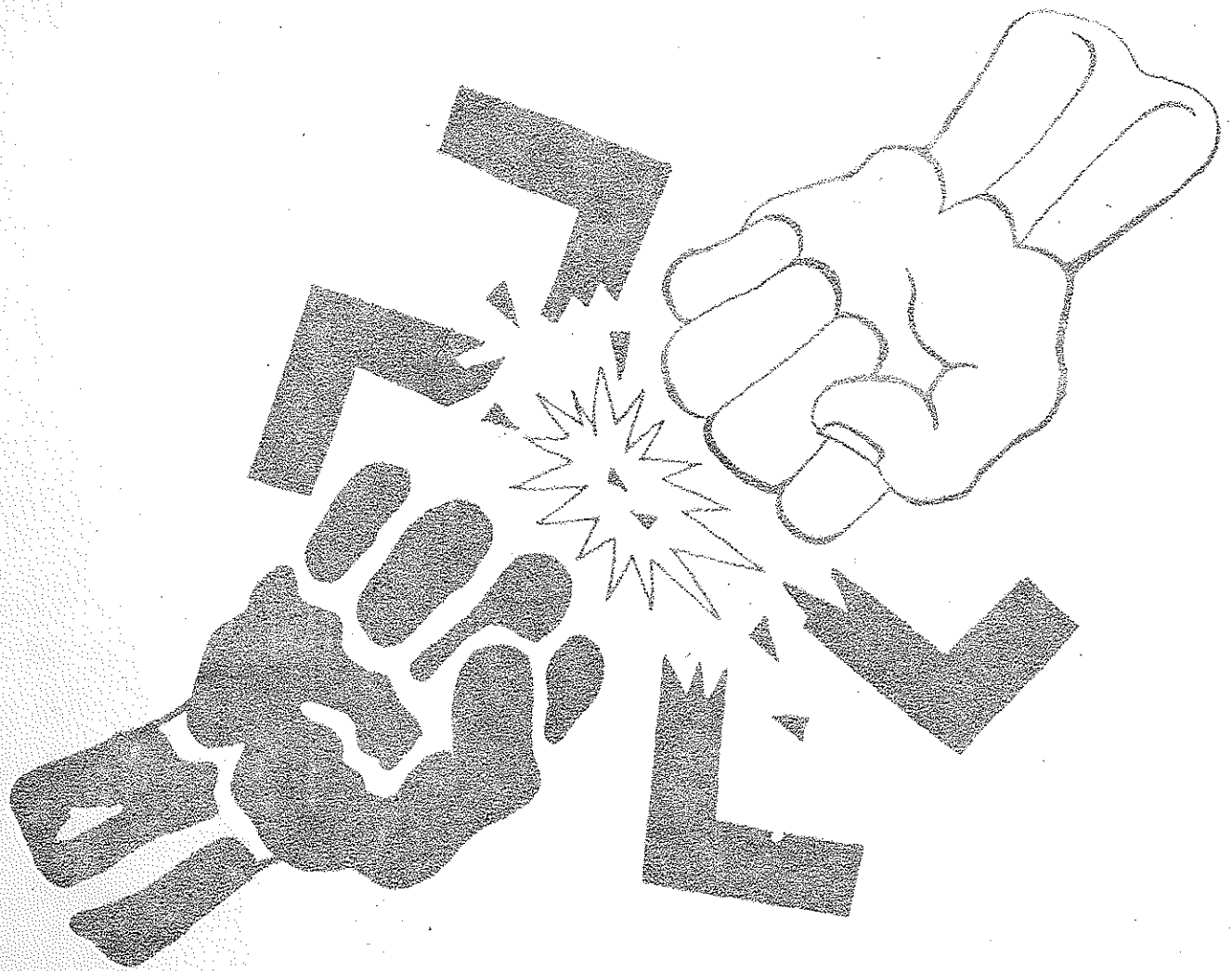


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FASCISM

AND ANTI FASCIST

TACTICS



Discussion Paper (25p)

FASCISM AND ANTI-FASCIST TACTICS

The marked increase in racist attacks including stabbings, murder and arson, has been inspired by the propaganda and activity of the National Front and other Fascist sects. These outrages have been particularly numerous in parts on East London, but there have been incidents in all areas where there is a black or Asian population. Therefore, in certain areas, the question of the nature of Fascism, perspectives for these groups, and our programme and tactics for combating their influence has been sharply posed. The purpose of this statement is to reiterate and clarify our position. It is also necessary to take up some of the points raised in the discussion amongst the marxists in the London area.

