

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Anna Louise Strong on Spain and Boudin on the Supreme Court—A Silone novel and an escapade in escapology

ANNA LOUISE STRONG flew into Spain last December on the plane which also carried the distinguished biologist, J. B. S. Haldane and Senator Branting of Sweden. The former was going to Spain to place his knowledge of the chemistry and physiology of poison gases at the disposal of the Loyalist Government; the latter to gather material for a report to the World Committee Against War and Fascism.

They landed at Alicante and Miss Strong was immediately struck, as is everyone who now enters Spain, with the happy friendliness of the people. "Is this just Spanish," she asked Senator Branting, "or is it the revolution?" "Both," he replied. "They were always a frank, hospitable people. But now there is undoubtedly an additional sense of liberation, a feeling of their own united power."

She went almost immediately to Valencia, the seat of the Popular Front Government, transformed, energized, teeming with a doubled population, seething with activity, especially at night, when all work is done behind closely shaded and shuttered windows. "Valencia is not yet war," Miss Strong says, "it is roaring energy of a people who mobilize and organize war."

There she met Del Vayo, "the most American person I met in Spain," and "La Pasionaria," the Communist Deputy from the Asturias who, "by gesture and tone diffuses around her an atmosphere of deeply concerned love for plain, ordinary people." Also, she met the chief of the Fine Arts section in the Ministry of Education, who told her of the removal of the great pictures from the Prado in Madrid and their storage in the huge towers at the gates of Valencia, so strong that even "half-ton bombs cannot penetrate them."

She met many other officials, and discussed with them the problems of the popular front government—the roles of the Communists, the Socialists, Anarchists, Catalan nationalists and so forth. These conversations* are replete with illuminating comments on the international situation, the so-called atrocities, the church, and the future of Spain after the defeat of Franco.

Her chapters on Madrid are realistic and moving. She recounts the heroic defense of that critical first week of November, the arrival of the International Brigade, the organization of the Lister Battalion, the achievement of a unified command. She conveys with considerable reportorial skill the enormous accomplishments of creating an army, organizing the provisioning of it, establishing a new government, effecting social reforms—all simultaneously.

The same sense of profound change and

astonishing accomplishment is conveyed in her passages on Barcelona and the problems of Catalonia, the industrial part of Spain. There the Communist and Socialist parties have united, and the unification of the two great labor unions, the Anarchist C. N. T. and the Marxist U. G. T., is a definite possibility. She says, "Step by step . . . a wider base of social control will grow beyond the factory, beyond industry, beyond even Catalonia and any leaders who hold out against this great need of the people for unity and discipline will be thrust aside by their own followers." Will this unity be perfected in time to thwart international fascism? she asked. "There is no power in Europe strong enough to turn the clock back now in Catalonia," she was answered.

HENRY HART.

After "Fontamara"

BREAD AND WINE, by Ignazio Silone. Harper & Brothers. \$2.50.

SILONE has strayed a long way into mysticism, but he is still an anti-fascist writer, and as such he has a literary method and spirit unique among anti-fascist writers. Who else can play so fast and loose with the dictatorships, can first vex and worry their absurdities and then, with a sudden twist, pounce, as it were, and break their backs? *Bread and Wine* has all this furious burlesque quality, all the broad stylization, the astounding richness of character and incident which made *Fontamara* a great novel. And as an indictment of Italian fascism it goes farther still. The economic suffering of the peasantry and proletariat, which *Fontamara* so effectively dramatized, is one thing; the spiritual misery of the clerical

and professional classes is another. *Bread and Wine* exhibits both. It shows how a prolonged dictatorship eats into the soul, destroys intelligence and confounds values, makes schoolteachers into official mouthpieces, turns priests into revolutionaries and revolutionaries into priests.

