

Delegation Fraternelle

The minority movement in European Socialism is still extremely small. But it is an increasing force, and it is of the greatest importance to those of us who belong to it that it shall become an international one.

At the recent congress of the *Parti d'Union de la Gauche Socialiste* (U.G.S.) in Lyon, the English Left was represented only by the *New Reasoner*. The other groups which had been invited but had not attended were the losers, for the congress represented something important for us as well as for the French Left. The Italian socialists were there, represented by their chief theoretical writer, Lelio Basso; the Yugoslav League of Communists had sent Bogdan Pesic, now *Borba* correspondent in Paris, and well-known to many British socialists as the leader of the foreign brigades' section on the Samac-Sarajevo Youth Railway in 1947. Edward Kardelj also sent a warm personal greeting. From North Africa came representatives of the socialist parties from Arab and ex-colonial countries, young for the most part, and new to international gatherings. An observer came from the West German Social-Democratic Party, cautious but friendly, and two young members of the staff of the Belgian weekly *La Gauche*, who soon made contact with the younger U.G.S. delegates. From French parties, a friendly greeting was sent by Pierre Mendes-France, Pierre Cot attended on the first day and delivered a message of encouragement; delegates came from the minority socialists, fresh from their final breach with Mollet and the main body of the S.F.I.O., and from one of the opposition groups within the Communist Party. This last delegate, Ludovic Marcus, received one of the biggest ovations of the congress when he stressed the urgency of achieving a genuinely united party of the working-class in France.

The theme of working-class unity was central to the whole discussion. The delegates, who represented ten thousand members, and who consisted in the majority of former members of one or other of the two great working-class parties, were young - I would say that a considerable majority were under forty, and very many under thirty. They were full of enthusiasm - the sessions lasted from nine o'clock until midnight, with only short meal-breaks, and there was no thinning of the ranks on the floor of the congress - but it was enthusiasm for the party itself, and its ideas; there was very little of the wild enthusiasm for particular leaders which has become so much a part of the atmosphere at gatherings of the established parties.

The U.G.S. leaders are for the most part not very well-known here in England. The main political report was given by Gilles Martinet, who has since become secretary of the national committee of the party. He is known here as a Marxist writer, but he is also a most impressive speaker. and seemed to be very popular amongst all sections of the delegates. Claude Bourdet, editor of the courageous and well-informed weekly *France-Observateur* needs no introduction to English socialists. He was absent from the first day's session, as he had to speak for the U.G.S. on television, and put the case for voting 'No' in the referendum into five minutes' viewing time. The only demonstration of really wild applause of the week-end greeted the end of this programme, and Bourdet's gallant effort to get a quart into a half-pint pot.

International Chronicle

109

Events are moving quickly in France, and by the time this is in print the results of the elections will be known. The committee of the U.G.S. agreed to join the grouping of the Union of Democratic Forces - the combination of radical and socialist republican groups who stood against De Gaulle in the referendum campaign - in the selection of electoral candidates. But their long-term aim, as expressed in one of the main resolutions passed at Lyon is the establishment of a united socialist party, including 'all militants, Marxist and non-Marxist, Christian and Atheist, who are determined to fight unflinchingly for the revolutionary transformation of society'. Such a party, whilst it would undoubtedly attract some members who are at present within the Communist movement, would not be in its aims and purpose anti-Communist. Indeed, the comparison which has been made with the situation in Italy, the one country in Europe where such a non-Communist Left is an important force, suggests that the Communist Party of France might well be radically influenced, in spite of itself, should the aim of the U.G.S. and its allies be achieved.



A panel from the U.G.S. poster issued during the French Referendum.

