

The Austrian Crisis and Communism

Continued from Last Issue

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Fascism is the second proxy of the bourgeoisie. Like the social democracy, and on an even greater scale, fascism has its own army, its interests and its logic of movement. We know that in Italy, fascism in order to save and strengthen bourgeois society, was compelled to be violently antagonistic not only to the social democracy but also to the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie. The same can be observed in Poland too. It should not be imagined that all the political organs of the bourgeoisie act in perfect harmony. Fortunately, it is not so. Economic anarchy is supplemented by political anarchy. Fascism, fed by the social democracy, is compelled to split the latter's skull in order to get to power. The Austrian social democracy does all it can to facilitate this surgical operation for fascism.

It is hard to imagine more concentrated nonsense than the reasoning of Otto Bauer which consists in saying that violence is admissible only for the defense of existing democracy. If this reasoning is translated into the language of the classes, it means: Violence is permitted to guarantee the interests of the bourgeoisie organized as a state, but it is inadmissible for the establishment of a proletarian state.

Bauer's Juridical Formula

A juridical formula is appended to this theory. Bauer chews over again the old formulae of Lassalle on law and revolution. But Lassalle spoke before a court. There his arguments were in place. The attempt to transform a juridical duel with the state attorney into a philosophy of historical evolution is nothing but the subterfuge of cowardice. According to Bauer, the application of violence is permissible only as a reply to an already accomplished coup d'Etat, when the foundations of "law" have already disappeared, but it is inadmissible twenty-four hours before, when it is a matter of preventing the coup. Along this conception, Bauer traces the line of demarcation between Austro-Marxism and Bolshevism as if it were a question of two schools of criminal law. In reality, the difference lies in the fact that Bolshevism strives to overthrow the domination of the bourgeoisie while social democracy strives to eternalize it. There can be no doubt that if a coup d'Etat were carried through, Bauer would declare: If we did not call upon the workers, when we had powerful organizations, a legal press, forty-three percent of the deputies, the Vienna municipality, to rise against the fascists who formed anti-constitutional bands attacking law and order, then at the present time, when the fascists have the state apparatus and base themselves upon a new law created by them, when we are deprived of everything, made outlaws, when we have no legal connections with the masses who are, moreover, manifestly disillusioned, oppressed and are passing over to fascism in increasing numbers—the proposal for an armed insurrection at the present time under such circumstances could be made only by adventurists or Bolsheviks. By turning their philosophy around 180 degrees in this manner, the Austro-Marxists remain entirely true to themselves.

The slogan of domestic disarmament surpasses by its reactionary baseness everything that we have heard up to now about the social democracy. These gentlemen beg the workers to disarm in face of the armed bourgeois state. The fascist bands are after all only auxiliary detachments of the bourgeoisie; dissolved today; they can be called to life again at any moment and armed twice as strongly as at present. As for the workers, no one will give them arms if the social democracy disarms them with the hands of the bourgeois state. The social democracy naturally fears the arms of the fascists. But far more does it fear the arms in the hands of the workers. Today, the bourgeoisie is still afraid of a civil war: first, because it is not yet certain how it will turn out, and second, because it wants no economic convulsions. The disarmament of the workers insures the bourgeoisie against civil war and consequently raises the chances of a fascist coup d'Etat to the maximum.

The demands for the domestic disarmament of Austria is a demand of the Entente countries, of France in the first place, and England in the second. The semi-official French journal, *Le Temps*, explains severely to Schober that domestic disarmament is necessary in the interests of external peace as well as in the interests of private property. In his speech in

the House of Commons, Henderson developed the same theme. In defending the Austrian democracy, Henderson defended the treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain. Here as in important questions generally, the Austrian social democracy is only the transmitting apparatus of the bourgeoisie of the victorious countries.

The social democracy is incapable of taking power and it does not want to take it. The bourgeoisie finds, however, that the disciplined organization of the workers by the social democracy, involves it in too much of an expense. The bourgeoisie as a whole needs fascism to hold the social democracy in check, and when necessary, to throw it on the scrap heap. Fascism wants to take power and is capable of seizing it. As soon as it seizes power, it will put it completely at the disposal of finance capital. But that is the road of social convulsions; it also involves a great expense. That is what explains the hesitations of the bourgeoisie, the internal struggle of its various social layers, and determines its most probable policy in the next period: with the aid of fascism to compel the social democracy to help the bourgeoisie reorganize the constitution in such a way as to combine the advantages of democracy and fascism,—of fascism for its essence and of democracy for its form—with the avoidance of the expenses for democratic reforms and, if possible, the expense of a fascist coup d'Etat.

