

BUILDING A UNITED FRONT

—by J. MATTHEWS

AS the Nationalists oppression becomes worse, the call for a united front composed of all genuine opponents of Apartheid becomes ever more insistent. It is perfectly natural that this should be so. In its efforts to establish itself firmly in the saddle the dictators in our country are compelled to threaten the safety, comfort and security of all groups and interests except those of the very tiny minority of monopolist mining magnates, landlords and industrialists who profit from the misery of the people.

Under such conditions it becomes historically correct for the Progressive Movement to rally the people on the widest possible basis to resist and finally defeat the dictatorship.

A number of important matters arise for consideration in regard to the tactics of United Front. It is important that the leadership provide complete guidance on the application of such tactics under South African conditions. If we are to use to the full all the possibilities of a united front tactics against Apartheid, we must be clear as to the manner of their operation.

There is, first of all, the need to consider the historical conditions under which United Front tactics become necessary. Needless to say **UNITY** of the people in the struggle for freedom is always necessary. But the application of **UNITED FRONT** tactics are not always called for. Whilst unity is always essential the basis of that unity may require re-definition in the light of compelling objective conditions.

Thus at a time when a semi-colonial country struggling to free itself from imperialism is invaded directly by the imperialist aggressors it might be correct for the Progressive Movement to unite even with vacillating and potentially treacherous elements in the "national" bourgeoisie on condition they will genuinely join in the resistance. A united front here can greatly advance the struggle for liberation (cf. Chinese situation upon invasion by Japanese Imperialists).

On the other hand in an imperialist country which has embarked on a war with another imperialist country, which war has for its object the division of colonies etc. the progressive movement might find it necessary to organise against the war, to reject collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and turn the imperialist war into a civil war in which the working class under its leadership seizes power (cf. Bolshevik Revolution in Russia).

In each case the question has to be decided in the light of an examination of objective conditions and on the basis of the ultimate interests of the people's struggle.

There is a further consideration which is relevant in our situation. Under conditions of a liberal bourgeois democracy it is an important part of the ideological battle to expose clearly the nature of the regime which is

that of a capitalist dictatorship in which civil rights and liberties are a mere facade. Whereas under conditions of fascism, where the strength of the progressive movement has compelled the ruling class to emerge openly as a dictatorship relying on naked force to maintain its rule; abolishes parliament and all so-called liberties, the duty of the progressive movement changes. Under the new conditions the Movement now has to uphold the rights and liberties of the people for which indeed it has always stood and which never really existed for the labouring classes.

Having decided from an analysis of the situation in the country that a United Anti-fascist front is correct policy then the next question that arises is how this is to be implemented in practice.

For instance with whom must the front be organised. On what basis must allies be chosen? Must the Progressive Movement cease to criticise the shortcomings of potential or actual allies, who because of their class interests are necessarily vacillating and unreliable — allies who will not go the whole distance? Should the movement gloss over differences and water down its ideas in order to be accommodating to potential allies? How will it be explained to the people that a particular group can be an ally although it may let them down in the long run?

These are merely some of the problems that arise for solution by the Freedom Movement now that a United Front against Apartheid is on the order of the day. Whilst the problem is by no means easy yet it is also true that if carried out properly united front tactics can considerably advance the struggle — place it on a higher level and enlarge the influence and power of the People's Movements.

So far as the South African situation is concerned enough has already been said, written and experienced to indicate the extent to which our country has been ruined by the Nationalist dictatorship. The Government, determined to push its apartheid policy, is now even prepared to attack the small petit bourgeois interests of Afrikaners themselves (Ficksburg), if these clash with those of the more powerful groups who the Nationalist Cabinet Ministers represent. They are prepared to disturb the comfort of sections whose support they normally require in the interests of big business (cf. Locations in the Sky Act). The interests of numerous groups formerly regarded as immune are now being affected. Of course this is all done "in their interests" to protect them from "the Black Menace" and other similar evils. But the point is they are being adversely affected.

Under the conditions that exist in our country today the policy of United Front needs to be pushed vigorously and skilfully. Generally speaking the following ideas must guide us in implementing the policy of United Front.

Differences between us and various groups and interests must not be glossed over but should be clearly demarcated. This, far from making for division and defeating the object of the united front policy, facilitates unity as it indicates clearly on what basis unity is founded. Fortunately the Progressive Movement has the Freedom Charter. This dynamic People's programme which is now fundamental law to all sections of the Congress Movement is a clear and noble expression of our aspirations. In the present historical period, acceptance of the Charter places one in the camp of progress, freedom and peace against Colonialism, oppression and war.

But should the Charter be the minimum programmatic condition for the United Front? Should we insist that all allies must accept the Charter? We must bear in mind that the essence of a united front policy is that it is always based on **Opposition** to dictatorship rather than common adherence to long term objectives and aims. To expect the policy of United Front to go beyond the defeat of the fascists is mere wishful thinking. It is true that to defeat the dictatorship will considerably advance the country in the direction of a democratic regime. That, however, is another matter. In my view the Charter cannot serve as the basis for a united front. It is our blueprint for a **People's Democratic State** and not a minimum programme for temporary ends.

Does this mean the Charter must be put into cold storage? A thousand times No! We must in fact redouble our efforts to secure greater adherence to the Charter by the masses of the people in order to strengthen the progressive movement. But to accept the Charter means to be in the progressive camp. To be part of the United front requires a different generalisation. Such a generalisation is the Declaration issued by the All-In Conference held at Bloemfontein recently. This Declaration is an example of the kind of thing we want. It has its limitations, inasmuch as it was drawn up by an exclusively African conference called to consider only the Tomlinson Report. That is a matter which can be remedied by the multi-racial conference called for by the President-General of the A.N.C.—Chief A. J. Luthuli.

Once a minimum programme for the United Front has been accepted, it will become the duty of the Progressives who are the most resolute in struggle and have the greatest interest in seeing the last of the tyrants to rally the widest possible support for the United Front. This must be done not merely by securing pious expressions of support but by drawing the people into active struggle against the acts of the fascists. The people will judge the different groups forming the United Front by the manner in which they work, fight and lead them in the struggle.

On condition we maintain our independent command and retain freedom of criticism there is no reason on earth why we should not achieve new successes in the forthcoming phase of the struggle for freedom.