

The best of all definitions of democracy is that it is the knowledge of necessity. Knowledge is death to the old, and new life springs from the putrescence. The advance of democracy is no more than the advance of knowledge. In order, then, that there shall not be plenty for all in our era, there must be ignorance on the part of most. In order to continue suffering for want of things that can now be produced in endless quantities, the mass of people must remain ignorant of their existence; or at least ignorant of how to extract them from nature and once extracted, how to distribute them so that a few cannot, for reasons of selfish display and vanity, prevent the many from sharing what is enough for all. The extent therefore of our national ignorance of these things is the extent of our lack of democracy.

Theodore Drieser

Chapter VIII

To Build A Democratic Front

The force of political action requires the force of organization. At the present, many organizations fighting on many fronts constitute a democratic front of struggle, but they do not yet constitute a single, united movement.

The foundation for the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist unity required to defeat the fascist menace is the unity of the working class itself. The absence of broad unity of action by the workers makes the building of a broader anti-fascist front all the more difficult. Thus, the necessity for the workers' united front is evident. It is the working class which is the direct target of fascism and war, and it is the working class which can best mobilize and organize to prevent fascism and war. Therefore, we must work to forge a front of united action by the workers, on the basis of a powerful rank-and-file movement. There is no force in society more consistently in support of the program outlined above, than the workers.

But fascism and war do not threaten the workers alone. Today, a large section of those actively engaged in struggle against fascism and war are strata of the petty bourgeoisie: intellectuals, professionals, small farmers and others. It would be extremely sectarian to limit the struggle against the fascist

menace to the united front of the working class alone. Not only would it isolate the workers from their natural allies, it would ignore sections of the people who are actually engaged in struggle.

What is most needed today is a movement which works to achieve support from labor and farm organizations, from church, community, and minority organizations, and from progressive national political organizations of all types, involving militant leaders from all sections of the people's movement. For this movement to develop and unify, we must create a broad organization which affiliates the many existing groups and organizations around a mutually acceptable program and tactics. It will be in the course of struggle to achieve unity of action around the program outlined above that organizational unity will be achieved. Such an organization has historically been called a People's Front. Perhaps the most powerful example of such a front was the *Front Populaire* in France prior to the Nazi occupation.

In the conditions of Europe, People's Fronts were formed through an alliance between the working-class party — the communist party — and parties of the middle class or petty bourgeoisie. The social-democratic party, for instance, often had large numbers of workers in its membership, although its outlook was decidedly petty-bourgeois. Farmers' or peasants' parties were also often allied in the People's Front.

In the present conditions of the U.S., an alliance of this type is impossible for two main reasons. A large, national working-class party, in a position to form national alliances, does not yet exist. In addition, no petty-bourgeois or middle-class parties of any national significance now exist. Therefore, the form of anti-fascist front built in the U.S. will not parallel what developed in Europe.

The history of the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist struggle in the U.S. has brought forward many important lessons. During the 1930's, a large democratic front existed in the U.S. The main force in this front was the American League Against War and Fascism, formed in 1933, which was a branch of the International League Against War and Fascism. While the democratic front was not formed out of an alliance of political parties, it did unite the important democratic forces of that day.

Prominent Americans such as Carl Sandburg, Paul Robeson and Theodore Dreiser were among its members. It included organizations such as the National Negro Congress, Southern Congress for Human Welfare, American Youth Congress and League of American Writers. The Communist Party U.S.A. was a member, as were various regional labor and farmer parties. These included the Labors' Non-Partisan League, the American Labor Party of New York, the Minnesota Farmer and Labor Party, the Progressive Party of Wisconsin and the Co-op Commonwealth Federation of Washington. Members of the "New Deal" wing of the Democratic Party also joined the front. At its height, the American League Against War and Fascism had 7.5 million members and held conventions of 2000-3500 delegates. In 1940, its heir, the American Peace Mobilization, grew to a membership of 12 million.

While there are many positive lessons to be learned from this period,

various problems with the development of the democratic front led to its demise as a fighting organization. The Communist Party U.S.A. played a decisive role in the building of the democratic front. By the end of the 1930's, after many years of ardent revolutionary work, with Earl Browder in the lead, the Party entered a period of degeneration and decay (due to many important factors which space does not allow us to present here). The work of the Party in the democratic front was, naturally, adversely affected.