Will the bourgeoisie succeed in this way? To the very end and for a long time, it cannot succeed. In other words: the bourgeoisie cannot create such a regime as will permit it to base itself peacefully upon the workers as well as upon the ruined petty bourgeoisie, without being involved in expenditures either for social reforms or the convulsions of civil war. The antagonisms are too great, they must find a way out either in one direction or another.

Austrian "Democracy" Condemned

In one way or another—the Austrian "democracy" is condemned. After the last attack of apoplexy, it can of course still recover and live on for a while its feet dragging behind it and its tongue barely mumbling. It is possible that a second attack will be necessary to put an end to it. But its fate is decided in advance. Austro-Marxism is entering a period of expiation for its political sins. The social democracy that saved the bourgeoisie from Bolshevism is now facilitating the saving of the bourgeoisie from the social democracy itself. It would be absurd to close one's eyes to the fact that the victory of fascism would involve not only the physical extermination of the handful of Communists, but also the pitiless crushing of all the organizations and all the points of support of the social democracy. In this regard, as in many others, the social democracy only reproduces the history of liberalism, whose belated child it is. More than once did the liberals help feudal reaction triumph over the popular masses only to be liquidated in turn by the reaction.

History has, so to speak, set itself a special task: to refute, in the crassest form, the prognoses and directives of the Comintern since 1923. That is how it was with the evaluation of the revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923; with the evaluation of the world role of America and the Anglo-American antagonism; with the course set for a revolutionary wave in 1924-25; with the estimation of the driving forces and the perspectives of the Chinese revolution (1925-27); with the estimation of British trade unionism (1925-27); with industrialization and the Kulak in the U. S. S. R., and so on without end. The same thing is happening now with the estimation of the "third period" and social-fascism. Molotov discovered that "France is in the first ranks of the revolutionary wave." While in reality, the revolutionary situation is at hand in Austria, where—and this is the most significant part of it—the point of departure of possible revolutionary development is not constituted by the struggle of Communism with "social fascism," but of the clash of the social democracy with fascism. In the face of this compact, the unfortunate Austrian Communist Party has landed completely in a blind alley.

Yes, the collision between the social democracy and fascism is now the most important fact in Austrian politics. The social democracy takes one step backward

after another, makes one concession after the other, crawls on its belly supplicates, and surrenders one position after the other. But the clash has a real character, it is a question of the head of the social democracy. A further advance of the fascists can—must—push the workers and even a part of the social democratic apparatus far behind the limits marked out in advance by Seitz, Otto Bauer and others. Just as revolutionary situations developed more than once out of the conflict between liberalism and the monarchy, which later went over the heads of both opponents, so a revolutionary situation can develop out of the clash between the social democracy and fascism—two antagonistic proxies of the bourgeoisie—which will pass over the heads of both of them.

The proletarian revolutionist would be worthless if he did not understand, in the epoch of the bourgeois revolution, how to estimate the conflict between the liberals and the monarchy, and instead of utilizing the struggle in a revolutionary manner, throw the two opponents into one pot. The Communist is not worth a copper who, in face of the collisions between Fascism and the social democracy, shouts down this conflict with the naked formula of social fascism, which has no content at all.

Such a position—the policy of a shouting and empty Leftism—closes the road for the Communist party to the social democratic workers in advance and gives rich nourishment to the Right wingers in the Communist camp. One of the reasons for the strengthening of the Right wing is that in its criticism it touches the open and indubitable wounds of official Communism. Weak as the party is in making its way to the social democratic workers, just so is the Right opposition strong in making its way to the social democratic apparatus.

The ignoring or incomprehension of the order of revolutionary crisis, political minimalism, the perspectives of eternal preparations—these are the principal features of the policy of the Right wing. They make themselves felt most strongly when the leadership of the Comintern seeks to create a revolutionary situation artificially in an administrative manner. In such cases, the criticism of the Right wing has something convincing in it. But it has nothing in common with revolutionary strategy. The Right wing supported the opportunist policy in the most revolutionary moments (Germany, China, England). They improve their reputation with the criticism of bureaucratic adventurism, so as later to play over again the role of a brake at the decisive moment.

What Is Social-Fascism?

The policy of the Centrists not only nourishes the Right wing but brings grist to the mill of the Austro-Marxists. Nothing can save the Austrian social democracy in the next period—nothing but the wrong policy of official Communism.

