

The Struggle Against Fascism

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Fascism confronts the proletariat as an exceptionally dangerous and frightful enemy. Fascism is the strongest, most concentrated, and classic expression at this time of the world bourgeoisie's general offensive. It is urgently necessary that it be brought down. This is true not only with respect to the historic existence of the proletariat as a class, which will free humankind by surmounting capitalism. It is also a question of survival for every ordinary worker, a question of bread, working conditions, and quality of life for millions and millions of the exploited.

That is why the struggle against fascism must be taken up by the entire proletariat. It is evident that we will overcome this wily enemy all the sooner to the degree that we grasp its essential character and how that character is expressed. There has been great confusion regarding fascism, not only among the broad masses of proletarians but also within their revolutionary vanguard, among Communists. At first, the prevailing view was that fascism was nothing more than violent bourgeois terror, and its character and effects were thought to be similar to those of the Horthy regime in

Hungary [1]. Yet even though fascism and the Horthy regime employ the same bloody, terrorist methods, which bear down on the proletariat in the same way, the historical essence of the two phenomena is entirely different.

The terror in Hungary began after the defeat of an initially victorious revolutionary struggle. For a moment the bourgeoisie trembled before the proletariat's might. The Horthy terror emerged as revenge against the revolution. The agent of this revenge was a small caste of feudal officers.

Fascism is quite different from that. It is not at all the revenge of the bourgeoisie against the militant uprising of the proletariat. In historical terms, viewed objectively, fascism arrives much more as punishment because the proletariat has not carried and driven forward the revolution that began in Russia. And the base of fascism lies not in a small caste but in broad social layers, broad masses, reaching even into the proletariat. We must understand these essential differences in order to deal successfully with fascism. Military means alone cannot vanquish it, if I may use that term; we must also wrestle it to the ground politically and ideologically.

The social-democratic view of fascism

The view that fascism is merely a form of bourgeois terror, although advanced by some radical forces in our movement, is more characteristic of the outlook of many reformist social democrats. For them fascism is nothing but terror and violence—moreover a bourgeois reflex against the violence unleashed or threatened against bourgeois society by the proletariat. For the reformist gentlemen, the Russian Revolution plays the exact same role as biting into the apple of paradise plays for believers in the Bible. They view it as the origin of all expressions of terrorism in the present period. As if there had never been wars of imperialist piracy; as if there were no bourgeois class dictatorship! Thus fascism, for the reformists, is the consequence of the Russian Revolution—the proletariat's original sin in the Garden of Eden.

It was no less a figure than Otto Bauer who put forward the viewpoint in Hamburg that the Russian Communists and their co-thinkers carry special responsibility for present-day worldwide reaction by the bourgeoisie and for fascism; it is they who split parties and trade unions.[2] In making this bold assertion, Otto Bauer forgot that the notoriously harmless Independents [USPD] split from the [German] Social Democrats even before the Russian Revolution and its morally ruinous example. Bauer explains that world reaction, which reaches its highest point in fascism, is also caused in part by the fact that the Russian Revolution destroyed the Menshevik paradise in Georgia and Armenia.[3] He finds a third cause of world reaction in "Bolshevik terror" in general. In his remarks, however, he felt compelled to admit the following: "We in Central Europe are today obliged to confront the violent fascist organizations with the proletariat's defense guards. For we have no illusions that we can overcome direct violence through an appeal to democracy."

You would think that he would draw from this observation the conclusion that force must be met by force. However, reformist logic goes its own way, unfathomable, like the ways of heavenly providence.

Otto Bauer's concoction continues as follows: "I am not talking about methods that often do not lead to success, such as insurrection or even general strike. What is needed is coordination of parliamentary action with extra-parliamentary mass action."

Here Otto Bauer does not reveal to us the secret in his chaste political bosom as to what form of political action he favors in parliament and, even more, outside parliament. There are actions and then there are actions. There are parliamentary and mass actions that, from our point of view,

consist of bourgeois rubbish, pardon my words. On the other hand, an action either inside or outside parliament can have a revolutionary character. Otto Bauer remains silent regarding the nature of the reformist actions. And the end product of his remarks on the struggle against world reaction is quite exceptional. It is unveiled as an international information bureau that will give precise reports on world reaction. Bauer explains: "The foundation of this International will possibly be met with skepticism. If we did not understand how to establish a news bureau that provides us with necessary information on reaction, this skepticism would be justified."

What lies behind this entire conception? It is the reformists' faith in the unshakable strength of the capitalist order and bourgeois class rule, along with distrust and cowardice toward the proletariat as a conscious and irresistible force of world revolution. The reformists view fascism as an expression of the unshakable and all-conquering power and strength of bourgeois class rule. The proletariat is not up to the task of taking up the struggle against it—that would be foolhardy and doomed to failure. So there is nothing left for the proletariat but to step aside quietly and modestly, and not provoke the tigers and lions of bourgeois class rule through a struggle for its liberation and its own rule. In short, the proletariat is to renounce all that for the present and future, and patiently wait to see whether a tiny bit can be gained through the route of democracy and reform.

The social roots of fascism

I have the opposite point of view, and so too, I'm sure, do all Communists. Specifically, we view fascism as an expression of the decay and disintegration of the capitalist economy and as a symptom of the bourgeois state's dissolution. We can combat fascism only if we grasp that it rouses and sweeps along broad social masses who have lost the earlier security of their existence and with it, often, their belief in social order. Fascism is rooted, indeed, in the dissolution of the capitalist economy and the bourgeois state. There were already symptoms of the proletarianization of bourgeois layers in prewar capitalism. The war shattered the capitalist economy down to its foundations. This is evident not only in the appalling impoverishment of the proletariat, but also in the proletarianization of very broad petty-bourgeois and middle-bourgeois masses, the calamitous conditions among small peasants, and the bleak distress of the "intelligentsia." The plight of the "intellectuals" is all the more severe given that prewar capitalism took measures to produce them in excess of demand. The capitalists wanted to extend the mass supply of labor power to the field of intellectual labor and thus unleash unbridled competition that would depress wages—excuse me, salaries. It was from these circles that imperialism recruited many of its ideological champions for the World War. At present all these layers are experiencing the collapse of the hopes they had placed in the war. Their conditions have become significantly worse. What weighs on them above all is the lack of security for their basic existence, which they still had before the war.

I base these conclusions not on conditions in Germany, where the bourgeois intellectuals face conditions of extreme impoverishment that are often more severe than the poverty of workers. No, look at Italy—which I will speak of shortly; the ruin of the economy there was decisive in causing social masses to join with fascism. Consider another country that, in contrast to other European states, emerged from the World War without severe convulsions: Britain. Just as much is said there today in the press and public life about the distress of the "new poor" as about the gigantic profits and luxury of the few "new rich." In the United States the farmers' movement responds to the growing plight of a large social layer. The conditions of the middle layers have worsened markedly in every country. In some countries this worsening leads to a point where these social layers are crushed or annihilated.

