

### III. THE CONSCIENCE OF AMERICA

THE Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade have written an indelible page in the history of the American people. When the ruling class of America connived at the destruction of Spanish democracy, undermining the peace of the world, you, the sons of real America, the sons of the working class, came to the aid of the Spanish republic. When you placed your lives at the disposal of a cause which was the cause of all humanity, you gave something to America, something deep and powerful and lasting. Today, you who have come back to us have a particularly big and vital contribution to make to the peace and welfare of the American people. The biggest thing you have is the political lessons that the Veterans of the Spanish War have to give to the American people. You have a very special position in this country. I wonder if you realize what a very special position you occupy.

You are the men who with your own lives pointed the way, and, if it had been followed by our country, would have prevented the present world war. While you were in Spain, you were holding off this war from the world. The country could not see it; it refused to see it. Now it is paying the price. Europe is paying the price for the betrayal of the Spanish republic. Today most of America knows that the betrayal of the Spanish republic was not only a crime against Spain—that they always knew. Now they are beginning to realize that it was a crime against France, it was a crime against England, it was a crime against the United States, and that we are going to pay for this crime. We are going to pay long and bitterly.

If you want to realize what an important position you hold in relation to the development of the consciousness of the American people to this problem, just remember a few things that happened in the last months. You know, one of the big-shots in this country now is a fellow by the name of J. Edgar Hoover. He is a very powerful man, next to the President; his personage is sacred and his actions are shielded by the organized channels of public information and by the Government. Hoover can do almost anything he wants in America today. But Hoover found out that there is one thing he can't do—he can't put his hands on the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade. When he tried it, he burned his fingers. That was because when he touched the Lincoln Brigade he touched the conscience of the American people and he had to pull his fingers back quick. What does that mean? It means that you can get the ear of the American people and can tell them things they won't listen to from anybody else.

The story told here about the meeting where the speakers were heckled and disturbed until the Veteran came forward to speak is a very significant little story. That is a symptom, a sign, a symbol of the position that all the Veterans hold in relation to all the American people. They listen to you when they won't listen to anybody else. But you can't speak clearly and systematically and effectively unless you are organized. That is why this organization becomes more and more important all the time. You must speak and you must make the American people hear what you have to say. It is vital for the American people, it is vital for the future of our country, it is vital for the future of the world.

There is another sign of how important it is that you should preserve and build your organization. If you want to know whether you have something valuable, one of the best tests is to see whether anybody else wants it. If nobody else wants it, you may become very careless of it. Well, you have been learning of late that there is somebody who wants the voice of the Veterans of the Spanish War. They want it for some very special purposes of their own. They want it so bad that although they did not give ten cents for

the Veterans when they were soldiers in Spain, they are willing to give hundreds of thousands of dollars today to get a group of Veterans who will speak as they tell them to speak.

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade wrote a glorious page in history in Spain. Are the men who did that great job going to allow that little group who were the weak, who failed, who surrendered, and who betrayed, to be brought forward as the spokesmen of that great movement in the present world situation? I don't think you are going to allow it. And I think that the very threat of such a thing is going to be an additional reason for the Veterans to give a lot of new attention to the proper organization and functioning and work of this organization that you set up when you came back.

In addition to this great political task of transmitting your experiences and the results of your experiences to the American people, and first of all to the workers, to the labor movement, there is another big job which this organization can do best—save those men who are still in concentration camps in France. The treatment of the International Brigade members in France, together with the treatment of the Spanish refugees, is just one of the signs of the character of the French Government—a corrupt and reactionary gang of paid agents of the Two Hundred Families of French finance capital. But I think the time is approaching when more results can be gotten in rescuing our comrades from the clutches of this gang of gunmen and pirates which calls itself the French Government. I think it is possible to do something to get some action over there.

We have an especially outstanding clear example of the problem in the case of Gallo. Most of you know Gallo, I think—one of the finest workers ever produced; one of those natural military geniuses that the people can put forward every time they get a chance to display their initiative. If the French people had not their Weygands but a French Gallo in charge of the defense of France, there would be a different story in this war now. Gallo is sick and on the point of death. He is being kept in one of those filthy concen-

tration camps and denied all help. Not only that—the Republic of Chile issued a visa for Gallo to come to Chile some time ago. The French Government refuses to let him go.

