

THE SEVENTH CONGRESS OF THE COMINTERN ON WAR AND REVOLUTION

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The following analysis represents the conclusions of the Study Group on the policies arrived at by the VII Congress of the Comintern on the issues of war and revolution, policies devised by the Comintern in an attempt to more effectively meet the threat posed by the development of fascism. The report will be largely analytical, and readers will be referred from time to time to earlier reports developed by the Study Group which complement this analysis. These reports, on the development of fascism ("The Bourgeois State in Crisis: Fascism"), on Comintern policy on the developing war ("The Danger of War and Communist Policy: 1928-1935"), and on the defense of the Soviet state ("Defense of the Soviet Union") present some of the history of the period and come to some tentative conclusions. This analysis is a continuation of those exploratory reports, focusing entirely on the theoretical framework presented at the VII Congress. The application of the policies developed at the Congress will be taken up in the next two reports, one on France and the other on Spain.

I. On War

A. Did the VII Congress Violate Leninist Principles on Imperialist War?

This is the charge that was levelled at the Comintern by Trotsky and his followers at the time, by ultra-Leftists since, and in the current period by the Progressive Labor Party and the Communist Workers Group (M-L), among others in the U.S.

In the years between the VII Congress (1935) and the Hitler-Stalin pact (1939), Leon Trotsky wrote a number of articles presenting his case. In "Lenin and Imperialist War" (December 30, 1938), Trotsky reviewed Lenin's position on imperialist war, noting that "the first question" that arose in August 1914 on the outbreak of World War I was:

Should the socialists of imperialist countries assume the 'defense of the fatherland'? . . . Lenin's answer was: No! the party must not do so, it has no right to do so, not because war is involved but because this is a reactionary war, because this is a dog fight between slave owners for the re-division of the world. (Leon Trotsky, Writings: 1938-39, pp. 164-170)

Trotsky says that between the French Revolution and 1870-71 "wars were predominantly of a national character" and were often of a "profoundly progressive historical character." In the next period, he says, from 1871 to 1914, European capitalism, having achieved national states for its development, became transformed into imperialism and "outlived itself." "In place of national wars there come imperialist wars," though there remain progressive struggles "of the oppressed peoples for national unification and national independence."

This corresponds, in vague outline, to Lenin's presentation of the issues. But Lenin did not say in place of national wars imperialist wars come into existence. Rather, imperialist wars will occur in the new era (the era of imperialism, the eve of proletarian revolution) and national wars in the colonies and semi-colonies will be inevitable. What's more, these national wars will become a component part of the proletarian-socialist revolution.

The de-emphasis on wars of national liberation is characteristic of Trotsky's position and also accurately reflects the views of most subsequent Trotskyist sects. In addition, there is one notable omission in Trotsky's version of Lenin's views. Trotsky leaves out Lenin's reminder that there could be "defense of the nation" even in Europe in this era; that one couldn't rule out this possibility in advance. Trotsky does just that in his writings, a critical omission. We will return to this point shortly.

Had anything changed in the years since the first World War to require a modification of basic communist policy towards the approaching war (WWII)? Trotsky's view is that:

Imperialism has assumed an even more violent and oppressive character. Its most consistent expression is fascism. Imperialist democracies have fallen several rungs lower and are themselves evolving into fascism naturally and organically. Colonial oppression becomes all the more intolerable the sharper is the awakening and eagerness of oppressed nationalities for national independence. In other words, all those traits which were lodged in the foundation of Lenin's theory of imperialist war have now assumed a far sharper and more graphic character.

Further:

If a quarter of a century ago Lenin branded as social chauvinism and as social treachery the desertion of socialists to the side of their national imperialism under the pretext of defending culture and democracy, then from the standpoint of Lenin's principles the very same policy today is all the more criminal. It is not difficult to guess how Lenin would have designated the present-day leaders of the Comintern who have revived all the sophistries of the Second International under the conditions of an even more profound decomposition of capitalist civilization . . .

No one is, of course, under compulsion to take his stand on the ground of Lenin's teachings. But we, his disciples, will permit no one to make mockery of these teachings and to transform them into their very opposite! (Trotsky, p. 169)

Trotsky "forgets" to mention that Lenin did not have as high an opinion of his "disciple" as Trotsky had of himself. Both before and after the October Revolution, Lenin found it necessary to devote considerable attention to correcting Trotsky's theoretical and practical mistakes on war and many other issues. For example, Trotsky was by no means an upholder of Lenin's position on WWI during that war, as the dishonest Trotsky would like to have us believe. Lenin considered Trotsky a "wobbler," part of the Kautskyite or Centrist trend in Social-Democracy during WWI. Specifically, Lenin noted that "Trotsky . . . as always, entirely disagrees with the social-chauvinists in principle, but agrees with them in everything in practice." ("Lenin on Trotsky," Lines of Demarcation, No. 3-4, journal of the Bolshevik Union (Canada), p. 66) Nor did Lenin think Trotsky was always clear on principles; on the contrary: "Trotsky has never yet held a firm opinion on any important question of Marxism." (V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 20, pp. 447-48)

But, while dismissing Trotsky's pretensions, we do not dismiss out of hand his criticisms on the new Comintern line on war. A criticism, by whoever,

that has at least a superficial case, as this one does, for showing a revision of Leninist principles, must be met head-on. Further, we do hold that some significant errors were made at the VII Congress on the war issue, errors which matured in later years in many communist parties into full-blown nationalism and class collaboration. In approaching the Comintern's 1935 position on the developing war and Trotsky's criticism, we remember Lenin's words:

The whole spirit of Marxism, its whole system, demands that each proposition should be considered (a) only historically, (b) only in connection with others, (c) only in connection with the concrete experience of history. (LCW 35.250)

We do not leap to the "attractive," simple view: 'A principle is a principle. No defense of the nation in Europe in World War I, therefore, no defense of the nation in Europe in World War II.' As Stalin pointed out, the simplest position is not always the correct one. We have to examine the character of the war; we have to take up the slogans "transform imperialist war into civil war" and "no defense of the fatherland" in the context of the specific conditions existing in Europe and the rest of the world in 1935. To do otherwise is to turn Marxism into a pastime of regurgitating formulas.

B. What Were the Grounds for the Change in the Comintern's War Policy?

In an article published after the VII Congress, the Bulgarian Georgi Dimitrov, who was the guiding spirit active at the Congress (Stalin did not address the Congress), concisely summed up the four conditions which made the situation in 1935 different from the one existing in World War I. These conditions were the same as those Ercoli (Togliatti) outlined in the main report to the Congress on war. They were:

- 1) a proletarian state which is the greatest bulwark of peace; 2) definite fascist aggressors; 3) a number of countries which are in direct danger of attack by fascist aggressors and in danger of losing their state and national independence; 4) other capitalist governments which are interested at the present moment in the preservation of peace. It is therefore completely wrong now to depict all countries as aggressors. (Georgi Dimitrov, The United Front, pp. 179-80)

While Dimitrov lists these conditions in the course of refuting the allegations of "'Left' phrasemongers" on the particular question of aggressors, he and the VII Congress in fact based their line on the developing war on these four factors. We have to ask, were all four factors "new" in comparison with WWI, and, if so, in what way should they have led to modification of communist policy on the developing war?

On the first factor, we hold to the view of the Comintern that the Soviet Union was and continued to be a proletarian socialist state; that is, a state under the dictatorship of the proletariat engaged in building a socialist society. We do not subscribe to the views of Trotsky, Fernando Claudin, etc. that the Soviet Union was a "deformed workers' state" or already fundamentally compromised as a socialist attempt. We do think that some serious misconceptions about the building of socialism did gain strength within the Soviet Union in the 1930's (the possibility of ending class struggle within the coun-

try within a relatively short period of time; lack of attention to reducing bourgeois right while the enormous feats of socialist economic construction were going on; a tendency toward overcentralization and the attempt to build socialism "from above," etc.) but that given the originality of the situation, the extremely difficult conditions for the building of socialism in Russia, the October Revolution had not been fundamentally undermined by the mid-1930's.

Second, we believe there were definite fascist aggressors in the developing World War II situation, compared with World War I. The technical aspect of aggression--who attacked first--is not so important.¹ What matters most is the social content of the policy pursued by the belligerents. As we have outlined in our conclusions on fascism, we do think there were qualitative developments in the superstructure of some imperialist countries which required a new policy on the part of the communist forces. Fascism was a qualitatively different system of rule from bourgeois democracy. In the German form it was a disciplined, effective, brutal, militarist system of bourgeois class rule designed to utilize the petty-bourgeoisie as a weapon, crush the resistance of the working class, and establish firmer control by the monopoly bourgeoisie. These characteristics meant that aggression by the fascist imperialist powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) would have a definite, specific effect on countries menaced by this military, political and economic aggression; namely, national oppression, "subjugation," "annexation," "enslavement." The last three terms were used by Stalin to describe the later actual German occupation. (See Joseph Stalin, On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, pp. 42, 19, and 13, from the years 1941 and 1942)

The third factor cited was countries in danger of losing their state and national independence. As history was soon to show, this included countries like Albania, Switzerland, Austria, Holland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and even France. The Comintern had previously drawn distinctions among the countries in Europe depending on their level of economic and political development (See p.164). Some were highly developed capitalist countries (France, Holland, Belgium) and others were at a medium level of development (Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria), for example. The VII Congress retreated from these distinctions and lapsed into the vagueness of saying that it was "small" or "weak" countries that were in danger of losing their independence. By its silence on the distinctions developed at the VI Congress, the VII helped pave the way for its homogenization of and lowering of the tasks communists faced in the different European countries as the war developed. (We will go into this in part two.) Also, it was incorrect to suggest that only "small" or "weak" European countries faced the danger, as countries that were neither, in European terms, did so. Besides the European countries, there were also the colonies and semi-colonies, which were already occupied, by either fascist or non-fascist imperialist powers.

It might be argued, weren't these countries in danger of losing their "state and national independence" in World War I (if they existed at the time)?

In regard to the colonies and semi-colonies: These countries had for the most part long been under colonial domination prior to WWI; they did not have state independence. WWI was in large part a war waged for the re-division of the colonies; it was an outgrowth of a policy of annexation pursued by both groupings of imperialists (centered around the Germans and British) for decades. (Cf. Lenin, "War and Revolution," CW 24.402f) This means national op-

pression was a factor in WWI--the national oppression of colonies and semi-colonies. But, as between the European countries it was an imperialist war, rivalry for the plunder of the colonies.

In relation to the European countries, no, the situation differed from that in WWI. On this point we think the remark cited in an earlier report is decisive and indicative of how Lenin would have viewed the world in the pre-WWII years:

Let us suppose even that the Germans take Paris or St. Petersburg. Would that change the nature of the present (WWI-- ed.) war? Not at all. The German's purpose--and more important, the policy that would bring it to realisation if they were to win--is to seize the colonies, establish domination over Turkey, annex areas populated by other nations, for instance Poland, etc. It is definitely not to bring the French or the Russians under foreign domination. The real essence of the present war is not national but imperialist. In other words, it is not being fought to enable one side to overthrow national oppression, which the other side is trying to maintain. It is a war between two groups of oppressors, between two freebooters over the division of their booty, over who shall rob Turkey and the colonies. (LCW 23.33-34, emphasis added)

We maintain the tentative conclusion arrived at in the earlier report; namely, that the intent--and policy--of German imperialism (as well as Italian and Japanese imperialism) was to perpetrate national oppression in Europe, was to subjugate small and large European and non-European states, was to crush "Paris and St. Petersburg." To a great extent, that is certainly what happened for a time: the German and Italian fascists overran much of Europe, and they weren't simply or primarily after the raw materials of Indonesia (Holland's colony), India (Britain), or French Guiana.

There is an enormous wealth of material on fascism and the fascists' occupation of Europe. We will cite a few of Stalin's evaluations of this invasion, evaluations themselves not free from one-sidedness in our view:

On the Soviet Union:

The enemy is cruel and implacable. He is out to seize our lands which have been wetted by the sweat of our brow, to seize the grain and oil which have been obtained by the labor of our hands. He is out to restore the rule of the landlords, to restore tsarism, to destroy the national culture and the national statehood of the Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Uzbeks, Tatars, Moldavians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanians, and the other free peoples of the Soviet Union, to Germanize them, to convert them into the slaves of German princes and barons. Thus, the issue is one of life and death for the Soviet State, of life and death of the USSR, of whether the peoples of the Soviet Union shall be free or fall into slavery. (Stalin, Radio Address, July 3, 1941, in On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, pp. 9-10)

In relation to Europe:

Comrades! More than two years have elapsed since the German fascist in-

vaders plunged Europe into the abyss of war, subjugated the freedom-loving countries of the European continent--France, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece--and began to suck their blood for the enrichment of the German bankers. More than ten months have elapsed since the German fascist invaders wantonly and perfidiously attacked our country and began to pillage and lay waste our villages and towns, to outrage and murder the peaceful population of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and Moldavia. (Stalin, "Order of the Day," May 1, 1942, On the Great Patriotic War, p. 42)

On the fascist programme:

The programme of action of the Italo-German coalition may be characterized by the following points: race hatred; domination of the 'chosen' nations; subjugation of other nations and seizure of their territories; economic enslavement of the subjugated nations and spoliation of their national wealth; destruction of democratic liberties; universal institution of the Hitler regime. (Stalin, "The 25th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution," November 6, 1942, On the Great Patriotic War, p. 52)²

Can there be any doubt that the fascists' intent and policy was national oppression in Europe? If the conditions created by Nazi occupation were not examples of the kind of situation Lenin had in mind when he spoke of the possibility of wars in defense of the nation in Europe, what could such conditions have been?³ Of course, Lenin might have been wrong. But in our view history vindicated Lenin's insistence on this possibility, which, as we noted earlier, is just the point Trotsky omits in his account of Lenin's theory. Lenin's "disciples" must come to terms with this "possibility," not ignore it.