As a result there are countless thousands seeking new possibilities for survival, food security, and

social standing. Their number is swelled by lower and mid-level government employees, the public servants. They are joined, even in the victor states, by former officers, noncoms, and the like, who now have neither employment nor profession. Social forces of this type offer fascism a contingent of distinguished figures who lend it in these countries a pronounced monarchist hue. But we cannot fully grasp the nature of fascism by viewing its evolution solely as a result of such economic pressures alone, which have been considerably enhanced by the financial crisis of the governments and their vanishing authority.

Failure of proletarian leadership

Fascism has another source. It is the blockage, the halting pace of world revolution resulting from betrayal by the reformist leaders of the workers' movement. Among a large part of the middle layers—the civil servants, bourgeois intellectuals, and the small and middle bourgeois—who were proletarianized or were threatened with that fate, the psychology of war was replaced by a degree of sympathy for reformist socialism. They hoped that, thanks to "democracy," reformist socialism could bring about global change. These expectations were painfully shattered. The reform socialists carried out a gentle coalition policy, whose costs were borne not only by proletarians and salaried workers but by civil servants, intellectuals, and lower and mid-level petty bourgeois of every type.

These layers lacked in general any theoretical, historical, or political education. Their sympathy for reform socialism was not deeply rooted. So as things turned out, they lost their belief not only in the reformist leaders but also in socialism itself. "The socialists promised an easing of our burdens and suffering, plus many beautiful things, and a reshaping of society on the foundations of justice and democracy," they said. "But the top dogs and the rich carry on and rule with even more severity than before." These bourgeois who were disappointed in socialism were joined by proletarian forces. All the disillusioned—whether bourgeois or proletarian in origin—nevertheless abandon a precious intellectual force that would enable them to look forward from the gloomy present to a bright and hopeful future. That force is trust in the proletariat as the class that will remake society. The betrayal by the reformist leaders does not weigh so heavily in the attitude of these disillusioned forces as another fact: namely, that the proletarian masses tolerate this betrayal, that they continue to accept the capitalist yoke without rebellion or resistance, indeed that they come to terms with a suffering even more bitter than before.

In addition, in order to be fair, I must add that the Communist parties as well, setting aside Russia, are not without responsibility for the fact that even within the proletariat there are disillusioned people who throw themselves into the arms of fascism. Quite frequently these parties' actions have been insufficiently vigorous, their initiatives lacking in scope, and their penetration of the masses inadequate. I set aside errors of policy that have led to defeats. There is no doubt that many of the most active, energetic, and revolutionary-minded proletarians have not found their way to us or have turned around on this path because they found us not energetic and aggressive enough. We have not succeeded in making them sufficiently aware of why we too, on some occasions, must hold back—even if unwillingly and with good cause.

Fascism's mass character

Masses in their thousands streamed to fascism. It became an asylum for all the politically homeless, the socially uprooted, the destitute and disillusioned. And what they no longer hoped for from the revolutionary proletarian class and from socialism, they now hoped would be achieved by the most able, strong, determined, and bold elements of every social class. All these forces must come

together in a community. And this community, for the fascists, is the nation. They wrongly imagine that the sincere will to create a new and better social reality is strong enough to overcome all class antagonisms. The instrument to achieve fascist ideals is, for them, the state. A strong and authoritarian state that will be their very own creation and their obedient tool. This state will tower high above all differences of party and class, and will remake society in accord with their ideology and program.

It is evident that in terms of the social composition of its troops, fascism encompasses forces that can be extremely uncomfortable and even dangerous for bourgeois society. I'll go further and assert that these elements, if they come to understand their own best interests, must be dangerous for bourgeois society. Precisely! If this situation arises, then these forces must do what they can to ensure that bourgeois society is smashed as soon as possible and communism is achieved. But events up to now have nonetheless demonstrated that the revolutionary forces within fascism are outstripped and restrained by the reactionary forces.

What we see here is analogous to events in other revolutions. The petty-bourgeois and intermediate social forces at first vacillate indecisively between the powerful historical camps of the proletariat and bourgeoisie. They are induced to sympathize with the proletariat by their life's suffering and, in part, by their soul's noble longings and high ideals, so long as it is not only revolutionary in its conduct but also seems to have prospects for victory. Under the pressure of the masses and their needs and influenced by this situation, even the fascist leaders are forced to at least flirt with the revolutionary proletariat, even though they may not have any personal sympathy for it. But when it becomes clear that the proletariat itself has abandoned the goal of carrying the revolution further, that it is withdrawing from the battlefield under the influence of the reformist leaders, out of fear of revolution and respect for the capitalists—at this point the broad fascist masses find their way to the spot where most of their leaders were, consciously or unconsciously, from the very start: on the side of the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie and fascism

The bourgeoisie naturally welcomes its new allies with joy. It sees in them a major increase in its power, a determined pack prepared for every form of violence in its service. The bourgeoisie, accustomed to rule, is unfortunately much more experienced and wise in judging the situation and defending its class interests than the proletariat, which is accustomed to the yoke. From the beginning the bourgeoisie has clearly grasped the situation and, thus, the advantage that it can draw from fascism. What does the bourgeoisie want? It is striving for the reconstruction of the capitalist economy, that is, the maintenance of its class domination. Under present circumstances, the precondition for achieving its goal is to considerably increase and intensify the exploitation and oppression of the working class.

The bourgeoisie is well aware that alone it does not possess the instruments of power to impose this fate on the exploited. Tormented by the scorpions of an upsurge in poverty, even the proletarian with the thickest skin finally begins to rebel against capitalism. The bourgeoisie can only conclude that over time, under such circumstances, even the mild and conciliatory sermons of the reform socialists will lose their dulling effect on the proletariat. It reckons that the proletariat can now be subjugated and exploited only through force. But the means of force available to the bourgeois state are beginning, in part, to break down. The state is losing the financial strength and moral authority needed to maintain blind loyalty and subjugation among its slaves. The bourgeoisie can no longer rely on its state's regular methods of force to secure its class rule. For that it needs an extralegal and nonstate instrument of force. That has been offered by the motley assemblage that makes up the

fascist mob. That is why the bourgeoisie offers its hand for fascism's kiss, granting it complete freedom of action, contrary to all its written and unwritten laws. It goes further. It nourishes fascism, maintains it, and promotes its development with all the means at its disposal in terms of political power and hoards of money.

It is evident that fascism has different characteristics in every country, based on specific circumstances. Nonetheless, in every country it has two essential features: a sham revolutionary program, which links up in extremely clever fashion with the moods, interests, and demands of broad social masses; and the use of brutal and violent terror.

Fascism's rise in Italy

The classic example of fascism's development and character today is Italy. Here fascism found its breeding ground in the disintegration and weakness of the economy. This might seem not to apply, given that Italy was among the victorious powers. Nonetheless, the war had a devastating impact on Italy's economy. The bourgeoisie returned from war victorious, but mortally wounded. The country's economic structure and development was decisive here. Only in northern Italy had a modern industrial capitalism emerged. In central and especially southern Italy, agrarian capital still reigned, to some extent still under feudal conditions, allied with a finance capitalism that had not yet scaled the heights of modern development and importance. Both were imperialist in orientation; both were hostile to the war; both gained little or nothing from the slaughter of millions. The noncapitalist peasantry suffered under them fearfully, and with it the urban petty bourgeoisie and proletariat. True, the artificially nourished heavy industry of northern Italy stashed away fabulous profits. Nonetheless, this industry lacked deep roots—Italy has neither coal nor iron—and its bloom soon faded.

