

LABOR ACTION

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Socialist Underground in Franco Spain Appeals for Aid to Heroic Barcelona Strike

AFL-CIO Parley Shows Power In Unity, Weakness in Program

By GORDON HASKELL

WASHINGTON, March 21—The official leadership of the American labor movement met here today to strengthen and consolidate its ranks for one of the greatest crises American labor has yet faced. The leaders of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the American Federation of Labor and the railroad brotherhoods were convened, some 700 strong, to dramatize the unity of the labor movement in its struggle against the government-business coalition which is in full power in Washington, and to initiate a program of action for the mobilization of the whole labor movement and all the common people in this struggle.

Two things stood out most strikingly in this conference. The first was the tremendous enthusiasm of the delegates for every mention of the unity of the labor movement in this struggle, and even greater enthusiasm for every expression of hope and determination that this unity shall be preserved and extended to all aspects of the labor movement.

The other striking aspect of the United Labor Conference was the contrast between the powerful and even passionate indictment of the whole government mobilization and stabilization program on the one hand, and the relative mildness and even feebleness of the program of action proposed to change it.

On March 20 the CIO officials

met separately from those of the AFL and Railway Labor Executives Association. In addition to the members of the United Labor Policy Committee, the AFL had invited the heads of state federations and central labor unions from all the major cities. The CIO had invited its regional directors, heads of state CIO councils and of major city councils.

MILITANT WORDS

On March 21 all these delegates met in the main ballroom of the Statler Hotel. The meeting had William Green and Philip Murray as co-chairmen. The morning was devoted to a series of speeches covering all aspects of the economy: rents and prices, wages and profits, taxes and government controls.

These speeches, delivered by the top leaders of the AFL and CIO went over ground already well known to the delegates. In some

cases they were full of interesting facts and figures (some of which will be printed in LABOR ACTION next week). But it was evident from the reaction of the audience that what moved them was not a factual recitation of the vast profits accumulated by the big corporations, or even of

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While the American press is speaking of the Barcelona general strike against Franco in the past tense, the organ of the Spanish socialist underground, just received here from abroad by air, appeals for international working-class aid to the fight of the Barcelona workers which was still continuing as of last Friday, March 16.

At this time the central districts of Spain's leading industrial city had quieted down, but in the factory districts and in the worker's areas the general strike in the plants was still going on, and Franco's police and civil guards were engaged in vicious repressions. Over 5000 had already been dragged to jail. There was talk of a new outbreak of a region-wide general strike to demand the release of the prisoners.

That is why the fighters in the Resistance against Franco address, to their brothers everywhere, the appeal for aid which is published below.

One thing is certain: whatever the immediate outcome in Barcelona, the fighting spirit of the whole Catalonian region has been aroused, and even if it is forced to lay low temporarily, the people have learned that they can overturn the rotten and shaky regime of the Falangists as soon as they unitedly rise to their full height. This totalitarianism, this tyranny, at least, can be broken tomorrow!

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AN APPEAL TO WORLD LABOR From the Socialist Underground in Barcelona

Workers of all countries:

The unanimous struggle of the people of Barcelona against streetcar company and against the Falangist authorities has ended victoriously. This great triumph was made possible by a mass movement of a scope rarely equalled in the history of the social struggles of Spain.

Barcelona—our Barcelona of the working class, our fighting Barcelona—has risen to its feet. The first victory has immediately given rise to new struggles. From an offensive against the streetcar company and the city council, the people have passed over to a widespread action against the servile press of the regime and against the high cost of living.

The movement has today entered its most important phase. The general strike, which was initiated this morning in the factories of Barcelona and Sans has been extended to the whole city and to the neighboring industrial population.

The hatred of the masses of people for the Fascist system which has shamefully oppressed them for many years has shown itself plainly. The whole immense repressive apparatus of the Franco regime revealed itself as powerless to hold back or repress a really sweeping movement.

The enthusiasm and fighting spirit of the Barcelona workers has surpassed the most optimistic expectations. Today everything is possible!

The struggle against the Fascist regime of hunger and misery has entered a new stage. In order to carry it to its conclusion, that is, to the downfall of the tyranny and the restoration of democratic liberties, the Spanish people need

the immediate, practical and effective assistance of the international working class.

From our heroic Barcelona, filled with confidence in our working class and in our people, we turn to the trade-union and political organizations of the working class of the world. We turn to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, to the CIO, to the AFL, to the British trade unions, to the International Workingmen's Association [Anarchist], to COMISCO [the International Socialist Commission], to the Yugoslav Communist Party, to the independent trade-union organizations, the Fourth International, the Socialist Parties, our brother parties of revolutionary socialism, everywhere.