The fourth condition or factor cited by Dimitrov was the existence of certain capitalist governments interested for the time being in preserving "peace," or as the Comintern resolution put it, in maintaining the status quo. That this was so has scarcely been denied by anyone, even Trotsky, for he too commented on the appeasement practiced by the leading Western "democratic" imperialist states.

Unlike the situation in WWI, there were not, in 1935, two coalitions of imperialist powers striving equally (Lenin) to bring on a war. The future Axis powers had already begun to attack (Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931) and were militarizing their societies at a rapid pace. They were the prime instigators of war. The Western "democracies" had by no means renounced their imperialist aims or policies--but their tactics differed from those of the fascist states. This slight difference provided a fissure which the Soviet Union could and with considerable effort did widen, so that in the course of the war the lone socialist state was not faced with a worldwide coalition of all the imperialist powers, which would have meant its almost certain defeat, but instead had the stronger half of those imperialist powers as allies (however half-hearted, unreliable, and treacherous). In short, the distinction between imperialist groupings that the Comintern made at the VII Congress was no fantasy.

In sum, we believe the Comintern was basically correct in identifying the four conditions or factors mentioned above, whatever errors it may have made in its adjustment of policies to suit the new conditions.

C. An Objection by the Trotskyists

'But', say the Trotskyists, 'wait a minute. You're sliding over some-
things here. The Comintern said the developing war was imperialist. (The
Trots are correct.) The Leninist line on imperialist war is to turn it into
a civil war against the bourgeoisie. The Comintern hacks didn't consistently
uphold that line, either at the Congress or later. You're saying we're full
of it when it was Dimitrov who was.'

This goes back to the character of the war. In World War I, the imperialist
aspect was clearly dominant in Europe, and the national aspect (Serbia) was
very minor, insignificant. But the outlines of World War II visible in 1935
showed that the national aspects of the war in Europe would not be minor or
insignificant. They would be, and were, major. These aspects were not, of
course, 'the entire story', but they were important enough to alter the char-
acter of the war.

From the standpoint of Marxism, nothing, no phenomenon is 'pure', unitary,
without various aspects, without various contradictions. In World War I, the
imperialist aspect definitely predominated over the national aspect in Europe,
but the latter did exist. In World War II the national aspect (wars of na-
tional liberation in the colonies and Europe and war in defense of the social-
ist state) played a very important role, as did the imperialist aspect (Axis
vs. Western "democracies"). If we belittle the first aspect, we arrive at
Trotskyism, the "left" deviation on the war. If we belittle the second (inter-
imperialist rivalry), we arrive at the right opportunism and nationalism which
thrived in many communist parties during World War II.

The question arises, which was the primary aspect of the war, the several
forms of national struggle or the inter-imperialist struggle? We think the
former. The most common general characterization of the war in the interna-
tional communist movement was and has been that it was an "anti-fascist war".
This puts the fascists on one side and all those who fought against them, in-
cluding the Western imperialist countries, on the other. Militarily, this is
what happened, and it represents the tactical alliance the communist forces
sought and achieved. But it also conceals the profound differences among the
"allies". On the other hand, distinguishing the war's national and inter-im-
perialist aspects brings us directly to what should have been the communist
strategic approach: the alliance of the socialist state, the national libera-
tion movements, and the working class and its allies in the capitalist coun-
tries. This was the long-term strategic prospect.⁴

The developing war, then, did not have a "unitary" character. In fact,
it combined the four kinds of war Lenin identified (see pp.118-19): a) war in
defense of a socialist state (the USSR); b) wars of national liberation (the
colonies, some European states); c) inter-imperialist war (between the Axis
powers and the Western capitalist countries which were in the "Grand Alliance");
d) civil war against the bourgeoisie and its allies to overthrow the state and
embark on the road to socialism. In several countries, the war began in one form
and became transformed into another. For example, Albania (b to d) and France
(c to b).

Given the conditions of the day, the Trotskyite line of direct struggle
for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the foremost immediate task in
every country was a clear "left" deviation. It is true that the Comintern,

in 1935, did not adopt a consistent principled position, either, as we will see. It was caught between viewing the new war in the old way (that is, simply an imperialist war) and its partial recognition of the importance that national struggle (defense against national oppression) would play in the war. This partial recognition became a full recognition and then an "overfull" one, and the legitimate national aspects of the war were inflated, obscuring the inter-imperialist characteristics. Due to the CI's rightism, the fourth kind of war, civil war for socialism, did not occur in several places where it could have, especially in Western Europe. But it should be recognized too that the 1935 Comintern line did begin to come to terms with the new conditions, rejecting the ultra-Left line on meeting the fascist danger which had been dominant in the CI from 1928 to 1934. The Comintern finally recognized the necessity of uniting with broad sections of the people in the capitalist countries in order to prevent fascism from within and defeat its invasion from without. Mobilization of non-proletarian strata for this struggle was essential, and for this struggle they did not constitute what Lenin referred to in other circumstances as a "minus" (forces hindering rather than helping). In doing so, the Comintern failed to take adequate steps in many countries to ensure the independence and initiative of the communist forces (a point we will explore further on) and this enabled rightism and revisionism to gain strength in and capture many parties at an earlier date than is usually recognized. However, the communist forces would have had less chance of surviving and helping defeat fascism if the Trotskyist line of waging civil war and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat as the main slogans under all conditions had been adopted.⁵

D. The Dialectical Roots of the Trotskyists' Objection

Jack Shulman, editor of Albania Report, introduces the flaw in the Trotskyists' dialectics in his preface to the Gamma edition of Dimitrov's report to the VII Congress:

In reading the works of Mao, we would strongly urge a careful study of one of his most important philosophical essays, On Contradiction. There is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding on the part of many Marxist-Leninist study groups (the preface was written in April 1974--ed.) on the difference between the fundamental contradiction in a given epoch, and the principal contradiction at any given stage of the people's struggle.

Of course, everyone agrees that the fundamental contradiction under capitalism is that between capital and labor, just as under feudalism it is between the landlords and the peasantry, or under slavery between the slaves and the slave-owners. But there is a strong ultra-left tendency which denies that the principal contradiction can be different from the fundamental one, at any stage. Thus they say that the principal contradiction today, everywhere, is between the capitalists and the workers, and all other contradictions remain secondary in importance, even the danger of fascism and war. There are some who say that even when fascism takes power, the principal contradiction is still between capital and labor, and not between the fascists and all ("all"?--ed.) the rest of the people.

As indicated, we reject Shulman's "all the rest of the people,"⁶ but we agree with his presentation of the dialectical root of the differences between the

Trotskyists and the Comintern on World War II.

Trotsky gives an indication of his views on this point in his March 1939 article, "A Step Toward Social Patriotism." Trotsky is criticizing some Palestinian Trotskyists who had advanced part way toward the Comintern's view by refusing to recognize revolutionary defeatism as applicable to all capitalist countries in the conditions then existing. Trotsky says:

Defeatism is the class policy of the proletariat, which even during a war sees the main enemy at home, within its particular imperialist country. Patriotism, on the other hand, is a policy that locates the main enemy outside one's own country. The idea of defeatism signifies in reality the following: conducting an irreconcilable revolutionary struggle against one's own bourgeoisie as the main enemy. (Trotsky, p. 209)

Very simple, and very mechanical. The possibility is foreclosed that any imperialist country (large or small, Trotsky doesn't care) may be conquered, overrun, subjugated by another. But this is the possibility already mentioned that Lenin insisted on bringing to people's attention: such national oppression was possible in Europe in this era and the struggle might be a legitimate one on the part of say, Belgium (Lenin's example). As it turned out, even highly developed and large imperialist countries like France could be and were conquered and subjugated. Trotsky insists that the "main enemy" must be at home, even if, apparently, the "home" bourgeoisie is conquered by, or made subservient to, a stronger "foreign" bourgeoisie. And even if the masses are literally up in arms over the invasion of the "foreign" bourgeoisie and its forces, welcomed, to be sure, by some sections of the "home" bourgeoisie and well served by other sections. Trotsky maintains, in other words, that the principal contradiction is always the fundamental contradiction, which is always the bourgeoisie vs. the proletariat "at home." This is Idealist "fidelity to principle," not Marxism. The concrete conditions are ignored and an "eternal idea" is upheld.

If, on the other hand, we admit that the principal contradiction may be between forces outside the country and forces inside, then we must face up to the issue of "national defense," of "defense of the fatherland," not only in colonial and semi-colonial countries but also in small and large capitalist countries in Europe. We must remember though, and the Comintern did not, that those domestic forces that communists united with against the main enemy (the fascist powers) did so for their own reasons. While under the conditions of the time "defense of the nation" had an important role to play in the anti-fascist struggle, the communists could not surrender this struggle to the 'leaders of the nation,' to the imperialist or national bourgeoisie. The communists had to realize that these strata would join the anti-fascist struggle only to a limited degree and only for their own class aims, which were to continue the exploitation of the working people, not end it. The CI, as we will see, while it may at times have recognized this in words, far more often neglected it in practice and in words, consistently subordinating the aims of revolutionary struggle in Europe and elsewhere to "national unity" and new, allegedly "progressive" forms of "democracy."

E. The Main Weaknesses in the VII Congress Resolution on War

In criticizing the Comintern line we will rely on the resolution adopted by the VII Congress ("The Tasks of the Communist International in Connection with the Preparations of the Imperialists for a New World War"), since this represents the official position of the Comintern.

At the VII Congress the communist movement had the difficult job of taking all of the newly developing conditions into account in formulating policy. Not all of the new conditions or factors which the Comintern identified had matured by 1935; specifically, the developments which would lead to the rapid conquering and subjugation of even large imperialist states in Europe were, at least to the eyes of the Comintern, still not discernible.

Our view, in brief, is that while the Comintern did not make the dogmatic "Left" error which the Trotskyists made at the time, it lacked a clear enough perspective on the situation to be able to present a definite line on the war which would have enabled the communist parties to steer clear of both "Left" and particularly Right errors.

The Congress was of two minds, and this is reflected in the resolution on war. One mind was 'with Lenin,' back in World War I, determined to uphold under the new conditions the principle that had been valid for that war: "turn imperialist war into civil war." The other mind was tardily staring the present realities in the face: the growth of fascism, its triumph in two major European countries, and the immediate danger of brutal national oppression. These two perspectives were synthesized in the resolution, giving it an ambiguous, two-faced character. The Comintern at this time was still under the spell of the experience of WWI and still clung to the perspective on imperialist war outlined in the resolution of the VI Congress in 1928. It was unable to fully adapt its policy to the newly developing conditions and tendencies. Later, by the time it faced more directly the reality of expanding national oppression in Europe, the CI was well on the way toward burying a correct understanding of the tasks of communists in a slough of patriotism, defense of (unqualified) "democracy," and praise for the "freedom-loving" imperialist members of the "Grand Alliance." It went much too far; in the correct direction, but too far. It neglected the inter-imperialist aspects of the war.⁷

From this point on we will indicate further weaknesses in the Comintern's policy while outlining what we believe the essentials of a correct position were.

The Congress' starting point should have been the character of the war that was coming into being and the general situation of the proletariat and its allies in relation to the war. The CI resolution (in VII Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Stenographic Report of Proceedings, pp. 587-95) identifies the developing war as an imperialist one, caused by the "intensified struggle" for the world market and an attempt at a "new partition of the world" with the Japanese, German, and Italian imperialists being the main instigators of the war, along with the British. The resolution notes the danger of a war on the Soviet Union posed by these developments and it also addresses the existence of national liberation struggles in the colonies and semi-colonies. It further points to the danger of dismemberment of "weak states" (Poland is cited) and the justness of a "war conducted by the national

bourgeoisie of such a country." (Proceedings, p. 593) The fourth kind of war mentioned by Lenin, civil war for socialism, is not an integral part of the analysis; it is merely tacked on at the end of the resolution. Thus, while the resolution does note the essential characteristics of the war that was to develop, it does not have a firm or accurate grasp of them, does not analyze them in close connection with each other, and so starts off from a faulty understanding.

Given these developments toward war, what was the principal contradiction on the international scene? The resolution states that the "basic" contradiction was "between the socialist and the capitalist world." The socialist world at that time consisted of the Soviet Union and the peasant soviets in China. The Chinese were then resisting the last annihilation campaign undertaken by the armies of Chiang Kai-shek, and war against the Soviet Union loomed. It seems to us that at that time (1935) the principal contradiction was between the capitalist powers and those areas in which socialism had established extensive strongholds. The Comintern's use of "basic" contradiction is not helpful: did it mean "fundamental" or "principal"? Actually, the CI was not consistently making the distinction that was later to be associated with Mao's name. The way to put it is that the fundamental contradiction was between capital and labor, then as in the entire epoch. The principal contradiction was between the capitalist powers and those areas in which labor had seized power (USSR and Chinese soviets). It should not be forgotten that the capitalist rulers were also attacking labor in "their own" countries to minimize the effects of the depression on capitalist profits. Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to speak of labor in the capitalist countries as in conditions so similar to those of the socialist world--as it was called--as to be involved to the same extent and degree in that pole of the principal contradiction. (This line of reasoning leads to obliteration of the distinction between the fundamental and the principal contradiction and arrives at the Trotskyist position.) Labor organized into its own state power with its own army was a tremendous threat, new in history, to capitalist rule, and the capitalists were certainly aware of this from 1917 on. The socialist world was at this time the prime target of the capitalists' actions and preparations worldwide.

