

France

Belin and the „Charte du Travail“

Sablettes

A conference of trade unionists organised by Belin's **[1]** newspaper "Au Travail" **[2]** was held in the South of France from the 27th to the 30th of November. The subject under discussion was the "Charte du Travail". There were not only trade unionists present, but also government representatives and the representatives of employers' organisations, and of unions of craftsmen, foremen and technicians.

The fact that the organisers of this conference were very active supporters of the Pétain overnment and their "Revolution Nationale" as well as being close friends of Belin made it of especial interest.

The paper "Au Travail" of December 13th publishes a very detailed report of the conference. The first sentence of the resolution which was adopted by the conference runs as follows:

"The Conference of Sablettes (the name of the meeting place of the conference) pays homage to the spirit of the Charte du Travail as expressed in the preamble to the Decree of October 4th 1941."

This sentence might give us the impression that the conference was almost completely unanimous at least so far as the preamble was concerned. This, however, was not the case. Many of its principles were radically rejected in other parts of the resolution as for instance: the method of fixing wages, the "pillar" of the "Charte du Travail", namely the mixed committees of workers and employers, and the statements in the preamble concerning the role of the trade unions etc.

Bertin **[3]**, the editor of the newspaper "Au Travail" and also the main driving force and inspiration behind the friends of the newspaper ("les amis de ` Au Travail' ") delivered an important speech at the conference about the "Charte"; the chief points of this speech will stand out as a monument of sharp criticism of the "Charte du Travail". The speech gives the impression of a spirit in absolute contradiction to the fundamental principles of the "Charte".

"Revolution Nationale"

This conference at Sablettes seems to have been an activity in the framework of a far-reaching attempt of the trade unionists who support the "Revolution Nationale" (and take it seriously) to oppose the reactionary spirit which prevails in many circles in Vichy. In this attempt they have the support of ministers such as Pucheu **[4]**, probably

Lehideux [5], and also of course Belin. These ministers, at least in so far as the first two are concerned, can be regarded as representatives of the Trusts in the Vichy Government. Both these ministers realise that the reactionary propositions put forward by the people around Pétain [6] ("Action Française" and clerical influences) are not likely to secure the necessary support of the working class for the new regime. They prefer to win over the more moderate representatives of the workers by a cleverly balanced policy with regard to social problems.

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Pucheu

In this connection it is interesting to mention that in the same issue of "Au travail" which reported the conference at Sablettes there was also an interview given by Pucheu, the Minister for Home Affairs, to a journalist from "Au Travail" concerning social problems. Pucheu said amongst other things:

"I shall never cease to repeat to the Marshal that we must liberate the working class from its proletarian condition, from its inferiority complex. But we should at the same time free the other classes from their phobia with regard to the working class."

Bertin

But to return to Bertin's speech: First of all, before going into the details of the "Charte du Travail", he criticises the opposition of the employers with regard to social problems. He gives the following examples:

"An investigation revealed that in a certain "Departement" 70 % of the employers failed to carry out the law of Marshal Pétain, of May 23rd, concerning wage increases. In face of such facts how can you expect the workers to throw off their prejudice? The workers are deserving of something better. For who has suffered since June 1940, if not the working class?"

He gives yet another example of employers having created works committee and "comités sociaux" which deliberately exclude trade union representatives. He also opposes the creation of special "Chartes" for the different trades. In some trades such "Chartes" have already been worked out; and here again the collaboration of the trade unions has intentionally been excluded.

Bertin deals with the following points from the "Charte du Travail" (I am mentioning only those with which he disagrees):

Mixed Trade Unions

Bertin is against mixed trade unions and regrets that the "Charte" makes provision for the legalisation of such trade unions and encourages their creation. He sharply attacks Jules Verger [7] who exerted a strong influence on Pétain in the drawing up of the "Charte du Travail", and who, in conjunction with Pétain, altered important conclusions of the commission set up to work out the "Charte".

Independent Trade Unions

On this subject Bertin makes the following statements:

"We must be totally independent of the employers. As Lefèvre [8] said this morning:

we must be totally independent of religion because the trade union organisation should not be bound up with any particular belief."

