

IN THE INTERNATIONAL OF LABOR
Reviews and News of the Working Class and Revolutionary Movements

The General Strike in Barcelona

The Failure of the Anarchist Policy and the Revolutionary Strategy of the Communists

The last general strike in Barcelona had a fundamental importance for the unification of the working class of all Spain, based not so much on the extent of the movement in itself, as on the lessons which we can learn from it, for future tactics and for the orientation of Spanish trade unions.

The general strike declared in the beginning of September by the local Trade Union Federation of Barcelona, and followed up unanimously and with admirable discipline by the proletariat of that city and of the most important industrial centers of Catalonia, is one of the most important episodes of the working class struggle in Spain between April 14 and the present time.

Militant revolutionists must analyze carefully this movement, so rich in experience. Let us limit ourselves today to pointing out, briefly, some of the lessons which it teaches, and to noting down the reflections which it suggests.

Strikes Under Present Conditions

The strike movement which had put great masses of workers in motion on the eve of the fall of the monarchy, has taken on a truly gigantic increase since the declaration of the republic. This movement, in the majority of cases, has had a purely spontaneous character, and the trade union organizations in reality have done nothing more than to sanction it, place themselves at its head, often against their will, in order not to lose the confidence of the working masses.

All revolutions, without exception, have known such periods; more than that, they are inconceivable without them. A revolution is not the act of one day, of that "Big Night" of which the pre-war revolutionary syndicalists used to dream. It is a prolonged and painful process, during which the masses go seeking a path, in a struggle sown with difficulties, "chaotic" actions, partial offensive, victories and defeats. The strike is one of the most characteristic manifestations of this struggle.

The Character of the September Strike
The Barcelona general strike was, in this sense, a typical movement of a revolutionary period. Its starting-point was a perfectly correct protest against the shameful Government imprisonments.

These Government imprisonments, to our shame, are nothing new. In this respect, as in many others, the republic only continues the inveterate tradition of the defunct monarchy. Still it was only in a clear-cut revolutionary situation that this procedure, which formerly aroused indignation in the most advanced minority only, should excite and set in motion hundreds of thousands of workers.

"Why," clamored the vestal virgins of republican "legality," "why do these workers, who under the monarchy tolerated passively the mass detentions, the systematic application of the 'fugitive prisoners law', the military dictatorship, why do these workers rise up now, when the consolidation of the new regime ought to be the chief consideration of everybody, against the fact that a few men here and there are kept in jail by Government order? Why do the same people, who showed such patience for years, show such impatience now?"

Because—the situation is revolutionary now, and was not before. Because the military dictatorship and its bloody repressions were not, as these gentlemen think, the cause of the passivity of the working class, but the result. Because the energy, the aggressiveness, the fighting spirit of the proletariat are not a constant phenomenon of all periods, but only of revolutionary periods. After these periods of high tension, the working class, particularly if it has been beaten, falls inevitably into a state of depression, of passivity, which smooths the road for reaction.

To understand the profound meaning of the last general strike in Barcelona, we must see it in its place in the general picture of the revolutionary situation in Spain. Then we shall see clearly the inconsistency of the opinion so widely spread, not only among the bourgeois, but even, to our disgrace be it said, among some working class circles, that this strike was entirely the work of a group of irresponsible anarchists.

eral picture of the revolutionary situation in Spain. Then we shall see clearly the inconsistency of the opinion so widely spread, not only among the bourgeois, but even, to our disgrace be it said, among some working class circles, that this strike was entirely the work of a group of irresponsible anarchists. We shall not deny the importance of the role played by the F. A. I. in declaring the strike. Yet there can be no doubt that if their action had been crowned by success, if it had been followed by the entire proletariat, it would have been due, not to their boldness or their "dictatorial" methods, but to the fact that the objective circumstances—the revolutionary situation, and the subjective—the fighting spirit of the working class, were completely favorable. In this sense we can say without hesitation that the elements of the F. A. I. interpreted the state of mind of the proletariat and its historical interests more faithfully than Pestana, Peiro, Arin and other "reasonable" syndicalists who signed the famous reformist manifesto which won them such praises from bourgeois circles.

