

Pollitt visits Spain

with a foreword by Professor J. B. S. Haldane



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Pollitt

Visits

Spain

**HARRY POLLITT'S
STORY OF HIS
VISIT TO SPAIN
IN
DECEMBER, 1937**

**with a foreword by
Professor J. B. S. Haldane**

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Foreword by Professor J. B. S. Haldane

I have now spent nearly three months in Spain during the present war, and can confirm everything that Harry Pollitt says. Within the last year the British Battalion has changed from a group of extremely brave, but untrained men, into a unit which would be a credit to any professional army. But at what a cost!

Hundreds of the finest comrades had died since I first saw the battalion a year ago.. They had first gone into action early last year, armed with rifles dating from the nineteenth century, rifles which jammed at every shot. These heroes had been mown down by Italian tanks because the National Government had made it a crime to supply them with rifles at a time when it was well aware that Hitler and Mussolini were sending Franco the very latest weapons.

I can even add a few details to Harry Pollitt's story. I covered a considerable area of Spain by hitch-hiking on lorries. I saw the life of the ordinary Spaniard and shared his hunger, sometimes getting no food for twenty-four hours. Franco's air-raids have done what centuries of propaganda had failed to do. They have united loyal Spain in a common determination.

When people discuss an air-raid, the word most commonly used is "criminal." They regard Franco and the other ex-generals as so many gangsters, who have

murdered thousands of women and children, and must be wiped out as a preliminary to any future society in which a decent man could live.

I not only saw schools, both for children and adults, I saw scientific research and advanced teaching going on. Some of the biologists over military age, who remain in Madrid, make it a point of honour to continue their researches within a mile and a half of the front line. In my own science of genetics, which deals with heredity, this little group has accomplished more in the last eighteen months than all the biologists in Italy. I gained some valuable information from conversation with my Spanish colleagues, and even more valuable courage from associating with them.

In Madrid, and everywhere else that I went, I found complete order. Even the evacuation of civilians from Teruel was taking place in a systematic and orderly manner, except when the fascist planes interrupted it. I saw the refugees exchanging their money for Government notes. Most of them had fascist paper. But one was delighted to be able to produce a large bag of coins which he had hidden at great risk right through the fascist occupation.

I mention these details for a very simple reason. Bombs are not the only weapons which the fascists use against the people of Spain. They use lies, sometimes of a peculiarly filthy character, which are reproduced in the British reactionary press. There are doubtless people in England who honestly believe that loyal Spain is the scene of massacres, governmental terrorism and unspeakable orgies.

I can only say that I have travelled in it widely, with no

weapons and no documents beyond an ordinary safe-conduct. Apart from cold, hunger, overcrowding and bombers, the chief objection to travel is the almost exaggerated respect for women, which insists, for example, that a light should be kept on all night in any wayside barn where both men and women travellers are sleeping. As for terrorism, I have heard a man say in a Madrid bar that he was sorry King Alfonso had run away. He was not assaulted or arrested, but merely told not to be a fool! Speech in Republican Spain is as free as speech can be in wartime.

These people need our help. It is now clear enough that they are going to win. Franco might possibly have defeated them early last year had he done what every writer on strategy recommends, namely, attacked the main force of his enemies instead of spending nearly a year in defeating the unfortunate Basques and Asturians, whose mines were (as Hitler said) a necessity to Franco's German paymasters.

After what I saw at Teruel, I have no doubt of the ultimate victory of the People's Army. If this army could import munitions on the scale which Franco does, they would win in a very few months. But as the National Government refuses them their rights, men and women in this country to whom honour and democracy still mean something must help them as they can.

Food, particularly milk, and medical aid are badly needed. But no cause is more worthy than the support of the British contingent of the International Column. They are among the very few Britons to-day who are willing to

give their lives for international justice, the cause to which so many of us give lip-service.

They need comforts such as woollen underwear and cigarettes. They need support when wounded and aid when convalescent. Above all, their wives, parents and children must be looked after while they are fighting, and if they are killed or disabled. For this purpose £700 per week is needed. This sounds a vast sum, but if four hundred thousand people would subscribe a halfpenny a week, it would be exceeded.

The main support for the fund has come, and will come, from the organised Labour Movement, and particularly from certain trade unions. If we can get mass support and regular subscriptions we need have no fear. Remember that a penny a week for a year is worth more than a single subscription of half-a-crown.

These men are fighting, not only for Spain, but for Abyssinia, for China, for the rights of British merchant shipping. We appeal for their support, not merely to democrats of all parties and of none, but to all men and women to whom the unprovoked slaughter of defenceless people and the open defiance of international law is hateful.

SLOWLY, but surely, through pain, struggle and sacrifice, the new, unconquerable Republican Spain is being born. This is the deepest impression that my third visit to Spain since February, 1937, has indelibly left on my mind.

Few men have had the opportunities that I had between December 15th and 27th to cover so much ground and to witness so much. Night and day Bill Rust and I travelled the country, and when I look back on all the places that we visited and the things we saw and heard, it seems almost impossible.

Before Bill went to Spain, I said to him: "No one can go to Spain and remain the same person. It will change your whole outlook, your whole life." When I met him in Barcelona he said: "You were right. I haven't been here long, but long enough to realise how true your words were."

I only regret that it is not possible for every democrat in Britain to visit Spain and to see with his own eyes what the people of Republican Spain are accomplishing in the service of democracy and peace.

We were in Albacete when the news of the fall of Teruel came through. You could feel the thrill that ran through the whole of Republican Spain.

For weeks the press and Governments of Britain, France and America had been busily playing up to the feelings of depression and hopelessness which existed. Feelers for mediation were being put out which found a certain echo in elements within Republican Spain. Certain leaders of the Second International were not slow to back up these

intrigues of democratic governments who were prepared to betray democracy in Spain. It was confidently asserted that Franco was about to begin a new offensive on three fronts that would give him victory by Christmas. In fact, while I was in Barcelona, I read in English newspapers that Franco's victory offensive on the Aragon front, at Madrid and near Toledo, had already begun.

