. The Communist Party's formal name was the French Section of the Communist International (SFIC), but the initials used here are CP.

[29] 12 February 1934, was the day of the general strike protesting the fascist demonstration of February 6.

Leon Trotsky

Bonapartism and Fascism

(July 1934)

The vast practical importance of a correct theoretical orientation is most strikingly manifested in a period of acute social conflict, of rapid political shifts, of abrupt changes in the situation. In such periods, political *conceptions* and *generalizations* are rapidly used up and require either a complete replacement (which is easier) or their concretization, precision or partial rectification (which is harder). It is in just such periods that all sorts of *transitional, intermediate* situations and combinations arise, as a matter of necessity, which upset the customary patterns and doubly require a sustained theoretical attention. In a word, if in the pacific and "organic" period (before the war) one could still live on the revenue from a few ready-made abstractions, in our time each new event forcefully brings home the most important law of the dialectic: *the truth is always concrete.*

The Stalinist theory of fascism indubitably represents one of the most tragic examples of the injurious practical consequences that can follow from the substitution of the dialectical analysis of reality, in its every concrete phase in all its transitional stages, that is in its gradual changes as well as in its revolutionary (or counterrevolutionary) leaps, by abstract categories formulated upon the basis of a partial and insufficient historical experience (or a narrow and insufficient view of the whole). The Stalinists adopted the idea that in the contemporary period, finance capital cannot accommodate itself to parliamentary democracy and is obliged to resort to fascism. From this idea, absolutely correct within certain limits, they draw in a purely deductive, formally logical manner the same conclusions for all the countries and for all stages of development. To them, Primo de Rivera[30], Mussolini, Chiang Kai-shek, Masaryk[31], Brüning, Dollfuss[32], Pilsudski[33], the Serbian King Alexander, [34]Severing[35], MacDonald[36], etc., were the representatives of fascism. In doing this, they forgot: (a) that in the past, too, capitalism never accommodated itself to "pure" democracy, now supplementing it with a regime of open repression, now substituting one for it; (b) that "pure" finance capitalism nowhere exists; (c) that even while occupying a dominant position, finance capital does not act within a void and is obliged to reckon with the other strata of the bourgeoisie and with the resistance of the oppressed classes; (d) that, finally, between parliamentary democracy and the fascist regime a series of transitional forms, one after another, inevitably interposes itself, now "peaceably," now by civil war. And each one of these transitional forms, if we want to go forward and not be flung to the rear, demands a correct theoretical appraisal and a corresponding policy of the proletariat.

On the basis of the German experience, the Bolshevik-Leninists recorded for the first time the transitional governmental form (even though it could and should already have been established on the basis of Italy) that we called Bonapartism (the Brüning, Papen, Schleicher governments). In a more precise and more developed form, we subsequently observed the Bonapartist regime in Austria. The determinism of this transitional form has become patent, naturally not in the fatalistic but in the dialectical sense, that is, for the countries and periods where fascism, with growing

[30] Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930), the bonapartist ruler of monarchist Spain under Alfonso XIII from 1923-1929.

[31] Thomas Masaryk (1850-1937) was the first president of Czechoslovakia, from 1918 to 1935.

[32] Engelbert Dollfuss (1892-1934) was chancellor of Austria in 1932 who the following year installed an Austro-fascist dictatorship; he was killed in July 1934 in an attempted coup by the Nazis.

[33] Jozef Pilsudski, former right-wing socialist and Polish nationalist, who led his army against the Bolsheviks in 1920. Pilsudski staged a military coup in 1926 and was the virtual dictator of Poland until he died in 1935. Trotsky's treatment of Pilsudski is ambiguous, sometimes (as below) treating him as a fascist (which he was not), elsewhere as a bonapartist (which he was).

[34] Alexander I (1888-1934) was king of Yugoslavia from 1921 until his assassination in 1924. He abolished the constitution in 1921 and dismissed parliament in 1929.

[35] Karl Severing (1875-1952) was the Social Democratic minister of the interior in Prussia until that government was removed by von Papen in 1932.

[36] James Ramsay MacDonald (1886-1937) was the foreign secretary in the first British Labour government and then became prime minister in 1924. He opposed the British general strike of 1926, and broke from Labour during his second term as prime minister (1928-31) to form a "national unity" cabinet with the Conservatives.

success, without encountering a victorious resistance of the proletariat, attacked the positions of parliamentary democracy in order thereupon to strangle the proletariat.

During the period of Brüning-Schleicher, Manuilsky-Kuusinen[37] proclaimed: "Fascism is already here"; the theory of the intermediate, Bonapartist stage they declared to be an attempt to paint over and mask fascism in order to make easier for the Social Democracy the policy of the "lesser evil." At that time the Social Democrats were called social fascists, and the "left" Social Democrats of the Zyromsky-Marceau Pivert-Just[38] type passed – after the "Trotskyists" – for the most dangerous social fascists. All this has changed now. With regard to present-day France, the Stalinists do not dare to repeat: "Fascism is already here"; on the contrary, they have accepted the policy of the united front, which they rejected yesterday, in order to prevent the victory of fascism in France. They have found themselves compelled to distinguish the Doumergue[39] regime from the fascist regime. But they have arrived at this distinction as empiricists and not as Marxists. They do not even attempt to give a scientific definition of the Doumergue regime. He who operates in the domain of theory with abstract categories is condemned to capitulate blindly to facts.

And yet it is precisely in France that the passage from parliamentarism to Bonapartism (or more exactly, the first stage of this passage) has taken on a particularly striking and demonstrative character. It suffices to recall that the Doumergue government appeared on the scene between the rehearsal of the civil war by the fascists (February 6) and the general strike of the proletariat (February 12). As soon as the irreconcilable camps had taken up their fighting positions at the poles of capitalist society, it wasn't long before it became clear that the adding machine of parliamentarism lost all importance. It is true that the Doumergue government, like the Brüning-Schleicher governments in their day, appears at first glance to govern with the assent of parliament. But it is a parliament that has abdicated, a parliament that knows that in case of resistance the government would dispense with it. Thanks to the relative equilibrium between the camp of counterrevolution that attacks and the camp of the revolution that defends itself, thanks to their temporary mutual neutralization, the axis of power has been raised above the classes and above their parliamentary representation. It was necessary to seek the head of the government outside of parliament and "outside the parties." The head of the government has called two generals to his aid. This trinity has supported itself on its right and its left by symmetrically arranged parliamentary hostages. The government appears not as an executive organ of the parliamentary majority, but as a judge-arbiter between two camps in struggle.

A government that raises itself above the nation is not, however, suspended in air. The true axis of the present government passes through the police, the bureaucracy, the military clique. It is a military-police dictatorship with which we are confronted, barely concealed with the decorations of parliamentarism. But a government of the saber as the judge-arbiter of the nation that's just what *Bonapartism is.*

The saber by itself has no independent program. It is the instrument of "order." It is summoned to safeguard what exists. Raising itself *politically* above the classes, Bonapartism, like its predecessor Caesarism, for that matter, represents *in the social sense,* always and at all epochs, the government of the strongest and firmest part of the exploiters; consequently, present-day Bonapartism can be nothing else than the government of finance capital, which directs, inspires and corrupts the summits of the bureaucracy, the police, the officers' caste and the press.

The "constitutional reform," about which so much has been said in the course of recent months, has as its sole task the adaptation of the state institutions to the exigencies and conveniences of the Bonapartist government. Finance capital is seeking legal paths that would give it the possibility of each time imposing upon the nation the most suitable judge-arbiter with the forced assent of the quasi-parliament. It is evident that the Doumergue government is not the ideal of a "strong government." More suitable candidates for a Bonaparte exist in reserve. New experiences and combinations are possible in this domain if the future course of the class struggle is to leave them enough time.

In prognosticating, we are obliged to repeat what the Bolshevik-Leninists said at one time about Germany: the political chances of present French Bonapartism are not great; its stability is determined by the

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[37] Dmitry Manuilsky (1883-1952) was, together with Trotsky, a member of the Mezhrayontsi (Inter-District Group) which fused with the Bolshevik Party in July 1917. In the 1920s, he supported Stalin and was secretary of the Comintern from 1931 until Stalin dissolved it in 1943. Otto Kuusinen (1881-1964) was a Finnish Social Democrat who fled to the Soviet Union after the collapse of the Finnish Revolution in April 1918. He became a Stalinist spokesman and was a secretary of the Comintern from 1922 to 1931.

[38] Jean Zyromsky (1890-1975) and Marceau Pivert (1895-1958) were left-wing members of the French Socialist Party. Pivert participated in the People's Front government of Léon Blum. Just was a Socialist journalist associated with Pivert and Zyromsky.

[39] Gaston Doumergue (1863-1937) was premier of France from February to November of 1934.

temporary and, at bottom, unsteady equilibrium between the camps of the proletariat and fascism. The relation of forces of these two camps must change rapidly, in part under the influence of the economic conjuncture, principally in dependence upon the quality of the proletarian vanguard's policy. The collision between these two camps is inevitable. The measuring time of the process will be calculated in months and not in years. A stable regime could be established only after the collision, depending upon the results.

Fascism in power, like Bonapartism, can only be the government of finance capital. In this *social* sense, it is indistinguishable not only from Bonapartism but even from parliamentary democracy. Each time, the Stalinists made this discovery all over again, forgetting that *social* questions resolve themselves in the domain of the *political.* The strength of finance capital does not reside in its ability to establish a government of any kind and at any time, according to its wish; it does not possess this faculty. Its strength resides in the fact that every non-proletarian government is forced to serve finance capital, or better yet, that finance capital possesses the possibility of substituting for each one of its systems of domination that decays, another system corresponding better to the changed conditions. However, the passage from one system to another signifies the *political crisis* that, with the concourse of the activity of the revolutionary proletariat, may be transformed into a social danger to the bourgeoisie. The passage of parliamentary democracy to Bonapartism itself was accompanied in France by an effervescence of civil war. The perspective of the passage from Bonapartism to fascism is pregnant with infinitely more formidable disturbances and consequently also revolutionary possibilities.

Up to yesterday, the Stalinists considered that our "main mistake" was to see in fascism the petty bourgeoisie and not finance capital.. In this case too they put abstract categories in place of the dialectics of the classes. Fascism is a specific means of mobilizing and organizing the petty bourgeoisie in the social interests of finance capital. During the democratic regime, capital inevitably attempted to inoculate the workers with confidence in the reformist and pacifist petty bourgeoisie. The passage to fascism, on the contrary, is inconceivable without the preceding permeation of the petty bourgeoisie with hatred of the proletariat. The domination of one and the same superclass, finance capital, rests in these two systems upon directly opposite relations of oppressed classes.

The political mobilization of the petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat, however, is inconceivable without that social demagogy, which means playing with fire for the big bourgeoisie. The danger to "order" of the unleashed petty-bourgeois reaction has just been confirmed by the recent events in Germany. That is why, while supporting and actively financing reactionary banditry, in the form of one of its wings, the French bourgeoisie seeks not to push matters to the point of the political victory of fascism, but rather only to establish a "strong" power, which, in the last analysis, is to discipline the two extreme camps.

What has been said sufficiently demonstrates how important it is to distinguish the Bonapartist form of power from the fascist form. Yet, it would be unpardonable to fall into the opposite extreme, that is, to convert Bonapartism and fascism into two logically incompatible categories. Just as Bonapartism begins by combining the parliamentary regime with fascism, so triumphant fascism finds itself forced not only to enter into a bloc with the Bonapartists but, what is more, to draw closer internally to the Bonapartist system. The prolonged domination of finance capital by means of reactionary social demagogy and petty-bourgeois terror is impossible. Having arrived in power, the fascist chiefs are forced to muzzle the masses who follow them by means of the state apparatus. By the same token, they lose the support of broad masses of the petty bourgeoisie. A small part of it is assimilated by the bureaucratic apparatus. Another sinks into indifference. A third, under various banners, passes into opposition. But while losing its social mass base, by resting upon the bureaucratic apparatus and oscillating between the classes, fascism is regenerated into Bonapartism. Here, too, the gradual evolution is cut into by violent and sanguinary episodes. Differing from prefascist or *preventive Bonapartism* (Giolitti[40], Brüning-Schleicher, Doumergne, etc.), which reflects the extremely unstable and short-lived equilibrium between the belligerent camps, *Bonapartism of fascist origin* (Mussolini, Hitler, etc.), which grew out of the destruction, the disillusionment and the demoralization of the two camps of the masses, distinguishes itself by its much greater stability.

The question "fascism or Bonapartism?" has engendered certain differences on the subject of the Pilsudski regime among our Polish comrades. The very possibility of such differences testifies best to the fact that we are dealing not with inflexible logical categories but with living social formations that represent extremely pronounced peculiarities in different countries and at different stages.

Pilsudski came to power at the end of an insurrection based upon a mass movement of the petty bourgeoisie and aimed *directly* at the domination of the

[40] Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) was the Italian prime minister prior to Mussolini's takeover.

traditional bourgeois parties in the name of the "strong state"; this is a fascist trait characteristic of the movement and of the regime. But the specific political weight, that is, the mass of Polish fascism, was much weaker than that of Italian fascism in its time and still more so than that of German fascism; to a much greater degree, Pilsudski had to make use of the methods of military conspiracy and to put the question of the workers' organizations in a much more circumspect manner. It suffices to recall that Pilsudski's coup d'état took place with the sympathy and the support of the Polish party of the Stalinists. The growing hostility of the Ukrainian and Jewish petty bourgeoisie towards the Pilsudski regime made it, in turn, more difficult for him to launch a general attack upon the working class.

As a result of such a situation, the oscillation between the classes and the national parts of the classes occupied and still occupies with Pilsudski a much greater place, and mass terror a much smaller place, than in the corresponding periods with Mussolini or Hitler; there is the Bonapartist element in the Pilsudski regime. Nevertheless, it would be patently false to compare Pilsudski to Giolitti or to Schleicher and to look forward to his being relieved by a new Polish Mussolini or Hitler. It is methodologically false to form an image of some "ideal" fascism and to oppose it to this real fascist regime that has grown up, with all its peculiarities and contradictions, upon the terrain of the relationship of classes and nationalities in the Polish state. Will Pilsudski be able to lead the action of destruction of the proletarian organizations to the very end? The logic of the situation drives him inevitably on this path, but the answer depends not upon the formal definition of "fascism" as such but upon the true relationship of forces, the dynamics of the political processes taking place in the masses, the strategy of the proletarian vanguard and, finally, the course of events in Western Europe and, above all, in France.

History may successfully inscribe the fact that Polish fascism was overthrown and reduced to dust before it succeeded in finding for itself a "totalitarian" form of expression.

We said above that Bonapartism of fascist origin is incomparably more stable than the preventive-Bonapartist experiments to which the big bourgeoisie resorts in the hope *of* avoiding fascist bloodletting. Nevertheless, it is still more important – from the theoretical and practical point of view – to emphasize that *the very fact of the regeneration of fascism into Bonapartism signifies the beginning of its end.* How long a time the withering away of fascism will last, and at what moment its malady will turn into agony, depends upon many internal and external causes. But the fact that the counterrevolutionary activity of the petty bourgeoisie is quenched, that it is disillusioned, that it is disintegrating, and that its attack upon the proletariat is weakening opens up new revolutionary possibilities. All history shows that it is impossible to keep the proletariat enchained with the aid merely of the police apparatus. It is true that the experience of Italy shows that the psychological heritage of the enormous catastrophe experienced maintains itself among the working class much longer than the relationship between the forces that engendered the catastrophe. But the psychological inertia of the defeat is but a precarious prop. It can crumble at a single blow under the impact of a powerful convulsion. Such a convulsion – for Italy, Germany, Austria and other countries – could be the success of the struggle of the French proletariat.