It is interesting to note that this point is in complete contradiction to the part of the preamble of the "Charte" which deals with this problem. This runs as follows:

"But there will no longer be the trade unions of the past. If they remain divided in every trade according to their social function in society (employers, skilled and unskilled workers) they must in future be compulsory in order to guarantee their strength, they must have no competition in order to secure their freedom. Their activity will in future be strictly confined to matters concerning their own profession. They will exist and function under the control of the comités sociaux and will draw their inspiration from the principles of the comités which will be none other than those of the Government."

Trade Union officials

It is well known that Verger tends to encourage the view that the workers would not be allowed to elect their trade union officials themselves, but that these officials should be appointed by the Government. Bertin strongly denounces this point of view and advocates the election of officials by the members. He uses the slogan: "The trade union movement must be free!" This slogan is absolutely incompatible with the spirit of the "Charte".

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Trades Councils

Bertin strongly opposes the dissolution of local and regional Trades Councils. He says:

"We deplore the abolition of our regional and local Trades Councils. In the first place we assert that this is unjust; because on the one hand the workers are deprived of every means of establishing contact between the various industries while on the other hand the craftsmen are still allowed to have their Guilds and the employers their Chambers of Commerce. The workers do not understand why they should be treated differently and deprived of their right to have local and regional Trades Councils."

It is interesting what Bertin has to say in this connection with regard to the Trades Councils: He is afraid that if these Trades Councils were dissolved they would in some way carry on their work illegally and would "fall a prey to certain agitators whose activity would be very difficult to check".

Comités Sociaux and Trade Unions

The "Charte du Travail" makes provision for the setting up of comités sociaux for every firm. In firms where more than hundred workers are employed the appointment of the workers' delegates to the comités sociaux is subject to the agreement of the management. Bertin put the question what that means and answers: "This means that in reality, it is the employer who appoints the workers delegates. The workers in the comités sociaux will thus not have a very brilliant rôle to play, he will be the agent of the employer."

Bertin in addition opposes one of the tasks which the "Charte du Travail" allots to the comités sociaux: namely that the activities of the trade unions should be supervised by the comités sociaux. He reverses the roles and demands that the trade unions should exercise a control over the activities of the comités sociaux. - He demands that the

workers' delegates to these committees should be elected by the workers themselves.

Planned Economy

According to the "Charte du Travail" the comités sociaux have only social functions to fulfil. Bertin very strongly opposes this exclusiveness. He says that rightly understood the task of the comités sociaux should also include economic matters, as the workers should have a say inside the comités sociaux with regard to the economic policy of their firm. In this way the desire of the workers for an influence in economic matters should be satisfied. He denounces the employers for wanting to prevent the workers from co-operating in this work and demands that the College du Travail should be subsidised by the State in order that the workers should receive a thorough training in economics.

Bertin stresses the necessity for decisive reforms in the economic structure of society, which would lead to a planned economy.

Fixing of Wages

Bertin demands that the "Charte" should make some provision for trade union representatives in those bodies set up by the "Charte" for the fixing of wages. It is noteworthy that the "Charte" remains silent concerning the collaboration of the trade unions in these bodies. Bertin demands the fixing of a minimum wage of 2,000 francs (under existing conditions). At present the average wage is between 900 and 1,300 francs.

And the Trusts?

It is interesting to note that neither in the speech of Bertin nor in the resolution adopted by the conference is anything mentioned about the power of the monopolies and trusts. This confirms the view expressed above that there is a connection between the "progressive" representatives of the trusts and these trade unionists.

Co-Operation

The last part of the resolution says:

"Apart from certain details of the "Charte" which could be bettered the creation of the mixed comités sociaux carries

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with it a great hope for establishing permanent co-operation between the different elements in industry."

This sentence makes light of the criticism expressed by the conference with regard to essential points of the "Charte". If these "details" to which the resolution refers were really improved upon in accordance with Bertin's suggestions, the whole "Charte" would take on a different complexion.

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There still remain some factors which are not clear in the attitude of Bertin and his friends. Do they praise the "Charte du Travail" as in the resolution, only to be better able to criticise it and to secure certain improvements? They hope perhaps to resurrect even the great French trade union tradition and to create in this way the legal basis for

the workers' struggle for more just conditions? (The tone adopted by the newspaper "Au Travail" makes us inclined to answer in the affirmative.) Or are they nothing but witting or unwitting agents of those trusts who realise that capitalism can only be saved by a somewhat more "progressive" policy towards the working class? Their attitude to collaboration with Germany, which many of these people advocate, seems to confirm this interpretation: because the representatives of the trusts are also in favour of Collaboration (Pucheu).