We have had anarchist groups before this. The desire to declare general strikes on any and all occasions did not come with the republic; they would like to call a general strike every Monday. Still, how often have they cried out into empty space! On the other hand, on September 4 they found an ardent echo in the working class. Why? Because the soil had been ploughed, because circumstances drove the proletariat irresistibly to the struggle.

What Should Be Our Attitude to "Chaotic" Movements?

We have tried to express one truth: that in the present circumstances, "chaotic" movements are inevitable. Does this mean that they are not a danger for the revolution and that they ought to be systematically encouraged? By no means. In the face of such movements, there are three fundamental positions that we can adopt:

First: To condemn them as a whole, on the ground that at the present time the working class is incapable of making a revolution and must limit itself to a slow work of preparation, organization and education, which is possible under a régime of bourgeois democracy. This is the position of Pestana, Peiro & Co., which puts off the emancipation of the working class to the Greek Kalends.

Second: To encourage such movements systematically, driven on by instinctive revolutionary sentiment, but devoid of revolutionary theory and tactics and still lost in abstractions. We refer to the elements of the F. A. I.

Third: The position of those who, while rejecting as absurd the pretension of holding back the isolated, "chaotic" movements of the masses at a time like this, understand the danger of such movements when they lack objectives and direction, and who try to take advantage of such movements to make the working class understand the necessity of a party, to forge it in the fire of struggle, and subordinate these movements to the general revolutionary struggle which is to lead the proletariat to the seizure of power and the installation of its dictatorship. This ought to be the position of Communists.

The first of these positions is dictated by absolute lack of faith in the revolutionary ability of the working class, by the ungovernable fear of revolution, conditioned by the lack of a concrete program. It leads inevitably to a policy of strangling the fighting action of the proletariat and to collaboration, direct or indirect, with the republican bourgeoisie. The policy of the reformist elements of the C. N. T. in trying to hold back the strike movements by means of a series of measures which lead backward to the U. G. T. (remember the leaflet of the Confederal Committee), the shameful break-up of the metal workers' conflict, the abandonment of the telephone workers, engaged in a struggle of enormous importance, the giving up of the most profoundly significant political demands, such as the recognition of factory councils, etc., and finally, the policy of direct support of the Catalan Generalidad, all prove our statement. This tendency must be fought pitilessly, since it constitutes a danger to the revolution as serious as the reformist socialism of Largo Caballero and Co., with which it coincides fundamentally.

The second tendency is no less dangerous, since it can, and inevitably will lead the proletariat to a bloody defeat. The elements of the F. A. I. are capable of provoking only mass movements without a future or isolated actions, heroic but in the last analysis sterile. The magnificent defense of the Building Trades Union by a few dozen admirable militants have clearly revealed the treasures of aggressiveness and self-sacrifice which the working class possesses, and has demonstrated the miracles which it can perform, given a consistent direction and discipline.

Communists must bend every effort to make the best revolutionary elements of the C. N. T. understand the necessity for a party, and try to form with them at least a united front for action. Only their active, energetic and prudent intervention can avert a defeat of the proletariat and the installation of a bloody régime of bourgeois dictatorship. In July, 1917, the workers and soldiers of Petrograd launched an impetuous movement in favor of turning over the

power to the Soviets. This movement was completely spontaneous, "chaotic". The Bolsheviks considered it premature, irrevocably condemned to failure. Still, seeing that it was impossible to hold it back, instead of abandoning it to its elemental force, they put themselves at its head and guided it along their channels. Thanks to this genuinely revolutionary policy, this movement, which, left to itself, would have been diverted into a premature insurrection, was converted into an armed manifestation, and the working class was able to retreat in good order with the minimum of losses. Had there been no Party, the working class would have been crushed, a period of reaction would have begun, and the proletariat would not have been able to seize power, as it did, three months later.

For Factory Councils

We have spoken of the necessity for a revolutionary united front. But on what base can it support itself?