Fascism arose in the inter-war period on the basis of the decay and "death agony of Capitalism". It came to power in its classical form in Italy and Germany. The Capitalist crisis not only ravages the wages and conditions of the Proletariat but also ruins the petit-bourgeois, driving them to desperation. The proletariat have their own organisations, the unions and political parties, to defend themselves from the onslaught of the Capitalists; however, the middle class is not homogeneous and is incapable of any independent action. Yet the small shopkeepers and farmers are demanding drastic measures to save themselves from bankruptcy and pauperism. They look initially towards the organisations of the Labour movement.

The bankrupt reformist policies of the Social Democrats and mistakes and ultra-leftism of the Stalinists offered no answers for the Italian and German petit-bourgeois, they only served to frustrate them further and turn them against the Labour movement. It was on this basis that they turned to the radical demagoguery of the Fascists.

The Capitalists had nurtured the collection of human garbage that formed the basis of the Fascist gangs. As the crisis deepened they prepared to use them against the organisations of the workers. It was a special form of capitalist reaction. Millions of pounds were poured into their coffers by big business which enabled them to become a mass movement based on the petit-bourgeois but dragging behind them lumpenised and backward sections of the Proletariat. The Fascists, unlike other forms of reaction, were used as a 'battering ram' to smash and atomise the Trade Unions, Political parties, Co-ops, and all independent organisations of the working class.

However, the bourgeoisie were forced to learn painful lessons for relinquishing political control to madmen like Hitler and Mussolini. These lunatics, whilst preserving private property, were not reliable representatives of the Bourgeois. They took complete control of the state machine. Although they smashed the organisations of the workers, thereby preserving capitalism, they became completely independent of the Bourgeois. The Fascist state machine began to carry out measures that were contrary to the long term interests of capitalism. For example Hitler's policy of continuing the war to the bitter end led to Germany's subsequent

defeat and the loss to capitalism of half of Germany and Eastern Europe.

After this bitter experience, together with the whittling away of the social base of Fascism (the petit Bourgeois) in the 'boom' period, the Capitalists have turned to using military-police dictatorships to crush the movement of the workers.

These Bonapartist regimes, as was the case in Greece, Chile, and Argentina, attempted to use the methods of Fascism. However despite all the atrocities, they failed to smash and atomise the organisations of the class. These regimes, lacking a social base, are therefore far less stable than the Fascist dictatorships of the past. In the post-war period, the Fascist groups have played nothing more than an auxiliary role causing 'chaos' and provoking the military to restore 'order'.

THE NATIONAL FRONT AND THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT

The National Front came to prominence in the mid 70's. They were able to base themselves on the racist prejudices of the lumpen-proletariat and backward workers, a hangover from Britain's Imperial past. Racism was stoked up by the Bourgeois and their press, initially under the Heath government and then under Labour in an (unsuccessful) attempt to drive divisions amongst the organised workers. The N.F. gained further sustenance from the disillusionment created by the failure of the Labour government to tackle the problems of unemployment, housing etc, and the lull in industrial struggle between mid 1974 and mid 1977. They gained a number of successes on the electoral plane. In the 1977 GLC elections they received 19% of the vote in Bethnal Green and 12% in Newham North East and Deptford. Throughout 1975, 76, and 77 they organised a series of marches of up to 1,000 fascists.

For a period the N.F. were unchallenged by the leadership or any official section of the Labour movement, with the exception of ourselves. The dominant idea within the movement was "ignore them, don't give them too much publicity and they will go away". The various sects, as is usual, became hysterical and started to panic about the "Fascist threat" and even raised the possibility of the N.F. winning the next election. We explained at the time that there was not, nor is there, any possibility of the N.F. or any other Fascist group winning a mass base let alone achieving power.

That does not mean that the Bourgeois in Britain will not in future move towards reaction. But it will be of a much more sophisticated form than the ravings and open Nazism of the N.F. or B.N.P. The racism, which is the main appeal of the Fascist groups, will be toned down. British Capitalism has important trade links and spheres of influence in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. All would be threatened by them embracing an openly racist movement. We recently saw their fright, represented through the Queen, over the threat to the Commonwealth caused by Thatcher's blunderings over South Africa.