The government is always complaining that the refugees and veterans from Spain are a burden on the French people. Why don't they relieve some of that burden a little bit by letting Gallo go to Chile? Why do they insist on keeping him in a concentration camp? I think this one case of Gallo can prove the case for the whole four thousand International Brigade members in France and force a new policy on the French Government. The French Government is very sensitive to voices from America now. Those actions which many of you participated in at the French Consulate were listened to in Paris.

If they had been followed up more energetically, they might have gotten more results. Today the French Government is even more sensitive to voices from America. They can be made to hear them. They are more sensitive to these voices because their own position is more precarious than ever. Not precarious because of the military invasion—because when a government really represents the people, the harder oppressed the people are the more they unite around the government, the more solid that government becomes; but because the more the people begin to realize that the government is systematically selling them out that government becomes very unstable indeed. And the French people are already beginning to realize that the invasion of their country was not a simple military triumph.

The German break-through at Sedan was the fruits of treason in the French High Command. It was the Fifth Column at work. The French Government had been busy suppressing the trade unions and hounding the French Communists and throwing the Gallos into concentration camps, but the Fifth Column had a free hand in the highest ranks of the French army. And it was because the French people understood this that there was a shift in the cabinet and then a purge of the French High Command which involved fifteen generals. But if you think that this purging of the

French High Command means that now there is a new kind of defense of France, you had better think it over again. Because this purge was the sign of General Weygand's entrance into chief position of power in France.

General Weygand utilized the fact that the masses were aroused and angered and in revolt against the treason at the top in order to wipe out one set of military traitors to put in another set even worse than the ones he removed. Weygand is a Cagoulard. You know what the Cagoulards are? They are the French fascists, who were organized and financed by Hitler and armed by Hitler for civil war before this war began.

And yet there are people who want us in America to go over and help sustain that kind of a set-up. Well, some of them say that they only want us to send over our supplies, our airplanes, artillery, and so on. It is necessary to note, by the way, that if we had sent over a couple of thousand airplanes sixty days ago, Hitler would have had them today. Because through the help of the military command of the Allies in the last thirty days there were delivered into Hitler's hands more military supplies than the United States could produce in six months. And yet there are people who want to get the United States involved in that bloody mess over there. The ones who shout "Fifth Column" the loudest, and inflict concentration camps upon the International Brigade members and the workers and Communists, are themselves Hitler's Fifth Column, sitting in the offices of the Allied military forces. It is clear that the time is rapidly approaching in France when the French people are going to begin to take charge of their own defense.

And their first defense is going to be to clean out all these high gentlemen.

But we should not wait for that. When that takes place it will release Comrade Gallo and all of his fellows from the concentration camps. But let us not wait for that. Let us force Weygand and Reynaud to release them even before the French people will. And the Veterans' organization can do more about this than anybody else because nobody dares to question their credentials. Who fought

against Hitler and Mussolini when it was possible to defeat them and throw them back relatively cheaply—and once they had been thrown back the German and Italian people would have done the rest for us? It was the men who volunteered for the Spanish republic. Nobody can question your credentials. Nobody can dare to question them, and you have to take these credentials and go out and use them, and arouse the American workers and the American people to secure the release of the International Brigade Veterans from French concentration camps.

You have to use them to secure humane treatment for the Spanish refugees, while performing your detailed tasks here that arise out of your own immediate problems: to help organize that great majority of the American people that want to keep out of this imperialistic mess in Europe, to make their will effective, to make sure that the American people will not be thrown into any imperialist adventures abroad for any reason.

America will begin to overrule the gentlemen down in Washington who are dreaming of world conquest. America will begin to overrule those who are dreaming of great war profits. The American people will take advantage of this opportunity to join hands with all of those in Europe who are already fed up with the whole system and the whole class that produces this kind of war, and they will help to organize the world for peace instead of war.

The only kind of peace that can come out of this mess is the peace that removes not only the individual leaders that are responsible for these mass slaughters, but one that removes from power the whole class that is responsible for them.

*Speech delivered at a meeting of Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, June 7, 1940.*