

# NEW MASSES

ESTABLISHED 1911

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## The Socialist Party's Progress

THERE is such an abundance of loose ends and dark corners in relation to the recent special convention of the Socialist Party that any definitive appraisal is as yet premature. For the first time in its entire history, the party found it necessary to hold its convention *in camera*. Newspapermen were not admitted to any of the sessions proper, and the daily handouts were strictly noninformative. Some of the resolutions are still not available. It appears that the American Socialists are rapidly adopting not only the policies but also the manners of a sect.

Meeting under circumstances which threatened the party with another split, the most influential leaders, especially Norman Thomas, were mainly concerned with the delicate business of keeping the conflicts described in the NEW MASSES of March 30 under cover. On the whole, the convention resolutions reflect political trades rather than political principles.

Consider the position adopted on the farmer-labor party question, substantially as originally presented by Thomas. The resolution begins by definitely committing the party to a national farmer-labor party "wherever conditions are favorable." Conditions for such participation are four. It must "consciously represent the interests of workers with hand and brain"; but whether such a party does objectively represent these interests or how much "consciousness" will be required is left unsaid. It must, "from its inception, have the definite support of important sections of organized workers and farmers"; though it is not stated whether the Socialist Party will do its share of the work of getting such support or whether that has to be done by others or whether it all has to be done "spontaneously."

It "should be committed at least to the general principle of production for use"; but if "production for use" means socialism then it ought to be so stated, and no such vague affirmation ought to be confused with real socialism; and if it does not, why import additional confusion? It should permit the affiliation of the Socialist Party as a unit or, "failing that, to receive Socialist support, it must permit membership of Socialists on terms compatible with the maintenance of the Socialist Party." This latter point is a decided step forward, because the pro-Trotskyist factions are most inflexibly opposed to anything but unit affiliation.

This resolution embodies the more hopeful side of the convention (none too exciting, of course). It goes beyond previous endorsements of the farmer-labor party on a number of counts, but it still suffers from the chief blight: sectarian aloofness from the movement in process of develop-

ment until certain ideal conditions have been met through the work of others. For this reason, the resolution deals solely with generalities, and fails to give the position of the party in relation to actually existing farmer-labor movements, such as the Wisconsin Progressive Federation, the American Labor Party, Labor's Non-Partisan League, and others. This is all the more damaging in view of the activity of Socialists in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

In Wisconsin, the Socialist Party entered the Wisconsin Progressive Federation on terms not compatible with the resolution. Is it principled or expedient to disregard that fact? In Minnesota, the Trotskyists who operate in the name of the Socialist Party have actually endorsed the mayor of Minneapolis, Thomas E. Latimer, for reelection, despite Latimer's notorious record as chief Minnesota strike-breaker. To do this, they actually had to split the regular Farmer-Labor Party convention and organize a rump convention for Latimer. The issue precipitated the most bitter dissension at the convention, but what do we read in the resolution? That the endorsement of Latimer "was based on numerous factors and a very complicated situation," that a sub-committee will study the question, and that the Minneapolis Trotskyists acted in "perfect good faith." This resolution indicates the fate of the party under Trotskyist influence. The so-called "greater evil" of outright reaction is chosen in preference to the "lesser evil" of a real Farmer-Labor Party under cover of propaganda against both!

The united-front resolution starts off with an introduction full of unexceptionable generalities until it gets down to the inevitable "conditions." United front with the Communists is limited solely to local issues *if, if, and if*. *If* "such action is likely to make the Socialist Party more or less effective in the work of reaching the masses"; but this places the whole emphasis on the party interests of the Socialist Party instead of the broad class interests of the masses. *If* the united front is not limited solely to the Socialist and Communist parties; but this rejects that united front which is an immediate possibility. *If* "the proposed united front activities absorb energy of party members out of proportion to the promised results"; but the "promised results" will partly depend upon the "energy of party members," and the interests of the party should not, in any event, overshadow the interests of the class.

The full texts of only these three resolutions are available in the *Socialist Call* of April 3. They indicate that the convention did not really grapple with the main problems of the party. The Trotskyist issue was glossed over, though the Trotskyists and their allies failed to win out on some of the most important issues, especially that devoted to the farmer-labor party. The war in Spain might have been waged on Mars for all its impact on the convention. It was barely discussed, and its implications were conscientiously avoided. No real solution on the basis of principles was achieved on even a single question. The corroding conflicts of the factions remain both in policy and personnel of the new National Executive Committee. This N.E.C. gives the allies of the Trotskyists decidedly greater influence than before, though no outspoken Trotskyist gained a seat.

This tentative assessment, based on the published resolutions, may be vitally altered when the whole story of the convention emerges. Meanwhile, much depends on who is appointed to the various committees and the editorial board of the *Socialist Call*. The Trotskyists will not cease their wrecking activities. So long as they are met with compromise, so long will sterility haunt the Socialist Party.

# REVIEW AND COMMENT

*Anna Louise Strong on Spain and Boudin on the Supreme Court—A Silone novel and an escapade in escapology*

ANNA LOUISE STRONG flew into Spain last December on the plane which also carried the distinguished biologist, J. B. S. Haldane and Senator Branting of Sweden. The former was going to Spain to place his knowledge of the chemistry and physiology of poison gases at the disposal of the Loyalist Government; the latter to gather material for a report to the World Committee Against War and Fascism.

