

Azaña and other republicans, in May, to fight for amnesty. Lerroix himself now retreated, reprieving Pena and 18 other condemned socialists, on March 29; when Gil Robles retaliated by driving his cabinet out of office, Lerroix was named Premier again by Zamora and dissolved the Cortes for a month in which the Radicals ruled alone; on May 4, Lerroix again formed a cabinet with clerical-fascists, this time with Gil Robles himself as Minister of War, but May Day had already made clear the turn of the tide. We now know that Gil Robles then took over the War Ministry for the purpose of preparing the army, arms depots and secret emplacements around Madrid, for the struggle which is now waging, and therefore knew as well as anybody that he would soon be ousted.

Great anti-fascist rallies took place around the demand for dissolution of the Cortes and new elections. Meetings of a hundred thousand, of two hundred thousand, became regular occurrences. Within the working class, the sentiment for unity was the dominant note. Terribly discredited for their refusal to join the October revolt, the anarchists sought to apologize by pointing to the repressions they were undergoing at the time from Companys and asserted they were ready to join with socialists in the struggle for freedom; Angel Pestana led a split and organized the Syndicalist Party for participation in the coming elections; and even the C.N.T. leadership made it clear they would let their followers vote against the semi-fascist régime. With the tide, most of the bourgeois press turned against Gil Robles. It needed only the final touch of financial scandal involving the Lerroix government. The clerical-fascists had arrived at an impasse; they had to retreat.

They had no idea, however, of the extent of the tidal wave which was to sweep over them. They thought that the February elections would give the balance of power to center groups. So, too, thought Azaña who, eight days before the elections, sought a postponement, fearing the republican-workers' coalition had not had enough time for its propaganda. But the masses of peasants and workers, men and women, had their say. They swept the semi-fascist régime away. And not only at the polls. With the posting of the election returns, the masses came out on the streets. Within four days of the elections Azaña was again at the head of the government and again crying for peace, for the workers to go back to work, banishing any spirit of vengeance. Already he was repeating the phrases, and pursuing the policies of 1931-1933!

V.

THE PEOPLE'S FRONT GOVERNMENT AND ITS
SUPPORTERS: FEBRUARY 20 TO JULY 17, 1936

Who are the criminals and traitors responsible for making it possible that, five months after the February days in which the workers drove the clerical-fascists from the government and the streets, the reactionaries can lead the army and police in such a powerful counter-revolution?

Every serious communist and socialist wants to know the answer to this paramount question, for it has significance not only for Spain, and for France where a similar development is taking place, but for the policies of the proletariat throughout the world.

The answer is: the criminals and traitors are the "left" republican government and its supporters, the Communist Party and the reformist socialists.

When the February elections approached, the left wing socialists were opposed to a joint election ticket with the republicans, because they did not believe the republicans had any real following, and because of the hatred of the masses for these men: Companys' Catalan *Esquerra* had been guilty of treachery in the October revolt; Martinez Barrios' "Republican Union" was merely the remnant of Lerroix' Radicals, singing a new tune for the occasion; Azaña and his left republicans had repudiated the October revolt and admittedly were nothing but a handful of intellectuals. The left socialists were especially outraged when Prieto and the Communist Party agreed to give these republicans a majority in the joint election tickets: the tickets that carried gave the republicans 152 deputies to 116 for the workers' organizations!

But this was not the real crime. Voting blocs for purely electoral purposes are not a matter of principle for revolutionists, although extremely seldom are they warranted by tactical considerations. But such voting agreements must be limited *solely* to the exchange of votes. Before, during and after the election, the proletarian party continues to speak from its *own* platform, with its *own* program, explaining to the workers that it *cannot* arrive at any agreement on *program* with its temporary electoral allies. For a so-called "common program" could be, and was in fact,

only the program of the class enemy. This was the real crime, that the Spanish workers' organizations underwrote and guaranteed another charter for the bourgeoisie, necessarily identical with that of 1931-1933.

