A Communist Proposal for a United Front Against War and Racism

by the Line of March Editorial Board

1. Introduction

As Ronald Reagan settles into the task of commanding U.S. imperialism's state apparatus, two features of his sweeping electoral victory stand out in sharp relief.

First of all, finance capital has succeeded in forging a sufficient ideological consensus among the masses on behalf of a program of militarism, racism and social "austerity" so that its political representatives are prepared to move with relative impunity toward its implementation.

Second, the most rapidly rising force in U.S. politics is a revived New Right which has demonstrated its capacity to dictate the nomination of a major party presidential candidate, envelop the machinery of that party with its adherents, subdue the careers of liberal politicians, and establish a sophisticated network of organization and propaganda throughout the country.

These two developments—particularly in their intersection—have graphically called to the attention of the working class movement and the communists a question that, in many respects, they are poorly prepared to confront: the question of fascism.

We use the term "fascism" here fully aware of the fact that the communist movement has had a tendency to cry "wolf"—or "fascism"—every time the bourgeois state provides additional evidence of the fact that, despite its democratic facade, the rule of capital is based on the repressive use of force and that, in maintaining this rule, its fidelity to the legal process is not nearly so steadfast as it claims. As a result, the left and the larger working class movement have grown somewhat inured to the cries of warning as the specter of fascism begins to materialize.
We have also been "blessed" with an equally negative legacy which asserts that there is no substantial difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism since both are "merely" forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The political consequence of this expression of dogmatism is to liquidate the struggle against fascism as a particular form of bourgeois rule.

In noting, therefore, that the 1980 elections pose the question of fascism before the working class movement, we recognize the necessity to re-establish the scientific analysis of fascism developed historically by the communist movement and study the current political situation in the U.S. today as the basis to elaborate a communist program and strategy for this period.

We hold that the concept of a united front against fascism is a correct one for the present stage of the class struggle in the U.S. and that the precise political expression of this united front is a United Front Against War and Racism.

We take up this question all too conscious of the objective limitations presently imposed on the communist movement in the present period, with opportunism dominating the handfull of relatively consolidated communist formations, and with the developing anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend still some distance away from maturing into a Marxist-Leninist party. Nevertheless, we believe that even within the objective limitations that exist, communists can and must attempt to impact the overall direction of the working class movement. In our view, proposing the formation of a United Front Against War and Racism—taking concrete steps to implement that proposal—gives real political content to those attempts, and simultaneously brings communists face to face with the immensely complex problem of transformation of the U.S. working class into a self-consciously revolutionary force. Precisely for this reason, the present proposal is both a step toward the rectification of the general line of the U.S. communist movement and, at the same time, a concrete proposal to guide revolutionary activity in the class struggle as it actually unfolds before us.

II. What Is Fascism?

The key point we want to establish here is the distinction between fascism and fascist movements. In doing so, it is necessary to combat two fairly prevalent prejudices on the left concerning fascism.

One is that fascist movements are at all times and in all circumstances the consciously directed creatures of finance capital. Such a view of fascist movements solely as the result of bourgeois conspiracy does not explain fascism's capacity to develop an objective social base in the petit bourgeoisie and among backward sections of the working class. This view is also a significant departure from the Marxist theory of the state which holds that bourgeois democracy is actually capital's preferred form of rule. The point is not that the bourgeoisie is a resolute defender of its own democratic apparatus. Far from it. But the bourgeoisie does not lightly discard its democratic apparatus and does not plan to do so until it feels impelled, by the intensification of the class struggle, to do so.

The other prejudice it is necessary to combat—in effect, the other side of the coin—is the view that sees fascism as somehow independent of and even in contradiction to capitalism. Such a view completely obscures the objective basis for fascism, which resides in the interests of capital and the particularity of fascism as a special form of bourgeois rule. In this sense we uphold Dimitroff's analysis of fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."

The question of fascism—whether identified as such or not—is never far from the minds of monopoly capital's political representatives, who instinctively recognize that bourgeois democratic rights can be maintained only so long as they are not "abused" by the masses in the course of the class struggle. The curtailment of bourgeois liberty—whether done legally or illegally—is the "natural" response of capital in periods of great social turmoil, particularly when efforts to buy social peace through economic concessions or political reforms prove unavailing. In the U.S., the nakedly terrorist attacks on militant leaders of the Black liberation movement by the police apparatus, together with the splitting and wrecking activities of the state against the anti-war movement of the '60s, illustrates this tendency.

Nevertheless, such activity by the state apparatus does not mean that the U.S. was—or is—a fascist state. Rather, we cite it to demonstrate the inherent tendency toward fascism which resides in the very heart of bourgeois rule. This is the general condition which led the Comintern to note that "in a more or less developed form, fascist tendencies and the germs of a fascist movement are to be found almost everywhere."

In the 1960s, the dominant sector of U.S. finance capital, without hesitation to utilize both legal and illegal terror against the political forces at the head of the mass movements, nevertheless was prepared to make significant political concessions to those movements in order to maintain political stability. As a result, most legal forms of racial discrimination were terminated. At the same time, military defeat in Vietnam, combined with growth of a militant mass movement in opposition to the war, led the chief representatives of capital to decide—with full concurrence of the most powerful financial sectors—to abandon their political and military objectives in Indochina.

But fascism as an all-embracing political system assumes a more

*The above and all other citations from Dimitroff and/or the Comintern in this article are taken from Georgi Dimitroff's report to the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935, published in The United Front: The Struggle Against Fascism and War (Proletarian Publishers: San Francisco, 1975).
visible form when the general crisis of imperialism begins to manifest itself in a crisis of bourgeois rule. Under these circumstances, finance capital’s preference for bourgeois democracy as its form of class rule begins to wane and the most reactionary sectors of finance capital, which invariably tend to coincide with the dominant sectors of finance capital, increasingly turn their attention to “open terrorist dictatorship” as the political instrument best suitable to their class interests.

This question has been grievously mishandled by the revisionists, who tend to posit two contradictory strains at the very heart of the bourgeoisie, one with a supposedly greater commitment to bourgeois democracy than the other. Such a view is completely consistent with the concept of a “sane” wing of imperialism which is prepared to accommodate itself to the realities of the international class struggle out of the “sensible” understanding that nuclear war would be a disaster for all. But hasn’t the most reactionary, most imperialist sector of finance capital been at the helm of U.S. bourgeoisie rule for at least the past 30 years? This is not to deny that within the ranks of finance capital there may be from time to time significant tactical disagreements on particular policies or that the working class cannot take advantage of even tertiary tactical contradictions in the enemy camp. But we argue that the principal aspect of the Dimitrov concept of the nature of fascism is not to suggest a shift from one sector of finance capital to another, but rather to indicate a shift by the dominant sector of finance capital from reliance on bourgeois democracy to reliance on open terrorist dictatorship.

Fascist Movements

While ultimately fascist movements emerge out of the same circumstances that propel a sector of finance capital toward fascism, these movements develop somewhat independently of their ultimate mentors in the ruling class. Such movements tend to well up out of the anger and frustration of large sections of the petit bourgeoisie and those sectors of the working class whose relatively “protected” position in class society is compromised by the social chaos spawned in the process of capitalist crisis and its subsequent erosion of authority. Under these circumstances, notes Dimitrov, “It is in the interests of the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie that fascism intercepts the disappointed masses who desert the old bourgeois parties. But it impresses these masses by the vehemence of its attacks on the bourgeois governments and its ir- reconcilable attitude to the old bourgeois parties.”

Under fascist leadership, these movements target the source of their own agonies as emanating from everywhere but capital. They find it in declining national prestige as evidenced by military defeat, the political “impudence” of upstart peoples challenging imperialism, even in instances where the monopoly capitalists of other countries achieve a competitive edge over their “own” monopoly capitalists. They find it in the decay of traditional social and moral values—the decline of religion, the rejection of historically evolved oppressive racial and sexual roles and mores, lack of respect for established authority—which have provided a stabilized ideological underpinning for their own relatively protected positions in the social order. They find it in the “burden” of “supporting” those sectors of the working class consigned by capital to the edges of society’s economic and social life, comfort themselves with the view that their own position of privilege is the result of qualities of character and intelligence clearly lacking in those less fortunate—a phenomenon which generally corresponds to national, racial or religious distinctions in the working class.

It is in this sense that we take note of the relative independence of fascist movements from capital. Concededly, fascist movements are frequently financed by—sometimes even launched—by particular capitalists. But just as the tendency toward fascism is ever-present right within bourgeois democracy, so the germs of a fascist movement are also ever-present in the declining social position of the petit bourgeoisie and certain sectors of the working class.

But the triumph of fascism—if and when it occurs—is not at all the triumph of the petit bourgeoisie or any sector of the working class, although finance capital is likely to employ the leadership of the fascist movements as its new political representatives in the administration of society.

III. “Fascist Tendencies and the Germs of a Fascist Movement” in the U.S. Today

By applying this theoretical framework to the actual motion of politics—both within and outside the electoral arena—we can see how “fascist tendencies and the germs of a fascist movement” inherent in capitalism have been qualitatively strengthened in the U.S. today.

To fully appreciate the actual political conditions which have placed the question of fascism before the working class movement, we must more precisely examine the meteoric rise and fall of Jimmy Carter.

Carter, denied a second term in office, has returned to the obscurity from which he so suddenly emerged in 1976, somewhat embittered at the seeming fickleness of a system to which he has rendered inestimable service. One can hardly blame him, for even in defeat he has served U.S. imperialism well.

