

Somosierra Charge

How a "psychological attack" staged by the rebels in the Guadarramas and preceded by an air raid was routed by the Popular Front militia

By Eugene Schachner

AT Somosierra, 93 kilometers north of Madrid, as I stood talking to a colonel in the people's militia, two fascist aircraft approached. The planes circled leisurely over us twice, then dropped three bombs each in quick succession. The TNT dug into the earth like a shrieking Cyclops tearing an ant hill to bits. We tried to balance ourselves with outstretched hands as the ground quivered and rolled beneath our feet. I found a tree to lean on. The colonel sat on a rock. The dust clouds rising from the parched earth looked like brown parachutes floating up to greet the two planes, which had banked steeply after releasing their bombs and were straightening out to circle us again. To our left the auto bus that had taken us to the Pass was a mass of flames, its chassis sagging in the middle as if an earthquake fissure had opened up between the front and rear wheels. A score of *milicianos* were lying stiff around it. The wounded writhed but uttered no sound. I hoped they would, so one could know how badly they were hit, but I had to judge their pain by the tautness of their jaw muscles. Another bomb had hit a stone farmhouse fifty yards distant, tearing a ten-foot hole in the roof and spitting fragments through the walls through holes as big as turnips.

We shaded our eyes so we might get a better glimpse of the planes' bomb racks, but the shadow cast by the under wings prevented us from seeing whether or not they

were empty. We wouldn't know whether it would be strafing or another bomb attack until they were almost directly overhead, when it would be too late to cope with either type of attack. We knew when we heard the machine-gun bullets streaming out through the propeller.

The colonel ran for the demolished bus. I stood still for a second; then I ran with all the strength I could muster towards the oncoming plane, hoping the bullets would overshoot me as I ran towards its machine gun. A fence separating me from a tiny square of plowed field held me up almost too long but when I had vaulted it I heard the bullets sink into the soft wood behind me. I went back to look for the colonel. He was lying dead under the bus, where a bullet had nicked a half inch of bone out of the back of his skull. Only one other of the dozen or so *milicianos* who had been sheltered by the bus had been hit. The *miliciano* was dying with a dazed, almost sweet look on his face, which grew yellow as we watched it. He was beyond the need even for companionship so I hurried after the others, who were running

to the barricades of field stone erected on the highway leading from the valley below, where the fascist vanguard had entrenched themselves. Apparently they expected the main body of fascists to attack momentarily.

I found the writer Quintanilla chatting with the Communists who were at the two machine guns guarding the road. Only one of the bombs had fallen among them, killing and wounding twenty, but missing the two guns. A one-pounder, the only other gun heavier than a rifle at the command of the *milicianos*, had been hit by a bomb fragment. It had been taken from the fascists the day before. A *miliciano* wearing a motorman's hat was sitting beside it, desperately trying to repair it in time to meet the impending attack. There were three girl Communists near the machine guns dressed in blue overalls and bearing rifles.

"What planes are those?" I asked Quintanilla.

"They aren't Spanish planes. They look like the old German Taubes."

"I thought so, too."

"Look through these glasses," he said. "The fascists are going to attempt one of the most hopelessly arrogant things I have ever heard of."

About a hundred fascist cavalymen were getting into formation, four abreast, on the highway just out of range of the Popular Front machine guns. Behind them I could see dense masses of men, probably six or seven thousand. The cavalry was undoubtedly preparing to charge up the road into the teeth of the two machine guns. If the men at the machine guns broke it meant a clear road to Madrid, for there were no more than five hundred defending the Pass. From the viewpoint of brute military strength the fascist horsemen were hopelessly inferior. They knew it, and so did the *milicianos*; they were counting on the psychological smashing power of their arrogance. I was reminded of the march of the White Guard officers in *Chapayev*.

The cavalry charged up the hill as if they were on dress parade. The Communists at the machine guns held their fire. At two hundred yards the *milicianos'* rifles brought down a half-dozen cavalymen. At a hundred and fifty a dozen more fell from their horses. At a hundred yards the machine guns let go.

The last of the horsemen fell at the edge of the stone barricade. The dead horses were used to strengthen the barricade against the attack of the fascist infantry, who were now less than three-quarters of a mile away.





Planning the Offensive

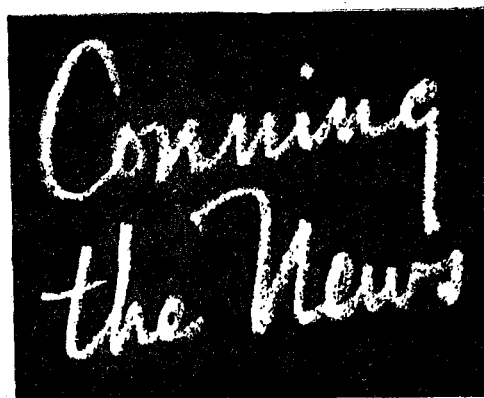
Fred Ellis

WHAT the presidential nominees said during the week was overshadowed by the fact that one of them was twice prevented by violence from saying anything at all. Earl Browder went to Terre Haute, Ind., as a nominee of a legally recognized party, on the ballot in 32 states. Terre Haute officials, not daring to jail him a second time for "vagrancy" (he came armed with a certified check for \$1000) brazenly resorted to less official methods. They served notice on Browder that if he attempted to speak he "might break a leg," and the Chief of Police intimated that if the mob decided to ride the candidate out of town, nothing much could be done to prevent it. Despite these crudely veiled threats, Browder attempted to speak, but a barrage of eggs and tomatoes, thrown by the vigilante business men of Terre Haute, and the menacing threats of a half-drunk mob that blocked his way to the broadcasting station kept Browder from making his address (story on page 11).

