

Nixon and Ford: whence the differences?

NIXON AND FORD: WHENCE THE DIFFERENCES?

"Our Constitution works. Here the people rule." With those words, Gerald Rudolph Ford took over the helm and proceeded to set the ship of state back on course, amidst rough seas and armies of hungry sharks. Right on Ford's heels, the "New York Times" was quick to proclaim that Watergate "symbolizes the finest hour of American democracy. A President has been deposed, but the Republic endures. Its institutions have survived, and some are saying they have been strengthened as well." (August 10, p. 1) Why all these efforts to reassure the American people that their voices have been heard? Why all these appeals to put the past behind and move together to work on the business at hand--the building of a great America? What are these but efforts by the bourgeoisie to end disillusionment with and restore the faith of the American people in our democratic system?

True, many of the vicious scandals and wrongdoings carried on in the highest offices have been exposed to the American public. True, the chief perpetrator of these scandals has been dethroned. And true too, we have a successor--one who was reared on apple pie and who presumably brings to the White House an all-American record of clean living. So the Republic has endured.

Does this demonstrate that bourgeois democracy, American-style, and all its glorious institutions, still work? NO. It is nothing but an "exercise" in bourgeois democracy, and a futile one at that, designed to give the American people the illusion of change. This exercise hardly proves that the impeachment process or the Constitution works. Rather, it is a desperate move on the part of the ruling class to cover up deep rifts within the class by focusing on the "orderly" transition of power. They couldn't even wait out Nixon's term of office and replace him by "democratic elections." By making Nixon out to be the single-handed culprit behind Watergate, the bourgeoisie can concentrate on making it look like Ford really will make a difference, and hide the nature of the state--the machinery of the ruling class--and the contention among the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie are trying to turn the public exposure of the filth and corruption they call politics into its opposite, into a plus for "democracy," by showing that the system can "reform" itself. This danger existed throughout the Watergate affair, and Marxist-Leninists that did not point this out all along were merely tailing the bourgeoisie.

WATERGATE AND FASCISM

The menace of fascism exists and we must fight it, but the struggles in the bourgeoisie were never a battle between the fascist and more liberal sectors of the bourgeoisie.

While certain moves were taken to further strip away the people's democratic rights, these actions generally were taken and supported by much wider sections of the bourgeoisie than just those around Nixon, and generally included groups both staunchly for and against Nixon. For example, Senator Ervin, Nixon's leading congressional opponent in the beginning, opposed every civil rights bill, voted to restore the death penalty, and opposed an anti-genocide bill. Rodino is chief architect of a bill to throw out immigrants. So the issue at contention was never the stripping away of the people's rights. All sections of the bourgeoisie use illegal and repressive measures against the people and against each other to further their own interests.

Georgi Dimitroff, writing on the united front in 1935, characterized the form that fascism in the U.S. would take as follows: "In contradistinction to German fascism, which acts under anti-constitutional slogans, American fascism tries to portray itself as the custodian of the constitution and American democracy." That is, fascism would be ushered in in the form of liberal measures "necessary" to preserve our democratic rights, under the guise of continuing our long tradition of parliamentary democracy and freedoms. Fascism would take on a perverted American form and creep in insidiously (no-strike labor contract, stop and search laws.)

Moreover, none of Nixon's plans involved fascism, the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary elements of finance capital. Even the much ballyhooed Huston plan was nowhere near a plan for fascism, which would entail open union-busting and mass terror with no pretense of "democracy." In fact, while Watergate showed the further weakening of the bourgeoisie political machinery, Nixon's orderly replacement by Ford showed that the button has not fallen out yet, that the bourgeoisie is still strong enough to retreat and make new concessions. There is still plenty of maneuverability left to bourgeois democracy, even to the point of getting the greatest presidential vote-getter to resign some 20 months after his landslide. The bourgeoisie is still relying on the illusion of change and still uses various reactionary reformists like the union bureaucracies and all the Black mayors, for example, as the chief social props for their rule. Yes, they are retreating and weakening, but they are not so weak that there is no room for more tricks. It will take a lot more than a few tell-tale tapes to get them to throw out their two-century trump card of bourgeois democracy.