What had actually happened was that the Spanish Government had begun the offensive at Teruel—an offensive that will rank amongst the greatest military strategies in history, an offensive that has thrown a spanner into the whole military machine of the fascists and that will have the same significance as Waterloo, Sedan and the decisive battles on the Western Front in the last world war.

Teruel has not only a military significance, not only a tremendous moral effect on Republican Spain; it has also an international importance that has already been reflected in the world press.

The unexpected has happened. Scoffing and jeering has been forced to give place to amazement and admiration. A new People's Army has been born in Republican Spain—a disciplined army that can fight. It possesses aeroplanes, tanks and artillery, and added to these the consciousness of a sacred cause which is something that Hitler and Mussolini can never supply to Franco.

Teruel has fired the whole Spanish people. It has sent a glow of pride through their ranks. It has firmly established their army and given it a sense of dignity and strength of purpose that can never be destroyed.

Great demonstrations were held throughout Republican Spain when the news of the fall of Teruel was heard. I myself was at Albacete. It was a filthy night—foggy, not a light anywhere. Bill and I were at the headquarters of the International Brigade. We heard the sound of bugles and ran to the window. Slowly the sounds grew louder and louder, and we saw the people stream into the streets, following the soldiers. Soon we heard the Spanish National Anthem, then the Internationale, and the people began to march by in their thousands, soldiers and citizens, singing and cheering. It was uncanny to watch; the fog

was so thick that the impression given was that of a cheering throng of ghosts.

At 7 o'clock next morning, every soldier in Albacete seemed to have lined up for another triumphal procession. We stood in the fog and saluted the banners as they went by, and listened to the Spanish soldiers' songs, the Italian "Bandiera Rossa," and German, English and American revolutionary songs. In very truth it seemed as if the workers of the world had united.

Immediately we began to think out ways and means to get to Teruel. What a journey! What a time it took! But we got there in the end, in spite of certain incidents round corners on the mountain roads that caused our hearts to stick longer in our mouths than was compatible with the happier feelings that movements of the heart are supposed to give!

As we approached the fighting zone, we saw the conditions under which the great victory had been won. Two feet of snow, great mountains, rail and road bridges destroyed by the retreating fascists. We came across soldiers on the move, fascist prisoners being brought to the rear (and what a miserable lot they looked!), captured tanks and guns, artillery, horses, waggons, but the expression of victory and joy on the faces of the soldiers was worth it all.

At last we got our first glimpse of Teruel—a great and noble city, encircled by the mountains, shining in the brilliant sunlight. The anti-aircraft guns were busy, particularly in our locality. The order was given to stop the car. We got out, and ran with the rest of the crowd into the fields. Only just in time! Our guides, Bill and I, threw ourselves on the ground, while all round us the bombs started to fall thick and fast. It was a grim experience, but later I will describe something that made an even greater impression on my mind.

The fascist planes were driven away, and we drove on. All round us we could hear machine-gun fire, and then we got a closer view of the city with great, tall, coloured buildings, the churches and bull-ring standing out above everything else. It is noticeable that every church in Spain

seems to have been specially built with an eye on its future military strategical importance, and the fascists have certainly turned every church and seminary into their chief military strongholds.

Then came a sight I shall never forget. Hundreds of women, young and old, carrying babies, dragging little children, running back for some toddler who couldn't keep up the pace. The fascist 'planes had come back again, and they were running for their lives. When they reached the Republican evacuation trucks, ready to carry them to safety, the look of terror on their faces immediately changed to hope, relief and joy—from death to life.

The efforts of the People's Army to save the civilians of Teruel is one of the epic stories of history. But the inhuman fascists increased their determination to avenge their defeat by bombing Teruel out of existence. High in the glorious clear sky, like great black birds, the engines of death and destruction hurled down their bombs, while all round sprayed the shells of the anti-aircraft. In the city the clouds of smoke told their tale.

We penetrated the outskirts of the city, but street fighting still continued in certain parts, and we could hear the machine-guns. We were told that the Civil Guard, who were making a last stand, had surrendered, but that one or two houses and a church in a key position were still holding out—so we were not allowed to go any further, but we had seen enough. We had seen the joy on the faces of men who had fought a great battle; they had left their dead, but they had avenged them.

Crawling up mountain sides covered in snow, through winds that cut through to the marrow, battling down and encircling the enemy—slowly, but surely, the People's Army had drawn in on Teruel. They had cut off the enemy's reinforcements, they had stood fast until they were victorious.

The great city fell. The danger to Valencia and Castellon was removed. Speedier communications between Madrid and the North were established.

As we stood in the road watching, we thought of the debauched General Quiapo de Llano, boastfully declaring



only the other night: "If the Republicans take Teruel, we will make them a present of Sarragossa." There will be no present. Sarragossa, like Teruel, will be taken.

We thought of De Llano's broadcast, in which he stated that the English and American sections of the International Brigade had been wiped out. A foul lie. Not a single member of the International Brigade had taken part in the fight at Teruel. It was fought and won by the Spanish People's Army. That is one of the greatest factors that the fascists will now have to take into account.

And so we left Teruel, thinking of 1812 and Moscow. We remembered the great archway in Madrid—shelled daily on one side by Franco, the other still marked by Napoleon's guns, from the time when he, too, tried to conquer Spain and failed, as Franco has failed.

And so to Madrid.

I have visited this magnificent city three times. It has been bombed and shelled, the working-class quarters wrecked, but the people still stand superb, unconquerable. I have heard occasional disparaging remarks about Spanish courage, and they make my blood boil. I remember the bombing of London during the world war. I wonder if the East End of London and New York had been bombed and shelled as Madrid has been, whether we would still stand erect and still proudly shake our fists to the skies and cry "No Pasaran! "?

