

Behind the Lines in Spain

The exigencies of civil war have spurred Spain in becoming "a republic of workers"

By Theodore Draper

AS the struggle in Spain passes its sixth month, the back-of-the-lines situation challenges in importance the actual front-line fighting. The longer the war, the more important an effective economy. Indeed, the military and social aspects of modern warfare are so intimately interdependent that they seem to merge into one vast and infinitely complicated whole. Mass armies requiring to be fed, clothed, and armed on a mass scale; hungry, homeless, and disorganized civilian populations; mechanized warfare demanding inexhaustible quantities of ammunition and armament of all sorts; fleets of trucks and other conveyances; complicated and costly systems of hospitalization and epidemic prevention—all these refinements of our civilization have contributed to make the politico-economic front as important as the combat front.

The initial advantage in coping with many of the most important problems of the war was with the rebels. Practically all of their most vital needs have streamed in from abroad, from Germany, Italy, and Portugal; the "neutrality" blockade penalized the legitimate government in its efforts to obtain the most elementary military equipment. The rebels took the initiative with more than 80 percent of the trained soldiers in the regular army on their side; the government was faced with the colossal task of organizing a people's army from raw recruits with an inadequate high command and bullets so scarce, time so precious that military training was an impossible luxury. The rebels fought as an experienced and disciplined unit under expert commanders; a large minority of the anti-fascist forces resisted discipline and a unified command on principle for a considerable period.

Tremendous as were these military obstacles, the economic problem of getting the factories back into operation and the fields harvested were only little less so. The very impact of the rebellion would have disorganized trade, industry, and agriculture under the best of circumstances. But, at least in respect to economy, the rebellion broke out under pretty nearly the worst. Big industry and the big estates were practically the monopoly of fascist sympathizers. Fascist supporters behind the government lines were thus in a peculiarly favorable position to sabotage production, especially during the first two months of the struggle. This may be considered the "normal" economic problem because indiscriminate fascist bombardment and shelling of cities made the situation immeasurably worse.

The guiding thread to the economic reforms of the last six months is sheer military neces-

sity. Another important consideration has been the necessity of wiping out the economic as well as the political roots of Spanish fascism. The present People's Front government has recognized the fundamental truth that fascism cannot be completely eliminated until its economic position has been thoroughly undermined. This economic position was based primarily on the semi-feudal economy of great landed estates worked by farm laborers or tenant farmers. It was bolstered up by native capitalists, like Juan March, who financed specifically fascist movements such as the Falange Española of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, now dead. It was the great mistake of the five previous years of the republic that the political thunder against fascism far exceeded the actual economic bite. The very exigencies of civil war have definitely changed all that.

A people that fights reaction with passion has a way of foreshortening history. What was previously not accomplished for decades is now done in days. John Reed hailed the magnificent spiritual resources released in the midst of the ten Russian days that shook the world. Similar resources and resourcefulness have been released in Spain these last six months.

Spain's basic evils are very old, very rotten. Though any permanent social progress depends wholly on military victory, a brief sketch of the accomplishments to date will indicate how great is the social progress which is staked on the outcome of this struggle.

The Land Question: This is the chief economic, and therefore political, problem. More than a majority of the Spanish people are directly dependent upon the land for daily bread. As everywhere else, the agrarian problem is one of division and ownership of the land. In twenty-seven out of fifty provinces registered in 1931, 2 percent of the people owned 67 percent of the land while 76.5 percent of the people owned 4.7 percent of the land. Grandees used to own vast estates as large as half a province. About one third of the cultivated land was under the tenant-farmer system. Sharecroppers and farm laborers worked at the lowest living standard in Europe. For these reasons and others, Spain has always been a relatively unproductive land with never more than 40 percent of the soil under cultivation. The special features of Spanish economic development were the continued existence of a feudal land tenure and, as



Fighting for Spanish Democracy

Painting by Abraham Harrison

a consequence, the retarded development of capitalist industry.