EXIT NIXON

Richard Nixon, as president and chief representative of U.S. monopoly capital, had a brutally long history of acts against the people, ranging from the Indochina War to the

murder of Black Panthers to making the working people pay for inflation through phoney "controls," etc. etc. Yet the bourgeois representatives in Congress did not see fit to remove him from office for any of his atrocities against the people of the world. On these issues, they locked arms and presented a solid united front.

But the general capitalist crisis is presently aggravating all of the fundamental world contradictions. The struggle for high profit rates in the face of both the sinking international pie and the deepening crisis at home forces the bourgeoisie into ever fiercer contention throughout business and government. Watergate was an intense struggle between the different monopoly groups in the U.S. bourgeoisie, a struggle in which each contending group had and still has profound interests at stake.

This inter-monopoly struggle goes on all the time, in different forms and around different issues. It is always a struggle over basic ruling class and state policy. In the late 1960's, for example, the Vietnam war policy was the main point of contention. Beginning in the 1970's and continuing through Watergate and the present, the main issue has been economic policy. With the recognition of defeat in Vietnam and the deepening capitalist crisis (inflation, unemployment, and recession), economic policy has been emerging for several years as the most important question among the American people and within the ruling class. Economic policy was the central issue underlying Watergate, which determined the main alignments of the monopoly forces throughout the struggle. This key point of contention, far broader than Watergate itself, has overtaken every sphere of business and government. Even now, with the apparent resolution of the Watergate scandal, this underlying issue is still far from resolved.*

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*One theory about the forces behind Watergate is that Nixon's administration represented an alliance between the South, South-Western, Western and Rockefeller-Eastern monopoly capitalist groups. This resulted from the much praised (by sections of the bourgeoisie) strategy of Nixon's "Southern Strategy". However, as different monopoly groupings have predominant interests in different sectors of the economy, differences in policies desired, especially in times of intensified crisis, lead to the striving for domination in the state machinery. These struggles are clearly seen from the rise and fall of appointed policy-making level officials throughout the years that Nixon was in power. One particularly clear example is the rise to national prominence and the ill-fated crash of Connally. Connally represented the interests of the South and South-Western monopolies. Included in this period was the signing of a restrictive trade agreement with Japan on textiles, which is most beneficial to the South and South-Western monopolies but detrimental to the Rockefeller Eastern group whose interests, mainly abroad, demand policies of "free trade".

The Rockefeller-led Republican grouping is now the dominating force in the monopoly bourgeoisie. The Nixon and Ford administrations' economic policies came mainly from this group, which is based in the largest multinational corporations, the key of which is

ENTER FORD

Ford does not represent a step towards truer democracy. His stands will not reflect a radical change from Nixon's especially in the critical areas of foreign and economic policy. His voting record on various issues show him up to be perhaps a more staunch conservative than even Nixon in his finest hours. As house Republican leader, he fought against Medicare, housing bills, raises in the minimum wage, the poverty program and grants for education and the alleviation of pollution. On busing, Ford had this to say: "I feel very strongly that to deal with integrated schools by busing is very superficial and very counterproductive. When individuals can move and live where they want to, that's the basic way to deal with the problem. (July 25, 1974). He favors high military spending: "There are forces in Congress that want to gut it, cut it, reduce it-- at the wrong time. (June 5, 1974). In foreign affairs, Ford has vowed to continue the "internationalist" stance of Nixon, demonstrating "continuity" (which comes as no surprise since Kissinger is being retained as chief architect for foreign policy). In terms of the home economy, Ford called on Congress to reactivate a second-generation Cost of Living Council, the Council on Wage and Price Stability, to monitor wages and prices and expose abuses. Can you imagine a COLC with only monitoring privileges and without the power to act as it sees fit? And all in the name of the battle to curb Public Enemy #1 and hold down Federal spending, Ford is urging Congress to curtail subsidies for such vitally needed services as social services and mass transit, saying the states and localities must shoulder more of the burden (without even mentioning what effect his call for more military spending is having on the economy and inflation).

