

The Spanish Revolution And Its Lessons

Broadest United Front Led Workers Revolt

by Bertram D. Wolfe

As we go to press the Spanish proletariat, judging from meager government-censored cable dispatches, seems to be fighting a losing battle. Its defeat would mark the end of the brief bourgeois-democratic republic of 1931 and the assumption of direct power by the Jesuit leader Gil Robles and his Catholic-clerical bands. Behind him stand the big industrialists, the great landlords, the Catholic clergy, the Catholic student groups, the corps of higher army officials, the Fascist organizations of the "gilded youth," the decadent nobility, the monarchists of all shades of "legitimacy"—the whole consolidated band of uniformed cowed—hooded—black-shirted reaction, elevated into unstable power on the blood-stained bayonets of the pretorian Guardia Civil (Civil Guard), Guardias de Asalto (shock troop guard), secret police, and "Republican" army.

The Spanish Proletariat Is Not 'Finished.'

The heroic Spanish proletariat seems to be defeated, but assuredly it is not decisively crushed. The general strike, crumbling in many places, is still on. The embattled miners still hold large areas of rugged Asturias and are performing exploits of epic proportions as they repulse attack after attack of the whole luxurious apparatus of airplanes, cannons, gas bombs, machine guns, tanks of the consolidated military forces of "Republican" Spain. A class that fights in that fashion, that shows such unity welded in the battle's fire, such heroism and such comprehension of its historic role, can be defeated, but it cannot so easily be completely crushed. It has met its "July days" or at worst its "1905".**

Germany, Austria, Spain!

Germany, Austria, Spain! A rising curve of militancy and unity. In Germany, thanks to Social-Democratic treachery and Communist tactical incompetence, a defeat without a struggle—a crushing blow from which the working class has not yet recovered.

In Austria, the same elements of treachery and sterile impotence, but a last minute, rather, a "zero hour" correction forced by the masses on the Social-Democracy and on the Communist Party, result in a heroic rear guard action and unification of Socialists and Communists in a common front forged in the fire of struggles. Hence, in place of a demoralized rout, an orderly, covered fighting retreat, with forces intact. Austrian fascism sits insecurely on its bayonets. The Austrian working class is uncowed. It is reorganizing its forces with great rapidity under a purified and corrected leadership. It will be heard from again in the not very distant future.

Responsibility Of Social-Democracy

In Spain, too, the theory and practice of Social-Democracy pre-

* Temporary defeat of the Russian working class in July 1917.

** Date of the first Russian Revolution, which tho defeated, proved a prelude to the second.

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Church Revolt Grows in Germany

Demonstrations Before Brown House

The revolt of the independent Protestant churches against Nazi coordination is assuming ever more serious proportions. In an effort to behead this church revolt, its leaders, Bishop Meiser was declared deposed and held a virtual prisoner. The answer to this act was a protest demonstration before the Brown House in Munich.

The rebellious church leaders refused to comply with the edict of the Nazi Reichbishop Mueller, who had ordered all protesting church leaders to vacate their offices. Instead the deposed church dignitaries printed proclamations which were to have been distributed to all attending services. These were promptly confiscated by Nazi police. Despite the fact that congregations were sprinkled with Nazi spies, police and Brown Shirts, these proclamations were read from the pulpits.

The religious in form these mass protests against the Nazi murder regime are of great import as indicative of the widespread hostility to the Fascist regime. The church is the only field in which the process of coordination has lagged. It is therefore this medium which expresses the opposition of many social strata to Hitler's rule.

The increasingly difficult economic condition and the intensive organization of illegal trade unions creates the possibility that the suffering German masses will also come forward on the economic field, during the coming winter months, to voice their opposition to the Nazi regime.

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Party Men

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

The Communist, January 1929.

"What is the future of the A. F. of L. and the craft unions generally? Are they definitely in decline as labor organizations? This question of perspective of the A. F. of L. becomes very important because in it is involved the question of whether or not there is a real base for the development of the new industrial union movement

"The A. F. of L. is definitely in decline as a labor organization. It can not and will not organize the unorganized."