It is probable that many of the trade unionists concerned are themselves not aware of the consequences of their attitude towards the "Charte".

In any case many trade unionists who read such conference reports and also other statements of the paper "Au Travail" sincerely believe that the struggle of the trade unions still continues, even if under a different form than hitherto.

Spain

Civil War in the Midst of World War

Open Wounds

"The conditions prevailing in Spain at present are in fact ghastly beyond description. It is a catastrophe, a tragedy and a degeneration. Incompetence and its consequences have assumed such proportions that even in Portugal, the country to whom France owes to a large degree his victory, friendly feelings towards Spain have considerably cooled down. General disorder, filth, apathy are the outward signs of the situation. The railways are in a completely neglected state; the trains run enormously behind time. In the central part of the country the masses are on the verge of starvation. But this poverty takes on a different form from that in France or even in Germany. In France there certainly are still people who are relatively well off. In Germany also there are probably ways and means of obtaining extra goods. But this is done unostentatiously and good care is taken that nobody should notice it. In Spain, however, there exists on the one hand terrible starvation amongst the broad mass of the people and on the other hand a small section of the community who are not at all badly off and who above all makes no attempt to conceal this fact from the world at large. These people have the face to strut past the beggared and starving people, to enter big luxurious restaurants, to revel in legally forbidden delicacies before open windows, and to celebrate noisily their drunken feasts. All this is done in such a provocative manner that it is almost unbelievable. (By the way, if you spend 16 to 20 Swiss Francs you can still get quite a decent meal in Spain. The only question is, who can afford such a sum.) There exist therefore two Spains: A Spain which starves and a Spain which rules. Peace and order are maintained at the point of the bayonet. One gets the impression not of a country which has enjoyed peace for three years, but rather of one which is in a state of siege. The working-class districts are vigilantly guarded. At nearly every cross-road in the 'Barrio Chino' district you find Guardia Civil with loaded rifles. The militia, that is the soldiers who have been called up for military service, also present a pitiful sight. They are ragged, filthy,

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their toes sticking through their shoes, often they do not even possess any shoes at all but, only alpargates. In contrast to these the troops who are used for keeping order are well looked after. A political reconciliation is quite out of the question and nobody so much as makes the slightest effort in this direction. Political repression is severe. People

are thrown into concentration camps on the least suspicion or denunciation. (One of the camps is situated on the Mora de Ebro.) They are not brought up for trial, they simply disappear into the camps and nobody troubles any more about them. The prisons are overcrowded. It is estimated that the number of prisoners amounts to about 20 per cent of the population. I have purposely made this estimate on the small side. Nobody will discuss politics with a foreigner. Altogether a mood of depression exists. Wherever you go, in the streets, in the imaginable way - a striking indication of the great poverty which exists. In addition to this, religious intolerance has gained a foothold once again. The small protestant minority suffer considerable hardships, and many of them are in prison. Communism and protestantism are regarded by the Spanish rulers as more or less identical. -Social propaganda is absolutely lacking. Whilst in Germany one does speak of "Volksgemeinschaft" and in France of the social "Revolution Nationale" in Spain there is not even such propaganda. And people do not work. For a long time I could not help asking myself how such a thing could be possible. For one cannot put it all down to incompetence. At least one would think that people would want to work, and have an interest in earning money if in nothing else. But there is a complete stagnancy. One would also expect these people to have an interest in achieving some degree of political conciliation; the Germans at least carried out some measures in this direction. Not only is nothing of this sort evident, but on the contrary, they do nothing but sing the praises of Franco [9], and that in a most provocative manner. Only one conclusion can be drawn from these facts: the present rulers of Spain are by no means convinced that their regime will last. They are relying on the force of the bayonet and extracting from the country what they can obtain without much effort. Nobody however seems to think of planning for the future. At any rate, those who have visited Spain to-day are not only seized with a feeling of disgust, but above all become convinced that sooner or later very fierce conflicts are bound to break out there and that Spain is without doubt one of the sore spots of Europe. A highly placed Swiss official with whom I travelled - he had previously spent fifteen years in the Far East - summed up the social situation in Spain very aptly: 'The situation in Spain', he said, 'is perhaps only comparable with certain conditions which prevail in China. I do not know in which of these two countries the situation is worse. But in my opinion it is in Spain!' ...

