

90

# DEMOCRACY OR REVOLUTION IN SPAIN?

By

**JOHAN MATTEO**

*(Speech as Fraternal Delegate from P.O.U.M. to the I.L.P. Annual Conference).*

JOHAN MATTEO DISCUSSES THE POPULAR FRONT, THE INFLUENCE OF SOVIET RUSSIA, AND THE ROLE OF BRITISH AND FRENCH IMPERIALISM IN SPAIN. HE EXPLAINS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST VIEW THAT "DEMOCRACY" IS THE ANSWER TO FASCISM AND THE P.O.U.M. VIEW THAT ONLY THE WORKERS' SOCIALIST REVOLUTION CAN DESTROY FASCISM.

**ONE PENNY**

INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY  
35, St. Bride Street, London, E.C.4

# DEMOCRACY OR REVOLUTION IN SPAIN?

By JOHAN MATTEO

(The Speech of the Fraternal Delegate from the Spanish Workers' Party of Marxist Unity to the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. at Glasgow, March 28, 1937)

COMRADES,—In the name of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unity (P.O.U.M.), I have to thank the I.L.P. for having invited its brother Party in Spain to take part in its Conference. The political and material help which you have given to the P.O.U.M. and to the Spanish Revolution is a sign of the revolutionary development of your Party. By your support you have affirmed your willingness to help the Spanish workers to fight Fascism and to achieve the Socialist Revolution.

Before giving you a detailed report of the internal and external situation of anti-Fascist Spain, we must pause to think for a moment of the secretary of our Party, Comrade Joaquim Maurin, who died carrying on the struggle, struck down by Fascist bullets. He leaves for ever the memory of a powerful and brave fighter, who laid down his life for the revolutionary cause. We must equally render homage to the names of the numerous band of militiamen of our Party, who have been killed on the different fronts, struggling for the triumph of the Socialist Revolution. Every one of the fighters of the P.O.U.M. is ready to die for the cause.

## HOW POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT FAILED

After eight months of bloody struggle against murderous Fascism, the workers and peasants of Spain see a new danger growing in front of their eyes, that of counter-revolution.

When they rose against the military rebellion on July 19, 1936, the workers of Spain knew that this Fascist insurrection was made possible only by the weakness and betrayal of the so-called democratic government of Republican Spain. The truth is that the so-called Popular Front Government—it was in fact a Liberal Capitalist Government—had permitted and even provoked the growth of Fascism. The Popular Front must bear the responsibility.

It is a great honour for our Party that it forecast the events of last July. By the mouth of our late comrade Maurin, the voice of the P.O.U.M. was heard in the Spanish Cortes (Parliament) on

June 16: "A situation leading to Fascism exists in the country; Fascism exists; it is attacking; it is throwing bombs and machine-gunning the workers."

Even on June 16 Maurin had already traced out the course of the struggle against Fascism. He showed that it must be met by Socialism. There was no other solution, he said, but the socialisation of the land, railways, heavy industry, mines and banks. "Moreover, in two months' time, it will be too late to put bonds on Fascism."

On July 17, 1936, two days before the Fascist insurrection, the *Batalla*, the official organ of the P.O.U.M., published a manifesto to the Spanish working class, exposing the Fascist offensive and the ineptitude of the Popular Front in face of the situation. The incapacity of the bourgeoisie to give any lead to the democratic revolution had been proved. Faced with the menace of a dictatorship, the P.O.U.M. was convinced that an alliance of revolutionary workers was the only instrument capable of beating Fascism and overthrowing Capitalism.

## REVOLUTION—AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In July the workers, arming themselves not only to fight Fascism, but to collectivise the factories and eliminate Fascism, proved that they understood that only the **Workers' Front** could achieve their emancipation, could achieve Socialism.

If we in Spain now find ourselves confronted with great problems—perhaps with great conflicts—it is because counter-revolution, masquerading as reformism, has for many months been trying to snatch from the hands of the workers what they won by their blood. The reformists would like the Spanish workers to forget that Fascism, at whose door the death of half a million workers in the civil war must be laid, is the ultimate expression of Capitalism. Reformism would like to throttle the working class forces and make them accept a bourgeois Republic, the rampart of the Capitalist oppressor. From day to day the struggle in Spain between revolution and counter-revolution, between Socialism and Capitalism, is becoming more acute.

This explains why the P.O.U.M. has become the object of so many national and international attacks. A revolutionary Marxist Party, raising proudly on high the flag of working class emancipation, fighting in every possible way and with all its energies for the advance of the Social Revolution, P.O.U.M. has become the focus-point of attack by both the counter-revolution and Fascism. To destroy the P.O.U.M. so that the bourgeois Republic may triumph—this is the real intention of Reformism.

But we can congratulate ourselves that the political activity of P.O.U.M. is attracting to itself the revolutionary workers of Spain just as it is attracting the sympathy and support of revolutionary organisations over the entire world.