It was Jimmy Carter’s fate to preside over the U.S. state in a period of urgent transition. In effect, he stood astride two eras. He came into office at a time when U.S. imperialism was hemmed in by the recent military defeat in Vietnam, the agonies of Watergate, and an inflation-ridden economy scarred by the most severe recession since the 1930s. It was, in short, a sorry time for imperialism. Encouraged by Vietnam’s victory over the U.S., revolutionary movements elsewhere were moving ahead
more audaciously. Southern Africa was aflame while the U.S. stood by helplessly. Revolutionary upsurges in Iran and Central America provoked additional frustrations in the ranks of the U.S. bourgeoisie. At the same time, while the U.S. had expended billions on its losing effort in Vietnam and popular opinion had ultimately forced reductions in military expenditures, the Soviet Union finally achieved what it had been seeking for 30 years—rough military parity with the U.S. And while the U.S., without the active support of its main allies, was bogged down in its war in Vietnam, those same allies had been strengthening their competitive position vis-a-vis U.S. capital.

Bad as all this was, the ability of any U.S. President to move forcefully in defense of imperialism’s interests was circumscribed by the prevailing antiwar sentiment among the masses, the deeply felt mistrust of government engendered by Watergate, and the ideological effects of the most serious disruption of the U.S. economy since the Great Depression of the ’30s.

Jimmy Carter faced an unenviable task. He had to “free up” U.S. imperialism’s military options, build its military arsenal, take clearly recessionary measures in order to combat inflation, reduce social services and put a damper on the expectations of the masses—all the while restoring “faith” in the bourgeois state apparatus. Further, he had to accomplish this mission with the utmost delicacy, given the wide mistrust of government among the masses and with fewer financial resources at his disposal.

Is it any wonder that Carter appeared “indecisive” at times? Every step to facilitate capital accumulation and circumscribe inflation had to take into account the fact that Carter was simultaneously trying to forge a new ideological consensus among the masses in support of imperialism. At the same time, every hesitation while trying to take into account the motion of the masses was greeted with impatient derision by those sections of the bourgeoisie—increasingly the dominant sectors—who wanted Carter to get on with the job irrespective of difficulties. In fact, Carter succeeded in effecting the transition that imperialism required. But the price he paid for it was his own political career.

Poor Jimmy Carter, devoted servant of imperialism and apprentice of the Trilateral Commission, cast aside by his masters not because he failed them but because he succeeded all too well!

But if Carter served imperialism so well, why then was he abandoned by it? The answer to this rests in the smoothly efficient intricacies of the bourgeois electoral marketplace. Actually, it is not completely accurate to say that Carter was abandoned by the bourgeoisie. In terms of U.S. imperialism’s programmatic requirements, Jimmy Carter’s re-election would have been completely acceptable to monopoly capital; but it would have indicated the pace at which that program could have been implemented. By the same token, Reagan’s electoral triumph means that U.S. imperialism’s turn toward war and the implementation of its program of racism and social austerity can now proceed at an accelerated pace.

In short, the bourgeoisie’s inherent tendency toward fascism has moved closer to actual realization as the dominant sectors of finance capital which, in the past, have been constrained by their concern with maintaining the social peace, now have a freer hand in utilizing threats of economic deprivation and outright repression in order to force the masses to acquiesce in the new policies required to defend the empire and improve prospects for capital formation.

The New Right and the Turn Right

The bourgeoisie, however, cannot simply wave a magic golden wand and on its own create a mass ideological consensus for its policies. It was under these circumstances that the bourgeoisie began to smile somewhat more benevolently on the New Right and to emit signals that its political activity—not only in the electoral arena—would be viewed more favorably than had previously been the case. In short, the bourgeoisie established a climate in which “the germs of a fascist movement” were encouraged to blossom, while the soil in which it could do so—the growing anxieties of the petit bourgeoisie and protected sectors of the working class over their relative security in the social order—was becoming eminently fertile.

The result has been nothing short of spectacular. According to Richard Vigerie, the man who almost single-handedly turned rightwing politics into a multi-million dollar mail-order enterprise, 85 percent of the present major conservative organizations have come into existence within the past six years. Some have been single-issue organizations focusing on such questions as opposition to abortion rights, school busing, affirmative action, and gay rights. Others have launched more wide-ranging programs of political action and agitation, ranging from the American Conservative Union to groups like Moral Majority, which was launched in 1979 and presently claims two million members, including 72,000 “pastors.” Some have embraced prestigious individuals in the cause of revived militarism, such as the stridently anti-Soviet Committee on the Present Danger. Others have been less visible in orchestrating various right wing campaigns at a local level. A few older organizations of a more definitely fascist identity—such as the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)—have attempted to forge new images for themselves on the basis of contemporary politics.

Frequently in competition with each other, sometimes at odds with each other around particular political issues, these right wing forces comprise an informal network embracing several million people. Taken as a whole, they are indeed the “germs of a fascist movement” very clearly on the rise. While the movement itself is not self-consciously fascist, many of its leading figures are—although they do not step forward as such.
From "right to life" to "reverse discrimination," the code words of this developing fascist tendency serve to register its skilful exploitation of certain significant social and "moral" issues which, while seemingly in defense of the family and traditional values, have actually been fairly blunt appeals to racist and sexist prejudice. The ability of this movement to "intercept" important sections of the "disappointed masses" has given it political momentum and has led to proliferation of organizations—some with a sizeable measure of mass influence—in which fascist forces hold dominant influence.

If the growth of this fascist tendency has been dramatic, its political gains have been no less so. It succeeded in thwarting ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment despite its endorsement by leading political representatives of the bourgeoisie. Its highly publicized "tax revolts" succeeded in broadening the right wing's social base and strengthening the influence of racist demagogues. Its propaganda mills churn out several score newspapers, magazines and newsletters. Prominent right wing ideologues spout forth regularly on extensively syndicated national radio networks. It has mobilized hundreds of thousands for anti-abortion rallies and succeeded in establishing severe restrictions on abortion rights. In 1978 and 1980 it successfully put the axe to a number of Senate liberals and in 1980 it won the Republican Party's presidential nomination for its ideological mentor, became the single most organized force in the Republican Party and saw "its" man, Ronald Reagan, take over the reins of state.

As we have pointed out previously (The 1980 Elections, Line of March, Vol. 1, No. 3), Reagan's election does not mean that the fascists have come to power in the U.S. What is closer to the truth is that the bourgeoisie was able to co-opt the right wing's most popular and visible figure and use him and his political base to complete the transition which Jimmy Carter had so bravely undertaken on behalf of U.S. imperialism.

But even though Reagan has made his peace, so to speak, with the dominant sectors of finance capital who are not at all prepared to turn the levers of power over to Reagan's right wing base, that base has still been considerably strengthened by the process.

Reagan is only the third Republican to win the presidency in more than half a century, but he is the first to win on a nakedly jingoistic right wing platform. The other two Republicans—Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon—were elected largely on the strength of their promises to extricate the U.S. from unpopular wars in Asia.

Reagan is also the first candidate from the right wing of the Republican Party to win the backing of the most powerful sectors of finance capital. In previous elections—with Robert Taft in 1948 and 1952, Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Reagan himself in 1976—the dominant sector of finance capital (sometimes known as the "Eastern Establishment") was able to frustrate the Republican right either by denying its candidate the nomination or, as with Goldwater in 1964, effectively sabotaging his bid for the presidency. But in 1980, if we may utilize The Wall Street Journal's felicitous terminology, the bourgeoisie learned to love Ronnie. While the principal aspect of this late-blossoming romance was Reagan's accommodation to finance capital, it also signified that a naked alliance between finance capital as a whole and movements representing the ideological advance guard of fascism is closer to being realized than was previously the case.

At the same time, a seemingly impregnable Democratic majority in the Senate has been wiped out with the defeat of some of the most illustrious representatives of its liberal wing, largely as the result of special campaigns organized by right wing political groups. In some cases, these liberals have been replaced by political figures who take active responsibility for the future of U.S. fascism.

To get a fuller appreciation of the growing political influence of this movement, let us note that if the organizational forms and party affiliations of U.S. politics more closely corresponded to their ideological underpinnings (as they do in most European countries) some 10 percent of Congress would today be identified as part of a fascist voting bloc that is, a bloc which consistently supports the principal political positions currently espoused by the developing fascist tendency.

The Consciousness of the Working Class

Our analysis of the development of a fascist tendency in U.S. political life would not be complete without an appraisal of the present level of consciousness of the working class. Here we must note a tendency toward what we can only describe as obligatory left optimism, a tendency which insists on finding in all negative political developments—surely the electoral triumph of Reagan and a bloc of right wing politicians—cannot be viewed as a positive development for the working class—that silver lining by which real setbacks can be magically turned into illusory gains. Thus there is hardly a group on the left which has not noted the fact that some 75 million eligible voters did not participate in the election and that many who voted for Reagan did so out of disgust with Jimmy Carter—as though somehow these factors will mitigate the actual political results of the election process.

But any scientific analysis of the 1980 elections must clearly conclude that they illustrate the backwardness and low political level of the U.S. working class. In one sense, this point should be readily obvious from the election results themselves. Aside from Reagan's election, the defeat of the Democratic liberals in the Senate, the gains of the organized right and the green light now given the bourgeoisie to proceed with its reactionary program at home and abroad, we must also note the inability of the working class to develop anything even resembling an independent political expression for itself. It could not even exercise the leverage it
has enjoyed in the past to force the Democrats to nominate a candidate
nominally pledged to its interests.

But even the "explanations" offered by the pollyannas of the left prove
the point. For if large sectors of the working class, out of disgust with
Carter, voted for and accomplished the election of an even more odious
candidate of monopoly capital, this can hardly be considered an example
of political maturity. And if 75 million people opposed to the candidates
offered by the bourgeois parties can do no better than to stay at home and
are unable either to affect the outcome of the election or to register their
protest, this can hardly be cause for celebration. With fascism develop-
ing the capacity to "intercept the disappointed masses" politically, and
cynicism about politics in general neutralizing a major section of the
working class, it will hardly do for communists to discover in such
developments an unwarranted cause for optimism that can only lead to
complacency in terms of the actual tasks before us.

