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SOLIDARITY FOR FRENCH MINERS SPREADS ACROSS EUROPE

By Pierre Frank

PARIS, March 11 -- France's coal miners have been out on strike since March 1. Other strikes have likewise been called, the iron miners in the east, the natural gas workers of Lacq.

The miners' struggle, by far the most important, has aroused strong feelings of solidarity. In the mine areas not only the workers in other industries, but the mine engineers, small businessmen, even the clergy, immediately supported the demands of the miners as justified. They were followed last week by fifteen-minute solidarity stoppages throughout France. In addition, the gas and electric workers stopped work for two hours in token of their sympathy and the railway workers are scheduled to follow up with similar action. Expressions of solidarity are now spreading across the entire continent of Europe. Coal has become "hot cargo" and workers in other countries are refusing to handle deliveries for France.

The point of departure for the miners' movement was the demand to bring their wages back to the level lost through inflation. In recent years, faced with mounting prices, workers in private industry, above all the skilled layers, have been able to maintain their standard of living, primarily because of full employment and a scarcity of labor. But government workers and functionaries, employes of cities and public services and of nationalized enterprises (like the mines) have not received sufficient wage increases to make up for declines in the standard of living.

The miners have felt this particularly acutely. Right after the war, when there was urgent need for their labor, they made gains. Today with the decline of coal as a source of energy, they

The mine engineers are highly qualified technicians who constitute the actual management of the nationalized mines. Their expressions of sympathy with the strikers, including the donation of two days' pay, is unprecedented.

are working in a sick industry. Statistics show that since 1957 wages of the miners have fallen 11.5 per cent behind those of private industry.

After heating around the bush for a long time, the government decided on a derisory increase of two per cent at the beginning of this year and another increase at the end of 1963 which would have brought wages up a total of 5.77 per cent.

Why such an attitude on the part of the government? If one disregards the traditional red tape (and this has played a certain role), the main reason is that the government wants to hold down inflation, setting an example by limiting wages.

It also appears that at the end of February the government, like the unions themselves, had no clear idea of what the reaction of the miners might be toward the limited increases that were granted. The CGT (Confédération Générale de Travailleurs), to which most of the miners belong, did not call for more than a two-day work stoppage before taking a definitive decision. The other unions, the FO (Force Ouvrière) and the CFTC (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens), called for an unlimited strike.

But the government happened to give an impulse to the struggle as well as a political tone to it by deciding to "requisition" the miners; in other words, to mobilize the miners on the job and force them to work like soldiers. In this way the government dealt a blow to the right to strike.

It was not the first time the government has acted in this way. However, up to now it has issued such an order only to small groups of workers (a couple of hundred or so) and the unions limited themselves to registering some timid protests.

Requisitioning the miners was a little too big a bite to swallow in this way. The first to go out on strike despite the requisition were the miners of the Lorraine basin, which is second in importance among the coal fields, and where the government formerly could have counted on a certain response. The labor movement is weakest in the Lorraine basin. In the referendum last October and in the elections in November, de Gaulle got an eighty per cent "yes" vote in the Lorraine and candidates of the de Gaulist UNR (Union pour la Nouvelle République) displaced the former office holders belonging to the MRP (Mouvement Republicain Populaire). Once the Lorraine basin went out on strike, success was assured in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, where Communists and Socialists are dominant and where in the elections of last November they aided each other.

On the eleventh day of the strike, the movement is continuing without the least sign of weakness. The only men going down into the mines are the security teams which the strikers themselves organized to see that no damage occurs below while the pickets watch the gates above.

Through Prime Minister Pompidou, the government vainly pleaded with the miners in a "fireside chat" March 8 over the radio and television network to go back to work. Squads of the CRS (Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité, the French gendarmerie) have been sent into the strike regions, but they are being discreetly kept in their barracks for the time being.

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This is the first big workers struggle since de Gaulle came to power in 1958. It also happens to be a struggle against the government-as-boss. It is pointless to debate whether the government made an error, as a big sector of the press believes, in going as far as a "requisition" by a decree "made out at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises" (where de Gaulle lives) and signed by de Gaulle himself.

Error or not, the government power, after having put an end to the war in Algeria (and to do this it had to turn primarily against the extreme right in France), naturally inclines now to turn against the workers. Error or not, it is now committed to a requisition decree, and it is invoking the authority of the state; that is, demanding a return to work before considering any new negotiations on wages. It is quite probable that at the present moment, the government is not so much preoccupied over upping wages an additional small percentage as over the problem of enforcing the requisition decree.

