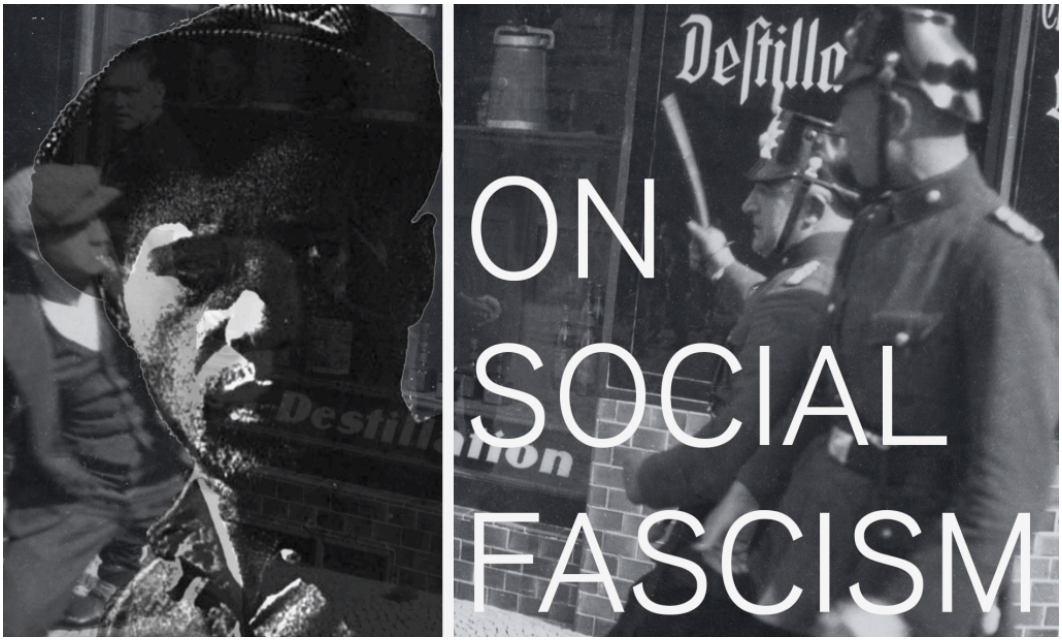
# On Social Fascism[1]

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"One may say without exaggeration that the most central task of our days (nay, perhaps even of our entire epoch) is to defeat social-democracy, the main factor of the international counter revolution."- Clara Zetkin [Speech to the Fourth Comintern Congress, 1922]

## *Introduction*

Any theorization of social democracy as social fascism will necessarily be met with controversy and thus is typically avoided by those who seek to remove conflict from Marxism precisely in an effort to liquidate the very best in Marxism—that is, to criticize all things and to assert the correctness of rebellion. To approach the matter of social democracy as social fascism we must proceed both historically and contemporarily, hashing out an admittedly loose definition. That being said, it is impossible to dispel all myths and win all arguments in the confines of one article.

In the above quotation from Zetkin, we are presented with a coherent line that for the foreseeable future (up to and including now and time to come) social democracy is viewed as the main and leading force in counter-revolution, this holds true and is apparent anywhere that social democracy has gotten a foothold, especially in places

[1] https://struggle-sessions.com/2018/09/18/on-social-fascism/

like Latin America where social democratic parties and leaders have trampled on the people's movements, and in many cases have taken on a corporativist (read fascist) character. In the words of the great Chairman Gonzalo; "We understand corporativism as the setting up of the state based on corporations, which implies the negation of parliamentarism." This description illustrates both fascism and its twin — social democracy. [Interview with Chairman Gonzalo, El Diario, 1988]

Another view of social democracy as social fascism, posed by Trotsky, was that as capitalism decays all bourgeois parties and especially social democratic parties take on a more or less fascist character, coming to the conclusion that social democracy could not be a reliable ally in the struggles of the proletariat against fascism. This is a far more favorable position than the one held by many contemporary Trotskyites regarding social democracy, who like the International Socialist Organization, tail it and capitulate to it without any shame or self-awareness.

