

Toward the Study of Fascization in the United States

(A Discussion Article)

By F. BROWN

TO analyze correctly the rapid development of fascism in the United States, to draw the necessary conclusions for the working class, we must see the relation of the fascist trends in the United States in the light of the developments of fascism in Italy, Germany and other countries. This is necessary in order to mobilize the masses into a powerful united front, not only to check these fascist developments, but to wage a powerful offensive against the attack on the living standards and the democratic rights of the working class. Before going into such an analysis, let us begin with a fundamental question. What is fascism? On an international scale we reach the following definition: *Fascism is the open dictatorship of monopoly capital.* Now, what is its form; how does the political superstructure, the bourgeois State, express itself in the form of fascism? At this point let us consider the main characteristics of fascism: (1) the abolition of the bourgeois democratic parliament or of all its powers; (2) rule through one Party, namely the fascist party as the unified party of capitalism; this implies the unification of the bourgeoisie; (3) the mass support of large sections of the petty bourgeoisie (gained through demagoguery and small concessions), as well as of the most backward elements among the proletariat; (4) suppression of all working-class organizations, particularly the Communist Party and the trade unions; (5) a more intensive exploitation of the working class; (6) the herding of the working class into fascist unions which become instruments of the government to impose on the masses the conditions dictated by monopoly capital; (7) the development of chauvinism to its highest expression, in other words, militarization to the highest degree in preparation for imperialist wars; (8) the effort to bring the church into line with fascist doctrine.

Fascism wins mass support through its demagogic program, which step by step drops its initial demagogic cloak to appear finally in its open form, namely, as the open dictatorship of monopoly

capital. This does not mean that fascism finally gives up demagoguery altogether, but at the later stage there are other forms of demagoguery, such as the Corporate State, the concept of a "higher" social justice, etc.

At this point let us analyze the development of fascism in Italy and in Germany, so that we may see the extent to which the development of fascism in the United States is following fundamentally the same course.

I

In Italy, fascism was a product of the first post-War stage of the general crisis. It came into power after the defeat of the proletariat as the result of the bankruptcy and reformist ideology of its Socialist Party leadership. The Italian Socialist Party, after having joined the Third International under the pressure of the masses who wanted to follow in the path of their Russian brothers, not only refused to submit to the 21 conditions, but brought about the Livorno split in 1921, thus dividing the forces of the working class at a moment when fascism, still weak, was growing stronger with the support of the bourgeoisie. Fascism appeared in Italy in 1920 in the form of a party with its own organ. At its head was the ex-editor of the central organ of the Socialist Party, well-known for the part he played in the Romagna Red Week. The insignificant Fascist Party came forward with a demagogic program, including proposals for the reduction of individual capital to 100,000 lire, the abolition of the monarchy, the revision of the Versailles Treaty and of the Constituent Assembly. While showing, demagogically, an anti-capitalist, anti-bankers face, to the point of supporting in words the movement for the seizure of factories in the north of Italy, its attack was aimed against the working class, against the Socialist Party, and later on (after the Livorno split), mainly against the Communist Party, the trade unions and the cooperatives. This was done under the guise of "destroying" Bolshevism. While the fascists conducted a demagogic campaign against the weaknesses of the Italian bourgeoisie, which was already in the throes of the general crisis and which came out of the Versailles conference with empty hands, the bourgeoisie supported fascism and protected its drive against the working class and its institutions with every instrument of bourgeois government. The fascists also were able to capitalize on some of the fundamental errors of the Socialist Party, as, for example, its slogan of socialization of the land. Thus, the fascists were able to win the support of the poor farmers and agrarian workers, who after the war, were fighting for more land, for the land which was promised them by the bourgeoisie in 1915.

It was also on the basis of its demagoguery for a "stronger" Italy that would have a "place in the sun", that fascism gained support among the petty bourgeoisie of the city and countryside.

The bourgeoisie was divided into various parties representing the interests of the various branches of capital. While they disagreed with some of the fascist methods, they agreed fundamentally with the fascists on the necessity of crushing the proletariat. Each of the capitalist parties not only helped the fascist party in its struggle against the working class, but one by one entered the one party of capital—the Fascist Party. Only a few impotent liberals attempted to resist the fascist attacks on the bourgeois-democratic form of rule, and these left the battleground quickly (Nitti, Sturzo and others).

