

NEW MASSES

SEPTEMBER 15, 1936

Britain and Spain

A keen analysis of the relation of the British ruling-class policy and the British Labor Party to the Spanish civil war

By R. Palme Dutt

IN letters of flame and blood, the issue of the present era is being written for all to read. The murderous war let loose by fascism in Spain, with the open support of the world forces of fascism, confirms once again, even for the most skeptical, the truth of Lenin's dictum that the path of the proletariat also in western Europe lies through "heavy civil war." What the Communist warnings for the two decades since the world war had not yet had time to teach the mass of the workers, fascism is teaching. Starting in Germany in 1933 with the Hitler terror (which in three years has slain ten thousand and condemned a quarter of a million human beings to six hundred thousand years' imprisonment or six hundred times the record of Bismarck's twelve-year anti-Socialist repression), through the bloody bombardment of Austria and the Asturias in 1934, through the ceaseless military preparations of fascism and open violation of treaties, through the Italian brigand war on Ethiopia in 1935, to the combined fascist war on the Spanish people in 1936, the fascist war offensive in Europe has advanced in widening waves. Every weakness, every hesitation or division in the popular ranks, only draws on the offensive and prepares the way for its extension. Today all, even the most legalistic democrats, liberals, reformists, progressives, pacifists, are compelled increasingly to recognize the inevitable struggle against an enemy that knows no law and no restraint, and to recognize that all they stand for is bound up with the victory of the armed workers' struggle in Spain. In this battle for life against destruction and barbarism we need to unite all forces in order to secure by every means the victory of the Spanish people. This issue transcends all others today.

"Armed struggle, not of their seeking,



William Sanderson

has begun and must be carried through." Thus the Labor Party organ, the *Daily Herald*, of July 20, 1936. Seventeen years ago the first manifesto of the Communist International proclaimed:

Civil war is *forced upon* the laboring classes by their arch-enemies. The working class must answer blow for blow, if it is not to renounce its own object and its own future, which is at the same time the future of all humanity.

The Communist Parties, far from conjuring up civil war artificially, rather strive to shorten its duration as much as possible—in any case it has become an iron necessity—to minimize the number of its victims, and above all to secure victory for the proletariat.

For seventeen years this issue, on which Communism has from the outset spoken the hard truth which all today are beginning to recognize, has been made the basis of attacks by the MacDonalds and Morrisons against Communism as the party of "violence" and of "civil war." Two and a half years ago, in the face of the armed struggles in Austria, when the Socialist and Communist workers fought shoulder to shoulder, the Labor Party organ was compelled to declare on February 14, 1934: "They could do no other. Civil war was forced upon them." And today, in the face of the armed struggles in Spain, when the Socialist and Communist Parties are fighting in a united front, the Labor Party organ is once again compelled to declare: "Armed struggle, not of their seeking, has begun and must be carried through." Who, then, was right or understood better the conditions of western Europe? The Communist International, or the traitor MacDonald and the reformist Morrison? In the burning flames of reality the sophistries shrivel and crumble.

AND YET, despite this situation, when the supreme need is unity of all forces in support of the Spanish struggle, when the united Socialist and Communist workers of Spain are

fighting and dying in "armed struggle, not of their seeking," the same official organ of the Labor Party, which proclaims this armed struggle inevitable and calls for its victory, denounces the Communist Party as "a party of violence" (August 13, 1936), and on this ground opposes the same unity in Britain, which is indispensable to transform the international situation and give the necessary aid for victory in Spain. This double bookkeeping would be incredible if it were not true. In one breath it is declared that "armed struggle must be carried through." In the next breath the Communist Party, which is spending itself in the forefront of the common fight to carry it through, is denounced as a party supporting armed struggle. Alternately, the supreme issue of the present struggle in Spain is declared to be the fight for democracy; and in the next breath the Communist Party is derided as "reformist" and "pseudo-liberal" because it puts in the forefront, at the present stage, the fight for democratic rights against fascism, and does not declare the immediate issue to be socialism. In one and the same article Morrison (in *Forward*, August 1) proclaims Hats Off to the People's Front in Spain: "We British Labor people raise our

hats to the workers in Spain, men and women; this mighty proletarian army has made a wonderful fight"; and then, amazingly, he proceeds to show that a People's Front must not be realized in Britain: "Still less is it wise to compare Spain and Britain; Spanish conditions are much less like British than French. . . . I still believe and hope that socialism can come to Britain without bloody revolution." (German Social Democracy also entertained this "belief and hope.")

