

9468/12

SPAIN and the T.U.C.

● HARRY POLLITT

| d.
—



"Take care! Today it is us. Tomorrow it
will be you . . . Help us . . ."

Always read the
DAILY WORKER
for vital news on
the Trade Union
Movement

(Continued)

Order from your newspaper or
direct from the "Daily Worker,"
Nelson Place, E.C.4

(SEVENPENCE A WEEK Post Free)

Published by the
COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
36, King Street - Covent Garden
London - W.C.2

First printed 11/9/35. 20,000

printed by
Merrill Printing Co.
(T.O. straightaway)
Nelson Place, London E.C.4
London, E.C.4

Spain and the T.U.C.

HARRY POLLITT

At the Plymouth Trades Union Congress, on September 10th, a resolution in connection with the Spanish situation was brought forward by the General Council and adopted by an overwhelming majority on a card vote. This resolution in effect reaffirmed the policy of support for "neutrality" which had already been declared in the National Council of Labour's statement of August 26th.

The Congress resolution contained the following paragraph:—

"Congress repeats the warning that while the international agreements that have now been made may lessen international tension if they are loyally observed by all the Governments and their execution is effectively co-ordinated and supervised, the utmost vigilance is necessary to prevent those solemn engagements being utilized to injure the Spanish Government."

This is the vital point. The neutrality proposals, which have had the effect of preventing the Spanish Government from obtaining arms and planes which were necessary in, to the fascist attack, have already done incalculable injury to the Spanish Government and people, and the maintenance of this policy is doing further injury which may be irreparable not only to the Spanish people but to the peoples of all European democratic countries, including Britain. The maintenance of

200.0.10.14

this policy is menading democracy and peace throughout the world.

How "Neutrality" Began

The statement issued by the National Council of Labour on August 28th—which has now become the official policy of the Trades Union Congress—well puts the position from the standpoint of international law quite clearly:—

"It was clearly the right of the Spanish Government by rules of international law to obtain arms for its defence, but by the supply of arms to the rebels in clear breach of international law in circumstances which showed foreknowledge of their plans, Fascist Italy created a new and immediate danger of war. This danger was simultaneously aggravated by the adoption of a similar policy by Nazi Germany, which had already established a vast system of espionage, corruption, and intrigue in Spain. Fascist Portugal had aided and abetted the rebellion and its territory had been used as a base."

No one for a moment can dispute that these are the facts. It is not necessary now, at this stage, to enumerate the open violations of international law, from the very first stages of the rebellion, by Italy and Germany sending planes and military supplies of all kinds to assist the rebellion in Spain, and by Portugal in also sending supplies and in facilitating the transport of German and Italian war supplies to the rebels through its territory.

In the meanwhile, the French Government, many of whose members at first were definitely in favour of supporting the legal right of the Spanish Government to obtain the supplies it required to defeat the rebellion, finally decided to put forward a proposal to all European Powers to pledge themselves to neutrality as between the Spanish Government and the fascist rebels. There can be no doubt whatever that had the British Government given the French Government a definite undertaking of support for a policy of giving the Spanish Government its legal rights as against the rebels, the French decision would have been very different. But incident after incident had shown the French Government that the British Government was prepared to recognise the rebels and to restrict in every possible way the activities of the Spanish Government forces against the rebels.

740-2/674

In this connection it is necessary to refer to the policy of the British authorities at Gibraltar, subsequently backed up by the British Government in the House of Commons, a policy which in effect prevented the oil supplies at Gibraltar being made available to Spanish Government warships. It is also necessary to refer to the official calls made by British naval officers on the rebel headquarters in Seville and to the stoppage and detention of Government travelers by the British destroyer "Cypria" near Gibraltar. It is therefore not surprising that the French Government felt unable to take a firm stand on the international legal aspect of the situation, by which France would have been fully justified in giving official aid to the Spanish Government and allowing it to obtain all the war supplies it needed.

The French Government's proposal was issued to the leading European Powers on August 1st. All the Powers concerned, with the exception of Germany and Italy, immediately agreed to the proposal. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, however, in order to delay even any formal obligation to stop sending supplies, gave vague answers at first, and it was only three weeks after the proposal had been made by the French Government that Mussolini formally accepted non-intervention. Hitler gave his formal agreement a week later; and fascist Portugal gave a grudging acceptance a few days after that.

But as the French Government had put a stop on supplies to the Spanish Government as early as July 15th, and similar action had been taken by the British Government, for at least five weeks before the neutrality proposal became formally binding on the fascist countries the Spanish Government had been refused its right as a legal government to buy arms, while the fascist rebels were being equipped with the most modern instruments of war on an ever-increasing scale.