Stalin would offer corrections to the above thesis by insisting that fascism which is a technical-military category is not only in service of the bourgeoisie in crisis but that it actively relies on social democracy to accomplish its role as a bourgeois fighting organization. While both positions see social democracy as fascism's twin, the first position held by Trotsky views fascism as an inevitable development of capitalism, whereas Stalin's standpoint understands correctly that fascism is the product of crisis and is an option for the bourgeois, who can return to bourgeois democracy once the proletariat has been smashed, if they are able to reel in the fascist section of their class. This process of first use and then "reeling in" is assisted by the fact that fascism is inherently unstable.

Stalin goes on to hold that social democracy itself cannot rule without the active support of the fighting organizations of the bourgeoisie: "Fascism is an informal political bloc of these two chief organizations [social-democratic and bourgeois fighting organizations]; a bloc which arose in the circumstances of the post-war crisis of imperialism, which is intended for combating the proletarian revolution. The bourgeoisie cannot retain power without such a bloc. It would therefore be a mistake to think that 'pacifism' signifies the liquidation of fascism. In the present situation, 'pacifism' is the strengthening of fascism, with its moderate social democratic wing pushed to the forefront." [Speech to Fifth Comintern Congress, 1924]

This last observation from Comrade Stalin is of critical importance; that is to say, fascism has constantly and always relied upon "pacifism" imposed by social democrats. Anyone who has the misfortune of experiencing or witnessing Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) within the current US antifascist movement can recall exactly how they serve as the left-wing of fascism by espousing their practical-stand-down and

don't-fight "pacifism" which many liberals and anarchists are so happy to accept as common-sense or "diversity of tactics". This is nothing but the bourgeoisie and bourgeois ideology serving to give cover and tactical support to its fighting organizations—the fascists, which in the US are mainly characterized by the populist reactionary movement.

In US conditions, where legalism is dominant and courage is limited, the ideas of "left-unity" above all else form a particularly noxious combination. Dialectical materialists must assert that not only how we fight, but also *how we do not fight* affects the outcome of antifascism, and that fascism—as bourgeois in essence—will always find support from bourgeois ideology even if this ideology appears antifascist in form. It can still wash the hands of fascism in its essence. The bourgeoisie carries out attacks from the "left" as well as the right.

*The History of Fascism's Twin* History is the best testimony to the relationship between fascists and social-democrats. Mussolini—himself a former social-democrat—was the leading fascist figurehead in the early 20s. In Germany the social democrats created white-terror bourgeois fighting organizations in the form of the proto-fascist Freicorps. In Italy the social-democrats established a treaty of "non-violence" with the fascists. This comes down to the class nature of the social democratic parties as well as their class stand; it is not a matter of policy or just bad decisions, their main purpose is to prevent Communist revolution from being carried out among the working class — like most variants of revisionism they seek to trap the proletariat within the cage of bourgeois "democracy". This is the role of the infant social democrats in the DSA today. Revisionism and social democratic tendencies, by trapping the proletariat in electoralism, objectively pave the way for the march of fascism in conditions where imperialist crisis has reached its apex and the bourgeoisie makes a strong right turn to crush its working class. This in part informs the Maoist position on election boycotts all over the world.

Social-democracy is but a funnel in which the bourgeois can pour their ideology into the working class, in most cases exhausting itself to drag workers back into the sham of electoral politics and voting, working to legitimize an illegitimate system, thus serving counter revolution and allowing fascism to incubate.

The aims and objectives of the social democrats are inextricable from corporativism, which is itself a characteristic of fascism. By seeking a forced class collaboration, administered in part by reactionary unions (historically this can be viewed through the lens of the fascist unions under Hitler and Mussolini) and pushing for a "combination of socialism and capitalism". This is not unique to social democracy but is evident in social imperialism as well in the modern revisionist theory of Khrushchev's "dicta-

torship of the whole people" in which a reactionary rule of the big bourgeoisie was enforced under a corporate model, which is exactly why Mao considered this to be a dictatorship of the Hitler variety—this was not hyperbolic nor was it just inflammatory labeling of a political enemy — it was a precise class analysis. *This is not to insist that social democracy and fascism is one singular thing, but that they are two distinct things which serve one another well in the interests of the ruling class with ultimately almost identical results.*