Large scale reaction is likely to develop in the form of splits within the Tories and the creation of a royalist-bonapartist movement. However, even such a movement will be used only

as an auxiliary to, and as a preparation for, military police dictatorship. Before then, the Proletariat will have many opportunities to take power. The building of the Marxist movement is therefore a life and death question. It is only Marxist leadership that can ensure victory before the move to reaction.

The traditional base of Fascism, the petit-bourgeois, has been whittled away in the course of the post-war boom. This forced the N.F. to orientate to backward sections of the working class. This in itself was a recipe for their failure. Whilst the sects were shrieking about "instant Fascism" and explaining how the white working class was "naturally racist", the 1977 perspectives document of the Marxists foresaw:

"The N.F. successes amongst a small section of backward workers will melt away once the organisations of the workers - mainly the Trade Unions - move into action in the coming period."

The end of the industrial lull, the strike at Grunwicks (where concrete unity was displayed between Asian and White workers), the firemen's strike, Ford's dispute and the winter of discontent acted as hammer blows to the body of the N.F. Alongside this the official organisations of the class increasingly took up the question of racism and the N.F. itself. The Labour Party Conference passed a marxist resolution on the question and organised a national demonstration. Individual trade unions started campaigning amongst their members on the issue, and regional T.U.C.'s issued leaflets and organised counter-demonstrations.

The amorphous Anti-Nazi League reflected this opposition and organised large demonstrations and rallies of youth. Whilst the A.N.L. undoubtedly played an important role, it must be understood that the decisive factor in forcing back the N.F. was the activity of the official Labour movement and the movement of the class on the industrial plane.

THE FASCIST GROUPS - A PHYSICAL THREAT.

Once the movement roused itself, the Bourgeois itself changed their attitude to the N.F. Up to mid-77 they argued for their right to free speech and their right to hold demonstrations. After the Lewisham events of 1977, and in the face of the growing campaign within the Labour movement they began to ban Fascist marches and clamp down on some of their activities.

The N.F. received a thrashing at the 1979 general election and were plunged into disarray. They lost members and split. Having been crushed electorally, the Fascist grouplets turned increasingly to thuggery. They began a campaign of attacks on blacks Asians and left-wing activists and bookshops. These activities plus their pitiful attempts at organising marches and meetings, show not their strength but rather their isolation and puny forces at the present time. But whilst they may represent a miniscule force there must still be vigilance on our part. They are a physical threat to blacks, Asians and the Labour movement. The attempt of the Fascist, later involved in a bombing incident, to infiltrate us last year is a serious warning. In areas where they

are active there should be one supporter of the Marxists made responsible for monitoring their activities. Any potential threat to meetings or supporters must be countered by well organised, efficient defence.

The Youth Organisation has a long and proud record in combating racism and Fascism. It must be in the forefront of the campaign against racist attacks. Local protest meetings, lobbies of the Council and other initiatives should be organised under the banner of the Youth. This should go alongside activity to involve tenants organisations, trade unions, and Labour Parties in the campaign. The anti-racist campaign will be a long-term campaign of the Youth, having more prominence in some areas than others, and taking on flesh as the concrete questions arise. The aim of the campaign through taking up not just racist attacks and fascist activity but the questions of discrimination, police harassment, deportations, etc. is to raise the level of consciousness of those we can reach by a rounded out Socialist explanation of racism. Through this we can win youth and workers to Marxism.

At this stage the mass of workers and Youth are looking towards the next election and a Labour victory. In the election campaign the main issues are likely to be jobs, education, housing etc. It is extremely unlikely that race will be a major issue. However it can't be totally ruled out that Thatcher would play the racist card to whip up backward prejudices in a desperate attempt to stay in power. A Kinnock government will be under enormous pressure from the Labour movement to ameliorate the conditions of working people. It is possible, to begin with, that there will be increased spending on roads, housing, education etc. as well as the introduction of a minimum wage. Therefore there is likely to be a 'honeymoon period' of 12-18 months or so. But there will inevitably come the stage, given the crisis in capitalism that there will be a dramatic turn to counter reforms. This will lead to a growing radicalisation amongst the advanced workers in the Trade Unions and Labour Party. However the reverse side of this process will be increasing disillusionment amongst backward and inactive layers of the class. Therefore the possibility arises of a growth in support for the fascist groups. However we cannot be categorical about this. Perspectives are always conditional and there are a number of factors that can cut across this development. The likelihood of a wave of industrial battles, as in Australia, Spain, Greece, etc., would help isolate the Fascists. The most important factor, however, in undermining their development will be the work of and influence of Marxism and in particular the building of a mass Youth organisation.

