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DEMOCRACY AND SPANISH CONFLICT

How Civil War Sprang from Disorder under a Powerless Government

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HEMEROTECA
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HASTY and superficial reasoning, blind to the existence of notorious facts, and propaganda more clever than sincere, have induced many who are fortunate enough to live in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian democracies to adopt towards the Spanish civil war an attitude quite opposed to their most intimate convictions.

They imagine that the war in Spain is a struggle between a legally elected Government and a part of the Spanish Army, which, reviving the shameful period of military pronunciamientos, has revolted against the properly constituted Authority in order to satisfy unworthy class-ambitions and a thirst for power. On this assumption they believe that the triumph of the Government designated by Sr. Azaña would mean the consolidation of a liberal democracy, while its defeat would imply the setting-up of a military dictatorship for an indefinite period.

THE CLASS-DICTATORSHIP

Having always professed a preference for a parliamentary democracy, in spite of all its defects, and a dislike of an indefinite dictatorship, of whatever party, class or person, I feel bound to point out their mistake.

It is not true that the Popular Front rose to power on a formidable wave of popular opinion which gave it a crushing victory at the polls. Nor is it true that the part of Spain which is still under the control of the Popular Fronts is ruled by a constitutional and parliamentary government. On the contrary, it is under the heel of a ruthless and barbarous class-dictatorship.

It cannot be admitted that the defeat of the Nationalists would mean the consolidation of a democracy which has long ceased to exist. Nor can it be taken for granted that their victory would imply the establishment of an unlimited Fascist régime in Spain, and the subordination of

the country to the external policies of Italy and Germany. Let us consider the facts.

GUILESS PROGRAMME

In dissolving the Cortes elected in November, 1933, before half their legal mandat had elapsed, the President of the Republic, Señor Zamora, made a great mistake—perhaps with the best of intentions—under the false impression that a new appeal to the country by a non-party man (Sr. Portela), with no other backing than the President's good will, would work a miracle and produce a strong party which would support him and act as a regulating force in Spanish political life. The present Spanish electoral system—an absurd combination of the majority system with one of limited votes in large constituencies—together with the tense atmosphere in which political struggles were waged, condemned this unfortunate move of the President's to failure in advance.

The elections were prepared under the aegis of the Popular Front, which united the Left middle-class—having little influence on public opinion—with the proletarian organisations, even those of the most extreme type. The Popular Front programme did not overstep the natural limits of a Left middle-class or democratic programme. But the proletarian organisations which accepted it, led by men who preached class-war and a proletarian dictatorship, and the masses who followed them, more extremist even than their leaders, knew that if they won the elections they could easily impose their will, as they had both the numbers and the necessary courage, while neither Sr. Azaña nor any other representative of the moderate Left had will or character enough to resist their demands or their threats.

HATRED EXCITED

So it came about that, while the election programme of the Popular Front—a long and dull document which nobody

troubled to read—was politically and socially almost conservative in its reforms, the propaganda carried out during the election period, monopolised as it was by the leaders of the proletarian organisations, was incredibly violent. Ignoring whatever constructive side there may be to Socialism, or even to Communism, it confined itself to rousing the evil instincts of the mob and exciting class-hatred, promising the most absurd social reforms, based entirely on the annihilation of all opponents.

The elections of Feb. 16, held in an atmosphere of pre-revolutionary passion, gave a majority to the Popular Front candidates in many of the provincial capitals and other big cities, and as the results from the big cities were the first to be known, by next day the proletarian masses thought they were sure of victory—a victory not of a programme which they had not read, and which no one had expounded to them, but of the incendiary doctrines served out to them at meetings and on bills during the election campaign. So the excesses of the mob began. In face of them the police adopted a waiting attitude, since the authorities on whom they directly depended—the civil governors previously nominated by Sr. Portela—fled or went into hiding, or did not dare to give orders of any kind which might infuriate the masses, since these within a short time would actually, and perhaps legally, have the power in their hands.

FALSIFIED RETURNS

Although during Feb. 17 and 18 the result of the elections seemed doubtful, and the forces of the Right and Left were evenly balanced, one thing was clear from the outset, and that was the complete defeat of the Government candidates supported by the President of the Republic and Sr. Portela's Cabinet.

An anarchical situation arose and spread rapidly through many Spanish provinces. During Feb. 17 and 18—before the result of the elections was known—Gibraltar was crowded with property owners and business men from the neighbouring provinces of Andalusia.

In such circumstances was the government of the country offered to Sr. Azaña, the leader of the Popular Front, the present President of the Republic.

Meantime the results of the elections which were coming in gave a large number of seats to the Popular Front, but did not ensure it a majority. To obtain this majority, during Feb. 19 and 20—the dates previously fixed for the scrutiny and the announcement of the successful candidates—under compulsion from the proletarian masses of the Popular Front, a large number of certificates of the partial scrutinies were falsified; but in spite of all these malpractices, the Popular Front still failed to secure a majority.