I saw an exhibition, which I shall never forget, of the fascist bombing of Madrid. The pictures stir the heart enough, but when you see the actual bombs that the fascists have dropped on Madrid, your breath leaves you. Comrades, I cannot describe it all to you; I only wish I could. I only wish I could send Chamberlain, Eden, Maxton, Citrine, Bevin and Brockway to see it. German and Italian bombs that come up to my shoulder, and that are fourteen inches broad. They are terrifying, ghastly. The fact that man can devise machines to fly like swallows in the sunlight and delight the eye, and then suddenly to fling down missiles which smash buildings like a pack of cards, and scatter blood and limbs in all directions, brings even to "non-intervention" a new meaning.

In a hospital in Tarancon, I saw a lovely Spanish girl, about twenty years of age, who had been struck by a fragment of such a bomb. It had cut off her right arm and breast as clean as a whistle. She lay there smiling, and the American doctor, Bush, told me that nothing could damp her ardour against Franco.

It is easy enough to write about such things, but words express my feelings very inadequately.

As I left the exhibition, I crossed the road to a bookshop opposite with a window display of "Peter Pan." The tears came to my eyes. I saw all the British children who go to see "Peter Pan" at Christmas time. May they never witness what the children of Madrid have witnessed: but if we are to save them, we must turn out the Chamberlains and Anthony Edens.

We walked through the working-class quarters. Destruction everywhere. The noise of shells boomed overhead, and round a corner, just as if it were in Poplar or Cowcaddens, we saw the washing hung across the street—a pair of pants, a pair of knickers, a blouse, a shirt, a pair of socks, nappies—what a mad world it is! We turn to go, and there, written across a half-destroyed wall, the slogan: "They who talk of compromise are the enemies of the people." How can such people be conquered? And on the other side of the street a great banner—put up on November 7th—said: "The youth of Madrid sends greetings to the youth of the Soviet Union on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution."

As we read we felt ashamed of Britain. How little have we done for such a people! The British who have fought so nobly for democratic traditions in the past. I thought of the Chartists, the help given by the London Trades Council to the Polish workers in the 1877 insurrection, the formation of the First International, the refuge given to Garibaldi and the formation of the Garibaldi Battalion which fought for liberty in Italy, and then of the Southampton and Glasgow dockers who refuse to touch Japanese goods.

Walking away, I bumped into an old comrade of mine from Italy. So much has been said about Italy that some-

times we think only of Mussolini's Italy. It was Captain Giovanni Calligaris, of the Garibaldi Battalion of the Italian Brigade. He walked with the aid of a stick. I remembered his six years' imprisonment for being a member of the Communist Party of Italy. It expired as the civil war broke out in Spain. Calligaris felt it his duty to go at once to fight fascism in Spain. He has been wounded four times—through the ear, the neck, the hip and feet. He will never walk properly again. We embraced. He recalled earlier meetings, and so did I. Then the inevitable happened, and he pulled out photographs of his wife and son, and I showed him our Jean and Brian. "Tell your people," he said "that the people of Italy are not all for Mussolini." I looked at his wounds and thought how true that was! Then he said: "An Italian worker and his wife celebrated their golden wedding recently, and managed to send the presents and money they received to Paris, to help the International Brigade." What could I say to such a story? What can you say?

We said goodbye, and I started off by car to find the British Battalion. On the outskirts of Madrid we noticed a lot of soldiers getting into trucks, off to the front. One soldier was standing with mother, wife and baby. They kissed. How could I help noticing the way he held his baby? Then his mother had the last kiss. She clung to him. I could read her thoughts. This was the child she had borne and reared, loved and watched play in the busy streets. She had seen him croon to his own child, and now he was going off. To what? Perhaps to live. Perhaps to die. As he climbed into the truck, his wife and mother raised their clenched fists to the sky and cried: "No Pasaran! ".

Another thought ran through my mind, the thought of all our own brave comrades who have gone to Spain with no one to see them off, no one to say a fond—and in many cases a last—goodbye. They, too, have gone to fight, perhaps to mingle their blood with the noble sons of Republican Spain, so that the soil of Spain will always be sacred to us all.

At last we found the British comrades. Need I state

that they were glad to see me? I carried over 500 letters for them; I had walked the streets of Paris trying to buy English cigarettes for them. There were only one or two for each comrade, but these must have seemed like nectar to judge by the boys' faces as they claimed their letters and took their cigarettes!

We paid our respects to the General and the Brigade Staff, and then held a meeting with the anti-tank section. We told the boys all the news, and they demanded a concert. What a concert! Comrade Nicholl, of Dundee, took the chair and began by paying a tribute to the splendid work of Hugh Slater, now in hospital with fever. (I went to see him later, and he got his share of Players! Hugh seemed to find them as good a dose as the doctor's best medicine!) Then the singing started, and everybody vied with everybody else to do a turn. There were songs, grave and gay; a sketch—"Franco rides his horse"—what a sketch! How "Scotty" Stewart revelled in his role as Franco! It was a foretaste of the way Franco will be flung down by the Spanish people.

More songs followed, then the call went out for an Irish comrade. Someone said: "He's on guard." Someone else answered: "I'll relieve him."

So the Irish lad appeared, mounted the improvised platform, and sang "The Death of James Connolly." Not an eye was dry. "The Men from County Clare" followed as an encore.

No one could remain unmoved as we listened to the voice of Ireland—not the land of O'Duffy, but the land of rebels, the heroes of 1916, the fighters for freedom.

Our next move brought us to the British Battalion. I was greeted by Wally Tapsell and Fred Copeman, who said they would work me to death now I had arrived. Then Tappy started to organise. He organised a meeting with the British comrades, the American comrades of the Washington-Lincoln Battalion, the Canadian comrades of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, the Spanish comrades. I was never so well organised in my life.

