

# **RCIT-Theses on the United Front Tactic**

## *Theses on the Principles of the United Front Tactic and Its Application to the Current Conditions of Class Struggle*

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## **Preface**

*In what follows we detail the fundamentals and principles of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) on the issue of the united front tactic. These theses generalize based on our experience since then as well as on the further development of our political positions. In a forthcoming booklet to be published soon, we will elaborate our perspective on this subject in greater detail.*

*The theses given here are structured on those of our predecessor organization (League for a Revolutionary Communist International) which we adopted in January 1994. However, we have substantially revised them so that the current text represents a new document. Note that, when referring below to the revolutionary party, our intent is equally applicable to smaller pre-party formations.*

### **I. The Nature and Principles of the United Front Tactic**

1. The basic principles of the united front are simple. Their goal is to enable communists to extend their influence in the working class and among the oppressed – or to express it in the words of the Communist International “*towards the Masses.*” The basic principles of the united front apply to all agreements for delimited, practical, common actions which the revolutionary party proposes to, or undertakes with, other organizations based on the proletariat, on other exploited classes, or on groups of socially or nationally oppressed. These principles can be summed up in the military metaphor “*march separately, strike together.*” This means political and organizational independence of the revolutionary proletarian forces combined with unity of action against a common enemy. The aim of the united front tactic is (a) to establish the maximum unity of workers and oppressed in the struggle against the ruling class and imperialism and (b) to break the domination of non-revolutionary leaderships and win the workers and oppressed over to the struggle led by the revolutionary party.

2. These are the principles which govern the relations between the revolutionary vanguard and other organizations of the exploited and the oppressed in the struggle against capitalism, imperialism and all forms of reaction. They have various spheres of application. Primarily, they aim at joint actions with mass organizations of the working class and, secondly, with mass organizations of other oppressed and exploited classes and layers (e.g., poor peasants, urban poor). Under exceptional circumstances, the united front can include sectors of the bourgeoisie where it possesses mass influence and through objective circumstances is forced to fight against imperialist aggression, national oppression, etc.

3. The united front, bloc, or alliance, can potentially pass through the following phases: an appeal to form it, negotiations between organizations, the striking of an agreement, its active implementation, and eventually its breakup or dissolution. However, only in a minority of cases will it pass through all of these stages.

4. As an alliance which must be actively initiated, the united front should be distinguished from all episodic, co-incidental actions where no agreement on a common immediate goal or coordinated tactics is involved. Such coincidental actions, for example a fascist trade union supporting a justified workers’

strike, imply no advocacy of a bloc whatsoever. Similarly, the united front must be distinguished from mere participation in a mass demonstration whose political basis and leadership the revolutionary organization opposes, and for which it takes no responsibility. Here, the revolutionary party is *not* in a bloc with the leadership, gives no support to their slogans, criticizes them openly, and makes propaganda and agitation for its own slogans. In short, a united front must be formally struck between those organizations for the revolutionary proletariat to form temporary agreements for common actions.

5. Yet another distinction must be made between joint *political* actions and an exclusively military bloc, i.e., an agreement simply to coordinate fighting forces against a common enemy. Such agreements can be struck with bourgeois forces in a situation of war, without in any sense constituting a united front. However, in other circumstances, a military bloc – the formation of an anti-fascist workers militia or alliances during a civil war – may have a clearly-defined united front character. Mere military means are not the decisive issue, since war is the continuation of politics by other means. The question is what is the bloc for and with whom is it struck? More problematically, in some languages and national traditions, a distinction has been made between the *united front* proper, which is conceived of as a longer-term formal agreement involving a campaign, and *common or united actions* which are limited to a single event. Whatever the virtues of these terms one thing is clear: the basic principles of the united front apply to each and every one of them.

6. Thus, the united front is at its heart about establishing as close a relationship as possible between the revolutionary party and primarily the working class masses, and secondly with other oppressed layers. While such relationships between the party and the masses must be permanent, they must also constantly be changing since the class struggle itself is both permanent and changing in form. The united front is thus a *ubiquitous* tactic; a tactic that is repeatedly being deployed in one arena or another. However, no one form of the united front is a permanently-deployed part of the revolutionary party's strategy. The united front itself is not a strategy, but a tactic. Indeed, it involves a range of tactics set within the overall strategy of the proletariat. In pursuing any one form of the united front, revolutionaries must always keep before their eyes the overall goal: the seizure of state power by workers' and peasants' councils and militias and the establishment of a world communist society by means of proletarian revolution. To realize this in practice an independent revolutionary Bolshevik-Communist party is an indispensable necessity. Only such a party can embody full class independence from the bourgeoisie and lead the proletariat in the struggle to establish its own dictatorship.

7. But to reach this stage we have to transform revolutionary nuclei into mass parties which have won the confidence of the broadest layers of the exploited masses. However, today, the great majority of the workers in the world support non-revolutionary and even counter-revolutionary organizations. Revolutionaries must expose the nature of these organizations and deprive them of their leadership, or rather misleaderships, over the proletariat and oppressed. On its own, propagandistic exposure of their errors and crimes is insufficient to achieve this. It is necessary to demonstrate in practice that the reformist, petty-bourgeois-populist, or centrist cannot adequately defend or fight for working class and oppressed interests. The revolutionary party has to deploy a range of tactics which prove to the masses in the course of the class struggle that only *it* is the consistent working class party. The party, in turn, must learn how to lead actual mass struggles, to demonstrate its capacity as an alternative leadership. In this process it must demonstrate both its independent initiative and its ability to co-ordinate its forces loyally with other mass organizations of the working class and oppressed. The mass of the working class and the oppressed, not yet won over to the revolutionary leadership, must come to trust the communists in daily

battles and compare them favorable with their treacherous reformist and petty-bourgeois-populist leaders. In fact, it is in the very defining of the arena in which such comparisons will be made that the united front tactic plays such a vital role in the building of the revolutionary party.

