



MYSTERY IN TUNISIA

THE latest alibi for *l'affaire Darlan* has been passed on to commentators, news analysts, correspondents reporting the war from Washington, etc. It is: "The arrangement with Darlan put the entire African campaign one month ahead of schedule."

If we take this alibi at its face value, we are forced to come to the conclusion that the vanguards of the Allied forces should really have reached Medjez-el-Bab only in mid-January 1943. As for General Montgomery's army in Libya—it should, presumably, have come up against El Agheila only at the turn of the year.

Let us look at the course of the campaign so far and try to determine whether or not the explanation offered is correct.

We know that General Eisenhower's armada consisted of some 500 ships, exclusive of some 350 convoying warships. Allowing an average of 5,000 tons per ship, which is very reasonable, and another average of five ship-tons per man with corresponding equipment and supplies for the first phases of the campaign, we come to the conclusion that the Allied expeditionary force numbered about 500,000 men.

These forces were disembarked along a line which is about 600 miles long (Casablanca to Algiers) and includes four principal strategic coastal points—Casablanca, Rabat, Oran, and Algiers. The entire area is linked by an excellent system of roads and one main trunk railroad with a number of branch lines. With the occupation of Bone near the Tunisian border in the first days of the operation, the Allied *place d'armes* was extended to a length of about 850 miles with those excellent lines of communications running all the way through smack up to the prospective battlefield. These lines extended into Tunisia, where the network of roads is such that it is difficult to fit a twenty-mile line anywhere on the map without seeing it cross either a railroad or a road.

Thus the situation as far as lines of communication and supply are concerned was good. Taking Algiers as the base for the Tunisian front, we see that General Anderson's First Army had a perfect setup of lines of communications, only 300 miles long. From this jumping-off line, say Bone-Lamy-Souk Ahras-Montesquieu-Clairefontaine, the average distance to Tunisia's eastern coast is 150 miles. Six trunk roads and five railroads run east from this line.

At that time, i.e., approximately dur-

ing the first week after the landing, the Axis had only about 10,000 troops in Tunisia, including all sorts of auxiliaries and technicians. General Anderson was reported to be at the head of 150,000 men. During the first ten days he reached the "distant approaches" to Bizerte and Tunis. One of his columns, American-French in composition, was reported racing across the waist of Tunisia to the sea, intent on reaching it somewhere between Sfax and Gabes. A Free French column was reported to be moving from Lake Chad in the general direction of Tripoli. Allied paratroopers were said to be seizing airdromes in the hump of Tunisia.

Two weeks after the landing Anderson's army was reported "poised to strike" at Bizerte and Tunis and was supposed to be about ten miles from Tunis. The important triangle protecting those two strategic points—Mateur-Djedeida-Tebourba—was reported in Allied hands.

BUT DURING the next two weeks everything seemed to go wrong.

The center of Anderson's army received a terrific armored blow in the Tebourba direction and had to give up the latter place as well as Djedeida and Mateur. It was pushed back to Medjez-el-Bab, some twenty-five miles to the rear. That the parachute landing parties were not able to capture any airdromes is attested to by the fact that the Allies don't seem to be able to establish air superiority because of lack of near airdromes for their fighters.

Nothing is known of the Allied columns which were reported marching to Sfax and Gabes. The Free French moving up from Lake Chad have not appeared yet.

In other words, the operation in Tunisia which—judging by the first bold stab by Gen. Anderson into the Mateur-Djedeida region—was originally planned as a lightning blow to catch the Axis unprepared, came to grief.

This is where we, frankly, cannot quite understand the statement that we are "a month ahead of schedule." It would seem to us that we are two weeks behind. We outlined probable developments in *New Masses* of November 24 and December 1 on the strength of news available then. But practically nothing has materialized.

The statement that we were "a month ahead of schedule" thanks to the *Darlan deal*, is not easy to understand, either.

It is clear that Gen. Mark Clark, during

his dangerous and highly successful mission to Africa last summer, prearranged the comedy of Vichy resistance "for the sake of honor" and the subsequent surrender of the bases in North Africa. It would seem that Casablanca and Rabat were not covered by that arrangement.

Now Casablanca was more under the thumb of the *para-fascist* French Navy than Oran and Algiers. So here Darlan's influence may have been expedient. But we see that Casablanca was precisely the place that offered the only large scale resistance of the whole lot. So what did Darlan do, after all? He did not even succeed in luring the French fleet from Toulon to Africa. He made an appeal without giving an order. We lost the fleet, but Hitler still has part of it: two light cruisers, six destroyers, and seven smaller ships.

Taking the picture as a whole, we frankly fail to understand the failure of General Anderson's First Army to take Tunis and Bizerte in its first sweep, when he outnumbered the Axis at least 10:1. Neither could we understand the delay before Montgomery pushed Rommel out of El Agheila. Rommel was also outnumbered 10:1. In the five see-saw swings of the Libyan campaigns we saw examples of lines of communication being established quickly over hundreds of miles and this in conditions of actual combat. Such conditions have not existed since the capture of Tobruk: the trouble with the British was that they could not catch up with Rommel, *not* that he was fighting them.

However, it must be conceded that General Anderson's troops were utterly green. Many of them (including all US troops) had never had anything but blanks fired at them. They came up against hard bitten veterans, some of whom had got their training on the Soviet Front. This can explain the setback at Tebourba. But it is difficult to explain the general delay in the conduct of the campaign. Judgment on this must await further developments.

Discussing lines of communications is a favorite indoor sport of the "experts." Now, when we hear of difficult lines in North Africa, we are reminded of the German conquest of Crete which was taken from 50,000 Allied troops with practically no lines of communications, except by air.

