

'Lalkaar-Pratibaddh' Group's Understanding of Fascism

A Menagerie of Dogmatic Blunders

(Part - III)

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9. Sukhwinder's Views on the Particularity of the Fascist Reaction: The Unbearable Lightness of a Trot-Bundist Mind

Sukhwinder talks about the particularity of the fascist reaction as a specific form of far-right bourgeois reaction and condemns various communists for harboring incorrect views about it and failing to understand this particularity. On the whole, there is no doubt that there has been a tendency in the world communist movement to regard any form of reaction and oppression as 'fascist'. This epithet has often been used for agitational purposes very carelessly to convey a pejorative meaning. Of course, this tendency is very harmful and most of the communist revolutionaries today understand it.

However, there are certain questions regarding this that Sukhwinder must answer.

Was he, too, a victim of the tendency to consider all forms of bourgeois reaction as fascist? If yes, when did he get rid of this? Let us see whether this malaise afflicted Sukhwinder or not and whether he ever self-criticized on this issue.

Sukhwinder had once characterized the *khalistanis* as fascists in one of his articles on Pash and *khalistanis* in July 2010. Sukhwinder wrote in an article 'Pash, Udasi, Communist, Khalistani', published in July 2010 issue of 'Pratibaddh':

"...Rajinder Rahi is a supporter of a reactionary ideology and is vouching for a *reactionary fascist upsurge like Khalistan*, the lewd comments passed by him on Pash and communist movement is not at all surprising. It is very consistent for the likes of such reactionaries.

...

"... Undoubtedly be it the case of attack on Harimander Sahib, the Sikh genocide of 84 in Delhi and other parts of the country, demolition of Babri Masjid, Gujarat pogrom of 2002 and also the mass killings of Hindu minority in Punjab at the hands of Khalistani fundamentalists. Communists have always raised voice against the attacks on minorities. Communists are against religion but they do not deny the fact of religious discrimination." (Sukhwinder, 'Pash, Udasi, Communist, Khalistani', *Pratibaddh*, July, 2010, *emphasis ours*)

Does he still believe that? This view of Sukhwinder was expressed when he was still in our organization and even then, our organization had time and again pointed out that the imbecile tendency of characterizing all forms of bourgeois reaction as fascist is not only theoretically erroneous but it is politically harmful, too, as it disarms the working class and working masses from mounting an effective fight against fascism. By the time this article was published, we had already published our booklet on fascism where we had dealt with this childish tendency, too. We were unaware about this comment which was made in the Punjabi magazine. Recently, a comrade brought this fact to our notice. However, we did not know that Sukhwinder had such

journalistic and infantile understanding of fascism. Now, is it surprising that he himself is borrowing various elements of his program from the *khalistanis* themselves!

It is a mark of honesty for communists to offer self-criticism. When we developed our understanding of economic crisis and arrived at the profitability-crisis-explanation, we openly wrote about it and self-criticized and accepted that it was the lack of comprehensive study of this question that had caused the mistake. The same was true for the concept of 'permanent crisis' which we had harbored erroneously and when we understood that *theoretically* this concept is wrong, even if the present long depression proves to be *historically* the last crisis, we openly wrote about it. We have quoted above this self-criticism that Kavita and I wrote. Since, 2016 itself, the shift in our writing was evident and we considered it our responsibility to express the evolution of our views on crisis theory.

However, Sukhwinder has the habit of opportunistically hopping like a frog repeatedly on various questions without offering any explanation or self-criticism on these questions. The readers might recall his pendulum-like vacillations on the question of MSP, on the national question, on the linguistic question, on the question of Soviet constitution and its allegedly 'federal' character, and many other questions. In fact, Sukhwinder completely shared our understanding of fascism, too, in all its evolution and changes, till 2019. However, in his booklet, he offers no self-criticism. He does make a self-critical comment about it in one of the recent editorials of 'Pratibaddh'. However, what would have been honest, was the admission of this self-criticism in his essay itself, which has been written precisely on the subject in question and propagated as this group's position on fascism. Moreover, Sukhwinder's essay on fascism came much earlier and that fragmentary self-critical comment in editorial of one of the issues of 'Pratibaddh' came much later. We can understand why this happened. Someone might have pointed to him that he, too, subscribed to the understanding of our organization till 2019.

Again, Sukhwinder tries to stick to plagiarizing, quotationing and paraphrasing from classical sources, so that he does not goof up again. However, the moment he tries to elaborate and explain, he reveals his utter inability to understand the most basic of things. Let us see how our Trot-Bundist honcho bollixes everything out of order.

Sukhwinder writes:

"Comrade Dimitrov, in this regard, says that, "Comrade Dutt was right in his contention that there has been a tendency among us to contemplate fascism in general, without taking into account the specific features of the fascist movement in the various countries, erroneously classifying all reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie as fascism and going so far as calling the entire non-Communist camp fascist. The struggle against fascism was not strengthened but rather weakened in consequence.

*"The trend of misnaming every form of bourgeois reaction as fascism can also be found in Chou-En-Lai's article 'On Chinese Fascism, The New Autocracy.' In this article Chou brands Kuomintang Party as a fascist party. This party, in its ideology, in its social basis cannot be called a fascist party in any way. Chou-En-Lai's understanding of fascism in no way accords with the understanding of fascism developed by Comintern, the parties associated with it, leaders, thinkers of these parties and Marxist intellectuals after the second world war. Here we cannot criticise it in detail." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 26, *author's emphasis*)*

First of all, the very injunction of Dutt, quoted by Dimitrov, is ignored by Sukhwinder: "there has been a tendency among us to contemplate fascism in general, without taking into account the specific features of the fascist movement in the various countries". Sukhwinder suffers from this, too. Temporally as well as spatially, Sukhwinder fails to recognize the particularities of fascist rise in different countries and in different times. Notwithstanding the mechanical and

economistic understanding of Dutt as well as Dimitrov, this particular point is noteworthy. Sukhwinder expects that fascism will assume exactly the same forms and will follow exactly the same trajectory that it did in the early-Twentieth century. This is precisely the childish and ignorant historicist dogmatism of Sukhwinder that we have identified time and again. The fact is that even the trajectory followed by the Italian fascism and that followed by the German fascism were very much different from each other, as we shall see later in this essay.

Sukhwinder writes further:

“To correctly understand the phenomena of fascism, it is important to differentiate between fascist movement and fascist regime. In the imperialist stage of capitalism, the reactionary movement of fascism can originate in any capitalist country. But it is not necessary that this movement will succeed in setting up a fascist regime. Fascist movements originated in almost all the capitalist countries after the first world war in the last century. But only in two countries, Germany and Italy fascist regimes were set up. Whether the fascist movement will be able to set up a fascist regime depends on many factors. We have already discussed these factors. *The most important factor out of these was the economic and political crisis of capitalism. Fascist dictatorship can only be set up in the condition when a threat (from the working class) emerges for capitalist system.*” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 26-27, *emphasis ours*)

So, this is precisely Sukhwinder’s line of argument behind calling Modi regime not fascist: there is no economic crisis and consequently no political crisis of capitalism in India, and therefore, there is no political offensive of the working class. We have already seen the sheer ignorance of Sukhwinder regarding the very concepts of economic crisis as well as that of political crisis. We have also seen that he fails to understand that the Indian economy is, indeed, going through a crisis and stagnation.

We would urge the readers to mind these words of Sukhwinder: “Fascist dictatorship can only be set up in the condition when a threat (from the working class) emerges for capitalist system.” This is *conditio sine qua non* for fascist rise to power for Sukhwinder. However, from Poulantzas, Zetkin, Gramsci and many others, we know there is no such necessary condition and Sukhwinder’s befuddled and disoriented head has cooked this up so that he can take a rest and relax while fascists run amok on the streets and perform an internal takeover of the state apparatus, as for him, no such threat from the working class exists in India right now! We have already pointed this out that the group that he leads has not done anything real and material against fascists in power right now. We have already demonstrated that his views about economic crisis in India are ridiculously ignorant and also the fact that revolutionary onslaught of the proletariat or the threat of proletarian revolution is not a precondition for fascist rise. In fact, the fascist rise begins on the ruins of the political revolutionary movement of the proletariat, as discussed earlier in the present essay.

10. Sukhwinder’s Prescription for Class Collaboration and Indefinite Suspension of the Present Revolutionary Tasks of the Proletariat

Sukhwinder writes:

“Here it needs to be discussed as to which situation is better for the development of working class movement? Is it the bourgeois democratic form or fascism or some other form of naked dictatorship? We should not forget that today in various capitalist countries the bourgeois democratic liberties that are available to the working class and other toiling masses, they aren’t a form of charity by the rulers to workers/toilers rather the working class with the help of other toiling

masses (especially peasants) has won these through century long struggles, uncountable sacrifices, martyrdoms. In the anti-feudalism struggles around the world, the ancestors of the working class, handicraft workers spilled their blood. Modern working class, since its origin, engaged in long struggles in feudal system, colonial anti-colonial countries with the alliance of toiling masses. The struggle of workers/toilers for democratic liberties continued ever after the establishment of capitalism. As a result of these sacrifices, workers, toilers won democratic rights. This struggle for the safeguard and extension of democratic rights has an important place in the struggle of workers/ toilers for the construction of new socialist society. It is in bourgeois democratic system that the working class can correctly organise itself. It can ideologically, politically and organisationally prepare itself for the construction of new social system (socialism). *That is why, when the working class faces the question of choice between bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship (or some other form of naked dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) it sides with bourgeois democracy. Such was also the directive of Comintern's line of 'Anti Fascist Popular Front' in 1935.*" (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 27-28, *emphasis ours*)

This statement reveals the pathetic bourgeois democratic illusions of Sukhwinder with utmost clarity. Sukhwinder argues that the 'popular front' line of the Comintern since 1934-35, provides a general framework of anti-fascist proletarian strategy and it does so even today. Does this claim hold any water?

First of all, even all the revolutionary communists of that period did not accept the universal application of the line of the 'popular front' espoused by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. Secondly, this was not the general policy, *temporally speaking*, even of the Comintern and was adopted in the conditions of complete defeat and destruction of the organized workers' movement, though, even in that situation, the line was afflicted with serious right-wing deviation, as we shall see. Thirdly, even in the 1930s, the harmful impact of the universal application of such policy without taking into consideration the character of the state, ruling class and social formation of a country, were quite evident. Let us discuss each of these in a little detail to reveal the bourgeois democratic illusions of our Trot-Bundist chieftain.

As we pointed out above, not all the leading revolutionaries of the period accepted the universal application of the line of the 'popular front'. Mao was one amongst them. Even though the use of the term 'fascism' by Mao and the CPC during the period of the Second World War and the period immediately after the war, was imprecise and inaccurate. For instance, it talks about 'Japanese fascism' of Tojo regime, the Polish fascism of the Pilsudski regime and even talks about 'KMT-comprador fascist regime', 'feudal fascist regime', etc. One reason for this erroneous tendency was the general lack of care in characterizing all the international allies of Germany, Italy and Japan as fascists; second reason was the tendency to characterize all forms of dictatorial reaction as fascist; however, these characterizations were certainly not accurate at all and they are not only present in the writing of Chou En-Lai but also in the writings of Mao himself, as well as, the CPC in general. At the same time, we also need to understand the historical context of the period in order to understand what led to such mistakes. Mao and the CPC were not alone in committing these mistakes. Many other revolutionary communists committed this mistake during that period. One reason for that was also the fact that fascism as a political phenomenon was still evolving for the first time.

In what follows, we have quoted Nicos Poulantzas at length on many questions, more than any other authority on this subject. The reason for this is the fact that among all Marxist scholars after the Second World War, Poulantzas, despite his Althusserian tendency of "ideologism" and "politicism", fell nearest to the Leninist and Maoist position, approach and method on this particular question. His critique of Comintern complemented his critique of Trotsky, who were united in their understanding by their economism and lack of massline. Moreover, Poulantzas

more-or-less correctly takes cue from the correct elements in the Marxist thinking of various Marxist revolutionaries and scholars, from Lenin, Zetkin and Gramsci to Togliatti and others. His presentation of the question is nearest to Lenin's approach in some respects. We have also critiqued Poulantzas on certain questions, especially questions pertaining to political economy. Besides, we have pointed repeatedly to the incorrect and reformist political prescriptions of Poulantzas, evident in the last parts of his last work, which stemmed from the general pathology of the European left since the capitalist restoration in the USSR, the revisionist acts of the PCF in France and also the Althusserianism of Poulantzas.

However, despite these shortcomings, his understanding of fascism in the early-Twentieth century, his critique of economism prevalent in Comintern's position, Trotsky's position as well as the positions of various communist parties of the period, his critique of the "left" as well as right-opportunist deviations in the international communist movement's appraisal of fascism and the policy of anti-fascist united front, and finally, his appreciation of the changes in the *modus operandi* of world capitalism in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage, especially, his identification of the decay of the bourgeois democratic content of the *form* of bourgeois parliamentary system, and his position that the rise of fascism and other exceptional bourgeois states in the period since neoliberalism will assume qualitatively different forms from their avatars of the early-Twentieth century, are very significant and relevant today. They provide very important pointers which can be developed and used by Marxist-Leninists today to analyze the contemporary rise of fascism and other far right movements and regimes.

A. *Sukhwinder's Delusions Regarding the Second United Front Against Japan in China and the Policy of the 'Popular Front'*

Sukhwinder's attempt to equate the Second United Front against Japan with Dimitroff line of the 'popular front' only betrays his complete ignorance of Maoist thinking and the history of the Chinese Revolution. After having a ridiculously inane discussion (to which we will come later) about the errors of the German Communist Party in refusing to form alliance with Social-Democratic Party as a broad anti-fascist front, Sukhwinder writes:

"For the construction of wide united front against a common enemy, we should learn from Comrade Mao. When people's war was striding forward in 1935 in China, Japanese imperialism attacked China. Before Japanese aggression the primary contradiction was with Kuomintang. But after Japanese attack the principal contradiction changed. The communist party of China, its leader Comrade Mao offered to forge a united front with Kuomintang for fighting against Japanese offensive. The understanding of Communist Party of China was that though reactionary elements dominated in Kuomintang but there were anti-imperialist and patriotic elements in it too, particularly in the masses which followed in its wake had large amount of patriotic elements. Thus, Kuomintang must be forced to join the anti-Japanese united front. But Kuomintang leader Chiang-Kai-Shek rejected this offer. But the communist party of Japan was steadfast in its position of forging a united front with Kuomintang against Japanese offensive and regularly issued appeals to Kuomintang for the same. This created a situation of split in Kuomintang. As a result, Kuomintang was forced to forge a united front with communist party against Japanese aggression." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 38-39)

Here, we will not discuss the highly imprecise use of terms like "primary contradiction" or mistakes which might be slips of pen (though, big ones!) like talking about the "steadfast policy of the Communist Party of Japan" of "forging a united front with Kuomintang"! We will continue to show the general problem of Sukhwinder, namely, imprecise use of various terms, serious slips like the one mentioned above, and also sheer and utter ignorance of history in what follows. For now, we return to the crux of the problem in the above excerpt of Sukhwinder.

