

Spain Ablaze

By LUDWIG LORE

AS THESE lines are written the fight of the democratic anti-fascist elements of Spain against fascist-monarchist reaction is at its height. True to its principles the democratic government has resisted the reactionary onslaught with almost superhuman courage in the face of overwhelming odds. The outcome is still undecided although the news of the last few days favors the government cause.

At the beginning the odds were undoubtedly heavily with the fascist forces. The greater part of the army, half the fleet and the civilian population in the overwhelmingly Catholic towns and villages of northern Spain, sided with the rebels. The loyal sailors, about half the nation's air force, the Civil Guard and the working class population in the industrial districts were the main props of the government defense.

Morocco was taken over by the rebels immediately, and the superbly trained troops of the Foreign Legion are the spearhead of the insurrectionist drive. In Andalusia in southern Spain traitor regiments forced the pro-government population to support the fascist cause at the point of the bayonet. Fighting is still going on in Seville while Malaga and Cordoba are once more in the hands of Loyal forces. The east coast has stood solidly with the government.

Armed workers and the faithful Civil Guards are successfully defending Madrid and the mountain passes which lead to the capital city. Barcelona, the important Catalan industrial center, remains in the hands of the anti-fascists after a fearful struggle against the rebels.

With few exceptions the newspapers of the world—liberal and republican as well as reactionary—were in sympathy with the rebels against the constituted government. America was no exception to this general rule. The Hearst press in this country differed from *Le Temps*, the *London Times* and from the so-called respectable newspapers of the *Herald-Tribune* type in tone and emphasis but not in their attitude toward the Spanish government. They all prefer an armed fascist to an armed, class conscious worker.

The words rebel and insurrectionist have suddenly lost all sinister meaning and to these newspapers the fascist putschists have become the defenders of national liberty. The Liberal-Republican government is "red," "communistic," and "Marxist." Army officers who lead the alien adventurers of the Foreign Legion against their own countrymen, who plot with foreign governments against Spain are true patriots,

honorable defenders of state and Church against the menace of Bolshevism. It's the workers and peasants, those who kept faith with the regularly elected government, who are terrorists. Most of the newspaper correspondents and radio commentators in this country openly sympathize with the rebel cause. A notable exception was H. V. Kaltenborn who, broadcasting from France on August 5, paid tribute to the splendid discipline and devotion of the Spanish working class.

It is generally admitted that the revolt would have been crushed after its first week had its leaders (General Franco, the bloody assassin of Asturias and General Mola) been forced to depend on their own resources. On July 25, the *Manchester Guardian* made the sensational charge that the rebels were receiving direct support from Berlin and Rome. "During the last few weeks," wrote England's outstanding liberal newspaper, "large numbers of Italian and German agents have arrived in Morocco and the Balearic islands. These agents are taking part in military activities and are also exercising a certain political influence. For the insurgents the belief that they have the support of the two great fascist powers is an immense encouragement, for many of the weapons now in their hands are of Italian origin. This is particularly so in Morocco."

"The German influence," the *Guardian* reports, "is strongest in the Balearic islands. Apparently she hopes to secure concessions there. . . . On the Spanish mainland Germany controls a large and extremely well-organized branch of the National Socialist Party. This branch has been strongly reinforced during the past few weeks by newcomers from Germany. She also controls a powerful organization for political and military espionage which works behind a diplomatic and educational facade."

A few days later the world learned that the Spanish military camarilla had concluded a pact with Italy and the Reich for military supplies, machine guns, tanks, airplanes, submarines and ammunition, for which they were to receive important cessions of Spanish colonies in the Mediterranean in the event of a fascist victory. All this was mere rumor until three Italian bombers made a forced landing in French Morocco. The French government grasped the opportunity. Premier Blum ordered an immediate investigation, called on the Italian government to explain and sent immediate proposals to London and Rome for a neutrality pact. French support of the Spanish government would follow a refusal to participate, he warned.