The attacks made on P.O.U.M. by Spanish Stalinism and international Stalinism clearly reveal the rôle they are playing. From the beginning of the Revolution, P.O.U.M. has exposed the line of Moscow Communism which tries to make believe that the Spanish workers and peasants are struggling just to save the bourgeois Republic! Recently the Premier of the Central Government, Caballero, stated to a representative of the Paris *Temps*: "The Spanish Republic will certainly preserve the same political form which it had before the Revolution."

This attitude is impossible nonsense. Its result is evident. International Capitalism is not deceived, but the energetic aid which the international working class would have given to the revolution is reduced. The workers will give only a small measure of support to the maintenance of a merely bourgeois Republic.

It is necessary to-day to denounce this reformist attitude as a betrayal, as a crime against the Spanish working class.

### BRITISH IMPERIALISM AND SPAIN

The attitude of the Central Government of the Spanish Republic is in accordance with the political forms conceived and imposed by the powerful British-French-Russian *bloc*.

Whilst Franco was supported from the beginning by the opposing Fascist Berlin-Rome-Tokio *bloc*, the Spanish Government has received since November the open aid of the Soviet Government; but it is known that this aid was given on condition that the Revolution should be stopped and that a return should be made to the bourgeois Republic. Similar pressure is exercised through diplomatic channels.

The other day it became necessary for P.O.U.M. to denounce the deals being carried out between the Valencia Government and the Governments of France and Britain. The international press declared that the Spanish Government had sent a note to these two nations. There cannot be any doubt about this note, because the French and British Governments referred to it.

This note is of enormous importance. In exchange for the help of France and Britain in putting an end to foreign intervention, the Spanish Government offered to establish Franco-British zones of influence in Spanish Morocco and to follow the political line of France and Britain in the future.

Spain has thus been placed in this dilemma: If on the one hand Franco triumphs, Spain will be converted into a kind of vassal state of Hitler and Mussolini, and a battle-ground for the next war for which they are preparing; if, on the other hand, the war is ended by an armistice imposed from outside by London and Paris, Spain will become a sphere of British and French Imperialism.

### WHY FRANCE FAILED SPAIN

To understand the play of international politics, the attitude of the democratic Powers with regard to Spain must be examined.

France, under a Popular Front Government led by Socialists, was the first State to close the Spanish frontier. This was on August 8, 1936. The support given by the French workers in the way of war supplies had to be given secretly, and for that reason was very much reduced. Since February 20 the French-Spanish frontier has been closed to all traffic, and rigorously guarded by armies of mobile guards. At the same time, fourteen hundred kilometres (1,000 miles) of Portuguese frontier has been controlled by 130 British agents.

The attitude of France towards Spain, so far from being decided by the sympathy of one Popular Front Government with another Popular Front Government, has been determined by the necessity of maintaining the Franco-British alliance intact. Great Britain made up her mind at the very beginning—between the Revolution and Fascism in Spain, she prefers the latter. It is sufficient for us to recall that London big business is lined up behind Franco, and that official British delegates have been sent through Portugal to the Fascist general. British diplomacy offers Spain these alternatives: if the Spanish Republic refuses willingly to become the vassal state of Great Britain, either aid will be given to Franco to assure his triumph, coupled with measures to prevent Hitler and Mussolini from becoming dominant in Spanish spheres, or else the Spanish Government will be brought under the domination of British Imperialism through the arrangement of an armistice.

France and Russia, being attached to the *bloc* of so-called anti-Fascist Powers, can do nothing else but follow the British line.

Both alternatives place the Spanish Revolution in danger, and it is our duty to appeal for your aid.

We must expose the development of this external manoeuvre. Its successive phases are: non-intervention, the blockade of the Peninsula, an armistice, and then a theatrical plebiscite, legalising the Imperialistic colonisation of Spain.

## THE MILITARY POSITION

From a military point of view, anti-Fascist Spain is fighting against modern armaments in the hands of contingents of interventionist Italian and German troops, equipped with the most modern weapons. There is no parallel in history to this heroic struggle. For five months Madrid has been subject to a furious attack designed to surround it and to cut off its communications with Valencia and Barcelona. The Fascist mercenary troops have been held up before Madrid at the cost only of great sacrifices on the part of the international and Spanish working class fighters. It is necessary to point out that the military conduct of the war has been conditioned by numerous foreign stipulations.

At the time of the greatest difficulties in front of Madrid, the Government refused to follow the slogan of the P.O.U.M.: "Advance to the attack on every front!" This general offensive would have freed Madrid and would have beaten Fascism. But it was not realised, because the reformist Government refused to arm the revolutionary workers on the Aragon front. The military situation on the various Spanish fronts will not permit of a rapid victory by the anti-Fascist forces without new armaments—artillery, aeroplanes and tanks—and without, above all, revolutionary reorganisation of the anti-Fascist army.

