

# Toward the People's Anti-Imperialist Front in Mexico

(Speech\* Delivered to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, August 10, 1935)

By HERNAN LABORDE†

*The Communist*, January 1936

In the draft resolution for this point of the agenda and in the report of Comrade Dimitroff it is said that “the most important task of the Communists in the colonial countries is the creation of the people’s anti-imperialist front”. It is clear that this is not meant for colonial countries exclusively, but also for the semi-colonial countries.

I propose to raise here some problems of the people’s anti-imperialist front in Mexico, particularly a problem which for the present is faced in no other country in the Caribbean or in South America – the problem of our position towards national-reformism in power, towards the National Revolutionary Party and the Cardenas government, which has the support of part of the toiling masses and petty bourgeoisie....

The task of the oppressed masses of Mexico, under the leadership of the proletariat and its Communist vanguard, *is to put once more into motion the bourgeois-democratic revolution*, which was begun in 1910 and betrayed by its principal bourgeois leaders, and to carry it to its close, to the realization of its tasks, which are primarily anti-imperialist tasks, for national liberation even though linked directly to the solution of the agrarian problem.

Twenty-five years after the revolution began, Mexico continues to be a semi-colony. The nearly three billion dollars invested in the country, in mining, in oil, in the railroads, in the electrical industry, in agriculture, and in the small and weak light industries, give foreign capitalists control over the fundamental positions in economy.

---

\* Abridged text. – Ed.

† Delegate from the Communist Party of Mexico to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. – Ed.

Although the agrarian reform of 1917, a result of the revolution, has given the peasants five million acres of cultivable land and twenty million acres of uncultivable lands, and although more than two-thirds of the peasant population is still without lands, the foreign exploiters have monopolized through concessions, evictions, etc., around seventy-five million acres of rich lands.

Due to the fact that the Yankee market absorbs the greater part of Mexican exports, and due to its closeness and its possibilities for placing pressure on the government by fomenting and financing revolts, Yankee imperialism has succeeded in gaining the upper hand, particularly after the capitulation of Calles in 1927-28, and in weakening nearly to elimination the influence of English imperialism.

...Imperialism, under the conditions of the depression of a special type, was able to increase greatly the exploitation of the masses; by increasing the production and the exports of the extraction industries, and by new methods, the lowering of the costs of production and of real wages, the raising of the cost of living obtained through the depreciation of the peso, which the government maintains at the rate of \$3.60 per United States dollar.

This explains why just at the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935 the strike movement expanded until it reached the number of 1,200 strikes in six months, affecting the most important enterprises – mining, oil, electrical, urban transport, plantations, and feudal estates, and which often acquired the character of a counter-offensive for better salaries, for collective agreements, etc. This movement, which has already begun to assume the form of regional and industrial general strikes, has an unmistakable anti-imperialist character.

This holds true not only for the proletariat. The anti-imperialist struggle of the other sections of the population burst out frequently in the form of movements of consumers of electric light and power for the lowering of rates, of struggles against the high price of gasoline, against the monopoly enterprises of agricultural products, etc.

#### THE EVENTS OF JUNE 12

One fact characterizes the state of mind of the masses. On June 12 of this year, General Calles, representing the landowners, capitalists, and big merchants most closely linked with foreign capital, and until then head of the National Revolutionary Party, made his statement urging the government to suppress by violence the strike

movement and to restrict the trade unions. This attack on the working class had all the characteristics of a cynical defense of foreign capital, the capital most affected by the strikes.

