

## United Front in Support of the Spanish Toilers

The following is a report of the speech made by Comrade Harry Pollitt at the united front demonstration on behalf of the Spanish workers, held in the Memorial Hall, London, on November 16.

The events which have taken place in Spain, and are taking place in Spain to-day, are all the more remarkable because they represent the highest point reached in the struggle which has now been going on continuously since 1931. A struggle taking place in a country where incredible poverty is rampant, which is not a highly industrialised country like Britain or Germany, but where more than 60 per cent. of the people are land and forest workers, more than 1½ million peasants are devoid of all land, where a further million have exceptionally small quantities of land, where there is an unemployed army, which for Spain is a tremendous number considering its size, of 1½ million, and when in spite of all these things we have seen a unity between the workers and peasants that has not been equalled in any country since the pre-revolutionary struggles in Russia, prior to 1917.

The movement that kicked Alfonso out in 1931 has been steadily developing ever since, particularly against fascism. It has expressed itself in a variety of ways. Not least by continual seizure of land and property. For example, in the first three months of this year alone, the landless peasants banded themselves together and made 264 seizures of land and 306 seizures of other forms of property. In the first four months of this year over 1,900,000 workers took part in some of the most militant and bitter strikes that Spain has ever seen, and all these have revealed the developing class and militant character of the struggle in Spain.

In 1931 a coalition government was formed, the leadership in the hands of the "Left" republicans and the socialist party, who were absolutely under the domination of the big bankers and landlords, employers and representatives of the church. The Coalition did nothing at all to better the conditions of the workers as a result of the transition from a monarchy to a republic, and the result was a deep-seated disillusionment expressing itself in many phases of the economic and political life in Spain, which continually got stronger as the open fascist representatives also grew bolder, in their attempts to crush this rising militant movement.

In September, 1933, they felt strong enough to remove this "Left" coalition government, and replace it by one in which open fascist tendencies had all the most important posts. Immediately that government came to power they had to endeavour to get a "democratic sanction" for the proposals they attempted to put across. They therefore organised a new General Election, which for forgery, wangling and corruption has not been equalled in modern politics. It was such a despicable example of capitalist corruption that even the Minister of Justice resigned his position as a protest against the fact that his colleagues had gone a little too far. One or two facts will show you the type of "democratic sanction" which was achieved as a result of that General Election. The fascists gained 3,345,000 votes, and for that number they had their seats increased from 42 to 212 in parliament. The socialists gained 1,627,000 votes, and their seats were reduced from 291 to 98. In the General Election in 1931 the Communist Party got 60,000 votes, at the last election they got 400,000 votes, and the Communist Party was granted one representative in parliament.

When the General Election was over, of course, the big cry in Spain was "that the will of the people had expressed itself," and that now there was sanction given to the line that this new fascist government was endeavouring to carry out. In order to get a true perspective, it is necessary to state that the conduct of the socialist leaders in the first coalition government, like the Labour governments in this country, had, by their proposals, prepared the way for the more repressive acts that this new fascist coalition now began to put into operation. Because it was the socialist Ministers in the first coalition government which, in order to dampen down the rising revolutionary wave, introduced measures preventing the right of demonstration, restricting the liberty of working-class organisation, making it illegal to carry fire-arms, and in this way they naturally prepared the way for what was to come immediately their services were no longer required for Spanish capitalism, and a more open and brutal policy was necessary. How far in this first period of a coalition government the repressive policy was carried out the following facts will tell, and we should take note of them because what happened since makes them all the more remarkable.

In the period from 1931, when Alfonso was dethroned, to the General Election 360 Spanish workers had been killed, 2,000

wounded, and 9,000 had been put into prison. These figures are eloquent testimony as to how far the Spanish workers and peasants were moving in their efforts to secure improvements in their conditions and fight against fascism.

From the moment Alfonso was dethroned, right down to the present time, the leaders of the *Anarchist party* in Spain have done nothing but carry out a disruptive role which has rendered enormous assistance to the fascist enemies of the workers and peasants. A role which, the more it is analysed, the more terrible it is in the betrayal not only of the socialists, trade unionists, and Communists, but even of their own rank and file, who, particularly in the Asturias events, fought side by side with the rest of their fellow workers.

This year the repressive measures have increased month by month. In the first three months of this year 1,500 workers were jailed, and their sentences amounted to over 3,500 years. This gives some idea of the character of the reaction that the comrades had been fighting against. And still it failed to damp down the anti-fascist movement, and when the *Austrian* events took place they had perhaps the most important repercussion in Spain of any European country, and led to an enormous development in anti-fascist activity, at the same time as it encouraged the fascists in Spain itself to go forward to try to consolidate their rule.

