

The Spanish Elections And the People's Front

By MAX SHAGHTMAN

People's Front Acts as Brake on Upward Movement of Masses

A singular unanimity marks the reception accorded the election victory of the People's Front by labor papers which are otherwise antagonistic to each other's views. The Jewish Daily Forward and the equally octogenarian New Leader vie with the editors of the Daily Worker in saluting the victory with an intoxicated enthusiasm which they do not allow a single critical comment to mar.

That the outcome of the elections reveals a distinctly gratifying advance by the Spanish working class is, of course, beyond debate. One must search far and wide in the modern history of the working class of the world to find a parallel to the amazing recuperative powers of the Spanish proletariat. What neither the social democratic nor the Stalinist press have obliged us with, however, is an explanation for the contrast between the resurgence of the formerly defeated Spanish working class and the continued paralysis of the German working class. Unless one is to ascribe the causes of the startling contrast to some mysterious national superiority of Spanish proletarian physiology or intellect over the German, the difference must be sought for in another domain. Neither social democrats nor Stalinists are particularly anxious to probe for an intelligible answer to the question for the simple reason that it would fly in the face of their respective political philosophies.

The Great Value of Struggle

Both your regular social democrat and your official Stalinist placed the seal of approbation on the failure of the German labor parties—S.P. and C.P.—to lead the proletariat in direct struggle against the Fascist bandits before they came to power in 1933. At the same time, they "deplored" the armed struggle of the Spanish workers against the advancing reaction in October 1934 and more than hinted that it had all the intolerable aspects of a futile putsch. How many times did they both say—often in so many words: It would have availed the German proletariat nothing to struggle against insuperable odds; and the Spanish defeat in 1934 showed how fruitless was such needless bloodshed as would have been involved by a similar attempt in Germany.

Yet, the lesson of the Spanish labor revival in not only unambiguous, but it speaks out conclusively against these present-day plagiarists of Plekhanov whose solitary contribution to the summary of the 1935 revolution in Russia was the lament that "they should not have taken up arms". The difference between Germany and Spain lies essentially in this: The German working class was defeated without a struggle. The Fascist thugs found that they could come to power without encountering any resistance from the proletariat. The ruling class was therefore able to say to itself: If I could bring this gang of semi-armed mercenaries to power for the purpose of crushing every vestige of labor organization, without labor even attempting to fight them off, how much less have I to fear from the workers now that the Fascist mameukes are equipped with the complete arsenal of state power? I can therefore be more arrogant and brutal: I can therefore have greater self-confidence. The working class could only say to itself, if I read: If my parties, my leaders) was not able to lift a finger against the Fascist trash when it was armed with little more than knives, how shall I be able to fight them now that they are armed with the whole repressive machinery of the state? And if my leaders stood petrified in their tracks when they still had the vast "legal" possibilities of fighting the Fascists, before we were dispersed and driven underground or under the yoke of Hitler, what reason have I to believe that they will be anything but less effective now, when Hitler has two machine-guns for every dagger he had yesterday?

In other words, just because they were not led into struggle in Germany, the workers have less confidence in themselves and, contrarily, the bourgeoisie has far greater self-assurance, firmness, solidity.

Reasons for Resurgence

In Spain, however, just because the workers fought, their mood and the corresponding mood of the bourgeoisie, are different. The workers think: Yes, we were defeated in one battle, but we showed the Fascists that we can and will fight, even under adverse circumstances. We have proved to ourselves that if only we organize ourselves better in this, that and the other respect, we possess an invincible power. The bourgeoisie thinks: We are not playing with a toothless old hound here, whom we can kick around contemptuously. This working class is a lion which showed his teeth and claws and inflicted some serious wounds upon us. And even if his leap was not well prepared and his retreat not so well ordered, we did not terminate the fight by skinning his hide. In other words, in Spain the bourgeoisie emerged from the October with respect for the work-

ing class and an idea that a measure of prudence was needed; the workers emerged from the battle with a high spirit of self-assurance and confidence in their ability to retrieve their losses in the very next battle.

Essentially, this is the explanation for the remarkable showing made by the Spanish workers in their speedy comeback. At the same time it is a pitiless indictment of the cowardly capitulation of the Second and Third Internationals in Germany in 1933, of their effrontery in attributing to the working class their own despicable cowardice. ("We would have liked to fight, but the masses were not ready.")