THE SECTS AND PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION

The question of the response of the Marxists to Fascist demonstrations and meetings has also been raised. The lessons of the 1930's and especially Cable Street is that the Fascists will only be driven from the streets by a mass mobilisation of the Labour movement with maximum discipline and organisation. The Labour and Trade Union movement is the only force with the potential power to defeat the Fascists. Where there is Fascist activity therefore, our first responsibility is to alert and attempt to mobilise the movement.

To the sects, or course, this idea is like a closed book.

In the campaign against the N.F. in the 70's they made no attempt to orientate to the Labour movement (which after all to them is made up of racist white workers!). Instead, they appointed themselves as the "anti-Fascist vanguard", sometimes drawing behind them a layer of students. They adopted a policy of confrontation at all costs, which usually meant confrontation with the police. One of their adventures led to the death of Kevin Gately, killed by a police baton in Red Lion Square. Later, of course, the sects turned from ultra-leftism to opportunism and dissolved themselves into the A.N.L. This body, while mobilising large layers of Youth, as with the C.N.D. today failed to give any class explanation of Rascism and Fascism. The failure to offer a socialist programme, raising the wider question of transforming of society that breeds these ideas led to the vast majority of these youth lapsing back into apathy and inactivity. Whilst attempting to mobilise the Labour and Trade Union movement, Marxists do not adopt a passive position. We cannot always wait for the big battalions before engaging in battle. Cable Street itself was a culmination of a series of counter demonstrations involving initially, just the advanced layers of the working class.

The Marxists intervened in all the counter demonstrations against the N.F. in the 70's, the composition of which was usually overwhelmingly sectarians and petit-bourgeois. Marxists played a major role in breaking up the N.F. march in Lewisham in 1977, where again the composition was mainly students, layers of black youth, some individual workers, and not a few sectarians.

But the intervention of the Marxists was always of an extremely disciplined nature, carefully weighing up the balance of forces before engaging in confrontation and refusing to be provoked into futile battles with the police.

Today Marxists must intervene in counter demonstrations in the same way. Where they have an influence they must be prepared to take the initiative and attempt to mobilise the Labour movement, local community and youth against the N.F. or B.N.P. **BUT THEY CANNOT SUBSTITUTE THEMSELVES FOR THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.**

The danger with the idea of isolated 'physical confrontation with the fascists' is that it can substitute the actions of heroic individuals for the actions of the masses. It belongs more to the arsenal of anarchism rather than Marxism. It seems to offer a short cut in place of the winning of the Labour movement for action. Our estimations in this respect are exclusively political. We are opposed politically to acts of individual terrorism, but not to wars of liberation waged by the oppressed masses, although that will entail individual killings. Likewise with attacks on the Fascists which are part of, and subordinate to the fight of the masses, and are not a substitute for them. Such attacks then become a minor auxillary in mass actions - a military measure supplementing mass action.

The Question of A.F.A. (Anti Fascist Action) has been raised. It has been suggested that A.F.A. will grow into a

"united front campaign" presumably similar to the Anti-Nazi League. It is entirely false to describe A.F.A. as a "united front" or to suggest it can grow into one. A united front is based on genuine mass organisations of the working class.

A.F.A. undoubtedly contains some genuine individuals, including some Asians, frustrated by the failure of the official Labour movement to take action against racist attacks. But it is overwhelmingly composed of sectarians, ex-sectarians, and other assorted petit-bourgeois. Its programme is a regurgitation of the mistaken ideas of the sects.

It is reported that A.F.A. policies are (a) physical confrontation with Fascists; (b) production of propaganda to undermine the N.F.'s basis for recruitment in the white working class; (c) support for black self-defence.

(a) The question of physical confrontation has already been discussed. A.F.A.'s attitude on recent anti-fascist demos in Liverpool and Bury was to behave without discipline and take a sectarian attitude to the demonstrations organised by the local Labour movement. Their approach seemed to be to set up roaming squads, separate from the Labour movement, to engage in fights with individual fascists.

