

A SPARTACIST PAMPHLET

On the **United Front**

A reprint of
Young Communist
Bulletin No. 3, 1976

Spartacist Publishing Company
Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116



Table of Contents

On the United Front	3
<i>based on the RCY "National Bureau Document on the United Front," 3 July 1973</i>	
The People's Front in the United States ...	8
<i>from The People's Front: The New Betrayal, James Burnham, Pioneer Publishers, New York, 1937</i>	
On the United Front Question	10
<i>Joseph Seymour, 1974</i>	
A Talk on the Labor Party Question	13
<i>1972 speech by Jim Robertson</i>	

This pamphlet was first published in 1976 by the Spartacus Youth League (SYL), the name of the youth section of the Spartacist League/U.S. (SL) from 1974 to 1986. The SYL was previously named the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY) from its founding in 1971 until 1974.

Second printing, January 1996

On the United Front

based on the RCY "National Bureau Document on the United Front," 3 July 1973

The united front (UF), as embodied in the work of the early Communist International (CI) and the subsequent struggle of Trotsky for a revolutionary international, grew out of the experience of building the Bolshevik party. The struggle over the UF in the CI was due to what might be called the "uneven and combined development" of the parties and groups, especially in Western Europe, which rallied to the Bolshevik Revolution and the CI. These parties and groups had their origins in social democracy (Germany, France, Italy) and often represented the fusion of left-wing social democracy with revolutionary syndicalism (U.S. and France). Their schooling in social democracy gave them a conception of the party as a "party of the whole class," or as one of the most articulate and left-wing exponents of this conception, Rosa Luxemburg, stated in *Leninism or Marxism?*:

"The fact is that the Social Democracy is not *joined* to the organization of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat." (emphasis in original)

Although she was in the forefront of the fight against Bernsteinism which saw the transformation of capitalism into socialism as organic and evolutionary, yet, like Bernstein, she saw the transformation of consciousness within the working class, from capitalist to socialist consciousness, as an organic, evolutionary, undifferentiated process. Luxemburg saw the party and class consciousness emerging organically from "the struggle itself." For Lenin the "struggle itself," the experiences of the masses of workers, were shaped both materially and ideologically by bourgeois society. From the "struggle itself" at best only trade-union consciousness could emerge. Scientific socialism had to be brought to, *joined to*, the "struggle itself." For Luxemburg, the party represented the proletariat as it is. Such a party can at best be only a party of trade unionism, of reformism. For Lenin the party represented the proletariat as it must be if it is to carry through its historic mission of the socialist reconstruction of society.

Thus, the common error of left-wing social democracy was the liquidation of the party into the class:

"...the Social Democratic movement cannot allow the erection of an air-tight partition between the class-conscious nucleus of the proletariat already in the party and its immediate popular environment, the nonparty sections of the proletariat."

—*Leninism or Marxism?*

The party is seen as an "all-inclusive" bloc of tendencies of which the central apparatus, the party functionaries, the party bureaucracy, is seen as the most conservative since it is the most distant from the "struggle itself," while the ranks of the party, and even the non-party workers, are seen as subjectively more revolutionary. This is, of course, often the case in social-democratic parties and reformist trade unions, but this is precisely because these organizations have merged with the "struggle itself" which, confined to the laws of the capitalist market, never transcend the simple battle to exchange labor power for its equivalent, i.e., never transcend wage slavery. Within this context, democratic centralism is seen simply as the subordination of the revolutionary ranks to the conservative apparatus. Indeed,

democratic centralism is the appropriate form only for a revolutionary party. Luxemburg's fears that the German Social Democracy's (SPD) adoption of democratic centralism would mean simply the subordination of the revolutionary wing of the party to the Kautskyites was well-founded. But it was her responsibility, while struggling for the maximum freedom within the SPD, to build a revolutionary democratic-centralist faction within it.

Thus, while Luxemburg's history as a heroic revolutionary is unimpeachable (it is not accidental that our tendency has adopted the name "Spartacist"), her views on party discipline, party building and the relationship between the party and the class were simply the most left-wing expression of social-democratic organizational norms. These norms equated the party with the class or placed the class above the party, denied the necessary vanguard role of the party of proletarian revolution and, hence, were fundamentally liquidationist.

The UF: Class Unity and Communist Hegemony

For the CI and Trotsky the UF had two equally important and inseparable aims: class unity and communist hegemony. Flowing from the dual nature of the UF is the necessity to maintain both the complete organizational independence of the communist party and the complete freedom to criticize one's temporary allies within the UF. The dual nature of the UF is captured in the CI slogan, "March separately, strike together." Each participant in the UF retains its organizational identity; agreement in the UF need pertain only to the details of the specific action to be carried out and can only be reached through unanimous agreement. Another slogan which captures the dual nature of the UF is "freedom of criticism, unity in action." Organizations like the Class Struggle League which take the definition of the UF and substitute it for the definition of the combat party effectively liquidate the party into the UF. This is the very essence of centrism.

The struggle for the UF at the Third and Fourth CI Congresses represented the recognition that the post-WWI revolutionary upsurge had passed over the heads of many of its national sections because they were unable to lead a majority of the working class into battle for the conquest of power. By the Third Congress the upsurge had already begun to recede, taking off the agenda, at least for the immediate period, the conquest of power, and placing on the agenda the conquest of the masses.

The need for the UF flowed from the fact that the majority of workers in most countries had gone through the post-war revolutionary upsurge retaining their allegiance to the reformist leaderships in the trade unions and the social-democratic parties. At the same time, capitalism itself, in the wake of the receding revolutionary tide, went on the offensive. It was not a question of a "revolutionary offensive" as was seen by the "ultra-lefts" in the CI, but of a capitalist offensive that was forcing even the reformist-led organizations into partial and defensive struggles to fight for their life, to fight simply to maintain the organizational

gains and standard of living they had won in the past. This situation placed on the agenda the need for a united workers front against the capitalist offensive.

The question was posed to the national sections of the CI: What was to be done in the face of the capitalist offensive which drove even reformist organizations to battle and intensified the objective need in the proletariat for class unity? The majority of the CI drew the conclusion that propaganda and agitation alone were not sufficient to break the mass of workers from their reformist leaderships. The infamy of the reformists, fighting capacity of the communists and viability of the communist program had to be demonstrated in action. A period in which the reformists are drawn into battle, albeit in a half-hearted, partial way, is precisely the best time to expose their infamy through common action side by side with them, where the workers can measure in their own immediate experiences and struggle the fighting capacity and program of the communists vs. those of their reformist leadership.

In the CI discussions a distinction was drawn between the "UF from above" which was an agreement reached between communist and non-communist leaderships to carry out a particular class action and the "UF from below" which was a direct appeal made to non-communist workers over the heads of their leaders. Certain members of the CI wanted the UF to mean only "from below" believing that agreements with opportunists must necessarily be opportunist agreements. Trotsky and others arguing against this viewpoint stated that if the rank and file of organizations were not ready to march under the leadership of the communists during the post-war upsurge, they would not break with their leaderships to march with communist calls to action now. Now that capitalism had taken the offensive and the revisionist and reformist leaderships of proletarian organizations were forced to call class actions or at least forced to talk of calling them, it was necessary to intersect this development. Communists should not only participate in partial and defensive struggles but should initiate them when necessary and fight to win the leadership of them when possible. Therefore, agreements with reformist and centrist leaders could not be precluded, though communists should be ever ready to break with the centrists and reformists when their vacillations become a brake on the struggle. In the course of such a break the communists might very well go over to a "UF from below." In any case either the reformists and centrists would refuse to enter into common struggle with the communists, in which case they would be discredited, or their pusillanimous behavior in the course of the struggle would tend to discredit them and enhance the authority of the communists.

The UF: Sharpening the Political Struggle

Thus the tactic of the UF should never be seen as a cessation of political struggle, as a non-aggression pact or mutual amnesty with other tendencies. The CI slogan for the UF—"freedom of criticism, unity in action"—anticipated that the UF would *sharpen* the political struggle and exacerbate hostilities between communist and non-communist leaderships. The UF as a political weapon in the struggle for communist hegemony is often put forth in anticipation that reformists and centrists will refuse to participate in common action with the communists, even though the former have committed themselves, at least verbally, to such actions. Whether these non-communist leaderships of proletarian organizations refuse to respond

to the UF call or respond only in a half-hearted way, the call can serve to discredit their authority over the non-communist workers and "set the base against the top."

An important international application of the CI UF tactic was the CI call for common class action with the Second International and the Vienna Union or "Two-and-a-Half International." Negotiations for common action broke down, and the Two-and-a-Half International was forced to move to the right to prevent its membership from engaging in common battles with the communists. This eventually drove the Vienna Union into fusion with the Second International. While CI members who were skeptical about the UF policy considered the fusion of the Two-and-a-Half International and Second International a defeat, Trotsky and other CI supporters of the UF considered the fusion to be a positive gain for the communists in as much as it cleared the path of an obstacle between the communists and the reformists. There was no longer a third pole which claimed to be both "revolutionary" and non-communist, thereby confusing militant workers and creating obstacles in the class struggle.

