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# Theses on the United Front of Labor.

Adopted by the Central Executive Committee of the  
Communist Party of America at its Session of May 29, 1922.†

A document from the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 96, l. 2-5, 10.

1. A United Front of Labor, a solid phalanx of the working class drawn up in battle line against the forces of the capitalist class and the capitalist state is the prerequisite of a victory of the proletariat. The creation of this phalanx is the task of the hour. Groups of workers organized in various organizations as well as groups of hitherto unorganized workers must be united in support of a common aim and in common action. Many organizations of labor though ostensibly formed to fight the battles of labor are tied up by their treacherous leaders to the interests of the capitalists, thus breaking the united front of labor and strengthening the front of capital. The problem is to break these groups of workers away from the army of capital and line them up with the army of labor, thus establishing a united front of labor against capital.

2. The working class as a whole is not conscious of having class interests in irreconcilable conflict with the interests of the capitalists. They are conscious, however, of immediate problems that demand a solution as a condition for their existence — questions of wages, working conditions, etc. These questions must form the basis for a United Front of the workers, for united action. It is through these struggles and only through them that the workers as a class can be made conscious of separate interests from those of the capitalists and can be lined up for a systematic struggle against the capitalist class, the capitalist state, and the capitalist system. It is through these struggles and only through them that the workers can learn the political character of their struggle. It is in these struggles that the betrayers of the workers in the position of leadership must be exposed in their true character as enemies of the

proletariat and the tools of the capitalists. It is in these struggles and only in them that the communists can establish their leadership in the class struggle and develop this struggle into a revolutionary battle for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship as an instrument of communist reconstruction.

3. In pursuing the policy of uniting larger and larger masses of the workers on the basis of a common struggle the existing organizations of the workers must be made more effective instruments of these struggles. The experience the workers will gain in these struggles will help us to gradually eliminate all dualism in the field of economic organizations of the workers. Trade lines must be gradually eliminated and step by step these organizations of the workers must be welded together into industrial unions closely united in one great body.

4. While the creation of the United Front can be accomplished on the field of economic organization through amalgamation of existing bodies, it must be accomplished on the field of political organization of the workers by elimination of the influence of such parties and groups whose program and action mislead the working class. The economic struggles of the workers are carried on by organizations including in their ranks most of the participants of the struggle. Working class political parties cannot organize within their ranks a majority of the working class. These organizations serve rather to give leadership to the workers' political struggles. Those parties misleading the workers must be eliminated from such leadership. On the basis of immediate issues the workers must be lead

†- Although undated in the archives, this document can be attributed with certainty based upon a written annotation stating the dissent of "Carr" [Ludwig Katterfeld]. Katterfeld stood alone against the adoption of certain United Front theses at the May 29 session of the CEC and formally requested that his opposition be registered. (See: Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 94, l. 42.) According to a May 25 letter to the Comintern (d. 93, ll. 46-47) from Katterfeld — who had just recently returned from service in Moscow as the "rep" of the CPA there — the primary author of these "Theses on the United Front of Labor" was Max Bedacht ["Marshall"].

into political struggles in which the communists prove the superiority of their tactics, their slogans, their aims, and their leadership as compared with the tactics, slogans, the aims and leadership of other political groups or parties claiming the support of the workers. Thus the Workers Party will gradually win away the masses of politically active workers from political organizations that betray the workers. It will discredit and destroy them and win complete leadership in the political struggles of the workers.

### **The Industrial United Front.**

5. In creating a united front of the working class for their economic struggle the existing labor unions must remain the instrument of these struggles while the members of the Workers Party must be the instruments to unify these economic organizations.

The plans for the general campaign are formulated after consideration of recommendations by the party membership in the unions. The CEC of the party formulates the slogans and sends its corresponding instructions to the membership. At the same time all means of publicity are used by the party for propagation of the action contemplated. The unity of action must be established on a basis that can be realized immediately and the action must then be developed and led on step by step to the climax. In the process of the struggle the weakness of the existing craft union form of organization will become apparent. The experience of such struggles developing these weaknesses must be utilized to drive home the criticism of the present form of organization and advantage must be taken of the situation to advance constructive proposals seeking to eliminate these weaknesses. Thus the amalgamation of craft into industrial unions becomes an issue dictated by the necessities of the struggles and ceases to be an abstract, theoretical bone of contention. The main criticism of treacherous or inefficient leaders and the fight against them must be based on their shortcoming in the actual struggles. Thus the abstract and invariably ineffective criticism on the basis of differences in the theoretical conceptions of the class struggles or the state will give way to concrete issues on the basis of which an alignment of the workers can be effected.

