

The CIVIL WAR in SPAIN and the SPUSA

The civil war in Spain is the key question confronting the international working class. The People's Front has proven its completely bourgeois nature by its drive against workers' control; resulting in the May 3-7 uprising in defense of the conquests achieved in the first period of the civil war. The bourgeoisie is using the Stalinists and the right Socialists as a spearhead to crush the revolution.

The entry of the POUM and the CNT into the government, and their cowardly capitulatory course May 3-7 in telling the workers to go back to work, have proven the bankruptcy of these organizations. Their policies have led objectively toward liquidation of the revolution and have laid the basis for further betrayals.

The ousting of the Caballero government and its replacement by the Negrin regime are indications of the degree of bourgeois consolidation already achieved. The People's Front still has the UGT and the CNT in reserve in case it may be necessary to call on the left to behead the militancy of the masses.

The May 3-7 uprising was a spontaneous class action of the workers, who were forced to defend their gains against the assaults of the bourgeoisie. The latter wants to crush workers' militancy behind the lines in order to make a compromise deal with Franco and thus end the war at the expense of the workers. The barricades set up in Barcelona and its suburbs found the PSUC (united Socialist-Communist party) shooting down workers and defending the interests of capitalist property. The Catalan Socialists share with the Stalinists the responsibility for the People's Front murder of the workers.

"In this situation what is the position of the SPUSA? The Handbook, quoting on p. 34 the NEC resolution on Spain, declares:

"The labor movement of Spain, under the guidance of Francisco Largo Caballero, Socialist and trade union leader, took upon itself the responsibilities of government after liberal-conservative elements had failed to sustain a vigorous defense. Thus the world's working class cannot consider the present government, primarily dominated by labor elements, and not resting on the old state apparatus, as a bourgeois regime."

(Our emphasis)

The Party declares for political and material support for the People's Front capitalist state. But simultaneously it calls for "committees of workers, peasants, and militiamen", which are working-class organs that can develop only in struggle against the capitalist state. This leaves the Party in a hopeless contradiction, which it "solves" by an attack upon the left. It does not hesitate to join a "Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (!)" to collect funds for the capitalist People's Front government, but it categorically

rejects a united front for working-class rights and for defense of the political prisoners of the same government.

Yesterday it gave "unstinting and effective support" to Caballero's "provisional revolutionary regime" (Handbook, p. 34) which during the May Days rushed troops in from the front to smash the workers' struggle. Today the Party gives full support to the capitalist administration of Negrin, which it admits is to the right even of Caballero. The Clarity NEC supports the bourgeois People's Front just as completely -but not so frankly- as does Altman.

The Party's position on Spain is utterly worthless. Worse than that - it is a line of political support to a People's Front capitalist state that is engaged in trying to drown in blood the proletarian revolution.

The Party is moving very definitely to the right, not to the left. The NEC resolution on Spain, the New York statement on the mayoralty campaign, the support to the CIO class-collaborationist policies, the rejection of the united front for the defense of workers' rights in Loyalist Spain, the Altman political expulsion campaign against the left - all prove that the direction is to the right.

The consolidation of bourgeois rule under the Negrin regime; the persecution and murder of anti-fascists opposed to the People's Front state; the suppression of the POUM and other working-class organizations; the removal of workers' organizations from key posts (telephone, radio, transportation) - these developments indicate clearly the shift toward open military dictatorship in Spain. And in the USA the class-collaborationist policies of the CIO in the steel strike, and the restraint exercised by the CIO misleadership over the militancy of the workers, have brought confusion and discouragement into the ranks of the working class. Objectively aided by these conservative factors and set-backs in the labor movement, Altman is driving his wedge between Appeal and Clarity, and is conducting a vicious campaign of expulsion against the Appeal. The vacillations and the concessions made by the Appeal leadership to Clarity, and by Clarity to the Altman group, is a chain moving constantly to the right. This whole process strengthens Altman politically at the expense of the left. If the Appeal finally starts to fight, this is merely a by-product of Altman's strategy.

The failure of the Cannon-Shachtman leadership seriously to educate the Party on the revolution in Spain simply reflects its own centrist confusion and vacillation on this key question. The Appeal Institute said that we "endorse the action of our party in helping, on a national scale, the sending of trained men to Spain to join the International Brigade" ("Socialist Appeal", March & Feb. issues, 1937). "Material" support to agencies controlled by People's Front forces is political support to capitalism. It gives a blank

check to the class enemy - gives them men and guns that they control and accordingly use against the working class.

