John Clendaniel

THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM OF LUKÁCS'S *BLUM THESES*

Georg Lukács regarded the *Blum Theses* as central to his Marxist development and believed that the underlying perspective provided a guideline for his work throughout the rest of his career as a Communist intellectual. I would like to argue that there has been a major distortion in the understanding of this work which Lukács considered to be so pivotal for his development. A common assessment is that with the writing of his *Blum Theses*, Lukács became a supporter of a "premature" Popular Front-style politics and that this orientation dominated the rest of his political thought. Aside from the fact that the perspective underlying the *Blum Theses* did continue to guide Lukács's later work, I believe that this view is fundamentally incorrect. I would argue that the *Blum Theses*, with their call for a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants as a strategic goal in bringing about the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary, should not in any way be seen as prefiguring Stalin's Popular Fronts, which were a distortion of Leninism. In fact, they actually attempt to put forward a Leninist politics appropriate to the Hungarian situation at the end of the 1920's.[1] The distorted interpretations of this work have also led to problems in the understanding of Lukács's development and the relation of his later work to Stalinism. After providing a more accurate reading of the *Blum Theses* and their relation to the politics of the Popular Front, I will attempt to explore what implications this has for some prominent accounts of Lukács's development.

The *Blum Theses* were put forward at the end of 1928 as a political perspective for the Hungarian Communist Party's (HCP) Second Party Congress on behalf of the anti-sectarian Landler faction. The Landler faction had been a consistent opponent of and counterweight to the bureaucratic-

sectarian approach of Béla Kun, and an advocate of a more realistic approach to the reconstruction of the HCP in counter-revolutionary Hungary. Landler, a former radical leader of the Railroad Workers' Union and People's Comissar in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, had recently passed away and the task of putting forward the faction's perspective fell to Lukács. As Lukács later noted in an interview in *New Left Review*, "The Blum Theses were my rearguard action against the sectarianism of the Third Period, which insisted that social democracy and fascism were twins."[2] They were rearguard in that the left-sectarian Third Period had already been inaugurated by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and consequently the theses adopted much of the language put forward in its program while attempting to cut against it by presenting a realistic alternative program for Hungary based on the past experience of the Landler faction and Lukács's understanding of Marxism and Leninism. The main concept of the theses was the strategic goal of establishing a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants through a revolutionary struggle against the authoritarian Bethlen regime which had emerged from the counter-revolution against the Hungarian Soviet Republic. It is the question of what Lukács means by this democratic dictatorship that has caused much of the confusion regarding the interpretation of the *Blum Theses* as a political document. In order to begin our investigation of this aspect of the *Blum Theses*, it is first necessary to give a brief exposition of how Lukács assessed the situation in Hungary and the character of the Bethlen regime.

In order to understand how Lukács characterizes the Bethlen regime, it is necessary to look at his conception of a process of "fascisization," the current development of world imperialism in which the bourgeoisie attempts to consolidate its rule. This process is broader than what we might normally understand by the term, "fascism," for instance, the regimes of Mussolini or Hitler, although it is also inclusive of such developments. Lukács takes the defining

characteristic of fascism to be the exclusion of the influence of the working masses from political life to ensure the consolidation of bourgeois rule. This can be accomplished while maintaining democratic forms through a corporatist arrangement with working class bureaucracy (Lukács's prime example is America), or with the classical variety of fascism seen in the case of Mussolini's Italy. In the first case, the American bourgeoisie:

> …has succeeded in creating the very forms of democracy in which every possibility for the free development, accumulation and expansion of capital is given, while at the same time the external forms of democracy are preserved – but in such a way that the working masses cannot exert any influence whatever on the actual political leadership.[3]

This most well developed form of democratic fascisization is seen as an ideal by the various national bourgeoisies in Europe. However, even though both the big bourgeoisie and the working-class bureaucracy both see classical fascism as problematic and risky, and would much prefer the "democratic" option, "no European bourgeoisie is going to completely abandon the possibility of the 'classical' (Italian) type of fascism: it will always keep even that option open in case of an intensification of the class struggle and a separation of the masses from the bourgeoisie."[4] The bourgeoisie will use whatever means are at its disposal to stabilize its own minority rule by eliminating any influence of the masses in the area of politics through some variant of a corporatist arrangement. Therefore, the option of classical fascism always remains on the table should the "democratic" alternative prove untenable. In Lukács's words:

> …today's imperialistic capitalistic state is equally concerned to render the masses completely ineffective politically and to combine and organize them within the state (or within 'society', under state supervision). The democratic form of fascisization is the most appropriate, but by no means the only form which this double objective can take.[5]

So then where does Hungary fall in this typology of fascisization? Lukács's answer is somewhere in the middle, on account of the fact that although Hungary underwent a petit-bourgeois counter-revolution after the defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, the

trade-union movement was not successfully smashed and the big bourgeoisie and land owners then "took over from the counter-revolution of the petty-bourgeoisie and middle peasantry and incorporated its organs into the state apparatus."[6]

This counter-revolutionary regime is now seeking to move toward the "democratic liquidation of the sum total of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois-democratic reforms" which finds its ideal in the American model.[7] This is to be achieved through the abrogation of the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the right to strike, as well as various anti-democratic parliamentary reforms and a fascist cultural policy.[8] Among the Hungarian parties there is a consensus in this direction:

> …complete unity reigns from Bethlen down to Jenö Kis. The resistance of petty-bourgeois fascists against this block does not count for very much. The most enthusiastic supporter and proclaimer of such a system of democracy is the Social Democratic Party…The HCP is the only party which represents the true struggle for democratic reforms in opposition to the Bethlen regime.[9]

This inclusion of the Social Democratic Party in this group as "the most enthusiastic supporter and proclaimer" of the "democratic liquidation of bourgeois democracy" raises the question of the manner in which Lukács treats social democracy, and more specifically, Hungarian social democracy, in the *Blum Theses*. This is an issue which requires some careful consideration since although much of the hostility to social democracy and in particular its equation with fascism as "social-fascism" is clearly the mark of the Comintern's left-sectarian Third Period, a significant amount of the criticism directed toward the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) is in fact genuine. The conservative leadership of the HSDP headed by Károly Peyer was in fact extremely accommodating toward Bethlen's counter-revolutionary regime and made a formal compromise with it in the Bethlen-Peyer Pact, which granted the numerous concessions to the regime in exchange for the ability to participate in elections and an amnesty which excluded

Communists.[10] In addition, throughout the 1920's the HSDP spurned all proposals for co-operation made by the HCP or their legal formation, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP). In evaluating Lukács's comments on this subject, this rightward trajectory and compromising nature of the HSDP leadership should always be kept in mind. It seems quite clear that Lukács's comment above, that "The HCP is the only party which represents the true struggle for democratic reforms in opposition to the Bethlen regime," is quite genuine and it is on this basis that he formulates his program in the *Blum Theses* while introducing Third Period terminology and analysis merely to accommodate the Comintern.

With this understanding of Lukács's assessment of the Hungarian situation and nature of the Bethlen regime, we can proceed to an examination of his concept of a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants which forms the core of his program in the *Blum Theses*. Lukács begins his description by basing the applicability of this concept to Hungary on the following section in the program of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, which had just recently ushered in the left-sectarian Third Period. Hungary numbered among the countries:

> …with a medium development of capitalism (Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, the Balkan countries, etc.), having numerous survivals of semi-feudal relationships in agriculture, possessing, to a certain extent, the material pre-requisites for socialist construction, and in which the bourgeois-democratic reforms have not yet been completed. In some of these countries a process of more or less rapid development from bourgeois democratic revolution to socialist revolution is possible. In others, there may be types of proletarian revolution which will have a large number of bourgeois-democratic tasks to fulfill. Hence, in these countries, the dictatorship of the proletariat may not come about at once, but in the process of transition from the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry to the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat.[11]

Here, Hungary is grouped with the countries in which a democratic revolution will play a key role in the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat on account of its incomplete overthrow of feudal relationships. Things are formulated loosely enough that Hungary could also be understood as belonging to the subset of countries in which a democratic dictatorship of the

proletariat and peasantry will form an important part of the transition to socialism and, importantly for Lukács's concerns, the concept of the democratic dictatorship is left undefined. Lukács saw this as a "loophole" and an opportunity to put forward a realistic strategic plan for the HCP based on his experiences as a leading party militant and a member of the anti-sectarian Landler faction.

