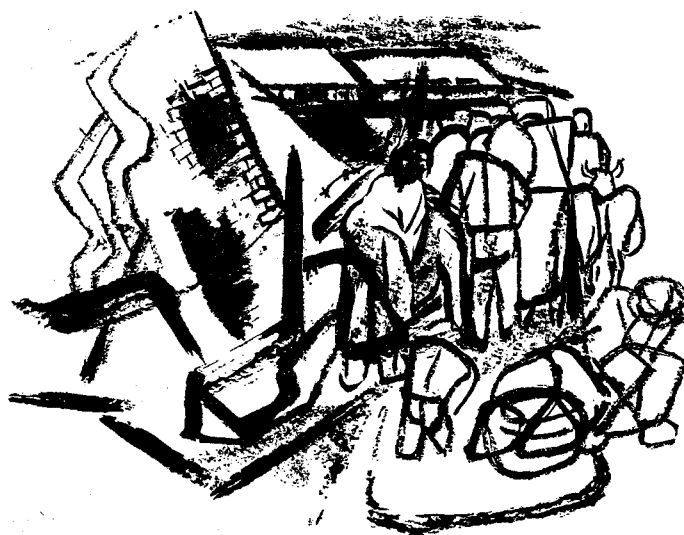


UNMASKING GUSTAV REGLER



J. Heller

One of the leaders of Mexico's fifth column finds aid and comfort among certain American "liberals." Egon Erwin Kisch tells the real story of a man who betrayed his friends.

IN OCTOBER 1939 Gustav Regler was brought to the concentration camp Le Vernet in southern France, together with 450 anti-fascists of various nationalities. The directors of this camp were notorious for their *Croix de Feu* spirit, their anti-Semitism, their corruption, and above all their brutality. The Garde Mobile, long hated by the French people, served as guards. A reign of terror was established about which a series of books has already been written.

Naturally, under such circumstances, not a single anti-Nazi internee was promoted to be a barracks leader. Only those who showed themselves ready to turn informer or were enrolled members of the German Nazi Party (Armand Schoemer, Scherbaum, and others) were entrusted with this function. But the day of his arrival at Vernet, Oct. 12, 1939, Gustav Regler was named barracks leader in Quarter C., Barrack 33.

At that time, also, no anti-Nazi prisoners were allowed to leave the barbed wire enclosure except to march out to forced labor. But Gustav Regler went in and out at will. He sat in the office of the Intelligence Officer, spoke to him, wrote, and received foreign newspapers. Regler refused to give his fellow prisoners the slightest information concerning what he had learned in that office.

But enough became known. Thus, for example, the Nazi agent Werner Popp addressed a letter in German to the Intelligence office of the camp in which he denounced a dozen anti-fascists. Gustav Regler did not shrink from translating this into French and from confirming Popp's slanders against his former comrades and fellow prisoners. The result was that the anti-Nazis mentioned in the letter were transferred to Quarter B from which their liberation was out of the question.

In the public declaration made by the German anti-Nazis and former internees at Camp Le Vernet, Georg Stibi, Paul Krautter, Rudolph Feistmann, and Paul Hartmann, one finds the following words: "... the former

Reichstag deputies and outstanding leaders in the struggle against Nazism, Franz Dahlem and Siegfried Raedel, were likewise denounced by Regler. Several months ago they were transferred from Vernet to the camp of Castres where they are in grave danger, since Hitler has demanded that they be turned over to the German Gestapo." Thereafter not a single honest person in the camp spoke to Gustav Regler. Regler's former friends, that is, those who were still living in freedom, knew nothing of his behavior. They induced a well known French personality (now in America) to intervene for his liberation. But after several days this person refused to intervene since it was clear from the record of the case that Regler's revelations had been used against his comrades.

It should be understood that writers in French concentration camps in 1939-40 were asked to sign a written statement to the effect that in case they were freed and allowed to travel abroad they would not engage in any campaign against conditions in the French camps. All the writers refused to give such a despicable guarantee. That would have meant a declaration of sympathy with Chamberlain and Daladier. The writers refused because they realized that the "phony war," the continuation of Munich by other means, was a preparation for surrender. The writers refused their signature and remained hungry, cold, down-trodden, in constant danger of being delivered to the Gestapo. Not a single German anti-Nazi internee crawled on his knees, not a single foe of Hitler was let out of Vernet in the period between October 1939 and February 1940. But Gustav Regler signed, and was set free.

