

What They Say in Prague About the United Front

From the Series of Articles in the Forthcoming Book 'The Only Road' :- by Leon Trotsky

WHEN THE Communist International made a united front with the social democratic leaders in 1926," wrote the central organ of the Czechoslovakia Communist party, RUBE PRAVO, on February 27 of this year, allegedly in the name of a worker-correspondent "from the bench", "it did this in order to expose them before the masses of supporters, and at that time Trotsky was terribly opposed to it. Now, when the social democracy has so discredited itself by its countless betrayals of the workers' struggles, Trotsky proposes the united front with its leaders. . . Trotsky is today against the Anglo-Russian Committee of 1926, but for any sort of Anglo-Russian Committee of 1932."

These lines lead us right to the heart of the question. In 1926, the Comintern sought to "expose" the reformist leaders with the aid of the united front policy, and that was right. But since then the social democracy has "discredited" itself. Before whom? There are still more workers following it than the Communist party. This is sad but true. The task of exposing the reformist leaders thus remain unsolved. If the method of the united front was good in 1926, why should it be bad in 1932?

"Trotsky is for an Anglo-Russian Committee of 1932, against the Anglo-Russian Committee of 1926." In 1926, the united front was concluded only at the top, between the leaders of the Soviet trade unions and the British trade unionists, not in the name of definite practical actions of the masses separated from each other by state frontiers and social conditions, but upon the basis of a friendly-diplomatic, pacifist-evasive "platform". During the miners' strike—and later the general strike—the Anglo-Russian Committee could not even come together, for the "allies" pulled in two opposite directions: the Soviet trade unions strove to assist the strikers, the British trade unionists sought to break the strike. The substantial contributions collected by the Russian workers were rejected by the General Council as "damned gold". Only after the strike had been finally betrayed and broken did the Anglo-Russian Committee come together again to the scheduled banquet to exchange small talk. Thus did the policy of the Anglo-Russian Committee serve to cover up the reformist strike-breakers before the working masses.

At the present time we are speaking of something quite different. In Germany the social democratic and the Communist workers stand on the same ground, before the same danger. They mingle with each other in factories, in trade unions, at the unemployment registries, etc. It is not a question here of a word—"platform" of the leaders, but of thoroughly concrete tasks which are calculated to draw the mass organizations directly into the struggle.

The united front policy on a national scale is ten times harder than on a local scale. The united front policy on an international scale is a hundred times harder than on a national scale. To unite with the British reformists around so general a slogan as "defense of the U. S. S. R." or "defense of the Chinese revolution", is to talk the blue out of the clouds. In Germany, on the contrary, there is the immediate danger of the destruction of the workers' organizations, the social democratic included. To expect the social democracy to fight for the defense of the Soviet Union against the German bourgeoisie would be an illusion. But we certainly can expect that the social democracy will fight for the defense of its mandates, its meetings, periodicals, treasuries and finally, for its own head.

Only, even in Germany we in no way advocate lapsing into a united front fetishism. An agreement is an agreement. It remains in effect so long as it serves the practical goal for which it was concluded. If the reformists begin to curb or to sabotage the movement, the Communists must always put themselves the question: is it not time to tear up the agreement and to lead the masses further under our own banner? Such a policy is not an easy one. But who has ever argued that to lead the proletariat to victory is a simple task? By counterposing the year 1926 to the year 1932, RUBE PRAVO has demonstrated only its lack of comprehension of what occurred six years ago as well as what is happening today.

The "worker-correspondent" from the imaginary bench also turns his attention to the example adduced by me of the agreement of the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists. "At that time," he writes, "Kerensky really fought for a certain time against Kornilov and at the same time helped the proletariat smash Kerensky. That the German social democracy today does not fight against Fascism is evident to any little child."

