

Are Popular Fronts Necessary Today?



The answer is a resounding YES. They are necessary and indispensable given the condition of oppression and exploitation that are worsening, and from which the people are suffering. The proletariat, with its party at the forefront, should be at the head of the popular masses, to organize and lead their struggles. It is not an easy task, but all difficulties can be overcome. For that to happen, it is necessary to work to link up in a broad manner with the advanced masses, to win their recognition.

The Congress of the Communist International (1921) stated that “The *United Front*[of the proletariat] *is the unity [...] of the workers who are decisive in the fight against capitalism*”. Dimitrov insisted that the Popular Front, given the circumstances that existed in the world, was an urgent necessity and that its essential basis must be the United Front of the Proletariat.

The fundamental contradictions of the period in which we live and struggle, are perfectly defined: *The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; the contradiction between capitalism and socialism; the contradiction between oppressed peoples and nations on the one hand and imperialism on the other; the contradiction among imperialist and financial powers.* The last contradiction manifests itself in the local wars, the aggressions against the peoples, the contention for geostrategic zones and the exploitation of the neo-colonies, the manipulation of the democratic and patriotic sentiments of the peoples. It is a rapidly growing contradiction.

We live in the period which Lenin defined, but with new characteristics and forms. Presently, we see the expression of a tendency towards fascism as organized groups of neo-Nazis carry out actions in various countries, and this should concern us. In many cases they are protected by the governments (such is the case in Greece, Hungary, Spain, etc.). Power and state apparatus, with some exceptions, are in the hands of parties and governments which are reactionary and anti-popular. The big powers and their puppet governments speak of democracy, of human rights, of peace among the people, while they are savagely subjugating and exploiting the people, who are oppressed, in many cases through force of arms.

This is a general situation, not in this or that country: in different degrees and different forms and intensity; it is a general tendency. The communist parties must daily confront situations of repression, of struggles for social conquests, against laws which encroach upon and suppress labor and social rights which had been achieved through many decades of struggle.

In his report to the VII Congress of the Communist International (1935), and with a similar situation at hand, Dimitrov focused on the importance of creating popular fronts against the conditions which arose with the growth of Nazi-fascism (Italy, Germany, Portugal, Japan, etc.). Despite the years which have passed and the events that have taken place, the report is still very relevant and can serve as a general orientation to the parties. It is evident that the present circumstances are not the same as the 1930s. The context in which we live is very different from that period, and it is enough to recall the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, the opportunist degeneration of many of the parties at that time, and that today, with some rare exceptions, the Marxist-Leninist parties are very weak, without much influence upon the broad masses.

The importance of Dimitrov’s writing is undeniable, yet we should keep in mind that the international situation is not the same, although there are problems of a similar nature (which are reflected in the fundamental contradictions), and it is also necessary to act according to the particular circumstances of each country and party. The work of a front cannot be carried out in the same manner in every country, since we have to take into consideration the inevitable unequal development, of the political forces as well as the Party and of society itself. It is undeniable that we

cannot compare the situation which Ecuador is living under (in all of the aspects pointed out), with that of Germany, for example, in Spain, Denmark, Turkey, Morocco, France, Venezuela, etc. etc., there are different conditions and therefore, tactically there will be differences, secondary differences, but in the end differences.

Defending the importance and the present aspects of Dimitrov's speech should not lead us to apply every detail, each and every aspect which his text deals with. To study, analyze and discuss the writings of great communist leaders, and Dimitrov is one of them, should not lead us to convert them into catechism, infallible doctrines, something which is opposed to the Marxist Leninist dialectic.

Each of our parties should consider these questions. There are no prefabricated answers. Only the dialectic examination, that is of the moment which can change from one day to the other, without separating ourselves from tomorrow's strategy, whose course cannot be predicted or defined, will allow us to take up tactical positions and measures to confront and attempt to solve the problems.

The important thing is to keep in mind at all times the reality in which our parties live and evolve, work and struggle. Therefore, we must keep in mind a decisive fact: In almost all countries, with different levels of development, the working class is the most revolutionary and its advanced members are at the head of the struggles for justice. But the working class is not the only class exploited by capitalism. There are sectors of the small and middle bourgeoisie which also suffer oppression. And although their mentality is not that of the conscious proletariat, we should take those sectors into consideration and try to get closer to them. We should keep in mind that if the working class and its party do not try to unite the other working classes, including certain patriotic and democratic sectors of the middle classes, these could be manipulated by some faction of the bourgeoisie. Undoubtedly, the working class must win over, in the ideological and political combat, the role of vanguard of all those exploited and oppressed sectors and defend their demands.

