

The SPGB and Spain

We have been asked to state as briefly as possible the principles which govern the attitude of the SPGB towards struggles such as that going on in Spain.

The first is that, as a matter of course, Socialists are on the side of the exploited in their struggles against the landed and monied classes. This is true whether the workers concerned are Socialist or not, organised or unorganised, and whether the struggle is a strike or a lock-out, or whether it is concerned with gaining "elbow room" for the working class movement, i. e., the right to organise, to carry on propaganda, to secure the franchise and parliamentary government. These struggles are all expressions of the class struggle and are in the line of development towards Socialism. It is the plain duty of the organised workers in the more advanced countries to support and encourage such struggles, both at home and in the less advanced countries. But here a difference emerges between the SPGB and non-Socialist workers' organisations. While our members individually take part in struggles for objects other than Socialism the SPGB as a party does not. It exists and seeks support solely for Socialism, i. e., for activities which the non-Socialist organisations, including the reformist political parties, do not and cannot undertake. Therefore the SPGB only gives material support to Socialist organisations.

Also, while the SPGB is on the side of the exploited in their struggles, it does not necessarily approve of the way in which every struggle is carried on. Reckless and ill-timed action often defeats its object. It is desirable that every action be as democratically controlled and carefully considered as possible. Actions based on mere emotion and trust in leaders in disregard of the magnitude of the obstacles to be overcome are bad for the working class movement. This is particularly true when the action is one which involves grave and lasting consequences, such as the decision of the Austrians in February, 1934, and the Spaniards in July, 1936, to resist suppression by taking up arms. We are opposed to the theory that it is in every case better to strike or fight when the propertied class throws down the gauntlet, without counting the cost or the consequences. In Austria and Spain it was the duty of the democratic forces to consider the military strength of the two sides, any dissensions among their own supporters--in Spain dissensions have continued in the midst of the war against Franco--and the likelihood of foreign intervention. There were some who held in both cases that armed resistance was not worth while. On balance, however, the Austrian and Spanish workers decided in favour of armed resistance. The Austrians were soon crushed, but in Spain Franco is still as far from victory as he was ten months ago. And whether the democratic resistance is eventually successful or not makes no difference to the Socialist attitude of being on the side of the democrats; though it will naturally influence our judgement and that of the Spaniards concerned as to the wisdom of the particular course of action.

In the present struggle in Spain two main groups are in opposition. On the one side those, headed by Franco, who threaten to deprive the workers of the power to organise politically and industrially in their own interests. On the other side is the main body of the workers.

Whether the Spanish workers were wise in participating in a struggle so costly in human lives may be debatable, but as they have decided to take the plunge, and as they have the most violent partisans of capitalism against them, Socialists are, of course, on their side. It must be assumed that the Spanish workers weighed up the situation and counted the cost before deciding their course of action. That is a matter upon which their judgement should be better than that of people outside the country.

ED. COMM

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