We had a full parade. The General had already addressed the British comrades, and had made my blood



Fred Copeman calling for cheers for Lt.-Col. Copic



Lt.-Col. Copic Addressing British and Spanish Comrades

quicken by his assurance that they were a model of what soldiers ought to be.

The parade was an exhilarating sight, the Spanish comrades proudly bearing the Spanish Republican flag and our boys the banner we had sent, entwined with a special banner, given by General Miaja.

We took the salute. But here is Sam Wilde, from Manchester, back again after wounds in previous battles. Sam couldn't rest at home, and is now Commander of the Major Attlee Company of the British Battalion of the International Brigade. Then Lt.-Colonel Copic, an old and tried revolutionary, and former member of the Yugo-Slavian Parliament, spoke.

He described the part played by the British comrades at Jarama, Brunete, Cordoba, Belchite, Quinto, and then went on to speak of the tasks that lie ahead.

Next it was my turn. I delivered the greetings from the democratic people of Britain, proud of their comrades in Spain. I did not hesitate to state that Clem Attlee, too, ought to be proud that a Company of such splendid men should be named after him, and I expressed the hope that the Labour Party, inspired by this Company, would redouble its efforts to help the Spanish people with all the energy it could muster.

I told the boys of the Tory opposition to Attlee and his defence of his actions in the House of Commons; I told them about the Labour Party's campaign for Spain. They were obviously delighted to know that at last the great Labour Movement was trying to fulfil its obligations and that it would force a change in the policy of the National Government.

We found that the visit of C. Attlee, M.P., Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., and Phillip Noel Baker, M.P., to the British Battalion had created a very big impression, and there was the utmost eagerness to learn what effects their visit had had in Britain. We hope that one result will be that the whole Labour Movement will do much more, officially, to help the Dependents' Aid Fund and to strengthen the British Battalion numerically.

The type of comrade who is in the British Battalion is

exemplified by Bill Alexander, who is temporary Commander during Fred Copeman's illness. As I was leaving to return to London, Bill came up, placed nine dollars in my hand, and asked me to pay his trade union contributions to the National Union of Printers and Bookbinders. A comrade who can think of this when he knew what he was shortly going to have to face, honours any Labour Movement of any country in the world.

After the speeches, a little dinner followed. Then the singing began. American, Canadian, Yugo-Slav, Cuban, Spanish and Irish comrades all gave contributions. Comrade Copic sang folk songs from Italy and Mexico in his clear, impressive voice; community singing followed.

Later we adjourned to the local cinema, crowded with the lads stationed in the village, who were holding a festival.

More songs; and then fists were raised and everyone joined in the "Internationale." It was sung in a medley of every language under the sun. We couldn't understand each other, but we all knew that the sacred words bound us in the common cause. And so ended a great night.

"You'll be back for Christmas?" the boys cried. "I will if it is humanly possible," I promised, "but now I want to visit the hospital to see the lads who have been wounded."

As I walked down the hall, I recognised a familiar face. It was George Turnhill, of Worksop. When I saw George last June he was very, very ill in hospital. Here he was, as perky and enthusiastic as ever. I couldn't believe my eyes.

I asked Tapsell about him. "The salt of the earth," Tappy replied. "He was due to come home, but certain difficulties arose, and he promptly volunteered for the fighting line again. He has done all the forced marches. He is an example to everybody, is George Turnhill." I saw George again some days later lying in his billet reading "Red Star Over China" and getting lyrical about it. Yes, George Turnhill is indeed the salt of the earth. One of the great unknown. One of the plodders who never get into the limelight, or win fame, but who has helped to make the great Labour Movement what it is to-day. We can never do enough to prove worthy of such comrades.

We started off on our round of the hospitals and found all the wounded getting on splendidly. It was a real inspiration to see their fine spirit and to find all those able to get about helping the hospital staff.

The news of Teruel had a tremendous effect on all the comrades in the hospitals. At one place we were greeted by everyone who could walk or be pushed in chairs into the hospital yard. What a wonderful greeting it was, accompanied by cheers and songs and the inevitable speeches. Votes of thanks were proposed by a French comrade, seconded by a Spanish comrade, and thirdded by English and Americans!

It was at this American hospital that I came across Comrade Wattis, of Birmingham. He was busy with the doctor when we arrived, but he was out at the meeting. Brimming over with enthusiasm, he had splendid things to tell about the British comrades with whom he had been fighting at Belchite. He made light of his wounds, and his one wish was to get back quickly to the boys.

Comrade Wattis gave me a most interesting account of the thanks offered by the civilian population of Belchite to the Spanish and International comrades for the care they had taken of them during the fierce fighting to win Belchite.

Next I visited another hospital close by, gave the comrades their letters and waited for their answers, and then on to Huete, the English hospital, where so many of our best comrades have been so well cared for and helped forward to recovery. Here Comrade Harrison showed me round with Benny Goldman, of Manchester, and I was able to admire the tremendous improvements since my last visit in June, when Huete had only recently been taken over.