We should not be led astray in our interpretation of the *Blum Theses* by either the fact that Lukács cited the Program of the Sixth Congress (the founding document of the left-sectarian Third Period) in support of his view, or that he cited a passage which, because of its loose formulation, could be seen as a holdover of the rightist stagism of the Second Period. Lukács's theoretical perspective did not stem from either the right or left swings of the Comintern, but from his understanding of the Russian and Hungarian revolutions, his study of Leninist politics, and his practical experience with Landler in the HCP. He was attempting to do the same thing for the Hungarian situation that he was at around the same time striving to do in regard to the situation in Germany, that is, develop "a 'genuine' left wing program," in response to Stalin's destructive politics of the Third Period.[12]

That this is in fact Lukács's project becomes clear in the extended explanation he provides of his conception of democratic dictatorship, which we will now examine in detail. He begins this explanation with a discussion of how Marxists should view bourgeois democracy:

> A struggle must be waged among the workers against the nihilism which has arisen out of disappointment in the Social Democratic Party's politics in relation to bourgeois democracy. The Marxist view – that bourgeois democracy is the best battlefield for the proletariat – must be made popular among the party members. It has got to be understood that serious revolutionary efforts are needed in order to create such a battlefield. The lessons of the 1917 revolution in Russia and the 1918/19 revolution in Hungary in this respect must be taken to heart and made popular. (Lenin said in the spring of 1917: 'Russia constitutes the most progressive democracy in the world.')[13]

In this passage, Lukács argues that it is necessary to make it clear to members of the party that the struggle for bourgeois democracy is not the discredited politics of compromise of the Social Democrats in the HSDP who have given it a bad name, but rather a revolutionary struggle necessary to achieve a better strategic fighting position for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary. He cites as an example the democracy established by the February revolution in Russia, which served as the "battlefield" on which the Bolsheviks made their insurrection. According to Lukács, the key to assessing the value of a democracy is in answering the question, "Whose class power does it organize, and whose does it disorganize?" The distinction is between the bourgeoisie's rule through parliamentarian democracy and a situation of dual power where at least part of its power has been ceded to the workers. This is the guideline of the entire strategy: mobilizing and organizing the working masses of Hungary and disorganizing the bourgeoisie.

Proceeding from this understanding of the role of the struggle for bourgeois democracy, he moves to treat a potential misunderstanding of the role of a democratic dictatorship in the struggle for socialism:

> It is necessary from the outset to combat that school of thought which maintains that a democratic dictatorship is a transitional form of government between the Bethlen regime and the dictatorship of the proletariat. That argument runs something like this: first, the Bethlen regime exists, then we will establish a democratic dictatorship, and when we have fully developed and realized that, then and only then will the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat dawn.[14]

One could not wish for a clearer and more concise description of the type of stagism which saw the Bolshevik seizure of power as premature and which again came into play during the Comintern's Second Period with its rightward shift. According to such a conception, a revolution must pass through its bourgeois democratic phase of development completely before it can move to its socialist phase. It is clear that Lukács understood that this was a potential way

to understand the term "democratic dictatorship" which he cited from the Program of the Sixth Congress, and it is also clear that he viewed this understanding as antithetical to his own conception. It was a school of thought that it was necessary to combat from the outset. For Lukács there is no need to pass through a bourgeois democratic stage of capitalist development before establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather, the democratic dictatorship is a battlefield on which the class forces of the proletariat can be further organized and those of the bourgeoisie disorganized so that the working masses can be mobilized and the proletariat can establish its dictatorship. He has in mind the course of events of 1917 in Russia, which led to the Bolsheviks' ability to lead a successful insurrection in the situation of dual power which emerged following the February revolution.

The above cited passage clearly refutes the interpretation that in the *Blum Theses*, Lukács is looking backward to the right politics of the Second Period or some other version of a stagist theory of revolution and opposing them to those of the Third. If Lukács is in any way looking backward in terms of Comintern policy then it is to the tradition represented in the first four congresses of the Comintern: that of learning from the successful experience of the Russian revolution and the negative experiences of the failed attempts at establishing similar governments in Hungary and Germany, which, although far from free of errors and mistakes, was a sincere attempt at revolutionary internationalism, undistorted by Stalinist tactics.

Lukács continues to define the democratic dictatorship, again looking to the Russian example:

> A democratic dictatorship can take various different forms. Early in 1917, Lenin pointed out to Kamenev, who wanted to pin the party down to the 1905 form of democratic dictatorship, that democratic dictatorship had already been achieved in quite definite form by the beginning of the 1917 revolution: one of these forms was a counter-government made up of workers' and soldiers' soviets.[15]

Lukács is referring to the disagreement between Kamenev, who wanted to provide conditional support to the provisional government and reconcile with the Mensheviks, in line with a stagist approach, and Lenin, who realized that a situation of dual power had already arisen with the advent of the February revolution and the establishment of workers' and soldiers' councils. Suffice it to say Lukács is for the latter, the Leninist approach. It is such a revolutionary transformation leading to the creation of a situation of dual power that Lukács is arguing for when he puts forward a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants as the strategic objective for the HCP. He is arguing that the HCP's strategy should be to lead a democratic revolutionary struggle against the authoritarian and dictatorial Bethlen government, creating a situation of dual power, the battlefield on which the working masses led by the HCP will be able to successfully establish and maintain their rule in Hungary.

So then what are the concrete advantages of such a situation of dual power? Why should the HCP struggle for it as a strategic goal rather than simply for the dictatorship of the proletariat? Lukács explains the advantages of such a battlefield:

> Democratic dictatorship, then, as a complete realization of bourgeois democracy, is a battlefield in the strict sense of the word, a field on which the all-deciding battle is fought between bourgeoisie and proletariat. At the same time, of course, it is also the most important means of the battle, a chance to address the broadest masses directly, to spur them on and lead them to spontaneous revolutionary action, as well as a chance to loosen the organizational and ideological forms which, under 'normal circumstances', help the bourgeoisie to keep the broad masses of the working people disorganized. A democratic dictatorship provides the possibility of creating those organizational forms which can help the broad masses of workers to assert their interests in the face of the bourgeoisie.[16]

While the advantages outlined in these comments are gained in any case where workers are able to achieve a situation of dual power, if one looks at the specifics of the development of the HCP and the Hungarian situation, then the importance of establishing this strategic position is all the more clear. The HCP had suffered severely from the White Terror following the defeat of the

1919 Soviet government, holding its First Congress only in 1925 and suffering repeated waves of arrests and trials.[17] If one takes into account the continued repression which both the HCP conspiratorial party apparatus and its legal forms, including the HSWP, faced, and what a toll this took on the functioning of the party, then the logic is all the more clear as to why a complete realization even of merely bourgeois democracy under a workers' and peasants' government would allow the HCP to play a much more successful role in the development of the class consciousness of Hungarian workers and to create organizational forms that could "help the broad masses of workers to assert their interests in the face of the bourgeoisie."