They landed at Alicante and Miss Strong was immediately struck, as is everyone who now enters Spain, with the happy friendliness of the people. "Is this just Spanish," she asked Senator Branting, "or is it the revolution?" "Both," he replied. "They were always a frank, hospitable people. But now there is undoubtedly an additional sense of liberation, a feeling of their own united power."

She went almost immediately to Valencia, the seat of the Popular Front Government, transformed, energized, teeming with a doubled population, seething with activity, especially at night, when all work is done behind closely shaded and shuttered windows. "Valencia is not yet war," Miss Strong says, "it is roaring energy of a people who mobilize and organize war."

There she met Del Vayo, "the most American person I met in Spain," and "La Pasionaria," the Communist Deputy from the Asturias who, "by gesture and tone diffuses around her an atmosphere of deeply concerned love for plain, ordinary people." Also, she met the chief of the Fine Arts section in the Ministry of Education, who told her of the removal of the great pictures from the Prado in Madrid and their storage in the huge towers at the gates of Valencia, so strong that even "half-ton bombs cannot penetrate them."

She met many other officials, and discussed with them the problems of the popular front government—the roles of the Communists, the Socialists, Anarchists, Catalan nationalists and so forth. These conversations\* are replete with illuminating comments on the international situation, the so-called atrocities, the church, and the future of Spain after the defeat of Franco.

Her chapters on Madrid are realistic and moving. She recounts the heroic defense of that critical first week of November, the arrival of the International Brigade, the organization of the Lister Battalion, the achievement of a unified command. She conveys with considerable reportorial skill the enormous accomplishments of creating an army, organizing the provisioning of it, establishing a new government, effecting social reforms—all simultaneously.

The same sense of profound change and

astonishing accomplishment is conveyed in her passages on Barcelona and the problems of Catalonia, the industrial part of Spain. There the Communist and Socialist parties have united, and the unification of the two great labor unions, the Anarchist C. N. T. and the Marxist U. G. T., is a definite possibility. She says, "Step by step . . . a wider base of social control will grow beyond the factory, beyond industry, beyond even Catalonia and any leaders who hold out against this great need of the people for unity and discipline will be thrust aside by their own followers." Will this unity be perfected in time to thwart international fascism? she asked. "There is no power in Europe strong enough to turn the clock back now in Catalonia," she was answered.

HENRY HART.

## After "Fontamara"

BREAD AND WINE, by Ignazio Silone. Harper & Brothers. \$2.50.

SILONE has strayed a long way into mysticism, but he is still an anti-fascist writer, and as such he has a literary method and spirit unique among anti-fascist writers. Who else can play so fast and loose with the dictatorships, can first vex and worry their absurdities and then, with a sudden twist, pounce, as it were, and break their backs? *Bread and Wine* has all this furious burlesque quality, all the broad stylization, the astounding richness of character and incident which made *Fontamara* a great novel. And as an indictment of Italian fascism it goes farther still. The economic suffering of the peasantry and proletariat, which *Fontamara* so effectively dramatized, is one thing; the spiritual misery of the clerical

and professional classes is another. *Bread and Wine* exhibits both. It shows how a prolonged dictatorship eats into the soul, destroys intelligence and confounds values, makes schoolteachers into official mouthpieces, turns priests into revolutionaries and revolutionaries into priests.

If I am not mistaken (and this is not at all an easy book to interpret), this sinister transformation of individuals under fascism is one of the main themes of *Bread and Wine*, a theme which distinguishes it pretty sharply from the earlier novel. In *Fontamara*, to be sure, we saw the transformation of Berardo from a utopian rebel, a kind of rural Wobbly, into a revolutionary. But this psychological interest was incidental, I think, to a tale of collective effort, which had its beginning and end in the struggle and destruction of the Fontamarans. In *Bread and Wine*, on the other hand, the central fact seems to be, not action, although there is plenty of it, but consciousness: the minds of two men, Pietro Spina, revolutionary, and Don Benedetto, priest.

Of this pair of complementary characters, Spina is the more prominent. In his name (which means thorn), in the priest's robe which he wears as a disguise, in a whole set of symbols and associations, Spina's idealist and mystical tendencies are implied from the start. Impatient with exile, tired of theory divorced from action, he returns to Italy to work secretly among the peasants. When someone reproaches him for not following the example of the great leaders who worked patiently in exile and waited for their hour, he admits that he is wrong: he confesses to being a "bad revolutionary." And, as the frustrations that lie in store for him prove, it is a fact. With his disguise, his artificially aged face, his gestures, his impatiences, his susceptibilities, he manages in spite of his courage to create an impression of futility and almost of melodrama. Working now among the peasants, now among the Roman proletariat, first with propaganda, then with acts of violence, he tries to build an underground group; tries and fails, for the peasants have already been stifled with fascist propaganda and the workers, their cells constantly broken by the police, are nearly paralyzed with caution.

Finally, dismayed by the sordid ceremony which surrounds the announcement of the Ethiopian campaign, the voice of the Dictator coming through the public radio, the solemn credulity of the crowd, the ritual cries of *Chay Doo! Chay Doo!*, Spina goes at night to the church steps and there chalks "Down with the government soup!" For this, his one real venture into action, someone else is arrested. Fascism has now begun to lose its historical character for this demoralized revolutionist; it begins to appear as a kind of time-



Woodcut by Morado

\* SPAIN IN ARMS, 1937, by Anna Louise Strong. Henry Holt & Co. \$1; paper 25c.