

# THE TRAGEDY OF SPAIN

*By*

**SIR FRANCIS LINDLEY, G.C.M.G., C.B.**

*Reprinted from*

**THE NATIONAL REVIEW**

*February, 1937*



## THE TRAGEDY OF SPAIN

FEW events have given more evidence of muddle-headedness and bad faith than has the tragic struggle in Spain ; so it may be of use to set down the facts and the inferences to be deduced from them as they appear to one whose object is to see things as they are.

Civil war is no new thing in Spain, nor is some of the savagery which accompanies it. But for a considerable period in the 19th century the Rotatory System, under which the Conservative and Liberal Parties enjoyed power in turn by tacit agreement, gave the country internal peace and reasonable contentment. The system, never inspiring, broke down owing to its failure to solve the Moroccan problem and to cope with the growing labour unrest which followed the Great War ; and in 1923 General Primo de Rivera assumed control by a military *coup d'état* which was hailed with almost universal satisfaction. The General, a genial Spaniard as far removed from the bloody-minded dictator as a man could be, rendered immense services to his country. He liquidated the Moroccan struggle which had for decades sapped the finances and drained the youth of Spain and, if he had done nothing else, his name should be held in honour in every Spanish village. But he did far more in reforming the Army, the whole Administration, and the road system. Catalonia alone proved recalcitrant ; and, ill-supported by his Royal master, the General retired and the Revolution of 1931 quickly followed.

Since the Republic was set up and Parliamentary Democratic Government has been nominally in force there has been no real peace in Spain—only short and unquiet truces. For Parliamentary Government is only possible where the important Parties are agreed in fundamentals and where devotion to the Constitution is sufficiently strong and widespread to prevent the Parties from following a course bound to wreck it. When these conditions are absent and when moderation is replaced by a fanatical urge to destroy one's

political opponents, Parliamentary Government develops into a series of revolts which, if the two camps are fairly evenly matched, end in civil war. Such has been the history of Spain since 1931.

The last Elections, whether carried out according to law or marred by violence and intimidation, gave the Parties of the Left a comfortable majority in the Cortes; and the Government which was formed reflected that majority in a Constitutional manner. It is this fact which has led so many of our own honest Parliamentarians astray and which has given their best propaganda weapon to those whose principal object is to destroy Parliamentary Government altogether. Yet it requires but little reflection or knowledge of events to see that the outcome of the Elections has no bearing on the present position from the legal and constitutional point of view.

In order legitimately to claim the obedience of citizens a Government need not be ideal. But it must perform certain elementary duties such as the protection of the lives and property of the public and the vindication of the law in essentials. If it fails to carry out these duties—still more if it does not even attempt to do so—its claim to allegiance falls to the ground and citizens are free, indeed they are in duty bound, to band together in self-defence and in vindication of the law of the land. This is precisely what has happened in Spain. At no moment did the original Popular Front Government make any attempt to govern; unless orders to the police not to protect sacred buildings from destruction or well-to-do people from murder can be called governing.

It is sometimes put forward as an argument in favour of the original Popular Front Government that it contained no extremists. A feebler argument could not be found; for, had the majority elected to the Cortes been extremists, it might have been argued that extremist action had Constitutional justification. The opposite is admittedly the case, and its moderate composition robs the original Popular Front Government of the last vestige of a claim to obedience.

Law-abiding citizens and all those who were either church-going Christians or had anything to lose were in a quandary.



If they could sit quiet long enough, it was pretty certain that the heterogeneous elements in the Popular Front would fall out and honest men would come by their own. Inaction would perhaps have been the course of political prudence ; but it is humanly impossible for people, least of all for Spaniards, to sit quiet whilst their relations and friends are murdered and their feelings outraged by the destruction of all they held most sacred. And it is doubtful wisdom to remain inactive when your organised enemies have long lists of those who are to be murdered next. The emergence of General Franco settled the question.