IT IS EVIDENT that here is a glaring contradiction between the burning realities and needs of the international situation, which all are compelled to recognize, and the policy for home consumption, which is still maintained in disastrous opposition to these realities. This contradiction is at the root of the weakness in the international front of the popular forces, which plays into the hands of the fascist offensive. The local narrow sectarian opposition to the united front, derived from the days of MacDonaldism, from the denial of the class struggle or the possibility of armed struggle in the countries of western Europe, is maintained in the face of the object lesson of present facts, and lets down the whole front

of struggle. The debit side of the account wipes out the credit side. *It is correct to recognize the urgent importance of the armed struggle of the Spanish people and to call for all support to it. But that support can only be effectively realized if the united front and the People's Front are realized in Britain.* It is the absence of the People's Front in Britain, and the consequent continued dominance of the National government, with its fascist sympathies, that gives a free hand to the fascist Powers to promote fascism in Europe, while strangling the role of the People's Front government in France. This international aspect of the Spanish struggle, and our consequent task, is the most important for us to realize in Britain.

SPAIN IS NOT BRITAIN? So, too, Germany was not Italy, and Austria was not Germany. These truisms of the differences of conditions not only cover blindness to the basic character of the capitalist-class dictatorship in all countries beneath the manifold differences, and above all to the unity of emergency methods to which every privileged class finally resorts when its privileges are threatened. They also cover—and this is more urgently serious for



A. Refregier

the immediate situation—blindness to the international character of the front of reaction which is built up on the basis of the Spanish struggle. The front of reaction in Spain is not only Spanish, nor only German Nazi and Italian Fascist, but also to a certain degree British. Spain may not be Britain, but there is much in the forces behind the reaction in Spain, and especially in the powerful capitalist interests behind it, that is directly British. And the British ruling class has no such illusions or blindness as to the unity of the struggle. For this it is only necessary to study the British Conservative press, which by its open class solidarity with the Spanish reaction betrays with abundant clearness the intentions of the British ruling class in the event of need in Britain.

Consider for a moment the significance of the language of the strongest individual leader of British Conservatism, Churchill, in connection with Spain:

It is idle to claim that a constitutional and parliamentary regime is legally or morally entitled to the obedience of all classes, when it is actually being subverted and devoured from day to day by Communism. A constitutional government, to be worthy of the name, must prove itself capable of preserving law and order, and protecting life, freedom, and property: If it fails to enforce these guarantees, no parliamentary system can endure. [From "The Spanish Tragedy," in the *Evening Standard*, August 10, 1936.]

There is no excuse for misunderstanding this language, which is the statement not of a Spanish reactionary, but of a foremost leader of the British ruling class. Parliamentary democracy will be permitted only so long as it maintains the rights of "property," i.e., so long as it maintains capitalism. Once these rights are invaded, legality and constitutionalism go by the board, and "no parliamentary system can endure."

The labor movement will do well to pay heed to this language of the real rulers of Britain, and not to be doped by the assurances of a Morrison that "Spanish conditions are not like British," and that the danger of "violence" comes from communism.

IN THE FACE of this open class consciousness and contempt for democracy on the part of the British ruling class, the organ of the Labor Party leadership can only express its pained surprise:

That Conservative democrats should be occupying an ambiguous position when the facts in Spain are so crystal-clear was neither expected, nor is it pleasant. [*Daily Herald*, July 30, 1936.]

Not "expected"? To anyone really acquainted with conditions in Britain, and not living in an atmosphere of doped schoolbooks and Baldwin's after-dinner speeches on "democracy," to anyone with any acquaintance with the whole record of the British ruling class on the side of reaction from the Napoleonic wars through the American Civil War, China, India, czarism, and Russian intervention, nothing else was to be expected. The workers' leader in Britain who does not "expect" this, who prefers to dismiss it from his thoughts as not "pleasant," who does not daily calcu-



"Cheer up, J. B. This union business is merely a fad—like jig-saw puzzles."