From this extract of a letter, written by someone who knows Spain well, one should not take it for granted that Spain, because of her misery, will not be forced into the present war. On the contrary, all our information from Spain shows that during the next months an invasion of Spain by the Germans is imminent and that not unimportant forces inside Spain sympathise with Germany, although the masses of the population are against the III. Reich.

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - René Belin (1898-1977), französischer Gewerkschaftsfunktionär, Generalsekretär der Gewerkschaft des öffentlichen Dienstes (1930-1932), Sekretär und zweiter Mann der CGT (1933-1940), in der Vichy-Regierung zunächst Minister für Industrieproduktion und Arbeit (1940-1941), danach Staatssekretär für Arbeit

- (1941-1942), nach der Befreiung Frankreichs Flucht in die Schweiz (1944), Einstellung der Ermittlungen wegen Kollaboration mit NS-Deutschland (1949), Bürgermeister von Lorrez-le-Bocage (1959-1965).
- 2 - „Au Travail“, französische Gewerkschaftszeitung, die nach „Renaissance“ (Heft 1, S. 5) unter der Devise einer „Wiedergeburt“ der französischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung im Rahmen der Nationalen Revolution des Marschall Petain stand, Herausgeber: Louis Bertin.
- 3 - Louis Bertin (1910-1962), französischer Gewerkschafter, Vorsitzender des Gewerkschaftskartells des Départements Haute-Savoie, Gründer und Direktor der Gewerkschaftszeitung „Au Travail“, die in der Okkupationszeit von 1940-1944 erschien, Zusammenarbeit mit der Vichy-Regierung, nach eigenem Bekunden um die französische Gewerkschaftsbewegung zu retten, nach der Okkupation Ausschluss auf Lebenszeit von allen Gewerkschaftsfunktionen (1944), posthum Rehabilitation (Dezember 1962).
- 4 - Pierre Pucheu (1899-1944), französischer Politiker, Kollaborateur, Innenminister der Vichy-Regierung (1941-1942).
- 5 - François Lehideux (1904-1998), französischer Unternehmer und Politiker, Generaldirektor von Renault, später Mitglied der Vichy-Regierung, Mitglied der Synarchiebewegung in Frankreich.
- 6 - Philippe Pétain (1856-1951), französischer Marschall und Politiker, Oberbefehlshaber (1917), Generalinspekteur der Streitkräfte und Vizepräsident des Obersten Verteidigungsrates (1922-1931), Kriegsminister (1934), Abschluss des Waffenstillstandsabkommens mit Hitler-Deutschland (Juni 1940), als Chef der Vichy-Regierung nach eigenem Verständnis Doppelstrategie aus Widerstand und Kollaboration gegenüber Deutschland (1940-1944), Internierung (1944), vom französischen Obersten Gerichtshof Verurteilung zum Tode (1945), Aussetzung der Strafe und Festungshaft.
- 7 - Jules Verger. Biographische Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.
- 8 - Lefèvre = Pierre Robert Lefèvre (geb. 1898), von Beruf Zahntechniker, französischer Gewerkschaftssekretär (CGT), während der deutschen Besatzung Frankreichs Unterstützung der Vichy-Regierung, besonders seines Freundes, des Arbeitsministers René Belin, Mitarbeit beim Journal „Au Travail“, nach der Befreiung Frankreichs Ausschluss aus der Gewerkschaft, bald aber schon wieder (bis in die 70er Jahre) als Funktionär im Verband der Zahnlabortechniker tätig.
- 9 - Francisco Franco Bahamonde (1892-1975), spanischer General und Politiker, Militärputsch gegen die republikanische Regierung (1936), dadurch Auslösung des Spanischen Bürgerkrieges, an dessen Ende - mit deutscher und italienischer Hilfe - der Sturz der republikanisch-sozialistischen Regierung stand (März 1939), danach (bis zu seinem Tod) an der Spitze eines diktatorischen, faschistischen Regierungssystems, Annäherung an den Westen (ab 1945).