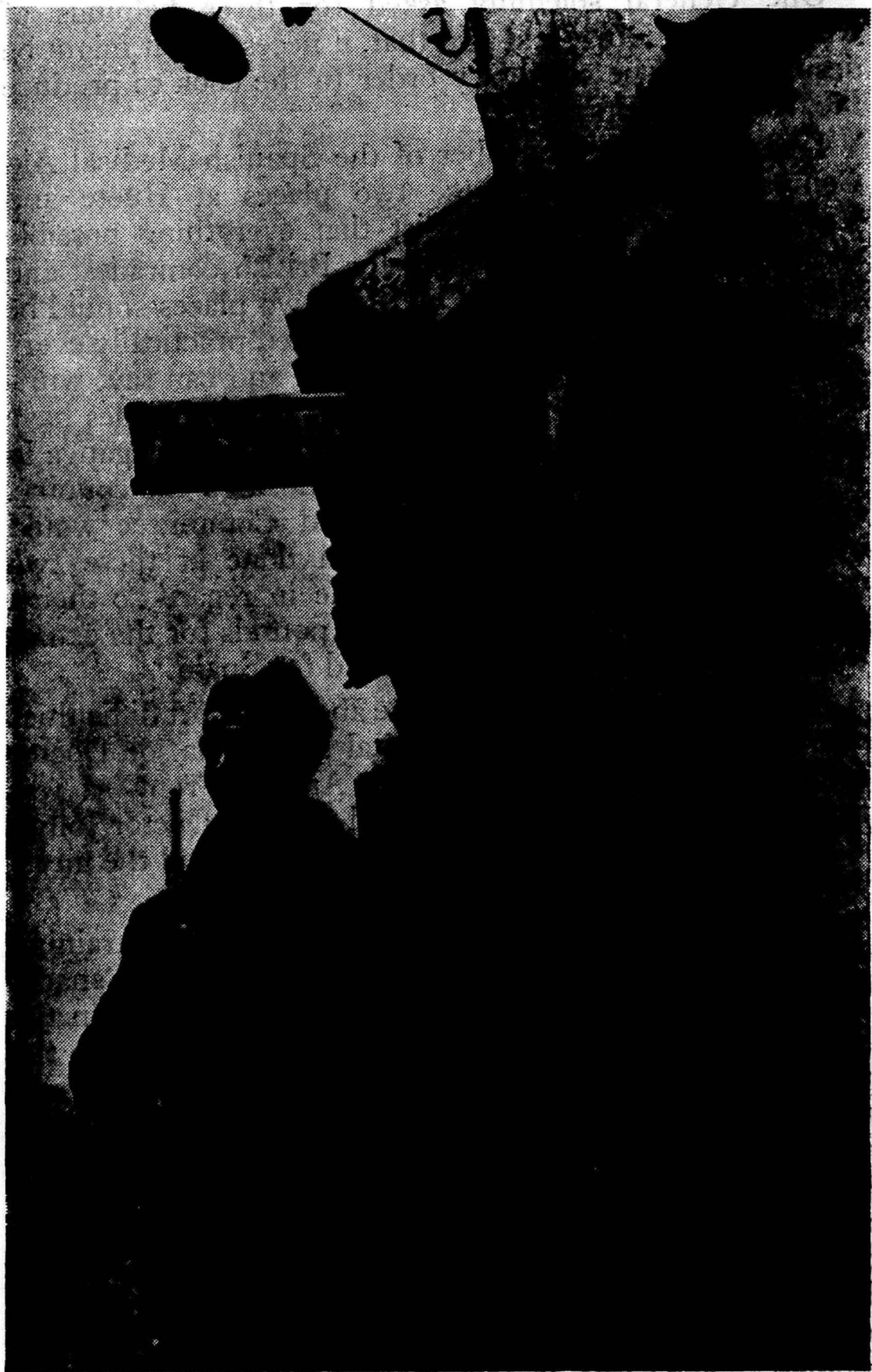
The comrades were busily preparing for Christmas; in fact a gala atmosphere prevailed, and decorations, paintings and presents for the local children were all over the place.

It was time to go. Next we visited Valdaganga, which is being used as a convalescent home. A fine young German doctor is in charge here and Comrade Ayres, of Doncaster, is the Political Comrade. The comrades are special-

ising in orthopædic treatment, and I met Comrade Len and Lilian Kentin, of Whitechapel. Lilian was up to her eyes at her job. She showed me all the various things she had had introduced into the home, made under her instructions by the patients. She had fitted up a kind of gym where comrades could recover their strength and the use of their limbs through various exercises.

I came across an old Canadian comrade called Williamson, aged 58, who had been badly wounded and is now well on the way to recovery. He was helping to fix the place up with all kinds of gadgets, amongst them a stove and chimney out of tin cans, which actually worked, and was, in fact, the warmest thing I met in the whole of my visit to Spain! I remarked to the doctor that if I were he, and had a comrade like Williamson about, it would be a long time before I certified him fit for the line. Indignantly the comrade cut in: "Yes, that's the trouble. I want to get back to do what I came for, fight the fascists, and they keep me here too long." Sundry winks were exchanged, but I had the impression that the doctor won't keep the comrade from Canada very much longer.

It was here, too, I met John Mahon. Now a lot of brave things have been done on the battlefields in Spain, but through his thoughtfulness and courage Johnny Mahon has won a big place in the affections of the comrades. He has been very ill, but when he got my letter from London telling him about the Christmas parcels he began to worry about their safe arrival, realising the many difficulties in transport. Then, against doctors' orders, he got out of bed and travelled night and day, all over Spain, collecting and delivering the 700-odd parcels to all the comrades everywhere, together with various personal parcels and letters. So each comrade got his parcels for Christmas Day, and if all those who contributed towards the cost of these could have seen the joyful faces of the comrades on receiving them, they would be well rewarded. In fact, I know French, American, Canadian, Spanish, German, Italian and Mexican soldiers in Spain who tasted Christmas pudding for the first time in their life and wanted to know why it couldn't be Christmas every day.



One General solemnly asked for three helpings of Christmas pudding, and said that, if necessary, it might be desirable to issue a military order to the cook to produce the necessary helpings.

I wish that every member of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee could see these two places at Huete and Valdaganga, they would insist that everything possible should be done to retain them for British comrades, and also that everything needed by these two places should be given them from London. I have visited practically every military hospital in Republican Spain, and can say, without any nationalist pride, that our British comrades have equipped and are administering Huete and Valdaganga in a way that makes them outstanding through the country. In fact, if the Spanish Medical Aid Committee would publicise as widely what has been done at these two centres, as the Americans have done in regard to theirs, they could easily raise thousands of pounds for the extension of the whole work of medical aid for Spain.

