



# **Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It**

*Leon Trotsky*

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Why fascism was able to conquer only in those countries where social democratic or Stalinist parties blocked the workers and their allies from utilizing a revolutionary situation to remove the capitalists from power.

## **Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It Details**

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# From Reader Review Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It for online ebook

## Alex says

Before I start with the actual review, a few sentences on Trotsky himself. Trotsky was one of the main players of the October Revolution, which killed perhaps a million people, many from executions ordered by the man himself. He was the second in command of Lenin at the time when Lenins regime caused the famines of 1921-1922 that killed million more people. Here's a quote by him that should show you what kind of person we're dealing with:

In a country where the sole employer is the State, opposition means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced by a new one: who does not obey shall not eat.

And another one, the context being that he ordered the killing of any retreating or deserting soldiers from his side:

An army cannot be built without reprisals. Masses of men cannot be led to death unless the army command has the death-penalty in its arsenal. So long as those malicious tailless apes that are so proud of their technical achievements—the animals that we call men—will build armies and wage wars, the command will always be obliged to place the soldiers between the possible death in the front and the inevitable one in the rear.

There was another quote by him to the effect that treating human beings as beasts of burden is decent and efficient, if I recall correctly. I cannot find it at the moment, but I think I made my case: Trotsky was a totalitarian at heart. Keep that in mind when you hear him rail against the facists (or Stalin, for that matter).

Somehow, Trotskys reputation has remained somewhat untarnished by this record, and now he is perhaps best known as Russias Lost Prince and Lenins Chosen One who was chased away and eventually killed by the usurper Stalin. I have my doubts whether he wouldn't have been even worse than Stalin had he been given the chance.

In this collection of letters, Trotsky talks about the origins and the dynamics of fascism and presents a strategy for defeating it. His strategy is to keep up the workers revolution, because that worked so well in Russia and China. His concept of what fascism is is only marginally more interesting. It hinges on the Marxist class theory, a theory that is deeply flawed already and that Trotsky somehow managed to ruin even further. Marx never defined what a class was; his draft of the final volume of The Capital broke off just as he was about to do that. This is the deep flaw of his theory, and it renders what he says as good as inoperable. Along comes Trotsky, and he comes up with the idea of a petty bourgeoisie. What is the petty bourgeoisie? Apparently, it's those that are disenfranchised to a certain degree, but don't yet qualify as workers. Trotsky doesn't say how that is supposed to work. He doesn't even make it clear that he's deviating from Marx. When you replace a clear-cut dichotomy with a spectrum, that's the kind of major deviation I'd like to see pointed out. And how does his modified class theory deal with alienation? Is that possible in degrees, too?

Like I said: Mangled. How, then, can I take him serious when he describes fascism as the petty bourgeois

counter-movement to the proletarian movement? His central premise is broken! That alone should be reason to dismiss him. And it's not a small error that can be mended, or readily modified. Any attempt to fix him would be a substitution of the readers' theory for that of Trotsky, for which Trotsky would deserve no credit.

All the other flaws that Trotsky, always the puritan, readily copied from Marx are just icing on the cake. Marx' theory of history as a series of consecutive class struggles concluding in a socialist (or communist, depending on who you ask) utopia has evidently been refuted. Not because the socialist movements failed, but because fascism did, and yet it wasn't supplanted by socialism. Isn't fascism "capitalism in decay"? How, then, can it turn into "slightly more healthy capitalism"? Marx has no response to that, and neither has Trotsky.

I can only repeat myself here: Read actual economics. Do not read this trash. Trotsky doesn't understand what he's talking about. No Marxist (or Leninist, or Maoist...) does. If they did, they wouldn't be socialists. In none of these books that I ever touched did I notice a semblance of economic comprehension. I have many books on economics on my shelves and I invite anyone to check some of them out. Alternatively, ask me for recommendations. Do not waste your time trying to iron out the subtle differences of theories that are all based upon false premises.

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## **Kent says**

Trotsky admits that fascism is a middle class(which he calls the petty bourgeoisie) movement that grows out of a collapse of capitalism. It is opposed to both the upper crust of the bourgeoisie and a proletarian revolution. Developed countries with a large middle class are resistant to a proletarian revolution(e.g. Germany and Italy). Underdeveloped countries with a small middle class are susceptible to a proletarian revolution(e.g. Russia, Cuba, etc.).

