
Supporters and Opponents of the United Front

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The “United Front” is at present the most popular slogan in the world. People belonging to different political parties or having different opinions are adopting resolutions about the creation of a united front. Political writers are devoting many articles to this subject. And the united front is now agitating very large circles of toilers and leaders of the labor and political movement. But the more that is written or spoken about the united front, the more this subject is obscured by misunderstandings and confusion. Everyone approaches the subject from a specific standpoint, hence why the movement in favor of a united front has not produced the results which might have been expected. Let us examine what are the conditions for the creation of a united front, for which forces can be united for common action.

Capital is attacking — it must be counterattacked. This is the reason for the rush to the united front. The stronger the attack of capital is, the stronger and more imperative is the rush for the united front. Germany and Italy offer us the possibility to investigate all the phases of the struggle for the united front and to determine who are its adversaries and where are its followers.

The conditions of the working class in Germany are doubtless worse than anywhere else. The German worker gets a wage 11 times lower than the worker in the United States of America. To be sure he does not suffer from unemployment, because he fulfills the role of a coolie for the American, English, and French capitalists. The ever increasing cost of living due to the deflation of money makes the life of the German worker harder every day. The bourgeoisie is all the time looking for some means of agreement with the English and French capitalists, and never slackens its op-

pressive grip over the workers. The government issues billions in paper money, and wages cannot keep pace with the rising cost of living. The working class leads a wretched existence, bordering almost on starvation.

In such conditions the United Front becomes an imperative necessity. To gather all the strength of the working class and to render the struggle against the capitalists more acute — such is the urgent need of the day.

But how do the leaders of the General Federation of German Trade Unions comport themselves? Or the German Social Democratic Party? They continue their coalition with the bourgeoisie without taking heed of the growing demand for a workers’ unity front. They are attempting to extend their collaboration with the bourgeoisie as far as the People’s Party (Stinnes’ party). The demand for a united front meets with fierce resistance from the side of the leading reformist organs. Why are the reformists so hostile to the unity of the workers, against their lining up in one revolutionary front? Why do they follow the path of coalition with the bourgeoisie? Because the creation of a single revolutionary proletarian front is the beginning of the Social Revolution. The united working class in Germany will crush its bourgeoisie. But the reformists want no struggle — they are afraid of it. They think that the working class can win without a struggle. That is why they resist by every means the creation of a workers’ front, and pursue the course of a workers’-and-bosses’ front. Nevertheless, the conditions for the establishment of a single front in Germany were never so favorable. Even such layers of the toilers as the office and railroad employees are starting to get satisfaction through the application of proletarian methods of struggle. For every worker it is obvious that they will

be beaten, but the harder the conditions become the stronger is the desire for a United Front. However, the reformist bureaucracy and the opportunist social democracy are making every possible effort to stem the current towards a single front, to crush it and draw part of the workers to the side of the bourgeoisie, thereby weakening the workers' power and destroying the possibility of a successful defense or a successful attack.

We are witnessing the same picture in Italy, where a sharp crisis is oppressing the already economically exhausted country. Unemployment is growing, a financial crisis is getting more and more acute, and the Italian bourgeoisie wants to make use of this crisis and get its revenge. The General Confederation of Labor avoids the struggle and is looking for compromise, distracting the working class from its only task — the revolutionary struggle. Communists have many months ago declared the necessity for a single front. They have offered to fight for a practical program; they promised revolutionary forms and methods of struggle for the defence of the livelihood of the workers. But here, too, the united front has not been created. The reformists with their belief in peaceful development and in the humanity of the democratic government put every obstacle in the way to unity. There is no struggle — there is no united front. The Italian proletariat is feverishly looking for such methods of struggle as will allow them to untie the noose around their necks. It would be possible if all the forces were united. But what obstructs the unification of forces? The exaggerated demands of the Communists, as the reformists are saying? No! The Communists do not ask the masses to become Communists. They propose to fight for the everyday needs of the workers and to stop talking about the justice of their theories. Here, too, the reformists avoid the struggle; and so long as there is no struggle, there can be no united front. The united front in Italy is still in the process of being made.

