

'People's Front' - New Panacea of Stalinism

By Max Shachtman

Fascism, in seizing power in Germany without encountering the slightest resistance from the working class, revealed how utterly savage and reactionary capitalism has become in the years of its decay. It nevertheless yielded one positive result. It brutally jerked the proletarian movement out of its complacency with the old labor parties, their theories, their practical policies and their leadership, and compelled it to undertake a search for a course different from those which led it to such a calamitous and humiliating defeat. At the same time that Fascism brought to the workers everywhere an acute awareness of the hideous inferno which it holds in store for them whenever and wherever it triumphs, it also impelled them to think deeply about why it took over the helm so easily in Germany and what line of action must henceforward be adopted so that the reptile may be strangled before it strangles them.

Nothing is more understandable than the fact that the workers, alarmed by the spread of Fascism to one country after another, should lend a receptive ear to every plausible plan presented as a means whereby they may deal an effective blow to what menaces their very existence. And of the plans recently put forward, none appears so

How the German Social Democrats Followed the Road to Ruin

The classic party of the "practical" struggle against Fascism, for peace and democracy, was the German social democracy. Its policy, generously complemented by the German Stalinists, resulted in the facile victory of Fascism, the enhancement of the danger of a new world war, the destruction of the last remnants even of bourgeois democracy. Briefly its course was based upon the following conceptions:

Not having behind us the majority, we cannot yet take control of the country, establish a Socialist government, and inaugurate a socialist society. The Weimar Republic is better for the working class than the Hohenzollern monarchy; Hitlerism is worse than the Weimar Republic. We must therefore defend the bourgeois republic, for the alternative is not socialism or Fascism. Being in the minority in the country, we can find a majority to defend the republic ("democracies require majorities") only if we ally ourselves with the democratic elements of all classes. They will ally themselves with us in the struggle against Fascism only if we do not drive them into its arms by a systematic prosecution of the class struggle. The class struggle, in such critical times as exist by virtue of the Fascist threat to seize power, is superseded by the struggle of the people (all classes, the good people of all classes) against the psychopathological Brownshirts. The unity of the people is represented by the Iron Front. That we have won the democratic bourgeoisie to the struggle against Fascism, is represented by the fact that Hindenburg is our candidate

Why the Stalinists Made the Turn to the 'People's Front'

Up to the time Hitler took power, the Stalinist line in Germany (as in all other countries) was derived from the theory and practice of "socialism in one country." The source of the new Stalinist line is exactly the same theory. At bottom, the latter is based upon a loss of faith in the revolutionary capacities of the world working class, for the Soviet bureaucracy simply says, when it formulates and fights so furiously for the idolization of its theory, that backward Russia will arrive at the classless socialist society, with a standard of living higher than that ever enjoyed by any working class in any capitalist country at any stage of development, sooner than the German, French, English or American workers will overthrow their bourgeoisie. Arrive there if military intervention can be prevented. If the capitalist world, especially Europe, can be made to preserve (more or less) the status quo, without eruptions or convulsions. A civil war in Germany to prevent Hitler from coming to power, would precipitate international complications and probably war, without the German workers being able to win (that prospect, the Moscow bureaucracy simply ridicules over its teacups). That would endanger the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union. Therefore, retreat before Fascism without giving battle.

Far from dispelling the danger to the Soviet Union, this abysmally blind policy vastly heightened it. Hitler in power became, to quote Trotsky, the super-Wrangell, the sword poised for Russia's heart. Frightened, panic-stricken by the results of their whole "Third Period" policy, the Soviet bureaucrats who manipulate the Third International like jugglers, made a

simple, so plausible, so effective as the one now so vociferously advanced by the Stalinist parties, following the 7th Congress of the Communist International, for virtually all the countries of the globe.

But only appears! For a closer examination of the Stalinist panacea against Fascism and war, which goes by the alluring name of "The People's Front," will not only reveal that the "plan" is far from a new one but also that its execution would have just exactly the opposite effects from those it promises to produce.