The revolutionary key to the situation in Europe and in the entire world is now, above all, in France!

Leon Trotsky

Whither France

(October 1934)

(Excerpts)

The Collapse of Bourgeois Democracy

After the war a series of brilliantly victorious revolutions occurred in Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and later in Spain. But it was only in Russia that the proletariat took full power into its hands, expropriated its exploiters, and knew how to create and maintain a workers' state. Everywhere else the proletariat, despite its victory, stopped half way because of the mistakes of its leadership. As a result, power slipped from its hands, shifted from left to right and fell prey to Fascism. In a series of other countries power passed into the hands of a military dictatorship. Nowhere were the parliaments capable of reconciling class contradictions and assuring the peaceful development of events. Conflicts were solved arms in hand.

The French people for a long time thought that Fascism had nothing whatever to do with them. They had a republic in which all questions were dealt with by the sovereign people through the exercise of universal suffrage. But on February 6, 1934, several thousand Fascists and royalists, armed with revolvers, clubs and razors, imposed upon the country the reactionary government of Doumergue, under whose protection the Fascist bands continue to grow and arm themselves. What does tomorrow hold?

Of course in France, as in certain other European countries (England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries), there still exist parliaments, elections, democratic liberties, or their remnants. But in all these countries the class struggle is sharpening, just as it did previously in Italy and Germany. Whoever consoles himself with the phrase, "France is not Germany", is hopeless. In all countries the same historic laws operate, the laws of capitalist decline. If the means of production remain in the hands of a small number of capitalists, there is no way out for society. It is condemned to go from crisis to crisis, from need to misery, from bad to worse. In the various countries the decrepitude and disintegration of capitalism are expressed in diverse forms and at unequal rhythms. But the basic features of the process are the same everywhere. The bourgeoisie is leading its society to complete bankruptcy. It is capable of assuring the people neither bread nor peace. This is precisely why it cannot any longer tolerate the democratic order. It is forced to smash the workers by the use of physical violence. The discontent of the workers and peasants, however, cannot be brought to an end by the police alone. Moreover, it is often impossible to make the army march against the people. It begins by disintegrating and ends with the passage of a large section of the soldiers over to the people's side. That is why finance capital is obliged to create special armed bands, trained to fight the workers just as certain breeds of dog are trained to hunt game. The historic function of Fascism is to smash the working class, destroy its organizations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery.

The Fascists find their human material mainly in the petty bourgeoisie. The latter has been entirely ruined by big capital. There is no way out for it in the present social order, but it knows of no other. Its dissatisfaction, indignation and despair are diverted by the Fascists away from big capital and against the workers. It may be said that Fascism is the act of placing the petty bourgeoisie at the disposal of its most bitter enemies. In this way big capital ruins the middle classes and then with the help of hired Fascist demagogues incites the despairing petty bourgeois against the worker. The bourgeois régime can be preserved only by such murderous means as these. For how long? Until it is overthrown by proletarian revolution.

The Beginning of Bonapartism in France

In France the movement from democracy toward Fascism is only in its first stage. Parliament exists, but it no longer has the powers it once had and it will never retrieve them. The parliamentary majority, mortally frightened after February 6, called to power Doumergue, the saviour, the arbiter. His government holds itself above parliament. It bases itself not on the "democratically" elected majority but directly and immediately upon the bureaucratic apparatus, the police and the army. This is precisely why Doumergue can permit no liberty for the civil servants or in general for employees of the state. He needs a docile and

disciplined bureaucratic apparatus on whose summit he can maintain himself without danger of falling. The parliamentary majority, scared of the Fascists and the "common front", is forced to bow before Doumergue.

At the present time much is being written about the forthcoming "reform" of the constitution, on the right to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies, etc. All these questions have only a juridical interest. In the political sense, the question is already solved. Reform has been accomplished without the trip to Versailles. The appearance on the arena of armed Fascist bands has enabled finance capital to raise itself above parliament. In this consists now the essence of the French constitution. All else is illusion, phraseology or conscious dupery.

The present role of Doumergue (like that of his possible successors, of the type of Tardieu[41]) is nothing new. It is a role analogous to that played, in different circumstances, by Napoléon I and Napoléon III. The essence of Bonapartism consists in this: basing itself on the struggle of two camps, it "saves" the "nation" with the help of a bureaucratic-military dictatorship. Napoléon I represented the Bonapartism of the bourgeoisie's impetuous youth. The Bonapartism of Napoléon III developed when the bourgeoisie was already slightly bald. In the person of Doumergue we meet the senile Bonapartism of capitalist decline.

The Doumergue government represents the first step of the passage from parliamentarianism to Bonapartism. To keep his balance, Doumergue needs at his right hand the Fascist and other bands which brought him to power. To demand of him that he dissolve the Patriotic Youth, the Croix de Feu, the Camelots du Roi, etc.—not on paper but in reality—is to demand that he cut off the branch upon which he rests.

Temporary oscillations to one side or the other are, of course, possible. Thus, a premature Fascist offensive might provoke a certain shift to the "left" at the top of the government. Doumergue would temporarily give way not to Tardieu but to Herriot[42]. But in the first place, no one has ever said that the Fascists would attempt a premature coup d'état. Secondly, a temporary shift to the left at the top would not change the general course of development. It would only postpone the showdown.

There is no longer any path back to a peaceful democracy. Events are leading inevitably and irresistibly to a conflict between the proletariat and Fascism.

[41] André Tardieu, a conservative former prime minister and interior minister.

[42] Edouard Herriot (1872-1957), leader of the Radical Party and several times premier.

Will Bonapartism Last Long?

How long can the present transitional Bonapartist régime stand? Or in other words: how much time has the proletariat to prepare itself for the decisive battle? To this question it is impossible, naturally, to give an exact reply. But certain factors can be established for the purposes of evaluating the tempo at which the whole process is developing. For this the foremost element is the question of the immediate fate of the Radical Party.

The very appearance of the present Bonapartist régime links it, as we have said, to the beginning of a civil war between the extreme political camps. It finds its principal material support in the police and the army. But it also has a political support on the left—the Radical Socialist Party. The base of this mass party is in the petty bourgeoisie of town and country. Its summit is occupied by "democratic" agents of the big bourgeoisie of town and country who have given the people occasional small reforms and, more often, democratic phrases, who have saved it daily (in words) from reaction and clericalism, but who, in all important questions, have carried out the policy of big capital.

Under the threat of Fascism, and still more under the threat of the proletariat, the Radical Socialists have found themselves obliged to pass from the camp of Bonapartism. Like the camel under its driver's whip, Radicalism gets down on its four knees to let capitalist reaction sit between its humps. Without the political support of the Radicals, the Doumergue government would at the present moment be impossible.

If the political evolution of France is compared with that of Germany, the Doumergue government and its possible successors correspond to the Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments which filled in the gap between Weimar and Hitler. There is, however, a difference which, politically, can assume enormous importance. German Bonapartism came upon the scene when the democratic parties had collapsed and the Nazis were growing at a prodigious rate. The three Bonapartist governments in Germany, having a very feeble base of their own, were balanced on the tight rope stretched across the abyss between two hostile camps—the proletariat and Fascism. All three of these governments fell quickly. The camp of the proletariat was split and unprepared for the struggle, disoriented, duped and betrayed by its leaders. The Nazis were able to take power almost without a struggle.

French Fascism does not yet represent a mass force. On the other hand, Bonapartism finds support, neither sure nor very stable but nevertheless a mass support, in the Radicals. Between these two facts there is an inner link. By the social character of its base, Radicalism is the party of the petty bourgeoisie. Fas-

cism can only become a mass force by conquering the petty bourgeoisie. In other words, Fascism can develop in France above all at the expense of the Radicals. This process is already under way, although still in its early stages. …

A Workers' Militia Must Be Built

In the ranks of the Socialist Party sometimes this objection is heard: "A militia must be formed but there is no need of shouting about it." One can only congratulate comrades who wish to protect the practical side of the business from inquisitive eyes and ears. But it would be much too naïve to think that a militia could be created unseen and secretly within four walls. We need tens and later hundreds of thousands of fighters. They will come only if millions of men and women workers, and behind them the peasants, understand the necessity for the militia and create around the volunteers an atmosphere of ardent sympathy and active support. Conspiratorial care can and must envelop only the technical aspect of the matter. The political campaign must be openly developed, in meetings, factories, in the streets and on the public squares.

The fundamental cadres of the militia must be the factory workers grouped according to their place of work, known to each other and able to protect their combat detachments against the provocations of enemy agents far more easily and more surely than the most elevated bureaucrats. Conspirative general staffs without an open mobilization of the masses will at the moment of danger remain impotently suspended in mid-air. Every working-class organization has to plunge into the job. In this question there can be no line of demarcation between the working-class parties and the trade unions. Hand in hand they must mobilize the masses. The success of the people's militia will then be fully assured.

"But where are the workers going to get arms?" object the sober "realists",—that is to say, frightened philistines—"the enemy has rifles, cannon, tanks, gas and aircraft. The workers have a few hundred revolvers and pocket knives."

In this objection everything is piled up to frighten the workers. On the one hand, our sages identify the arms of the Fascists with the armament of the state. On the other, they turn towards the state and demand that it disarm the Fascists. Remarkable logic! In fact their position is false in both cases. In France the Fascists are still far from controlling the state. On February 6 they entered into armed conflict with the state police. That is why it is false to speak of cannon and tanks when it is a matter of the immediate armed struggle against the Fascists. The Fascists, of course, are richer than we. It is easier for them to buy arms. But the workers are more numerous, more determined, more devoted, when they are conscious of a firm revolutionary leadership.

In addition to other sources, the workers can arm themselves at the expense of the Fascists by systematically disarming them.

This is now one of the most serious forms of the struggle against Fascism. When workers' arsenals will begin to stock up at the expense of the Fascist arms depots, the banks and trusts will be more prudent in financing the armament of their murderous guards. It would even be possible in this case—but in this case only—that the alarmed authorities would really begin to prevent the arming of the Fascists in order not to provide an additional source of arms for the workers. We have known for a long time that only a revolutionary tactic engenders, as a by-product, "reforms" or concessions from the government.

But how to disarm the Fascists? Naturally, it is impossible to do so with newspaper articles alone. Fighting squads must be created. An intelligence service must be established. Thousands of informers and friendly helpers will volunteer from all sides when they realize that the business has been seriously undertaken by us. It requires a will to proletarian action.

But the arms of the Fascists are of course not the only source. In France there are more than one million organized workers. Generally speaking, this number is small. But it is entirely sufficient to make a beginning in the organization of a workers' militia. If the parties and unions armed only a tenth of their members, that would already be a force of 100,000 men. There is no doubt whatever that the number of volunteers who would come forward on the morrow of a "united front" appeal for a workers' militia would far exceed that number. The contributions of the parties and unions, collections and voluntary subscriptions would within a month or two make it possible to assure the arming of 100,000 to 200,000 working-class fighters. The Fascist rabble would immediately sink its tail between its legs. The whole perspective of development would become incomparably more favourable.

To invoke the absence of arms or other objective reasons to explain why no attempt has been made up to now to create a militia, is to fool oneself and others. The principal obstacle—one can say the only obstacle—has its roots in the conservative and passive character of the leaders of the workers' organizations. The sceptics who are the leaders do not believe in the strength of the proletariat. They put their hope in all sorts of miracles from above instead of giving a revolutionary outlet to the energies pulsing below. The Socialist workers must compel their leaders to pass over immediately to the creation of the workers' militia or else give way to younger, fresher forces. …

Not A Program of Passivity But A Program of Revolution

The struggle for power must begin with the fundamental idea that if opposition to further aggravation of the situation of the masses under capitalism is still possible, no real improvement of their situation is conceivable without a revolutionary invasion of the right of capitalist property. The political campaign of the united front must base itself upon a well-elaborated transition program, i.., on a system of measures which with a workers' and peasants' government can assure the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Now a program is needed not to ease the conscience but to guide revolutionary action. What is a program worth if it remains a dead letter? The Belgian Workers' Party, for example, adopted the pompous plan of De Man with all its "nationalizations". But what sense was there in it when the party did not lift its little finger to realize it? Programs of Fascism are fantastic, false, demagogic. But Fascism carries on a fierce struggle for power. Socialism can advance the most scientific program but its value will be equal to zero if the vanguard of the proletariat does not unfold a bold struggle to capture the state. The social crisis in its political expression is the crisis of power. The old master of society is bankrupt. A new master is needed.

If the revolutionary proletariat does not take power, Fascism will inevitably take it!

A program of transitional demands for "the middle classes" can naturally assume great importance if this program corresponds, on the one hand, to the real needs of the middle classes, and on the other, to the demands of the development towards socialism. But once more the centre of gravity does not exist now in a special program. The middle classes have seen many programs. What they need is confidence that the program will be realized. The moment the peasant says: "This time it seems that the working-class parties will not retreat"—the cause of socialism is won.

But for that it is necessary to show in action that we are firmly prepared to smash every obstacle in our path.

There is no need of inventing means of struggle. They are provided by the whole history of the world working-class movement.

A concentrated campaign in the working-class press pounding steadily on the same key; real socialist speeches from the tribune of parliament, not by tame deputies but by leaders of the people; the utilization of every electoral campaign for revolutionary purposes; repeated meetings to which the masses come not merely to hear the speakers but to get the slogans and directives of the hour; the creation and strengthening of the workers' militia; well organized demonstrations driving the reactionary bands from the streets; protest strikes; an open campaign for the unification and enlargement of the trade-union ranks under the banner of resolute class struggle; stubborn, carefully calculated activity to win the army over to the cause of the people; broader strikes; more powerful demonstrations; the general strike of toilers of town and country; a general offensive against the Bonapartist government for the workers' and peasants' power.

There is still time to prepare for victory. Fascism has not yet become a mass movement. The inevitable decomposition of Radicalism will mean, however, the narrowing of the base of Bonapartism, the growth of the two extreme camps and the approach of the showdown. It is not a question of years but of months. The length of this period is not fixed by anyone but depends upon the struggle of living forces and above all upon the policy of the proletariat and its united front.

The potential forces of the revolution exceed by far the forces of Fascism and in general of the whole united reaction. Skeptics who think that all is lost must be pitilessly driven out of the workers' ranks. From the depths of the masses come vibrant echoes to every bold word, every truly revolutionary slogan. The masses want the struggle.

It is not the spirit of combination among parliamentarians and journalists, but the legitimate and creative hatred of the oppressed for the oppressors which is today the single most progressive factor in history. It is necessary to turn to the masses, toward their deepest layers. It is necessary to appeal to their passions and to their reason. It is necessary to reject the false "prudence" which is a synonym for cowardice and which, at great historical turning points, amounts to treason. The united front must take for its motto the formula of Danton: "De l'audace, toujours de l'audace, et encore de l'audace." [audacity, always audacity, and once again, audacity] To understand the situation fully and to draw from it all the practical conclusions, boldly and without fear and to the end, is to assure the victory of socialism.