Trotsky asserts that the Comintern(Communist International) was run by a bunch of idiots, especially Stalin, who didn't know political strategy. Trotsky focuses on the German elections between 1928 and 1930. During that time the Communist Party in Germany grew by 1.3 million votes and declared a Soviet Germany. However, in the same time the NSDAP grew from 800,000 votes to over 6 million votes. Trotsky says the NSDAP overwhelmingly won over the middle class by only focusing on the middle class, and in doing so won over some sections of the proletariat. On the other hand, the Communist Party embraced a theory called "social fascism" which declared war on the social democrats. This theory came from the mouths of the Comintern, which ultimately led to the Communist Party's downfall.

At the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, the end of capitalist stability and the beginning of the "Third Period" was proclaimed. The end of capitalism, accompanied with a working class revolution, was expected and social democracy was identified as the main enemy of the communists. This Comintern's theory had roots in Grigory Zinoviev's argument that international social democracy is a wing of fascism. This view was accepted by Joseph Stalin who described fascism and social democracy as "twin brothers", arguing that fascism depends on the active support of the social democracy and that the social democracy depends on the active support of fascism. After it was declared at the Sixth Congress, the theory of social fascism became accepted by the world communist movement.

Trotsky argued against the accusations of "social fascism" and in the 'Bulletin of the Opposition' of March 1932 declared: "Should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank... And only a fighting unity with the Social Democratic workers can bring victory". However, Trotsky said in

the same essay that any cooperation with the social democrats was only tactical and temporary and that in the final analysis the social democracy would have to be defeated and subverted by the revolutionary faction:

"The front must now be directed against fascism. And this common front of direct struggle against fascism, embracing the entire proletariat, must be utilized in the struggle against the Social Democracy, directed as a flank attack, but no less effective for all that... No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself... No retraction of our criticism of the Social Democracy. No forgetting of all that has been. The whole historical reckoning, including the reckoning for Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, will be presented at the proper time, just as the Russian Bolsheviks finally presented a general reckoning to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries for the baiting, calumny, imprisonment and murder of workers, soldiers, and peasants."

Trotsky then states that the middle class is incapable of forming an independent policy and must choose between the policy of the big bourgeoisie or the proletariat, but I beg to differ. Trotsky must have been unfamiliar with Robert Ley's German Labor Front and their theory of "Einheitsgewerkschaft". According to the Comintern, the middle class is indissoluble from the big bourgeoisie and the former is a caricature of Jacobinism. Trotsky disagrees with this and brings up the Paris Commune of 1871 as an example of the middle class siding with the proletariat.

According to Marxist doctrine, the most developed capitalist country is supposed to be the first country to have a proletarian revolution. So when Germany went to the NSDAP and not the Communist Party, this baffled Trotsky and spent the rest of his life trying to figure out the nature of fascism.

So how does Trotsky suggest fighting fascism? With armed proletarian militias. Trotsky says the proletariat should confiscate and seize the weapons of the fascists in this struggle to the death.

Trotsky was banned from the Soviet Union in 1929 and went to France, Norway, and finally ended up in Mexico. From Mexico, he would continue to write critically of the Soviet Union and continue his fascination with fascism. He was assassinated by Stalin's NKVD agent while in Mexico in 1940 and never lived to see Germany invade the Soviet Union.

This book contains excerpts from his two major works on fascism, "The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany" and "Leon Trotsky On France".

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## **Yogy TheBear says**

If this is all that Trotsky has to say on fascism then he is the biggest joke of marxism. He does not deal with the ideology, the history and context of its emergence, the relation with socialism, syndicalism and even communism from whom fascism had a productively borrowing; instead Trotsky gives us a fairy tale with the characters named: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, proletarians, stupid social democrats and stalinists and fascists. And as an interesting observation: Trotsky blames the parliamentary and conservative attitude of the communism for the victory of fascism... but was not this attitude promoted by Lenin in his left wing communism... ?(1922)

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## **Sarah says**

Whole thing available for free at  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trot...>

From The Workers Militia and its Opponents mentions "Liberalism has always said to the workers that by their class struggle they 'provoke' the reaction." and "If the oppressed do not balk, the oppressors will not be obliged to beat them" which sounds like the same kind of gaslighting our culture enacts against african americans who speak out (kneeling during the pledge, getting shot because they wear a hoodie, reaction against BLM, etc). I like how this section breaks it down into a tactic and shows how its been used against different groups in different places.

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## **J.P. says**

Pretty solid for a short pamphlet. Trotsky definitely had a way with words. Obviously primarily concerned with fascism & its rise at the time, he also makes time for liberals, petite bourgeoisie, big bourgeoisie, & anyone who would call themselves allies to workers & betray them politically. He briefly talks about the failings of various communist parties as well as the failure of that in Russia in either consolidating power with bourgeoisie via bureaucracy or slipping into fascism. It definitely can make one cautious of & concerned about fascist seeds in the current political climate & society in the United States.

