

The Platform of the Workers Alliance

Valeriano Orobón Fernández

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*A 1934 newspaper article by Valeriano Oborón Fernández, a leading theoretician of the CNT, in which he explains why he is in favor of a “Workers Alliance” entailing the tactical unity of the CNT, UGT and PCE—particularly aimed at the proletarian rank and file of these organizations—for the purpose of not only defeating the fascist threat by means of revolution, but also for ensuring the predominance of “revolutionary working class democracy” in the post-revolutionary society, and outlines his suggestions for the basic principles of such an Alliance.*¹

Now we come to the most delicate aspect of the problem. The first thing we should do is point out that none of the specific doctrinal foundations of the various movements can serve as a unity platform. The convergence we are seeking is a tactical orientation imposed by exceptional circumstances to which inflexible theoretical particularities must be sacrificed. If each tendency strives to maintain its own program as a compulsory mold for the alliance, the alliance will be practically impossible. We must therefore seek a neutral terrain for our pact. And it is clear that this terrain must be firm enough to resist the burdens and consequences of unity without breaking.

This agreement of a tactical nature is the one that presents the fewest difficulties, for all sectors coincide in their assessment of the gravity of our current situation; we only need to discuss, and reach an agreement on the details of, methods and timing.

Where obstacles arise that are not so easy to surmount is in connection with the orientation to follow after the hypothetical event. Largo Caballero speaks of “the integral conquest of public power”; the communists want to establish the “dictatorship of the proletariat”; and the anarchosindicalists aspire to install “libertarian communism”, using the rural municipality and the organization of the industrial workers as basic cells. Here, the terms are quite different, and we should note that while socialists and communists summarize their program with exclusively tactical slogans, represented by the political formulas of “public power” and “dictatorship”, the anarchosindicalists, for their part, present a distinctive and complete social system.

From these three points of view we must rule out everything that is mutually incompatible or inconsistent. Only thus can we discover the necessary line of convergence, upon whose attainment and preservation the permanent and ascendant triumph of a proletarian revolution depends.

¹ [The “Workers Alliance” was a proposal that originated in the CNT in Asturias (where the UGT was a major force among the industrial proletariat) in 1933, in the midst of the Depression, and was supported by some other libertarians and Andres Nin, among others. Its purpose was to gain the support of the rank and file members of the UGT, who had been radicalized by the effects of the Great Depression, and supported the parliamentary demagogue, Largo Caballero (who was at that time threatening to unleash the revolution), for a joint revolutionary struggle against the threat of fascism and for a proletarian revolution in response to the fascist CEDA obtaining Ministries in the government after the upcoming national elections, based on a common understanding of the (ostensible) shared goals of the CNT, the UGT, and even the Spanish Communist Party, and to reduce tactical considerations to “workers democracy” in an attempt to bypass the centralist and statist leaderships of the Socialist and Communist Parties. The Workers Alliance was opposed by the majority of the leadership of the CNT and the FAI, who believed that any pact with the “reformist” UGT would be a betrayal of libertarian principles, and by the time the insurrection broke out in Asturias in October 1934, the libertarians, who had squandered their energies and manpower on a plethora of small-scale uprisings all across Spain, were unable and in many instances unwilling to support the insurrection, which was isolated and mercilessly crushed. (For an account of the role played by Valeriano Oborón Fernández in the movement for the Workers Alliance, written by one of the leaders of the Asturian CNT, see: libcom.org.) (Translator’s supplemental note.)]

Of course, we have to dispose of the formulas, “conquest of public power” and “dictatorship of the proletariat”, for being characteristics that are too partial and uninformative with respect to the practical content of a social revolution. Today, the Spanish proletariat is very mistrustful, and rightly so, of a mere substitution of one power by another power. After the experience of 1931, it demands that the fruit of its struggle must take the form of more tangible, positive and profound transformations.

Revolutionary working class democracy

In view of the fact that, in terms of basic principles, and as is recognized explicitly in their theoretical programs, the socialists and communists also aspire, as the final stage of their development, to a regime in which we can coexist without either classes or State, one of the founding principles of the alliance must stipulate an advance in this direction wherever and to whatever extent possible. That is, in the new social order, institutions of coercion must not be created arbitrarily and capriciously for the purpose of making the new order fit the artificial recipe book of a single tendency, but only as the strictly indispensable means for the effective unfolding of the revolutionary process. The entire governmental and repressive mechanism of the old system must disappear without a trace. To crush the class enemy it is not necessary to install a long-term dictatorship, but to adequately utilize the “revolutionary violence” that Bakunin recommended for the period of transition.

Bureaucratism and Bonapartism, latent threats in any revolution, can be avoided by putting the revolution in the hands of the working people, arousing the emulation of the vast multitudes to defend it and make it fertile.