When we turn to contradictions among the imperialist powers, we find the CI maintaining that the "main" contradiction was the "Anglo-American antagonism." The Comintern had been holding this viewpoint for some years, while events continued to undercut what basis there had been for it. We believe the principal contradiction here was between the fascist countries and the Western "democracies," a point we went into earlier. The CI's position on this question is hardly consistent with the rest of the resolution itself, which points to the role of Japan in particular.⁸

Given this situation and the leading contradictions as the CI saw them, what perspective for the communist movement does the CI present? While somewhat unclearly noting the defensive aspects of the position, the Comintern opts for stressing the prospects for peace.

The CI should have set forth clearly that the immediate prospect for the Soviet Union and the world proletariat was a period of being in a strategic defensive position. The major reasons calling for this perspective were the attacks launched by the powerful militarizing fascist states; the existence of

only one socialist country and a few socialist base areas, both surrounded by greater and lesser capitalist antagonists; the weakness of the working class in the fascist countries, where large sections had been incorporated into the fascist war machine; the continued division of the European and American proletariat into reformist and revolutionary sections; and finally, the weakness, politically and organizationally, of nearly all of the communist parties and thus of the CI itself.

These factors were dominant, despite the weakness which the depression had brought to the entire capitalist system, despite the coming over to the communists of sections of the Social-Democratic workers, despite the great successes of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and its increased material and 'spiritual' strength, despite the existence of the Chinese Red Army and the flaring up of other national liberation struggles, and finally despite the increasing resistance to fascism among the working masses in Europe. Despite all these positive factors, the working class entered the post-1935 years on the defensive.

While the CI did stress the defensive aspect in the report and discussion on united front tactics, in the sections on the war danger this aspect is not clearly brought out. It was not clearly stated whether the Soviet Union and the world proletariat were on the defensive or on the offensive under the threat of a second world war.

Even more damaging was the CI's emphasis on the possibilities of "struggling for peace." Of the four sections in the resolution, three have the word "peace" in the title and keep it in the forefront of the text. One prominent theme, for example, was that the existence of the Soviet Union and the wide solidarity it had from the working peoples of the world were a mighty factor for peace. To some extent this was true, but this force was not so mighty as to be able to prevent the imperialists from going at each other, or at the colonies, or at the Soviet Union itself. The impression was given, both in the resolution and in the Congress discussions, that peace (such as it was) might be preserved almost indefinitely, if only sufficient forces were mobilized to demonstrate and propagandize for it. Perspectives on preparations by the communist forces for the coming war were downplayed and pacifist illusions were spread.

The resolution provides evidence that the Comintern had already lost its bearings about the relation of tasks facing the world communist movement. Because defense of the Soviet Union was uppermost in the policy considerations of the CI leadership, other vital tasks tended to be subordinated to this defense. The stress on the possibilities of peace is an example of elevating the defense of the Soviet Union to the prime, not to say sole, task of the world movement, covering over those other revolutionary responsibilities of communists around the world.

We have argued that the world situation contained elements that made it quite different from the pre-World War I conditions, that the war that was shaping up, even in Europe, was not an imperialist war pure and simple, that the national aspect would play a far greater role than it did during WWI, and that communists had to take these different conditions into account in formulating policy. If we say the slogan "turn imperialist war into civil war" should not have been the dominant slogan, what slogans and policies should

have been taken up in different countries? What were the new tasks set for the communist movement? We will give our views in rough outline; it would have been necessary to have been closely in touch with the situation in each country and part of the world to be precise on the emphasis given at any particular time to each of the multiple tasks facing the proletariat in this war.

1) for the Soviet Union: a war in defense of the socialist state; aid to national liberation movements and to communist parties resisting fascism in the capitalist countries; making use of contradictions among the imperialists so as to split them, gain allies (however unreliable, unstable, etc.).

2) for the proletariat in fascist imperialist states: transform imperialist war into civil war for socialism; coordinate efforts with foreign forces resisting fascism, struggling for national liberation, or defending the Soviet Union.

3) for the proletariat in capitalist states which were, or because of proximity would be, menaced by fascist invasion (nearly all of non-fascist Europe): prevention of an internal fascist takeover; aid for defense of the Soviet Union, for national liberation struggles, for resistance to fascism taking place in other capitalist countries; preparation for conditional defense of national independence in case of fascist invasion--the conditions to include strict safeguards against loss of independence, initiative, and revolutionary perspective by the communist party, e.g. against tendencies toward bourgeois nationalism and prettification of bourgeois democracy, for working class leadership of the resistance, adequate preparation for the transition in the struggle from the anti-fascist phase to the overthrow of the ruling class and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat or the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.

4) for the proletariat in capitalist countries not likely to be menaced by the threat of fascist invasion (United States, Canada, Australia, et. al.): aid for defense of the Soviet Union, for national liberation struggles, and for resistance to fascism taking place in other capitalist countries; prevention of an internal fascist takeover, still a high priority; attempt to bring mass pressure to bear to force alignment with the Soviet Union, not the Axis, as the war situation developed; cautious secondary use of the perspective of turning imperialist war into civil war in direct connection with events which bore the seeds of a change in the character of the war, e.g. if the government moved toward alliance with the Axis powers against the Soviet Union; safeguarding the independence and initiative of the communist party as in 3) above.

5) for the proletariat in colonial and semi-colonial countries: war for national liberation and new democratic revolution, whether occupied by a fascist or a "democratic" imperialist power; coordination of the struggle with defense of the Soviet Union and the resistance to fascism in the capitalist countries; exposure of fascist "national liberation movements".

6) for the Comintern: continued direction of and guidance to the communist parties and the world proletariat in the varied and difficult conditions they faced; on no account dissolution of the international organization of the working class as a "contribution" to the war effort or for any other reason.

Instead of attempting some such breakdown of tasks, given the different conditions of communists, the Comintern resolution provides this general guidance in the section called "From the Struggle for Peace to the Struggle for Revolution":

Should a new imperialist world war break out, despite all efforts of the working class to prevent it, the Communists will strive to lead the opponents of war, organized in the struggle for peace, to the struggle for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war against the fascist instigators of war, against the bourgeoisie, for the overthrow of capitalism. (Proceedings, p. 594)

This is as specific as the resolution gets on the question of civil war, and it is about as specific as a rainbow. It contains many hues, and they blend with one another. In the last three major phrases (the ones beginning with "against," "against," and "for") we find the ambiguity, the lack of direction, the confusion that the Congress itself showed.

If the resolution meant that the fascist powers were the principal enemy, which is what Ercoli said in the main report on the war issue, and were to be defeated first, and that following that the task was to overthrow the bourgeoisie elsewhere--then the resolution would have been consistent with the thrust of the presentations and discussion at the Congress. The fascists were thought, correctly, to be the main enemy, and the main task was to prevent the spread of fascism and to overthrow it where it existed. But if this is what the resolution intended, then the next two phrases should not have been hung there, without explanation. The Congress preferred to toss in reassuring phrases about a future offensive than take up in a serious way the immediate defensive tasks and realistic future prospects for going over to the offensive.

We will conclude with a final weakness of the resolution, which bears directly on one of the main points we have been making: the extent of progressive national defense in this period. The resolution limits support to those countries threatened by fascism which are "small" or "weak" states. A "weak" state is specifically contrasted to "one or more big imperialist powers" which threaten annexation. The Congress did not want to spell out the possibility of national defense for an imperialist country like France, because that would have meant, at some point, recognizing that the proletariat could conditionally take part in the national effort of resistance, even though the imperialist bourgeoisie of that state would be taking part and would have a great deal of power and influence in the national defense. This went against the precept from the first world war, which Lenin spoke of, that the imperialist bourgeoisie of the big capitalist countries was our main enemy. As we have said, we do not hold that under the circumstances in the mid- and late 1930's the imperialist bourgeoisie of all big capitalist countries was the main enemy. We think the fascist imperialist bourgeoisie was, and that a distinction was correctly drawn here between the groups of imperialist powers. But it seems clear that in 1935 the CI was not ready to develop the new view to its logical conclusion; it drew the line of "defense of the nation" at "small" or "weak" states.⁹

F. Footnotes

1. It has some importance in the light of the necessary and proper attempts by the socialist state in that situation to make use of contradictions among the imperialist countries so that when war did break out the socialist state would be attacked as late and by as few forces as possible. The Soviet Union had some success in doing this.
2. As but three examples of one-sidedness, of which more may be found in the volume cited, Stalin does not here distinguish between the classes among the invaders--they are essentially 'the fascist horde'; second, Stalin mistakenly claims Hitler wanted to "restore Tsarism"; third, Stalin, along with the Comintern leadership in general as the war went on, incorrectly refers to certain imperialist countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands) as "freedom-loving."
3. Lenin gives us a clue about how he would have reacted to the threat posed by the full development of German fascism in a letter in which he views the Italian fascists in 1922 as "barbarians, diehards worse than those in Russia in 1905." (LCW 45.592, his emphasis)
4. Instead, in many cases the tactical alliances necessary during the war were extended, solidified and amplified. This happened in the communists' policy toward the social-democrats, the petty-bourgeoisie, and even the imperialist countries themselves. Earl Browder on the US' supposed great progressive role after Teheran was only the most infamous and Rightist instance of this. The above policies came to embody a strategic prospect too: one ranging from rank revisionism to less severe opportunism. This incorrect estimate of allies during the war was shown in the convenient but oversimplified characterization of the war as an "anti-fascist" one.
5. The best example of combining the national struggle with the struggle for working class rule during the war was the Party of Labor of Albania. See History of the PLA, chapters 2 and 3, especially p. 275. Also, RCP's The Communist, volume 1, number 1, pp. 101-02.
6. Shulman poses the principal contradiction incorrectly. Under conditions of fascist conquest it would not be identical in all instances, and in any case would not include "all" the non-fascists in a given country on the same side. To do so ignores another of Mao's (and Lenin's) insights that in any situation there are not only the two poles but the intermediate forces. In all the occupied countries there were non-fascist strata who were playing a wait-and-see game, vacillating between the fascist invaders and their quislings (native puppet rulers) on the one hand, and the working class and its close allies on the other. Shulman reflects the right error made by many communist parties in occupied countries of including the entire petty-bourgeoisie and large sections of the national bourgeoisie among the "people's forces" when in fact they were not, even in the struggle against fascism.
7. By this time, too--we're thinking of the years after the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 especially--the Comintern had virtually stopped functioning as an organized international center for the world communist movement, and it officially dissolved itself in 1943. In our view this was a

totally unjustified action, a direct antecedent to and model for the Browderite dissolution of the CPUSA in 1944. More on this in a later report.

8. As the war developed, the principal contradiction on the international scene changed: it became the fascist powers on the one hand, and the coalition of the socialist state, national liberation struggles (including some that developed in Europe), and the non-fascist capitalist countries on the other. As Stalin observed of the alignment, "Incredible, but true." (Problems of Leninism, Peking ed., p. 883) This alignment, as we mentioned earlier, should have been viewed as a tactical, primarily military necessity, not as a strategic prospect.
9. This was the case even though the Laval-Stalin accord had been reached, in which Stalin stated publicly that he understood and approved the policy of the French government to provide adequately for the national defense (under the threat of German fascism). This diplomatic statement caused some internal difficulties for the French CP. For one thing, Rightists in the party were able to use it to push a bourgeois nationalist line.

II. On Revolution

A. Were United Front and Popular Front governments as proposed at the VII Congress of the Comintern principled forms of transition to the proletarian dictatorship?

We consider that in evaluating the errors in the reorientation of the line of the international communist movement which the Seventh Congress undertook, the above question is the central one. The topic of United Front (UF) and Popular Front (PF) governments was addressed several times at the Congress, the most important places being in the resolution on the "Tasks of the Communist International in the Fight for the Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism" and in Dimitrov's main report. We will focus on the presentation of the question in these two places.

The resolution poses the issue this way:

In the circumstances of a political crisis, when the ruling classes are no longer in a position to cope with the powerful sweep of the mass movement, the Communists must advance fundamental revolutionary slogans (such as, for instance, control of production and the banks, disbandment of the police force and its replacement by an armed workers' militia, etc.), which are directed toward still further shaking the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie and increasing the strength of the working class, toward isolating the parties of compromise, and leading the working masses right up to the point of the revolutionary seizure of power. If with such an upsurge of the mass movement it proves possible, and necessary in the interests of the proletariat, to create a proletarian united front government, or an anti-fascist people's front government, which is not yet a government of the proletarian dictatorship, but one which undertakes to put into effect decisive measures against fascism and reaction, the Communist party must see to it that such a government is formed. (Proceedings, pp. 578-79)

In his report to the Congress, Dimitrov introduces the subject in virtually the same way.