The opposite effects? Precisely. Do you then mean that the Stalinists, instead of wanting to avert Fascism and war, would rather bring them on? Not at all, any more than the German social democrats wanted the war of 1914-1918 or the victory of Hitler in 1933; for that matter, any more than the bulk of the members of the capitalist class "want" imperialist war. What is decisive in this, as in all other social questions, is not what you want, but what will logically result from the policy you pursue. Not even the most ardent and anxious mountain climber has ever been known to reach the top of Mont Blanc by starting to dig a ditch at the foot of it; such a method would hardly bring him half-way up the side of it.

for the presidency of the republic (God knows he isn't perfect, but Hitler is worse). The struggle against the Fascists must not exceed parliamentary bounds, for actual physical struggle would precipitate a civil war of the classes in the country, which would frighten our allies into the camp of Hitler. Better a thousand times that both sides should disarm, for workers need no arms in order to conquer a majority at the ballot box.

The consequences of this course are too frightful and recent in the memory of all to require detailed comment.

Now, wherein does the Stalinist policy of the "People's Front" differ essentially, in France or in the United States, from the policy of the German social democrats? In only one respect. The Germans pursued this line of thought and action out of a deeply-felt desire to protect the mighty organizations and institutions of labor, built up by years of effort and sacrifice, as the living basis for the coming socialist society in Germany. These organizations and institutions the leaders identified with themselves. The Stalinists have adopted the same line out of just as deep a desire to protect the proletarian institutions and the foundations of socialism which are being laid in the Soviet Union. In turn, they too identify them with the Soviet bureaucracy and its interests. In both cases, such a line must ultimately lead—as it already has in Germany—not only to the wiping out of these institutions and consequences of past years, but even to the smashing of the very bureaucracy whose course brings on the catastrophe.

complete turn-about-face in line, which was consecrated at the 7th World Congress.

Believing even less in the fighting capacities of the world proletariat now than it was prostrate in Germany, and impelled by the same nationalistic theory, the Stalinists have turned for allies to defend "socialism in one country" from Hitler to the bourgeoisie of other countries. The entry of the Soviet Union in to the League of Nations and its disgraceful adaptation to the interests and policies of the dominant imperialist gang at Geneva; the senny pacts made with French imperialism and its Czechoslovakian vassal; the frantic efforts to consummate similar alliances with England and the United States—all these attest the extent to which the Stalin clique is relying for salvation upon the presumed friendship of capitalist allies.

It is not within the province of this article to discuss the Soviet foreign policy, to which the same criteria should not and cannot be applied as are applied to the policy of a proletarian party, be it in Russia or in a capitalist country. What is important, however, is the fact that, contrary to Lenin's policy of subordinating the foreign diplomacy of the workers' state to the international interests of the proletariat, the Stalinists have subordinated the proletarian movement they control to the interests of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. The "People's Front," wherever it is created, is essentially a movement organized by the Stalinists as a guarantee and a prop under their Soviet foreign policy of alliances and military pacts. As such, it cannot be other than an agency for preserving in power in each country that bourgeoisie, or section of the bourgeoisie, which is

either "friendly" or "allied" with the Soviet Union, or whose "friendship" the Soviet Union seeks. This friendship (how temporary, how treacherous such friends always prove to be in a crisis!) is purchased by the Stalinists at the price of converting—more accurately: of organizing—their "People's Fronts" into recruiting agencies figuratively and literally) of the democratic imperialist bourgeoisie in the respective countries.

It is at this point that the difference between the Stalinist and the German social democratic courses comes to an end, and their identity is resumed. The difference is of little or no fundamental account, and of no practical significance; it relates to the Why and the Who, but it alters nothing in the How and the What . . . or in the results.

The Soviet government signs a military-political pact with Czechoslovakia; the Stalinists, "pleased," reads the New York Times cable (Dec. 22, 1935), "with a Soviet pact for defense against German aggression which Mr. Benes' realism induced him to conclude, voted alongside the bourgeois Catholic parties for their former enemy." Cause and effect! Litvinov signs a pact (good, bad or indifferent, that is not the point at the moment) with the Czech bourgeoisie. The Czech Stalinists promptly suspend the class struggle and every other revolutionary principle by voting for the military budget in parliament