The Thälmann who so closely resembles a "little child" contends that an agreement of the Russian Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists never even existed. RUBE PRAVO, as we see, pursues a different course. The agreement it does not deny. But according to its conception, the agreement was justified by this, that Kerensky really fought against Kornilov, in distinction to the social democracy which is preparing the road to power for Fascism. The

idealization of Kerensky here is quite astounding. When did Kerensky begin to fight against Kornilov? At the very moment when Kornilov swung the Cossack's saber over Kerensky's own head, that is, on the eve of August 26, 1917. On the previous day, Kerensky was still in a direct conspiracy with Kornilov with the aim of jointly crushing the Petrograd workers and soldiers. If Kerensky began to "fight" against Kornilov or more correctly, to offer no resistance, for a time, to the fight against Kornilov, then it was only because the Bolsheviks left him no other alternative. That Kornilov and Kerensky, both of them conspirators, broe with each other and came into open conflict, was to a certain extent a surprise. That it would have to come to a collision between German Fascism and the social democracy, could and should have been foreseen, were it only on the basis of the Italian and Polish experiences. Why should an agreement with Kerensky against Kornilov have been concluded, and why is it forbidden to preach, to fight for, to advocate and to prepare an agreement with the social democratic mass organizations? Why must such agreements be destroyed wherever they have come into being? That, however, is just how Thälmann and Company proceed.

RUBE PRAVO naturally pounced ravenously upon my words that an agreement on fighting actions may be made with the devil, with his grandmother and even with Noske and Grzesinski. "Look, Communist workers," writes the paper, "you've got to come to terms with Grzesinski who has already shot so many of your comrades-in-arms. Come to an agreement with him for he is to fight together with you against the Fascists, with whom he hobnobs at banquets and in the boards of management of factories and banks." The whole question is shifted here onto the plane of spurious sentimentality. Such an objection is worthy of an anarchist, an old Russian Left wing Social Revolutionist, a "revolutionary pacifist" or of Münzenberg himself. There isn't a glimmer of Marxism in it.

First of all: is it correct that Grzesinski is a worker's hangman? Absolutely correct. But wasn't Kerensky a hangman of the workers and peasants in far greater measure than Grzesinski? Nevertheless, RUBE PRAVO approves after the fact the practical agreement with Kerensky.

To support the hangman in every action directed against the workers, is a crime, if not treachery: that is just what the alliance of Stalin with Chiang Kai-Shek consisted of. But if this same Chinese hangman were to find himself engaged tomorrow in a war with the Japanese imperialists, then practical fighting agreements of the Chinese workers with the hangman Chiang Kai-Shek would be quite permissible and even—a duty.

Did Grzesinski hobnob with the Fascists at banquets? I do not know, but I'm quite prepared to grant it. Only, Grzesinski was subsequently obliged to sit in the Berlin prison, not in the name of socialism, it is true, but only because he was loath to give up his warm seat to the Bonapartists and the Fascists. Had the Communist party openly declared at least a year ago: against the Fascist assassins we are prepared to fight jointly even with Grzesinski: had it invested this formula with a fighting character, developed it in speeches and articles, brought it into the depths of the masses—Grzesinski would have been unable to defend his capitulation before the masses in July with references to the sabotage of the Communist party. He would either have had to go along with this or that active step or else expose himself hopelessly in the eyes of his own workers. Isn't this clear?

To be sure, even if Grzesinski were drawn into the struggle by the logic of his situation and the pressure of the masses, he would be an extremely unreliable, a thoroughly perfidious ally. His principal thought would be to pass over as quickly as possible from struggle or half-struggle to an agreement with the capitalists. But the masses set into motion, even the social democratic masses, do not come to a halt as easily as do outraged police chiefs. The approach between the social democratic and the Communist workers in the process of the struggle would offer the Communist party leaders a far broader possibility for influencing the social democratic workers, especially in face of the common danger. And that is precisely what the final aim of the united front consists in.