Following this passage, the resolution goes on to describe three conditions that are a necessary prerequisite to the formation of a UF or PF government, and Dimitrov's report outlines the same three conditions but in a slightly more detailed way. We will examine these conditions as we explore what we believe the main errors of the Congress were on these points and indicate what we think the correct approach to the seizure of state power entailed. While Dimitrov stated that these conditions were adequate to prevent opportunist interpretations of 'intermediate forms of government,' that is, forms short of the proletarian dictatorship, on the contrary, we consider these conditions were not adequate and helped lay the basis for the opportunist applications which followed, particularly in France in the late 1930's. Overall, we hold that the presentation of the question of the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat in both the resolution of the Congress and in Dimitrov's formulations is basically mistaken and opens the door to gross opportunism on the question of state power.

B. Dimitrov's Inconsistency on the 'Intermediate Stage'

In supporting the idea of a United Front government, Dimitrov relied on Lenin's "'Left'-Wing Communism":

Fifteen years ago Lenin called upon us to focus all our attention on "searching out forms of transition or approach to the proletarian revolution." (Proceedings, p. 178)

It was legitimate to refer to that work in the context of the VII Congress, because Lenin did appear to recommend a flexible approach to the question of the seizure of state power, one that would not be restricted by 'dogma':

As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries--and these differences will continue to exist for a very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale--the unity of international tactics of the Communist working-class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the fundamental principles of Communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as will correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences. Investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp that which is peculiarly national, specifically national in the concrete manner in which each country approaches the fulfillment of the single international task, in which it approaches the victory over opportunism and 'Left' doctrinairism within the working-class movement, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship--such is the main task of the historical period through which all the advanced countries (and not only the advanced countries) are now passing. (Lenin, 'Left'-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, pp. 95-96, emphasis in the original)

The advice to 'modify' the 'fundamental principles' of communism, as Lenin uses the terms here¹, clearly implies that political forms need to be developed which, while not identical to those of the Soviet experience, will contain the same revolutionary content. Lenin naturally does not give carte blanche here; he says "as will correctly modify," not just "modify." Also, he does not specifically state nor does he imply that a transitional or intermediate government will be such a correct modification. Nonetheless, he doesn't preclude the possibility either. (Lenin elsewhere had put forward the slogan of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" as appropriate to Russian conditions in the years of the 1905 revolution.) And, the passage is the one in which Lenin probably came closest to implicitly endorsing the possibility of an approach like the one the VII Congress took.

Dimitrov prefaced his own conception of a correct modification of the "fundamental principles of Communism" with criticism of earlier congresses of the Comintern, which had similarly relied on this passage from Lenin. At the Fourth Congress (1922) and the Fifth Congress (1924) one of the leading topics had been intermediate forms of government, specifically the "workers' government" and the "workers' and peasants' government." But what was meant by these terms, or whether they should be thought of as intermediate forms of govern-

ment, was quite unclear. Zinoviev, as President of the Comintern at the time, led the discussion over a period of many months, and led it very ineptly too. At these congresses, both "Left" and Rightist lines emerged, and there were ample targets for those, like Dimitrov, who later criticized the discussions. At the Seventh Congress, Dimitrov attacked both the "Left" and Right errors that had been made at the earlier congresses, the latter for trying

to establish a special 'democratic intermediate stage' lying between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the purpose of instilling into the workers the illusion of peaceful parliamentary passage from the one dictatorship to the other. This fictitious 'intermediate stage' they have also called 'transitional form,' and even quoted Lenin's words! (Proceedings, p. 178)

In the same vein, Dimitrov later criticized those communists who held that a united front government had to be "an indispensable stage" on the road to the proletarian dictatorship. (Proceedings, p. 367)

But Dimitrov was speaking out of both sides of his mouth, for elsewhere he gives the unmistakable impression that he was trying to establish--though in a more 'subtle' and 'refined' form--the idea of a "special 'democratic intermediate stage'". In the section of his reply to the discussion titled "Attitude Toward Bourgeois Democracy," Dimitrov leaves the goal, proletarian dictatorship, entirely out of account and even says:

Now the working masses in a number of capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a definite choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism. (Proceedings, p. 370)

Moreover, Dimitrov did not remedy this one-sidedness anywhere in his reply to the discussion. Also, neither in his report nor in the Congress resolutions is this one-sidedness avoided. The CI was so intent on avoiding the "Left" sectarian errors that had been made in the years immediately preceding the VII Congress--errors about the nature of fascism and social-democracy and how to combat them--that it swung over to a Rightist perspective, one that lost sight of the relationship between the tasks that confronted communists in this period. This changeover was accompanied by an amazing lack of self-criticism by the top leadership of the Comintern, which was ultimately, and in many instances directly, responsible for the mistakes that had been made.²

It was correct to put emphasis on the defense of democratic rights which had been won through decades of effort and sacrifice, which was Dimitrov's intent in his reply to the discussion, in view of the severity of the threat fascist rule posed to the maintenance of the elementary forms of association and organization which the working class had won. It was correct to cite the new conditions in fascist Germany (and elsewhere), contrasting them with those under the Weimar Republic fifteen years earlier. It was useful though subject to misinterpretation to cite Lenin, as Dimitrov again did, on "the struggle for democracy":

It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure it, or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot

be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.

It was correct to say that

it is not at all a matter of indifference to us what kind of political regime exists in any given country: whether a bourgeois dictatorship in the form of bourgeois democracy, even with democratic rights and liberties greatly curtailed, or a bourgeois dictatorship in its open, fascist form. (Proceedings, p. 369)

All this was correct. But Dimitrov and the Congress were mistaken in relegating struggle for "Soviet democracy" to obscurity, in raising the task of preventing fascist rule so strongly that the task which "followed" (really, was closely bound up with) was shunted aside and "forgotten." It was this perspective, established at the Seventh Congress, which fostered illusions about "democracy," about the nature of class rule in the "Great" Western "democracies" and about the difficulties of overthrowing bourgeois state power which haven't been overcome in the world communist movement to this day.

Dimitrov's position was somewhat more carefully stated than those of many at the earlier congresses on the question of intermediate governmental forms. In discussing the conditions under which he believed intermediate governments could be formed, Dimitrov criticized the lack of stipulations by earlier congresses about the context in which it would be possible for communists to support or enter intermediate governments, but Dimitrov himself proposed conditions we believe are inadequate.

C. The Inadequacy of the Conditions Dimitrov Proposed for the Formation of a UF or PF government

In introducing his conditions for the formation of an intermediate government, Dimitrov attempted to demarcate himself from the presentations at the IV and V congresses. As we have mentioned, the discussions at those congresses were not well led; in fact they were roundabout, confused and repetitious. The Italian communist leader Bordiga summed them up well when he said at the 1924 Congress:

how can a simple peasant understand the workers' government when we, leaders of the labour movement, after three years have not been able to understand it and to give a satisfactory definition? (Applause).
(Fifth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report, p. 91)

As examples of the kinds of ideas that led to confusion, Zinoviev's five "types" of workers' governments should be cited. These were

- 1) a Liberal-Labour government. Such a government existed in Australia; such a government may soon arise in England in the near future.
- 2) A Social-Democratic workers' government (Germany).
- 3) A Workers' and Peasants' government. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, etc.
- 4) A workers' government with Communist participation.
- 5) A genuine proletarian workers' government, which can be realized in its pure form only through the Communist party. (Fifth Congress Abridged Report, pp. 33-34)

If this was not enough, Zinoviev also held on more than one occasion that the concept of a workers' government was merely a "pseudonym" for the dictatorship of the proletariat, an agitational slogan to put the Latin into more popular form.

In analyzing communist participation in transitional governments, some communists at these earlier congresses had tried to indicate what they took to be the necessary conditions, but here too Dimitrov found much to take exception to. He cited three series of mistakes that were made.

The first was that the Workers' government was "not clearly and firmly bound up with the existence of a political crisis." So, Dimitrov asserts, now (in 1935) we communists

lay great stress on the exact consideration of the specific, concrete circumstances of the political crisis and the upsurge of the mass movement, in which the formation of a united front government may prove possible and politically necessary. (Proceedings, p. 176)

The second "series" of errors

arose from the fact that the question of a workers' government was not bound up with the development of a militant mass united front movement of the proletariat.

To correct this, the communists

even prefer not to use the terms "workers' governments," and speak of a united front government, which in political character is something absolutely different, different in principle, from all the Social-Democratic governments which usually call themselves "workers' (or labour) governments." (p. 176)

"Absolutely" different is used for emphasis, not accuracy, since no two forms of government are "absolutely" different, regardless of which class rules through the government; all governments have unity or identity in that they are governments and represent the rule of one class over another or others. Further, in passing, Dimitrov claims the UF government is "different in principle" but neither he nor the Congress ever specified which of Zinoviev's five types it was different from or in what way it was "different in principle."

The third group of mistakes lay in the proposed practical policies of a workers' government. To avoid this, the communists now, Dimitrov says, place emphasis on "definite and fundamental revolutionary demands." Since we will not further discuss this point in this report, we will simply observe that the Comintern, with Dimitrov among the top leadership, subsequently approved of Popular Front demands of a practical character proposed by the French Communist Party which were so "revolutionary" that the none-too-revolutionary French Social-Democrats criticized them for being reformist! And this happened as well in countries besides France, where, though PF governments did not come to power, the communists were known for policies to the right of those of the social-democrats.

In our view, after at least taking the precaution of making these criticisms--correct ones--of the approach of the earlier congresses, Dimitrov still didn't heed his own advice, still didn't adequately specify what conditions would be necessary for communist support for or participation in a transitional government.

As Dimitrov explained it, the first condition is that

the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie must already be sufficiently disorganized and paralyzed, so that the bourgeoisie cannot prevent the formation of a government of struggle against reaction and fascism.

(Proceedings, p. 174)

This, as with the other two conditions, occurs within

conditions of political crisis, when the ruling classes are no longer able to cope with the powerful rise of the mass anti-fascist movement.

These few lines are all that Dimitrov, or the Congress, had to say about the specific conditions! This hardly seems like "great stress on the exact consideration of the specific concrete circumstances." These doubts are increased by the way in which Dimitrov and the resolution addressed the question of "disorganization" and "paralysis" of the "state apparatus." For example, in speaking of measures to be taken by a UF government, Dimitrov mentioned "disbandment of the police force and its replacement by an armed workers' militia." One is unsure what to think. Was Dimitrov so naive that he believed the "disbandment" of the police and the substitution of an armed militia would be sufficient to give the UF government actual armed control of the country? Neither here nor elsewhere at the Congress did the man who was driven into exile by the armed might of reactionary forces in Bulgaria (following serious military and political errors made by the experienced Bulgarian CP leadership, of which Dimitrov was then, as subsequently, a part) talk about other "special bodies of armed men" (to use Engels' terms); namely, the army and the navy. Of course Dimitrov was not so naive. But what then are we to think of one who talks of the paralysis of the state apparatus and forgets to mention the military? What can be going through someone's head when he omits mention of an army (the French) which four years later, after no great build-up, could offer 110 divisions, 65 active, for the defense of the bourgeois state? (The successes of the French party were the centerpiece of discussion at the Congress.) The essential answer would seem to be social-democratic "parliamentary cretinism," which Lenin attributed to those taken with lasting illusions about the likelihood of genuine social change through parliamentary means.

The kind of government Dimitrov apparently envisioned suffers from just this malady of its creator. It is a government the bourgeoisie allegedly cannot prevent from being formed; its purpose is "primarily" to struggle against "fascism and reaction." Dimitrov urges this government to form an armed militia. This is a necessary but insufficient step. The conditions outlined by Dimitrov as general guidelines do not postulate a "disorganization" and "paralysis" of the state apparatus as would enable a transitional government to control not only the benches of parliament, votes and offices, but the material foundation on which that formal power rests. Without genuine paralysis and disorganization--which would include demoralization in the military, desertion

of units and individuals to the revolutionary forces--there can be no hope of the working class truly exercising power in whatever kind of "popular" or "people's" governmental trappings. We do not expect Dimitrov to have foreseen all of the particular situations that might have arisen in this period, but he omitted any discussion of the specific conditions most necessary to ensure transition to proletarian rule, and by this omission promulgated, and later explicitly sanctioned as well, revisionism on the issue of state power. Dimitrov's "united front government" is a revisionist form.

The second condition is that

the widest masses of working people, particularly the mass trade unions, must be in a state of vehement revolt against fascism and reaction, though not ready to rise in insurrection so as to fight under Communist Party leadership for the achievement of Soviet power. (Proceedings, p. 175)

Again, laying very brief "great stress," and this complicates the problem for anyone trying to interpret this "exact consideration" of circumstances: just how are we to know when this fine point has been reached, when the "widest masses" are in revolt so far and only so far?

As a complement to the earlier omission of the military force essential to destroy bourgeois state power, Dimitrov (and the Congress resolution as well) now leave out of account, in this second condition, the necessary existence and development of the organizational forms of eventual proletarian power (Soviets or soviet-like organizations). To be sure, Dimitrov is explicitly limiting his presentation to the formation of a government which is "not yet a proletarian dictatorship." But our point is, what guarantees are there without such alternate bases of power (even if in rudimentary form) that this "new" kind of government that the bourgeoisie "cannot prevent" from being formed will in fact have more than nominal power? Will in fact be able to struggle against the development of internal fascism, will have a chance of leading to the proletarian dictatorship? Of course, the army would be such a "guarantee," but Dimitrov would prefer to let it lie there and hope it will obey this "absolutely different" kind of (what else can we call it) "workers' government"? Dimitrov doesn't insist on, doesn't even mention two of the most important "guarantees."