The tragic position to-day is that even in the event of the fascist countries observing their undertakings—an extremely unlikely event—the Spanish Government, which has an overwhelming majority of the people behind it, is unable to arm them even with rifles in sufficient numbers, and is very seriously inferior to the rebels in its resources of planes, tanks and guns and ammunition.

The Fascist Countries Are Not Neutral!

There is not the slightest reason to believe that the fascist governments of Italy and Germany, which have so repeatedly and wantonly violated their international obligations, will observe the new obligation of neutrality. Correspondents of every paper report that Italian and German pilots are flying planes in the service of the Spanish rebels, and that Italian and German officers are in evidence at all rebel headquarters.

Speaking at Manchester on September 6, Ellen Wilkinson said:—

"I was in Lisbon at the end of August, and I saw three great German ships flying the Swastika and two ships flying the Italian flag. They were unloading all day. . . . As to the destination of the munitions—well, it was obvious. There was no war in Portugal."

Viscount Churchill, in a telegram from Spain, published in the press of September 9, reported:—

"I have returned from the front where I myself saw the bodies of women and children killed by bombs which have been identified as German and which were dropped from a German plane. There are constant proofs that the Italians and the Germans are steadily supplying the rebels with munitions and services."

The Spanish fascist rebellion is part of a much wider fascist aggression; the rebellion would not have started, nor could it have continued for more than a few days, but for Italian and German organisation and material aid. It is essentially a fascist attack on democracy in Spain, as a step towards further aggression. Is it likely that the Governments of Italy and Germany, which planned and organised the rebellion and helped it in every way possible, will now abandon support for it when their own military experts are directing it?

Of course not. And our British "governess" would do the same. I have not forgotten the period of British intervention in Russia, when after repeated denials it was at last admitted that enormous quantities of munitions had been sent by Winston Churchill to help the counter-revolutionaries.

The attitude of the German, Italian and Portuguese Governments to the Committee which is supposed to be going to "control" the neutrality agreement is a good enough in-

decision of what they are doing. Portugal even refused to attend the first meeting. The German and Italian delegates had to go back "to consult their governments." The Committee adjourned without taking a single practical step to control anything. The comments in the press are revealing. They say that if any government protests that the neutrality agreement has been broken, there will then have to be an inquiry. No doubt it will be like the inquiry of the League of Nations into Italy's occupation of the Wal-Wal area in Abyssinia—an inquiry which dragged on for months and settled nothing, but served as a cover for continuous troop and armament shipments from Italy to Ethiopia and Somaliland.

The fact is that Germany and Italy are far too vitally interested in a fascist victory in Spain for them to observe the neutrality agreement.

And I maintain that we, the working class of Britain and all who stand for democracy and peace, are far too interested in the victory of the Spanish Government for us to allow ourselves to be cheated as to what the real position is.

The Argument That Help for the Spanish People Means War

In his speech to the Trades Union Congress in support of the neutrality policy, Carrine used as his main argument that any other course would lead to war with the fascist countries.

This is the same argument that was used to prevent decisive action, such as oil sanctions or the closing of the Suez Canal, being taken to stop Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia. And with what result? That because effective action against the law-breaker was not taken then, Mussolini moves on to the next stage of his aggressive plans, and instigates and aids the fascist rebellion in Spain. And at this stage he has Hitler Germany with him. And fascist Portugal.

To refuse to take decisive action now, when Italy, Germany and Portugal, in violation of international law, are organising and aiding rebellion against a democratic government which is a member of the League of Nations, is not avoiding the risk of war, but very definitely encouraging Mussolini and Hitler to further acts of aggression, which they will be all the more ready

to make when they have a fascist Spain dominating the Mediterranean and completely subject to their influence.

Bevin's speech in support of neutrality contained the following:—

"We have been on the retreat as democratic powers. We have weakened our prestige. There has been an assumption that we would never defend ourselves. That is not true, Fascism is not going to saddle itself on the whole earth either by intrigue or the methods employed in Spain."

This is all very well, but what does it boil down to? That fascism is steadily developing its aggressive plans, and that we reply: "All right, go ahead now, but look out—some day we will hit back."

Is this the attitude to be taken to a criminal who is steadily carrying on robbery with violence and building up a network of outposts from which he can fight the police if ever they do make up their minds to tackle him? Do we say to such a criminal: "All right, go ahead, but look out, when you attack the Bank of England we really will have to stop you"? And do we then justify such an attitude by saying that if we went to arrest him now it might lead to a fight?

