

The Blind Men of Transport House

By R. Palme Dutt

LONDON, April 14.

IN this hour of crisis labor has issued a pronouncement.

Spain is fighting single-handed the supreme battle for the cause of democracy all over the world—a battle in which even the slightest material aid from this country would turn the scales.

In France the future of the people is imperiled by the pressure of British reaction on French internal politics.

Britain has signed the pact with Mussolini, which places the power of Britain on the side of the fascist alliance and tips the balance for fascist world-war.

Universal popular opinion is indignant and alarmed. On all sides throughout the labor movement, and on the widest democratic front, the feeling is expressed that a stand must be made, that common action must be taken to defeat Chamberlain and his alliance with fascism, and to save Spain and peace. Stirred by the urgency of the hour, the leader of the Labor Party, together with prominent members of the Labor Party Executive and trade-union leaders have joined hands with the leaders of liberalism and representatives of a broad democratic front in order to call an all-inclusive national conference of support for Spain, on April 23.

At this point Transport House, headquarters of the Labor Party, has at last moved. Faced with the universal demand to furnish a lead, the chiefs of Transport House, basing themselves on the dwindling majority in the Labor Party Executive, have given their lead. That lead is to say *no*. On all the urgent issues of the crisis they are silent. They have no plan to save Spain, no plea to defeat Chamberlain and the alliance with fascism. Of one thing only they are certain. There must be no united working-class front. There must be no popular front. There must be no democratic front. There must be no peace front. That is the supreme expression of their leadership in this hour of crisis.

Translated into plain terms, that leadership means: "Chamberlain must rule."

"Independence" of the labor movement is the watchword under which the right-wing opponents of unity defend their stand against any democratic peace front to defeat Chamberlain.

What a mockery that these advocates of class-collaboration should now present themselves as the defenders of the "independence" of the working class.

Was it "independence" to swing behind the "National" government in regard to its lying League professions about Abyssinia in 1935 and proclaim Sir Samuel Hoare the "voice of Britain"?

Was it "independence" to tail behind the "National" government's criminal "non-in-

tervention" policy for fourteen months and help to strangle Spanish democracy?

Was it "independence" when Citrine and the general council obediently responded to Chamberlain's call for coöperation at Downing Street on March 23, and thereby helped to save Chamberlain at the moment when his government was shaking, and enabled him to defeat the revolt of his own supporters because he could claim that he had the coöperation of labor?

The reality behind this mock slogan of "independence" is—*dependence on Chamberlain*. They are so anxious to be *independent* of the possible *allies* with whose aid they could defeat Chamberlain that they end up by being dependent on the real enemy, the representative of the main forces of finance-capital, Chamberlain.

The real independence of the labor movement consists precisely in leading and uniting all forces for the defeat of the main enemy and representative of finance-capital, the "National" government.

"Socialism" is solemnly proclaimed by these right-wing opponents of unity to be the aim in whose name they oppose any united democratic front which would not include Socialism in its objects.

This may sound very "left," but what does it mean in practice? It means that no sincere democratic fighter, no opponent of fascism, no supporter of a collective peace policy is to be allowed to unite in the common fight, unless he will also swallow the principles of "Socialism" as laid down by the Labor Party. This means, in fact, thrusting away millions of willing allies, and handing them over to the "National" front. Once again, the reality of the policy is to *help Chamberlain*.

The *Daily Herald* taunts the Communist Party because in the program of the Communist crusade for the people the aim of Socialism is not included as an immediate object of the common fight.

Precisely because we are serious about the fight for Socialism we do not play with it as an empty word behind which to hide passivity and shirking from the real, immediate issues of the present struggle.

In order to reach the goal of Socialism, a great deal has to be done first. We have no hesitation in declaring that the immediate issue of the fight at this moment is not Socialism. The immediate issue is to defeat the "National" government, to win the fight of Spanish democracy, to defeat fascism and its war-offensive, to win the fight for democracy and peace and the rights of the working-class movement, so as to create the conditions for advancing to the fight for Socialism.