There is no reason to suppose that General Franco is a Fascist. As far as one can judge, he is cast in the very Spanish mould of General Primo. It has long been the practice of the Bolshevists and their admirers here to appeal to the simple-minded by dubbing their enemies Fascists. The term has been applied in its time to almost every British statesman—usually with the suffix Imperialist. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was a Fascist-Imperialist in his day ; and, if the Spaniard and the Scotsman resemble each other but little in other ways, they may well both have about equal proportions of Fascist leanings.

That there are some Fascists in General Franco's forces is probable, though Fascism is neither an article of export nor suited to the Spanish character. But the bulk of his forces, outside the regular soldiers, Moorish and Spanish, is quite obviously composed of ordinary people who are there either because their religious feelings are outraged or because their relations and friends have been murdered and they know that they would suffer the same fate themselves if the " Legitimate Government " prevailed. Much has been made of the employment of Moorish troops, and their use is certainly distasteful to Englishmen. But we are far from the humanity and wisdom of 1900 when the British Government refused to allow the use of any coloured troops against the white Boers ; and it may be relevant to remember both that a Liberal Spanish Government used Moorish troops against a rising in 1934, and that the present Spanish Government is now enrolling all the Moors it can find. How many

foreigners there are in General Franco's forces it is impossible to say.

On the other side we have a much more heterogeneous crowd, of which the most incongruous element is the Basque. How the Catholic countrymen of the Basque Provinces manage to co-operate with the anti-God Anarchists and Communists of Bilbao is a mystery, but the Separatist feeling in the North must be much stronger than used to be supposed. The Government have taken a leaf out of the Moscow book in this matter, as in so many others, and have promised the Basques all and more than all they ask for. And the unfortunate Basques seem to have fallen into the same delusion as the erstwhile Ukrainians that they would really be allowed to govern themselves in a Soviet Spain. General Franco is precluded from out-bidding Valencia because his stalwarts are for a unified Spain and he cannot afford to offend them. But the Basque theatre gains its importance from its vicinity to the French frontier. It is eccentric to the main struggle and free from much of its savagery. Nor do the Basques take any orders from the so-called Spanish Government.

The Catalonian question would require a book to explain. Here it is only necessary to say that the Separatist sentiment has been of late years far stronger than in the Basque Provinces and that Barcelona, the capital, has for generations been notorious for turbulence and the production of the most violent and eccentric social doctrines. The protagonists of separatism and revolution are now in an uneasy alliance and act quite independently of the so-called Government. The Revolutionary wing is itself led by a number of fanatics, whose doctrines, while differing fundamentally as regards the kind of Utopia they hope to establish, are unhappily at one as to the means by which it should be set up. The disciplined organisation and ruthless thoroughness of the Communists directed from Moscow are here allied to the natural ferocity and sadistic bestiality of the home-bred Anarchists and Syndicalists; and we see the result in the systematic destruction of all traces of religion, the murder of those who profess it, of whichever sex, and the extermination of everyone likely to oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat

and the confiscation of property. In short, the full Moscow programme is being carried out in Catalonia with a success which must rejoice the heart of those who direct it.

In the rest of Spain the Government supporters are composed of the same elements as in Catalonia without the Separatists. The number of foreigners fighting for the Government is as unknown as is the number opposed to them. But they are a more valuable addition to the Red forces than are the foreigners to General Franco, for the reason that they supply a trained element which would otherwise be lacking. Without the numerous foreign organisers and leaders behind the lines the Reds would, outside Catalonia, have been helpless. Wherever the Government supporters are supreme the same programme as in Catalonia is being carried out; and the *Times* correspondent in Madrid recently reported that not for several months had anyone been either married or buried with Christian rites in a capital containing many tens of thousands of Christians.

Anti-clericalism is, of course, no new thing in the Peninsula, and was long ago strong enough to deprive the Church of its political privileges, and most of its possessions. There is, therefore, the less excuse for the present outburst which is essentially different from anything which occurred before 1931. When you observe a new development in an old situation, you naturally look for a new cause. In Spain there is no difficulty in finding it in the Moscow agents who have been busy preparing the revolution for the last ten years and more. For, as Moscow is never tired of proclaiming, religion is the arch-enemy of Communism—whether that religion be Christian, Mohammedan, Jewish, or anything else. The destruction of churches, priests, nuns, and believers is a sacred duty which has already been pretty thoroughly carried out in Catalonia, and would have been all over Spain but for General Franco.