Earl Browder led the Communist Party U.S.A. to adopt the incorrect analysis that the Democratic Party had split into two wings, the left wing represented by Franklin D. Roosevelt and the "New Deal" program, and the right wing which was allied with the Republicans against the "New Deal". This led to the reactionary conclusion that "the New Deal Wing under Roosevelt leadership is an essential part of the developing democratic front against monopoly capitalism". (*Earl Browder, The Democratic Front, Workers Library Press, p. 16*) Browder concluded that a section of a capitalist political party had become anti-imperialist.

On this analysis, the Communist Party U.S.A. drew the conclusion that the interests of the working class lay with the Democratic Party and that capitalist democracy would evolve into socialism, which Browder summed up in his famous statement, "Communism is twentieth century Americanism." Browder also led the Communist Party U.S.A. to various incorrect conclusions about the nature of capitalist democracy, particularly Jeffersonian democracy. In the end, the independent role of the communist party itself was undermined and its revolutionary program and tactics were abandoned, leading to its liquidation in 1944. Though it was reorganized and exists today, it has abandoned its revolutionary orientation of the 1930's. This is the early root of the present view of the Communist Party U.S.A., now led by Gus Hall and Angela Davis, that there is a non-monopoly section of the capitalist class which is the ally of the working class. Today a large assortment of people outside the Communist Party U.S.A. have a similar view, thinking that there is a section of the Democratic Party that can be allied with. Clearly, the legacy of the "New Deal" era is still with us. This history is important to recount in that many of the same problems of that period arise in our work today.

The main forces that form the basis of the democratic front are already in existence. They include the various rank-and-file workers' organizations and even local organizations of reformist unions, various anti-repression, anti-Klan, anti-police-terror committees, anti-draft coalitions, some anti-nuclear organizations and others. Many of the newly-emerged groups fighting the Reagan budget cuts and other reactionary measures would be involved, as would some local political parties. Artists, writers and other cultural workers would be involved. There are virtually hundreds of organizations that objectively fall within the scope of the democratic front.

Communist and revolutionary organizations would constitute an important element. In every country in which a mass anti-fascist movement has arisen, it has been the communists who are at the forefront of the struggle. Thus, the democratic front must oppose all anti-communism and red-baiting.

The democratic front would not exclude, in principle, reformist or even revisionist organizations such as those now at the heel of the Soviet Union and China. The membership of any organization would be determined on the basis of its actual unity with the program of the front, as evidenced by its actions. Unlike Earl Browder's conception of the democratic front, however, to maintain its anti-fascist and anti-imperialist character, no alliance would be sought with any section of either the Democratic or Republican Parties, or any other capitalist political party, or any individual such as John Anderson. Nor would it seek any unity with any section of the capitalist class.

In short, all individuals and organizations who in deeds fight against the dual menace of imperialist war and fascism should affiliate with the front. The foundation of the front is the working class, though members will come from other progressive strata of the people.

In the struggle, the democratic front would utilize as many forms of organization and as many forms of struggle as required. Because it must be a fighting organization, it will combine education with militant action of all types. It will utilize every means available under existing law, but will not confine itself to the limits of the law. If the anti-war movement of the 1960's and 1970's had confined its activity to the limits of the law, many of its activities, including large demonstrations, would never have occurred.

Furthermore, while the democratic front will utilize elections, petition drives and other such measures, it will not rely on reforms for success. It is primarily through revolutionary action of a mass character that fascism and war will be defeated. This means that the terror and violence of the police and fascist gangs or the military, will be met with self-defense. Education and preparation for self-defense will be an important aspect of the activity of the front, for self-defense constitutes an essential tactic to fight fascist terror.

Today, we are at the stage of discussion and education regarding the nature of fascism and the need for unity of action, but events over the next few years will not allow us to be lax. The objective necessity for the advance of our struggle is escalating daily. It is our task to see to it that the subjective consciousness and organization arises to meet the demands of history.