Bertram W

The Spanish Revolution

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pared the defeat of the proletariat. It was the Socialist confidence in bourgeois democracy, the Socialist insistence on "constitutional legalism"—on playing the game according to the enemies' rules made so that the enemy cannot possibly lose—that prepared the blood bath thru which the Spanish proletariat, the Socialist workers more than others, are now wading. It was the Azana government of socialist-petty-bourgeois Republican collaboration which placed the present officers in charge of the army. It was the Azana government which not only failed to dissolve but even strengthened the shock troops of reaction, the Guardia Civil and Guardias de Asalto. It was the coalition government with Largo Caballero as Minister of Labor that alienated the masses by employing censorship, outlawry, and Guardia Civil against strikes and peasant uprising. It was the Social-Democratic leaders that "persuaded" the peasants to leave the settlement of the land question to "constitutional and legal" measures, which left the big landowning class intact to form their armed, fascist bands and subsidize and engineer the counter-revolution that has now broken loose in Spain. Three years of Socialist coalition rule left the forces of reaction intact, its economic power undisturbed, its military-political apparatus actually strengthened, the problems of the Spanish Revolution unsolved, nay untouched, the masses bewildered, disorientated, disheartened, and largely alienated from the Republic and the leadership that had fulfilled none of the promises that the 1931 Revolution had made. Yet the Socialist youth, the Socialist masses, and at least one Socialist leader, Largo Caballero, had learnt something from the German and Austrian events. If in Germany the Socialist turn was made after the battle and in Austria at the very zero hour, in Spain it was made at the eleventh hour, just a little space before the Fascist-clerical reaction lunched its attack.

Responsibility Of The Communist Party

If the Socialist Party did not learn from Germany and Austria till the eleventh hour, the Communist Party did not learn till a scant minute before midnight! If there is any country in the world where the impotent, self-defeating sectarian line of the Communist International has showed its bankruptcy most glaringly, it is Spain! So feeble was its connection with the masses that the Revolution of 1931 took it by surprise! When the great Socialist and Anarchist union federations with over a million members each swung into action, the Communist Party was again caught nodding over little play-toy red unions of its own! When the great left swing began in the ranks of the poverty-stricken, courageous, instinctively militant worker-peasant masses that make up the Spanish Socialist Party, the Communist Party busied itself sniping at the leftward-struggling Socialist movement, taking pot shots at a "cleanly" distance with an air-rifle labelled "left social-fascism is the most dangerous form of social-fascism." The great uprising caught the still diminutive Communist Party debating whether or not it should relinquish its precious toy in favor of more effective weapons pointed in another direction.

When the Socialists, after a bitter internal fight, joined with the Communist Opposition (Maurin group) and Trotskyites (Nin group which is now breaking with Trotsky on the question of entrance into the Social-Democracy) in the Alianza Obrera, formed on Maurin's initiative in Catalonia, and when the Alianza spread like wild fire throughout the Republic and dragged in the Syndacalists as well as Socialist unions in all key places, the Communist Party again forgot capitalism and fascism in the zeal of a furious, impotent war of naughty names against the united front of the Spanish proletariat. It was these peculiar united front organs of the Spanish proletariat, local soviets on a Spanish scale, that led the general strike and uprising now in pro-

gress. In the columns of the New Masses and the Daily Worker, and perhaps in Pravda and Imprecator, the Spanish Communist Party formed this united front and led the Spanish Revolution. But the painful fact is that our Party decided to enter the Alianza Obrera at a meeting of its Central Committee on September 11 and 12, 1934, almost a year after their initiation and less than three weeks before the revolution broke out! Party pamphlets were still on sale at the end of September, declaring the Alianza Obrera to be "the focal point of all reactionary forces" and the "holy alliance of the counter-revolution." The Party announced its decision publicly on September 15 and did not even have time to complete the "face-saving" negotiations for its entrance, when the general strike and armed uprising began. The Comintern change of line came too late. History had caught the bewildered party of sectarianism napping once more!

Character Of The Revolution

The Revolution was precipitated by the great bourgeoisie in attempting a "legal" transition to fascism. The Socialist petty-bourgeois coalition government established by the Revolution of 1931 with a Socialist majority in parliament and a Socialist minority in the cabinet (!), having failed to make good on any of the promises of the Revolution and having suppressed its further development by suasion moral and military, the masses became disorientated, disillusioned, passive, and in some sectors, a prey to reactionary demagoguery. Large sections turned to the Syndicalists but these had nothing to say on politics but "steer clear of it," "hear not, see not, speak not, touch not, think not" of the unclean abomination, a workers' government. Then the masses turned hopefully to Communism but the Party told them lots about Russia and Stalin and Social-Fascism, but no clear directions for the solution of their problems in Spain, so the party declined and the masses left it sitting like Jack Horner in the corner repeating "what a good boy am I."

