

The United Front and Popular Front tactics in the strategy of communist movement. Proposals for a Front government in to-day's Italy.

1. *The origins of united front tactics.* After the victory of the October Revolution in Russia and after the foundation of the Communist International in 1919, the tactics of the proletarian united front was formulated for the first time by the III International in 1921, on Lenin's impulse, in a situation characterized, on the one hand, by the birth and the first development - in Europe - of some communist parties and, on the other hand, by the persistent influence of the main social democratic parties on a wide part of the working class.

Recognizing realistically an objective situation in which the revolutionary movement did not succeed in overwhelming capitalism either at a world-wide or at European level, communists understood the necessity to develop a political action suitable to conquer to the revolutionary positions more wide strata of the working and popular masses that still were on backward positions; and the necessity to conquer them not only by the propaganda and revolutionary agitation, but also on the ground of the direct participation of communists to the proletarian and popular fights, through the formulation of practical propositions of struggle for the more shared demands of the working masses and the leading of these fights through the communist directives and the experience of the masses themselves.

The strategy of the Communist International for the revolutionary breaking of the weak links of the world-wide imperialist chain, for the conquest of power through the revolutionary struggle, for the knocking down of the bourgeois State and the instauration of the proletarian dictatorship, remained unchanged; but this strategy, in accordance to a principle clearly stated by Stalin («*Tactics are a part of strategy, subordinate to it and serving it*», "The foundations of leninism"), was articulated in tactics consistent with an historical situation characterized by a slackening of the revolution and by a fierce bourgeois attack.

Tactics of united front - already experimented by the bolsheviks in Russia before the revolution of 1917 - found in Europe its first expression in the *Open letter* addressed in January 1921 by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) to the other worker parties (SPD, USPD and KAPD) and to trade unions, a letter which made an appeal to common actions for the immediate economical and wage demands of the workers, for the disarmament and dissolution of the bourgeois military formations and for the establishment of proletarian defense organizations. The appeal, rejected by the leaderships of the three parties, was then addressed by the communists to the rank and file organisations of the other parties, with the invitation to discuss together some common actions.

In the III Congress of the Komintern Lenin fought resolutely in favour of the united front of all workers indicated by the *Open letter*, and the *Theses on tactics* - that explained the necessity to conquer the majority of the working class - were approved unanimously-

«*The communist parties - stated the Theses - must put forward demands whose fulfilment is an immediate and urgent working-class need, and they must fight for these demands in mass struggle, regardless of whether they are compatible with the profit economy of the capitalist class or not*». The dialectic nexus between tactics and strategy of communists was indicated with utmost clarity; «*If the demands correspond to the vital needs of broad proletarian masses and if these masses feel that they cannot exist unless these demands are met, then the struggle for these demands will become the starting point of the struggle for power*».

The *Theses* exhorted communists to pay attention also to wide strata of little-and-middle employees and intellectuals, and in general to urban and rural lower middle class, in order to draw up them on the side of proletarian united front, appealing also to their growing impoverishment as a consequence of capitalistic economic crisis.

Finally, communists should try hard so that the development of mass struggles could lead into organizative results, namely into the formation of proletarian unity organisms in and outside the factories (strike committees, action committees, factory counsels, etc.), that are the framework of the worker movement.

2. *The worker's government as the political exit of the united front tactics.* As the culmination of the united front tactics, the Communist International in its IV Congress of 1922, put forward the slogan of the «worker's government» (or, according to concrete situations, of the «workers and peasants government»), which - as clearly explained the *Theses on tactics* of the following V Congress of 1924 - had not to be conceived «as a government within the bourgeois-democratic framework and as a political alliance with social-democracy», but as «a method of agitation and mobilization of the masses for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of soviet power».

According to this point of view, the slogan of «worker's government» was «the inevitable consequence of the whole tactics of united front».

In Italy, these revolutionary tactics were received and welcomed by the III Congress of Communist Party of Italy, set in Lyon in 1926 under the leadership of Antonio Gramsci. The *Political Theses* of that Congress stated, against every opportunist interpretation, that the formula of the workers and peasants government «indicates to the more backward masses the necessity of the conquest of power for the solution of the vital problems that concern them and is the way to carry them on the ground proper to the more advanced vanguard of proletariat (struggle for the proletarian dictatorship). In this sense, it's a formule of agitation, but does not correspond to a real phase of historical development. [...] In point of fact, a fulfilment of it can be conceived by the party only as the beginning of a direct revolutionary struggle, namely of the civil war run by the proletariat, allied with peasants, for the conquest of power».