oil. This group has received the largest share of the big bourgeoisie's recent inflated profits, gained at the expense of all other classes: the proletariat, the petty-bourgeoisie, small capitalists and even the secondary monopoly groups. The injury to the proletariat from inflation and the wage-price controls, has of course been general and the most severe. The petty bourgeoisie, as well as many small capitalists, have also suffered from inflation, which is clear from the rising number of small and medium-sized corporate bankruptcies. The damage to secondary monopolies and the struggle among all the monopoly groups appeared clearly in the oil crisis, during which the Rockefeller-controlled oil monopolies profited greatly at the expense of many military and consumer industries. What was Watergate? It was exposure by the Kennedy-Morgan group in trying first to split up the existing alliance of groups behind Nixon, himself make an alliance with the Southern groups and prepare for 1976. Throughout the exposures, Rockefeller gained the upper-hand in having the Other forces behind Nixon thrown out-trying to make the best of it while things are crumbling apart. Again this is seen in the rise and fall of individuals within the administration culminating in the resignation of Richard Nixon. This struggle-the latest amongst the various groupings of monopoly capitalists, over state policies, principally economic policies has reached temporary conclusion.



FORD AND FITZSIMMON

The Nixon and Ford Administrations' fiscal policy both use low government spending and high interest rates ("tight money") in an attempt to slow down inflation and actually bring on recession in a "controlled" way, through constantly rising unemployment. This policy's slogan, as stated by Arthur Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, is: "painful but beneficial."--beneficial for the biggest monopolies and painful for the working class. With Ford, we can expect a hike in the borrowing rate, attempts to smash the labor front and closer collaboration with the labor bureaucrats. George Meany has already expressed his satisfaction with Ford and Rockefeller (an "unbeatable pair for '76" add has patched up his relations with the White House which had been broken off under Nixon.

This cooling-down policy is the opposite of that of the Kennedy-represented Democratic forces who advocate an openly inflationary Keynesian lack of stimulating the economy, through militarization, etc. For example, they propose a tax cut for incomes below \$17,000 and increased taxes for large corporations. Being lesser monopolists who have not profited recently as much as their rivals, and tailed by small capitalists, petty bourgeoisie and some working class forces, who have all seriously lost, these Democrats are pushing and inflationary policy in the hope of gaining in the future. Acting from a position of relative weakness, they must try to delay recession as long as possible, without foreseeing the far more serious crisis that must eventually result.

Another sign of just where Ford stands in the political spectrum is indicated by examining his possible choices for Vice-President George Bush, chairman of the Republican National Committee, Melvin Laird, Ronald Reagan, Elliot Richardson--and his final choice-- Nelson Rockefeller (Ford was a member of his Commission on Critical Choices for Americans), who represents the fattest of the monopoly capitalists

(his fortune is modestly estimated at \$500 million). Rather than continue to pull the strings from off-stage (e.g. the elimination of Agnew), and rather than push out a Rockefeller front-man like Melvin Laird, Mr. Monopoly Capital himself has moved to center stage to rule directly, consolidating his political as well as economic base. Rocky's record says alot for the man too" once characterized as a "liberal", he has issues increasingly conservative statements on, for example, welfare; he ruthlessly made his fortune off the backs of the people of Latin America, and he will go down in infamy for ordering the vicious mass murder at Attica in 1971.

The choice of Rockefeller, accompanied by Ford's other acts of cleaning out the White House and hand picking his own men, completes the consolidation of one particular monopoly group at the top. Yet all this "unity" will be short-lived. The same objective contradictions that led to Watergate still exist, and have since intensified. The socialist countries are daily growing stronger. Today, China, Albania are stronger internally and have friendly relations with more states and peoples than ever before. Second, U.S. imperialism is even weaker in the world. "Detente" with Soviet social-imperialism is crumbling. NATO is becoming useless, as seen by the siding of Western Europe and Japan more and more with the Arabs and by the Greek-Turkish contention in Cyprus. Further, the Third World has advanced its struggles through the oil embargo, the new victories of national liberation movements in Africa, and the U.N. raw materials conference, and their victory in establishing a 200 mile exclusive economic zone in the sea. With double-digit inflation helping to topple almost every major Western imperialist government, and the proletariat in all the capitalist countries rising up against inflation, taxes, unemployment and bad working condition, the vise can only tighten for U.S. imperialism. Under such condition, they can only turn more and more upon each other.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE QUESTION