Of course, the widespread political alienation of the masses from
bourgeois politics and politicians is worth noting, since it indicates that
the bourgeoisie's mandate from the masses is not an enthusiastic one.
But by no means can we interpret such phenomena as being politically
progressive or advanced in themselves.

Unfortunately, the prevailing moralism in the communist movement
and its marked tendency to endow the spontaneous movements of the
masses with a consciousness far beyond their capacities stand in the way
of objective historical analysis. Indeed, in some quarters it is considered
"anti-working class" to make note of this political backwardness,
indicating that many communists have not yet grasped that the role of a
vanguard is not to laud the revolutionary potential of the working class
but to uncover and develop it through systematic training, propaganda
and agitation.

IV. The Present Politics of Fascism

What are the concrete politics of rising U.S. fascism?

At the political center of U.S. monopoly capitalism there has been a
definite shift toward a strategic concept in which the interests of capital
will be better served by a more active military posture, a program of
social austerity for the masses, government intervention to maximize
profit and accelerate capital formation ("reindustrialization"), and a
strengthening of the state's repressive apparatus. Clearly these are
policies which, of necessity, will place the question of fascism on the
bourgeoisie's agenda if and when their consequences result in an
intensification of the class struggle and a political maturation of the
working class. In this sense, the bourgeoisie's inherent tendency toward
fascism has been strengthened.

At the same time, as we have previously noted, fascism as a social
movement has shown a dramatic growth in the recent period. This
development has been highlighted by the proliferation of right wing
political groups and the encouragement accorded them by the bour-
geoisie. We should take note of the fact that fascism as an ever-present
tendency within the police apparatus has been strengthened in the
recent period.

However, the unity between the tendency toward fascism at the
political center of the system and fascism as a political and social
movement is far from complete. The agitation on the right over Reagan's
accommodation to finance capital (the government, from the vice-
presidency through all of the key administrative departments is firmly in
the hands of the political representatives of finance capital rather than
the ideologues of the right) clearly speaks to this fact. Our point here is
not to sow any illusions about some irreconcilable antagonisms between
the bourgeoisie and these fascist movements—although the existing
contradictions may provide the basis for some useful tactical maneu-
vering in the period immediately ahead—but rather to note with utmost
accuracy the present stage of maturation of fascism in the U.S. today so
that we can develop the most precise methods of struggle.

We must attempt to identify the concrete political expression of
fascism in the U.S. today at its present stage of development. In our
view, the essence of that process is to be found in the way in which the
U.S. bourgeoisie has responded to the deepening of the profound
economic and political crisis gripping it. Internationally, U.S. imperial-
ism has adopted a more aggressive and militaristic posture in defense of
its world-wide strategic interests, a posture which has sharply increased
the likelihood of military intervention and even full-scale war. Domestic-
ly, it has launched a massive assault on the working class, seeking to
heighten capital formation and impose a program of social austerity on
the masses. This assault has an overwhelmingly racist coloration to it, so
that the consequences of the bourgeoisie's drive for social austerity will
be felt most heavily by the most oppressed sectors of the working class.
On behalf of this program of militarism and racially-defined social
austerity, the bourgeoisie is presently attempting to forge a "white"
ideological consensus.

This focus on policies promoting war and racism is not some arbitrary
choice of the bourgeoisie or simply the policy of the moment. U.S.
imperialism is the international headquarters of the world imperialist
system and its principal military guardian, while racism has been the
central particularity of U.S. capitalist economic and political develop-
ment.

War in the Marrow of U.S. Imperialism

The tendency toward war is built into the very marrow of the capitalist
system. In his work, *Imperialism*, Lenin ably demonstrated that with the
development of capitalism into monopoly capitalism and the completion
of the process whereby the rival capitalist countries divided the world up between them, there had then emerged the inexorable drive by capital to re-divide the world on the basis of military strength. This was the root cause of World War I and a decisive factor in World War II. (Japan’s attack on the U.S. in 1941 was nothing but an attempt by Japanese imperialism to establish its own economic sphere of influence in East Asia and the southern Pacific at the expense of the power then predominant in the area, U.S. imperialism.)

But this tendency for capitalist rivalry to mature into world war was not sustained in the post-World War II period. Does this mean that Lenin was wrong? Not at all. But it does mean that the historical development of both capitalism and socialism has reached a new stage with its own set of dynamics.

Clearly inter-imperialist rivalry remains an important feature of the capitalist world. In a certain sense, the very attempts to regulate it—the European Common Market, international currency agreements, the Tripartite Commission, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, etc.—indicate that competition between the imperialist powers remains a permanent feature of world capitalism. On the other hand, the emergence of the U.S. as an imperialist superpower has imposed a relative degree of stability on the relations among the imperialist countries themselves. Today the entire world capitalist structure is dependent on the economic and military strength of the U.S. And even though U.S. imperialism’s capitalist rivals may be able to mount a significant economic challenge in certain areas such as steel and auto, the military strength of the U.S. is such that no other capitalist nation or grouping of nations is capable of challenging U.S. imperialism’s hegemonic role in their world system.

Another factor mitigating inter-imperialist rivalry and holding back its tendency to break out in open hostilities is the common interest of the imperialists in countering popular anti-imperialist struggles in the world and attempting to contain the growth of socialism. This has imposed upon them an operative military alliance which tends to supersede their economic rivalry. (Another factor, the complex of phenomena sometimes described as the “internationalization of capital,” may also be operating here, but, in our opinion, insufficient research and analysis has been done to define more precisely this “internationalization” and target its significance.)

Meanwhile, the forces of socialism representing the new mode of production which is replacing capitalism on a world scale have leaped ahead qualitatively since World War II. This is obvious in the appearance of a whole number of socialist countries in Eastern Europe and Asia, establishment of the first socialist country in the western hemisphere (Cuba), and socialism’s entrance into Africa in the wake of the successful struggle against Portuguese colonialism. But the growth of socialism is also marked by ripening of the fundamental contradiction

between the two modes of production in the neo-colonial world and political expression of that contradiction in growth of revolutionary national liberation struggles.

It seems possible to postulate now that in the period between the two world wars the inner compulsions of the capitalist system were such that the rivalries between contending imperialist powers ultimately took precedence over the attempt by world imperialism to obliterate the world’s first socialist country, the Soviet Union. (This was not at all a settled question during the period. Undoubtedly the mobilization of the world proletariat in defense of the Soviet Union, including the tactic of the international united front against fascism, as well as the successful industrialization of the USSR in the ’30s, were decisive factors in making the attempt to destroy the Soviet Union subordinate to inter-imperialist rivalry.)

This relationship between inter-imperialist rivalry on the one hand and inter-system contention on the other appears to have been reversed in the post-World War II period. Clearly the competition over investments, natural resources, and for markets between the imperialist countries has not disappeared. But today it has taken second place (become subordinate to) the maturation of the contradiction between the two modes of production, capitalism and socialism. For all its aggressiveness, imperialism is still in a defensive posture, trying to prevent the breakup of its system. There are neither new worlds to conquer nor has the basis for re-dividing the world among the imperialists through military means been established. At the same time, we would not at all rule out the possibility that imperialism may, at some juncture, attempt to re-establish its hegemony in areas of the world which have already broken out of the imperialist system.

Therefore, imperialism’s inherent tendency toward war can no longer be identified solely or even primarily with the inexorable compulsions of inter-imperialist rivalry. Rather, it rests principally in the fact that imperialism has no choice, sooner or later, but to defend its interests against the rising tide of revolution. Likewise, the internal logic of both the revolutionary struggles and socialism is an objective alliance against imperialism. Clearly it is this objective alliance which is the modern incarnation of that communist specter which continues to haunt imperialism. (Even the socialist system of the People’s Republic of China represents this basic challenge to imperialism despite the fact that its party is pursuing an extremely reactionary and narrowly nationalist course of class collaboration with imperialism at the present time.)

The common thread that links Lenin’s analysis of wars of imperialist rivalry with the present analysis of wars of imperialist defense and counter-revolution is that the very nature of capital requires the ultimate use of military power for both its expansion and defense. That the target has changed is a sign of historical development. That the compulsion for war has not is a sign of capitalism’s inner nature.
With the U.S. military budget careening upward at a mad pace and government leaders talking openly about the prospects of nuclear war, the empirical evidence to support the above theoretical analysis is unmistakable. U.S. imperialism is preparing to fight wars of aggression and counter-revolution in defense of its access to energy resources, investments and world geo-political position. The inevitability of other Vietnam is well understood in the highest reaches of capital, where the determination that the U.S. will never again suffer a similar defeat has now hardened into concrete military policy. A central aspect of this policy is intimidation of the Soviet Union, which remains, despite considerable vacillation, the principal source of “outside support” to these revolutionary struggles.

Let us underscore the political importance of this theoretical understanding of the principal source of the war danger today. If we recognize that imperialism’s turn toward war is not the result of intra-imperialist rivalry but the concrete expression of the class struggle between the two social systems of the present epoch—capitalism and socialism—then we must grasp the fact that imperialism’s target is, in essence, the world proletariat, both in those areas of the world where it already holds power and in those areas where it is most actively reaching for power. The communist movement has not done well in understanding this dialectic. Modern revisionism sees the relationship between “existing socialism” and the national liberation struggles, but distorts the actual dialectic by holding that imperialism’s principal target is the area of the world where the proletariat already holds power rather than those areas where it is on the verge of breaking out of the imperialist system. “Left” opportunism sees U.S.-Soviet contention as simply another expression of capitalist rivalry and, where it takes sides, lines up with U.S. imperialism in one of the most aggravated forms of class collaboration in the history of the communist movement. Meanwhile, centrists in the communist movement obscure the objective unity of the international proletariat, while generally supporting the “pure” (or “independent”) national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples. They fail to highlight the role of socialist countries, the Soviet Union in particular, as an integral component of the worldwide anti-imperialist front. Champions of the rights and sovereignty of small countries, the centrists avoid responsibility for defense of socialism and socialist countries. Centrists see the socialist countries as possible, although dubious, tactical allies of the rest of the proletariat, and deny the objective basis for their strategic unity.