ANOTHER ITEM: when he arrived in the United States Regler tried to justify this treason to his wife; he alleged that her father, the famous painter Heinrich Vogeler-Worpswede had been executed in the Soviet Union. Naturally Regler knew very well that there was no basis whatever for such a rumor.

Vogeler-Worpswede is today living and working in the USSR, honored and esteemed.

Gustav Regler's novel *The Great Crusade*, which appeared in the United States, has as its heroes his fallen commander and the soldiers of an International Brigade. But it is not written in their spirit. They fought with weapons which the Soviet Union gave them. But in his book Regler attacked the Soviet Union. Regler thus managed to get favorable book reviews and the author's picture even adorned the book jacket. To be sure it did not help the sale of the book especially, for Regler—how seldom the phrase really fits—"is the author who is distinguished from his books by the fact that the latter are not salable."

Six weeks ago when the refugee ship *Serpa Pinto* arrived, Regler was in Vera Cruz, Mexico. People wondered why he had come to the dock where he was bound to meet many former friends who now despised him. Soon, however, a partial explanation developed. A statement, dated from Vera Cruz, appeared in the New York weekly *New Republic*. The occasion was a discussion concerning the formation of a German government-in-exile. Regler was anxious to remind the public of his existence. He who had bought his freedom by renouncing his opinions and by helping the Intelligence Bureau of Le Vernet now attacks those who have not sold themselves.

At a time when Stalin and the Red Army are braving death against the Nazis on the Eastern Front, when democrats, Communists, and all friends of liberty are fighting courageously in the factories of France and in the mountains of Serbia, Regler speaks of "Stalinists with discipline but without brain and heart." By this discipline which he despises, Regler means above all the fact that his former comrades recognized the meaning of the Moscow trials when they occurred. Today even the former American Ambassador in Moscow, Joseph Davies, recognizes that the Soviet Union owes it largely to the Moscow

trials, that its military preparedness was unimpaired.

But it may be recalled that the man who helped edit in Moscow the account of the trials in the German language was Gustav Regler.

In his letter to the *New Republic* Regler also included among these "Stalinists without brain or heart," our friend Andre Simone, a publicist who has tirelessly, energetically, and effectively led the fight against Nazism, against the enemies of republican Spain, against the fifth column in Europe and America, against fascism of every kind and Hitler's agents of every stripe. Andre Simone, without brain and heart! It was not so long ago that Regler admired that brain and sought a little place in that heart. He sought to collaborate on the books edited by Andre Simone, *The Brown Book* and *Brown Network*, and did in fact collaborate on them.

Finally: In a Trotskyite magazine which recently appeared in Mexico, an anonymous writer, using the pseudonym El Observador d'Artagnan, gave a "portrait" of Andre Simone. The author gives the impression of purposely piling up mounds of dung and lies in order to conceal himself. Nowhere in the civilized world are campaigns waged against an opponent in anonymous letters; no literary groups tolerate character assassins in their midst. The name of the man who wrote the article against the anti-fascist Andre Simone, and who in that article incited to the murder of Simone, I can testify is Gustav Regler.

EGON ERWIN KISCH.



A woodcut by Giacomo Patri

THE BACKGROUND

MANY of our readers are aware of the current scandal in Mexico City over a group of Trotskyists and their co-workers, among them Victor Serge, Julian Gorkin, Marceau Pivert, Grandisio Muniz, and Gustav Regler. Early this year a group of deputies in the Mexican Chamber charged these men with being fifth columnists, and undesirable in Mexico. Whereupon the *Nation*, for February 7, in an article by the discredited Richard H. Rovere, came to the defense of the fifth columnists, and charged they were being persecuted by the "GPU." Simultaneously a committee consisting of Roger Baldwin, John Dewey, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Sidney Hook, Quincy Howe, Freda Kirchwey, and Reinhold Niebuhr initiated a letter to the President of the Mexican Republic in behalf of Serge et al., and persuaded some 160 personalities to join in. Among these were mostly the well known American Trotskyists plus an assortment of Norman Thomas' friends. And we were surprised, as many others must have been, to see a few men and women like Dorothy Thompson, Stanley Isaacs, and Dr. Frank P. Graham among them.