As we said in our Jan. 1974 issue of "Workers Viewpoint," (page 7), "In the final analysis, the importance of Watergate is its role as a vehicle for the exposure of the ruling class to the masses of the American people. Marxist-Leninist organizations have the duty to help the masses see that the entire class of the bourgeoisie is no longer fit to rule, and that a simple impeachment of Nixon or his resignation would give just an illusion of change. After all, it is the bourgeoisie that initiated the movement for the impeachment of Nixon! This does not mean we should boycott the mass anti-Nixon movement; it does mean we should struggle within it to bring within its sights the whole ruling class." (emphasis in original). We failed most miserably in this most urgent of tasks. Instead among the "left" in this country, there were several approaches to the questions of Nixon and impeachment: Some felt that all our efforts should be devoted to building a mass movement to ax Nixon, so we could settle for the lesser of 2 evils and forestall the advent of fascism. Others felt that, because the ruling class was weak and divided by the events of Watergate, it was opportune time to kick them while they're down and reap all the gains we could. Others like the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization and the Black Workers Congress simply boycotted the whole issue. They took the economist position that in the day-to-day struggle for survival in the Black and Puerto Rican communities, issues like food, heating, etc. were much more immediate than the squabbles among the ruling class. Let us examine these positions critically.

Just as the Watergate revelations were not surprising to those who understand the true nature of imperialism, the liberal analysis given by the revisionist CPUSA should not be surprising. From the beginning, the revisionists portrayed this as a struggle between the forces of fascism and the forces of democracy and tried to hide the contention among the bourgeoisie. The people became a mere pressure group cheering section for the anti-Nixon forces in the bourgeoisie. As late as July 30, 1974, their paper the "Daily World" ran a headline "Panel Nails Nixon in Police State Acts," whitewashing the House Judiciary Committee debate as whether to oppose or defend "the building of a police-state type of machinery in the White House." As is usual for the revisionists, no attempt is made at a class analysis of what interest are for or against Nixon. The net effect is a promoting of the bourgeoisie to the people. The revisionists' "solution" to Watergate is more reforms. Before Nixon quit, Gus Hall was ranting about "impeaching the trusts." But their main answer all along was--new elections! While this demand might be good at other times, to raise it now, when more people than ever are disgusted at the bourgeois electoral process and have seen the worthlessness of reformism by Ford's regime carrying out the same attacks on the people as Nixon, is to hold back the people.. With contradictions bound to sharpen again in the bourgeoisie, and with disillusionment with a system that is openly corrupt and doesn't even claim to have a solu-

tion to inflation, the conditions are ripe to expose to the masses that we live under a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that the only solution is proletarian revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat. But the revisionists want to set us up for another Chile, another "peaceful transition" that ends up with our blood running in the streets. Thus they raise slogans like "stop evasion of the Constitution" showing their unflagging loyalty to the bourgeoisie, its political system and its laws.

On the other hand, the "Communist" League characterized Watergate as the time and place the bourgeoisie decided to go over to fascism. This analysis is entirely in conformity with their general counterrevolutionary line. Rather than conclude that Watergate represented a heightening of contradiction and vicious infighting among leading groups of monopoly capitalists for the shrinking pie, the CL stated in "People's Tribune" (Vol. V, No. 9) that Watergate represents one of the "struggles of the imperialists to tighten their grip on all aspects of this society.: What about the splits among the bourgeoisie? "Nixon causes plenty of embarrassment among the very big monopolies, but overall he is doing exactly what they want and need him to do." In practice, CL calls for the resignation of Nixon and new elections, rather than educating the masses on the need to overthrow the system and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. They see Watergate as a further piece of evidence to support their contention that there is a shift to fascism going on in the U.S., because the shakeup in Nixon's cabinet has enabled him to "replace bureaucrats with militant fascists and especially with extremely reactionary army men." In short, the imperialists are consolidating their power in preparation for the outright institution of fascism. How should we fight this? Build the United Front Against Fascism Build a party now!

