

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

José María Salaverría, the well-known publicist, writing some months back in the monarchist daily *A.B.C.*, bitterly lamented the lack of tolerance and compromise which characterized Spain's political life. The reason, he stated, was to be sought in the age-old problem . . . what must Spain do to keep up with the march of 'progress'? . . . a problem that has perplexed the greatest minds of the Peninsula and yet remains unsolved. Two solutions have been offered, one the *europaización* of Joaquín Costa, a renunciation of the past, a purging of all traditional elements, the double lock on the tomb of the Cid; the other the traditionalism of men like Ramiro de Maeztu whose desire was for a regeneration of his country on the old lines. Here in a nutshell is the tragedy of modern Spain, the struggle of opposites. The modernists have wished the complete elimination of traditional elements as incompatible with 'progress,' the traditionalists have viewed innovations with mistrust and have desired to maintain the old Spain without any concession. Other nations, confronted with the same problem, reached a solution through a process of transition, but Spain maintains partisan intransigence to an extent unknown elsewhere, rendering political life a question of all or nothing, a violent oscillation of the pendulum from extreme to extreme. Political fanaticism of the Right or the Left is equally at fault and breeds nothing but continual alarm, violent polemic, and fruitless struggle. That 'sweet reasonableness' which is the essence of democracy is completely lacking. Even the personal appeal of Alcalá Zamora, President of the Republic, in a speech at Valladolid some weeks before the revolt, in which he pleaded for an abatement of political passions and for the sinking of individual differences, went unheard, and his statement that Spain's future would be decided in the ballot box was unconsciously ironic, for only a few weeks later his country was to be the scene of a bloody holocaust difficult to parallel even in the most

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turbulent times of her history. Bullet not ballot was to decide the issue.

Writing in the April number of **BLACKFRIARS** the present writer gave a brief account of the proletariat forces in Spain, stressing in particular the revolutionary temper of the working classes and their leaders. The conclusions to be drawn from even that summary analysis have proved only too correct, as last October's tragic happenings showed. Readers in this country have already been provided with a full and detailed account of the revolt by the secular press, but some comment on its causes seems called for in view of the complexity of the position and the many side issues.

Since last November, the Republic has been ruled by several Centre governments relying on Right support, Gil Robles as yet being unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of office. Lerroix, the veteran Radical leader and one of the few remaining *republicanos históricos*, held the premiership four times and Martinez Barrio and Samper once each. Naturally enough Gil Robles as piper called the tune and much previous legislation was rescinded or nullified. The disgruntled Socialists, erstwhile democrats, daily grew more revolutionary, and united front arrangements with Communists and Anarcho-Syndicalists proceeded rapidly. The Republican Left, mostly leaders without parties, (Azaña, Maura, Marcelino Domingo) formulated plans for the fusion of all their supporters into one united Left group. Masonic pressure brought to bear on Martinez Barrio secured the resignation of his government after a great deal of lobbying and intrigue ostensibly on the plea of excessive Catholic dictation by Gil Robles' party, the C.E.D.A. (*Confederación española derechas autónomas*). However, personal animosities prevented any effective alliance, and up to the present the proposed party is nothing but a pious hope. Overtures to the Socialists for collaboration in a new Pact of San Sebastian were equally unsuccessful, the Marxists happy in their new proletariat alliance being able to scoff at such proposals. Their press in the meantime waged a virulent campaign

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against the régime, declaring that not even the worst days of the monarchy could equal the present period. Elaborate military organization of the Marxist militias proceeded unchecked as did the smuggling of arms, especially off the Galician and Basque coasts where separatism has strong roots and probably considered any weakening of the central authority to be to its own advantage. In September as a result of a ministerial decree prohibiting the political enrolment of minors a great gathering of the Marxist forces (50,000 strong according to the most conservative estimate) was held by night in the Sports Stadium outside Madrid. That same month at Ciudad Lincal on the outskirts of the capital a complete chemical laboratory for the manufacture of explosives was discovered. Morón, a Socialist deputy, was in command. The *Casa del Pueblo* (Socialist headquarters) became the central arms deposit and it has since been discovered that many socialist deputies were allowing their private houses to be used for similar purposes. The *Turquesa*, a specially chartered vessel, was detained off the Asturian coast and a full complement of arms and ammunitions discovered. Samper's pusillanimous minority government would not or could not check the blatantly aggressive preparations for the 'day.' As a wit declared . . . 'All Spain but the Minister of the Interior knows what is brewing.' Eventually the government became alarmed and late in September a statement was issued that proof was to hand that the extremists possessed all types of weapons, including machine guns, rifles, tear gas, grenades, revolvers and flame-throwers: in short the plotters were equipped on an army basis. Throughout the month the Marxist press kept up a constant barrage of inflammatory propaganda urging the workers to prepare. Finally came the grim warning . . . 'We must conquer or be conquered.' On the same day that *El Socialista* issued this statement Largo Caballero (the Spanish Lenin, according to his own press) was telling a foreign journalist that there was no alternative for Labour but revolt.