Likewise, in the late '60s, Progressive Labor Party (PL) was an obstacle between the SL and those sections of the New Left which were moving leftward toward proletarian socialism. PL's verbal commitment to a pro-working-class and non-exclusionist Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) provided the framework in which the UF could be applied to a whole series of issues, from the question of military recruiting on campus, strike support and the question of unemployment, to whether SDS should be an explicitly socialist organization. The application of the UF tactic to PL essentially offered PL two choices. Either it could carry through with its verbal commitment to a pro-working-class non-exclusionist SDS and conduct common actions with the SL/RCY which would ultimately force it to break with its Stalinist heritage, or it could retreat to the right. PL took the latter course which, while dashing our hopes of winning a section of the PL cadre, removed PL as an obstacle to our recruitment of those sections of the New Left which were moving in a proletarian socialist direction.

The struggle for communist hegemony has as its aim the political polarization of all ostensible revolutionary organizations into revolutionary and non-revolutionary components, and the regroupment of all organizations, tendencies and factions which stand for revolutionary Marxism into the united Leninist vanguard party. The UF is an important component of the regroupment tactic for it is precisely through common action that the political struggle of counterposed programs can reach its sharpest expression. Thus, it was both full political discussion (Zinoviev's famous speech at Halle) and common action that won a majority of the German Independent Socialists over to the German CP. The center of our regroupment orientation during the late '60s was PL/SDS. PL/SDS' abandonment of a proletarian perspective and their capitulation to academic liberalism with the "anti-racist textbook" campaign combined with our acquisition of groups and tendencies from the PL periphery (like the Buffalo Marxist Collective) are both the negative and positive confirmations of the correctness of our regroupment perspective for that period.

Ultra-Left and Opportunist Opposition to the UF

Rejection of the UF or of the "UF from above," while often clothed in the rhetoric of revolutionary intransigence,

in reality represented a kind of political passivity, conservatism and lack of revolutionary will. Such "leftism" was, in fact, an acceptance of the status quo and the division of the workers movement into the communists who had revolutionary intransigence and the reformists who had the working class. Opposition to the UF came not only from the left but also from the right, especially from those groups whose break with social democracy had been organizational but not methodological. Most of Trotsky's CI polemics in defense of the UF were directed against centrist elements in the French CP which resisted communist organizational norms, refused to support international democratic centralism or Leninist functioning in their own party, refused to subordinate their press, parliamentarian or trade-union fractions to party discipline, publicly attacked the CI in their press and in public meetings, resisted carrying out communist propaganda in the military or in the trade unions and refused to take up the fight against French colonialism. It was the left wing of the French CP, those former Socialists and syndicalists who supported Lenin's break with social democracy during WWI and who immediately declared themselves for the CI who fought for the UF within the French party. It was those centrist elements whose break with social democracy was belated and who resisted affiliation with the CI and the purge of the social-chauvinist traitors from their ranks who also fought against the UF. Thus opposition to the UF produced its own "united front" running from Hermann Gorter and Bordiga on the left to Frossard on the right.

Opportunist opposition to the UF like that of ultra-leftism is based on political passivity and conservatism. The opportunist projects his own opportunism on to the UF. He cannot conceive of alliances aside from the deals that are made in the back rooms of parliament and trade-union offices: mutual accommodation and non-aggression pacts. Trained in the school of social democracy where the party is conceived of as blocs of diverse tendencies, the centrist who holds a liquidationist conception of the party cannot conceive of the UF except as liquidationist. Reluctant to break with his reformist cronies, the centrist is now unwilling to turn around and do battle with them in common action. Hostility to the UF is simply an inverted non-aggression pact with the reformists, an implicit agreement not to fight them on their own turf.

Stalin and the UF

With Stalin's ascent to power and the conversion of the CI from an instrument of world revolution into an instrument of *realpolitik* diplomacy based on the narrow, conservative interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, the UF was degraded as a tactic for class unity and transformed into an instrument for class collaboration and counterrevolution. In China the "bloc from within" was transformed into the complete liquidation of the Chinese CP into the Kuomintang (KMT). The KMT was made a "sympathizer" section of the CI, Chiang Kai-shek was made a "fraternal" member of the I.E.C. and the KMT army was equipped with Soviet arms and trained by Soviet military advisors, but kept entirely in the control of the warlords like Chiang who ran the KMT. By the Second KMT Congress in January 1926 the Chinese CP held one-fifth of the total seats on the KMT Central Executive Committee, headed the Peasant and Organization Departments and (through Chou En-lai) Whampoa Academy which trained the leading military cadre. Even so, Chiang was able through his control over the army, beginning with the 20 March 1926 coup in Canton and culminating in

the March 1927 suppression of the Shanghai uprising, to turn the "bloc from within" into the block upon which the Chinese CP was beheaded.

In Britain the CI UF policy was embodied in the "Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee" which was formed in May 1925 between the leaderships of the British and Russian trade unions. The Committee served to give a revolutionary cover to the British trade-union leadership's betrayal of the 1926 General Strike and the Committee broke up only after the British union leaders broke with it a year later. The position of the Trotskyist Left Opposition was that the original formation of the Anglo-Russian Committee was tactically defensible as the Committee represented a temporary alliance with British trade-union leaders who, under mass working-class pressure, were moving slightly leftward and were willing, for at least a short period, to come out for the defense of the Soviet Union and international trade-union unity, and it was necessary to hold them to these positions. Under the impact of the sharpening class struggle culminating in a pre-revolutionary situation it *should* have been anticipated that these reformist union leaders would be driven over into the defense of the bourgeois order. To maintain a bloc with them under these conditions was simply to lend the prestige of the Bolshevik Revolution and communism to these strike breakers.

The accumulating failures of Stalin's 1924-27 policies of conciliating the colonial bourgeoisie and trade-union reformists abroad and the kulaks at home led straight to the "third period" policies of liquidating the kulaks and completely undoing the work of the Third and Fourth Congresses in regard to the UF. The UF "from below" was proclaimed to be the only permissible tactic for the CI sections.

The UF: Strategy or Tactic?

There is a tendency to conclude from Trotsky's strong polemics in defense of the UF in his German writings that the UF is not simply a tactic but a strategy. For example, a 1966 International Committee document which was probably authored by the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste states:

"'Class against class' is the very cement which binds together the transitional slogans as a whole.

"That is why the Workers' United Front is not simply a slogan, but a strategic axis in the policy of Trotskyist organizations. The strategy of the United Front is embodied in various tactical expressions which range from limited agreements for united actions between different organizations to the Soviets, the 'natural form of the united front at the time of combat,' as Leon Trotsky said in *Whither France?*"

—quoted in *Spartacist Internal Information Bulletin* No. 19

Trotsky repeats time and time again in *What Next?* (from which the "soviet is the highest form of the united front" quote is taken) that the UF is a tactic and not a strategy, and that to consider the UF a strategy rather than a tactic is the essence of centrism. *What Next?* is not only a polemic against the ultra-left sectarian policies of the Stalintern, but it is also a polemic against the UF and soviet fetishism of centrist groups like the SAP (Socialist Workers Party of Germany). For example, Trotsky states:

"In any case, the policy of the united front cannot serve as a program for a revolutionary party. And in the meantime, the entire activity of the SAP is now being built on it. As a result, the policy of the united front is carried over into the party itself, that is, it serves to smear over the contradictions between the various tendencies. And that is precisely the fundamental function of centrism."

—*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*

Even more succinctly Trotsky states in "Centrism and the Fourth International":

"A centrist swears readily by the policy of the united front, emptying it of its revolutionary content and transforming it from a tactical method into a supreme principle."

—*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1933-34*

In his polemic against the UF fetishism of groups like the SAP and the Brandlerites, Trotsky polemicized against the conception that the UF is for all times and all places, a kind of workers' parliament where the various tendencies hold endless debates and draw up endless resolutions (the fantasy world of the National Caucus of Labor Committees during its strike-support proto-soviet coalition days). The UF can only be a reality during periods of social struggle, when the need for sharp class battles makes class unity a burning objective necessity that shakes the ranks of the non-communist workers' organizations from their lethargy and day-to-day humdrum organizational parochialism, and places strongly before them the need for class unity that transcends their particular organizations; or during unsettled periods in the left movement when the possibilities of and necessity for regroupment clearly exist. Only then will the road be opened for the communist party to approach the non-communist worker and his organizations with the call for a real UF.

The trade unions, the workers militia, the soviets are all forms of the UF precisely because they are organizations which stand above parties, and reflect the uneven development of the consciousness of the working class. At the same time they represent the needs of the class for unity in its struggle with capitalism. But to see only the class-unity side of the UF (whether in reference to unions or soviets) is the mistake of centrism. The UF is equally important because it provides one of the roads for the communist party to conquer the class. "Class unity around a revolutionary program" necessarily means class unity led by the vanguard party which embodies that revolutionary program, or it is meaningless. Programs do not exist suspended in midair, they are necessarily embodied in parties. As Trotsky states in *What Next?*:

"The interests of the class cannot be formulated otherwise than in the shape of a program; the program cannot be defended otherwise than by creating the party.