Prieto forgot that he had said: "In this period of perishing capitalism, the Spanish bourgeoisie could not even carry through the bourgeois-democratic revolution." The Communist Party, slavishly obeying the new international orientation, wiped out its 1931-1933 criticism of the impossibility of the bourgeoisie undertaking the democratic tasks of the revolution, and declared the coalition with the bourgeoisie would carry out these tasks!*

The People's Front program was a basically reactionary document:

1. *The agrarian question.* The program states: "The republicans do not accept the principle of the nationalization of the land and its free distribution to the peasants, solicited by the delegates of the Socialist Party." Instead, it promises stimulation of exports, credits, security of tenure for tenants and state purchase of estates for rental to peasants. In other words, the program of 1931, which had already been proven a cruel joke.

2. *Expansion of Spanish economy.* It promises a more efficient system of protective tariffs, institutions to guide industry (a department of commerce, labor, etc.), putting the treasury and the banks at the service of "national reconstruction, without slurring over the fact that such subtle things as credit cannot be forced outside of the sure field of profitable and remunerative effort. The republican parties do not accept the measures of nationalization of the banks proposed by the workers' parties." "Great plans" of public works. "The republicans do not accept the subsidy to unem-

* To inveigle the left socialists into the coalition, the Stalinists talked very "left": "The Communist Party knows the danger of Azaña just as well as the Socialists who collaborated with him when he was in power. They know that he is an enemy of the working class. . . . But they also know that the defeat of the CEDA (Gil Robles) would automatically bring with it a certain amount of relief from the repression, for a time at least." (*Inprecorr*, vol. 15, p. 762.) But did the Stalinists propose, then, that once Azaña was in power, the workers should struggle against him? On the contrary. This "enemy of the workers" would fulfill the basic democratic tasks: "land to the peasants, freedom to the oppressed nationalities," "free Morocco from imperialist oppression." (*Ibid*, p. 639.) In order to justify this open espousal of the Menshevik conception of the bourgeois revolution, the Stalinists had to blacken their own past: Garcia, at the Seventh Congress, denounced the party's leadership of 1931: "Instead of advancing slogans which corresponded to the moment, they expressed themselves against the republic concerning which there were very strong illusions among the masses of the people, and advanced the slogans, 'Down with the bourgeois republic,' 'Long live the Soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat.' With the expulsion of these renegades (in 1932), our Spanish party began to live and work in a communist manner." (*Ibid*, p. 1310.) But these slogans had been raised not only by the "renegades," but by the party itself, up to the beginning of 1935, by Ercoli, Pieck and the Comintern itself!

ployment (dole) solicited by the workers' delegation. They believe that the measures of agrarian policy and those which are to be carried out in industry, public works and, in sum, the whole plan of national reconstruction, will fulfill not only its own ends but also the essential task of absorbing unemployment." This, too, like 1931.

3. *The Church.* Only the section on education affects the clergy. The Republic "shall impel with the same rhythm as in the first years of the Republic the creation of primary schools. . . . Private education shall be subject to vigilance in the interest of culture analogous to that of the public schools." We know, from the story of 1931-1933, what rhythm that was!

4. *The army.* The only section that affects the army is that promising investigation and punishment of police abuses under the reaction and dismissal of commanding officers found guilty. Not even the lip-service to democratization of the army which was given in 1931! Thus, the officers' corps is left intact. And in the five months that followed, the People's Front government put off any investigation of the Asturian massacres or other crimes perpetrated by the officers' corps!

5. *The colonial and national questions.* Not a word in the Popular Front program. Morocco remained in the hands of the Foreign Legionnaires until they finally took it over completely on July 18. The semi-autonomous statutes of Catalonia were later restored, but further autonomy not granted. A less liberal arrangement for the Basques.

6. *Democratization of the state apparatus.* Mixed labor boards, Supreme Court, president, censorship, etc.—all were restored as in 1931. The program promised reorganization of the labor boards so that "the interested parties may acquire a consciousness of the impartiality of their decisions"! And, as a final slap in the face, "The republican parties do not accept the workers' control solicited by the socialist delegation."