In the February 28 issue of the *Nation*, seven Mexican deputies (none of them Communists since there are no Communist deputies in the Mexican Chamber) protested Rovere's article. They were joined by Lombardo Toledano, president of the Latin-American Trade Union Federation, by Ludwig Renn, among other German writers, and by Pablo Neruda, the famous Chilean poet and Chile's consul in Mexico City. They restated the feeling of the Mexican people about the Trotskyists in their midst and told Mr. Rovere off in no uncertain terms. As a result, the *Nation's* editors retreated considerably in so far as Victor Serge and his partners were concerned. But they insisted that Gustav Regler was being unjustly treated; they closed with the remark that the *Nation* has always defended the rights of Communists (as is attested by its present silence about Earl Browder) and "similarly defends persons whose only offense is to criticize the tactics of the Communists."

NEW MASSES for March 3 touched the earlier development of this situation in a brief editorial. Two further points are worth elaboration. First, as to who the Trotskyists' center is: Victor Serge is of Russian descent, lived in France, notoriously anti-Soviet, and for a time was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities. Marceau Pivert was expelled from the French Socialist Party for Trotskyist activities and disruption of the People's Front. Julian Gorkin is a POUM man, tried by the Spanish republic for treason and convicted, as the *Nation's* contributing editor, Alvarez del Vayo, will recall. Grandisio Muniz was one of Gorkin's sidekicks. As for Gustav Regler, we print on an opposite page an article by the well known German author, Egon Erwin Kisch, whose book *Sensation Fair* was published here last fall. Certainly the evidence against Regler, as presented by Kisch, is overwhelming.

But there is a deeper issue involved. Is it the whole story to say that these men are simply critics of the tactics of the Communists? We don't think so. First of all, what are the tactics of the Communists? They are to help win the war, to mobilize the widest sections of the people for this one purpose. Second, are these men merely critics? No, they are the remnants of a whole international gang whose chief avocation was to slander and defame the Soviet Union in order to prevent the close collaboration of that country with the western democracies, a collaboration which everyone realizes would have smashed Hitler long ago, and which today is the hope of the world. It was to be expected that Max Eastman or Sidney Hook should defend these men, since they are part of the same international hookup; it was to be expected that Norman Thomas' "left Clivedeneers" should defend them, too. But is it not time that liberals and progressives who have learned something of what fifth columns meant in Europe, and who wish to wipe out the fifth column that threatens our own country, is it not time that such people should have done, once and for all, with Hitler's "leftist" agents?

This is not an issue between Communists and their critics. For Serge and Regler are not critics: they are professionals in their slander not only of Communists but of all anti-fascists who want to see the widest unity against Hitler. Their function for Hitler has been to divide Communists from liberals, democrats, progressives of all opinions, at a time when we have all recognized that only in unity and perseverance against the enemy in all his manifestations will the war be won and the security of our country preserved. We think it is time not only to recognize Hitler's agents in Mexico, but it is the essence of good neighborliness to encourage the Mexican government to defend itself against them. And we think it is also time, in the spring of 1942, that the American wing of the Trotskyists and the left Clivedeneers of the Norman Thomas stripe be recognized for what they are.

THE EDITORS.

MY FIRST GUN DRILL



"We stuffed our ears and waited. The first shell was jammed home and thunder broke loose right under our noses." A sailor's life aboard an armed merchantman. Illustrated by Soriano.

DURING the gray afternoon we slipped out into the stream and dropped the hook. Later, under cover of darkness, a barge came alongside and we took on the ammunition, two A. B.'s working the winches, the Navy boys handling the boxes, while the wind blasted through the frozen shrouds.

No one knew where we were bound. Rumormongers were in their element: "I hear. . . ." "Listen, I've got this straight from. . . ." "Yeh, Australia. . . ." "Uh-huh, Alaska. . . ." "Sure, Iceland. . . .", et cetera, et cetera. Rumor and speculation. But no one actually knew. No law against guessing, however, and it did help to pass the time. Most of us, though, shuddered at even the thought of Iceland, any place north. Even as it was, here in New York, the quarters were like reefers; you froze to your bunk. The SS—, formerly a member of the Great White Fleet, assigned to the "banana run," was meant for the tropics. No doubt about that. Radiators, it is true, penny-whistle radiators, had been installed here and there. But they were more for psychological than practical purposes, it seemed.