"The class, taken by itself, is only material for exploitation. The proletariat assumes an independent role only at that moment when from a social class *in itself* it becomes a political class *for itself*. This cannot take place otherwise than through the medium of a party. The party is that historical organ by means of which the class becomes class conscious. To say that 'the class stands higher than the party,' is to assert that the class in the raw stands higher than the class which is on the road to class consciousness. Not only is this incorrect; it is reactionary."

The question is not: What strategy for the party?—the UF. The question is: What strategy must be put forth in the course of the UF? This can only be answered by the struggle of parties. The answer to *What Next?* can only be programmatic and will be found in the party that embodies the necessary revolutionary program. As Trotsky points out, the soviets by themselves are incapable of leading the proletariat to power. "Everything depends upon the party that leads the soviets" (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*).

The "People's Front"

It is important to answer certain questions that have arisen on the left concerning the relation between the popular front, which generally takes the form of a parliamentary bloc, and

class-collaborationist non-parliamentary movements, like the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). This question obviously has disturbed enough members of the SWP/YSA for the organization to issue an "Education for Socialists" pamphlet entitled *Alliances and the Revolutionary Party: The Tactic of the United Front and How It Differs from the Popular Front* by Les Evans, and another pamphlet in the same series which included the first two chapters of James Burnham's *The People's Front: The New Betrayal*, which was first published by the SWP in 1937. What the SWP will no longer republish is the last chapter of Burnham's pamphlet which describes how the Stalinists applied the People's Front to the U.S. where they were not strong enough to bargain away proletarian revolution for ministerial posts. Burnham writes:

"Most significant of all is the application of the People's Front policy to 'anti-war work.' Through a multitude of pacifist organizations, and especially through the directly controlled American League against War and Fascism, the Stalinists aim at the creation of a 'broad, classless, People's Front of all those opposed to war.' The class-collaborationist character of the People's Front policy is strikingly revealed through the Stalinist attitude in these organizations. They rule out in advance the Marxist analysis of war as necessarily resulting from the inner conflicts of capitalism and therefore genuinely opposed only by revolutionary class struggle against the capitalist order; and, in contrast, maintain that all persons, from whatever social class or group, whether or not opposed to capitalism, can 'unite' to stop war."

The Trotskyist movement has long held that the application of the popular-front policy in the U.S. has always taken the form of "single-issue broad-based coalitions" against war, fascism, racism or some other injustice. The application of the "People's Front" strategy formulated at the Seventh Congress of the CI to countries where the CPs did not have sufficient strength to demand of the bourgeoisie ministerial posts, has always taken the form of "anti-imperialist," "anti-war," "anti-fascist," etc. coalitions.

The popular front is a political bloc, which may or may not take the form of a governmental coalition, in which the politics of the working-class component of the bloc are subordinated to the politics of the bourgeoisie, to the defense of the bourgeois state and capitalism. The bourgeoisie, as the ruling class, is supremely self-conscious of its own class interests. Any ongoing coalition or alliance with the bourgeoisie must necessarily take place on the bourgeoisie's own terms, and on the basis of their politics. It is not necessary for the bourgeoisie as a whole, or even a section of the bourgeoisie, to play an active role in the political bloc for the popular front to exist. Thus Browder, as a loyal technician of the popular front may have offered to shake hands with J.P. Morgan, but no one has ever accused Browder of breaking with the popular front when Morgan did not reciprocate. Likewise, during the Spanish Civil War, the bourgeoisie, by and large, supported Franco, not the Republican Popular Front. Azaña and his Radicals were nothing more than a handful of lawyers and professors, nonetheless they constituted what Trotsky called the "shadow of the bourgeoisie," i.e., their presence in the popular front was the guarantee to the Spanish and world bourgeoisie that the Republic stood for the defense of capitalism and the bourgeois order:

"Politically most striking is the fact that the Spanish Popular Front lacked in reality even a parallelogram of forces. The bourgeoisie's place was occupied by its shadow. Through the medium of the Stalinists, Socialists, and Anarchists, the Spanish bourgeoisie subordinated the proletariat to itself without even bothering to participate in the Popular Front.

The overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades openly went over to the camp of Franco. Without any theory of 'permanent revolution,' the Spanish bourgeoisie understood from the outset that the revolutionary mass movement, no matter how it starts, is directed against private ownership of land and the means of production, and that it is utterly impossible to cope with this movement by democratic measures.

"That is why only insignificant debris from the possessing classes remained in the republican camp: Messrs. Azaña, Companys, and the like—political attorneys of the bourgeoisie but not the bourgeoisie itself. Having staked everything on a military dictatorship, the possessing classes were able, at the same time, to make use of their political representatives of *yesterday* in order to paralyze, disorganize, and afterward strangle the socialist movement of the masses in 'republican' territory.

"Without in the slightest degree representing the Spanish bourgeoisie, the left republicans still less represented the workers and peasants. They represented no one but themselves. Thanks, however, to their allies—the Socialists, Stalinists, and Anarchists—these political phantoms played the decisive role in the revolution. How? Very simply. By incarnating the principles of the 'democratic revolution,' that is, the inviolability of private property."

—Trotsky, "The Lessons of Spain:
The Last Warning"

The mere fact that the Italian CP courts the bourgeois parties, though it is unable to capture even one lonely splinter left Christian Democrat, is sufficient to brand the CP's politics and appetites as for the popular front. Even before the Radicals entered the recent French "Union of the Left," the CP-SP bloc was popular-frontist both in its program and its appetites.

NPAC, WONAAC, SDS and Pop Frontism

The reason that we characterize NPAC, Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) and SDS (after SDS had locked onto its "anti-racist textbook" campaign) as popular fronts is precisely because they attempted to reduce the program for struggling against fundamental aspects of capitalism—imperialism, sexual and racial oppression—to campaigns which consisted primarily of parades in the case of NPAC, parades mixed with legislative motions that were *beneath* parliamentary cretinism in the case of WONAAC, and the SDS caricature of parliamentary cretinism (i.e., calling on Congress and state legislatures to censure racist textbooks). Thus, the SWP and PL offered themselves up to the bourgeoisie as safety valves for the popular discontent with various aspects of capitalist oppression, channeling social discontent into avenues which were both socially impotent and diffusive but which would serve to reinforce illusions about capitalist institutions, capitalist politicians and academic liberalism.

When the SWP first adopted the "single-issue" coalition gimmick in the anti-war movement, they claimed this strategy was not popular-frontist because no section of the bourgeoisie accepted the "single issue" of "Out Now." However, as soon as the U.S. bourgeoisie realized that a decisive military victory was impossible in Vietnam, and the bourgeoisie became defeatist, it was precisely the program of the SWP/NPAC they adopted. As more and more capitalist politicians not only endorsed the "Out Now" slogan and also NPAC parades, the SWP suddenly discovered that the bourgeoisie had "capitulated" to the SWP. But what was fundamental was the question of program, and the program of NPAC was not revolutionary defeatism but *bourgeois defeatism*, not utilizing imperialist war to advance the class struggle, but ending the war so as to disrupt U.S.

imperialist hegemony as little as possible.

Likewise, WONAAC's successive dilutions of its program (from opposition to abortion laws to opposition only to "anti-abortion laws" in order to keep up with the parliamentary maneuvers of Bella Abzug) was an explicitly conscious effort to tailor program to the needs of their bourgeois allies. PL and SDS went from getting thrown out of the July 1971 NPAC conference because of their vocal opposition to Vance Hartke's presence, to printing articles in support of McGovern for President in the pages of *New Left Notes*. The "anti-racist textbook" campaign, like NPAC and WONAAC, led straight to Miami Beach and the 1972 Democratic Party Convention, where the SWP/YSA could watch on television the consummation of seven years of "single-issue coalition" politics as the Democratic Party sucked in both the "activists" and issues of past campaigns. Even more despicable was the sight of SDS, on its knees before the entrance to the Democratic Party Convention, begging McGovern to adopt its "anti-racism bill" as a plank in the Democratic Party platform. The difference between the SWP and PL and the CP in Chile, Ceylon, post-WWII France and republican Spain is that the SWP and PL did not have social power to send delegates to the Democratic Party Convention, though their politics were clearly represented by their erstwhile allies within the convention hall. Also, the bourgeoisie did not need a McGovern-Gus Hall-Linda Jenness-SDS government.

A descriptive distinction can be drawn between popular-front alliances among two or more separate political parties (e.g., the French Union of the Left) and popular-frontist groups (e.g., NPAC, WONAAC, SDS). One can point to the 1930s, where the European CPs, for the most part, entered into popular-front alliances, whereas the CPUSA, lacking the mass working-class base to sell to the bourgeoisie in exchange for ministerial portfolios, built various anti-war, anti-racist, class-collaborationist front groups paralleling the activities of the European CPs. The attitude of Trotskyists, of course, is no different toward these socially weaker popular-frontist formations. We are as opposed to entry into SDS [see "SDS Destroyed by Liberalism," *RCY Newsletter* No. 12, May-June 1972] as into the Union of the Left, whose size and social roots, however, make it a greater obstacle to the growth of revolutionary consciousness within the working class than the former. The People's Front was never conceived of as only a government coalition, although that is, for the Stalinists, the "highest form" of the People's Front. The People's Front has always meant the political subordination of the left to the program of the liberal bourgeoisie.