Mao talks about the broad anti-Japanese united front as a front that will include various anti-Japanese fractions of the Chinese ruling class (including tactical alliances with fractions of comprador bourgeoisie, who were agents of British and US Imperialism, and as a derivative result of inter-imperialist rivalry, were opposed to the Japanese invasion) and whose aim would not be the establishment of workers' and peasants' democratic dictatorship, but repelling and defeating the Japanese invasion as the first principal task.

Sukhwinder has ignorantly used this as an example of Mao's general support for Dimitrov's line of the 'popular front'; evidently, Sukhwinder is unable to distinguish between *fascist rise*, which is *immanent to the political situation of a country* on the one hand, and a *foreign imperialist invasion*, which exists on a *different level of determination*, that is, inter-imperialist rivalry and class struggle at the international level, on the other hand. It goes without saying that there is a relation between the two levels, however, the strategic and tactical considerations for both scenarios are qualitatively different. One illustration of this fact is the correct communist criticism of the CPI's mistake of not participating in the 'Quit India Movement' in the beginning, on the pretext, that on the international level, Britain is part of the allied forces against fascism. Anyway, we need to understand the two different scenarios.

In the former case, the general line on strategic and tactical alliances would be different from those in the case of an imperialist invasion. *If the CPC considered KMT-rule as a "fascist one", why did it ally with it against Japan? And if CPC did not consider KMT as fascist, then why did it not ally with it after the defeat of Japan if it followed the line of the 'popular front', which was also another instance of CPC under Mao rejecting the line of the Comintern?* Every serious student of modern Chinese history knows that the case of broad united front with the KMT was *only* in the conditions of Japanese imperialist invasion; in fact, when the Comintern prescribed alliance with the KMT except the periods of imperialist invasion of Japan, Mao did not agree with it, which again makes it clear that the broad united front against Japan was not a model of the 'popular front'. It was a broad united front of all forces ready to fight against an imperialist invasion. It had no idea of strategic class alliance behind it, in terms of stages of revolution in a country. The 'popular front' does have an idea of *strategic class alliance of all forces* opposed to *'the most reactionary elements of financial monopoly bourgeoisie'*, of course, an incorrect idea, to say the least.

Regarding the character of the broadest united front against Japanese invasion, which intended to transform China into a total colony, Mao writes:

"At the present time, the basic task of such a government should be to oppose the annexation of China by Japanese imperialism. It will have a broader representation so that it may include those who are interested only in the national revolution and not in the agrarian revolution, and *even, if they so desire, those who may oppose Japanese imperialism and its running dogs, though they are not opposed to the European and U.S. imperialists because of their close ties with the latter.* Therefore, as a matter of principle, the programme of such a government should be in keeping with the basic task of fighting Japanese imperialism and its lackeys, and we should modify our past policies accordingly." (Mao Tse-tung. 1975. 'On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism', *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, p. 166, *emphasis ours*)

Mao clearly pointed out that the policy of the Second United Front was driven by the most important factor of the Japanese imperialist invasion, where the internal contradictions of China have, temporarily assumed a secondary place (a completely different consideration from the one that led to the incorrect policy of the 'popular front'):

"As the contradiction between China and Japan has become the principal one and China's internal contradictions have dropped into a secondary and subordinate place, changes have occurred in China's international relations and internal class

relations, giving rise to a new stage of development in the current situation.” (Mao Tse-tung, 1975. ‘The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party in the Period of Resistance to Japan’ (1937), *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 263, *emphasis ours*)

Mao elaborates:

“The contradiction between China and Japan has changed internal class relations within China and has confronted the bourgeoisie and even the warlords with the question of survival, so that they and their political parties have been undergoing a gradual change in their political attitude. This has placed the task of establishing an anti-Japanese national united front before the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people. Our united front should include the bourgeoisie and all who agree to the defence of the motherland; it should represent national solidarity against the foreign foe.” (ibid, p. 264, emphasis ours)

Mao points out that the character of the Second United Front is actually that of *national united front against imperialist invasion*:

“The contradiction between China and Japan has changed matters for the masses throughout the country (the proletariat, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie) and for the Communist Party, and it has changed the Party's policy. More and more people have risen to fight for national salvation. The policy proclaimed by the Communist Party after the September 18th Incident was to conclude agreements with those sections of the Kuomintang which were willing to co-operate with us for resistance, subject to three conditions (stop attacking the revolutionary base areas, guarantee the freedoms and rights of the people, arm the people), and it has developed into a policy of establishing an anti-Japanese united front of the whole nation.” (ibid, p. 264, emphasis ours)

More:

“In terms of relative political importance the development of the national contradiction between China and Japan has demoted the domestic contradictions between classes and between political groupings to a secondary and subordinate place. But they still exist and have by no means diminished or disappeared. The same is true of the contradictions between China and the imperialist powers other than Japan. Therefore, the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people are faced with the following task -- to make the appropriate adjustments with regard to those internal and external contradictions which can and must be adjusted at present so as to fit in with the general task of unity against Japan.” (ibid. p. 265)

Many such quotations from Mao can be reproduced here, which is not needed. The above representative quotations themselves demonstrate that the very foundational thinking behind the formation of the Second United Front, had nothing whatsoever to do with the policy of the ‘popular front’ and in this same period, Mao and the CPC did not agree with the general policy of the ‘popular front’ as we will shortly see. Of course, the Second United Front against Japan was *objectively* a part of what Mao casually termed as ‘world united front against fascism’, because Japan happened to be part of the fascist axis, and also happened to be the country that invaded China. However, to conflate the Second United Front against Japan and the idea of ‘popular front’ reveals the most childish kind of ignorance on part of Sukhwinder.

Thus, we can see that the idea of broadest possible united front of all forces ready to fight against an imperialist invasion on the one hand, has nothing to do with the idea of the 'popular front' against fascism, on the other (even though the latter idea itself was incorrect), *because the very system of contradictions in the two cases are qualitatively different*. Since Sukhwinder cannot find justification for his erroneous class capitulationist line, he misappropriates and distorts the history of Chinese revolution itself! Or, there is an equal possibility that despite racking his brains, he could not understand the history, which is a regular thing for editor *saab*.

Now let us come to the question of Comintern's policy since 1933-35, that is, the policy of the 'popular front' and the approach of Mao towards this policy.

B. The CPC, Mao, the Comintern and the Policy of the 'Popular Front': Sukhwinder Nescience of History

Why is Sukhwinder so antagonistic towards history? He is not aware that the CPC as well as Mao had a critical attitude towards the policy of the Comintern in case of the strategic and tactical considerations of the Chinese revolution, as is well known now, and *also in the case of the implementation of the policy of the 'popular front' in Europe and especially in Spain*. However, the party did not voice these concerns and criticisms in a pronounced manner during the war. In the 1960s, critical statements regarding the policies of the Comintern pertaining to strategic class alliances and especially regarding the 'popular front' started to become more vocal.

We will show in what follows, the attitude of Mao and Kang Sheng regarding the 'popular front' policy of the Comintern. Those interested in reading Mao's and CPC's criticism of the Comintern can read Chou En-Lai's essay 'The Communist International and the Chinese Communist Party' from 1960: (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CI60.html>) and also RCP's critique of Hoxhaite line, 'Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tse-tung Thought': (<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-hoxha/section1.htm>) where Mao's criticism of Comintern has been discussed in detail. Readers can also refer to excerpts from Mao's speech on the dissolution of the Comintern (a decision which in itself might be a matter of controversy, in which we cannot go into here): (https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_36.htm). Those who would read the primary material related to this subject, would immediately realize that the Second United Front against Japan and the Dimitrov line of the 'popular front' *only coincide in time*, and not in theory or content, as Sukhwinder imagines. Chou En-Lai points to this fact in the aforementioned essay, as we shall see later.

First of all, let us see, how Mao constantly opposed the incorrect political line of the 'popular front'. Regarding this, J. Werner writes:

"Unfortunately 1927 was not the last time in the history of the Chinese Revolution that the Comintern gave poor advice to the Chinese communists. We have already pointed out that the Wang Ming line, which Hoxha so stubbornly defends long after it has been proven to be wrong, was to varying degrees supported by the Comintern and perhaps by Stalin as well. From 1935 onward, during the period of the war against Japan, Wang Ming generally proposed a capitulationist line, and once again had the support of the Comintern in doing so. *Wang Ming called for a "united government of national defense" in direct opposition to Mao's call for a "people's republic" and for a united front against Japan*. Wang Ming at this time supported Chiang Kai-shek's condition for unity with the Communists—namely that Chiang be given control over the Red Army. Of course Mao vigorously fought—and defeated—this.

"This same tendency came out in much sharper form in 1945, following the defeat of Japan. *At that time Stalin argued strenuously that the Chinese Communist Party should cast away any perspective of completing the bourgeois-democratic*

*revolution in the near future and should instead fight for a legal role in a bourgeois republic led by Chiang Kai-shek. In response to the situation following the defeat of Japan, Mao did, correctly, enter into negotiations with Chiang, but at the same time he made very clear that any coalition government that was formed would have to be on the basis of preserving the independence of the Communist Party, its base areas, and its army. It was in 1945 that Mao put forward his famous statement "without a People's Army the people have nothing" as a direct rebuke to those who would have had the People's Army dissolve and be absorbed unconditionally into a Chiang government. It should be noted that this policy, which was being urged on the Chinese Party, was the line that many of the parties of Western Europe (in France, Italy and Greece, for example) followed at the time, with the result that any immediate prospect for revolution was lost." (Werner, J. 1979. 'Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tse-tung Thought', *The Communist*, Number 5, May, 1979)*

The last italicized portion is regarding the policy of the 'popular front' itself. Regarding the Wang Ming's right deviation, what Chou En-Lai has written is actually a veiled criticism of the policy of the 'popular front'. Chou En-Lai points out:

"Although Comrade Mao Zedong was in charge of the Chinese Party during this period, the Communist International still had its influence. The main problem was the reappearance of the Wang Ming line. Wang Ming came back from the International at the end of 1937 and said that he had talked with Stalin. Claiming to speak for the International, he proposed that "everything should go through the united front" and declared that the Kuomintang, like the Communist Party, had rallied excellent young people around it. After his return Wang Ming was placed in charge of the Changjiang Bureau. He deceived a number of people and pushed through his line a second time. Though this line was implemented for only a short time, it had an influence on the north, on the New Fourth Army and on Shanghai. It cannot be denied that the reappearance of the Wang Ming line had something to do with the Communist International. Stalin trusted Wang Ming, and Dimitrov was on friendly terms with him. Later, when I went to Moscow to talk about Wang Ming's errors, Dimitrov was surprised by what I had to say." (Chou En-Lai. 1960. <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CI60.html>)

Wang Ming implemented an even more capitulationist version of the 'popular front' in China, in terms of his prescribed approach towards Chiang and KMT. However, this, too, is clear from Chou En-Lai's account that the Chinese Communist Party did have serious reservations regarding the policy of the 'popular front'. These reservations began to be voiced more vocally since the late-1950s and 1960s.

Again, those who are interested in reading, in particular, a critique of the 'popular front' from a broadly Maoist position, can refer to the article 'The Line of the Comintern on Spanish Civil War in Spain', written by Bob Avakian in his genuine Maoist period, published in *Revolution* magazine's volume number 6, issue number 1, in June 1981. Here we will concentrate on Mao's reservation on the 'popular front'.

Kang Sheng expressing Mao's viewpoint during a long talk by Mao pointed out:

"On New Democracy is of great significance for the world communist movement. I asked Spanish comrades, and they said the problem for them was to establish bourgeois democracy, not to establish New Democracy. In their country, they did not concern themselves with the three points: army, countryside, political power. They wholly subordinated themselves to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy, and achieved nothing at all. (Mao: These are the policies of Chen Tu-hsiu!) They say the Communist Party organized an army, and then turned it over to

others. (Mao: This is useless.) They also did not want political power, nor did they mobilize the peasantry. At that time, the Soviet Union said to them that if they imposed proletarian dictatorship, England and France might oppose it, and this would not be in the interests of the Soviet Union ... Also, when they fought, they waged regular war, in the manner of the bourgeoisie, they defended Madrid to the last. In all things, they subordinated themselves to Soviet foreign policy.” (quoted in Schram, Stuart. 1974. *Chairman Mao talks to the People*, Pantheon Books, p. 218, *emphasis ours*)

Readers are requested to concentrate on certain statements of Kang Sheng here that we have italicized.

The first italicized portion talks about the capitulationist policy of the ‘popular front’ of refusing to establish either a socialist republic or a people’s democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Sukhwinder, too, commits the same blunder, though in a much poorer and much more ignorant and “bare-naked” fashion. It never occurs to him that even if we accept that under certain peculiar conditions, the strategic horizon in conditions of fascism in power is not the socialist revolution, then why it must necessarily be *restoration of the bourgeois democracy, and why not new democracy or people’s democracy?* Such line reeks of rank tailendism and surrender of the political independence of the proletariat.

Lenin clearly stressed on the policy of ‘united front from below’ which was that of tactical issue-based alliances with social-democratic and socialist parties, but mainly organizing the rank-and-file workers and working masses from all kinds of organizations, including the social-democratic ones, against fascism. Lenin pointed out:

“The victory of the Italian Communists is assured if they do not isolate themselves *from the masses*, if they do not lose patience in the hard work of *exposing all of Serrati’s chicanery to rank-and-file workers in a practical way*, if they do not yield to the very easy and very dangerous temptation to say “minus a” whenever Serrati says “a”, if they steadily *train the masses* to adopt a revolutionary world outlook and prepare them for revolutionary action, if they also take practical advantage of the practical and magnificent (although costly) object lessons of fascism.” (Lenin, V. I. *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, Progress Publishers, p. 11, *emphasis ours*)

Elsewhere, Lenin writes:

“The third fact is the most important. A meeting was held in Rome to organise the struggle against the fascists, in which 50,000 workers took part—representing all parties— Communists, socialists and also republicans. Five thousand ex-servicemen came to the meeting in their uniforms and not a single fascist dared to appear on the street. This shows that there is more inflammable material in Europe than we thought. Lazzari praised our resolution on tactics. It is an important achievement of our congress. If Lazzari admits it, then *the thousands of workers who back him are bound to come to us, and their leaders will not be able to scare them away from us.* “Il faut reculer, pour mieux sauter” (you have to step back to make a better jump). This jump is inevitable, since the situation, objectively, is becoming insufferable.” (Lenin, V. I. *Collected Works*, Vol 42, Progress Publishers, p. 236-27, *emphasis ours*)

This was precisely the Leninist line, as Poulantzas, too, has noticed: *to the masses!* And this was precisely the Leninist line (‘united front from below’) abandoned by the line of the ‘popular front’ and which could not be implemented in a correct fashion during the right-deviationist period of the policy of ‘united front of the working class’ (since 1923) and then the “left”-deviationist period of the policy of ‘united front of the working class’ (since the Fifth Congress of

the Comintern) and then the ultra-left deviationist period of the policy of 'united front of the working class' (since 1928). The reasons for these failures were implicit in the errors of economism and the lack of massline in the European communist movement, especially in the period after the death of Lenin.