There is little doubt in our mind that the magnificent logistical beginning of the campaign was not followed by equally brilliant tactical and strategic moves.

WORDS CAN BE BULLETS...

What newspapermen should ask themselves. "To sweep away prejudice, superstition, and ignorance." Palme Dutt's transatlantic broadcast called for a press that will fight.

The following remarks by R. Palme Dutt were broadcast from Britain to New Masses' recent "Words Can Be Bullets" dinner.

I SHOULD like to express my gratitude to NEW MASSES for the opportunity to speak to friends in the United States. May I also take the opportunity to pay tribute to NEW MASSES on behalf of its many readers in Britain, and to say how much we value it both for the living closeness with which it brings to us American democratic policies and progressive thought, and for its outstanding role as a journal of international progressive opinion. Today, above all, NEW MASSES, with its expanding circulation in Britain, the Dominion, and all English-speaking countries, is performing an invaluable role as an international link of the people united in the common struggle against fascism.

Can words be bullets? I think we must answer that question thus: Words are no substitute for bullets. The dreams of idealists who imagined they could dissolve fascism by preaching or by eloquent words have long been shattered. Words cannot replace guns, planes, and tanks, which can alone finally destroy fascism. But words can be very powerful generators of the force which produces guns, planes, and tanks and which can wield those weapons courageously, with inflexible purpose to destroy fascism.

How has fascism, which is contrary to the plain interests of the common people in every country and loathsome to every human feeling and decency of ninety-nine percent of mankind—how has it been able to attain such strength that it can threaten the whole world, hold up the business of the world, turn us aside from urgent constructive tasks in order to concentrate on the single, necessary, bloody task of destroying it?

Fascism has achieved its conquests not only by brute violence but by lies, deception, a cunning propaganda, a poison press—both in the countries where it holds power and in the world press, into which it has insidiously penetrated for many years, influencing reactionary, anti-popular circles of thought.

Therefore, the first task of the democratic press of the world is to combat fascism; to counter its lies and propaganda and the propaganda of its secret friends; to expose fascism not in abstract phrases but in living concrete detail close to the feeling of the masses, laying bare its foul record; to inspire a deep, holy, burning, undying hatred of fascism in all the peoples of the world.

Fascism has achieved its conquests not primarily by a strength superior to the strength of its opponents, but by the division of its opponents—by the division of the people. Unity is the key to victory over fascism.

BUT this unity of free peoples cannot be imposed by mechanical discipline. The free alliance of the United Nations is not like the Hitlerites' forced combination of subject nations, held together by brigand armies of occupation, the Gestapo, and satellite quislings. The peoples' unity of action in the fight against fascism must be inspired by a unity of spirit,

mind, and will; by knowledge of the enemy and the cause for which we fight; hatred of the enemy, fascism, and the determination to destroy it; and by a common resolve to work, fight, and sacrifice for complete victory in the cause of liberation.

Have we yet that complete unity of will and effort, that 100 percent mobilization of the people, that united action of the alliance which spells victory? Are there not still pockets of indifference, half-heartedness, cynicism, sectional interests, failure to understand the issues that are at stake?

It is here that the press can play its decisive role.

The second task of the democratic press in the war of liberation against fascism is to unite and mobilize the peoples against fascism; to build close the unity of the alliance, the unity and friendship of the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, China, and all the nations engaged in the common struggle; to strengthen the unity of the nation against all disrupters and defeatists; to strengthen the unity of the fighting forces and the home front; to intensify war production; to expose and fight ruthlessly all half-heartedness, incompetence, corruption, bureaucratic neglect, or sabotage by vested interests; to respond closely to the feelings and the needs of the men in the armed forces, their families, and the workers in industry; to raise the whole fighting pitch of the nations to a new level.

The modern press is a mighty engine of power. In tens and hundreds of millions of copies a day it can mold the thought and feelings of men. There has been nothing like it in the human record. We may reflect how little it has yet been used to its full strength outside the Soviet Union for great constructive purposes: to sweep away prejudice, superstition, and ignorance, and inspire mankind to glorious common efforts. Fascism has shown how that same power of the press can be used against civilization to poison, debase, and enslave, to spread racial hatred, to inculcate brutality, to teach contempt for humanity, freedom, and progress. But the war against fascism offers a great opportunity to the press and the writers of the world.

THE press has played a great role in the struggle for liberty since the first invention of printing. Remember the Reformation and the fight to make the sacred books, which were then the repositories of human knowledge, available to the common people by the power of print. When the English people began the modern battle for liberty, beheaded their king, set up their republic, and faced the wrath of reactionary Europe, it was Milton, prince of poets, who stepped into the dust of the arena and fulminated over Europe in fiery pamphlets on behalf of the English Revolution. The press of eighteenth century France prepared the French Revolution. The American press prepared the American Revolution. And the Abolitionist press prepared the battle for the ending of slavery. The Chartist press won the freedom of the press for the English people.

Today the world press can play a still greater role in the first world struggle of mankind for liberation against fascism.

The Soviet press has set a splendid example of the press of the people in battle, close to the masses, winning their confidence by its plain, unvarnished truth, inspiring their efforts, exposing the enemy, proclaiming the aims of the people; it has been their agitator and organizer.

Remember the illegal press in the enslaved countries of Nazi-occupied Europe, with what daily heroism of countless thousands it is produced and distributed, keeping alive the sacred flame of the struggle. Remember Gabriel Peri, editor of *Humanite*, who died singing with the words of freedom on his lips, a hostage in the hands of the fascist beasts; he set a deathless example for the youth and the writers of all nations.

Let us, who have still open to us the means of expression in the democratic world, be faithful to our trust. Let us swear that we shall use every nerve of our strength in the cause of victory over fascism and for the liberation of mankind.

R. PALME DUTT.