If I am not mistaken (and this is not at all an easy book to interpret), this sinister transformation of individuals under fascism is one of the main themes of *Bread and Wine*, a theme which distinguishes it pretty sharply from the earlier novel. In *Fontamara*, to be sure, we saw the transformation of Berardo from a utopian rebel, a kind of rural Wobbly, into a revolutionary. But this psychological interest was incidental, I think, to a tale of collective effort, which had its beginning and end in the struggle and destruction of the Fontamarans. In *Bread and Wine*, on the other hand, the central fact seems to be, not action, although there is plenty of it, but consciousness: the minds of two men, Pietro Spina, revolutionary, and Don Benedetto, priest.

Of this pair of complementary characters, Spina is the more prominent. In his name (which means thorn), in the priest's robe which he wears as a disguise, in a whole set of symbols and associations, Spina's idealist and mystical tendencies are implied from the start. Impatient with exile, tired of theory divorced from action, he returns to Italy to work secretly among the peasants. When someone reproaches him for not following the example of the great leaders who worked patiently in exile and waited for their hour, he admits that he is wrong: he confesses to being a "bad revolutionary." And, as the frustrations that lie in store for him prove, it is a fact. With his disguise, his artificially aged face, his gestures, his impatience, his susceptibilities, he manages in spite of his courage to create an impression of futility and almost of melodrama. Working now among the peasants, now among the Roman proletariat, first with propaganda, then with acts of violence, he tries to build an underground group; tries and fails, for the peasants have already been stifled with fascist propaganda and the workers, their cells constantly broken by the police, are nearly paralyzed with caution.

Finally, dismayed by the sordid ceremony which surrounds the announcement of the Ethiopian campaign, the voice of the Dictator coming through the public radio, the solemn credulity of the crowd, the ritual cries of *Chay Doo! Chay Doo!*, Spina goes at night to the church steps and there chalks "Down with the government soup!" For this, his one real venture into action, someone else is arrested. Fascism has now begun to lose its historical character for this demoralized revolutionist; it begins to appear as a kind of time-



Woodcut by Morado

* SPAIN IN ARMS, 1937, by Anna Louise Strong. Henry Holt & Co. \$1; paper 25c.

less evil, "deeper than politics" (as the priest, Don Benedetto, puts it). "It is a canker. You cannot heal a putrefying corpse with warm poultices. There is the class struggle, the town and the country, but underlying all these things there is man, a poor, weak, terrified animal. The canker has penetrated to his marrow." To this priest, who, through progressive disillusionment with the Church, has come close to a revolutionary position, Spina turns in his despair. And now, figuratively speaking, the two change roles. Poisoned by the authorities, Don Benedetto dies like a political conspirator, while Spina in the last scene climbs toward a Calvary in the Apennines.

Thus *Bread and Wine*, in spite of its historic setting, is in its essence a philosophical novel, centering on the clash of the Christian idea with the idea of revolutionary materialism. In the end the two are represented as fusing to form a new revolutionary concept with its own peculiar program. Such a concept finds, of course, no justification in Marxism or in history. And insofar as Silone himself accepts it (and there seems little doubt that he does, that it represents his own attempt at a solution) he must be reckoned for the present among the casualties of intellectual despair. His novel, meanwhile, is a powerful record of his confusions.

F. W. DUPEE.

Empire Revisited

AWAY FROM IT ALL, by Cedric Belfrage.
Simon & Schuster. \$3.

IT IS one of England's deadliest literary customs for bright young men to travel through the empire and write books about it. They generally discover that the empire is great and glorious, that the sun never sets on it, and that the British are a superior race, forging civilization in backward areas out of sheer benignity. To anyone familiar with this state of affairs, Cedric Belfrage's book is a blessed relief, and, moreover, a turning point. He is one of the few young Englishmen who have visited and written about empire without seeming to loll in Rudyard Kipling's lap. Above all, Belfrage writes not only with real insight but delightful wit.

In England, Belfrage had been trained in escapology, an art highly cultivated in capitalist countries to keep people from peeping over economic barriers and discovering the results of the profit system. Belfrage began to find that escapology wasn't fooling him a bit, so he took the last desperate step and followed the conventional away-from-it-all impulse, only to find that this didn't work either. Wherever the profit system had been established, exploitation and human misery prevailed. His countrymen were carrying the white man's burden with a snobbish complacency and a sense of martyrdom, because the loot was so heavy to carry away. India, the brightest jewel in Britain's crown, was full of "red-faced beasts" who kept a foot on the neck of a degraded native population and fawned on native potentates. The Persian



Joseph Serrano

"If the 'Worker' would only pan it, maybe the 'Times' would give us a break!"

