

Hitch-Hiking in Spain

The casual traveler in republican territory has his difficulties, but the charm of the people dispels them

By Stephen Spender

TODAY, in order to go from one town to another in Spain, it is necessary to obtain a safe-conduct, on which is stated the extent and nature of one's journey. In order to obtain a safe-conduct, one has to submit oneself to one of those tests of faith in exasperating circumstances which correspond to the tests to which the saints submitted themselves in other days: in Republican Spain, the counterpart of the hair-shirt, the days of fasting, the penitentiary, is the endless waiting about in government offices, the journeys in trains set on establishing new records of unpunctuality, the arrival at a destination where there may reign a perpetual Lent of no sugar, no coffee, and little meat.

Yet no experience is so charming as traveling today in Spain. I use the word "charming" advisedly, for during a war, when one is surrounded by suffering and hatred, the charming is that which strikes one immediately as the unforgettable. Even the least observant travelers in Spain notice the extraordinary contrast of the gay, the spontaneous, the charming, with the war. No one who has to wait for five hours on his way to Barcelona at the little frontier town of Port-Bou forgets his first impressions of the new democracy which is fighting in Spain.

With me, the little incident that I shall not forget was the sudden halt of a whole lorry load of militia in front of me. I was sitting on the parapet of a bridge, reading *Humanité*: they had stopped merely to greet me and ask what I was reading. I showed them the newspaper, and as I had almost finished it, offered to give it to them. At first they refused as though I were offering them some overwhelming favor; however, I managed to make them accept it, and then they thanked me with an emphasis that was related

not to the gift of a newspaper but to their consciousness of my "solidarity" with them.

It is again and again this added significance of small things—the offering of a cigarette, the raising of a hand in the "*Salud*," the refusal of a tip by a waiter—which surprises one in Spain. The truth is that the outward and visible sign of popular freedom is generosity: the Spanish people feel themselves to be free, and they behave to each other and to strangers with the generosity of those who feel themselves to be equal.

Now, on one's safe-conduct is written that "all the civil and military authorities are called upon to assist the bearer on his journey." This is not a formality; it is true. You can, for example, show the safe-conduct to the guard of a town, and he will then stop all lorries until he has found one which will take you to your destination. Recently, I have traveled from Valencia to Madrid, to the front, and circuitously back to Valencia in this way. On all these journeys, the drivers, the workers, the soldiers and peasants, who use the same means of conveyance, have amazed me by their kindness, their generosity, and their good-humor. These people share everything with each other: no one who has a bottle of wine takes a drink without handing the bottle round to all his neighbors; it is the same with cigarettes. Once I gave a soldier a bar of chocolate, and he instantly divided it into small portions and gave one to everyone in the lorry.

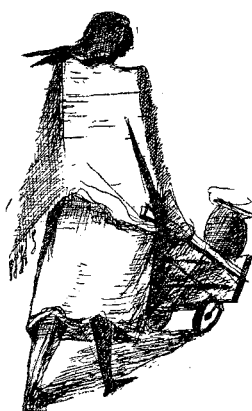
In the same way, the people show the utmost consideration in helping each other. For example, two days ago, the camion in which I was put did not go quite as far as Valencia, where I was due. The lorry driver and his three mates discussed at great length what

it would be best for me to do: whether I should sleep a night at Gandia and then proceed to Valencia next morning, or whether I should go on by train from some point. Finally they took me to a junction of the main road and railway, where I had the choice of staying a night or going by train or by road.

When we stopped for lunch at an inn, they insisted on paying for my meal. At these small villages the food is today the best in Spain. That day we chose fried eggs and lamb chops; we went into a hall where there was a charcoal fire and watched the woman cook our food in olive oil in a huge frying pan.

Usually on these journeys there is some joke current amongst the travelers—a simple, almost pointless joke about someone or some phrase, such as children have amongst each other. On this journey the joke was the phrase "To Tarracon!" Apparently before I arrived someone had said "To Tarracon" in an especially ludicrous manner. At intervals in the journey, particularly as we started again after a halt, one of the workers would shout, "To Tarracon!" in an effort to excel the original, and we would all laugh. Finally, I became infected, and although I have never learnt the origin of the phrase, I now think of it as extraordinarily funny.

Yesterday I met in Valencia an American who told me that although he had no interest in politics, he would not leave Spain unless he was obliged to do so. "Why?" I asked him. "Because I love the people," he replied. And it is a remarkable fact of this war that the foreigners who have come here to aid Spanish democracy find that it is not only an idea which they are fighting for, but a people who are perhaps the most interesting and most likeable in Europe.



Sketched in Spain by Abis

William Green in Action

Adhering to Gompers's policies, the A. F. of L. chief frowned on militancy, fawned on employers, and tolerated racketeering

By Bruce Minton and John Stuart

WILLIAM GREEN no more thought of questioning the Gompers heritage than Moses dreamed of challenging the Ten Commandments. In 1935, Green was still insisting that "the majority of employers sincerely and honestly wish to maintain decent wage standards and humane conditions of employment. They neither seek the exploitation of labor nor the exploitation of the consuming public. They are inspired by a keen sense of justice and are influenced in all their business dealings by a spirit of fair dealing and fair play."