Undoubtedly the history of the revolutionary working class movement up to now has offered us no organ of the united front so perfect and efficient as the Soviet, an instrument of struggle today, of power tomorrow, for the entire working class, represented in the Soviet by workers' delegates from all factories and workshops without distinction, let their political and trade union organizations be what they may. One of the negative sides of the Barcelona general strike, like that of Seville before, was the failure of such an organ to make its appearance during the struggle. Had it been otherwise, how different would have been the importance and the political consequences of the movement!

Still, the fact is that Soviets have not arisen in this or any other of the great workers' movements which have taken place in this country during the last few months, and that up to the present, there is no sign of a tendency in this direction among the Spanish working class. Will it arise later on? We may hope so, even though it is certain that the working class of our country will arrive at the creation of the Soviets by a different road from that followed by the Russian proletariat.

Yet we cannot adopt a passive attitude until this moment is reached. We must immediately lay the foundations for a united front, we must create the necessary prerequisites for the creation of organizations destined to group the working class together and prepare it for the struggle. This basis can be supplied by the factory councils.

Up to now, including the period 1917-1929, the peak years of the revolutionary movement, there have been in Spain no factory councils, properly so-called. Still the system of delegates, of representatives of the factory and the workshop, has become widespread, and in recent times the idea of factory councils has made much headway and has acquired a certain popularity among the masses.

We must therefore start from this point and energetically encourage the creation of such organizations, assigning to them, as an immediate aim, the control of production. The leaders of the C. N. T. accept them, and favor them, while they still conceive of them as trade union organizations, designated from the top, by the trade union committees. The socialists, for their part, through their representative in the Provisional Government, Senator Largo Caballero, are preparing a bill for workers' control which in reality does not pursue revolutionary control as our aim, but class collaboration.

Communists must fight both conceptions with equal energy. The factory council must not be appointed from the top, but must be elected democratically by all workers without exception. The purpose of the control must not be collaboration with the bourgeoisie, but taking possession of the means of production.

There is not a single revolutionary worker who will not be disposed to struggle jointly with the Communists on the basis of a struggle for the factory councils. And this struggle, correctly orientated, correctly guided, will irresistibly be converted into a powerful movement which will lead to the creation, on the basis of the factory councils, of Soviets, or other organisms similar to the Soviets in structure and functions.

For all these reasons, we believe that the creation of factory councils should be the basic slogan at the present time. Every important strike, every mass movement, should be utilized in this direction.

The Experience of the Guerrilla Fight
One of the most interesting episodes of the Barcelona general strike was the armed defense of the Building Trades Union. For more than six hours, a few dozen workers, insufficiently armed but fortified in the union local, kept at bay a large force of police. Similarly, in the neighboring streets, other groups of workers, sheltered behind a barricade, carried on a fight against the armed force of the government, and after hours of struggle, retreated strategically without giving up a single prisoner into the hands of the enemy.

This episode is rich in lessons for us. During the insurrection of December, 1905 in Moscow, a few hundred poorly-armed workers obstinately sustained a fight, thanks to a correctly led guerrilla struggle, against thousands of perfectly armed and equipped soldiers. First Kaut-

sky and then Lenin, drew from this experience the conclusion that guerrilla fighting played a much more important role than revolutionists had imagined up to then.

Still the insurrection was defeated. With the arrival of new reinforcements, the Moscow workers had to give up. For the final victory, it is necessary that a large part of the army place itself on the side of the revolution.

The heroic fighters of the calle Mercaders, at the end, had to give up, and the combatants of the calle Moncada had to withdraw.

What lesson can we draw from this experience? That the tactics of the anarchist groups can lead only to guerrilla fighting; that this, combined with the general strike and organized revolutionary action, can constitute an auxiliary element of the first rank as a means of distracting the forces of the enemy which will make it possible for us to strike the decisive blow at the decisive points, but is incapable, by itself alone, of giving us the victory; that to achieve victory, today even more than in 1905, on account of the enormous progress of military technique, it is necessary to win over to the revolution a good part of the army.

The practical conclusion which we draw from all this is the urgent necessity of intensifying the work of agitation and propaganda among the troops, and of undertaking without delay the creation of soldiers' Committees.