All the evil effects of the war rained down on Italy's economy and governmental finances. A dreadful crisis unfolded. Industry, handicrafts, and trade ground to a halt; one bankruptcy followed another. The Banca di Sconto and the Ansaldo company, both creations of imperialism and war, collapsed. The war left behind hundreds of thousands searching for work and food, hundreds of thousands of cripples, widows, and orphans needing nourishment. The crisis augmented the army of those returning home in search of work and positions with crowds of laid-off working people, both men and women, both laborers and clerks. A massive wave of misery flooded through Italy, reaching its high point between the summer of 1920 and the spring of 1921. The industrial bourgeoisie of northern Italy, which had agitated so unscrupulously for war, was incapable of restoring the ruined economy. It did not have the political power to mobilize the state for its goals. It had lost control of the government, which fell back into the hands of the agrarian and financial capitalists under Giolitti's leadership. Even if that had not happened, the state, creaking in every joint, would not have possessed the means and opportunities to cope with the crisis and misery.

Thanks to this situation and in pace with its evolution, Italian fascism was able to sprout up. The predestined leader awaited in the person of Mussolini. In the autumn of 1914, Mussolini had been pacifist socialism's renegade. With the slogan "war or republic" he became the most fanatical of warmongers. In a daily paper founded with money from the Entente, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, he promised the masses of producers heaven on earth as the fruit of the war. Together with the industrial bourgeoisie he waded through the bloodbath of war; together with them he wanted to reshape Italy into a modern capitalist state. Mussolini had to woo the masses in order to be able to intervene as an active force in a situation that refuted all his prophecies and went counter to his goals. In 1919, he formed the first *fascio di combattenti* (league of frontline soldiers) in Milan, with the goal of assuring the survival and flourishing of the nation by "securing the revolutionary fruits of the revolutionary

war for the heroes of the trenches and the working people.” Fascist groups were formed in a number of cities. The new movement engaged from the start in a bitter struggle against the revolutionary workers’ organizations, because these, Mussolini asserted, had “divided and weakened the nation” by putting forward a perspective of class struggle. Fascism also turned its spears against the Giolitti government, which it held to be wholly responsible for the horrific suffering of the period after the war. Fascism developed very slowly and weakly at first. It was still held back by the trust of the broad masses in socialism. In May 1920 there were in all of Italy only about one hundred fascist groups, none of them with more than twenty to thirty members.

Demoralization and terror

Soon fascism was able to draw nourishment and strength from a second major source. The objectively revolutionary situation led to the rise of a subjectively revolutionary mood in the Italian proletariat. The glorious example of the Russian workers and peasants had a strong influence here. In the summer of 1920, the metalworkers carried out the occupation of the factories.[4] Here and there, reaching into southern Italy, agricultural proletarians, small peasants, and tenant farmers occupied estates or rebelled in other ways against the large landowners. But this great historic moment found the workers’ leaders to be feeble in spirit. The reformist leaders of the Socialist Party drew back in fear from the revolutionary perspective of broadening the factory occupation into a struggle for power. They forced the workers’ struggle into the narrow confines of a purely economic movement, whose leadership was the business of the trade unions. In concord with D’Aragona and other officers of the General Confederation of Labor, they betrayed the rebellious wage slaves through a shameful compromise with the employers, benefiting from superb collaboration from the government, especially Giolitti. Leaders of the Socialist Party’s left wing, from which the Communist Party later crystallized, still had too little training and experience to take command of the situation in thought and action and steer events in another direction. Moreover, the proletarian masses proved unable to go beyond their leaders and drive them forward in the direction of revolution.

The occupation of the factories ended in a severe defeat of the proletariat, causing discouragement, doubt, and timidity in its ranks. Thousands of workers turned their backs on the party and the trade unions. Many of them sank into indifference and mindlessness, while others joined bourgeois associations. Fascism won growing support among the disillusioned and also in the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeois population. It had achieved victory politically and ideologically against a working class infected with reformism. In February 1921 there were about 1,000 fascists. Fascism won the masses through sham revolutionary demands advocated through unscrupulously demagogic agitation. Its pompous verbal radicalism was aimed above all against the government of Giolitti, “betrayers of the nation.”

It was with fire and sword, however, that fascism proceeded against its second “enemy”: the international workers’ organizations, the enemies of the fatherland. Mussolini demanded, in keeping with his republican, antimonarchist, and imperialist views, the dismissal of the royal dynasty and the literal beheading of Giolitti. His followers began to “discipline” the “antinationalists,” that is, class-conscious workers’ organizations, with direct, bloody terror. In the spring of 1921 the fascists undertook their first “punitive expeditions.” They struck out against the rural proletarians, whose organizational headquarters were devastated and burned out and whose leaders were murdered. Only later did the fascist terror extend to the proletarians of the large cities. The prosecutors let all this take place without regard to law and justice. The bourgeoisie, whether industrial or agrarian, openly sponsored fascist terrorism, supporting it with money and in other ways. Even though the workers’ occupation of the factories ended in defeat, the bourgeoisie feared a future revival of proletarian power. In the municipal elections, the Socialists had won a third of the 8,000 councils.

Preventive action was necessary. To be sure!

Fascist electoral gains

The government then had cause and opportunity to forcibly strike down fascism, which was moving in on it threateningly. But in the prevailing situation, that would have caused a strengthening of the workers' movement. Better the fascists than the Socialists and revolutionaries, Giolitti thought. The sly old fox dissolved parliament and decreed new elections in May 1921. He created an "alliance for order" of all the bourgeois parties and brought into it the fascist organizations. During the electoral campaign, fascism engaged in boisterous republican appeals. This antimonarchical and antidynastic agitation fell silent now that the Agrarian Party leaders and masses were joining it. The fascist gains in the election were largely due to this support as well as the extension and growing strength of the fasci, which in May 1921 had 2,000 groups. Mussolini was indisputably exposing himself and his cause to the risk inherent in flooding the fascist movement with agrarian forces. He recognized that, by halting sham revolutionary antimonarchical agitation, he was giving up a strong incentive for the masses to join the fascists.

When the electoral battle was over, Mussolini wanted to go back to his slogans of 1919. In an interview with a reporter from *Giornale d'Italia*—which represents the interests of heavy industry—he stated that the elected fascists would not take part in the opening of parliament because it was impossible for them to shout, "Long live the king!" after the speech from the throne. This announcement had the effect of showing the strength of the agrarian wing in fascism. Some deputies elected with support of the fascist groups quit to join the monarchists and nationalists. A meeting was called of the fascist deputies together with regional delegates of the fasci in order to settle the dispute. Mussolini and his proposal were defeated. He reined in his republicanism with the explanation that he did not want to split fascism over this question.