The main reason why a thorough bourgeois democratic revolution, in the form of the establishment of a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, would be an organizing force for the working class and a disorganizing force for the bourgeoisie is that such a democratic dictatorship "is irreconcilable in principle with the economic and social power of the bourgeoisie, even though the explicit class content of its concrete objectives and immediate demands, far from going beyond the bounds of bourgeois society, is in fact the perfect realization of bourgeois democracy."[18] In other words, a full realization of bourgeois democracy, one in which the classes which make up the vast majority of society (workers and peasants) are actually in political power, is something which now points beyond capitalist society. This is because the bourgeoisie is no longer a revolutionary class as it was in 1793 when "complete democracy did not conflict in principle with the power of capitalism," but is rather a class for which it is necessary to use the state, social organizations, and its economic power to disorganize the working masses in order to ensure its own minority rule in alliance with the remnants of feudalism.[19] The bourgeoisie can no longer tolerate its own earlier democratic aspirations since they pose a serious threat to its continued minority rule. With the economic consolidation and

development of capitalism, such a democratic development runs contrary to their continued economic and social power. This is why "in both Kerensky's and Károlyi's revolution, … the bourgeoisie should attempt to dismantle abruptly 'the most highly developed democracy' which followed the outbreak of the revolution and re-establish 'normal democracy' – which secures the power of capitalism – as quickly as possible."[20] One might look to Kerensky's flirtations with Kornilov for one of the best examples of this inability of the bourgeoisie and their allies to tolerate "the most highly developed democracy."

Because of the bourgeoisie's hostility to a complete realization of bourgeois democracy, it is impossible to arrest revolutionary development at a stage of democratic dictatorship:

> A democratic dictatorship, then, although in terms of its immediate concrete content it does not go beyond bourgeois society, is a dialectical form of transition towards the revolution of the proletariat – or towards the counter-revolution. To stop at democratic dictatorship, conceived as a fixed, 'constitutionally determined' period of development would necessarily signify the victory of the counter-revolution. Democratic dictatorship can therefore be understood only as the concrete transition by means of which the bourgeois revolution turns into the revolution of the proletariat. 'There is no Chinese wall between bourgeois revolution and the revolution of the proletariat' (Lenin).[21]

Because the bourgeoisie can no longer tolerate a full realization of their own type of democracy, the establishment of a democratic dictatorship brings things to a head: either there is a move forward toward the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship with the support of the peasantry, or the counter-revolution of the bourgeoisie will triumph and they will re-establish their minority rule. Here we again see Lukács making a clear distinction between a stagist perspective, one which conceives of democratic dictatorship "as a fixed, 'constitutionally determined' period of development," and his own perspective of a continuous revolutionary transition in which the bourgeois revolution turns into the revolution of the proletariat. It is no accident that he supports his conception with a quote from Lenin, which emphasizes the lack of separation between these

two revolutionary processes, since this is precisely the dynamic that was present in the Russian revolution.

Again, the question in evaluating such a democratic dictatorship is, "Whose class power does it organize?" Lukács is arguing that the establishment of a democratic dictatorship would lead to a situation "where – although it maintains its economic exploitation – it has ceded at least part of its power to the broad masses of workers."[22] Everything must be evaluated from the standpoint of "mobilizing the masses and disorganizing the bourgeoisie."[23] In the situation of dual power, workers' control of production must be viewed in terms of this larger perspective:

> Take, for example, proletarian control of production, which becomes an immediate issue under such circumstances. There must be no illusions on this score, no believing that proletarian control of production can of itself have any kind of 'consolidating' effect. Unmasking the sabotage perpetrated by the bourgeoisie, and if need be just stopping it: such measures do not have any particular value except as instruments in the struggle for power and the mobilization of the masses.[24]

What Lukács is envisaging is something very similar to the Russian example, the only difference being that the HCP, as the sole force seriously fighting for bourgeois democracy in Hungary, would need to play a more direct leading role in the struggle for the establishment of such a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants in the face of the quasi-fascist Bethlen regime and on account of the weakness and the compromising nature of Hungarian social democracy. As Lukács says in the introduction to the section of the *Blum Theses* on democratic dictatorship:

> Thus far the HCP has correctly exposed the fact that the parties of so-called democratic reform do not fight seriously enough even for bourgeois-democratic reforms. However, the present situation holds open the possibility that the broad masses are becoming awake to this kind of betrayal of bourgeois reforms, this disguising of the increasingly fascist state machinery in democratic apparel – all of which is happening with the consensus of every one of the bourgeois parties, including the social democrats. The facts reveal more and more clearly that the HCP is the only party in Hungary today which is fighting seriously for bourgeois democracy. This struggle of the party must be widened into a mass struggle, it must be taken beyond the confines of the proletariat. The central slogan of this struggle, which is directed towards bringing down the entire Bethlen regime, is: a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.[25]

In contrast to the Russian example where the Bolsheviks, in the year following the outbreak of a bourgeois democratic revolution against Tsarism, were able to successfully establish a lasting Soviet state, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, on account of a hostile international situation and the mistakes of the inexperienced HCP, ended in defeat with a counter-revolution and an accompanying White Terror. There followed the consolidation of a right wing government representing the interests of large scale capital and landowners (along with a loyal and compromising social democratic opposition), which continued to eliminate democratic freedoms and repress left-wing elements. It was in this situation that Lukács formulated his strategy, looking toward the Russian revolution as a model. The HCP, as the only party seriously struggling for the full realization of bourgeois democracy, must lead a struggle to bring down the Bethlen regime and establish a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants. From this strategic position of a situation of dual power with the advantages it would entail, the working class and peasantry must be mobilized to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat or risk a backward slide into counter-revolution. This is a strategy consistent with the revolutionary realist perspective of Marx, and one which as Paul Le Blanc notes draws "various elements from the democratic perspectives that Lenin articulated in 1905, in the World War I period, and at the Third Comintern Congress."[26] The *Blum Theses* should no longer be regarded as being of a piece with, or as a precursor to, the later Stalinist distortions of Marxism and Leninism.

But then what about the common understanding that the *Blum Theses* "prefigure" the Popular Front? In order to address this issue we can begin by comparing Lukács's strategy of establishing a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants as part of a concrete transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that contained in the politics of the Popular Front. Since

we have just finished outlining the former let us then give a sketch of the politics of the Popular Front. After the sectarian policies of the Third Period which treated the social democrats as "social fascists," and thereby frustrated any attempts to form a United Front in Germany to oppose Hitler, Stalin, increasingly concerned by the rising threat of fascism in Europe, made another about-face and the Comintern again swung in a rightward direction. This change in strategy and tactics was reflected in the speeches and decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern held in 1935, although the Stalinist leadership had begun to move in this direction slightly earlier.

What this shift amounted to was that the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie was replaced by the struggle between bourgeois democracy and fascism. As the historian E. H. Carr notes in his book *Twilight of the Comintern*, "the main target was no longer bourgeois capitalism, but Fascist imperialism; the anti-Fascist front was no longer exlusively proletarian."[27] The parties of the Communist International were, where possible, to form "People's Front" coalition governments between working class parties and those of the peasantry, petite-bourgeoisie, and anti-fascist elements of the liberal or conservative bourgeoisie. In one of his speeches to the Seventh World Congress, Dimitrov, a Bulgarian Communist and from 1934 General Secretary of the Comintern, attempted to distinguish this approach from that of the coalition governments of social democracy:

> While the social-democratic government is an instrument of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie in the interests of the preservation of the capitalist order, *a united front government* is an instrument of the collaboration of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat with other anti-fascist parties, in the interests of the entire working population, a government of struggle against fascism and reaction. Obviously there is a *radical difference* between these two things.[28]

In fact, in practice it was difficult to distinguish between the two. In countries where Popular Front governments were established such as France and Spain, Communist parties (despite

Dimitrov's rhetoric about "complete independence from the bourgeoisie") played the role of holding back militant workers' struggles and subordinating independent working class politics to bourgeois interests in the hope of preserving the bourgeois democracies threatened by Fascism.