'People's Front', Democracy and Fascism

Almost up to yesterday, the Stalinists not only rejected a united front with the Socialist parties and the reformist trade unions, but denounced those revolutionists who advocated such a bloc against Fascism as being themselves a species of "social-Fascists." Not a united front with the social democracy against Fascism, said the Stalinists, but first crush the social democracy, and there will be no Fascist problem. The head of the world proletariat, the beloved Stalin, delivered himself in 1925 of the dictum which became canonical doctrine in the International: "Social democracy is objectively the moderate wing of Fascism. . . . These organizations do not negate, but supplement one another." The hindquarters of the world proletariat, the slightly less beloved Manuilsky, warned at the 11th Plenum of the C. I., in March, 1931, that "the social democrats, in order to deceive the masses, deliberately proclaim that the chief enemy of the working class is Fascism, in order thereby to divert attention from the question of the struggle against the dictatorship of capitalism in general, to idealize the democratic forms of the latter and to create among the workers the impression that they must struggle for the 'democratic' forms of their exploitation and against the Fascist forms."

But all this was in the period when the Stalinists guaranteed us that there was a universal stormy revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat, a mass radicalization, which threatened the innermost fortresses of world capitalism. The upsurge has apparently abated considerably under the general leadership of the Stalinist staff, and from the struggle on all fronts for the proletarian dictatorship the Third International has made a forced march forward to the struggle for "the democratic forms of . . . the dictatorship of capitalism in general."

"Now the toiling masses are faced with the necessity of making a definite choice, and of making it today," announced Helmsman Dimitroff at the 7th Congress, "not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy but between bourgeois democracy and Fascism."

To the extent that there is a kernel of truth in this assertion, the responsibility for a situation in which—in the era of imperialist decay and social revolution—the struggle for working class power has been set low on the order of the day, lies with the reformist social democracy and the no less treacherous policy of Stalinism. The conclusion, however, which the Stalinists draw does not differ by a hair from the conclusions drawn by the social democracy for years.

From the fact that on this, that or the other day the working class did not yet stand on the eve of the fight for power, the German reformists concluded that not only was this fight postponed to the Greek Kalends, but that no steps should be taken to organize the class struggle in such a manner as to bring the proletariat constantly closer to the decisive battle. It is false to think that the German Socialist leaders ever declared that the ideal of a socialist government was abandoned by them—any more than the Stalinists now declare their renunciation of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat some day in the future—the distant future. The crime of the social democrats consisted not in failing to take power when it could not be taken, but in supporting the spurious capitalist democracy of

and by joining with the bourgeois parties to elect Eduard Benes, shrewd and faithful servitor of Czech and French imperialism, as president of the republic. A Roland for an Oliver! A Benes for a Hindenburg!

Ditto in France. Only here, instead of Benes or Hindenburg, the name is Herriot, or Daladier, whose renown as a fighter against Fascism was first gained on that famous February 6 when he crumpled up at the mere sight of several thousand Fascists, armed with razor-blade-tipped canes, demonstrating in front of the Chamber of Deputies.

Ditto in Mexico, the "friendship" of whose bourgeoisie the Soviet bureaucracy thirsts after. The clever bourgeois demagogue, President Cardenas, during whose less than two years in office more than 2,000 militant peasants have been assassinated in the state of Vera Cruz alone, has the ardent support of the ludicrous little C. P. of Mexico. Its manifesto only a few weeks ago, pasted all over the capital, began: "With Cardenas! Against the Callesist reaction!" and ended: "Let us support Cardenas in his struggle against the Callesist reaction!" Half the Mexican C. P. membership working in the government apparatus, is only added reason for such ardor.

Now let us see the "People's Front" as it labors to be born in the United States.

the Weimar Republic, they helped the bourgeoisie consolidate itself in power on the grounds that Fascism would thereby be warded off. Then, having demoralized and devalitized the proletariat, they stood by helplessly while Fascism rose to power quite legally and constitutionally and "democratically" on the basis of that very same Weimar Republic.

The intentions of Stalin and Co. may be of the noblest type, but we see no reason why the general run of the German Socialist bureaucracy should not be characterized similarly; in any case, it is not important. What is important, is the identity of their positions. The so-called "conditions" that Dimitroff sets for casting his vote for bourgeois democracy are essentially the same as those promulgated by the German Socialists in their time. The latter also demanded that the bourgeois democratic governments which it supported or "tolerated" should "disarm the Fascists" and do this, that and the other thing. Like the Stalinists, they too spoke of a "real struggle" against the Fascists. Like the Stalinists, they too said that "final salvation this government cannot bring." And like the Stalinists, they supported bourgeois democracy as the "lesser evil."