Ajay

late on this as the essence of the realities he has to face, is not fit for his post.

THIS IS NO WAR between two sections of the Spanish people. It is a war of the world forces of reaction and fascism against the Spanish people and its elected government. In order to fight the Spanish people, world reaction has had to draw on foreign mercenaries, the debased victims of poverty and violence from every capitalist country in the globe, and on conscripted Africans, uprooted from their homes and trained only for the purposes of capitalist savagery and barbarism. Against the heroic Spanish people foreign arms, machine guns, and aeroplanes have been poured in from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and also—until the working-class opposition and strike threat of the National Aircraft Shop Stewards Council compelled the embargo—from Britain. The financial basis of the rebellion comes equally from abroad. Behind the interventionist war in Spain stand Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, the Catholic church, and the most powerful reactionary sections of finance capital in Britain and the United States. The representatives of international finance capital, not only German and Italian, but also British, French, and American, are gathered in the counter-revolutionary headquarters in Burgos like vultures waiting for their prey.

Without this foreign aid the handful of militarist generals, feudal landowners, and priestly oppressors could not have held out against the Spanish people for a week. This is admitted in the news messages even of the British Conservative pro-fascist press:

The attitude of the civil population seems to be proving decisive. All over the country they have turned out with rifles, shotguns, pistols, and any other weapons to hand in defence of the government. [*London Times*, July 21, 1936.]

General Franco, the insurgent leader in the south, dare not weaken his forces to march on Madrid be-

cause Andalusia has strong pro-Government sympathies. Similarly in Saragossa the insurgent garrison cannot leave for a march on the capital until they are assured that the townsmen would not immediately join the government. [*London Times*, August 17, 1936.]

This is the situation of an invading army of occupation, not of a country divided by civil war. The tactics adopted by the counter-revolution correspond to this situation; and the methods of holding the occupied areas closely resemble the methods of Italian Fascism in the occupied areas of Ethiopia:

A typical example of militarist insurgent tactics to date has been the dispatch from headquarters—notably Seville—of detachments, about 100 strong, of Moors or foreign legionaries by motor lorry. On arriving at the outskirts of a dubious village they fire a few rounds from mountain guns, an aeroplane drops some bombs, and they then advance. Unless the resistance is too severe, they scour the village, shoot all suspected persons, and retire to their bases, repeating the process later if necessary. [*London Times*, August 13, 1936.]

And this is in the areas of occupation, presented in the international press as "insurgent" or "anti-government" areas.

It is evident that in this situation the decisive question is the question of foreign supplies. In order not to impede the flow of supplies from international reactionary supporting groups, all pretense of legality has been thrown to the winds. If the workers of western Europe still hold any lingering legalist illusions in the constitutional professions of the ruling class, the example of Spain—the open military coup against a democratically elected majority government, with the unconcealed applause and support of the most powerful capitalist press in the remaining parliamentary-democratic countries—will deal a heavy blow to such illusions, following on and confirming anew the examples of Italy, Germany, Austria, and France, not to mention pre-war Ulster. But with Spain the same process of the contempt of the ruling class

for all legality, once the issue of the class struggle is at stake, has been demonstrated with merciless precision on the *international* plane. This lesson is of burning importance for the future of the class struggle in Europe.

THERE is no question as to the facts. By international law a recognized legal government has the right to purchase any supplies it requires from countries with which it has relations; while the affording of any supplies to a revolt against that government is an offense against international law, for which heavy damages can be demanded and have been paid in the past (as Britain had to pay compensation for its supplies to the reactionary South in the American Civil War). Yet what has happened? The fascist Powers have poured in supplies, arms, aeroplanes, and personnel to the illegal rebellion in Spain without any protest from the other Powers; while the British government has proclaimed, and thereby compelled the French government to follow a corresponding line (reinforced only by the desperate attempt to secure from the fascist Powers a promise of a similar line), a policy of "neutrality," i.e., "neutrality" between law and illegality. In international law no such "neutrality" is possible. Its practical effect is to deny supplies to the democratic government in Spain, while supplies pour in against it from the fascist Powers. History knows no parallel to such a position. Even in the case of the British supplies to Kolchak and Denikin, Britain had not legally recognized the Soviet government, and the Supreme Council had made a declaration "recognizing" Kolchak as ruler of Russia.