Further, if the working people are in "vehement revolt against fascism and reaction" (the Congress never quite says what it means by reaction and how it differs from fascism), if there are large militant protests of all kinds--mass meetings, street demonstrations, marches--these are the conditions under which the communist party must bring to the fore the necessity of "eventually" (and the sooner the better) attaining proletarian rule. The communists must not draw the line which Dimitrov postulates in his condition. If the working people indicate that large sections of them do want to draw that distinction, the job of communists is not to say "fine, let's not go beyond bourgeois democracy." Instead the communists must, carefully evaluating the internal and external fascist danger, put forward their perspective that the purpose of thwarting fascist rule is not to be able to return to the "glories" of bourgeois democratic society, but to go through the crisis to the only real solution, working class rule (the dictatorship of the proletariat or the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry under the leadership of the working class or the joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes

under the leadership of the working class--it will depend on the specific economic and political conditions.)³

For all its citing of Lenin, there is a quotation of his which the VII Congress overlooked:

The gist of this thesis is that the first stage of revolution is the restriction of absolutism, which satisfies the bourgeoisie; the second is the attainment of the republic, which satisfies the 'people'--the peasantry and the petty-bourgeoisie at large; the third is the socialist revolution, which alone can satisfy the proletariat . . . We actually have here an ascent by three different schematic stages, varying according to the classes, which, at best, will accompany us in this ascent. But if we interpret this correct Marxist scheme of three stages to mean that we must measure off in advance, before any ascent begins, a very modest part, let us say, not more than one step, if, in keeping with this schema and before any ascent begins, we sought to 'draw up a plan of action in the revolutionary epoch,' we should be virtuosi of philistinism. (LCW 8.465)

Lenin wrote this in 1905, but he maintained the same basic perspective in 1917, after the February revolution, where conditions were such that there was a good chance that the third step of the "schema" could be taken, although most of the Bolshevik leadership did not have this view until Lenin returned from exile and won the rest of the Central Committee over to it. Much happened between 1917 and 1935, including the rise of the Italian and then the more virulent German form of fascism. But this perspective--not marking out firm limits or steps in advance, "before any ascent begins" (Lenin mentions this twice)--remains valid for the period of the VII Congress or any period. How far the struggle can go, what gains the working class can make--this depends on the concrete conditions: how far the working class has come, economic conditions in the country, the relation of class forces, the likelihood of aid or interference from forces outside the country, etc.⁴

The Comintern had, correctly we believe, adopted the perspective of fighting the internal and external danger of fascism as the primary immediate task under the new conditions. But the Comintern should have kept the ascent, whose particular features had to be discerned in the concrete situation in each country, firmly in mind. After successful resistance to the threat of fascism (whether internal or external), based on use of united and popular front tactics, which called for rallying social-democratic workers and then broader sections of the people (mostly the petty-bourgeoisie) around the working class which was under communist leadership--after this, what next? Implicit (or as with Dimitrov, explicit) support for a return to a form of bourgeois democratic rule, however prettified? Or hard struggle toward working class rule? Based on the perspective taken up by Dimitrov and the VII Congress, the great majority of communist parties during and after this period (that is, the pre-WWII years and WWII, and on into the post-war years as well) tragically abdicated their revolutionary responsibilities and more and more took the first option.

The third and final of Dimitrov's conditions is that

the differentiation and radicalization in the ranks of Social-Democracy and other parties participating in the united front must already have

reached the point where a considerable proportion of them demand ruthless measures against the fascists and other reactionaries, struggle together with the Communists against fascism, and openly come out against that reactionary section of their own party which is hostile to communism. (Proceedings, p. 175)

When the united front tactics were first adopted in late 1921, the aim was to use them until the majority of the working class, particularly the European working class, had been won over to the side of the communists. This is what Lenin meant when he said that united front tactics would be pursued "to the end." It was certainly necessary to recognize that a "considerable proportion" of the workers under the influence of social-democracy would have to break with their parties and cease to be hostile to communism if the communist working-class movement were to threaten bourgeois rule. But, given the weaknesses of the other two conditions Dimitrov sets out, this condition also is inadequate.

Let's review the situation. It is 1935. The more principled workers in social-democracy have left their party--ex-social-democratic workers joined the Bolsheviks in building the Communist International from 1919 on. The forces remaining in social-democracy have kept the faith of hostility to communism, democratic transition to socialism, subservience to capitalism, reliance on the "crumbs" tossed them by imperialism, some of them for sixteen years. Now a depression comes, fascism stirs and gains power in some countries, some sections of social-democracy again begin to move toward communist ideas and toward the communist organizations (there was genuine movement in this direction)--how reliable will these ex-social-democrats be in remaining with the communists? How steadfast will they be, from the communists' viewpoint, if they find their representatives "in power" in a government which by definition will not be a proletarian dictatorship and which will appear to them to offer a chance at getting more than "crumbs"? The use of ferocious adjectives ("ruthless") will not scare the bourgeoisie, nor will it guarantee strong resistance by social-democrats to the onslaughts of the bourgeoisie and its fascist agents, much less ensure struggle against them for the form of rule that the working class needs. Certainly the communists could not count on such ex-social-democrats in such a government. United front tactics would not have yet been pursued "to the end."

We conclude that the conditions Dimitrov and the resolution on "tactics" proposed were insufficient for the task set and constituted revisionism on the question of state power. This does not mean that we believe communists may support or participate in only a dictatorship of the proletariat. As we have indicated, we uphold the view of Lenin and Mao, among others, that communists may take part in other forms of rule, one of which is the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. We believe too that under the threat of fascism, communist support for or participation in a transitional form of government becomes more, not less, of a responsibility. Fascism is a qualitatively different form of bourgeois rule, a much harsher, more violent, monolithic organization of the superstructure than under bourgeois democracy, and in conditions of extreme decay, crisis and the genuine threat of large fascist movements, the immediate task of the communists is to prevent the bourgeoisie from being able to realize this "higher" stage of class rule. This is the primary task for a time. To ignore this is to take Trotsky's path, which in general was to call for the full "ascent" regardless of specific conditions in a country.⁵ It is to belittle national differences and particu-

larities on the plea of the obsolescence of the capitalist system of production in the era of its decline, the era of imperialism and social revolution. At the same time it is to belittle the differences between the two forms of rule, bourgeois democracy and fascism, on the grounds that under imperialism bourgeois democracy has become more and more restricted, so that fascism is really nothing new. We think such a view is suicidal. We reject both "Left" and Rightist deviations on this issue. (We will take up this question in more depth later in the report.)

D. What Is the Class Character of a UF Government?

We turn from Dimitrov's sins of omission on the conditions for the formation of a united front government to a further omission about such a government; namely, what is its class character? The class nature of a government--which class or classes is in power--must be of fundamental importance for Marxists, but remarkably enough the leaders of the international communist movement introduced the idea of a "new" kind of government and omitted any developed consideration of whose class interests would be represented. The Congress said a little on the question, but only very little.

The resolution of the Congress on "tactics" states that a United Front government is a "proletarian" government (p. 579). But what does that mean if it is not a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Which of the five types of "workers' governments" does it resemble? If it doesn't resemble any of them, as Dimitrov seems to think, in what fundamental way is it different? The Congress doesn't say! The one word "proletarian" is literally all the resolution has to say on the subject! Since the Comintern's word is insufficient, we'll have to analyze the class character of a UF government ourselves.

As we noted earlier, Dimitrov claimed the UF government would be something quite different from all of the social-democratic "workers' governments". The most extensive statement of his view was given in his main report to the Congress:

. . . we now emphasize, on the one hand, that we are not in the least anxious for a 'workers' government' that would be nothing more or less than an enlarged Social-Democratic government. We even prefer not to use the term 'workers' governments,' and speaking of a united front government, which in political character is something absolutely different, different in principle, from all the Social-Democratic governments which usually call themselves 'workers' (or labour) governments.' While the Social-Democratic government is an instrument of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie in the interests of the preservation of the capitalist order, a united front government is an instrument of the collaboration of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat with other anti-fascist parties, in the interests of the entire working population, a government of struggle against fascism and reaction. Obviously there is a radical difference between these two things. (Proceedings, p. 176)

Before continuing, we would like to note that we are analyzing here only the proposed UF government, a government allegedly of one class since it is termed a "proletarian" government. Dimitrov and the Congress made a distinction between a united front government and a popular front government, the

latter, corresponding to the implications of popular front tactics, being composed of representatives of parties from more than one class. The PF government, in other words, was conceived of as a multi-class government, consisting chiefly of parties representing the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie. We will not separately address the theoretical problems associated with the PF government, because in the context of this analysis they would present an amplified version of the errors inherent in the UF government concept.⁶

According to Dimitrov, more than one party would be ruling in a UF government. The communist party would be "collaborating" with other parties, often described by Dimitrov as "anti-fascist" parties. The largest and most influential parties in Europe that would fit this description were the social-democratic parties. These were the only other parties in Europe besides the communist parties which had significant followings in the working class. In Spain the anarchists had a working class base, but this was the exception. Elsewhere in Europe (the geographical focus of the Congress by and large) only the fascist parties did, and by 1935 there was no question of united action with them, much less collaboration in government. The type of "proletarian" government Dimitrov had in mind would very likely be composed of a social-democratic party and a communist party.

Communists have always held, at least since Lenin's writings on the party gained wide acceptance, that only the communist party in a country and in the world (the Comintern being the world party of the proletariat) represents the fundamental interests of the working class. Only the communist party, as the vanguard of the working class, can lead the class, win over basic allies, overthrow the reactionary forces (feudal and capitalist primarily), and move toward the construction of socialism and a classless society. A major reason for this is that only the communist party is guided (or should be guided) by Marxism-Leninism, which is the only scientific theory of historical development. Second only the communist party is (or can be) a revolutionary party in this epoch, a Leninist party of a new type based on democratic centralism. Dimitrov was well aware of all this and no doubt agreed with it in theory.

The parties of social-democracy, by contrast, had none of the above characteristics. They were not guided by Marxism-Leninism and they were not parties of a new type. They were not the vanguard of the working class. While having a base in the working class, these parties did not represent the vanguard of the working class, but insofar as they represented workers represented the more backward strata. They didn't take care of the basic interests of the working class but rather the short-term interests of the "better-situated" strata. These parties had a different fundamental basis than that of the communist parties. While the communist parties had been formed to make revolution by breaking with reformist Marxism, the Marxism that had come to dominate the international socialist working class movement in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the social-democratic parties had attempted to maintain and uphold those "traditions." These "traditions" included reliance on the vote to gain some say in the affairs of parliamentary governments, success in which fostered pacifist illusions about the possibility of fundamental social change through the vote; also, decades of relatively peaceful economic struggle, waged through the trade unions, in order to improve the economic conditions of the working class. In Europe in the second half of the 19th century these policies were able to achieve some success, some economic and political gains which did not pass beyond the limits of reformism; by

these gains some sections of workers, not inconsiderable in size, were won to this perspective of "democratic socialism" and remained with it even through the turmoil of the first decades of the 20th century, turmoil which included the alternative to reformism presented by the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917.

Social-democracy was not monolithic in any sense; in particular it included some of the worst misleaders of the working class as well as honest working class people. Lenin several times lambasted the rotten leadership of social-democracy, not only for its social-chauvinist stand on World War I, but for its overall representation of the ideas and policy of the bourgeoisie within the working class movement. Such "leaders" as Noske, Scheidemann, Vandervelde, Kautsky, Turati, etc. were agents of the bourgeoisie, like the "labor lieutenants of capital" (DeLeon), imperialist-minded, imperialist-bribed, imperialist-corrupted. The economic basis for this phenomenon was, as Lenin pointed out, the superprofits obtained by the imperialist powers (especially of Europe, where social-democracy was strongest) at the expense of the workers and peasants of the colonial and semi-colonial areas of the world. The capitalist class could set aside a portion of these superprofits--"crumbs" Lenin called them--to buy off a section of the working class, in return for which the leaders within this section would defend the capitalist system and "help" the workers by bargaining for whatever further "crumbs" (reforms, economic gains) it seemed likely the bourgeoisie would part with. Marx and Engels had often referred to this same economic phenomenon in the British working class during the heyday of British imperialism, roughly the last three-quarters of the 19th century.

Given this history of social-democracy, whose class interests did the social-democratic parties represent and serve? It is true that the "bottom half," so to speak, of social-democracy was in and of the working class. There was no question that social-democracy had substantial working class backing, otherwise there would have been no need for the communist movement to have adopted the united front tactics in 1921. But, as far as composition went, the social-democratic parties, as far as we are aware, also contained significant membership in the petty-bourgeoisie, including professionals and intellectuals, shopkeepers, civil servants, and peasants. This, to a greater extent than the communist parties, however inadequate the composition of most of them was in 1935.⁷ But the "lower half," the majority even of the membership, does not determine the character of a social-democratic formation. By their guiding ideas, program, leadership, and structure, the social-democratic parties were not serving the basic interests of the working-class. They were doing the work of the bourgeoisie in a way the bourgeoisie itself could not. By their attitudes and style of living, the leadership of social-democracy was bourgeois and petty-bourgeois, not proletarian. Similarly with their policies and actions. Thus the dominant aspect of the social democratic parties, in our view, was subservience to the bourgeoisie, the objective upholding of the interests of the capitalist order. It was these parties, parties of this character, that Dimitrov and the Comintern wanted to collaborate with in government.