Excluding the Bourgeoisie

The "exclusion of the bourgeoisie" has been one of our key demands at anti-war and women's liberation conferences. The exclusion of the bourgeoisie from social movements which claim to fight the basic injustices of capitalism has been a fundamental position of the Marxist movement since Marx polemicized against those Utopian Socialists such as Robert Owen who thought the bourgeoisie could be won to socialism. Ending imperialist war and the oppression of women and blacks means ending capitalism, and what was simply utopian for the predecessors of Marx, becomes in the mouths of those who claim to be Marxists rank opportunism.

The prerequisite for an organization to be characterized as part of the working-class movement, even if it is

thoroughly reformist, is the exclusion of the bourgeoisie. Even here there are exceptions, for the European CPs may occasionally attract a petty capitalist into its ranks. However, this is most clear with an organization like the British Labour Party whose leadership has a perennial appetite to administer British imperialism, but whose formal politics claim to stand in the tradition of class-struggle socialism and whose by-laws exclude members of the bourgeoisie. Thus, we distinguish the reformist politics of the Labour Party program, which it *will betray* when it gets into power, from the explicitly capitalist politics of the popular front, which are beneath reformism, and which the popular front *will carry out* if it gets into power. Thus both the Labour Party and the French Union of the Left had the same appetite to administer their respective national capitalisms, but in order to do so the Labour Party must betray its program when in power, while the Union of the

Left will carry it out. Thus, with the Labour Party campaigning in its own name and on its own program, we can give it critical support, pointing out that its program is partial, limited, reformist, etc., and that the Labour Party will betray this program once in power. But for the Union of the Left there is no such contradiction to exploit. The Union of the Left will simply carry out the program it promises, for all it promises is to be better defenders of the bourgeois order than the explicitly capitalist parties. Critical support is an application of the UF, the counter-position of the program of proletarian revolution to that of reformism, a momentary pact from "above" to put the Labour Party into power, which very soon goes over to a UF "from below" when the Labour Party calls out the cops and army to defend the factories, when the workers through industrial action, try to collect on the Labour Party's electoral promises.

The People's Front in the United States

*from The People's Front: The New Betrayal, James Burnham,
Pioneer Publishers, New York, 1937*

The People's Front has not, of course, advanced as far in the United States as in France or Spain. In the formal sense, there is not yet in the United States an established "People's Front." The United States is not faced with a developing revolutionary crisis, as is France, nor is it in the midst of a Civil War, as is Spain. Though the historical issue for the United States, as is the case for every nation at the present time, is socialism vs. capitalism, though only the workers' revolution and socialism can solve even a single one of the major problems facing United States economy; nevertheless the issue is not yet posed in terms of the immediate struggle for state power. The American proletariat is still faced primarily with the more elementary immediate demands: the struggle for the right to organize, for industrial unionism, for the exercise of democratic rights generally, for a powerful trade union and unemployed movement, for relief and union conditions, for a conscious mass revolutionary party of struggle.

But just as the issue of state power can be settled in favor of the proletariat only by the independent revolutionary class struggle of the workers, and is lost for the proletariat through the reformist strategy of the People's Front; in the same way, at the more elementary stages, the interests of the proletariat can be served only by the appropriate methods of class struggle, and are fatally undermined by the class collaborationist methods of the People's Front. The People's Front in this country, seeping into the labor movement under the sponsorship of the Communist Party, has made considerable headway; and already its disastrous effects are becoming apparent in a dozen fields.

2

Up to the present, the best known and most conspicuous result of the People's Front strategy emerged during the 1936 election campaign. From the point of view both of the social composition of his support and likewise of the political content of his program, Roosevelt was in effect a People's Front candidate. No one could doubt that he was

a staunch and outstanding defender of capitalist democracy, nor that the bulk of the proletariat, the farmers, and the lower strata of the rest of the middle classes, were solidly behind him. Thus the upholders of the People's Front ideology found themselves, willingly or unwillingly, driven into the Roosevelt camp: either openly, as was the case with many, or, like the Communist Party itself, through a backhanded and ambiguous formula.

The Communist Party was compelled to define the issue of the campaign as "Progress vs. Reaction," "Democracy vs. Fascism." It had to discover the forces of fascism in the "Landon-Hearst-Liberty League" combination. It was then required to raise as the central slogan, "Defeat Landon at all costs!" And the only realistic interpretation of this slogan—the interpretation which the majority of even its own sympathizers made—was to vote for Roosevelt. Browder admits quite openly that this was the central direction of the Stalinist campaign. In his post-election analysis of the elections, delivered to the Central Committee of the party, he boasts as follows: "The first objective was the defeat of Landon. This was accomplished to a degree far surpassing all expectations...this aim we shared with the largest number of people.... Without exaggerating our role in bringing about this result, we can safely say that the weight of each individual Communist in the struggle was far higher, many fold, than that of the members of any other political group in America." He apologizes at length for the nominally independent Communist Party ticket that was in the field. If only "a national Farmer-Labor party..." had "decided to place Roosevelt at the head of the ticket nationally.... Would we have refrained from putting forward our own independent tickets and supported the Farmer-Labor party ticket even with Roosevelt at the head? I venture to say that under such circumstances we would almost surely have done so."

In point of fact, this was done in many localities either by the Communist Party officially, or by individual party members. In Minnesota, Washington, California, the

Stalinists supported Farmer-Labor and "progressive" coalitions with no criticism of the fact that Roosevelt headed their tickets. In New York, the Stalinists gave full support to the American Labor Party, which entered the election campaign—as its leaders openly declared—only to gather labor votes for Roosevelt. Individual Communist Party members joined the American Labor Party, and spoke from its platforms in support of Roosevelt.

The People's Front policy dictates a wholly anti-Marxist analysis of Roosevelt. He can no longer be treated as the chief executive for the dominant class. Criticism of him can only suggest that he is not responsive enough in carrying out the "people's mandate," that he cannot be relied on to take progressive steps unless a certain amount of pressure against him is generated. Even when, after the elections were safely under his belt, Roosevelt, at the bidding of his masters, ruthlessly cut the WPA rolls, even in the light of Roosevelt's attitude toward the auto strikes, the Stalinist criticism must remain mild and "loyal." The Communist Party, having abandoned the revolutionary aim of the overthrow of capitalist society, becomes the "party of Twentieth Century Americanism"; its purpose as defined by the People's Front, is to function within the framework of democratic capitalism, as a reformist "pressure group." It must strive to become "respectable," to ingratiate itself with the class enemy; to show that in return for vague promises of friendship for the Soviet Union and polite words against fascism, it is willing to do its part in smothering the class struggle and guaranteeing the protection of bourgeois democracy against the threat of proletarian revolution.

3

A reformist political line cannot be isolated into any supra-mundane sphere of "pure politics." It must show its effects on every arena of the class struggle. We thus find during the past two years a cumulative development of the People's Front strategy as applied to Communist Party activities in the trade unions and unemployed organizations. We may be sure that during the coming months this development will be carried unprecedented steps further. The basis of the People's Front is class collaboration; and we know from past experience of reformism what this means on the trade union field.

Are the reactionary trade union bureaucrats agents of the class enemy within the working class? Do their policies act as the major brake to militant class consciousness within the unions? This is what Marxism has always taught, but no one could possibly learn this from the most detailed study of recent Stalinist literature. Nowhere is there any explanation of, or even reference to, the social function of the trade union bureaucracy. At the most, there is occasional personal criticism of some action too gross to ignore; but even this is kept to a minimum, in the interests of currying favor with the maximum number of the bureaucrats.

The policy of class collaboration forces the Stalinists to abandon more and more the fighting struggle for economic demands, and through that struggle the raising of the level of class consciousness, for the attempt to come to agreements with the bureaucrats, to settle disputes through deals behind the scenes, to rely on governmental arbitration boards and mediators. The Stalinist work in the unions must be subordinated to the great aim of achieving in this country a mass, classless People's Front. To secure the adherence of a union to a Negro Congress, or an American League

Conference, or a Farmer-Labor-Progressive what-not, or a Social Security Assembly is far more important than to get it to prepare and win a militant strike.