A Clear and Present Danger

If Jimmy Carter’s “transition” administration not only began the turn in U.S. foreign policy but also set the ideological conditions for its further development (see Line of March, Vol. I, No. 2, U.S. Foreign Policy: A Turn Toward War), Ronald Reagan has accelerated the pace of this process. In this respect it is useful to note the way in which that bellwether of finance capital’s political sensibilities, The Wall Street Journal, registered its growing appreciation for Reagan’s views on foreign policy over the past year.

In June, 1980, the Journal interviewed candidate Reagan on foreign policy concerns and quoted him as follows: “Let’s not delude ourselves. The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren’t engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn’t be any hot spots in the world.” The Journal called this view “attractively simple” and went on to note that it was a cause for considerable concern among U.S. and foreign diplomats.

But when nominee Reagan mounted an ideological defense of the Vietnam war during the course of the campaign, The Wall Street Journal (August 20, 1980) was quick to note the significance of his comment: “Governor Reagan’s speech makes him the first presidential nominee since the Vietnam war to declare unequivocally that America’s expedition in Southeast Asia was, in truth, a noble cause. . . . It’s about time. In reaching back to Vietnam to find the underpinnings for his foreign policy, Governor Reagan is, we believe, making an important point. . . . The lesson President Carter has been teaching is that Vietnam taught America the limitations of its power and that the tasks of America’s President must be to accommodate policy to these limitations. . . . Governor Reagan has had the nerve to open old wounds in an effort to develop a new philosophical basis and summon the sort of commitment he thinks America will need for the confrontations ahead.”

By year’s end, The Wall Street Journal (Dec. 29, 1980) had adopted President Reagan’s “attractively simple” view as its own: “When Moscow started its romp by proxy through the Third World around 1975, our foreign policy passivists argued that nothing was going on but a string of local conflicts.” Citing Ethiopia, Angola, South Yemen and Afghanistan, the Journal declared:

“After half a decade of this sort of local conflict, it’s time for U.S. policy makers to see the single, alarming pattern . . . the hands of Moscow’s new proxy apparatus, where, with local variations, Cubans train the militia, East Germans organize the secret police and Russians run the show.”

Going on to hail “resistance” to “Soviet imperialism” in Angola, Afghanistan and, supposedly, in Cuba, the Journal concludes with these ominous words:

“It’s a national shame that this spontaneous and heroic resistance has been totally ignored by the current State Department. . . . Yet even the hint of serious American sympathy can have an electrifying effect. One Afghan emissary tells us that when he first heard Ronald Reagan’s much ridiculed remark about blockading Cuba, he was so excited he
Racism, Too, in the Marrow of U.S. Imperialism

The U.S. working class is in no way immune from this assault. U.S. imperialism is also escalating its attack on its “own” proletariat through a sweeping program of social austerity and a reduction in the living standards of the masses. The cutting edge of this direct assault on the U.S. working class as a class is the reinforcement of racism.

To understand why this is so, it is necessary to place racism in the U.S. in its historical development. Racism—the forced and systematic separation of peoples on the basis of “race,” to be specially exploited by capital—has been a central underpinning of the political economy of this continent ever since it was possible to speak of political economy in any meaningful sense of the term. In fact, U.S. racism emerged historically precisely to facilitate the development of capitalism on the North American continent. “Race” is, in this sense, not a biological category (the very concept of race on the basis of skin color is totally without scientific foundation) but a social category produced by the developing U.S. bourgeoisie as a particular means of bringing about the forced proletarianization of one portion of the laboring masses (racially defined) in order to create the conditions for a stable laboring force and capital accumulation.

The political and ideological counterpart to this process was the building of a “white united front” under the leadership of the bourgeoisie which successfully established the “race” relation in U.S. society as this society’s most conscious social relation. In short, racial slavery was central to the foundation of U.S. capitalism and, in turn, gave rise to a political and ideological system which not only reinforced slavery but took on a life of its own and became a material force that has been a virulent, consistent threat throughout U.S. history.

A particular function of racism under the conditions of contemporary monopoly capitalism has been to provide a shock absorber for the consequences of capitalism’s intensifying internal contradictions. Let us take, for instance, the question of unemployment. Everyone makes note of the fact that official figures on joblessness in the U.S. demonstrate that unemployment among Blacks and other minorities is some two-and-a-half times that of whites. (These “official” figures are, in fact, quite suspect. Actual unemployment is much higher and is even more concentrated among minorities.)

To get an appreciation of the social significance of these by now taken for granted statistics, we should note that the unemployment rate among minorities has been constantly at the overall rate of unemployment for the entire working class during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Or to put it another way, one section of the working class—its racially oppressed sector—lives permanently under the conditions of the most severe economic crisis in U.S. history. And what is true about unemployment is also true about wage scales, housing, access to and quality of education and health care, and social services in general. In order to maintain this unevenness of condition among the masses, the police power used against minorities is, of course, particularly harsh and arbitrary.

Such stratification of the working class is not at all unique to U.S. capitalism. It is, in fact, a universal feature of capitalism in its monopoly stage. This stratification in the working class produces both a more “protected” sector (a labor aristocracy) and a particularly vulnerable sector from which the industrial reserve (the unemployed and under-employed sector of the working class) is drawn.

What is unique to U.S. capitalism, however, is the organization of this stratification along racial lines. In other words, by concentrating the ravages of capitalism’s ailments among minority workers, the bourgeoisie is able to cushion the shock for the rest of the working class, thus leading to a certain complacency among the “white” workers and laying the foundation for forging a “white” ideological consensus on behalf of imperialism.

(To what extent does the bourgeoisie consciously implement racism
Racism Reinforced

The point that we are trying to establish is that particularly in a period of intensifying imperialist crisis in which the bourgeoisie talks openly of its preparations for war and the necessity for a program of social austerity directed at the working class, racism as a defining social relation of U.S. capitalism is bound to be reinforced.

Even the most casual examination of recent events demonstrates the point. As it has been historically, the bourgeoisie today is once again attempting to forge a “white” ideological consensus in support of its political program; in this case on behalf of its policies of militarism and social austerity for the period ahead. Its strategy for achieving this consensus is through a wide-ranging economic, political and social attack on the working class, the brunt of which is directed at its minority sectors. The aim is to isolate and mask the condition of minority peoples while simultaneously cushioning the shock of the generalized assault on the working class (in varying degrees) for the “white” workers. As with the drive toward war, the evidence of a resurgence of racism emanating in the first place from capital’s design of unevenly divided social austerity among the masses can hardly be denied.

A racist counter-offensive to set the climate for reforging this consensus has been underway for the past four years. The first shot in this counter-offensive was the assault on affirmative action which crystallized in the Bakke case. By upholding Bakke’s claim of “reverse discrimination,” the Supreme Court legitimized both legally and ideologically the concept of “white rights,” even though the actual decision in the case was quite narrow. This theme of some abstract “equality” of rights which ignores the inequality of condition has become a key building bloc of the racist counter-offensive, not only politically but ideologically. Politically, it maintains one section of the working class in the position of special vulnerability to the depredations of capital. Ideologically, it advances the concept of “white rights” as a means of maintaining the present class stratification along racial lines.

While the courts contributed to the racist counter-offensive by curtailing all forms of affirmative action to end racial segregation and discrimination, they also beefed up the other side of the oppressive process by reinforcing the “rights” of the police. Meanwhile, Congress began withholding funds for desegregation programs and imposing other restrictions on enforcement policies; and the Executive (considering it was a Democratic administration very much dependent on minority voters for its hoped-for re-election) confined itself to artfully conceived tokenism while acting as though it was helpless in confronting the racist tide.

But the bourgeois offensive went far beyond the actions of the state apparatus. The “grass-roots” populist movements which sprang up with a great clamor for reducing the burden of taxes on the middle class were spawned, for the most part, by groups part of or close to the organized right. This “tax revolt” was racist in its political objectives (its program for reduced social spending was inevitably at the expense of the poorest sections of the working class, where most minority people in the U.S. are located), its ideological underpinnings (“they” are all welfare cheats or “too lazy to work,” etc.), and in its composition (the movement was conspicuously white).

While the campaign grew for tax-cutting at the expense of the poor, there simultaneously emerged a great outcry for strengthening of the police apparatus and restoration of capital punishment. “Crime” became a code word for “race” and not a few bourgeois politicians staked out careers as “crime-fighters,” not even bothering to mask the racism at the heart of the matter.

Finally, the last four years have seen a surge in both legal and extra-legal racist violence. Police departments across the country, emboldened by the new atmosphere generated by the state apparatus and the leading ideologists that the period of concessions to minorities had come to an end, utilized “legal” violence against minorities with impunity. As police officers guilty of murdering Blacks walked away from their crimes scot-free—sometimes even hailed as “heroes”—it was “open season” against all minorities for the increasingly racist police departments.