That same evening, the most important workers' organizations, representing two-thirds of the organized working class, including its decisive sections – mining, oil, railroad, electrical, etc. – achieved unity of action in deed, and declared themselves prepared to oppose, even with a general strike, any attempt to establish a dictatorship or to restrict the rights of the proletariat. In a few days, the National Committee for Proletarian Defense was established, which is to convoke a Unity Congress to form a unified trade union center. Naturally, we are not speaking of a miracle here. The united front was possible because our Party had prepared the ground by fighting consistently, although with weaknesses, for unity of action ever since the appeal of the Communist International in March, 1933. It was possible also because of the influence of the international movement of the proletariat towards the united front. But the rapidity and energy with which the workers' organizations (including some who a month before had sabotaged the united front) answered the attack of Calles by achieving unity of action and preparing themselves for defense, indicate the degree of maturity of the mass sentiment and willingness for struggle against the oppressors of the country and people.

Immediately after the Committee for Proletarian Defense was established, student groups and others sent in their endorsements, and the peasant organizations initiated conversations to form a peasant united front. This indicates that the situation was ripe, not only for the united front of the proletariat, but also for the people's front against imperialism.

But our Party then did not understand the problem of the people's front. It did not understand that the semi-colonial conditions of the country and the double oppression of imperialism, that the character of the revolution with its task of national liberation, and that the class forces which must participate in it in its first stage, the anti-imperialist stage, impose as the basic principle of our political line the tactic of the people's front. The Party had a wrong line.

This wrong line prevented us from seeing the favorable conditions which the political situation in the country, from the taking of power by President Cardenas to the end of 1934, offered us to develop a vast people's movement against imperialism. And, in June,

when the clash between Calles and Cardenas took place, when Cardenas rejected the statements of Calles by announcing himself opposed to his reactionary proposals and for the right to strike, we saw nothing more than a factional struggle springing from a rivalry of economic interests between two bourgeois-landlord cliques, and disagreements on the most adequate methods to liquidate the struggles of the masses and to quiet down the country for the benefit of foreign capital and its national allies. We placed Cardenas on the same plane as Calles and limited ourselves to saying to the masses: "Neither with Calles nor with Cardenas", and to asserting that the two were against the proletariat.

This position was wrong.

#### OUR ERRORS IN ESTIMATING THE STRUGGLE OF CARDENAS AGAINST CALLES

The fight between the Calles and Cardenas factions, which culminated in the June clash, has its source in the policy of the Cardenas government which has taken a series of national-reformist measures to restrict, although timidly, the exploitation of the country by the imperialists. It has cancelled some illegal concessions, revised the electric light and power scales, encouraged cooperatives in mining and electricity, nationalized insurance, raised the tax on silver, etc. At the same time, Cardenas has broadened the policy of distribution of lands and credits to the peasants on the basis of the reforms of 1917, and has displayed a certain tolerance towards the strike movement and towards the workers' movement in general, including the Communist Party, which now enjoys some opportunity for legal action after five years of illegality....

The struggle of Cardenas against Calles is basically the vacillating, inconsistent resistance of the national-reformist bourgeois sector against the increasing pressure of imperialism supporting itself on the landowners and the Callista millionaires, and which is absorbing also the branches of the light industries before reserved for the national bourgeoisie.

This is what we did not understand. Neither did we see that the "new methods" and the "Left maneuvers" of Cardenas are, in large part, concessions which bourgeois national reformism, lacking sufficient strength in itself, due to the smallness and weakness of industry in Mexico, is obliged to make to the toiling masses and the petty bourgeoisie in order to assure itself of their support. We did

not see, finally, that the mass base of Cardenismo, strengthened and broadened recently, undoubtedly includes national-revolutionary sections who have followed Cardenas because, noticing his position in relation to the reactionary Right, they hoped to find in him a leader of the anti-imperialist struggle.

The source of these errors is partly the Plenum of July, 1929. In that Plenum, our Central Committee broke resolutely with the opportunist past of the Party, which had been at the tail end of Obregon and Calles for a long period; but it placed us at the other extreme in considering that the national bourgeoisie taken as a whole and its petty-bourgeois allies had capitulated *conclusively* to imperialism. In order to avoid this error it would have been sufficient not to forget the Colonial Thesis of the Sixth Congress which states that the capitulation of the bourgeoisie of the colonies and semi-colonies to imperialism “is not conclusive as long as the danger of the class revolution of the masses does not appear as a direct and threatening factor”.