The miners in France have a tradition of long and militant, if rare, strikes. The last big strike was the one in 1947, notable for its battles with the CRS. After it was lost, the trade-union split occurred that gave birth to the Force Ouvrière. This time the strike shows a power of united action among the unions such as has not been witnessed for a long time.

Up to now the strike has developed in calm fashion in the tradition of the miners, with parades, rallies, music and the singing of the Internationale. The government appears to be letting it proceed; it has received all kinds of appeals for an understanding, etc. Probably the situation will not crystallize for a while.

But it is quite clear that the government has not given up thought of a test of force, while the unions (all of them) although standing firm up to now on the right to strike, have been anxious to open negotiations. A number of people, it seems, would like to help the government save face. The danger is that it will work out the other way and they will open a breach in the ranks of the strikers.

In the present political situation in France, the main concern of the workers' movement is to assure the miners of complete solidarity, first of all in compelling the withdrawal of the requisition, secondly in putting the squeeze on for the wage hike.

The first demonstrations of solidarity, as we have indicated above, have been very good. The collection of funds poses the necessity for a Joint Solidarity Treasury. Another need is a Central Strike Committee; that is, a united front of the miners federations. Other demonstrations must be considered if the government does not give in, especially street demonstrations. The miners must not be left to face the CRS alone.

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It was the government which, in its way, brought the miners strike to a political level, as was noted. But we have not reached the point where the miners and the working class in general have joined battle, even objectively, against the de Gaullist regime as such. We are only at the first great confrontation between the workers and a regime of which they do not have a clear understanding, the traditional working-class parties having done nothing to clarify them on this subject.

The power of the workers on the level of economic demands is proving to be very great; the same cannot be said for the political level. But it is through such confrontations, with all they place at stake, that the political consciousness of the workers will be revived and developed.

REACTION OF THE FRENCH MINERS TO POMPIDOU'S APPEAL

In the Lorraine Basin

(As reported in Le Monde, March 10-11)

Does this mean that the oration of the Prime Minister had no effect whatever? Quite visibly, in this city of Chénes, where some 4,500 persons of miners' families live, and where television sets are numerous, the oration -- the "sermon," some miners would say -- aroused neither a warm nor a chill response..

In one of the clean, neat little homes where I found myself in the company of six people (four underground miners and two women), the reactions, as Mr. Pompidou's explanations went along, were rather ironic and bitter. There was little or no growling, just wry smiles.

"That's true, that's the miners...responsible for this here inflation," said one of the women watching the television screen.

The men were more explicit. "Him," and he gestured at Mr. Pompidou, "when he wants a raise, he doesn't run up against any question of conversations or negotiations."

"He ought to come here. We'd show him our pay slips," insisted another miner.

Finally, out of disgust no doubt, one of the two women concluded: "The day I voted for that big Charley I would have done better to break a leg. Anyway, from now on, never again."

In the Nord Basin

(As reported in Le Figaro, March 9-10)

It was an underground miner who told me the following:

"When he reached the chapter that interested us, we said: 'Ah, at last, he's going to speak about us.' And it's right there that the first criticism comes of the head of the government. He spoke of the miners. He didn't speak to the miners."

Two underground miners told me:

"Our first impression was that he didn't speak squarely to the miners. He said, 'Mister,' talking to the journalist he was facing. You don't speak to us that way."

As for the broadcast as a whole, the remarks were bitter. Here are some random phrases caught on the fly:

"What we're interested in is getting what we're asking for... They take us for kids -- we don't want any promises because they don't stand up... We want action... We want immediate talks with all our unions together and we're not going back to work until that condition is met if we have to live on bread and water while we're waiting... The miners have firmly decided to keep up the struggle to the end for immediate results and not for the month of September."

One of the government promises is to "review" the situation next September if the miners go back to work now.7

THE COUP D'ETAT IN SYRIA

By T. F. Santy

The coup d'état in Syria, which toppled the Khaled el Azem government on March 8, exactly one month after the Kassem government fell in Iraq, testifies again to the unrest and ferment in the Arab world.

In 1958 the Syrian bourgeoisie, confronted with rising revolutionary agitation among the masses, sought to strengthen their position by uniting Syria and Egypt in the United Arab Republic. But as Nasser subordinated their interests more and more to those of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, they turned their backs on Arab unity and, exploiting errors committed by Nasser, provoked a split, taking Syria out of the UAR in September 1961.

Among the Arab masses, however, two aspirations are quite

strong -- Arab unification and socialism. These sentiments have received notable reinforcement in the recent period. After the split with Syria, Nasser came out for "Arab socialism" in a sense approaching that of the Baath (Socialist party of Arab Renaissance) which was organized some twenty years ago in Syria and which extended its influence into Iraq and Jordan.

