

Communist International
April (4), 1936, pp. 498-504

The Victory of the People's Front in Spain

In October, 1934, the Spanish workers took up arms to defend their rights and liberties against fascism. They fought on the barricades to save the Spanish people from the fate which had befallen the peoples of Germany and Italy. They fought with amazing courage, but they lost the battle. It was a defeat, however, which contained the elements of future victory. Spanish fascism tried to erect its terrorist rule on graves and prisons. But the victors did not feel they were out of danger, for their victory bore within itself the preconditions of defeat. The Asturians who fought for their liberty inflicted deep wounds upon the victors. The unextinguishable fire of the people's revolution burned in Spain. The Spanish proletariat lost the battle, but acquired new forces and won still more confidence and new sympathy among the broad masses of the people. Built up on the basis of joint action by the Communist and Socialist Parties, on the basis of united action by the decisive masses of the proletariat, the anti-fascist people's movement swelled into a mighty, rushing torrent, which boiled and stormed, and hurtled forward ever more openly and unrestrainedly, and ever more loudly drowned the voice of the victors in its mighty roar.

This torrent of the anti-fascist people's movement overthrew all barriers and obstacles in its path, and swept away the government of fascists and reactionaries. The electoral victory of the Spanish people's front, which has won an absolute majority in the Cortes, exceeded all the fears of the counter-revolution. Under the pressure of the mighty, invincible people's movement in Spain, which has brought freedom to those held in prison, opened for the workers the doors of their people's clubs and reinstated the members of the municipal councils who had been dismissed from their posts, fascism was forced at the first moment to give up the action it had prepared against the majority of the people, and many fascists fled abroad. The government resigned and a new government was formed. A few days later it declared an amnesty for all anti-fascist prisoners.

The speed with which all these events took place is an indication of the great scope of the people's movement, but the speed must be maintained by the movement if the victory is to be consolidated. The success is a tremendous one! It is a revolutionary event. But the dimensions of the success confront the people's front and the proletarian organizations, and first and foremost, the Communist Party of Spain, with still greater tasks, and place a colossal, historic responsibility on them.

The toiling people of Spain are expecting the victorious people's front to bring them rapid, radical and perfectly tangible changes in all the unbearable conditions against which they have hitherto revolted repeatedly, though unsuccessfully. The Catalonians, the Basques and Galicians are expecting the immediate fulfilment of their national freedom and the right to self-determination. The masses of the peasants, tenants, agricultural laborers and the proletarian and petty-bourgeois masses who joined the people's front so as to bring about a radical transformation of Spain, a country of feudal land relations, clerical obscurantism and fascism, are awaiting the immediate direct satisfaction of their needs.

But even the toilers who today are still supporters of the clerical and fascist charlatans will, as a result of the tremendous changes in the moods of the masses, as a result of the sudden shifting of forces, be ready to change their line in favor of the people's front, if the latter actually does give them the thing with the aid of which fascism only tempted them, namely, a real, rapid, tangible improvement in their conditions. We must stretch out a hand of brotherly assistance to these toilers so as to draw them out of the slough of want. We must help them, help them economically and politically, in order to wrench them from the strong grip of clerical and fascist demagogy, so as to inspire them with the knowledge of their own strength and the strength of the toiling masses united in the people's front movement.

The whole problem today is to ensure that the great movement of the people does not for a single day weaken its efforts. And if this movement tears out fascism by the very roots, and alters the living conditions of the Spanish toilers, with the same determination with which it drove out the hornets' nest of fascism, it will bring along in its train all those whom fascism has successfully fooled up to now, and

convert the electoral victory into the final victory of the Spanish people over the counter-revolution.

The Spanish revolutionists correctly believe that the next few weeks will decide the situation. During these weeks, the proletarian organizations are called upon to perform miracles of political and organizational action, just as the workers displayed miracles of heroism during the October battles. During these weeks, the political conditions will be so much hot iron, and we must strike while the iron is hot. It must not be allowed to cool before hammering it into the right shape. The main thing that has to be achieved in Spain during the next few weeks is to bring about an immediate, tangible improvement in the living conditions of the toilers and first and foremost in the living conditions of the needy peasant masses. A blow must be dealt at the roots of fascism; the proletarian parties must consolidate the victory of the people's front politically and organizationally. The Communist Party will do everything possible to convince the Socialists and the workers organized in the syndicalist trade unions of the decisive importance of these weeks, and, together with them, urge the people's front to take rapid, bold and consistent action.

Fascism is beaten, but still constitutes a serious political force and a menacing danger. At the present moment it has retreated, but only to take up new positions, to mobilize all its reserves and to make a new, fascist, counter-revolutionary coup d'état.

The Spanish revolutionaries know that fascism still constitutes a serious political force. Wherein lies the source of this strength?

1. The coalition policy of the Socialist Party begun in April, 1931, and continued for two and a half years, did not, and could not, lead to the satisfaction of the chief demands of the toilers, and, primarily, of the peasants. It scarcely touched upon the material base which ensures the domination of the landlords, the churches, and the finance capitalist magnates, leaving them their privileges and monopolies. Thus, it caused dissatisfaction and disillusionment among the masses of the people, and allowed the reactionary fascist demagogues to make use of this dissatisfaction and to increase their influence over the masses.