The estimations of the Plenum of July, 1929, led us to a sectarian and purely negative position towards the reforms of 1917 still in force (as the distribution of lands and credits to the peasants, certain guarantees to the proletariat, right of organization and strike, etc.)....

All this explains why the masses could not understand us when we shouted against the National Revolutionary Party and against its governments, calling them “counter-revolutionaries”, “lackeys of imperialism”, etc.; and why the National Revolutionary Party has succeeded in retaining a large mass base, notwithstanding its undoubted collaboration with imperialism, while we with our loud slogans on the agrarian anti-imperialist revolution, the workers’ and peasants’ government, the power of the Soviets, have been able to win over only the most advanced sections of the working class and the peasantry.

This sectarian line, which prevented us from understanding for many years the true character of the party in power, has prevented us from a timely appraisal of the new national-reformist currents inside the party, and from correctly characterizing the Cardenas government, which *is emphasizing* the national-reformist aspects of its program. Therefore, we have not only not concentrated our fire against the reactionary Calles faction, but further, by considering Cardenismo as the demagogic “Left” of the National Revolutionary Party, which it was necessary to combat in order to separate the masses from the par-

ty, we even reached a point where we characterized the Cardenas government as “the principal source of the fascist danger”.

We have spoken much about the fascist danger in Mexico, primarily in the form of a “process of fascization” derived from the policy of the government and its Six-Year Plan, and, in the second place, from the semi-fascist groups which have sprung up from the government....

It is clear that our Party must not abandon its struggle against the semi-fascist groups. But it is necessary to recognize that the “fascist danger” to a certain extent had caused us to relegate to a secondary plane the principal enemy, which is – under Mexican conditions – imperialism, particularly Yankee imperialism. In the future we must assign the fascist groups their true value as secondary auxiliaries – as yet very weak – of imperialist oppression, and without ceasing to fight them, place the struggle against imperialism in the center of the attention of the masses. As Comrade Wang Ming has stated correctly, the struggle against imperialism and for the national interests of the people is the best way to fight and expose the semi-fascist groups in our countries.

These have been our principal errors. The political and practical consequence of these errors has been a false tactic, which blinded us to the perspective of a people’s anti-imperialist movement and has prevented us from taking advantage of the exceptionally favorable situation to deepen the contradictions between a part of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, to gather the great masses of the people for the anti-imperialist struggle, to strengthen the workers’ organizations, to secure the alliance of the peasantry with the proletariat and to facilitate the struggle for the hegemony of the proletariat in the movement, to transform the Communist Party into a strong Party linked with the masses and capable of organizing and leading the revolution, and to utilize the temporary national-reformist allies in the best possible way.

We must quickly change the line of the Party and adopt a correct tactic.

#### THE DANGER OF THE REAPPEARANCE OF CALLES

The declarations of Calles in June were designed to apply brutal methods of repression and to liquidate the mass movement against imperialist oppression. These statements undoubtedly correspond to the interests and desires of imperialism. To achieve this desire, the

man favored most continues to be Calles, who not only is not crushed, but even retains undeniable support in the National Revolutionary Party itself, in the Congress, the Senate, and in the Army. He is preparing to regain by any means his preponderant role in the politics of the country. Everything seems to indicate that the reappearance of Calles will take the form of a military coup d'état to establish his dictatorship and to apply the program sketched in his June declarations. The latest news from Mexico shows, not only the development of the mass movement, but also the sharpening of the crisis in the National Revolutionary Party and of the struggle between reactionary Callismo and Cardenismo.