Fascist apparatus

This defeat prompted Mussolini to set about constituting fascism as an organized and centralized party; until then it had been only a loose movement. The transformation took place at the first fascist congress in November 1921. While Mussolini won on this point, he was defeated in the selection of the party leadership; he did not have it fully under his control. His personal supporters made up only one half; the other half were monarchist Agrarians. This situation is significant. It indicates a conflict within fascism that has continued and intensified up to the present day, a conflict that will contribute to fascism's decay. It is the conflict between agrarian and industrial capital or, in political terms, between monarchists and republicans. The party now has 500,000 members.

Constituting fascism as a party was not enough in itself to grant Mussolini the power to become master of the working class and to compel the proletariat, through even more dismal drudgery, to contribute to the reconstruction and further development of the capitalist economy. For this purpose he needed a dual apparatus. One apparatus to corrupt the workers, and another to suppress them with armed force and terrorist means.

The apparatus to corrupt the workers' movement was created by founding the fascist unions, named "national corporations." They were to carry out systematically what fascism had done from the start: combat the revolutionary workers' movement, indeed every independent movement of the workers. Mussolini always rejects the charge that he is conducting a struggle against the working class. He continually gives assurances that he wants to raise the working class materially and culturally and

not lead it backwards into “the harrowing conditions of a slave-like existence.” But all that must be in the framework of the “nation” and subordinated to its interests; the class struggle is sharply rejected.

The fascist trade unions were founded with the explicit goal of providing an antidote against not only the revolutionary organizations of the proletariat but also against class organizations of any kind. Every proletarian class organization is immediately suspected by Mussolini and his henchmen of being revolutionary in character. Mussolini created his own trade unions, encompassing all workers, employees, and employers in a given trade or industry. Some of the organized employers have declined to join Mussolini’s unions, as has the agricultural league and the league of industrialists. Nonetheless, despite their heresy, they are not called to account by fascist punitive expeditions. These forays take place only where proletarians are concerned, who perhaps are not even in the revolutionary movement but nonetheless struggle in accordance with their class interests. Tens of thousands of workers have been forced to join the fascist unions, which are said to include about 800,000 members.

The fascist groups for terrorist subjugation of the working class in Italy are the so-called squadrons. These constitute a military organization that has evolved out of the agrarian punitive expeditions. Bands of “punishers,” which here and there formed spontaneously, became permanent organizations of paid mercenaries, who carry out terror as a profession. The squadrons developed over time into a purely military force, one that carried out the coup and underpins Mussolini’s dictatorial power. After the seizure of power and the establishment of the fascist state they were legalized as a “national militia,” a part of the bourgeois state. They are committed, as was officially declared, “to the service of God, the nation, and the prime minister”—please note: not the king. There are various estimates of their strength. At the time of the fascist coup they numbered between 100,000 and 300,000;[5] now they are half a million.

The failed general strike

Just as the failure and betrayal of the reformist leaders helped give birth to fascism, so too fascism’s conquest of state power was preceded by yet another reformist betrayal and therewith also another defeat of the Italian proletariat. On July 31, [1922] a secret session took place of the Italian reformist workers’ leaders—from both unions and the [Socialist] party; Turati was there, just like D’Aragona. It decided to proclaim a general strike through the General Confederation of Labor on August 1, a strike that was not prepared and not organized.[6] As things stood, it could end only in a dreadful defeat for the proletariat. In many localities the strike began only after it had already collapsed elsewhere. This was a defeat just as great and fateful as the occupation of the factories had been. It gave courage to the fascists for their coup, while discouraging and demoralizing the workers so that, passive and hopeless, they refrained from further resistance and let everything happen. After the coup the betrayal of the reformist leaders was sealed when Baldesi, one of the most influential leaders of the Italian trade-union confederation and the Socialist Party, declared on orders of Mussolini that he was ready to join the fascist government. This shameful alliance collapsed—what a disgrace—not because of the reformists’ opposition and protest, but because of the resistance of the fascist Agrarians.

Comrades! This short overview will have enabled you to recognize the interconnection in Italy between the development of fascism and the economic decay that impoverished and deluded the masses; between the development of fascism and the betrayal of the reformist leaders—cowards who abandoned the proletarians in the struggle. The weaknesses of the Communist Party also played a role here. Quite apart from its numerical weakness, the party surely also made a policy error in

viewing fascism solely as a military phenomenon and overlooking its ideological and political side. Let us not forget that before beating down the proletariat through acts of terror, fascism in Italy had already won an ideological and political victory over the workers' movement that lay at the root of its triumph. It would be very dangerous to fail to consider the importance of overcoming fascism ideologically and politically.

Fascist promises vs. performance

It is evident that, in terms of its organization and strength, fascism could evolve in the way briefly outlined here only because it had a program that was very attractive to the broad masses. We face a question that is important to proletarians of every country: What has fascism in Italy done since taking power to realize its program? What is the nature of the state that is its chosen instrument? Has it shown itself to be the promised state standing above class and party, granting justice to every layer of society? Or has it shown itself to be a tool of the propertied minority and especially of the industrial bourgeoisie? This is best judged by comparing the most important demands of the fascist program with the way they have been implemented.

What did fascism promise, in political terms, when it stormed in like Samson with wild, flowing hair?

A reform of the right to vote and consistently implemented proportional representation. What do we see? The old and flawed proportional representation law of 1919 is to be repealed and replaced by an electoral law that is a joke, a bloody mockery of proportional representation. The party that gets the most votes is to receive two-thirds of the seats in parliament. There has been a debate on whether it should be two-thirds or three-quarters. According to recent press reports, the fascists will be content for the strongest party—namely their own—to get two-thirds, and the remaining third to be distributed proportionally among the various other parties. That's some electoral reform!

Mussolini promised women the right to vote and to be elected. Recently an international bourgeois conference for women's suffrage met in Rome.[7] Mussolini graciously honored the women by his presence and explained to them with a sweet smile that women would obtain the right to vote—but only for the municipal councils. Political rights would thus still be denied them. Moreover, not all women would gain rights in municipal elections; only those who could give evidence of a certain level of education, plus women with "war medals," and women whose husbands possessed a sufficiently large bag of money to pay a certain level of taxes. That's how he keeps his promise with regard to equal rights for women.

Fascism included in its program the abolition of the senate and the creation of an economic parliament, standing alongside the political one. We hear nothing more about the economic parliament. But when Mussolini made his first address to the senate, that junk room of all reactionaries, he celebrated its magnificent contributions in the past and confirmed its great achievements in the present—all of which required an enhancement of the senate's influence in lawmaking.

The fascist program called for immediate summoning of a national assembly to reform the constitution. Where does that stand? Not a word has been said about this assembly. On the contrary, constitutional reform looks like this: the parliament—made up as I have described, which means fascism as its majority party—proposes a prime minister. The proposed fascist prime minister must then be affirmed by the king. The prime minister puts together his government any way he wants, presents himself and his cabinet to the parliament, and receives a vote of confidence, after which parliament leaves the scene, adjourned for four years—that is, for the entire period of its term in office.