2. The fascists were able to base themselves upon the Catholic cooperatives, the agricultural syndicates, and the agricultural credit societies, to convert them into a tool for directly influencing the peasants, and thus subordinating over two million peasants in need of credits to their influence.

3. The fascists, relying on the colossal economic and political influence of the Church, obtained the organizational force and the tremendous material means they required, precisely through the churches and monasteries and Jesuit orders, all of which gave them the opportunity of abusing the religious feelings of the masses of the people and of using these masses against the Republic.

4. The fascists made use of the power in their hands, in particular during the period after October, in order to strengthen their positions in the state apparatus and, primarily, in the army and the civil guard.

5. The fascists were in constant receipt of financial assistance from the banks, big landlords and finance capitalist magnates.

6. The working class—the vanguard forces of the anti-fascist, people's movement—have still by no means overcome the split in their ranks.

From the analysis of the sources of the strength of Spanish fascism, the Spanish revolutionaries determine the immediate, most important and most urgent tasks of the anti-fascist people's front and of its leading force, the working class.

The working class links up in the closest fashion the struggle for their specific class interests and the struggle for the interests of the whole of the toiling people, for the complete development of the democratic rights of the broad masses of the people, for the speedy liberation of the peasant masses and the national minorities, for the complete destruction of fascism. In the daily struggle for their economic demands, for improvements in living and working conditions, higher wages, health insurance and unemployment benefits, and for the maintenance of the eight-hour working day, etc., the working class is acting as the determined, untiring vanguard fighter of the whole of the toiling people.

Concentrating their attention upon the immediate, important and urgent tasks, the working class

regards the cause of all toilers, the cause of the democratic republic and democratic liberties, as their own personal concern. They are striving to secure that the strong majority of the people's front in the Cortes will immediately, with tremendous energy and determination, proceed to fulfil these tasks and not waste its strength on fruitless, formal arguments and boring legal discussions. They will support the majority of the people's front in the Cortes with all their weight, all their fighting power, all the surging activities of the people's movement outside parliament, they will support the Left government when it puts through the program of the people's front, and on all determined measures adopted against fascism, and on behalf of the demands put forward by the masses of the people.

The working class demands that the government ensure the unhindered development of the anti-fascist struggle and not undermine this struggle like the first government of Azana, which gradually adopted the position of alliance with the reactionary groups of the bourgeoisie. The working class will subject the government to criticism if it begins to waver, to drag out and delay the solution of urgent tasks. With unfailing vigilance, it will frustrate all fascist plots against the republic, against the fulfilment of the program of the people's front, and will not allow the fascists to make use of the hotheads to provoke the masses into premature action, by misleading the masses and sowing confusion in their midst.

Only in the closest alliance with the peasant masses will the working class be able to ensure victory over fascism and the counter-revolution. It would be a fatal and tremendous mistake to disillusion the peasants again, who experienced such bitter disillusionment after the victory of the Left parties in January, 1931.

As the experience of the revolution in Spain has shown, the great task facing the toiling masses is the solution of the land question. While declaring themselves in favor of increased agitation on behalf of the confiscation without compensation of all big estates, the Spanish revolutionaries are demanding that the Cortes immediately and without compensation divide among the toiling peasants the landed estates of at least the aristocratic landlords, receiving in this connection the active assistance of the toiling peasants and agricultural laborers. This will deliver a devastating blow at Spanish fascism and is the real, economic, and political guarantee of the existence of the democratic republic. This and this alone, will convert the broad masses of the peasants into faithful allies of the working class in the struggle against the common enemy.

But this is not all. The toilers of Spain are demanding the re-election of the boards of management of the peasant cooperatives and that the enemies of the peasants be driven out of them, that speculators and middlemen be eliminated, and the peasants guaranteed more satisfactory prices for their agricultural products. The burden of taxation upon the peasantry must be immediately lightened, the wages of the agricultural workers must be raised, and the latter united into a strong organization, while social insurance must be extended to the villages, and measures adopted to defend the interests of tenants and to satisfy a number of other demands of the peasantry. If the people's front quickly and energetically lightens the position of the peasantry, if it quickly and energetically gives the peasants the opportunity of living lives worthy of human beings, the peasantry will link themselves up closely with the cause of the people's revolution and be prepared to defend it as their own cause.

The revolutionary workers respect the religious feelings of the broad masses of the people. But they consider it unjust for the Church in Spain to control such enormous wealth while the masses of the people are perishing of hunger and want. They consider it an insult to the religious feelings of the broad masses that the churches so stubbornly cling to their own earthly wealth, while the peasantry are dying under the burden of poverty. The churches, the monasteries, the Jesuits, who are not ashamed to sit on the money-bags, while the people labor on empty stomachs, will be forced by the pressure of the masses to give up their riches to mitigate the want of the people. Therefore, the workers are fighting to secure that an auxiliary fund is created for the needy peasants and unemployed out of the treasures of the Church.