The Spanish people are fighting and dying, not for Socialism as the immediate common

aim, but for the Spanish Republic. If the working-class parties had separated themselves to insist on Socialism as the program of the fight against fascism, they would have smashed any common front, and Franco would long ago have conquered in Spain.

The serious fighter for Socialism is he who faces the realities of the present fight, and refuses to take refuge in empty words to cover practical support of reaction.

Again, "defeatism" is charged by the *Daily Herald* against those who advocate a united working-class front and democratic front to defeat Chamberlain. They declare that the Labor Party can win on its own without allies on the left or the right.

The real defeatism is exactly this policy. For this policy means, in reality, to be completely unconcerned about the urgency of defeating Chamberlain in the present crisis, and to be content to continue as a permanent opposition, peacefully awaiting a hypothetical future majority, in whose possibility the leaders themselves privately have no confidence.

It is just because we are seriously concerned with defeating Chamberlain that we demand that the Labor Party organize the unity of the working class and win all potential allies in the common fight, in order to ensure speedy victory in the present crisis.

The realization of working-class unity, and of unity between the working class and other elements of the democratic front, would not only combine existing forces, but would at once bring millions of the unorganized into the trade unions and the Labor Party, and rally millions of those at present apathetic, as the example of France has shown.

That is why the policy of unity is the policy of victory. The refusal of unity is the real defeatism.

The manifesto of Transport House does not represent the real feelings and wishes of the labor movement. But in it we can see sure evidence of the strength of the rising tide for unity.

We need to redouble our efforts to make the April 23 conference an overwhelming success, whose representative character will show beyond question the wishes of the popular forces in this country and will constitute a first triumph of unity overriding the opposition of reaction.

We need to press forward the preparations for a United May Day that will constitute a landmark in the history of the labor movement.

The future is not with the blind men of Transport House. The future is with working-class unity and with the united labor and democratic front which alone can win victory over the "National" government, save peace, and defeat fascism.

Across the Ebro

By Joseph North

BARCELONA, April 25 (By Cable).

THE Ebro is Spain's Mississippi River. In a land of dry river beds it swirls along angrily, eddying in a thousand bends. It is particularly deep this time of year due to melting snows of mountain country. That is no help to Mussolini, for the fascists must cross the river; and Father Ebro protects his Spanish children better than the stoutest fortress.

Two armies, two systems of thought, of life, face each other across the river. I was at the republican parapet in Tortosa this week and looked at the fascists across the stream. I heard some Italians yell across, "How do you like Italian cannon?" and the Spaniards reply, "Not bad, but tell us, what are Italian men like?" Discussions of this sort always close with bursts from machine guns.

I spent a full day near the banks of the Ebro with Modesto, commander of the armies' southern "agrupacion" of the east—that means the armies of Catalonia. Till his promotion he had been head of the Fifth Army Corps, the bravest of an army of brave men. Del Vayo singled this corps out for special mention in an address before the world press recently. It includes internationals. It helped Catalans put up the defense that headed off Aranda's march on Barcelona, bogging him down at Lerida and Balaguer.

Modesto talked tanks, plans, material. He also talked of infantry. He liked American tanks best, and French heavy artillery. But, he said, tanks will soon be as outmoded as dodos. The anti-tank gun has spelled its doom. He scoffed at the efficacy of the Italian whip-pet tanks, as did Antonio Cordon two weeks ago when I interviewed him at Lerida, before he was named head of the army of the land. Modesto grinned: "Tanks get outmoded, doughboys never." Of course, Modesto said, when the enemy lays down its heavy artillery on a narrow sector and rains three or four hundred tons of steel on a thousand-kilometer line per hour, it isn't comfortable. And then add the airplane, but still these aren't decisive. "Men tell the tale of war," he said, "not cannon. As soon as the rest of the world sends us enough cannon"—he looked at me, American, and at my colleague, French—"our vastly superior infantry will roll them back."