External influences have had their internal repercussions. Since Soviet Russia intervened in October, 1936, Stalinist influence has helped to exclude the P.O.U.M. from the Catalonian Government, to confiscate the P.O.U.M. radio in Madrid, to suppress the *Combatiente Rojo* ("Red Fighter"), to suspend the *Batalla* (P.O.U.M. newspaper in Barcelona), and to carry out a certain number of counter-revolutionary measures, undertaken principally by the Catalan Government. The Stalinists have resisted the collectivisation and socialisation of enterprises and have tried to replace the revolutionary workers' police (control patrols) by the former well-known repressive bodies, the Civil Guards and Assault Guards.

Encouraged by the Valencian Government, the Catalonian Government has starved the Aragon army to the benefit of the General Headquarters. It is interesting to go into this question more deeply, for it clarifies the present motives behind the governmental crisis in Catalonia.

A few days after the Fascist rising, the Catalonian militiamen were the first to go out to meet the military Fascists on the roads to Aragon. Animated by revolutionary spirit, the organisers of these columns set out to substitute for the 4th Division of the past a Red Army, with a revolutionary spirit. But the militia in Aragon has received neither guns, machine-guns, aeroplanes, nor

munitions from the Valencian Government, nor even money to buy them. In this manner, after seven months of effort to build up a real Red Army, the reformists and Stalinists in Catalonia have triumphed and have placed the Aragon Division under the command of the General Staff, the same General Staff which bears the responsibility for the loss of Malaga.

## THE CRISIS IN CATALONIA

This is one reason, among many others, for the crisis in Catalonia. The C.N.T. (the Syndicalist Trades Unions—the largest of the workers' organisations), hesitating before the threats and the risk of breaking up the Popular Front, has made numerous concessions. On the one hand, these have permitted the advance of counter-revolution, but on the other, they have given rise to working class reaction against reformism.

After eight months, P.O.U.M. is still in the vanguard of the struggle for the Socialist Revolution and against the counter-revolution—counter-revolution styled reformism. Many of its pronouncements have been criticised, and have come under the suspicion of being sectarian. But just as it was in the right before the Fascist rebellion, the facts of recent happenings have entirely confirmed its deductions. Its force and foresight have proved that it follows the line of revolutionary Marxism and that its fighting principles are based on the class struggle and the fight to the death between Capitalism and the working class.

**The P.O.U.M. has sounded a warning against numerous measures which will lead to the return of bourgeois power when they are applied.** The P.O.U.M. stands for a Workers' Government on the basis of factory, peasant and soldier delegates. It is setting up the Revolutionary Workers' Front.

There already exists the Front of Young Revolutionaries, which has established a unity between the P.O.U.M. Youth Movement and the Anarchist Youth Movements of all Spain. This action has encouraged sections of the Anarchist Youth Movement to return to a revolutionary platform. Undoubtedly there will be established to-morrow an alliance between the C.N.T., F.A.I. (Syndicalists and Anarchists), and the P.O.U.M.

In the revolutionary struggle, the P.O.U.M. plays the part of an advance guard, because it is a fighting Party based on the doctrine of classes. It seeks a united front with the C.N.T., because this organisation, in spite of its absence of clarity, is a great revolutionary force which must be encouraged and guided, an organisation through which the young workers can be developed into the revolutionary workers they should be.

Although six months ago relations were strained between the

C.N.T., F.A.I. and the P.O.U.M., to-day they are becoming more intimate as they converge towards the same goal—the achievement of the Socialist Revolution.

## REFORMISM AND REVOLUTION

In spite of the enormous difficulties which confront the Spanish Revolution to-day, in spite of the possibility of even sterner struggles in the future, the P.O.U.M. holds to its revolutionary faith. The fact that certain groups of the Socialist Party in Madrid and Valencia are now protesting against propaganda directed from Moscow against the Revolution, confirms the P.O.U.M. in its fighting Socialist position.

At the present time Catalonia, Valencia, and Castile are in the middle of a political ferment. From day to day the difference between the reformist forces (of which the official Communists are the main support) and the revolutionary forces (represented by the P.O.U.M., the C.N.T., and F.A.I.) is being clearly defined. Reformism, striving to turn the Spanish Revolution into disastrous channels and to return to Capitalist domination, has not been able to chain Spain to the chariot wheel of London-Paris-Moscow. The workers are taking count of the menace which this political line means for their lives and interests. They are reacting and mobilising for the last fight against the bourgeois forces.

The P.O.U.M., with its fighters, the revolutionary working class, is ready for the combat against reformism. Our comrades of the I.L.P. may rest assured that the P.O.U.M. will not fail in its task. But it needs the material help of the international working class.

The Spanish Revolution needs the support of the working class of the whole world. It is to the revolutionary organisations of every country, particularly the I.L.P., that there falls the duty of mobilising every force to confront the perils which assail the Revolution in Spain.

**The working class has nothing in common with capitalist Governments. It is only the international revolutionary working class which will break the iron chains of international Capitalism which are out to fetter the Spanish working class.**

In thanking you for allowing our voice to be heard at your Conference, we appeal for your help, convinced that the whole Independent Labour Party, like the fighters of the P.O.U.M., will respond as one man.

**Comrades—I salute with you the triumph of the Socialist Revolution!**