Short read but packs a punch.

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## **Robert A. says**

A few bits were eye-opening and definitely applicable to the political climate today. Especially the part mentioning weak parties putting forth "lesser evil" candidates. Another putting forth the idea that the bourgeoisie (the 1%) will try to capture as much holdings as possible while capitalism collapses turning the middle class (the petty bourgeoisie) against the proletariat (the working class and the poor) to achieve this. More relevant passages such as: *We may set it down as a historical law: fascism was able to conquer only in those countries where the conservative labor parties prevented the proletariat from utilizing the revolutionary situation and seizing power.* Seems a parallel to neoliberal suppression of progressives to me. It was a quick read and informational. As a political pamphlet it does its job but it reads like one. I could recommend this if you like politics especially something that may have a few eerie parallels to the current situation in it.

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## **Martin says**

This went from having an open discussion to forming a workers' militia in about a hour.

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## **Tess says**

An excellent and useful text collecting excerpts from Trotsky's published works and letters, outlining the main points needed to understand the phenomenon of fascism and to combat it before it fully gets its grips into the fabric of a nation.

Trotsky had learned from the rise of Mussolini in Italy and could see the same thing happening in Germany, predicting the unfolding disaster while others turned a blind eye.

Only a strong working class movement combating fascists on the streets can stop their movement taking hold!

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## **Sami Eerola says**

Almost nothing has changed since the writing of this book. Only difference to today is that there is no workers uprisings that the fascist are exploiting. Only problem is the advise to form workers militias to combat fascim. The current antifa is terrorising enough whit out rifles.

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## **Ollie says**

It's strange to think that fascism is getting so much attention these days. In our current political climate things are getting so divisive that it's much too common to label people as either fascists on the right or I-don't-know-whats on the left. But for a word that gets thrown around so much, maybe we should know precisely what it means before we fling it around so carelessly.

Leon Trotsky's book *Fascism: What it is and How to Fight it* is a small book (almost a pamphlet) collecting some of Trotsky's writings on the subject. One would think Trotsky would be a reliable source to discuss this topic, but one of the main drawbacks of this book is that Trotsky seems to be addressing his peers and not the common person. As such he's often using strong "revolutionary" jargon which I suppose is much more common in his circles. This makes these 54 pages a little harder to read than they should be.

Fascism is divided into two sections: What it is, and How to fight it. The former part is a bit of a letdown as Trotsky characterizes Fascism as a phenomenon that started in Italy, is petty-bourgeois in nature and that it happens as a hijacking by the right when the left is unable to fully take power in a revolution. What Trotsky does not do is discuss characteristics of fascism specifically, what are some of its goals, what are its policies, and how are they different from communism.

As for how to fight it, Trotsky here is very clear. The workers must unite during a revolution and arm themselves. And even though pacifist elements on the left will argue that by arming itself it will incite the fascists, it also has to remember that the fascists will take any opportunity to squash them, especially if they're helpless. Here, policy is important: one can arm oneself and choose not to use the arms unless necessary. Otherwise, "Not having what they require in their hands, they will have to seek self-defense in their feet. And fascists will in the meantime sack the workers organization with impunity."

A short and straightforward book. Flawed but still valuable.

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### **Brian Napoletano says**

A brief collection of some of Trotsky's important letters and articles regarding fascism, this pamphlet offers a brief introduction to the nature of fascism, the conditions that give rise to it, and the strategy of resisting it through a "united front." Based on his observations of the growth of National Socialism (i.e. fascism) in Italy, Germany, Spain, and France, Trotsky concludes that fascism is a mass movement based primarily in petite bourgeoisie and backed by the big capitalist powers. Trotsky identifies a twofold set of conditions that allowed fascism to take hold in Europe: 1) the disorientation and desperation (primarily among the petite bourgeoisie) brought on by the abrupt end of capitalism's growth phase and 2) the absence or failure of a genuinely revolutionary workers' party that offers both the proletariat and the petite bourgeoisie the hope of escape from the grasp of the bourgeoisie. Accordingly, Trotsky assigns a fair proportion of the blame for the rise of fascism in Europe to the leaders of the Communist parties, the Comintern, and the leaders of the social democratic parties who betrayed the workers' revolutions in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. Trotsky links fascism to the reactionary backlash that followed these aborted revolutions, and counterpoises against the notion of the Communist Party as a form of revolutionary hope the notion of fascism, as a mass movement, as a form of revolutionary despair.