The coup d'état in Iraq last month was largely the work of partisans of the Baath. Last week's coup d'état in Syria was carried out by the Aflek wing of the Baath, the current which favors reaching an understanding with Egypt. The new head of the Syrian government, Salah Al Din Bitar, was one of the founders of the Baath and a leading member of the Aflek tendency.

The "anti-Communist" aspect of these coup d'états must be condemned. In Iraq the blood purge is still continuing, three members of the Central Committee of the Communist party having been executed March 7 by hanging according to press dispatches. (Hussein El Radwi, secretary of the party; Mohamed Hussein Abou Eleich and Hassan El Exena.)

Terror or repression waged against any sector of the labor movement weakens and undermines the anti-imperialist struggle as a whole. That is why the recent coup d'états have brought expressions of smug satisfaction from American imperialism. "From the Western standpoint," the International Edition of the New York Times declared editorially March 12, "the most important factor is that all these revolutions are vehemently anti-Communist. The Communists are being hunted down, jailed or even executed."

The fact that the Communist parties of these countries could be victimized at all, however, shows what disastrous policies they have been following. In Iraq, for instance, the Communist party was so strong that it could have taken power, had it wished, shortly after the 1958 uprising. The extreme isolation and weakness of the Communists today is due to the fact that they subordinated the struggle for socialism to the narrowest temporary needs of Soviet diplomacy and thus went against mass movements which consequently fell completely under the domination of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaders. This occurred, too, with the Syrian Communist party under the leadership of Kaled Bagdache.

With the victory of the Baath party in Syria, the question has again come to the fore of welding together the genuinely politically independent Arab countries -- Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Algeria. Aside from the confusion which unquestionably exists as to the basis on which this can be achieved, it is only thanks to the considerable social progress made in these countries that the question of Arab unity can be considered at all as a concrete issue.

Moves toward unity cannot help but strengthen the revolutionary forces in the other Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya) and foster new developments in the

independent countries in the direction of a genuine socialist transformation.

HAVE THE KURDS WON AUTONOMY?

The Aref regime announced March 9 that it had agreed to "the principle of decentralization of government" for the some two million Kurdish people who live in Iraq and who were in rebellion against the Kassem regime that was toppled in a coup d'état last month.

Wild celebrations of joy were reported underway in the Kurdish area where the announcement was received as equivalent to recognition of Kurdish autonomy.

In Baghdad, however, the exact meaning of the announcement remained equivocal. It was accompanied by the rather ominous proviso that the Kurds must turn in their arms. Once disarmed, the rebellious people, who have fought for many years for self-rule, may find that they gravely over-estimated what the Aref regime meant by "decentralization."

If the Aref regime finds itself actually compelled to go through with the agreement in the sense in which it has been taken by the Kurds, however, the event will have wide repercussions. The Kurdish people extend into Syria, Turkey and Iran. These sectors, too, will expect self-government if not union with the Kurds in Iraq.

The success of the Kurds will also inspire similar movements by other subject peoples for greater voice in handling their own affairs if not complete self-government. The fact that an Arab government grants autonomy will, in the final analysis, bring greater strength and cohesion to the movement for Arab unification by winning the support of other peoples living in this part of the world.

The March 12 Le Monde carries an article by special correspondent Eric Rouleau, purporting to give the inside story of the negotiations. The Kurdish leader, General Barzani, he reports, was brought into the plot to overthrow Kassem about a year ago. The price for his support was autonomy.

Barzani exhibited great mistrust of the plotters and insisted that one of the first declarations of the new government, if it succeeded in toppling Kassem, must be to grant autonomy to the Kurds.

Various nominations which Barzani made for posts in the government, including Aref, were made when the plotters succeeded; but nothing was said about autonomy for the Kurds.

The Barzani group felt that they had been betrayed and the younger ones especially prepared to resume battle. The 59-year-old general, however, decided to make still another try at negotiating

and sent a delegation to Baghdad headed by 27-year-old Jalal Talabani.

The Aref regime stalled for time, explaining that many Iraqis would misunderstand autonomy as dismemberment of the country and that the "brother Arab countries" would object. They suggested that Talabani go to Cairo and Algiers and present his case. Talabani agreed.

Much to the astonishment of the Aref regime, Talabani met with a favorable reception.

According to Le Monde, Nasser said, "No one can deny that the Kurd people do exist. Consequently they have their rights, and one of these is to lay claim to autonomy."

Nasser then turned to the Iraqi members of the delegation and said, "I don't see why the word autonomy should frighten you. Many European countries have adopted the system of decentralization on an ethnic basis without thereby putting in danger their national unity."