8. By extension, the enduring gain of a correct united front policy is the exposure of the limitations of reformism, petty-bourgeois populism, Islamism, anarchism, syndicalism, centrism, and various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies and programs within the working class, and the eventual replacement of all vacillating and inconsistent leaderships with a revolutionary communist one. Therefore, at every stage, the united front policy should be used to strengthen the revolutionary organization by increasing recruitment and deepening its roots within mass organizations.

9. However, the united front is not exclusively and solely a means to build the revolutionary party. Rather, it is a tactic in the ongoing class struggle which seeks to establish the broadest possible fighting unity for the exploited and oppressed masses regardless of their present political differentiation. The purpose of this unity is to repulse the attacks of the bosses and bourgeois governments and to secure better economic, social and political conditions for the working class and its allies in a way that brings nearer the goal of overthrowing capitalism. In this sense, the united front arises in the first place from the needs of the class struggle. For this very reason, revolutionaries do not simply respond to calls for common action against the class enemy but are the first to initiate the call whenever the class struggle demands united action.

10. As a consequence, on the one hand, united front tactics presuppose the maintenance of an independently organized revolutionary organization based on a transitional programme for the seizure of state power and the overthrow of capitalism. This party must participate as an independent detachment and not dissolve itself in the united front. On the other hand, the necessity of the united front presupposes the existence of broad non-revolutionary masses under the sway of other political forces.

11. The united front cannot be regarded as an uninterrupted series of actions with the same partner up to and including the seizure of power. Its repeated use constitutes only a series of tactics within the framework of the overall strategy of the proletarian vanguard party. This strategy by necessity includes the independent actions of the party. In widely different forms, the united front is constantly being struck and broken. It must never be turned into a systematic subordination of the proletarian vanguard to any limited platform of demands which are acceptable to various non-revolutionary leaders of mass organizations. This would be to relegate the revolutionary programme itself to passive propaganda and restrict agitation solely to immediate or, at best, transitional demands.

### **Ultra-Left and Opportunist Dangers**

12. The united front is a *differentiated unity*. It is common action for clearly limited and prescribed goals; it also entails sharpest criticism of the united front partners. Without the former, capitalist attacks cannot be repelled or new gains won; without the latter gains cannot be consolidated nor the revolution advanced. All mistakes in the application of the united front begin when this differentiated unity is

replaced by a *formal identity* between the tasks of the revolutionary organization and the limited and immediate tasks of the class.

13. Ultra-leftism invariably begins when the revolutionary program is advanced in contradiction to the demands essential to the immediate tasks facing the mass of the working class. For the ultra-leftist, the united front is intentionally proposed as an ultimatum, deliberately courting its rejection by reformist and centrist leaders in the vain belief that this exposes them. However, such “exposure” is, in reality, purely rhetorical in nature. Reformist leaders are not exposed because they fail to carry out revolutionary tactics or strategy but precisely because they fail to fight for the immediate interests of the masses. The sectarians, who limit themselves exclusively to denunciations, avoid being measured on the practical terrain of the class struggle, fearing that they will succumb to opportunist temptations.

14. The opportunist starts not from the platform of struggle, or even a single demand dictated by the objective needs of the class struggle, but rather by what the present consciousness of the masses is deemed to be or, worse, what their leaders can be expected to accept. In comparison, the scope of the proposals put forward by revolutionaries for a united front, while likely to be less than the “full program” is also likely to be considerably greater than the timid proposals of the reformist leaders, and even ahead of the social-general consciousness of the masses. At the same time, the slogans proposed for the united front must relate to the current consciousness of the advanced workers, both to win them over to the joint struggle as well as to exert pressure of the reformist leaders. The aim of the united front must be to link the present consciousness of the masses (and especially its advanced sections) to the urgent tasks of the day, as specifically dictated by the nature of the enemies’ attacks. The slogans of the united front must enable the revolutionary vanguard to lead the masses into the struggle.

15. Because the united front is not a strategy, there is no such thing as a “united front program” that extends from today’s struggle to the seizure of power. The revolutionary organization advances those parts of its program that appear necessary to unite broader forces in a practical fight. Having determined the nature of the attack and the balance of class forces, the revolutionary organization raises concrete demands that, taken together, can create the basis for a united fight against this present attack, in order to repel it, or by extension secure new advances.

16. The character of the demands to be fought for in the united front does not fall into any schematic categorization. The demands must be specific, precise and avoid all extraneous and artificial demands or ideological dressing that does not pertain to the achievement of the common goal. Any concrete united front proposal may consist of only a single demand; but can also be composed of a single type of demands; e.g., immediate economic demands, democratic demands, or transitional demands. Finally, the proposal for a united front can be put forward or forged as a platform of several demands tied together in a series of actions designed to meet a particular crisis. Thus it follows that a united front can involve a single action – e.g., a strike or an armed action – or it can incorporate a longer campaign of various actions. The only valid criticism of a united front proposal would be that it entirely excludes an essential demand for action; action to which the masses can be won over and which exposes their leaders if the proposal is refused. Therefore, the absence of numerous revolutionary demands from a united front platform cannot be taken as a valid criticism; indeed, the presence of such demands in a non-revolutionary situation is a sure sign of passive propagandism, scholasticism and sectarianism. However, this is not the case when there is a mass upswing in the class struggle signaling the development of a

revolutionary situation. In such a situation it becomes indispensable to fight for such multiple revolutionary demands as the best expression of the united front.