Leon Trotsky

Bonapartism, Fascism and War

(August 1940)

The following article was unfinished at the time of Trotsky's assassination by a Stalinist agent on 20 August 1940. It was published in Russian in the Bulletin of the Opposition and in English translation (by John G. Wright) in Fourth International, *October 1940.*

In his very pretentious, very muddled and stupid article ["National Defense: The Case for Socialism," *Partisan Review*, July-August, 1940] Dwight Macdonald[43] tries to represent us as holding the view that fascism is simply a repetition of Bonapartism. A greater piece of nonsense would be hard to invent. We have analyzed fascism as it developed, throughout the various stages of its development and advanced to the forefront now one, now another of its aspects. There is an element of Bonapartism in fascism. Without this element namely, without the raising of state power above society owing to an extreme sharpening of the class struggle, fascism would have been impossible. But the class struggle, fascism would have been impossible. But we pointed out from the very beginning that it was primarily a question of Bonapartism of the epoch of imperialist decline, which is qualitatively different from Bonapartism of the epoch of bourgeois rise. At the next stage we separated out pure Bonapartism as the prologue to a fascist regime. Because in the case of pure Bonapartism the rule of a monarch is approximated. …

The ministries of Bruening, Schleicher, and the presidency of Hindenburg in Germany, Pétain's[44] government in France – they all have proved, or must prove, unstable. In the epoch of imperialist decline a pure Bonapartist Bonapartism is completely inadequate; imperialism finds it indispensable to mobilize the petty bourgeoisie and to crush the proletariat under its weight. Imperialism is capable of fulfilling this task only in case the proletariat itself reveals its inability to conquer power, while the social crisis drives the petty bourgeoisie into a condition of paroxysm.

The sharpness of the social crisis arises from this, that with today's concentration of the means of production, i.e., the monopoly of trusts, the law of value – the market is already incapable of regulating economic relations. State intervention becomes an absolute necessity. …

The present war, as we have stated on more than one occasion, is a continuation of the last war. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. As a general rule, a continuation signifies a development, a deepening, a sharpening. Our policy, the policy of the revolutionary proletariat toward the second imperialist war, is a continuation of the policy elaborated during the last imperialist war, primarily under Lenin's leadership. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. In this case too, continuation signifies a development a deepening and a sharpening.

During the last war not only the proletariat as a whole but also its vanguard and, in a certain sense, the vanguard of this vanguard, was caught unawares. The elaboration of the principles of revolutionary policy toward the war began at a time when the war was already in full blaze and the military machine exercised unlimited rule. One year after the outbreak of the war, the small revolutionary minority was still compelled to accommodate itself to a centrist majority at the Zimmerwald Conference.[45] Prior to the February Revolution and even afterwards, the revolutionary elements felt themselves to be not contenders for power but the extreme left opposition. Even Lenin relegated the socialist revolution to a more or less distant future…. If that is how Lenin viewed the situation, then there is hardly any need of talking about the others.

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[43] Dwight Macdonald (1906-1982), an editor of the left liberal Partisan Review at this time, was briefly a member of the Socialist Workers Party, then the Trotskyist party in the United States, in 1939-40. He split from the SWP together with Max Shachtman and James Burnham, refusing to defend the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II.

[44] Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain (1856-1951) commanded French troops at Verdun in 1916, commanded French troops who slaughtered Berber rebels in Morocco in 1925-26, was minister of defense in the 1934 Doumergue government, and in 1940 became head of the Vichy government in France that collaborated with Nazi Germany (which occupied northern France during WWII).

[45] Zimmerwald, Switzerland was the site in September 1915 of a conference to reassemble the antiwar and internationalist currents that had survived the debacle of the Second International. Most of its participants were centrist, and a second conference was held at Kienthal, Switzerland the following year of the Zimmerwald Left.

This political position of the extreme left wing expressed itself most graphically on the question of the defense of the fatherland. In 1915 Lenin referred in his writings to revolutionary wars which the victorious proletariat would have to wage. But it was a question of an indefinite historical perspective and not of tomorrow's task. The attention of the revolutionary wing was centered on the question of the defense of the capitalist fatherland. The revolutionists naturally replied to this question in the negative. This was entirely correct. This purely negative answer served as the basis for propaganda and for training the cadres, but it could not win the masses who did not want a foreign conqueror.

In Russia prior to the war the Bolsheviks constituted four-fifths of the proletarian vanguard, that is, of the workers participating in political life (newspapers, elections, etc.). Following the February [1917] Revolution the unlimited rule passed into the hands of defensists, the Mensheviks and the SRs[46]. True enough, the Bolsheviks in the space of eight months conquered the overwhelming majority of the workers. But the decisive role in this conquest was not played by the refusal to defend the bourgeois fatherland but by the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets!" And only by this revolutionary slogan! The criticism of imperialism, its militarism, the renunciation of the defense of bourgeois democracy and so on never could have won the overwhelming majority of the people to the side of the Bolsheviks. …

Insofar as the proletariat proves incapable at a given stage of conquering power, imperialism begins regulating economic life with its own methods; the political mechanism is the fascist party, which becomes the state power. The productive forces are in irreconcilable contradiction not only with private property but also with national boundaries. Imperialism is the very expression of this contradiction. Imperialist capitalism seeks to solve this contradiction through an extension of boundaries, seizure of new territories, and so on. The totalitarian state, subjecting all aspects of economic, political, and cultural life to finance capital, is the instrument for creating a supranationalist state, an imperialist empire, ruling over continents, ruling over the whole world.

All these traits of fascism we have analyzed each one by itself and all of them in their totality to the extent that they became manifest or came to the forefront.

Both theoretical analysis and the rich historical experience of the last quarter of a century have demonstrated with equal force that fascism is each time the final link of a specific political cycle composed of the following: the gravest crisis of capitalist society; the growth of the radicalization of the working class; the growth of sympathy toward the working class and a yearning for change on the part of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie; the extreme confusion of the big bourgeoisie; its cowardly and treacherous maneuvers aimed at avoiding the revolutionary climax; the exhaustion of the proletariat; growing confusion and indifference; the aggravation of the social crisis; the despair of the petty bourgeoisie, its yearning for change; the collective neurosis of the petty bourgeoisie, its readiness to believe in miracles, its readiness for violent measures; the growth of hostility towards the proletariat which has deceived its expectations. These are the premises for a swift formation of a fascist party and its victory.

It is quite self-evident that the radicalization of the working class in the United States has passed only through its initial phases, almost exclusively in the sphere of the trade-union movement (the CIO[47]). The prewar period, and then the war itself may temporarily interrupt this process of radicalization, especially if a considerable number of workers are absorbed into war industry. But this interruption of the process of radicalization cannot be of long duration. The second stage of radicalization will assume a more sharply expressive character. The problem of forming an independent labor party will be put on the order of the day. Our transitional demands will gain great popularity. On the other hand, the fascist, reactionary tendencies will withdraw to the background, assuming a defensive position, awaiting a more favorable moment. This is the nearest perspective. No occupation is more completely unworthy than that of speculating whether or not we shall succeed in creating a powerful revolutionary vanguard party. Ahead lies a favorable perspective, providing all the justification for revolutionary activism. It is necessary to utilize the opportunities which are opening up and to build the revolutionary party.

The Second World War poses the question of change of regimes more imperiously, more urgently than did the first war. It is first and foremost a question of the political regime. The workers are aware that

[46] The Social Revolutionary Party in Russia, founded in 1900, emerged as the political expression of the various populist currents, and had the greatest influence among the peasantry prior to the 1917 revolutions. The SRs joined the bourgeois Provisional Government after the February Revolution that overthrew the tsar. Aleksandr Kerensky led the right wing of the Social Revolutinaries.

[47] Congress of Industrial Organizations, formed in 1938, brought together the industrial unions in the mass production industries, in contrast to the narrow craft unions grouped in the American Federation of Labor (AFL). In 1955, the two federations merged to form the AFL-CIO.

democracy is suffering shipwreck everywhere, and that they are threatened by fascism even in those countries where fascism is as yet nonexistent. The bourgeoisie of the democratic countries will naturally utilize this dread of fascism on the part of the workers; but, on the other hand, the bankruptcy of democracies, their collapse, their painless transformation into reactionary dictatorships compel the workers to pose before themselves the problem of power and render them responsive to the posing of the problem of power.

Reaction wields today such power as perhaps never before in the modern history of mankind. But it would be an inexcusable blunder to see only reaction. The historical process is a contradictory one. Under the cover of official reaction, profound processes are taking place among the masses, who are accumulating experience and becoming receptive to new political perspectives. The old conservative tradition of the democratic state, which was so powerful even during the era of the last imperialist war, exists today only as an extremely unstable survival. On the eve of the last war the European workers had numerically powerful parties. But on the order of the day were put reforms, partial conquests, and not at all the conquest of power.

The American working class is still without a mass labor party even today. But the objective situation and the experience accumulated by the American workers can within a very brief period of time place on the order of the day the question of the conquest of power. This perspective must be made the basis of our agitation. It is not merely a question of a position on capitalist militarism and of renouncing the defense of the bourgeois state but of directly preparing for the conquest of power and the defense of the proletarian fatherland.

May not the Stalinists turn out at the head of a new revolutionary upsurge and may they not ruin the revolution as they did in Spain and previously in China? It is of course impermissible to consider that such a possibility is excluded, for example, in France. The first wave of the revolution has often, or more correctly, always carried to the top those "left" parties which have not managed to discredit themselves completely in the preceding period and which have an imposing political tradition behind them. Thus the February Revolution raised up the Mensheviks and SRs who were the opponents of the revolution on its very eve. Thus the German revolution in November 1918 raised to power the Social Democrats, who were the irreconcilable opponents of revolutionary uprisings.

Twelve years ago Trotsky wrote in an article published by *The New Republic*:

> "There is no epoch in human history so saturated with antagonisms as ours. Under too high a tension of class and international animosities, the 'fuses' of democracy 'blow out.' Hence the short-circuits of dictatorship. Naturally the weakest 'interrupters' are the first to give way. But the force of internal and world controversies does not weaken: it grows. It is doubtful if it is destined to calm down, given that the process has so far only taken hold of the periphery of the capitalist world. Gout begins in the little finger of a hand or in the big toe, but once it has begun, it reaches the heart."
>
> –"Which Way Russia?" *The New Republic*, 22 May 1929

This was written at a time when the entire bourgeois democracy in each country believed that fascism was possible only in the backward countries which had not yet graduated from the school of democracy. The editorial board of *The New Republic*, which at that period had not yet been touched with the blessings of the GPU[48], accompanied Trotsky's article with one of its own. The article is so characteristic of the average American philistine that we shall quote from it the most interesting passages.

> "In view of his personal misfortunes, the exiled Russian leader shows a remarkable power of detached analysis; but his detachment is that of the rigid Marxian, and seems to us to lack a realistic view of history – the very thing on which he prides himself. His notion that democracy is a fair-weather form of government incapable of withstanding the storms of international or domestic controversy, can be supported (as he himself half admits) only by taking for your examples countries where democracy has never made more than the feeblest beginnings, and countries, moreover, in which the industrial revolution has hardly more than started."

Further on, the editorial board of *The New Republic* dismisses the instance of Kerensky's democracy in Soviet Russia and why it failed to withstand the test of class contradictions and gave way to a revolutionary perspective. The periodical sagely writes:

> "Kerensky's weakness was an historic accident, which Trotsky cannot admit because there is no room in his mechanistic scheme for any such thing."

Just like Dwight Macdonald, *The New Republic* accused the Marxists of being unable to understand history realistically owing to their orthodox or mechanistic approach to political events. *The New Republic* was of the opinion that fascism is the product of the backwardness of capitalism and not its overripeness. In the opinion of that periodical which, I repeat, was the opinion of the overwhelming majority of average

[48] The Stalinist secret police.

democratic philistines, fascism is the lot of backward bourgeois countries. The sage editorial board did not even take the trouble of thinking about the question of why it was the universal conviction in the nineteenth century that backward countries must develop along the road of democracy. In any case, in the old capitalist countries, democracy came into its rights at a time when the level of their economic development was not above but below the economic development of modern Italy. And what is more, in that era democracy represented the main highway of historical development which was entered by all countries one by one, the backward ones following the more advanced and sometimes ahead of them. Our era on the contrary is the era of democracy's collapse, and, moreover, the collapse begins with the weaker links but gradually extends to those which appeared strong and impregnable. Thus the orthodox or mechanistic, that is, the Marxist approach to events enabled us to forecast the course of developments many years in advance. On the contrary, the realistic approach of *The New Republic* was the approach of a blind kitten. *The New Republic* followed up its critical attitude toward Marxism by falling under the influence of the most revolting caricature of Marxism, namely, Stalinism.

Most of the philistines of the newest crop base their attacks on Marxism on the fact that, contrary to Marx's prognosis, fascism came instead of socialism. Nothing is more stupid and vulgar than this criticism. Marx demonstrated and proved that when capitalism reaches a certain level, the only way out for society lies in the socialization of the means of production, i.e., socialism. He also demonstrated that in view of the class structure of society, the proletariat alone is capable of solving this task in an irreconcilable revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. He further demonstrated that for the fulfillment of this task the proletariat needs a revolutionary party.

All his life Marx, and together with him and after him Engels, and after them Lenin, waged an irreconcilable struggle against those traits in proletarian parties, socialist parties, which obstructed the solution of the revolutionary historical task. The irreconcilability of the struggle waged by Marx, Engels, and Lenin against opportunism on the one side and anarchism on the other demonstrates that they did not at all underestimate this danger. In what did it consist? In this, that the opportunism of the summits of the working class, subject to the bourgeoisie's influence, could obstruct, slow down, make more difficult postpone the fulfillment of the revolutionary task of the proletariat.

It is precisely this condition of society that we are now observing. Fascism did not at all come "instead" of socialism. Fascism is the continuation of capitalism, an attempt to perpetuate its existence by means of the most bestial and monstrous measures. Capitalism obtained an opportunity to resort to fascism only because the proletariat did not accomplish the socialist revolution in time. The proletariat was paralyzed in the fulfillment of its task by the opportunist parties. The only thing that can be said is that there turned out to be more obstacles, more difficulties, more stages on the road of the revolutionary development of the proletariat than was foreseen by the founders of scientific socialism. Fascism and the series of imperialist wars constitute the terrible school in which the proletariat has to free itself of petty-bourgeois traditions and superstitions; has to rid itself of opportunist democratic, and adventurist parties; has to hammer out and train the revolutionary vanguard and in this way prepare for the solving of the task apart from which there is not and cannot be any salvation for the development of mankind.

Eastman[49], if you please, has come to the conclusion that the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state endangers his "freedom" and he has therefore decided to renounce socialism. This anecdote deserves being included in the text of a history of ideology. The socialization of the means of production is the only solution to the economic problem at the given stage of mankind's development. All delay in solving this problem leads to the barbarism of fascism. All the intermediate solutions, undertaken by the bourgeoisie with the help of the petty bourgeoisie, have undergone miserable and shameful ruin. All this is absolutely uninteresting to Eastman. He noticed that his "freedom" (freedom of muddling, freedom of indifferentism, freedom of passivity, freedom of literary dilettantism) was being threatened from various sides, and he decided immediately to apply his own measure: renounce socialism. Astonishingly enough this decision exercised no influence either on Wall Street or on the policy of the trade unions. Life went its own way just as if Max Eastman had remained a socialist….