Now, let us focus on the second italicized portion from Kang Sheng's statement. This refers to the disastrous results of the 'popular frontism' in Spain, where it was the communists who most resolutely organized against fascism and even registered some important victories in the first period of military resistance, but finally handed over the political lead to the bourgeoisie. This ultimately resulted in the victory of Francoism with the help of Britain and France. The help of Britain and France to Franco itself showed the erroneous nature of the line of the 'popular front'.

The third italicized portion from Kang Sheng's statement refers to another mistake of the 'popular front' line: the refusal to take power and the refusal to go directly to the masses; instead, forming alliances with the bourgeois parties and social-democratic parties and assuming that a *united front of the ally classes can only be established through the alliance with the parties*. As Poulantzas has pointed out, this was confusing *the parties* with *the classes*. The final outcome of such policy was class collaborationism, tailendism and capitulation resulting in tragic defeat everywhere where the policy of the 'popular front' was implemented.

It is clear from the above discussion that Mao and his Maoist comrades did not subscribe to the policy of the 'popular front'; their rejection of Comintern's line regarding the Chinese Revolution in the 1930s was not unrelated to their rejection of the line of the 'popular front' as well as the "left"-deviationist version of the 'united front of the working class', as we have seen above.

C. *The Policy of the 'Popular Front': Economism, Class Collaboration, Class Capitulation*

Let us first discuss Poulantzas's critique of the line of the 'popular front'. Poulantzas's position is broadly correct. His criticism is detailed, systematic and structured and nearer to Lenin's position on resistance to fascism. Most importantly, Poulantzas traces the error of popular frontism in its incorrect analysis of the political economy and class basis of fascism. Poulantzas, whom Sukhwinder claims to have read and quotes repeatedly, pointed out the problem with the position of the Comintern on the nature of united front against fascists especially since 1933:

"This leads us to *the problem of the Third International's definition of fascism*. Especially after the Seventh Congress went over to the policy of 'popular fronts', and because of its ideas about the relationship between fascism and economic class interests, *the field of interests which fascism 'exclusively represented' was held to be ever narrower*. From the dictatorship of capital 'in the period of its decline' (Fifth Congress), fascism became the dictatorship of big capital; dictatorship of finance capital (Sixth Congress); dictatorship of 'the most reactionary, chauvinist and imperialist elements of finance capital' (this was Dimitrov speaking); dictatorship of the 'two hundred families'. *The implications are very clear: popular front politics based on the broadest possible antifascist alliance, including all fractions of capital except the ever narrower one which fascism was considered 'exclusively' to represent*. The present consequences of this policy are well known: it is not at all surprising that this kind of formulation about fascism is again to be found in the same form in the analyses of 'State monopoly capitalism' as the exclusive instrument of a 'handful' of monopolists. What needs to be made very clear is that despite the actual text of Dimitrov's report, and despite the correctness of his formulae for united and popular fronts (*the fact that the formal claim was that popular front will be subordinated to the united front of the working class-author*), the turn occurs at this point. It is from this point on that the *International decisively went over to the conception of a*

continuous narrowing of the economic interests the State supposedly represents, and this opened the way to the whole subsequent strategy of alliances.

*“So it was no accident that this definition of Dimitrov’s finally boiled down to the social democratic conception formulated by Otto Bauer: ‘While in bourgeois democracy the whole of the bourgeoisie is in power, although under the leadership and domination of big capital, under fascism, big capital and large landowners rule alone.’” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p 97, *emphasis ours*)*

Poulantzas explains the basic methodological problem with the arguments of Dimitrov:

*“It is in fact correct that fascism represents an effective reorganization and redistribution of the balance of forces among the dominant classes and fractions. It accelerates the consolidation and stabilization of the economic supremacy of big finance capital over the other dominant classes and class fractions. *But this can by no means be interpreted as meaning that fascism represents the economic interests of big capital ‘exclusively’.* Fascism rather operates, in the economic sense, as a factor neutralizing the contradictions among these classes and fractions, while regulating development to ensure the decisive domination of big capital.” (*ibid.*, p. 98)*

Revealing the economistic understanding implicit in the position of Dimitrov and a number of others in the Comintern, Poulantzas points out:

“Finally, a remark on the definition of fascism, common in the Comintern, as the expression of the most ‘retrograde’ or ‘reactionary’ elements – see Dimitrov, among others. It is again necessary to take careful note of this, for where the Comintern leaders are concerned, such adjectives are not simple slips of the pen.

*“If these adjectives were simply intended to describe a considerable increase in the economic exploitation of the masses, there would be good reason for using them. But this is something quite different: *this definition stemmed from the Comintern’s economistic conception* that imperialism and the supremacy of big capital, as the death agony of ‘decaying’ capitalism, automatically meant a halt in the development of the productive forces. The ‘productive forces’, in this economistic and technicist view, were seen as independent from the relations of production, the simple ‘advance’ or ‘halt’ of this ‘technical’ process determining the nature of the capital involved – in this case a ‘retrograde’ one.*

*“Such illusions can only arise from posing the question the wrong way. In fact, fascism really represented a development of capitalist forces of production, that is within the limits of imperialist social relations. It represented industrial development, technological innovation, and an increase in the productivity of labour – but all the while promoting the expanded reproduction of the conditions of capitalist production, that is, reinforcing class exploitation and domination. Caught in the trap of technicism, Marxist historians of fascism are still racking their brains to demonstrate its ‘economically retrograde’ character, as if that was more important in their eyes, than class exploitation and domination.” (*ibid.*, p. 98)*

Poulantzas, after quoting Dimitrov’s stated position in the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, presents a succinct critique of the problematic foundational elements:

“Now these positions constitute an important step for the Comintern, although it is still necessary to distinguish what Dimitrov said at the time from the practical application of these directives and their later evolution. The important points in the theses themselves are as follows:

“(a) Dimitrov’s definition of the class basis of fascism is decisively restricted, so *opening the way to the broadest anti-fascist alliances with the liberal bourgeoisie*.”

“(b) Although Dimitrov says that the ‘popular front’ must be founded ‘on the basis’ of the united front, he attributes much more importance to the popular front, which for him seems to govern the proletarian united front.

“(c) Dimitrov accords small importance to the communists’ own mass work among the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie: although communists must carry out their own work among the social-democratic masses of the workers, *it seems as if the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie must firstly and mainly be drawn in through their ‘own parties’, which if they did not exist, would have to be invented*.”

“(d) Official and pronounced emphasis is laid on the ‘national’ side of communist policy.

“There is no more to be said here. We do know that in ‘revised’ and ‘corrected’ form these theses still govern the policy of frontist electoral alliances held by various communist parties today. *They were of course still some way from this: it would be wrong to equate Dimitrov with the present-day parties. But the way was already wide open.*” (*ibid*, p. 164-65, *emphasis ours*)

Poulantzas has captured some very crucial elements in the incorrect theorizations of the Comintern. Bob Jessop has more-or-less correctly summarized the crux of Poulantzas’s criticism of ‘popular front’:

“However, Poulantzas criticizes Dimitrov's interpretation of the popular front on four separate grounds. First, in offering *an over-restricted definition of the class basis of fascism* as ‘the most reactionary, nationalist and imperialist elements’ of big capital, Dimitrov permitted an alliance with other fractions of the bourgeoisie. Second, *Dimitrov gave primacy to the popular front over the proletarian United Front and thereby ignored the leading role of the working class*. Third, through *his fundamental misunderstanding of the representational ties between classes and political parties as somehow pre-given and organic*, Dimitrov attached too little importance to communists’ own mass work among the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Instead he considered that they should be reached through their own parties even where these were under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and big landed interests. Elsewhere Poulantzas argues that exactly the same error informed the view of certain sections of the KKE towards the Greek peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. Finally, Dimitrov placed too much emphasis on the ‘national’ side of political struggle at the expense of proletarian internationalism.” (Jessop, Bob. 1985. *op.cit.*, p. 274-75)

What many dogmatists do not understand that they do not become Trotskyite if they critique the reformist policy of ‘popular front’. Many communists are afraid to criticize the incorrect line of the ‘popular front’ because they assume that by this they would be siding with Trotsky. This is an extremely harmful confusion and reveals ignorance regarding Mao’s stand on this question. It is noteworthy that the question was not whether or not to form alliances with certain bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties based on particular issues in certain conditions (for instance, total defeat of an already-existing organized workers’ movement, which must not be confused with the revolutionary political movement of the proletariat as a political class). Of course, such alliances can be formed under certain conditions. However, to define fascism in such a way in terms of its class character that *a strategic alliance* with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois political parties as well as classes becomes the *conditio sine qua non* of anti-fascist proletarian strategy, is problematic.

Trotsky's critique of 'popular front' was a left-opportunist critique and revealed his neo-Lassallean line. However, the critique presented by Kang Sheng under the guidance of Mao was not a Trotskyite critique. In fact, on this question, they also critiqued Trotsky's "left" deviation. Their argument was simple: *to put restoration of bourgeois democracy (rather than new democracy, that is, completion of bourgeois democratic tasks under the leadership of the proletariat, by establishing a people's democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry) as the only permitted and desirable strategic aim against the fascist dictatorship, is nothing but reformism and objectively the line of class collaboration and losing proletarian independence.* Objectively what is possible in a given political situation is a different question altogether. However, the subjective position and *a priori* strategic aim cannot be the restoration of bourgeois democracy.

However, Sukhwinder does not simply subscribe to the incorrect position of the Comintern since 1933 itself (when the Comintern began to move away from the position of the 'united front of the working class' as a pathological reaction to the ultra-left deviation in the implementation of this line). He presents an extremely imbecile, vulgar and obscene revisionist and social-democratic version of the policy of 'popular front' (which itself was incorrect), which converts an objective reformism into a subjective and conscious reformism, class-collaborationism and capitulationism of the worst and most disgusting type.

So, let us be clear about some basic things, which go over the head of editor saab like a bouncer: No, the communists never "side with bourgeois democracy" whenever faced with fascism or any other form of open dictatorship! *In terms of subjective approach, their first priority is people's democracy or new democracy under the leadership of the proletariat, or, depending on the political situation and historical context, even socialist revolution.* 'Popular front' policy did not understand precisely this class line of the CPC and Mao, which Kang Sheng summarized precisely and accurately in the above-quoted excerpt. Moreover, communists in that period "sided with bourgeois democracy" only as a matter of compulsion created by the total vanquishing of the working-class movement, which, of course, was incorrect, too.

D. Evolution of Comintern's Policy from 1921 to 1935: From Leninist Position to Right, "Left", "Ultra-Left" and Finally Ultra-Right Deviation

Related to the above point is the fact that 'popular front' was not the only strategic policy adopted by the Comintern from the beginning. In fact, Sukhwinder completely misses the evolution of the views of Comintern since the early-1920s to the 1930s, despite formally paraphrasing about it from a variety of sources, and knows only about the Trotskyite critique of the 'popular front' and about the critique by certain revolutionary communists of the "left" implementation of the policy of united front of the working class by certain communist parties in Europe, which helped the fascist forces objectively. The initial strategy of the Comintern has been summarized well by Köves and Mazumdar:

*"The strategy of action evolved by the Comintern to fight this threat was to organize for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. In this strategy, the concept of a united front of the working class (quite different to the one adopted in 1935 by the Seventh Congress) played a central role. While this concept did not rule out appeals for united action to the social democratic parties and organizations, its basic thrust was aimed at *united action from below* which would also expose the reformism of the social-democratic leaders and their collaboration with the bourgeoisie." (Köves and Mazumdar. 2005. *op.cit.*, p. 14, *emphasis ours*)*

Sukhwinder assumes that the whole period since the Fourth Congress, of the policy of united front, was the period of "left" deviation. This only reveals that he has not read anything systematically on the question of the emergence of Comintern's policy on the united front against fascism. The policy of the united front of the working class itself can be divided into its

relatively correct phase, its right-deviationist phase, “left” deviationist phase and its “ultra-left” deviationist phase. The latter began from 1928. However, the crux of the mistake was not *the use* of the term ‘social fascism’ for social-democracy. The error was to effectively obliterate the qualitative difference between social-democracy (which did contribute to the rise of fascism due to its policy of class-collaborationism and economism) and fascism as two qualitatively different political tendencies of the bourgeoisie, needed by the bourgeoisie at different types of political conjuncture. The peculiarity of fascism was eliminated in this theorization and the exceptional nature of the fascist regime, too, was diluted. It does not mean that a correct strategy against fascism would not include, at the same time, the task of exposing the social-democracy before the masses of the working class.

First of all, let us discuss the “left”-right swings during the period of the united front of the working class. Sukhwinder assumes that this entire period is one homogenous mass, especially after the Fourth Congress. This betrays his total lack of consciousness about the history of the evolution of front-policy of the Comintern. Poulantzas points out:

“To take the Italian case first. The Comintern, at its Third Congress, recognized a period of ‘stabilization’ of class struggle, and launched the slogan, ‘To the masses’; six months later, in December 1921, its executive adopted the theses on the united front, in pursuit of this watchword. These theses, ratified by the First Plenum (February-March 1922) and the Fourth Congress under the title ‘Theses on the unity of the proletarian front’, were added in abbreviated form to the Fourth Congress resolutions. *It should furthermore be noted that these theses were elaborated under Lenin’s direction. The Comintern recognized (i) a turn in the class struggle, (ii) its own sectarian errors during the previous period and (iii) the persistence of social-democratic influence in spite of the split. It now turned its efforts to the formation of a proletarian united front. A ‘rank and file’ united front, of course, implying the independence and autonomy of the communist parties within this front, and the participation of communists primarily in the rank and file organizations of the working class; but also implying a certain policy towards the social-democratic party, derived from a particular understanding of it.*” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 157, *emphasis ours*)

This is the period, that is, the period before 1922-23, where the policy of ‘united front from below’, formulated under the leadership of Lenin, was being prescribed by the Comintern and represented a correct proletarian line on this question. What was the crux of this policy? One, issue-based alliances with the social-democrats and socialists, while also maintaining the proletarian independence and the freedom of exposing the social-democracy and socialists for their objective role in the rise of fascism; two, making a distinction between the parties with working class base (such as social-democrats and socialists) and the working class itself; three, focusing on organizing the rank-and-file workers in the social-democratic, socialist and even petty-bourgeois organizations into anti-fascist organizations. This was the correct line, as it did not swing to the ultra-left position, which was later represented by Thälmann, as we shall see.