Under these conditions our Party must concentrate its fire against Calles, explaining his reactionary role, awakening and preparing the masses against his military coup d'état. At the same time we must develop the mass movement on the basis of a struggle for the economic, political and anti-imperialist demands. We must develop the economic struggles, first of all, against the foreign companies, for increased wages, for better collective contracts, and the political strikes against any attempt to restrict the right to strike and the rights of the proletariat in general. We must link these struggles to the movement of the peasants, students, and the urban petty-bourgeoisie, and thus create the conditions for the general strike and for great mass actions in the city and the countryside against a Calles coup d'état.

The Party must look for and crystallize the Left wing within the National Revolutionary Party represented by groups and organizations of peasants, workers, students, and the impoverished petty-bourgeoisie, led by the Cardenistas. We must base ourselves on this Left wing by means of the united front tactic in order to accelerate the differentiation of classes and groups in the party, in order to develop in it a national-revolutionary wing, steadily more defined and consistent.

In practice we have already cooperated with the lower organs of the National Revolutionary Party such as municipal peasant governments of N.R.P. origin which were fighting against the reactionary elements of the party. Since the Third Latin American Communist Conference we accepted the possibility of proposing a united front in some cases to the Sub-Committees of the National Revolutionary Party. *But now we must go much further....*

It is evident for us that in Mexico the people's anti-imperialist front is possible only by taking into consideration the toiling masses and the petty bourgeoisie of the National Revolutionary Party. And it is necessary to draw our conclusions from this fact.

AS TO A UNITED FRONT WITH THE NATIONAL  
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

I am not proposing the united front with the National Revolutionary Party as a whole, including the Callista Right, deeply hated by the people, but rather with the national-reformist Cardenista movement, which has on its side the basic masses of the National Revolutionary Party. But we could even come to a united front with the National Revolutionary Party as a whole, with one condition: that the *Callista politicians and generals be expelled*. The united front with the Cardenista movement, or with the National Revolutionary Party as a whole, supposes cooperation in the actions of struggle and in the organs of the people's anti-imperialist front, not only with the organs of economic struggles, as trade unions, peasant leagues, etc., which are led by the followers of Cardenas, but also with the internal organs themselves of the National Revolutionary Party where these organs directly control the masses. *This, of course, will demand the entrance and the work of the Communists in the organs of the National Revolutionary Party.*

Naturally, we must also take into consideration the other political organizations, such as the Mexican Labor Party, the Socialist Party of the Lefts, of the old Leftist Tejada, etc.

What must be our position towards the government of Cardenas, towards his program, the Six-Year Plan, and towards his concrete policy? The explanations of Comrade Dimitroff in referring to the de Man plan in Belgium help us to find the correct position. We must reject everything in the program of the National Revolutionary Party which is injurious to the masses and favorable to imperialism and its national tools; but we must support and demand that the parts be fulfilled which can benefit somewhat, even though it be only a trifle, the toiling masses, and to limit somewhat, although it may be very little, the oppression of the country and the people by imperialism. We must apply this test to the concrete policy of Cardenas and present new demands which would drive the struggle of the masses beyond the limits of the national-reformist concession of the government.



Our Party must call on the popular masses and to all of its organizations, groups, and representative persons, to build the national movement of struggle against imperialism, with a platform of immediate demands, and direct this struggle towards the national liberating revolution which must restore complete economic and political independence to Mexico. The Party must declare itself prepared to cooperate with whatever organizations, groups, or individuals that accept this platform, and even to cooperate with them in actions of struggle for isolated anti-imperialist demands. The Party must also declare that it will support any government, including the present government of Cardenas, whenever and insofar as it carries out a policy in accord with the platform of the people's anti-imperialist front.

At the same time, the Party must raise before the government these political demands: complete legality and freedom of action for the Communist Party and for all revolutionary organizations, broad democratic liberties, the elimination of the reactionary Callistas from all organs of the administration and the army, the return to the peasants of the arms which were taken away from them by previous governments, a general arming of all peasants for their defense against the reactionary Callista coup d'état which will be directed largely against them, the disarming of the whiteguards of the landowners, and an effective preparation against the coup d'état of Calles.