The terminology "social fascism", was notably deployed against the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), whose police chief in Berlin, Zorgiebel, issued a ban on open air demonstrations resulting in the murder more than 30 people and wounding at least 200 in the Communist-led the International Workers Day march in Berlin, on May 1st 1929. Following the May Day massacre the Communists led massive strikes and shut downs, while popular neighborhoods were on virtual lock down occupied by heavily armed police backed by the social democrats. These events led both the Communists in Germany as well as in the Comintern to begin linking the role of social democracy with the rise of fascism, the International Communist Movement becoming aware that the Party in Germany began its shaky status as a semi-illegal organization. According to Heinz Newman, a Central Committee member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD): "Social Democracy is preparing, as an active and organizing force, the establishment of the fascist dictatorship." And "If Italy is the classical country of fascism, Germany is the classical country of social fascism." [Speech at the tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the KPD, Die Rote Fahne, 1929]

What followed was the establishment of self-defense organizations against the police which were to be led by Communists, the Comintern in 1931 issued a handbook to be distributed in Germany which in part stated; "Knives, brass knuckles, oil-soaked rags', axes, bricks, boiling water to pour on the police-beasts raging in the streets of the workers' quarters, simple hand-grenades made of dynamite, to emphasize only the most primitive of the infinite and ubiquitous possibilities for arming the proletariat." The police chiefs were often times members of the SPD, and SPD Prime Minister Otto Braun had much to do with the antagonisms mounting to this point where the Comintern was openly advocating such a level revolutionary violence. [Comintern, Handbook for Revolutionaries, 1931 reissue]

Claiming fascism as a form of socialism has lost its appeal among most fascists in the US, still, it is important to remember that the early fascists relied on just this in order to rally support from the most backward of the masses, mainly the dejected petty bourgeois, labor aristocratic forces, declassed lumpenproletariat, ideologically backward workers, the extremely religious and national chauvinist elements of the working class etc. Fascism is inherently eclectic, Gonzalo explained fascism thus: "We

see fascism also on the ideological plane as an eclectic system without a defined philosophy. It is a philosophical position made up of fragments chosen from here and there according to what's most useful. This is clearly expressed in García Pérez. When he goes to Harare in Africa he's an African and he salutes the Africans, salutes Kenneth Kaunda. When he goes to India he salutes Gandhi, he's a Gandhian. When he goes to Mexico he hails Zapata, he's a Zapatista. When he goes to the Soviet Union, if he ever does, he'll be the champion of Perestroika. He's like that because this is the ideological and philosophical training of fascism, it does not have a defined stand, it is eclectic and it takes what is at hand." This is evidenced historically by fascist appropriation of the swastika, the red flag, various primitive cultural symbols etc. [Interview with Chairman Gonzalo, El Diario, 1988] Of course it must also be mentioned that in its adaptability as well as its instability (which correlate) fascism can negate the principles of liberal democracy in essence while maintaining its appearance in form. Likewise fascism cannot be reduced to just the existence of white terror, which is recurring throughout all bourgeois democracies, Gonzalo insists that: "Today we see how it practices a skillful violence, more developed, broader, more brutal and vicious. This is what is called terror. But apart from this, white terror has always been practiced, has it not? The reactionaries, when they have encountered difficulties, have always applied white terror. So we should never identify and reduce all fascism simply to terror. We must understand that fascism means a more refined violence, and the development of terrorism, yes, but that is not the totality of it but a component, it is fascism's means of unfolding reactionary violence". [Ibid]

Social democracy, while claiming adherence to "democratic" values and at the same time upholding vicious anti-Communism can only be an instrument of white terror, seeking to build the fascist corporative organs without the refined and open violence of the fascists, which of course objectively serves fascism—it can only serve the interests of the bourgeoisie just as Communism can only serve the interests of the proletariat in the long term. The anti-Communism inherent in social-democracy exposes it fully as the sibling of fascism, as much or more than its other characteristics.

## *Social Fascism Today*

Social fascism, far from being an antiquated curiosity of the third period is still useful today as both an epithet and an exposé of the class nature and function of social democracy. As organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America, in their open collaboration with yellow, reactionary trade unions like the AFL/CIO and their endorsement of pacifism in the antifascist movement embody the reasons for the long held resentment between Communists and social democrats. The only reason they are not attempting to butcher us is because they have failed thus far to achieve

a substantial enough voting base; they lack the popularity and power enjoyed by the SPD in pre-fascist Germany. Nonetheless, this is a matter of conditional circumstance and can change with the objective conditions, fundamentally and principally they are class enemies which represent an irreconcilable and antagonistic contradiction.