In the face of these facts the attitude of some of our highly-placed divines is stupefying, and to me personally, as a life-long member of the Church of England, revolting. The ineptitude of those English clerics who embark on the sea of foreign affairs is of course notorious; and no one should have

been surprised when they worked overtime to advocate a policy which was inevitably bound to lead to the total subjugation of Abyssinia, whose independence they had so much at heart. But I have cudgelled my brains in vain to find the explanation of their support of the so-called Government of Spain. I hesitate to accept the only logical explanation that they do not regard the Catholic Church as a branch of Christianity, or professing Roman Catholics as entitled to the rights enjoyed by the rest of mankind.

It is a peculiar English habit to maintain, especially when foreigners are concerned, that there is really little to choose between them and that one side is as bad as the other. It is agreeable to feel broad-minded and a trifle contemptuous; and it is pleasant to avoid the trouble of trying to ascertain the truth and the effort of making up one's mind. Such is the attitude of the majority of Englishmen, both as regards atrocities and intervention in Spain. We will take the former first.

Experience in the Great War has made us rightly shy of accepting atrocity stories; but unfortunately it is a fact that atrocities have been committed in Spain on a scale hardly known, except in Russia, since 1918, when Genghiz Klan exterminated whole populations. Having read all the available accounts in papers and pamphlets, and having genuinely tried to strike a balance, I conclude as follows.

On the Government side (not by Government orders, for if any are given they are not obeyed) we have the shooting of prisoners of war unless they are at once enrolled in the Government forces, the bombardment of any open towns and villages occupied by Franco's men, and continuous systematic mass murders of men, women, and even children behind the lines. The destruction of churches and emblems of religion and the confiscation of property are not atrocities in the popular sense, but, to put it mildly, they have an irritating effect on the devout and on those with anything to lose.

On General Franco's side we have the same bombardment of open towns, including to a limited extent Madrid, and, in many cases, the shooting both of prisoners of war and of men suspected of having taken part in fighting. There have also,



no doubt, been many isolated murders in cold blood. The Government recently published a list of one hundred such murders.

It seems to me that the two sides are as the poles apart. In the first place, it must always be remembered that General Franco's rising was caused by murders and the destruction of churches which were and are continuous. The reaction of his forces to these events are to be condemned ; but I would in all seriousness ask those who most loudly condemn them to try to imagine what they would feel like when faced by the accomplices of those, or possibly the very men, who had murdered their dearest relatives and friends, and destroyed all that they held most holy. I hope I should have had restraint in the hour of victory ; but in my heart I feel I might have seen as red as the Spanish Nationalists. However that may be, there has been nothing on General Franco's side at all comparable to the systematic destruction of whole classes.

To turn to the responsibility for intervention, there is even less doubt on which side the fault lies than there is in the atrocities question. The policy of Moscow, openly proclaimed and not, therefore, in dispute, is to prepare and organise revolution abroad by means of agents liberally financed, and, if it should break out, support it with men and material. Spain has, also quite openly, been long proclaimed as a promising field for this procedure, and efforts have for years been concentrated on her. The long-awaited event followed the Elections when a "revolutionary situation," to use the Bolshevik jargon, arose and men and material were poured in. Now the post-war theory of International Relations has been that a Power, provided actual hostilities are avoided, is at liberty to act in the most unfriendly and damaging way towards other Powers without laying herself open to the application of force. This doctrine has admirably suited the Bolsheviks, whose admission to the League of Nations seemed to prove its validity. But practical men have always felt that it had its limitations. Such hard-boiled fellows have long foreseen that, as soon as the war-weariness of 1918 passed away, proud and powerful nations would cease to tolerate the active interference of another State in their home affairs.



