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POLITICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON POPULAR FRONTISM

1. The discussion in the Fourth International has revealed an important difference on the question of popular frontism. This has come to light both over the question of the Unidad Popular (UP -- Popular Unity) in Chile, and the Union de la Gauche (Union of the Left) in France.

The "Draft Political Resolution" submitted by the IEC Majority Tendency (International Internal Discussion Bulletin, vol. X, no. 20) denies that the Chilean Unidad Popular was a popular front formation, the view formerly advanced by the United Secretariat, in its unanimous statement of December 1971.

In France, the ex-Ligue Communiste gave critical support to the Union of the Left in the 1973 elections. This stand was criticized by the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party in its May 28, 1973 letter to the Ligue Communiste Political Bureau (IIDB vol. X, no. 14), which views the Union of the Left as a class-collaborationist electoral alliance of the popular front type. The leaders of the ex-Ligue Communiste reject the main line of the SWP's criticism, and reaffirm the correctness of their support to the Union of the Left, in their reply "The Mote and the Beam" (IIDB, vol. X, no. 18)

2. The Chilean Popular Unity was a programmatic electoral alliance formed to nominate a single candidate of the "left" in the 1970 presidential election. While its electoral strength rested on the mass base of the Communist and Socialist parties, the UP also included smaller parties which were not working class in character. While paying lip service to the long-range goal of socialism, the Unidad Popular's concrete program was class collaborationist, limited to reforms which would not break Chile from the grip of capitalism. In order to win Christian Democratic support in the Congress for his election as president, Allende pledged not to change the armed forces, the judiciary, the bureaucracy or the educational system. Allende's cabinet included, as well as leaders of working class parties, politicians from bourgeois parties, and, during certain crucial periods, representatives of the armed forces.

3. While admitting that the Allende regime "possesses several features of a Popular Front government, of collaboration with bourgeois parties," the "Draft Political Resolution" insists that "from the start, it differed from a classical Popular Front regime by the fact that it openly proclaimed its resolve to enter upon the road to socialism, and that it openly based itself on the organized labor movement." (P. 10)

4. The Union of the Left in France was a programmatic electoral alliance launched by the Socialist and Communist parties which later embraced a grouping of politicians who had broken from the bourgeois Radical Party. It ran a common slate of candidates in the 1973 French legislative elections. Like the Chilean Unidad Popular, the Union of the Left had a reformist and class-collaborationist program, although it proclaimed socialism to be its ultimate goal.

5. The analysis of the leaders of the ex-Ligue Communiste in "The Mote and the Beam" of the Union of the Left is essentially the same as that of the IEC Majority Tendency of the Chilean Unidad Popular. Unlike the Popular Front leaders of the 1930's, according to the Ligue Communiste Political Bureau, the Union of the Left leaders "present their alliance as the means for realizing, by a parliamentary and peaceful road, an intermediate democratic stage of short duration for the transition to socialism." (P.13) This they contrast to the 1936 Popular Front which claimed only "to bar the door to fascism." As well, they argue, the 1936 Popular Front was initiated and dominated by the bourgeoisie through the Radical Party, while the 1973 Union of the Left was initiated and dominated by the Communist Party, and included only an insignificant breakaway from the main bourgeois parties. On this basis, they justify their stand of critical support to the Union of the Left in the second and deciding round of the 1973 elections.

6. The Draft Political Resolution does not say what tactical or strategic conclusions it draws from the view that the Unidad Popular was not a "classical Popular Front." It does not indicate whether it would consider political support of the Unidad Popular, or of the Allende candidacy of the UP in 1970, permissible tactics. The Ligue Communiste, however, clearly drew far-reaching conclusions from its analysis of the Union of the Left, an analysis based on a similar view of popular frontism. The Ligue Communiste not only denied that the Union of the Left was popular frontist in character; it gave critical support to this coalition in the 1973 French legislative elections.

In our view critical support for either one of these coalitions would have represented a fundamental violation of Trotskyist principles.

