

## THE PEOPLE'S FRONT IN GERMANY

## "The Alternative Is Death"

*A famous novelist says history has convinced his fellow-Germans that they must take power*

By Heinrich Mann

OF all national groups, the Germans have encountered the greatest difficulty in developing their own people's front. In the first place, the Nazi regime has concentrated all of its immense power to prevent the Germans from forming such a front. The heroic Spaniards were able to take up arms in defense of their Frente Popular. In Germany, terror cracks down on the people's front when it is barely in embryo.

In addition to this difficulty, the Germans have been faced with many obstacles which have hindered decisive steps toward forming their own popular front. For various reasons, more or less insignificant in themselves, if not in their effect, the German people have never been united. Thus they have not only recently, but at all times offered every advantage to a despotic minority. Under the Hohenzollern empire, Germany was always ruled by a minority government. Yet the same junkers and industrialists who then acted as the ruling class appeared again under the Weimar republic. They adapted themselves to democracy in their own fashion, and ruled as before.

The German people have not as yet developed a sense for power—except for this ruling class, which has developed it far too strongly. When the German people had the Weimar republic, which should have been a people's state, they administered it very honorably, but never defended it. The Germans have to learn above everything else that power must be conquered and defended. Only the ruling class has been able to realize this in the past. Recently, certain adventurers have learned from them. Under the new fraudulent name of "National Socialism," these adventurers consistently rule against the people. They reign in the manner of the old master class, but they are more oppressive and ruthless than their instructors.

The German people began to understand and solve these questions very slowly, and then only recently; many of them do not grasp them even today. The middle class in Germany is large, but ineffective. It does not know its own mind, but at last it is beginning to hate its Nazi enemies and to understand that it will be destroyed if this regime lasts much longer. In spite of this fear, it nevertheless detests, or at least distrusts, the workers. The narrow-minded middle class and its "intellectuals" have alone been deceived by the "anti-Bolshevist" slogans. It fears that the socialist workers will confiscate its shops.

It is of the utmost necessity to teach the

middle class that no people's-front government will nationalize its shops, laboratories, and offices. The French Front Populaire governs, one must concede, without nationalization. The German Volksfront would adhere just as strictly to its obligations. The Communists, too, have promised that the people's front in Germany would introduce not communism, but democracy. A people that had lost its basic rights and all its liberties must first regain them. The question of social reform can arise only much later. Such reforms will not be introduced by force, but by voluntary decisions. Universal suffrage will be respected. It is quite another question whether socialism can be reached through free and universal suffrage. It would still be a socialism for the trusts and big landowners. The little man has nothing to fear; he can only gain.

The petty bourgeoisie themselves either furnish the Nazis with personnel or passively tolerate the tyranny. At most, they whisper among themselves that something has to be changed. What? That they do not know. And so far they have not made the slightest attempt to reach an agreement with other strata of the population. They are the pawns of the present regime. However, the absolute majority lies with the workers and the poor peasants; it would be sufficient if these two strata would act together systematically. Their unity would actually be the beginning of the people's front.

Taken as a whole, the peasants as well as the workers really reject the Nazi state. Have they reached an agreement and are they proceeding towards unity? They are resisting, each group in its own fashion. The peasants would rather risk the most terrible consequences than obey orders which would starve them and ruin their land. The workers hold to their illegal unions in spite of the mass trial, torture, and the scaffold. Granaries burn down as frequently as munition dumps. The secret police force, which exists only to torture the people, keeps a close watch on every single citizen. They cannot prevent sabotage; they can only hinder the open, systematic formation of the people's front. But the great proletarian masses, workers and peasants, know that salvation lies in the words "people's front," and they realize that they must act accordingly.