He also argued that it would strengthen Arab nationalism because it would win the friendship and support of the Kurdish people in confronting the enemies of Arabism.

In Algiers the delegation met with a similar response. Ben Bella adopted an attitude like Nasser's. He even drew a parallel between the insurrection of the Kurds against the Baghdad government and that of the FLN (National Liberation Front) against France.

One of the main arguments of the Aref regime was thus destroyed and they had to fall back on the alleged resistance of the Iraqi people to granting autonomy. Stalling again, Aref demanded a period of "psychological preparation" like that used by de Gaulle in opening the way for Algerian independence.

He proposed a series of partial steps to Barzani that would take some time. But the leader of the Kurds rejected this kind of haggling and delay. His reply was "Recognition of the principle of autonomy publicly first of all, and then we will negotiate the modalities and limits of this autonomy..." Baghdad's response to this was the announcement of "decentralization."

It remains to be seen whether the Aref regime can negotiate the stubborn Kurdish fighters into handing in their arms.

INDONESIAN COMMUNIST PARTY BACKS SOEKARNO

The January 1 issue of The People's Daily, official Peking publication, published without comment extensive excerpts from a speech made December 24 in Djakarta by Aidit, chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Indonesian Communist party.

The failure of The People's Daily to comment is worth noting in view of the fact that the line expounded by Aidit is scarcely distinguishable from that of Togliatti, Thorez, Dange, or the highly opportunistic leaders of the American Communist party, all of whom are currently being raked over the coals by the Chinese Communist party leaders for their lack of militancy in relation to the bourgeois governments they live under.

The occasion for Aidit's speech was an address by President Soekarno stating that his government stood on three planks: "nationalism," "religion," and "socialism."

Aidit said that "every political party that wants to continue to exist must accept this message." Soekarno's address, he continued, represented what the Indonesian Communist party stood for. Aidit asked Soekarno to name a cabinet on this basis, assuring the Indonesian president that the Communist party would support it.

Flatly rejecting any other road to socialism than the "peaceful one," which he maintains is open in Indonesia, Aidit said that to oppose Soekarno's position would signify "rejecting the peaceful road to socialism and adopting the road of nonpeaceful and antidemocratic means."

Aidit boasted of the size and power of the Indonesian Communist party. From some 10,000 members in 1951, when the party was reorganized after an abortive insurrection a few years earlier which was put down in blood by Soekarno, the organization now has about 2,000,000 members, making it the largest Communist party in the world outside of China and the Soviet Union.

The head of the party boasted of its monolithism. There are "no differences" in its ranks, he said, because the "party teaches Marxism-Leninism."

As for the differences between Peking and Moscow, Aidit considered this "only a temporary phenomenon" which can be "resolved." He hoped for a world conference of Communist parties but said that there must first be "one or two years of preparatory work."

JULIÃO'S REMARKS ON SOCIALIST ROAD IN LATIN AMERICA

Last week, in reporting a call by Francisco Julião for a Continental Congress of Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, we quoted the Brazilian peasant leader as warning that there is "no other way out except armed struggle in Latin America." The March 3 issue of Hshinhua carries additional parts of special interest in this speech which Julião made in Havana March 1:

"The road Latin America is to take is the road of Cuba, and Venezuela has already embarked upon this road."

"There is no way out but revolution for the situation in

Venezuela, and this is more or less the case with the whole of Latin America except the free land of Cuba.'

"Referring to the misery brought to the Latin-American peoples by U.S. imperialist exploitation, Julião said: 'Can millions upon millions of people remain in that state? We cannot allow U.S. imperialism to plunder the resources of countries on this continent or elsewhere.'

"He stressed: 'In Latin America, not a single patriot is standing aloof from the struggle for burying North American imperialism.'

"Julião said: 'Liberty has to be paid for. One even has to shed one's own blood in order to win it. We don't believe in the peaceful road. It is impossible to effect the transition from capitalism to socialism peacefully.'

"It would be ideal and marvellous to replace the capitalist system with the socialist system without costing the people a drop of blood. But this is impossible.'

"Julião recalled that the Russian Revolution had triumphed under the leadership of great Lenin at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. In glorious China led by Mao Tse-tung, the victory of the revolution cost hundreds of millions of lives.' In this respect, Julião also referred to the struggles of the Vietnamese and Cuban peoples.

"The road of revolution was beset with hardships and difficulties and Cuba bore witness to this, Julião declared, and quoted a Cuban militiaman as saying: 'A revolutionary should be the last to eat, the last to go to bed, but should be the first to lay down his life whenever necessary.'