At times, Green's reiteration of this theme sounded suspiciously like whistling to keep up courage. No doubt he desired above all things peace and pleasant relations with the employing class. But the price he paid for it was steep. "The right to strike," he informed the labor movement, "involves so many considerations that it ought to be utilized only as a last resort." Throughout his twelve years as president of the A. F. of L., Green never fully conceded that conditions warranted the use of this "last resort." Though the wage of thirty-three million American workers in the "prosperous" days of 1929 averaged twenty-five dollars a week, placing their incomes below what the U.S. Bureau of Census found to be a minimum comfort level, Green and the executive council gave no thought to raising this level. That half the workers received even less than the meager twenty-five-dollars-a-week wage, existing at a bare subsistence standard of living or worse, failed to alter Green's steadfast resolution to discourage organized struggle by the working class. When pressure from the membership grew so powerful that Green was forced to make a show of supporting a strike, he immediately attempted to smooth things over by settling it before the strikers had gained their objectives. Jurisdictional disputes between the unions continued feverishly enough; but Gompers had ordered peace with the employers and Green guarded the tablets of the law. "If reason and judgment are enthroned," he asserted doggedly, "directing the lives and actions of men, we can establish a relationship in industry which will speed the cause of peace, satisfaction, and prosperity."

His conviction stemmed from the belief, borrowed from Gompers, that it was vital to abide by

our consistent refusal to commit our movement to a class-conscious philosophy which would have entailed tactics based upon a belief that irreconcilable conflict exists between owners of capital and labor. The American trade unionist has always



Darryl Frederick

William Green

believed that conference and joint negotiation were the way to decide conditions written into the work contract.

The flaw that marred Green's empty homily was the failure of the American labor movement to grow. When Green became president in 1924, the average membership of the A. F. of L. totaled 2,865,799, already a drop of approximately two and a quarter millions from the high mark of four years before. Green disregarded the warning. In consequence, the Federation limped along until 1929 with a stationary membership, shockingly inadequate in the light of the thirty million American workers still eligible for organization. The subsequent economic crisis, instead of increasing membership, lowered it, until by the middle of 1933 it had sunk to the 1916 level of 2,126,796.

Such was the objective result of Green's stewardship during the first nine years after Gompers's death. His energy had been directed against the "Red menace," and, in conjunction with the employers, against such militant independent unions as those created by the Trade Union Unity League in 1929. The independents of the T.U.U.L. emphasized the need for bringing the unorganized into effective industrial unions. Their program, supplemented by a policy of attempting to spur the A. F. of L. into motion, not surprisingly terrified Green and his associates on the executive council who saw in it a threat to their jobs. For the T.U.U.L. exposed to the ma-

jority of American workers just how illusory was the "prosperity" hailed by Green and just what steps should be taken to protect the working class from the terrific exploitation.

Once threatened, Green hit out blindly against this effort to vitalize the labor unions, and simultaneously drew closer to the employers for protection. His sense of decorum, shared by the executive council, prevented the A. F. of L. from undertaking a serious campaign to organize workers outside the labor movement. When the officialdom did contemplate such a drive, Green first notified the employers and meekly asked permission to proceed. If permission were refused—as inevitably it was in the mass-production industries—Green repeated his polite plea for employer "reasonableness" and promptly relinquished the drive. His experience with Henry Ford proved typical. After the Ford Motor Co. rebuffed Green's overtures toward organizing its plants, Green clucked like an angry hen, but he scrapped the elaborate plans just as he had previously canceled his intention to organize General Motors. Sweet reasonableness led only to capitulation.

In lieu of an aggressive policy, Green busied himself explaining labor's objectives in countless speeches and magazine articles. He sounded alarmingly like a cautious social worker with his requests for free public schools, insurance, holidays, extension of contracts, and arbitration. Characteristically, he neglected to back his program with any suggestion as to how it could be achieved, overlooking the fact that to realize his aims, labor had first to face more basic problems. In reality, Green had no serious intention of forcing his program on reluctant industrialists. Instead, he waited for generous employers to drop concessions into his lap. He begged from door to door, hat in hand, with a tenderness that found a ready response from the owners: they flattered Green with soft words, reassuring generalizations, and of course no action.

The Gompers tradition led Green even farther afield. From it stemmed not only the ineffectualness of the official labor movement, but the abuses: lack of democracy in the unions, grafting, racketeering, shady political deals. Even the cautious Green was infected by the demoralization that poisoned the entire A. F. of L. Well aware of the corruption, though he managed to avoid personally implicating himself too deeply, Green closed his eyes to the dishonesty that surrounded him. Yet class coöperation involved him in acts which brought discredit and defeat to the labor movement. In New York City, the A. F.