3. *The anti-fascist popular front of the 30' of XX century, and the popular front government.* In the 30', in the new international reality characterized by the victory of Mussolini's fascism in Italy (1922) and of Hitler's national "socialism" in Germany (1933), communists must urgently face the dual task of struggling with the greatest force against the fascisms in power and of forestalling the success of fascism in the countries in which it had not yet won. In this situation was much needed, on the one hand, to profit of the internal weaknesses of the fascist regimes and, on the other hand, to consider the profound contradictions arisen within the social democracies, in which a part of workers was beginning to oppose themselves to the policy of class collaboration of their leaders with the bourgeoisie and to shift on positions more close to those of the revolutionary class struggle.

The VII Congress of Communist International (1935) pointed up as the first exigence of the struggle against fascism a vigorous restarting of the policy of proletarian united front, which could have a large influence on other strata of workers, on peasants and on the urban lower middle class. «It's necessary - said Dimitrov in his report on tactics - that the action unity of all sectors of the working class, aside from their party-or-organisation membership, is realized before the majority of working class unifies itself in the struggle for the overthrowing of capitalism and the victory of proletariat».

«Communists - continued Dimitrov - never must renounce to their independent work for the communist education, for the organization and mobilitation of the masses. However, in order to open to workers the way of action unity, it's necessary at the same time to engage agreements - of short or long duration - of common action with social democratic parties, with reformist trade unions and other worker's organisations against the class enemies of proletariat». All this both to rouse social and economic demands, and to carry out mass political actions and organize self-defence against the fascist aggressions.

A third and fundamental requirement was indicated for the formation of the united struggle front of proletariat: «Communists and all revolutionary workers must strive to build in the factories,

among the unemployed, in the worker districts, among the lower-class urban and rural people, elective not party-organisms of united front. Only organisms of this kind are able to conquer to the united front movement the huge mass of not organized workers».

In order to face the fascist menace the VII Congress made as well the proposal of the *«creation of a wide popular front on the basis of proletarian united front»*, as *«a battle alliance of proletariat with the working peasants and the fundamental masses of urban lower middle class that are the majority of the population in more developed industrial countries too»* (Dimitrov).

For the creation of the antifascist popular front was decisive *«the resolute action of revolutionary proletariat in defence of the demands of these strata»*, demands that *«should be coordinated, during the struggle, with the demands of the working class»*. But fundamental was the idea that the antifascist popular front should be built on the basis of proletarian united front, on the basis of mass organisms of proletarian united front, namely under the leadership of proletariat and in the perspective of an united front government built *«on the eve and before the victory of proletarian revolution»*.

The report on tactics examined finally the question of the antifascist popular front government: *«To the question»* - stated Dimitrov - *«if we, the communists, are on the ground of united front only in the struggle for the partial demands or if we are ready as well to assume responsibilities when it's the matter to form a government on the basis of the united front, we reply, with full conscience of our responsibility: yes, we consider that can arise a situation in which the formation of an united front government or of an antifascist popular front government is not only possible, but necessary in the interest of proletariat, and in this case, without any exclusion, we will intervene for the formation of a government of this kind»*.

He specified that this could occur on condition that:

- The bourgeois State apparatus is already disorganized and paralysed to the extent that the bourgeoisie can not prevent the formation of a government of struggle against reaction and fascism.
- The wide masses of workers, and particularly the mass trade unions, rise up impetuously against fascism and reaction, under the leading of communist party, for the conquest of political power.
- The differentiation and evolution to the left within both the social democracy and the other parties that support the front is arrived to such a point that a considerable part of social democracy requires the adoption of unmerciful measures against reaction and fascism.

We must - warned Dimitrov - *«increase our vigilance against the right-wing and "left-wing" deviations from the bolshevik line in that question»*.