An incompleting revolution either goes forward or backward. It cannot stand still. On November 20, 1933 the elections to the Cortes gave the opponents of the Republic a majority and the Socialist Party and petty bourgeois republicans went into the opposition. Then came press censorship (in less than a year more than 94 "denunciations" of El Socialista by the police), government-protected, armed fascist demonstrations, clerical demonstrations, attacks on labor organizations, hell let loose against the peasantry by the Guardia Civil. On the other side Alianza Obrera, a united front that on the eve of the Revolution included virtually all mass organizations and political groups in the country, (tho the anarchist leaders were still resisting the entrance of the Syndicalist Unions nationally and the official Communist Party was only swept in by the "new turn" in mid-September), and great general strikes with political aims in Madrid, Barcelona, Asturias. At the same time the petty-bourgeoisie prepared to take the field in defense of the Republic (this explains why many petty-bourgeois-minded leaders of the Social-Democracy finally went a long with the Socialist youth and Socialist left) and their allies, the petty-bourgeois national autonomists of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque provinces increased their resistance to the centralizing tendencies of the anti-republican reaction. On October 3, the Lerroux government was formed with Gil Robles and two other leaders of his clerical-fascist group as members. The answer of the Spanish proletariat was the general strike on Oct. 5, immediately going over into an armed uprising. The answer of the petty-bourgeoisie was a withdrawal from the Cortes and a call to arms to save the Republic. The answer of the petty-bourgeois regional autonomists was the proclamation of a separate republic in Catalonia, ready to enter into a "Federation of Spanish Republics." Obviously, the success of the revolution would

VOTE COMMUNIST

Support the Communist Party in the coming election!

Vote Communist! The Communist Party, standing firmly on the foundations of revolutionary Marxism, is the only party representing the interests of the American workers and farmers. The Communist Party (Opposition) takes this occasion to point out to the workers of New York that it is fully behind the election campaign being waged by the Communist Party. While we have in the sharpest fashion fought against policies and practices of the official Party which have been and are today detrimental to its own advance and also of the class it represents, the basic principles upheld by the Communist Party are our principles as well. Because, the Communist Party is the only Party in the elections which is an

C. P. G. Sends Letter To Communist Opposition

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Party leadership maintains—we ask you to tell your followers in Germany to create a united trade union movement with our comrades in the interest of the proletariat for the joint overthrow of Hitler."

The extent to which the CPG has responded to the growing pressure of the working masses for proletarian unity against fascism is thus further reflected in this letter of September 18th:

"The CC of the CP is at all times ready to come to an agreement as far as problems of the future joint activities and problems of the trade union movement, as far as the establishment of united trade unions is concerned with all existing working class groups in the country who are willing to lead the struggle against fascism, in the spirit of a comradely discussion to the extent to which this is possible."

In the forthcoming issue of the Workers Age we will present the reply of the National Committee of the CPGO.

A. F. of L. Meet Endorses Vertical Unionism

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and frequent. No radical departure from the past has emerged from this convention. The raw material meanwhile for a powerful progressive movement within the Federation accumulates. Here lies the hope of American trade unionism.

still leave the problem, "Kerensky government" or proletarian dictatorship to be fought out.

Perspectives

The Spanish proletariat has performed miracles of heroism. It is fighting for its life. It has shown unexampled unity and solidarity, the greatest united front of the workers since November 1917. But the revolution has also shown that even unity and heroism are not enough. Besides unity and heroism there must be centralized direction, competent planning, a genuine, realistic, mass revolutionary party of the proletariat. The false theories of the syndicalists, the belated and inadequate reform and petty-bourgeois confusion of the Socialist leadership, the sterile impotence of the official Communists, the theoretical weaknesses and lack of national strength of the Maurin group (it is a big mass force only in Catalonia) have provided the fatal defect in the Spanish revolution—lack of adequate clarity and leadership.

Yet, even if the revolution is suppressed, the proletariat will emerge undismayed, undemoralized, more united than ever, and more conscious of its tasks. The Spanish working class has not yet said its last word. In the meanwhile, it is our task to form a united front to defend it from the fury of Fascist terror if it is temporarily beaten. And to defend it against imperialist intervention if it wins.