The hour has struck for effective and decisive international action against the system which was built up by Hitler and Mussolini.

The Falangist traitors are trembling before the protest of the whole people.

Workers of all countries: Help us!

Demonstrate before the Francoist embassies and consulates!

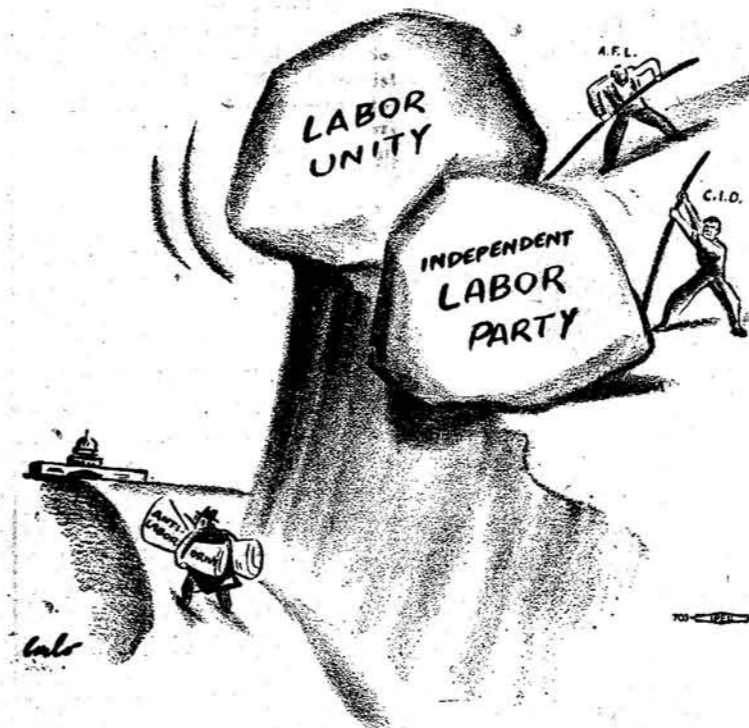
Prevent Franco from receiving financial aid! Demand that your government break with Franco!

Organize a boycott of all goods coming from Spain!

Long live international working-class solidarity!

Down with Francoism! Liberty for the people of Spain!

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the POUM
Barcelona, March 12, 1951



Socialist Underground Appeal—

(Continued from page 1)

In this situation the important thing for American workers to remember is that one of Franco's main cards right now is the financial aid and international face-lifting that he is getting from Washington. While the heroic people of the embattled Catalanian capital are sacrificing to throw the Franco regime off their backs, U. S. Ambassador Griffiths is toadying to it and dickering with it.

This is the significance of the appeal of the underground organization of the POUM in Barcelona.

It is addressed, by necessity, to the American labor movement above all—to the AFL and CIO whose leaders, at the founding congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, pledged themselves to prevent any aid by their government to the hated fascist dictatorship.

POUM'S INFLUENCE

The POUM (the initials, used as its common designation, stand for Workers Party of Marxist Unity) is the socialist movement in the Catalanian region. The other strong movement among the workers there is that of the Anarchists. The strength of the Stalinists is negligible; the Spanish Socialist Party is weak. Unlike the SP, the POUM is a left socialist movement; it holds to a Third Camp position on war and complete hostility to Stalinism.

The appeal of the Barcelona underground is printed in a special issue of its organ *La Batalla*, dated March 19. The copy we have received is printed on thin tissue-like paper, since it is one of those put out, by the central headquarters of the party in emigration in France, for smuggling in large quantities across the border into Spain. It is known that the POUM has perhaps the best apparatus of all the anti-Franco groups operating from France, for transportation across the border.

IN SPECIAL ISSUE

The special issue of *La Batalla* carries the following report in the center of the front page:

"All advices received to date confirm that the underground organization of the POUM actively participated in the struggle of the Barcelona people.

"Our comrades in the interior devoted enormous efforts to unify the action of the Resistance and to orient the movement which was unleashed in Barcelona toward a decisive struggle for the downfall of the Francoist regime. The party organization in emigration is proud of them. . . . You are not alone, comrades!"

The special issue features three dispatches from Barcelona: a lead article written before the general strike itself on "The Struggle Against the Streetcar Company"; a second article by the same correspondent on "Some Aspects of the Movement"; and a report, dated two days after

the outbreak of the strike, on the police repression and arrests in Barcelona. [The important sections of these articles will appear in translation in next week's LABOR ACTION—Ed.]. In addition, a front-page editorial proclaims "The Hour for Action." "We are at the beginning of the end" of the Franco regime, it says, and calls for the concentration of all anti-Franco forces against the fascists.