Between 1920 and 1925, then, the bourgeois parties in parliament representing various interests inside the sphere of monopoly capital were uniting into a bloc with fascism against the toiling masses represented by the Communists, Socialists, and Left-Wing Catholic deputies. While there was no united front of these representatives of the toiling masses resisting fascism (the position of the Socialist Party at the time of the Matteotti assassination is known by its Aventino policy, its defeatist retreat from parliament and its previous policy of an armistice with the fascists when the street battles were taking the character of civil war), nevertheless, in the factories and in the streets the toiling masses, under the influence of the Communists, were able to unite in struggle in common actions against fascism.

At this point, let us make a brief and general analogy between Germany and Italy in the post-War period.

Germany left the World War a defeated country. Italy, on the contrary, was counted among the bloc of the victors. In reality, Italian capitalism suffered severe losses during the World War, which explains the slogan for the revision of the Versailles Treaty launched by the fascists, one of the slogans around which the fascist party aimed to unite the bourgeoisie and get the support of the petty-bourgeois masses. While in 1919 a tremendous sentiment was created around the Wilson program, especially by the reformist leaders after Versailles, fascism developed a counter-sentiment, especially among the petty-bourgeois masses, when the Wilson program no longer satisfied the wishes of Italian capitalism. In spite of the defeat it suffered as a result of the treacherous role of the reformist leaders, especially in the trade-union field (D'Aragona, Colombino), and in spite of the numerical weakness of the Communist Party, the working class was still a power in Italy in 1922-3-4, and fascism had to subjugate it inch by inch in continual battles such as took place at Parma and Molinella. Hundreds of battles

took place in all the provinces, in the course of which over 5,000 workers, among them hundreds of Communists gave their lives resisting fascism. Fascism was in power for three years before it dared suppress the Communist and other political parties (including the bourgeois parties which were, however, in practice, already part and parcel of fascism). This shows that in spite of the tremendous apparatus of the fascist party, which had gained control of the governmental apparatus as well, the Communist Party and to some extent the Socialist Party, as well as the Left-Wing of the Catholic Party, were still connected with large masses.

In this brief analysis, we note a fundamental factor—namely, the existence of a fascist party which comes forward at its inception with a demagogic program and is supported by heavy industry, by the landlords, by the brothers Perone (the Italian Thyssen), modifying its program month by month until, as it takes power, it manifests itself in its complete form of open capitalist dictatorship, although still camouflaged in the formula of a Corporate State (in which the workers are only formally represented by appointed fascist leaders).

In Germany, fascism developed in somewhat different conditions. Social-Democracy was in power for years in the post-War period, and was supported by the bourgeoisie. Yet here also we find fascism following the same trends as in Italy. Here also we find a party with a demagogic program, a party that grew by absorbing the bourgeois parties, and in the end embraced practically all the supporters of the bourgeois parties, all of whom confronted a working class divided under the leadership of the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties. What are the essential points of the German fascist program? The abolition of the Versailles Treaty; the abolition of the Weimar Constitution which was weakening the position of the German bourgeoisie in the international arena and preventing the reconstitution of the old Reich; the abolition of the bourgeois-democratic parliament; State control of industry; compulsory military service; suppression of the Jewish people; and above all, the "destruction" of Bolshevism, Marxism (concretely, the Communist Party, the trade unions, the cooperative institutions, etc.), and the development of super-nationalism.

While still claiming to be for this program, the German fascists in practice have conveniently forgotten, for example, the State control of industry. Here, as in Italy, we see fascism making a gesture of attacking the bankers, while in reality launching a systematic attack against the working class and its parties, and supporting the bankers to the limit.

In a comparison between the two fascist programs, the Italian

and German, we find the persecution of Jews missing in the Italian program. This is to be explained by the fact that Italian fascism could not have conducted a sham attack against the bankers by attacking the Jews, who in Italy constitute a negligible number. By outlawing the Masons, however, and by digging up the "glory" of ancient Rome, etc., the fascists have developed chauvinism to its highest expression. Moreover, in its development the original fascist program has undergone modifications in Italy, whereas the German fascists purport to be carrying out their original program.

In Germany as in Italy, Social-Democracy paved the way for fascism. In Germany, as in Italy, fascist tendencies expressed themselves also outside of the official fascist party. The various German governments, especially the one led by Bruening in which the Social-Democracy participated in coalition, took all kinds of measures to suppress the struggle of the masses, to lower the standard of living, to suppress the workers' rights, curtailing as well the rights granted by the Weimar Constitution. German Social-Democracy did not pave the way for fascism, but in its various theories and practices of class-collaboration and of arbitration, itself brought forward fascist trends to check the struggle of the masses. In Germany as in Italy, *fascism appeared as the method of saving capitalism from the crisis at the expense of the workers, of saving capitalism from proletarian revolution.* This was its fundamental purpose.