It is in this climate that the Ku Klux Klan has re-emerged as the focal point at which the open ideology of white supremacy links up with the practice of organized terror. In fact, the Klan is the most concentrated expression of the underlying political and ideological fabric of the developing “white” consensus against which all forces define themselves one way or another. In this fashion, the Klan has exerted an influence on this process far beyond its own numbers. While more respectable right wing forces ritualistically denounce the Klan, the bourgeoisie media have helped to establish the KKK as a strident but legitimate voice of the “white” consensus; it is safe to say that large numbers of people look at the Klan as the group with the guts to say what others are only thinking.
In effect, the Klan has positioned itself to influence and recruit from the forces brought into motion by more respectable right wing politics.

A particularly ominous aspect of the Klan’s resurgence has been a close connection between the KKK and the police. In cities across the country—hardly confined to the South—this tie has become unmistakable. Many local Klan groups include significant numbers of policemen; in some cases, policemen have been the principal founders of a particular Klan chapter. By the same token, many local police departments are heavily Klan-infiltrated.

Nothing highlights this alliance more than the grim events of Greensboro, N.C. where five members of the ultra-left Communist Workers Party (CWP) were murdered by members of the Klan and the Nazi party, an event which bore all the hallmarks of a consciously coordinated plan worked out with the Greensboro police. When, a year later, the killers—whose identities were clearly established by videotape evidence—were acquitted in court, the message was lost on no one. The state had given the Klan a hunting license against the anti-racist movement, particularly against any forces who attempted to link that movement up to a broader political perspective.

Documentation of the rise in racist violence over recent years would encompass hundreds of killings by police, mob attacks, cross-burnings, individual shootings and assaults, fire-bombings of integrated schools, buses, Black homes in “white” communities, death threats and a marked escalation in a whole range of racist brutalities and indignities inflicted on minority communities and people. A particularly telling and typical incident occurred in Decatur, Ala., where a KKK vigilante squad shot four persons during an armed attack on an anti-racist demonstration protesting the frame-up of Tommy Lee Hinds. When a Black man fared back at the Klan during the assault, he was arrested and ultimately became the only person to be convicted for breaking the law during the entire incident. In other words, the Alabama court in effect ruled that there is no legitimate recourse to self-defense for Blacks under armed attack by racists.

Finally, we should note that the newly charged racial atmosphere in the country has given rise to an outburst of “irrational” racist violence. While individual Blacks have been murdered without any specific motivation (other than “race”) in the streets of Buffalo, a wave of kidnap-murders of Black children has struck terror in the Black community of Atlanta. In Chico, Calif., a white hunter, frustrated at his failure to bag any game, determined that Blacks were “in season” and turned his hunting rifle on the first Black person to cross his line of vision. Such incidents of “racial madness” cannot be separated from the active promotion of a racist climate.

In a larger sense, the upsurge in racist violence and the absence of a mass protest movement in opposition to it is a grim indicator that the low level of political consciousness in the U.S. working class today provides favorable conditions for the growth of fascism. In France, for instance, the bombing of a synagogue by fascist groups this past October elicited a mass demonstration by 100,000 people in the streets of Paris only four days after the event. (One sign of the maturity of the French working class movement is that large numbers of Arab workers participated in the demonstration.) But in the U.S., the trade unions and the working class movement in general have watched the upsurge in racist violence impassively.

The principal response has been from the Black community, where a most important political resurgence is now taking place; for what may continue to be invisible to the racially defined protected sectors of the working class is all too apparent to the most oppressed sectors—namely, that they have been targeted for special attack in the present period. This attack has become a felt experience in all realms, from the most stringent imposition of the bourgeoisie’s program of social austerity to the violence which is the inevitable means by which policies of repression are enforced. On the most spontaneous level, ghetto insurrections in Miami, Philadelphia, Wichita, and other cities have indicated the reservoir of anti-racist anger that resides among the Black masses. On the more explicit political level, new organizational forms such as the Black United Front and the recently organized National Black Independent Political Party have stepped forward in the Black community to challenge the programs and authority of the community’s traditional leadership.

The results of the 1980 election are both a reflection of the racist upsurge and an encouragement to it. The new Congress is preparing either to repeal or neutralize a whole series of legal impediments to racism. While Carter vetoed legislation that would have forbidden the Justice Department to pursue school busing as a means of combatting segregation, Reagan has already indicated that he will sign such legislation. A bill to make the 1968 “Open Housing” law enforceable was in the last session of Congress and clearly stands even less chance of passage in the new one. An all-out assault on the voting rights legislation of the ’60s in under way. A major decision by the Supreme Court last spring held that suits challenging local electoral systems on the grounds of racial discrimination must prove the discriminatory “intent” of those devising the system. Proving that such systems have an objectively racist result is insufficient. Now there is a move underway in the Senate to repeal existing voter rights legislation altogether. In one significant court case, a group of Black medical students was convicted of “libel” for charging a white professor with racism.

Similarly, Reagan’s much-vaunted new economic policies will clearly hit minorities the hardest, while the even greater emphasis given to beefing up law enforcement can only further fuel the racist arrogance of the police apparatus.
As we noted earlier, at the heart of the racist drive is the bourgeoisie's attempt to isolate minorities and to forge a "white" consensus—a not-so-silent majority—on behalf of the most urgent needs of capital. U.S. imperialism's revived foreign policy of active counter-revolution requires mass support at home. By the same token, the announced drive to increase capital accumulation—which is only a fancy phrase for building up corporate net profits—can only be at the expense of the working class, whether in the form of reduced social services resulting from lower taxes on business or through increasing the rate of exploitation at the point of production.

In both of these decisive arenas, the bourgeoisie has written off the possibility or necessity of winning any significant support for these policies among minorities. But a "white" consensus, it has concluded, is possible. Given the history of racism in the U.S. and the prevailing inability of communists to offer an effective ideological challenge to the bourgeoisie, we must recognize that such a calculation is not sound.

Never mind that for white workers, the bourgeoisie's schemes add up to "a fool's paradise" at most, perhaps a short-term reprieve from some of the consequences of monopoly capital's new anti-working class offensive. For there can be no future for the working class as a whole—neither in the long run nor across-the-board in terms of its capacity to wrest the best possible terms from capital for the sale of its labor power—so long as it permits capital to mount an unchallenged assault on its most oppressed sector. But while the working class movement has glimpsed this truth at times in the past—largely as the result of the agitational and propaganda efforts of the communists combined with the power of mass movements among minorities—the bourgeoisie today has a relatively clear field in pursuing its goal of a "white" consensus. The trade union leadership is clearly not oriented to challenge it, while social democratic forces seem to have concluded from the elections that concessions to the "white" consensus have become mandatory.

Ultimately the target of the bourgeoisie is the working class as a whole. Of this there can be no doubt. The wars for which U.S. imperialism is preparing will have to be fought by the working class, and the casualties, however disproportionately, will cut across racial lines, for the bourgeoisie has already understandably concluded that an army disproportionately composed of minority combat troops will not be a reliable fighting force in imperialist war, particularly in wars directed against colored peoples.

Similarly, the bourgeoisie's drive for greater productivity, enhanced capital accumulation and a stronger competitive position vis-à-vis its imperialist rivals must ultimately be at the expense of the entire working class.

In this sense, the bourgeoisie's attempt to forge a "white" consensus is only the opening assault in a heightened class war. But the bourgeoisie's capacity to cushion materially the shocks of this assault for large sectors of white workers (the disproportionate rates of unemployment between white and minority workers being merely the most visible reflection of this capacity) in the absence of the capacity of communists to expose the process lays a foundation for such a "white" consensus actually to be forged.

There are, of course, other aspects to the growing tendency toward fascism. Of these we must particularly note the assault on women's rights and the organized women's movement which has become the ideological hallmark of the right wing; the attack on organized labor and the trade union movement; the revival of religious fundamentalism, with its accompanying attack on science and intellectual life in general; the offensive against homosexuals; evidence of new attempts to restrict political rights and basic bourgeois liberties.

But in our opinion, the political essence of the developing tendency toward fascism is to be found primarily in the intersection of the twin pillars of imperialist political hegemony, the drive for war and the reinforcement of racism on the basis of a program of racially defined social austerity.

**The Present Period Summed Up**

Let us, then, sum up the particularity of the present period, which, as we have tried to demonstrate, is to be found in four major tendencies:

1. **U.S. imperialism's turn to a more aggressive policy of war and counter-revolution.** The principal aim of this policy is defense of monopoly capital's strategic global interests and investments and, where possible (in Iran, perhaps?), reclaiming "lost" areas. The class essence of this policy is a heightened attack on the international proletariat, both in those areas where it is most actively striving for power and in those areas where it already holds power.

The ideological war against Cuba, Vietnam and the Soviet Union over the past two years has created a climate in which the bourgeoisie now believes it can resume the policy of direct military intervention against national liberation struggles. Present propaganda is aimed at convincing the U.S. masses of the necessity for such counter-revolutionary activities, largely on the strength of the by-now classical "Soviet threat."

2. **A program of racially-defined and racially-organized social austerity for the masses.** Unable to maintain the "guns and butter" economic policy which played a key role in capitalism's present inflationary crisis, the bourgeoisie cannot refuel its war machine without draconian economic measures that will cut back on social spending and directly attack the living standards of the working class. At the same time, rampant inflation and intensified competition with rival capitalists has triggered a drive for the refinancing of U.S. capitalism's productive apparatus ("reindustrialization") through enhanced capital formation.
United Front

opportunity to offer political leadership that could help focus a spontaneous concern and give it historical significance. But such a responsibility will not be discharged by the mouthing of platitudes about unity or by empty calls for unity without making clear the political basis for forging it.

The strengthening of the fascist tendency in the U.S. and the turn toward war and racism by the bourgeoisie find the communist movement poorly prepared for the political tasks of such a period. Nevertheless, the times call for extraordinary action by Marxist-Leninists and left forces in general, whatever their own state of preparedness. But blind activity is frequently worse than no activity at all. The key to a program, a plan of action for the coming period is, therefore, completely dependent on an accurate summation of the actual motion of politics at the present time. It is in this spirit that we advance the analysis developed in the previous section of this article.