More has been accomplished in agrarian reform in the last six months than in the preceding five years of the republic, which is to say, in the whole history of Spain. Only partial figures are at hand, but these are sufficiently eloquent. From August 1933 to February 16, 1936 (i.e., from the election which put the reactionary Lerroux-Gil Robles coalition in power until the last election won by the People's Front), 410,662.5 acres were distributed to the landless peasants. From February 16, 1936, until July 17, 1936 (when the fascist rebellion broke out), 1,780,185 acres were distributed. From July 17, 1936, to September 15, 1936 (three months of war), 1,797,547.5 acres were distributed. Now, the People's Front government under Francisco Largo Caballero came into office September 4 last, and it is really from this date that most agrarian reform has gone forward under the Communist Minister of Agriculture, Vicente Uribe. In any event, there was more land reform in the first three months of the war than in the preceding six months. And there was more in those six months than in the preceding three years. If the same rate was maintained for the last three months (it was certainly much faster), a spectacular land reform has gone forward during the six months of the civil war.

The decrees announced and carried out by Minister Uribe are drastic and far-reaching. The fundamental decree confiscates without compensation the lands of all persons convicted of direct or indirect participation in the rebellion. It must be remembered that the backers of the rebellion were precisely the big landlords. The confiscated estates already reach into the thousands. Wherever confiscation is authorized, a commission, composed of the local council, local People's Front committee, and one delegate each from the trade unions of the farm laborers and associations of small landholders and tenant farmers, is appointed in each municipality or rural district to divide the land. The locality is empowered to decide whether the land is to be worked as a collective or in individual holdings. Cultivation of the land is placed in the hands of the farm laborers in the respective district.

The law declares that all confiscated lands belong to the nation; tenants, farm laborers,

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Badajoz to Dorset

Telephone wires cry in the wind
and make song there. I stand in the misty
night
and listen. Hear voices from a far distance;
hear sounds from further, outside the wires,
than ever inside. Hear sounds from Spain.
The mist muffles all but these; blankets per-
haps the reply—
But the wind plays the wires still, and the
wires cry.

VALENTINE ACKLAND.



Woodcut by Gus Bundy

and small farmers "are granted the use in perpetuity as long as they maintain the fertility by a rational agricultural exploitation corresponding to the parcel of farm cultivated by them." Most of the land is divided into small cultivations, defined as seventy-five acres of unirrigated land or twelve and a half acres of irrigated land and seven and one half acres of orchard. Rent and feudal dues have been abolished everywhere. On September 8, Uribe declared that "the whole land which used to be an object for exploitation will in the future be a means of work for all peasants and for all landowners."

Agrarian reform has gone farthest in Catalonia. One unfortunate tendency, especially in some regions of Levante, has been hasty and forced collectivization. The Soviet experience has shown that the road to collectivization is not a straight and easy one. It is dangerous to force peasants into collectives before the way has been thoroughly prepared through provisions of adequate machinery, education, and, above all, a strong and independent industry. There has been another tendency to "collectivize" through individual unions and localities without consideration for a national plan or pattern. In practice, this leads to economic decentralization. Because the chief task in Spain at the present moment is the transference of the land from the big landowners to the peasantry, Minister Uribe has warned against forcing small landholders into collectives against their will by arbitrary expropriation, as though exploited peasants were the same as the old grandees. Collectivization by choice is an altogether different matter from collectivization by force. The latter, at this stage, is an unmitigated evil.

The problem of increased cultivation is courageously being faced, and marked improvement has already been announced. In the case

of at least two provinces, Jaen and Ciudad Real, the cultivated area has increased by twenty-five percent over last year. The increase in cultivation is, of course, not disconnected with the division of the land.

The key to the land reform is the slogan: *The land is for the man who works it.*

INDUSTRY: Spanish capitalism developed late and very unevenly. Most big industry is owned by foreign capital. Spanish industry as such is predominantly small-scale. As in agriculture, the big capitalists almost always sided with the fascists, though there have been notable exceptions. The chief industrial region is Catalonia, and this accounts for the strength of labor organization there. The chief Spanish industries are the Catalan textile industry and the metal and mining industries in the Basque provinces and Andalusia. The backwardness of capitalism partly accounts for the strength of the anarchist movement. Long ago, Engels remarked that anarchism flourishes where capitalism is under-developed and small production predominates.

As pointed out before, government operation of factories has, in the first place, been a military problem and a military necessity. Factories owned by persons who directly or indirectly assisted the rebels have been confiscated and nationalized. Factories engaged in the manufacture of articles classified as war materials are under state supervision. Wherever factories were shut down either for inefficiency, sabotage, or following the early disorder, production has been taken over by the state. According to Michael Kolzov, of the Moscow *Pravda*, about 18,000 factories were taken over by the middle of October. Of these, 2500 were in Madrid and 3000 in Barcelona. The decree which most effectively separated the businesses which were to be controlled