Lenin too made demands on the bourgeois democratic government of Kerensky in the struggle against the "Fascist" Kornilov. Quite true. But—and here lies the fundamental, unobliterable difference!—at no time did Lenin support the Kerensky regime, at no time did he put the social democratic-Stalinist alternative. In the very struggle against Kornilov he subjected the bourgeois "democracy" and its government to a pitiless criticism, organizing the masses independently, warning against the counterfeit "democracy," patiently explaining, and systematically mobilizing the masses for the struggle for power. The same policy is now denounced by the French Stalinists in terms lifted directly from the Russian Mensheviks of 1917: except that where the latter said "a Leninist-Trotskyist provocation," the former merely say "a Trotskyist provocation."

In its consequences, the policy of the German social democracy led to the victory of Fascism, despite the fact that it was calculated to prevent it. The "defense of bourgeois democracy," of the Weimar Republic, as the lesser evil, did not bring the workers to power, did not stop Hitler from taking power, and did not even save bourgeois democracy from inundation. Let that not be forgotten!

At the 7th Congress, the beloved Czech Stalinist spokesman, Gottwald, impudently plagiarizing Hitler, Ferdinand, Wels and Loebe, declared: "If this bourgeois democratic republic is threatened by bloody Fascism, then we defend this republic against Fascism and call upon all real socialists, democrats and republicans to a united front for the joint fight so that this republic shall be spared the greatest disgrace of all, and the toiling people the greatest catastrophe of all, viz., bloody Fascist dictatorship." When this is followed by the Stalinist vote for Hindenburg-Benes for president of the Czechoslovakian Republic, one must ask (no answer will be forthcoming!): Where is the difference between the social democratic Iron Front in Germany, which was so mercilessly attacked by the revolutionists, and the Stalinist "People's Front"? And wherein will the consequences differ?

In the official textbook of the Stalinists, published only a few months ago—"Fascism and Social Revolution"—the author, Dutt, comments as follows on the resignation of Daladier after the February 6 Fascist demonstration in Paris:

"Throughout the whole card-castle of bourgeois democracy, of the 'democratic' defense against Fascism, of 'democracy' versus dictatorship, of the whole social democratic line, came tumbling down. The line of the 'Left Cartel,' of the French Socialist party, of the parliamentary-democratic defense against Fascism, was once again only to have smoothed the way for the advance of Fascism, for a government of the Right, for intensified dictatorship against the workers. . . ." (P. 275.)

The Farmer-Labor Party and the 'People's Front'

Like Theseus in the labyrinth of mythology, one would need a large ball of string to enable him to get to the center (and out again) of the maze through which the American Communist party has travelled in its futile search for a Farmer-Labor party in the course of the last dozen or more years. Shelved with a sigh of relief several years ago, it was taken down—not the party, but the hope—shortly before the 7th World Congress and dusted off. Now, a few months afterwards, it appears, considerably the worse for alteration, as the specific American form of the People's Front.

In the October 1935 issue of "The Communist," W. Z. Foster, who has also been taken off the shelf and dusted off, explains that unlike France, where the masses have "parties, of their own, which could serve as the basis of such a united front," the United States possesses no large mass party. If the decisions of the 7th Congress are to be carried out in this country—and God knows they must be—the C.P. must unite with somebody or something to form the "People's Front." If there is no somebody or something, it will have to be manufactured.

The fabled sculptor, Pygmalion, became enamored of the lovely but inanimate statue he had chiselled, and wished so ardently that it might come to life that the gods finally granted his request. The marble gave way to the flesh and blood of Galathea, whom Pygmalion espoused and lived happily with for a goodly period of time. Let us see what the Stalinist Pygmalions ideas with in order that they may come to life as the American

And further: "To preach confidence in legalism, in constitutionalism, in bourgeois democracy, that is, in the capitalist state, means to invite and to guarantee the victory of Fascism. That is the lesson of Germany and Austria." (P. 290.)

Perfect! If anything is to be added to it, it is this: The place of the Left Cartel in France has now been taken by the Stalinist-organized "People's Front"; the Stalinists now cry for the same Daladier to take power! The line of the "People's Front," instead of averting Fascism, will, if continued—we are merely echoing the pre-7th Congress Dutt—smooth the way for the advance of Fascism, for a government of the Right, for intensified dictatorship against the workers. And not only in France.