"Late reports inform us," it says, "that the underground organizations and the workers' groups formed spontaneously in the factories have formed a plan to launch a new general strike next Monday with the aim of preventing mass firings and of demanding the freeing of the prisoners."

Another editorial is headed, "Unity of Action!" and an article by Luis Soto draws "First Lessons" from the Barcelona movement. A notice calls for "General

Mobilization of the POUM," addressed "to all sections of the party in emigration." It urges that "Without more delay, our sections must get into contact with the sections of the other workers' and republican organizations and consider in common ways and means of bringing to bear urgently needed support to the fighters of Catalonia."

A LESSON

A cut reproduces a throwaway which "was widely distributed during the streetcar strike." It is simply a card with the words: "In Memory of Juan Moreno Ruiz—Five Years Old—Assassinated by the Spanish Police." There is no indication as to who issued it.

Here in the U. S. press, a dispatch by the N. Y. Times correspondent Sam Pope Brewer (March 19) contains the significant comment:

"If [the general strike] was dangerous for the regime because for the first time the people had discovered that when their indignation reached a certain point they could protest effectively."

He adds: "Barcelona's general strike was the most serious blow the Franco regime has had to face since the civil war ended nearly twelve years ago. It was seen as an indication that unless reforms are carried out real trouble may follow."

WIDE SUPPORT

"There was a certain deadly calm about this protest against the economic situation that gave it special importance. It indicated this was no abortive uprising staged by Communists, but a general and reasoned protest backed by almost the entire community."

"Individuals as varied as militant members of the Falange, foreign businessmen and proprietors of the factories affected by the strike have expressed their approval of the movement. . . .

"Foreign observers were astounded at the unanimity of the public response to the boycott [of the streetcars, prior to the strike]. The protest was sufficient to cause the return of the streetcar fares to the old level but already the public had discovered its strength."

When word circulated there was to be a general work stoppage March 12, everybody responded without knowing who had started the word around."

UP TO U. S.

The reference to support of the fight by some Falangists, businessman, etc., is by no means unbelievable, though it is not independently confirmed. It is well known that the deep-going rot and corruption of the Franco regime has affected every section of the population, and that there is widespread disgust and disaffection even in bourgeois circles. It was the workers, however, as always, who launched the struggle, are bearing the brunt of it, and alone can be depended on to carry it through.

Now that the Spanish workers have started the struggle for the "beginning of the end" of the Franco tyranny, will the labor leaders of this country's trade unions still maintain their attitude of resigned quiescence toward the shameful policy of Washington in propping up this shaky and disintegrating regime?

AFL-CIO Parley Shows--

(Continued from page 1)

the extent of the control of the whole mobilization program by big business.

What moved them was every expression of a fighting determination to resist the attack which the government and big business has mounted against the standard of living and the organization of the American workers, and to organize for a counter-offensive.

They cheered most loudly when Phil Murray said: "No, said these stabilizers, if a stable cost-of-living contract bumps into our rigid formula, the contract will have to be violated. The stabilizers well knew they were risking instability in half a dozen of our most vital industries; they knew that workers had fought for those contracts, and would fight, on the picket line if necessary, to keep them."

They cheered most loudly when Walter Reuther said, with reference to labor's relation to the mobilization setup: "We are not in a grievance committee working out a few grievances. We are negotiating an entire new contract."

DENOUNCE SETUP

The condemnation of the mobilization setup was extremely vigorous. Said William Green:

"Behold the picture! At the top of the structure sits the one-man czar of the defense program, Charles E. Wilson, ex-president of the giant General Electric Corporation. Beside him are two hand-picked corporation directors, to carry out his bidding. Beneath them are ranged lesser business executives, each one chosen from a particular industry to make defense policies affecting that industry.

"Thus, furniture price and production policies are made by men selected from big furniture companies, clothing prices and policies are taken care of by executives drawn from big clothing firms—and so right down the line. Believe me, these representatives of business are taking good care of their own businesses.

"Where does the public interest fit into this picture? Where does labor fit into the picture? No-where!"

Said Philip Murray: "These businessmen have shown an intent to force the workers of this country into a narrow, blind alley. On one side: a rigid, unbending wage formula. On the other side, the malicious, provocative provisions of the Taft-Hartley anti-labor law.

"Big business, in effect, is say-

ing: We are rich; if need be, we will toss you a penny or two to keep you from grumbling too loud. That is all we will give you.

"But if you aspire to some of the better things of life—more satisfactory pensions or medical care or welfare provisions, or improved working conditions, or a greater degree of security for yourself or your union—then big business has its answer.

"Its answer is a club—the Taft-Hartley Act.

"Were we wrong in getting excited? Should we have accepted this hangman's noose for our free labor movement? Should we have signed the terms of our own death warrant, instead of having fought as hard as we know how for a decent wage and disputes formula, for equality of sacrifice, for fair play in the mobilization program?"

