

World Socialism

Turmoil Over Belgium

By HERBERT ZAM

COALITION IN BELGIUM

The decision of the Belgian Labor Party (Socialists) to participate in the Van Zeeland coalition government continues to hold the interest of Socialists everywhere. Belgium is being watched with keen interest, as events there are bound to have important consequences for the International Socialist movement.

Meanwhile, opinions on the Belgian events, as well as the details of the events themselves, are beginning to trickle through.

EHRLICH REFUTES DeMAN

We have before us a lengthy article by Heinrich Ehrlich, leader of the Polish Bund, and one of the leaders of the Left in the Socialist International. He concludes that the decision of the Belgian Party to participate in the coalition was "a pure political error which was pregnant with tragic consequences."

The arguments now being given by the defenders of the coalition policy, he points out, are directly contrary to the point of view which prevailed in the Party since the 1933 Congress when the "De Man Plan" was adopted and became the basis of the Party's work. The plan, it had been argued, was an entirety. It could not be broken up or applied piecemeal. And since no other party in Belgium could accept the plan as a basis for government, no coalition was possible.

Now the very same comrades who reasoned thus are bringing forward the argument, that entry into the coalition was necessary in order to be able to carry out at least "small portions" of the plan.

The 1933 policy meant that the Belgian Party refused to take responsibility "for the application of mustard plasters to the festering wounds of capitalist economy." Now, however, De Man, Spaak and Vandervelde have again undertaken to give capitalism in Belgium the reform cure.

NO LEGAL ROAD, BUT . . .

Comrade Ehrlich is particularly sharp against De Man, who justifies the coalition as follows:

"The legal road to power has become increasingly more precarious."

To this Ehrlich answers: "De Man is right. But just herein lies the weak side of that historic congress of the Belgium Party where he argued that the plan could be realized only through the democratic, constitutional parliamentary way. But one might believe that as soon as this road proved to be closed, it would be concluded that a new way had to be found."

Ehrlich believes that instead of drawing revolutionary conclusions from his own statement, as is logically the case, De Man drew the illogical, but extremely reformist conclusions of the need for coalition.

In answer to the argument of the need for fighting fascism, Comrade Ehrlich points out that fascism thrives because the masses lose faith in existing parties and methods, and that participation in coalition will surely compromise the party in the eyes of the masses.

COALITION IN A HURRY

We also have received a complete report of the Special Congress of the Belgian Party. From it we learn the astounding news that not only the Congress itself, but even the Central Committee of the party were faced with an accomplished fact.

The five leaders of the party first accepted cabinet posts, and then asked the party to approve their actions. Under these circumstances the delegates were placed before the danger of a possible split and no objective consideration of the matter was possible.

The left wing stood up admirably in this situation in spite of

the desertion of the previous leader, Spaak. The left group made the following statement to the Congress:

"We again reaffirm our belief in the revolutionary road to Socialism. Coalition is disastrous. The bourgeoisie will never give up their social position willingly. The Roosevelt reforms have brought nothing but disappointments for the American working-class. Coalition government is not our road to freedom. It has always been the road of the reformists. Whenever the situation of capitalism was bad they hurried to save the situation. The result was momentary relief, but a deeper disappointment for the working class in the long run. We remain steadfastly in our position. Spaak's departure will not weaken our activity in the party."

A deputy from Brussels declared:

"Remember what you are doing. The situation is identical with 1926, the arguments are the same, and sorry to say, the disappointments will be the same. I have been active for the past thirty years in the labor movement and I am convinced now more than ever that with these methods, capitalism will not be conquered."

"We have behind us bitter events—Germany, Austria—isn't that sufficient that we should learn? We must have more confidence in the power of the working class—in our own strength—the time will come when our voice will be heard—the word of REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM."

SPAAK OUT OF LEFT WING

"Action Socialiste," the organ of the Left Wing, is continuing, contrary to some hopes. Spaak has, of course, resigned as editor. The paper is carrying on a vigorous agitation against the policy of coalition. After having gone through this crucial test, the left wing is bound to grow and become the dominant factor in the party. The coalition will surely not benefit the reformists.

Bishop



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