In France there is no fascism in the real sense of the term. The regime of the senile Marshal Pétain represents a senile form of Bonapartism of the epoch of imperialist decline. But this regime too proved possible only after the prolonged radicalization of the French working class, which led to the explosion of June 1936, had failed to find a revolutionary way out. The Second and Third Internationals, the reactionary charlatanism of the "Peo-

[49] Max Eastman (1883-1969) was an early sympathizer of the Left Opposition and translator of several of Trotsky's books. His rejection of Marxist dialectics and materialism in the 1920s was followed by his rejection of socialism in the late 1930s. He later became a virulent anti-communist and editor of *Reader's Digest.*

ple's Fronts" deceived and demoralized the working class. After five years of propaganda in favor of an alliance of democracies and of collective security, after Stalin's sudden passage into Hitler's camp, the French working class was caught unawares. The war provoked a terrible disorientation and a mood of passive defeatism, or, to put it more correctly, the indifferentism of an impasse. From this web of circumstances arose first the unprecedented military catastrophe and then the despicable Pétain regime.

Precisely because Pétain's regime is senile Bonapartism, it contains no element of stability and can be overthrown by a revolutionary mass uprising much sooner than a fascist regime.

In every discussion of political topics the question invariably flares up: shall we succeed in creating a strong party for the moment when the crisis comes? Might not fascism anticipate us? Isn't a fascist stage of development inevitable? The successes of fascism easily make people lose all perspective, lead them to forget the actual conditions which made the strengthening and the victory of fascism possible. Yet a clear understanding of these conditions is of especial importance to the workers of the United States. We may set it down as an historical law: fascism was able to conquer only in those countries where the conservative labor parties prevented the proletariat from utilizing the revolutionary situation and seizing power. In Germany, two revolutionary situations were involved: 1918-1919 and 1923-24. Even in 1929 a direct struggle for power on the part of the proletariat was still possible. In all these three cases the Social Democracy and the Comintern criminally and viciously disrupted the conquest of power and thereby placed society in an impasse. Only under these conditions and in this situation did the stormy rise of fascism and its gaining of power prove possible.

Italy: Popular Frontism and the Strong State

(*Workers Vanguard* Nos. 609, 26 October/11 November 1994)

The following article is reprinted from Workers Vanguard, *the leading newspaper of the International Communist League at a time when it was still the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism. As the article notes, the ICL had warned since 1992 that following the destruction of the Soviet Union, the Italian bourgeoisie was pushing for bonapartist measures to rip up workers' gains. The new leadership of the ICL, which took over in 1996, was in disagreement with this, and subsequently it has dropped any mention of the push by the Berlusconi regime (and the popular-front "opposition") toward a "strong state," even following the July 2001 police-state repression against "anti-globalization" demonstrators in Genova. Subsequently, as noted in our article "Fascism, Bonapartism and Police Terror in Italy" (*The Internationalist, *May-June 2002 [see page 37 of this bulletin]), the ICL declared that the Alleanza Nazionale of Gianfranco Fini was no longer fascist but only the parliamentarist "historical descendants" of the fascist MSI. This is the same position as that of the Italian PDS, Rifondazione Comunista and the Ulivo (Olive Tree) popular front.*

The rightist victory in the March 1994 elections marked a turning point in Italy's postwar history. It underlined the sharply escalating political and class polarization throughout West Europe. For the first time since World War It, fascist forces are now present in the government of an imperialist power. This ominous. development represent, a direct threat to the workers movement, as the reactionary ruling triumvirate of Berlusconi-Fini-Bossi takes aim at union gains won through decades of hard struggle.

Democratic rights are menaced by this so-called "Pole of Freedom" right-wing coalition, which claims to be "liberal" while seeking to establish a muscular "presidential republic," drastically curbing the power of parliament and the judiciary. But the "Pole of the Progressives" coalition which was defeated in the elections presents no real opposition to their reactionary designs. Indeed, the left (and not-so-left) bloc offered itself as an alternative vehicle to carry out the bourgeoisie's program for a "strong state."

In the elections of March 27-28, the Trotskyist League (LTd'I) refused to call for votes to the "progressive pole." The later was a typical *popular front,* a class-collaborationist coalition which tied the working class to direct representatives of the bourgeoisie, from anti-Mafla liberals to prominent capitalists such as a former vice president of Confindustria (the manufacturers' association) and the brother of the owner of Olivetti. Although it was led by the reformists of the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista (RC), this front is a *bourgeois* political formation. It stood not for defense of the workers' livelihoods but for the bosses' profits – to continue the government of the former Bankitalia chief Ciampi,

which has meant the loss of *one and a half million jobs* since mid-1992 and a sharp drop in real wages last year.

We have pointed out that the push toward a "strong state" in Italy is a direct result of the collapse of Stalinist rule in East Europe and the Soviet Union. Across West Europe, the capitalist rulers no longer see the need to throw a few crumbs to the workers to fend off the "communist menace." This and the economic crisis of the last several years are key factors in producing a general onslaught against the "welfare state" under its different national rubrics: *"l'état providence"* in France, "lo *stato sociale"* in Italy. What [British prime minister Margaret] Thatcher and [U.S. president Ronald] Reagan undertook in the 1980s, the continental bourgeoisies are driving hard to accomplish in the '90s: to increase profits by jacking up the rate of exploitation and holding down social "overhead" expenses. But their success is by no means guaranteed.

Now a battle has been launched over the government's plans to drastically slash pensions. Finance Minister Dini wants to cut L50,000 billion (over $30 billion) out of the health and social security system, and declares peremptorily that there will be "no negotiations on pensions" with the unions *(La Repubblica*, 7 September). This is a showdown for the entire workers movement. The CGIL-CISL-UlL union tops talk of a "hot autumn" of social struggle, while politely waiting for an audience with "no-negotiations" Dini. But angry metal workers in the Fiat bastion of Torino have declared that they are not waiting for permission and will launch a "preventive" strike against the cutback offensive of Berlusconi & Co. on September 8.

This is a good opportunity to give the rightist government in Roma the treatment the Air France workers gave the rightist government in Paris. An offensive of sharp class struggle could dramatically change the relationship of forces. Yet current PDS leader D'Alema is calling to "broaden" the popular front into a center-left "pole of the democrats." In Italy, as in France and throughout Europe and the world, the key question is leadership, the need for a revolutionary vanguard, a Leninist-Trotskyist party that can break the chains of class collaboration and wage a victorious struggle for working-class power. In order to build such a party, it is necessary to understand what are the forces in contention and what the battle is about.

"Sweat and Tears"

For the last several years, decisive sectors of the Italian bourgeoisie have been driving for an authoritarian, semi-bonapartist regime. Their goal: to "discipline" the working class by breaking the power of the unions and "clean out" the Italian political establishment, which was put together by the CIA after WWII and has since been rotted by decades of corruption. Because this involves some real reshaping of the capitalist class itself, they must displace the normal push-and-pull of competing factions under bourgeois democracy. A would-be Bonaparte, who presents himself as savior of the nation, is already in place: Citizen Berlusconi, the media magnate whose Fininvest holding company is one of the largest capitalist enterprises in the country. But he is constrained by his two allies, the fascist Italian Social Movement/National Alliance (MSI/AN) of Gianfranco Fini and Umberto Bossi's rightist populist Northern League. This latent conflict between the right-wing coalition partners came to a head in mid-July over Berlusconi's attempt to hamstring the *mani pulite* (clean hands) anti-graft investigations.

Berlusconi appealed to small and medium businessmen beset by heavy taxes and ubiquitous bribes, squeezed by the Mafia, facing powerful unions which have won relatively high wages. In a country where 99 percent of all businesses are family-owned, this is a large audience. This is the same voting base as the Northern League, whose battle cries of *"Roma ladrona"* (Rome the thief) link up the widespread anti-Southern chauvinism of the Northern petty bourgeoisie with what is at bottom a classic tax revolt. It is also from this layer of enraged petty-bourgeois that the fascist MSI/AN draws its hard core of support, until now largely in the South. Although he pitched himself to small entrepreneurs as a "self-made man;" Berlusconi is personally worth an estimated $7.5 *billion* and is the quintessence of a monopoly capitalist. And that raises a real conflict of interest between Berlusconi and his voting base. Because now that he was in the saddle, the Hon. Fininvest wanted to stop the corruption purge and get on with business. Although they recruit from the same milieus, the parties of the right-wing coalition have important policy differences (e.g., the League is federalist, the fascists are centralist). Twice in mid-July, differences within the governing majority came to fistfights in parliament. But they have one common enemy: the working class. And in spite of rifts arid maneuvering, the coalition partners will unite in their crusade to drive down wages, undo union gains and devastate the unions themselves.

In this country where union membership is still over 20 percent, the bourgeoisie from top to bottom yearns to become like the U.S., where unions are down to 15 percent of the workforce, or France, where the labor movement now counts barely 12 percent of the workers. The CGIL-CISL-UIL federations now sense that they are facing a mortal threat, and are negotiating

a bureaucratic unity agreement after decades of being tied to the multiple parties of the "first republic." But neither they nor the mass reformist workers parties, the PDS and RC, waged a *class* fight against the capitalist assault. On the contrary, through the "progressive" popular front they gagged the working class and bound it to its class enemy.

To demonstrate his "responsibility" to the bosses, then PUS leader [Achille] Occhetto promised the workers nothing but "sweat and tears." Berlusconi promised "one million jobs." With unemployment at a record 11.5 percent and rising, is it any wonder that the right wing won? And with the petty bourgeoisie clamoring for a strong state to clean up corruption, to cut taxes, to drive down wages, they voted for the force that put forward a would-be strongman who told them what they wanted to hear. Now that he's in office, of course, Berlusconi will deliver "sweat and tears."

Fascism and Bonapartism in the "Second Republic"

The right-wing election victory accompanied by pictures of fascists giving the straight-arm "Roman salute" and chanting "*Duce, Duce*" in celebration sent shock waves around the world. Was fascism back in power? Various European bourgeois and reformist leaders, such as French president Mitterrand, postured as "anti-fascists" striking the alarm. Europoliticians in Strasbourg wagged their fingers over the MSI ministers in Berlusconi's new government. But soon this died down, and various media began accepting Fini's self-definition as a "post-fascist." I here was a rush to declare fascism a purely "historical" question. Now the *New York Times Magazine* (24 July) published an article, "Benito Mussolini: Back From the Dead," discovering that *ll Duce* wasn't so bad after all, especially before 1938 (when he joined Nazi Germany in the drive to World War II – this is the same kind of argument used by "respectable" German apologists for Hitler).

The electoral gains of the fascist MSI in part reflect the political vacuum created by the collapse of the Christian Democrats and their Socialist allies, who were so shot through by corruption that key sectors of the bourgeoisie decided to get rid of them in the interest of restoring the "competitiveness" of Italian business. The now-defunct parties that governed Italy throughout the whole postwar period had been cobbled together and fostered by the American CIA to serve the purposes of the Cold War. Over time, the Italian bourgeoisie can reconstruct "center" parties with new faces and configurations. As it is, large sections of the Italian and international bourgeoisie are far from convinced that the newly preponderant rightist and fascist formations constitute the best chance for consolidating stable capitalist rule. Thus, at the time of the March elections, PDS leader Ocehetto received the OK of the American ambassador, the blessing of the Pope and the open support or tacit acceptance of prominent Italian industrialists.

Shattered by their electoral defeat, some of the "progressives" raised a lament that fascism stood at the door. On the other hand, PDS leaders Occhetto and [Massimo] D'Alema (the new party secretary) during the campaign flirted with Fini during TV talk shows, treating the MSI leader as a "valid conversation partner." Even ostensible Trotskyists belittled the fascist danger. Livio Maitan, veteran Italian spokesman of Ernest Mandel's "United Secretariat" (USec), declared that in judging the National Alliance, "overly simplistic characterisations should be avoided. No doubt, the MSI was founded to organise those nostalgic for the Mussolini regime. Bu t...it systematically integrated itself into the institutions, and appeared more as [a] right-wing or [a] conservative formation in which the weight of those nostalgic for fascism progressively diminished" (*International Viewpoint,* June 1994).

For leftists to take part in painting the heirs of Mussolini in respectable colors is foolhardy in the extreme. The National Alliance is nothing but a double-breasted electoral suit for the MSI fascists, quite a few of whom are not-so-neo at all. MSI Eurodeputy Pino Rauti was a fascist thug in Mussolini's 1943-45 "Salò Republic" in German-occupied northern Italy. And the *squadristi* are not just history. Leading MSI parliamentary deputy Teodoro Buontempo was long active with these gangs of goons. It was only a couple of years ago that blackshirted MSI squads marched in Milano to support rightist state president Francesco Cossiga. And galvanized by the victory of the right, bands of skinheads have began openly attacking the workers movement. In Roma and Milano, skinheads have burned down offices of Rifondazione Comunista, and on May 14 a couple of hundred of these Nazi scum staged a provocative march in Vicenza.

As for AN/MSI leader Fini, this "postmodern" yuppie fascist not only proclaimed ll Duce "the greatest statesman of the century" but also declared: "It's necessary to give thanks to Benito Mussolini that Italy didn't become communist in 1922." He also praised fascism as a tradition of "honesty, correctness and good government" and came to the defense of skinheads, saying "Naziskins are not dangerous."

At the same time, it would be losing all sense of reality to consider the presence of fascist ministers in the government as the equivalent of a new march on Rome. Fascism means the military mobilization of the enraged petty bourgeoisie in the interests of big capital

to prevent social revolution by utterly destroying the organized workers movement. This is not happening in Italy today, because the proletariat has not frightened the bourgeoisie by threatening its power. For now, the fascist gangs, guard dogs of capital, are being kept on a leash, mainly used to terrorize dark-skinned immigrants. What is happening, which is ominous enough, is the enlisting of petty-bourgeois *electoral* support as voting cattle for capitalist forces seeking to erect a "strong state" to *discipline* and decisively *weaken* the workers movement. But whether this succeeds depends centrally on the response of the proletariat to this concerted capitalist offensive.

With his right-wing racist appeals, Bossi and his Northern League (formerly Lombard League) certainly have fascistic overtones. Sometimes the League's aims coincide with the MSI. But Bossi's fundamental appeal is against high taxes, the bane of the small entrepreneur. "Tax regionalism" (i.e., spending more of the state's revenue in the "industrious" North rather than subsidizing the "indolent" South) is Bossi's rallying cry, not separatism.

When you strip away its medieval heraldry and costumery, the Northern League evokes the tax revolt led by Pierre Poujade in France in the 1950s. This, too, was mainly a crusade of small property owners demanding cheap government. The Poujadists were looking to sweep away the corruption and chaos of the French Fourth Republic (1947-58), where "revolving door" cabinets came and went just as frequently as in the Italian First Republic. Poujade himself recognized the affinity of his movement with the Italian Northern League. In an article last year titled "Bossi C'est Moi" in the weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* (No. 24, June 1993), Poujade expressed his sympathy for the "Senatur," saying that "your League is very similar to an updated version of Poujadism," and "they make the same criticisms of Bossi as of me: racist, xenophobe and so on."