If the reader draws from the above conclusion that the Spanish masses did and do have the kind of leadership that offers an additional assurance of the final victory, he will have misread the situation badly. After having remained firmly asleep at the switch and deprecating the revolution of 1931 as a mere nothing, the Stalinists ended up, in October 1934, by grudgingly entering the united front of the working class organizations against which they had inveighed up to the last minute. As for the socialist leadership, it kept the Spanish working class in leash for as long as it could, trying it as firmly as possible to the "democratic" capitalist republic, demoralizing it month in and month out by the practice of coalitions with the bourgeoisie, and "organizing" the October insurrection for the grand purpose of "forcing" the capitalists to restore the socialists to their inglorious position of captives in the government of the "republic of the working classes."

People's Front—A Lightning Rod

Then, as if this record were not sufficiently ignoble, they—both socialists and Stalinists—capped it by performing the function of lightning rods, grounding into the harmless soil of "democratic" capitalism the increasingly menacing flashes of working class resurgence which has been rising for months like a black cloudbank that might inundate the rule of the bourgeoisie in Spain for all time. This not very laudable function was performed through the mechanism of the Spanish People's Front. To pass uncritically over the pompous phraseology of the People's Front in Spain would be just as criminal as it was to beat the drums for these other "victories" which were gained in Germany by the "Iron Front" in its time—and would lead to just as complete a calamity for the Spanish working class and any other that would emulate it, as it did for the German proletariat a couple of years ago.

The first question that arises in connection with the Spanish People's Front is: Is it correct for the workers to seek and arrive at an agreement with a bourgeois democratic party in the struggle against bourgeois reaction, even an agreement on the parliamentary field? Absolutely correct! But only under certain conditions and in certain ways. The principal condition, especially in elections, is that the party of the proletariat which makes the agreement with the bourgeois democrats, retains, absolutely, its political and organizational independence. It may not merge itself into the bourgeois party. It may not write a "common program" with the bourgeois party. In this or that district, the proletarian party, may vote for the candidate of the bourgeois party, in exchange for similar votes for itself in other districts. But from its own platform—and it must have one of its own—it must always point out why it has a program of its own, why it speaks from its own platform, why it has arrived at a temporary agreement with a bourgeois party, why the agreement is only temporary and cannot be permanent, and why the proletarian class and its party can never write a common program with the bourgeois class and its party or parties. Otherwise the workers' party loses its reason for independent existence; it has wiped out the irreconcilable struggle of the classes.

What was inexcusably criminal on the part of the Socialist party, the Communist party and the Maurin-Nin party of "Marxian Unification" was not only that they wrote a "common program" with the discredited bourgeois parties—which was bad enough—and that thereby, politically speaking, they appeared before the masses in one party with the bourgeoisie, but that this "common program" was dictated and written by the bourgeoisie, and that in every other respect the joint party—under the pseudonym of the "People's Front"—was dominated by the bourgeoisie. In other words, if the class criterion which Lenin loved so much to apply—"Who? Whom?"—is employed in this case, the result is clearly this:

Bourgeoisie Discredited

The "republican" bourgeoisie was so badly discredited in the eyes of the masses that it required a protective covering. In the "united

front", it was not "used" by the workers' parties—but the workers' parties used by it. It was not taken in tow by the socialists and communists—it dragged the latter in its wake. The payment which it made (the amnesty of the thirty thousand which leaves unaffected all those labor fighters who were imprisoned prior to the insurrection) was extorted from it by the overwhelming pressure of the masses who were storming the penitentiaries themselves. The payment which the workers made (restoration of bourgeois democratic power, new credit to the discredited "republican" parties of Azana and Martine Barrios, etc.) were voluntarily, unnecessarily and unwarrantedly given to the bourgeoisie as a gift by the labor leaders.

It is not so much the workers who needed the support of the bourgeois politicians, as the bourgeois politicians who urgently required the support and protection of the workers. They received the latter in the form of the complete subordination of the labor parties to the bourgeois parties in the "People's Front".