As Carr notes, what went unsaid in Dimitrov's speeches during the Seventh Congress:

> …was that the new course implied the postponement of the pursuit of proletarian revolution in favour of an aim – the defeat of Fascism – which, though perhaps a necessary prelude to proletarian revolution, was not in itself revolutionary, and could be pursued in alliance with declared enemies of revolution. The logical outcome of this unconfessed dilemma was the silent relegation of the proletarian revolution to as inconspicuous a place as was decently possible in the proceedings and resolutions of the seventh congress. Lenin's "united front" had been designed to hasten the advent of the proletarian revolution. Dimitrov's "popular front" was designed to keep the proletarian revolution in abeyance in order to deal with the pressing emergency of Fascism.[29]

The difference which Carr highlights is crucial to understanding the difference between the *Blum Theses* and the Popular Front. Lukács's strategy of a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants was designed to hasten and ensure the success of a proletarian revolution by providing the working class and the HCP with a better strategic position in their pursuit of this objective, not to keep it in abeyance in order to deal with the Bethlen regime (or a classical fascist threat to it). The democratic struggle advocated by Lukács was to be fought and won by workers and peasants. The Popular Front with its seeking of a cross-class alliance with the bourgeoisie, those "declared enemies of revolution," is something entirely different from the *Blum Theses* and from the strategy and tactics of Lenin himself.

At the Seventh Congress these politics of class collaboration were accompanied by vague rhetoric about the importance of the relationship between bourgeois democracy and working class struggle for socialism, some of which bears a superficial resemblance to that of Lukács's position in the *Blum Theses*. For instance, in the following passage of Dimitrov's August 13th speech to the Seventh Congress, where he responds to those who want to know which should

take precedence, the building of a workers United Front or the formation of an anti-fascist Popular Front, he refers to the same quote from Lenin that Lukács used in explaining his conception of democratic dictatorship, that "there is no Chinese wall between bourgeois revolution and the revolution of the proletariat":

> Evidently, both groups fail to understand that the united proletarian front and the anti-fascist Popular Front are connected by *the living dialectics of struggle;* that they are interwoven, the one passing into the other in the process of the practical struggle against fascism, and that there is certainly no Chinese wall to keep them apart.
>
> For it cannot be seriously supposed that it is possible to establish a genuine anti-fascist Popular Front without securing the unity of action of the working class itself, *the leading force* of this anti-fascist Popular Front. At the same time, the further development of the united proletarian front depends, to a considerable degree, upon its transformation into a Popular Front against fascism.[30]

However, clearly it is not used here in the manner in which it is used by Lukács (following Lenin), that is, to emphasize that both bourgeois and proletarian revolutions are part of a unitary process of a concrete transition to socialism and are not to be artificially separated. Instead, (along with "the living dialectics of struggle") it is used in the manner of an empty phraseology which seeks to blur the clear difference between a workers' United Front and the cross-class alliance with the bourgeoisie of the Popular Front. In much the same manner, Dimitrov quotes the following passage from Lenin:

> It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.[31]

While the quote does certainly support Lukács's strategic perspective in the *Blum Theses* and captures an essential element of Lenin's political thought, it does not provide any support for the policy of cross-class alliance with the bourgeoisie and holding back revolutionary workers contained in the Popular Front. Although the quotes of Lenin that are cited are themselves very

similar to the content of the *Blum Theses*, the politics of Stalin and Dimitrov embodied in the Popular Front are not. For the way in which these quotes and references are utilized by the authors of the Popular Front strategy is to excuse and sanctify the retreat from the revolutionary struggle for socialism to the attempt to safeguard bourgeois democracy through class compromise in a manner that suits the tactical demands of Stalin's foreign policy. This shift is crystallized by Dimitrov in the following paragraph:

> Our attitude to bourgeois democracy is not the same under all conditions. For instance, at the time of the October Revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks engaged in a life-and-death struggle against all those political parties which, under the slogan of the defense of bourgeois democracy, opposed the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship. The Bolsheviks fought these parties because the banner of bourgeois democracy had at that time become the standard around which all counter-revolutionary forces mobilized to challenge the victory of the proletariat. The situation is quite different in the capitalist countries at present. Now the fascist counter-revolution is attacking bourgeois democracy in an effort to establish the most barbarous regime of exploitation and suppression of the working masses. Now the working masses in a number of capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a *definite* choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism.[32]

This shift is not the result of some innate dialectical dynamism and flexibility of Bolshevism, but rather that of the narrow tactical considerations of Stalinist foreign policy and its retreat from revolutionary Marxism.

Another superficial similarity is that Dimitrov speaks of the Popular Front government becoming the democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry:

> It is likewise not difficult to understand that the establishment of a united front government in countries where fascism is not yet in power is something *different* from the creation of such a government in countries where the fascist dictatorship holds sway. In the latter countries a united front government can be created *only in the process of overthrowing fascist rule.* In countries where *the bourgeois-democratic revolution is developing,* a Popular Front government may become the government of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry.[33]

One might see this as similar to Lukács's strategy in the *Blum Theses*. After all he does speak of a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, but again, this would be entirely incorrect. At

no point in the *Blum Theses* is there any talk of forming a cross-class alliance with progressive elements of the bourgeoisie against the Bethlen regime (in fact, Lukács argues against any pact with the bourgeoisie). And the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants is not treated by Lukács as something which may (or may not) grow out of such a worker-bourgeois government. On the contrary, as we have seen, the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants is envisioned as a strategic objective in the revolutionary transformation of Hungarian society and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The only cross-class alliance of which there is any talk is the one between workers and peasants.

From what we have already discussed it should be clear that we are dealing with two opposing strategies and that there is no question of one prefiguring the other. On the one hand, there is Lukács's attempt to put forward a strategy of fighting for a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants in order to bring about a strategically advantageous situation of dual power, which will further enable and facilitate the mobilization of the working masses to overthrow the bourgeoisie and large land owners thereby establishing a proletarian dictatorship in Hungary. On the other, we have the Popular Front with its blurring of the distinction between a United Front of working class parties and a Popular Front based on a coalition government with sections of the bourgeoisie, the holding back of revolutionary developments, and the subordination of working class politics to bourgeois interests in the name of the struggle against fascism, all to serve the narrow tactical interests of Stalinist foreign policy.

Further proof of this difference can be found if one examines the slogans which Lukács proposed as part of his strategic program. It is sufficient to quote the following string of demands:

> Fight for the overthrow of the Bethlen regime. Fight against all forms of pseudo-opposition to the Bethlen regime, and against bourgeois and social-democratic pseudo-opposition. No pact with the bourgeoisie. Class against class – long live the alliance of workers and peasants.
>
> Fight against the implantation of fascism in a democratic framework. Fight against the slogan 'democracy or fascism', which misleads the workers. Fight against social democracy as a mainstay of fascism. Fight for universal freedom which assures freedom of movement for the working class (the right of combination and assembly, freedom of the press, right to strike). Fight on the basis of conglomeration of these basic liberties for a republic headed by a government of workers and peasants.
>
> Fight for the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat.[34]

These slogans, in particular, "No pact with the bourgeoisie," and "Class against class – long live the alliance of workers and peasants," make it clear we are dealing with something quite different than the politics of the Popular Front or any precursor of it. Even the main framework of the Popular Front, that of a struggle between bourgeois democracy and fascism is attacked: "Fight against the slogan 'democracy or fascism', which misleads the workers." And the struggle for the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants is directly connected with the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. All this is further testament to the extent of the divide which separates the *Blum Theses* from the Popular Front. Of course, one can also see that there is a very obvious fixture of the Third Period such as "Fight against social democracy as a mainstay of fascism," which is Lukács's attempt to pay lip-service to the Third Period. On the other hand, the use of the slogan "class against class" is sincere, but Lukács is using it in accordance with his own political perspective and in a manner which is opposed both to the sectarian politics of the Third Period and to the politics of the Popular Front.

