

Italy

We learn about the struggle of Italian socialists inside and outside Italy from a long report, from which we have taken the extracts below:

Socialist Anti-War Week

"The reports which we have received up to now concerning the 'Anti-War Action Week' from April 1st to the 7th have been very satisfactory. Agreement with the line of the party leaders was achieved in all districts. The necessity of progressing beyond the organisation and political inner work and of starting activity among the masses in order to mobilise them against Fascism and against the war was agreed to by all comrades. The 'Anti-War Action Week' brought about the following results:

- 1) The Italian Socialist Party after its many years of [absence] from political life, is once more an important element in Italian internal politics. Its cadres are disciplined and courageous and its paroles express the deepest aspirations of the Italian people.
- 2) The existence of a deep dissatisfaction among the people, and the springing up of groups, movements and antifascist sections of those who are the best type for the underground work which is now being undertaken in Italy. 'Combing out' of suspicious elements is no longer of any use, for grouseurs and defeatists have now become the majority; and in fact the numerous arrests by the police have not at all touched the organisation of the socialists.
- 3) The socialist initiative has been well received by other anti-fascists. As the Socialist Party had declared in its call to action that the week from April 1st to 7th was only the beginning of a systematic and progressive action against Fascism and the war, the greater part of the other anti-fascists saw in this the end of the pernicious illusion which regarded the fall of Fascism as possible only as the result of a military defeat. Many democrats, republicans and Catholics tired of the endless twisting and turning of the so-called anti-fascism of high monarchist, militarist and clerical circles and remembering the betrayals of 1922 and 1925, have expressed their satisfaction at the initiative of the Socialist Party, who are also quite aware that the so-called high circles will only move when the people are in action.

Socialist Appeal

The call to action of the Socialist Party 'Down with Fascism. Down with the war!' was printed in many Italian towns and widely distributed in Milan, Trieste, Turin, Bologna, Genoa, Spezia, Livorno, Rome and Naples.

The reactions of the police were violent, chaotic and ineffective. The arrests were

mainly of old socialists who were members twenty or thirty years ago; there were also numerous arrests of workers who had returned from France and North Africa. Apart from these arrests the police have started their usual methods of intimidating the public - searching trains, watching station exits, searching hostels in working-class districts, night patrols, etc. The socialist propaganda has had as

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direct result: new regulations for correspondence with abroad, revision of visas for crossing the frontier, the conference of the prefects with Mussolini.

Open Resistance

The political situation in Trieste and in Venice in general has become much more critical. Some bands of Slovak partisans control the region of Postumia and Prevallo. In Trieste it has been reported that the zone of Mount Nanos is in the hands of the rebels.

Over the door of a butchery in Postumia one morning a notice was found: 'Meat today without coupons'. Inside were found the bodies of two carabinieri who had been hanged. One of the Trieste officials organised a punitive expedition with a large number of soldiers armed with bombs and machine guns, and many Slovene peasants were slaughtered. This caused a great revulsion of feeling. The prefect of Trieste appeared to be horrified and caused the view to be spread that Mussolini had disapproved of this act and that those responsible would be removed from their posts. For the Italian population of Trieste, even the antifascists, it has become dangerous to venture into the Slovene quarters of the town, especially at night. The fascists play upon this Slovene-Italian antagonism and encourage the belief that a military defeat of Italy would mean the massacre of the Italian-speaking population of Trieste. But anti-fascism is strong, even among the Italian section. A call to action against Fascism and war had a very good reception.

In Trieste the moral decadence within the Fascist Party is well-known. The Burgomaster Ruzier [1] was dismissed because he spoke as witness in favour of the lawyer Tomsich [2] in the prosecution of the Slovene terrorists, and was therefore popular. One day the house of one of the most hated fascists was found decorated with a large death's-head. The symbol had been done with a stamp, and in the same night had been done in districts widely separated. The culprit was not caught. The fascists suspected a terrorist group of road-sweepers. Many fascists, and especially high party officials, fear to walk in the town during the black-out hours. One night two sentries were killed in front of a barrack. One morning numerous inscriptions were found on the walls: 'Less Duce and more bread!' Protests are made every week about lack of foodstuffs, though Trieste is in a more favourable position than other towns so far as the supply of foodstuffs is concerned. This can be put to the credit of the anti-fascists - the government is nervous about Trieste. In no town do the people speak so openly against Fascism - in the streets and in public places - as in Trieste. Anti-fascist inscriptions on the walls are repeatedly seen, even in the central parts. There was a large-scale poisoning of bread. The customers of two bakeries one day had bread poisoned with arsenic. After a few days the poisoning was repeated at another bakery. The fascists started the rumour that the wheat came from army stores and had been poisoned by the Slovenes. The usual flour in Trieste is a mixture of grain and field chestnuts.

The most obvious deficiency is that of clothing. Trieste looks like a town of scarecrows. Uniforms are even lacking for the newly called-up soldiers, one sees them

going about looking like beggars in civilian clothes with an arm-band.

Rumours are circulating about an agreement between Slovene, Croat and Trieste socialists on common political action against Fascism and against the war. The opinion is widespread that it is mainly thanks to the Germans that Mussolini is still in power."