III

Now, how does fascism express itself in the United States? Before answering this question we have to compare first the differences between American, Italian, and German capitalism during the post-War period. American capitalism not only was stronger than German and Italian capitalism, but in the United States the elements of the Versailles Treaty were missing. The United States was one of the victorious imperialist Powers that sucked the gold of all the other belligerents. During the World War it expanded its industrial productive apparatus to the point where this enormous apparatus laid the basis, not only for a crisis in the United States itself (due to the inherent contradictions of the capitalist mode of production), but for the intensification of the crisis on a world scale.

In the United States capitalism had not yet been confronted by a coordinated attack of large masses of workers under the direct leadership of the Communist Party to the proportion that German capitalism was. And today, although large masses are in motion, the struggle of the masses is much more split up than in Germany. The last elections, for example, show that, despite the increase of class conscious votes for the Communist Party, the masses' will to

struggle was divided between the support they gave to the Epic movement, the Farmer-Labor Party, the Commonwealth Builders, the Progressives and the Socialist Party. Yet the movement of the masses in the economic field has taken on such proportion, and such a drive for unity, that in spite of the various influences played by the various bourgeois parties of the "Left", American capitalism feels the growing danger of the mass upsurge. This was openly expressed in the speech of General Johnson, in which he said that a year ago the United States was on the verge of a revolution. This explains not only the measures against the working class taken under the demagogic cloak of the N.R.A., but also the measures taken by the McCormick-Dickstein Bill presented in Congress and in the bills presented in a dozen states for the suppression of the Communist Party or its removal from the ballot.

While in the United States the mass Socialist Party that was a factor in Germany, and to some degree in Italy, does not exercise a mass influence to the same extent, which means that a parallel role, in the absolute sense, is missing as compared with German or Italian Social-Democracy, the leaders of the American Federation of Labor in the United States, in cooperation with and supported by the leaders of the Socialist Party, are playing the role of the German and Italian Social-Democracy in paving the way for fascism.

VI

It is important to note the position of leading Socialist spokesmen. Algernon Lee, for example, who has taken Norman Thomas's place in the *New Leader*, says in the March 16 issue of that organ: "I do not believe that there is any specific danger of fascism in the United States. Long and Coughlin are but two more in a long list of demagogues. . . ."

Trotsky goes so far as to say that in the United States "the revolution will be smoother in character than the Russian Revolution", and, "as to comparatively few opponents of Soviet Revolution, one can trust to American inventive genius". (*Liberty* magazine, March 23.) In other words, in the U.S., Trotsky's "revolution" will take the character of a Sunday picnic at which the Wall Street robbers, the Morgans, Mellons, Fords and Rockefellers, "converted" by Trotsky's articles in *Liberty*, will appear with flaming red carnations in their buttonholes. What better proof that they are paving the way to fascism?

This is taking place despite the increasing attack of Roosevelt against the A. F. of L. unions. The masses in the trade unions have started to fight over the heads of the bureaucratic leadership, as is evidenced by the increasing strength of the rank-and-file movement in the A. F. of L. under the leadership of the Communists;

the bureaucrats are finding it increasingly difficult to hold back the struggles of the masses. Roosevelt's aim, in attacking the A. F. of L., is to hold these bureaucrats in line with the administration will.

One important element that has not yet appeared in the development of fascism in the United States is an openly-organized Fascist Party. The Khaki Shirts, the Blue Shirts, the Silver Shirts, and other similar manifestations, such as the proposal made by Wall Street bankers to General Butler, were all abortive measures in the hands, so to speak, of dilettantes. Yet it is important to note that even without a party the developing fascist process is going on very rapidly. This offensive expresses itself in the general attack against the standards of living of the masses, in the increasing political suppression of the democratic rights of the masses; in the drive for company unionization and wholesale injunctions; in the growing attacks against the poor farmers, the agricultural workers, the tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the South. It expresses itself in the growing attack against the Negro people and the foreign-born masses; the subtle spreading of anti-Semitism; in the wave of American chauvinism, accompanied by a more intensive militarization drive (new armaments, C.C.C. camps, etc.), and in the sharpening of the specific attacks against the Communist Party. It is clear, however, that the fascization offensive expresses itself primarily through the N.R.A., the Roosevelt government policies veiled with the demagoguery of "Security for All".