The workers represent the most enlightened stratum in Germany. This does not mean that they are as thoroughly informed as a free people would be about the situation in the

world at large or about conditions within their own country. They have sunk to the level of forced laborers; they have been stripped of all freedom; they are mentally fettered by unscrupulous propaganda; they are forbidden to tune in on foreign broadcasts. The foreign press reaches them only clandestinely, but it does reach them. The workers alone, among all the classes in Germany, receive news from abroad. Their party leaders are in constant connection with the party leaders across the frontiers. The workers have their international organizations. That is the reason for the particular feeling of strength against a state that weighs most heavily upon them. In their consciousness, they contrast it with other powers, hoping that these will be stronger in the end.

IF OTHER CLASSES were also conscious of being connected to the world at large, the German people's front would have been at once an accomplished fact. Meanwhile, the regime has succeeded in cutting them off from the world, especially the intellectuals. The first and foremost concern of the Nazis was to deprive the people of its intellectual leaders. One must add that there never were many of them. The German intellectuals were for the most part not even a link between the people and the ruling class. Scarcely possessing an intellectual superiority, they were petty bourgeois who shared with the middle class its mental tractability and social ineffectiveness. How otherwise can we explain that such masses of intellectuals—scientists, jurists, writers, artists, as well as technicians, officials, and white-collar employees—could suddenly renounce independent thinking? The enemies of the "intellectual beasts" had merely to assume power, and no intellectuals were left in Germany. Immediately they all had the same prescribed *Weltanschauung*; and those who prescribed it were very insignificant people, in the lowest ranks of the professions. These nonentities had, however, risen to power through circumstances not of their own making. Their own sense of power is just as small as that of their class, the middle class.

This applies to the majority, though there are, of course, exceptions. As a class, the workers can only be highly esteemed; viewed as individuals they sometimes appear in a different light. Among them one finds traitors to their own class, strike-breakers, stool-pigeons, and some strata of workers who are Nazis as long as they earn more than their

fellow-workmen. For this reason, the regime lets a few shifts alternate in earning more than others. But such tricks do not prevent the working class from offering the most promise. On the other hand, some intellectuals take a much more definite stand than one would ever have expected from people of their class. There is, for example, an old woman, a historian and novelist, who has proudly kept her independence of mind in spite of the philistines and the power of the state. There was a surgeon whom they tried to bribe with all sorts of titles and honors, but who correctly called them philistines. There are more men of this sort, but they would probably be found on the side of the old Right.

This complete disappearance of the intellectual Left is characteristic of the men who had been the leaders—though only the apparent leaders—during the republic. They should have defended the former ideology of the civilized state, but what have they ever defended? Now they stand at attention for the Nazis in order to appear as though they are permeated with the official *Weltanschauung*. Many even overstep the bounds of decency. As we know, all of the Left who had some importance have emigrated, or been tortured and

murdered at home. The politicians\* emigrated with the intellectuals. What differentiates them in exile? Abroad, the politician without party or governmental office becomes an ordinary intellectual like the others. He reaches the German masses, now separated from him by guarded frontiers, just as the writer does. It is this situation above all that has brought the idea of the people's front to the German Left.

The German Lefts would still not have thought of accepting the people's front, especially because before their exile they could not visualize themselves united. A politician in exile made the pointed remark that "writers must now be taken seriously." On the other hand, the writers have been led to the realization that without the apparatus of the large socialist parties, they would not be able to utter a word. Internationally known names are not sufficient. Neither can a party apparatus alone accomplish anything. Only the union of both political and literary talents, on the one hand, and the resources of an organization, on the other, can create a real force. Thus the German Left was made a power, even in exile. It might be more correct to say that it became a power through the exiles.

The "sense of power" was not developed by the Left while it was "in power." It preferred to share it with others. It was afraid of the responsibility as well as of its own unity. But now, in exile, they have at last understood both this responsibility and unity, though they have not quite been able entirely to achieve the latter. It is hard to believe, but even today the German Left has

\*The German word "*Politiker*" does not carry the derogatory connotation implied by its closest English equivalent, "politicians."—TRANS.

its irresponsible elements. To these, it seems more important to harm a comrade than to overthrow Hitler. Some hardly wish to overthrow him. They prefer to remain exiles for the rest of their lives, and to make pessimistic analyses of reality. Thus do these elements continue the old mental gymnastics of the German Left which ultimately led to defeat.