The collaborations mentioned above can be explained by turning to Lenin, who exposed the nature of social democrats as a bourgeois force that go among the workers, in an introduction to *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* which we will quote at length: "What is the basis of this world-historic phenomenon? Precisely the parasitism and decay of capitalism which are characteristic of its highest historical stage of development, i.e. imperialism… Obviously, out of such enormous super-profits (since they are attained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their 'own' country) it is possible to bribe the labor leaders and the upper stratum of the labor aristocracy. And the capitalists of the 'advanced' countries are bribing them; they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

"This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or 'labor aristocracy', who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principle prop of the second international, and, in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie, for they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, labor lieutenants of the capitalist class, real channels of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the 'Versaillese' against the 'Communards'." [Lenin, Introduction to Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Peking Foreign Language Press, 1965]

This formula by Lenin remains intact in spite of its age; due precisely to the fact that imperialism remains intact, even if it has adjusted, the current age is still dominated by the principle contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed nations. Like fascism, which emerges in the crisis-points of imperialism, social democracy relies on the exact same social base with the exact same promises of super-profits being used to buy up labor aristocrats—Trump's proto-fascist slogan "make America great again", could be deployed just as well as the slogan of social democracy, as both rely on winning upper stratum workers over to imperialism and national chauvinism. This is evidenced in part by the large number of Bernie Sanders supporters who went over to the Trump camp once Sanders lost the Democratic Primaries. This was shocking to everyone, including the bourgeois media, but it was not at all shocking to genuine Marxists who understand the social base of fascism and its twin social democracy.

The program of the 1928 Comintern Congress divided social democracy into two camps, the left and the right, explaining that due to circumstance of imperialist crisis,

the bourgeoisie would resort to either fascist methods or coalitions with social democrats; "while social democracy itself, particularly at critical moments for capitalism, not infrequently plays a fascist part" — while understanding that both fascism and social democracy are seen as extremes by the bourgeoisie under normal conditions, both are used in crisis to halt the rise of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie live gripped with fear of a proletarian revolution and will go to whatever extremes to stop one from taking place; it accepts and protects its twin henchmen in this interest.

When the same Comintern program describes the left and right wings of the social democratic parties one cannot help but see similarity in the current two types of DSA membership: "In systematically carrying out its counter-revolutionary policy, social democracy makes use of its two wings: the right overtly counter-revolutionary wing is indispensable for negotiations and contracts with the bourgeoisie, while the 'left' is used to execute particularly subtle maneuvers for deceiving the working class. While playing with pacifist and sometimes even 'revolutionary' phrases, 'left' social democracy turns against the workers, particularly at critical moments." Note that the right of the DSA, which attempts to throw the bulk of the organization into a caucus within the Democratic Party, backs Police union organizers, and seeks status in the reactionary trade unions, while the "left" within the DSA attempt radical sloganeering and claim to be willing to work with communists in their efforts to "base build" and "push DSA to the left". Like a two-headed snake, the DSA manages to spread its poison in multiple directions at once to bolster its ranks. The laws regarding social democracy still apply because the class nature of the ideology behind it has not changed fundamentally, and like fascism, it relies heavily on eclecticism.

Of these two social democratic wings, it was the "left" which was viewed as the more dangerous of the two by the Comintern; this position should inform those seeking unity with the left among social democrats and dissuade them from such a venture.

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While social democracy in the US is weak in comparison to that of the German SPD as well as the social democratic parties throughout Europe and Latin America, worsening imperialist crisis only means the rise of political tendencies and ideologies which are seen as "too far out" by the state in regular capitalist conditions, which are mainly social democracy (or according to DSA "democratic socialism") and fascism, which have both seeped into a growing niche within populist movements on the "left" and the right. Inversely, the need for revolution also increases, which is used by the "left" social democrats as a pull.