It is this line of argument in international affairs which has led to the present situation. And if this line is maintained, it means fascism dominating Europe and "saddling itself on the whole world." It means inevitable war, but with fascism in a much stronger position than it is in to-day.

Citrine made great play with the argument that "the only way to deal with a bully was by superior force," and that the only way to restrain Italy and Germany from supplying arms to the rebels was "to place a naval blockade round the coast of Spain."

That, I think, is true. And I believe that had the League of Nations been summoned and asked to declare that the supply of arms to the rebels was a violation of international law and constituted a threat to peace, an international blockade of the rebel ports could and should have been imposed.

But Citrine's argument is not directed to the point at issue. The point at issue is not, at this moment, whether we should

restrain Italy, Germany and Portugal from violating international law, but whether fear of an attack by the fascist Powers should restrain us from giving the Spanish Government the rights of international law.

And I maintain that to give the Spanish Government these rights, to allow it to purchase what it needs to defeat the fascist rebels, is not a challenge to peace, but the only way of safeguarding peace.

If Citrine holds the view that the fascist Powers would then impose a blockade of the ports held by the Spanish Government, capture our ships and drive off the British navy, then he is only logical in saying that to allow the Spanish Government to buy supplies would lead to war. But no one in his senses can hold such a view. And if such a view were correct, it would only show the absolute determination of Hitler and Mussolini to make everything on a fascist victory in Spain. And if we are not strong enough to withstand an attack now, would we be after a fascist Spain had been established?

But of course Hitler and Mussolini would not dare to impose such a blockade: they know too well what the result would be.

Let us then take the second line of argument: that with both the fascist Powers helping the rebels, and the democratic Powers allowing the Spanish Government to obtain its needs, there would be such a pouring of arms into Spain that it would actually be the beginning of an international war.

This line of argument entirely leaves out of account the fact that the fascist Powers have already poured vast quantities of arms into Spain, and that the Spanish Government lacks arms to meet the fascist arms. The overwhelming majority of the Spanish people is behind the Government; the rebels have very limited resources of the officer caste, Foreign Legion and Moors. Properly equipped Government forces could end the rebellion very quickly. And only the end of the rebellion by a victory of the Spanish Government can remove the imminent danger of war.

Citrine said in his speech that the Labour deputation a month ago had told Mr. Eden: "You cannot trust the word of Mussolini or Hitler, irrespective of what they may sign." It should therefore be clear enough that Italy, Germany and Portugal are

simply using the neutrality agreement in order to get further time to supply the rebels while the democratic countries hold up supplies for the Spanish Government. Of course it will be denied that such supplies are being sent; the fascist Powers will sabotage and delay any Commission of Inquiry; and in the meantime tens of thousands of the Spanish people will be slaughtered by German and Italian munitions, and the whole country reduced to economic chaos, with the possibility of the Government's forces being smashed by superior armaments.

To stop this whole process by letting the Spanish Government have war materials to defeat the rebels does not mean war; it safeguards peace.

The Position of the Blum Government in France

A further point made by Citrine was that "the revolt against the Government policy in France seemed to be petering out." This is not true. The Communist Party of France has been conducting a vigorous campaign against the Blum Government's policy of neutrality, and urging it to allow the Spanish Government to buy what it needs. Immense demonstrations have been held, and on the Monday when the British T.U.C. met, 300,000 engineers in the Paris district carried out a one-hour protest strike against the Government's policy. On the Wednesday—the day before the T.U.C. debate on Spain—the C.G.T., the French T.U.C., after two days of discussion on Spain, passed a resolution which, while reaffirming loyalty to the People's Front and the Blum Government, asked it

"to reconsider, in agreement with the British Government and the other democratic countries, the whole policy of neutrality."

The Government was also asked to take the necessary steps for calling without delay a meeting of the League of Nations Council,

"whose duty it is to proclaim international right as it stands from the interpretation of the Pact and to call on all the Governments to strictly observe international rights."

This line, as Jouhaux, leader of the French C.G.T. put it, is

expressed "in terms which showed respect to the constitutional forms of the country"; but it is none the less a line which is essentially different from the line which the General Council succeeded in getting the British T.U.C. to adopt. The British line is neutrality, and warning that if neutrality is not respected by the fascist governments it may injure the Spanish Government. The French T.U.C. line is to ask their Government to reconsider—i.e., abandon—neutrality, and to call the League of Nations in order that the violation of international law by the fascist countries may be shown up, and the right of the democratic countries to let the Spanish Government buy what it needs may be declared to the world.