To reduce the whole policy of the proletariat to agreements with the reformist organizations or, still worse, to the abstract slogan of "unity", is something that only spineless Centrists of the stripe of the Socialist Workers Party can do. For the Marxists, the united front policy is merely one of the methods in the course of the class struggle. Under certain conditions this method becomes completely useless; it would be absurd to want to conclude an agreement with the reformists on the socialist upheaval. But there are conditions under which the rejection of the united front may ruin the revolutionary party for many decades to come. That is the situation in Germany at the present time. (Continued in the Next Issue)

PRINKIPO, September 2, 1932. L. TROTSKY.

LEON TROTSKY

Proletariat and Peasant War in China

(Continued from last issue)

Thus, in China, the causes and grounds for the conflicts between the army, which is peasant in composition and petty bourgeois in leadership, and the workers, not only are not eliminated but also all the circumstances are such as to make these conflicts extremely possible and even inevitable; and in addition thereto the chances of the proletariat are incomparably less favorable than was the case in Russia.

From the theoretical and political side the danger is increased manifold as a consequence of the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy hides the contradictory situation under a blanket by its slogan of "democratic dictatorship" of workers and peasants. Is it possible to conceive of a more attractive in appearance and more perilous in essence? The epigones go through their processes of thinking not by medium of social concepts, but by means of pigeon-holed phrases; formalism is the basic trait of bureaucracy.

A REACTIONARY ACCUSATION

The Russian Narodniki ("Populists") betimes accused the Russian Marxists of "ignoring" the peasantry, of not carrying on work in the villages, etc. To this the Marxists replied, "We will arouse and organize the advanced workers and through the workers we shall arouse the peasants." Such in general is the only conceivable road for the proletariat party.

The Chinese Stalinists have acted otherwise. During the revolution of 1925-27 they subordinated directly and immediately the interests of the workers and the peasants to the interests of the national bourgeoisie. In the years of the counter-revolution they passed over from the proletariat to the peasantry; i. e., they undertook that role which was fulfilled in our country by the S. R.'s when they were still a revolutionary party. Had the Chinese Communist Party concentrated its efforts for the last few years in the cities, in industry, in the railroads; had it sustained the trade unions, the educational clubs and circles; had it, without breaking off from the workers, taught them to understand what was occurring in the villages—the share of the proletariat in the general correlation of forces would have been today incomparably more favorable. The party as a matter of fact tore itself away from its class. Thereby in the last analysis it can cause injury to the peasantry as well. For should the proletariat continue still to remain on the sidelines, without organization, without leadership, then the peasant war even if fully victorious will inevitably drive into a blind alley.

In old China every victorious peasant revolution was concluded by the creation of a new dynasty, and subsequently of a new group of large proprietors; the movement was confined within a vicious circle. Under the present conditions the peasant war by itself without the direct leadership of the proletarian vanguard can only pass on the power to a new bourgeois clique, some "Left" Kuo Min Tang or other, "a third party", etc., etc., which in practice will differ very little from the Kuo Min Tang of Chiang Kai-Shek. And this would signify in turn a new onslaught on the workers with the weapons of "democratic dictatorship".

What then are the conclusions that follow from all this? The first conclusion is that one must boldly and openly face the facts as they are. The peasant movement is a mighty revolutionary factor, insofar as it is directed against the large farm owners, militarists, serfdom and usurers. But in the peasant movement itself are very powerful proprietary and reactionary tendencies, and on a given stage it can become hostile to the workers, and sustain that hostility already equipped with arms. He who forgets about the dual nature of the peasantry is not a Marxist. The advanced workers must be taught to distinguish from among "Communist" signs and banners the actual social processes.

The operation of the "Red Armies" must be attentively followed, and the workers must be explained systematically the direction, the significance and the perspectives of the peasant war; and the current demands and the tasks of the proletariat must be tied up with the slogans for the liberation of the peasantry.

STUDY THE CLASS TENDENCIES

On the bases of our own observations, reports and other documents we must painstakingly study the inner life processes of the peasant armies and the order established in the regions occupied by them; we must discover in living facts the contradictory class tendencies and clearly point out to the workers which tendencies we support and against which we are fighting.