People's Front

In the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the C. P. on January 18, 1935, upon Browder's return from Moscow with the straight information that the American masses were clamoring for a Labor party, four types of Labor parties are described, "reflecting the two chief political tendencies of this movement—the class struggle or class collaboration . . . : (a) a 'Popular' or 'progressive' party based on the LaFollette, Sinclair, Olson and Long movements, and typified by these leaders and their programs; (b) a 'Farmer-Labor' or 'Labor' party of the same character, differing only in name and the degree of its demagoguery; (c) a 'Labor party' with a predominantly trade union basis, with a program consisting of immediate demands (possibly with vague demagoguery about the "cooperative commonwealth," a la Olson), dominated by a section of the trade union bureaucracy, assisted by the Socialist party and excluding the Communists; (d) a Labor party built up from below on a trade union basis but in conflict with the bureaucracy, putting forward a program of demands closely connected with mass struggles, strikes, etc., with the leading role played by the militant elements, including the Communists" (The Communist, Feb. 1935, p. 123).

Being, as they were, in a position to choose, the Stalinists decided only a year ago to having nothing to do with any of the variants except Type D. Anything less represented class collaboration. But that was before the 7th Congress. What does the "People's Front," anti-Fascist, mass Farmer-Labor

union would extend every personal courtesy to him; he should not take this in any sense as a truce with the administration and that there would be no pulling of punches in questions or remarks addressed to him as a representative of the administration. The chairman then added that since Mr. Schuhl had indicated that he was a very busy man, and the union was a very busy organization, he wished to submit a printed list of nine questions drawn up by the union, copies of which were in the hands of every worker present, as the basis for the speaker's remarks.

For fifteen minutes Schuhl rambled and fumbled through the questions, passing the buck to the Federal WPA and to the local city and county governments. He ended up feebly by stating: "I know I haven't answered these questions very much to your satisfaction, but it's all I can say." When he turned to go, the chairman called upon him to answer direct questions from the workers. His 15 minutes stretched to an hour, as worker after worker speared Schuhl with sharp questions that tore his apologies apart, and exposed his false claims on many points by stating their own experiences. The chairman mercifully closed the question period to permit the groggy administrator to beat a hasty exit.

Stalinists Sabotage Unity

Great confusion, however, still exists among the WPA workers due to the refusal of the local W.A.A. to cooperate in joint action with the union in fighting for the WPA workers. Members of the Communist Party and the liquidated Unemployed Councils have taken practically complete control of the local W.A.A. These individuals have stopped at no vile tactic to prevent unity among the unemployed and project workers in the W.A.A. and Unemployed League. They have stooped to the basest type of personal slander against leading members of the union and League. At a meeting of the union last week, five members of the W.A.A., who incidentally had been among those for whom the union had secured back-pay and new jobs, inspired by Fred Voelker, former Unemployed Council organizer and now a leading light in the W.A.A., attempted to break up the union by a vague charge of "selling out." The rank and file union members took the floor and smashed their flimsy lies and laughed them out of the meeting.

Toledo W.P.A. Has Its Say

(Continued from Page 1)

The WPA here which has left thousands of qualified workers on the relief rolls, laid off thousands of others for varying periods of time that cut monthly pay from the \$55 minimum down to as little as \$20, default issuance of pay-checks for days and weeks, short-paid hundreds who have worked full time by a trick method of accountancy, and has provoked scores of other grievances. Schuhl, at the last minute the day before, attempted to evade speaking at the meeting, the date for which he himself had set. A little persuasion by a union committee forced from him an agreement to speak for "15 minutes."

When Schuhl put in his appearance at the meeting, the entire audience rose at the signal of the chairman, Art Preis, one of the first members of the Ohio Unemployed League in this territory and a leader of the big FERA strike here last spring, and sang lustily the words of a parody song to the tune of "Hinky-Dinky-Parley Vouz" especially written for the occasion as a greeting to the administrator: Two verses of the song, printed on song-sheets issued to every worker, reflected the spirit of the meeting and had Schuhl's ears burning. They went:

"They promised us fifty-five bucks a month and said, 'This will do.' Then they laid us off for half the time, and it was cut in two. They give you hot air and bally-hoo To warm up your house and make your stew. And say, 'That's good enough for you.' We workers are simply all fed up on bally-hoo, We're tired of all this passing-the-buck and parley-vouz. There's plenty here, as we all can see, We don't have to beg on bended knee, We'll get what we want, and to hell with you."