Here the illegality is open and unconcealed. It arouses no tremor in the British press, normally so concerned for legal rectitude, if it can be used against the popular side. Thus on the Italian supply of aeroplanes to the Spanish revolt, the *Observer* casually and placidly remarks:

The fact that Italian aeroplanes have passed over French-African territory on their way to join the rebels in Morocco shows the strong interest the Italians have in a rebel victory. [August 2, 1936.]

"Shows the strong interest." That is all. It would only be necessary to imagine the converse, if arms and aeroplanes were to be poured from the Soviet Union in support of an illegal revolt against a democratically elected government in Europe, to conceive the thunders that would pour from the British press and demands for immediate action. There could be no clearer demonstration that legality has no existence for the bourgeoisie save as a weapon in the class struggle, to be used or discarded according to the interests of the struggle; the class struggle governs all.

TWO FRONTS are facing each other on an international plane in this Spanish struggle. On the one side, the fascist powers act openly, lawlessly, without hesitation, confident that they will be covered by their backers in the other countries. On the other side, the popular forces are still strangled by the lack of a People's Front in Britain; and in consequence the British National government is able to act in practice as the covert ally of Fascism, and to prevent the lawful supplies from the democratic countries to the Spanish People's Government. The view of British official quarters

was described as follows by the diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester *Guardian*:

They fear that arms supplied to the Spanish government might fall into "extremist" hands, and by them it is considered desirable that there shall be as few arms as possible in Spain. [July 31, 1936.]

It is this British line that has driven the French People's Front government to the desperate expedient of endeavoring at any rate to secure a similar embargo on supplies from the fascist Powers. The same journal makes clear that this line was from the outset pressed on the French government by the British government:

When the Spanish war broke out, the French government was sharply split, not knowing whether or not to let the Spanish government have its full legal rights; the British government urged "non-intervention" on it. [August 21, 1936.]

It is thus evident that a key to the whole situation, both to the issue of the struggle in Spain and to the whole international situation, lies in Britain. May the delegates to the Trades Union Congress this month, and to the Labor Party Conference next month, bear in mind this situation, not only for the future in Britain, but for the whole international situation and the heavy consequences that hang on their decisions—the alternatives of a fascist Europe or popular-democratic advance—when they make their decisions on the vital question of unity. We must support the Spanish struggle by every means in our power. This is agreed by all. We must send all the material support we are able. This is agreed by all. But the greatest support of all we can give is the establishment of working-class unity and the People's Front in our own country.

Ancestors

Childbirth, one woman said, might be
the thing daydreamers dream of,
twanging the long nerve between brain and loins,
the orgasm prolonged to hours,
the body, quaking all its length, the pulses
huge and long, issuing the prodigious seed.

The child the prodigious seed! The thought
stayed with me. How many beings
burgeon from that seed. Linnæus of souls,
counting, could number, in a single life,
a majority of the species,
but especially rich in the lower orders,
thriving in the capitalist miasma:

The thief, the liar, the coward, the egomaniac,
the bully and the meek, the prodigal, the miser,
the ascetic, the glutton, the peeper, the prude,
the boaster and the shader of his light,
the stubborn and the sandy-willed,
the climber and the stander-still,
the gloaters and the self-forbidders,
the sprawlers and the tuckers-in,
the too enduring and the patienceless,
the shrinkers and the thickeners of crowds,

the light of mind and those with over-running brains,
the speeders and the late, the tight, the loose,
the yesmen and the scorning all,
the pryers and the hiders, the hard, the soft,
the slave bowed and the master arched—

I have them all within myself.
I curse them, starve them how I can.
If I could disown them, willingly I would cut
doors in my flesh to cast them out.

One thing I can. I know their ancestors.
I know the fathers of my fears,
the sires of my suspicions.
Heavy and loathsome they have grown
on surfeit and injustices,
poxed ears that have devoured the wholesome,
capitalist pillagers, capitalist anarchists.

Lest they father on my children too
cowards, betrayers, long-sufferers, dolts,
I espouse the revolution, I put to it,
put to its courage, its wisdom, its will,
all that is left fertile in me, to father
new Bolshevik being.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.