

World Socialism

WHITHER THE FRENCH COALITION

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WHEN Leon Blum assumed power in France as the head of the "People's Front" coalition government, the hopes of the advanced workers throughout the world were aroused to a high degree. In spite of very negative experiences with other coalitions in other countries, it was hoped that because of the exceptional condition in France, the experiences there would be of a different character. These hopes were held not only by workers who saw in the establishment of the coalition a victory for Socialism, but also by revolutionists who had no faith in the powers of the coalition to accomplish anything of lasting value. At the Congress of the French Socialist Party where the decision was taken, not only the Blum majority, but also the two left groups, the Zyranski wing and the Pivert revolutionary left, voted in favor of entering the government under the conditions outlined.

The Real Change

The preliminary achievements of the Blum government during the first few days of its life gave body to these hopes. The favorable settlement of the series of strikes, the establishment of the forty-hour week, the measures pronounced against the fascist bands—all must be definitely entered on the credit side of the ledger. But the progress hasn't been uniform, nor have the developments all been in a direction indicated by the first few days. On a whole series of questions, the Blum coalition government has not only been unable to carry out a thoroughgoing revolutionary Socialist program, but has even found it impossible to apply the electoral program of the People's Front. The army and other military forces have been centralized under one command, but the period of compulsory service has not been reduced or eliminated. Essentially the same elements remain in real control of the army. The Bank of France, against which the first assault was to be directed for the destruction of the power of the bankers, remains untouched. Only very minor reforms are to be carried out. The Bank directors have shown their gratitude by whole-hearted cooperation with the government. No steps have been initiated by the government for the institution of woman suffrage. The reforms proposed for the colonies are of a purely administrative character and leave untouched the exploitation of the colonial people by the French imperialists, or the question of independence for the colonies.

One of the main arguments in favor of the formation of the coalition government was that it would move against the fascist movement. In reality the government has been unable to take substantial measures against this movement. The measures it has taken have only served the purpose of diverting the fascists to "legal" political activity, and have helped lay the basis for a mass fascist party, which the government will tolerate, in the same manner that Hitler was tolerated by the various coalitions in Germany.

The 'Sit-Down' Strike

Perhaps the most disappointing act of all was the announcement of Minister of the Interior Salengro, under pressure from the Senate, dominated by the same Radical Party which is part of the government, that hereafter "sit-down" strikes would be treated as "illegal," in contradistinction to Blum's earlier declaration that nothing would be done in the way of action against workers engaged in such strikes. These "sit-down" strikes, initiated by the masses more or less as a spon-

taneous movement on the eve of the assumption of power by the present government, were more than an economic strike for better conditions. They indicated very definitely that the masses considered that the government would have to have extra-parliamentary assistance in the carrying out of its program, and by their character—staying in the factories, rather than walking out—the workers, consciously or not, indicated the direction in which the struggle must develop further—toward the socialization of industry. In the light of this, the decision of the government to move against strikes of this character can only be interpreted as a gesture against any type of extra-parliamentary activity by the workers.

It would be futile to enter into a tirade against the Blum government for its mistakes and failures. The fault lies not with the Blum government, but with the original sin—the setting up of the coalition government. By its very nature, a coalition government cannot accomplish anything but preserve a very bad status quo, since any move against the foundations of capitalism would immediately rend the coalition. In France, as in England at the time of the first Labor government, the capitalists are endeavoring to use the Socialists to tide them over a very stormy period. After the chestnuts have been pulled out of the fire of economic and political chaos, the capitalists will give the government its walking papers. We saw an example of this only recently in Sweden, where the allies of the Socialists broke up the government over a trifling sum appropriated for old age pensions, because they felt themselves strong enough to do without the coalition. The opposition in principle of the revolutionary Socialists to participation in coalition governments together with capitalist parties derives not from an abstract dogma, but from the concrete experience of the workers in all countries, where coalitions have, without exception, brought results contrary to the interests of the workers and have played into the hands of the fascists. Even the brief experience with the French coalition forecasts the same results. The abandonment of the traditional policy of the French Party has not been justified. The reluctance expressed in the resolution authorizing the assumption of power, has been further strengthened and has led to statements indicating a possible change of course.

Communists Approved

The communists of course are already trying to profit by the bad experiences of the government. But let us recall once more that they are the real fathers of the coalition idea, and are still defending, in principle, the formation of "Peoples' Front" governments. Their refusal to participate in the government which they had so vigorously fostered is a piece of unprincipledness not easily explained away. The Blum government is now at the parting of the roads. It can either follow the path of traditional coalitions, with the same results—or it must boldly strike out on a path of independent working class action, combining parliamentary with extra-parliamentary activity, and gradually shake itself free of the incubus of the Radicals. Only the latter path can bring positive results for the French and the international working class.