In the French Fourth Republic, the petty-bourgeois proprietors grew increasingly unwilling to cough up the taxes to finance the losing colonial war against Algerian independence, while remaining staunchly pro-colonialist, which posed a national crisis. In rising up against the "republic of parties," the Poujadists were a movement for authoritarian rule. And when a strong man came along – General de Gaulle – Poujade's movement, although it had received 3 million votes (over 11 percent of the total) in the 1956 elections, disappeared almost overnight.

If' comparisons of' Bossi to Poujade come to mind, Berlusconi's most fervent fans picture him as a new de Gaulle – although he's a pretty poor excuse for one. The French general was a real bonapartist figure, but the "presidential" Fifth Republic he installed in 1958 was only a *semi*-bonapartist regime, in which the democratic trappings of a substantially weakened parliament were maintained. Berlusconi, with his years-long participation in the P2 "masonic lodge" (membership card number 1816), certainly aspires to de Gaulle's plebiscitary style of government.

For the last couple of years, key sectors of the Italian bourgeoisie have been demanding a "strong state" and a "second republic." In our article "Italian Capitalists Demand 'Strong State'," *Workers Vanguard* No. 554, 26 June 1992), we quoted Fiat boss Giovanni Agnelli's declaration that "a strong government that takes unpopular measures" is needed, particularly to cut pensions and health care. The present cabinet in Roma is not (yet) inch a regime, witness the hesitations of Labor Minister Mastella to launch a frontal war over pensions in the middle of the uproar over Berlusconi's attacks an the magistrates. But neither is it just a continuation of the unstable parliamentary ministries of the First Republic. The current fractious coalition, a government "uniting" the various components of the right-wing "party of order," is the intended antechamber to a Second Republic of considerably stiffened presidential powers, which are already being drafted.

But whether Berlusconi & Co. succeed in realizing their aspirations is quite another question. That depends centrally on the response of the proletariat to their capitalist offensive. There is a parallel to the victory of the Gaullist right in France a year and a half ago. After an election campaign whose hottest issue was unemployment, the French right won because Mitterrand's popular front, which had administered capitalist austerity for a dozen years, repelled decisive sections of the proletariat. The left was reduced to a small minority in the French parliament; Prime Minister Balladur's popularity soared. Yet within months, the Balladur government was reeling when the Air France workers rose in rebellion against plans to privatize the airline and cause thousands of layoffs. The victory of the workers inspired other sections of society to struggle. Last spring French students forced Balladur to abandon his plan to slash the sub-minimum wage for newly hired workers (which is an explicit model for Berlusconi's heralded "new Italian miracle").

Behind the Tangentopoli Affair

The economic program of the rightist triumvirate Berlusconi-Bossi-Fini is a derivative of Thatcherism/Reaganism, but Italy does not have the deep-seated, centuries-old Westminster traditions of bourgeois democracy, and it has the most militant working class in Europe. The fact that the labor mobilization in Italy against the cutback offensive has been the most

widespread and militant in Europe is a main reason why the recent dramatic growth of fascist and rightist populist parties and the emergence of a new popular front both came about first in the peninsula.

It all goes back to the aftermath of World War II. Italy was the one place in West Europe where the smashing of the fascist regimes was accompanied by an actual working-class uprising, which was strangled with the decisive aid of the Stalinists. This is the "heroic" history of the *Resistenza* that the offshoots of the Communist Party, the PDS and RC, look back to. But since the Italian working class was so strong, the victorious imperialist Allies and the Italian bourgeoisie had to strike a deal with the PCI. In return for preventing the workers from going for power, the Stalinists would be integrated into subordinate positions in the state apparatus.

From the 1948 constitution to the "red belt" of PCI local and provincial administrations to the *lotizzazione* (patronage jobs) which gave the RAI 3 television channel to the PCI, these concessions were the price paid for the domestication and social-democratization of the Stalinists. While Berlinguer's project of a "historic compromise" between the PCI and the Christian Democrats was vetoed at the government (cabinet) level, it was a fact at the parliamentary level: it is estimated that since the late 1970s some *80 percent* of all laws passed had the support of the PCI/PDS, which for the last 18 years has held the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies.

But to set up this system in the aftermath of the demise of the fascist regime, the American occupiers had to scramble to put together the bourgeois machinery of state. In return for keeping the Communists out of the government, the Mafia was given free rein in controlling Sicily and the South, while De Gasperi's Christian Democrats were quickly cobbled together as a "party" by allowing the fascist functionaries to remain in place. Of the 64 provincial prefects in office in 1960, 62 served in the Interior Ministry under the fascist government; all of the 241 sub-prefects made their career in the bureaucracy of Mussolini's regime; and 120 of the 135 quaestors (provincial police chiefs) entered the police under fascism.

Similar operations were carried out by American military governments in Germany and Japan. The resulting all-inclusive bourgeois parties (Christian Democrats in Europe, "Liberal Democrats" in Japan) were characterized less by their program than for the fact that they served as institutionalized bulwarks against the Communists. The process of mediating between different factions of the ruling class was carried out through the maneuvering of tendencies within these hegemonic parties of the bourgeoisie. And to oil this machinery, patronage was spread about on the model of New York City's Tammany Hall political machine.

In large part because of the militancy of the Italian working class, Italy did not undergo lengthy military occupation. The Americans couldn't even afford to go through the motions of "de-Nazification" and cartel-busting that were carried out in postwar West Germany (only to be reversed with the onset of the Cold War). The old fascist state-owned business syndicates (and firms like Fiat and Pirelli) continued to operate without a hitch. As a result, roughly 40 percent of Italy's economy is in the public sector, going up to 90 percent in key sectors such as transportation, steel and banking. These state-capitalist enterprises then became the source of patronage jobs and bribes.

The pervasive graft which became the object of the corruption scandal and the *mani pulite* (clean hands) judicial operation was not due to any special avarice of Italian politicians. Rather it was the product of and necessary fuel for a whole system set up to deny the strongest CP in West Europe control of the state. Thus the IRI (the giant industrial holding company set up by Mussolini, with almost 500,000 employees) was staffed by right-wing Christian Democrats: ENI (oil) was run by left Christian Democrats, beginning with Enrico Mattei, and Sarragat's Social Democrats (PSDI). In the 1960s, when the Socialist Party (PSI) joined the coalition with the DC, the electricity industry was nationalized to create ENEL to give them jobs.

This payroll padding occurred on a truly massive scale, and contributed to the enormous budget deficits which steadily pushed up to over L160,000 billion (US$I03 billion) this year, or about 13 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By now, the accumulated public debt is up to L1,500,000 billion (US$1 trillion), or about *110 percent of the annual GDP*. In addition, the cost of bribes has been estimated about L15,000 billion a year, while organized crime takes in something like L26,000 billion yearly, according to the London *Financial Times* (30 June 1993). This tremendous overhead cost for Italian capitalists has become all the more burdensome as the collapse of the "threat" of the Soviet bloc since 1989 made it seem unnecessary.

Carlo de Benedetti, head of Olivetti and publisher of *La Repubblica*, summed up the causes of the demise of the Christian Democratic regime in an interview in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* (29 November 1993):

> "The catalyst of this revolution was the fall of the Berlin Wall. Italy also had its internal Wall, and it collapsed just like the one in Berlin. As the Communist threat was finally gone, there was no more

reason to accept the Christian Democrats' blackmailing with the Communists. With this blackmail, a lot of people made a huge lot of money. Corruption and state debt are the price that had to be paid for the political consensus. The rulers hollowed out Italy's financial stability for their private purposes. They didn't worry about the infrastructure and the educational system. They destroyed the administration and the state."

Competition from capitalist rivals is another important factor leading to the explosion of this system. While Italy had the largest Communist Party of' West Europe, its industry was the least able to withstand the impact of the advent of the European single market at the end of 1992. Italy's few giant conglomerates are mostly state-owned and heavily in debt, while there are a multitude of small and medium-sized companies. Thus while three of the seven largest European companies are Italian (IRI, Fiat and ENI), after those three giants there was nothing until Ferruzzi (no. 43 on a list published by *Die Zeit*, 30 August 1991).

As the Bundesbank and German capital remake West Europe in their image, they have imposed a number of rules (e.g., budget deficits not to exceed 3 percent of GDP, strict limits on government subsidies) which would cripple Italian big government holdings, while the tiny family-owned firms are not large enough to compete with much larger German *Mittelstand* (middle bourgeois) companies. So in order to become competitive, Italy's bourgeoisie, both small and large, are seeking to feed off the state-owned giants through *privatization.* Already in the last six months of the Ciampi government, three major public banks and other enterprises were sold off to the sum of L10 trillion (US$640 million). Now the Berlusconi cabinet has decided to put the state insurance company INA on the market, followed by STET (telecommunications), ENEL (electricity) and, in 1995, ENI (oil).

Berlusconi is an *affarista* (profiteering) adventurer who promises to produce a new "Italian miracle" like the 1970s and '80s by *"privatizing" the state* in the interest of himself and his cronies. (Louis Bonaparte similarly made fortunes by handing out concessions for railway construction while speculating on the Paris bourse.) In the *Azienda Italia* (Italy Inc.) which Berlusconi wants to establish, *he* is to be the *capo.* While complaining about an *assistenzialista* (welfare) state, he wants the state to assist business, or at least his business interests, and he isn't worried about damaging the other big shots of Italian capitalism.

The Working Class Under Attack

The main aim of the Italian capitalists is to go after the hard-won gains of the workers movement. As part of the deal to piece off the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the unions in the postwar period, Italian capital agreed to various mechanisms to ensure labor peace. These have grown increasingly expensive, and now they urgently want to do away with them. The *scala mobile* (inflation adjustment escalator) was introduced in 1946, immediately after the defeat of the workers' near-revolution the year before. Similarly, after the 1969 "hot autumn" of worker and student struggles, there was a huge expansion of social services, introduction of the *cassa integrazione* (supplemental unemployment benefits) for temporary layoffs, etc. This was paid for with budget deficits, financed by huge emissions of BOTs (treasury bills). The interest costs on this debt continue to rise, contributing to inflation.

The result was that in 1992 total labor costs (wages plus social benefits) in Italy were US$21 an hour, *the second highest in the Common Market after Germany* ($27/hour) and well ahead of the U.S. ($16), according to the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft. But the lira was chained to the D-mark through the European Monetary System (EMS), making it impossible to devalue, and pricing Italian exports out of the market (since with a relatively low level of automation, Italian labor costs per unit of output became correspondingly much higher). The bourgeoisie declared war on the workers in mid-late 1992. The *scala mobile* was eliminated, the lira was unhooked from the EMS and devalued by 25 percent against the D-mark, and industry carried out hundreds of thousands of layoffs.

The result has been a massive assault on the living standards of the Italian working class. Even according to official figures, unemployment is currently at a record high of 11.6 percent of the workforce – over 14 percent according to the Economist Intelligence Unit – and rising. From mid-1992 (before the Amato government's austerity package) to the end of 1993, the civilian labor force lost more than 1.5 million jobs, a whopping 7 percent of the total, the highest recorded job loss of any West European country in the last 15 years.

The result of this onslaught was an induced recession that led to a fall of the Gross Domestic Product in 1993 for the first time since 1975. Private consumption fell by over 2 percent, real wages by 3.7 percent. But the most significant aspect of this attack on the workers' livelihoods is that it was negotiated with the full cooperation of the reformist union tops. This betrayal is what gave rise to the militant outbursts of bitter anger by the trade-union ranks, pelting their own leaders with worthless coins, rotten vegetables and bolts in the "hot au-

tumn" of 1992. And that response is what the sell-out bureaucrats and bosses fear today.

So the onslaught against the Italian working class was already well underway when the right-wing coalition triumphed in the March elections. Now business interests want to escalate the attack, particularly against pensions and the National Health System. Meanwhile, massive unemployment (over 20 million jobless in Europe according to official statistics) is blamed on the supposed "rigidity" of the labor market. What these capitalist ideologues are saying, in their economist jargon, is that they want to break the unions' power to raise wages. They want to consign youth to poverty--level jobs, to slash unemployment insurance, social security, health and welfare benefits, in fact to *increase* "cyclical" unemployment, so that wages would fall to the point where, supposedly, with the price of this commodity cheap enough, the labor market would "clear" and unemployment would disappear.

In fact, this would not eliminate unemployment at all, but create a mass of impoverished workers who can then be used as potential scabs to batter the unions and *raise profits*. This plan for massive wage-gouging has become official policy for the leading capitalist powers. And it is already being implemented in the U.S., from Reagan to Clinton. Thus according to the OECD statistics from 1992 to 1993, the profit rate (rate of return on capital in the business sector) in the U.S. rose from 12.5 percent to 18.3 percent, almost a 50 percent rise, while in Italy it remained pretty much unchanged, going from 11.9 percent to 12.3 percent.

Now Italian bosses (at the head of the queue of the West European bourgeoisies) are pushing to climb on the gravy train. In the name of "competitiveness," the imperialist bourgeoisies are competing with each other to counter the long-term tendency to decline in the rate of profit by jacking up the rate of exploitation through driving down wages and eliminating every form of social welfare benefits and gains for workers. "Globalization" of the economy means a global war on the working class.

Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution

The Europe-wide capitalist offensive against the "welfare state" is built on the lie that if social benefits for the masses are slashed, the trains will run on time – as they mythically did under Mussolini – and cheaply. We say: the working class must throw back the attacks against wages, pensions, the health system, education, the privatizations and the assault on the unions. But the answer is not to return to a nonexistent "social" capitalism, with its bloated state apparatus of legions of ticket-punching officials, but to set up a regime based on the power of soviets, of democratically elected workers councils which combine deliberative and executive functions. This could truly provide the highest quality health care for all. and ensure a dignified old age in comfort and prosperity rather than penury.

The fact that a bonapartist danger is posed does not at all mean that it can be fought with a simply (bourgeois) "democratic" program. That an "anti-party" and anti-political mood could gain such force is evidence of the perceived bankruptcy of the Italian parliamentary regime. The working class can offer the prospect of relief for the hard-pressed petty bourgeoisie from the crushing weight of state parasitism (of which the Mafia is a concomitant element), but not in the manner of the PDS and RC reformists with their fantasies of a "judicial road to power." The Paris Commune, the dictatorship of the proletariat, was the answer to Louis Bonaparte's tawdry Second Empire, not a return to the exhausted Second Republic. As Marx wrote:

> "The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality, by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure – the standing army and State functionarism.... But neither cheap Government nor the 'true Republic' was its ultimate aim; they were its mere concomitants."
> –*The Civil War in France* (1871)

It is by overturning capitalism that this oppressive state machinery can be removed. Thus today the fight must be for an Italian republic of soviets in a Socialist United States of Europe. A workers revolution in Italy must be extended throughout Europe, particularly to the industrial powerhouse of Germany, and the other imperialist centers, which will do everything they can to crush it. The dogma of building "socialism in one country" was a nationalist lie when put forward by Stalin/Bukharin as the "program" of the conservative bureaucracy that betrayed the internationalist program of the October Revolution. Today, following the collapse of Stalinist rule throughout East Europe under the economic pressure of imperialism, its bankruptcy must be clear to all.