The results are already widely present within the labor movement, though not yet so widely recognized. In the WPA sit-downs, the Stalinists and the supervisors together explain why the workers must be peaceful and go home. In Pennsylvania, the Stalinists declare that the new policy for the Workers' Alliance must abandon strikes as a method for "settling disputes." At the January unemployed demonstration in Washington, not a single militant slogan or banner was permitted; the whole demonstration was directed toward the achievement of a friendly chat with the relief authorities. In the Federation of Teachers, the general fight against the Boards of Education is deprecated, dual organizations (such as the Teachers' Guild in New York) are met with conciliation, and the open struggle against the A.F.of L. Executive Council and for the C.I.O. principles is shunted aside. In the Cafeteria Workers, there is disclosed an ironbound alliance between the Stalinists and the older racketeers. The furriers, the wild men of the Third Period, turn respectable, and devote their energies against the progressives and revolutionaries in the union. Ben Gold, who as leader of the furriers roared for five years like an untamable lion, now speaks like the mildest lamb. In the United Textile Workers, the Stalinists at the Convention come to the rescue of the reactionary officials. On the Pacific Coast, among the Maritime Unions, the Stalinists last year first tried to put over the I.S.U. proposals on the Sailors, then attempted to head off the strike, then insisted that it be delayed until after the elections (so as not to injure Roosevelt); and in the end were forestalled only by the militant stand of the Sailors' Union.

This trend will continue and increase. The Communist Party, under the banner of the People's Front, now functions in the unions more and more as a reactionary force, and the progressive movement in the unions will have to be built not along with but in large measure against it.

These conclusions are impressively supported by the Stalinist policy with respect to the A.F.of L.-C.I.O. struggle. At the present time, as Marxists have made clear, the progressive movement in the unions must proceed in accordance with the basic slogans: for industrial unionism; for organization of the basic mass industries; for a class struggle policy; for trade union democracy. Every one of these slogans, taken individually or together, dictates repudiation of the policies and course of the A.F.of L. bureaucracy, and determined, though of course critical, support of the C.I.O. This follows not because the C.I.O. as at present constituted and with its present leadership is the sufficient answer to the needs of the workers (indeed, through its fundamental class collaborationism and its violation of intra-union democracy, it acts even now and will in the future increasingly act counter to the needs of the workers), but because in the light of the real and actual conditions of the present, the *direction* of the C.I.O. is the direction of advance for the labor movement, just as the direction of the A.F.of L. officialdom is the direction of decay and disintegration. As *against* the A.F.of L. bureaucracy, therefore, Marxists must, whole-heartedly and unambiguously, support the C.I.O. Only such an attitude is at present compatible with progressive trade unionism.

The Communist party policy for the next period, however, is formulated around the single slogan of "unity." "We

shall," Browder says in the report already referred to, "redouble our efforts in the fight for trade union unity, for the unity of the American Federation of Labor.... We think that it would be harmful if any unions were divided, one section going to the C.I.O., the other to the A.F.of L.... under no conditions do we carry that fight on in such a way as to make a split in that union.... For example, in the probable organization of some sections of heavy machinery, we will have the problem of whether these new unions shall go into the Machinists or into some of the other unions, whether it be the Amalgamated Association, or what not. Generally, we have been clear on this last question. We refused to use our forces to carry sections of newly organized workers away from the jurisdictional claims of the Machinists Union over into some of the industrial unions, where there was a fear that this would intensify rivalries and sharpen the split."

No one will argue against the desirability of trade union unity, nor will anyone "advocate" splits. Nevertheless, it is always the concrete content of unity, not unity as an abstract slogan, that is important. And, under the present circumstances, in the labor movement, the fight for unity itself can be understood only as a fight under the slogans stated above, and—translated into organizational terms—for the C.I.O. movement as against the Executive Council. Such a fight alone makes possible the re-integration of the A.F.of L. on a basis that would mean an advance and not a defeat; and such a fight is equally necessary to prevent the C.I.O. officials themselves from betraying the movement which at present they lead. Re-integration, of course, may not be possible without capitulation; and if this is the case, then the workers must be prepared to face the full consequences—prepared to face the necessity for the building of a new Federation. The conduct of a genuinely progressive campaign will have laid the basis for such an eventuality.

The "unity" campaign of the Communist Party, on the contrary, disorients the progressive struggle. It blocks the sharp and fruitful fight against the policies of the Executive Council, announcing in advance a willingness to compromise and indeed to capitulate; and at the same time it contributes to reactionary tendencies on the part of the C.I.O. officials. To an increasing extent its results will be discovered in one union after another—as, for that matter, they have already been discovered in a number of specific instances: for example, in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, at the Convention of the Federation of Teachers, and at the A.F.of L. Convention itself, in each of which

instances Stalinist influence smothered clear-cut support of the C.I.O.

4

In other fields of People's Front activities, the same general trend is observable. For example, in youth work. Following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, and the subsequent Congress of the Young Communist International, proposals were made in this country—as elsewhere—for the liquidation of the proletarian political youth organizations into broad, classless, non-political (i.e., People's Frontist) youth movements. When the position of the Young Peoples' Socialist League made this impossible, the Y.C.L. tried to gain the same end by the creation of the American Youth Congress on the same People's Front basis. The Y.C.L. now devotes a major part of its efforts to conciliating Y.M.C.A. and religious youth groups so as to maintain a bloc with them against revolutionary socialists. In the student field, the Y.C.L. consistently attempts to manipulate the American Student Union into a straight People's Front program and organizational form.

Most significant of all is the application of the People's Front policy to "anti-war work." Through a multitude of pacifist organizations, and especially through the directly controlled American League against War and Fascism, the Stalinists aim at the creation of a "broad, classless, People's Front of all those opposed to war." The class collaborationist character of the People's Front policy is strikingly revealed through the Stalinist attitude in these organizations. They rule out in advance the Marxist analysis of war as necessarily resulting from the inner conflicts of capitalism and therefore genuinely opposed only by revolutionary class struggle against the capitalist order; and, in contrast, maintain that all persons, from whatever social class or group, whether or not opposed to capitalism, can "unite" to stop war.

What this "anti-war work" means in actuality is suggested by the fact that the Stalinists have abandoned attacks on the armament program of American imperialism; greet the Buenos Aires Conference (a mighty step forward in this country's preparations for the coming war) as a great advance toward "world peace"; and criticize revolutionary socialists as planning to sell this country out to Japan, when they call for non-support of the government in the war. The truth is, of course, that through the People's Front, the Stalinists are making ready to support the government, and to recruit the masses for such support, in the new imperialist war.

On the United Front Question

by Joseph Seymour

A united front does not refer to any and every kind of cooperation with other political organizations. A united front is essentially a common *action* characteristically around concrete, usually negative, demands on bourgeois authority. The characteristic organizational form of the united front is a technical coordinating committee. This does not mean that a united front need be limited to a single event. It is possible to have a united-front campaign, for example, a legal defense case. However, if a united-front campaign acquires significant political importance, it has

an immanent tendency to develop into a higher form of collaboration—a bloc.

In contrast to a united front, a bloc is an open-ended agreement to collaborate for broadly defined aims usually involving common propaganda, tactics, etc. Characteristically a bloc is a unified opposition to the incumbent leadership of a workers organization. The classic bloc was the Zimmerwald Movement during World War I—the oppositional formation of all anti-war socialists to the social-chauvinist leadership of the Second International. For

Lenin's faction, the Zimmerwald Movement was viewed as the embryo of a new international. During the early 1930s, the French Trotskyists engaged in an important bloc with left syndicalists in the form of an oppositional caucus, the Unitary Opposition, in the Stalinist-led union federation, the CGT-U. A bloc is inherently in unstable equilibrium, either leading toward regroupment/fusion or breaking apart.

It is common for a bloc to take the form of a nominally independent membership organization (e.g., a trade-union caucus). The actual bloc character of such an organization is evident if its activists are primarily loyal to different party organizations; the bloc partners thus constituting the basic factions within the organization. If the bloc breaks up, the dominant partner often retains the original bloc organization as a transitional instrument, usually run along front group lines. The initiation and participation in a bloc, including that embodied in a nominally independent organization, is a legitimate Leninist tactic. Depending on concrete circumstances, its purpose is either an entry, common work leading to regroupment/fusion or an attempt to establish a transitional organization of the vanguard party.

What Was NPAC?

NPAC was a bloc (*not* a united front) between the SWP and certain bourgeois politicians on a program and tactics congruent with bourgeois liberalism in the 1969-71 period. Thus NPAC was a non-electoral "popular front" quite parallel to those set up by the Stalinists "against war, fascism," etc. in the 1930s. In terms of actual organizational power, NPAC was an SWP front group, that is, the activists and apparatus were effectively controlled by the SWP/YSA so that other political forces, including the liberal bourgeoisie, operated at the sufferance of the SWP.

Our call for "Bourgeoisie Out of the Anti-War Movement" was not meant as a self-sufficient programmatic statement. Rather it was a central agitational slogan as part of a series of interrelated demands constituting a revolutionary defeatist and class-struggle policy toward the Vietnam War. In no sense was the demand, "Bourgeoisie Out of NPAC" meant to be, "NPAC Without the Bourgeoisie." We gave agitational emphasis, at the time, to kicking out the liberal politicians because their presence represented the most obvious, gross and unpopular manifestation of the SWP's liberal social-chauvinism on the war question.