17. The demands must be associated with clear and precise methods of struggle (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, defense squads, armed militias) and forms of organization (e.g., strike committees, mobilization committee, soviets). The united front can thus vary in form and duration depending on the nature of the attack it seeks to repel. Committees which exist to co-ordinate a series of diverse or repeated actions aimed at achieving the objective are united front organizations; in this sense the united front is more than the action itself (e.g., a demonstration); rather it embraces the organizational preparation in advance of the action as well as its post festum evaluation.

### **The United Front Tactic, the Working Class, and Other Oppressed Layers and Classes**

18. With which types of forces is it permissible to form a united front, or a bloc based on united front principles? There is no one answer to this question. Rather it depends on the situation, the character of the country (imperialist, semi-colonial or degenerated workers state), the objectives of the struggle, the class forces involved, and the degree of class differentiation. As a general guideline, revolutionaries initiate proposals for a united front tactic towards forces which have a mass base inside the working class and other oppressed layers and classes (usually these are reformist or petty-bourgeois-populist organizations). In exceptional circumstances, these can also be bourgeois and sometimes even centrist organizations which are objectively in a confrontation with reactionary forces (e.g., ruling class, imperialist powers, racist or fascist forces).

19. By contrast, the *popular front* is a bloc between bourgeois forces and workers' organizations in which the latter accept programs that restrict the workers within the limits set by private property and which protect the bourgeois state. Thus, what distinguishes a popular front from a united front is not the participation of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces in itself, but rather the political subordination of the proletariat to the platform of the bourgeoisie in a popular front.

20. A popular front can also be very dangerous when it involves very weak bourgeois forces (the "shadow of the bourgeoisie"). Workers' parties which have undertaken such ostensible united fronts with weak bourgeois forces "in defense of democracy," for example, can find themselves defending the bourgeoisie and capitalism against the proletariat (as happened in Spain in 1936, Chile in 1973, and Greece in 2015). Whichever way it's reached, wittingly or unwittingly, the popular front is, as Trotsky said, a noose around the neck of the proletariat.

21. No popular front has ever opened the road to socialism. On the contrary, they have repeatedly opened the road to anti-working class counter-revolution. Genuine Trotskyists always fight against popular fronts. They are in favor of *working class unity* and for the independence from and not unity with the bourgeoisie. We place demands on all the workers' parties and unions, whose leaders have taken them down the road of the popular front and, consequently, class collaboration and insist that they break with the capitalist parties, defend workers' rights, and take up the fight for workers' power. Such demands to break with the bourgeoisie are similarly directed to petty-bourgeois populist forces which

have a mass base among the workers and oppressed, as the Bolsheviks did it towards the Social-Revolutionaries in Russia until 1917 (e.g., Castro-Chavista organizations in Latin America, certain Islamist-populist organizations in the Middle East).

22. Naturally there are certain differences in the application of the united front tactic in imperialist as opposed to semi-colonial countries, as well as between different countries within each such category. In Western Europe, Canada, and Australia bourgeois workers' parties play an important role within the working class. However, at the same time they are undergoing massive bourgeoisification. In other imperialist countries, either no bourgeois workers' parties exist (the US, China, Russia) or only very weak ones do (Japan). In the countries of the South (where nowadays  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world proletariat live) there are no or only weak bourgeois workers' parties (important exceptions are India and South Africa). At the same time radical (petty-)bourgeois-populist formations often do play an influential role among the working class and the oppressed in these countries. Petty-bourgeois-populist formations also play an increasingly influential role among migrants – a growing sector of the working class – within imperialist countries. Under certain circumstances, new petty-bourgeois-populist forces can possess an influential role among sectors of the workers and youth in imperialist countries (e.g., the Occupy Movement in the US; PODEMOS in Spain)

23. Given the conditions in colonies and semi-colonies, even the national bourgeoisie, or sectors of it, can at times be forced to form alliances with oppressed classes against reactionary forces. This is also true for bourgeois forces among oppressed layers in the imperialist countries (e.g., migrants, oppressed nations). The national bourgeoisie can suddenly find itself crushed and exploited by imperialist big capital, discriminated against via national oppression, or oppressed by imperialist armed intervention or by local military forces acting for imperialism. Under such pressure, bourgeois nationalist parties not only resort to anti-imperialist rhetoric but, on rare occasions, may also enter into a real struggle with the imperialists or their local agents.

24. Normally, under such conditions, it is the radical petty-bourgeoisie which engages inconsistently in such struggles and with whom the proletariat can form a *democratic or anti-imperialist united front*. But we cannot exclude the possibility that a bourgeois party, with a mass plebeian following, might also do so. Under such conditions, it too might be included in the proposal for a democratic or anti-imperialist united front. This is possible, of course, on the condition that the proletariat's hands are not tied, nor is it forced to renounce the struggle for power – let alone any promised political support for a bourgeois government; such a united front would *not* be a popular front.

25. In semi-colonies (and even under certain very specific circumstances in imperialist countries and degenerated workers states), politically bourgeois forces which have a mass plebeian following, or even a working class following, and which suffer from systematic social oppression (e.g., ethnic and national minorities, women) could participate in actions based on united front principles without this transforming such a bloc into a popular front. Clearly, the actions would be defensive and limited in scope and duration.

26. The key question would then be whether the demands which such a bloc would fight for are sufficient for, or even necessary, for the workers' *own* struggle at this particular conjuncture. Bourgeois parties of the nationally oppressed, or bourgeois women's organizations, might be drawn into united actions or campaigns, especially where their leaders hold the allegiance of large sectors of the oppressed,

particularly of the oppressed workers. For the revolutionary party, the aim of such a united front, other than maximizing opposition to bourgeois reaction, would be to break away the proletariat elements from the bourgeois leadership of the oppressed. Towards this goal, joint action would contribute by exposing the character of this leadership in the course of the struggle.

