

Red Flag Flies Over New French Stay-Ins

Latin-American Notes

By Bernard Ross

Chile

The bankruptcy of Popular Frontism and Stalinism becomes more evident with each passing day. Recently, the reactionary general Carlos Ibanez del Campo who only a few years ago was driven out of power by the Chilean masses, returned to Chile. The Nacista Party, headed by Jorge Gonzales von Maree, promptly decided to support the candidacy of Ibanez in the coming presidential elections. And then... the popular front coalition also decided to support Ibanez.

The Communist party issued a manifesto declaring itself behind General Ibanez and urged all leftist organizations to support that candidate against the openly reactionary, former Minister of Finance, Gustave Ross.

In that same manifesto the Communist party criticizes the Socialist Party for having its own independent candidate, Colonel Grove, and foams against Trotskyite tendencies in the Socialist party....

Mexico

Evilio Bandillo, former member of the Central Committee of the Mexican Communist Party was sent last summer by his party to study in Soviet schools. He mysteriously disappeared and rumours are afoot that he was apprehended as a "Trotskyist." Evilio Bandillo never was a Trotskyist but, on the contrary, his record was that of an outspoken supporter of Stalinism. But the G.P.U. assassinated and persecutes not only revolutionaries, but its own lackeys when it suspects that the latter are not sincere in their protestations of servility to Stalin.

The insolence of American and British oil interests in Mexico reached new heights when they announced that they will not accept any government decision granting the workers more than 13 million pesos in wage increases. This in spite of the fact that a government commission investigating the financial status of

the company reported that the enterprise could easily grant 26,000,000 pesos annually in wage increase. The workers originally demanded 16,000,000 pesos.

The "anti-imperialist" Cardenas government which recently granted large concessions to the British Royal Dutch Shell, hesitates before the handing down of a decision. Incapable of fighting against imperialism and threatened by feudal reaction, the liberal bourgeoisie headed by Cardenas cannot afford to alienate working class support. The most likely result will be a compromise decision.

The American Smelting Co., largest imperialist mining interest in Mexico, bringing its American investors \$25,000,000 annually, refuses to come to terms with the Miners Union.

The conditions of the miners are deplorable. Working more than eight hours a day, under terrible hygienic conditions, their legs knee-deep in mud, inhaling poisonous vapors, the miners barely receive a subsistence wage.

To date the Cardenas government using dilatory tactics has succeeded in warding off a strike, urging the miners' leaders to arbitrate the issues involved.

Cuba

The Cuban military dictator, Colonel Fulgencio Batista is an apt pupil of Gestapo methods. Not satisfied with the reign of terror he has established on the island, his government sends agent provocateurs and professional gunmen among Cuban emigre circles.

All this was established by the Mexican police investigating the assassination of an emigre named Torrado. One of the suspects apprehended was classified as "a well-known Cuban gunman with very bad antecedents." The police discovered on his person credentials from the Batista government. One other suspect testified that the Cuban government, through the national Chief of Police, Pedaza, was responsible for the murders of Torrada and a number of other exiles.

(Continued from page 1)

Goodrich factory must be evacuated before negotiations could start." (N. Y. Times, December 25). It is necessary to recall that compulsory arbitration is the law of the land and that all strikes are therefore "illegal" under the People's Front. The government is forced to intervene to save its prestige. Besides, for some time now the bosses have been on an open offensive to break the unions, abolish the 40 hour week and to pave the way for the counter-revolution.

Needless to say, throughout all this, the lackeys of the French bourgeoisie—the Stalinist, reformist and trade union bureaucrats—have been quiet. They certainly don't want any strikes. But the workers are becoming more and more incensed.

4. While truces are reported, the fall of the Chautemps government is imminent. "The widespread labor troubles threatened a split in the Popular Front, supporting the Chautemps government." (N. Y. Times, Dec. 25). Even more revealing, is the article on the financial page of the Times (Dec. 27). "This recrudescence of labor unrest has for its ostensible motive demands for higher wages to meet the increase in cost of living, but financial observers wonder if it was not engineered by extreme Left politicians with a view to creating difficulties for the present government and thus preparing a return to power of a Cabinet dominated by Socialists and Communists."

Two Alternatives Before Bourgeoisie

Obviously, if the strike wave gathers momentum for as long as a week, the French revolution, whose tempo has been extremely slow, will enter a new stage. The French bourgeoisie must then choose one of two alternatives. Either they will decide to crush the workers by force, using the army and the fascists; or, they will drift along for a while with the current, make a few concessions, and then call upon their agents in the labor movement to swindle the workers out of their gains. This would mean the formation of a Blum-Thorez government, where the Stalinists would bear the brunt of the dirty work, i.e., the execution of the orders of the French bourgeoisie. In the event of a protracted strike movement, the latter is indubitably the more likely alternative. For one thing, the fascist movement is by no means ready to take power; and, even more important, the French capitalists, and their British and American brethren, cannot afford, in view of the international situation, civil war in France at the moment.