Political support is permissible only to an organization with a Marxist program, because only a Marxist program is politically correct. But material support may -and must- be rendered not only to Marxists and Marxist organizations, but also to anti-Fascist organizations firmly controlled by working-class rank-and-files, who can be trusted not to turn the guns against their own class. Thus we should send money and supplies directly to units such as workers' militia squads, factory committees, or peasant communes.

What have we been told about the POUM? The "Socialist Appeal" for August states (We quote from the "Socialist Appeal" as representing the position of the Appeal administration: if some of the quotations were merely the opinions of individuals, then so much the worse for an opportunist leadership that would not commit itself for or against its printed statements on questions so crucial.): "The Maurin-Nin group (POUM) has eliminated itself as a progressive factor." (p.11)

But then the "Appeal" unabashedly reverses itself in (p.3) the September issue, and greets us by characterizing the POUM as "revolutionary Marxist"! Apparently the Maurin-Nin outfit had rehabilitated itself, and was now not only "a progressive factor", but was the party of the proletarian revolution.

History, however, knows all kinds of degenerations! By November the most that the "Appeal" can say for the POUM is that "it is possible that a Bolshevik force may yet emerge from it." (p.12) (Our emphasis)

But by December the editor is making extremely grave charges against this erstwhile "Revolutionary Marxist" party. Now, it seems (pp.5&6), the versatile POUM not only had turned into one of the various "species of centrism", but it "ended by joining the People's Front and signing its name to the bourgeois platform." It entered "into the coalition government of the Bourgeois Generality, whose role it is to defend democracy." "The Catalan workers' councils" are "gutted", and "assisting in the work this time, is the POUM leadership." --Rather serious reflections on the political character of the party, you might suppose. Nevertheless, "it is not excluded that, despite this lamentable record, the POUM will yet succeed in redressing its course and becoming the rallying ground of the truly consistent revolutionary movement in Spain...."

To be sure, the Dec. 15th "Appeal" finds (p.8) that "the old policies of class collaboration and coalition government" are still "the guiding lines of the leadership" of the POUM.

January, however, shows that hope springs eternal, and pleads (p.8) that "the POUM has only (!) to cease its gyrations and resolutely to unfurl the banner of revolutionary Marxism

and to inscribe upon it the necessary tasks of this moment...."

February continues the furious campaign of hoping for the resurrection, and declares (p.23) that the POUM's "expulsion from the Catalonian government - at the demand of the CP (!) - affords it the possibility of making a turn in the direction of revolutionary Marxism."

At last in March the faithful nights of hoping bear triumphant fruit, for once again one may refer repeatedly to the PouM as "the revolutionists"; and may glory in it as "the only party in Spain fighting for Socialism." (pp. 43 & 44 - Institute resolution)

But alas, how perverse is fate: it seems that once again our pet has changed its spots, and can no longer be given unqualified support. Comrade Morrow's letter early this month (July 1937) merely vouchsafes (p.2) "political support to the revolutionists in the POUM, CNT, and FAI...." To what organization? To what Marxist force? To what tendency? We are not told.

IT IS NECESSARY FIRST OF ALL TO REALIZE THAT THERE IS NOW NO MARXIST PARTY IN SPAIN, AND THAT ONE MUST BE BUILT.

The Appeal administration, bureaucratically pursuing its policy of compromise and "peace" with Clarity, failed to carry on a political fight; and permitted Altman to assume the offensive. The mere fact that the Appeal officials may now be forced to defend themselves changes nothing. The political tail-endism of the Cannon-Shachtman leadership has created confusion and disorientation among the Appeal rank and file.

The events and experiences of over a year demonstrate perfectly clearly the futility of any course other than the sharpest, most intransigent struggle on the questions of political line and policy. We must conduct in the Party a clear principled fight against People's Frontism in all its forms.

The purpose of this preliminary resolution is:

to help initiate a full, open, democratic discussion in the Appeal, and in the Party generally;

to fight for - and contribute to - the formulation of a genuine Marxist policy, and its carrying out in action; and

to show the need for a new - a revolutionary - party in Spain and throughout the world - the

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL !

23 July, 1937.

(The Marxist Policy Committee invites comrades to communicate with us. Address all correspondence to: C. Becket, 3435 N. Elaine Pl., Chicago, Ill. For APPEAL MEMBERS ONLY.)