For this mess of pottage the workers' leaders abdicated the class struggle against the bourgeois republic.

Think of it! The very program for the sake of which the Stalinists and socialists pledged to support the bourgeois republican government, made inevitable the onslaught of reaction. The economic foundations of reaction were left untouched, in land, industry, finance, the Church, the army, the State. The lower courts were hives of reaction; the labor press is filled, from February to July, with accounts of fascists caught red-handed and let free, and workers held on flimsy charges. On the day the counter-revolution

broke out, the prisons of Barcelona and Madrid were filled with thousands of political prisoners—workers, especially from the C.N.T., but also many from the U.G.T. The administrative bureaucracy was so rotten with reaction that it fell apart on July 18. The whole diplomatic and consular corps, with a handful of exceptions, went over to the fascists.

The government “impartially” imposed a rigid press censorship, modified martial law, prohibition of demonstrations and meetings unless authorized—and at every critical moment authorization was withdrawn. In the critical days after the assassinations of Captain Castillo and Calvo Sotelo, the working-class headquarters were ordered closed. The day before the fascist outbreak the labor press appeared with gaping white spaces where the government censorship had lifted out editorials and sections of articles warning against the *coup d'état*!

In the last three months before July 18, in desperate attempts to stop the strike movement, hundreds of strikers were arrested in batches, local general strikes declared illegal and socialist, communist, anarchist headquarters in the regions closed for weeks at a time. Three times in June the Madrid headquarters of the C.N.T. was closed and its leadership jailed.

The Stalinist and socialist leaders found it impossible to restrain the hatred of their following for this repetition of 1931-1933. Even that most vociferous supporter of the government, Jose Diaz, secretary of the Communist Party, had to admit:

“The government, which we are loyally supporting in the measure that it completes the pact of the Popular Front, is a government that is commencing to lose the confidence of the workers.” And then he adds this most significant admission: “And I say to the left republican government that its road is the wrong road of April 1931.” (*Mundo Obrero*, July 6, 1936.)

Thus, in the very moment of pleading with the Asturian miners not to break with the Popular Front, Jose Diaz had to admit that February-July 1936 was a repetition of the disaster of 1931-1933! When the counter-revolution broke out, the Stalinists asserted that they had not ceased throughout to urge upon the government the necessity of smashing reaction. We have already seen, however, that the Popular Front program protected reaction on every important front.

No urging can change the republican bourgeoisie. Such a coalition government, committed to maintenance of capitalism, must act as Azaña does both in 1931 and in 1936. The government behaves identically in both cases because its program is one of

building a Spanish economy under capitalism. That means: *it cannot touch the economic foundations of reaction because it does not want to destroy capitalism.* Azaña's basic program is put succinctly enough in two phrases soon after he came back to power: “No vengeance”; “Gil Robles too will one day be an Azañista.” This program is not dictated by psychological weakness but by Azaña's capitalist premises. His government has not been weak, it has made no “mistakes.” It has permitted the reactionaries full scope for arming and mobilizing because that is an inevitable consequence of the capitalist nature of the Popular Front program.

Trotsky has laid bare the anatomy of the People's Front government's relation to reaction:

“The officers' corps represents the guard of capital. Without this guard the bourgeoisie could not maintain itself for a single day. The selection of the individuals, their education and training make the officers, as a distinctive group, uncompromising enemies of socialism. That is how things stand in all bourgeois countries. . . . To eliminate four or five hundred reactionary agitators from the army means to leave everything basically as it was before. . . . It is necessary to replace the troops in the barracks commanded by the officers' caste with the people's militia, that is, with the democratic organization of the armed workers and peasants. There is no other solution. But such an army is incompatible with the domination of exploiters big and small. Can the republicans agree to such a measure? Not at all. The People's Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of capitulation to the bureaucracy and the officers. Such is the great lesson of the events in Spain, now being paid for with thousands of human lives.”