I regretted very much that time and transport difficulties prevented me visiting the hospital at Murcia, or Doctor Jolly and his gallant staff on the Aragon Front. I was fortunate to meet Harry Evans and some of Doctor Jolly's staff on Christmas night, and hope they enjoyed the meeting as much as I did.

After we left the hospitals we proceeded to the training base, where the new recruits from America, Canada, Britain and Spain are prepared to take their places in the Spanish People's Army. We were due to take part in the parade at 7 a.m. on the morning of Christmas Eve, and then to speak. Dead on time the comrades marched into the Town Square. It was still dark. The Spanish Government flag and the flag of the International Brigade were proudly borne by the comrades as they marched in fine style past the Commander, Major Johnson. The bugles sounded, the Spanish Government flag was hoisted over the Square, and the entire company marched past and saluted the flag they had come from all over the world to defend. Then they filed into the Public Hall. It was an impressive meeting. As I was speaking, I could pick out

the faces of the fine comrades from all over Britain who have found their way to Republican Spain. I felt, as I looked at them, that they would more than uphold the magnificent traditions and high standards set by the British Battalion during its deathless struggles.

We all sang the Spanish Anthem, revolutionary songs from our respective countries, and the meeting ended with the "Internationale."

Now to the Convalescent Home at Benicassim. I found the convalescents in a meeting planning the night's festivities. We had a chat, and then they said that I must meet Angel. I asked who Angel was, and was told that she was the best comrade they had ever met, the Secretary to the Administration of the Convalescent Home, who had a wonderful record for courage in all sorts of tight spots. So off we went, and met Angela Guest, the daughter of Mrs. Haden Guest. Travelling later through the night, very cold and very hungry, we found in the car some sandwiches. They were a godsend. They had been placed there by the Angel.

One other little story. We found one British comrade in bed at this Convalescent Home, whose leg had been badly hit by bullets and who will be a long time recovering. "Tell me," I said, "weren't you told in London that you were not old enough to come out to Spain?" "Yes," he said, "but I was determined to come out and fight, and I managed to get here." "Where do you live, so that I can write and tell your parents how you are going on?" "I have no parents," he said. "When I get better I want to stay here in Spain." I was more moved than I have ever been before.

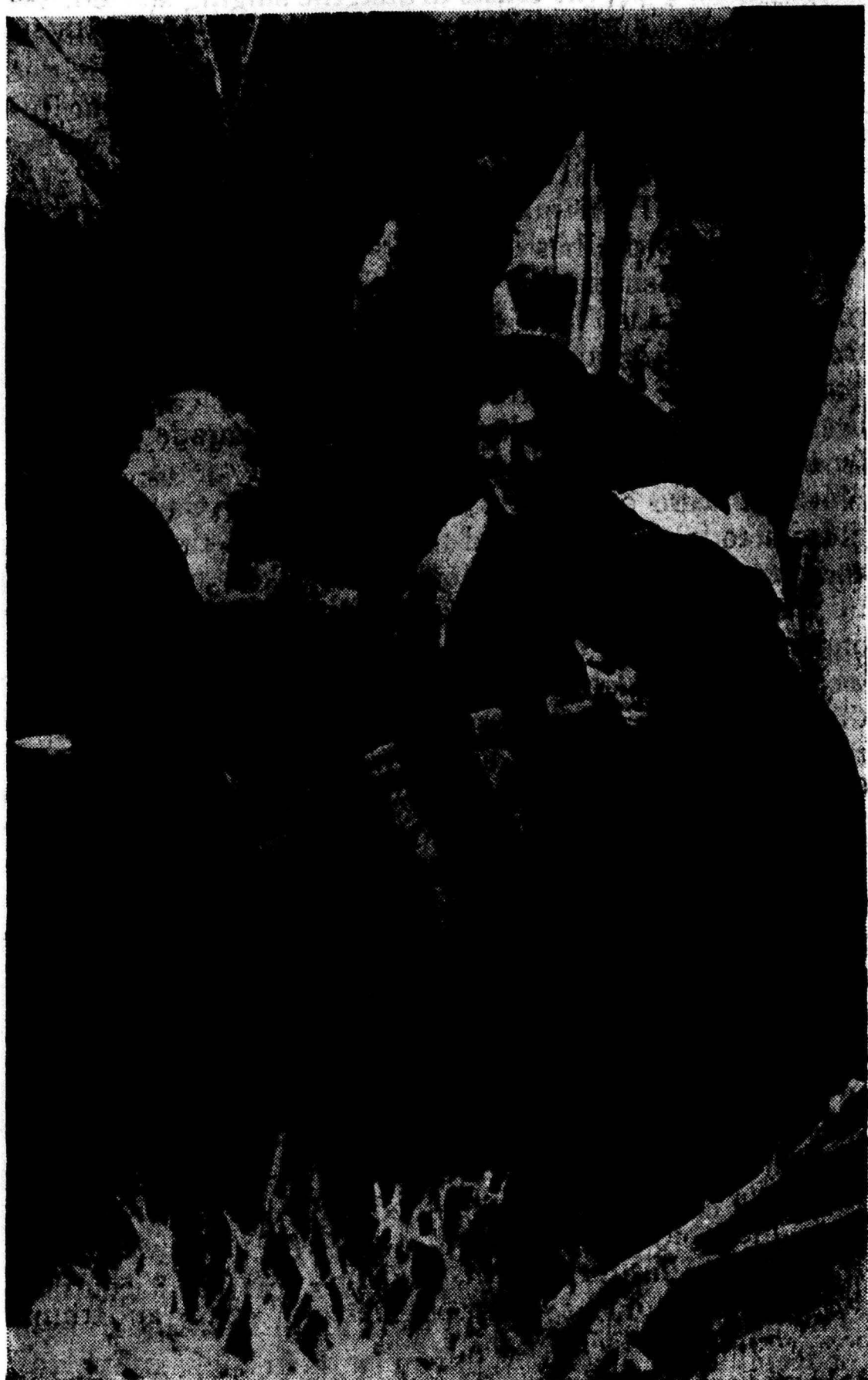
Comrade George Watkins, aged 16, who got to Spain by saying you were 22, we salute you; you, too, are of the salt of the earth.