On the basis of this analysis, we believe that the strategic task of this period consists in the building of a united front against fascism. However, simply to issue a call for a united front against fascism in the abstract will not make such a conception a material force. When in 1935 the Comintern called for a united front of the working class against fascism (and people’s fronts with other classes and strata), the communists were a significant political force in almost every capitalist country. Such a call at that time immediately became a material force simply by virtue of the communists’ numerical strength and their strategic location in the working class movement; to say nothing of the prestige of the Soviet Union. Clearly this is not the case with the U.S. communist movement in 1981.

But history does not wait until the communists are ready for it. And so certain tasks are imposed upon this fledgling communist movement for which it is not yet fully prepared. Nevertheless, it must accept those tasks. In fact, it is precisely by undertaking the urgent and broad political tasks of the class struggle—without in any way subordinating the principal task of re-establishing the party—that the communists will both enrich the process of line rectification and accelerate the pace of party re-establishment.

The United Front Against Fascism

The United Front Against Fascism was a historically definite conception developed in the early 1930s by the international communist movement as a specific strategy for the defense of the Soviet Union and to thwart the attempts to establish fascist governments in a number of capitalist countries. The concept arose in the course of summing up the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany and the appearance of explicitly fascist movements throughout the capitalist world.

It has become fashionable in some current left circles to ridicule the
United Front Against Fascism as though it were a proven disaster. Many see it as a decisive step toward the consolidation of revisionism in the international movement. To this day, Trotskyism makes an attack on the United Front Against Fascism a political cornerstone of its critique of "Stalinism." Other "anti-Stalinists" have joined in the fray. In general, their critique seems to be that the United Front Against Fascism diverted the European working class from the path of proletarian revolution; that it was therefore opportunistic in the sense that it substituted the short-term interests of the working class for its long-term revolutionary interests.

As a matter of history, this summation is completely incorrect. The United Front Against Fascism was actually a major strategic success for the working class movement. The forging of an international united front between the Soviet Union and the western capitalist countries ultimately sealed the fate of German, Italian and Japanese fascism and was decisive in protecting the one area on earth where the proletariat was in power. To have enlisted the U.S., France and Britain in the objective defense of the first socialist state was surely no minor success. The concept also was instrumental in preventing the triumph of fascism in a number of Western countries. In fact, the United Front Against Fascism unleashed and focused the revolutionary capacities of the masses at the level of their development in a non-revolutionary period. In other words, it is totally idealist (and a reflection of the subjective prejudices of Trotskyism) to attribute the failure of the European and U.S. proletariats to take power to the United Front Against Fascism.

This much is history. Any estimate of theoretical and practical errors made in developing the strategy of the United Front Against Fascism must be placed in the context that this line was verified many times over by the actual experiences of the class struggle.

But Dimitrov and the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern did more than develop a historically correct strategy for their period. They also made a major theoretical contribution to Marxism-Leninism. The United Front Against Fascism, for all its particularities, also contains certain "universal" truths of Marxism-Leninism for the epoch of capitalism's decline and the emergence of proletarian revolution. Prior to the Seventh World Congress, it was widely assumed that the question of proletarian revolution and the seizure of state power was immediately and directly on the agenda of the working class movement in the entire capitalist world. But the rise of fascism indicated that the bourgeoisie was not resigned to conducting this "final struggle" on terrain most favorable to the working class.

In the chaos characterizing a period in which the conditions for proletarian revolution are ripening, fascism emerges as the concrete expression of that fundamental concept of Marxism that no ruling class ever voluntarily surrenders power. Fascism's "open, terrorist dictatorship" is not dictatorship in the abstract; it is a particular form of bourgeois rule, one in which the bourgeoisie abandons its own preferred form of rule (bourgeois democracy) for rule by direct terror. More particularly, it is the rule of "the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialist sector of finance capital."

Because fascism's immediate political objective is to destroy the working class movement and to abrogate all forms of bourgeois liberty in order to prevent the working class movement from pursuing the class struggle, it is in the interest of all working class forces to oppose fascism. The strategy of the United Front Against Fascism therefore proposes that the various political forces in the working class movement, regardless of their substantial differences on fundamental questions of the nature of socialism and the transition to it, develop a "unity in action" in opposition to fascism. Says Dimitrov:

"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... We shall defend every inch of the democratic gains which the working class has wrested in the course of years of stubborn struggle, and shall resolutely fight to extend these gains."

Clearly, if the tendency toward "bourgeois dictatorship in its open, fascist form" is inherent in the rule of monopoly capital, then the question of fascism and the strategy for combating it cannot be seen simply as a specific question of the 1930s. In this sense, the United Front Against Fascism is a universally valid strategic concept for the working class movement in all those countries where the question of state power has not yet ripened and where the bourgeoisie is moving to stifle the working class movement through the imposition of fascism.

The United Front Against Fascism is a strategy for uniting the working class in opposition to fascism as a political force and in its concrete political expressions. That unity of the working class, however, takes into account the fact that divergent political forces exercise definite influence in the working class movement. The United Front is an attempt to unite these political forces, not simply at the base level, but on a leadership level as well, in a common program of anti-fascist struggle.

Nor can the working class movement wait until fascism has fully matured as a political force before it moves in united opposition to it. "Before the establishment of a fascist dictatorship," Dimitrov notes, "bourgeois governments usually pass through a number of preliminary stages and adopt a number of reactionary measures which directly facilitate the access to power of fascism. Whoever does not fight the reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie and the growth of fascism at these preparatory stages is not in a position to prevent the victory of fascism, but on the contrary, facilitates that victory."

In our opinion, this statement by Dimitrov could well have been
written about the situation presently confronting the working class movement in the U.S. We believe that the question of forging a United Front Against Fascism has become a timely question—indeed a pressing question—for the working class movement. The task before us is to make this concept into a historically concrete strategy.

VI. For a United Front Against War and Racism

Political Content and Focus

Dimitroff notes that “the development of fascism, and the fascist dictatorship itself, assume different forms in different countries, according to historical, social and economic conditions and to the national peculiarities and the international position of the given country.”

This comment provides a timely reminder that a united front against fascism in the conditions of the U.S. today cannot simply duplicate earlier efforts in this direction or the way in which the working class movement may address this question in other countries.

Taking into account our analysis of the key features of this period, the particular role of U.S. imperialism as the foundation for the entire world imperialist system, and the particularity of racism as a defining social relation of U.S. capitalism, we hold that the historically concrete expression of the united front against fascism that must be built in the U.S. is a United Front Against War and Racism.

It is only through such an orientation that the united front against fascism can properly identify its main target and achieve its essential political focus. The drive for war and the reinforcement of racism, politically, economically and ideologically, in order to forge a “white” consensus for the bourgeoisie’s programs constitute the heart of imperialist politics today and comprise the essential link between capital and the rising fascist tendency.

It is also necessary to emphasize the indissolubility of this focus. The forging of a broad anti-war front is completely dependent on disrupting the chauvinist appeal to “patriotism” and the attempt to forge a “white” consensus in support of imperialism’s policies. Similarly, the building of a powerful anti-racist movement—a movement which would, of necessity, have to challenge both reformist and narrow nationalist tendencies among minorities—is likewise dependent on linking the struggle against racism not just to the imperialist system in general, but to the actual policies of imperialist war and aggression which today are the principal means through which the system is being defended.

The other attacks against the working class mentioned earlier, are all important questions in their own right, and the people’s movement must take them up as well. But none of these other questions can be taken up in a politically mature fashion unless they are linked to the cutting edge of the class struggle today which is precisely in the struggle against war and the racist character of the bourgeoisie’s generalized assault on the working class.

United Front—With Whom?

The call for a united front against war and racism as the concrete political expression of the united front against fascism immediately poses the question: a united front with whom?

The sectarian legacy of the communist movement around this question—particular the legacy of the New Communist Movement—has been to see this united front simply as uniting the working class around the line and program of the communists. This is usually referred to as “the united front from below.”

Now, there can be no doubt that the struggle to unite the working class as a whole—particularly the advanced workers and the broad middle strata of the working class—around the line and program of the communists is a permanent feature of communist work. But this is not the same as the call for a united front which explicitly means the attempt to unite different political tendencies and definite political forces in the working class movement.

In the 1930s, the Comintern’s call for a united front against fascism was concretely a call for “joint action by the supporters of the parties and organizations of the two internationals, the Communist and the Second International.” The Comintern pointed out that such joint action “would not be confined in its effects to influencing their present adherents, the communists and social democrats; it would also exert a powerful impact on the ranks of the Catholic, anarchist and unorganized workers, even upon those who have temporarily become the victims of fascist demagogy.”

In other words, the very concept of a united front of the working class is built upon the premise of striving for a conscious alliance between the communists and other political forces. Let us apply this principle to the concrete situation facing the working class movement in the U.S. today.

At first glance, our own situation would appear to be totally unlike that which prevailed when the Comintern proposed a united front of political forces. In the 1930s, the parties and organizations of the two internationals had each achieved a relatively advanced state of political and organizational cohesion. Between them they encompassed the bulk of conscious Marxist forces functioning in contemporary political life. In some cases their combined political influence among the masses had ripened to the point where Popular Front governments could be formed.

In other countries, the unity of communist and socialist forces in a united front against fascism meant that the majority of the trade unions would effectively come under anti-fascist leadership.

