

REVIEW AND COMMENT

The Other Europe

EUROPE UNDER THE TERROR, by John L. Spivak. Simon and Schuster. \$2.50.

LET us look at Europe after the armistice. Still licking her wounds, she returned to peacetime occupations. Peasants in Galicia and Champagne set out to cultivate fields far richer in cartridges and barbed wire than in grain. Workers once more sought out their former bosses and their workshops which had been manufacturing nothing but shells for the past four years. The people lacked several million arms, legs, eyes and jaws. Beyond that, nothing was changed in the West, or at best, very little. Men who had been "too old to fight" in 1914 were still at their posts—Poincaré, Hindenberg, George V, busy dedicating monuments to the dead.

Yet the war was not over. November 11, 1918 had passed, but guns still thundered in Siberia, Silesia, Turkey, Lithuania, using up warstocks.

The crisis following the armistice seemed to have reached its end. In Germany and Austria, Social-Democratic governments presided at the pacific transformation (long live the ballot box!) of the capitalist system into the "socialist" system and, incidentally, turned machine-guns on "misguided" workers. In Italy, Mussolini had taken power, but fascism appeared to be a phenomenon purely Italian—it could not possibly menace another country.

A few years pass. Then some agricultural and backward states—Poland, Jugoslavia, Bulgaria—in the wake of the crisis which shook the continent, yielded to fascism.

In the very nature of their economic situations, this was not true fascism but rather a military dictatorship with fascist tendencies (the same was true in Spain under Primo de Rivera). Superficial observers, nevertheless, continued to preach the benefits of democracy solidly established, according to them, among the great occidental powers.

Then came the Reichstag fire, the bombardment of workers' houses in Vienna, the murder of Asturian miners by the Spanish Foreign Legion, the proliferation of the Croix de Feu in France. It could be said that Europe had been thrown backwards seven centuries, if this would not have been a calumny on the Middle Ages. And those very ones who thought democracy immortal resigned themselves in advance to the "inevitable" ascension of fascism.

After the bloody defeat of the Bavarian Soviets and the Hungarian Commune, the European working class had marked time

or retreated. With the exception of several islands not yet submerged by the rising tide of fascism, the continent west of the Soviet Union was at that time nothing more than a vast concentration camp.

If there were ever historic dates that have a meaning, that of February 9, 1934, is one. In the evening of that day, at Paris, three days after the attempt of the fascist coup d'état, following the appeal of the Communist Party and despite the government order forbidding it, the workers of Paris, descendants of the sans-culottes and grandsons of the Commune, took possession of the streets. The paving-stones of Paris, old friends of revolution, moved out of their setting to form barricades under the hands of the Communists, the Independents and also of the Socialists who had come to join their brothers, despite the orders of their party. The demonstration of February 9 was the first obstacle in the path of French fascism, the gauge of approaching united action among the parties of the working class.

The United Front, amplified by the adhesion of peasant and petty-bourgeois elements, was destined to culminate in France and in Spain, in the formation of the People's Front. It showed the whole world that fascism was not inevitable and pointed out the means of avoiding it.

It goes without saying that the task of the People's Front in the countries where it exists, is far from being ended; indeed, it has only just begun. And despite Hitler, Mussolini and their less spectacular imitators—from Portugal to Finland—the Europe of 1936 is, if one may be allowed to examine the present by the light of coming events, and not of the immediate past, the Europe of the People's Front.

What I have said is a criticism of the title of the new book of John L. Spivak, rather than of the work itself. One may not reproach an author for not having discussed a topic other than the one he has chosen. But if his readers wish to have a complete idea of Europe, they must remember France and Spain while following Spivak through Italy and Germany.

A book such as this was indispensable in the United States where the newspapers have a very peculiar manner of covering the political news. Everyone who is informed on European events knows to what point the information published in most American newspapers is incomplete and often incorrect. The censorship established in fascist countries must, naturally, take part

of the responsibility, as Spivak says in his preface, but even if it were not so rigorous, we could depend upon our friends Hearst, Macfadden, Knox, McCormick, etc., to take the place of a Goebbels and a Ciano. (The accounts of the French elections have been the most recent proof of this; almost all the American newspapers misreported the facts, and the editorials devoted to this subject constitute a model of conscious or unconscious ignorance.)

Thus Spivak's book will be a revelation for many readers. This man is a devil of a fellow, a sort of a movie camera equipped with the human qualities of judgment, intelligence and with a genius for showing the facts as they are. Undoubtedly, he, with Mihail, Koltsov, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ilya Ehrenbourg and Andrée Viollis, form today the finest body of reporters existing in Western countries. And I am not only speaking of revolutionary reporters (although I am persuaded that if the four writers mentioned above are all on the side of the workers, it is not by pure coincidence; the art of a reporter is measured by his themes and the revolutionary cause alone offers today, beside the key to events, an interest large enough and human enough to justify the profession of the reporter.)

Some will reproach Spivak for a certain air of romance, above all in his description of illegal revolutionary movements. Spivak notes in one chapter: "I'm not much good at this Edgar Wallace stuff." I can't help thinking that, on the contrary, he likes it and excels in it. But I don't see much harm in that. Romanticism—not that of imaginary tales, but the realist romanticism which is made up of heroism, adventure and human passion—is today the exclusive appanage of the revolutionary writers. We are the only ones who have before us a cause, men and subjects worth talking about. The life of any militant you choose, from Dimitrov down to the obscure miner of Kentucky, is worthy of a Homer. One could hardly say the same of the biography of a Cal Coolidge, for example.