7. The IEC Majority and the ex-Ligue Communiste defines as "classical Popular Fronts" those of the 1930's. But this is thoroughly misleading. Popular Frontism was not a new policy in the 1930s -- it was only a new name invented by the Stalinists.

"For it is often forgotten that the greatest historical

example of the Popular Front is the February 1917 revolution. From February to October the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries who represent a very good parallel to the 'Communists' and Social Democrats, were in the closest alliance and in a permanent coalition with the bourgeois party of the Cadets, together with whom they formed a series of coalition governments." (Leon Trotsky, The Spanish Revolution, p. 220)

8. If the "greatest historical example" of popular frontism is kept in mind, it is immediately clear that the IEC Majority's programmatic differentiation between and "classical" Popular Fronts and the Unidad Popular and Union of the Left is invalid. The Union of the Left, as the ex-Ligue Communiste points out, was for socialism after "an intermediate democratic stage". The IEC Majority resolution does not say so, but this was exactly the perspective of Popular Unity in Chile. Allende, to win mass support, talked about socialism often, but it was always in the future, after the "democratic, anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchical" stage.

There is no essential difference whatsoever between this conception and the 1917 program of the Mensheviks. It is the Menshevik theory of stages, which Stalin adopted. At different times the Stalinist-Mensheviks verbally emphasize either the democratic stage or the socialist stage, by it remains one and the same theory. We cannot base our policy on the verbal shifts of Stalinism.

9. Much has been made of the "weakness" of the bourgeois formations in the Chilean and French electoral blocks. What is crucial is the essential purpose of these alliances, which is to form a coalition government with a sector of the bourgeoisie. There is nothing new in the fact that such alliances contain only very weak bourgeois parties - or, for periods, no bourgeois parties at all. In Spain in 1936 the Stalinists and Social Democrats very rapidly became the leadership of the Popular Front. The policies of the Popular Front were Stalinist and Social-Democratic policies. The bourgeois parties in the coalition lacked any social base - they were, as Trotsky, wrote only "a phantom of the bourgeoisie". Despite this the coalition was based on subservience to the bourgeoisie. Trotsky considered that a vote for the Popular Front, or a vote in the parliament for a Popular Front budget, would be treachery.

10. There are important differences between the popular fronts of 1917, 1936 and 1973. And there are important differences between the popular fronts in Chile and France in 1973, just as there were differences in the 1930s between the popular fronts in France, Spain and Chile.

We must take these differences into account in deciding our propagandistic and agitational approach to the supporters of each.

But these differences are not qualitative. Each is popular frontist in character -- a programmatic electoral bloc which has as its reasons for being the creation of a class-collaborationist government.

11. It is permissible to give critical support, in certain circumstances, to political parties of the working class which have a reformist and class-collaborationist program. In such cases, we do not support their program or their pro-capitalist leadership; our support is based on their character as parties which form part of the working class movement. Our stand of critical support to the New Democratic Party falls in this framework -- we do not support the program or leadership; but the NDP's character as a labor party.

But a class-collaborationist electoral block, a popular front, has no essentially working class character; it is not a political tendency within the labor movement. Its essential class character is different from the character of the working class parties which may account for most or even all of its electoral base. The essence of the Union of the Left and Popular Unity was class collaborationism. In choosing to reject the designation "popular front," the IEC majority and the ex-Ligue Communiste make secondary and superficial features the deciding factors.

12. The Allende government in Chile was bourgeois in its class character. Its program was based in the last analysis on defense of the capitalist order, and it ruled within the framework of the bourgeois state. We give no political support to such a government. While defending the Allende government against the threat of right-wing overturn, we have no confidence in it; we vote against its budgets in parliament; we call on the masses to break with the government and to fight for its replacement by a workers and farmers government.

13. This statement rejects the political analysis of Chile's Popular Unity Coalition of the IEC Majority Tendency's "Draft Political Resolution", and the line on the Union of the Left presented by the ex-Ligue Communiste Political Bureau in "The Mote and the Beam." It endorses the line of the SWP Political Committee's May 28, 1973 letter to the Ligue Communiste on the French elections.