The workers will respond to and support, even at this stage mainly passively, a well organised, disciplined counter-demonstration of the Labour movement with clear propaganda and slogans. In Bury, A.F.A.'s activities had the effect to convince many workers that they were witnessing two rival football hooligan gangs in town for a ruck.

(b) Regarding propaganda, firstly Marxists firmly reject the idea that seems to be prevalent within A.F.A. that the white working class are a natural basis of recruitment for the N.F. Their support at the moment is overwhelmingly from the lumpen-proletariat. However, the tiny minority of working class youth who do fall prey to the Fascist's propaganda can only be won away from them by Socialist ideas; a programme and slogans that explain the root cause and give answers to the problems of unemployment, housing, decay of the inner cities etc. A.F.A.'s propaganda completely lacks any class or socialist programme and is little different from the moralising liberal material produced in the past by the A.N.L.

(c) Where Blacks or Asians are forced to defend themselves from racist attack, Marxists, of course, fully support them. Any oppressed group has the right to self defence. However it is wrong to raise the slogan 'black self defence'. Our demand is for the Labour movement and local community, through their organisations, to defend minorities under attack.

It is only the Labour movement that can unite Black and White workers along class lines and therefore it is only this movement that has the potential power to defend all layers of the class from attack.

It is possible, particularly if the Youth Organisation is not actively campaigning under its own banner, that A.F.A., where it exists, might pick up a few youth. Obviously the Marxists then have a responsibility to intervene and win them to Marxism. This will not be done by submerging themselves within A.F.A. but by showing in practise the superiority of marxist ideas and tactics by, in particular, the independent work of the Youth.

It would be entirely wrong to initiate or argue for the setting up of A.F.A. branches. Where the Fascists are active, Marxists must advocate the setting up of local anti-racist and anti-fascist committees based on the organisations of the Labour and Trade Union movement and involving the local community, but the key question is building Marxism, especially amongst the Youth into a mass force.

23.9.86

APPENDIX

Printed opposite, as an appendix, is an article by Trotsky that he originally wrote as a letter to his French supporters. Melinmontant was a working class area in Paris through which the French Fascists attempted to march on 26th February 1934. There are, of course, fundamental differences between the situation then and Britain 1986. The working class had suffered a series of defeats and Hitler and Mussolini had taken power in Germany and Italy. Today on an international scale the balance of forces is overwhelmingly on the side of the Proletariat. There are no military-police dictatorships in Western Europe. In the Phillipines and Haiti military-police regimes have been swept away by the movement of the masses and Pinochet staggers from one crisis to another in Chile. In Britain despite set-backs there has been no serious defeat of the workers.

In 1934 the French Communist Party was going through an ultra-left phase, and Trotsky's words are fired against them. Today, both wings of the C.P. adopt a purely liberal approach. They have opposed any direct physical confrontation on the streets in favour of 'building alliances' with church leaders and other assorted do-gooders.

However Trotsky's approach to tactics remain fully relevant. They are a crushing refutation of the ultra-left antics of the SWP and IMG in the '70s.

Trotsky explains "it is very important to distinguish between the Fascists and the state". At Lewisham in 1977 the SWP and other sectarians let themselves be provoked into a series of running battles with the police. The Marxists, on the other hand, stood their ground, remained disciplined and kept attention on the main task at hand:- demonstrating against the NF and if possible stopping them marching. It was because of this approach that the section of the counter demonstration led by the Marxists continued to occupy the road and succeeded in splitting the NF march, causing about 100 flag waving Fascists to turn and run.

Marxists are not pacifists. We are in favour of teaching the Fascist bullies a lesson but we constantly stress that the Fascists can only be effectively dealt with and driven from the streets by mass, disciplined action based on the organisations of the working class.

As Trotsky puts it:

"the task is to involve the workers in increasing numbers in the fight against Fascism"

Adventures, and acts by individuals that are divorced from the building of a mass movement have the completely opposite effect.

Witness the activities of the puny sectlet 'Red Action'. These people have set themselves up as a mobile anti-fascist hit squad. They certainly have some handy street fighters, but their whole approach is undisciplined, contemptuous of the Labour movement, in fact downright lumpen.

They repel workers who would otherwise involve themselves in a struggle against the Fascists. As Trotsky explains an

"adventure can only isolate a small, militant minority. After such an experience workers who would have been ready to teach the young bourgeois bullies a few lessons will say 'No thanks, I don't want to get my head broken for nothing'"

FIGHTING FASCISM

by LEON TROTSKY

What is the objective, not just for the moment but for the entire coming period? It is to get the workers to take up the struggle against the fascists before these elements have become a dominant force in the state, to get the workers used to not being afraid of the fascists, to teach them how to deal blows to the fascists, to convince them that they are stronger in numbers, in audacity and in other ways.