Program of People's Front

Take the question of the program, for example. Even assuming for the moment the admissibility of writing a common program with a bourgeois party—which we reject in principle—it is worth while examining the "program" that was finally adopted. In the January 16, 1936 issue of the Comintern publication, Rundschau, of Basle, we read that "in the minimum program of the Communist party for this electoral bloc stand the following demands: Amnesty for all the 30,000 political prisoners and for the more than 100 revolutionary fighters who are condemned to death; abolition of the reactionary laws, reestablishment of the rights of democratic liberties; national constitution for Catalonia; confiscation of the landed property of the aristocracy, the monarchists and all enemies of the people; dissolution of the Fascist and monarchist organizations, purging the army of Fascists; rehiring of all the workers discharged from factories after October 1934."

Thus the minimum program of the C.P. for the People's Front on January 16. Miserable enough, it will be said, and rightly so. But even this, which the Stalinists announced with such apparent intransigence as their rock-bottom, below which they would not move, is not to be found in the program of the bloc after it was formed—that is, with the exception of the proposal of amnesty for political prisoners and the promise to rehire workers discharged after October 1934. But in place of the "minimum" demands which the bourgeois allies (read: bosses) refused to include, the latter inserted a number of planks underneath which the three labor parties shamelessly signed their names. The People's Front program which makes the French People's Front platform and even President Roosevelt's program look like substantial Left wing documents, is summed up by the very same Rundschau of a week later (January 23, 1936), as follows: "Support of small industry and small commerce. . . In the field of financial reform the most important is the proposal to work for the 'Bank of Spain' so revising its activity that it may fulfill in reality its task, the regulation of credit. Unfortunately, the Republicans could not decide (!) to accept the more far-reaching proposal which demanded the nationalization of all banks. In the field of improving the lot of the workers it is promised . . . 2. The reorganization of the labor courts and the establishment of their independence." (Not only are the class collaborationist "labor courts" to be "reorganized" but their independence—from whom and what?—is to be established!) We forbear from quoting further. The program is simply inferior to the average petty bourgeois radical election platform. Compared with it, the average German social democratic party platform, even of the period of the "Iron Front" and "comrade" Hindenburg, is a significant social document. In so far, therefore, as the program of the "People's Front" is concerned, the question of "Who? Whom?" is answered: The bourgeoisie wrote it; the proletariat accepted it. More accurately, the treacherous leadership forced it on the proletariat.

Relationship of Forces

On the distribution of candidates, the complete subordination of the proletarian wing of the Front to its bourgeois wing is also clearly evidenced. Bear in mind, first, that in the 1931 elections, following the revolution, the socialists were returned as the largest party in the Cortes. Most of the "Republicans" got in by the skin of their teeth. Since that time, the "Republican Left" parties have been considerably weakened and even more discredited among the masses. Since that time, also, the communist party has grown and the proletarian

forces in the country (also on a parliamentary scale) have been strengthened absolutely and relatively by the fact that women have the vote and that, this time, many anarchist and syndicalist workers decided to cast ballots. In face of these indisputable facts, the bourgeois wing of the Front was given the decisive predominance in the division of candidacies. With Catalonia having a list of its own, the division stood as follows: the Republican Left parties in the bloc were granted 170 candidates and the labor candidates only 143 (127 socialists, 14 communists and 2 syndicalists). Elected were more than 120 members of the bourgeois party and some 100 members of the labor parties.

To what relationship of forces in the country does such a division, which patently gives the bourgeoisie the upper hand, correspond? To absolutely none! It corresponds only to the contemptible attitude of groveling before their bourgeois allies—in whom they have more confidence than they have in the forces of the proletariat—which is shared equally by the socialist and Stalinist leadership. The Maurin-Nin party which signed the People's Front program and supported it in the election, is nevertheless obliged to acknowledge in the post-election number of its periodical, La Batalla (Feb. 21, 1936): "Catalonia apart, it is certain that, in the rest of the country the republican movement, as a force, is a veritable fiction, as it proved to be in the elections of 1933." This veritable fiction was given the leadership, the majority and the programmatic control of the People's Front by Caballero, Uribe, Maurin and Nin.