Poulantzas points out further:

“The theses on the united front flowed directly from the Leninist slogan, ‘To the masses’; but with the Fourth Congress and Comintern policy in the period straight after it, there was a change to the slogan of workers’ governments (Arbeiterregierungen), or governments of alliance between communists and social democrats, with definite objectives...

...

“I shall not discuss Comintern developments between the Fourth Congress (1922– 3) and the Sixth Congress (1928), as this period is of no direct interest

for the rise of fascism. I would simply note that it is characterized by a great confusion on the question of alliances, and that this stems from the Comintern's alternating definitions of steps.

...

"The Fifth Congress made an 'ultra-left' turn, neglecting 'stabilization' and changing the position on workers' governments. While the Fourth Congress had seen these as a 'step' towards the dictatorship of the proletariat through revolution, the Fifth Congress – the Congress of 'Bolshevization' – identified them with the dictatorship of the proletariat, implying that they could not come as a particular step before revolution. This amounted in practice to a rejection of the theory of workers' governments. The theses on the united front remained intact in appearance, but (at the same time as the theory of social fascism first appeared) it was specified that the united front was 'nothing more than a revolutionary method of agitation and mass mobilization', and that 'its main objective lay in the struggle against the leaders of counter-revolutionary social democracy'.

...

"With the Comintern's Sixth Congress (1928), the decisive turn took place." (*ibid*, p. 158-59)

After 1922-23, the alternating right-"left" swings began, as Poulantzas shows. Since the Fifth Congress and especially since the Sixth Congress, the ultra-left turn, precisely as an over-reaction to the right swing of the previous period, emerged. Poulantzas points out:

"The Fourth Congress (1922-3) spoke of stabilization in an economic sense for the first time, and drew from it wrong ('ultra-right') conclusions about the step of the class struggle.

"The Fifth Congress (1924) was silent on stabilization as a characteristic step of the class struggle, apparently no longer accepting 'economic stabilization'. This congress took the Comintern's first 'ultra-left' turn, making an equally incorrect definition of the step, although in the opposite direction from the Fourth Congress." (*ibid*, p. 45, *emphasis ours*)

Thälmann, according to Poulantzas clearly represented the essence of the ultra-left turn:

"As for the social-democratic masses, Thälmann has a revealing way of putting it: 'As long as they are not delivered from the influence of the social fascists, these millions of workers (of the German Social-Democratic Party and its associated trade unions) are lost to the anti-fascist struggle.'" (*ibid*, p. 160)

Poulantzas also argues that the ultra-left turn was more of a "left" phraseology, and actually it was never translated into action:

"This orientation led to disastrous results. But it would be quite wrong to think that behind this radical terminology, the KPD was carrying out an intransigent, if sectarian, struggle against fascism, and for the revolution. Not that it failed to carry out the implacable struggle it advocated against social democracy: *the problem was that it did nothing but that.*" (*ibid*, p. 161)

Thus, the period from 1920-21 to 1922-23, then the period from 1924 to 1928, and finally the period from 1928 to 1933, must be distinguished from each other. Formally, this, entirely was the period of 'united front of the working class'. However, in essence, the correct Leninist line of 'united front of the working class from below', began to be abandoned from 1923 itself, with the

confusion prevailing in the Comintern and resultant *right-“left” deviation* followed by “left” deviation. From 1928, decisive ultra-left turn begins and leads to disastrous results due to the incorrect formulation of *‘social fascism’ as the main enemy*. Moreover, no attempt was being made to organize the rank-and-file workers from all organizations, including the social-democratic ones. *An over-reaction to this ultra-left turn was the decisive right swing to the policy of the ‘popular front’.*

Therefore, Sukhwinder only reveals his ignorance of the pendulum-like motion of right and “left” deviation within the period of ‘united front of the working class’ since the Fourth Congress itself. The Fourth Congress represented the first departure from Leninist ‘united front from below’, mainly towards the right. On the other hand, the Fifth Congress represented a “left” swing by diluting the qualitative distinction between fascism and social-democracy (to be termed as social-fascism since 1928). With Sixth Congress, the “left” turn became the ultra-left turn. Thus, between 1922-23 (the Fourth Congress) to the Sixth Congress (1928), there were alternating right-“left” deviations and from the Sixth Congress to 1933, the ultra-left deviation dominated, resulting finally in the pathological reaction to this in the shape of the policy of ‘the popular front’.

We have to understand the background in which the shift to the policy of ‘popular front’ took place. There are two basic co-ordinates of this shift. One was the “left” adventurist mistakes in the implementation of the policy of united front of the working class (which Sukhwinder mistakes as the “left” character of the very policy of the united front of the working class), which isolated working class politically. The second coordinate was the mistake of *economism* and *lack of massline*, which again prevented the working class to constitute itself as a *political class* capable of assuming the political leadership of the people, by establishing the hegemony of the proletarian political line among the masses. This manifested itself in the lack or complete absence of political work in the classes and sections of the people or the masses, on the part of the communist parties. It is noteworthy that the mistake inherent in this “leftist” implementation of the policy of united front of the working class is essentially the same mistake in an inverted form, that was committed by the policy of ‘popular front’, namely, not organizing the peasantry and the petty-bourgeois masses directly, but only dealing with these classes through ‘their’ bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties. Thus, both represented the same mistake of not implementing the Leninist directive of ‘to the masses’; the “leftist” version of the united front of the working class argued, in the words of Thälmann, that the masses associated with social-democratic and socialist mass organizations are “lost to us”; at the same time, the ‘popular frontists’ argued that the united front with the masses will be made only through their parties, so the revolutionary communists do not need to organize them directly. Both involved the refusal to implement the revolutionary massline as directed by Lenin in his slogan ‘to the masses’, though in an inverted fashion.

Both these mistakes resulted in the inability of the communist parties to mount a political offensive of the proletariat. *It must be noted here that the proletarian political revolutionary movement could not gain momentum because of its internal contradictions, reflected in the dominance of economism, instead of the fascist rise to power.* In fact, as Poulantzas has pointed out, fascism *began* to rise when the proletarian political offensive had already failed to build itself.

It was only with the complete defeat of the organized workers’ movement and the near-total destruction of communist organizations and groups that fascism rose to power. In this new situation, Dimitrov and various leaders of Comintern tacitly accepted, changing their previous line, in the Seventh Congress that fascism rose to power not due to the threat of the proletarian revolution, but due to the total defeat of this potential political offensive. This holds true in the context of Italy as well as Germany. The communist offensive was already in ruins and tatters, when fascism began to rise. That is why Poulantzas points out:

“Let us now come to the antifascist popular front, an idea directly related to the recognition of the fascist danger, Dimitrov having tacitly admitted that the rise of fascism corresponded to a defensive step for the workers’ movement.” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 163)

Poulantzas argues:

“The working class had already been thoroughly defeated by the time fascism came into power, and the bourgeoisie did not have to pay for this defeat with any catastrophic equilibrium. *In other words, throughout the rise of fascism, the bourgeoisie remained the principal aspect of the principal contradiction.*” (*ibid*, p. 61, *emphasis ours*)

Some other quotes on the same subject have been presented above.

However, the reasons for the shift in the Comintern policy regarding the nature of united front against fascism (united front of the working class or the popular front) are not clear to Sukhwinder. Had he understood this history properly, he might not have swung to the extreme-right version of the already right-deviationist policy of the ‘popular front’. This shift is congruent with his overall political *volte-face* since the farmers’ movement itself, where he capitulated to the agrarian bourgeoisie of Punjab and also, on the question of ‘federalism’, where he capitulated to the entire regional Punjabi bourgeoisie. In such a situation, it is not surprising that the strategy of the ‘popular front’ appears to Sukhwinder as the panacea to the problem of anti-fascism today.

E. ‘Popular Front’, the Erroneous Political Economy Behind it and Stalin

We also need to understand that the theory of the ‘popular front’ has roots in the erroneous political economy which emerged *after* Lenin. The particular version of the ‘monopoly capital theory’ which is evident in the textbooks of political economy published in the USSR even before the death of Stalin, reveal an incorrect line: the line of ‘all vs. monopoly’. This leads to the erroneous policy of forming alliances with other fractions of the bourgeoisie against the monopoly bourgeoisie. It was precisely this political economy, whose vulgar expression was Dimitrov’s argument that fascism is the dictatorship of the most reactionary elements (not even the entire class of monopoly bourgeoisie!) of the monopoly financial bourgeoisie. We have shown above why this political line led and lead even today various communists to irreparable damage and unpardonable blunders.

Third, even in the 1930s, the line of the ‘popular front’ wreaked havoc on the revolutionary communist movement by making it a tail-ender of the bourgeoisie, condemning it to lose its political independence and degenerating it to the level of class capitulationism and collaborationism. That is why on this particular point, the Maoist Bob Avakian before his *new synthesis, which is neither new nor a synthesis*, was more-or-less correct:

“The international communist movement needs no more excuses on behalf of the Comintern. It needs the kind of blunt appraisal we can find in the discussion between Mao Tse-tung and Kang Sheng concerning the Spanish experience. In it, Kang Sheng says (in the context of what is mainly a long talk by Mao, and clearly expressing Mao’s viewpoint also): “They did not concern themselves with the three points: army, countryside, political power. They wholly subordinated themselves to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy, and achieved nothing at all.”” (RCP (USA). 1981. “The Line of the Comintern on the Civil War in Spain”, published in *Revolution*, Vol. 6, #1, June, 1981)

Overall, the line of the ‘popular front’ was neither applicable universally in the 1930s (disastrous results of which became evident very soon) nor is it applicable today. Some scholars have doubted Stalin’s role in the formulation of the policy of ‘popular front’:

“A strange fact about this Report is that there have been a number of references of Lenin in the Report but not a single reference was made of Stalin by Dimitrov though Stalin was the top leader of the USSR at the time in whose capital city it was being held and who played the most important role in defeating Fascism. Stalin was also absent from the sessions of the Congress like the previous edition of 1928. A hard fact to believe, indeed. Some even argued that the Comintern reorientation – the switch from left to right – became possible at a time when the ‘Marxist-Leninist elements’ around Stalin remained a minority within its leadership. The new Political Secretariat elected by the Congress in 1935, for instance, included a strong majority of leaders who were the known critics Stalin. Members of the Political Secretariat elected by the Seventh Comintern Congress were Dimitrov (General Secretary), Togliatti, Manuilsky, Pieck, Kuusinen, Marty, Gottwald; candidates: Moskvina, Florin, Wang Ming. Further, the new popular front policies were never endorsed by Stalin which shows strong circumstantial evidence of his personal opposition to them. This opposition became almost evident at the 18th Congress of the CPSU (B) in 1939, when Stalin, in his long report, made no reference whatsoever to the Comintern policies. Besides, no attention at all to the people’s fronts was paid by the official *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)—Short Course* published in 1939. (Steinmayr 2000) Stalin’s problem with a section of the top most leaders of the CPSU has been the issue of plethora of writings and he was criticized severely by Khrushchev in his secret speech in 1956. However, ‘every “revelation” in Nikita Khrushchev’s infamous “secret speech” to the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, is provably false’. (Furr 2011) This study of Grover Furr substantiates the position maintained by Steinmayr to an extent.” (Deb, Bikash Ranjan. 2018. ‘Marxism, Bengal National Revolutionaries and Comintern, in *Social Trends*, Vol. 5)

Similarly, Monty Johnstone, too, argued that Dimitrov had to try hard to persuade Stalin to give nod to the shift of policy from the united front of the working class to the ‘popular front’:

“Dimitrov had to battle with Stalin to overcome his opposition to a change in the old line for which he held major responsibility.” (Johnstone, M. 1985. ‘Trotsky and the People’s Front’ in Jim Fyrth (ed.) *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, p. 91)

Jonathan Haslam points out that “the Popular Front was a French creation.” (Haslam, J. 1979. ‘The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front, 1934-35’ in *Historical Journal*, 22:3, p. 689). Notably, historian Eric Hobsbawm points out:

“The relative roles of Moscow and Paris in the genesis of the Popular Front have been much discussed but it now seems clear that its real innovation, the readiness by Communists to extend the so-called “United Front” from other socialists to friendly non-socialist Liberals and essentially to all anti-fascists opposed to Communism originated in France.” (Hobsbawm, E. 2002. *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life*, Allen Lane, p. 429, note 1)

Chou En-Lai, too, pointed out:

“In this period the Chinese Party maintained fewer contacts with the Communist International. *The International held its Seventh Congress in July-August 1935. Stalin was more concerned with domestic problems, and Dimitrov was in charge of the International...* At that time the International developed the Anti-Fascist United Front, which *coincided* with the formation of the anti-Japanese National United Front in China. When Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng arrested Chiang Kai-shek in the Xi’an Incident, the International openly declared

that Zhang was a running dog of the Japanese imperialists and that the arrest of Chiang Kai-shek suited the needs of Japan. This judgment was completely wrong. Our own approach to the Xi'an Incident was, on the whole, correct." (<http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CI60.html>, *emphasis ours*)

Of course, these are circumstantial evidence and we cannot conclude on the basis of the above facts that Stalin necessarily and definitely did not subscribe to the policy of the 'popular front', even though this much is clear that he was not the one who formulated this line. This line was certainly formulated in France and in Comintern under Dimitrov's leadership. Whether Stalin lent direct support to the line of the 'popular front' or he was reluctant to do so, is not important in itself. Since he was the leader of the international proletariat during that time, some responsibility does indeed lie with him.

We should not prevent ourselves, as revolutionary communists, from critiquing the right opportunist mistakes of the Comintern since 1933, as well as the "left", economic mistakes of a number of communist parties of Europe in the 1920s, the most vulgar version of which was presented by Trotsky.