The Strike and Democratic Illusions

Unquestionably the Barcelona general strike has considerably weakened the democratic illusions among the working class. Still it would be a profound mistake to think that these illusions have been definitely liquidated. Maurin, for instance, starts from this premise and justifies the absurd position taken by the Bloque Obrero y Campesino, (Workers' and Peasants' Bloc), renouncing democratic slogans and raising the slogan of the taking of power by the proletariat. The reality, which is the only thing that can serve as the foundation for a truly Marxist policy, is unfortunately quite different. Only a part, and that the smallest, of our working class, has completely lost faith in the bourgeois republic; another part is beginning to be assailed by doubts; the great majority still believes in the republic. They protest, they join the general strike, not against the régime, but against the "bad republicans". The majority of the workers still think that if they took the power away from Maurin, and the governorship from Anguera de Sojo, and replaced them by "real republicans", things would be very much better.

Contributing to this illusion in the first place was the policy of the anarcho-syndicalists of supporting the radical petty bourgeoisie, with its praise for the "venerable", "most integral", "honorable" Macla, expressions which you will find repeatedly in Solidaridad Obrera; likewise responsible is Maurin himself, who at a lecture in Madrid favored "the taking of power by the advanced elements of the Atenseo". How can any one expect, under these conditions, that the working class, which evolves slowly and learns only with the help of its own experience, should abandon immediately and at one blow its democratic illusions?

These last have suffered a severe blow, but only a correct policy can contribute to liquidating them definitively.

The Internal Crisis of the C. N. T.

Two words, in conclusion, on the internal crisis of the C. N. T.

The general strike, declared against the wishes of the leaders of this revolutionary organization, has undoubtedly sharpened the crisis. The recent resignation in a body of the editorial staff of Solidaridad Obrera is a clear proof of this. The fact that the organ of the Confederation, for the first time in the history of our movement, categorically condemns the strike in the first number which appeared after it took place, is sufficiently eloquent on this point, and reveals before the eyes of the entire world the grave sickness from which the C. N. T. is suffering.

But the crisis will go still deeper. In more or less normal times, such crises can be conjured away with relative ease. Under revolutionary conditions like the present, it is a much more difficult matter. The divergencies do not have an abstract character, but are a logical consequence of the problem which the situation places before the C. N. T. inexorably demanding from it a clear and precise answer—how shall we make the revolution?

The Communist Party cannot remain outside of this internal struggle of tendencies, whose outcome may have enormous consequences for the future of the Spanish proletariat. Let us not forget that this will depend 90% on whether or not the workers in the C. N. T., who are the flower of the working class of our country, continue to give their confidence to the anarchists. To win over these workers should be the principal aim of our party. This will be accomplished, not by the stupid splitting tactics followed up to now, but by an intelligent policy which will be able to take advantage of the internal struggle within the C. N. T.; not by heaping invective on its leaders, and putting into circulation such idiotic epithets as "anarcho-fascists", but by proving patiently and persistently to the revolutionary workers the sterility of anarcho-syndicalism and the necessity of a powerful Communist Party; to prevent the peasant revolutionary situation, instead of leading to the victory of the proletariat, from leading to the enthronement of a dictatorship without a mandate, of the fascist type. —ANDRES NIN.

Trotsky on Opposition and the Party in Spain

To Andres Nin: Dear Friend:

First of all, I should like to clear up for myself the disputed question in the Left Opposition: a narrow or broad faction? I have received your opinion and that of comrade Lacroix on this subject. Comrade M. has not yet submitted the report that he promised.

