

BLACKFRIARS

COMMUNIST SELF-WITNESS ABOUT SPAIN

- (a) The brief account of events in Spain since 1931, given on earlier pages, shows the vivid contrast between the weakness of the Republican-Socialist Government of 1931-1933 and the strength of the Republican Government of 1936.
- (b) It would be incredible blindness for anyone in the working class or on the side of democracy and liberty, not to see what made this change possible.
- (c) *It was the developing strength of the working class as a whole; and this, in turn, was made possible by the developing strength of the Communist Party, and the triumph of its policy of unity and resolute class-struggle.*
- (d) As in other countries, the leadership of the Socialist Party was hostile to the Communist Party, hostile to a policy of class-struggle, filled with illusions of a peaceful, democratic constitutionalism.
- (e) This led to the policy of *holding back* and even *repressing* the militant struggle of the rank and file in 1933.

(*Spain*, by Emile Burns, published by the COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN, page 11.)

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The italics are those of the pamphlet. I am writing this not as a politician, nor in the interest of politics, but solely in the interests of the poor and of peace.

1. I need not point out that this honest self-witness of the Communist Party dispenses us from the almost impossible task of finding out the truth about the alleged terrorism on one side or the other. For the moment the only available evidence is of one side about the other; in other words, it is admittedly the weakest of all evidence. But this printed self-avowal of the Communist Party of Great Britain is the strongest of all evidence, being what a group says about itself not, as we shall see, in self-justification but in self-condemnation.

2. This straightforward confession of the Communist Party is all the more timely and welcome when lovers of political freedom and peace, like the signatories of the letter to the *Times* (August 18) are so out of touch with the reali-

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ties of the Spanish situation as to write: "At the present moment in Spain a constitutional Government elected by the people is being attacked by a junta of generals who, with the aid of Moorish troops, have declared their intention of destroying Parliamentary democracy. . . .

"The Government which is being thus attacked is a Liberal democratic Government; it contains no Socialist or Communist.

". . . It is therefore a matter of grave concern to find that in many quarters, particularly in the popular Press, a persistent attempt is being made to misrepresent the nature of the struggle and to enlist the sympathies of Britain for the military rebels on the ground that the Government is Bolshevik or Communist." (*Times*, August 18.)

3. It is a relief to turn from this benevolent second-hand inaccurate evidence to the blunt and almost brutal self-evidence of the Communist Party. Admittedly the present Government¹ contains no avowed Socialist or Communist. But even though its personnel be not Communist nor Socialist, its policy is the triumphant Communist policy of "resolute class-struggle" (c). Now to men like Professor Ernest Barker, and Professor Tawney, and the other signatories to the above-mentioned letter, it need hardly be pointed out that a Party is constituted not by personnel but by policy. If the present Conservative Party kept unchanged all its rank and file and all its officials but adopted a Communist policy it would be in fact, though not in name, a Communist Party.

4. Fortunately for the realities of discussion the Communist Party have not left us in darkness about the nature of this resolute class-struggle or, as it was sometimes called, "class-war." We have not to judge of the nature of this class-struggle on the evidence—even on the true evidence—of the class against which the struggle is waged, but on the self-evidence of the class which wages the struggle.

The Communist Party deserve our gratitude by telling us

¹ Are we still accurate in calling it "the present Government"? Has it not resigned in favour of the Spanish United Front?

(e) that it was in fact not just a political or even an economic struggle, but a militant struggle, i.e. with violence to life and property.

Moreover it was such a resolute militant class-struggle that a Republican-Socialist Government—not a Fascist or a Catholic Government—after seeking to hold it back, had finally to repress it.

5. Again, the frankness of this Communist self-manifestation has one of the most engaging qualities of truth. This Republican-Socialist Government showed its weakness (*sic!*) by repressing the militant class-struggle of the rank and file. It was, therefore, as all Socialist leaders were, not only hostile to this resolute class-struggle with its violence to life and property; but *under two illusions* (d).²

The first illusion of Socialist leadership was A PEACEFUL CONSTITUTIONALISM.

The second illusion of Socialist leadership was A DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONALISM.

In other words, the Socialist, the Liberal, the Conservative desire of Peace and Democracy was an illusion!

Two things make this social tragedy almost into burlesque. The first is the appeal that it would be incredible blindness for *anyone on the side of Democracy* (b) not to support this Communist Party which looks on Democracy as an illusion.

The second thing which turns the tragedy into almost burlesque is that a number of intellectual, scholarly, benevolent Englishmen and Englishwomen look upon this frankly confessed anti-peace and anti-democratic policy as defended by a Government which, by Communist influence, has made that policy its own.

6. If we address our arguments mainly to the signatories of the letter to the *Times*, it is because few groups in the country would be taken, as they are taken, to represent the intelligent, detached, judicial attitude of the English mind.

It is therefore to this judicial mind I would address this last train of thought.

² The present writer could hardly believe his eyes when he read this statement in the pamphlet.

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From time to time this country has a General Election. It is a period of political class-struggle, ending happily when all the votes are counted and the poll declared. Though the groups in Parliament continue the practical discussion of their programme during the life of the successful Party, yet with the declaration of the poll the great struggle is at an end.

But with this frank, self-revealing Communist Party, the political struggle having ended, the social class-struggle has just begun. It will not be peaceful; it will be militant. It will not be democratic; it will be autocratic. And it will be resolute. The almost mimic war of the polling booths will change into the violent class-war whereby one class, now in political power, hopes to annihilate the other.

For the moment I am not saying that this is right or wrong; nor whether it is or is not shared by other political parties. I am only pleading that a party, like the Communist Party, which frankly advocates this policy of class-war and confesses that a certain Government (including no avowed Communists) has this policy, can hardly be looked upon as a defender of Democracy.

Moreover St. Thomas Aquinas assures us that lawfully constituted Authority can claim our *obedience*, as obedience, only when its commands are lawful. He even says that, when unjust laws are promulgated even by a lawful authority and the subjects rise against these unjust laws, it is not the subjects but the authority that is seditious.

With still greater truth would he say this if not only this or that law was unjust, but if there was a publicly formulated policy of class-struggle; in other words, a frank, un-hypocritical Declaration of War; which is none the less bloody because it is class-war.

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All this has been written by one who neither professes nor is competent to be a politician. As an ethical teacher, and a "Sower of the Word," even at the Cross-ways he has had to answer such questions as: "Why does not your Pope condemn the Spaniards who are rebelling against lawfully-constituted Authority?"

I take it that any unprejudiced and intelligent reader of

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the frank statement of policy and of fact made by the Communist Party will see the answer that any party—Catholic or even atheistic—would be justified in resisting force by force. *Vim vi repellere licet.*

And if the threat of force was not merely against the material needs of life but even against the religious needs and rights of the mind, then the right of self-defence might well become a duty.

Here I should end if I were speaking only in the name of the politicians and patriots. But here I cannot end if I must speak in the name of the saints; and in the name of peace.

Granted as true all that is reported as true about the anti-religious acts of violence to sacred things, and places and persons, our Catholic duty is not satisfied by a mere denunciation of the sin of others; unaccompanied by any denunciation of our sin which has perhaps occasioned the sin of others. Even if we went into the smouldering ruins of the Temple we should not go as the Pharisee "despising others" but as the self-accusing Publican, standing afar off, beating our breasts, and crying out: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Only thus shall we go down justified, rather than the other.

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