IV

The analysis of the N.R.A. in the Eighth Party Convention Resolution of the Communist Party has been eloquently confirmed by recent developments. The N.R.A. is revealing itself so openly as an instrument of fascization, that already differentiations are taking place in the ruling camp, expressed by "liberal" tendencies against Roosevelt in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Outside the N.R.A., fascism finds expression not only in the various grouplets springing up everywhere under the stimulus of the Chambers of Commerce and of banking groups, as well as in an enforcement of all the reactionary measures on the statute books, particularly in the South, but also by three other currents, namely: Huey Long's "Share-the-Wealth Program", Father Coughlin's "National Union for Social Justice", and Hearst's attack against the Communist Party. Here we see the division of labor in the forces of fascism: Huey Long's "Share-the-Wealth" program, speaking in favor of the petty bourgeoisie and sounding very much like the original demagogic program of Mussolini; Coughlin's program, while supposed to be aimed at Wall Street, while making a show of attacking the advisers of Roosevelt, actually attempting to unify

the most reactionary forces in Congress; Hearst, venomously attacking the Communist Party and the Soviet Union and demanding the destruction of Bolshevism, utilizing counter-revolutionary Trotskyites and Socialists like Harry Lang for the purpose. *Here we have a fascist combination outside of and parallel with the N.R.A.*

The problem before us is not only to analyze these various tendencies, but to see where these tendencies are leading to determine to what extent these fascist manifestations have a common base. While it is premature to predict that in a short time we will be confronted with a fascist party with a full-fledged fascist program, we must face the possibility.

V

Through what channels will such a party be developed? There is the possibility that under the pressure of monopoly capital, a reactionary bloc will be formed by closer ties between the reactionary forces of the Democratic and Republican Parties, working within the N.R.A. Because the leader of such a bloc would be discredited in the eyes of the masses, the bloc would seek some popular figure like Coughlin (although it is clear that the priest himself will not be a presidential candidate). Such a bloc would reinforce the fascist line of the N.R.A. or could speed the process of fascization without the demagogy of the N.R.A., using other demagogic covers and eventually the Constitution itself by passing, under the cover of the Constitution, new laws fitting their needs for open dictatorial powers, Concretely, the reinforcement of all the existing reactionary laws, plus the new ones that would be passed, through the various loopholes in the Constitution, would abrogate all civil rights embodied in the Constitution, *would give more power to the instruments of the capitalist government.*

Thus we would have a fascist party in embryo as part and parcel of the administration. Then there is the possibility that a broad fascist movement, without taking the form of an organized party in the first stage, can develop outside of the N.R.A., seemingly in opposition to the New Deal. In its development this movement would bring together the more reactionary elements of both major parties, Republican and Democratic. Such a maneuver is being directed by the American Thyssens with Coughlin as the mask of the movement.

Furthermore, there is the possibility of a new wave of promises by the Roosevelt administration as a means of attempting to stop the growing disillusionment with the Democratic Party, with the aim of gaining the support of the so-called progressive elements (the Olsons, the LaFollettes, etc.), and so preventing the move for a third party. In this case a new demagogy would cover the fascist

trends of the Roosevelt administration, and the fascization process of the N.R.A. would continue under the mask of liberalism and constitutionality.

Notwithstanding these maneuvers certain things are clear: masses will desert the Roosevelt camp; the disillusionment with the Republican and Democratic Parties will continue to spread and increase; a third party of the bourgeoisie with a "Left" liberal program, built by the elements unwilling to support Roosevelt, is possible.

VI

At this point let us look back for a moment. In Germany, in addition to the fascist party, fascist tendencies were manifested by the various governments preceding fascism: in fact, by the Social-Democratic governments themselves (class collaboration, arbitration, police repression of workers' struggles, etc.). The fascist program was supported by the Nationalist Party, an offspring of fascism, to a large extent, especially in its attacks on the one hand against the working class and Bolshevism (the Communist Party), and on the other hand against the Weimar Constitution. Yet the main trend of the fascization offensive was carried through by the Fascist Party, financed by heavy industry. In the United States, as stated before, such a party is missing. *The center of gravity of the fascization is found in the Roosevelt government itself.* While the American bourgeoisie, like the German bourgeoisie before Hitler, is marching on the road to fascism, the development is taking a different course. The Weimar Constitution in Germany, as the outcome of the bourgeois revolution of 1918, did not suit either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, inasmuch as the aim of the bourgeoisie was "back to the old Reich", and the aim of the most advanced part of the proletariat was—the *proletarian revolution*, for which they fought in 1918 but of which they were robbed by the betrayal of Social-Democracy. However, despite the fact that they fought for the proletarian revolution and against the Weimar Constitution, the workers continued to fight for the civil rights gained in decades of struggle.