Treacherous Stalinism

And even though the masses, some deliberately, some instinctively are fighting to break away from the leading strings of Azana and Co., of the astute demagogues of the bourgeois parties—even though the masses are groping, in elementary ways, towards class independence, and showing that by themselves they are infinitely more powerful and effective than they are when held under the bourgeois yoke, the labor leaders seek to fasten it only the more firmly around their throats. Typical and characteristic is the Madrid dispatch to the Daily Worker of Feb. 25, 1936, that is, after the elections and the stormy movements of the masses: "Without consulting the Azana forces (Oh Heinous crime!) many Left local governments are active in Asturias province and other parts. A stupidly premature (not only premature, but stupid to boot!) attempt is being made to divide Azana from the Left allies, the socialists and the communists." A more truly classic picture of social democratic treachery of the Scheidemann-Wels type could hardly be furnished than what is reflected in the two sentences quoted!

Is it surprising therefore that in addition to the hysterical praises sung to the Spanish "People's Front" by the Stalinists, the Right wing of the social democracy should also give it the accolade of approval? Everything the Stalinists stand for is contained in the comment on the "victory" contained in the February 25, 1936 issue of the Jewish Daily Forward, written by its foreign expert, D. Shub, a biological Menshevik: "The present victory over the reaction was made possible thanks to the fact that all the progressive parties and groups united in a democratic People's Front which put forward a joint list of candidates in most of the districts of the country. Into the People's Front entered the socialists, the syndicalists, the radical bourgeois republicans and also the communists, who gave up their own communist program in favor of the moderate (Hear! Hear!) democratic program of the People's Front. . . What the Spanish socialists did not succeed in attaining by means of a general strike and a bloody armed uprising sixteen months ago, which cost hundreds of human lives has now been attained in a peaceful way by means of the usual methods of democracy."

Shub rolls off these formulae with ease, because he has been repeating them for years. He hailed the victory of the social democrats in electing Hindenburg to the German presidency in exactly the same terms and spirit. In essence, it was just the same kind of victory, too. That he can now include the Stalinists in his comments that he now agrees line by line with their evaluations, is no sign at all that he has moved closer to Marxism. It only means that the Stalinists have moved all the way to Shub. On these grounds, he has every right to felicitate himself. The Spanish workers have not.

SUPPORT THE ELEVATOR OPERATORS IN THEIR FIGHT FOR HIGHER WAGES AND BETTER CONDITIONS

READ THE NEW MILITANT

"Speed Up or the Scabs Will Take Your Jobs--" Straw Boss? No, West Coast C.P.

O enamoured have the smaller American editions of Stalin become, that Stakhanovism has been introduced, or rather an attempt at introduction to the longshoremen, in San Francisco, has been made.

The C.P. Waterfront Worker of February 3, 1936 (p. 8) contains the following choice morsel intended, no doubt, to warm the cockles of the hearts of all stovedores—"Laziness must be eliminated, working-class discipline must be enforced."

"Today, we face a new problem—a problem if not met squarely and honestly will wreck the organization we sacrificed so much for and fought so hard to build. That problem is the amount of work performed per gang per day. In the Blue Book days, 30 or 40 tons per gang per hour was considered an average hours work. Today, 30 or 40 tons is considered a good 4 hours work. Everyone will admit 40 tons is too damned much cargo to move in one hour, but at the same time 40 tons for 4 hours is not a helluva lot. After all, we still live in a capitalist society, the shipowners still own the ships and

he must take profit; if he cannot, he will refuse to operate. Or if operating costs become too high, when it would prove cheaper for him to use scabs and lock out the Union men, that is exactly what he will do." (My emphasis, B. M.)

Let the shipowners tremble at the roar of this militant blast from the Stalinists:—"Toe the mark, boys, or we'll anger the bosses." "After all, we still live in a capitalistic society"—"the speed-up isn't as bad as it might be"—etc.

We have no doubt the longshoremen will give these capitalist lackeys the answer they so richly deserve. These workers who saw their striking comrades shot by the bosses' thugs, will turn to these Stakhanovite henchmen of Hearst, Plant and Giannini and say, "You can fawn upon the ship-owners—but for us union conditions were won by strike action, not by class-collaboration with finks and bosses. We intend to stand our ground, and fight for union conditions won at the cost of working-class lives. Working class discipline—hell! You mean the speed-up!"