In this period it is very important to distinguish between the fascists and the state. The state is not yet ready to subordinate itself to the fascists; it wants to "arbitrate". We know what this means from the sociological point of view. However, this is not a matter of sociology but of giving blows and taking them. Politically it is part of the nature of a pre-Bonapartist, "arbitrier" state that the police hesitate, hold back, and on the whole are far from identifying with the fascist gangs. Our strategic task is to increase these hesitations and apprehensions on the part of the "arbitrier", its army and its police. How? By showing that we are stronger than the fascists, that is, by giving them a good beating in full view of this arbitrier without, as long as we are not absolutely forced to, directly taking on the state itself. That is the whole point.

Fright

In the case of Menilmontant, as far as I can tell from here, the operation was handled in the diametrically opposite way. 'L'Humanité' [the paper of the French Communist Party] reports that there were no more than sixty fascists in a thoroughly working-class neighbourhood! The tactical, or if you will, "technical", task was quite simple—grab every fascist or every isolated group of fascists by their collars, acquaint them with the pavement a few times, strip them of fascist insignia and documents, and without carrying things any further, leave them with their fright and a few good black and blue marks.

Barricade

The "arbitrier" defended freedom of assembly (for the moment the state is also defending workers' meetings from the fascists). This being the case, it was totally idiotic to want to provoke an armed conflict with the police. But this is precisely what they did. 'L'Humanité' is exultant—they erected a barricade! But what for? The fascists weren't on the other side of the barricade, and it was the fascists they came to fight. Was this an armed insurrection, perhaps? To establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in Menilmontant? This makes no sense. As Marx said, "One does not play at insurrection." That means, "One does not play with barricades." Even when there is an insurrection, you don't erect barricades just anywhere, any time.

They succeeded in: (a) letting the gilded youth [youths of wealthy background, who sought excitement and violence in the ultra-right organisations] return home in fine shape; (b) provoking the police and getting a worker killed; (c) giving the fascists an important argument—the Communists are starting to build barricades.

The idiot bureaucrats will say: "So, you want us to forget about building barricades out of fear of the Fascists and the love of the police?" It is a betrayal to reject building barricades when the political situation demands it and when you are strong enough to defend them and erect them. But it is a disgusting provocation to build sham barricades for a little fascist meeting, to blow things up out of all political proportions, and to disorient the proletariat.

The task is to involve the workers in increasing numbers in the fight against fascism. The Menilmontant adventure can only isolate a small, militant minority. After such an experience, a hundred, a thousand workers who would have been ready to teach the young bourgeois bullies a few lessons will say, "No thanks, I don't want to get my head broken for nothing." The upshot of the

whole undertaking was just the opposite of what was intended. And not to mince words, it wouldn't surprise me very much if it came out that after a while the ones who shouted loudest for the barricades were fascist agents planted in the ranks of the Stalinists, fascists who wanted to get their friends off the hook by provoking a confrontation with the police. If this was the case, they succeeded well!

General Staff

What should the most active and perceptive elements have done on the spot? They should have improvised a small general staff, including a socialist and a Stalinist if possible. (At the same time, it should have been explained to the workers that the neighbourhood general staff should have functioned on a permanent basis on the eve of the demonstration.) This improvised general staff, with a map of the district spread out in front of them, should have worked out the simplest plan in the world—divide up one or two hundred demonstrators into groups of three to five, with a leader for each group, and let them do their work. And after the battle the leaders should get together and draw the balance sheet and the necessary lessons for the future. This second meeting could provide a good core for a permanent general staff, a good underpinning for a permanent workers' militia in the district. Naturally, there would have to be leaflets explaining the need for a permanent general staff.

For the perceptive, revolutionary elements, the balance offers the following lessons:

(a) You have to have your own general staff for such occasions.

(b) You have to anticipate the possibilities and eventualities in such conflicts.

(c) You have to establish a few general plans (several variants).

(d) You have to have a map of the district.

(e) You have to have proper leaflets for the situation.

This is all I can say for the moment. I am almost sure that these suggestions are completely in accord with your own ideas. So much the better.