The French trade union movement gives us a striking illustration of how far a constant and unbridled reformism will lead. The General Confederation of Labor marches, as it is acknowledged, at the head of modern reformism. Its leaders, with innate French grace, have gone over from the extreme Left to the extreme Right and find things very comfortable there. They have undertaken the task not of strengthening

the labor organizations, not of drawing in large working masses into the struggle, but to “clean” the General Confederation of Labor of the revolutionary elements which do not allow them conciliation with the bourgeoisie, and to carry on their policy of betrayal. The reformists standing at the head of the Confederation of Labor are shouting very loudly for unity. At home, and at the Amsterdam International, they are the most fervent clamorers for unity, but they understand it their own way. They wait to convert the French labor movement into a reformist cemetery, and think of unity as the conversion of all the workers into obedient reformist sheep. If this dream should become a reality, it will indeed mean unity, but unity of what? Unity in betrayal of working class interests, united refusal of their class demands. For several years all the ingenuity of the leaders of French trade unionism has been directed towards destroying the revolutionary danger and getting rid of the troublesome elements. They have acquired a policeman's psychology. The troublesome and dangerous elements are in their mind all those who strive towards revolution, all those who feel suspicious of bourgeois collaboration.

Those are dangerous, who stand for the Third (Communist) and the Red Labor Union Internationals. At every opportunity they brand the Communists and Revolutionary Syndicalists as disrupters. These fine fellows, possessing the patent of working class unity, little by little vitiate the working class and demoralize the labor organizations. The greater the demoralization they bring into the ranks of the working class, the more is their clamor and cursing against the “Moscow disrupters.” These tactics have brought the General Confederation of Labor very near to a split. It is only because of the firmness and cool heads of our French comrades that the French trade unions have not already split in two.

Vain were all the attempts to negotiate with the officials of the General Confederation of Labor; vain were all the methods of moral persuasion. Even the Unity Congress which gathered 1,500 delegates could not persuade the leadership of the General Confederation of Labor to keep in mind the necessity for labor unity. As yet there is no united front. The General Confederation of Labor is still composed of two parts, one of which — revolutionary — makes every possible effort to safeguard unity; the other one — re-

formist — making the same effort to break unity. Thus the reformists, putting all their hopes upon the bourgeoisie, are breaking up the labor organizations and sacrificing the revolutionary workers to the idea of conciliation with the progressive layers of bourgeois society.

The exchange of letters between the Red International of Labor Unions and the Amsterdam International on the question of the split in France can serve as a striking example of which are the followers and which are the adversaries of unity. We have followed step by step the development of the reformist and revolutionary policies, and we know who are the disrupters. In spite of our aversion to reformism and the repugnance every revolutionary feels against coalition of the labor leaders with the bourgeoisie, we have taken upon ourselves to initiate negotiations for the sake of conserving the unity of the trade union movement of France. We addressed ourselves to the Amsterdam International proposing to them to call a conference where both fractions would meet and attempt to avoid the split at any cost. How did the Amsterdam International respond to our request? First of all they declared that the split is the result of the actions of the Third (Communist) International. Then they expressed their readiness to call such a conference if we postponed the Unity Congress, which, as is known, was called by the revolutionary syndicalists for the purpose of keeping back their overly zealous leaders. And as we could not and did not want to postpone this congress, the Amsterdamers, following the advice of the General Confederation of Labor (meaning Citizen Jouhaux), told us that in view of the fact that the Congress was already over and that “you and your friends are guilty of the split,” they considered the conference useless. This cable is a master piece of hypocrisy. The Amsterdam International knows very well who is splitting apart the General Confederation of Labor. They are also aware that the Revolutionary Syndicalists demand the leaders of the Confederation of Labor to abide by the statutes; that the Revolutionary Syndicalists are on the defensive, willing to do anything to avoid expulsion, and that it is for this purpose that they had called the Congress. To postpone it under such conditions would have meant to disorganize the followers of unity, to help out the followers of a split, which neither the Red International of Labor nor the Revo-

lutionary Syndicalists could permit.