In this connection, Citrine tried to discredit the French Communist Party for declaring that although they were agitating for the abandonment of neutrality, they would not vote against the Blum Government in the French Parliament; Citrine asked: "Does that not show the hollowness of the situation?" It does nothing of the sort. Not only the Communist Party, but the Trade Unions and a not inconsiderable section of the French Socialist Party are all agitating for the abandonment of neutrality, and are trying to get the Blum Government to change its policy. But neither the Communist Party, nor the Trade Unions, nor the section of the Socialist Party referred to, want to throw out the Government and have a Right-wing government instead. The assumption that to agitate for a change of policy is inconsistent with general support of a government means that the person who makes this assumption does not believe that the rank and file of the movement have any rights—they're only to do what they are told, not to tell the leaders what to do.

Nor is it true, as Bevin alleged, that the British Communists "said scarcely a word about intervention till the National Council of Labour made its decision, and then the Communists thought it was a ground of attack." As early as July 25th, in an appeal I issued on behalf of my Party, I asked the Labour Movement to demand that the British Government supply the Spanish warships and planes with the oil they needed—this was the immediate issue at that time. A manifesto issued on August 1st demanded that the British Government supply arms and medical requirements for the Spanish Government, and

also demanded the calling of the League of Nations Council, which has now been put forward by the French T.A.C. The resolution passed at the Hyde Park demonstration on August 29th, organised by the Communist Party, included in the demands:

"every facility and help to the legal Spanish Government to obtain the aeroplanes and arms it requires to defend democracy."

In every article, in every speech, in every resolution and manifesto of the Communist Party, this demand has been repeated. The "Daily Worker" of August 29th—the day when the National Council of Labour was to meet and decide its policy—contained a report of my speech at Wigan on the 23rd, in which I said that it was the duty of the National Council of Labour to present an ultimatum to the Baldwin Government to force it to give the legal Spanish Government what it needed.

Berrin's statement is therefore not true, and he knows it perfectly well; but this false statement, like the other false statements made by Currie, was deliberately used in order to make any questioning of neutrality into a "Communist plot."

Another of Currie's statements was that the French Communist Party

"had never once referred to the fact that the Soviet Government had accepted the agreement" (on neutrality).

This also is not true. Apart from innumerable speeches by the leaders of the French Party, I have in front of me the "Humanité," the French Party's paper, of September 8th. A special article calls attention to the fact that the fascist press has been asking why the French Party is against neutrality, when the Soviet Government has accepted it. The article states the reasons for the Soviet Government's acceptance quite clearly: that when the Blum Government made its proposal, the Soviet Government had two alternatives, to accept it or reject it; had it rejected it, this would not only have encouraged the fascist press to exploit the refusal, but would have meant the alienation of the French Government from the Soviet Government. But if the pressure of the French workers and supporters of democracy, responding to the agitation of the French Com-

76/10. 62908
nunist Party, can influence the French Government to change its policy, then without a doubt the Soviet Government will join in.

These false statements by Ciriac and Bevin are important because, not for the first time, they used them to cover up their own wrong policy by making false charges against the Communist Party and the Soviet Government.

Another argument in favour of neutrality is the allegation that any other course would split the People's Front in France, bring down the Blum Government and open the way to fascism in France.

There could hardly be any more grotesque caricature of the real position. The great mass demonstrations throughout France, at which the slogan: "Planes for Spain!" dominates the proceedings, are a proof that the French workers are profoundly discontented with the policy of neutrality. It is this loss of confidence in the Government that will weaken the People's Front and open the way to fascism. The workers, and large numbers of the Radicals as well, understand perfectly well that a fascist victory in Spain will be immediately followed by a fascist rebellion in France—a rebellion that will be aided from all of France's frontiers. And the French people cannot understand why the Blum Government is allowing such a situation to arise.

Within the British Labour Movement, the London Trades Council has adopted a resolution calling on the British Government to allow the Spanish Government to obtain the war supplies it needs. In an article in "Forward" (September 12), Herbert Morrison definitely declares against neutrality:

"I cannot reconcile myself to this 'neutrality' business. It is unjust, no unfair to a people heroically fighting against heavy and cruel odds."

At Sheffield on September 13, Sir Charles Trevelyan also spoke against neutrality:

"I regard it at this moment as a disaster that the Labour Movement should have fallen into the trap of indifference prepared by the British Government."

I am firmly convinced that these statements represent the views of the British workers far more accurately than the decision of the Trades Union Congress.