Terre Haute was the signal for similar tactics elsewhere. California's notorious Imperial County lived up to its tradition when a gang invaded the broadcasting station in which Esco Richardson, Communist candidate for Congress, was making a speech. Firing shots into the walls, the mob tore Richardson away from the microphone and dragged him to a vacant lot, where they pelted him with rotten eggs and fruit. The local police were all on duty at a high-school football game. The sheriff, it was later revealed, had sent a telegram to Terre Haute officials congratulating them on their treatment of Browder.

But it remained for Tampa, Fla., to hit a new low level for treatment of a presidential nominee and for contempt of American traditions. Led by men brazenly flaunting caps of the American Legion, a small armed band attacked members of an audience that had gathered to hear Earl Browder in an open-air meeting. The legionnaires beat twelve persons, including one woman, over the head with the butt ends of their revolvers, and, advancing to the platform, seized the light stand and tilted it over, forcing the speakers to slide off. Then, in a moment of high irony, the leader of the gang cautioned his men. "Careful! Don't let the flag touch the ground." Tampa's police force, in full knowledge of the scheduled meeting and of the possible danger of interference, was not represented on the scene of action. Entraining, Mr. Browder declared: "Criminal charges will be filed by my friends against those recognized as leaders in the attack, and they also will be made parties in an action for damages." Adding its bit to the troubles of the Communists, the Supreme Court declined to take immediate action to force the State of Illinois to put the Communist Party on the ballot even though it had satisfied all the requirements of Illinois law.

Earl Browder's Democratic and Republican rivals in the presidential campaign, neither of whom saw fit to put in one small word of protest against the shameful treatment of their



*Covering the events of the week
ending October 26*

fellow-nominee, had much easier sledding. Each of them has already said over and over again all that he apparently has any intention of saying, and the campaign sank into a contest to see which would draw bigger crowds. In this respect Roosevelt had the distinct edge. Huge and enthusiastic throngs constantly delayed the progress of his automobile tour through New England, supposedly the one safe section for Governor Landon.

Adapting himself to his surroundings, the President for the most part couched his week's oratory in a conservative key. At Worcester, Mass., he defended "democracy in taxation," but promised a balanced budget without increase in taxes. To a Boston audience of 125,000 he pointed out that the New Deal had afforded New England industries more protection than they had enjoyed under Republican leadership. And from Washington he broadcast to business men gathered at Good Neighbor League dinners in several cities his complete allegiance to the system of private profit. "No one in the United States," said the President, "believes more firmly than I in the system of private business, private property, and private profit. No administration in the history of our country has done more for it."

GOVERNOR LANDON'S travels took him to the Pacific Coast in what was generally conceded to be a hopeless effort to win California from the Democrats. Even his supporters allowed him only a "fighting chance" to succeed—and that only because Dr. Townsend instructed his followers in California to vote Republican.

Through all the Landon speeches of the week ran a thread of nationalism couched in more belligerent language than the Kansan has yet used. "If we are to preserve our American form of government," he said at Los Angeles, "this administration must be defeated." At Phoenix, and again at Baltimore several days later, he proclaimed the "American system the fundamental issue." And at Albuquerque he harangued the crowd in the best ultra-nationalist tradition: "Out here where the West begins, there will be no trouble in enlisting recruits in this battle to save our American system of government . . . you will respond as readily when the attack

on our freedom comes from within as you did when it came from without."

The governor's principal speech of the week was made at Indianapolis, where he attacked Roosevelt as an isolationist, denounced the League of Nations as a "failure" and the World Court as "political," declared we must "mind our own business," and threw in a plea for international cooperation through mediation and arbitration. Yet Landon spoke of the "contradictions" in the foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration.

Credit for the crudest campaign trick of the week went to the Republicans for their use of pay envelopes as a political weapon. In thousands of wage envelopes distributed by big industrialists with G.O.P. cooperation appeared the following message referring to the Social Security Act: "*Pay Deduction*—Effective January 1937, we are compelled by a Roosevelt 'New Deal' law to make a 1-percent deduction from your wages and turn it over to the government. Finally this may go as high as 4 percent. You might get this money back in future years. . . . There is no guarantee. Decide, before Nov. 3, Election Day, whether or not you wish to take these chances." Ironically, on the bottom of a widely circulated Republican campaign brochure appeared the information: ". . . your ballot is *secret*. All threats to influence you are illegal. Make your own choice."

America's most overt fascist, the Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith, received a severe setback during the week when he was unequivocally disowned by Dr. Townsend. Smith made his New York debut before a scanty audience of 600 in the huge Hippodrome with the announcement that he would head a new "nationalist" movement to war on communism. "When the Reds dynamite the tunnels and bridges of New York," he screamed, "us cotton choppin', corn huskin', baby havin', God fearin', Bible readin' are goin' to have our own united front—we'll save America." Then came word that Dr. Townsend, upon whose following Smith has for some months had an eye, declared in righteous wrath: "The Townsend movement wants no part of a fascist organization which plans to incorporate portions of the Townsend plan in a fascist movement. The Townsend plan and fascism are as opposite as good and evil. . . . There is no room for fascism in the traditions and heritage which we of America hold so dear."

LABOR gave the administration little immediate worry as far as the elections are concerned, but it continued to store up several good headaches for the near future. The West Coast maritime unions proceeded with their balloting on whether or not to empower union officials to call a strike on or after October 28 at their discretion. All signs pointed to an overwhelming affirmative vote. The "united front" of shipowners showed signs of cracking. The Panama Pacific, Grace, Luckenbach, United Fruit, and eight other lines deserted the more obdurate employers and offered to grant the longshoremen's basic de-