F. Is 'Popular Front' a Policy Against 'Fascism in Power' Only? Sukhwinder's Quietist Illusions

Thus, Sukhwinder intentionally conjures up a *necessary binary* of fascism and bourgeois democracy in order to justify his support for the 'popular front' today. Moreover, this is especially important for Sukhwinder because of his conciliatory attitude towards the *kulaks* and the entire agrarian bourgeoisie of Punjab, as we pointed out above. If 'popular front' is indeed the only possible anti-fascist front and the horizon of proletarian line on fascism, then of course, all except the "most reactionary elements" of financial big monopoly bourgeoisie (for example, Adani, Ambani, etc.) have to be allied with and this obviously includes the rich *kulaks* and capitalist farmers as well! The demand for MSP, too, has been presented by the political representatives of *kulaks* as a demand which goes against the "corporates", that is, the big monopoly bourgeoisie and it goes without saying that a few of them, Adani, Ambani, etc. represent its "most reactionary fractions". Once the reader is acquainted with the rest of the class capitulationist and class collaborationist line of Sukhwinder, everything falls in place *vis-à-vis* his essay on fascism, which is more of a medley of his "bare-naked" versions of economic, class collaborationism, class capitulationist, dogmatist and historicist errors.

Obviously bourgeois democracy is the best possible scenario for working class to organize its forces. Nobody denies that. However, this false absolutist binary of "bourgeois democracy vs. fascist dictatorship" is Sukhwinder's way of making the working class tailend the non-fascist bourgeois parties and classes (especially *kulaks* of Punjab) as well as social-democrats. *For him open fascist dictatorship (which is only a form of bourgeois rule itself) vs. socialist revolution is unthinkable! For him, even open fascist dictatorship vs. people's democracy with democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants is unthinkable!* It has to be bourgeois democracy! It must be the restoration of bourgeois democracy in alliance with entire bourgeoisie, except, "the most reactionary fractions" of the monopoly bourgeoisie! This is precisely the class-collaborationist and class capitulationist line of the 'Spanish comrades' that Kang Sheng referred to under the guidance of Mao. The only difference being the fact that for the Spanish comrades (who were actually fighting with guns in their hands), it was an objective error stemming from the mistake of the Comintern, whereas, for Sukhwinder it is a subjective error stemming from his political quietism, cowardice, reformism, and class collaborationism.

Sukhwinder might argue that when fascist dictatorship is in place, the forces of working class are completely annihilated and destroyed, therefore, the task of socialist revolution will not be practical and feasible. However, again, why is he waiting for this ultimate catastrophe to befall the working class? Why is he not implementing Comintern's "directive", as he puts it, from the

day 1? Why is he not aligning with Akali Dal, AAP, Congress and CPI, CPM, CPI (ML) Liberation from today itself to escape the fate that befell the working class in Germany and Italy?

Did the Comintern say that the 'popular front' will be formed only when fascism is in power? No. In fact, the first experiments of the 'popular front' began before the Seventh Congress of the Comintern and even after that they began even in the countries where fascism was not in power. For instance, at Comintern's directive, the 'popular front' was formed in June 1935 by PCE (Communist Party of Spain), which narrowly won the elections in February 1936 against right-wing coalition, whereas an exceptional state emerged only in July 1936 with the victory of Franco's forces which led to the fascistoid or quasi-fascist military regime of Franco. In France, too, the 'popular front' was formed before any fascist seizure of power, and it won elections in May 1936 leading to the formation of a 'popular front' coalition under the leadership of socialist leader Leon Blum. Here, too, the 'popular front' had failed because Blum's SFIO and the Radical Party of Daladier betrayed the anti-fascist stand of the 'popular front' very soon and essentially it collapsed within a couple of years, which only proved the incorrectness of the general policy of the 'popular front'.

Thus, forming a 'popular front' does not require Sukhwinder to wait for something exactly like Germany or Italy to happen, that is, a seizure of total power through a 'war of movement', as an event, by the fascist forces. Why wait for that? That was not the policy of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern! The policy was to form a 'popular front' even if there was a fascist movement, that is why, it was formed in Spain and France just before and just after the Seventh Congress itself and before any fascist takeover in these countries. If Sukhwinder has a correct understanding even of the 'popular front' policy of the Comintern, then he should immediately form an alliance with Akali Dal, Aam Admi Party, BSP and the Congress in Punjab! Maybe he will eventually, as his Trot-Bundism might propel him to do so ultimately, anyway.

11. Sukhwinder on the "Contradictions of Fascism in Power": An Intellectually Pauperized Version of the Incorrect Theses of Dimitrov

Here, too, Sukhwinder reveals his intrinsic inability to understand what he reads. The only thing he succeeds in is headstrong dogmatism. Sukhwinder writes:

*"Dimitrov had said that fascism is a ferocious but unstable power. After capturing power, it is mired by many conflicts. The promises that fascism makes with the masses, especially petty bourgeois masses, while capturing power aren't fulfilled after fascism ascends to power. The empty phraseology of fascists that it considers nation above everything bursts like a water bubble. The real meaning of nation for the fascists comes to the fore in the form of interests of a fraction of monopoly capital. *There can be a temporary alliance of small and large owners for crushing the worker's movement.* But after fascism ascends to power it comes clear that the policies of interests of monopoly capital can be furthered only at the cost of the interests of middle class and working class. Accumulation of capital, inflation, burden on people of new taxes puts fascism in conflict with its mass base.*

"Petty bourgeoisie's (middle class), which forms the axis of fascist movements, interests are hurt after fascism comes to power. Petty bourgeoisie, due to its class position, swings to and fro between capitalists and working class. It cannot make an independent economic policy for its interests. As part of the fascist movement, it assists in crushing the workers' movement. The capitalist class definitely benefits from the crushing of workers' movement; it becomes stronger

which is also not in the interests of petty bourgeoisie. *This hastens the proletarianisation of petty bourgeoisie.* (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 28-29, *emphasis ours*)

Some of this does not make sense at all. We will focus on the points where Sukhwinder blabbers something that resembles something meaningful.

A. *Fascism in Power and the Petty-Bourgeoisie: Sukhwinder's Philistine Phantasies*

First of all, it is not clear what he means by “temporary alliance between small and big owners” to crush the working-class movement. It appears from what follows that he is trying to say that first the fascist bourgeoisie allies with the petty-bourgeoisie to crush the working-class movement and “benefits from it” and once it is in power it also attacks the petty-bourgeoisie for the benefit of the monopoly capital. This is the contradiction of fascism in power, according to Sukhwinder, a view for which justification has been sought from Dimitrov. However, Dimitrov's views regarding the ‘contradictions of fascism’ stem directly from his faulty understanding of the class character of fascism (“the most reactionary elements” of big monopoly bourgeoisie); moreover, he conflates parties with classes. Poulantzas presented a correct criticism of this understanding regarding the ‘contradictions of fascism’:

“The positions of the Seventh Comintern Congress and Dimitrov himself on ‘political parties’ and ‘bourgeois parties’ in particular are of interest here. Dimitrov, precisely because he did not see the parties as ideological State apparatuses, both overestimated their ‘organizational’ role for the fractions of the bourgeoisie, and thought that they were the only network within which power could circulate among the fractions. *This comes out in his analysis of the ‘contradictions of fascism’*: ‘Fascism undertakes to overcome the differences and antagonisms within the bourgeois camp, but it makes these antagonisms even more acute. Fascism tries to establish its political monopoly by violently destroying other political parties. But ... the party of the fascists cannot set itself the aim of abolishing classes and class contradictions. It puts an end to *the legal existence* of bourgeois parties. But a number of them continue to maintain an illegal existence ... the political monopoly of capitalism is bound to explode.’ (*op. cit.*, pp. 576–7.) *Clearly, for Dimitrov the elimination of the ‘bourgeois parties’ meant that all fractions of the bourgeoisie other than ‘the most nationalist and reactionary’ big capital (the fascist party) were excluded from power, since they were seen as unable to participate in the exercise of power except through their ‘parties’, the only way in which they could possibly organize. Hence the reasoning: (a) the elimination of other bourgeois parties by fascism means the exclusion of other fractions of the bourgeoisie from State power; (b) this situation could not last long because of its ‘internal contradictions’. The International’s conception of non-proletarian parties had deep roots. It could be argued that the Comintern had a wrong and mechanistic understanding of Lenin’s theory of the working-class party, unwarrantedly applying it to other social forces. It could not see that these other social forces could also be organized through other State apparatuses.*” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 326, footnote, *emphasis ours*)

Poulantzas has captured a very important point here, about which Sukhwinder is completely ignorant.

First of all, fascism does not only represent some fractions of the monopoly bourgeoisie; moreover, it represents, not only monopoly bourgeoisie but *the bourgeoisie as a political class under the hegemony of the fraction (not certain elements of it!) of the big monopoly bourgeoisie.* The whole notion of crisis of the ‘power bloc’ of the ruling class consists precisely in the problem of collectivization of the bourgeois interests under the hegemony of one fraction.

Dimitrov, not only does not understand this, but also *conflates classes with parties*. Thus, if certain parties are banned out of existence by the fascists, the classes or class fractions supporting those parties, too, are seen to be removed from the political power. Sukhwinder makes the same mistake, though in a ridiculously vulgar fashion, in “bare-naked form”, if you will. Moreover, Sukhwinder in the above excerpt talks about the “interests of monopoly capital” in general instead of “the most reactionary elements of the big monopoly capital”. Something must have transpired in his mind when he started writing and when he reached this particular point! Ergo, the transition from “the most reactionary element of monopoly capital” to “monopoly capital”. We don’t know what happened!

The second problem here is Sukhwinder’s view of petty-bourgeoisie as a monolithic class. History shows that not all echelons of the petty-bourgeoisie faced the threat of proletarianization. It was mainly the lower echelons of the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie which faced the threat as well as reality of proletarianization in Germany as well as Italy during the fascist regime and it is quite understandable. The monolithic view of petty-bourgeoisie as a class which gets completely ruined with fascism in power fails to explain the real history of fascism. Poulantzas, too, understands this. He argues:

“Secondly, fascism, once established, *did not radically eliminate the traditional petty bourgeoisie*. There is a particularly important *counter-tendency* in the stage of monopoly capitalism, to such a kind of elimination. The very establishment of the dominance of monopoly capitalism in a social formation in fact makes room for the *persistence of a weak sector of small-scale production and petty commerce*. The high prices and production costs of small-scale production, together with the high retail prices of petty commerce, make it possible to raise the cartel prices fixed by the big monopolies and chain stores. The big monopolies therefore disguise the profits they make by pointing to the prices of small-scale production and commerce. *This counter-tendency is therefore mainly of a political and ideological nature, and in the case of fascism, it generally works in favour of certain measures to protect small urban property.*”

“As for the salaried employees, there is an important side of the question which should not be forgotten: *by a characteristic extension of the bureaucratic State apparatus, very well analysed by Gramsci, fascism provided openings for an important part of the petty-bourgeois masses*. There was an excessive growth of the State apparatus, what has been termed the ‘fascist bureaucracy’, and *this was one of the reasons for the support the petty bourgeoisie gave to the fascist State.*” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 257, *emphasis ours*)

Togliatti, too, had identified this change in the composition of the petty-bourgeois support for fascism once it is in power. He points out:

“The supporters among the petty-bourgeois producers abandon fascism little by little. Henceforward the membership of the Party is predominantly composed of the non-producing petty and middle bourgeoisie (state functionaries, professional fascists, etc.)” (Togliatti, P. 2003. ‘On the Question of Fascism’, in Köves and Mazumdar (eds.) *op.cit.*, p. 216)

In fact, Sukhwinder presents the views of Togliatti by selectively editing it. He quotes Togliatti as follows:

“Togliatti informs as to how the structure of fascist party changes when fascism comes to power. We shall discuss some changes here because rest of the changes listed by him aren’t that accurate. He says that:

“1) The supporters of fascism among petty bourgeois producers began to desert it bit by bit. Now the membership of the party (fascist – author) comes primarily

from unproductive petty and medium bourgeoisie (employees of state, professional fascists etc.)

"2) The fascist cadre is almost entirely replaced. The former black vests are replaced by Fascists of the first hour, who occupy the leading posts are the representatives of the big bourgeoisie (industrialists, bankers, landlords and their agents)" (author's emphasis)

"Togliatti did not add that the fascist party does not represent all the above mentioned fractions of the capitalist class, strife and collisions continue between them." (Sukhwinder, op.cit., p. 29, emphasis ours)

Sukhwinder has shown, once again, dishonesty in quoting a source. The entire excerpt from Togliatti goes like this:

"One of the most interesting facts to note, furthermore, is that fascism was obliged to become reactionary in its own internal organization after the conquest of power; it was compelled to effect a quite rapid and far-reaching transformation in its structure and social composition. The principal forms of this process that we have been able to identify so far are the following:

"(1) The supporters among petty-bourgeois producers abandon fascism little by little. *Henceforward the membership of the party is predominantly composed of the non-producing petty and middle bourgeoisie (state functionaries, professional fascists etc.)* This fact is particularly important as it heralds a change in the balance of forces in the countryside.

"(2) The fascist cadres are almost completely changed. In the place of the former blackshirts, the 'fascists of the first hour', are the direct representatives of the big bourgeoisie (industrialists, bankers, landlords and their agents) who occupy the leading posts in the Party.

"(3) The Fascist Party gradually absorbs a part of the general staff of all the old parties of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

(4) At the same time democracy is completely eliminated at the centre of the Fascist Party, and replaced by a system of government from above.

"In consequence of this process, fascism proves itself conclusively to be not only an instrument of reaction and repression, *but also a centre of political unity of all the dominant classes: finance capital, large industry, the landowners.*" (Togliatti, P. 1983. 'On the Question of Fascism, in D. Beetham (ed.) *Marxists in Face of Fascism*, Manchester University Press, p. 146-47, *emphasis ours*)

Sukhwinder has taken the quote from Beetham's anthology mentioned above. As the readers can see, Sukhwinder has edited the quote according to his opportunist and dishonest ways to suit his propositions. *He has not even added 'dots' at places where he has made omissions in the quotations.* Thus, a reader would assume that the entire quote has been presented *verbatim!* This is how the scatter-brained editor of 'Pratibaddh' functions.

He also edits the portion where Togliatti points out that fascism does not represent only one fraction of the bourgeoisie but the bourgeoisie in general. The last sentence of Sukhwinder's quote that we have presented above does not make sense, perhaps due to bad translation, but also perhaps because of the poor ability of Sukhwinder to articulate his own views. However, it seems that he is saying that the conflict among the different fractions of the bourgeoisie did continue, even though Togliatti contended that all these fractions found their political unity in the fascist state. This is to state the obvious. The question of attaining this political unity arises only when the interests of different fractions are not *always-already* united and that is precisely

the point of fascism: to unite/collectivize these interests under the hegemony of the big monopoly capital in times of a political crisis, through exceptional means, as the regular means prove insufficient for this purpose. *Does this mean that the conflicts among different fractions vanish? No!* Had that been the case, there would be no continued need for fascism, or for that matter, any form of bourgeois state (as collectivization of the class interests of the bourgeoisie is not only the function of fascist state, but any bourgeois state, the only difference being that the former does this through exceptional means, whereas the bourgeois democratic parliamentary state does this through regular means, as we have discussed earlier in the essay). The emergence of fascist regime does not mean that the conflicts among different fractions cease to exist. This again shows complete obliviousness of Sukhwinder towards the basics of Marxist political theory as well as Marxist political economy.