Clearly, the corresponding political forces today in the U.S. do not at all resemble their predecessors in terms of level of development and
influence among the masses. Nor have they each achieved the level of ideological cohesion internally that existed in the '30s. The communist movement itself contains three relatively distinct political trends: modern revisionism, Maoism, and a developing Marxist-Leninist trend. Social democracy is likewise characterized by several distinct trends within it, none of which can speak for the whole. In addition, large numbers of Marxists and other anti-capitalist forces function outside both movements.

Taking all of the above into account, the call for a United Front Against War and Racism is directed, in the first place, to all those political forces who, basing themselves on an anti-capitalist critique, have an objective basis for such unity today regardless of their present subjective views on the question of unity with each other in general and unity with communist forces in particular. Specifically, we identify four main political tendencies as having an objective basis for such unity: the communists, the modern revisionists, the left wing of social democracy,* and a number of anti-capitalist political forces operating exclusively within the Black and other minority communities.

(Special note should be made of this last category since it does not precisely parallel the first three. Clearly this category exists in life and embraces definite political forces who have a key role to play in the building of a United Front Against War and Racism. Its material foundation is in the very nature of racism as a pervasive social relation of U.S. society which tends to focus the political outlook of many revolutionary-minded forces in minority communities on the struggle against the racial and national particularity of their oppression. The reality of racism as an all-sided relation also gives rise to a particular political arena of minority community politics which inevitably draws the attention of many radicalized forces among minorities.)

(In addition, we must note that the CPUSA's surrender of a revolutionary perspective and the failure of the New Communist Movement to rectify this situation has erected an imposing barrier between the communist movement and many anti-capitalist forces in minority communities. We speak here not only of the failure of the communist movement to move central to the struggle against racism or to develop an advanced revolutionary line on the struggle against racism, but more broadly, to the failure of the communist movement to address all the questions of the class struggle from a revolutionary perspective.)

By the communists we mean all those Marxist-Leninists who objectively fall within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend. Here we include the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OCIC)

*Concerning "left" opportunist forces—the variety of Maoist and Trotskyist groupings on the left—a somewhat different situation exists. On a tactical level, it probably would be incorrect to deliberately exclude such forces from participating in the joint activity undertaken by the forces of the united front. On the other hand, it is highly questionable that the same objective basis for unity in the struggle against war and racism exists with these forces of the ultra-left. Those who support the Chinese Communist Party's Theory of the Three Worlds can hardly be counted upon to unite in opposition to U.S. militarism, even if for strictly tactical reasons some of them have taken up work in such activity as the anti-draft movement. After all, those who criticize the U.S. for not standing up to "Soviet aggression" can hardly be considered resolute fighters against U.S. war preparations. Nor would we expect those who uphold the slogan of "no united action with revisionism" to enter such a united front with other than the motive of wrecking it. As to the other Trotskyist and Maoist forces, most have only demonstrated heretofore their contempt for the very concept of the united front. For these reasons, we do not advance or consider it appropriate to direct our call for a united front against war and racism to either the Trotskyist or Maoist tendencies in the communist movement.

*Social democracy as an international trend has degenerated to the point where large sections of it are nothing but the direct and conscious agents of imperialism, such as those who backed the Vietnam war. Clearly there is no objective basis for a united front with them.
Concrete forms, including a people’s political party, at some time); rather it is a strategic unity of definite political and ideological tendencies, one aspect of which is the unity in action of definite and distinct political forces.

The unity of “anti-capitalist political forces representing these trends around a program of united action against war and racism is, of course, not in itself the building of a broad united front but rather its beginning. At the outset, the unity may consist in little more than dialogue. Later on, it may grow into systematic consultation designed to coordinate activity. In time it may mature into a commonly devised strategy and set of tactics; it may even give rise to new organizational forms reflecting the unity of purpose of the different political forces.

In time, such unity could significantly affect those organizations which currently provide the principal forms through which the working class is organized economically and politically. In particular, it would have a profound effect on important sections of the trade union leadership and a whole spectrum of forces in the Black political community, ranging from such groupings as the recently organized National Black Independent Political Party to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and even have an effect on groups like the NAACP and the National Urban League.

Such unity could also radically transform the prevailing climate in the left generally and set favorable conditions for mounting a coordinated left offensive against war and racism that could embrace large numbers of individuals and groups not presently identified with a “socialist” organization but who are rather involved in certain mass anti-imperialist, anti-racist, working class organizations of a spontaneous character. The forging of a United Front Against War and Racism of these working class forces would likewise impact in a positive fashion the organized women’s movement, civil liberties organizations, pacifists and activists in the anti-nuclear movement and important sections of the intelligentsia, lending a broader political significance to the mass struggles in these areas.

It is in this fashion that a united front of the working class lays a sound foundation for a broad people’s front in opposition to war and racism.

Finally, the united front and the people’s front set the most favorable conditions whereby contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the fascist political forces and contradictions within the ruling class itself can be exploited. Such contradictions already exist and are bound to emerge in new forms. Given the particular legacy of this communist movement, it is not at all too soon to target that infantile leftism which, armed with little but moral indignation, has not been able to grasp the political significance of the Leninist truism that contradictions within the ruling class constitute a strategic reserve of the proletariat.

Although the united front of the working class sets the most favorable conditions for building a broad people’s front against war and racism, we do not in any way intend to suggest a “stageist” strategy for this process. Life will dictate the precise way in which the broadest front against war and racism will unfold. Undoubtedly, the strength and character of a multi-class people’s front is, to a large degree, dependent on the unity of working class political forces. In the long run, the working class must become the leading force in a genuine people’s front. On the other hand, gains in the broader people’s front may be registered even before similar gains are achieved in the working class movement.

While the communists must not tail behind the spontaneous movement of the masses, neither can they act independently of that movement. Any “formula” which asserts that there is a simple, preordained way in which to build the United Front Against War and Racism, regardless of actual developments in the spontaneous movement, is bound to be politically sterile.

We do not underestimate the difficulties of winning other political forces to a United Front Against War and Racism as the strategic concept of political struggle for the period ahead. The Reagan election and the populist orientation of the growing right wing movements—an orientation which is completely consistent historically and theoretically with the development of fascism as a social movement—has already thrown many groups into ideological and intellectual disarray.

The vacillating response of many liberal and social democratic forces to Reagan and the success of the right—while thoroughly consistent with the actual class position and historic legacy of these trends—is nevertheless a great cause for concern, particularly insofar as the communists remain too weak to have a communist alternative taken up seriously by them. This underscores the fact that ultimately the communists will be the only force with the capacity to give the United Front Against War and Racism a firm political and ideological anchor.

The most glaring example of social democracy’s tendency to make ideological concessions to fascism in the guise of an illusionary and phony populism was provided by former New Left activist Tom Hayden, who has popularized the utopian notion of “economic democracy,” a scheme which seems to consist mostly of getting workers and consumers onto the boards of directors of U.S. corporations. Writing, appropriately enough, in the pages of The Wall Street Journal (Nov. 14, 1980), Hayden sums up the setback to “liberalism” in the 1980 elections as follows:

“Liberalism became reluctant to wave the flag too righteously, and allowed the fundamental issue of patriotic nationalism eventually to be controlled by the conservatives.... The liberals began losing the issue of religion to the right wing.... Shocked by the Vietnam war and nuclear insanity, the liberals became critics of military spending per se, without a coherent military doctrine of their own, losing the issue of national security to the likes of Richard Nixon. Raised on the Roosevelt
tradition, liberals believed that an expansion of the public sector was the answer to every ill of society. The liberals barely noticed that the unemployed of the ’30s who supported Roosevelt had become the squeezed suburban taxpayers of the ’70s who supported Howard Jarvis. Faced with a rising wave of crime and violence, the liberals acted like social psychologists as people were victimized. They seemed to counsel the citizen being stabbed to remain patient until the Humphrey-Hawkins bill passed. The conservatives began to recruit liberals who had been mugged. Reacting to the rigid disciplinary mores of the past, liberals adopted permissiveness as a new concept of freedom. Having thus lost God, the flag, national defense, tax relief, personal safety and traditional family values to the conservatives, it became more than a little difficult for these liberals to explain why they should be entrusted with the authority to govern.

The danger of this orientation cannot be overstated, the more so in that it is a current capable of becoming a material force. Hayden here has laid the foundation for bringing into being an organized social imperialist trend, one prepared to collaborate with the U.S. bourgeoisie in defense of imperialism, cooperate in the reinforcement of racism and operate as a sales force to the working class on behalf of a program of capitalist-imposed social austerity—all under a “left” banner. We must ask, is it a political task of those who would be the political representatives of the working class to have “a coherent military policy of their own” on behalf of U.S. imperialism? Is it their task to legitimize the racist assumptions of the right or to rationalize the racist and anti-working class essence of the “tax revolt” by echoing pieties about “squeezed suburban taxpayers?”

While Hayden’s views, taken as a whole, may not presently provide the political banner for social democracy, significant elements of this perspective show up in the views of all the various social democratic forces from the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee to certain trade union leaders and others.

Uniting a grouping containing elements as diverse as Hayden, DSOC, such key Black political figures as Representatives Ron Dellums and John Conyers, the editors of In These Times, and a whole stratum of union leaders, will not be simple. We can already see a developing orientation that will attempt to make the Democratic Party the central political instrument for the anti-fascist struggle. This view has already been advanced by certain social democratic union leaders, like William Winpisinger of the International Association of Machinists, who had previously signalled interest in organizing a labor party independent of the Democrats and Republicans. Now, in the wake of Carter’s defeat, they are entranced with the possibility of recapturing the Democratic Party for the old liberal-labor alliance. As Winpisinger put it, “Under the guidance of the progressive Kennedy wing, the Democratic Party will return to its senses and present the people with an equitable and dynamic program for peace and prosperity.”

What should be apparent from this comment is that Winpisinger’s earlier expression of interest in a labor party was nothing but a ploy on behalf of Kennedy’s challenge to Carter in the primaries.