This could be the basis for forging tactical, momentary alliances. But we should not confuse or counterpoise those *tactical* alliances of a given moment, to the *strategic* alliances. That is, we do not subordinate *strategic* alliances to questions of the moment, circumstantial ones, but neither do we subordinate *tactical* alliances to the establishment of possible *strategic* alliances, so long as this does not imply abandoning essential questions. To be clearer: we should be vigilant so as not to confuse with the Popular Front tactical, partial, or momentary alliances, in many cases local ones or of a city, region or province, including agreements with special sectors, but which cannot include the most advanced general sectors.

The Popular Front should respond to the general needs of the struggle, to political questions which are proposed, and above all, to mobilize the advanced masses to incorporate them into action.

The working class, theoretically the proletariat, should be the principal force of the Popular Front. *This means that in practice it should also be the leading force.* We should keep in mind that theory without practice is just empty words, and that practice without theory is like blindly striking out blows.

Given the broad political nature of the forces which could become part of the Front, the Party should strive to be at the head, be the leader (in relative terms depending on the circumstances) so that the proletariat can exercise its influence as the main force. That leading role is not achieved by force of will, or by a decree; it must be won in daily practice, by the clarity of our political proposals, with the respectful and faithful application of agreements.

If the party does not fulfil that role, in the long run it will tail behind the petit bourgeoisie and that would be a grave error. Here we should keep in mind the "Law of the unity and struggle of opposites".

This leads us to the question of the *ideological independence* of the Party. A Popular Front, built upon minimum agreements (depending on the circumstances), cannot take up all our proposals. But that should not lead us to renounce our political and ideological positions. Within the framework of the tasks of the Front, communists are, and will be, very careful at the time of fulfilling our agreements even if these are not exactly what we would have preferred.

The policy of unity in any alliance, and also in the Popular Front, should not lead us to forget the class struggle. In fact, the alliances, agreements or tactical compromises with other political forces should help us to reinforce the strength of the Party and not the other way around. That is not always understood, so that if the Party, communists, become diluted as a result of such an alliance, that would result in a grave weakening or possibly the disappearance of the Party.

With much ability and tact, and without high-handedness or strange manoeuvres, the Party should, as Lenin stated, lead everything. This forces us to carry out a clear and sincere work with the forces which make up the Front, to respect and fulfil the agreed-upon commitments and programs, but without forgetting that:

“...only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organizing a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass.” (Lenin, Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party. Our emphasis.)

We should be with the advanced masses, becoming more and better, to mobilize within the Popular Front and in all the fronts created which include the masses. That requires defeating the relative weakness of the parties, (without forgetting the inevitability of unequal development), since without a strong party we can do very little; and it is also necessary to be conscious of the fact that regardless how big and powerful a Party may be, we will always be a minority in society:

“...We communists are but a drop in the ocean, a drop in the ocean of the people”, but “without a party of the proletariat we cannot even consider the defeat of imperialism, the conquest of the dictatorship of proletariat...” and also the Party “is the vanguard of a class and its duty is to guide the masses, and not to reflect the average mental state of the masses,” Lenin sharply stated.

For communists it is of prime importance to carry out a constant work face-to-face with the masses. But this must be well planned and we should not speak of the masses in a superficial way, without being precise: we should lead the advanced masses and keep in mind that there are various levels of understanding among them regarding the struggle. Dimitrov said that *“Sectarianism finds expression particularly in overestimating the revolutionization of the masses...”* and he quoted Lenin, *“we must not regard that which is obsolete for us, as obsolete for the class, as obsolete for the masses.”*

Lenin, like Stalin, Dimitrov, the great leaders, were constantly concerned about the work towards the masses. Lenin specified and warned:

“There is nothing more warranted than the urging of attention to the constant, imperative necessity of deepening and broadening, broadening and deepening, our influence on the masses, our strictly Marxist propaganda and agitation, our ever-closer connection with the economic struggle of the working class, etc. Yet, because such urging is at all times warranted, under all conditions and in all situations, it must not be turned into special slogans, nor should it justify attempts to build upon it a special trend in Social- Democracy. A border-line exists here; to exceed the bounds is to turn this indisputably legitimate urging into a narrowing of the aims and the scope of the movement, into a doctrinaire blindness to the vital and cardinal political tasks of the moment.”