### **The United Front Tactic and the Non-Revolutionary Leaderships of the Workers and Oppressed**

27. The permissibility or non-permissibility of any united front does not depend upon the past record of the leaders of the other parties in the bloc. If the formation of a united front becomes necessary with mass workers' organizations led by today's versions of Kerensky, Noske, Zorgiebel or Stalin – all of whom, in their original incarnation, were responsible for the murder of revolutionary workers – we cannot nevertheless rule out forming a united front with them. Forming a united front with counter-revolutionary leaders is a necessary evil, hence the famous dictum that the united front might get struck with "the devil and his grandmother." That's to say that the offer of forming a united front does not constitute a vote of confidence for counter-revolutionary leadership to whom it is proposed.

28. Thus, the freedom to criticize these leaders throughout the common action is an essential principle of the united front. Such criticism must be directed at the vacillations of the bloc partners in carrying out the objectives of the united front, as well as their broader political failings. There should be no common propaganda, as this can only be done at the cost of placing aside important – even decisive – differences between revolution and reformism. The only common publications which are permissible are those specifically associated with the united front (e.g., strike committee bulletins, leaflets for mobilizing demonstrations) and which are designed *only* to agitate for the united front demands and objectives. The precise balance between common action and criticism cannot be established by some predetermined formula. We reserve the right to criticize our partners before, during, and after the common action. When, and in what form, we exercise that right depends on concrete judgments made in specific circumstances. But it is obligatory that such criticism be made.

29. The united front must be addressed to the rank and file as well as to its leadership. However, we reject the notion of coalescing a united front from below, *only* because it is a self-defeating and ultra-left trap. If the workers could indeed be persuaded to abandon their leadership by such a direct and unilateral appeal, there would be no need for the united front in the first place. The purpose of directing the united front appeal to the leaders is to draw the latter into action. It is in this way, rather than by means of declamatory exposure, that we can prove to the masses how fatal the limitations of their leaders actually are.

30. In the great majority of cases, the proposal for a united front will remain just that, and no practical agreement will be reached with the reformist, populist, and other leaders to whom it is addressed. In such conditions, the proposal will remain part of an agitational and popular propaganda campaign aimed at the rank and file members of the non-revolutionary organizations.

31. Even when some success has been achieved in breaking away radicalized workers from their non-revolutionary leadership, the united front continues to retain its full validity and force for those who



remain behind. In such cases, implementing the united front from below may indeed bear fruit, after the non-revolutionary leaders have refused to act in concert with the revolutionaries. As an extension of what we wrote above (see Thesis 29), at this point it is necessary to combine denunciations of the leaders with proposals for action aimed at the rank and file or individuals under revolutionary leadership. But even here part of the aim of this tactic is to generate pressure from within the organization upon its leaders to act. If successful, this can only have the effect of drawing even more layers into action.

32. Dissolving the united front can be as important as forming it. When the united front has served its purpose, and its goal has been either achieved or lost, the united front needs to be redefined or dismantled and the appropriate lessons drawn for the forces involved. The following circumstances may necessitate the dissolution of the united front: (1) When it is maintained only as diplomatic or literary exercise and entails no obligation on the part of bloc partners to act; (2) When bloc partners are actually sabotaging or undermining the aims of the united front either by not implementing it or by compromising with the class enemy; (3) When the partners of the united front refuse to take seriously its extension to other mass forces, and instead restrict membership in the bloc to sect like proportions. Where such circumstances necessitate dissolution of the united front, at the same time revolutionaries must still attempt, as far as possible, to continue the united struggle with the informal leaders of the rank and file, encouraging them to split with the organization's formal leadership and establish their own, while winning over to their own ranks the best elements from their respective non-revolutionary organizations.

33. Short-term blocs with centrist organizations without mass influence can be legitimate for the purpose of organizing practical actions. They are subject to the same principles as those for the examples of the united front discussed above. However, they cannot, as Trotsky repeatedly emphasized, really be considered as united fronts given the lack of influence of these organizations among the working class and the oppressed. For small communist pre-party organizations, such short-term blocs should only play a secondary role in comparison with proposals for cooperation directed to the mass organizations.

34. While adhering to the above considerations is a necessary condition if the united front is to be principled, it is not sufficient in itself to guarantee either its principled nature or its success. Only a concrete analysis of a situation can determine what the correct basis for a united front proposal is. Leadership and experience, accumulated over years through involvement in the class struggle, is required to determine what united front demands are permissible and necessary and to which forces these demands may be addressed. However, by understanding the basic purpose and principles of the united front, revolutionaries can prevent many unnecessary basic errors.

## II. Various Applications of the United Front

35. The united front tactic was elaborated by the Bolsheviks and first codified at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1922. By that time, the post-war revolutionary tide had ebbed. Throughout the world, the capitalist classes were on the offensive and the young Communist Parties had failed to win over a majority of the working class in most developed capitalist countries. At the same time, a wave of anti-imperialist liberation struggles began in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. However, in these latter countries, the working class represented only a small fraction of the population and bourgeois forces wielded huge influence with large sectors of the petty-bourgeois, peasant-dominated population. Under such conditions, the Comintern developed the *workers united front tactic* as well as the *anti-imperialist united front tactic*.

36. Obviously, there have been important developments since the 1920s and '30s. While at that time, the huge majority of the world proletariat was situated in the old imperialist countries, today quite the reverse is true and the focus of the proletariat has moved to the South. At the same time, there are increasing divisions within the respective proletariats of the imperialist metropolises, divisions between the privileged labor aristocracy (the traditional main bases of the reformist parties and trade unions) and the broad mass of the working class. During the course of decades, social democracy and Stalinism underwent intense bourgeoisification and were integrated into the accepted political milieu of many bourgeois states. While this occurred, in parallel there arose new layers of radicalized, mostly young, workers and oppressed. However, because of the substantial weakening of *authentic* revolutionary forces, the radicalization of the younger generation in most cases has led to the formation of new populist or radical-reformist formations. Revolutionaries must attentively study these changes, and should incorporate into their tactical arsenal the lessons gained. To do so, they should apply the method elaborated by the Comintern and, later, the Fourth International to current concrete conditions. Primarily, we should be aware of the dominant influence among the working class and the oppressed which (petty-)bourgeois forces wield, as a result of the developments just cited. Clearly, rather than making the application of the united front tactic superfluous, these developments only augment its importance.