Whether they considered such interference as a *casus belli* or not would depend on no doctrine, but on their own convenience. This obvious fact was fully realised at the Conference of all the nations of the American continent recently held at Buenos Ayres, where the atmosphere must be very different from that of Geneva. For one of the most important resolutions unanimously passed there laid down the principle that: "Intervention, whether direct or indirect, in the affairs of another country is an inadmissible threat to peace." Let the boobies who have adopted Mr. Litvinov's famous slogan "Peace is one and indivisible," examine its sincerity in the light of the Buenos Ayres resolution. The plain fact is clear to all who wish to see. The Spanish civil war would have been a purely internal affair had it not been for Moscow. No other Power would have had either reason or wish to intervene. Once the Bolsheviks set the example, others were certain to come in on the opposite side. And it is a delusion to believe that, with no foreign intervention, the Government would have won. With Spaniards left to themselves everything points to a swift victory outside Catalonia for General Franco, who had at his disposal all the trained forces and the military skill of the country.

In our most vociferous and self-assured circles it is the fashion to subordinate British interests to those supposed to be of importance to the whole human race, and it is in order to appeal to such circles that I treat these interests last. When you are warned against a great danger or advised to take some serious action, you naturally examine the credentials of those who warn or advise you. If we so treat those who are loudest in declaring that a victory for General Franco will constitute a dangerous threat to the British Empire, we shall find that these are the very people who, on all other occasions, have paraded their dislike of and contempt for that Empire. So we naturally conclude that the victory they fear will be the best outcome as regards our Imperial interests. This conclusion is correct as an impartial examination of the position makes manifest.

I suppose no one doubts now that a Red victory in Spain means a Soviet State directed from Moscow. Catalonia is

already such a State, and the rest of Spain will become one if General Franco is beaten. The first result of this would be the total destruction of British property and the cessation of all British enterprise in Spain. There are a number of people in this country who would regard such a development with complacency ; but that does not alter the fact that it is our resources abroad, accumulated through the energy and enterprise of generations of British subjects, which enable our population to enjoy a standard of living higher than in any country of Europe or Asia. And British assets in Spain form no negligible part of those resources.

The notion that a Soviet victory would conjure the danger of excessive German or Italian influence in the Western Mediterranean is a delusion. Should a Soviet State be set up in Spain, the danger of Germany entrenching herself in some Spanish possession in order to counteract Bolshevik activities becomes a very real one. General Franco, on the other hand, is fighting for Spanish unity and it is highly improbable that he would consent in the hour of victory to cede any part of the Spanish dominions. Italy is a little off the map as a bogey after the recent Anglo-Italian exchange of Notes ; but, while the same argument applies to her as to Germany, her geographical position already makes the friendliest relations with Great Britain an imperious necessity for both countries.

We come finally to Portugal. It is due to no mere chance or to sentiment that Portugal has been our ally for some seven hundred years. Again we have only to look at the map to understand the reason. And the map does not change. Nor is it chance that has led the Soviet Ambassador in London to direct his most virulent and insolent attacks on Portugal. For the Government of that country has had the good sense not to admit a Soviet Diplomatic Mission to Lisbon, nor to recognise any Soviet Consular or Commercial agents. Without such prudence it would have been impossible for Portugal to have enjoyed the tranquility and increasing prosperity of the last ten years. In short, there can be no more exasperating spectacle in Soviet eyes than Portugal. Here we have a country which, having refused any financial help

1164  
Southwark Pamphlet  
D  
269

from Geneva when her finances were desperate, has, by the application of those traditional remedies now considered out of date, reached a degree of well-being held to be quite impossible when General Carmona took over the Government. And to make matters worse, Dr. Salazar, who has worked this miracle under the President, combines a genius for finance and administration with profound devotion to his Church. If one thing is certain, it is that, if General Franco loses, Moscow will make a dead set at Portugal. The Bolsheviks will leave nothing undone to bring her down and she may very well call on her ancient ally in her hour of need.

To sum up. Whilst every Englishman with Christian civilisation and the Empire's welfare at heart should support through thick and thin H.M. Government in their policy of non-intervention in Spain whatever others may do, equally every such Englishman should hope and pray for the defeat of the Red forces.