6. In cases where dual industrial organizations

are involved in a struggle the party must take the initiative to offer its services for the creation of a unity of purpose, unity of tactics, and united direction of the struggle. The object here must be not only a united front in action but also the creation of organizational unity. While in such cases the party addresses itself to the leaders, the executive of the organizations, it also [addresses] the membership of such bodies to the same end so that the leadership that stands in the way of unity will be discredited and eventually eliminated. But in all such cases such elimination is not the sole object of the application of the tactics of the United Front of Labor but only one of the objects.

7. Not only those workers who have immediate interests in a struggle should compose the United Front. All issues of importance must be made class issues and the working masses rallied to the support of the workers immediately concerned. Only by this broadening [of] the struggle will the working masses become class conscious.

8. Separate delegated bodies, councils, etc., for the organization and direction of the united working class action on the economic field must be organized only if there is danger of serious conflict with existing bodies of the same character. In all cases where such directive bodies are created they should be formed, if at all possible, on the initiative and by action of the unions involved. Our party organization nuclei will supply the initiative wherever the formation of such bodies become necessary. No basis for even a shade of suspicion of dualistic intention must be given.

### **The Political United Front.**

9. The creation of a United Front of Labor on the political field in the United States is the problem of the development of independent political action of the working class. The working class of Europe has for a long time participated independently in political activities. Not so in the United States. Here the problem is not to unite existing political groups and organizations for common action but to awaken political class consciousness among the workers. The class struggle has reached such a degree of intensity here that every battle of the workers reveals the political character of the struggle in ever increasing proportions. It is the school of these struggles that is teaching the

proletarian masses the necessity for class conscious political action. The numerous efforts of all kinds of labor organizations to form a labor party in the United States is evidence of this fact. These efforts are an indication of the class struggle toward working class action. To oppose this tendency toward the formation of a labor party would be folly.

10. The capitalists realize the potentialities of even a tame and not in the least revolutionary independent labor party for the development of class consciousness of the working class. Their tools in the labor movement have, therefore, consistently opposed its formation. But when its formation can no longer be prevented these capitalist tools will assume the leadership of the movement for a labor party and will exert every effort to reduce such a party to a mere machine for their election, and to prevent it from becoming a real weapon for the workers in the class struggle. To [make] the labor party an instrument of the class struggle and the revolution, the participation of the communists is an imperative necessity. It is not in the interest of the proletarian revolution nor can the Workers Party assume responsibility for the latent political power of the workers remaining dormant. Neither must the party oppose the coming to life of this power because it has not yet the standing and influence among the masses to set it at work in the name of and for the purpose of Communism.

11. To promote the development of the political action of the working class into revolutionary action the communists must become factors in any labor party that may be formed. We can achieve this end only if we anticipate the formation of such a party and now adopt a policy through which we will become established as a force in the political struggle of the workers and thus an important factor in the labor party. Participation in a United "Front in local political struggles in which we participate will give us such a strong position in relation to the labor party.

12. Attempts to misuse the name of Labor Party in the formation of some sort of a league must be guarded against. Such a body would merely exploit the growing desire for independent working class political action to get endorsements for some misleaders of labor on capitalist party tickets, on the principle of Gompers' "reward friends — punish enemies." It is the work of the Communists to guard also against the

formation of such a labor party as is forecast in the work of the Conference for Progressive Political Action. This conference includes not only representatives of labor, but progressives and liberals of every shade. A party such as forecasted by this conference would not mobilize the political power of the workers for the immediate struggles against the capitalists, but would dissipate that power in election campaigns fought on the basis of petty ameliorative reforms and of schemes for minor changes in the form of capitalist government. Such a party would be but a larger but weaker edition of the Socialist Party, which has for two decades misdirected the political energies of the workers supporting it through its program of reforms and limitation of the political struggles of the workers to mere participation in election campaigns. The Communists must fight to make the labor party a real instrument of the class struggle, fighting the immediate battles of the workers upon the political field and engaging [in] political action, from election campaigns to mass strikes with political objectives and their logical development in revolutionary struggles.