With especial care must we follow the inter-relationships between the Red Armies and the local workers, without leaving out of sight even the minor misunderstandings between them. Within the framework of particular cities and regions, conflicts, even if acute, might appear to be insignificant local episodes. But with the further development of events the class conflicts may take on a national sweep and lead the revolution to a catastrophe, i. e., to a new devastation of the workers by the peasants, hoodwinked by the bourgeoisie. History of revolutions is full of such examples. The more clearly the advanced workers will understand the living dialectic of the class inter-relationships of the proletariat, the peasantry and the bourgeoisie the more confidently will they seek unity with the strata of the peasantry closest to them, the more successfully will they counteract the counter-revolutionary provocateurs, within the body of

A Letter to the Chinese Bolshevik-Leninists

The peasant armies themselves as well as within the cities.

The trade union must be built up and the party nuclei; the advanced workers must be educated, the proletarian vanguard must be fused together and must be drawn into the battle.

We must turn to all the members of the official Communist party with words of explanation and challenge. It is quite probable that the rank and file Communists who have been led astray by the Stalinist faction will not understand us at once. The bureaucrats will set up a howl about our "revolution" of the peasantry, perhaps even about our "hostility" to the peasantry (Chernov always accused Lenin of being hostile to the peasantry). Naturally, such howling will not confuse the Bolshevik-Leninists. When prior to April 1927 we warned against the inevitable coup d'Etat of Chiang Kai-Shek, the Stalinists accused us of hostility to the national Chinese revolution. The events have demonstrated who was right. The events will provide a check this time as well. The Left Opposition may turn out too weak to give the events the direction in the interests of the proletariat at the present stage. But it is sufficiently strong even now in order to point out to the workers the correct way, and by depending upon the further development of the class struggle to demonstrate to the workers its correctness and its political insight. Only in this manner can a revolutionary party gain confidence for itself, only thus will it grow, become strong and take its place at the head of the national masses.

—L. TROTSKY.
Prinkipo, September 22, 1932

P. S. In order to express my ideas with the greatest possible lucidity, I shall sketch the following variant which is theoretically quite possible.

Let us presume that the Chinese Left Opposition carries on within the nearest future—widespread and successful work among the industrial proletariat and attains the preponderant influence in its midst. The official party, in the meantime, continues to concentrate all its forces on the "Red armies" and in the peasant regions. The moment arrives when the peasant armies take occupation of the industrial centers and are brought face to face with the workers. In such a situation, in what manner will the Chinese Stalinists act? It is not difficult to foresee that they will counterpose in a hostile manner the peasant army against "the counter-revolutionary Trotskyists". In other words, they will sic the armed peasants on the advanced workers. This is what the Russian S. R.'s and the Mensheviks did in 1917; having lost the workers, they fought might and main for their support among the soldiers, inciting the barracks against the factory, the armed peasant against the worker Bolshevik. Kerensky, Tseretelli and Dan, if they did not label the Bolsheviks outright as counter-revolutionists, called them either "unconscious aids" or "involuntary agents" of counter-revolution. The Stalinists are less choice in their application of political terminology. But the tendency is the same, malicious baiting of the peasant—and generally

Archives of the Opposition

Marx and the Peace Conference

In the year 1867 there was held at Geneva a congress of the League of Peace and Freedom. The Peace Congress attempted to secure the backing and support of the First International, and did actually secure support from the Lausanne Congress of the International. Writing to Engels under date September 4, 1867 Marx has the following to say about the League of Peace and Freedom.

"You know that in the General Council I opposed our having anything to do with these peace windbags. I spoke on the subject for about half an hour. Eccarius who was minute secretary, prepared a report for *The Beehive*, but he reproduced only one or two sentences of my speech. . . . Nevertheless what I said at the General Council meeting attracted a good deal of attention. The jackasses of the Peace Congress . . . have completely modified their original program, smuggling into the new one (which is far more democratic) the words 'the harmonizing of economic interests with liberty'—a vague phrase which may mean nothing more than free trade. They bombarded me with correspondence, and had the impudence to send me the enclosed specimen of eye-wash. You see they have the cheek to address me on the envelope as 'a member of the Geneva, etc., Congress'."