I must admit that the basis for this dispute is not clear to me. Yesterday, with regard to Catalonia, as I can see from your letter, the question was posed in the following manner: Should we call upon the worker to enter the official Communist party or the Catalanian Federation? From your last letter, it appears that the Catalanian Federation expels the Left Opposition from its ranks, that is to say, it proceeds in the same manner as the party does. This fact by itself is quite logical. The Right wing and the Centrists manifest the self-same hostility toward the Bolshevik-Leninists in all countries, beginning with the U. S. S. R. It would be odd for Spain to be an exception to this. On the contrary, in view of the revolutionary situation in Spain, all the political processes (including all the mistakes) arrive at their ultimate conclusion very swiftly. But is it still possible to speak seriously of the Left Opposition calling on the workers to enter the Catalanian Federation? I cannot understand it! We can, to be sure, try to create our nuclei in the Catalanian Federation with the aim of recruiting a maximum of followers in the event of the inevitable collapse of the Maurin organization. We can send individual comrades into the Federation with this aim. But can we openly call upon the non-party workers to enter the Federation? Never. It would be the most monstrous mistake and would not only weaken us but even disgrace the Left Opposition.

Our Relation to the Party

In principle, the question of the official party is posed differently, since we have not renounced the idea of winning to our side, the Comintern, and consequently, each of its sections. It has always appeared to me that many comrades have underestimated the possibility of the development of the official Communist party in Spain. I have written you about this more than once. To ignore the official party as a fictitious quantity, to turn our back to it, seems to me to be a great mistake. On the contrary, with regard to the official party we must stick to the path of uniting the ranks. Still, this task is not so simple. As long as we remain a feeble faction, this task is in general unachievable. We can only produce a tendency toward unity inside the official party by becoming a serious force.

The opponents of the "broad faction" reply to this: But if we group about us a broad section of workers, we automatically transform ourselves into a second party. I must admit that this argument astonishes me. If we are to reason in such a formal manner, then in order to avoid the danger of a second party, the Bolshevik-Leninists must altogether disappear from the face of the earth. That is just what the Stalinists want. Political malthusianism is the most unnatural of all the varieties of malthusianism. Every political tendency that grows in forces cannot help going in the direction of uniting around it the

largest masses possible. It is possible to come to the party by different roads. If the Left Opposition becomes stronger than the present official party, that will furnish us the possibility of struggling with a hundred times greater effectiveness for the unity of the Communist ranks than at present when the Opposition is still weak. Isn't this clear?

But, the partisans of the "narrow faction" will answer, the Left Opposition can only take into its ranks conscious followers. Indeed! But does not the same thing hold true for the party? It all comes down to this: the Left Opposition must not attract to itself new workers; no, it is obliged to direct them toward the ranks of the party, where they will be taught that the Trotskyists are "counter-revolutionists". Then, and only then, the Opposition will have the right to disillusion these workers, to reduce them, to cure them of the contagious Stalinist slanders. Really, I cannot understand such a complicated mechanism.

Growth and Scope of the Opposition

It seems to me that the Opposition has not only the right, but the duty, to group about itself all those that come to it, who respond to its appeals and whom it is able to reach. Naturally, at first, they will be far from convinced and conscious Bolshevik-Leninists. But this only imposes the necessity of occupying ourselves seriously with the education of our followers. Within the scope of this education, there will also enter the question, why we are for one party and why the Stalinists are for two parties. If the flow toward us proves to be too tempestuous (which is hardly to be feared!) then we can form a circle of sympathizers. A local organization of the Opposition numbering 20 members can assemble about it 2 to 300 sympathizers. In this circle of sympathizers, it will be necessary to clear up the difference between Leninism and Centrism. After the circle has reached a certain level under our direction, it can invite the representatives of the official party to present its views before it. On this basis a discussion will arise between our followers and the Stalinists. Only this will bring about a serious reconciliation between the Left Opposition and the party, and create a far more secure path toward a united party than the malthusian measures against reproduction.

The Left Opposition would be transformed into a sect if it were to come to the conclusion that its task is only criticism of the actions of the official party and of the mass organizations of the proletariat. The Spanish revolution is a fact. We have already, without all this, lost a great deal of time, including the Left Opposition, in Spain. We will not be able to reproduce this revolutionary situation, which we are passing up today, at will next year. Precisely in Spain the Opposition can within a brief time grow into a great force. But the first condition for this is: not to fear to become a force, but to strive toward that.

That is all I can say in the meantime on the disputed question, on the basis of incomplete information. I will be very happy to receive additional information.

September 27, 1931

—L. TROTSKY.

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