In this way we will sharpen the crisis in the National Revolutionary Party, the struggle between the Callista Right and Cardenismo; we will encourage the national-revolutionary currents in the party; we will link ourselves with the Cardenista masses and isolate the conciliatory elements who intercede in order to hold back the struggle against imperialism and against its national allies. We must criticize the vacillating position of Cardenas, denounce his concessions to imperialism, and reject the tendency visible in the trade unions and even inside our Party to consider Cardenas as a national-revolutionary leader. But it must be made clear to the masses that we are not dealing here with maneuvers to expose Cardenas, but that we sincerely want to broaden and develop to the utmost the people's front of struggle against imperialism and against the Callista reaction which serves it, by embracing all those who are willing, even though only partially and temporarily, to participate in this struggle.

## HOW SHALL WE BUILD THE PEOPLE'S ANTI-IMPERIALIST FRONT?

Our Party must boldly raise the question of the people's anti-imperialist front, basing itself above all on the unified workers' movement as the driving force of the people's front. Therefore, the most urgent task is the consolidation and extension of the trade union united front already achieved, drawing in organizations not yet adhering to it, and in insuring by the work of the Party, above all in the reformist organizations, the achievement of the Unity Congress and of unity itself. The second task is the formation of the peasant united front, as the best ally of the working class to assure its leadership in the people's front. The peons and the unorganized agricultural workers, who form an enormous mass, must be gathered and incorporated into the people's front in Committees of United Front Struggle.

The forces of the people's front must include every stratum of the toiling population and the petty-bourgeoisie. The people's front must be the people itself organized and mobilized for the struggle against imperialist oppression and for the national liberation of the country. Together with the workers, peasants, employees, etc. the toiling youth and the students play a large role as vanguard, as a shock troop, in the people's movement, and the Young Communist League here must be the best helper of the Party for the mobilization and organization of the masses of youth. We must give special attention to the women, who will be the most sensitive to certain aspects of the struggle against imperialism. The broad Catholic mass must be attracted to the anti-imperialist front, and must be differentiated from the bishops and reactionary clerical leaders. In the countryside, a factor of greater importance for the people's movement will be the Indian tribes. We must not forget the soldiers, who can participate in the movement even though now it be only in small groups.

### DRAFT PLATFORM FOR THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

Our delegation has sketched a rough draft platform for this people's front. We propose as demands for the proletariat: enforcement of the minimum wage law, increased wages in the imperialist enterprises, strict fulfillment of the Labor Law in those points that benefit the workers and which the imperialist enterprises are now violating partially or wholly, and an attachment of the property of

those enterprises to oblige them to fulfill the law. For the peasants, Indians and middle landowners, the return of the lands which have been robbed from them by the foreign companies. For the peasants and Indians, free distribution of the lands belonging to foreign exploiters and their national allies, and the struggle for the direct occupation of these lands. We propose the struggle against the conditions of semi-feudal oppression of the toilers of the countryside, particularly the peons, and for the liberation of the Indian tribes, although we have to discuss the form of presenting this question from the point of view of the people's front. For the urban petty-bourgeoisie, for the women and for the poor and middle population in general, the demand for the reduction of electric light and power rates, the struggle against the shutting off of electric services for lack of payment, the struggle against the monopolies of food products and for the reduction of prices.

These are the demands which most vitally touch the masses and will place them in motion. But the platform must also contain general anti-imperialist demands, as, for example, the cancellation of the foreign debts. Of course, there must be included the struggle for disarming and dissolving the semi-fascist groups ("gold shirts," etc.).