One can also see in these slogans that there is a strong effort to closely link the struggle for a full realization of bourgeois democracy in the democratic dictatorship with the immediate interests of workers. This is further clarified in an earlier section where Lukács argues that the HCP should

retain the slogan of its legal expression, the HSWP, for a republic. (Note that he again appropriates the slogan of "class against class"):

> As long as the tranquil and unruffled power of large-scale landed property and large-scale capital expresses itself in advocating the coronation of the legitimate king, the struggle for the republic will also continue to represent, in the eyes of the masses, the struggle for all basic liberties, for the right to combine, assemble, and even to strike. In propagating this slogan, no communist should allow himself to be misled by the so-called republican propaganda of social democracy. On the contrary: it must be pointed out that the slogan of the republic means nothing more to the social democrats than a screen for legitimism […] Naturally, the party must not, either now or in the future employ the republican slogan in isolation. The republican slogan can only be used in the sense of a struggle for total democracy, for the republic headed by a government of workers and peasants, a struggle against the democratic liquidation of democracy, a fulfillment of the slogan, 'Class against class', a mobilization for the struggle which has to be conducted to secure democratic dictatorship.[35]

In contrast to the manner in which it is used by compromised leadership of the HSDP, Lukács is quite clear that by the slogan for a republic he means a radical struggle for a thoroughgoing democracy tied to the interests of the working class and peasantry which will create a situation of dual power. The theoretical orientation of the *Blum Theses* as well as the manner in which Lukács formulates his proposed slogans make it clear that we are not dealing with a strategy which in any way retreats from (or relegates to a different stage) the goal of a proletarian revolution in Hungary, the formation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the initiation of a transition to socialism.

This more accurate assessment of the *Blum Theses* which sees them as a Leninist attempt to put forward a strategic political perspective appropriate to the Hungarian situation at the end of the 1920's, rather than as a holdover from the right distortions of the Comintern's Second Period, or a premature anticipation of Stalin and Dimitrov's Popular Front (whether positively or negatively assessed), demands a significant reassessment of the standard interpretations of his intellectual and political development, particularly during the later half of the 1920's. In what follows, I will

look at some of the prominent accounts of the *Blum Theses* and their accompanying conceptions of Lukács's political development.

In his *George Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, one of the most comprehensive and useful accounts of Lukács's development from a Marxist standpoint, Michael Löwy advances the view that during the period of 1926-1929, Lukács undergoes a philosophical and political rightward shift, representing his reconciliation with Stalinism, and that the *Blum Theses* represent the culmination of this process. According to Löwy:

> …all that lies behind them is an application to Hungary of the right turn of the Comintern; Lukács was only following the 'general line' of 1924-7… It was Lukács's misfortune that these Theses were to be the last echo of the right turn, coming as they did at the very beginning of the International's new (sectarian) 'left' turn.[36]

In my interpretation of the *Blum Theses* I have already dealt extensively with the question of whether they represent such a holdover from the Second Period of the Comintern and have shown that there is a clear difference between the strategic program of struggling for a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants that would then, with the increased mobilization of the masses of workers and development of their class consciousness, grow over into the dictatorship of the proletariat and the stagist politics of the Second Period Comintern. Lukács attacked just such conservative Second Period stagism in the description of his conception of democratic dictatorship. Löwy also sees the *Blum Theses* as "an augury of the Popular Front strategy of 1934-1938," and as coming "both too late and too early."[37] Again, we have in our comments above provided extensive argumentation against such a view. So what does Löwy base his interpretation on? He tells us that he has "purposely chosen the most 'right-wing' formulations of Lukács's text, by-passing some more 'leftish' passages which were no more than verbal concessions."[38] One can only imagine what monstrous distortions could be concocted if

one approached the interpretation of a thinker like Lenin in this manner (or for that matter any other serious Marxist). Certainly, Löwy feels justified in doing so because it is clear that Lukács is attempting to present his perspective in a manner that will be palatable to the left-sectarian turn of the Third Period, but it is completely unacceptable to on this account treat every "leftish" sounding passage as no more than a verbal concession. Rather, a more subtle treatment is required. One must assess what aspects represent mere concessions to the Third Period, and which are (sometimes even using the language of the Third Period) Lukács's sincere attempt to put forward his Leninist politics, his genuine left-wing program for Hungary. Löwy's simplistic approach in treating this matter is simply not up to the task and it leads him to draw an incorrect assessment of the *Blum Theses*.

So then what of the rest of Löwy's account of Lukács's alleged rightward shift during 1926-1929? If we accept that the political document that Lukács produced in the *Blum Theses* is in line with an authentic Marxism and Leninism, then is it possible that in the years leading up to it Lukács was, in his philosophical essays, demonstrating a rightward reconciliation with Stalinism? While a full treatment of the question is beyond the scope of this article, the brief answer that we can provide is that in fact rather than representing a rightward deviation from an authentic Marxism, the philosophical essays *The New Edition of Lassalle's Letters* (1925) and *Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics* (1926), constitute the continuation of Lukács's deepening understanding of Marxism, in particular the materialist and anti-utopian aspects of Marx's thought that set him apart from the idealism of the other Young Hegelians. This is in fact Lukács's view of his own development, which he puts forward in his 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*.[39]

Löwy's interpretation of the essay on Moses Hess, that because Lukács argues that "methodologically, Marx took over *directly* from Hegel," rather than by way of the other Young Hegelians or True Socialists, he, as a result, "tilts toward 'reconciliation' with reality" and provides "the methodological basis for his support for the Soviet 'Thermidor'," is extremely tendential and is not borne out by the essay itself.[40] In the essay, Lukács is not putting forward Hegel's reconciliation with reality as a program or as a political or philosophical orientation, but rather emphasizing that the close connection to reality present in Hegel, despite its taking on a reactionary character of a reconciliation with reality, was a feature of Hegel's thought that was then taken over by Marx in the form of his materialism, realism and anti-utopianism. Moreover, this was precisely what was missed by and lacking in the other Young Hegelians, even in the case of Feuerbach. Lukács is here supporting Marx's approach, which is in no way a reactionary reconciliation with reality, but rather a revolutionary realist and anti-utopian perspective. Considering that Lukács in his own earlier work had such a tendency toward idealism and a problem with understanding this aspect of Marx, this work is in part intended as a self-critique and represents an advance toward "the real Marx" even if, as Lukács later notes, some of the mistaken conceptions of *History and Class Consciousness* regarding alienation are preserved.[41] In short, the essays of this period represent an advance toward Lukács's complete assimilation of Marx's conception. This assessment of Lukács's development allows for a more unified and coherent view of his Marxist development during the 1920's rather than it simply being truncated in 1925.

John Rees puts forward a similar view to that of Löwy in his introduction to the recently discovered *Tailism and the Dialectic*, Lukács's 1925 defense of *History and Class Consciousness*. According to Rees, the *Blum Theses* went:

> …far beyond the tactical considerations of working under the dictatorship, they advocated the wholesale abandonment of the strategy of proletarian revolution and instead called for the HCP to work merely for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, that is, merely for a democratic revolution.
>
> In many ways, this foreshadowed the Popular Front strategy that Stalin was to adopt in the 1930's.[42]

As I have argued, Lukács was not abandoning the strategy of proletarian revolution with his call for the strategic objective of a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, but rather understood, as did both Marx and Lenin, that there was no wall separating the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. He was arguing that a democratic revolutionary overthrow of the Bethlen Regime, consolidating itself in democratic dictatorship, could lay the strategic basis for the successful and lasting establishment of a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This is consistent with Marx's perspective in the Communist Manifesto, that "of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which grows over into the proletarian-socialist revolution," and the practical approach of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917.[43] This strategy is completely opposed to the politics of class compromise of the Popular Front Period.

Rees also endorses the view that the essay on Moses Hess provides the first indications of Lukács's "collapse into an accommodation with existing reality."[44] In Rees's account of Lukács's Marxist development, *Tailism and the Dialectic*, along with *History and Class Consciousness* and *Lenin,* form the high point of Lukács's Marxism after which there is a rightward turn culminating in the *Blum Theses*. *History and Class Consciousness* and *Tailism and the Dialectic* are given an extremely positive reading which in some ways is very useful in highlighting Lukács's attempt to theorize the Leninist party and connect it to Marx's theory of alienation, but which overlooks and plays down the idealist distortions of Marxism present in both works. On the other hand, the value of Lukács's later work is minimized.