Let us also compare the fascists' promises in the social sphere with their performance. Fascism promised legal protections for the eight-hour day and the establishment of a minimum wage for both industrial and agricultural workers. The law now proposed on the eight-hour day has a hundred exceptions and concludes with a provision that it can also be set aside in some cases. What is more, the eight-hour day has already vanished in practice for broad layers of the proletariat, especially for railway workers, postal employees, and other communications and transport employees, for whom—exactly on the model of “that miserable dog Groener”[8] —eight hours spent on-call at work is replaced by eight hours of work actually performed.

What is the situation regarding the establishment of a minimum wage? Thanks to the terrorist shackling and destruction of the trade unions, thanks to the conduct of fascist “corporations” pledged to “civil peace,” the employers' resistance against wage demands has been so reinforced that workers have been unable, given the bad economic situation, to defend even their previous wage levels. Wage reductions of 20–30 percent on average have taken place—50 percent for a great many workers. Indeed, there are even cases where the wage reduction comes to 60 percent.

Fascism talked about insurance for the elderly and for invalids, which would shield them against the worst levels of poverty and suffering. And what happened to this promise? The very weak beginnings of social welfare for the elderly, infirm, and sick, which took the form of a fund of 50 million lire, have been abolished. The 50 million lire was simply stricken from the budget “to save money,” so that those suffering from poverty no longer have access to any welfare provisions. Also stricken from the budget are the 50 million lire for employment agencies and support to the unemployed, and 60 million lire for the cooperative credit unions.

Fascism had raised the demand that workers take part in the technical leadership of the factory—in other words, control of production. It was promised that fascism would subject public enterprises to the technical supervision of factory councils. Now a law is being considered that simply abolishes the factory councils. Further, public enterprises are to be handed over to be operated by private employers, and this has already been done in part. The manufacture of matches, previously a state monopoly, has now wound up in the hands of private profiteers. So too have the postal package business, the telephone industry, the radio-telegram business, and also the railways. Mussolini has stated that the fascists are “liberals in the classic meaning of the word.”

Let us consider some of the fruits of fascism in the financial field. Fascism promised a thorough tax reform. Their “authoritarian” state was to use its power to levy a general and strongly progressive tax on capital, which was supposed to be, to some extent, an “expropriation of capital.” But what followed was the elimination of various taxes on luxury goods, such as on carriages, automobiles, and the like. In justification, it is said that such taxes “restrict national production and destroy property and the family.” In addition, it is now planned to expand indirect taxes, with an equally fanciful justification, namely that extending these taxes would reduce consumption and thus promote exports abroad. Moreover, the requirement for securities to be held in the name of their owner—the so-called “nominality of securities”—has been eliminated, opening wide the door to tax evaders.

Mussolini and his cronies called for confiscation of church assets. Instead of that, the fascist government has brought back into effect a number of old and long-ago-terminated concessions to the clergy. Religious instruction in the schools was abolished fifty years ago; Mussolini has brought it back, and a crucifix must now hang in every school.

Fascism had demanded that government contracts for war supplies be modified and that up to 85 percent of war profits pass over to the government. What happened? Parliament set up a commission to review the contracts for war supplies. It was supposed to present a report to the parliament as a whole. Doing this would no doubt have deeply compromised most of the captains of

heavy industry, the patrons and benefactors of fascism. One of Mussolini's first decisions was that this commission would report only to him personally, and that anyone revealing anything of the report's contents would be punished with six months' imprisonment. As for seizing war profits, on this point all the fascist trumpets fell silent, while billions were approved for heavy industry to cover deliveries of various types.

Fascism also wanted to fundamentally overhaul the armed forces. It demanded abolition of the standing army, a short period of service, limitation of the army to defense of the country as opposed to engaging in imperialist wars, and so on. How was this program carried out? The standing army was not abolished. The time of compulsory service was raised from eight months to eighteen months, which enlarged the 250,000-man army to 350,000. True, the Guardia Regia, a sort of militarily armed and organized police, was abolished. Was this perhaps because it was quite unpopular with the people, and especially the workers, after it had intervened in assemblies, strikes, and the like? Quite the contrary! Mussolini considered it too "democratic" because it answered to the ministry of the interior rather than to the general staff, and Mussolini feared that these forces could come into conflict with his squadrons and act against him.

The Guardia Regia had included 35,000 police. To make up for it, the size of the Carabinieri was increased from 65,000 to 90,000. In addition, the number of police was doubled—even the detectives and the customs police. In addition, the fascist government converted the "blackshirt" squadrons into a national militia. Their number was initially estimated at 100,000, but a recent decision in the fascist camp will raise it in the future to half a million.

The squadrons were infiltrated by the nationalist "blueshirts" —agrarian-monarchist forces—a fact that must have made Mussolini tremble with fear of an uprising against his dictatorship. From the moment when the squadrons first appeared, he took measures to place them under the political leadership of the party, that is, subject to his supremacy. He believed that goal to have been achieved by placing the squadrons under a national supreme command chosen by the party leadership. But the political leadership could not prevent conflicts within the squadrons, conflicts that became increasingly sharp when the nationalists, the "blueshirts," entered the squadrons. In order to break their influence, Mussolini arranged for a decision that obligated every party member to join the national militia, so that its strength became equal to that of the party. Mussolini hoped in this way to politically subdue the agrarian forces that were resisting him. Nonetheless, bringing party members into the militia will embed the political conflicts in it, and these conflicts will develop further there until they lead to decay.

The armed forces were to serve only to defend the fatherland. That was the promise. But the burgeoning size of the army and the enormous scope of armaments are oriented to major imperialist adventures. The artillery has been enormously expanded, the size of the officer corps has increased, and the navy is receiving special support. A large number of cruisers, torpedo destroyers, submarines, and the like are on order. The air force is developing in an especially conspicuous fashion. Orders have already gone out for 1,000 new planes, and many airfields have been built. The air force has its own commission, and hundreds of millions of lire have been approved for heavy industry to build the most modern machines and murderous instruments of death.

When one compares the program of Italian fascism with its actual implementation, one thing becomes evident: the complete ideological bankruptcy of the movement. There is a blatant contradiction between what fascism promised and what it delivered to the masses. All the talk about how the fascist state will place the interests of the nation above everything, once exposed to the wind of reality, burst like a soap bubble. The "nation" revealed itself to be the bourgeoisie; the ideal fascist state revealed itself to be the vulgar, unscrupulous bourgeois class state. This ideological bankruptcy must lead sooner or later to political bankruptcy.

Fascism's contradictions

And that day is now approaching. Fascism is incapable of holding together even the different bourgeois currents with whose silent and beneficent patronage it came to power. Fascism wanted to secure the power for social rebirth by seizing control of the state and utilizing its apparatus of power for its own ends. It has not even succeeded in fully subduing the bureaucratic apparatus. A sharp struggle has broken out between the old entrenched bureaucracy and the new fascist officials. The same antagonism exists between the old regular army with its officer corps and the fascist militia with its new leaders. The conflict between fascism and the bourgeois parties is growing.