In Paris, after the congress, I had the opportunity to discuss some of these questions with members of the various opposition groups which exist within the French C.P. I had been told - and this was certainly borne out by every party member to whom I spoke - that every intellectual within the party was critical of the leadership. Those who were not connected with any of the active opposition groups were resigned to the fact that they faced the alternative of remaining within the party whose leader-

ship they distrusted, or going into the political wilderness outside. Although many of them agreed with the general policy of U.G.S., they did not have any faith in a movement which is still so small in numbers and in industrial influence, and, seeing no alternative, kept their cards, but without enthusiasm.

I did not meet any of the organised Trotskyists within the party, although such a group does apparently exist. They pursue a policy of 'enterism', paralleled by that of their opposite numbers in the British Labour Party, although their conditions of work must be more difficult. They do not seem to be very numerous or influential. The word 'Trotskyist' is, as might be expected, often applied to other opposition groups but, although there was the same 'discovery' of Trotsky's writings, particularly by the younger comrades, after the Twentieth Congress, their effect, as in England, seems to have been only one of the many influences of the general loosening up and re-examination of accepted dogmas.

Amongst the opposition in the party, the atmosphere is not a hopeful one. Most of the people involved still feel that the Communist Party is the only force capable of bringing Socialism to France, although not in its present form. A leading member of the most influential group told me that there was no chance of changing the party from within, admitting in fact that they were waiting for events outside to force a change upon the leadership. In the meanwhile they are trying to stimulate discussion on fundamental problems of Marxism, and to achieve at least a greater degree of intellectual flexibility. A monthly journal issued by this group, with a print of 5,000, has already issued four numbers for public sale on the bookstalls. Entitled *Voies Nouvelles*, it carries contributions mainly from Party members, some under their own names, some pseudonymous, as well as documents from other countries and other parties. A second publication, *La Voie Communiste*, also issued monthly, has so far been restricted in circulation to members of the party, but is now also to become a public journal. Smaller, and, hitherto at any rate, very much less concerned with questions of theory than *Voies Nouvelles*, it aims at promoting questioning and discussion of current policies rather than of more fundamental questions.

A third group of critics, whose delegate attended the U.G.S. Congress, are taking a line rather like that of U.G.S. itself. Unlike the groups around *Voies Nouvelles* and *Voie Communiste*, they no longer see the future of socialism in France solely in the transformation of the Communist Party. In July they issued a manifesto signed by an ad hoc committee, in which they point to the continued defection of comrades, tired of the hopeless fight against Stalinism within the party, who are leaving quietly, or lapsing into inactivity, and thus becoming lost to the working-class movement. They therefore make an appeal aimed specifically at those who still remain within the C.P., for a new grouping with a view to forming a new party which would work for the unification of the working-class movement, in order to fight against the possibility of a militarist dictatorship in France, against the war in Algeria and for the triumph of a system of humane socialism. These aims, and further details of their position can be found in the first issue of their bulletin *La Tribune du Communisme*.

It is, I think, significant, that all these groups, having now been in opposition to a greater or lesser degree for about two years, now see the publication of open journals, to promote the re-examination of hitherto accepted ideas, as the main way forward. Within the party itself such discussion becomes increasingly difficult. The party structure, of course, is aimed to prevent discussion, and the recurrent bouts of expulsions reinforce this; when I was in Paris, the latest distinguished party member to be expelled was Henri Lefebvre, one of the best-known and most highly respected Marxist historical writers in Europe. But discussion within the party is prevented also by the very low level of attendance at meetings and of activity generally.

In spite of the stimulating effect of the U.G.S. Congress, with its very hopeful indications of a revival of socialism amongst the younger people, it is impossible to feel optimistic about the general state of the French Left. An all-out attack on it, which must inevitably throw the main defence on to the Communist Party, would be disastrous. No one can tell how much time the New Left has to assemble its forces, put out its propaganda, and tackle the heavy task of winning the French working-class again for the values of socialism, and away from the brutality, jingoism and cynicism which a period of good wages and long hours at home, ruthless imperialist wars abroad, and sterile opportunist policies by the traditional left-wing parties have fostered.

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