Steklof who reports the incident in his "History of the First International" continues with the following remarks. "Thus, the mere allusion of the bourgeois pacifists to Marx as a member of their contemplated congress, seriously annoyed him." We can readily understand, therefore, how profoundly disturbed he must have been by the resolution of the Lausanne Congress of the International, which not merely accepted at its face value the bourgeois mouthings of the League of Peace and Freedom, but actually promised 'full support' to the League—thus giving it an endorsement in the name of the international proletariat. Unfortunately, Marx was not able to convince his colleagues on the General Council, and some time was to

petty-bourgeois elements against the vanguard of the working class.

CENTRISM SEEKS SUPPORT FROM THE RIGHT

Bureaucratic Centrism, as Centrism, cannot have an independent class support. But in its struggle against the Bolshevik-Leninists it is compelled to seek support from the Right, i. e., from the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, counterposing them to the proletariat. The struggle between the two Communist factions, the Stalinists and the Bolshevik-Leninists bears in itself, in this manner, an inner tendency toward transformation into a class struggle. The revolutionary development of events in China may draw this tendency to its conclusion, i. e., to a civil war between the peasant army led by the Stalinists and the proletarian vanguard led by the Leninists.

Were such a tragic conflict to arise, due entirely to the Chinese Stalinists, it would signify that the Left Opposition and the Stalinists ceased to be Communist factions and had become hostile political parties, having a different class foundation.

However, is such a perspective inevitable? No, I do not think so at all. Within the Stalinist faction (the official Chinese Communist Party) there are not only peasant, i. e., petty bourgeois tendencies but also proletarian tendencies. It is important in the highest degree for the Left Opposition to seek to establish connections with the proletarian wing of the Stalinists, by developing for them the Marxist evaluation of "Red armies" and the inter-relationships between the proletariat and the peasantry in general.

While maintaining its political independence, the proletarian vanguard must be invariably ready to assure the united action with revolutionary democracy. While we refuse to identify the armed peasant detachments with the Red Army; and while we have no inclination to shut our eyes to the fact that the Communist banner hides the petty-bourgeois content within the peasant movement; we, on the other hand, take an absolutely clear account of the tremendous revolutionary-democratic significance of the peasant war, we teach the workers to comprehend this significance and we are ready to do all in our power in order to achieve the necessary military alliance with the peasant organizations.

Consequently our task consists not only in not permitting the political and military command over the proletariat on the part of the petty-bourgeois democracy that leans upon the armed peasants but also in preparing and assuring the proletarian leadership of the peasant movement, its "Red armies", in particular.

The more clearly the Chinese Bolshevik-Leninists comprehend the political environment and the tasks that spring from it, the more successfully they extend their bases within the proletariat and the more persistently they put through the policy of the united front in relation to the official party and the peasant movement that is led by it, all the more surely will they succeed not only in shielding the revolution from the frightfully dangerous conflict between the proletariat and the peasantry, and in assuring the necessary united action between the two revolutionary classes, but also in transforming their united front into the historical step toward the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Prinkipo, September 26, 1932 —L. T.

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will be against the New York comrades; for two reasons. First because the New York comrades can do what we have done: dig in the dust of second-hand book stores; secondly because out-of-town comrades cannot get them locally, even by this means. But orders will be filled strictly in the order in which they are received. And they must be accompanied with the price of the book ordered.

Here is what we have: 1 copy of Our Revolution—\$2.50; 2 copies of the Bolsheviks and World Peace—\$1.50; 3 copies

of Lenin, a Biography—\$2.00; 1 copy of Whither Russia!—\$1.00.

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