So as to frustrate fascism which, with the help of its agents, will lay plots in the state apparatus, and,

first and foremost, in the army, against the republic, and will make use of the civil guard and the courts against the anti-fascist fighters, and so as to prevent sabotage of the people's front, the toiling masses, with the active assistance of the Republican soldiers and the government employees, will quickly, thoroughly and mercilessly, drive all monarchist and fascist elements out of the state apparatus, while all tried, absolutely reliable Republicans and anti-fascists will take their places. The toilers are correct in considering it an absolutely inadequate measure to give these monarchist and fascist elements worse jobs or to dismiss them with pensions by way of "punishment". They demand that these gentlemen be finally and irrevocably driven out of the state apparatus. They demand that relentless measures be adopted against financial plots organized by the counter-revolution in respect of foreign currency and the export of money abroad, and that the property of those found guilty be immediately confiscated.

Finally, the Spanish revolutionaries demand that the new government immediately satisfy the national demands of the Catalonians, the Basques and the Galicians, and create a strong alliance of free nations to defend the republic and democratic liberties.

It is essential for the consolidation of the victory and the final overthrow of fascism that these demands, linked up with the economic demands of the working class, be fulfilled.

In order to carry out these tasks and endow the turbulent movement of the people with growing fighting power, the proletarian organizations call for the stronger consolidation of all the forces of the people's front and the creation of a strong organizational base. Only if the workers' and peasants' alliances cease to be scattered, narrow, anemic organizations and become the living organs of the people's front, elected by the masses and living the same lives as the masses, if they cover the organized and unorganized workers and peasants of all currents, if they are the embodiment of the will of the broad people's movement, will they, in practice, ensure that a united struggle of the masses of the people is carried on against fascism, and serve as the guarantee for the further unfolding of the people's revolution.

However, the proletarian organizations are at the same time confronted with the task of mustering their own ranks more closely, and making every effort still further to consolidate the united front, to make it invincible, and once and for all, to overcome the ruinous split. The united front not only with the Socialists, but with the Syndicalists who, in spite of the negative position adopted by their leaders, in spite of the fatal traditions planted by their leaders, voted for the people's front and are taking part in the anti-fascist people's movement; the rapid creation of a united trade union organization, -which the Socialist, Communist, Anarchist, Syndicalist and non-party workers will join; the struggle for the united, consolidated, revolutionary party of the proletariat; these are the decisive preconditions necessary to ensure the victory of the revolution.

The Spanish proletariat have done great deeds. Their October battling deeply wounded fascism in Spain, and the wound has not healed up. Their purposeful, people's front policy, so full of revolutionary enthusiasm, undermined the government of the fascists, and set huge masses of the people into motion. But the Spanish proletariat are faced with a task of much greater dimensions. They have to double their efforts, to combine tremendous revolutionary courage with tremendous political wisdom and organizational firmness in order to have the opportunity of continuing the road they have taken and building a great, free and happy Spain.

* * *

The victory of the people's anti-fascist front in Spain calls forth joy and enthusiasm among the working masses throughout the whole world. The news of the great successes of the anti-fascist movement in Spain will arouse the desire to resist and to fight against fascism among all proletarians and toilers.

"Fascism is a ferocious, but unstable power." Events in Spain have most convincingly confirmed these words used by Georgi Dimitroff. "To vote for the people's front is to vote for Dimitroff", shouted the agitators of the counter-revolutionary bloc during the election in Spain, striving in this way to scare

the people. And the tolling masses replied: "We are voting for the people's front, for the cause of Dimitroff." *The events in Spain are a brilliant confirmation of the new tactical line of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern.*

Spain has shown that there is only one force that can check the fascist offensive and hurl it back. *This force is the mighty movement of the masses in the united working class front, and in the anti-fascist people's front. This force can, and will, conquer fascism.*

Reactionary Social-Democrats are trying to pass over in silence or even to distort this most important lesson of the Spanish events, which are of exceptional importance for the entire course of the class struggle in the capitalist countries.

The Bulletin of the Socialist International and a number of leading organs of the Social-Democratic Parties prefer to pass over in silence the fact that *the united proletarian front and the people's anti-fascist front exist and are being victorious in Spain.*

The reactionary elements of Social-Democracy will be as little able to conceal or distort this historic fact as to conceal and distort the other fact that fascism has been delivered a determined blow in just that country where the Communist and Social-Democratic workers offered resistance to the onslaught of fascism in a joint armed struggle. "There was no need to take up arms", howled the *Neue Vorwaerts*, the Brussels *Peuple*, and other Social-Democratic newspapers at that time, in justification of the capitulatory policy of the leaders of German Social-Democracy. Eighteen months have not yet passed, and the same Bulletin of the Socialist International has been forced to admit that "where the working class offered fighting resistance to the offensive of reaction, a rapid upsurge is possible even after defeat".

Facts are stubborn things. The world proletariat, in spite of all the efforts of the reactionary circles of Social-Democracy, are drawing their own conclusions from the Spanish events. And they will be in favor of the united working class front, in favor of the anti-fascist people's front, in favor of a joint, decisive struggle against fascist barbarity, against imperialist war, and against the capitalist offensive.