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Frente obrero: El origen de una táctica

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1982

(January 1982, Founding Conference of the IWL–FI)

(*Panorama Internacional*, No 20, May 1982, a magazine published by the PST in clandestinity)

Cover and interior design: Daniel Iglesias

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Worker's Front: The Origin of a Tactic

First, I must clarify that our new approach to the subject knocks down what we wrote in the theses of the FI–IC regarding the workers' front. We will not do Lambert's manoeuvre and we will say things as they are.

At the time, we considered that what the theses said about the *workers' united front* was correct and a contribution from the OCI (u) comrades. It was they who insisted on such content, and we approved. We weren't mature enough.

Now it is different: what happened with Mitterrand and in Nicaragua led us to make a new reflection on this tactic and what we write now is a discovery for us.

For some time we had suspected there were problems in the tactics of the workers' front. We had been working without finding a way out. Many years ago, we thought it was a strategy. It was a mistake which we later corrected: the united front is a tactic. During the Russian revolution, this tactic was only applied for about 15 days. Trotsky says it categorically, according to quotes we have contributed. The reading of Lenin corroborates it. He states there is no agreement to be made with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries at all stages, although the workers' front—as we all know—is a special type of agreement that is proposed to reformism. During the uprising of Kornilov, he changes, proposing to the social-traitors an agreement or front, only for 15 days, as Trotsky comments.

In other words, the Bolshevik policy of 1917 was carried out without using the tactics of the united front. On the contrary, Lenin's great slogan in 1917 is one of “no agreement” with the opportunist parties because they are part of the government or support it.

The tactic of the workers' united front arises between the III and IV Congress of the Third International. It is, therefore, a tactic after the Russian revolution.

To those who agree with the OCI (u), this raises some problems: did the Bolsheviks discover in 1921 a permanent strategy or tactic, which they did not use before because of ignorance and that if they had applied it earlier it would have facilitated the Russian Revolution?

We believe not. We believe it is a tactic and as such it applies at certain times. This tactic arose when the Third International discovered that, because the European revolution had failed, the Social Democratic parties remained largely majority. This forced to change the tactics elaborated by the first and second congresses of the Third International.

During these congresses, the Communist International had followed the policy of Marx and Engels, “to a working-class, a party”. All of Marxism—since Marx—develops in the conception that our parties should not be Marxists but that the entire working class had to have a single party, with its own language and ideology, to the point that in his famous letter to Sorge, Marx argued that the labour party of the United States should speak and think like the class itself, despite its semi-Masonic conceptions.

It was Kautsky, who when young was not a bad politician, who begins to insist Marxist parties must be built. He vindicates Marxism to fight against the intellectual, petty-bourgeois wing of the German Social Democratic Party. Thus the concept of the Marxist workers' party emerged, which means that if it is not Marxist, it is not a workers' party, and this extended from Germany to all the advanced countries.

The two conceptions, the one of Marx—“a single class, a single party”—and the one of Kautsky “a single party, but a Marxist”—, are adopted by the Third International when founded.

A new tactic arises

The first and second congresses of the Third International stated that if the revolution triumphed in Germany and one or two other countries, the social democracy would enter a crisis with no exit and there would be only one hegemonic workers' party, the communist. But after the second congress, when the revolution in Europe fails, Lenin, Trotsky and the Third International face the fact that social democracy remains largely the majority.

This combines with the relative stabilisation of capitalism, the ebb of the European workers' movement, and, ultimately, that although the workers' revolution had failed, the communist parties were transformed into mass, albeit minority, parties.

This new situation raises the imperative need to win the Social Democratic workers to make the socialist revolution. The tactic of the united front arises from this conjunctural and sporadic need. As such, it is part of the strategy of sweeping off the socialist parties from the working class to achieve the hegemony of the communist party. It is a tactic to weaken the social-traitors through the proposition and execution of common actions felt by both parties.

The tactic did not pose a union or permanent agreements with the Social Democratic parties. Its strategy and principles were to destroy them. Precisely the Third International warns about the danger of trying to raise maximum slogans or programs of workers' revolution with the traitorous workers' parties. It argues that doing so is treason and not a united front because it amounts to placing some revolutionary trust in them.