TRUMAN GOES SCOT-FREE

Yet one note was lacking both from the platform and in the resolutions adopted in the afternoon. With two exceptions, to be noted below, no one referred to the specific role of President Truman and the responsibility of the Truman administration and the Democratic Party which it represents for the whole mess in Washington.

"And we are excited," said Murray, "because the direction of this defense mobilization program . . . has slipped into the hands of a clique of men who represent only one attitude: the attitude of the top executive offices of big business."

And "United Labor's Declaration of Principles," adopted unanimously at the afternoon session, states: "As the defense mobilization program has unfolded, we have come to the inescapable conclusions that the democratic principle of equality of sacrifice has been abandoned by the Congress and by those charged with the administration of the mobilization program."

In every case, both speakers and resolutions carefully avoided specific mention of Truman's role. They carefully avoided any hint that labor's alliance with the Democratic Party has ended in the present crisis.

At most they called for the administration to "exert more constructive and aggressive leadership," or complained that "the administration has not fought hard enough to protect the public interest." These leaders of labor acted as if they hope to defeat the unholy alliance which confronts them by not mentioning one of the partners in it.

There were two exceptions. The afternoon session on March 21 was given over to adoption of the Declaration of Principles and "United Labor's Program for Action." After each of these documents was read from the platform, "discussion" from the floor was opened. It was clear that the chairman was prepared to accept one speech from an AFL leader and one from a CIO man, with prearranged speakers.

MAZEY SPEAKS UP

But after these men were through, and before Murray could call the question on the Program for Action, Emil Mazey, secretary-treasurer of the United Automobile Workers (CIO), stood up in the front row and aggressively asked for the floor. Murray could hardly ignore him, especially as another man, Ed Wells of the Central Labor Union of Knoxville, Tennessee, was also demanding the floor quite loudly.

Mazey started by saying that he felt one phase of the problem had not been adequately covered. He pointed out that Truman had gained re-election in 1948 by stamping the country for a Fair Deal program. But, he said, the president has put forth a feeble effort for the Fair Deal, and has now appointed Wilson who is giving labor and the American people a raw deal. He has the responsibility to remove Wilson. He cannot escape his share of the responsibility for the confusion and injustice which exists in the whole mobilization setup. The only way in which we are going to get a Fair Deal is to go back to the country and to elect people from our own ranks to office who will represent us and not big business.

It seems reasonable to believe that Mazey did not make this speech as a result of a personal decision. It is much more likely that this was an attempt by the Reuther leadership in the UAW-CIO to make at least a gesture which would differentiate it from the rest of the labor leadership which was beating about the bush on this most vital question.

PROGRAM OF ACTION

Ed Wells stated that although the grievances of labor had been well presented, and the program of action was good as far as it goes, "I keep asking myself what can we do to effectuate this program. . . . We must work on the Truman administration. We must walk out of the Truman administration. . . . that we are ready to walk away from it, and eventually establish a democratic labor

party in this country to combat the Truman policy of holding hands with big business."

In the atmosphere of, and with the composition of the delegates to, this conference, Wells' speech—which furthermore, unfortunately sounded neither well-prepared nor delivered—received only a lukewarm hand.

The United Labor Conference went on record for a pretty good program for rent control, housing, price control, equitable taxation, and the like. Their program of action consists in good part of the usual idea of putting pressure on Congress by sending telegrams, lobbying, and developing a strong publicity campaign.

Perhaps the most important point in the program reads: "To help establish local consumer committees through which the people may be fully advised of developments in Washington, violations of price regulations may be publicized, and to cooperate with public-spirited merchants for local anti-inflation programs."

COMPROMISE COMING?

On balance, important as this demonstration of the solidarity of the labor movement is, it must be said that this first United Labor Conference fell far short of what the rank and file of labor have a right to expect from their leaders. Many of the speeches sounded militant and even uncompromising in their condemnation of the whole Washington setup. But no real political road out of the crisis was sought or found.

In fact, the failure to point the finger at the Truman administration, and the repeated insistence that what is most needed is to put labor on a basis of "equality" in the mobilization program, leave plenty of room for a compromise which will seek to smooth over the basic conflict.

It should be remembered that the men assembled in Washington were all top labor officials. No one from the factories was there. The conference met for such a short time that it could not but be a sounding-board for the United Labor Policy Committee rather than a real planning conference. And the most important fact of all was that no program was presented which can get the labor movement out of the blind alley—both the blind alley to which Murray referred, and the more important political blind alley of supporting the Democratic Party which condemns the great power of the fifteen million organized American workers to impotence as long as they stay in it.

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