13. The Workers Party must not artificially force the development of a labor party. It must carry on the work of education in class conscious political action until the movement for the labor party wins the support of the masses of the workers.

14. The work of education can best be carried on through establishment of the United Front on the basis of political issues growing out of the intense economic struggles of the workers. The party must use its influence and strength through its nuclei in the trade unions to form delegated conferences of labor organizations. Such conferences decide on a general political campaign including all forms of political action from petitions and election campaigns through mass strikes. Through these tactics the Communists help to awaken the political consciousness of the proletarian masses, broaden the conception of these masses as to the meaning of political action, and establish themselves as a force in the political activities of the workers. The party must be the most ardent champion of all such action and must identify itself with all its phases. Our nuclei should initiate such action through the unions. The position which we will thus gain for our party will attract the revolutionary forces of the workers of the United States and they will rally around our banner.

These tactics will make us a force which will have to be considered in the event of the formation of a labor party and we will be able to influence its character and its activities and win leadership in it.

15. The United Front tactics cannot be interpreted to mean organization unity with any other organization. The Workers Party must exist as a distinct organization with a disciplined, educated membership acting upon a program to give leadership to the struggles of the workers. In all its activities the party retains its full independence, its right of criticism, and its freedom of action. The Workers Party must be the left and most active section of the labor movement on both the economic and the political field. By its unceasing activities, by its correct interpretation of problems and situations, and by its qualities of a real fighting advance guard of the workers it must gradually eliminate all other parties and groups claiming the support of the workers as a factor in leadership. It will win leadership in all the phases of the struggle of the working class and lead the solid phalanx of the proletariat into the last decisive battle against the capitalist class, the capitalist state, and the capitalist system.

### **Program for Coming Election.**

1. The United Political Front embraces all forms of political action from election campaigns, mass demonstrations to mass strikes with political objectives and their logical development in revolutionary struggles. The basis for a United Political Front which will embrace the working masses has not yet been created in the United States. To enter into a political federation with existing political organizations, which have the support of the masses of the workers, would be to negate the possibility of creating a real United Front of the workers politically. The Workers Party will therefore, as a rule, nominate its own candidates in the election and carry on its campaign independently.

2. However, wherever the Central Labor body of a city votes for independent political action by the organized workers, thus indicating that the movement has the support of the masses, or the fact that the movement for independent political action has the

support of the masses is otherwise indicated, the Workers Party will support this action by joining, as an autonomous body into a federation to carry on the struggle. It will take the initiative in those cases where it considers conditions ripe for such action. The conditions for such participation are the following:

(a) All working class organizations ready to participate in the United Front campaign must be accepted as part of the federation.

(b) The platform must raise as the issues of the campaign [the] immediate question of the class struggle, such as unemployment relief, the open shop, the use of the injunction against the workers, opposition to industrial courts, etc.

(c) The United Front federation should adopt as the name under which the candidates are placed on the ballot and the campaign conducted a name other than that of any existing political party, if the name "Workers Party" and its candidates are not endorsed. Permission to place candidates on the ballot under the name of an existing working class political organization may be granted by the CEC when technical conditions make that necessary; in such instance, however, the campaign must be conducted under the name of the United Front Federation.

3. In such political divisions where it develops that a candidate of another party claiming to be a working class party will be defeated through votes cast for the Workers Party candidate and a capitalist party candidate elected, the Workers Party will follow a policy appropriate to the situation. The unsound principles and tactics of reform parties can best be demonstrated in action. Also, the Workers Party can best gain the confidence of the masses of the workers who support candidates of these parties in districts where there is prospect of their success by not causing their defeat and the election of a capitalist candidate, but by advocating the election of such candidates to prove the futility of their party program in action. The Workers Party therefore, in such instances [will] withdraw its candidates prior to the election, at the same time issuing a manifesto making its criticism of the candidates in whose favor it withdraws and stating the grounds for its action.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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