Mussolini had a plan to create a unified class organization of the bourgeoisie in the shape of the fascist party as the counterpart of the revolutionary proletariat. That is why he devoted so much effort to smashing or absorbing all the bourgeois parties. He succeeded in absorbing one single party, the nationalists.[9] As we have seen, there are many indications that this fusion is twosided. The attempt to unify the bourgeois, liberal, republican, and democratic groups in a conservative framework failed miserably. Quite the contrary: fascist policies have led the remnants of bourgeois democracy to draw on their previous ideology. Confronted with Mussolini's drive for power and use of violence, they have taken up a struggle "to defend the constitution and restore the old bourgeois liberty."

Fascism's incapacity to consolidate and deepen its hold on political power is well illustrated by its relationship to the Catholic People's Party,[10] indisputably the largest and most influential bourgeois party in Italy. Mussolini counted on being successful in breaking away this party's agrarian right wing and unifying it with the fascists, while thereby weakening the left wing and securing its dissolution. Things worked out differently. At the recent congress of the popolari in Turin, there was a true outcry against fascism. Those on the party's right wing who tried to speak favorably and protectively of fascism were shouted down. The most severe criticisms of its policies, by contrast, were met with enthusiastic agreement.

Behind these conflicts—those I have mentioned and others— is the class conflict that cannot be talked out of existence by organizational maneuvers and sermons about civil peace. Class contradictions are mightier than all the ideologies that deny their existence, and these contradictions find expression despite fascism, indeed thanks to fascism and against it. The conduct of the popolari reflects the awareness of broad layers of urban petty bourgeois and small peasants regarding their status as a class and their antagonisms to large-scale capital. This is extraordinarily important with regard to the fascists' hold on power in Italy, or more properly, for the disintegration that it is headed toward. These layers, and especially the women within them, are deeply influenced by Catholicism and the church. Mussolini has therefore done all he could to win the Vatican. But the Vatican has not dared to counter the first stages of antifascist rebellion among the peasant masses in the People's Party.

The small peasants see that fascism brings the bourgeoisie lower taxes, increased possibilities for tax evasion, and fat contracts. Meanwhile, the small peasants feel the weight of heavier taxes through indirect payments and notably through a recalculation of agricultural income. The same holds true for the pettybourgeois masses in the city. They are provoked into sharp opposition by triumphant fascism's abolition of rent control; landlords once again have unlimited power to impose high rents. The growing rebellion of small peasants and agricultural workers finds pointed expression precisely in the rural regions where fascism imagined its squadrons to have broken all resistance. For example, in Boscoreale near Naples more than a thousand peasants stormed the town hall in protest against oppressive taxes. In three localities in Novara province, the agricultural workers were able to assert with success their previous wages and working conditions. They did this

by occupying a number of estates, indeed with the support of fascist squadrons. It is evident that the idea of class struggle is beginning to sink roots even within the ranks of fascism.

Proletarian awakening

Of particular importance is the awakening of sections of the proletariat that were intoxicated and poisoned by fascism. Meanwhile, fascism is incapable of defending the workers' interests against the bourgeoisie, and incapable of keeping the promises that it made, particularly to the fascist trade unions. The greater its victories, the more incapable it is of posing as the proletariat's protector. Fascism cannot even force the employers to hold to fascist promises about the advantages of common organizations.[11] Wherever only a few workers are organized in the fascist trade unions, it may be possible for a capitalist to pay better wages to these few. But wherever the masses are herded into the fascist organizations, the employers do not take into consideration the "fascist brothers," because it would cost too much—and where moneybags and profits are concerned, capitalist gentlemen do not display kindness.

The awakening of the proletarians has been speeded up in particular by the large number of workers thrown into the street with no sustenance, not only in private concerns but also in public enterprises. Soon after the fascist coup, 17,000 railway workers were laid off. Further layoffs followed and more are definitely in store. The governmental army workshops were closed, leaving 24,000 workers with no income and delivered over to unrestricted exploitation in the private workshops.

A fervent rebellion against fascist economic policies is emerging precisely among the workers organized by the fascists themselves. In Turin, Naples, Trieste, Venice, and a large number of other cities it was the fascist trade unions that took the lead without exception in joining with workers of other parties and organizations—including the Communist and syndicalist workers—in a massive public rally against the layoffs and workshop closures. Several hundred war invalids who had been dismissed from the army workshops traveled from Naples to Rome in order to protest the injustice they had suffered. They hoped Mussolini himself would grant them justice and protection, and instead, as reward for their faith, they were arrested the moment they got off the trains. The dockworkers of Monfalcone and Trieste, the workers of many localities and industries—all of them members of fascist organizations—have moved into action. In some places factory occupations have once again come about, carried out in fact by workers in fascist unions, with sympathetic toleration or support by the squadrons.

These facts show that ideological bankruptcy leads to political bankruptcy, and that it will be the workers above all who will quickly begin thinking once again in terms of their class interests and responsibilities.

Who will topple fascism?

There are many conclusions to be drawn. First, we must not view fascism as a homogenous phenomenon, as a block of granite, against which all our efforts will shatter. Fascism is contradictory by nature, encompassing different conflicting forces that will lead it to internal decay and disintegration. We must take up the struggle more energetically not only for the souls of proletarians that have fallen to fascism but for those of small and medium bourgeois, small peasants, intellectuals—in a word, all the layers that are placed today, by their economic and social position, in increasingly sharp conflict with large-scale capitalism.

However, it would be extremely dangerous to assume that the ideological and political decay in Italy will lead quickly to military collapse. True, fascism's military decay and collapse will come—it must come—but this may be a lengthy drawnout process because of the inertia of the available instruments of power. The proletariat in Italy will break free of fascism. It will again grow conscious, stronger, and more purposeful in the struggle for its interests. It will take up again the revolutionary class struggle for its freedom. But during this process, the Italian comrades and the proletariat must reckon with the fact that fascism, while perishing ideologically and politically, will assail them with military terrorism, with unsparing and unscrupulous violence. We must be prepared! A monster, even in its death throes, often succeeds in dealing out devastating blows. For that reason the revolutionary proletarians, Communists, and Socialists must follow the path of class struggle, prepared and armed for harsh battles.

The worst thing we could do would be to allow our historical understanding of fascism to sway us toward inactivity, toward waiting, or toward the postponement of arming ourselves and struggling against fascism. Yes, fascism is surely condemned to decay internally and to fall apart. Only temporarily can it serve the bourgeoisie as a tool of class struggle; only temporarily can it reinforce, whether legally or illegally, the power of the bourgeois state against the proletariat. Still, it would be disastrous for us to fall into the role of clever and refined observers of this process of decay. On the contrary, it is our bounden duty to drive this process forward and hasten it by every possible means.

Fascism in Germany

Such is the special duty of the proletariat not only in Italy, where this process will probably take place first; it is also the task of the German proletariat. Fascism is an international phenomenon; we all agree on that. Thus far, next to Italy, its strength is greatest in Germany. Here the war's outcome and the failure of the revolution have been favorable for its growth. That is understandable, bearing in mind what we know regarding the roots of fascism.

