

The Situation in Spain Today

BARCELONA, July 24. (By Courier to the Frontier).— July 19th anniversary of the proletarian crushing of Fascism in Catalonia, was not celebrated here. At the last moment the Valencia Government prohibited the joint demonstration scheduled by all the Catalan parties, cynically declaring that anti-fascist sentiment, "the perfect harmony between the rear and the front", required no special manifestation. This attitude was only logical on the part of the Valencia authorities: how can a reactionary government permit the celebration of a revolution? The CNT-FAI leadership made no protest; their members wished to demonstrate illegally, but the authority of the anarcho-reformist leaders is still great enough to stifle such initiative from below. The General who, in charge of Public Order, had prevented the demonstration planned for the 18th, himself ordered a characteristic demonstration for the 19th: the assault guards and shock police, armed to the teeth, came out and patrolled the streets of Barcelona, between each company two machine guns, 1937 model, with munition cases.

Stalin Police System Installed

The point is that, having suppressed all forms of Catalan autonomy—although the Catalan statute remains on paper—the authorities have confidence in nobody who has any tie, no matter how slight, with the Catalan masses. The entire Catalan police were transferred to the center of the country or to the front. Only the old "cossacks" the Civil Guard, rechristened as the National Republic Guard, remain. Even the firemen have been sent to Madrid. An entirely novel system, probably introduced by the Russian police here, is that the whole city is covered with a network of guardsmen carefully concealed; the meshes of this net are so fine that from one guard post to another is only three minutes on foot. Thus they hope to be able to stifle any illicit movement from the first moment.

The repression is much worse in Catalonia than in the rest of the country. Solidaridad Obrera (CNT organ) can speak only in the language of flowers about the most important problems. It dares not publish the speech of Mariano Vazquez, Secretary of the CNT National Committee, in which the CNT finally took up the public defense of the POUM. Indeed, only Castilla Libre of Madrid published it; unfortunately it has not a large circulation. We must not deceive ourselves: not a few people—especially the petty-bourgeoisie—are beginning to believe that the POUM is guilty of some of the charges. Now the shortcomings of the CNT press, which never explained the significance of the Moscow trials—they refrained in the name of unity and still publish little; on the shooting of the Russian generals, for example, Soli and Noche merely published the official bulletins without commentary—are being paid for by both the POUM and CNT prisoners.

Issue Reactionary Decrees

Recently two decrees of the Ministry of Justice (the Minister is Irujo, representative of the big Basque bourgeoisie) have paved the way for Moscow trials in Spain. One drove the FAI out of the Popular Tribunals, by decreeing that parties that were not legalized before the 16th of February could not be represented. The other decree, still more serious, constitutes Special Tribu-

als, to hold secret trials on espionage and high treason charges; as the CNT secretary pointed out, "all oppositionists to the Government, all those who speak or demonstrate against the constituted Government, come under the terms of this decree. And this means, for example, that at this moment, I am subject to its penalties and tomorrow I can be arrested and tried behind closed doors."

If only Vazquez' words on Nin had been published in the big CNT papers! If only the CNT had organized a real campaign for his defense! The CNT leadership knew Nin well; he had been one of the biggest of them, twenty years ago, before he founded the Communist Party of Spain.

"Ah! but what nobody can understand," said Vazquez, "is their saying Nin has been in contact with Franco, and that Nin is a fascist. This must be taken into the courts and proved to the people because, for the people, Nin is a revolutionist. He is a man who, from youth, has been in the revolutionary organizations, and the people cannot reconcile this with what is said regarding Franco. It is supreme madness, to say the least, politically mad as well, not to proceed legally in these matters." But, of course, the Stalinists and the Negrin government dare not bring Nin into open court. (This was written before the discovery that Nin had been lynched by the GPU).

Prisoners on Hunger Strike

A hunger strike of foreign political prisoners, most of them POUM and CNT co-workers, began on Monday, July 12—seventy prisoners refused nourishment. They demanded, not only better treatment, but above all to know of what they were accused. Despite concessions to them on increasing food allowances and provided bed sheets, the prisoners continued their strike for four days, that we know of: a trial or liberation, was their slogan.

Under the pressure of the CNT, the police made a promise not to hold prisoners more than thirty days without bringing them into court; but the promise has not been kept; even the ordinary rank-and-file worker is imprisoned for fifty days and more without a perfunctory hearing, and a good many of them held strictly incommunicado during all this time.

