

Popular Front Breaks Army for Fascist Coup, French Sit-Downs; Gov't Calls Troops

By Terence Phelan

Do these bland liars think the French working class is deaf, dumb, blind, and feeble-minded? The Popular Front government mobilized the Gardes Mobiles and 1,000 troops against the strike, prepared for even heavier army repression; and these cynical Stalinist editors proclaim 'the government... realized this must not be done.' 'A People's Front Victory' alas it was—a victory over the Paris municipal workers by French capital acting through its Popular Front lackeys; that even a compromise settlement has been precariously obtained is because the government of the Front Populaire, though promising its finance-capital masters that it would 'use the utmost vigor...' and despite all resistance ensure the resumption of public service' etc., was afraid both of provoking the militancy of the aroused workers too far and of revealing too plainly to its deceived working-class following the mailed fist within the famous 'outstretched hand'.

The Lesson

The hammer-blows of these facts are reforming the militancy and class-consciousness of the French workers. The government they elected and re-elected to protect parliamentarily the gains won in the revolutionary struggles of May-June 1936 has given them the diametric opposite results: the vicious law of December 30, 1936 which established the fascist principle of compulsory arbitration and outlawing of strikes; the devaluation of the franc and the unchecked skyrocketing of the cost of living; leniency to the fascist gangs coupled with savage repression of workers' mass action. The lesson is simple: class struggle won the gains; class-collaboration lost them.

Tragically, however, the uninformed worker turned naturally to the powerful C.P., which to him represented the extreme left; and here the Stalinist bureaucracy, prostituting the prestige of the October Revolution it is now liquidating, again tried to canalize the worker's revolt into class-collaboration with its tactic of what the French worker calls 'headstuffing', *bourrage de crane*. But that even this will not any longer hold back the indignant French worker is demonstrated these days, as predicted in these columns, by a rising strike-wave.

As soon as the department store sit-ins win their gains, the truck-drivers and warehousemen strike in Paris; then the transport workers in Valenciennes. No sooner have these been 'settled' by the army than the coal-miners are out at Anzin. As we write, the ship-strike at Rouen goes on; the food-handlers walk out at Grand-Combe; the powerfully organized metal-trades vibrate with rank-and-file pressure for real strike-action following singularly provocative lock-outs. The opportunist Stalinist tops and their trained seals in the trade-unions alternately soothe, sabotage, or jump on the bandwagon; government arbitrators hastily throw clean collars and assorted sell-out plans into their suitcase and entrain for trouble-

led points; the Popular Front talks of its love for labor and democracy, and calls out the troops.

Leadership Needed

The wave is yet a ground-swell only, but it surges and mounts. Whether it will be flattened again by the disillusion of repeated betrayals, or sweep up into a triumphant wave like that of May-June 1936, depends above all upon the workers' finding true revolutionary leadership. In factories and mines where the Bolshevik-Leninists of the IV International have not even been heard of save through the filthy slanders of the Stalinist press, the workers, kicking over the traces of their reformist leadership, are instinctively carrying out the precise slogans of the rapidly growing but still small Bolshevik-Leninist party, the P.O.I. (Workers Internationalist Party). Only the monstrous incubus of Stalinism stands between, slandering, betraying, defeating.

Time is short. French finance capital, though it still hopes to retain its choking grasp on French economy through its left hand, the Radical-Socialist Party and the Popular Front, before venturing on the more expensive and risky expedient of rule through its right hand, Fascism of both Hitler and Franco varieties, will yet inevitably, by the very nature of capitalism, be forced to go Fascist. The French workers must be ready: ready with workers' militias, with naturally linked factory and soldiers' committees, ready above all this time to carry through to the end, the socialist revolution.

Time is shortening, but there is yet time to save France from the fate of Spain. P.O.I. led, or, gropingly, self-led or leaderless, the French workers are beginning to find the way.

By Pierre Naville

PARIS.—The recent trials stemming from the revelation of ex-Premier Andre Tardieu that he had paid out secret funds to de la Rocque have strikingly confirmed the repeated warnings of the P.O.I. (Workers' Internationalist Party) concerning the preparation of a fascist coup under the cover of the administration, the police and the army.

While de la Rocque was pleading not guilty in the affair of the secret funds, Pozzo di Borgo and his followers were arrested on charges of plotting "the re-establishment of the monarchy." A number of arms depots were uncovered. A third trial was meanwhile going on against the French Social Party on the charge that it was guilty of "reconstituting a dissolved league" (the Croix de Feu).

The witnesses who came to these trials to justify and glorify their plans for massacring the workers, fully confirmed our accusations. The official communique issued by Marx Dormoy, socialist Minister of the Interior, spoke of a "monarchical plot." But it also revealed something far more substantial than a threatened resurrection of the Orleans family. The plotters 'modelled their organization on that of the army.' This little phrase really means that the plot was organized by the army chiefs themselves.