Yet the revisionists and Trotskyites were not the only ones who panicked and posed the struggle as one between the bourgeois democracy The October League (M-L), while in a more modified form, put forward a similar analysis that over-estimated the danger of fascism based on that issue. While we make a qualitative distinction between the revisionists who pin their hopes on the reasonableness of the bourgeoisie, and base all other political activities on their grand strategy of "peaceful transition to socialism", on re-election etc. which represent the main danger we are nevertheless obligated to point out the errors, and deviations of comrade organizations and our own in regard to these question in this period. The essence of their line is that there was a split in the bourgeoisie between those like Nixon who tried to "consolidate its power, using terror, sabotage, and harassment against the people's movement as well as against its own capitalist opposition elements" (July 1973, The Call) and those in the

bourgeoisie who were opposed to "the fascist threat". After the Cox-Richardson firings, they raised the slogan "Dump Nixon! Stop the Facist Tide!" again reacting to the intensified contradictions in the bourgeoisie as moves of facists against anti-facists.

This analysis led OL into a series of errors that led them to the brink of abandoning the class stand of the proletariat. First, they portrayed the impeachment movement as another spontaneous mass movement, and overlooked that it was initiated by the bourgeoisie only after their internal contradictions sharpened, and not as a result of any move towards facism. Second, they said that there could be a "tactical alliance" (this they said verbally) between the masses and the liberal imperialists to oust Nixon. This came from the analysis that both the people and a section of the imperialists opposed facism, and therefore, had common interests. Third, from this, by seeking to unite with a section of the imperialists, they had to modify their class stand and start to make it acceptable to a section of the bourgeoisie. They promoted the idea that the democratic constitutional process works. (Feb. 1974, "Call) We are concerned with Nixon's tax evasions and his taking of bribes from the dairy millionaires, oil monopolies, and IT & T--- WE are equally concerned with the crime of the Nixon regime which are not "impeachable" such as the Indochina War, etc.. Here they are only "equally" concerned about crimes against people and infighting in the bourgeoisie. And doesn't this talk of "violations of the constitution" sound like CPUSA "stop invasion of the constitution"? Lastly, their analysis of the role of Congress was misleading. Congress was presented in the April 1974 "CALL" as if they were a vacillating middle force between the facist Nixon and the masses of people. The "Call" accused the Congress of being "paralyzed" and said that "mass sentiment" must be "organized so that the pressure remains on the Congress to act". Yet what proved decisive was not any change in mass sentiment against Nixon, but the development of unity in the bourgeoisie against Nixon. There was no identity of interest here between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and no basis for such class collaboration. But their conception of the struggle as involving facism and bourgeois democracy leads them to seek an alliance with a sector of the bourgeoisie which in turn leads them to eliminate all talk of socialism and revolution, which is unacceptable to their bourgeois allies. In practice, their "pressure" strategy meant just posing reforms as the solution to Watergate, and not socialism. They do not raise a solution--proletarian revolution. The essence of what they have done is to start with a tactic of exposing the menace of facism, and instead of subordinating that to the strategic goal of socialist revolution, they sacrifice the longrange goal for the sake of the short-term struggle, and in so doing alter a class analysis into a liberal critique of Nixon and some facist-militarists, withdrawing the aim of overthrowing all the imperialists, both the then-pro Nixon and anti-Nixon sections.

All along as the Watergate drama unfolded, the Revolutionary Union did not take a position on the impeachment movement, except to say that Watergate represented a "falling out of thieves." Then, in the November 1973 "Revolution", in bold headlines, appeared "THROW THE BUM OUT!" ORGANIZE TO FIGHT!" The lead paragraphs states "The kicking out of Richard Nixon has become a mass demand of the American people. The RU supports this demand and believes it is very

important now to mobilize mass struggle in support of it, around the general slogan THROW THE BUM OUT! ORGANIZE TO FIGHT!"

"It is not the concern of the people how it is done -through impeachment, resignation, or whatever, And it is not our intention to get trapped into bourgeois 'legalistic' arguments about whether or not Nixon has committed impeachable offenses. Nor do we give a damn about who replaces Nixon."

First of all, the RU only seems to have noticed the Watergate affair after lifting its head from the drawing board for building a mass movement. It had apparently gotten too near-sighted to notice whatelse was going in the country. They jumped on the bandwagon only after the Watergate scandals had burst into the news media, only after Cox and Richardson were fired which in turn sparked a mass letter-writing campaign and apparently jolted the RU into realizing that the impeachment issue was rousing mass sentiment. That's why only "now" it was an opportune time to "mobilize mass struggle in support of it!"