37. The Marxist united front tactic contains, firstly, the *workers' united front*. Its goal is the broadest possible *unity of the working class* in the concrete struggle against the bourgeoisie, together with the splitting the proletariat away from its reformist and populist leaders. Furthermore, the Marxist united front also encompasses the *democratic or anti-imperialist united front*. The goal of this latter united front is to create an alliance with the *non-proletarian oppressed classes* under the leadership of the proletariat in a common struggle against reaction (racism, dictatorship, imperialism, etc.), while wresting away leadership from the same (petty-)bourgeois forces to which these non-proletarians previously looked.

38. However, such categorizations must not be understood schematically. In real life, there are often overlaps and combinations with characteristics of both the workers' united front and the democratic or anti-imperialist united front. In any case, with few exceptions, the same principles apply for all forms of the united front. As we mentioned above, bourgeois workers' parties (social democracy, Stalinism) play a dominant role for the working class in only a relatively few countries – mainly in Western Europe. Furthermore, these parties have and are continuing to rapidly bourgeoisify. Thus, the workers' united front should be directed not only to the traditional reformist organizations but often also to (petty-

)bourgeois populist forces which wield a significant influence inside the working class. Furthermore there are numerous political class struggles (e.g., against imperialist war, against racism, for democratic rights) which by their nature mobilize not only organizations of the working class but also of other oppressed layers and classes.

### **The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony within the United Front**

39. The central task of revolutionaries consists in always focusing their attention on the struggle for *proletarian hegemony* in their application of the united front tactic. This means, in particular, the need to fight for the strengthening the revolutionary forces within the united front at the expense of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces (social democracy, Stalinism, petty-bourgeois populists, Islamists, etc.). This is because the latter constellations constitute an obstacle to the political independence of the proletariat and other oppressed layers and, it follows, makes them politically dependent on the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the paramount importance of achieving the political hegemony of the proletariat also requires revolutionaries to advance the creation of an alliance with the peasants and other oppressed layers *under the leadership of the proletariat*.

40. In order to establish proletarian hegemony within the framework of the united front, Communist Parties must make demands on the reformists, petty-bourgeois-populists, and centrists to defend the interests of the workers and the oppressed against the capitalist offensive. Such demands are manifested in the slogan raised by the Comintern "*March separately, strike together.*" No less, communists need to also demand that the non-communist organizations of the working class, the peasantry, the urban poor, oppressed nations, migrants, etc. (parties, trade unions, etc.) break with the bourgeoisie and take up the struggle for workers' and popular councils and militias.

41. We must remember that the entire objective of the united front is to achieve maximum unity in action in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeois ruling class and imperialism by means of an alliance between it and its allied layers. At the heart of the united front is the struggle for *class independence* from the bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers. Thus, its guiding principle is the challenge which the revolutionary organization addresses to reformist and populist leaders of mass workers and oppressed organizations: "*Break with the bourgeoisie!*" This being so, the tactic of the united front is applicable to a range of scenarios, from the most limited and defensive actions up to a broad-based mass offensive against the entire bourgeois order. The latter is typical of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, when the gauntlet is thrown down as a challenge to the reformist and populist misleaders "*Break with the bourgeoisie; take the road of struggle for a workers' government!*" or for "*a workers' and peasants' government!*" as circumstances dictate.

42. The principles of the workers' united front find a wide range of applications in trade unions and similar mass organizations. But the united front cannot be restricted exclusively to the trade unions as the Bordigists sought to do. Rather, it's equally applicable at times of heightened class struggle, and even more so by political parties claiming to represent the interests of the workers respectively the oppressed and which, in fact, actually do organize broad sections of the proletariat or the peasants and other oppressed layers. In such contexts, the purpose of the united front is to drag the reformist and populist

leaders out of their union offices, their parliamentary chambers, their banquets and secret meetings with the class enemy, into the streets and force them to join the class struggle – i.e., participate in mass demonstrations, picket lines, etc., and, in revolutionary conditions, onto the barricades. The fact that these leaders may ultimately prove themselves to be lackeys of the bourgeoisie can be no argument for not proposing a united front to them. What is decisive is that these traitors still hold, if not the confidence, then at least control over large masses of the proletariat and, it follows, the revolutionary party has not yet won the confidence or the organized leadership of these masses.

43. In both imperialist and semi-colonial countries, revolutionaries should initially direct the united front tactic towards workers' organizations or mass organizations with strong roots among the working class. This includes not only trade unions and workers' parties, but also organizations representing proletarian women, migrants, youth, etc. Proposals can be made to traditional bourgeois workers parties (mainly social democrats and Stalinists) as well as to newer workers' parties (e.g., the former *Democratic Labor Party* in South Korea or the *Partido de los Trabajadores* in Bolivia). In exceptional circumstances, where centrists wield mass influence, this tactic can also applied to them (e.g., FIT in Argentina)

44. Moreover, the united front tactic also plays a central role in the struggle against fascism (*anti-fascist united front*). Here, each fascist movement must be specifically analyzed and distinguished from versions of right-wing populism and Bonapartism, as fascism aims at a "*particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society*" (Trotsky). The anti-fascist united front cannot be separated from other forms of this tactic (one that fights for democracy, etc.); it adheres to the same rules and principles applied in other variations of the tactic. The libertarian and ultra-left approaches tend to differentiate the anti-fascist struggle from the general one (which focuses on social and democratic realms). This differentiation results in two fundamental errors: (a) The ultra-left forces act in place of the working class and; (b) the adoption of a Popular Front tactic involving bourgeois parties and churches, which assume strong political influence in such alliances. A special feature of the anti-fascist united front is the need to create from the outset joint self-defense groups of workers (whether unionized or not), migrants and leftist activists against fascist forces. This is because, neither the police nor the judiciary are reliable forces in the struggle against fascist attacks; rather they protect the latter. Yet another deviation from the united front is the so-called "red-brown" strategy in which the left forms an alliance with fascists to fight against capital and its state.