The chief of police—Ortega—for all Spain, is a Stalinist. (Since this was written Ortega was dismissed for illegally summoning and arresting a POUM military commander during preparation of the Aragon offensive, but was immediately replaced by Gabriel Moron, another Stalinist). But the official police force, jails, etc. do not suffice for their bloody work; in the case of the POUM leadership, for instance, they arrested them without using the legal channels. Indeed, in most of the political arrests, there is no official notice at Police Headquarters or elsewhere. Friends have seen, for example, the official record, releasing Jose Escuder, managing editor of La Batalla; but then the Stalinists took him to one of their unofficial "Cheka" (GPU).

Socialists Tacitly Aid G.P.U.

And the authorities, the Valencia and Barcelona governments, consent to all this. Although the Cheka is not under their control, they condone its persecutions and murders Negrin, Prieto, and the other Social Democratic leaders, it is known, are a

little appalled by the crudity of the Stalinist GPU—but they are linked with the Stalinists in the same repressive governmental apparatus. They enjoy its reactionary fruits. We blush when we hear foreign anti-fascist comrades, combatants from the front, fallen under the heel of the G.P.U., exclaiming bewildered: "Have we made a mistake in sides?"

The great masses, still largely anarchist in sympathy, remain expectant. But the pathetic orations of their leaders do not succeed in awakening their enthusiasm. The anarcho-reformist bureaucrat's phraseology about "nobility" and "let us sacrifice" is too worn. The local group of the FAI have resumed their illegal propaganda; unfortunately it does not center around the most immediate problem, the release of the prisoners. Protesting against Stalinist repression, the Anarchist youth, the Libertarian organization, as in its time the German Social Democracy, demands of the state help against—its own bands!

"How long? It is time for the Government Council to speak, or lacking that, the Delegate General of Public Order and the Chief of Police," says one pathetic leaflet. But the illegal leaflets and press of the anarchists does provide interesting revelations. Anarquia reports: "To the shame and mockery of those calling themselves democrats, on the 17th of the present month, while proven anti-fascists and fighters for a better tomorrow are held in jail, seventy prisoners were set free, among them fifty-five proven fascists." We learn from the illegal leaflets that the PSUC (Catalan Stalinists) issue instructions for recruiting: "Stop your companions in the War School and offer them liberty in exchange for entry into the PSUC." "If a man is arrested who is ascertained, or whom one believes, not to be a revolutionist, the police propose that he enter the PSUC." Anarquia of July 1 reports: "What we cannot tolerate nor consent to... is uniformed assault, robbery and pillage penetrating our centers and cultural organs." A Libertarian headquarters had been assaulted, its equipment destroyed, valuables stolen, by a Stalinist detachment.

Discontent with Anarchist Leaders

There is widespread discontent with the leadership in the anarchist ranks. The Bolshevik-Leninists (Trotskyists) are still too small, however, to channelize it. Having been the tail to the CNT during most of the events, the POUM has attracted few of the anarchists. Consequently, the main tendency among the discontented CNT workers is a fruitless one, of desiring to return to their traditional anti-politicalism. The CNT National Committee has found itself obliged to attack them publicly and effectively too; for the sterile criticism of the "hundred percent" anti-statists only gives force to the reformist alibis of their leaders.

The Bolshevik-Leninists have won sufficient influence in the CNT ranks to receive, at the hands of the CNT leaders a downright dishonest attack. During the May Days, as an immediate measure, we called for united action of the C.N.T.—F.A.I.—P.O.U.M. Accusing us of speaking in their name, though our leaflet was plainly signed by the Bolshevik-Leninists of Spain, the CNT denounced our "dirty maneuvers." We answer-

ed them in fraternal spirit, that we had the right to call for CNT-FAI-POUM action because we consider that today only the struggle of these three organizations can stop the imprisonments, closing of centers, monstrous trials, and the offensive against the collectives. The "nobility" of the anarchist leaders did not go so far as to publish our answer.

The desperate repressive campaign, led by the Stalinists, has finally frightened Caballero into motion, for it is plain that the Stalinists will try to wipe out every form of opposition. The "Spanish Lenin"—what a preposterous title, after his shameful record as Premier during the period of reconstruction of the bourgeois state, from September 4th to May 15th!—was all the more ready to come to the fore, since both the CNT and POUM, with their slogan of a CNT-UGT Government—ceded unquestioned leadership of the opposition to Caballero. How bad the situation is here may be realized from the fact that Caballero now calls the government a "reactionary regime". He makes a sharp distinction between fighting at the fronts and political support to the government, and gives it no political support. He offers the masses, however, no perspective other than a new parliamentary combination. Even this is too much for the Stalinists, who are openly threatening to outlaw the Caballero group if they continue in opposition.