Just as socialist support of the government in 1933 made impossible the warding off of reaction, so communist-socialist support in 1936 opened the gates for the counter-revolution. But, workers may ask, could they not, while supporting the government, also mobilize the workers and peasants against their enemies? No! Two important examples must suffice:

1. In Albacete province, near Yeste, the peasants seized a big estate. On May 28, 1936, they were attacked by the Civil Guard, 23 peasants killed and 30 wounded. The Minister of Interior greeted this blood-bath by sending a telegram of congratulations to the Civil Guard. The press correctly termed the situation a repetition of that in the Casas Viejas massacre of 1933. The interpellations in the Cortes on June 5 were awaited with bated

breath . . . but the communist and socialist deputies proceeded to absolve the government of all responsibility. "We know that the government is not responsible for what has happened, and that it will take measures to prevent its repetition, but these measures must be taken speedily in the interests of the People's Front," said a socialist deputy." "The plot is clear," said the Stalinists:

"The landowners systematically drive the peasants to desperation and when the peasants take means to help themselves the landowners find venal civil guards prepared to shoot them down. The Civil Guard has carried out a blood-bath and the politicians of the right are doing their best to exploit this happening in order to destroy the People's Front. Politically, the Yeste affair was unsuccessful, but it can and will be repeated. . . . The Communist Party was right when it countered the political maneuver of the right by placing the affair on its real basis and demanding that action should be taken against the rich landowners. It pointed out that a struggle must be conducted above all against misery and starvation, which is increased by the caciques and landowners when they sabotage the orders of the government and the republic and refuse the masses bread. *The Communist Party did this by demanding that the agrarian reforms should be accelerated.*" (*Inprecorr*, No. 32, July 11, 1936, p. 859.)

In plain words: the struggle against the landowners should be confined to attempts to persuade the government to agrarian reform. Because further struggles of the peasantry, by themselves, in militant action, on the land, which is the only real form of action, lead to events like Yeste, which cause conflict between the masses and the government, and we must avoid breaking the People's Front. "Not breaking the People's Front" can mean only to limit the struggle to friendly persuasion in the arena of parliament!

2. The construction workers of Madrid, over 80,000 strong, went on strike, their main demand being a 36-hour week. The government ordered the workers to arbitrate; and decided on a 40-hour week. The U.G.T. and the communists agreed and instructed their followers to return to work. The C.N.T., however, refused to accept the government settlement and, what is more, the U.G.T. workers followed the anarchists. The Stalinists gave the following "reasons" for calling off the strike:

"It is a secret to nobody that after the 16th of February the fascist bosses introduced into their forms of struggle that of pushing the workers to declare conflicts, first, and to pro-

long their solution afterward, as far as necessary and possible, in order to drive the masses to desperation, which would take the form of sporadic acts without finality or effectiveness . . . but which would confront the workers with the government, because this is one of the conditions . . . for a *coup d'état*. . . . This attitude of the bosses . . . makes it necessary that the construction workers, even though not satisfied with the settlement, put an end to a situation the prolongation of which involves a grave danger for all workers. . . . The moment has arrived to know how to end the strike, without renouncing the possibility created by the settlement of continuing to discuss in the mixed labor board the problem of salaries." (*Mundo Obrero*, July 6.)

In plain words: the bosses insist on fighting you, but this brings you in conflict with the government—which means that the government has more in common with the bosses than with you!—and endangers the People's Front. Therefore: end the strike. But then, why start strikes? However, the logic of reformism does not always go that far, because then the workers would repudiate it altogether. The workers, alas, insist on striking. The duty of the Communist Party is to stop the strike before the government gets mad. . . .

This policy of confining the struggle against reaction to the parliamentary arena could mean only the eventual defeat of the masses. For it is a cardinal tenet of Marxism that *the mobilization of the masses can take place only through militant struggle*. Had the workers followed the Popular Front policy, we would today be mourning the downfall of the Spanish proletariat.