45. Petty-bourgeois forces often have tremendous influence on the working class in semi-colonial countries and among oppressed peoples or migrants in imperialist metropolises. Various examples of this would include: Castro-Chavista organizations in Latin America (the Bolivarian parties and organizations in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and populist mass organizations in Argentina, etc.); certain Islamist-populist organizations in the Middle East and Asia (e.g., Hamas, al-Qadri's PAT in Pakistan, various FSA and Islamist rebel groups in Syria, Libya, and Egypt, and the Houthis in Yemen); progressive-populist organizations in Asia and Africa etc.; the Northern Irish Sinn Fein/IRA before its capitulation in 1998; Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland, the Basque HB and its successor organizations, CUP in Catalonia, etc.; numerous migrant organizations in the imperialist countries, and organizations of blacks in the US and Britain, etc.

46. Furthermore, revolutionaries should also apply the united front tactic to mass organizations which represent other oppressed layers (e.g., poor peasants, urban poor, lower strata of the intelligencia, etc.). Here, appropriate examples would include: the MST or various *favela* organizations in Brazil;

militant peasant organizations in Africa; and various petty-bourgeois democratic groups in Egypt, Tunisia, etc. Similarly, petty-bourgeois nationalist organizations of oppressed peoples (e.g., the Palestinian Balad party in Israel) and of migrants should also be approached.

47. Finally, revolutionaries must always consider new formations spawned by developments on the ground. In the last few years, in light of the rapid bourgeoisification of traditional reformist workers parties and the failure of centrists, new petty-bourgeois populist forces have emerged in imperialist countries; for example the Occupy Movement in the US in 2011 and PODEMOS in Spain. Such formations can wield broad influence among the working class and youth. Consequently, revolutionaries should apply the united front tactic towards such formations as well.

48. Soviets are the highest form of a united front. They appear in a revolutionary situation and reflect a contradiction: on the one side, the power of the exploiting class, many times in a form of a popular front, as opposed to the power of the working class on the other. One of these two opposing forces must win and smash the other. Without revolutionary leadership of the Soviets, they will be led by reformists, bourgeois forces, populists and centrists who will subordinate the working class to the power of the capitalist class. Within the soviets, revolutionaries must fight for leadership with the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets.*" However, in certain situations *other* forms of working class organizations can be the force that leads the revolution. For example, when Soviets are still under the leadership of reformists and centrists who represent an earlier phase of the revolution, actions committees can take the lead and represent the majority of the active workers. After the revolution, the Soviets in power manifest working class power. They can be form a socialist coalition government only with forces that defend the socialist revolution. By contrast, the slogan of the counter revolution is "*Soviets without the Communists.*"

### **The United Front Tactic and Bourgeois Forces**

49. As Trotsky wrote in the *Transitional Program*, the Marxist tactic of the united front is based on an "anti-bourgeois" thrust, thereby emphasizing the need to counterpose organizations of the working class and its allied layers and classes to all blocs with the parties or individual representatives of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat does *not* refuse the support of sympathetic individuals from the bourgeoisie for its *own actions*. In the imperialist countries, the bourgeois parties are incapable of any systematic progressive actions and revolutionaries must therefore oppose these parties' participation in common fronts with organizations of the workers and oppressed. Under *all* circumstances revolutionaries reject any call for support of a government of the reformist workers parties with the parties of the bourgeoisie, a "Left" coalition or Popular Front. If an organized pseudo-united front or popular front is formed between mass workers' organizations and bourgeois-imperialist parties, revolutionaries must strive to develop tactics for expelling the latter from this front by demonstrating to the workers that bourgeois parties are incapable of mass struggle; that they only obstruct and betray such struggles; and that the reformist leaders constantly use the need to retain their support as a pretext for actually avoiding vital struggles.

50. Things are somewhat different with regard to bourgeois forces in semi-colonial countries or ethnical or national oppressed layers within imperialist countries. Given imperialist oppression, these bourgeois forces are under constant pressure from above. At the same time, they often wield significant

influence over the workers and other oppressed layers who create pressure from below. Thus, under certain circumstances, in such cases the application of the united front tactic towards bourgeois forces can be justified; for example: the Chinese Kuomintang in the 1920s; the Baathists when they resisted US aggression; the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 coup in Egypt; the *Red Shirt*-movement in Thailand during the struggle against the coup, etc. In any case of coup d'état, revolutionaries should defend a popular front or a bourgeois-populist government against the counter-revolution, *without* lending it any political support (e.g., the 1973 coup against Allende in Chile; that of 2013 against the Morsi government in Egypt; against the government of the Taksim party in Thailand in 2006 and 2014; and the PT-led popular front government in Brazil 2016).

51. At the same time, revolutionaries should never forget that the bourgeoisie of oppressed peoples will immediately betray the struggle at the next possible opportunity. Hence, revolutionaries must under no circumstances subordinate or curtail their own demands, immediate or historic, for the purpose of winning such uncertain allies from the petit bourgeoisie or maverick bourgeois notables. In imperialist countries, the bourgeois strata of the oppressed are the main force for compromise and surrender of the interests of the oppressed. Therefore, the proletariat must strive to break their hegemony, disintegrate their "popular fronts," and replace them with a united front led by the working class under the leadership of the revolutionary party as early as possible. However, it still may be necessary to organize common actions with and even participate in existing popular front campaigns with the aim of breaking bourgeois hegemony.