"In conclusion, he said, 'The revolutionaries are not those who sit on doorsteps with folded arms to watch the corpse of imperialism carried past, but those who rally the masses to make a revolution.'"

LUIS CARLOS PRESTES ECHOES KHRUSHCHEV

During a recent visit to Havana, Francisco Julião made an extremely militant speech from which it can be concluded that this leader of the Brazilian peasantry, who is also a prominent figure in the left wing of the Brazilian Socialist party, now envisages for the revolution in Brazil a pattern like that of the Cuban Revolution. Another prominent Brazilian radical visited Havana at the same time -- Luis Carlos Prestes, main leader of the Communist party of Brazil, who stood not far from power at the close of World War II but chose not to struggle for it. Prestes spoke in Havana as if he were trying to refute Julião.

In an interview published in the Havana Communist party pub-

lication Hoy March 9, Prestes is quoted as saying:

"Violent revolution is not necessarily the means to install communism in Brazil.

"There are people who wrongly think that the best support for Cuba would be the establishment of an armed struggle in Brazil to cause the downfall of the government.

"In the current situation in Brazil, this would be completely false. A violent revolution would cut the Communists from the masses and lead the Brazilian government to break relations with Cuba.

"According to the principles of Marx and Lenin, revolution is not synonymous with violence and profound governmental changes can be brought about without insurrection or civil war."

And if the revolution were to succeed and bring Prestes or Julião to power in Brazil?

IN MEMORY OF FERNANDO BRAVO JAMES

The February issue of Lucha Obrera, official newspaper of the POR (Partido Obrero Revolucionario), Bolivian section of the Fourth International, which has resumed publication after some months suspension, carries the sad news of the death of one of the main leaders of Bolivian Trotskyism, Fernando Bravo James.

More than 3,000 people joined the funeral cortège in La Paz for the well-known professor. Hundreds of floral offerings banked the walls of the Salón de Honor del Rectorado, which the university made available for the services of its faculty member.

Workers of all trades, students, peasants, political and trade-union leaders, Trotskyists and their friends and sympathizers packed the hall to pay final tribute to Fernando Bravo.

Lucha Obrera does not give the cause of death, but the Trotskyist leader was stricken while conducting a teachers strike last fall. The doctors ordered him to take a complete rest, but as head of the strike committee, he felt he could not do this. Only after the strike was won did he take a taxi and go to a hospital. Surrounded by friends and comrades, he realized that he would probably die. He asked the Bolivian Trotskyists to go forward, as he was sure of their eventual victory and he asked that his body be wrapped in the red flag. He died a few days later on November 17.

Comrade Bravo belonged to the generation that was sent to fight in the Chaco war with Paraguay (1931-34). He was aroused by the senselessness of this slaughter which was precipitated by rival imperialist interests. Going to work at La Joya, a well-known mine, he participated in organizing the Miners Federation.

On this road he eventually became a Trotskyist and remained one until the day of his death twenty-five years later.

Seeking an education, he became a student at the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oruro. Later he was granted a chair in Economic Geography, first at Oruro and then the University of La Paz.

As a college professor he was very active in the union activities of the teachers but also maintained close contact with the miners union. He was one of the team that wrote the famous Theses of Pulacayo, a militant, revolutionary program that guided the miners in their struggles for many years. He was a prominent speaker at the miners congresses in Pulacayo, Colquiri, and Huanuni. His speeches were noted for their sharp opposition to the policy of betrayal of the Bolivian revolution that occurred under leadership of the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario).

Speakers at the funeral services included Dr. Nava Morales, Dean of the Faculty of Economic Sciences, who spoke in behalf of the entire university staff; Hugo González Moscoso, general secretary of the POR, who told about Comrade Bravo's life and his dedication to the principles of Trotskyism; Jaime Bravo, representing the Federation of Urban Teachers of La Paz, and Comrade Atahuichi, a delegate to the COB (Central Obrera Boliviana) who represented the Center of Students of the Economic Faculty.

The casket was carried from the University to the Comibol, the building of the mining board, where speeches were made by Dr. Octavio Lazo de la Vega, representing the Potosina Action Center, and Enrique Salinas, delegate of the Federation of Mine Workers of Bolivia.

A cortège was then formed. More than 3,000 mourners went to the cemetery where speeches were made by Jose Navarro in the name of the workers calls of the party, and the teachers' leader, Villarroel. Finally the leader of the Trotskyist youth José Moreno, carried out the last wish of Fernando Bravo, laying over the dead leader's body the Red Flag of the POR and of the Fourth International, one in which Comrade Bravo himself had painted the hammer and sickle crossed by a "4."

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