However, their pretext is quite “logical.” They decline the conference because the Congress took place. Let us admit that the split had already occurred; then it would have been necessary to call the conference for the unification of the divided sections. The General Confederation of Labor is nearing a split. If the French reformists persist in their criminal policy, a split must take place. Thus, whether the French labor movement is on the verge of a split, or is already split, as the Amsterdam International tells us — in either case unity is necessary; in either case it is necessary to unite the hostile parts.

The Amsterdam International is afraid to put the question of unity squarely, to meet us in the open before the international proletariat and to solve the question of the labor movement in France. They do not want to meet us because they know beforehand that we really mean unity, which they do not want. We want it because the working class is for it, because unity is the trump card against the bourgeoisie. But the Amsterdamers do not want victory, they want to postpone for a long time the clash between the opposing classes. Unity is contrary to their interests and therefore they are making every effort to break the movement of the workers towards a united front, to disorganize and demoralize its ranks. And the more their tactics are successful, the more disorganization and moral decomposition they bring to the working masses, the more they destroy real unity, all the more do they clamor hysterically for a united front.

How shall unity be established under such conditions? How can we unite the working masses if we meet such a stubborn opposition on the part of the reformist parties and labor unions? It can be done only through a battle for unity. Unity is nothing immaterial, metaphysical. It is a tangible means of getting concrete results. The united front is not an aim, but a means to reach the aim. The aim is to take the offensive, to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The question of defense is a practical question of the day for every worker. Unity is growing out of the complexity and hardships of the social struggle. Thus among the problems before the worker which must be solved, unity is one of the most urgent.

On our part we again declare that we are against empty phrases about unity. We are telling the work-

ers: the capitalists are taking away your 8-hour day — get ready to resist; they are lowering your wages — let's create a solid single front and you will keep it intact. Your wages cannot keep up with the cost of living — let's close our ranks, let's stop isolated action and we will better our conditions; your wages are taxed to cover war expenses — let's gather all our forces and we will transfer the weight of taxes to the bourgeoisie; the growth of armaments and hostility between the ruling classes of different countries creates the danger of a new war — close your ranks, oppose your class-conscious might to the power of the bourgeoisie and you will avoid war. You are suffering from unemployment — organize the employed with the unemployed and you will compel the bourgeoisie to give you work and bread; hundreds of thousands of workers are starving from hunger and cold — let's take away the bourgeois hotels and dwelling houses and put there the starving families of the workers. This is what we propose to the workers. Is it acceptable for workers of different opinions? Yes, it is.

For such concrete action we are willing to unite with any labor organization. But when a labor organization, through its leaders, puts forward the slogan of conciliation with the bourgeoisie or looks for salvation to the League of Nations or the International Labor Bureau, we say: "On such a single front we will not unite. Our front is a real proletarian front and not a workers'-and-bosses' front; we do not want to align ourselves with the League of Nations and the International Labor Bureau. We want action and not mere

empty talk of class struggle. We want a united front within the working class and not a mixed class front."

In the ever fiercer struggle the working class meets a better organized attack, a united iron bloc of political and economic organizations of capital. A bloc attacking the elementary gains of the workers, a bloc which lowers the level of their livelihood, and on the corpses of many millions of workers wants to reestablish capitalism and perpetuate "normal" capitalist exploitation. Here is the reason the working class is longing for the united front. It is the instinct of self-preservation. It is an answer to the imminent danger.

It is a blow for a blow. And as the struggle becomes more fierce, the workers must attempt with more firmness to create a single front. They must sacrifice everything for the defensive and offensive struggle against capital. The united front is created because of the danger of the working class being destroyed, it is created in the struggle, in action. The class that will show more endurance will have a more solid front. The closer welded class will win. If the bourgeoisie have had the upper hand over the working class up till now, it is not only because it is better organized, but because of the support of labor organizations, because of reformism, which is the most vital expression of the power of the bourgeoisie over the working class. Struggling against the bourgeoisie, the working class creates the united front, and on the basis of class activity is losing its reformism. And as soon as it will get rid of reformist it will approach to its final victory.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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