At the same time, the newspaper In These Times, which is attempting to become the unofficial voice for a Eurocommunist brand of social democracy in the U.S., concludes (Nov. 19, 1980) from the election results:

“Given the nature of our political system, the solution is not a third party. Both structurally and historically, ours is a two-party system. That’s the bad news. The good news is that the parties are not private, as in many other countries, but are in large part government structures, open by law and historical practice to anyone—or any group—that registers in them and operates through them. There is thus no reason why socialists and other leftists cannot build their own constituencies and their own legislative blocs—in state legislatures and in Congress—within the Democratic Party. That is precisely what the right, with a smaller potential base of support than the left (but with a leadership much more in tune with American political life) has done in the Republican Party.”

In general, these views are consistent with social democracy’s illusory view of the bourgeoisie state as being an instrument independent of the class struggle and subject to “capture” through the electoral activity of the masses. More to the immediate point, however, is the fact that ITT’s political perspective is bound to subordinate the forging of a genuine united front against war and racism to the fantasy that the struggle against fascism, a form of bourgeois rule, can be centered in one of the main political instruments of the bourgeoisie, the Democratic Party.

Now, we do not at all rule out the possibility that a genuine united front against war and racism will require political alliances with forces committed to working in the Democratic Party or that there may be occasions when support for certain Democratic Party candidates may be an acceptable tactic in the anti-fascist struggle. But to center the struggle against fascism, a form of bourgeois political rule, in one of the main political instruments of the bourgeoisie, the Democratic Party, is to diminish the only political form—the united front against war and racism—which has the capacity to defeat fascism.

There will also be many complex tactical problems to solve in building the United Front Against War and Racism. Even among those who would agree with the need for a militant and conscious response to the development of fascism, we cannot expect that the formulation of a united front against war and racism will be agreed to as the correct political expression for the period. Nor can the communists simply insist
on their formulation as the only legitimate basis for the formal unity of the united front—although we believe that in life, the front's essential antifascist character is completely dependent upon the extent to which it targets the struggle against war and racism as its central focus. A key task will be to make this united front increasingly conscious of its own political character.

We must also recognize that the communist forces are not nearly as numerous as or as organizationally developed as the social democrats and the revisionists, thus providing a pragmatic justification for the historic anticommunism of the former and the traditional sectarianism of the latter toward all forces to their left.

Nevertheless, we believe that it is correct to project such a united front at the present time and to work actively to try to establish it, even if at the beginning stages the efforts to build the front consist primarily in opening up a serious political dialogue about the issues involved. In the long run, of course, our capacity to forge such a united front will correspond directly to our capacity to forge our trend into a party and our ability to make the line of the party a material force among the masses.

Unity and Struggle Within the United Front

The very concept of a united front implies a dialectical tension between unity and struggle among the political forces in the front. If there did not exist substantial ideological and political differences between the component groupings of the united front, then they would objectively be in the same political trend. A united front, in this sense, is much more than a coalition of like-minded organizations with different points of emphasis or disagreements around secondary questions. It is, in the first place, the attempt to forge unity in action between the political representatives of distinct and mutually exclusive trends in the working class movement.

Within the framework of unity of purpose and action in the struggle against war and racism, there are bound to arise differences between the political forces which will have to be approached in the spirit of principled struggle.

The first point of struggle in the united front is the struggle to maintain and deepen the unity of the front. Here what must be kept in mind is that the front comes into being not because of some abstract commitment to “left unity,” but rather as the result of a political assessment that a particular question—the rise of fascism—has acquired such importance for the working class movement as a whole that the very future of the movement is dependent on unified action against it. It is only the political urgency of the struggle against war and racism as the cutting edge of the struggle against the rise of fascism that lays the foundation for forging a genuine united front. We can fully expect that other forces in the front will vacillate on their commitment to its unity, depending on the ebb and flow of the class struggle and on what they perceive to be the relative political gains scored by one or another tendency within the front. The struggle for unity in these circumstances is the struggle to hold all forces in the front accountable to the working class movement as a whole.

The second point of struggle within the united front is bound up with the political lines and tactical measures designed to give concrete expression to the struggle against war and racism.

It is in this area that we can expect some of the more fundamental differences between the forces in the united front to manifest themselves. Since the social democrats do not take responsibility for the defense of the socialist countries, it will not always be a simple matter for them to target the schemes and machinations of U.S. imperialism in relation to the socialist countries. Nor is their record in the anti-racist movement a very good one. They tend to waver on such questions as affirmative action, and frequently entrap themselves in such politically naive and objectively racist positions as defending the “civil rights” of the Ku Klux Klan. While the political stand of the revisionists on such questions is much better, the CPUSA’s pronounced tendency to tail after reformist elements in the anti-racist movement, and their continued ilusions about finding a “sane” sector of imperialism as a means of preventing war, will likewise give rise to vacillations in unleashing the full mass potential of the united front against war and racism. We can also anticipate the possibility of a measure of sectarianism from “revolutionary nationalist” forces who may attempt to make their particular view on the question of revolutionary strategy for minority peoples a point of unity in the front. It is important that communists be aware of these problems now so that we guard against any sectarian tendency to give up on the united front at the first signs of political vacillation that appear, and so that we are prepared to conduct principled struggle in the spirit of unity-struggle-unity within the united front.

The third point of struggle within the united front is bound to revolve around the independent political activity of the forces comprising the front. Communists do not abandon the struggle to train and educate the working class toward the goal of proletarian revolution simply because we have agreed with other forces to target the struggle against war and racism as the common and most immediate concern of all working class forces. We certainly do not expect the social democrats and the revisionists to abandon their independent political activity either. This means that the forces who comprise the front are likely to find themselves in contention in various arenas of the class struggle such as the trade union movement or in the electoral arena. There can be no ready-at-hand formula beforehand as to the “proper” balance between the work in the united front and the “independent” work of communists or other forces except to note that both must be maintained and developed and that more
particular questions will be of a tactical nature that will require great skill and political acumen to handle properly.

The fourth point of struggle within the united front will be over the precise ideological differences between the various political forces involved. While such questions as the dictatorship of the proletariat, a parliamentary path to socialism, the CPUSA’s anti-monopoly coalition or the presumed existence of and right of self-determination for a “Black nation” should deliberately be excluded as a frame of reference for the unity of the front, the very experiences of the struggle against war and racism are bound to pose the broadest questions of social change before the masses. Without in any way compromising the unity of the front in the struggle against war and racism, we should welcome debate between the various political forces over these more fundamental questions. Clearly such a debate cannot constitute the principal or even a major portion of the front’s work. And we would certainly oppose any attempt to impose unity around questions of revolutionary strategy on the front even if it were possible to assemble a majority to do so. On the other hand, we would equally oppose any attempt to rule such ideological struggle out-of-bounds within the framework of building the front.

The point of all this is that a key form of the ideological struggle consists in holding all forces accountable to the principles of unity of the united front.

The United Front Against War and Racism and the Question of Proletarian Revolution

Is the United Front Against War and Racism a tactical question for the present period or a strategic question of the U.S. revolution?

In our opinion, the United Front Against War and Racism as the concrete political expression of the united front against fascism is actually a strategic question of the proletarian revolution in the U.S., even though it does not explicitly embrace the question of the struggle for state power.

Why is this the case? The U.S. revolution requires the successful resolution of a number of outstanding questions beyond those of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat and mass insurrection. Before those latter questions can even be taken up as practical matters, communists must undertake the fundamental task of organizing the process that will lead to the revolutionary transformation of the consciousness of the U.S. working class. For surely the U.S. working class does not have a revolutionary consciousness today, nor are we so sanguine as to believe that it will arrive at such a consciousness simply on its own.

The United Front Against War and Racism in effect highlights the main barriers to revolutionary consciousness which presently exist in the working class. This class will never become conscious of its own revolutionary destiny until it sees that it has absolutely no class interests that unite it with imperialism’s exploitation and oppression of other peoples. And such an understanding must be at the heart of a militant front against war.

Nor can the U.S. working class ever become a revolutionary class unless it takes up defense of the most oppressed sectors within it, a task which cannot be accomplished until and unless it takes up the struggle against racism as a class question.

Finally, the United Front Against War and Racism sets the conditions for the political unity of the working class. This, we must emphasize, is not exactly the same as “unity in action” in the struggle against fascism. The very process of forging anti-fascist unity is bound to have a profound effect on the political alignment and realignment of the politicized masses. We believe, naturally enough, that the communists have the greatest capacity to build the united front in its strongest form and to lead a united working class on to socialism. This is not a matter of magic but a matter of political line and perspective. But other political forces undoubtedly view themselves in similar fashion. Such differences need not compromise the United Front Against War and Racism. We hope to prove in both theory and practice before the working class itself that Marxism-Leninism offers the only ultimate solution to the problem of ending the system of capitalist exploitation that holds the working class in thrall. Perhaps we will also prove this point to other political forces in the front.

In this sense, the United Front Against War and Racism provides communists with the opportunity to demonstrate their revolutionary capacities to the working class so that the class may be won to follow communist leadership in general.

But ultimately the crucial strategic question is that of transformation of the U.S. working class into a class which grasps its revolutionary destiny and functions politically with that destiny in mind. This transformation will never occur until the U.S. working class breaks completely with its own bourgeoisie in the way it looks at the rest of the world proletariat, and until it breaks completely with the racist orientation that objectively unites the “white” section of the class with the bourgeoisie against the non-white section of the class.

The United Front Against War and Racism, precisely by focusing on these twin pillars of capitalist rule, brings the working class into the very political struggle which is the material basis for its revolutionary ideological transformation. No question of the U.S. revolution is more compelling than this one.