Lukács's alleged right deviation from Marxism in the second half of the 1920's is used to explain his decision to withdraw from politics and remain in the Stalinized Communist movement while pursuing intellectual work in the areas of philosophy and aesthetics, as well as his decision not to join Trotsky's Left Opposition. In opposition to this view, I have argued that while there is a shift in Lukács's development, it is a shift toward a more accurate assimilation of Marx's thought. In order to explain Lukács's withdrawal from politics after the defeat of the *Blum Theses* and the reasons why he did not join the Left Opposition, I believe that it is necessary to examine in detail his own comments on the matter and his critique of Trotsky (regardless of how one assesses it) which is contained in his late works.

László Sziklai, in his interesting and well researched book, *After the Proletarian Revolution: Lukács's Marxist development, 1930-1945*, puts forward a view of the *Blum Theses* which is substantially different from and more detailed than those of Löwy and Rees. Sziklai takes the *Blum Theses* as his starting point in understanding Lukács's development during the following period. Although this is the main focus, he does provide some treatment of the works during the second half of the 1920's. This treatment generally parallels Lukács's own interpretation and is similar to what I have already laid out above, i.e. that these works were part of Lukács's continued Marxist development culminating in the *Blum Theses*.[45] The fact that he attempts to provide a sympathetic interpretation of the *Blum Theses* based on Lukács's own later understanding of them, makes his account an extremely useful starting point for examining the implications which my interpretation of the *Blum Theses* has for the understanding of Lukács's Marxist development from the *Blum Theses* onward.

The framework from which Sziklai proceeds is a positive appraisal of the strategy and tactics of the Popular Front period as a correct anti-sectarian approach to the threat of Fascism and a healthy turn away from the destructive sectarianism of the Third Period. He also sees a continuity in development between the perspective contained in the *Blum Theses* and Lukács's later work:

> …what the leading official of the Hungarian Communist Party had summarized in his political theses was continued by the ideologist after 1930. The Link in organic development is what Lenin expressed in these words: "there is no Great Wall of China between bourgeois revolution and the revolution of the proletariat.[46]

And yet along with this, he also holds that there is an important difference between the *Blum Theses* and the strategy and tactics of the Popular Front: "The theses had only opened a *crack* in sectarianism, instead of breaking through it along a *wide front*, as the Seventh Congress of the Comintern was to do."[47] Sziklai attributes the limitations of the *Blum Theses* to "the *external*, unfavorable international circumstances and his reluctant submission of the terminology of the period," as well as to a lack of recognition that the struggle was that of all anti-fascist forces against fascism rather than of socialism against capitalism. He bases this view on Lukács's comments at a June 1956 discussion of the Blum Theses:

> The question of Social Democracy and the trade unions is different. In this regard the theses must be discussed as they were embedded in the international current with a view to the questions of the Red Trade Union International, schisms, Social Fascism, 'Social Democracy as the twin brother of Fascism', etc…Do not forget that, at that time, the fight against the German '*Versöhnlers*' was the central concern of the Comintern, and this struggle came to a head precisely over the issue of Social Democracy and unionism… None of us had recognized that, in Europe, it was not Socialism versus Capitalism that was in the forefront, but the mobilization of all the anti-Fascist forces against Fascism. *No one* recognized that, at that time in Europe, including the author of the 'Blum Theses'…In view of this, it cannot be declared that the 'Blum Theses' had made the turn in strategy and tactics that was to come only later.[48]

I would like to point out the following two things. First, while from Sziklai's perspective this "lack of recognition" on Lukács's part may seem a limitation, from my perspective, in which I have attempted to differentiate the Leninist perspective contained in the *Blum Theses* from the

compromised strategy and tactics of the Popular Front, it is in fact their strength. Second, in the passage quoted above, Lukács's primary concern is to prevent a distorted reading of the *Blum Theses*. He points to the various distortions which he had to introduce on account of the situation in the Third Period Comintern. He then makes clear (in a tactful way which allows him to avoid criticism) that the strategy and tactics of the *Blum Theses* were fundamentally different from those introduced in the Popular Front period, in that the former were based on "Socialism versus Capitalism" while the latter were based on "the mobilization of all the anti-Fascist forces against Fascism," that is, Democracy versus Fascism.

Sziklai continues his account with an attempt to resolve the issue of how there can be a continuity in Lukács's development from the *Blum Theses* onward, when the *Blum Theses* has a sectarian limitation in its conception of Fascism in comparison to the Popular Front. His solution is to argue that Lukács was able to make his conception compatible with Popular Front politics because the theses were about how to respond to the variant of "democratic fascism" in Hungary with democratic dictatorship whereas the Popular Front and the framework of Democracy or Fascism was the appropriate strategy and tactics for responding to a situation were Europe was threatened by the spread of "classical fascism" of the Hitlerite variety. According to Sziklai Lukács's theorization was not in regard to "classical fascism" and so:

> …the idea of democratic dictatorship, adjusted to take into account a modified concept of Fascism (which, in turn, modified the former), could actually be revived at the time of the Popular-Front. Thus Lukács kept drawing both *false and true* conclusions from his "Theses", applying them to the changing historical situation, to the equally changing strategic and tactical options of the workers' movement, and he could rightly regard theses answers as elements of an organic continuity.[49]

The position presented here differs from that account: in order to explain the continuity of Lukács's thought from the *Blum Theses* onward, it is not necessary to resort to any such

complicated explanations, or in Sziklai's terminology, "paradoxes." Sziklai makes it sound as if Lukács could continue the political perspective in the *Blum Theses* by supporting the strategy and tactics of the Popular Front, thereby breaking out of the limits of his sectarianism to a full anti-sectarian position.

I would argue that if one "seeks an answer to the dilemma of organic continuity between the twenties and thirities,"[50] then the answer is to be found in a different manner, in his decision to withdraw from active politics and "follow the Russian line" while continuing to work on his perspectives guided by his Marxist orientation achieved in the *Blum Theses* in the area of literature and philosophy. He did not support Stalin's Popular Front because he saw it as a continued application of the *Blum Theses* in changed circumstances, but because he saw the Soviet Union as the only serious opponent to fascism, regardless of the gross blunders of its Stalinist leadership, and attempted to function within it as a Marxist intellectual.

As is well known Lukács always emphasized the continuity of his later work with the *Blum Theses*. Sziklai provides the following summary:

> The theoretical contents of the "Blum Theses" constituted the "secret" *terminus a quo* of his further development, however little he achieved at the time. We cannot forget that Lukács himself confessed on several occasions: "the turn in my outlook which was the source of my theses has become the guidline for my subsequent practical and theoretical work, without, of course, being given a relatively adequate form of expression."
>
> Lukács, just like his opponents, always adduced his aesthetic works from the period after 1930 as conclusive evidence of his "secret" continuity. Another piece of evidence that was invariably cited to confirm this was the so-called "Révai-argument". To Lukács's mind, Révai's statement proved that his unswerving commitment to the "Blum Theses" was not subjective fantasy, but objective fact: "Anyone who knows the history of the Hungarian Communist movement must know that the *literary views* that comrade Lukács advocated in 1945-1949 are connected to his much earlier *political views*, which he embraced in the late twenties, concerning Hungarian political progress and the strategy of the Communist Party."
>
> The "Révai argument" however, is highly paradoxical…Révai denied that there was any connection between the "Blum Theses" and the Popular-Front concept… [51]

Although Sziklai may find the "Révai argument" highly paradoxical, the fact that Lukács referred to Révai's comments as objective proof that the *Blum Theses* served as a guideline for his later work, and that Révai denied that there was any connection between the *Blum Theses* and the Popular Front only lends further credence to the view presented here and is consistent with the comments made by Lukács, even if for Sziklai it requires a more complicated explanation.