B. Fascism in Power and the Proletariat: Sukhwinder Shoots Himself in the Foot

Sukhwinder further writes:

“To restore capital’s falling rate of profit fascism in power, shifts the burden of crisis onto the toilers and especially the working class. Naturally the working class opposes it. This sharpens the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat.” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 29)

But wait! How does the working class oppose it when fascism is in power, that is, when there is fascist dictatorship? Will not the working class be busy restoring the bourgeois democracy by forming alliances with all other fractions of the bourgeoisie except “the most reactionary fractions of the big monopoly bourgeoisie”? Has not Sukhwinder argued a couple of paragraphs before that with fascism in power, the task of the working class is to “side with bourgeoisie democracy” and form a ‘popular front’ to restore the bourgeois democracy (even though, according to the Comintern, formation of the ‘popular front’ was not to be done only when fascism was in power, as Sukhwinder thinks!)?

We can see that the entire argument of Sukhwinder is self-contradictory. Also, how is the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat sharpened? *Because if except “the most reactionary elements of the big monopoly bourgeoisie”, all other fractions of the bourgeoisie are excluded from the state power and are strategic allies till the restoration of the bourgeois democracy, because according to Sukhwinder with fascism in power, the proletariat “sides with bourgeois democracy”, then how can the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in general, be sharpened or assume a principal status?*

If the strategic aim of the proletariat under fascism, as a matter of rule, is the restoration of the bourgeois democracy, then, of course, *the principal contradiction is between the “most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly finance bourgeoisie” (the class content of the fascist state according to Sukhwinder) and the rest of the masses, which till the accomplishment of the aforementioned strategic task, includes all other fractions of the bourgeoisie, too.* The very point of the line of the ‘popular front’ was to put the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie on the backburner, because the principal task was to restore the bourgeois democracy, because the principal contradiction was “the most reactionary elements of the big monopoly finance bourgeoisie vs. all”! Then how is the proletariat going to deal with this “sharpening contradiction” according to Sukhwinder? Sukhwinder is again lost in the gunk of his own contradictions.

Sukhwinder continues his balderdash:

“Fascism in power abolishes the parliamentary democratic form of bourgeois rule. This shuts the door to the resolution of contradictions between the different fractions of bourgeoisie in parliamentary sphere. Fascism embarks on the path of eradicating rival factions inside it and rival bourgeois parties. It attempts the impossible task of forming a single party of the various factions of

capitalist class. It miserably fails in this. The conflicts between various factions of the bourgeoisie sharpens after fascism comes to power. The strife between different factions inside the fascist party sharpens too.” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 29)

The first argument is the same that fascism cannot retain the shell/form of parliamentary democracy. We have answered this inanity above in sufficient detail. There is no need to repeat that.

Secondly, again, due to quoting from disparate types of sources indiscriminately, Sukhwinder totally loses view and consciousness of the pile of contradictions into which he takes a plunge with a stupid smile on his face. Let us understand these contradictions.

If fascism represents only the “most reactionary elements” of the big monopoly bourgeoisie, then what is the material class basis of the existence of rival factions within fascism? Has Sukhwinder totally forgotten the ABC of Marxist class analysis? Oh, wait, no! He never understood them! Rival factions within all bourgeois parties as well as the state always reflect the existence of rival factions within the bourgeois class itself. They do not and cannot exist on the basis of individual contradictions or antagonisms alone. In fact, in most of the cases, the irresolvable individual contradictions always represent conflicting interests of the rival factions of the class themselves.

If all the other fractions of the bourgeoisie except “the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly capital” are excluded from the state and in fact the dictatorship of the latter has been established *on* them, too, then the contradiction between the fascist state and all the other fractions of the bourgeoisie is not “contradictions of fascism” but contradictions *between* fascism and the people, including the other fractions of the bourgeoisie.

Moreover, if fascist party (just like fascist state) represents only “the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly capital”, then why does the contradictions among “rival factions within the fascist party” sharpen? Weren’t we told that fascism represents only “the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly capital”? Such are the silly contradictions of Sukhwinder.

12. Sukhwinder on the Fascist Experience in Italy: Hair-Raising Idiocies and Political Illiteracy

Just like he did on all other issues related to fascism, Sukhwinder totally misreads and misinterprets the history of fascism in Italy and Germany. Besides the presentation of facts regarding the history of rise of fascism in Italy (though here, too, he misses some of the most important nodal events), all the interpretations (wherever they are not copied *verbatim* from Marxist sources) are thoroughly incorrect and reveal that in this case, too, Sukhwinder has not read anything about the history of Italian fascism in a comprehensive manner. Let us begin this tiresome exercise of revealing the ignorance of Sukhwinder regarding history (as well as theory) of Italian fascism.

A. Dogmatic Historicism of Sukhwinder at Full Display

In the very beginning, Sukhwinder makes a thoroughly dogmatist and historicist comment:

“Italy and Germany are those two nations in the history of fascism (almost 100 years) where fascist dictatorships were established. It is from the experience of Italy and Germany that fascism can be correctly understood.” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 30, *emphasis ours*)

Nope! Any political and ideological tendency cannot simply be understood by the exact historical experience in which they materialized in their first incarnations. This would

tantamount to argue that socialism can only be understood on the basis of the exact experience of the Bolshevik Revolution or the Chinese Revolution. This, precisely, is the particularly idiotic and dogmatic historicism of Sukhwinder. For instance, socialist revolutions today *do not*, as a matter of necessity require the exact political conjuncture of the rise of the 'dual power' and a world war. Such an approach fails to understand that the political conjuncture leading to the Bolshevik Revolution must be *situated* in the real conditions of the national and international class struggle of that period.

Of course, one learns from the historical experience of any political and ideological phenomenon; however, while learning from the concrete historical experience, one must be able to distill *the elements that are constitutive, immanent, intrinsic, systemic and structural* and distinguish them from the elements that are *contextual, exogenous, extrinsic, contingent and conjunctural*. This is another example of the ignorance of Sukhwinder regarding the relationship between *content, essence* and *substance* on the one hand, and, *form, phenomena* and *appearance* on the other. That is the reason why until and unless everything happens exactly in the same way in which it happened in the *historical fascism* and *historical Nazism*, he would not accept that fascism has arrived.

Further.

B. Particularities of Capitalist Economic Development in Italy and the Rise of Fascism: Uneven Inanities of Sukhwinder

Sukhwinder opines:

"Up until the first world war there were many similarities in the economic development of Italy and Germany. First let us consider Italy. Capitalist development occurred at a later stage in Italy but quite rapidly between 1890-1914. But as is the law of capitalist development, this development was quite uneven." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 30)

First of all, except two elements (constitutive of the emergence of economic conditions of the rise of fascism in both countries), nothing was common in the economic development of Italy and Germany. What were these elements?

The first element as pointed out by Poulantzas was the particular place of both these countries in the imperialist chain. Both emerged as industrial powers later than the other leading North-Western capitalist countries and joined the ranks of imperialist countries. However, by the time this process was achieved through the role of the state and finance capital, the world was more-or-less already divided among the old imperialist powers. As a result, Italy and Germany had a very small share in the colonial loot and plunder. Poulantzas points out:

"Germany and Italy were the weakest links in the chain after Russia – the latecomers, as I have said, to capitalism; though this often-used expression is misleading if it is taken to mean that they were the least economically developed countries. Weak and strong places in the chain cannot be explained by a chronological evolution of economic advance or backwardness, no more than uneven development can be explained as a simple rhythm of economic 'development'." (Poulantzas. 1979. *Op.cit.*, p. 25)

Poulantzas, after discussing the German case, comes to the Italian case and argues:

"Let us now turn to the case of Italy, which is quite different from that of Germany, though a similarity can be established if, and only if, we consider its position in the imperialist chain." (*ibid*, p. 29)

Poulantzas goes on to explain this point and shows that except this particular similarity, there is no similarity in the cases of the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy.

The second related common feature was the rupture and catastrophe involved in the *sudden rapid capitalist development* of these two countries. It is noteworthy that the unification of Italy as well as Germany happened in the second half of the Nineteenth century with very different kinds of political and economic dynamic. In any case, they emerged as nation-states in the stage of imperialism. As a consequence, the capitalist development in these countries revealed the role of two actors: *the state* and *the finance capital* (banks, etc.). Alexander Gerschenkron's work on the trajectory of late-industrializations in these capitalist late-comers and how it was different from the classical trajectory of capitalist development through the stages of handicrafts, technical division of labour and manufacture, and emergence of machinofacture, is relevant here (Gerschenkron, A. 1962. *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective, A Book of Essays*, Harvard University Press). Also, the lack of proper bourgeois democratic revolutions and radical bourgeois land reforms, contributed to the proneness of these two countries to the rise of a variety of far-right political tendencies as well as to the rupture that was involved otherwise.

Here a contingent rupture was involved. This is one of the most important constitutive element in the formation of social, political and economic conditions of the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany. As a consequence, the economic upheaval and resultant precariousness of the economic situation of the intermediate classes of petty-bourgeoisie involved a much more pronounced element of *rupture, discontinuity* and *break*. Consequently, the structure of German and Italian capitalisms was extremely fragile *in the political sense*. The economic condition created by state-led and bank-led swift industrialization in these countries was nothing comparable to what had been happening in Britain, France and some other North-Western capitalist countries since last few centuries. What was achieved in the latter in a long-drawn historical process, was to be achieved in these late-comers in the matter of a couple of decades.

Due to this, when the economic catastrophe following the First World War hit Germany and Italy, though in quite different ways, the political ground for the drift of the already economically fragile petty-bourgeoisie was created. The sudden and catastrophic ruin first in the first few years after the end of the war and then again, especially in Germany, since 1929, led to a particular economic condition and political situation for the petty-bourgeoisie in both these countries. It goes without saying that this alone cannot explain the process of fascist rise and one has to understand the particular location of these countries in the imperialist chain and the political crises that the bourgeoisie in these countries faced in the general conditions of economic crisis. However, this much is certain that due to certain particularities of the historical trajectory of capitalist development and industrialization in both these countries, the economic condition as well as the political situation of the petty-bourgeoisie was particularly fragile.

Poulantzas refers to the rapid concentration of capital during the rise of fascism which pushed the petty-bourgeoisie into an economic crisis:

"The rise of fascism corresponds to an economic crisis for the entire petty bourgeoisie. This is an important fact: in both Germany and Italy, the petty bourgeoisie was particularly affected by the economic crisis the countries had just been through. But in so far as the crisis had begun to be resolved before fascism actually came to power, the essential point is the step of transition to the dominance of monopoly capitalism to which fascism corresponds. *The acceleration of the concentration of capital during the rise of fascism directly jeopardized the economic existence of small-scale production and small-scale ownership.*" (*ibid*, p. 247)

Poulantzas, in the case of Germany, supports this argument with some concrete figures:

"In Germany, small-scale production and commerce underwent a serious economic crisis, due above all to the process of capital concentration. Between 1907 and 1925, the proportion of 'independent' traders and producers in the population as a whole fell by about 4.5 per cent, and between 1925 and 1933 by

a further 2 per cent, which in all amounts to the considerable decline of some 6 to 7 per cent. At the same time, this fraction of the petty bourgeoisie, exploited by big capital (not only or even mainly by means of expropriation and proletarianization (in the strict sense), and subject to price movements, inflation, and the crisis of the 1929 depression, was one section of the population which suffered most 'economically'. In this process of pauperization, artisans and traders lost almost half their income." (*ibid*, p. 259)

This particular fact was present in the Italian experience, too:

"The situation of the urban petty bourgeoisie in Italy was broadly similar to that in Germany. In view of *the precocious and artificial concentration of Italian big capital, accelerated during the war, the position of the artisans and small traders became more and more critical throughout the rise of fascism.*" (*ibid*, p. 265)

In other words, the unevenness of the development of capitalism did not have any implication, per se, for the rise of fascism in both these countries, as Sukhwinder thinks. Why? Because in different quantities, this element is common to all instances of capitalist development. Of course, extreme unevenness can play a certain role in the rise of reactionary movements. However, in Italy, as Poulantzas pointed out, this unevenness was not so much the unevenness of capitalist development, not any more than any other example of capitalist development, but a breach in the economic development of Italy between Industrial capitalist North and the Agrarian feudal and semi-feudal South.

Thus, it was not, in particular, the *unevenness* of the capitalist development (a quantitative trait present in all examples of capitalist development) but the *way* in which and the *pace* at which the process unfolded, which created the fascist potentialities in these countries, besides the particular political conjuncture of class struggle that existed historically in these countries. Sukhwinder has completely missed this. As we can see, even while reading history, Sukhwinder is utterly incapable of distinguishing the elements of a phenomenon which are its *differentia specifica*.

C. Political Crisis in General, Revolutionary Crisis, and the Intellectual Crisis of Sukhwinder

Sukhwinder attempts to present a factual account of developments in the working-class movement in Italy in 1920, but in his trade-mark style, utters such inanities that no serious student of history and Marxism can think of. He writes:

"Italy was mired in deep economic crisis in 1920. *This situation gave rise to the revolutionary crisis in Italy in 1918-20. This further worsened the condition of toiling masses of Italy.* The workers' movement rose in this situation in Italy. In 1917, there occurred an anti-war armed rising of the Turin workers. Workers fought for increase in wages, 8 hour working day, right to form trade unions. Isolated strikes often turned into general strikes. In August-September 1919, two-month long strike took place in which 2 lakh metal workers participated. In the wake of the rising tide of workers' movement, ruling classes were forced to retreat and accept several demands of the workers." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 30)

Okay. So, Italy was facing a "deep economic crisis" in 1920; this gave rise to "revolutionary crisis" during 1918-20! And this revolutionary crisis itself "further worsened the condition of toiling masses of Italy"! How? Revolutionary crisis does not worsen the conditions of toiling masses any further, except the hardships imposed by the revolutionary class struggle itself. Sukhwinder does not understand the difference between the concepts of economic crisis, *political crisis in general* and *a revolutionary crisis in particular*.

First of all, political crises do not follow spontaneously and automatically from an economic crisis, as we have shown earlier in the essay; they emerge only in *particular conjunctures of class struggle in the general conditions of economic crisis*.

Secondly, only those political crises are converted into revolutionary crisis, which correspond to *the revolutionary offensive of the working class*.