Insofar as none of the tendencies can advocate the oligarchic position that the proletarian masses should be governed without their willing consent, it is logical to assume that all of them have shown themselves to be ready to serve and comply with the will of the proletariat as the last court of appeal, which leads us to a formula that we believe is acceptable for everyone: revolutionary working class democracy. This basic principle corresponds closely enough to the one that was proclaimed by the Republic of Workers Councils in Bavaria in 1919, in which, until the social democrat Noske drowned it in blood, the collaboration of left-wing socialists like Ernst Toller, communists like Eugen Levine, and anarchists like Landauer and Mühsam was possible. Revolutionary working class democracy is direct social management by the proletariat, a sure safeguard against party dictatorships and a guarantee for the further development of the forces and projects of the revolution.

In the current theoretical assessments of the socialist and communist parties an excessive importance is conceded to the role of the political instrument in the revolutionary process. This is a strange position for the official advocates of historical materialism to endorse, for they must see that the touchstone of any effective social transformation lies in the ability to influence the economy. We, despite the fact that we are so often called utopians, believe that the consolidation of the revolution depends above all on the rapid and rational organization of its economy. We therefore think that a simple slogan of a political order is insufficient to address the fundamental problems of a revolution. What we must focus on as the essential point is the socialization of the means of production and the formidable task of coordination and organization that is entailed by building an economy from scratch. And this cannot be the task of a central political

power, but only of the trade union and communal institutions, which, as the immediate and direct representative bodies of the producers, are in their respective zones the natural pillars of the new order. It must be stressed in advance that, although they are subordinated to a general technical plan, the management and operations of the economy, on both the local and national levels, are in the hands of the working class collectives in their respective domains. Thus, the revolution will be spread out over a network of living and perfectly adapted cells, which will enthusiastically and skillfully engage in the construction of integral socialism.

General Guidelines

It would be too presumptuous to want to foresee, and then examine one by one, the many questions that must arise over the course of a revolution, and then to declare *a priori* solutions for all of them. The most important thing is to establish, right now, the general guidelines that can serve as a platform for the alliance, and as a combative and constructive model for its united forces. In our opinion, the following points must be emphasized:

First. Agreement on an indisputably revolutionary tactical plan which, absolutely rejecting any policy of collaboration with the bourgeois regime, is instead directed towards its rapid overthrow, a process whose duration is limited only by requirements of a strategic nature.

Second. Endorsement of revolutionary working class democracy, that is, the democracy of the will of the majority of the proletariat, as the common denominator and determinant factor of the new order.

Third. Immediate socialization of the elements of production, transport, distribution, housing and finance; reintegration of the unemployed into the productive process; orientation of the economy towards the intensification of yields and raising the standard of living of working people as high as possible; establishment of a rigorously equitable system of distribution; products are no longer commodities, and become social goods; labor is an activity open to everyone, and it is from labor that all rights emanate.

Fourth. The municipal and industrial organizations, federated by industries or fields of activity and confederated nationally, will be responsible for the maintenance of the principle of unity in the structure of the economy.

Fifth. Every executive organ that is necessary to attend to other activities besides the economy will be controlled and elected by the people, and their mandates will be revocable by the people.

These basic principles are much more than just so many slogans. They represent a program, one that synthesizes the practical forms that are capable of giving a real backbone to the revolution. Besides providing the material for a poster that could express the essential aspirations of the workers movement, they constitute a point of convergence with respect to basic principles for all tendencies.

In any event, with these or with other foundations, we think that it is necessary to establish an agreement in advance about the first steps of the revolution. With the solemn commitment, of course, to totally abide by its strictures. For if the unity of the proletarian forces is indispensable in any attempt to overthrow an enemy regime, it is even more indispensable to safeguard the fruits of the revolutionary victory and to overcome the difficulties that might arise in the initial period. The outbreak of hostilities between the different tendencies during this period would

pose a serious threat to the life of the revolution. In the interest of the working class we must render this eventuality impossible.

Final words

What we have said will perhaps scandalize dilettantes who live in a world of theoretical purity. Perhaps we will be called heretics because we did not pay tribute to fashionable and rigid dogmas. We don't care. By expressing our opinion on the extremely important problem of unity we have been true to ourselves. We have seen what reality looks like, when you don't look at it through the smoked glass of doctrinal preoccupations and conventionalism. What we are talking about here is a revolution; this is not a doctoral examination on one or another principle. Principles must not be commandments of the law, but flexible formulas that can grasp and mold reality.

Does our alliance platform guarantee the advent of integral libertarian communism on the day after the revolution? Obviously not. But what it does guarantee is the defeat of capitalism and its political base, fascism; what it does guarantee is a regime of proletarian democracy without exploitation or class privilege, leaving the door wide open to a completely libertarian society. All of this seems to us to be more positive than the pure metaphysics and theories of revolutionary monopoly and miracle-working.

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