The counterpart of "socialism in one country" In the USSR was the "popular front" abroad, binding the working class to supposedly "democratic" sectors of the bourgeoisie. This was used to head off workers revolution in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the Italian *Resistenza*, and has blocked sharp class struggle ever since. Thus today the "Pole of the Progressives" led by the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista (RC) is acting as a loyal par-

liamentary opposition to the right-wing government, trying to establish its credentials as an alternative leadership for the "strong state" the bourgeoisie seeks. The first thing that D'Alema did after replacing Occhetto at the head of the PDS was to totally surrender to the new government's antiworker program, saying "yes" to the subminimum "starting salary" for youth, "yes" to financing private education, "no" to defending jobs "to the end."

Then there are the COBAS (Rank and File Committees), bringing together some of the most combative sections of the working class in strategic factories in the North. At Alfa Romeo, the COBAS even outvoted the candidates of the FIOM/CGIL leadership in union elections. Yet although during the March parliamentary elections Rifondazione Comunista dropped COBAS candidate Calini (an oppositionist inside RC) in order to further class collaboration, the COBAS still decided to vote for the coalition of the "Progressives"! These union opposition forces try to box in the workers' struggles within the limits of militant syndicalism. But in this period of economic decay, every important demand of the working class inevitably goes beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and comes up against the bourgeois state. And thus the COBAS have no program, either electorally or through labor struggle, to fight the reformist misleaders. This made it possible for the CGIL Metal Workers federation to sign a sellout contract this year without even a token strike, for the first time since World War II.

To answer the provocations by this government pledged to war on the workers' gains requires a revolutionary program. Berlusconi himself understands this well. In the uproar over the "conflict of interests" between his role as premier and his ownership of the three main private TV chains, he challenged the opposition to put up or shut up: "One way for me not to remain the owner of Fininvest would be to collectivize it, to expropriate it. If someone wants to, let them put this forward" (*La Repubblica*, 4 August)! But, of course, none of the leaders of the pusillanimous "progressive" left accepted the challenge, for like Berlusconi they are committed to privatization rather than collectivization, to defense of the interests of capital rather than defense of the workers.

It's not that the will to fight is lacking among the working masses and youth. In June, tens of thousands demonstrated to protest attacks on public education, and over 50,000 health workers went into the streets to defend their contract. On July 2, some 10,000 demonstrated for gay pride, which should be a message to despots like the fascist Buscaroli, who campaigned for the European Union elections calling for concentration camps for gays. A few days earlier, on June 28, porters in the port of Genova went on strike, refusing to unload the *Achille Lauro* (infamous as the cruise liner where an elderly Jewish man was killed by Palestinian nationalists) when Fini and his fascist pals returned from a Mediterranean cruise in which they revisited the site of the El Alamein WWII battle.

But such combative anti-fascist and working-class actions do not have the support of, and are often actively opposed by, the PDS and RC leaders. Where the popular front tells workers to take thousands of layoffs in the name of "shared sacrifices," a class-struggle leadership must put forward a program of transitional demands and slogans to transform defensive struggles into a proletarian offensive capable of smashing the right and leading the way to a workers government. Against the mass unemployment and attacks on the living standards of the working class, it's necessary to defend every job and to fight not just to win back the *sliding scale of' wages* (protection against inflation) but also to institute a *sliding scale of hours*, to divide all available work with no loss in pay among those needing it, both Italian and immigrant.

This would also answer Berlusconi's demagogic attempts to impose a lower starting wage for new hires. This is an open invitation for the employers to sack older workers who have a family to feed and have sweated for decades; it would be a way of diving out of the factories the unionized workers and particularly those militants who have played a leading role in workers' struggles. But a concerted fight against this, raising such a program to *unite* the interests of young and old workers against capital, could bring hundreds of thousands into struggle as the marches against the sub-minimum "youth wage" in France did this spring. In marches and strikes, *the organization of pickets and workers defense guards* can protect against cops and scabs and open the way to militant workers mobilizations to disperse the fascists.

The need for massive *working-class mobilizations to stop fascist terror* was sharply posed in Vicenza in May. The PDS and RC leadership were utterly indifferent, limiting themselves to verbal protests. When a number of *autonomo* (semi-anarchist) militants responded to the Nazi skinhead provocation, attacking the local offices of the MSI and denouncing the fascists in the government as the inspirers of the killer skinheads, RC president and "anti-fascist partisan" Armando Cossutta responded by denouncing the *autonomi*. We demand: *Hands off Autonomia Operaia and other anti fascist militants!*

The defense of immigrant workers is a crucial issue for a revolutionary party acting as a tribune of the people in defending all victims of oppression. While the PDS and RC have even joined in the racist anti-

immigrant furor, and are not to be seen in protests over fascist assaults on darker-skinned "foreigners," Marxists call for *full citizenship rights for immigrants*. With the upsurge in irredentist demagogy, especially against Slovenia and Croatia over Istria, it is especially important to *defend autonomy for national minorities*, such as German-speakers in the South Tirol (Alto Adige) and Slavs in the Friuli-Giulia and Trieste areas. (The PCI was notorious for its chauvinist attitude toward Slavs in Trieste.) Genuine communists must also *mobilize against the foreign adventures of ragtag Italian imperialism*, in Somalia, Mozambique and now Rwanda.

As well, for a party that seeks to promote the participation and leadership of women in the class struggle and the fight for women's liberation, it is urgent to fight for free abortion on demand, including for minors and immigrants; for quality free public health service for all; and for the *complete separation of church and state* – rip up the Lateran Treaties, no extraterritoriality for the Vatican, the Roman Catholic church should have the same democratic rights as all other religious institutions. The working class must take up the demands for full and free access to all public education, with adequate stipends for students. In short, it is necessary to put forward a program to guide social struggles of all the oppressed toward the fundamental question of proletarian power.

But the entire panorama of the Italian pseudo-left, from the PDS/RC reformists to the opposition inside Rifondazione Comunista led by the ostensible Trotskyists Maitan, Grisolia and Ferrando, limit themselves to a program of economism and are unable to put forward an alternative to class collaboration. The supporters of the "second motion" (against joining the "Pole of the Progressives") at the January RC conference grouped around the magazine *Proposta* (edited by Grisolia and Ferrando) subsequently placed themselves to the right of sectors of the working class, saying it "would be an error" not to vote for the candidates of the popular front, including the openly bourgeois candidates.

The absence of a genuinely Bolshevik party in Italy has meant that the most militant working class in Europe has remained trapped in the false "alternatives" of class-collaborationist parliamentarism and militant syndicalism, which has no program for revolutionary *political* struggle against the bourgeoisie and its reformist labor lieutenants. The centrists and reformists of the second order disarm the working class and keep it tied to the popular front. What is necessary is to build a Leninist party which relentlessly fights for working-class political independence, seeking to split the base from the tops of the bourgeois workers parties as part of the struggle for socialist revolution. The workers must be organized to fight for their own class rule – the dictatorship of' the proletariat, which, as Marx said, in freeing itself frees society as a whole. The Lega Trotskista is dedicated to building such a party.

Fascism, Bonapartism and Police Terror in Italy

(*The Internationalist* No. 13, May-June 2002)

In Genova, Italy last summer the government of Silvio Berlusconi imposed a veritable police state on tens of thousands of demonstrators protesting against the meetings of the heads of state of the eight leading capitalist powers (the Group of 8). On July 20, carabinieri (paramilitary national police) charged into a peaceful demonstration and as protesters scattered, they shot an "anti-globalization" demonstrator, Carlo Giuliani, in the head, rolled over him twice with a police vehicle and drove off. It was an execution. That night squads of riot police broke into the Diaz school which housed many protesters and the independent media center that was sending out news of the demonstrations. The blood-stained walls recorded the horrors that took place as scores of youth were brutally clubbed and hauled off to holding pens. As they were carrying out the attack, the cops repeatedly shouted "Viva Il Duce!" (Mussolini) and "Viva Pinochet!"

Italy is the West European country where the connection between fascists, police-state terror and a drive toward a bonapartist "strong state" stands out in sharpest relief. This is no accident, because for decades Italy simultaneously had the most solidly implanted fascist party and the largest Communist Party. The Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which regularly got 5 percent of the vote, was founded in 1946 by the remnants of the Salò Republic, the last redoubt of Benito Mussolini at the end of World War II. In 1993 the MSI renamed itself the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini, who declared the new party to be "post-fascist." Yet despite the superficial face-lift and a split two years later of a tiny group nostalgic for the old days, the AN is essentially the same party as its fascist predecessor.

In 1994, the AN got over 13 percent of the vote, and joined the government of rightist media magnate

Silvio Berlusconi with five ministers. (In Naples, the niece of the Duce, Alessandra Mussolini, got almost 47 percent.) However, a series of massive workers strikes and judicial investigations of government corruption and conflicts of interest stymied the first Berlusconi government. The "Ulivo" (Olive Tree) popular front led by the social-democratic rump of the old Communist Party, the Democratic Left (DS), was elected two years later and, dependent on the parliamentary support of Rifondazione Comunista, it proceeded to push through many of the anti-worker "reforms" that the right-wing Berlusconi couldn't get passed. As the working class became demoralized, Berlusconi's Forza Italia won elections in March 2001 in alliance with Fini's AN and Umberto Bossi's Lega Nord, a right-wing populist regional party.

The AN was given the ministry of the interior, in charge of the numerous police forces. The fascist minister, Claudio Scajola, immediately began setting up special squads armed and trained for civil war. The carabinieri who shot Carlo Giuliani were brought up from the south, after being trained by Los Angeles sheriffs in military tactics used to suppress the 1992 L.A. upheaval. Hundreds of arrested protesters were sent to a prison camp outside Genova where they were tortured by the GOM prison riot cops, notorious for their fascist leanings and for carrying out massacres of inmates at Sassari and Secondigliano. Prisoners who refused to sing the fascist anthem *Falcenetta* were beaten. On the day of the attack, fascist vice-premier Fini himself was in the Genova police headquarters following the situation.

This is not to say that the bourgeois "democrats" and reformists aren't capable of unleashing police terror – on the contrary. The plans for the Genova summit were begun under the previous popular-front government, and only a few weeks earlier the police of social-democratic Sweden gunned down an anti-globalization protester in Göteborg. As corporate mergers set off a new wave of layoffs and union gains are under attack throughout Europe, social-democratic and liberal parties are enacting draconian laws against immigrants and criminalizing leftist and labor demonstrations. In Italy, *il cavaliere* Berlusconi is an aspiring Bonaparte rather than a fascist; he was a member of the infamous P2 network whose influence extended throughout the political, military/police and business hierarchies. But while Berlusconi holds the baton, in a country like Italy – where ties between fascists and the secret services go back decades (the head of P2, Licio Gelli, was Mussolini's envoy to Göring's SS) and played a key role in the government's "strategy of tension," such as in the 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station that killed 85 – the heirs of Mussolini in the government play a key role in implementing police-state measures.

As Fini's Alleanza Nazionale was preparing to enter the government last year, the Italian section of the International Communist League, the Lega Trotskista (LTd'I), declared that the AN "historical descendants" of the fascist MSI were "essentially an electoral phenomenon, no different from the Austrian FPÖ of Jörg Haider." Certainly, "terrorist groups nostalgic for Mussolini commit frequent acts of fascist terror and violence, in the first place against immigrants and other minorities, the weakest strata of the proletariat," they allowed, "but they are still far from having the strength to directly attack the organized workers movement" (*Spartaco*, April 2001). So because the terror is directed mainly at immigrants and other minorities, AN isn't fascist according to the LTd'I! This is not only an astounding chauvinist statement but a falsehood as well. In fact the fascists' victims aren't only immigrants, as was dramatically shown in Genova only a few weeks later.

But not only in Genova, and not only by fascist-infested police. In December 2000 one Andrea Insabato exploded a bomb at the offices of the leftist daily *Il Manifesto* in the center of Rome. The bomber was formerly close to the fascist terror group Forza Nuova and more recently the anti-Semitic Militia of Christ; in the 1970s he had participated in an armed assault on a Communist Party office. Insabato was a regular at rallies of Fini's Alleanza Nazionale, and the week before planting the bomb he was photographed at a fascist demonstration greeting Haider during a visit to Italy (see photo). That provocation was opposed by a mobilization of several thousand leftists shouting at Haider "fascist" and "*Nazi raus*" (Nazi get out). But for the LTd'I, the AN and Haider's supporters are not fascists but only "electoralists" (with bombs?)

The police-state repression, and the role of the fascist AN in carrying it out, did not end with the uproar over the bloody cop terror in Genova. This past May 31, the police raided two dozen homes of militants of the Cobas/SLAI syndicalist organization. The accusation: membership in an organization with subversive aims (Article 270), and offense to a public official (Article 342), for chanting "carabinieri – police – assassins"). Immigrants are particularly targeted with the passage on June 4 of a racist immigration law. Immigrant workers play an increasingly important role in Italian industry, notably in steel, and they have mobilized and even struck against the attacks on them. But they must not stand alone.

The Italian workers movement has the power to crush the fascists, but it is paralyzed by the reformist union and party bureaucrats, in particular those of Ri-

fondazione Comunista, who bind it to bourgeois "allies." Last fall, teachers and others struck against Italy's participation in the war on Afghanistan and the attacks on labor at home. In February, March and April of this year there were escalating protests against the Berlusconi government culminating in an April 16 general strike that brought out 13 million Italian workers and 3 million demonstrators against the government's anti-labor reforms. But this tremendous power and energy were dissipated by the reformist union and party leaders who are trying to breathe some life into the moribund Ulivo popular front. The key to defeating the drive for a "strong state," whose central purpose is to break the power of the Italian workers movement, is to build a genuinely Trotskyist vanguard which can tell a fascist party when it sees it, recognizes the danger of Bonapartism and knows how to defeat it – through international socialist revolution. ■

Fascists, Conservatives and Reformists Vote for Police-State Laws

National Front At Forefront of Capitalist Drive Toward "Strong State" in France

Break with the Popular Front! Build a Trotskyist Party to Lead the Struggle for International Workers Revolution!

(*The Internationalist* No. 13, May-June 2002)

The presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen, *Führer* of the National Front (FN), in the run-off round of the French presidential elections stunned France and sent shock waves around Europe. The fact that a dyed-in-the-wool fascist could edge out Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin in the first round of voting on April 21 was portrayed in the capitalist media as a stain on the national honor. Tens of thousands of high school students poured into the streets day after day to protest against Le Pen. The reformist left, from the Socialist (PS) and Communist (PCF) parties to the (not very) "far left," cynically channeled this outrage into support for the notoriously corrupt conservative president Jacques Chirac. In the end, Chirac was re-elected with over 80 percent of the second-round votes. The fact that the "contest" for the highest office in the nation was waged on the slogan "*Votez l'escroc, pas le facho*" (Vote for the crook, not the fascist), speaks volumes about the fraudulent nature of bourgeois "democracy." And the fact that the electoralist left ended up as vote-collectors for Chirac exposes the bankruptcy of their "lesser evil" bourgeois politics. Erstwhile fire-breathing "red 68ers" are today the palest parlour pinks.