The Spartacist tendency had broken with the SWP's "independent" anti-war organizations in 1965 when, after a big fight, the primal ancestor of NPAC, the National Coordinating Committee, was formed on the basis of the single slogan, "End the War Now." We asserted such an organization was a deliberately conceived obstacle to a defeatist and class-struggle centered anti-war campaign. We further pointed out, at the time, that the logic and purpose of the SWP's line would lead to a common organization with bourgeois political forces (then represented by pacifists and liberal academics) should opposition to the war develop within the ruling class. The organizational entrance of prominent Democratic politicians around 1969 represented the full realization of and not a change in the nature of the SWP's anti-war organizations. Of course, the actual presence of Hartke et al. was a powerful verification of our line on the SWP and anti-war movement in general, which is why we gave it so much agitational emphasis.

Between 1965 and the entry of prominent bourgeois pol-

iticians into anti-war organizations around 1969, the SL employed a number of main agitational slogans in its anti-war activities, notably "Victory for the Vietnamese Revolution" and "For Labor Strikes Against the War." These slogans (like that of "Bourgeoisie Out of the Anti-War Movement") were not presented as self-sufficient programmatic statements. Rather such slogans were attempts to encapsulate, under differing conditions of intervention, a revolutionary, internationalist and proletarian policy toward the Vietnam War.

Given the front group nature of NPAC, an expulsion of the bourgeois politicians could only have come about through a major left split in the SWP which destroyed the latter's organizational control of NPAC. Had such a development occurred in 1969-71, we would have had two tactical choices to be decided by concrete circumstances. One was opposition to any "independent" anti-war organization in favor of a series of united fronts centered on working-class tendencies. The other tactic would have been a bloc of working-class tendencies in the form of a defeatist and class-struggle oriented, nominally independent, anti-war organization. The purposes of such a bloc are outlined in the first section.

Democratic Versus Class Demands

It is incorrect to view this question as if there were two fundamentally different types of united fronts, i.e., one a united front to defend democratic rights in which bourgeois elements are permitted, the other around class demands in which only workers organizations can participate.

A rigid dichotomy between democratic and class demands is invalid. Clearly the right of a member of a workers party to teach in a public school is in the interest of the workers movement. On the other hand, even purely wage struggles have a democratic component. In numerous, important situations any difference between support for the democratic right to strike and support to an actual strike simply collapses. At the limit, one should recall that the Bolshevik Revolution was partly motivated by the need to defend the democratic institutions of the working masses from imminent bourgeois reaction. Rather than two kinds of united fronts, there is a *continuum* of social struggles ranging from localized civil liberties cases to the seizure of state power by a workers militia, in which the united front is an applicable tactic.

The notion of a dichotomy between democratic and class issues contains the seed of a serious rightist deviation, particularly if applied to backward countries. The idea of struggles around democratic demands normally involving alliances with the bourgeoisie as distinct from the struggle for workers power contains key elements of a two-stage revolution, if extended beyond episodic situations. Applied literally it would prevent a communist vanguard from seeking to transform a mass upsurge initially centered on a united-front struggle for democratic rights into a class-based socialist revolution.

Just as a continuum exists in the democratic/class-struggle programmatic character of a united front, so a continuum exists in the degree of bourgeois participation. It is an elementary proposition of Marxism that struggles which are objectively against the interests of the bourgeoisie will be opposed by the organizations of the bourgeoisie. The more directly and significantly the demands of a united front go against bourgeois interest, the less likely bourgeois participation. Thus, while there may be substantial bourgeois support for the right of an academic Marxist to hold

a professorship, there would not have been any bourgeois support for a committee to transform the recent San Francisco city workers strike into a general strike. Thus, the bourgeoisie is *self-excluded* from a given united front by its program and context.

"The Workers United Front"

The "workers united front" of the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International was the application of the united-front tactic to a particular historically conditioned political class alignment, then exemplified by Germany. This political alignment included a mass reformist workers party and consequently the general recognition by the workers of the need for an independent class political expression. Secondly, the communist vanguard had sufficient organizational weight to materially affect the outcome of a concrete struggle and was therefore viewed as a desirable ally by workers loyal to the reformist party. A propaganda group of a few hundred could not apply the "workers united front" tactic to a many-millioned reformist party.

The "workers united front" was not a type of united front to be distinguished from other types of united front; it was essentially a *slogan* (see 18 December 1921 ECCI *Directive on the United Front*, Sec. 7) to agitate for a series of united fronts between the communist vanguard and reformist parties. As an agitational slogan it had two virtues. It pointed to the contradiction between the reformist party's claim to represent class interests and its collaboration with the bourgeoisie often against the communists. Secondly, it asserted that unity in struggle between the reformist party and communist vanguard would, in reality (and not merely in exemplary fashion), bring the full power of the organized working class into play.

The "workers united front" did not involve the mechanical exclusion of bourgeois elements. Rather in Western Europe in the 1920s, bourgeois support for workers' struggles would necessarily be marginal. Where bourgeois support for mass struggles (including strikes) would not be marginal—namely, in the colonial countries—the slogan of "workers united front" was not considered applicable. Even in Western Europe, united fronts with bourgeois elements were not ruled out in principle. When the French army occupied the Ruhr in 1923, the KPD (German Communist Party) formed a united front with right-wing nationalists! While Radek's tactics were criticized as being overly embrasive (the Schlägeter line), no one considered a united front with such forces as wrong in itself. When Trotsky called for a united workers front against fascism, he certainly did not mean that if a contingent from the Catholic Center Party (which had a certain working-class constituency) showed up to defend a union meeting against Nazi goons, they should be told to go home. Quite the contrary! The primary, often dominant, purpose of the "workers united front" is to win over the base of the reformist party. However, a secondary purpose is to win petty bourgeois and those particularly backward workers still tied to bourgeois parties. Such political elements must be permitted to participate in a united front under their own organizational banners, not merely as atomized individuals.

The American Question

The "workers united front" presupposes both the existence of a mass reformist party and of a communist vanguard strong enough to materially affect the outcome of labor

conflicts. Neither of these conditions are met in the U.S. today. The political class alignment in the U.S. resembles that of Western Europe before the emergence of mass workers parties. The closest parallel is late nineteenth century Britain where a strong union movement supported the Liberal Party, while the would-be revolutionary socialists existed as propaganda groups. The "workers united front" is a demand that the mass reformist organizations break with class collaboration and struggle for the workers' interests in alliance with the communist vanguard. A literal transposition of the "workers united front" to the U.S. would be a demand that the AFL-CIO break with the Democratic Party and form a series of fighting alliances with the Spartacist League. Once the question is posed that way, the inapplicability of the tactic is obvious.

This does not mean that the underlying conception behind the "workers united front"—the counterposition to class collaboration of unity in struggle with the communists—is inapplicable in the U.S. Rather the principal tactical form of that counterposition cannot be the united front. The American equivalent of the tactic known as the "workers united front" is the labor party—a party formed through the trade unions breaking from the bourgeois parties and open to the program and cadre of the communist vanguard.

In sharpening our line against Wohlforth, we have asserted that a labor party (of any sort) is only a historical possibility and not a necessary stage in constructing a mass revolutionary party. In other words we do not preclude, at this time, the linear development of the SL into *the* mass party of the American workers through direct conflict with the Democratic Party. A fixation with the united front or its proper American analogue, the labor party, tends toward a two-stage theory of party building since embodied in these concepts is a mass workers party not led by communists.

There is a notion put forth, for example, by Harry Turner of what might be termed the "exemplary united front of the workers"—a united front of ostensibly revolutionary propaganda groups symbolically representing proletarian unity. Such a formation is based on a series of programmatic demands (usually culled from the *Transitional Program*) which exclude not only bourgeois elements, but the trade unions as well. As a concept, the united front for propaganda elevates the united front above the party as a kind of higher political organization. In practice, it often is a device whereby a small propaganda group seeks to overcome its numerical inferiority by dissolving larger organizations into a common public face.

While it is possible to exclude bourgeois elements from united fronts that we organize, it is impossible for us to exclude them from the major struggles of the American workers. Organizations involving bourgeois support for labor struggles are not "popular fronts," which we refuse on principle to enter. Thus, we played an active role in the Farmworker support committees despite the prominent presence of Ted Kennedy, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, etc. To apply one tactic and one tactic only in dealing with bourgeois presence in labor struggles—demanding their immediate and unconditional exclusion—would be stupid ultimatism, would be an obstacle to our struggle for leadership over the class. Our party must know how to use the united front tactic to expose and discredit friend-of-labor politicians.

—Mid-April 1974

A Talk on the Labor Party Question

by Jim Robertson

Note: The following is a slightly edited version of comrade Jim Robertson's "Talk on the Labor Party Question," delivered at an internal youth educational in Boston on 5 November 1972.

This report is intended to be a presentation of a series of interlocked home truths and a comment on the search for deviations, of which in a hardened way we seem to have discovered only two. Its origins are that in the West Coast Labor Day Pre-Conference Discussion the issue of the Labor Party quite thoroughly dominated the discussion. A great deal of uncertainty, confusion and a very considerable spread of opinion on the Labor Party question presented themselves there, and we had to thrash them out.