Secondly, why didn't the RU "give a damn" about who replaces the bum? Their goal was specifically to kick Nixon while he's down because it could be a stepping-stone to "strike an important tactical blow against the whole imperialist ruling class" and strengthen the subjective forces. It was pointed out that this was a "tactic of the proletariat" which should be linked up with the fight against wage controls, police terror and other moves towards a fascist state. But to talk only of Nixon and to say nothing about his successor who is equally a representative of the monopoly capital, or the entire class of monopoly capitalists (or "bums" as the RU would say), seems to lay an extra burden of guilt on the man Nixon himself. This is one illusion we must challenge and expose to the American people--to say we don't "give a damn" just liquidates that whole question.

Thirdly, when it was clear that the issue had aroused mass sentiment, but not a mass movement, why did the RU continue to put so much emphasis on building it into a mass movement? In the final analysis, Nixon was forced to resign by overwhelming opinion in both houses of Congress and by the fact that opposing groups of monopoly capitalists had whittled away at his political "base".

The RU's failure to provide communist leadership was not accidental; it grows out of their formulation of the principal task of the last period as building the "struggle consciousness and revolutionary unity of the working class." The RU has read about but obviously failed to understand that there are two kinds of consciousness: trade union consciousness, which the working class rises to on its own, and socialist consciousness which must be introduced from without. Because the RU has relegated the role of theory to the backseat, they were bound to commit errors of tailing after the spontaneity of the masses.

What most of the groups on the left have in common is that they adopted essentially a defensive stance, especially with regard to facism. This outlook stems partly from a gross over-estimation of the unity and strength of the ruling class and, on the other side of the same coin, a pessimistic under-estimation of the power of the masses and the level of their consciousness---overall, not grasping that revolution is the main trend of the

world today. The masses of the American people, especially the national minorities and working class, have been fighting for years and will continue to spontaneously take the offensive against fascist attacks on their standard of living and the stripping away of their democratic rights. What they lack most right now is organization and ideology to advance their spontaneous understanding. But on so fundamental an issue one which showed up the monopoly capitalists, as a class, to be in dire straits and incapable of coping with their mounting crisis at home and abroad, the Marxist-Leninist forces tailed behind the bourgeoisie and found themselves left in the dust. In the end it was the bourgeoisie themselves, who initiated and carried through to completion, for their own interests, the whole impeachment campaign.

Communists should have been out in front playing a leading role in exposing finance capital's interconnections, their various interest groupings, and explaining the crisis imperialism is in which is forcing these groups of monopoly capitalists to start cutting each others' throats. Much more propaganda and education should have been done, rather than concentrating on the act of impeachment itself, on Nixon himself, or warning against the rising tide of fascism.

The Asian Study Group criticizes itself as well for its failure to play a more active role, especially in the areas of propaganda and education. Our participation was limited to helping build the March 2nd demonstration in New York City (around the issues of the energy crisis and impeachment) and putting out an analysis of Watergate in the first issue of "Workers Viewpoint."

Ford, for a short time, may try to give the illusion that his is an "open presidency," and that he consults with the American people before making major decisions, but in the end this will all be exposed as an illusion. Ford will be forced to continue attacks on the standard of living of the working class, in order to try to save the sinking ship of state, but any makeshift solutions he comes up with will be bound to fail. In the final analysis, this whole exercise in democratic institutions and the democratic process, has irretrievably weakened the ruling class. It will have been a good lesson for the American people in how bourgeois democracy really works--the scandals, the deals, the campaign financing, the deprivation of rights--and for whom it works. It will be clearer than ever that the changing of the guard was nothing more than that, and that essentially the same policies, in a slightly different garb, are being pursued. And the masses of American people already up in anger about Watergate, about inflation, about housing and school conditions, about unemployment, under the leadership of communists, will see more and more the need to rise up in arms to make revolution and topple the whole class of monopoly capitalists--Nixon, Ford, Rockefeller, Kennedy and all their like.

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The proletarian revolution can forestall fascism. And the dialectics of history is such that if the proletarian revolution is diverted and delayed, even by a historical moment of hesitation by the defensive posture of our advocates of the United Front Against Fascism strategy, then what is forthcoming can indeed be fascism and not socialism.