Possible Truce Only Temporary

There is a third possibility. That the government will be able to force through sufficient truces to break the momentum of the strike movement. This would enable it to stay in office for some weeks, but would in no way change the basic analysis that we have made. The strike wave can be temporarily postponed or diverted into so-called "peaceful and orderly" channels, but it is inherent in the entire economic

and political situation of France. No wave of the magic wand of class collaboration (People's Frontism) can change this basic fact. Moreover, the Chautemps government is doomed, because it has accomplished its basic task and therefore can no longer serve the bourgeoisie.

5. The formation of the Chautemps government signified politically the assumption of the offensive in the class war by the capitalists. The People's Front was shunted onto more respectable and conservative rails. The budget was to be balanced, or at least the reforms of the Blum government were to be completely vitiated. In general, internally and externally, France was to be made safe for the capitalists and their profits and equipped to conduct the coming imperialist world war. This meant, above all, that the armaments had to be taken care of.

War Budget Voted Unanimously

6. The debates of the Parliament on the war budget are very revealing on this score. Not only was the war budget voted unanimously, 603-0, in the Chamber of Deputies, but it was the largest in French history—the record sum of 12,934,000,000 francs, an increase of 17½% over the 1937 war budget. The total armaments budget, which includes the navy, the air and colonial defense, runs to well over 30,000,000,000 francs—i.e., over 1 billion dollars, about the size of the American armaments budget. And when one considers the size and population of France, the figure is staggering. It would correspond to considerably over 5 billion dollars on the part of American imperialism, which even our jingoists haven't begun to reach.

In the debates, none (no "Socialist" or "Communist") even dreamed of questioning the need for strengthening to the utmost the national defense of French imperialism. When Daladier, the War Minister, declared: "The eyes of the army are fixed on the frontiers and not on political strife," he was cheered on all benches. No, the only question was why so much money had to be spent on armaments, so that the balancing of the budget was being threatened.

Here, the summary of the debates printed in the Paris *Le Temps*, of December 4, is amazingly clear and most revealing. "The chief factor in the increase of the credits demanded by the Minister of War and National Defense for the 1938 budget as compared with that of 1937 is the rise of prices.... The price of a day's food (for a soldier) is being increased from 5 fr. 11 to 7 fr. (you can just imagine what kind of slops the conscripts will get, when you consider that this is less than 25c per day for the average soldier—F.L.D.) for 1938.... The coefficients of increase are 62 per cent for meat, 100 per cent for wine, 140 per cent for uniforms (cloth), 165 per cent for boots. There is something still more serious.... the increase in prices for shells and bombs has gone up 109 per cent...." And if the army has to pay such increases for basic necessities, imagine what the economic situation of the average worker is, and you have the real cause of the strike wave!!

Stalinist Maneuvers in the Labor Movement

7. Finally, it would be a mistake to ignore the labor movement, and especially its most important section, both numerically and politically—the Stalinists. For months the Stalinists have been clamoring for the achievement of organic unity with the Social Democrats. Following the conclusion of the pact between the Russian trade unions and the Amsterdam Federation of the Second International, the French C.P. took it for granted that now Blum & Co. would come along into the folds of the united party of the "proletariat and the people." Imagine their surprise and consternation, when the S.P. bureaucracy abruptly broke off negotiations at the end of November, using a speech of Dimitrov's as pretext, claiming that this proves the C. P. is dominated by a foreign government.

Immediately, the Political Bureau of the French C.P. adopted a resolution (published in *L'Humanite* on December 7) which is noteworthy not only for what it omits, but also for what it says. Placing the onus for the rupture on the S.P., the Stalinists delve into history to prove that the C.P. has always been for the unity of the proletariat. Going back to the Congress of Tours in 1920 when the French C.P. was formed as the result of the adhesion of a majority to the Third International, the resolution goes on to say: "The working class of France has thus known the hard proof of the split, which the C. P., for its part, has never considered as definitive." This is the clearest expression of the Stalinist line that the Third International should never have been formed and thus there should be organic unity with the Second International—naturally, on a reformist program.

Role of C. P. in Strike Wave

Reports on the strike wave indicate that the Stalinists are supporting it; or, at least, not opposing it. There are two important reasons for this: (1) the membership of the C.P. is basically revolutionary in France. They are the ones on strike. In order not to lose the support of its following, and also to counteract the exposures of Barmine, etc., the C.P. is forced to go along now—the better to strangle the movement in the end, as Blum did in 1936.

(2) There has been a veritable campaign in the bourgeois press against continuing the Franco-Soviet Pact. "It is only a scrap of paper.... Russia is a dubious ally at best, etc." Thus, Stalin can very well use the French labor movement as blackmail against the French capitalists. He will sell it out—yes, but for a price! Namely, the continuation of the French-Soviet alliance.

The entirely new feature of the situation, therefore, is that the Stalinists appear likely to play a dominant role. They will no longer be able to escape the responsibility for their treacherous policies. The rank and file of the French proletariat is face to face with its most crucial experience. Inevitably, they will be forced to the conclusion that only on the road of the Fourth International lies their salvation.

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