In Germany, the economy has been especially devastated by the lost war, the burden of reparations, and the Versailles Treaty.[12] The state is shattered down to its roots. The government is weak, without authority, a plaything in the hands of Stinnes and his cronies.[13] In my opinion, there is no country where conflicts are so great as in Germany between the objectively mature conditions for revolution and the subjective immaturity of the proletariat, as a result of the betrayals, the outlook, and the conduct of the reformist leaders. Nowhere did Social Democracy collapse so shamefully when the war broke out as in Germany. Here capitalist industry was highly developed; here the proletariat could be proud of its strong organization and lengthy Marxist schooling. We can concede that the British, French, and Austrian Social-Democratic parties and all the organizations united in the Second International had their strong points. But the leading party, the model party, was the German Social Democratic Party. Its breakdown is therefore a more unforgivable and outrageous crime than the breakdown of other workers' parties. There are more grounds to excuse or forgive the collapse of the other parties when the war broke out than there are for the German Social Democratic Party. The impact of this collapse recoiled on the proletarian masses in a particularly strong and destructive fashion. When German imperialism was shattered by Entente imperialism, the preconditions here were particularly favorable for fascism to shoot up rapidly.

But despite everything, I am convinced that the Versailles Treaty and the occupation of the Ruhr[14] with all its deeds of violence have not promoted fascism in Germany as much as Mussolini's coup. That coup gave a bigger boost to the German fascists than any other event. It gave them self-confidence and faith in their victory. The defeat and collapse of fascism in Italy would immediately deal the greatest blow of demoralization to fascists in Germany, and would greatly encourage the

proletariat. All the more so if the proletariat can say: Fascism in Italy was victorious and for a while enjoyed the height of power, but now it is no more, not only because it had to be torn apart by its internal contradictions, but also because of the strong and purposeful action of the proletarian masses there. This understanding would spread internationally, whatever the situation in individual countries.

So it is our duty internationally to work with all our power to overcome fascism in Italy. But in this effort, we must not forget that there is a precondition for successfully overcoming fascism abroad, and that is for us to also combat organized fascism in our own country with all our strength and thoroughly defeat it.

I have outlined the development of fascism in Italy rather fully—although far from fully enough—because it is mature, clearly defined, and complete before our eyes. The Italian comrades will fill out my remarks. I am not going to portray fascism in other countries; this can be done by delegates of our parties in these countries.

Combating fascism's appeal

In the resolution I have proposed, various methods are outlined for us to employ, various tasks that we have to carry out, in order to win mastery over fascism. I will not discuss the resolution in detail; I believe it speaks for itself. I only want to stress that these tasks run along two lines. One group of tasks aims at overcoming fascism ideologically and politically. This task is enormously important. It demands to a certain extent a rethinking or a more precise evaluation of some social phenomena that are peculiar to fascism in its essence. Also, it demands intense activity. We must remain aware that, as I said at the outset, fascism is a movement of the hungry, the suffering, the disappointed, and those without a future. We must make efforts to address the social layers that are now lapsing into fascism and either incorporate them in our struggles or at least neutralize them in the struggle. We must employ clarity and force to prevent them from providing troops for the bourgeois counterrevolution. To the extent that we do not win such layers for our party and our ideals and are unable to incorporate them into the rank and file of the struggling revolutionary proletarian battle forces, we must succeed in neutralizing them, sterilizing them, or whatever word you want to use. They must no longer threaten us as warriors for the bourgeoisie. The preconditions for our success are present in the living conditions that bourgeois class rule imposes on these layers in this stage of historical development.

In my view, it is extremely important that we purposefully and consistently carry out the ideological and political struggle for the souls of those in these layers, including the bourgeois intelligentsia. We must understand that, incontestably, growing masses here are seeking an escape route from the dreadful suffering of our time. This involves much more than filling one's stomach. No, the best of them are seeking an escape from deep anguish of the soul. They are longing for new and unshakable ideals and a world outlook that enables them to understand nature, society, and their own life; a world outlook that is not a sterile formula but operates creatively and constructively. Let us not forget that violent fascist gangs are not composed entirely of ruffians of war, mercenaries by choice, and venal lumpens who take pleasure in acts of terror. We also find among them the most energetic forces of these social layers, those most capable of development. We must go to them with conviction and understanding for their condition and their fiery longing, work among them, and show them a solution that does not lead backward but rather forward to communism. The overriding grandeur of communism as a world outlook will win their sympathies for us.

To the masses!

In contrast to the Second International, the Comintern is not an International for the elite of white proletarians of Europe and America. It is an International for the exploited of all races. Thus the Communist Party of each country must now be not just a vanguard fighter for wageworkers in the narrow sense of the term, not only a tribune of the interests of proletarians engaged in manual labor, but also a champion of intellectual workers, a leader of all social layers whose vital interests and whose longing to attain a more advanced culture places them in growing contradiction to the capitalist order. I therefore gladly welcome the decision of our plenum to take up the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government. The new slogan is not only irrefutably applicable to the largely agrarian countries of the Balkans like Bulgaria, Romania, and so on; it is also of great significance for Italy, France, Germany, and especially the United States. The slogan is virtually a requirement for the struggle to defeat fascism. It requires that we go among the broadest layers of exploited peasant producers and agricultural workers and bring them the joyful message of liberating communism. The task is to show all social layers in which fascism is recruiting a mass following that we Communists defend their interests through intense activity against bourgeois class rule.

There is something else we must do. We must not limit ourselves to struggle with and for the masses with our political and economic program. True, the political and economic demands press their way to the fore. But how can we offer the masses more than just defense of their bread? We must at the same time bring them the entire noble inner substance of communism as a world outlook. If that is done, our movement will sink roots in all social layers, and especially among bourgeois intellectuals whom recent historical developments have rendered insecure in their thinking and their striving, who have lost their old world outlook without being able to find a new one in the turmoil of these times. Let us ensure that these seekers do not go astray.

In the spirit of this line of thought, I say, "To the masses!" But let me underline a precondition for success. We must not forget the words of Goethe, "Getretener Quark wird breit, nicht stark." [15] We must maintain our Communist ideology in all its strength and clarity. The more we go to the masses, the more necessary it is for the Communist Party to be organizationally and ideologically unified. We cannot pour ourselves out broadly like a puddle dissolving into the masses. That would lead to damaging opportunism, and our efforts among the masses would collapse in humiliating defeat. If we make concessions to the masses' "lack of understanding"—and I mean both the old and the new masses—we then abandon our true vocation as a party. We lose what is most important for the seekers—that which binds them together: the flame of a new social life that warms and illuminates, bringing hope and strength in the struggle.

What we need is to reshape our agitation and propagandistic methods and our literature in line with these new tasks. If the mountain will not come to Mohammad, Mohammad has no choice but to go to the mountain. If the new masses that we must attract do not come to us, we must find them and talk to them in their own language, one corresponding to how they see things, without giving up the slightest bit of our Communist outlook. We need special literature for agitation among the peasantry, special literature for civil servants and the small and middle bourgeois of every type, and also literature devoted to work among intellectuals. Let us not underestimate the role that intellectuals can play not only in the revolution but also after the revolution. Let us recall the extraordinarily damaging sabotage carried out by intellectuals in Russia after the November [1917] revolution. We want to learn from the experiences of our Russian brothers. This is why we must understand that it is far from unimportant whether intellectuals are with us or against us, both at the moment of revolution and after it takes place.