52. Given the bourgeoisie's vacillating character and constant readiness for treachery, revolutionaries reserve no place for it in the united front. By contrast, they do actively seek the participation of plebian and poorer sectors of the petit bourgeoisie. At *no time* must the working class sacrifice its struggle and refrain from making independent class demands against native capitalism and the national bourgeoisie in order to secure a united front with it. Doing so would constitute a joining a popular front.

53. The anti-imperialist united front tactic in no way implies giving support to so-called "anti-imperialist governments." Communists cannot, under any circumstances, give support to a bourgeois government, i.e., to a government of their own exploiters. Any government claiming to be "*above classes*" or representative of "*the people as a whole*" is peddling deceptions. We *do* support any serious action of such governments taken against imperialism (e.g., the nationalization or expropriation of imperialist corporations) or against a right-wing coup d'état. The working class and the oppressed *can* lend their support to the fight for democratic rights, insofar as these rights allow them to organize and develop their own revolutionary struggle. But such struggles and slogans should never become an end in themselves, being seen as self-contained or self-limiting once erected. Rather, soviets must eventually replace even the freest parliaments; and a workers' dictatorship the democratic republic.

54. Communists should support and participate in military actions taken against imperialism (e.g., in Nicaragua against the *Contras*, in Argentina against Britain in the Malvinas, in Afghanistan and Iraq against imperialist aggressors, in Palestine against Zionism); in such struggles they should fight for the arming of the workers and the oppressed, and for the establishment of democratically controlled workers' and popular militias. Similarly, where civil war erupts around a rebellion against a dictatorship, communists may enter a military united front, whenever possible as an independent armed force, accepting common discipline in battle, making agreements under a common command. We recognize that military united fronts are one form of the united front—a form not qualitatively different from united

actions for political goals. When we call for the military victory of such movements in their fight against imperialism or its agents, we are not endorsing victory for their political program. Within such a united front we struggle for our own program and fight to split the workers and poor peasants away from the bourgeoisie, steering it towards a road leading to a workers' and peasants' government.

### **The United Front Tactic and Slogans about Government**

55. The united front tactic also involves making demands on the "*parties of petty bourgeois democracy*" (Trotsky) – i.e., social democrats, Stalinists, petty-bourgeois populists – to break with the bourgeoisie and struggle for a workers' and peasants' government or (in most imperialist countries) a workers' government. In moments of acute political crisis this can become *the* major slogan of the day. What is an authentic government of the workers and peasants? One that takes decisive actions to disarm the bourgeoisie and arm the workers and peasants; one that aids the workers and peasants in the struggle to seize the key vantage points of capitalist power – the banks and the big monopolies. Clearly such measures cannot be carried out via electoral and parliamentary politics. To reformist workers and peasants who harbor illusions that they, in fact, *can* achieve this, we say: "*Go ahead, elect your parties to office; force them to attempt taking such measures if you can; but be ready, if your leaders take any serious measures threatening private property, to mobilize your unions and your parties for the inevitable bourgeois declaration of civil war. We will critically support your parties' electoral victory and defend them against bourgeois attack.*" To centrist workers who believe that a combination of a parliamentary victory and independent mass mobilization is sufficient we say: "*It is suicidal to tie workers' mass actions to electoral timetables, to respect majorities and minorities, and to fail attacking the real core of the state, and its special bodies of armed men, out of some notion of constitutional or legal scruples. The 'workers' and peasant government' that does not win over the soldiers and their weapons, tearing them away from the bourgeois officer corps; the high command, etc., that does not arm a workers' and peasant militia and disarm and dissolve the police force will have its throat cut.*"

56. For communists to support the taking of power by any non-revolutionary political force, two main conditions must prevail. First, it must be a mass organization of the working class or the oppressed. Second, communists must make it clear that they will remain in political opposition to such a government. Revolutionaries would defend this government against any attempted overthrow by right-wing forces, without at the same time lending it any political support. They would also support only those governmental measures which really serve the interests of the workers and oppressed.

57. Under certain exceptional circumstances, communists can themselves form a common government with non-revolutionary forces drawn from the workers and peasants. Such a government would not yet constitute the proletarian dictatorship. But, as the Communist International made clear, with strict conditions attached, communists could offer their backing to this government. Such a government must be based on workers' and peasants' councils and militias. It should at once attack and disarm the bourgeoisie as a class. It should impose workers' control of production and allow full freedom of criticism of the government's actions by communists. In such a government, communists may constitute a minority. In short, such governments are revolutionary workers' and peasants' governments, transitional to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communists would seek to use their positions in such a

government to complete the overthrow of the capitalist class and to install a new revolutionary dictatorship.

58. However, it is utterly wrong to assume that revolutionaries must fight for governments of parties representing the "*parties of petty bourgeois democracy*" as a necessary and unavoidable stage. In certain cases, communists will call for non-revolutionary parties of the workers and peasants to take power. They will combine such support with putting forth a concrete transitional program (expropriation of the bourgeoisie, public works programs, etc.) as well as the demand that these governments should base themselves on mobilizations and mass organizations of the workers and oppressed (soviets, trade unions, etc.). At the same time, revolutionaries should never stop warning the working class and the poor peasantry that such a bourgeois workers' and peasant government will maintain and reinforce the capitalist state. We can never call for a government of bourgeois forces, or for a coalition between workers' and peasants' parties and such forces.