As is evident from the brief sketch above, to say that when a social-democratic and a communist party collaborate in government, under certain conditions, the government is "proletarian" is to leave the vital aspect of

social-democracy out of the picture. It is to omit the fact of bourgeois penetration into the working class movement. For all his faults, Zinoviev earlier grasped this point when he wrote that every bourgeois government is a capitalist government, but not every "working class government" is "a proletarian government," "a socialist government."⁸ He explicitly said this was so because the bourgeoisie had its agents within the working class. Dimitrov's summation of the "workers' government" controversy of the mid-1920's has completely lost sight of this insight of Zinoviev's, a well-publicized one at that.

In Comintern materials from the mid-1930's we do not find attention given to the above distinctions and the caution they should suggest in contemplating governmental "collaboration" with the social-democrats. Even the basic question of which party is dominant, the social-democratic or the communist, and their respective bases of power in a given situation, is not taken up.

If the communists are "in the government" and are the dominant force, if this governmental power (power in the former 'organs of government') is backed by genuine strength in soviet-like forms, if the communists have significant sections of the military behind them, if under these conditions the communists have invited the social-democrats into the government as temporary allies--that is one thing. The government established in the old organs of government (parliament), in such a unique situation could bear the name "proletarian" in some meaningful sense. We add this qualification because it would still be necessary for the working class and its allies to destroy the old administrative organs and the police and military structures and replace them with new proletarian forms. The government we have described above would be in transition, in other words, to a full "smashing of the state apparatus". We do not rule out the possibility that such a government could arise under the threat of fascism. And as we noted, it could with some justice be described as proletarian. This would be a possibility for any country which had had a significant period of bourgeois democratic rule, whether imperialist or a lesser capitalist country. But it would be only a possibility.

But, if, say, the social-democrats are the dominant party and force in government, if there are no embryonic or developed forms of alternate power in which the working class has any strength, if there is no division in the military, if under these conditions the communists "collaborate" in a government with the social-democrats, then the word "proletarian" in reference to such a government would be a deception. Yet in the presentation of the question by the Congress under Dimitrov's guidance, it is this kind of government that is meant.⁹

To sum up this point, our conclusion is that the Comintern did not devote adequate attention to the class character of a "united front government". Its one-word description, "proletarian," begs the question. As presented by Dimitrov and the Congress, the united front government is not "different in principle" from either the various workers' governments Zinoviev described (with the single exception of the fifth type, which is a dictatorship of the proletariat) or from social-democratic conceptions of coalition governments.

E. When can communists support or participate in intermediate forms of government?

We have criticized Dimitrov and the Seventh Congress for an incorrect approach to the issue of intermediate forms of government, at the same time saying in passing that we believe there are circumstances under which communists not only may but must take part in governments which are less than a dictatorship of the proletariat. We'll now take up the general conditions or circumstances under which the communists may do so, in our opinion. This will involve a presentation of the question different from that of Dimitrov. In fact, the way we have put the question, above, developing out of the analysis of the policy of the Seventh Congress just given, leaves a good deal out of account. As stated, the problem could be seen in narrow terms, as the problem of "coalition governments," which is what the presentation of the Seventh Congress did tend to. In our approach we will try to sketch what we believe the correct theoretical framework to be. This topic needs considerably more space than we are able to give it here, but we will attempt to present the essentials necessary for an evaluation of what communists should have done in the conditions of 1935 in relation to the winning of state power. This analysis will also have implications for our attitude toward the state today.

Soviet Experience of the "Ascent"

The goal of communists is to establish a classless society, and the sooner the better. But communists from Marx and Engels on have had to develop their policies to further the cause of the working class, the only consistently revolutionary class in this epoch, within a specific historical set of conditions, conditions which limit those policies. However much Marx and Engels wanted to get rid of the state--all states, which represent the rule of one class by another--they did not adopt the perspective of the anarchists, who wanted to overthrow the bourgeois state and be done with it. Marx and Engels insisted that there would have to be a transition period between capitalist society and the classless society, in which the working class would have to rule through a dictatorship of the proletariat; and they made recognition of this a touchstone of Marxism, as against all utopian forms of socialism.

As Lenin indicated in a remark we have already cited, communists want to take the revolutionary process as far as it can go in a specific economic and political situation in a given country. The communists do not mark out a fixed plan for the ascent "before any ascent begins." In analyzing how far the revolutionary process can go "at one time" Marxists rely on a correct estimate of the specific economic and political situation, particularly the relation of class forces, the depth and extent of the crisis in the society, the likelihood of outside aid or reactionary interference. etc. That is, once the ascent has begun, during a revolutionary situation.

This is what Lenin and the Bolshevik party aimed at doing, and did, in 1917 in a country with a small but advanced proletariat (high percentage in large-scale industry) in a predominantly peasant country.

But Lenin and the Comintern leaders recognized, as in the 1928 Programme, that conditions would not always permit the direct establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, its attainment in one sweep. In fact, Lenin popularized the slogan of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the

peasantry for the conditions of the Russian revolution in the 1905 period. Didn't this contradict Lenin's statement elsewhere that we don't mark off stages in advance? We think not.

The slogan was put forward as one to lead the masses, as the one which most concretely set out the next task before the working class and peasantry, as the one which indicated the next step on the ascent. This slogan too could become obsolete. Writing in June-July 1905, after the ascent of the 1905 revolution had begun, Lenin said:

We are witnessing a highly instructive and highly comical spectacle. The bourgeois liberal prostitutes are trying to drape themselves in the toga of revolution . . . This is an exceptionally significant phenomenon that characterizes not only the progress of bourgeois liberalism, but even more so the progress of the real successes of the revolutionary movement, which has compelled recognition. Even the bourgeoisie is beginning to feel that it is more to its advantage to take its stand on the side of the revolution --so shaky is the autocracy. On the other hand, this phenomenon, which testifies to the fact that the entire movement has risen to a new and higher plane, also sets us new and higher tasks. . . We must now formulate the immediate concrete tasks of the revolution differently, in the name of our program and in amplification of our program. What was adequate yesterday is inadequate today. . . It is our duty at the present time to show the proletariat and the whole people the inadequacy of the slogan: "Revolution"; we must show how necessary it is to have a clear and unambiguous, consistent and determined definition of the very content of the revolution. And this definition is provided by the one slogan that is capable of correctly expressing a "decisive victory" of the revolution, the slogan: for the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. (Lenin, Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, FLP, Peking, pp. 140-142)

In 1917, following the February revolution in Russia, this slogan did become obsolete. Where some leaders of the Bolshevik party would have been content to support the establishment of a government and society which fell short of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the building of socialism, Lenin did not share this perspective and argued that conditions permitted struggle for the next step of the ascent and a fine chance of success as well. This was the experience of the Russian revolution to this point.

This approach of Lenin's should be contrasted with Trotsky's in this period (1905). Trotsky's main slogan was 'No czar but a workers' government,' a conception Lenin vigorously criticized. Trotsky's approach saw no possible intermediate steps in the revolution; it had to be an "uncompromising" call for the direct establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin, by contrast, argued that there were steps to that goal and that the process would have to proceed along that route. He took into account that the revolutionary process might get stuck at a certain step, that the working class might not be able to "push" the revolution as far as it would have liked. Or, for that matter, the communists might not be able to push the working class as far as it would have liked. He took this perspective, recognition of steps or stages in the "ascent," and a policy of trying to climb all the steps as soon as could be done.

The CI's Programme and Stages in the Revolution

As mentioned, the Comintern Programme, adopted in 1928, maintained this perspective. There and elsewhere in the communist movement it was established that there were different possible steps in different countries. This has come to be understood, in briefest form, as 'one-stage revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, two-stage revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial (underdeveloped) countries'. This summary, however, does not parallel the framework established by the 1928 Programme and in our view does not do justice to the varying conditions in different countries which existed then and do today as well. To summarize what we said in "Strategy and Tactics of the Comintern: 1928-1935", the Comintern distinguished three kinds of countries: 1) the highly developed capitalist countries for which the principal political demand is the direct transition to the proletarian dictatorship, 2) countries at a medium level of capitalist development where the revolutionary process may proceed rapidly or slowly to the socialist revolution, where there may be "many tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to accomplish", and 3) colonial and semi-colonial countries where as a rule there will be a series of stages preparatory to the socialist revolution. The Comintern distinguished three, not two kinds of countries, correctly we think. The second kind, less developed capitalist countries (the Comintern cited Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, the Balkans) correspond, in this context, to those intermediate forms which Lenin spoke of as existing everywhere in nature and society.¹⁰ Economically, politically, and culturally, these countries had significant differences with the highly advanced capitalist countries and the colonial and semi-colonial ones. To put it the other way, they had significant characteristics of both these kinds of countries. Thus, while a one-stage revolution was the prospect for the highly developed capitalist countries, and a two-stage one was what the experience of this century showed was very likely for nearly all the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the less developed capitalist countries presented more possibilities, in that some might have one-stage revolutions while others would develop historically in a way that would resemble the likely development in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

With this understanding, the division, for simplicity, into one- and two-stage revolutionary processes can be retained. In the advanced capitalist countries, the imperialist countries, there would be generally few outstanding capitalist economic tasks to complete at the beginning of socialist construction.¹¹ Similarly these countries had had decades of bourgeois democracy in most cases, so the next task politically would be to move from bourgeois democracy to soviet democracy (the dictatorship of the proletariat). Thus, economically and politically the tasks in the advanced capitalist countries could be summed up as one-stage revolution. In the underdeveloped countries, the colonies and semi-colonies, there would be many outstanding capitalist economic tasks to accomplish. Feudal and slave remnants would have to be wiped out. Limited capitalist development would be in order in some cases, perhaps most. Also politically there would be outstanding tasks to accomplish. Monarchical forms might have been dominant and these would have to be done away with. For these reasons, and others, the revolutionary process in the colonies and semi-colonies would be a prolonged one, marked by many steps, or stages and sub-stages. Only in short form could this be summarized as two-stage revolution, although politically there was this basis for that characterization: either the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry or a related form (for example, the joint dictatorship of several revo-

lutionary classes, under the leadership of the working class) would precede the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat; politically there would be two main state forms.¹²

The above account outlines what has been the more or less explicit "classical" understanding of revolution by stages up to World War II.¹³

The Threat of Fascism and Stages in the Revolution

Into this "classical" account of the steps in revolutionary development "steps" the phenomenon of fascism. Although the VI Congress of the Comintern (1928) had seen a good deal of the development of Italian fascism and some of German fascism, it did not see any need to modify any of the steps because of the threat of fascism. As we know, the VII Congress did; for all practical purposes it set into motion a line which postulated one giant step called democracy, which most of the communist movement was unable to transcend. On this question we believe the VI Congress was much sounder than the VII Congress. But having said this, we add that the VI Congress had an underdeveloped, inadequate understanding of the nature of fascism and the threat it posed for the working class movement.

In the schema established at the VI Congress in the Programme of the Comintern, the threat of fascist rule poses no theoretical problems of a major kind in regard to the third kind of country. (We will use the schema of the VI Congress and continue our analysis of 1935 conditions.) That is, since a two-stage revolution was likely "anyway," the thought of some intermediate form of government, one short of the proletarian dictatorship and aimed at preventing fascist rule, was not a radical one. Similarly for the lesser capitalist countries (Spain), which the Comintern had spoken of. But for the advanced capitalist countries this was not the case.

In those countries, the idea of an intermediate form of government, whether called "united front," "popular front," a "workers' government based on the united front," or whatever, would mean, politically, two-stage revolution. Such a conception could not be justified on economic grounds, in our view. The introduction of fascism did not retard the development of monopoly capitalism economically, it did not mean a step backward economically, it was the introduction of a superstructure qualitatively different from bourgeois democracy to further the ends of monopoly capital under the particular conditions of crisis. The justification for a two-stage revolution in the advanced countries would have to rest on political grounds. The Seventh Congress pointed the way to this approach, but held back from taking it to its logical conclusion. It still had something of the full ascent in mind, though muted considerably, and it did not speak glowingly of life under bourgeois democratic rule, as the communist movement was to do during World War II. The Congress did, as we have noted, also set into motion the great democratic fable, the praise of "democracy" pure and simple, without specifying of what kind (proletarian or bourgeois), a fable that was continued in the guiding "principles" of the Soviet revisionists.

In our view, support for or participation in governmental forms short of the dictatorship of the proletariat in any country, but especially the capitalist countries, whether advanced or lesser, had to rest on a sound understanding of the interrelations of monopoly capitalism, the state, bourgeois democracy

and fascism, and the soviet alternatives to these.