Workers' self-defense and the united front

Thus the struggle against fascism imposes on us a rich array of new tasks. Every single section of the Communist International has the duty of taking up these tasks and carrying them out in a manner corresponding to the specific conditions in their country. And we must be aware that overcoming fascism ideologically and politically is not in itself sufficient to protect the struggling proletariat from the malice and violence of this enemy.

At present the proletariat has urgent need for self-defense against fascism, and this self-protection against fascist terror must not be neglected for a single moment. At stake is the proletarians' personal safety and very existence; at stake is the survival of their organizations. Proletarian self-defense is the need of the hour. We must not combat fascism in the way of the reformists in Italy, who beseeched them to "leave me alone, and then I'll leave you alone." On the contrary! Meet violence with violence. But not violence in the form of individual terror—that will surely fail. But rather violence as the power of the revolutionary organized proletarian class struggle.

We have already made a start here in Germany toward the organized self-protection of the working class against fascism by forming the factory detachments.[16] These self-defense units need to be expanded and imitated in other countries as a basis for international success against fascism.

But proletarian struggle and self-defense against fascism requires a proletarian united front. Fascism does not ask if the worker in the factory has a soul painted in the white and blue colors of Bavaria; or is inspired by the black, red, and gold colors of the bourgeois republic; or by the red banner with a hammer and sickle. It does not ask whether the worker wants to restore the Wittelsbach dynasty [of Bavaria], is an enthusiastic fan of Ebert, or would prefer to see our friend Brandler as president of the German Soviet Republic. All that matters to fascism is that they encounter a class-conscious proletarian, and then they club him to the ground. That is why workers must come together for struggle without distinctions of party or trade-union affiliation.

Proletarian self-defense against fascism is one of the strongest forces driving to establish and strengthen the proletarian united front. Without the united front it is impossible for the proletariat to carry out self-defense successfully. It is therefore necessary to expand our agitation in the factories and deepen it. Our efforts must overcome above all the indifference and the lack of class consciousness and solidarity in the soul of the workers, who say, "Let the others struggle and take action; it's not my business." We must pound into every proletarian the conviction that it is their business. "Don't leave me out. I must be there. Victory is in sight."

Every single proletarian must feel like more than a mere wage slave, a plaything of the winds and storms of capitalism and of the powers that be. Proletarians must feel and understand themselves to be part of the revolutionary class, which will reforge the old state of the propertied into the new state of the soviet system. Only when we arouse revolutionary class consciousness in every worker and light the flame of class determination can we succeed in preparing and carrying out militarily the necessary overthrow of fascism. However brutal the offensive of world capital against the world proletariat may be for a time, however strongly it may rage, the proletariat will fight its way through to victory in the end. Despite fascism, we see the capitalist economy, the bourgeois state, and class rule at the end of their tether. Symptoms of fascist decay and disintegration in bourgeois society speak to us loudly and piercingly of coming victory, provided that the proletariat struggles with knowledge and will in a united front. That's what must be!

Above the chaos of present conditions, the giant form of the proletariat will rear up with the cry: "I have the will! I have the power! I am the struggle and the victory! The future belongs to me!"

Clara Zetkin

Footnotes

1. Miklós Horthy was the leader of the counterrevolutionary regime in Hungary following the overthrow of the Hungarian soviet government that had existed from March to August 1919.
2. Otto Bauer was the leader and theoretician of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. He was part of the centrist Two-and-a-Half International that had merged with the right-wing Second International at a congress in Hamburg on May 21–25, 1923.
3. Georgia, formerly part of the tsarist empire, became independent following the October 1917 Russian Revolution, with a government led by the Menshevik Party that was hostile to Soviet Russia. On February 16, 1921, Red Army troops entered Georgia in support of a local rebellion by pro-soviet forces. Georgia soon became an independent Soviet republic linked by treaty with Russia. A portion of Armenia, formerly divided between the Ottoman and Russian empires, became independent after the First World War, under the rule of the Dashnaks, a nationalist party. In September 1920 Turkish forces attacked the country; in November, as Armenian military resistance collapsed, Soviet troops entered the country in support of a rebellion by pro-Soviet forces, leading to the creation of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.
4. Beginning at the end of August and continuing through the end of September 1920, over half a million workers, led by the metalworkers, seized factories throughout Italy, creating a revolutionary situation in the country. Workers began to organize production under the leadership of factory councils, and in many places workers organized Red Guards to defend the seized factories. The strikes spread to the railways and other workplaces, and many poor peasants and agricultural workers carried out land seizures. The Italian Socialist Party and the trade-union federation, however, refused to see this revolutionary movement as anything more than a union struggle, and the movement eventually foundered.
5. A reference to the fascists' "March on Rome" of October 22–29, 1922, at the conclusion of which Mussolini was asked to form a cabinet.
6. On July 31, 1922, the Alleanza del Lavoro—grouping the CGL federation and other unions—declared a general strike against the Mussolini regime, to begin the following day. Coming after waves of fascist attacks carried out with virtual impunity and amid growing working-class demoralization, the poorly organized strike met with a weak response by workers, as well as fierce repression. As a result, the leaders capitulated and called off the strike on August 3.
7. A reference to the Ninth Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, which met in Rome May 12–19, 1923.
8. Wilhelm Groener was Germany's railway minister, who had taken actions to suppress a nationwide strike of rail workers in February 1922.
9. The Italian Nationalist Association joined Mussolini's Fascist Party in March 1923.
10. A reference to the Christian-democratic Italian People's Party.
11. A reference to the fascist unions, called corporations, which were supposedly "common organizations" of labor and capital.
12. The Versailles peace treaty signed June 28, 1919, between Allied powers and Germany, included

among its provisions, the transfer of 10 percent of Germany's territory to France, Belgium, Denmark, and Poland, and called for Germany to pay \$33 billion (\$461 billion in 2016 dollars) in reparations to the Entente powers.

13. Hugo Stinnes was one of the most prominent members of Germany's capitalist class, with a vast, multifaceted economic empire.

14. On January 11, 1923, 60,000 French and Belgian troops invaded and occupied the Ruhr region of Germany—the center of its steel and coal production—in an attempt to exact war reparations following Germany's failure to pay them under the terms of the Versailles Treaty. The occupation lasted into 1925. 15. Literally “trampled cheese spreads out but does not grow strong.”

15. From Goethe's West-östlicher Divan. The lines that follow clarify Goethe's meaning: “Hammer it firmly into a strong mold and it takes on form—a strong brick for construction.”

16. A reference to the Proletarische Hundertschaften (sometimes translated as “proletarian hundreds”), which were workers' militias for self-defense against the threat of rightist paramilitary attacks and assassinations. They were first organized on the initiative of the factory-council movement in Central Germany in February 1923. The German Communist Party sought to build these into a national united-front movement that could also be utilized in the fight for revolutionary power. By May 1923 tens of thousands of workers were enrolled in their ranks.

P.S.

- <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1923/06/struggle-against-fascism.html>