A very momentous warning since the political leaders of revisionist parties - to say nothing of the bourgeois historians and the historians influenced by the ideology of modern revisionism - have at first opportunistically interpreted and then profoundly deformed the meaning of VII Congress of the Communist International, presenting its theses as a whole overturning of the VI Congress line (the congress in which the International had elaborated its *«Revolutionary Program»*). The theses discussed and approved by the VII Congress on the renewed tactics of proletarian united front and on the new tactics of antifascist popular front were presented by revisionists during a very long time as the start of a NEW STRATEGY whose content was a general political alliance with social democracy and other bourgeois parties (the so-called *«national ways to socialism»*).

In Italy, for example, on the basis of this mystification the leading group of P.C.I., with Togliatti at the head, build in the years after the second World War its revisionist political line and justified the agreement with the Christian Democracy.

The strategic indications of the VI Congress of the Communist International for the revolutionary exit from the crisis of capitalism remained steadfast in 1935 too: with reference to the new historical situation, changed the methods and tactics for the mass actions of proletariat and for the agreements to reach with other parties in order to carry out some common actions against

fascism and reaction, and to organize the mobilisations and struggles against the risk of new imperialist wars.

From the programmatic point of view, the programs of the popular fronts in France and Spain in the 30's contained an ample set of measures to carry out in favour of the working class and the working masses.

In France: introduction of the working week of 40 hours; two weeks of paid holidays for workers; obligatoriness of collective agreements between employers and workers; institution of a national fund against the unemployment; extension of the family allowances to rural workers; a large pension regime; a program of public works of a great purport; protraction of obligatory school courses until the 14th year of age.

In Spain: a large amnesty (300 000 detained were still in jail); re-engagement of workers and employees of public enterprises discharged for political reasons; a great program of public works against the unemployment; reduction of latifundia and rise of wages of rural workers; reform of bank system and credit facilitations in favour of workers; increase of primary schools and some measures for making easier the mass access to learning system.

Through strikes, factories and lands occupations, hard and fighting mass struggles that sometimes passed over the programs of popular front governments, many of those measures became actual conquests of the workers.

4. *The present perspective of united front and popular front governments.* The political inheritance of popular fronts lives today in some important experiences that are developing in various countries of the world, from Palestine to Tunisia, from France to Spain, from Mexico to Ecuador, for a radical transformation of these societies.

In the sharpening of the general crisis of imperialist world are maturing the conditions in which the more aware vanguards of working class - breaking decidedly with the policy of subalternity towards the old and new parties of the bourgeoisie - are able to set in a revolutionary way the question of government and power.

The proletariat, the more advanced class of society, is the only social force able to set up a government that not bows to the altar of capitalistic profit and to the «sacred dogmas» of the liberal bourgeois constitutionalism. Its basic features are the following:

- A worker's government as real antithesis of all bourgeois and social democratic governments, a government that is the expression and culmination - on the superstructural level - of a period of long economic and social struggles run by the proletarian united front, supported and upheld by a large revolutionary popular front.
- A government whose source of political legitimation are the worker comitees and counsels, founded on the elective grounds of a class democracy.
- A government whose principal, although not exclusive, leading political force is a communist party reconstructed on leninist grounds and recognized by the working class as its vanguard.
- A government of revolutionary breaking, ready to confront - on all levels and with every necessary means - the reactionary counteroffensive of the bourgeoisie.

Even though this government is not, today, an immediate aim, this one is the perspective and the political alternative that we indicate, in Italy, to the most advanced social forces that, in the latest months, are resolutely entered the field against the dominating bourgeoisie.

On account of the deepening of capitalistic economic crisis, in a phase characterized by a strong exacerbation of the class struggle and by a sharp crisis of the bourgeois hegemony, is possible as well the arising of conditions that favour - in Italy as in other countries - the formation of revolutionary popular front governments on the basis of proletarian united front.

They are governments of antimonopolistic, anti-imperialistic and antifascist character, born on the spur of worker's and popular struggle and founded on a large web of worker's organisms (without whose existence is vain to speak of united front and popular front), trade-unions,

associations and popular coalitions. On the political level, they could include also some representatives of antifascist, anti-imperialistic and progressive forces and parties that not express the interests of little and middle capitalists, but the interests of classes and social strata conflicting with monopolistic capital and financial oligarchy.