I have considered here only the immediate demands of the people's front, because in Mexico the struggle for power is not a problem of the immediate future as it is in Brazil. But there exist the necessary factors for a relatively rapid development of the people's movement and even of the revolutionary crisis, before the conditions ripen for Soviet Power. Therefore, it seems to me that very soon the people's revolutionary government and its program, which we have not yet discussed, and which must be discussed without delay, will be raised as a very concrete immediate question. Of course, already from now on, we must popularize the fundamental slogans of the National Revolution: confiscation of the properties of the imperialist enterprises, etc.

Even when the slogan of the defense of the U.S.S.R. must not necessarily form part of the platform of the people's front, our Party must raise the interest, the sympathy, and the active endorsement by the masses of the peace policy of the U.S.S.R., popularize the Soviet solution of the national problem and the successes of Socialist construction, and show to the masses that the path of the October Revolution is the only one which leads to the complete destruction

of imperialism, to the liberation and fraternization of all peoples. The Party must take advantage of the favorable situation for a great campaign for renewal of diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. by the Mexican government.

There still remains one question which demands a complete change in the position of the Party. I refer to our position towards the patriotic traditions and towards the revolution of 1910 – a sectarian position which has consisted in ignoring or underestimating them, and which has prevented us from taking advantage of these patriotic sentiments of the people, of the revolutionary traditions of the War of Independence, as the first emancipation movement of the Mexican nation, of the reform as an important stage in the struggle against the landlord-clerical reaction, and of the revolution of 1910 with its anti-imperialist and anti-feudal aspects. We must regain possession of the heritage and the revolutionary traditions of the people and make of September 16 the anniversary of the Independence, and of November 20 the anniversary of the 1910 revolution – two days for the national liberation movement.

The struggle for the liberation of the Mexican people is an inseparable part of the national liberation movement of all the peoples of the Caribbean and of South America. It will be necessary to link the internal tasks of the people's front in Mexico to the mass movement in support of the Cuban revolution and of the national liberation movement of Brazil, and to support the creation of the people's front throughout Central America.

#### THE TASKS OF THE C.P.U.S.A.

And it is not possible to discuss these problems without recalling the role of the Communist Party of the United States, which will have from now on far greater tasks and responsibilities in organizing the active support of the North American working class to our national liberation movements. But this question must not be raised as a simple question of help from the stronger brother to the weaker brothers. We understand what the establishment of a fascist dictatorship in the United States would mean for our countries with its repercussions of barbarous and feudal terror in the semi-colonies of Yankee finance capital. For this reason, the popular masses of our countries are interested in the victorious struggle of the North American working class against the advance of fascism, and our national movements must and surely will support this struggle. The

Communist Party of the United States and the North American working class, in general, must in their turn lend their support to the movements of liberation of the Caribbean and South America, because in them they have their best allies for the victorious struggle against the North American bourgeoisie, for the defeat and destruction of Yankee imperialism.

The reorientation of the Communist Party of Mexico on the line of the people's front places before us with greater force than ever before the question of the Party itself. We need a strong Party, which has not only the correct line, but also cadres capable of carrying it out. It will be necessary to discuss in detail after the Congress the problems of the reconstruction of the work of the Party. But it is evident that the transformation of the Party will be possible only in the course of our mass work inside the people's front, organizing it, directing it, in fighting on two fronts, against the sectarian resistance which will present itself towards our line, and above all, against the most serious danger, the Right deviation of comrades who will surely confuse the tactics of the people's front with the relinquishing of the independent policy of the Party, so painfully won and guaranteed during the last five years. Every attempt to distort the tactic of the people's front and to return to the times of tailist collaboration with the bourgeoisie must be energetically rejected. The people's front will be successful and the victory of the revolution will be possible only if we know how to link ourselves to the broad masses who today follow national-reformism, to organize them and to lead them through partial struggles towards the revolution, at the same time retaining the organic and political independence of our Party, as the revolutionary Party of the proletariat, and always keeping in view our objectives of struggle for the complete triumph of the agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution, which opens the breach towards Soviet Power and towards socialism.