John L. Spivak could have continued his description of Europe under the terror, if he had wished to do so. There are yet the Balkans, Hungary and the Baltic States. The fascists of Finland take their victims for a ride in the best gangster style. The Portuguese prisons are never empty. And the Nazis themselves could learn something of the technique of torture from the policemen of Jugoslavia.

But Spivak was right in choosing only the most representative fascist regimes and in describing not the most bloody horrors, but the daily, habitual terror which weighs on whole

peoples, the terror and misery which are the daily lot of the workers, peasants, the petty-bourgeois and the intellectuals under the dictatorship of the Krupps, Montecatinis, Mandls and their governmental office-boys. The book of Spivak illustrates perfectly this evident truth that fascism is a source of misery in the present and of war in the immediate future.

A single remark: in his description of Germany, Spivak is perhaps too insistent upon the gangsterism of the Nazis, this gangsterism from which the capitalists, too, suffer. It is certain that fascism—which is a sign of the weakness of the regime and not of its strength—is often prejudicial to the individual interests of this or that capitalist, while permitting during a certain time—and here is its essential function—the survival of the body of capitalists, as a class. On the other hand, it would be futile to attach too much importance to the numbers

of the members of illegal revolutionary parties. These militants, the best among the best, are not the mass; organizers and leaders of men, they constitute the bony structure of the ineluctable proletarian revolution. It is proper to recall that at the moment of the October Revolution, in a country whose population was almost three times and whose territory forty-four times greater than those of Germany, the Bolshevik Party only numbered 60,000 members.

The picture of Europe painted by Spivak might seem to be too dark. The truth is that the reality is so. Moreover, as I have already said, the author has not touched upon those countries where the working-class movement has taken the offensive instead of retreating.

A final caution; we forget, too often, that about one-half of the European continent is within the borders of the U.S.S.R.

JACQUES MARECHAL.

Art for Life's Sake

LUST FOR LIFE, by Irving Stone, Heritage Press. \$5.00.

GOYA: A Portrait of the Artist as a Man, by Manfred Schneider. Knight. \$2.75.

TWO great artists would have been surprised, shocked and not a little annoyed at the use their pictures had been put to during this past art season in New York City. Vincent van Gogh, the humble painter of the Boraines miners, the unhappy painter of the Dutch Brabant potato eaters, the vivid madman of Arles, could never have imagined in the worst of the hallucinations from which he suffered just before his end that the cream of society would ever make the approval of his work fashionable, that reproductions of his masterpieces would be used as backgrounds in the swanky shops along Fifth Avenue to show off silk stockings, diamonds and ermine wraps. He would never have believed it and he would not have liked it; these were the very people against whom he had always protested in his letters to his brother as the enemies to progress in art. But there is no longer any danger that this wild-looking painter in a workman's jacket might stumble into an exhibition to pollute the air of an opening tea, or embarrass the upper crust with his disconcerting ideas about a brotherhood of man. All his life Vincent had lived, painted and gone hungry, not only for food but for recognition and appreciation that had never come. Only his brother, a handful of fellow impressionists and an occasional simple peasant, to whom the word Art meant nothing but who was able to recognize a truth about himself when he saw it, had ever given him the faintest hope that the work of his whole life that he had struggled so hard to achieve and for which he had suffered so much was worth while.

The life and death of Vincent has become well known to American newspaper readers since the huge exhibition of his work at the

Museum of Modern Art this season with its attendant publicity. Magazines have reproduced his paintings and drawings, a fictionalized biography has become a best seller, color prints have found their way into homes that had never heard of any other artist than Maxfield Parrish, people everywhere have become involved in violent arguments about the pronunciation of his last name. This Vincent would have liked, he would have liked to see that masses of people had been made aware of beauty through the medium of his art, that to scores of thousands art had become something human and alive.

Francisco Goya, on the other hand, would have been startled perhaps to find that he, the one-time First Court Painter to His Majesty the King of Spain, had appeared along with rebels from other countries in an exhibition against war and fascism at the New School for Social Research, that his etchings of the horrors of war and his satires on the ruling classes of his time had attracted more attention at his show at the Metropolitan than his paintings of the members of the court or of his many mistresses. Not that he wouldn't have been in agreement with the idea, for his powerfully etched indictments of war came at the end of an impulsive and meteoric career, when he had tasted of all the successes and honors of 18th century Spain.

Art was never a struggle for Goya. He painted as easily as he seduced his mistresses; success came early and stayed until he was tired of it and turned to emotions deeper than those displayed on the empty faces of the hangers-on at the Spanish court. Goya, as a courtier, bullfighter, swordsman, adventurer and lover, has long been a legend. The story of his love affair with the Duchess of Alba and of his painting of her in the nude is familiar to everyone who has ever heard his name. These stories are all told in

Goya, a Portrait of the Artist as a Man, as well as numberless other stories that reveal the decadence of the Spanish rulers of his time. The whole book, however, does nothing to make one feel a new understanding of the work that he produced. The actual illustrations of Goya's work because of their bad reproduction do nothing to kindle a new appreciation.

Heritage Press has shown us how a book may be worthy of a painter's art and lead to a fonder appreciation of both the man and the artist. The limited edition of Stone's *Lust for Life* is a beautiful book, worthy of the art of Van Gogh, but it is to be regretted that it is not yet available in a less expensive form that will lose none of the richness of the color plates or black and



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