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Belgium

We have received the following information from Belgium:

Food

"A high percentage of the Belgian food supply goes to Germany. A consignment of tinned milk, meant for Belgian children, was requisitioned and sent to Germany. The gentlemen responsible for this tried to justify their action by stating that this consignment was meant for Belgian workers in Germany.

According to the ration cards, the rations per head of population in Belgium seem adequate, but as in Germany, there is a great shortage of rationed foods.

The chief of the Belgian winter relief service toured Europe to try to get some food for Belgium. In Switzerland he got some medicinal supplies - nothing else. The Germans told him that they were unable to contribute anything or to sell any goods to him, as they had nothing themselves. Had the winter lasted another two months, they would have been starving.

Flanders

The Flemish 'Leader' made great efforts to find volunteers amongst the Flemish population to put up coastal batteries and anti-aircraft guns along the Flemish coast as a protection against English raiders. There was not a single volunteer for this work.

Opposition: The Church

The Archbishop declared publicly that Catholics were forbidden to collaborate with Germany. The Commander in Chief of the army of occupation intended to protest against this and sent a message to the Archbishop telling him to call. The Archbishop replied that he was the Primate of the Church and that whoever wished to speak to him should ask for an audience. The Commander thereupon asked for an audience, which was granted. The Archbishop and two high church dignitaries received the German officer in their most impressive robes. They let the Commander repeat his accusation three times without so much as answering him, whereupon the German general departed.

Co-operation

A Belgian who is actively engaged in organising resistance received an order to cut the telephone connection between Aix-la-Chapelle and a small village in the Ardennes. He was ordered to do this exactly to the minute at a certain time. A few minutes later British bombers flew over the village and completely destroyed a building where a meeting of high German officers was taking place at that time.

On several mornings the Commander in Chief of the army of occupation has found in his office copies of the 'Times' issued the same day in London.

Army

Many of the old officers of the Belgian army have been released from concentration camps. On their return to Belgium they have become active in reorganising the Belgian army for acts of resistance against the German Army of occupation and preparing for the coming revolt. The weapons required for this work are being collected by people from all sections of the population. There are private weapons, weapons from peasants, and - German weapons with German ammunition.

In Brief

We are told there is a 'Belgian Legion' in Russia fighting side by side with the Germans. In reality this Legion numbers 600 men.

The only engines in use in Belgium date from about 1900; all other engines have been requisitioned by the Germans.

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Many Belgian workers transported to Germany are prepared to take the first opportunity of joining in a revolt against Hitler. These workers report that owing to the regular raids of the R.A.F. it is very difficult to carry on production efficiently.

The whole population in Belgium seems to be actively engaged in making life for the Germans in Belgium as unpleasant as possible. To give some examples:

If German soldiers try to play with Belgian children in a park the children are immediately called away by their mothers and the whole family leave the park. Officers who offer their seats in trams and buses to ladies are ignored.

When Germans enter a restaurant the establishment empties itself in the shortest possible time.

Belgians, mostly seamen, often treat German soldiers to drink. When they have succeeded in making the Germans drunk they take them and throw them into the canals. The official verdict the next day is: 'Death from blood pressure'. There is never any mention of acts of violence.

Many Belgians escape to England. As soon as the names of these fugitives become known their families have to suffer for it."

France

Our comrades in France send to us the following picture of the work of resistance against the Nazis; unfortunately, we have to leave out certain important features of this picture, for reasons which can easily be understood.

Underground Press

"Since the middle of February our movement of resistance is making great progress. This can be best seen from the increasing number of copies of underground newspapers.

`Combat', for instance, is now printed in 35.000 copies. `Libération' is also printed in 35.000 copies. `Franc-Tireur' is printed in 20.000 copies. Three months ago we could not have dared to anticipate such numbers. `Libération' for instance, had an edition of only 12.000 copies as late as February of this year. `Témoignages Chrétiens' [3] which started by printing 5.000 copies, have produced 12.000 copies of the latest issue and they believe that for the next issue they will have to increase the number to 25.000. The underground press has become almost a mass publication. It has penetrated even into very small towns.

Co-Operation

The three main groups (`Combat', `Libération', and `Franc-Tireur') are collaborating with a view to reaching an agreement about the line of policy to be adopted in any situation which may arise. The first important and positive result of this collaboration was the decision to publish the First of May Appeal of the French Trade Unionists in all three papers; this undoubtedly marks a great step forward. Two months ago a certain confusion arose because some members of the resistance movement entered into negotiations with Pucheu and other men of Vichy; to-day, however, this confusion is completely cleared up. To-day all three opposition groups have adopted the same policy towards Vichy. But this fact does not exclude the possibility that some people who are on the right wing of the resistance movement may attempt under certain circumstances to preserve Pétain and some of his ideas concerning the `Revolution Nationale'.