Army Chiefs Involved

General Duscigneur, Capt. Le Maresquier and a number of business men who are reserve officers, were arrested. These officers are not on active service, any more than Gen. Weygand who, along with Tardieu, was probably at the head of the movement. But their activity would be inexplicable without the support and cooperation of officers on active service, of the higher-ranking officers. Who prepared the training of cadres, the armaments, the connection with aviation centers the arsenals and artillery bases? It was the same

group of men whom M. Thorez describes daily as the "elite of the Republican army."

Daladier, the minister of "national defence," in reality covered up the preparations of which he could not have been ignorant. Under the debonair gaze of the People's Front Government the plans for the barbarous assault ripened. Thorez and Guyot preached discipline and "pride in being a soldier"; and the minister of the soldiers encouraged his General Staff to prepare bloody repression against the workers.

At the de la Rocque trial, Pozzo, addressing the Croix de Feu chief, said: "When we spoke to you about arms, you adopted a modest air and said: 'Don't worry about that—in any case I have many acquaintances in the army. All that will be arranged.'" Pozzo thus quite cynically revealed the liaison between the army and the mercenaries of capitalism. The plot of the "Cagouards" (Hooded Ones) is the plot of the General Staff!

By the same blow, the role of the bourgeois army in civil war became plain to the blindest, despite the camouflage of Humanite and Populaire, who on this point are no different from the rightist press. When the minister of the Interior admitted that the plotters "modelled their organization on that of the army," he was obliged thereby to admit that the army functions and is organized for combat against the workers. The myth of the army as an instrument of external defence of the "fatherland" vanished to give way to reality.

The trial of the French Social Party also revealed what we knew quite well: that Roger Salengro, the late socialist minister of the Interior, and Leon Blum themselves legalized and covered the organization of the French Social Party when the Croix de Feu was dissolved. The testimony of Ybarnegaray and Ottavi, both leaders of the F.S.P. established this beyond question.

Helped Found Party

Ybarnegaray told how Salengro and Blum together approved the creation of the F.S.P. as successor to the Croix de Feu and assured him that "we have neither the intention nor the desire to make your party subject to the decree of dissolution," even though admittedly, it was "born of the Croix de Feu."

Ottavi related that he had two interviews at the ministry of the Interior with Magny, director of the Surete Generale (police), Langeron, prefect of police, and Verlomme, chief of Salengro's staff. They were discussing the methods of dissolving the Croix de Feu and Ottavi raised the question of the so-called "benevolent" organizations of the Croix de Feu: "Why don't you attach them to the party you are going to establish?" they said to me," related Ottavi.

These are two statements that ought to go down in history. The French Social Party was an incontestable advance for Fascism. While preserving intact its secret military organizations and its connections with the General Staff, it developed more broadly under the cover of "legality" its propaganda among the masses. The disagreements inside its putschist wing do not change anything in the regroupment of fascism under the People's Front Government, Blum and Salengro held the baptismal font for the new infant.

French labor was given another bitter and illuminating lesson in the real nature of Popular Frontism last week when their P. F. Government smashed within 24 hours the general strike of Paris municipal workers.

Opposed by the trade-union bonzes, and only tardily supported by the band-wagon Stalinists, the strike was forced by the militant pressure of a rank and file fed up with the failure of protracted class-collaborationist 'negotiations'. More than 120,000 responded to the strike call: all transport service, by subway, by bus, and tram, was completely stopped; gas, electricity, and sanitary services were cut to the minimum; and only skeleton service was maintained in street lighting, water, etc.

Savage Threats

The answer of that great friend of labor, the People's Front Government, was instantaneous and savage: it called out the Mobile Guards, brought in 1,000 troops ready to break the strike (as they were already doing in the truck-drivers' strike), and to cap all, threatened to call the striking workers (who are army reservists) to the colors for strike duty, so that, as French soldiers, they had either to act as their own strike-breakers or face court-martial for desertion or mutiny—a method of repression which marks a new low in the hypocritical cynicism of class-collaborationist reformism.

But a strike is a strike. The superiority of genuine class-struggle mass action over round-table deals is shown by the fact that fear forced the P. F. to couple to its military threats a half-way concession—it is reported that they offered the Paris workers between 50 and 70 francs (1.85 to 2.31) a month instead of the demanded minimum of between 100 and 150 francs as a special high-cost-of-living grant (the French price-index has increased 50 per cent in the last year). But the reports are conflicting; and, as matters stand in France, even this wretched amelioration may well be stolen from the workers, now they have returned to work, in the final negotiations.

Stalinist 'Explanations'

French labor will not soon forget this lesson, following immediately upon the government's use of the army as strike-breakers in the walkout of grocery workers and truck drivers. Even the Paris council of the C.G.T. (French equivalent of the A.F. of L.) has sharply protested against the Popular Front's fascist threat to mobilize the workers into the army to break their own strike. The Stalinist newspaper *l'Humanité*, however, makes the following statement under the heading "People's Front Victory":

"The workers' victory is a victory of the People's Front. Doriot, de la Rocque, the trusts and the newspapers all urged the government to use force, to throw itself into the arms of reaction.

"But the government, reflecting the extent of the movement, its echoes and realizations, realized this must not be done."

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