When Stalinism applied this tactic with the English union leadership saying "let's make a united front to help the English strikers", Trotsky said it was one of the biggest betrayals since they should have suggested that Russian unions directly support the miners' strike through the revolutionary wing of English trade unionism, to defeat the bureaucratic union leadership. Never, during the great English strike, should the tactics of the united front be applied, but the one of support for the strike to defeat not only the employers and the English government but also the trade union bureaucracy.

The tactic of the united front is an invitation. And we can only it when there are points in common between the reformist and revolutionary parties. If a workers' party is in favour of the austerity plans the government applies, it is impossible to have a united front with that party in favour of higher wages. The basis of the united front is that at a certain point the reformist masses (who do not believe in the revolution) and their leaders (who want to reposition themselves) led by the class struggle are forced to raise some slogan of struggle against capitalism. For example, when Isabel Peron's government in Argentina lowered wages by 40 per cent and the working class and many Peronist leaders were furious, we invited the bureaucracy, and the workers who followed it, to fight together to recover purchasing power. Thus an impressive general strike was made.

What does it mean that the workers' front is a tactic? It means it is only a tool, a means among others, to build the party, winning sectors of the working class for it. Therefore, to say it is "the tactic" or a strategy means it is the only tool or means the party has to build itself and to achieve a greater audience in the working class. Or, at the very least, that it is the privileged tool or means.

Our strategy, our central task, to which everything is contingent, is to transform our organisations into parties with mass influence, with increasingly greater working-class influence, with more and more proletarian cadres in their ranks. That is the strategy. And whenever you talk about tactics, you have to refer to this strategy.

The OCI has been saying for years that the workers' united front is a strategy or privileged tactic (which is the same). In the thesis, it says it is a tactic because of a concession they made to us. We brought them texts by Trotsky where he writes the workers' united front is a tactic. Then they presented us with a single quote from Trotsky in which he says that it is a non-circumstantial tactic, which refers, specifically, to a moment of the class struggle in a country: the stage before Hitler's ascent.

If we take the workers' united front as a permanent and privileged tactic, it means the permanent way to build the party, or the privileged tool or means is the agreement with the traitorous workers' parties. The OCI (u) is consistent when it puts, in fact, an equal sign between the construction of the party and the tactics of the workers' front.

A tactic for each situation

For us, each stage of the class struggle demands different means or tactics to build the party. They do not arise just from the class struggle but from the relationship established between the class and the party.

This relationship is not aesthetic or scientific. We don't study reality just to know it or to get excited. Nor do we specify the situation of our party as historians or sociologists.

We study the two realities, of the class struggle and the party, to find ways to strengthen the party. It is an interested, political analysis. So much so that these means or tactics change not just with the objective reality but with the reality of the party itself. Assuming two similar objective situations, we will have very different tactics, if our organisation consists of 20 students or 20,000 metalworkers or miners.

This explains, among many other tactics, that of entryism in the socialist parties of the 1930s. If we had been powerful workers' organisations, we would not have made entryism. This was our central tactic for two or three years, and not the tactic of the workers' united front because we were small groups. Entryism was the privileged tactic at a certain moment of Trotskyism and it was the denial of the tactic of the united front, although in France it served for a short time to take part in the united front the socialist and communist parties had agreed upon. It was a means to break the socialist parties, as soon as possible, from within. They entered them not to develop the united front with the leadership but to denounce it and make the socialist left break with it.

The tactics of the revolutionary party are endless. They change according to each situation. For example, the PST of Argentina, when it took part in the elections, the greatest tactical success of its history which turned it into a national party and allowed it to "appropriate" a small sector of the mass movement, practised a tactic opposed to the united front: the tactic of the workers' and socialist pole. This meant uniting class-struggle and socialist activists to oppose them to workers' organisations and leaderships that practised class collaboration. If someone from our movement had told us not to take part in the elections because the correct tactic was to raise the workers' united front of the CGT [General Confederation of Labour] and the workers' parties, they would have committed a crime.

Therefore, for me, the supporters of the united front as a privileged tactic or strategy make the grave mistake of getting our leaderships used to not thinking about the tactical truths that are imposed. They falsely believe they have solved the problem forever, repeating as a crutch "workers' united front". And it is a serious methodological error, which adds to the political one, of adapting to the counter-revolutionary apparatuses as the only valid interlocutors.