In light of the social foundation upon which fascism rests, Trotsky emphasizes the need for a united front led by a revolutionary proletarian party (as the vanguard of the proletarian class) against fascism. In order for the proletariat to inspire confidence among the petite bourgeoisie, however, the revolutionary movement must first possess confidence in itself. This means that the party must be lead by genuine revolutionaries from the working class who possess the commitment and the strategic capacity to build on and encourage the workers' revolutionary initiative. Trotsky also points up the need for solidarity and for the workers to defend themselves against violence from the fascist. Given the level of violence that workers face, he proposes the development of workers' militias and then systematically dismantles the most common oppositions offered to such a proposal. The final sections of the pamphlet discuss the situation in the United States at the time, and Trotsky warns that the same conditions that gave rise to fascism in Europe have already appeared in nascent form in the US. While his prediction of the length of time that the "war economy" could be used to forestall the radicalization of the working classes proved overly optimistic (Trotsky predicted that this delay could not be of "long duration," whereas the capitalist powers in the US have managed to maintain the military economy since the build-up to World War 2), the severe crisis which capitalism has recently entered into, coupled with the rise of the "Tea Party Patriots," the mainstream media's glorification of "Minutemen" vigilante mobs along the US-Mexican border, the vitriolic backlash against even the slightest measures to alleviate the poverty of the working class, the growth of Christian fundamentalism and the demonization of Muslims, and the absence of an independent workers' party, let alone a revolutionary party, all combine to create conditions similar to those described by Trotsky as the grounds from which a fascist movement grows. As Trotsky observes, the most effective way to counter these trends is to build the revolutionary party.

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### **Rajat Meemanshi says**

This is more of a pamphlet than a book, but it does its job well. Trotsky sets out to analyse the rise of fascism in both Germany and Italy, after the failed revolutions there, and he does his job well. But his preoccupation

with "Stalinism" and the "degenerated workers' state" of USSR, puts a smokescreen before his own eyes. He analyses everything well, comes to the right issues and tries to answer them to the best of his knowledge, but fails in the end (although only in the end). Trotsky, a self-proclaimed dialectician, betrays dialectics in the end when he answers the title of the book. He suggests uniting with all anti-fascist forces, including social-democracy even though he points out social-democracy is one of the principal reasons why fascism rose to power in the first place. But it is nevertheless an informative booklet/pamphlet or whatever else you will call it.

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### **Max Van Dyke says**

A very good read. Trotsky provides one of the best looks into the nature and causes of fascism. Trotsky attributes the rise of fascism to two main elements. Firstly, a social crisis which sends the middle class into disarray, and secondly, the lack of a genuine worker's party to be the "vanguard of workers." According to Trotsky the failure and fecklessness of the Communist Party in Germany provided cover for fascism to emerge and attract workers. He describes fascist movements as inherently plebeian, but notes that they are financed by "big money capitalists." Trotsky sees the only safeguard against fascism as being a true worker's party that allows the proletariat to assume its full potential and seize power.

It truly is amazing how insightful this was as well as how much of history repeats itself. To get a good sense of how we ended up where we are right now with Trump in the White House and the ascendancy of the alt-right and the devastation of the middle and working classes under both Democrats and Republicans, read this. You can look at history and pinpoint the events from the 80's onward that created the milieu for our current situation.

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### **Jessica Coco says**

A forgettable book that fails to explain what fascism really is & how to stop it. What is Fascism according to Trotsky and what were its causes? Trotsky argues that Fascism is a middle class phenomenon supported by the Wealthy Elite. Adding: "The gigantic growth of National Socialism is an expression of two factors: a deep social crisis, throwing the petty-bourgeois masses off balance, and the lack of a revolutionary party that would be regarded by the masses of the people as an acknowledged revolutionary leader".

Trotsky further places blame on the rise of Fascism in Germany on the German Communists; arguing that Fascism was a result of the German Communists failing to create a United Front with the German Social Democrats (SPD). Every point he makes is wrong. Either it is because Trotsky knows nothing about political science and history or because he was an agent of the Western Powers, as some authors like Grover Fur (See Trotsky's Amalgams) allege.

Either way, the true definition of Fascism is capitalism in decay. When Capitalism can no longer fool the workers with the illusions of elections, it uses force. When the workers fight back, but cannot win, you have Fascism; when they fight back and do win, you have True Socialism. If you look at all the countries where Fascism took place: Spain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, etc., they were all countries on the verge of revolution or had a revolution; where the workers were literally fighting on the street. Fascism should not be confused with Authoritarian governments. (For example, during the Gilded Age in the US, the National Guards were often called to stop strikes and were known for openly firing even at women and children. However,

although there were pockets of discontent in the country, there was no strong nationwide mass movements nor possibilities for revolution).