Wherever she was going, however, we were going. We knew that. We had known it when we signed on. We knew it had to be like this—not the radiator angle, but the mystery, the possibility of hardship and danger. It was our war.

Although we didn't know where we were going, it was a pretty sure bet we weren't going to pick up a load of bananas. The formidable array of guns we stacked—on the "head," on the poop, on the boat deck, above the bridge, starboard and port—scotched any such ideas. A better guess would have been that we were destined to be an armed raider. But that theory also was shot through, although it was certainly one to titillate the imagination. A ship intended for armed raiding would have been manned entirely by the Navy. We were seventy-five percent merchant marine.

Finally we did gather fairly definite information indicating that we were scheduled for a port in the Caribbean. We were sailing practically light, hardly any cargo, but the little we did have was mostly labeled for that destination. But from there? Reenter hearsay.

THE wind was an hysteria in the rigging as we rolled and lurched through the black night off the Jersey coast, a glittering string of minute gold beads wavering tenuously far-off the starboard beam. Bound south—through those same ill-fated waters where a few days later disaster was to strike again and again. We were blacked out: painted a brackish, battleship gray; our ports blackened, securely dogged down; no deck lights. It was a feat, risky and eerie, especially in heavy seas, to go from back aft to 'midships across the well deck, groping your way, colliding with winches, deck cargo, hatches, and other blind gropers.

On the bridge, standing lookout, a head-on wind lashed your face savagely. No matter how you maneuvered, it caught you; there was no lee. The lookout on the bridge was not the only one. There were eight more—navymen—placed in stra-

tegic positions about the ship. Good. We were certainly taking precautions, I thought, as I stood my trick as lookout on the bridge. Then, my eyes straying aloft toward the crow's nest, I got a surprise—the foremast light was on, our running lights were on! A wry smile would have been in order, if my frozen face had permitted. Running lights—might as well throw on all the lights. And then I remembered that the covers were still on the lifeboats and that the "falls" practically overlapped each other, making it impossible to swing out two boats at the same time on the same side; you had to wait for one to swing clear before you could start hand-cranking out the other. Nice business in an emergency. Which one was to go out first? An Alphonse and Gaston act, with perverse motif, to see which one was going to have the honor! (Later covers were removed and one lifeboat on each side swung out.)

The running lights were on, of course, a moment's sober reflection told you, because of the heavy traffic along these lanes, especially between New York and Cape Hatteras. More danger from collision with other ships than from torpedoes, it had been reasoned. From a fairly "authoritative source," as press dispatches have it, we had learned that US Navy officials did not anticipate any particular trouble in this zone, that is, from New York to Cape Hatteras, along the coast. They felt—from the same "source"—that we were more liable to encounter danger below the Cape, where the coastline recedes and the ship lanes are farther removed from contact with coastal patrols.

AT THE sound of the general "all-out" alarm we hurried on the double-quick to our stations, not to boat- or fire-stations, but to our battle stations. Some of the men, slightly flustered, came rushing across the decks struggling into life belts, casting quick, reconnoitering glances over the surrounding waters.

The sea was as smooth and shining as the inside of a blue sea shell. A few miles off to our left bulked the headland of Haiti, a bronze, rugged mass, blue-hazed in its deeper recesses. To the west, on our right, but beyond the horizon now, lay Cuba.

We were going through the Windward Passage. It was Monday afternoon and the running and the alarms were all part of our first gun drill. Our gun drill—the merchant seamen—as well as the navymen.

A few days before, talking to some of the navy fellows on board, we had learned inadvertently that there were not enough men in the Armed Guard to man all the guns adequately. Some of us talked it over and a short while later our ship's committee (National Maritime Union)—the delegates of the three departments—met with the Commander of the Armed Guard, Ensign D—. It had been easy to talk to him. He was young, straightforward, friendly. We told him of the crew's desire to cooperate in every way with him and the Armed Guard. We mentioned that we had heard he was short of men and needed more for the effective manning of the guns. We won-