This trend can also manifest itself in a growing interest in genuine Marxism, which is today Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism. In these conditions, as elabo-

rated by Lenin in comparison to the belligerents of the Paris Commune, US social democrats are inevitably to come into direct and sometimes open confrontation with the US Maoist movement, and as class struggle goes, these confrontations will see a violent escalation. This position is not a threat coming from Maoists; it is an objective fact of class struggle as well a fact of historical materialism. Those who place "left" unity above all else, who are incapable themselves of making a class analysis in essence will reduce themselves to a facsimile of third-positionist fascists, who simply dress their class collaboration with a different smoke screen. The "left" Unitarians see "left and right" outside of class terms , which is impossible from a Marxist viewpoint, resulting in the same exact class collaboration (in essence) as those who claim there is neither a left nor a right or that they are adherents to neither, seeking neither socialism nor capitalism.

## *Reformism as the forerunner for fascism*

The Fourth Congress of the Comintern's Italian Commission to investigate the March on Rome (led by Mussolini) determined this explicitly when they stated that; "the treachery of reformists is primarily responsible for the great sufferings of the Italian proletariat" and "the real forerunner for fascism was reformism". While this analysis predates the term social fascism, it was an early instance of linking social democracy with fascism. More importantly it was analysis of the specific post-war conditions which served as the motor of fascism's rise.

This holds true today in our conditions in the US where imperialist crisis has pushed to the forefront presidential candidates like Sanders and Trump, who are viewed (incorrectly) as anti-establishment figures by many voters. This is made even more difficult by the fact that reformism is the bourgeois common-sense activism of the so-called left; as imperialist crisis is worsening, populist fascism becomes more emboldened, and open fascist policy (like the family separation policy under Trump and naked ruthless mass deportations and trials) are pursued.

Reformism as mentioned above paves the way neatly for fascism in two ways. First, it serves fascism by being soft and ineffective, materially this increases popular interest in fascism, and second, by opposing revolution outright, the reformists soften all resistance to fascism. This simultaneous softening of resistance and strengthening the appeal for fascism is the hallmark of social democracy, which earned it the epithet of social fascism to begin with. Of course, social democracy shows its true face with the example of Sanders lamenting the death of John McCain, a noted warmonger for US imperialism who rose to fame by the butchery of the Vietnamese people.

Many on the "left" argue that Sanders would have won had the Democratic Party not maneuvered against democracy and that this would have been a good thing. Marxists however must understand that the popularity of Sanders was not a good thing, principally it did not reflect any genuine interest in socialism—to hold the position that it did is to conflate socialism with social democracy. This is beyond the pale of lunacy. In its principle aspect, the popularity of candidates like Sanders speaks to one thing—the deepening crisis of US imperialism, and imperialism's desperate bid to accept things which in normal conditions it would not—the popularity of both Sanders and Trump speak loudly of this desperation and are signals for the very real threat of fascism growing far beyond the ability of so-called antifascists to confront it. This crisis in the ruling class likewise causes a panic in the labor aristocracy and trade union bureaucrats, resulting in increased collaborations between the AFL/CIO and the DSA. This is nothing new. The CPUSA in the 1920s already declared that the rise of US fascism could just as well come from the leadership of the Socialist Party and the AF of L.

## *"Totalitarianism" and pacifism*

One of the devices used by social democrats historically is to maximize appeal to liberal bourgeois sentiment in their framing of Communism and fascism as two forms of "totalitarianism" which are in essence alike, of course to do this they rely on forgetting class, class make up, class origin, class stand etc. to bamboozle the working people still steeped in liberal hegemony.

This bewitching has had an effect even on the would-be radical sections of those who would at least in intention take up the cause of antifascism, especially among liberal-anarchists who appropriate the name "antifa". This is evidenced by the choice of symbolism they deploy, by appropriating the three arrows of the social democratic Iron Front which equate monarchy, fascism and Communism to one thing which must be attacked. It is true that many who utilize the three arrows today are ignorant to its origins, nonetheless a lack of consciousness to the fact that it is an anti-Communist (social fascist) symbol do not withstand the fact that symbols often have a deeper meaning and a purpose behind their use. Whether this is conscious or not, the driving ideology behind the deficient "antifa" movement is still a collaboration largely between liberal-anarchists and social democrats, built on an anti-Communist rejection of centralism and in essence all leadership, which they equate with "totalitarianism", i.e. what they consider fascism.