59. The united front tactic also recognizes the possible entry of communists in non-revolutionary – reformist, petty-bourgeois populist or centrist – parties (i.e., the tactic of entrism). This tactic is legitimate under certain conditions: the party represents a significant sector of the radical workers, oppressed or youth moving to the left; there is a true possibility to openly argue for the revolutionary program within the party. Such entrism will not be of long duration, since the party leadership will not tolerate a consistent communist opposition, and a longer stay inside the party could only be achieved through opportunist adaptations. This is proven through the experience of various centrist groups which lodged themselves for years or decades in such parties (e.g., the CWI in the past and the IMT until today, the Morenoites in their Peronist phase, the Lambertists in social democracy)

### **The United Front Tactic during Elections**

60. Revolutionaries should also, if possible, apply the united front tactic during election campaigns. Elections, particularly in periods of low-level class struggle, are an important arena of class struggle. Revolutionaries strive not to stand aside when class-conscious sectors of the proletariat participate in the electoral campaign and the elections themselves; rather they undertake to intervene with appropriate tactics. This means that, when it is not possible for revolutionary communist candidates to stand, we can give electoral backing to the candidates of the mass working class organizations, in particular those who have the support of the most militant sections of our class. In general, critical support for non-revolutionary workers parties is a legitimate tactic for helping class-conscious workers to overcome their illusions in reformist leaderships. However, this tactic must not be applied schematically. In situations where a bourgeois workers' party (usually as a governmental party) serves as a whip or executioner in the implementation of serious attacks on the working class – austerity programs, imperialist wars, racist hatred, attacks on democratic rights, etc. – it is necessary that revolutionaries *not* call for the electoral support of this party, with the aim that vanguard workers will break with it. Concretely, we would either call for critical support for another party which better reflects the desire of the progressive workers and oppressed to fight back or, if such a party does not stand at the elections, call for a blank vote.



61. In countries, where no bourgeois workers' party (not even a reformist one) exists or where the existing bourgeois workers' parties are already so degenerated that they repel the workers' vanguard, revolutionaries call upon the workers' vanguard and mass organizations to found a *new workers' party* (or "*Labor Party*"). Here, too, interim stages are conceivable. Revolutionaries might support alliances towards such a goal or the foundation of new organizations of oppressed layers (e.g., migrant organizations) which could also stand at elections.

62. The demand for a *Labor Party* is a special application of the united front tactic used by small Communist forces engaged with larger working class formations (e.g., trade unions) in countries where a mass bourgeois workers' party does not exist. Such a Labor Party must be independent of the capitalist and petit-bourgeois parties, and during election campaigns run against them. This tactic can be successful in a period of intensified working class struggle, something which we can anticipate in the coming period. Such a party should *not* be political propaganda block that merely hides the betrayal of the reformist and the centrists. Rather, within the framework of a Labor Party, Communists do *not* call for a reformist measures as a step forward, but struggle for the adoption of the full transitional program as the program of this party. In this way, Communists constitute the revolutionary tendency, one that fights for the leadership of the party by exposing the betrayal of the reformists and the centrists in the actual struggle. This can be done by making a minimal number of appropriate transitional demands which unify and mobilize the workers and the oppressed against the capitalist class enemy, using the tactic of the united front with other forces against the common enemy according to the principle "*march separately, strike together.*"

63. When no bourgeois workers' parties with mass influence exist, or those that do exist are subject to such massive bourgeoisification, if at the same time there are petty-bourgeois populist parties with mass influence among the working class or the oppressed, critical electoral support for the latter is legitimate. The Bolsheviks did so for the petty-bourgeois populist parties of the Trudoviks and the Social-Revolutionaries in Russia; later on the Communist International did the same towards populist forces in Mexico in 1923, as did the US-Trotskyists with the Farmer-Labor Party in the 1930s. Today, such forces might be petty-bourgeois populist in semi-colonial countries (e.g., Evo Morales and the MAS at the first elections in 2005; Julius Malema's EFF in South Africa; Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland; the Palestinian Balad party as well as the Joint List in Israel, etc.). Such critical electoral support could also be applicable for petty-bourgeois nationalist parties of oppressed nations (e.g., militant parties of the Tamils in Sri Lanka like the TNA; the Northern Irish Sinn Fein/IRA before its capitulation in 1998; the Basque HB and its successor organizations; CUP in Catalonia; etc.). This could also be applicable to new petty-bourgeois populist parties in imperialist countries, like George Galloways' RESPECT in Britain.

64. Critical electoral support should only be given while simultaneously denouncing these parties' bourgeois or petty-bourgeois programs, challenging them to break with the capitalists and fight them not only in words but in deeds. Note, however, that communists can never call for a vote for or the taking of power by parties or candidates of the bourgeoisie – neither in imperialist nor in semi-colonial countries. Revolutionary Marxists advocate a workers' and peasant government and not a government of the workers, peasants and sectors of the bourgeoisie. The latter would be a popular front government. Such openly bourgeois parties directly represent the ruling class against which revolutionaries seek to mobilize the workers and oppressed. Electoral support for such a party would not represent a step towards class independence but rather towards subordination of the workers and oppressed to the bourgeoisie. We should demand that all workers' and peasants' parties break with bourgeois candidates whom they have

enrolled on their list, or break from a popular front list. In certain circumstances we may still vote for the candidates of the workers' or peasant party on a popular front list, if we take care not to vote for, or crossing off the list, the bourgeois candidates.

## **Summary**

65. To summarize: the united front tactic is a central tool for the Bolshevik-Communist organization (a) to achieve the broadest possible unity of the working class and its allied oppressed layers and classes, and (b) to undermine the ominous dominance of the reformist, petty-bourgeois-populist or centrist leaderships and replace them with a determined revolutionary leadership. The most important requirement for this is an independent and clear profile of revolutionary communists as well as the successful founding of a Bolshevik combat organization.