The Stalinist Degeneration

There is simply no way of describing in a few words the political degeneration of the Stalinist party. In Catalonia its composition is based on the "new bourgeoisie", that is, the former small shopkeepers and businessmen who—the former big bourgeoisie having been liquidated largely on July 19, 1936—under the regime of free trade and bank credits to favorites, have become full-blown bourgeois entrepreneurs. In Spain generally, the Stalinists have come into sharp collision with both the CNT Federation of Peasants and Agricultural Workers and the UGT Peasant Federation; Ricardo Zabalza, secretary of the latter, and by no means a leftist, has continually denounced the Stalinists for their recruiting of "kulaks" and "caciques," charging that the Gil Robles men and reactionaries in the villages generally have joined the Communist Party as the most efficacious means of fighting the peasantry and the collectives. Generals, governmental bureaucrats, traders, hordes from the Catalan Esquerra—all have joined the Stalinists because they are the most vigorous defenders of the bourgeois regime. With the pending fusion with the Socialist Party into one "united party of the proletariat (!)", Spain will have a totalitarian party based on ruthless extermination of the revolutionary forces.

The POUM has regrouped itself organizationally, but, alas, has not at all changed its political line. The divergences between the three factions.—The Rightists or former Maurinists, the Centrists or remains of the Executive Committee, and the Lefts led by the Madrid and Barcelona Local Committees—are deepening. The Maurinists are saying: the policy of the "Trotskyists", Nin, Andrade, Molins, etc. is to blame for the repression against us. The Center tries to maintain unity by evoking only sentimental pleas. The Left wing is in constant fermentation: they

make a "Trotskyist" criticism of the POUM but fear nothing so much as contact with the Trotskyists; but this is merely the remnants of their heritage of Nin's "Neither Trotskyist nor Stalinist."

POUM Disoriented

The illegal leaflets published by the Executive Committee of the POUM testify to the complete disorientation reigning in their ranks. One of these is particularly worthy of comment. They, who have always reproached the Bolshevik-Leninists for seeing only Stalinism, have fallen into a completely vulgar anti-Stalinism. They have, indeed, become anti-Stalinist and nothing more. Today even the bourgeois liberals find grace in their eyes. The leaflet addresses itself to everybody on the left and on the right: to the anarchists as well as to the "young separatists" of the ultra-reactionary Estat Catala. The POUM asks all to protect them against Stalinism, which which is alone held guilty of the repressions. The POUM passes over in complete silence the fact that the Stalinists can fulfil their counter-revolutionary job only thanks to the complacency of Companys and Prieto and the whole-hearted aid of the bourgeoisie of the Estat Catala. "The men of the Left cannot betray their postulates. The Separatists cannot sell Catalonia by their silence." And the leaflet ends with a slogan: "Prevent the establishment of the dictatorship of a party behind the lines." Are there still comrades abroad who believe the POUM can be reformed, or that the demand for a new party would be premature?

The POUM leadership has no perspectives. Hence they find it easy to write in an article against the Bolshevik-Leninists, that "The scanty elements that compose the Bolshevik-Leninist Section in Spain for the Fourth International published in recent days leaflets that are real models of confusion and demonstrate that the poor Trotskyists are politically dwelling in the stratosphere. In them they ask for such absurd things, so contrary to the reality of the present movement, that they amount to actual political aberration." But they are careful not to inform their membership what are the "such absurd things". That is why I reproduce the last part of our leaflet of June 19, 1937:

"Only the United Front of struggle of the CNT-FAI-POUM and all revolutionary organizations can succeed in annihilating the ogre of counter-revolution. Workers: demand of your organization and your leader a united front pact which must contain:

"1. Struggle for the freedom of the workers press! Down with political censorship!

"2. Liberation of all revolutionary prisoners. For the liberation of Comrade Nin, transported to Valencia!

"3. Joint protection of all centers and enterprises in the possession of our organizations.

"4. Reconstitution of strengthened Workers Patrols. Cease disarming the working class.

"5. Equal pay for officers and soldiers. The return to the front of all the armed bodies sent from Valencia. General offensive on all fronts.

"6. Control of prices and distribution through committees of workers and Workingwomen.

"7. Arrest of the provocateurs of May 3rd; Rodriguez Salas, Aiguade, etc.

"To achieve this, all workers,