Except for some regrettable incidents and certain individuals and groups, who could not be counted on under any circumstances, the émigré Left has understood the idea of the popular front. They are doing their best towards a realization of this idea. An eminent Frenchman not long ago admitted that we Germans had striven harder and accomplished more than any other group of émigrés. We have established contacts with our country, and are using them. The German workers and members of other classes know about us; they know that we have more than once been responsible for international demonstrations and mass meetings for world peace and against fascism. The mere existence of a committee for the formation of a German people's front encourages millions to struggle for it, although this means risking their lives. Under these circumstances, the realization of the people's front means also its victory. A fascist state that can no longer separate its enemies is lost. Their unity is its end.

AFTER considering all adverse circumstances—the tactics employed by the Nazi state as well as the traditional behavior of the German character in general and the German Left in particular—it becomes evident that the popular front came because it had to come. The alternative is death. Everybody knows that the Hitler regime represents nothing but death. Death is even nearer for the Germans at home than for those abroad. Those left behind see themselves driven to war. The first victims of war whom the regime demanded for Spain have filled the people with terror. The fear of war is greater in Germany than anywhere else. All the noisy propaganda of the government is in reality an empty sham; their fear, however, has a deep and silent content. A people cannot be embittered against its government, cannot suffer unceasing abuse, and still wage foreign wars. On top of this, the Germans are expected to attack; they fully realize that they are being misused for aggressive purposes. They have not the slightest faith in the cause of their rulers, who cannot help revealing that they have lost faith in their own cause and are dependent on the crumbling past. Any day can bring an end to their glory.

The fear of war does its share; the rest is accomplished by the agitation for peace, by the continuous international struggle to make war impossible for National Socialist Germany, to sap its war strength both morally and physically. The German Opposition participates in all efforts in this direction. Peace, Hitler's greatest enemy, is its ally. With the help of peace, this opposition will forge the German people's front.



Abbott



# The Yanks under Fire in Spain

*Although it was their first experience of warfare,  
they held the center at Jarama like seasoned troops*

By James Hawthorne

**W**ITH THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BATTALION.—In this sector of the Jarama battle-front, in the Spanish war of independence against international fascism, five hundred American anti-fascists held the key position during one of the greatest battles of this war. From the vague concepts of modern warfare they might have nourished in training camp, they passed in less than twenty-four hours to the inconceivably cruel realities. Punished and horrified, they became veterans by that swift transformation process that tests the fundamental fiber of a man. When the battle was over, they had suffered heavy losses, performed a heroic service to the cause of world progress, and justified their long journey.

Both wings of the semi-circular line in which they found themselves in late February were occupied by brigades of the Spanish People's Army: the regular army, comparable to the best, that exists in the center area. Some two thirds of the line was held by these Spanish forces, among whom one sees the faces of mere children, the incredibly brave volunteers who performed the miracle of the defense of Madrid. The center of the line extends over two hills and a hollow. The International Brigades, especially the Fifteenth, were entrusted with guarding the center.

The hill on the right center (facing the fascists) is considerably higher than the one on the left. Beneath and between them lies a flat area about one hundred yards wide, sloping evenly down from the rebel lines to the government trenches, which are about sixty feet behind the line of trenches on either side.

Into this weak position the green American volunteers were moved before daylight one morning in the last days of February. On their right they found the approach to their trenches protected by machine guns on the hill where the British battalions had fortified themselves during two weeks of attack and counter-attack. Beyond the British, the Franco-Belgian Battalion linked the line to Lister's men, Spanish veterans who probably average twenty years of age. On the left, the slighter eminence was held by one of Madrid's best mixed brigades, another pride of the Spanish People's Army. In front of them lay the olive-planted no-man's land through which they could see the fresh dirt being thrown up as the fascists deepened their trenches.

