

Some Remarks on the United Front.

By D. IVON JONES.

Comrade Lopes wrote an able article in "The International" for August 18th. By the time it got to the Crimea, and these remarks return to South Africa, the matter may have lost its political significance, such is the speed of the crisis of Capitalism. Be that as it may, the article in question has inspired a few observations even in this distant part of the world.

Comrade Lopes pleaded that the United Front was not applicable to our Party in South Africa for various reasons. Now I wish to refer to a common misapprehension regarding the United Front. It does not consist of making "bedfellows" of the opportunist leaders. It is not proposed to unite with Colonel Creswell or Sampson, O.B.E., as Comrade Lopes suggests. In this respect the United Front idea is liable to be misinterpreted. The problem is how to unite the workers, and then how to keep the Communist Party in touch with the workers, and ready at any moment to take the lead, and constantly offering a lead, a common slogan of immediate demands.

The Third Congress of the Comintern raised the slogan, "To the masses and with the masses into the revolutionary struggle." At the Conference on the United Front the Italian Opposition said: "Let us go to the masses, not to the chiefs." Zinoviev, with that sledge-hammer logic of his, replied: "How are you going to get at the masses? Do you think you can go out one fine morning into the streets, looking for the masses, and say, 'Good-morning, masses, come with us!'" No! The problem is how to get at the masses, and the United Front solves that problem.

To-day every struggle for the daily needs of the workers is a revolutionary struggle, because capitalism is becoming too bankrupt to throw sops of reform to alleviate the position. The reformist leaders in all parts of the world are sabotaging this struggle for partial demands, where once they used to make political capital out of it. Because they cannot identify themselves with the daily struggle without furthering the revolution. This was seen in the engineering lock-out in England, and is very clear to-day in Germany.

It remains for the Communists to lead this struggle. But the masses are still behind the reformist chiefs. How, then, get the masses to move? How to get them to realise the true character of their chiefs? By openly declaring our willingness to combine for certain definite action under definite slogans for certain definite working class demands, and forcing the chiefs either to reject our proposals, and thus betray their true character to their following, or make them line up in the active struggle for the partial demands. From that struggle the Communists are bound to return with an increased following, for only the Communists struggle to the uttermost with the workers.

That is the United Front, and it does not necessarily imply that we should ever exchange a single word personally with the chiefs. It is a public parley between chiefs in the presence of the workers on the fate of the working class. Certainly it does not preclude personal contact with opportunist leaders as to technical arrangements. But Communists who are sure of their principles should be the last to fear such contact. We do not believe in the monastic virtues.

The position in the Colonial movements somewhat differs from that in Europe. In the Colonial revolts we see reformist labour men in the active struggle. Colonial exploitation is an absentee exploitation, and local bourgeoisie fight under Labour

slogans. Although these bourgeoisie are represented by the Creswell type and others, like Waterson—who, after marching his men up the hill and down the hill again in the good old Duke of York style—runs away to Capetown when he finds that the workers are not in a playing mood. So that this coquetting with revolt only means that Crawford has played out the old game of spooft by collaboration. The pitifully apologetic speeches of the Labour members in the Capetown Parliament showed that the Labour Party in South Africa is just as afraid of going the whole hog for the present needs of the workers as its confreres in Europe. Hence the need for the Communist Party.

Comrade Lopes suggests that our Party in South Africa is not yet sufficiently large nor sufficiently clear in principle for the United Front; at least he quotes Talheimer as saying that such parties should refrain from attempting it.

But what of that? If the party is negligible, the other parties can ignore us, and there will be no united front. If in the United Front we get submerged and the workers fail to see the difference between us, then certainly the party is not characterised by clear-cut thinking. But the problem remains, how to make the workers learn the difference between us and the reformist parties? By the United Front! The United Front is not a suspension of the struggle, but the pursuit of the struggle on a wider field. It is only formally an agreement between chiefs. In substance it is a challenge to the opportunist leaders to fight for the workers or quit the arena.

It seems that the United Front is developing more in the direction of an agreement with the Nationalist Party (to the exclusion of the C.P.) than of purely working class action. This is our weakness in action. It proves one of two things: either that there is no need for a Communist Party in South Africa, or that the Communist Party is not correctly applying the tactic of the United Front. The former is by far the least likely reason. A United Front in which the Communists do the donkey work but in which the Communist Party is ignored is a travesty of the whole idea.

Creswell and Hertzog have identical aims: the protection of the interests of the small local bourgeoisie—one of the towns, the other of the country. The local bourgeoisie, the shopkeepers, etc., sympathise with the strike up to a certain point, because the Chamber of Mines threatened to reduce the number of their best customers. Creswell's white labour policy was a policy, and is a policy, of the local bourgeoisie in search of more customers. There is an identity of interest between the local bourgeoisie represented by Creswell, which desires more white customers, and less black labour, and the Nationalist farmers, who desire more of the black labour now grabbed by the Chamber of Mines. This union is not a working class union. It is an anti-Imperialist union, quite desirable after true working class unity has been achieved. But such unity can only be accomplished on the Left by the Communist Party. The Party must, in its turn, become the link on the left between the white and black workers. It can most effectively do this by first gaining the confidence of the white workers.

That is the whole problem, comrades, how to gain the confidence of the white workers, and having gained their confidence, how to make it operate effectively to our Party advantage, and to the mutual advantage of both black and white workers. Herein lies the problem of how to apply the tactic of the United Front in South Africa.