To achieve their end, they were obliged to postpone the general scrutiny in some

of the provinces in order to gain time for further falsifications. By means of these they managed to produce a majority of 10 or 12 seats for the Popular Front, which did not represent, even with the help of all their forged papers, one-half of the total votes cast.*

So insignificant a majority condemned the new Cortes to impotence. There was still a hope, it is true, that once in power the Government might attract and absorb various groups, thereby increasing and consolidating its strength in the House, but Sr. Azaña refused to run any risks and used his insignificant majority—a majority obtained by fraud—to annul the elections in some of the provinces where the Popular Front had been defeated.

Fresh elections, during which the excesses of the mob were countenanced by the authorities, at length gave the Government of the Popular Front the parliamentary basis which the votes of the Spanish electorate had not yielded.

PROMISES BY RADIO

A few hours after accepting office, Sr. Azaña broadcast a speech to the nation in irrefragable terms. He declared that he would faithfully carry out the Popular Front programme with the help of Parliament, observing strictly the limits fixed by the Constitution, and that he would allow no measures to be forced on him when in power which he had not accepted while in opposition.

Sr. Azaña's speech, full of good sense and forcefully delivered, kindled a ray of hope, but this was extinguished within a few hours. The leaders of the Communist and Socialist organisations demanded of Sr. Azaña that a start should at once be made in carrying out the Popular Front programme, without waiting for measures to be voted in Parliament, even where the Constitution required it.

Their demands were contrary not only to the Constitution, but also to the obligation contracted a few hours previously by the President with all Spaniards. Contrary to the Constitution, a general amnesty was decreed, although it could be legally granted only by passing a special law. Again, without any law to that effect, and contrary to the Constitution, it was decreed that employers should take back discharged workmen, although they had been dismissed for legitimate reasons, although the Arbitrary Courts had sanctioned their dismissal, and although the Government had ordered it.

DISRUPTION SETS IN

By the application of these two decrees, all discipline among the workers was des-

*The actual number of votes polled by the Popular Front was 4,556,000, while the Centre received 340,000 and the Right 4,676,000.—(Spain Today, p. 119)

troyed, and countless cases of monstrous injustice resulted.

These early illegalities on the Government's part meant a considerable speeding up of the process of social disruption through which Spain had been passing since Feb. 17. The Law was perverted, the Constitution mocked; and the extremist masses

soon found their leaders prepared to countenance and encourage excesses and crimes of all kinds.

And so the Spanish Civil War began, with the invasion of private estates, the murder of employers, the burning of churches and the persecution of Fascists.

SPAIN UNDER SHADOW OF ANARCHIST RULE

Franco's Coup as Vindication of Patriotism

IT should be observed that Fascism in Spain was a negligible quantity until after the elections of Feb. 16. At these elections, in Madrid, where Fascism had the greatest numbers and the greatest scope, the Fascist candidates only obtained 2,000 votes, with a roll of more than 400,000 voters.

In Spain the Popular Front, organised to fight non-existent Fascism, by pursuing a ghost created a reality, which is called Fascism simply because it was given that name by its enemies. It is in reality nothing but a natural defensive reaction such as is bound to develop in any political entity when violent forces of disruption threaten its very existence, and the Government, represented by anarchy, will not, or cannot, fulfill its most elementary duty of maintaining order and enforcing the law.

"HELP FOR THE REDS"

When Sr. Azaña was elected President of the Republic, Sr. Casares Quiroga took over the Popular Front Government from him. During his Premiership the process of internal disruption in Spain accelerated daily. The Government was under the complete control of Socialists, Communists and Anarchists.

Political and social crimes were the order of the day. It was impossible to use the highways without paying tribute, under the guise of "Help for the Reds," to gangs that robbed travellers under the very eyes of the police, who were obliged to remain helpless spectators of crimes of all kinds committed in the name of a revolutionary theory. A red flag or a clenched fist raised aloft gave complete licence to rob, burn or murder with impunity.

The verdict which Sr. Casares Quiroga's conduct deserves may be judged from two instances. First, when asked in Parliament to put an end to the state of civil war into which many of the Spanish provinces had drifted, and make everyone—both Right and Left, Fascist and Communist—obey the law and respect authority, he replied that in this struggle the Government regarded itself not as a judge, but as a belligerent.

Secondly the murder of the monarchist leader, Sr. Calvo Sotelo, committed

by police in uniform, using an official police motor-lorry, drawn from Sr. Casares Quiroga not one word of protest, nor did he give the slightest indication that the murderers would be punished.

THE ARMY'S ACTION

Then it was that the military revolt broke out. The general attitude of the Army was well known: absolute respect for the Government and legally constituted authority, so long as the disruption and bolshevisation of Spain were not imminent; once these threatened they were on the Government's side if by chance it proposed to resist, but against the Government if it submitted to the internal disruption of Spain.