Now the battle is on for the legislative elections, June 9. Even though Chirac got barely one-fifth of the votes on April 21, this won't stop him from striking a pose as "savior of the nation," affecting a cheap imitation of his former patron, General Charles De Gaulle, the bonapartist strongman who erected the presidential Fifth Republic. Le Pen's National Front is expanding even as new witnesses come forward accusing him of

Nothing "ex-" about these fascists. Skinheads march before screen showing National Front *Führer* Le Pen at 1 May 2002 FN mobilization in Paris. (Photo: AP)

torturing prisoners during the Algerian war for independence. While the former "plural left" tries to cobble together a "united left" to counter Chirac's Union for a Presidential Majority, the princelings of the Socialist Party are jockeying over who will replace Jospin now that he has bowed out. The PCF is rent by internal squabbling and in a number of electoral districts, dissident Communist candidates are running against the official nominees. As for the ostensibly Trotskyist "far left" – notably Lutte Ouvrière (LO – Workers Struggle) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnnaire (LCR) – after their presidential candidates got over 10 percent in the first round of the presiden-

tial election, three-quarters of their voters cast ballots for Chirac on the second round. And now that they have gotten used to "casting a useful ballot" (*voter utile*), their electors see no use in voting for the "far left" in the legislative elections: the combined LO/LCR score in recent polls has dropped to under 4 percent. None of the candidates in these elections present a class opposition to the racist imperialist war being waged at home and abroad by the bourgeoisie and its reformist lieutenants.

The electoral turmoil and mass demonstrations have highlighted the question, what is the National Front? It was posed point-blank on May Day, the international workers day, when the fascist FN provocatively stages its annual mobilization at the statue of Joan of Arc. In 1995, a Moroccan youth was murdered by skinheads from the FN march. This year the popular-front left brought hundreds of thousands into the streets in a giant anti-Le Pen rally, not to cleanse the streets of the racist killers, but to get workers to vote for the arch-reactionary Chirac! In contrast, in a 26 April supplement to *L'Internationaliste*, published following the first round of the French elections, the League for the Fourth International called: "No to Chirac and Le Pen! Sweep Away the Fascist Thugs May 1! Boycott the Elections May 5!" Our article headlined: "France 1935-2002: The Popular Front Opens the Door to Fascist Reaction – Fight for Workers Revolution!" Against the class-collaborationist pseudo-Trotskyists, we called to "Build a Real Leninist-Trotskyist Party!"

A rather different tack was taken by the International Communist League (ICL) in the paper of its U.S. section, the Spartacist League (SL). In its 3 May issue, *Workers Vanguard* wrote:

> "By outlook and history, Le Pen is a fascist. But like Haider's FPÖ [in Austria], Le Pen's National Front (FN) is currently scoring big gains primarily as an ***electoral party***. Reactionary views alone do not define fascism. Contrary to fake leftists who cynically pretend that fascism is just around the corner in order to justify voting for Chirac, France is not currently besieged by organized fascist gangs attacking workers' picket lines or assaulting parliament as the French fascists did in the 1930s." [emphasis in original]

According to *WV*, the FN is not fascist but an "*electoral party*." It argues that "fascist terror against immigrants is not now rampant in France," if only because the government of the "plural left" was carrying out the kind of cop terror the fascists have called for. Interestingly, this was ***not*** the position taken by the ICL's French section. A 23 April statement by the Ligue Trotskyste de France (LTF), which *WV* 's commentary serves as an introduction to, declared that the popular-front government "Opened the Way to Le Pen's Fascists." It continued:

> "Le Pen and the fascists don't represent 'bad ideas' that one can debate. Fascism is a program to wipe out the organized workers movement, send women back to the home and massacre 'immigrants,' Jews, minorities and homosexuals…. *Smash the fascists before they smash us! For worker/immigrant self-defense groups based on the factories!*"

So for *WV* Le Pen's fascist "outlook and history" and his "reactionary views" do not make his "electoral party" fascist. The statement of the LTF, however, draws the opposite conclusion: "Le Pen's fascists" "don't represent 'bad ideas'" but a mortal threat to the workers movement and the oppressed. Nowhere does it say that the FN is not fascist. This is no mere terminological question. After all, if the National Front is fascist, then Trotskyists would call to mobilize the power of the workers movement to disperse the FN troops on May Day, as we did in our 26 April article. The LTF statement did say softly that "what's necessary is mass mobilization to repulse this danger" of the FN march. *WV*'s introduction also raises the possibility of a labor mobilization, *but only in order to dismiss it*. After first arguing that, "If the PCF, LCR or LO – or the CGT trade-union federation – were serious about stopping Le Pen, they would fill the Place du Châtelet [starting point of the FN march] with organized union members hours before Le Pen's fascist thugs get there," it quickly adds: "They could stop the fascists before they start, but they won't do this" because the reformists fear independent mobilization of the working class more than they fear Le Pen.

So that's that – nothing to be done about it. But hold on a minute. A couple of paragraphs earlier, *WV* argued that the FN is an electoral rather than a fascist party – so where do "Le Pen's fascist thugs" come from? And what is this phenomenon of a far-right "electoral party" which is somehow different in character from its leader, who is "by outlook and history a fascist"? The National Front was founded in 1972 by the fascist group Ordre Nouveau (New Order) and has been headed since its creation by Le Pen. It is organized according to the *Führerprinzip*, the "leader principle" of Hitler's Nazis. Indeed, when some of Le Pen's principal lieutenants got out of line, led by Bruno Mégret whose roots are in the Catholic royalist/fascist tradition of Charles Maurras and Action Française, the result was a bitter split in 1998. (Mégret got 4 percent of the vote on April 21, making the combined fascist score 20 percent.) The idea that the FN has a different political character than Le Pen is absurd. The ICL is squirming as it tries to wriggle around the incontestable fact that the National Front is not just an electoral apparatus but a fascist party with a veritable private army of storm troopers.

The National Front merely an "electoral party"? Demonstrators cast wreath into the Seine in Paris May 1 to pay homage to Brahim Bouarram, a 29-year-old Moroccan who was beaten and drowned by skinheads from the 1995 FN demonstration. Above, left: woman holds sign, "Le Pen has the blood of Bouarram on his hands. Le Pen has the blood of Algerian citizens on his hands. Put out the flames..." (Photos: Eric Chaverou/Radio France and AFP)

Le Pen's Fascist Party a Mortal Threat to Immigrants, Workers, Women, Leftists

The claim that an "electoral party" cannot be a fascist party is a classic social-democratic thesis, reflecting the reformists' parliamentary cretinism. It recalls Trotsky's remark about Germany: "The workers had the right instincts and wanted to fight. But the Social Democrats held them back, promising to give the signal when Hitler should have finally abandoned legal methods." Hitler's Nazis played the bourgeoisie's electoral game, and only abandoned it after taking power. In order to dismiss any talk of a fascist danger in Europe, the ICL sets up a straw man. Whoever says the parties of Le Pen, Fini and Haider are fascist must mean that "fascism is around the corner," claims *WV*, even while admitting that the Internationalist Group says that "Le Pen is not about to take power." "So does the IG [Internationalist Group] think Austria is fascist today?" it continues without a pause. If fascist parties are in the government in Italy and Austria, it asks snidely, where are the concentration camps? The cynical editors of *Workers Vanguard* know perfectly well that we do not argue that Austria or Italy are fascist because of the presence of fascist parties as junior partners in coalition governments. But more fundamentally, the ICL's parliamentary blinders prevent them from seeing that while fascist dictatorship is not on the agenda, *there is a clear and present danger posed by the drive toward a bonapartist "strong state."* In recent years, the bourgeoisie as a whole and its reformist lieutenants in the workers movement have rammed through police-state measures across Europe, in the U.S. and throughout the capitalist world. The imperialists' current terrorist "war on terrorism" intensifies this push. The real danger represented by Le Pen and his ilk is that in various countries where they have a historical presence, the fascists act as the cutting edge of this drive.

What is fascism? For the Stalinists, it is simply a government or party of unbridled capitalist reaction. Thus they routinely describe military dictators like Pinochet in Chile or Suharto in Indonesia as "fascist." Their response, from the 1930s to today, is to call for a "popular front against fascism," i.e., to politically bloc with the "democratic" bourgeoisie, whether in a formal coalition or voting for Chirac. But this obscures the essential character of fascist movements, from Mussolini's black shirts and Hitler's Nazi brown shirts to the white sheets of the American nativist fascists of the Ku Klux Klan or the "saffron" (Hindu) fascists of the paramilitary RSS in India – namely that they organize masses of ruined petty bourgeois into a battering ram against the workers movement and the oppressed. "Fascism unites and arms the scattered masses. Out of human dust it organizes combat detachments," as Trotsky wrote in *Whither France?* (1934). And the way to fight this dangerous threat is not through class-collaborationist blocs but by revolutionary mobilization of workers power to shatter the fascist bands.

Fascism is not counterposed to participation in bourgeois electoral politics – it is a bourgeois political current after all, and most sizeable fascist movements have played the parliamentary game as they accumulated forces. The German Nazis' growth consisted not only of shock troops of the Sturmabteilung (SA), but also in the mushrooming vote for the National Socialist German Workers Party. Just because they engage in electoral demagogy does not mean they are not pre-

paring for civil war. This is amply proven by the example of Le Pen's National Front. In the last French presidential elections, the FN's campaign was punctuated by two racist murders by Le Pen's fascist thugs: on 21 February 1995, FN gunmen opened fire on ten youth of North African origin, killing Ibrahim Ali; and on May Day in Paris, four skinheads from the FN march brutally beat Brahim Bouarram and tossed him into the Seine River where he drowned. In both cases the killers were connected with the National Front's goon squad, the DPS (Department of Protection and Security). Those like the ICL and LO who portray the FN as simply an "electoral party" are sowing deadly illusions.

Right after the first round, Le Pen upped the voltage by declaring that he would set up "transit camps" and order "special trains" to ship immigrants out of the country. This inevitably recalled the *Transitlager* and *Sonderzüge* the German occupiers used to ship Jews to the death camps in WWII. But this is not mere rhetoric – the National Front's "French preference" is a program for terror against immigrants. The murders of Ali and Bouarram are the most notorious racist assaults linked to the FN, but hardly the only ones. The attacks on largely immigrant workers' hostels in Cannes and Cagnes-sur-Mer in 1988 were carried out by Nazis of the PNFE (French and European Nationalist Party), which was also implicated in the anti-Semitic desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Carpentas in May 1990. The PNFE has its own profile, concentrating on skinheads and recruiting cops. But its leader at the time, Michèle D'Ara, was a municipal councilor in the town of Villepinte near Paris elected on the National Front ticket. Elements from the virulently anti-Semitic Oeuvre Française formed the FN's police "union" and have frequently taken part in DPS actions against leftists. The Groupe Union Défense (GUD), a campus-based fascist action group, has periodically had run-ins with the National Front, but also participates regularly in FN events, notably the annual May 1 Joan of Arc mobilizations.

The National Front is also up to its neck in the anti-abortion commandos who violently attack clinics and harass and intimidate women seeking to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. The first actions were carried out in the mid-'80s by SOS Tout Petits founded by Xavier Dor, a long-time member of the National Front. The second major group involved, Laissez-les-vivre, includes several members of the FN top leadership in its honorary presidium, including Bruno Gollnisch and Marie-France Stirbois. Its president, Emmanuel Tremblay, is part of the FN's women's front, the CNFE. The most aggressive of the commandos, Trêve de Dieu (God's Truce), is part of Human Life International, headed by Paul Marx, who accuses "some

National Front merely an "electoral party"? Jewish cemetery at Carpentas, France where in May 1990 fascists dug up body and impaled it, destroying 39 gravestones. Members of the Nazi PNFE were tried for the desecration. The head of the PFNE was a municipal councillor elected on the FN ticket.

(Photo: Didier Lefèvre/Vu)

Jews" of leading "the greatest holocaust of all time, the war on unborn babies," and whose German affiliate is run by the fascist Siegfried Ernst. In short, with its "family preference," the fascist National Front and its satellite operations are a threat to women as well.

The DPS' thug violence is so notorious that in 1998 the French National Assembly organized a commission to investigate it. They documented 68 cases of violent attacks by this goon squad, including 38 armed attacks. The actual number is considerably greater, since the police (who are heavily infiltrated by the FN) regularly hide the fascist links of many perpetrators, dismissing them as "common criminals" or describing assaults by the FN youth (many of them skinheads) as "clashes" between rightist and leftist demonstrators. The size of the DPS is estimated at about 3,000 men. They are usually seen in their "Outfit 1," marine blue blazers and gray trousers. But this is only the "respectable" façade of this paramilitary force. Anyone who thinks the DPS is a bunch of doddering family men acting as ushers for a party dedicated to ballots not bullets is in for a rude awakening. Within the DPS there are several hundred shock troops, the UMIs (Mobile Intervention Units), who dress in "Outfit 2," all-black riot uniforms of the Belgian police, with helmets, Plexiglas shields and clubs. This deliberately makes them almost indistinguishable from the official UMIs of the gendarmerie and CRS riot police.

On a number of occasions, these squads have attacked leftist protesters as police stood by in silent complicity. For example on 25 October 1996 at Montceau-les-Mines where a UMI squad of the FN confronted demonstrators of Ras l'Front (Fed Up with the

Front), while a similarly uniformed UMI squad of the CRS was held in reserve. Or on 23 May 1997 in Vitrolles (a town controlled by the FN), where FN thugs attacked human rights groups. And again a week later in Maintes-la-Jolie, when 50 FN thugs attacked 20 "far left" counterdemonstrators. (In that incident, Le Pen himself was photographed beating up the Socialist candidate, Annette Peulvast-Bergeal.) The DPS also carries out clandestine surveillance of opponents, opening mail and tapping phone lines. The National Front thugs have even occasionally attacked police with impunity, as on 21 October 1996, when several hundred FN demonstrators marched from a speech by FN leader Bruno Gollnisch to the Arc de Triomphe to stage a provocation. On orders of DPS chief Bernard Courcelle, the cop on duty was bodily seized and removed.

From the time of the National Front's founding in 1972 it had a strong-arm goon squad which was first formed by Roger Holeindre, who fought in the French army in Indochina and then Algeria. He was part of the terrorist apparatus of the OAS "secret army" that launched a wave of terror across France on the eve of Algerian independence in 1962. While leftist students were demonstrating in Paris in 1968 chanting for Ho Chi Minh, Holeindre led fascistic groups to support the U.S. puppet South Vietnamese regime. A former member of the DPS told how the hard core of this "parallel army" consisted largely of veterans of French military adventures in Africa. Their role was to "join groups of anti-FN demonstrators, single out the leaders and smash them. We didn't act openly but discreetly. We would drop off groups of three or four in the demos, grab the leaders, haul them off to the side, pound them and then disappear" (*Libération*, 13 November 1997).

The impunity of the National Front's paramilitary apparatus is a function of its close ties to organs of state repression (notably the army, police, gendarmes, CRS and secret services), and the private "security" companies and professional mercenaries that are their offshoots. The acronym DPS was deliberately chosen to resemble that of the military intelligence agency, the DPSD (Direction de la Protection et Sécurité de la Défense), of which Gollnisch is an active reserve officer. The man who turned the FN's goon squad into a serious paramilitary operation and named it the DPS, Bernard Courcelle, is also a former paratrooper and military intelligence operative. Courcelle was instrumental in extracting a group of French mercenaries led by his brother-in-law Bob Denard (a notorious mercenary and former member of the French presidential guard) from a botched coup they had carried out in the Comoro Islands. Courcelle's brother is the head of Groupe 11 France, a mercenary outfit which was also active in recruiting professional killers for Zaïre dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Courcelle also employed DPS members as the security team for the Elf French oil company installations in Angola.