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Political Programme

Great efforts are made by members of the opposition groups to draft a common political programme. This political programme is the necessary precondition for the creation of a real fighting organisation. Such an organisation must have definite political aims which inspire it to undertake political action more far reaching than the present task of writing and distributing newspapers which has been satisfactorily tackled from a technical point of view. For carrying out this programs the co-operation of all movements and individuals interested in the same aims is very important, especially the collaboration of the socialists and of de Gaulle and his friends. This programme should under no circumstances be merely the expression of an anti-German ideology, but it should be a platform which has very concrete and clear plans for the reconstruction of France after her liberation from the yoke of the German armies of occupation. And here we are faced with one of the most difficult problems concerning which the various opposition movements have not yet reached complete agreement. Many who are actively engaged in organising resistance against the Nazis are puzzled about the political ideology of General de Gaulle, about whom some of them have grave doubts. For they want a reconstructed France which shall not be a mere repetition of the old regime. These socialists and trade unionists are just as determined not to collaborate in the realisation of plans which are still in the minds of representatives of a `Revolution Nationale'.

There is agreement in the important opposition circles that a synthesis must be found between authority and freedom. A social programme must be drafted, if possible with a clearly socialist solution, the position of the workers must be safeguarded. They must at least have a guarantee that dominance by the Nazis will not be merely exchanged for dominance by French trusts and French Fascists. Concrete and clear measures for

breaking the power of the trusts must be put forward and it must be shown that preparations are already being made for putting them into effect.

All this is not only indispensable for developing effective and progressive political propaganda and action, it is also important in order to take the wind out of the sails of those communist demagogues who often try to give the impression that they are the only ones who fight to-day against Fascism in all its forms. De Gaulle and his supporters must on all accounts adopt a definite and clear political line which does not allow of any doubt or misinterpretation."

(In the meantime such a political line has been adopted and on July 3rd we published an extract from a manifesto issued by the "Comité d'action socialiste" - an organisation consisting of former members of the old socialist party of France - concerning the relationship between the movement of General de Gaulle and his group. We are here reprinting this extract:

"In France all activity for Socialism is subordinated to the liberation of the country, and if it is right to call on people to work for the future establishment of a new regime, then it is also right to rally them here and now in the struggle for national independence. ...

For us, General de Gaulle is the natural and necessary symbol of resistance and liberation. We do not think that the working class have anything to fear from him in spite of the hopes which may be placed on him by a part of the bourgeoisie. Symbol of the spirit of resistance to Hitler Germany, the natural ally of the Anglo-Saxon democracies, de Gaulle symbolizes, consciously or not, the restoration of the democratic state. It would be inconceivable that the temporary dictatorship, which will be established and which the 'Comité d'action socialiste' have already declared themselves willing to support, would be anything more than a preparation for a return to a democratic regime.")

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Labour Movement

"The opposition group which comprises in the main socialists and trade unionists has made specially good progress since the beginning of this year. We have the impression that this movement has rallied a circle of people who could become the nucleus around which the whole movement of resistance in France could group itself. The increase in the number of copies of newspapers published by this group is to a large extent the consequence of the strenuous efforts on the part of trade unionists and socialists.

The work of resistance carried out by the trade unions is becoming more and more concrete; this applies to both wings of the trade union movement; the Free Trade Unions and the Christian Trade Unions. The preparation of the First of May was outstanding and its success surpassed all expectations. What made such an excellent impression was the realisation that there existed not only a firm contact between the various circles of resistance inside France but that in addition to this good and quick connections had been established with centres of resistance outside France.

Concerning socialist work proper we shall only mention to-day that its organisation is rapidly improving. A number of 'chain-letters' containing extracts from speeches made at the Riom trial were sent off by socialists.

Also in the Occupied Zone socialists and trade unionists are active. They have

established good connections amongst their various groups in the Occupied Zone, and have also taken up contact with their comrades in the Unoccupied Zone. One of these groups publishes every week a journal on the 'chain-letter' system. A reliable official of this group said recently that he believes that in this way his paper reaches about 20.000 people every week. Socialist work has so far made the best progress in Northern France. Socialist headquarters have also been established in the Occupied Zone where good work has been carried out since about May of last year.

Publications

As compared with the Unoccupied Zone the number of publications in the Occupied Zone is much smaller. It is much more difficult to get a correct picture of the whole work carried out in the Occupied Zone, because the movement of resistance is split up into innumerable small groups, which in many instances work quite independantly of one another. Even the leaders of such groups do not know exactly which other groups are active; only through occasional indications do they gather that other groups exist besides their own; this we can take as a sign that precautionary measures are well organised.

There is also a marked increase of anti-Nazi feeling. People speak more openly and with many people one has the feeling that the faint hope that the Germans might lose the war has now become a certainty."

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - Ruzier, nach „Europe speaks“ von den Faschisten abgesetzter Bürgermeister von Triest. Weitere Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.
- 2 - Tomsich, nach „Europe speaks“ Rechtsanwalt in Triest. Weitere biographische Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.
- 3 - "Témoignages Chrétiens" = „Courrier français du témoignage chrétien“, von dem Jesuiten Pierre Chaillet gegründete, zwischen 1941 und Juli 1944 in Paris unregelmäßig erschienene französische Résistance-Zeitung (erschien zwischen Juli und Dezember 1944 als „Courrier du témoignage chrétien“).