Sharecroppers Take Vote on General Strike

By H. L. MITCHELL

Executive Sec'y, Southern Tenant Farmers Union

MEMPHIS, Tenn.—Members of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in an effort to bring some measure of justice to the workers on the cotton plantations of Northeast Arkansas are now taking a vote on a proposal to call every one out on strike throughout the entire area.

New evictions of union members are reported daily. Most of them are made without any sort of settlement of wages due the workers. Government payments or subsidies are also refused. Planters offer Yellow Dog contracts in an attempt to force sharecroppers and tenants, as well as day laborers, to accept worse conditions than ever before—the provision that each worker accepting shall give up union membership.

Efforts by interested people such as Brooks Hays, Resettlement Administrator of Washington, and citizens of Arkansas to act as mediators in the intolerable situation now existing have been repulsed by plantation owners. They refuse to deal with the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, and threaten widespread violence. Reports from reliable sources, union and non-union, indicate that bands of outlaws are being formed to wipe out the Union. Continual threats to stage another "Elaine Massacre" (massacre of Negroes, Elaine, Arkansas, 1924.) are being made by the planters. This time they plan murder of white as well as black Union men.

The Union has offered to meet a committee of responsible plantation owners and attempt to get a settlement of the controversy which cannot go on forever. We are ready at any time to negotiate a fair and just contract. Our demands are as follows: Just and adequate settlement at end of season, legal rates of interest on advances made sharecroppers and tenants, wages of \$1.00 per 10 hour day with 15 cents per hour overtime for all work done by day laborers, and a written guarantee binding owners not to interfere with Union organization or to discriminate against Union members.

Mass Evictions Continue

The mass eviction of Union families continues from many plantations with no let up in sight. Men, women and children are set adrift on the highways. When they find a place of refuge in tents (supplied by the Union), churches, owned by themselves, in homes of other Union members they are hounded by threats and warnings, many of them saying, "leave the state or be lynched." Dynamite was recently placed in the tent colony near Parkin. A few days later a mob led by the County Sheriff served notice on the homeless people gathered there to leave within 48 hours. The governor of the State of Arkansas, J. Marion Futrell, made a "so called" investigation and with a bucket of white wash exonerated his friends the planters.

Relief from all governmental sources is effectively blocked. State relief administrators at Little Rock, Arkansas, of the various agencies set up to provide for people, flatly refuse to carry out orders from Washington. The control of the plantation interests extends to the very doors of the capitol. Planters and Peace Officers have sent guarded threats that they are prepared to prevent the Union relief committee from distributing food and clothing contributed by sympathizers and supporters of the sharecroppers cause.

Help is needed. Post these conditions to the President of the United States. Ask your senators and congressmen to demand a congressional investigation. All contributions should be sent to Box 5215, Memphis, Tenn.

READ THE NEW MILITANT

St. Louis Retail Clerks Ask Aid in Strike

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ally and in spreading the boycott of Kroger stores since very early in the strike have been the Progressive Miners of America and the United Mine Workers of America (District 12). Both of these organizations have placed Kroger on their "we don't patronize" lists and all of their locals in the state of Illinois have posted notices to this effect. In some cases locals of these unions have placed a fine of \$25.00 on any member of their organization caught dealing with Kroger. Many other unions here are helping financially and by having their members refuse to buy Kroger goods.

Issue Strike Bulletin

To answer the lies and slander that the Kroger company is putting out over the radio, in the newspapers and through their other paid mouthpieces, the union has gotten out a strike bulletin in which they tell their side of the story. In the February 28th issue of this strike bulletin we read that after almost four months of hunger, hardships, and privation the union is standing pat on its original demands, and furthermore that their ranks are holding firm and not a man has deserted.

The union with only 146 men is fighting a gigantic chain grocery store which has thousands of stores all over the country. In order to make this fight effective they must hit Kroger in the heart, i.e., the pocketbook. This can be done only by acquainting the people and particularly the union men and women who normally trade with this labor hating corporation that Kroger is unfair to organized labor so that they can buy their groceries elsewhere. Any individual or organization desiring to help the progress of this strike can do so by placing a picket in front of the Kroger store in their community, by having their organization put Kroger on the "we don't patronize list," or by sending a donation to Oscar T. Wiles, Secretary, Warehouse Workers Union, No. 667, 4046 Folsom Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. (Note: If you can picket a Kroger store in your community write to this organization and picket signs will be sent by return mail.)