Here we come to the most delicate and the most important point. Had the time arrived when the most elementary sense of patriotic duty demanded that the Army should intervene, either without the Government, or against the Government, to check the process of disruption in Spain, already well advanced? On this point many may have their doubts. Many of us, indeed, did have our doubts, and were inclined to say "No" when the military rising broke out.

But all our doubts vanished when we found that the Iberian Anarchist Federation (F.A.I.)—the powerful organisations which really rules in all the provinces still under the Popular Front Government—had made perfect preparations for revolutionary intervention, aiming at *seizing* power the moment when, the Army disorganised and corrupted by anarchist propaganda, there should nowhere be sufficient force to oppose their bold move.

CATALONIA'S EXAMPLE

It was notorious that these extremist organisations demanded the removal from the Army of officers of all ranks who might oppose an Anarchist or Communist coup. It was notorious, too, alas, that the Government had not sufficient honesty or character to resist their pressure or their threats.

Should anyone doubt the reality of Spain's impending danger, and think that time might

have lessened or removed it, I invite him to consider a circumstance which will show how profoundly he is mistaken. This is the present situation in Catalonia.

In Catalonia the military revolt lasted only 24 hours. We may even say it was over in 12 hours, when the head of the movement, General Goded, a prisoner in Barcelona, spoke over the wireless to all the other Catalan garrisons, advising them to surrender. From July 20 the Popular Front was in complete command of the situation in Catalonia.

Catalan territory is far removed from the war zone. No attack has been made against it by the Nationalist forces. The internal situation in Catalonia, with its autonomous Government, is consequently not determined by the Civil War; it is the natural outcome of conditions prevailing throughout Spain before the military revolt.

What is happening in Catalonia? The Red Terror rules there more savagely and cruelly than in any other part of Spain.

THREAT TO ALL SPAIN

Not only are priests, the middleclasses, and Right supporters persecuted and murdered, but moderate Left supporters, whose leaders organised the Popular Front, have been treated just the same. The most prominent of these leaders are in hiding in France, and Belgium, or have crossed the Atlantic on some fantastic mission, as a pretext for their flight. Such as remain in Barcelona are there because they have been unable to escape the implacable vigilance of the F.A.I.

For every priest or middle-class citizen the Anarchists have murdered 10 workers. Courts of Justice, both civil and criminal, have been suppressed and replaced by "Popular Courts," composed by representatives of the revolutionary committees charged to administer justice, not according to the law, but according to the dictates of their revolutionary principles. It must be remembered, moreover, that the majority of the executions which take place daily are not even ordered by these Popular Courts, but simply by committees of the Communist and Anarchist organisations.

Churches have been burned, the majority of private houses plundered, and all property both Spanish and foreign, has been sequestered. In banks the safes have been opened and Anarchist committees freely dispose of the bank's effects and private customers deposits. All newspapers have been taken over, not by the Government, but by members of the different revolutionary organisations; they use them to support the policy of the revolutionaries, at the expense of the former owner, if he possesses property in Spain.

Only in Hungary, under Bela Kun, could the system of government now operating

in Catalonia be matched. And the system of government operating in Catalonia—which is that operating in Valencia, Alicante, Jaén, Málaga, Cartagena, and all the provinces at present under the control of the Popular Front—would now be operating throughout Spain, had it not been for the military revolt.

IF IT WERE ENGLAND

These facts should be carefully considered by all who, living in Parliamentary and democratic countries where respect for law and authority are postulates admitted by all political parties, find it difficult to grasp the reality of what has been happening in Spain since Feb. 17.

I ask all reasonable men to consider what their attitude would be in their own country—let us say England—if the Government should ever come to submit to the orders of Anarchist and Communist committees, and if these imposed, and the Government accepted every form of abuse: violating the Constitution infringing the laws and prostituting justice; sanctioning crime, by preventing the police from opposing robbery, arson and murder, and removing from their posts all who did not co-operate gladly in this work of national destruction; organising the murder of political opponents by uniformed police, and wrecking the Army.

This is just what has happened in Spain, and there is no diplomatic or consular representative who can contradict me.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Since the truth of these facts must be admitted, it must be admitted, too, that Spain had come to such a pass that a revolt against the Government was not only a necessity, but also a patriotic duty.

I cannot say—no one can say—what form of government will be established in Spain if the movement headed by Gen. Franco is successful. What is clear, however is that it will have a markedly national character. Consequently, Spain's foreign policy, will be based on purely patriotic considerations which will exclude all possibility of Spanish interests being subordinated to those of any other country or political system. We have only to look at the map of Spain, to see at once that her national interests are not, and cannot be, opposed to those of Great Britain.

On the other hand, if the Nationalist rising fails, there is not the slightest doubt that in Spain there would be established a Soviet Republic governed from Moscow, wholly absorbed in the political sphere of the U.S.S.R. Can any Englishmen, can anyone belonging to our individualistic and Christian Western civilisation, possibly hesitate before the prospect offered by these two alternatives?

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