By way of conclusion, I will provide a sketch of an alternate view of Lukács's development following the *Blum Theses* and point to a few additional pieces of evidence which lend support to this view, even though its full presentation and defense will require a much more extensive treatment.

After his decision to withdraw from active politics and adapt to the Stalinist reality in the Comintern and the Soviet Union, Lukács continued to hold the Marxist and Leninist perspective put forward in the *Blum Theses* and this formed a guideline for the rest of his theoretical output, and (when possible) his practical political activity. Although as part of his adaptation to the political environment of Stalinism and his putting forward of "the Russian line", he swam in the stream of the Popular Front period and did his best to let the regime forget about his *Blum Theses*, he did not regard the Popular Front as an improvement upon the politics in the *Blum Theses* or even as consistent with them, but rather (along with Stalinism in general) as a distortion of Marxism and Leninism. Although he was an ardent anti-fascist he did not side with the Soviet Union on account of the wisdom or correctness of its leadership's policy during either its left or right tactical zigzags or on account of its supposed continuity with the approach of Marx and Lenin, but rather on the basis that the Soviet union was the only serious anti-fascist force.[52]

In order to provide some provisional support for the view that Lukács continued to follow the *Blum Theses* in distinction to some variant of Popular Frontism, let us look at how Lukács treats the relationship between the *Blum Theses* and the Seventh Congress in his autobiography. In the following quote, he speaks of both the *Blum Theses* and the Seventh Congress:

> After the Landler faction broke up, a number of first-rate people went over to Kun, because within the Hungarian Party a group was starting to form around Sándor Szerényi. This move towards Kun gave rise to a transitional period which ended with the Seventh Comintern Congress and the policies arising from it. These developments fully confirmed the views I had advanced in the Theses.[53]

This has been cited as evidence that Lukács later saw a continuity between the *Blum Theses* and the Seventh congress, but in fact it is intended more narrowly in relation to Hungarian development. Lukács is arguing that later developments in the Hungarian situation including the failure that resulted when they were not adopted in favor of Kun's sectarianism confirmed the correctness of the *Blum Theses*. This is in line with the following comments:

> …on the one hand, it is a historical fact that the general perspective of the 'Blum Theses' was justified by the actual Hungarian development, and on the other, I was after all the only one who had foreseen this development.[54]

Later in the autobiography, Lukács returns to the relationship between the *Blum Theses* and the Seventh Congress in the discussion of his relationship with Révai:

> *Int*: Tell me how your relations with Révai developed after 1945.
> *G.L.*: After the Blum Theses Révai and I broke off relations completely. During the preparations for the Seventh Congress he told me privately that the Blum Theses would have to be treated as the precursor of the Seventh Congress. But of course he never said as much in public, and after that congress he never so much as alluded to the Blum Theses again. On the contrary, it was his contacts with populist movements that moved into the foreground. The situation was that there were disagreements on this point within the party. Andor Gabor, for example, sympathized with Szép Szó, whereas I, as you know, felt equally hostile to Szép Szó and to Válasz (The Answer), and in that respect found myself on the same side as Révai.[55]

There are a number of interesting things here. One, is that it is clear that, according to Lukács, the *Blum Theses* and the Seventh Congress weren't compatible. It seems Révai was under the illusion that they would be, but this was corrected by the reality of his participation in the

Congress. Another is that Révai's move toward Populism (in line with the implementation of the Popular Front strategy in Hungary) was seen as a move away from the *Blum Theses*. It is also of note that Lukács found himself equally hostile to the left-bourgeois and populist literary journals of the period in Hungary during the Popular Front period.

Lukács's critical attitude to the Stalin's Popular Fronts is further clarified in a passage from his 1967 *Conversations with Lukács* where he is discussing various forms of alliance:

> I refer once again here to what is in this respect an exemplary policy, how Lenin saw the peasant Social Revolutionary party as a potential ally ever since 1905, but at the same time criticized very sharply and continuously its false ideology. We must break with the false idea which arose in Stalin's Popular Fronts – i.e. that people who didn't sign declarations were therefore totally reactionary. A Popular Front, if I dare use this term, which indeed also bears on these problems, is only possible if the conscious elements struggle together according to their capacities at the time, and at the same time criticize each other. I regard the conjunction of these two factors as one of the most important problems of future development. Otherwise we have an unprincipled amalgam, and the worst thing about this is not that non-participants are disparaged, which indeed is bad enough, but that the participants themselves are not criticized.[56]

Here, Stalin's Popular Fronts are criticized as a distortion of Leninism. The bourgeois allies went uncriticized while those forces that didn't abide by the dictates of the Popular Front governments were treated as totally reactionary. Thus what resulted were "unprincipled amalgams," that is, alliances that had no connection to the strategy and tactics of Leninism derived from Marxist theory, but were the arbitrary tactical constructions of a thoroughly pragmatic and theoretically bankrupt Stalinism. Lukács is both criticizing the "unprincipled amalgams" of Stalin's Popular Fronts , as well as putting forward a different (Leninist) version of a Popular Front (based on Lenin's views in 1905), where workers' and peasants' parties "struggle together according to their capacities at the time, and at the same time criticize each other." Setting aside the distortions introduced by the Third Period and Hungarian conditions which resulted in the lack of inclusion of social democracy, this is what Lukács put forward as a strategy for Hungary in the *Blum Theses*. What can be seen in this quote is a clear opposition

between a Leninist and a Stalinist politics, something which forms a central object of concern for Lukács and which one can begin to see more openly in Lukács's writings with the advent of the Twentieth Party Congress.

With these quotes, I have attempted to show that the later Lukács viewed the *Blum Theses* to be opposed to Stalin's Popular Front and that he was critical of such politics as a distortion of Leninism. A discussion of how Lukács's continuation of the revolutionary Marxist politics of the *Blum Theses* plays out in his aesthetic, philosophical, and political writings, as well as his practical activity during 1945-48 and in 1956 is beyond the scope of this article.

Lukács's active involvement in politics was in many ways cut short in 1929 just as his "thinking produced a general theory for the first time capable of further generalization from the correct observation of immediate reality [as he] became an ideologist who derived his perspectives from reality…."[57] The *Blum Theses*, as we have shown, represent an attempt to put forward a Marxist and Leninist politics appropriate to the Hungarian reality. Their framework was of a struggle between a movement of the working masses for socialist democracy and the rule of an undemocratic and reactionary bourgeoisie, which was attempting to consolidate itself and exclude the influence of the masses from political life. It was Lukács's view and one that I share that these politics continued to guide his activity throughout the rest of his life and I believe that at their core the products of this activity bore little relation to the Popular Front or other concoctions of Stalinism, even though they were often marked by them on the surface. His achievements during this period are of a different nature than those of the 1920's, but we should not underestimate their greatness and their usefulness for those of us who are today struggling for a socialist future from a Marxist perspective. Today, many view Marxism as an outdated

relic of the past which has little to offer in the way of topical contributions in the areas of philosophy, aesthetics, and the theory of science. But there is no reason for this terrain to be surrendered (and often to such theoretically weak opponents). What Lukács understood, and what formed the basis for much of his theoretical work post *Blum Theses*, was that Marx's system itself contained the basic framework of an approach in all these areas which was superior to any of the various approaches of the bourgeoisie and which was not in need of any supplementation by other bourgeois theories. It must be admitted that the transmission and development of Marxist theory even among the far left, despite the efforts of many dedicated activists and intellectuals, as well as important advances, remains extremely weak. There was, and remains, the need for the Marxist renaissance of which Lukács spoke in his later years and to which the works he produced during this period were geared. His elaborate defense of artistic realism in his *Aesthetics* and numerous works on literature, as well as his reconstruction and extension of the Marxist world-view in the areas of philosophy and theory of science in his *Towards an Ontology of Social Being*, are towering achievements upon which it is essential to build, while drawing from all the rest of those thinkers who make up the "warm stream of Marxism." Such a Marxist renaissance in these areas is not a substitute for, but a necessary and important compliment to the reconstruction of Marxist and Leninist politics appropriate to today's realities and the flexible political experimentation required in engaging with today's struggles which point toward democracy and beyond capitalism.