“But for the very reason that the work of intensifying and broadening our influence on the masses is always necessary, after each victory as after each defeat, in times of political quiescence as in the stormiest periods of revolution, we should not turn the emphasis upon this work into a special slogan or build upon it any special trend if we do not wish to court the risk of descending to demagoguery and degrading the aims of the advanced and only truly revolutionary class.” (On Confounding Politics with Pedagogics, 1905)

To overestimate the role of the masses is as dangerous as to underestimate it, since both errors distort the role of the Communist Party. This also has to do with the Popular Front since its work is oriented precisely towards the popular masses. One of the conditions for considering an alliance as a Popular Front is that it include, as a minimum, sectors of the exploited and oppressed classes whether they are organized or unorganized.

It is necessary to pay attention, in all our activity, the Leninist Communist Party, leader of the proletariat, of the advanced sectors of the working class, so as not to confuse it with the “mass party” which is amorphous and includes the revisionists and right-wingers of every type. There exists a line of demarcation which must not be underestimated. For communists, what we define as “mass line” is to implement our politics and proposals in a decisive and capable manner outside of the Party. We should not limit ourselves just to our own members and intimate friends.

It is important to have a clear understanding of the lines of demarcation between Marxist-Leninists and opportunists, Khrushchevites, Maoists, including those who preach socialism of the 21st century. Does this mean that we should not have agreements, compromises, and unity pacts with all those who do not share our principles? Clearly not! If we only unite with those who share our ideas and principles, we would not be talking about alliances, popular fronts, etc.; we would only be talking about unity with communists. And that is a different problem.

Presently, many of our parties have a problem which is a history of weak organizing, which is trying to fulfil the role of leaders. This is not achieved through decrees; there are no magic formulas. It will be achieved, depending upon the circumstances, through our work and dedication. Alliances tactical agreements, etc. with other political forces or groups are proposed to us. We are not in a situation in which we can impose our positions. However, we should not refuse the offer because of that. On the contrary, we should participate loyally and in the discussions present our political proposals; we should discuss and confront opinions and little by little go about winning political and ideological ground.

A very simple question, but one which we do not always keep in mind, is that alliances of broad fronts are not meant to last forever. They must be seen as developing; they are not static alliances; what we propose and approve today as just and valid, can stop being so at another time.

The Popular Front is created depending upon the circumstances and we do not create circumstances; we find ourselves in them and we must take them up, always having in mind the evolution of these circumstances. As Dimitrov warns with a great deal of reason: *“. it is particularly dangerous to confuse the wish with fact. We must base ourselves on the facts, on the actual concrete situation.”*

The Popular Front is an important task which must be dealt with under all circumstances in which the political struggle is developing; it is not an option, it is a necessary task. To promote it and to advance in completing that task, the revolutionary party of the proletariat must draw up a correct revolutionary policy which takes into consideration the concrete conditions, always keeping in mind the strategic objectives. The application of that policy depends not only on its correctness, but also on the potential of the Party, of its forces. A just and correct revolutionary policy can remain as a proposal if there is not a firm decision to carry it out with the advanced sectors of the masses.

The experience of the international communist movement leads us to seriously consider the danger of deviations which can occur. Generally, the existing opportunism has been, and is, of the right. But we cannot forget that there is also left opportunism; both are particularly harmful to the work of a broad front. It is convenient to remember Marx's warning in his Critique of the Gotha Program: "*no bargaining about principles.*"

Right-wing opportunism tends to appear with the following expressions or characteristics: to make concessions of principles in order to make allies; to reduce the level of the struggle for fear of the enemy; to lag behind the level of consciousness of the masses instead of going in front of them; to exaggerate the importance of national or regional particularities without taking into account the general principles; and liberalism in matters of organization, of which the most dangerous is to *hide the Party* as if it did not exist. We should always keep Lenin in mind: *Enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principle.*" (What Is To Be Done?)

Opportunism of the left has the following main characteristics: the false criteria of all or nothing; not knowing how to make the needed concessions and compromises useful for the development of this work; not knowing how to adapt Marxism-Leninism to the particular conditions of the reality in which we live, allowing us to be influenced by the experiences of others, which leads to not know how to adapt or to make mistakes about the level and forms of the struggle and the objective conditions of the masses; in adopting rigid criteria in matters of organizing.

In his Poverty of Philosophy, Marx criticized opportunism. Quoting Juvenal: "*Et propter vitam Vivendi perdere causas*", in other words, "And for the sake of life to lose the reasons for living!" Let us not forget this old lesson.

Approved by XX Plenum of International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations, Turkey, nov. 2014.