Governments of this kind (that are not worker's governments, that don't come out a radical bourgeois democracy and don't carry out the role and tasks of the dictatorship of proletariat) could apply - on the spur of the organized masses - some vigorous measures against monopolies, reaction and fascism and could take some means in favour to the working masses.

We marxist-leninists should back up these governments, provided that their action: 1) allows to the working class to enlarge its hegemony on more and more wide strata of workers, and allows to its party - the communist party - to maintain intact its ideological and political independence, its freedom of propaganda and agitation, its struggle against social democracy, reformism and revisionism; 2) assures conditions more advantageous to the revolutionary struggle of proletariat and speeds up the way toward the socialist revolution. In some cases, we could not only back up these governments, but actively favour their formation and offer a contribution to the definition of their programs.

Clearly, so that these governments can arise, the bourgeoisie must be paralyzed to such a point that it can not prevent their formation, and the proletarian and working masses - although not yet ready to conquer the power through the revolution - should be resolute to struggle, together with communists and revolutionaries, for imposing the formation of these popular front governments. The rank and file organisations of social democracy and the trade-unions should be ready to struggle, together with communists and revolutionaries, for the adoption of measures against the multinational corporations and capitalistic monopolies, against the parasites and corrupts, against the warmongers, reactionaries and fascists. And ready to struggle for a real control of the production and banks, for a reform - founded on the proportional representation - of the electoral law, for the reform of means of communication and other democratic reforms, for the dissolution of present police corps, ecc.

Communists must press unceasingly the popular front governments, asking the fulfilment of their engagements, pushing to the left their political axis and working so that - when the struggle has reached its more acute phase - the revolutionary break can occur in the conditions more favourable to the working class.

5. As far as Italy is concerned, we now indicate tactically some solutions of a few general problems of political-institutional character that - in a phase of development of the mass movement more advanced than the present phase, on the basis of changed relations of force among the classes and of the reconstruction of a strong communist party marxist-leninist - can become an integrant part of the revolutionary program of a proletarian united front government or of a popular front government, in order to favour the realization of a revolutionary political alternative:

- *Convocation of a Constituent Assembly*, elected with universal, equal and direct suffrage. The present institutions of the Italian republic (government, Parliament, Presidency of Republic, magistracy, Constitutional Court) are working exclusively in aid of capitalistic and financial oligarchy. The more advanced part of the working class, through the experience of its struggles, is already aware of this truth; but, as the events of the latest years are demonstrating, this consciousness is gradually acquired by more large strata of the working masses. The Constituent Assembly will have the task of elaborating a new constitution based essentially on a Chamber only (National Assembly) elected with universal and direct suffrage, with a government formed by the National Assembly itself and responsible before the same.
- *Profound and radical transformation of the electoral system*. The voting right will be guaranteed to all persons, of any nationality, ethnic group and religious confession,

who reside and live in our country and are 18 years old. They will be eligible at every level. In all the political and local elections, introduction of the criterion of the pure proportional representation. In referendums abolition of the quorum.

- *Absolute defence of laicality of the State.* Revocation of all economic, social and fiscal privileges enjoyed by the Roman Catholic Church through the concordatory system. Elimination of every influence of religious confessions in the schools of all levels and degrees. Strict separation between the State and the religious confessions. Annullment of the Treaty of 1929, the Concordat and the various agreements stipulated between the Italian State and the Vatican.
- *Coming out of European Union, euro and NATO.* To free our country from the conditioning and overwhelming weight of European institutions at financial oligarchy service and from the political and military restraints of NATO. Closing of all USA and NATO bases in our country, with the forbiddance of constructing other bases. Coming out of every warlike alliance. Immediate withdrawal of Italian troops from all areas in which they are engaged in imperialist enterprises abroad. Solidarity and support to the proletarian revolutions, to the anti-imperialist, democratic and anti-feudal revolutions all over the world.

It's evident that the eventual fulfilment of these measures - that today we propagandize in order to enlarge our influence in the working class and to demonstrate that marxist-leninists are able to indicate well-grounded solutions of the problems of our country - will determine a further change, favourable to the working class, in the relation of forces, but will produce also a relentless resistance of the bourgeoisie, and consequently an acceleration of the revolutionary process and the beginning of more profound struggles.

August 2011

Communist Platform of Italy