The ICL says blithely that "fascist terror against immigrants is not now rampant in France" while fascist-infested police have put immigrant areas under a state of siege. Meanwhile, the National Front has been terrorizing Africans for years, in Africa. The DPS and Courcelle in particular were up to their necks in genocidal wars from Rwanda to the Congo (Brazzavile). It is amply documented that the *interahamwe* Hutu militias in Rwanda were trained by the French army in 1992-93, before the outbreak of the genocide that killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in 1994, while numerous French mercenaries were running around the country. François-Xavier Verschave, editor of the African affairs magazine *Survie*, reports of the mercenaries that "They were all recruited from far-right milieus, notably the DPS." Future DPS chief Courcelle was in close touch with the "presidential cell" of the DPSD, which recruited scores of fascists and mercenaries to train death squads and prop up dictators. Le Pen's château, St. Cloud, is the former French residence of Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic. The National Front supplied the "dogs of war" to do the dirty work of France's neocolonial empire in Africa, while it was the conservative Chirac and the "socialist" Mitterrand who employed them.

Armies of Professional Strikebreakers

Courcelle claims that he banned guns in the National Front squads, although even the police admit that the FN thugs show up at demos with their car trunks jammed full of weapons. But he was up to his neck in arms trafficking, at least from the time he was stationed as a military officer in charge of security for the Luchaire arms manufacturer in the 1980s when the latter was smuggling arms to Iran (France's "Irangate"). In 1995-96, when he was head of the DPS, Courcelle organized a million-dollar arms deal with Chechen Islamic guerrillas led by Djukar Dudayev, involving AK-47s, high-power sniper rifles, rocket launchers, mortars and other arms supplied by a Belgian mercenary arms dealer based in Zagreb, Croatia. In addition, the FN controls a number of private security agencies with well-stocked arsenals. According to police reports, fully half the DPS members are employees of these rent-a-cop agencies.

Trotsky writes in the Transitional Program:

> "The bourgeoisie is nowhere satisfied with the official police and army. In the United States, even during 'peaceful' times, the bourgeoisie maintains militarized battalions of scabs and privately armed thugs in factories. To this must now be added the various groups of

American Nazis. The French bourgeoisie at the first approach of danger mobilized semi-legal and illegal fascist detachments, including such as are in the army."

This is certainly true of the role of the National Front in France today. In whitewashing the FN, the ICL argues that "France is not currently besieged by organized fascist gangs attacking workers' picket lines" (*Workers Vanguard*, 3 May). Then how would they explain the FN commando of strikebreakers that attacked a picket of striking truck drivers in Vitrolles in 1997, leaving several truckers lying in a pool of blood? On the night of November 5, a squad of 20 thugs led by Patrick Bunel (connected with the private security agency Normandy and body guard of Bruno Mégret, whose wife was mayor of the town) – dressed in black, wearing hoods and armed with tire irons and baseball bats – assaulted strikers outside the depot of the TFE trucking company (see photo). Readers of *The Internationalist* may recall that this was the strike in which the ICL leadership initially *opposed* its French section putting out a leaflet. A few weeks later, the ICL expelled the comrades of the Permanent Revolution Faction, which had called for such an intervention in this first major workers struggle against the popular-front government of Jospin and his PCF transport minister Gayssot.

In another case in 1997, workers struck the Valéo auto headlight plant in Evreux (Eure) in April when plans were announced to shut it down. In response, in early June the management contracted with a private security company, OGS (Management and Security Organization) led by the mercenary Gonzague du Cheyron du Pavillon (a former member of the OAS), which supplied a squad of 80 thugs, including numerous DPS members, to block workers protesting the removal of the machinery from the plant. At one point the fascist goons tried to break through the workers' pickets, but trucks were turned back as the picketers heaved rocks at them. Earlier, in February 1997, the Normandy security agency sent a squad of 24 thugs led by fascists of the GUD to carry out an attack on the CGT union at a paper plant in Corbeil (Essone). All this in a single year. Only an organization utterly divorced from the proletariat and which has no interest in the workers' struggles could make *WV*'s absurd claim.

European capitalists look with envy at the destruction of the British unions that began with Margaret Thatcher's breaking of the 1985-86 coal strike. As French bosses close one plant after another, French unionists are constantly facing gangs of professional strikebreakers linked to the FN/DPS and other fascist outfits. Among these "security companies" are the AGS, Ambassy, Bègue Consultants, Éric SA, Groupe Onze International, Groupe Onze France, Normandy, OGS and SPGM. They supply the same thugs who beat up leftists and immigrants outside National Front

French unions don't face "organized fascist gangs attacking workers' picket lines"? False. Left: striking drivers in Vitrolles, near Marseille, were assaulted by squad of National Front thugs during national truckers strike, 5 November 1997.

(Photo: L'Humanité)

demonstrations. In our article "Truckers Blockade France" (*The Internationalist* No. 4, January-February 1998), we noted that the fascist assaults on the striking truckers at Vitrolles should have been answered by "an assembly of thousands of militant workers and immigrants from the Marseille area, forming workers defense squads to deal decisively with the racist terror squads." It was, and is, necessary to drive home Trotsky's call in the Transitional Program:

"The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory – and ends in the street. Scabs and private gunmen in factory plants are the basic nuclei of the fascist army. Strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army…. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating workers' groups for self-defense."

Mobilize Workers Power, Not Appeals to the Bourgeois State!

Many of those protesting against the National Front in France have called for it to be banned. This is the theme of the Gauche Socialiste, for example, which wants the FN to be outlawed on the grounds that it is not a democratic and republican party. GS spokesman Jean-Luc Mélenchon writes in *Le Monde* (29 May) that "the National Front must be banned. The law exists since 1936 permitting the dissolution of the fascist leagues, predecessors of the FN today." Mélenchon adds: "In France, racism and anti-Semitism are not considered opinions but crimes which are severely punished." The purpose of the 1999 French National Assembly investigation of the FN's goon squad, the DPS, and its paramilitary formations, the UMIs, was to consider whether they should be proscribed

under this law allowing the government to dissolve organizations with "combat groups" or "private militias." The parliamentary socialists finally decided to do nothing, calculating that the 1998 split between Le Pen and Mégret would lead to the decline of both. Since that has not happened, the calls for action by the bourgeois state are again being heard.

Trotskyists have always opposed such political proscriptions in the hands of the capitalist rulers, warning that they will inevitably use such bans to attack leftists and revolutionary working-class organizations. The French "anti-militia" law of 1936 was extremely broad, allowing the banning of groups which "provoke street demonstrations" and oppose the "republican form of government." Although initially used to outlaw Action Française, the Croix de Feu and the royalist Camelots du Roi, already by 1939 it was used to ban the Party of the Algerian People (PPA); in the mid-'50s, it was the basis for proscribing the Algerian National Movement (MNA), the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Algerian Communist Party. Following May 1968, this same law was used to outlaw the entire spectrum of the "far left," including the JCR, PCI and their successor, the LC; Voix Ouvrière (predecessor of LO); the OCI (now the Parti des Travailleurs); a number of Maoist groups and several self-proclaimed revolutionary student groups.

At bottom, how to fight fascism is a class question. The answer of liberals and reformists to the National Front is to build class-collaborationist coalitions in the name of (bourgeois) "democracy." Ultimately this leads them to vote for the arch-reactionary bourgeois "democrat" Chirac and to push for increasing the repressive powers of the "democratic" capitalist state. Yet the bourgeois democrats open the door to the bonapartists and fascists, just as the 1930s popular front led to the Vichy government of Marshal Pétain. The capitalists use varying political forms to protect their interests, from monarchies to republics and bonapartist regimes. In quiet times they hold the fascists in reserve, perhaps even banning a few of the more notorious groups (which will then reform under a new name). But as the class struggle intensifies, the ruling class calls upon the reformists to form popular fronts to divert the workers from revolutionary aims. Hence the election of Socialist Lionel Jospin's government of the "plural left" following the mass strikes of November-December 1995. And ultimately they will call upon the fascists and other shock troops to use the methods of civil war to crush the organized workers movement and annihilate oppressed sectors of the population.

Marxists do not call on the bourgeois state to outlaw racist and anti-Semitic propaganda, or to dissolve fascist organizations, for the capitalists' state power is the fundamental instrument for suppression of the exploited and carrying out racist oppression and such bans will inevitably be used against the left. We oppose gun control, even when it purports to disarm fascist militias, for such measures will inevitably be used to disarm the workers. The fascists will not be eliminated by the bourgeoisie, which protects them since it may need their services in the future. It is up to the workers movement to sweep these racist terrorists from the streets, shattering their union-busting goon squads and disarming their paramilitary forces by mobilizing the power of tens of thousands of workers that today can easily overwhelm the fascists, however sinister their plans and menacing their growth. But that requires forging a revolutionary communist leadership, a genuinely Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party of the proletariat.

Revisionist Minds Think Alike

Pseudo-Trotskyist Lullabies

(*The Internationalist* No. 14, September-October 2002)

Is the National Front fascist? Is the Pope Catholic? Various opportunist leftists are desperately trying to explain away the recent sharp political shift to the right in France and across Europe by redefining dyed-in-the-wool fascists into plain old vote-hustlers. But this ominous development cannot be disappeared by sleight of hand. Even if they're currently wearing sheep's clothing, dressed in fashionable double-breasted suits and ties instead of black or brown shirts, they're still fascist wolves.

We have exposed how the International Communist League (ICL) echoes the bourgeoisie in claiming that Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, Gianfranco Fini's National Alliance in Italy and Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria are no longer fascist but merely "electoral parties." But the left-centrist ICL is not alone. These fairy tales are also spread by the reformist tendencies led by Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe, the remnants of the pseudo-Trotskyist Militant tendency that for decades was buried in the British Labour Party.

It is striking how identical arguments are repeated, often word for word, by centrists and reformists.

Where the ICL says Le Pen/Fini/Haider may have fascist origins and ideology but their parties are merely vote-collecting machines, Taaffe's Committee for a Workers International (CWI) writes:

> "Despite the neo-fascist antecedents of many of the leaders of the far-right parties, these formations are not fascist-type parties with their own para-military forces (apart from small groups of thugs that still shelter within them).
>
> "Leaders like Le Pen and Haider have past links with neo-Nazi organizations and there are still elements of racist authoritarian ideology in their politics. But they have grown on an electoral level, presenting a respectable face, distancing themselves from the tiny neo-fascist groups on the fringes of far-right politics….
>
> "The far-right parties have grown as an electoral phenomenon, not as paramilitary forces on the lines of the fascist militias of Hitler and Mussolini."
>
> –*Socialism Today*, June 2002

The same soothing arguments come from the international grouping around Grant's Socialist Appeal outfit in Britain. An article titled "Is There a Threat of Fascism in Europe?" by their spokesman Alan Woods states:

> "In fact, Le Pen is not a fascist, but a reactionary racist and a pacemaker for fascism. If he had been elected, he would have behaved in the same way as Fini, the leader of the Italian neo-fascist party the National Alliance, which has become just another right-wing conservative party….
>
> "We must, of course, combat reaction and racism at all times. [Of course!] But it is a serious mistake to sound the alarm bells and start shouting about fascism every time some reactionary demagogue gets an increase in votes.
>
> "At this moment in time the real fascist organizations have been reduced everywhere to virulent sects…. The ruling class does not need these elements at the present time."

How terribly reassuring.

Attempts by opportunists to revise the communism of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky invariably reflect a loss of confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat and adaptation to the pressures of the bourgeoisie. Thus the ICL pretends that these parties are not fascist because the bourgeoisie doesn't need fascism today, due to a "qualitative" regression in the consciousness of the proletariat following the destruction of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the CWI asserts:

> "Despite the swing to the right electorally, the balance of social forces does not favour a resurgence of fascist reaction…. A major factor has been the setback to class consciousness following the collapse of Stalinism after 1989."

Taaffe & Co. harp on this theme, arguing:

> "There was a profound setback to working-class consciousness as a result of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes…. Even the politically advanced layers of workers were disoriented and confused. There have been massive industrial struggles and protest movements throughout Europe during the 1990s and more recently. These struggles, however, lacked cohesion and clear political direction."

This same line was taken by the new ICL leadership in a January 1996 perspectives document, which declared:

> "Across West Europe, the working class has engaged in some of the largest and most militant battles in years, yet for the first time since the Paris Commune, the masses of workers in struggle do not identify their immediate felt needs with the ideals of socialism or program of socialist revolution."

This was the first expression of the ICL's new line, codified in a new declaration of principles two years later, that the world situation was dominated by a great leap backwards in workers' consciousness.

This is not a new line-up. We noted in *The Internationalist* No. 8 (June 2000) that in Austria the ICL, Taaffeites and Grantites gave a *Persilschein* (a kind of Good Housekeeping seal of certification) to Haider's electoralist-not-fascist credentials. But while the left-centrist ICL gets a little queasy when it comes to dotting the i's and crossing the t's about where this all leads, its reformist cousins are quite explicit:

> "The noisy propaganda about the 'risk of fascism' in Europe is entirely false. The bourgeois in Europe burnt their fingers badly with fascism in the past, and are not likely to hand power again to fascist madmen like Hitler and Mussolini." (Grantites)
>
> "The bourgeoisie burned its fingers with fascism in the inter-war period, or rather burned its arms and legs…. The bourgeoisie will not make the same mistake again." (Taaffeites)

So it turns out that bourgeois support to the German Nazis and Italian fascists was all a "mistake" which won't happen again. We have Grant's and Taaffe's word on it. To be sure, Alan Woods argues that "every move towards reaction will only prepare even bigger swings to the left." This tick-tock conception of the class struggle can only serve to lull the workers into passivity when it is vital to crush the fascists now, *before* they are a mass movement.

What is the programmatic conclusion of the opportunists' latest discovery? Taaffe & Co. call for "the

formation of broad, democratic workers' parties, on the basis of an anti-capitalist programme." In other words, they want to recreate the Old Labour Party so they can bury themselves in it again. Lutte Ouvrière (LO) in France likewise envisages a new "party of the working people." The ICL uses the same arguments to justify its desertion from the class struggle, since workers' struggles supposedly no longer have anything to do with socialism, and the fascists supposedly are no longer fascist.

In France this spring, tens of thousands of youth streamed into the streets to protest against the fascist National Front. Mainstream reformists sought to divert this justified anger into the safe channels of an electoral popular front that ended up channeling votes to the arch-reactionary Chirac. For their part, various pseudo-Trotskyists like Taaffe, Grant, LO and the ICL deny that the FN is fascist and pooh-pooh all talk of a danger of fascist reaction. Whatever tomorrow may bring, Woods preaches, "At the present time there is no danger of fascism or even Bonapartist reaction in any developed capitalist country." Amen, say the ICL and CWI.

The League for the Fourth International has uniquely warned that the very real danger represented by the fascists in Europe is that they are on the cutting edge of a drive toward bonapartist and semi-bonapartist regimes. Their central aims are to go after immigrants, rip up workers' gains and break the power of labor. We have underlined that bourgeois conservatives and liberals as well as reformist workers parties have joined in this drive, voting for police-state measures in the name of fighting "terrorism" and "crime."

The way to combat this is not by chaining the workers to the class enemy through "popular fronts" or by lulling them to sleep by pretending that fascism is dead and gone. It's necessary to build genuine Trotskyist parties that warn of the danger to the workers and oppressed of a capitalist "strong state" and put forward a program to mobilize the working class to sweep away this deadly threat through socialist revolution. ■

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