The Development of Bourgeois Democracy and Fascism

Imperialism developed, according to Lenin, late in the 19th century. By 1917 or 1935 it had been in existence only a few decades. Lenin characterized imperialism economically in his work of that name: it was capitalism in its last and highest stage, monopoly capital, a violent, self-contradictory entity (the 'monopoly' aspect according to Lenin being the antithesis of the 'capital' aspect), which at the same time embodied capitalism in its decline, the eve of socialist revolution. Lenin described capitalist society as politically more and more restrictive of bourgeois democracy, as reaction all along the line. This was the clear tendency, discernible to Lenin by at least 1916 when he wrote Imperialism. Fascism had not, by 1916, or even 1924 when Lenin died, become a large-scale phenomenon, but it had shown some of its potential when the Fascists took power in the march on Rome in 1923. In the next years fascist movements grew in many countries of Europe, and the Nazis showed what more could be done when they were invited to power in early 1933 and set about building a "thousand-year reich." The introduction of fascist rule in Italy and Germany, as well as Japan, did not mean that the monopoly capitalists throughout the world had decided or were able to implement this form of rule everywhere. Bourgeois democracy still persisted, restricted, it is true, in direct proportion to the crisis within a specific country. Nonetheless it persisted, did so through WWII, and does so to this day.

To look briefly at a historical analogy, when the bourgeoisie arose in Europe several hundred years ago, it came to economic and political power only over the course of many decades and even centuries. It established capitalist outposts, as in the Italian city-states in the 1400's, only to have these fore-runners swamped in the feudal sea; they didn't last. Even when its economic power became much stronger, relentless, irresistible, it did not all at once and decisively establish its characteristic form of rule, bourgeois democracy. The bourgeoisie had to go through centuries of homage to feudal (monarchical) governmental forms. The bourgeois revolutions did not really even begin until the late 18th century (1789) and even then the bourgeoisie was seldom, and only for relatively brief periods, able to establish "its" form of rule. In France, where as Marx noted revolutionary processes have always been carried through further and more decisively than anywhere else in Europe, the incisive French revolution was still followed by the later return to the Empire of Napoleon the first and Napoleon the second. In England, the land of muddlers, the bourgeoisie adopted the sensible tactic of gradually withdrawing power from the throne while allowing the trappings of power, and in turn placing that power in parliament, into the hands of good men who could do the will of the British bourgeoisie. Germany and Italy didn't even become unified capitalist nations until much later.¹⁴

The central point is that the bourgeoisie had to feel its way over a long period of time to the form of rule most suited to it, which was, in its laissez faire, pre-monopoly period, bourgeois democracy. Objective tendencies forced the consciousness of the bourgeoisie in this direction but it took several centuries for this process to mature. In its final stage, imperialism, what would the appropriate form be? Logically, it would be fascism. But, fascist rule, as the world has seen, entails certain risks, certain dangers, just because it is a more brutal form of rule and rouses previously "content"

sections of the people, not just workers but members of the petty-bourgeoisie as well, to discontent, resistance, and where there is leadership, revolution. So far the bourgeoisie has not opted for the universal application of fascism. Of course, it tries to get the benefits without the risks. Thus it will call all kinds of repressive measures vital parts of its "free society," its "democracy," which is all the more reason that communists must combat these tactics of the bourgeoisie and on no account spread "democratic" mystifications themselves.

In the 1920's and 1930's the bourgeoisie was experimenting with this new form of rule, fascism. The experiments did not yield the most heart-warming results from the point of view of the reactionaries. Yet many countries today are under forms of rule which, while economically not classically fascist, are popularly and more or less correctly termed so, since the militarist rulers act in alliance with and in the interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie, especially its more reactionary sections. Still, one cannot say that overt fascist rule has gained such dominance that it is now the characteristic form of rule under imperialism, since this is not the case in many highly developed capitalist countries. Fascist rule may become characteristic of all of capitalist society, if the working class movement fails to overthrow capitalism, but it is not now so, nor was it in the mid-1930's.

All this to put into perspective what the threat of fascism meant in this period. Fascism had not yet become the characteristic form of rule (nor has it today, though that is the tendency, the objective tendency of the superstructure under imperialism). It was not a distinct, established stage of capitalist rule, though the bourgeoisie had experimented and put it into practice in some situations of extreme crisis. The Comintern, however, did not take the view just outlined, as shown in the paper "The Concept of Social-Fascism." They assumed that if there was any fascist threat, this meant there was a great danger of its coming to power in a country. As Pieck pointed out at the Seventh Congress, there had been a tendency to see fascism even where it did not exist, so all-inclusive was the CI's thrust against fascism. But even the Seventh Congress did not make the distinctions we believe were appropriate and necessary in this period, particularly the distinction between fascism as a distinct form of state rule and the fascist movements (not in power) as tools or instruments of the bourgeoisie.¹⁵

A consequence of the Comintern's conception of fascism and the political superstructure of capitalism, however, was that it tended to magnify the importance of a united front or popular front government as a stay against fascist rule. In fact, as the historical example of the Blum government shows, the fall of a UF or PF government would not necessarily lead to a fascist form of rule. A reactionary, yet not fascist, government replaced Blum.

Another major point to consider in this discussion is a correct estimate of the role of the state under monopoly capitalism. Lenin concluded that even the freest bourgeois democracies like the U.S. had "perfected" their state machinery early on in the century, specifically in the case of the U.S. it was during WWI. The advanced capitalist countries had all established standing armies (and permanent military forces in all branches of the military) and administrative bureaucracies. As a result, Lenin further concluded that this put an end to the possibility, entertained by Marx and Engels, that the transition to socialism might be undertaken peacefully, or by and large peacefully.

Unlike some of our neo-Marxists, who believe the state has only in recent decades taken on a new, more active role as the executive committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie, we see no reason to modify Lenin's conclusion that this phenomenon took shape decisively with the introduction of monopoly capitalism. Government bureaucracies may have become enlarged, but the enlarged role of the state, in comparison with the role of government under laissez faire capitalism, was demonstrable in the first two decades of the century. (In the U.S. the process lagged behind that in the European countries, as shown by the much later introduction of unemployment insurance, welfare measures, care for the elderly, medical care, etc.)

It follows that communists had, under imperialism, even more reason to combat the bourgeois state, which had become, in its new form, a far stronger component of capitalist rule. Under these conditions, the Comintern should have been particularly wary of spreading parliamentary illusions.

Communists had always been in favor of economic developments which, in the era of capitalism, led to the replacement of earlier more primitive means and relations of production, such as were characteristic of slavery and feudalism, by more advanced ones, which capitalism embodied in the course of its historical development. Similarly, communists favored the introduction of more large-scale methods of production, the establishment of trusts, syndicates, etc. from the economic point of view. Lenin's writings on the advantages of capitalist development and state capitalist development (Germany the model) for the Russian revolutionary struggle are very clear on this point.

But, in the era of imperialism and socialist revolution, can communists view developments in the superstructure in the same light? Economically, imperialism is an advance, a "higher stage" of capitalism. But, from our viewpoint, is the increased role of the state, or the development of fascist rule as the tendency of the superstructure under imperialism, desirable? The clear answer would seem to be no, it is not. Simply put, we want to overthrow the state, not the means of production. We want to get rid of the class which controls the means of production and the relations of production, and administers the state through its agents. Its replacement, the working class, controls the means of production and establishes new relations of production over a period of time. It also administers the state, chiefly through its vanguard.

The upshot is, since we want to smash the state, we don't support or promulgate measures, through our role in parliament or the cabinet, which have the net effect of strengthening the political-economic capitalist system. This doesn't mean we are against certain reforms, or measures like medical care, unemployment insurance, etc., but we don't make it our view that such measures, or even somewhat more radical ones, constitute anything more than reforms; we still maintain our perspective of destroying the upper and lower organs of the bourgeois state, e.g. parliament and municipal government, the intelligence service and the local police, the military.

We have devoted some space to the above points in order to outline the framework within which the Comintern should have acted on the question of state power. We have indicated that in countries of the second and third kind (by the 1928 Programme), we see no major theoretical difficulties in the support for or participation in intermediate forms of government by the com-

munists in that country, regardless of the threat of fascism. The threat of fascist rule, as we said, increases, not decreases the responsibilities of communists in relation to the defense of bourgeois democratic rights, which may mean support for or participation in an intermediate form of government. Here too, of course, the communists must exercise strict caution. They cannot be put in the position of taking responsibility before the masses of workers and peasants for purely parliamentary measures, for nominal government, but must have, along with their allies, material bases of power such as military units, militia, a Red Army, the backing of soviets, etc. The conditions Dimitrov outlines, which come close to representing the Spanish situation, as we will see in a later paper, must be amplified; even more strict conditions are necessary, as we have indicated. But we do not reject out of hand any support for or participation in governments of an intermediate kind in such countries; we hold this is the Trotskyist deviation on the question, one which, as in Spain, would lead to the defeat of the working class and its allies.

In relation to the imperialist countries, the main area of theoretical uncertainty, we have outlined our view earlier. That perspective is that while such participation is not impossible, or wrong in principle, we think communists should have viewed it then as an extremely rare possibility, something of very low likelihood. The main perspective for the imperialist countries must be a one-stage revolution, even under conditions of an internal threat of fascism. The other perspective, which in fact is (or approximates) the CPUSA's two-stage anti-monopoly coalition, a form of democracy of a new kind, must be rejected by those who claim to be anti-revisionist. The Seventh Congress did not take the perspective we outlined; it laid the groundwork for the two-stage theory of the CPUSA. It did not make the distinctions we do here among three kinds of countries. It did not go into the possible economic and political tasks in countries with different levels of economic and political development. Instead it postulated UF and PF governments for any country, and the conditions Dimitrov went into with such "exact consideration" didn't even address these fundamental national differences. In effect, Dimitrov did not recognize the law of uneven development under capitalism, and the acquiescence by Stalin in the proceedings of the Congress meant that he too, for all his polemics against Trotsky on the question of uneven development, made the same mistake at this time.

F. Did the line of the Seventh Congress represent a strategic or tactical reorientation of the line of the international communist movement?

We raise this question, which will be the final one we will take up in this analysis, because we believe there was a mistaken view on it dominant at the Congress and because in the anti-revisionist movement in the U.S. today, the same mistaken evaluation has great currency.

The speakers at the Congress thought they were instituting a tactical change. As the resolution on "tactics" put it, the main task was to establish a united fighting front of the working masses against fascism, and to do this it was necessary to apply "uf tactics in a new manner." (Proceedings, p. 574) Other examples indicating that on the whole the Congress believed it was undertaking a tactical realignment, not a basic change of strategy or a revision of fundamental principles of Leninism, are Dimitrov's speaking of the Congress' having revised communist "policy and tactics" (p. 357), of having developed new

"tactical lines" (358), and of having addressed the "tactical problems confronting us" (364). Clement Gottwald (Czechoslovakia) said too that the communists were not changing their "principles," only their "forms" and "methods."

Today, in our movement, the San-Diego collective called the Committee for a Proletarian Party continues this 40-year perspective when it writes:

Historically, the world communist movement has always considered the united front a tactic designed to achieve goals short of proletarian revolution, and not a strategic plan for the disposition of forces for the revolutionary seizure of capitalist state power. (CPP, "Principles of Unity," p. 23)

and

The united front has always been considered by the world communist movement to be a tactical means to prepare the conditions for the success of proletarian revolution, but never a substitute for struggling directly for socialism itself. (CPP, "Strategy and Tactics of the Proletariat in the Era of Imperialism," p. 24)

In support of these assertions, CPP quotes Dimitrov from his concluding speech to the Seventh Congress:

Ours has been a Congress of a new tactical reorientation for the Communist International. Standing firmly on the impregnable position of Marxism-Leninism, which has been confirmed by the whole experience of the international labor movement, and above all by the victories of the great October Revolution, our Congress, acting in the spirit and guided by the method of living Marxism-Leninism, has reshaped the tactical lines of the Communist International to meet the changed world situation. (Dimitrov, The United Front Against Fascism, Gamma edition, p. 49)

In other words, don't worry, folks, these changes are only tactical, and general congratulations all around!

While the CPP has correctly put forward in its pamphlets that the strategy for revolution in the U.S. is not and cannot be the "united front" (which has been declared the only strategy for revolution in this country by the opportunist forces, chiefly the RCP and the CPML), still the CPP is here covering for the errors made by the international communist movement stemming from the reorientation in line made by the Seventh Congress. Opportunism is often concealed by the plea, It's only a tactical change.

Other communists, communists writing in 1935, were not so sure that the reorientation which was in the works for the Seventh Congress would be "only tactical." The Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) published an editorial in December 1934 on the coming Congress, one of the materials developed by the ECCI for discussion prior to the Congress. The title of this widely distributed piece was "From Shaken Stabilisation to the Second Round of Revolutions and Wars." The article warns:

In proportion as the new tactics of the united front are not understood

and adopted WITH THE ABSENCE OF A CLEAR OBJECTIVE, the Right danger arises. This is the danger of separating the tactics of the united front from our strategic tasks. (Communist International, Vol. XI, No. 24, p. 958)

The article describes "our strategic task" as winning the majority of the working class for the direct struggle for power. It says we must subordinate our tactics to our strategic task. Though warning of the "Left" danger, it says that the Right danger is still the main one, as at the Sixth Congress (1928). It further notes, eight months before the Congress that the French CP had not been careful enough in its application of the new united front tactics; it hadn't, for example, raised those points that "distinguish the communists from the Social Democrats." Also, the Belgian comrades had made "the grossest opportunist mistakes" (not specified) in their intercourse with the Belgian young socialists.