Further contrary to what Trotsky says Fascism is not a middle class phenomenon; it has nothing to do with the petty-bourgeois "falling off-balance". It is a pre-calculated movement by the Ruling Elite; a safety net when elections can't keep the slaves enthralled with future promises for emancipation through elections. Check out Hearstfield's poster of Hitler that says: "He's supported by millions" (referring to the Banker's monetary contributions) If one really want to learn what Fascism is, one of the best books on this subject is "The United Front: the Struggle against Fascism and War" by Georgi Dimitrov written in 1935. This book will not disappoint. It is easy to read and Dimitrov really understands his subject matter.

Lastly, Trotsky argument that it was the German communists who were responsible for allowing the rise of fascism by their failure to create a United Front with the Social Democrats is ridiculous. The German Social Democrats were socialist only in name. The Weimar Government led by Ebert after all was not voted into power, but appointed into power by the Germany Ruling Aristocracy & German military to keep the masses further stupefied with more electoral false promises of Labor reforms. As latchkeys of the Right-Wing, they were not only not anti-Fascists; but actually pro-fascist. For example, they were involved in the murders of anti-fascists like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. They were also involved in one of the bloodiest put downs of any strike in German history: The massacre of the Ruhr Valley strikers surpassing anything in Germany up to that time. Moreover, The Social Democrats had no compunction about calling out the Freikorps (proto-type of the NAZI storm troopers) to suppress workers at anytime.

Under such conditions it is self-evident; it was the German Social Democrats who refused to form a United Front with the Communists and not the other way around. Trotsky supresses the fact, the right-wing of the SPD (representing the Bourgeoisie) preferred and openly supported Fascism or that many members of the left-wing of the SPD openly admitted they regretted not forming a United Front with the Communists on account of their desire to stay in power; causing them to suppress the communists at the expense of miscalculating the real threat the Fascists posed instead.

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## **Laszlo Szerdahelyi says**

In this collections of letters and excerpts, Trotsky tries to underline the main processes of the formation of fascism, the influences that act upon this process and the ways in which to combat it.

The reaction of fascism by Trotsky is attributed to the petty bourgeois class as a form of revolutionary despair, where capitalism enters a crisis of growth (or decay) and is met with either the inability of the revolutionary class to exploit this opportunity or the closing of ranks of the bourgeois, who will use fascism as a counterweight against a potential rise of the proletariat or to diminish the democratic state in their favor.

"It may be said that fascism is the act of placing the petty bourgeoisie at the disposal of its most bitter enemies. In this way, big capital ruins the middle classes and then, with the help of hired fascist demagogues, incites the despairing petty bourgeoisie against the worker. The bourgeois regime can be preserved only by such murderous means as these. For how long? Until it is overthrown by proletarian revolution."

A very succinct but precise historical depiction of the historical processes petty bourgeois evolution is offered, seeing it as the class that can be swayed either the proletariat or the bourgeois in the struggle of class power dynamics.

He calls out the failure and betrayal of the social-democrats in their inability to seize the moment in starting the revolution due to being tied up in parliamentary politics and fearful of losing political capital that comes forth in their exaggerated pacifism and compromise mentality (using the examples of Germany and Italy). He also argues that social-democracy has turned into a petty bourgeois reaction, that sits with one foot in the service of the system it now inhabits and one foot in socialism. He does however denounce the 'social fascist' approach of denouncing social democracy as being the same as real fascism as advocated by the Stalinists as this leads to a splintering of the workers movement and grossly misrepresents an actual and dangerous tendency.

Trotsky argues for organization of a common front that includes social democrats and socialists of all branches into a mass of proletariat and the formation of militias to combat fascism on the streets.

Much of his writing is disjointed due to it being a glued collection of works and sometimes one has a hard time getting into the flow of it. It is also strongly effused with Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, Trotsky cannot imagine the revolution without the vanguard, organizing and leading it 'for the workers' in the form of the Communist Party, furthermore, in line with his Stalinist offshoots, he includes the peasantry in the petty bourgeois group, with a typical fixation on the laborers of the cities that in Stalin's case will lead to a mass genocide of the peasant class in the USSR.

I was partly curious to see how Trotsky deals with fascism, and his writings are an interesting take on the atmosphere of the 20s and early 30s in the fight against the bands of Mussolini and Hitler and others, the alertness and prescience is present in understanding social and political dynamics but it is diluted in a doctrine that is stiff, exclusionary and hierarchical and sets the stage for systematic and organized violence against the future and present 'enemies of the people'.

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