At this point the slogan which I have been defending and want to defend here is the slogan "Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers Party based on the trade unions." Another slogan which was debated and which presents an aspect of rank and file-ism, of syndicalism, would be the slogan "For a Labor Party without bureaucrats." Now that slogan lacks the contradictory tension of a struggle and suggests simply rank and file-ism and possibly, by implication, the development of an organized mass workers party counterposed to the trade unions: perhaps the political equivalent of the red unions of the CP's third period.

I gather that on the Coast there is perhaps a comrade who objects to the first part of the slogan, "Dump the bureaucrats," and just wants to have a slogan "For a Labor Party based on the trade unions." In New York there is a comrade who just wants to have the slogan "Dump the bureaucrats! For a Communist Party."

There is a great deal of confusion. The confusion centers along two separate axes, and that's why there's a great deal of confusion, or rather, complicated confusion. Furthermore, in the last debate in New York, I spent all my time on the decisions of the Third and Fourth Congresses. I'm going to evade that this time and simply point out that the Labor Party slogan is the current American version of the issue of the united front. It's posed in the absence of a massive political expression of reformism or Stalinism in the United States; rather, with the organization of industrial unions with a deeply committed pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, it is toward them that the issue of proletarian unity and the process of communist triumph in struggle is centered on the Labor Party question. The axes are twofold....

There are two axes of confusion over the Labor Party. One is the importance of realizing that this is a propagandistic demand for us today *which has no relationship to what will happen in the future*. That is, today, the Workers League to the contrary notwithstanding, the idiots who think that Meany who does not like Negroes, homosexuals or abortion laws is therefore building a Labor Party in order to carry out these anti-capitalist demands—it's nonsense. There has to be a sense of proportion, which the Communist Party originally lost in 1924.

In the first place, the Labor Party is not the issue for

propaganda; the workers government is. Now, we stumbled into this. If you read the early issues of *Workers' Action*, you will find out that the final, triumphant, ultimate statement of position in the *Workers' Action* program was for a Labor Party. Uh-uh. We are for a workers government, in the unions, in the plants and in our general education and approaching students with the conception of proletarian power. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a formulation which suffers certain problems. A popular understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the workers are going to be put into concentration camps, like in Russia. If you talk of some kind of socialism, you get an image of happy Sweden maintaining its high alcoholism and suicide rates through victoriously staying out of two world wars. [Laughter] But what should be clear in *every* way, over every kind of issue, is that the working people need their own government.

But—how do you get a government? That implies a political party of the working people—a class party. And it is as a subordinate element of the achievement of a workers government, which is an algebraic expression, as the saying goes, for the concrete realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that they require a workers or a Labor Party, which in its concrete, arithmetical expression is a revolutionary Labor Party: a Bolshevik party.

That's a propaganda presentation.

Now what's really going to happen in this country? Who knows?... Only Lynn Marcus. [Laughter] I'll give you some variants.

One is: We have an unpolitical, extremely combative working class, with a bureaucracy that at present and without the aid of a thousand YSAers, is incapable at any serious level of struggle of controlling this class. Part of the residue of the enormous class struggles in Europe is the presence of an extremely sophisticated, able, political bureaucracy in depth. Can you imagine the capacity of a George Meany to cope with an American general strike the way that the CP did in France in '68? It's impossible. Which is where Jack Barnes and his gang think they've got their opening.

So it's entirely possible now—as indicated in the fundamental premises of the Transformation Memo—now that American hegemony has been lost, reducing the United States to merely the most powerful (but very effective) of the capitalist/imperialists, and with the fundamental preconditions for severe social crisis laid down on the planet, that the American working class may be impelled into massive political actions without a party, without a revolutionary party, without any party at all, and overwhelm the bureaucracy. That will be in the best case a fruitful catastrophe, rather akin to the Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution. It is not something, therefore, that we work for. But as a smaller propagandistic group, we'll do our job. If it comes to that, if we are unable to have the capacity as revolutionists to place ourselves at the head of insurgent masses, we will fight anyhow, even if we have to go through an experience as the Spartakusbund did in

1918/1919. The next time around it will be different, then.

That's a possibility—that's if the motion at the base in the class accelerates.

It is possible to go to the other extreme—given an orderly, stretched-out intensification of social crisis, the capacity of the growing communist movement to keep ahead of developments, a thing which had begun to suggest itself classically in 1934 in this country when three ostensibly communist organizations led three city-wide general strikes (in Toledo, San Francisco and in Minneapolis): the possibility that the communist party could simply grow in linear fashion.

The other possibility would be the realization of a Labor Party either of a revolutionary or of a reformist character. That is, under the accumulated mounting pressures of social struggle, the bureaucracy begins to be torn asunder through the pressure from below, from developing class antagonisms, and it becomes stretched. With a successful communist agitation at the same time, the Labor Party could be formed in what will be a very convulsive act.

What is behind so much of the conceptual garbage that the Workers League puts out is that the Labor Party is an easy thing. (By the way, there's a book by Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labor Party*, which is useful for guidelines.) If you study the history of the achievement of political class consciousness by *any* proletariat, you'll see that it is a convulsive, historically monumental act—sometimes compressed, sometimes stretched out—but always enormous in character, even if the outcome after the dust begins to settle is the restabilization of a pro-capitalist bureaucracy. The impact of ripping the mass of the working people away from capitalism—so that the assertion is: we need a society in which the working people govern, the productive property is nationalized—is enormous, and on top of this is laid the reformist and Stalinist labor skates. That will be a convulsive period in American history, substantially larger than that of the sit-down period from '35 to '37.

But what will happen bears no particular relationship to our present advocacy, which is a way to pose the question of working people becoming the government and developing the political instrument to achieve this, to link up that objective fundamental need with the present consciousness of the bulk of trade-union-conscious American workers. The attempts to telescope with "what ifs," as though there is a particular relationship, a linear connection, between what we say today and what will happen in mass motion is the source of a great deal of confusion and error.

I left open the question of the outcome, of the character of the Labor Party in the third case. In the Bay Area somebody said, "Ah, but how can there be a revolutionary Labor Party? Obviously by definition it's reformist." And immediately there came to mind the examples of the transformations of the Italian and French mass Socialist Parties into Communist Parties and, more engagingly, because of the similarity in name and origins, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Majority) is commonly taken to be a revolutionary Labor Party. But that depends on the relationship of forces in the development between the revolutionists and the reformists who associate themselves with such an insurgent move on the political plane—approximately the same way that John L. Lewis and a section of the AFL bureaucracy did with the CIO industrial organizing in 1935.

So that's one kind of confusion.

The other axis of confusion is over the question of why advocate a Labor Party and what is the relationship between

the advocacy of a Labor Party and its political character? Will it represent the general historic interests of the proletariat, i.e., be a revolutionary Labor Party, or will it represent special, partial, narrow, limited, aristocratic, chauvinist and nationalist appetites within the proletariat, i.e., be a reformist Labor Party? And therefore, why advocate a Labor Party at all since it seems to have a kaleidoscopic character?

There is, of course, a perfectly good circumstance in which our present propagandist and limitedly agitational advocacy of a Labor Party would be abandoned. And that is if we began to see that a communist party began to be recognized by advanced sections of the proletariat, not even very large ones but significant layers, and had the capacity to struggle in a linear way, by bootstrap operation, to become the authentic and literal vanguard of the class. At that juncture we would probably see a section of the bureaucracy form a Labor Party very fast in an attempt to head this off. The progressive wing of the bureaucracy would counterpose the development of a Labor Party. And necessarily, from its birth, its essential purpose would be that of an anti-communist Labor Party. We would fight such a thing in every way. We would try to united-front it to death, we would denounce it to death, we would raid it to death, we would do everything we could to smash it in the egg at every step.

But that is a far cry from the present situation. It is literally not possible by qualitative orders of magnitude—not just one, but qualitative orders of magnitude—to advance at this juncture the Spartacist League as the answer to the felt mass problems of the proletariat. But those felt mass problems exist. And what does exist in a mass way is the trade-union movement. Therefore one can point out (and should!) that the trade-union movement, the economic organization of a section of the working class, has the responsibility to offer the political as well as the economic answers to the plight of the working people. And so it is an address made to that one institution that exists in the United States—the organized labor movement.

Now I've got a couple of other points to make in this connection. To go back to the workers government slogan, which is the purpose of the Labor Party agitation, we should be clear what is meant by a workers government. It is nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. There have appeared some speculations or projections, either in a hypothetical way or at one point as an ephemeral possibility in history, that a workers government is not simply a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Interestingly enough, in the formulations of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, where there was a vagueness and an abstraction about the projection of the conditions under which a workers government would be achieved, both Hal Draper and Joe Hansen zeroed in on that material—as they did on a phrase in the *Transitional Program*—in order to "prove" that from the British Labour Party government of 1945 to Ben Bella in Algeria to Fidel Castro's Cuban government—all were workers governments.