We could go into the matter of alliances between groups like Redneck Revolt and the DSA, but we instead will allow readers to look into this themselves. This is not to ignore the real class struggles internal to the antifascist movement including among

those who use the term "antifa" to define themselves and their ideas; *there is always and at all times a struggle between bourgeois and proletarian lines regarding antifascism, and at this stage the bourgeois, conciliatory-class collaborationist line is the principle aspect, fettering antifascism to a mere performative act, pacifist in its essence.*

## *Without Class Analysis, Bewilderment*

In Lenin's masterpiece "Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism", he explains the phenomenon behind what above we called bewilderment:

> "People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. Champions of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is *only one* way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can—and, owing to their social position, must—constitute the power capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organize those forces for the struggle."

The deception and self-deception that Lenin attacks here are what the twins—social fascism and fascism—desperately require to replenish their ranks, fulfill their objectives, and implement their vile programs. And precisely this is the case when class is not analyzed; the twins of course pride themselves on class collaborations and these collaborations are one of their most defined characteristics. While the contemporary fascist will label those who refuse class collaboration as an anti-American and frame collaboration as "patriotic" most often, the social democrat will frame refusal of class collaboration as "sectarian" and "obstructionism against progress predicated on left-unity".

Considering the role that reformists and distorters of socialism play in ascending fascism, it would be wrong to consider the contemporary social democrats as just simply misguided liberals, liberalism itself a beast worthy of combat does not hold the same appeal by marketing itself as in anyway anti-capitalist. Like the early fascists, this marketing is necessary to present themselves as "anti-establishment" and a rupture from even capitalism.

Reality on the other hand quickly smashes these notions; the Marxist theory of the state exposes fully the lies and manipulations of the twins. We understand that, no matter the form a government takes—bourgeois democratic, social fascist, fascist proper etc.—it is only a change in the way in which bourgeois dictatorship is enforced; it is not and cannot really alter the existence of the bourgeois dictatorship. The only thing which can alter this dictatorship is to change which class is dictating and which is being suppressed— that is the essence of proletarian revolution, that is to say the socialist revolution, and its continuation under the dictatorship of the proletariat as cultural revolution, onward in waves until Communism is achieved throughout the whole of the world.

## *Conclusion*

As detailed throughout, it is important to realize that giving social democrats the label social fascist is not simply a way to abuse them, but principally the way in which we analyze their role and function in class struggle.

Precisely identifying the ways in which they establish fascist rule as an apparatus of the old state, in function they clear the way for fascism by defanging antifascism, by swaying the masses away from combating fascists and by poisoning people on Communism. This is the political role they perform as the DSA etc. There is a great risk in undermining the history of class struggle and it is most certainly to the benefit of the capitalist class, which as history has concretely proven will resort to fascism.

While the third period writings of the Comintern have their defects, and the proceeding period of the popular front have as many if not more shortcomings, these shortcomings were by and large corrected by the Maoist conception of the united front as applied by the Chinese Communists under the leadership of the great Mao Zedong against Japanese fascism. What Mao promoted was a strategic way of defeating a superior enemy, which at no point in time liquidated the forces of the Communists; in fact, the united front carried out by the Chinese Communist Party was strategically at the expense of the nationalists. This is due precisely to the fact that it did not seek to apply the deviationist, liquidationist defects of the popular front. While tactically the Communists worked with the nationalists, they overcame them strategically, understanding all along that the nationalists would seek by all means to reestablish their role as agents of foreign imperialism once Japanese fascism had been expelled.

Today, we are in the stage of the strategic offensive of world proletarian revolution, where imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism has reached its limits and the lessons derived from the history of class struggle have converged in the high ideology of Maoism, a weapon which is decisive in imperialism's final defeat. Being of this age,

we must not hesitate to grasp that it is an age of great peril where imperialism will often seek fascism in its desperate bid to survive its self-imposed crisis. We must not hesitate to implacably struggle against imperialism, fascism, revisionism, and social democracy. Communists must be upfront about the political functions of revisionism and social democracy and must always seek to defeat them politically, giving them no hiding place and thoroughly expelling them from mass movements. Antifascism must be reclaimed and led by Communists, for we alone are the sole, legitimate representative of the proletariat which is the only class capable of once and for all annihilating fascism from the world. This is a heavy task.