Now we can ask the question: To what extent do the masses in the United States believe in the Constitution? While it is true that the Constitution in the United States has to all intents and purposes been reduced to a hollow mockery, the masses still see the Bill of Rights in that Constitution. This means that while the fascization process going on will try to utilize the Constitution as a legal cover for further fascization, for reactionary laws that will be passed to coincide with the open dictatorial aims of monopoly capital, there will be masses who will struggle for the upholding of the democratic guarantees in the Bill of Rights. So that, in the development

of the fascization process in the United States, the problem will arise: What kind of constitution? A constitution that conceals the open dictatorship of monopoly, or a constitution for a workers' democracy, developing out of the mass struggle, that will safeguard the democratic rights already gained and will extend them through the revolutionary struggle for real workers' democracy? In other words, open dictatorship, fascism—or the proletarian State. At this point we have to consider that on this basis of the struggle around civil rights the united front will be extended to reach those elements that will fight for these rights, that will identify themselves with the right to organize, the right of free speech, of assembly, of a free press, etc.

The fundamental trend in the United States, it is clear, is the orientation of the American bourgeoisie towards fascism. This is expressed through the Roosevelt administration primarily, and by the Longs, Coughlins and other reactionary forces secondly.

This means that while our task today is to follow up all fascist manifestations and unmask them day by day, the main problem is the development of the struggle of the masses on the economic and political field, the development of the struggle against the lowering of the standard of living in connection with the struggle for workers' rights, showing in the course of this struggle how the process of fascization leads directly to the open terrorist dictatorship of monopoly capitalism.

Day by day we have to show to the masses the analogy of the demagogic "Security Program" of Roosevelt, of the "Share-the-Wealth" program of Huey Long and the fascist program of Coughlin, with Hitler fascism and with Mussolini fascism. We must show concretely where the "Security Program" of Roosevelt has led to more intensive exploitation, to greater suppression of workers' rights, etc. At this point we must be on guard also against immediately labeling as full-fledged fascism all kinds of reactionary manifestations. Similarly, we must bear in mind that by simply labeling a certain demagoguery formation as fascism we do not yet convince the masses of our correctness. It is necessary to make the masses see with us by explaining to them why we characterize Huey Long, Coughlin, Hearst and primarily the N.R.A. as fascist manifestations. Today, when the fascist manifestations are so numerous, when we can already see the general trend of the American bourgeoisie towards fascism as their means of trying to solve the crisis at the expense of the workers and check the course of the struggles toward the proletarian revolution, we have to explain how the increased reaction, the intensification of all the reactionary measures of the ruling class, are fitting into the general development of fascism.

VII

On the basis of the changes that are taking place in the country and on an international scale, the line of the Communist Party of strengthening itself in the A. F. of L. unions; of leading the masses to make of these unions their mass weapons of struggle against the exploiters; of developing united-front struggles around the issues of unemployment and social insurance, anti-war and fascism, and the defense of the Soviet Union; of appealing to the masses to build an anti-capitalist Labor Party, was correct and its correctness is clearly proved today. In the face of the rapid development of fascism which leads toward a more solid unification of the bourgeois forces, the tempo of the work of class-conscious workers inside the mass organizations of the toiling masses, in the widening of the united front, in becoming the driving force to crystallize the sentiment of the masses for a Labor Party, has to be increased to the utmost.

How do we explain the daily attacks against the Communist Party, which is still numerically weak; how do we explain all of the bills for the suppression of the Communist Party if not in the knowledge of the ruling class that the Communist Party, in spite of its numerical weakness, *is growing in strength, and is connecting itself daily with larger masses, is the factor that can and will coordinate and lead the struggles of the masses, that can and will unify them in the realization that the issue is—class against class—fascist dictatorship or workers' democracy—dictatorship of the proletariat.*

The situation and the perspectives dictate clearly the tasks for the class-conscious workers and their allies. It becomes necessary to wage a more intensive struggle against the Roosevelt administration, which means, concretely, a more intensive struggle against the lowering of the standards of living of the masses, against the high cost of living; for the right to organize and bargain collectively with the bosses; for the Workers' Bill H.R. 2827; against repressive measures aimed at the Communist Party; for widening the united front, by explaining to the masses how the attacks against the Communist Party are attacks against the entire working class; for the exposure day by day of all the various fascist manifestations; for gaining support for the Communist Party in its leadership of the struggles of the masses, not only against the government, as previously stated, but against the bureaucratic leaders of the A. F. of L. who yield to fascism.

The class-conscious workers must be the driving force in the movement towards a powerful Labor Party built on class lines that will give expression to the united independent action of the toiling masses—a powerful Labor Party that will beat back the fascist attacks and will mobilize the toiling masses of the U.S.A. for the revolutionary way out, for a Soviet America.