As we noted in an earlier paper, there hasn't been consistent usage in the communist movement of the terms "strategy," "tactics," "program," etc. Because Lenin seldom used the term "strategy," Dimitrov was able to cite Lenin and claim that the changes under consideration were tactical, even when the issue was the question of state power. This was not Lenin's fault, since he was consistent and principled in his discussions of state power, and there is something to be said for maintaining his terminology, since it avoids the confusion the communist movement has gotten into over the differences between strategy and tactics, over what is a strategic and what is a tactical re-orientation. Stalin, on the other hand, nearly always employs both "strategy" and "tactics," even when speaking of Lenin's views. He is careful, however, in discussing the taking of state power, to use the term "strategy"; also, "strategic turns," "strategic periods." We believe his usage, too, at least until 1935, after which he had almost nothing to say on the subject, was consistent with Leninism. Either terminology can be adopted, but fundamental principles involved in the seizure of state power cannot be reduced to questions of tactics, which, as we believe we have shown, is just what Dimitrov and the Seventh Congress did. A view which speaks of a choice between bourgeois democracy and fascism, and omits proletarian democracy, postpones it to an indefinite future, cannot be termed merely a "tactical" reorientation. Dimitrov was fairly explicit about the need for a modification of the communist line on the ascent in seizing state power.

We have said almost nothing about what really was the tactical change in the line of the Comintern, the application of united front tactics in a new manner, and the introduction of popular front (multi-class) tactics. This was because we felt the central point was to show the opportunism of the Congress on the question of making revolution, on the seizing of state power, a position which has so far been adopted only by Trotskyists (a point of which we are well aware), not by the mainstream of the communist movement (which degenerated rapidly following the Seventh Congress) and not by the leading parties of the last decades, the CPC and the PLA. We believe this emphasis and detail was necessary because of the great resistance this appraisal will encounter, yet we believe it is the only correct one.

Nonetheless, we want to be clear that because of the threat of fascist rule, the broadening of tactics that was adopted was called for: a broadening so that social-democrats, both rank and file and some leaders, could be won to united action against the threat of fascism. And, based on that change in

united front tactics¹⁶, the mobilizing and organizing of the petty-bourgeoisie in united action for the same purpose: to resist internal or external fascist takeover. The latter were the popular front tactics. This had to be done with the perspective of communists and the working class taking the initiative, maintaining their own positions and independence, and very clearly this was not the main result. The broadened tactics were inflated far beyond what a principled reorientation called for. Even here, in other words, the Congress sanctioned and the parties instituted opportunist lines, tactical opportunism. But the idea of a tactical reorientation, both of the united front and the (new) popular front, was correct and certainly necessary.

G. Summary

The united front government as proposed at the VII Congress of the Comintern was not a principled form of transition to the proletarian dictatorship. For one thing, the three proposed conditions for the formation of such a government were completely inadequate. Also, the exact nature of the "united front" government was unclear. How did it differ from the several workers' governments discussed at earlier congresses? The Congress, under the active leadership of Georgi Dimitrov, didn't say. As to the class nature of the uf government, the Congress was satisfied with the one-word description "proletarian", not analyzing what this meant concretely if both the social-democratic party and the communist party were "in power".

Marxist-Leninists do not reject all participation in forms of government short of the proletarian dictatorship. The "ascent" of which Lenin spoke cannot always be carried through in a relatively short time period, as happened in Russia in 1917. Accordingly, Marxist-Leninists have held that communists may propose and take part in the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, the joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes under the leadership of the working class, or other forms that the concrete conditions may require.

This was the perspective adopted by the Comintern in its 1928 Programme, where three kinds of countries were recognized and the main economic and political tasks in those countries outlined. Simply put, the prospect for the advanced capitalist countries was one-stage revolution, for the colonial and semi-colonial countries it was two-stage revolution, while for the less advanced capitalist countries either prospect was possible.

The rise of fascism, especially in the early 1930's, introduced a new factor into the situation. This was the open terroristic dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in several countries, a form of rule qualitatively different from bourgeois democracy.

Historically, it took several centuries for the bourgeois democratic republic to become the dominant political form. This was the form best suited for the bourgeoisie in the period of competitive capitalism. Similarly, we would not expect fascist rule, the form that objective developments drive the bourgeoisie toward in the period of imperialism, to become the dominant form in a short period of time. Nor did this happen. The bourgeoisie experimented with fascist rule in the 20's and 30's but the results were "disappointing" for those bourgeoisies which implemented it.

When imperialism came into existence, the state took on a decidedly greater role. The fascist state was an attempt to carry this process further. While communists have recognized the progressive role that capitalism has played economically (and to some extent politically), one of the basic tenets of Marxism has been opposition to the capitalist state in whatever form, and accordingly Marxist-Leninists have not supported measures which strengthen that state or prettify it.

The principal conclusions for the imperialist states, which is where the theoretical treatment by the Comintern was weakest, are:

- Communists must fight the attempt to introduce fascism and for this purpose united front and popular front tactics are vital.
- It is possible that a situation may arise in which communists may have to support or take part in a governmental form which falls short of the dictatorship of the working class, but this is not the main prospect and should not be put forward as the likely line of development.
- Conditions for such support or participation must be considerably more stringent than those Dimitrov and the VII Congress proposed. (We have touched on them in our criticisms of Dimitrov's conditions above.)
- The strategic prospect for communists, in short, must remain a one-stage, socialist revolution in the imperialist countries, even with the threat of fascism. Tactically, popular front tactics will be useful and in all likelihood essential.
- The reorientation in line introduced by the VII Congress was a strategic reorientation, and it put forward a revisionist reorientation on the question of seizing state power.

H. Footnotes

1. In this period (c. 1919-1924) Lenin often referred to Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the basic or fundamental principles of communism. These were not the only two principles Lenin upheld, of course. As Stalin pointed out, one of Lenin's great historic merits was that he was the most consistent upholder of policies based on principle, even when he was virtually alone in doing so. These policies covered varied questions and circumstances, and Lenin often referred to the principles involved in each of them. From just this, as we have not made a comprehensive study, we take it that Lenin held there were principles of varying importance, principles at different levels of revolutionary activity, like the two fundamental ones cited above, and lesser, tactical ones. The communist movement lacks a thorough study of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao on this subject; terminology is not consistent among even these best leaders of the working class movement, and the most rank opportunists, like the Trotskyists, will insist their policy is based on pure proletarian principle. Such a study should include the relation among principles, strategical and tactical considerations, and compromises. Of course, the most vital things can be learned from study of the lines and practice of leading communists and parties, but it will be necessary also to have a unified theoretical and terminological approach toward these questions as the science of Marxism, which is monist, progresses. The U.S. movement, in particular, still has a primitive understanding of questions of principle, a by-product of its failure to seriously take up questions of theory.
2. W. Pieck's report to the Congress was the one exception; here there was some willingness to ascribe the errors to their source, to engage in some self-criticism on behalf of the higher Comintern leadership.
3. The next two reports will examine the difficult concrete "anti-fascist" situations communists faced in France and Spain and the policies adopted. Here we are analyzing the theoretical framework laid out by Dimitrov and the VII Congress.
4. It might be argued: Doesn't the concept of two-stage revolution contradict Lenin's view on the ascent? How can we say some revolutions will be two-stage and others one-stage in advance, before any ascent begins. We take up this question in some detail on pp 244-247, focussing on the views of Lenin and the Programme of the Comintern. Further on this point: in our understanding those who have put forward the need for two-stage revolution have done so not out of hesitancy, reformism, Right opportunism, etc. but out of the experience of their own revolution. The Chinese party has been one of the foremost models in this respect, and the perspective of a protracted military struggle and a new democratic stage emerged as the correct line, forged through the practice of millions of people, after the failure of the famous three "Left" lines, all of which were governed by the perspective of pushing the "ascent," insisting on the ascent, even though hundreds of millions of peasants were not ready for such a quick ascent. The theory of new democracy, quite influential for other revolutionary parties in colonial and semi-colonial countries, evolved after the ascent had begun, and was based on the revolutionary practice of the masses. In contrast, the experience of the other leading Marxist party of

the last decades, the PLA, shows that the transition to the proletarian dictatorship can occur relatively swiftly, in a peasant-majority country, even growing out of a situation of national liberation, which tends to foster patriotic illusions that benefit the old rulers; in other words, where conditions permit and the party pursues a correct policy.

5. Trotsky explicitly rejected the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." See Leon Trotsky, Writings 1938-39, Pathfinder Press, p. 52.
6. We should keep in mind, too, that both at, and even more so after, the Seventh Congress, the distinction between united and popular front was not always--by any means upheld. Often "united front tactics" was used when "popular front tactics" was meant; the reverse happened as well. Probably because of the great emphasis by the Chinese CP on "united front tactics" by which they meant multi-class tactics, (a usage sanctioned by the Comintern in the 1920's), and the great prestige of the Chinese revolution in the anti-revisionist movement in the U.S., all sections of this movement have adopted this terminology. As noted, the "leading" (largest and noisiest) groups, like the RCP and the CPML, have even taken over this tactic (Mao never refers to it as a strategy, even for Chinese conditions) and elevated it, on no grounds whatsoever, to the definitive strategy for revolution in the U.S. Our position is that the original Comintern usage should be re-adopted. "United front" tactics should refer, especially in an imperialist country like the U.S.A., to tactics within the working class. The term for multi-class tactics introduced by the Seventh Congress is still valid: popular front tactics. Now that the more principled sections of the anti-revisionist movement have broken with the "theory of three worlds" and the present Chinese leadership, we believe it is essential for this section of the movement to closely examine those aspects of the line and practice of the CPC and the PLA prior to the death of Mao which are wrong or have caused harm to the U.S. communist movement through misapplication. One clear example, we are convinced, is the taking over from the Chinese party of the united front "strategy" and terminology, and its application to US conditions. Until this error is rectified, the communist movement here will not be on course in one of the most critical areas: the strategy for revolution in this country.
7. See for example Franz Borkenau, The Communist International, chapter 21.
8. Fourth Congress of the Comintern: Abridged Report, p. 87.
9. Whatever erroneous lines and deviations the Trotskyites tried to inflict on the world movement in this period--and they were certainly considerable --we think there is some accuracy in the criticism a writer for the Fourth International made of the "new" kind of government proposed by the VII Congress:

"What we have presented here is not the slogan of the workers' government as a consequence of the united front policy in a revolutionary situation. It is not the idea of Soviets as the highest form of the united front under the conditions in which the proletariat enters the stage of struggle for power. No! What we have presented here is the idea of support of coalition governments. Dimitroff understood it in

that sense, and support of coalition government has now become the declared policy of the Comintern. Wherein does this differ in content from the social democratic conception of coalition governments, aside from its form of presentation? Now it is called a 'bold and determined course toward the united front of the working class.'" (Arne Swabeck, "The Real Meaning of the United Front, The New International, October 1935, p. 180)

We cite this entire paragraph since it brings out an accurate criticism and also contains the fluff and inaccuracy which characterizes almost all of Trotsky's and the Trotskyists' writings from this period (and of course other periods as well). The accuracy is pretty much contained in the term "coalition government." The UF government was not "different in principle" from the old "workers' governments" and it was not "different in principle" from the social-democratic conception of coalition governments. That this was so will be further shown in our report on the application of the UF and PF policy by the French party, a criticism that we hold is valid even though the PCF did not actually formally enter the Blum government. As for the fluff and inaccuracy, we will only cite two statements here. "All the delegates to the Seventh Congress understood it in that sense"--this is fluff, a rhetorical flourish which cannot be substantiated and is very likely untrue. "Support of coalition government has now become the declared policy of the Comintern." --This is inaccurate; the Comintern nowhere made such a statement, as far as we are aware, and Swabeck does not cite the statement of this "declared policy." The Comintern did take a bit more care than Swabeck gives it credit for in formulating its policy on the question.

10. See, for example, Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Peking ed., pp. 97, 101, 107.
11. Tasks which capitalism sets itself to fulfill, such as overcoming feudal economic relations.
12. The Comintern did not put forward the form the Chinese CP was to later adopt, but it is our view that there is nothing wrong in theory with the idea of a joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes, with the working class in the leading role. The concept is an expansion of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, suited to Chinese conditions. It had applicability, as the CCP claimed, to other countries which had been semi-colonial, semi-feudal, etc.
13. In the post-WWII period we encounter the phenomenon of "People's Democracies" and other views on the state and its transformation which we will not go into here. Based on preliminary investigation we believe the ideas associated with European "People's Democracy" stemmed from the new perspective arrived at by the Seventh Congress and raise serious theoretical problems on the transition to socialism which the more principled sections of the communist movement in this country have not dealt with. Neither the CPC (before the revisionist seizure of power in October 1976) nor the PLA has adequately addressed these questions or other issues posed by the turn in the communist movement which the Seventh Congress initiated, as far as we are aware.

14. In fact, Germany so much lacked a bourgeois democratic tradition that the leadership of the communist movement adopted policies for Germany in 1945, after its defeat and occupation, based on the assumption that the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1848 had not been completed!
15. This concept has been grounded historically in our paper, "The Concept of 'Social-Fascism'" and we will not pursue the point further here.
16. Tactics within the working class, though as we have said, the leaders of social democracy were not representatives of the basic interests of the working class and were in many ways petty-bourgeois.

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