The concrete possibilities that Trotsky posed in the *Transitional Program* were roughly of the following formulation: It is conceivable that under mass revolutionary pressure reformist elements might go much further in the direction of a workers government than they ever conceived they would at the outset. That was a "what if" question, a generalization on the following condition that took place in the Russian Revolution between February and October: The

slogan of the Bolsheviks addressed to the Provisional Government—which was a coalition government of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, the minuscule Trudoviks of Kerensky and the Cadet Party, that is, the Constitutional Democrats, the effective liberal bourgeois party—was the slogan “Down with the ten capitalist ministers, form a government purely of the workers parties,” coupled of course with the social and political and economic demands that the Bolsheviks were raising. Posed in a “what if” way, the question is, what if under mass pressure the Cadets had been thrown out of the government? You would have a murky period at that point, something not very stable, in the context of what already is inherently a historical episode of a dual power situation between a bourgeois government and the existence of organized nationwide soviets. What that would represent is not a workers government separate and apart from the dictatorship of the proletariat, but an episode immediately on the way. But of course the centrists make much out of non-viable episodes possible in the histories of revolutions in order to try to construct a sort of third camp between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the administration of a bourgeois state by the reformists.

Now another question’s been raised, just lately; a useful question has been posed by comrade Seymour’s article on the Labor Party, I think, because it’s not a clear-cut case and it shows some problems in actual application. And that’s the experience of the Communist Party in 1923-24 with the Farmer-Labor Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the general issue of the possibility of a bloc between the communists and, as Cannon put it, the progressive section of the labor movement. You know, apparently it is never too late to learn something, because after 25 years, while reading Seymour’s piece, it suddenly occurred to me, Farmer-Labor Party—wait a minute, that’s a *two-class party*, we’re opposed to a *two-class party*, what the hell are we doing in a two-class party situation? “One step forward....” Furthermore, the thing has got to be reformist because what kind of interests of both workers and farmers could be contained within a common program? The farmers produce their commodities, they sell them themselves, they’re interested in high prices, squeezing out the middlemen, getting to the export market directly, all this kind of stuff is the economic program of the farmers. Sometimes of course farmers can be pretty restless and make a lot of trouble. But those interests of the workers that you could possibly put together could only be extremely narrow, the circumscribed interests of the American working class, even if you just sat down and said, “Let’s cook up a Farmer-Labor Party.” Necessarily it would have to be episodic and limited in a reformist way because there are a lot of antagonisms between petty- and not so petty-bourgeois producers, which is what farmers are, and the proletariat.

And that’s the key to what was wrong in 1924 with the Communist bloc with the Chicago Federation of Labor. From the outset it was preordained that the struggle was going to be for a *reformist* Labor Party, i.e., throwing in the farmers to boot. And it was on that basis that a bloc was constructed then: that the Communists would simulate a reformist party hoping to maneuver on the inside, courtesy of brother Pepper. It’s on that basis and probably from that experience that Shachtman wrote his excellent article in 1935, where he asked, “Who needs a second-class, fake, reformist, hidden Communist Party?”

Now we, for our part, should have no reason to be opposed to a bloc with a section of the labor movement, including the labor officialdom, providing that bloc goes in the direction we want it to go. But looking back to 1923, on what basis for heaven’s sake is this Chicago Federation of Labor going to give us what we want? That is, an agreement to struggle for a Labor Party together in the first place, and in the second place to struggle with each other over the character of its program and its cadres. On that basis we’ll make a bloc with people. If Meany says, “I’m for a Labor Party—you guys are for a Labor Party,” fine, we’ll all go and organize for a Labor Party and we’ll fight like hell to determine its program.

Yeah, we’d accept such a bloc and we’d fight—we’d seek such a bloc. The problem with a bloc is the nice old phrase of Bismarck that every alliance consists of two components—the horse and the rider. [Laughter] So that I do not know how we would realize the bloc because I’m afraid our projected horse would bolt. And the Communist Party clearly was doing the donkey work—or proposing simulating doing the donkey work for the trade-union officialdom—except that they also wanted organizational control by the Communists plus a reformist program. This is not in aid of anything, and that’s the basic reason why they got such a mess out of it.

So that in reviewing the historical experience—we ain’t ever for a Farmer-Labor Party—we *oppose* it. But a Farmer-Labor Party—it’s not going to happen in America. An interesting point that James Burnham made in 1938: He said, “Comrades, the *Transitional Program* says that we should be for a workers and farmers government in the United States.” But he observed already then, I believe, that there were more dentists than farmers in the United States, and therefore why not a workers and dentists government? [Laughter] Comrade Gordon waxes irate with me because I find the formula of a workers and “x” government very useful while on national tour. You know, there’s a workers and students government if you’re speaking on a campus; you go out to the military base, it’s a workers and soldiers government, you know. And you gradually move through all sections of the population. I suppose in Berkeley a few years ago it would have been a workers and women’s government. The final achievement is one that boggled my *own* mind. The Argentine Pabloists came out a few years ago for a workers and peoples government. [Laughter]

Well, we’re for a workers and “x” government, all right; the problem with motley America is that “x” stands for a wide variety. But behind that is a truism: that the dictatorship of the proletariat will be centrally, but not simply or purely, proletarian. There is a wide layer of oppressed sections in American society—racially, ethnically, socially oppressed, ranging from old people to Latins, blacks, students, soldiers. This is quite real, it’s quite true, although a workers and peoples government is not exactly the formulation that one wants. But it senses something that’s particularly important: If one says a labor movement or a Labor Party right now, there is very good reason to see it right now in the most encrusted, aristocratic, racist, chauvinist, George Meany-like fashion. It’s extremely important and one of the reasons for the formulation “Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers Party!” There’s no difference in conception between a “Workers Party based on the trade unions” and a “Labor Party based on the trade unions,” except that the terminology projects a somewhat different conception.

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

Spartacist League of Australia

Spartacist ANZ Publishing Co.
GPO Box 3473, Sydney, NSW, 2001, Australia

Australasian
SPARTACIST 

Marxist journal of the Spartacist League of Australia
\$5/4 issues (1 year) in Australia and seairmail elsewhere
\$7/4 issues—Airmail

Spartacist League/Britain

Spartacist Publications
PO Box 1041, London NW5 3EU, England

WORKERS HAMMER 

Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain
£3/1 year International rate: £7—Airmail
Europe outside Britain and Ireland: £4

Trotskyist League of Canada/ Ligue trotskyste du Canada

Spartacist Canada Publishing Association
Box 6867, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X6, Canada

SPARTACIST CANADA 

*English-language newspaper of the Trotskyist League/
Ligue trotskyste*

\$3/6 issues International rate: \$8—Airmail

Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands

SpAD, c/o Verlag Avantgarde
Postfach 51 06 55, 13366 Berlin, Germany

SPARTAKIST 

*Herausgegeben von der Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei
Deutschlands*

6 Ausgaben: DM 5,—
Auslandsabo: DM 15,— Übersee Luftpost: DM 20,—

Dublin Spartacist Group

PO Box 2944, Dublin 1, Republic of Ireland

Ligue trotskyste de France

Le Bolchévik, BP 135-10, 75463 Paris Cedex 10, France

LE BOLCHEVIK 

Publication de la Ligue trotskyste de France
10 numéros: 30 FF Hors Europe: 40 FF (avion: 60 FF)
Etranger: mandat poste international

Spartacist Group India/Lanka

write to Spartacist, New York

Lega trotskista d'Italia

Walter Fidacaro, C.P. 1591, 20101 Milano, Italy

SPARTACO 

Bollettino della Lega trotskista d'Italia
Abbonamento a 6 numeri (1 anno): L. 6.000
Europa: L. 8.000 Paesi extraeuropei: L. 12.000

Spartacist Group Japan

PO Box 49, Akabane Yubinkyoku, Kita-ku, Tokyo 115, Japan

スパルタシスト

Publication of the Spartacist Group Japan
Current Issue: ¥100

Grupo Espartaquista de México

P. Linares, Apdo. Postal 453, 06002 México 1, D.F., Mexico

ESPARTACO

Publicación del Grupo Espartaquista de México
México: 4 números/N\$ 10 (por correo)
Extranjero: US \$4/4 (vía aérea) US \$2/4 (vía marítima)

Spartacist/Moscow

121019 Moscow g-19, A/Ya 19, Russia

Spartakusowska Grupa Polski

Platforma Spartakusowców, Skrytka Poczтовая 148
02-588 Warszawa 48, Poland

Platforma
SPARTAKUSOWCÓW 

Pismo Spartakusowskiej Grupy Polski
4 numery: 12.000 zł

Spartacist League/U.S.

Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA (212) 732-7860

WORKERS VANGUARD

Biweekly organ of the Spartacist League/U.S.
\$10/22 issues (1 year)
International rates:
\$25/22 issues—Airmail \$10/22 issues—Seamail

Fraternal

Luta Metalúrgica (Brazil)

Av. Lucas Evangelista no. 418 s/306
CEP 27295-320
Volta Redonda, RJ, Brazil