What does "social fascism" really mean? No matter how shrewd the honest "theoreticians" make themselves look, they can reply to this question with nothing but the statement that the social democracy is ready to defend the foundations of the bourgeois regime and its own positions in the bourgeois regime with the aid of armed power against the workers. But isn't this the general characteristic of all "democratic" parties without exception? Did not Kerensky and Tseretelli smash the peasants and the workers in the honeymoon days of the democratic revolution? Did not the French Radicals employ armed might against strikers before and after the war? Is not the history of the rule of the republican and democratic parties in the United States at the same time the history of sanguinary clashes with strikers? If all this is fascism, then the history of class society is the history of fascism; then there are as many fascisms in the world as there are bourgeois parties: liberal fascists, radical fascists, national-fascists, etc., etc. Then what meaning is there in the appellation? None at all. It is only a noisy symptom for class violence.

In August 1914, we named democratic socialism—social imperialism. With this we said that the social democracy is a special kind of imperialism adapted to the working class. Imperialism unites the social democracy with all the parties of the bourgeoisie without exception. "Socialism" distinguishes it from these parties. Social-imperialism defines it as a whole.

But socialism, unless one wishes to

play a senseless game with words, is not the general characteristic of bourgeois parties, but constitutes a specific bourgeois party, which has specific conditions and tasks that are opposed to the other bourgeois parties.

One can answer to this that the hostility of the bourgeois parties among themselves is only relative. That is not only correct, but it is a truism which does not, however bring us one step forward. The fact that all the bourgeois parties, from fascism to the social democracy, put their defense of the bourgeois rule above their programmatic differences, eliminates neither the differences between these parties, their struggle among themselves, nor our duty to utilize this struggle.

The Austrian social democracy, more than any party in the Second International, is intertwined with the working class. For this reason alone, the development of the revolutionary crisis in the country presupposes a series of deep-going internal crises in the social democracy. In Austria especially, where the differentiation is belated, it is not out of the question that an "independent" party should split off from the official party and at one blow, as was the case in Germany, make it possible to give the Communist Party a mass foundation. This is no absolute road, but, according to circumstances, quite possible. The perspective of a possible split of the social democracy under the pressure of the revolutionary crisis can in no case lead to a more moderate attitude of the Communist Party to the future "Independents" or the candidates for the "Independents". The need for implacable exposure of the Left of the Max Adler type or of a newer type requires no demonstration. But it would be wrong if, in the course of the struggle against Fascism, one did not see the need for an approach of the Communist Party to the broad masses of the social democratic workers who still feel themselves to be social democrats and count themselves as such. It is the direct duty of the Communist Party to criticize the bourgeois character of the social democracy to these workers, to show them that to make the policy of the social democrats equivalent to that of fascism when the social democratic workers mortally hate fascism and their leaders fear it just as mortally, means to act in contradiction to real political relations, means to infuse these masses with distrust to Communism, means to strengthen the union of these workers with their leaders.

The Danger in the Stalinist Theory

It is not difficult to foresee that the throwing of the social democracy and fascism into one pot brings forward the danger of idealizing the Left social democracy, when the latter comes to a serious clash with fascism. That has already been demonstrated by experiences in history. It must be remembered that the equalization of social democracy and fascism, proclaimed for the first time by the luckless Fifth Congress, found its necessary antithesis in the capitulation before Purcell, before Pilsudski, before Chiang Kai-Shek, before Raditch and before LaFollette. That is entirely legitimate. Whoever makes the extreme Left of bourgeois society equal to its extreme Right, that is, Austro-Marxism and Fascism, is inevitably preparing the capitulation of the Communist Party before the Left social democracy in the critical moment.

This question is very closely connected with the slogans in perspective for the Austrian working class: Soviets of deputies and dictatorship of the proletariat. Generally speaking, these two slogans are closely connected with each other. The formation of Soviets is conceivable only under the conditions of a revolutionary situation an aroused movement of the masses, under the condition of a great and growing role of the Communist Party, that is, under the conditions that precede or accompany the conquest of power by the proletariat.

But in Austria, more than in any other country, there is an open possibility that the slogan of Soviets will not coincide with the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat, yes, will even stand directly opposed to it, that is, by the transformation of the Soviets into a weapon against the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is all the more important to understand and foresee this because of the fact that the epigones (Zinoviev, Stalin and others) have made a vulgar fetch of the slogan of Soviets, in which they substituted the or-

*I cannot dwell at length on this question, especially since it is discussed in sufficient detail in my "Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern".

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