Gulf coast was a private oil pool maintained by the simple device of encouraging native chiefs to kill each other while Britain pumped the oil. Belfrage did not confine himself to England's feeding grounds; wherever the profit system had touched, he found the same conditions. In Palestine, Zionists enjoyed an artificial capitalist boom at the expense of an exploited Arab working class. In the South Seas, the tropical glamor of travel folders existed side by side with disease, exploitation, and race slaughter. The only hopeful signs he found were the essential health of the working classes and an increasing awareness of their condition. By the time he had got back from his junket, he realized that he had to get both feet over the fence and stand with them.

Belfrage's ironic wit burns up with ridicule the false pretenses of empire and the spurious idea of romantic adventure which imperialism has fostered. He casts himself as the hero of an unromantic exploit. Having convinced himself that romance in the tropics is bunk and that the results of imperialism are appalling, he wishes the trip were over when he still has half the world to cover. Occasionally, his justifiable indignation seems to turn in on itself; his wit becomes facetious; there seems to be no point in continuing the adventure; he exposes the fallacy of "escapology" early in his journey, but he still has to ride his idea back home. Nevertheless, he is a good traveler, his eyes are wide open, and he is doggedly persistent about seeing it through to the end. So the result is something unique in travel books. It's a telling satire on "escapology," a revealing account of one man's escape from it, a twentieth century Childe Harold replete with wisdom, irony, and jest.

STEPHEN PATERSON.

Boudin on the Court

SCIENCE & SOCIETY: A MARXIAN QUARTERLY. Spring issue, 1937. 35 cents.

MOST timely in the current issue of *Science & Society*—which Harold Laski justly describes as the best Marxist journal in the English language—is a long study on the Supreme Court and Civil Rights by Louis B. Boudin, distinguished both as a lawyer and as a Marxist scholar.

What is most significant in this article is that Boudin is not making a stock contrast between law and actuality, between what the Constitution provides and what the courts practice. Instead, he is making a purely legal analysis, showing that the law makes none of the provisions which liberals think it does. His reasoning is impressive; his exposition contains highly illuminating cases and decisions. Justice itself, Mr. Boudin shows, is not a federal right, and the doing of justice is neither a constitutional guarantee nor a Supreme Court function. The fourteenth amendment, under which many civil liberty cases are argued, does not protect citizens against the abridgment of those privileges and immunities which the layman imagines inhere in civil rights. Such is the law as interpreted and established by the Supreme Court.

Mr. Boudin shows that the Supreme Court has ruled that trial by jury is not a requirement of due process of law and is therefore not protected by the United States Constitution against abridgment or abolition of the states. Similarly, freedom of assemblage is not a right protected against infringement by the states. Nor does the federal constitution guarantee against discrimination, against racial and religious minorities; as interpreted by the Supreme Court it offers no protection against the kind of "racial purity" laws typical of Nazi Germany. According to the Supreme Court, our states may punish marriage between members of different races—actually a criminal offense in many states.

Dealing specifically with civil rights, Boudin points out that, as traditionally understood, freedom of speech and press meant that no one would be imprisoned or otherwise molested for merely speaking or writing, so long as he himself refrained from doing anything illegal and no one else was actually influenced by the speech or writing to do anything illegal. But Supreme Court decisions have abridged the civil rights of those who teach or advocate revolutionary doctrines with respect to the social or economic order, even though neither they nor their adherents follow up their teaching or advocacy by any action whatever. The Supreme Court has never declared that any criminal anarchy or criminal syndicalism law is unconstitutional. The Court has repeatedly sustained convictions under these laws even when no illegal act was involved; it has on rare occasions reversed particularly stupid state court decisions based on these laws, but the criminal syndicalism statutes themselves have never been touched. The recent DeJonge ruling, hailed by liberals as a victory for civil