There is an interesting parallel between the fight of the Spanish workers and our fight here against fascism. On April 20, 1934, the fascists staged a big demonstration in *Madrid*, exactly like the Hyde Park demonstration on September 9 in this country. The Communist Party in Spain issued a call for a one-day general strike, particularly in Madrid, in order to register the opposition of the Spanish workers to fascism. Just as the labour leaders here said "Don't go to Hyde Park, stay at home," so the Spanish labour leaders said "Don't provoke the fascists, it will only encourage them." And in spite of that (and this was the danger signal to the fascist leaders) the general strike was a splendid success, and the fascist march was a fiasco, and from that victory the whole militant working-class movement and the peasants gained enormous encouragement.

Since then there has been a steady upward impetus which received a further drive forward in August of this year, when at the socialist party conference in Asturias the motion for united front with the Communists was carried by 65 votes to 9. From this we had a strengthening of the *Workers' Alliance*, uniting on the basis of common action every section of the Spanish working-class movement. It represented a tremendous achievement because there is no country in Europe where the working-class movement is so split as in Spain, and the formation of this *Workers' Alliance* movement represented a very important step forward for all who participated in it.

The cause of this last gigantic struggle in Spain was that the existing government desired to establish in Spain a complete fascist dictatorship on the lines existing in Italy, Germany, and Austria. The masses understood this, and they therefore prepared their resistance. Now we all know of the wonderful struggle that has been put up. We know particularly the magnificent struggle of the miners of the *Asturias district*, and the iron and steel workers of the *Bilbao* area, and it was in that northern part of Spain that most of the fighting took place. It is already clear from the documents which are being published from the English press and from the French press which is carrying great information about Spain, that the Spanish events of October represent the highest point of the revolutionary struggle since the October days of the Russian revolution in 1917.

If the Spanish workers and peasants had been successful it would have altered the whole of the entire international situation. We would have seen the same attempts at intervention on behalf of the British and French governments against the successful Spanish revolution as we saw in the course of the Russian Revolution, because French and British capital is very largely invested there, and because the iron ore which is one of the principal industrial exports is so vital for the armament firms both here and in France, and therefore we can be quite sure that in spite of the so-called declarations of neutrality, both the French and British governments were not merely keeping a watchful eye on the Spanish situation, they would also be assuring the Spanish government of all forms of material help if their own resources failed to crush that uprising.

It has not been successful. It has been temporarily defeated, not because of the superior military technique of the Spanish govern-

ment, not because of the superior military forces and the way they used the colonial and other troops. The defeat has been brought about because of the disunity that existed in the ranks of the working class. I would like to read this extract from the Madrid correspondent of "The Times" which he wrote on November 3:—

"It may even be doubted whether the Lerroux government would have gained the upper hand if the proletariat of Andalusia, Valencia, Estremadura, and Aragon had been able to come out in force simultaneously with Catalonia and Asturias, or if the full strength of anarcho-syndicalism in Catalonia had broken loose."

"It will only be a question of time, however, for Marxism to reorganise."

In spite of the fact that the workers were badly armed, that they were isolated from most of the other important parts of Spain, it is a historical fact that we shall read about for many years to come that for 14 days the miners of Asturias established local Soviets, that for 14 days the Red Flag flew triumphant in Asturias. That all the military forces and technique for that period could not crush that rising, and even the English capitalists tell us that it could not have been crushed if the rising had been general, and there had not been that disunity that existed in the ranks of the Spanish workers and peasants as a whole.

The important lesson for us to draw is that we must build up our energies in order to build up a united fighting movement against fascism at home. The character of the Soviet Decrees that were issued by the Soviets in Asturias are not only remarkable because they called for no violence, looting, etc., but because for the first time in Spain there was unfolded a *programme of action* showing what it was going to do, which will be the inspiration of millions of Spanish workers for days to come, and that will have an enormous effect upon them, to hasten the time that these Soviet Decrees shall become part and parcel of the Soviet life of millions of Spanish workers and peasants.

Spain hitherto has not been a country where the *women* have taken part in the struggle in the same organised way as the women of Germany and England have done in the past. But now the women have not merely taken their place with the men, but were even in the streets, fighting and assisting in every way possible, in order to try to achieve this common victory.

This was the situation when the *Communist International* made an appeal to the Second International for joint action. A delegation of the Communist International met a delegation of the Second International. The Second International representatives stated that they were not empowered to come to any agreement, but that they would report the matter to the full meeting of their Executive, due to take place on November 13 and 14. They have now been meeting in Paris for two days. Let us face the issue. First, the refusal to take part in immediate action was simply assisting the Spanish fascist reactionaries in their endeavours to crush the Spanish workers. Secondly, it was striking a blow against this passionate desire for working-class unity which is now the coming issue in every country in the world.