England agreed in principle while Italy, tongue

in check, nominally accepted the plan. Meanwhile deliveries of war materials to the rebel troops went merrily on while the appeals of the Spanish government to Europe's democracies were ignored. Finally on August 6 the French government agreed to send twelve pursuit planes and six bombers to Madrid if England and Italy remained stubborn.

One understands the hesitation of the Front Populaire government and its fear of turning the Spanish struggle into a world conflagration. Italy and Germany have no such scruples. One is forced to conclude from their present attitude, indeed, that they are prepared to intervene in all earnest. German marines have been landed in Ceuta from the German warship "Deutschland." The German freighter "Seville" played a prominent part in the Tangier harbor incident. It appears likely that immediate intervention by France and England would have been a much more positive assurance against the spread of hostilities. Surely the past two years have proved that a tolerant attitude toward fascist aggression is a boomerang policy. The failure to appreciate the methods of reaction may have disastrous effects.

To attempt an evaluation of the ultimate outcome and implications of this intensely dramatic story is an ambitious undertaking. All sorts of incidental factors come into consideration. Spain is neither culturally or politically united. Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, is a highly developed industrial center with a strong labor movement. The provinces are almost wholly agricultural. There is a substantial group of independent farmers as well as an army of destitute agricultural laborers who work on the feudal plantations.

The victorious struggle in Barcelona brought immediate and concrete advantages to the working class of that area. A government decree issued July 25 makes a 40-hour week and a 15% wage increase immediately effective for all industrial workers earning less than 600 pesetas a month.

The leadership in Barcelona lay almost entirely in the hands of the anarchist heads of the trade union federation and the POUM (Labor Party of Marxist Unity). The POUM favors a united front of labor to the exclusion of all bourgeois elements. It regards the People's Front government as a brief phase on the way to the proletarian state, a phase which must be overcome by active class struggle. This conception is in sharp contradiction to that of the other labor parties which give the present government their unreserved support. The Socialist and Communist Parties, the Catalan "Proletarians" and the Socialist Union created a common fighting front which they called "Troball" (Labor) a possible forerunner and instrument of an organizational amalgamation later. During the fighting it took forcible possession of the printing plant of the re-

actionary *Correo Catalan* where its organ *Avant* is now printed.

Of the labor groups the anarchist CNT was undoubtedly best prepared to take up the fight. Those who have followed events in Spain for the last two years will remember that the anarchists held back in the anti-fascist uprising of October 1934 and refused to join the republicans until unjustified rumor declared that they were in league with reaction. In the present struggle old suspicions and jealousies give way before the urgent need for unity. The attitude of the anarchist groups thus far has been above reproach. After their victory in Barcelona they placed themselves unreservedly at the service of the Madrid government. They no longer preached their old doctrine of local federalism with limited rights and responsibilities, which made it possible for a centrally organized foe to throw its entire strength against one working class center after another without fear of effective resistance. Spanish labor has learned its lesson.

Differences in tactics remain. The other labor parties, including the Communists, are concentrating every effort in the defense of the Republic. The POUM believes that the immediate issue lies between socialism and fascism. This difference has its immediate practical implications as when the question arose whether Barcelona should continue its general strike after the fascist insurrection there had been defeated. The POUM and CNT refused to call it off against the will of the other parties. In the end conditions proved stronger than theory and the strike was called off after a week of indecision and in spite of the majority decision.

Where the Spanish revolution will go from here depends on the tempo of development. In Catalonia a workers and peasants regime would be well within the range of possibilities. It has the major industries and the intelligent, highly organized proletariat which are important prerequisites for a workers state. Its middle class and officialdom are progressive and instilled with the traditional Catalan ideas of personal and political liberty. Other parts of the land are not yet ripe for a proletarian regime. Between a Catalanian soviet government and the rest of Spain there would be constant friction. Differences would undermine the strength of the Republic and lead to fascism in the end.

The importance of the Spanish labor movement has always been out of all proportion to the industrial and political development of the nation itself. This is more evident than ever in the present crisis. If Spain goes fascist no Left Republican government can hope to hold itself in power in neighboring France. Reaction, drunk with power and victory, would look for new worlds to conquer, new peoples to subdue. On that issue the international labor movement will have to decide its policy. . . .