Modesto, like his men, is a son of the people, at work since the age of nine. He looks forty but is actually thirty-one. The best fighting direction comes from those who a few years ago were active trade-unionists, organizing the masses.

Modesto had military training in Africa, where he learned to hate the Monarchy. When he left the army he joined the U.G.T. "I used to fight for the united front within the trade-union movement," he said. "Today

we fight with guns for a united Spain." He showed me his wounds—a six-inch gash down his thigh, a shattered hand. He had a couple of hours off and wanted us to stay through supper. He showed me a picture of his wife, a Madrilenos, and their two kids. I showed him a picture of my family. "Guappas." He said that means handsome in Spanish. "America," he said, "is O. K." That's one American word all Spaniards know. He also liked the American tanks that can go sixty miles an hour. "If we are using tanks, I'd like to use American tanks." I told him, as I've been telling all Spaniards and internationals for the past month, that public opinion in America is for loyalist Spain, that Congress is beginning to reflect the popular will. He wanted to know if it is true that Roosevelt is friendly toward the Spanish people.

We ate supper by candlelight, because the electricity kept flickering off and on. My French colleague had found a copy of Dante in the Italian library of the mansion which once belonged to a rich Rovinial fascist, and was reading about the descent to Hell. "Like Tortosa." He said Modesto liked the way he read poetry. "Italian sounds nice. It's a

to make important advances, regaining towns the Italians must have in order to get to Puigcerda to close the pass to France. The legions of "pico y palo" (pick and shovel) are doing their work all along the roadways. I saw hundreds on my way down to Tortosa, marching with their humble yet vital weapons.

In the other regions of republican Spain, that is in all but the Catalanian area, General Miaja and Jesus Hernandez, newly appointed government commissar for that area, toured the southeastern coastal area, the Valencia-Segunto-Castellon area. Everywhere they went cheering crowds closed in on them, demanding speeches of Miaja. The soldier told them bluntly that he expects and knows they'll defend their territory as the Madrilenos defended the capital. He said that everywhere he went, order reigned, and there was complete endorsement of the reorganized government. Castellon mobilized all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five for military service whether at the front or at the rearguard.

The Spanish press made much of the national conference to aid Spain, held in London. The London *Times* was quoted as saying, "It is impossible to forecast the final result of the Spanish war." The press here made much of that, for last week-end the European press had written Spain's death-warrant—"prematurely, as usual," the Spanish press said dryly.

The happenings in Asia get a big play here and the Spanish people rejoice in China's victories as though they were their own. And in a very real sense they are. The war has made the formerly insulated Andalusian or Castilian or Catalan internationally minded.

Intellectual Spain launched a manifesto reiterating its faith in victory, hailed events in China, and urged all progressives the world over to help the Spanish and Chinese people, "for the triumph of democratic principles is indispensable to the advancement of human culture." Finally, President LeBrun's welcome to the new Spanish Ambassador, expressing amity and admiration for loyalist Spain, touched the Spanish people. They knew that reverberations would be felt in Rome and Berlin immediately. Sunday in Barcelona was brilliant. The drums were beating. The Italians were in Valderrobres on the highway to the sea. Yes, it was not so long ago that the Spanish horizon was closed by snow-peaked Pyrenees; today the Spanish people feel that their nation is the center of the world. They are molding the future and they know it.



"Ah—Rebels!"

shame that Mussolini talks it." He said, "I want the book autographed for a Frenchman who got a piece of explosive bullet in his hand the other day when we were at the front lines at Tortosa." Modesto autographed it to "the hero in horn-rimmed spectacles." He asked us to come around soon again "with cannon and planes, please."

Actually, the military scene here is much improved. It is as Negrín said the other day: "If we resist we shall get arms." More arms are coming in but not enough human material although more men are entering the service, more fighters and more "fortificadores." For as Spain fortifies, it plans also to train. Reserves are a critical necessity when the Republic goes on the defensive.

Guerrilla warfare is spreading, particularly in the North where the Republic has begun