Here's to a Marxist renaissance!

Bibliography

Braunthal, Julius. *History of the International*. New York,: Prager, 1967.

Carr, Edward Hallett. *Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Deutscher, Isaac. *Marxism in Our Time*. Berkeley, Calif.,: Ramparts Press, 1971.

Dimitrov, Georgi. *Dimitrov on the United Front*. New Delhi,: People's Pub. House, 1971.

———. Selected *Speeches and Writings : Birth Centenary Volume*. New Delhi Peoples Pub. House,, 1982.

Kadarkay, Arpad. *Georg Lukács : Life, Thought, and Politics*. Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1991.

Kolakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism : Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution.* Volume 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

Kovrig, Bennett. *Communism in Hungary : From Kun to Kádár, Histories of Ruling Communist Parties*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1979.

Le Blanc, Paul. "Spider and Fly: The Leninist Philosophy of George Lukács." Unpublished Essay

Lichtheim, George. *George Lukacs*. New York, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1970.

Lorman, Thomas. *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920-1925 : István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation, East European Monographs No. 696.* Boulder, CO New York: East European Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2006.

Löwy, Michael. *Georg Lukács--from Romanticism to Bolshevism*. London: NLB, 1979.

Lukács, György. *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*. London New York: Verso, 2000.

———. Der Junge Marx. *Seine Philosophische Entwicklung Von 1840-1844, Opuscula Aus Wissenschaft Und Dichtung*. Pfullingen: Neske, 1965.

———. *Goethe and His Age, The Universal Library*. New York,: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969.

———. *History and Class Consciousness; Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge, Mass.,: MIT Press, 1971.

———. *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*. London,: N.L.B., 1970.

———. *Marxismus Und Stalinismus. Polit. Aufsätze, His Ausgewählte Schriften*. Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970.

———. Political *Writings, 1919-1929: The Question of Parliamentarianism and Other Essays*. London: NLB, 1972.

———. *The Process of Democratization, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Lukács, György, and János Ambrus. *Curriculum Vitae, Lukács György Összes Művei*. Budapest: Magvető, 1982.

Lukács, György, and Frank Benseler. *Revolutionäres Denken: Georg Lukács, Eine Einführung in Leben Und Werk.* Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984.

Lukács, György, and Frank Benseler. *Zur Ontologie Des Gesellschaftlichen Seins. 2 vols, Georg Lukács Werke*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984.

Lukács, György, and István Eörsi. *Record of a Life : An Autobiographical Sketch*. London: Verso, 1983.

Lukács, György, Hans Heinz Holz, and Theodor Pinkus. *Conversations with Lukács*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975.

Molnár, Miklós. *From Béla Kun to János Kádár: Seventy Years of Hungarian Communism*. New York: Berg : Distributed exclusively in the US and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Novack, George Edward. *Polemics in Marxist Philosophy.* New York: Monad Press : distributed by Pathfinder Press, 1978.

Parkinson, G. H. R. *Georg Lukács*. London ; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Rees, John. *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition, Revolutionary Studies.* London ; New York: Routledge, 1998.

Sziklai, László. *After the Proletarian Revolution: Georg Lukács's Marxist Development, 1930-1945.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992.

[1] A similar interpretation can be found in Paul Le Blanc's informative, yet unfortunately unpublished article on Lukács's development during the 1920's titled "*Spider and Fly: The Leninist Philosophy of George Lukács*."
[2] Lukács, *Interview with New Left Review*, cited in *George Lukács: Record of a Life*, pg. 178
[3] Lukács, *Blum Theses*, in *Political Writings, 1919-1929* , pg. 244
[4] Ibid., pg. 247
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., pg. 248
[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.
[10] After the fall of the Soviet Republic and a boycotting of the first elections in 1920, the HSDP, led by the conservative Peyer, made significant compromises with the Bethlen regime in what is referred to as the Bethlen-Peyer pact. Peyer's concessions to the counter-revolutionary regime included the following: allowing the government to maintain "the notion that [political] meetings required the authority's permission, were limited to certain locations, and could continued to be monitored"; a ban on open air meetings remained in force; union meetings were not allowed to deal with politics and there would be a ban on political strikes; and the government could still restrict the sale of newspapers. (Lorman, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary*, pgs. 113-117) In addition the HSDP leaders agreed "to declare that their interests were the same as those of the nation and country, which would require struggle and sacrifices," and to refrain from attempting to unionize civil servants, railway workers, or agricultural workers. (Lorman, *Counter-revolutionary Hungary*, pg. 117 ; Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary*, pg. 82) In exchange an amnesty was granted which excluded Communists and the HSDP was "allowed to seek representation in parliament and pursue normal party and union activities in Budapest and other urban areas." (Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary*, pg. 82) The full details of the pact were not made public at the time of the agreement and although when they later emerged in 1924, the HSDP denounced the pact, it "maintained its understanding with the government under a different guise." (Molnár, *From Béla Kun to János Kádár*, pg. 50)
[11] Program of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, Section IV, Subsection 8
[12] Lukács, 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, pg. xxix
[13] Lukács, *Blum Theses*, pg. 241
[14] Ibid., pgs. 241-242
[15] Ibid., pg. 242
[16] Ibid.
[17] Molnár, *From Béla Kun to János Kádár*, pgs. 38-39
[18] Lukács, *Blum Theses*, pg. 242
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., pg. 243
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., pgs. 240-241
[26] Le Blanc, "*Spider and Fly: The Leninist Philosophy of George Lukács*"
[27] Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern*, pg. 417
[28] Dimitrov, August 2nd Speech at Seventh Congress, in *Dimitrov on the United Front*, pg. 61
[29] Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern*, pgs. 425-426
[30] Dimitrov, August 13th Speech to the Seventh Congress, in *Dimitrov on the Popular Front*, pg. 87
[31] V.I. Lenin *Collected Works,* Vol. 22, pg. 133, cited in *Dimitrov on the Popular Front*, pgs. 97-98
[32] Dimitrov, August 13th Speech to the Seventh Congress, in *Dimitrov on the Popular Front*, pgs. 96-97
[33] Ibid., pgs. 94-95
[34] Lukács, *Blum Theses*, pg. 251
[35] Ibid., pg. 249
[36] Löwy, *George Lukács -- From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, pg. 198
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Lukács, 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, pgs. xxxiii-xxxv
[40] Löwy, *George Lukács -- From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, pg. 196
[41] Lukács, 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, pg. xxxv
[42] Rees, Introduction to *Tailism and the Dialectic*, pg. 33
[43] Lukács, *Der Junge Marx*, pg. 67 (my translation)
[44] Rees, Introduction to *Tailism and the Dialectic*, pg. 34
[45] See Sziklai, *After the Proletarian Revolution*, pgs. 72-74
[46] Ibid., pg. 51
[47] Ibid., pg. 56

[48] June, 1956 Discussion of the Blum Theses held at the Institute for Party History, in *Curriculum Vitae*, pg. 219, cited in Sziklai, *After the Proletarian Revolution*, pg. 56
[49] Sziklai, *After the Proletarian Revolution*, pg. 64
[50] Ibid., pg. 56
[51] Ibid., pg. 52
[52] Lukács, 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, pg. xxx; *The Process of Democratization*, pg. 134
[53] Lukács, *George Lukács: Record of a Life*, pg. 180
[54] Lukács, Foreword to *Magyar irodalom – magyar kultúra*, pg. 18, cited in Sziklai, *After the Revolution*, pg. 64
[55] Lukács, *George Lukács: Record of a Life*, pg. 122
[56] Lukács, Holz, and Pinkus, *Conversations with Lukács*, pg. 146
[57] Lukács, Foreword to *Magyar irodalom – magyar kultúra*, pg. 18, cited in Sziklai, *After the Revolution*, pg. 54