Across the bat slope, rifle and machine-gun bullets whistled twenty-four hours a day. "This is a windy position," the brigade runner

explained as he took me through the lines. Truth to tell, it was a poorly fortified trench, completely dominated by rebel machine guns pouring fire close to the ground from their higher levels. They could see over the parapet of our trench. The olive grove in front was a garden of death. It was crossed and criss-crossed by machine-gun fire from both wings of both lines, and striped by direct fire from the trenches immediately opposite. The grotesque figures of men stiffened with long death lay there. It was a dangerous task to bring in dead and wounded. Under the trees, the bodies of Moors and Nazis marked the recent failure of a rebel attack. Small exploring parties, handfuls of men, wandered into this territory at night, but rarely recovered a half-dozen bodies without attracting fire even under cover of dark.

Hardly had the Lincoln Battalion occupied this edge of no-man's land, than an attack was launched. It was not yet light when the artillery preparations began. The men of the battalion had never heard the threatening moan of an approaching shell. They had never heard the thin whistle of a stray rifle bullet. Their ears were unaccustomed to the crisp spatter of a dum-dum slug striking the sand-bags on the trench parapet, or the crackle of explosive bullets in the air. One could hear the bang of enemy rifles close behind the explosion of the bullets, so near were the rebel trenches. A few of the men had seen the World War, but that was a long time ago. Only a very few had ever heard the sound of cannon. There was never a man whose nerves didn't twitter in those first hours of fire. The flashes in the sky, where the reflection of flame shooting from a cannon's mouth makes lightning, caused the momentary appearance of shadows in the solid dark. All the décor of hell. You peer tensely through the black vacuum for another movement where that shadow darted. Was it that the light threw a tree into sudden relief and then blotted it out, or was it a rebel darting swiftly from one protection to another? Another movement, the shadow of a movement, in the grove. You fire, the machine gun spits four or five angry needles of fire. A rifle cracks and the whee-e-e of a stray tells you that someone in the opposite trenches is trying to locate the machine gun. There is no more movement. Did we get him? Or was it never more than a swaying of a tree?

DAY CAME slowly through a misty rain. Then the sun broke over the clouds. Under the

trees, here and there, a body. Perhaps there had been a rebel attack in the night, driven back by those sheets of artillery fire. More likely, only a scouting party, trying to drag itself unseen to within hand-grenade range of the weak spot in the government lines. The sun began to thaw out the damp chill of the Jarama night. The artillery had never let up. Yet after the early-morning attack, the air seemed still. Through the relative stillness, the drone of airplane motors brought the faces of the infantry up in that instinctive but dangerous search for the intruder. There were four rebel ships above them.



Scott Johnston

Two Junkers, bombers, had recklessly visited the lines with only two pursuit ships to protect them. A single bomb dropped. The Americans cowered in their shallow trench. Their first bomb. Whoever has heard the roar of those terrible engines of destruction, has heard it close at hand, knows the wonderment at finding himself alive, untouched by the hot, flying metal. The upturned faces (which help a pilot locate an objective), shining like mirrors up to the plane, had been drawn back into the shadow of the trench. Only a direct hit could hurt them. The Junkers maneuvered to get directly over the line of trenches without drawing anti-aircraft fire. Another bomb sent up its inverted cone of black smoke, metal, dirt, stone-dust. In the dying echoes of its roar, a new whirl sounded. Two government planes, flying low, hidden from eyes above by the color of the ground, shot out of nowhere to give battle. The racing of a motor, the sound peculiar to a swiftly climbing plane, reached the trenches well after the loyalist planes zoomed up at a sharp angle. (They are immeasurably better climbers than any of the German and Italian planes of late model in the rebel camp.) The faint crackle of many machine guns floated down as the battle began. One rebel chaser was hit, corkscrewed, straightened out, lost control again, and fell hopelessly in a barrel roll behind the loyal lines. A government pursuit ship soared over the two bombers, dived nose-down, pouring hundreds of bullets through the intervening space as its four automatic guns barked excitedly. Explosive bullets hit the ground and burst in no-man's land and around the rebel front lines. Suddenly one of the bombers burst into a sausage of flame and fell like a paper in the wind, at a reluctant pace, gradually lower, out of sight behind the