Arrest 14 in NY WPA Protest

Fourteen workers, members of the Workers Alliance of America, were arrested at the Port Authority Building, Thursday, March 6th, while demanding the Asst. W.P.A. Administrator, Mr. Ring, see them regarding their reinstatement on W.P.A. jobs from which they were arbitrarily dismissed. For the second time Ring broke his engagement with the workers. In the meantime, these workers, who have families to feed, were given the famous "runaround" by the city authorities and the W.P.A. officials. While shouting such demands as: See our Committee—Give us Jobs—and Feed our Families, guards ordered the workers to leave the building. The order was ignored and the shouting continued. The group was placed under arrest.

Following this, a messenger from Ring arrived, promising an appointment with his assistant. This was rejected and an appointment was wrung out of Ring.

As the workers proceeded peacefully to leave the building the guards attacked them brutally. Office workers on the floor, numbering about three thousand, who had witnessed the whole affair and had expressed themselves in sympathy with the workers demands, jumped in at this moment to protect them from the brutal assault of the guards. About five thousand people employed in the Port of Authority Building gathered outside to see the workers taken away by the police.

Among these arrested were Henry Ronke, M. Fleischmann, Harry Winthrop, Harry Shepard, M. Liebowitz and others.

This is the "Security" promised to the workers by Roosevelt and carried out by his office boy Victor Riddler. Workers are now being laid off by the thousands,

Demands Pres. Act on Cal. WPA Layoffs

BERKELEY, Calif., Feb. 27—Faced with mass dismissals on WPA projects delegations of the Professional Workers Union sent representatives to the city managers of Berkeley, Oakland and the Board of Supervisors of Alameda County and forced the officials to allow the use of the long distance phone to one of its representatives, George Grayden, who depicted the local situation and presented the union demands to Pres. Roosevelt.

The union is seeking affiliation to the Gov't Employees organization of the A.F. of L. and has the support of the Central Labor Council of Alameda County in this request. It is also planning a mass meeting on the WPA situation in the latter part of March.

The text of Grayden's speech follows:

Mr. President: I am a spokesman for a committee of the Union of Professional Workers of the East Bay, speaking from the Alameda County Court House, California.

The thousands of us now working on WPA projects are concerned about the large number of men and women who are facing discharge within a few weeks.

Those of us working on the National Guide, a Federal Project are reaching a state of panic as March tenth approaches when 96 per cent of the Personnel are to be discharged.

New projects are not being set up rapidly enough to take care of these now working on WPA projects and most serious of all is the situation of the rapidly increasing unemployed who are forced to ask for relief and by your ruling denied opportunity of assignment to WPA projects.

We submit that the relief allowance in California is inadequate to maintain a family above a slow starvation level, with the payment of rent, service bills and medical care beyond the slim dole allowed.

We ask that you assure us of continuous employment at wages sufficient to maintain our families on a basis of health and decency.

We submit that as American citizens, in this marvellously rich country, that we are entitled to an abundance that we are anxious and willing to produce.

We demand that the Federal government provide work for all the unemployed and at once:

That the meagre allowance given the unemployed in California be eliminated in favor of work at decent wages.

Mr. President, we are determined to end the misery we see about us. This suffering that is sending our friends and neighbors to the insane hospitals, to the taking of their own lives, condemning our children to illness and forcing many to lives of crime.

We demand security of employment. The withdrawal of your order discharging the thousand workers from WPA in California, each month, and we demand the immediate setting up of new projects to care for all these to be released March 10 or thereabouts and the immediate setting up of a program that will provide employment for all the unemployed.

F. D. Sharpens Relief-cut Axe

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ferno of famine. Beyond the immediate perspective of struggle, there lies also the necessity of revolt. Every worker in this country has felt acutely the distinct contradiction between modern property relations and human relations. As workers, we do not have the time to build Farmer-Labor parties in order to elect reformist dog-catchers and congressmen. The choice during the next few years is not between reform and reaction. The choice lies between revolution; and starvation!