Third, the revolutionary crises, in and by themselves, do not worsen the economic situation of the toiling masses; on the contrary, they emerge when the economic situation of the toiling masses have already, under certain situations of political class struggle, reached a bottle-neck and as such, are *a response* to this condition. Let us see how Poulantzas differentiates between political crisis in general and revolutionary crisis in particular:

“Experience shows that a common political position is generally maintained in ‘normal’ conjunctures of class struggle, or in conjunctures of acute political crisis where the working class is on the defensive, as in the case of fascism. *The dislocations appear above all in revolutionary conjunctures or in political crises corresponding to the working-class offensive, as in Germany and Italy between 1919 and 1921.*” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 244, *emphasis ours*)

Poulantzas is correct here. Only those political crises turn into revolutionary crises, which are accompanied by a *political revolutionary offensive of the working class*. On the contrary, fascism corresponds to a political crisis, which is accompanied by *the offensive of the dominant classes and the failure of the proletariat to mount a political offensive*. This is a qualitative difference and no element of evolutionism, quantitarianism or gradualism can be allowed to creep in here.

In other words, every political crisis is pregnant with dual possibilities. Depending on the accumulation of the subjective forces of different classes that constitute the different terms of the contradiction, it can assume a political crisis leading to reactionary outcome, or a political crisis leading to a revolutionary outcome. The first is the case which leads to one of the exceptional forms of bourgeois regime, whereas the other is the case which, accompanied by a revolutionary offensive of the proletariat, leads to systemic change and a revolutionary regime of the proletariat. In nutshell, there is a qualitative difference between the generic idea of a political crisis, and the revolutionary crisis, which is manifestation of *a particular kind of political crisis corresponding to the revolutionary offensive of the proletariat*. All of this is lost on Sukhwinder.

D. Recurring Blunder of Sukhwinder: ‘Fascism as a Response to Revolutionary Offensive of the Proletariat’

Sukhwinder attempts to present an image that the rise of fascism was a response to the emergence of a revolutionary working-class movement in Italy. He writes:

“In cities and villages, the struggle of workers and peasants was led by the socialist party of Italy. In 1920, this struggle of Italy’s workers and peasantry reached its peak. *The struggle of toiling masses brought on agenda the question of power. In Antonio Gramsci’s leadership the Ordine Nuovo group of the socialist party began creating factory councils and turning them into institutions of workers’ state.* When the ruling classes began dismantling these factory councils, then a large strike movement started spreading in Northern Italy. The workers occupied the factories of Milan, Rome, Naples, Genoa, Turin and other cities. Workers set up factory councils and armed red defenders. Milan, Florence and many other cities were in the occupation of workers.

“But Italy’s proletariat could not sustain this victory. The other sections of the socialist party showed no enthusiasm for furthering the workers’ movement and taking it to victorious culmination. Two-line struggle sharpened inside the

socialist party. Socialist party split in January 1921 and the Communist Party of Italy came into existence." (*ibid*, p. 31, *emphasis ours*)

Sukhwinder writes further, quoting Poulantzas:

"In fact, during the rise of fascism, and despite their own mistakes, Gramsci and the Turin Ordine Nuovo group seem, in their position on the workers' councils, to have been the only section of the Third International in Europe to have grasped the problems of the united front." But Bordiga's left sectarian line dominated over the party, thus, Gramsci's thinking could not be turned into practical action." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 33, *author's emphasis*)

It is true that Gramsci presented a relatively correct line within the PSI and later within the PCI, too. However, Sukhwinder overestimates the offensive of the working class in Italy. Poulantzas has pointed out that in Italy, too, when the revolutionary offensive of the working class subsided due to its internal weaknesses (primarily economism, not the refusal to ally with the PSI, as Sukhwinder thinks), only then the fascist rise began. The interval between the two events was, of course, smaller than that in Germany, but Italian fascism, too, was not a response to 'red scare' in Italy; on the contrary, its rise began when the 'red scare' in Italy had already subsided.

Poulantzas himself writes:

"Firstly, the rise of fascism, and the preceding period as well, were again a very concentrated experience for the proletariat. *The stabilization period between the turning point of the defeat and the start of the rise of fascism was especially brief in Italy. The process of defeat in this case saw no attempt at insurrection in the full sense – apart from a local insurrection in Turin in 1917.* The proletarian offensive essentially took the form of strikes, in particular of political strikes. The process of defeat nevertheless took place in a continuous 'veiled' civil war between the two forces in operation." (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 198, *emphasis ours*)

As we can see, even in Italy the fascist rise *began* on the ruins of *political offensive* of the proletariat, contrary to Sukhwinder's belief.

E. Gramsci and the Conception of United Front Against Fascism: Sukhwinder's Complete Obliviousness towards History and Theory

Moreover, Gramsci's relatively correct view regarding 'united front' that Poulantzas talks about has nothing to do with even something comparable to the 'popular front', as Sukhwinder wants us to believe by way of an allusion. Let us see what Poulantzas writes about it, which Sukhwinder has missed because he did not read the entire work of Poulantzas:

"Togliatti thus implicitly excluded medium capital (the 'liberal bourgeoisie') from the fascist bloc, but he apparently kept to Gramsci's conception of the landowners. In fact, while he now emphasized the advanced and concentrated nature of Italian capitalism, and the hegemonic role of monopoly capital, which he had not done previously, Togliatti still retained the distinction between the 'two sectors' under fascism in Italy (a monopoly capitalist sector, and a very backward, therefore feudal, agrarian sector), and failed to see the penetration of agriculture by monopoly capitalism. But the theory of 'feudal survivals', apparently a continuation of his previous analyses, served a quite different purpose: it only corroborated the strategy of alliances advocated by Dimitrov. *As far as Gramsci is concerned, he did of course stress the need to fight fascism by a 'popular anti-fascist revolution', but only in the sense that he was opposed to making the foundation of a soviet republic the immediate objective of the struggle against fascism, and saw the need for transitional aims. Gramsci was in no way the disciple of Dimitrov.*" (*ibid*, footnote, p. 123)

In fact, the united front concept that Gramsci adhered to stemmed directly from the Leninist slogan of 'to the masses' in order to resist bourgeois reactionaries. This entailed the idea of the 'united front from below', which meant, a united front with the rank-and-file, even in the social-democratic trade unions, forming issue-based tactical alliance with the socialists, social-democrats, too, while at the same time not missing any opportunity to expose the role of social-democracy in the rise of fascism. Poulantzas has summarized this succinctly:

"To take the Italian case first. The Comintern, at its Third Congress, recognized a period of 'stabilization' of class struggle, and launched the slogan, *'To the masses'*; six months later, in December 1921, its executive adopted the theses on the united front, in pursuit of this watchword. These theses, ratified by the First Plenum (February-March 1922) and the Fourth Congress under the title 'Theses on the unity of the proletarian front', were added in abbreviated form to the Fourth Congress resolutions. *It should furthermore be noted that these theses were elaborated under Lenin's direction.* The Comintern recognized (i) a turn in the class struggle, (ii) its own sectarian errors during the previous period and (iii) the persistence of social-democratic influence in spite of the split. *It now turned its efforts to the formation of a proletarian united front. A 'rank and file' united front, of course, implying the independence and autonomy of the communist parties within this front, and the participation of communists primarily in the rank and file organizations of the working class; but also implying a certain policy towards the social-democratic party, derived from a particular understanding of it.*

"The united front tactic means that the communist vanguard must take the lead in the day-to-day struggles of *the broad working masses* for their most vital interests. In these struggles the communists are even *ready to negotiate with the treacherous social democrat and Amsterdam leaders ...* The existence of independent communist parties and their *complete freedom of action in regard to the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary social democracy is the most significant historical achievement of the proletariat, which the communists will in no circumstances whatever renounce ...* Nor does the united front tactic mean so-called upper-level "electoral alliances" which pursue some parliamentary purpose or other. The united front tactic is the offer of a joint struggle of communists with all workers who belong to other parties or groups, and with all non-party workers ... Its true realization can come only "from below", from the depths of *the working masses* themselves. Communists, however, must not refuse in *certain circumstances* to negotiate with the leaders of the hostile workers' parties, but the masses must be kept fully and constantly informed of the course of these negotiations ...'

"The theses on the united front flowed directly from the Leninist slogan, 'To the masses' ..." (*ibid*, p. 157-58)

Thus, what Sukhwinder is allusions regarding the Gramsci's idea of united front only reveals his total inability to understand what Gramsci thought about united front in this period and why he was making more sense than others, ("left" as well as right within the PCI). The mistake of the Bordiga tendency was the "left" mistake of, in effect, rejecting even the 'united front from below', that is, communists-led 'rank-and-file united front' of all working class masses, including those who were members of social-democratic trade unions and social-democratic parties. In Germany, Thälmann was the main representative of this same tendency. PCI under Bordiga did accept *economic united front* at the level of trade unions, only for particular economic demands. However, the idea of *the political front* at the level of the rank-and-file elements of the all workers' organizations, was rejected outright. The excerpt presented by Sukhwinder, where Gramsci is being commended for having a relatively correct understanding about united front, is basically Poulantzas's reference to Gramsci's idea of following the Leninist call of 'to the masses' in the formation of united front from below, not simply an economic one, but a political one,

which was completely and diametrically opposed to the “left” tendency represented by the likes of Bordiga and Thälmann. However, it was *equally and vehemently opposed to right-wing deviation of capitulationism in the matters pertaining to the question of the united front.*

F. Another Instance of Sukhwinder’s Ignorance About History

Sukhwinder presents a highly inaccurate historical account of the rise of fascism in Italy. For instance, he contends that due to the maximalist program of PSI regarding agrarian reforms and its “left” attitude towards the rural petty-bourgeoisie, the latter ultimately joined the feudal lords of South Italy. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

It is true that due to the maximalist program, the PSI under Serrati failed to win over the rural petty-bourgeoisie, especially the poor peasantry, because it rejected any intermediate redistributive land program. *However, due to this, the poor peasantry did not join the feudal lords!* It was politically demobilized and lost trust in the Italian socialists and immediately after that involved in spontaneous riot-like revolts against the semi-feudal lords (by the way, even the landlords in South Italy were not *feudal lords* as such, but semi-feudal lords undergoing a transition to capitalist landlordism due to the intervention of the monopoly capital. In fact, Poulantzas criticizes Gramsci for giving too little significance to this process). Ultimately, it was fascism which, by using the ideology of ‘community of the soil’, unified interests of all the rural classes vis-à-vis the urban classes and industry, and the ideology of what Marx had termed ‘feudal socialism’, won over, the chunk of rural petty-bourgeoisie; whereas, it already had, from the very beginning, the support of rural big property. Poulantzas points out:

“The end of the war saw a real peasant uprising in both countries, and in Italy it took particularly radical forms. *Many small-holders and tenants went over to social democracy.* The agricultural labourers were organized into social-democratic unions *en masse*, and some of them supported the communist party.

“But social democracy betrayed them. As for the KPD and the ‘Maximalist’ tendency in Italian social democracy, they both completely neglected the question of alliance with the poor peasantry, and so did the PCI to a certain extent, during the rise of fascism. This had its roots in the general political line of the parties and their specific practice in relation to alliances. Their policy did not allow them to advance any concrete transitional programme for the peasantry on the basis of distribution of land.

“In this situation, the different peasant classes and fractions found themselves extremely disoriented politically, and their revolt increasingly took on typical jacquerie forms. They too were in ideological crisis.” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 278-79, *emphasis ours*)

Poulantzas points out further:

“Fascism, then, presented a demagogic face to the poor peasantry, making false promises of ‘colonization’ and land distribution. But there was more to it: fascism thoroughly exploited both the particular forms assumed by petty bourgeois rebel ideology in the countryside, and the ideological theme of the solidarity and community of the soil. It was this corporatist aspect which prevailed in the ideological role of fascism in the countryside. Like the emphasis on ties of blood and ties of the soil, on personal loyalty, etc., this aspect linked up with the survivals of *feudal ideology* in ‘rural fascism’.” (*ibid*, p. 280, *emphasis ours*)

And finally:

“On the basis of this secondary contradiction, fascism manages to disguise the principal contradiction in the countryside, between the big landowners and the popular classes, in a quite specific way. Fascism originally appears much more as

a reaction of the whole agricultural sector against the capitalization of agriculture, than as the direct expression of the reaction of the poor peasantry, i.e. the rural petty bourgeoisie, against the big landowners. Under fascism, this petty-bourgeois revolt is directed almost exclusively against credit (banking capital) and the 'profiteering Jew', against falling prices on the urban market, and against the industrial proletariat." (*ibid*, p. 281)

Secondly, as we pointed out above, Sukhwinder tries to present a picture and Italian fascism emerged as a reaction to an insurgent working class. That, too, is untrue. In fact, the fascist rise began immediately after the political offensive of the working class had already become dormant and passive. This was a point, to which Gramsci also alluded when he said in 1924 that fascism never engages or maneuvers against an active political movement of the working class; it waits till this movement subsides, and then it falls upon it, for not what it does, but for what it is. We have presented this quote of Gramsci earlier in the essay. This a remarkable point. Poulantzas, too, shows that Mussolini's rise begins with the political defeat of the revolutionary communists as well as the maximalist Socialists under Serrati. He argues:

"Firstly, the rise of fascism, and the preceding period as well, were again a very concentrated experience for the proletariat. The stabilization period between the turning point of the defeat and the start of the rise of fascism was especially brief in Italy." (*quoted above*)

After this Poulantzas goes on to show, in detail, why despite spontaneous militancy, the working-class movement failed *politically*, owing to the lack of the correct political line. On the one hand, was the right-wing of PSI under Turati, which capitulated to the bourgeoisie, on the other, there was the maximalist left tendency within PSI, under the leadership of Serrati, which never went beyond legalism and reactive defencism, despite often being radical in its phraseology. Similarly, under Bordiga, the PCI completely rejected the united front of the working class from below and also issue-based tactical alliances with socialists, especially, the Serrati faction. In fact, Lenin and later Bolsheviks had often advised the Italian communists to form particular alliances with the Serrati faction. On the other hand, there was the faction led by Gramsci, which did have a relatively correct understanding, but till 1924-25, did not declare open 'war' against the "lefts" because, as Gramsci himself had said, he did not want to be seen acting as a "surety" for the right-wing opposition (under Tasca) to Bordiga. Even when Gramsci assumed the main leadership, especially since 1926, the PCI could not implement a politically correct line. One of the reasons was the arrest of Gramsci. Moreover, it was too late by 1926.

Further.