Why are the Second International so long in making a decision? Because of Britain. The *British Labour party* and its delegation, who are now in Paris, together with the Scandinavian leaders of the Labour party there, will split the Second International from top to bottom rather than come to any understanding with the Communist International regarding joint action. Why is that? Because in the Scandinavian countries and in Britain the movement to bring mass pressure to bear on the labour leaders is not yet strong enough, that it is only in its infancy, but we have not yet brought in the millions of organised workers deep enough in the factories and trade unions, and we must have the perspective that if we can force the National government to do things as we have forced them to do during the last year, we can force the Labour party leadership also to do things. And therefore in every local Labour party, in every trade union branch, in every place where workers are meeting, we should be passing resolutions insisting that the labour leaders in this country agree to united front action at home and abroad.

Because unless we do this, I quite frankly have the view that the working-class movement is in serious danger, and that the approach to every political question to-day has to be made from that angle. United action alone can bring victory. This is what is written in Germany, Austria, Spain. Written in the blood of the workers, written now in the concentration camps, now in the most

appalling suffering modern civilisation has ever seen. Lack of unity has led to the temporary triumph of fascism. Where any sort of unity has been established on a mass basis, then the advance of fascism has been stemmed as it has in France. There it is not only a question of having prevented an open fascist government coming into power in France this last week, but it is a question where on the economic field the French employers have been forced to give more concessions to the French working class since the Communist Party and the socialist party made a united front against fascism.

The workers of the world rescued Dimitrov twelve months ago. The workers of the world can to-day exert their pressure in Spain if only the movement is big and militant enough.

What are our immediate tasks?

First to demand the release of all working-class prisoners; that freedom of the trade unions to carry on with their work be granted, as well as freedom to all other working-class organisations; the end of the courts-martial and the firing squads.

We can do it in every town where there is a Spanish Consulate. It should be made the centre of unceasing activity. In every part of the country where a Spanish ship is coming in, we should be greeting the sailors, sending greetings to the workers, giving them fraternal greetings, giving them duplicated leaflets and telling them what we are prepared to do in the way of practical assistance.

We must get this movement for the food ship going on a much wider basis.

Another glorious page has been written in the struggle of the working-class movement. Five thousand who have fallen have not fallen in vain. Everybody knows that Austria was a challenge and that whilst thousands died in Austria in February, their very death has enormously strengthened and quickened the anti-fascist fight and movement of every country all over the world. We have a duty to those who are left behind, to those in Spain, we have the duty of common international solidarity. Let us send an armada of food ships to Spain. They will not merely be taking food, they will be taking the practical symbols of international working-class solidarity. This is what this meeting was called for. Called in a hurry, this meeting is a magnificent tribute to the solidarity of the workers.

I will conclude by asking every one of us here to see that this is not merely another pious meeting, but that it will be a meeting that will give a new impetus to the development of the united front in Britain and of such a campaign on behalf of the Spanish workers that long before Christmas the first ship can leave the London Docks, and when it leaves, let it leave with thousands of us lined up on the quay side. Let it be the ship that leaves London to the strains of the International, because one day it will be the International that will unite the human race in the struggle against fascism and war and in our efforts to build up socialism in every country in the world.

## The United Front in Britain

By R. Bishop (London)

At the Southport Conference of the *Labour Party*, the struggle of the Spanish workers was "welcomed" as evidence that "the workers' organisations are prepared to resist the threatened attempt to establish a Fascist regime."

It was omitted to mention the fact that in *Spain* the heroic resistance of the workers had only been made possible by the broadest united front between Communist and Socialist organisations, such a united front as the Labour Party chieftains had done their damnedest to prevent maturing in Great Britain.

At Southport, and at the twin gathering of the Trades Union Congress, the united front was outlawed with bell, book and candle. All those who fraternised in any way with united front bodies were warned of the consequences of their actions—excommunication and exile to outer darkness.

No sooner were the conferences out of the way than the officials of the reformist labour movement drafted their circulars to trade union executives, to local Labour Parties, to trades Councils and similar organisations, instructing them that (as far as trades councils and Labour Parties were concerned) no Communist must be admitted to membership or as a delegate, nor must any person suspected of association with united front bodies, and (as far as the trade unions were concerned) the rules must be altered to prevent such persons being elected to hold any official position.

Those leading labourites who had participated in the work