British Labour Holds the Key

There is no doubt whatever in my mind that the key to the situation is in the hands of the British Labour Movement, with the support of all friends of democracy and peace in Britain.

If immediate and overwhelming pressure is put on the British Government, joint help for the Spanish people from Britain, France and the Soviet Union can save Spain from fascism and Europe from war.

Is all Spain to become one vast Badajoz because we are not prepared to do our duty?

Ten thousand times we have sung "The people's flag is deepest red . . ." Never was it so red and sacred as now, when it is dyed in the blood of thousands of Spanish working men and women who have given their all in its defence.

The Spanish people are asking for help. The Spanish Government is now a real government of the People's Front, and is headed by Largo Caballero, a Socialist and militant trade unionist. Republicans are in the Government as well as Communists and Socialists. This Government sent a delegation to Paris, which in the course of a statement to press representatives declared:

"We demand that the declaration of neutrality—which we regard as being incompatible with the rules of international law—should not be made, as it is at present, a punitive measure against the legal government, which is refused any aid whatever, whilst certain countries are giving the rebels constant and open help. These actual and effective sanctions against the legal order in Spain are something new, and both dangerous and dishonourable. We are certain that public opinion shares this view."

It is because I feel that this appeal of the Spanish Government and people cannot be left unanswered, whether under the false pretext of fear of war or fear of creating difficulties for the French Government or any other pretext, that I ask every man and woman in the Labour Movement of Britain, every sincere

friend of democracy and peace, not to be misled by side issues, but to look squarely at the situation as it is.

With their immense preponderance of arms and planes supplied largely by the fascist Powers, the rebels in Spain have wrought incalculable sufferings on the Spanish people, and are menacing the whole existence of democracy in Spain. A fascist victory in Spain will plunge the world into war, in which democratic France will be surrounded by fascist States, and will be disrupted by a Hitler-controlled fascist movement within France itself. It is an absolute illusion to believe that Britain can "keep out of it."

But the mass of the people of Spain are with the Government. Properly armed and equipped, the Government forces could overwhelm the rebels, in spite of their assistance from abroad. The policy of neutrality keeps the Government forces unarmed in face of the highly armed fascist rebels. Is it not obvious that in the interests of the people of Spain, of the people of France, of the people of Britain, this neutrality which injures only the Spanish Government must be ended?

I therefore ask every Trade Unionist, every Co-operator, every member of the Labour Party, every member of the Liberal Party and of every organisation which stands for peace and democracy, to bring the utmost pressure on their organisation to secure:

A nation-wide campaign, carried out with the co-operation of every organisation and person in Britain who has peace and democracy at heart, to force the British Government to give the legal Spanish Government the right to buy the arms and planes and munitions it requires to defeat the fascist rebels.

I believe that the following are further practical measures to be taken:—

(1) The sending of official Trade Union and other delegations to Madrid, as an indication of British support to the Caballero Government.

(2) The organisation through the Co-operative Societies of a regular service of food ships for Spain.

(3) The sending of official Trade Union and other delegations to take part in all demonstrations of the People's Front in

France, as an expression of British and French solidarity in the fight against fascism.

(4) The strengthening of the British Medical Unit already in Spain, and the sending of skilled mechanics and technical experts to help the Spanish Government.

(5) The immediate convening of Parliament and of the League of Nations, in order to take a definite stand against the fascist violations of international law, which are endangering peace.

(6) Arrangements for the care, until the fascist rebellion has been crushed, of all orphaned children who can be brought to Britain from Spain.

(7) Really nation-wide financial assistance for the Spanish people, with a levy on all organized workers, to be collected through the shop stewards and trade union branches.

An effective campaign on these lines will, even at this late hour, bring practical help to the Spanish people, and immensely strengthen the Labour Movement and all democratic forces in Britain.

It will save the Blum Government and France from fascism.

It will be a real contribution towards our Spanish comrades who, in blood and sacrifice, are writing pages of history more glorious than any in the long and stirring history of the people's fight for freedom.

It will stem the advance of the fascist Powers; it will draw the democratic peoples closer together.

It will help the anti-fascist fighters in Germany and Italy.

Yes! Many times we in the Labour Movement have sung the Red Flag. Let us to-day remember these lines in it:

"With heads uncovered swear we all
To bear it onward till we fall."

Proud heads are bearing it onward in Spain. Many have fallen; many more will fall. It is in our power now to see that these sacrifices for peace and democracy shall not be in vain. We must end the neutrality which only injures the Spanish people, and help the Spanish Government to defeat the fascist rebels.