G. Sukhwinder's Quixotic Imaginations About the "Left" Deviation in the Communist Movement of Italy

After an inaccurate account of the history of rise of fascism and the mistakes of the PCI as well as the PSI which contributed to it, Sukhwinder again reveals his ignorance when he presents a summation:

"The treachery of socialist party and the errors of communist party too helped to pave the way for rise of fascism in Italy and establishment of fascist dictatorship. Whereas the socialist party turned away from resisting fascism, the communist party under its leader Bordiga was prey to left sectarianism. The communist party could not detect the real character of fascism and underestimated its danger. Whereas the leader of Communist party, Bordiga was prey to left sectarianism, Tasca, on the other end of the spectrum was right opportunist. Gramsci's understanding on fascism and the way of resisting was relatively accurate. He considered Tasca's right opportunist line to be more dangerous. For resisting fascism, Bordiga was against the formation of united front with socialist party or any other group. It was Gramsci that correctly understood the

importance of anti-fascist united front. *"In fact, during the rise of fascism, and despite their own mistakes, Gramsci and the Turin Ordine Nuovo group seem, in their position on the workers' councils, to have been the only section of the Third International in Europe to have grasped the problems of the united front."* But Bordiga's left sectarian line dominated over the party, thus, Gramsci's thinking could not be turned into practical action." (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 32-33, *author's emphasis*)

As we have already pointed out, Gramsci's concept of united front was completely different from what Sukhwinder wants us to believe. We have shown this above with sufficient clarity. Gramsci was not in the favour of forming *general anti-fascist front* with the socialist party. First of all, the PSI itself was divided and there was no question, for Gramsci, of rapprochement with the right-wing and parliamentarist wing of the PSI; the question of alliance with the Serrati faction, too, was about particular tactical alliances; the united front for Gramsci was implementing a massline to form united front from below, among the rank-and-file workers from all kinds of trade unions and organizations (including the socialist-led organizations). Gramsci's approval of participation in Arditi Del Popolo was precisely based on this general understanding. Sukhwinder has fantastic ideas about this too:

"The first organisation that came into being in Italy to resist fascism was Arditi Del Popolo. It was founded by anarchist Argo Sokotari in June 1921. It included all types of anti-fascist fighters (communist, socialist, anarchist, republican). In a few months, Arditi had organised 144 sections to resist fascism which had 20 thousand members. In the beginning, Arditi had considerable success in resisting fascism. But in the end, Arditi could not survive in face of the fascist offensive. One cause for this was the open financial support to fascists by monopolists of Italy and second was the attitude of socialists and communists towards Arditi. On 3 August 1921, Socialist party affected a peace truce with Mussolini and withdrew support from Arditi. Socialist party was against armed resistance of Fascism. Its peace agreement with Mussolini allowed the fascists to re-organise and sharpen its offensive. Under the influence of left sectarian line, Communist party rejected Arditi by branding it as a bourgeois trick and declared their withdrawal from Arditi. But the rank and file of both parties revolted against their leaders and remained in Arditi on a large scale." (*ibid*, p. 33)

First of all, Arditi del Popolo was not founded *only* by Argo Secondari (who is this Sokotari, by the way?!). It was co-founded by Secondari, Giuseppe Mingrino (a socialist) and Gino Lucetti (an anarchist). PCI did not see Arditi as "bourgeois trick" as such. The sectarian line represented by Bordiga did not see Arditi del Popolo as a possible model of 'united front from below'; he argued that communists cannot be part of any armed resistance group which is not under the strict control of and formed by the communist party itself and ordered to found communist military resistance groups of the PCI, which were, indeed, formed. However, this was certainly a "left" sectarian mistake. Gramsci differed and opposed this line. Poulantzas has quoted PCI's views regarding Arditi del Popolo:

"The PCI denounced them and forbade its members to take part in them: "The "Arditi del popolo" apparently propose to use the proletarian reaction to the excesses of fascism to re-establish the "order and morality of social life". The aim of communists is quite different: they want to lead the proletarian struggle to the revolutionary victory. Their position is based on the implacable antithesis between the dictatorship of bourgeois reaction and the dictatorship of the proletarian revolution ... They therefore point to the pernicious and defeatist nature of all distinctions between the defensive and offensive of the working class.' The Arditi elements were branded as '*suspicious*' and '*confused*', and the PCI organized its own communist squads, stressing 'the value of isolation'." (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 212)

Of course, it was a serious “left” deviation criticized by Gramsci at that time itself. However, what Sukhwinder understands about it, is fantastic.

“The lack of understanding about fascism’s true nature, the trend of underestimating its threat wasn’t just prevalent in the Communist Party of Italy but also in the Communist movement of Europe. Most of them thought that fascism is a common tool of counter revolution which will quickly be outmoded. *Before long the bourgeois, with the help of social democrats, would return to the parliamentary forms of rule. That is why, the social democrats are the real barrier in the way of proletarian revolution.*” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 33-34, *emphasis ours*)

I do not properly understand what Sukhwinder means by “common tool of counter revolution”. Perhaps, he meant to say “ordinary tool”. Moreover, the last two sentences of the excerpt quoted above, have no rigorous logical relation. If fascism was misconstrued by certain communists as a temporary short-lived phenomenon and a temporary tool for the bourgeoisie in crisis, and if, due to this misconception, they believed that soon the bourgeoisie with the social-democracy would restore parliamentary democracy, then why would they consider the social-democrats as the real barrier to the proletarian revolution? Moreover, since Sukhwinder subscribes to the line of the ‘popular front’, he should not have any problem with that, because in the case of fascist regime, the very task for Sukhwinder is “siding with the bourgeois democracy” and its “restoration”! Sukhwinder is unable to decide where to stand, where to jump, and where to sit.

Moreover, this depiction of “most of them (communists)” does not hold water. There was a fierce debate between and among parties, in Comintern, inside the Bolshevik Party as well as major Marxist thinkers. Besides, from the writings of the 1920s and the 1930s, we can clearly discern a general atmosphere of confusion regarding different elements of fascism, its relation with different classes and the political crisis which leads to fascist rise. This was natural, as we have pointed out many times in this essay. There was no precedence of the rise of fascism as a particular kind of far-right reaction of the bourgeoisie. Communists were becoming a witness to it for the first time and they were genuinely trying to grapple with it in order to draw practical conclusions from it.

The period till 1922 was of ‘united front of the working class from below’ which argued for issue-based particular and tactical alliances with socialists, social-democrats, but not general anti-fascist united front with them, while at the same time, organizing the masses of the rank-and-file workers, irrespective of their organizational affiliations to different trade unions, etc. From 1922-23, under the same name, the policy of ‘workers’ government’ was introduced, which failed, too, due to the non-implementation of the massline, which was the original idea at the foundation of the line of ‘united front of the working class from below’; this failure due to the right swing at the Fourth Congress, ultimately resulted in the reaction of the “left” swing from 1923 to 1928 and then to ultra-left deviation from 1928 to 1932, which led to the isolation of the revolutionary communists, even among the masses of the working class, not to speak of the utter neglect of political work among the other classes of the people; this led to near-total decimation of remaining communist organizations, crushing of the organized workers’ movement (not to be confused with the political offensive of the proletariat) and conversion of the resistible rise of fascism into the irresistible rise of fascism. This led to the beginning of right deviation again, which began from 1933 itself and revealed it completely with the line of the ‘popular front’.

However, Sukhwinder fails to see this pendulum like motion from “left” to right and from right to “left”, in the absence of massline, correct understanding of the primacy of *the political* and due to the dominance of trade-unionism, economism, syndicalism and other alien bourgeois ideas in the communist as well as revolutionary working-class movement.

H. A Few Questions Regarding the Rise of Fascism in Italy that Sukhwinder Wants to Evade

Sukhwinder writes:

“By the end of 1920 Italy’s counter revolutionary forces and their leading fascist detachments’ activities gained pace. In November 1920 Fascists captured the city councils of Bologna which was previously led by socialists. In the parliamentary elections of May 1921, Fascists had great success.

“In 1922, fascists captured many cities of Italy. On 28 October 1922, they started the famous ‘march to Rome’. Fascist squads easily entered Italy’s capital, Rome. Governmental troops did not oppose them at all. The king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel declared Mussolini to be the prime minister. The fascists banned factory councils, trade unions. Peasants were removed from the lands captured from feudal lords, worker clubs were broken. The killings of trade union activists, socialists, communists began. The communist party was particularly targeted for repression which made it quite weak. To crush the workers’ movement fascists particularly depended on extra-legal violence along with “legal” means.

“In 1926, through an order Mussolini was declared to be above the parliament. Besides the fascist party, all other political parties and organisations were declared illegal.” (Sukhwinder, *op.cit.*, p. 32, *emphasis ours*)

It is noteworthy that Sukhwinder is obliged to mention in this account that *in content* the parliament ceased to exist since 1926 in Italy. He also has to mention that in 1921 elections, the fascists performed well and he also mentions that the seizure of power by the fascists happened by the end of 1922. However, he intentionally omits the fact that in Italy another parliamentary elections were held in 1924, even though the passage of the Acerbo Law had given an advantage to the fascist party in the elections. *In other words, the democratic content of the electoral process and parliament was in decay, a process which can take a variety of forms in different historical contexts.* Secondly, the parliamentary institutions were retained for a long time after the fascist takeover and some of them survived after 1926, even though it was *purely formal*. Why did Sukhwinder omit these important details? Because that would have raised several questions which he would not have been able to answer. What are these questions? Let us see.

First of all, Sukhwinder needs to answer this question: *when was the fascization of the state completed in Italy?* Sukhwinder sees that as an event whereas it took the form of a process. No doubt it was different from today, because the *differentia specifica* of the present experience is that this process itself is never complete, but assumes the form of a perpetually ongoing project. However, in Italy, too, this much is certain that it did not take the form of *an event*. Poulantzas has pointed out that in Italy after seizing the power, the fascists undertook the task of the *reorganization of the state apparatus* especially between 1926 and 1928. Poulantzas argues:

“1925-6, with the various ‘ultra-fascist’ laws, was a major turning point in the reorganization of the State system, and the party was increasingly subordinated to the repressive state apparatus. At the same time as power was concentrated in the executive, the dominant role among the branches of the apparatus shifted towards the administration: for example, the powers of the prefecture were extended, the prefects becoming ‘the highest State authority in the provinces’, which occasioned much discontent in the fascist party and among the regional secretaries of the fascia. In 1927, a new circular about the administration and the prefects submitted the party hierarchy to the State hierarchy. The party itself was considered an ‘instrument of the will of the State’, and the circular stated that ‘squadristism is now an anachronism’. With the formation of the fascist Grand Council, the supreme body for decision-making, supplementing the Council of Ministers, the subordination of the fascist party to the State apparatus was finalized. *The process was completed with the proclamation, in 1928, of the ‘unity of party and State’,* which had the same meaning as in Germany: the petty

bourgeoisie lost its presiding place.” (Poulantzas. 1979. *op.cit.*, p. 352-53, *emphasis ours*)

This leads us to the second question: if fascist seizure of power took place in 1922 and till 1926 parliamentary system continued to be formally in existence, what should have been the proletarian anti-fascist front strategy and what should have been the stage of revolution for Italian communists? Fascism was in power and the parliament, too, continued to exist in form, though the content was truncated. In fact, 1924 elections, the communists and socialists did not form an alliance and fought the elections separately which was a big issue of debate. Was the seizure of power not complete? Sukhwinder does not and *cannot* answer these questions. It appears from his account that qualitatively the process of rise of fascism in Italy was quite similar to the process of rise of fascism in Germany, whereas, nothing can be farther from the truth.

Poulantzas has pointed out that in Italy the process of rise of fascism was very different from that in Germany. Poulantzas points out:

“The rise in fascism, firstly, was of a dual nature in Italy. *It was both more militarized and more parliamentary than in Germany.* The collusion of the repressive state apparatus with fascism was much clearer, and it will be remembered that the representatives of medium capital were much more conciliatory towards fascism.” (*ibid*, p. 350, *emphasis ours*)

He argues further:

“Italian fascism, once in power, proceeded to reorganize the State apparatuses on much the same lines as Nazism; but it did not go so far as Nazism, or follow the line right through. In particular, the suppression of the relative autonomy of the State branches and apparatuses was less marked than with Nazism; State intervention in all social activity, including repressive and ideological intervention, was more restricted, *and certain institutional forms of the ‘parliamentary democratic’ State were preserved.*”

“The explanation lies in *the particular characteristics of the class struggle: the different features of big capital in Italy, the stronger resistance of medium capital and also of the masses, in particular the working class, i.e. the specific characteristics of the ideological and political crisis.*”

“*During the first period of fascist rule, which was longer than in Germany, there was again a gradual reorganization of the repressive state apparatus under the dominance of the fascist party, whose members invaded all the apparatuses. The party’s dominance was stronger and more necessary in so far as parliamentary forms were preserved throughout this period: the gap between real and formal power persisted to some extent, the party acting as the centre of real power, despite appearances on the political scene.*” (*ibid*, p. 351-52, *emphasis ours*)

Finally, Poulantzas demonstrates the qualitative differences between the Italian case and the German case, which also blinded bourgeois authors like Arendt, who did not consider Italian case as an example of ‘totalitarianism’, a category as good as horse-shit anyway:

“The relevant criteria for distinguishing between forms of exceptional regime show the identical nature of the two cases, *though the Italian fascist regime kept up a façade of constitutionality, because of the particular compromises it had to resort to.* The king in principle still had the power to dismiss and nominate the Prime Minister (Mussolini); *parliament was ‘elected’ on a single slate drawn up by the fascist Grand Council on the nomination of the various corporate bodies, though it had only a decorative function;* alongside it was the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, nominated by the fascist leadership; *the Senate, appointed by*

the king, continued to exist, as did the State Council and the Court of Appeal. This was clearly only a façade, though it helped give Mussolini real standing in the eyes of some heroes of 'Western freedom': first among them, of course, being Churchill, the future executioner of Greece." (ibid, p. 354, emphasis ours)

Sukhwinder has missed all these nuances which point to the qualitative differences between the Italian case and the German case, because that would raise questions to him that would make him uncomfortable. The complexity of the experience of the rise of fascism in the early-Twentieth century itself explains the plurality and multiplicity in the emerging views of the revolutionary communists in that period. Sukhwinder attempts to present a different monolithic and homogeneous view of the period.

In sum, we can safely say that Sukhwinder's account of rise of fascism in Italy is not even good for a class 8 history textbook. He has missed all the cardinal details, the important complexities, its specific differences from the German case and the peculiarities of the process of rise of fascism to power and the consequent reorganization of the state apparatuses. Even schoolboys studying history as a subject can present a more accurate and articulate account than that of Sukhwinder. It is not to say that we had expected something more from him. The experience of dealing with the hair-raising stupidities of Sukhwinder has trained us systematically in the past few years to expect only this much from him.

(To be continued)

(Part-IV will start with a critique of Sukhwinder's Account of Rise of Fascism in Germany)