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A CALL FOR A GENUINE UNITED FRONT AGAINST FASCISM!

The most important question for discussion at the conference of the Anti Fascist League (Easter 1935) is the question: what are the aims of the A.F.L.? What is it trying to do?

Some of the participants declare that the objects of the Anti Fascist League are not only to fight against the Fascist movement growing up in South Africa, but also to abolish Capitalism and to bring about a Socialist state of society. This means that if there are any opponents of Fascism who are not also prepared to support socialistic propaganda, there is no room for them in the Anti Fascist United Front.

We all know that Fascism has many enemies besides the workers and the "Marxists". Fascism has attacked Catholics, Jews, Freemasons, Liberals, Democrats, Pacifists, Feminists, humanitarians and a host of other groups which are connected neither to the "Marxists" nor to the trade unions. It is certain that these groups, though they might support the struggle against Fascism, will not go so far as to support a League whose avowed aim is the abolition of Capitalism.

But let us suppose that the A.F.L. decides that it can carry on quite well enough without the support of these non-socialists. What groups will remain in the A.F.L.? Only a handful of Reds and Pinks. The trade union leaders who have hitherto hung back from the A.F.L. will now have an additional excuse for their inactivity. "This A.F.L." they will say, "is a kind of political party which aims to bring about a political change, whereas our trade unions are concerned only with the economic struggle."

If on the other hand we abandon the idea of putting forward a programme of socialism for the A.F.L., how shall we answer the question: "What is the aim of the A.F.L.?"

We must declare that the A.F.L. as its name suggests, joins together all who are against Fascism. Our attitude is defensive, and we defend those democratic rights which we still have and which Fascism threatens to wrest from us. We resist the slow encroachment on these rights now being carried out by the government. We defend one another's meetings from Greyshirts and other Fascist hooligans. We defend the democratic principle of freedom of worship, freedom of speech, of press and of meeting. In a word, we join together in a defensive alliance.

Then is this all that is necessary to combat Fascism? Obviously not. But when we begin to discuss further steps, when we pass from the defensive to the attack - our united front begins to crumble. Only in one point are we in agreement: we are all against Fascism. In all other points there are as many opinions as there are sects. Our first task however is to strengthen our defences.

One of the most energetic A.F.L. organisers has pointed out that Afrikaner workers at A.F.L. meetings complained of their miserable wages and asked what steps they should take to improve their conditions. What, he asked, should his reply have been?

He must point out that the A.F.L. is not a political party and that workers must look to the political parties to point the way out of their wretched conditions. Further than this he cannot go when speaking from the A.F.L. platform.

Of course there is nothing to prevent participants in the United Front from following up the A.F.L. speakers, and addressing meetings called by themselves from their own platform. In this case they are of course free to say what they please. For example, the Communist Party may if it likes send its own party speakers to hold its own meetings at which they could explain to the Afrikaner workers who complained of their conditions the Communist Party remedy: a Native republic

in South Africa. Other parties can hold their own meetings likewise.

But at Anti Fascist League meetings, no speaker must be permitted to put forward his own particular political programme, nor must there be any narrowing down of the united front to any positive programme. The coming of Fascism to South Africa must not find us divided, as it found the people of Germany. Let us unite, now, today, on the broadest possible basis; let us reject no likely ally in this struggle. If we fail to build an effective rampart against Fascism, we will pay for our failure as the German people paid - with imprisonment, torture, humiliation, slavery, barbarism and death.

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