K.O.ed by Questions

The chairman then introduced Schuhl, and pointed out that the administrator was the WPA workers' servant, and that while the

part look like now, in the Stalinist conception? "Les' und staun'!" as the Germans say; read and gasp.

"The anti-Fascist mass party," writes Foster in the October 1935 Communist, "should be based on the trade unions [What? Not from below?] and should include farmers' organizations, the Communist party, Socialist party, state Farmer-Labor parties, veterans' organizations, working women's organizations, workers' and farmers' cooperatives, workers' fraternal societies, tenants' leagues, anti-war societies, groups of intellectuals, etc." (p. 901.) One would think that these were enough, that everyone has been covered. But no, the "etc." impels us to read further and to gasp more:

"The new mass party of toilers should also strive to include sections of the sprouting Fascist or partly Fascist organizations and tendencies; such as company unions, American Legion posts, and groups of the Coughlin and Long movements, etc." (Ibid.)

If, after this stupefyingly comprehensive enumeration, there is still one man, woman, child or beast omitted from the roll call, he, she or it will undoubtedly be covered by the second, more ominous "etc."

What more pointed indication could the sager sections of the American bourgeois have of the fact that, as another installment on the price for Russian recognition, and as a promise of what greater gifts the Soviet bureaucracy is prepared to make to the "democratic" American rulers in return for an alliance against Japan, the Stalinists are working with might and main to blur all class lines, to soften the class struggle, to reduce themselves voluntarily to the position of an innocuous, all-embracing, national extension of LaFollette petty bourgeois "progressivism"? Or do we owe the LaFollette dynasty in Wisconsin an apology? If we are not mistaken, it draws the line at "sprouting Fascist or partly Fascist organizations and tendencies" in its ranks, and the trade unions which are part of the "progressive" movement, being uneducated in the precepts of overhauled Stalinism, would probably balk, in their unreasonably sectarian way, at sitting in the same party with company unions and Coughlin-Long groups.

Just read what is palmed off nowadays, without a smile, as Leninism: "The hour," reads the 1935 election platform of the Stalinists in New York, "demands the building of the broadest people's front, uniting workers, farmers, unemployed, professionals, small business men, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Socialists, Communists, Democrats and Republicans, a people's front, fighting in the interests of the common people, the working people and the poor farmers."—"Every means and effort," reads a circular, dated August 26, 1935, sent to all C. P. units by the New York district literature department, "must be made to widen and broaden our united front among all classes of people in New York City. . . . The necessity for the widest distribution of this platform, as you can see, is very great, much greater than ordinarily, because of our attempt to unite all people in an anti-Fascist front."

Socialists, Communists, Republicans, Democrats, all classes of people, all people, fighting in the interests of the common people—where is there room for the class struggle in all this vulgar verbiage so adeptly lifted from the platform speeches of every capitalist demagogue in the history of modern politics?

The "People's Front" will embrace all parties and political views (except the revolutionary, to be sure!) and it will therefore be an appendage of the bourgeoisie just as unflinchingly as was the Iron Front, paralyzing the independent movement of the proletariat. The "People's Front" will embrace all classes of people and it will therefore represent none of them. Comprehensive in its scope and composition as it will be, it will have few to struggle against, just a few, like Mr. W. R. Hearst who—O knave impure in body and soul!—in addition to being a Fascist is further indicted by the Stalinists for his shocking habit of conjugal infidelity.

And in such a struggle, what more powerful, even if—how shall we put it?—not entirely reliable and not entirely consistent ally can the "People's Front" have than that distinguished paladin of bourgeois democracy versus autocratic dictatorship, Franklin D. Roosevelt? But this is an aspect of the question so central in importance that it requires and deserves more ample treatment than can be devoted to it in this article.

(Next week, Max Shachtman will deal with the question of the "Government of the People's Front" and the "People's Front and the War Danger."—Ed.)