Soon we were on the move again. It was Christmas Eve, and we had promised to spend Christmas with the British Battalion. Through the night we drove, but transport difficulties prevented us arriving in time for the morning parade of the British comrades, where presents were given out by Lt.-Colonel Copic on behalf of the

Brigade Staff to Comrades Fred Copeman, Fletcher, Miller and Stevenson. Sterling men, every one of them, rightly honoured for their great services in Spain. After this came Christmas presents to the village children. What excitement this caused! What sort of an army was this that, instead of bombing civilians, gave Christmas presents to the children? The Washington-Lincoln Battalion, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalions, did the same. It all created a wonderful effect.

Then followed the great event of the day—Christmas dinner with the British comrades. The General of the Division and the Brigade Staff had been invited to be the guests of the comrades along with Comrade J. B. S. Haldane, Bill Rust and myself. We went to the dining place. After one look at “Hookey” Walker’s (the Quartermaster) face, we knew by that serene smile that it was going to be some dinner. It certainly was. The best Christmas dinner we have ever eaten. Then came the toasts. The General, Comrade Haldane and myself either moved them or responded; what did it matter what the order was? Our compère, Wally Tapsell, was the life and soul of the gathering. He rushed about attending to our comforts, then to see about the men in the village, next off to see that all was fixed for the concert and ball for the whole population, and between times he found time to dash twenty miles away to take Fred Copeman a Christmas present from the boys! Now this was the only fly in the ointment. Fred was lying in hospital after a serious operation. He had been looking forward so much to this Christmas celebration. But doctors will insist that their orders are obeyed. Only a few nights previously I had listened to Fred giving the last orders to his officers and men regarding the urgent likelihood of their going into action. It had been in a room dimly lighted by a couple of candles. Everybody present felt the tension. This might be the eve of battle. Copeman’s instructions and advice were listened to with extreme attention and respect. As it happened, the call had not been made, but Fred was taken seriously ill with appendicitis. Fred had been more seriously ill than he knew, but is now well on the way to recovery, and will soon be back with his men.

The meal over, the toasts drunk, the singing started. At first only revolutionary songs, sung by all nationalities, then individual efforts. I can see Lieutenant George Fletcher now, sitting on a chair on the table, doing his turn—"One finger, one thumb, keep moving." Did we get into a mess trying to follow all the various evolutions? I'll say we did. Then quiet-looking Doctor Bradsworth, of Birmingham, who has done such valiant service in Spain, insisted upon singing: "How can a guinea pig show he's pleased if he hasn't got a tail to wag?" When we got to this stage it was more than odds on where we would get to. Soon it came; an Australian nurse started it with "The Shade of the Old Apple Tree," then Comrade Gibbons, from Canada, got up and sang "The Rose of Tralee." Now we were off with a vengeance! "I Saw the Old Homestead" followed, and then all the old-time choruses came out. I looked at "Hookey" Walker, and could tell by the look in his eyes what he was going to sing; sure enough, up he got, and before we know where we are, we were full steam ahead with "Nellie Dean." Oh, Gertie Gitana, you have had some music-hall audiences singing that song, but never as we sang it on this Christmas night. This brought Sam Wilde into action with "Frankie and Johnnie." Then Bill Rust waxed vocal with "Come, Landlord, Fill the Flowing Bowl." Then Tappy thought it was time to show the Carl Rosa Company that it had missed a treasure, for he started, too! Then we adjourned to the local ball. The comrades had organised a dance which would have made Jack Hylton green with envy. You couldn't move, let alone dance. So the singing started again. I had to make another little speech. Then we called for three cheers for victory for Republican Spain, which could have been heard a mile off. I am still hoarse from that effort. The Ball ended. We went round to the lads in their billets to wish them farewell, as we were leaving that night for Teruel. As I was leaving, a comrade came up to me and said: "I came from Palestine to fight for Republican Spain. Will you let them know in England that there are three hundred of us here from Palestine?". Now back to headquarters to say farewell to the rest of



Civilians Evacuated from Teruel

the comrades. In a corner of the room a group was gathered round the wireless set. Someone was impersonating Gracie Fields singing "Good-night, My Love." If Gracie could have seen the faces of the lads as they listened and joined in, I am sure it would have made her happier than being mentioned in the New Year's Honours List.

So ended Christmas Day, 1937. Victory will have been won for Republican Spain long before Christmas, 1938.

I have already told you of my visit to Teruel. The time has come to close this story, but one incident I have deliberately left to the last. One night, trying to find the British Battalion, we got lost. Mile after mile the car sped on, and every mile, according to the road signs, seemed to be bringing us uncomfortably nearer to the fascist lines. At about 1.30 a.m. we stopped the car in a little village, and got out to make enquiries. I noticed on the wall a sickle and hammer, and beside it a wall newspaper with photos of Stalin and Litvinov. I guessed there must be a branch of the Communist Party here, noticed a light shining from underneath the door, and we knocked. It turned out to be the meeting place of the local C.P. branch, and the comrades were listening to a report of the recent meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain. We presented our credentials and were made welcome. A comrade explained to our driver that we had better wait until day-light before proceeding further, and that he would find us sleeping accommodation. He took us to a house, knocked at the door, and we were invited in. In a few minutes the man was making us some supper, when his wife came out of another room with a baby boy about two years old in her arms; the little thing was half asleep, but he was saying: "Bombas, bombas. Refugio, refugio." We knew at once what was going through his little mind. This village is constantly being bombed. He thought that the planes were here again and that they were going down into the dug-out for shelter. I cannot describe what went through my mind as we stood there. Just try and think how you would feel.

How long will this be allowed to go on? How long will little babies wake from sleep crying "Bombas!"

bombas! ”? How long before the democratic people of Britain fulfil their responsibilities to the people of Republican Spain? We hope that this pamphlet will help to rouse all those who read it to immediate action. Organise mass supplies of food, clothing and medical supplies, but also demand No Help for Franco from the side of the National Government; the removal of the Blockade on Republican Spain; Arms for the Spanish Government; and support for the British Battalion of the International Brigade.

Along these lines alone can we wipe out the shame of British policy towards Spain, which more than anything else has condemned the Spanish people to these eighteen months of fearful war, in their everlasting effort and sacrifice to save the peace and democracy of the world. They have been so proud in their suffering and sublime courage that we should be proud to help such a glorious and democratic people.

A resolute purpose has gripped the whole population. There is a clear realisation that every available resource of a great people is now behind the Republican Government in its heroic effort to conquer once for all.

I was positively astonished at the improvements in regard to every aspect of the Spanish People's Army, its equipment, discipline, military training, morale and class. At the calm, public order and respect for the Government that prevailed everywhere. At the development of its new war industries, at the strength and unity of purpose that seemed to dominate every section of the people, a unity that every day grows stronger and stronger.

The peoples of Britain, America and France would do well to take all these factors into account. Support for Republican Spain is not only a matter of being moved by humanitarian considerations, it is a question of understanding that we are supporting a rapidly-growing and powerful country which will be destined to strike a crushing blow at fascism. She has the right, and we have the duty, to see that this great, proud and valiant people receives our help, not only in the form of money, medical

supplies and food, but by the character of the political pressure we bring to bear on our Government.

Amidst all the sacrifice, anguish and anxieties of this protracted civil war, amazing strides are being made in all aspects of educational and cultural activity. War has been waged on illiteracy; the light of reason and knowledge, of learning and understanding, is being widely spread amongst millions of Spanish people, whom Reaction and Clericalism have previously left in darkness and ignorance.

There can be no doubt that the Spanish People's Government, in spite of mistakes, shortcomings and certain bad aspects of organisation, commands the unstinted support of the overwhelming majority of the Spanish people. When you take into account the variety of political tendencies, the rival sects, the activities of the Fifth Column and the P.O.U.M., the pernicious activities of Caballero, it is little short of marvellous that the present stable Government has been hammered out, that a united military command has been accomplished, and that the world has now been forced to understand that Franco, backed by Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and Eden, can never conquer Spain for fascism.

Constant bombing and shelling of peaceful civilians, shortage of food and fuel, accompanied by inevitable queues, dark cities, streams of refugees from Franco territory—these are the features evident to all who travel from town to town and from village to village. But other things also strike the attention—signs of one all-important determination, whether it be in Barcelona, Madrid, Albacete, Valencia, Tarancon, Lerida, or in the scores of other towns and villages—the slogan written everywhere: "No compromise. The only course is—the crushing of Franco."

On walls, hoardings, pavements and public buildings, this invincible challenge meets the eye. This is the spirit of Spain.

On buildings torn to fragments, in places where during these last days fascist bombs have left their ghastly trade mark, this is the voice of Republican Spain!

Long live the Republican and Democratic People of Spain!

Speed on with our help their decisive victory!

Long live the volunteers of the International Brigade and their brothers in the Spanish Republican Army, to whom Miles Tomalin, now fighting in the British Battalion, dedicated these lines:—

**“ He gives, but he has all to gain,
He watches not for Spain alone,
Behind him stand the homes of Spain,
Behind him stands his own.”**

HARRY POLLITT.

International Brigade

DEPENDANTS & WOUNDED AID COMMITTEE

Thousands of men from 32 countries have given up everything, many their lives, in the defence of world democracy and peace in Spain. Amongst them are one thousand men from the British Isles, who left before the ban on volunteers.

The great debt we owe them can be in part, at least, repaid, by taking care that those they left behind—mothers, wives, children, and other dependants—do not suffer through the departure of their breadwinner to fight and to defeat Fascist aggression.

**£700 IS NEEDED EACH WEEK TO ASSIST
DEPENDANTS AND TO PROVIDE CON-
VALESCENCE AND CARE FOR THE
WOUNDED.**

We cannot replace those who have fallen, but we are doing our utmost to ensure that not a mother nor a child shall suffer materially for their loss.

We ask for your support of this humane work.

Send donations to:

Hon. Secretary, CHARLOTTE HALDANE,
1, Litchfield Street, W.C.2.

1209

**Are you a member of a
Labour Party
Trade Union Branch
or Co-operative or other
organisation ?**

**If so, suggest to your
organisation that it should
invite a speaker to give a
first-hand account of the
International Brigade
and its work in Spain.**

**Ask your Secretary to
write for a speaker to
The Secretary
Dependants' Aid Fund
1 Litchfield Street
Charing Cross Road
London · WC2**

"You are all aware that on the Government's side, Socialists, Trade Unionists, Communists and people who were not attached to any political party whatever, but who revered freedom and wished to see it preserved, rallied to the support of the Government, and everybody must honour them for the part that they played in the great conflict."

—SIR WALTER CITRINE, SPEAKING
AT THE NORWICH TRADES UNION
CONGRESS, SEPTEMBER 7th, 1937.

**Is Your Branch sending a
Regular Weekly
Contribution to the
International Brigade
Dependants' Aid Fund?**