Regionalist difficulties did not facilitate Samper's task. With the advent of the republic in 1931 Catalonia saw its

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long years of struggle for independence partially crowned with success by the concession of a wide measure of Home Rule (*autonomia*) permitting the establishment of a parliament and administration with control over Finance, Education, Police, etc. The Catalan language, instrument of a great literature with a centuries old tradition, so ruthlessly persecuted by the dictatorship, now gained equal footing with Castilian throughout the *Generalitat*. Slowly but surely the *traspaso de servicios* (decentralization) was taking place and future relations between Madrid and Barcelona promised to be most cordial. Then the Catalan Cortes passed a land law intended, so its authors declared, to alleviate acute agricultural distress, actually to win the political support of the *rabassaire* or small-farmer class. The system of land tenure proposed clashed with the collectivist principles of the constitution and the law was denounced to the central government by Cambó, the very able and astute leader of the Catalan *Lliga* or Right, anxious to make party capital out of the issue. Samper had no alternative but to protest against the law's promulgation. The Tribunal of Guarantees, Spain's supreme court of appeal, confirmed his decision. The stage was now set for a bitter struggle. Catalonia, zealous of her newly-won liberties, was prepared to resist to the last, by force if needs be. Hotheads in Barcelona seriously discussed the practicability of invading Spain across the Ebro. Republican flags were hauled down from public buildings and replaced by the starred banners of Catalonia free and independent. The Catalan *Esquerra* (Left) walked out of the Cortes in protest, accompanied by the Basque Nationalists. (A strange alliance for political purposes of two parties, religiously poles apart!) Danger threatened the régime, for the Left sided with the truculent Catalans, the Irish of Spain, and the Right urged strong repressive measures. Overnight the Monarchists became the staunchest of constitutionalists and their journal *A.B.C.* (strangely enough the most popular daily in republican Spain) resurrected the old cry of *Hermanos o Extranjeros* (Brothers or Strangers). Happily, summer forced the suspension of the Cortes for the

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vacation and tempers cooled somewhat during the next few months, till finally a face-saving compromise was adopted, the law being promulgated but its wording altered. This incident showed how touchy both sides were and the infinite tact required to preserve amicable relations between both capitals. The solidarity of the separatists was shown during a conflict of the central government with the Basques over the control of local taxation. Talk of an armed rising was rife and Catalonia was prepared to support the Basque Provinces to the full. Hundreds of councillors and mayors were deposed or imprisoned. Once more federalism and centralism were contending—the old quarrel of the periphery against the centre.

Before the Cortes reopened in October Gil Robles in a vigorous speech at Covadonga criticized the government's handling of the three major issues—Basque and Catalan unrest and extremist revolutionary preparations. The Catholic leader deplored the lack of initiative shown by the government and its weakness in the face of a serious threat to national unity. Such criticism meant only one thing, withdrawal of Right support from Samper. On October the 1st, the Cortes reopened. Robles in a brief speech demanded portfolios for his party in any government that might be formed. Samper at once resigned and consultations with the President began immediately. The possibility of Right participation in the government infuriated the Left which declared the republic lost if placed in the hands of the Catholics, and at once began a campaign to prevent such an eventuality. Savage attacks were made on the President when it became known that he was not unwilling to sanction the formation of a coalition government with Right representation. Martinez Barrio threatened such a combination with civil war and the scaffold. On October the 3rd, Lerroix announced his list of ministers to the press. Three portfolios, those of Justice, Labour and Agriculture, were held by the *C.E.D.A.* Within a few hours a revolutionary general strike was declared in all Spain and life in the capital was at a stand-

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still. Fighting broke out in Asturias. At Barcelona the workers came out in support of their Socialist comrades in Madrid, the Catalan government viewing the situation with complacency. *La Humanitat*, the organ of Companys, the Catalan President, attacked Alcalá Zamora as a traitor to Catalonia and the Republic. That evening from the balcony of the Generalitat Palace Companys proclaimed the *Estat Catalá dintre de la Republica federal espanyola*, not, as the English and foreign Press generally stated, an independent republic. Within ten hours the revolt was crushed, thanks to the loyalty of a Catalan soldier, General Batet, and Companys was a prisoner. How far he himself was responsible for the precipitate and foolhardy proclamation has yet to be decided, but there are grounds for believing that he acted as unwilling agent for the separatists of his own party, in particular Dr. Dencas and Miguel Badía. Most of the Left Wing Republicans were in Barcelona at the time awaiting the proclamation of the Federal Republic. The plan was to declare Azaña President, and Prieto, the Socialist leader, Prime Minister. Azaña was captured, but Prieto succeeded in making his escape and is at present in Paris with many other refugees. In Madrid the government had little difficulty in controlling what proved to be but very feeble attempts to storm public buildings and within a day order was re-established. The contribution of the Catholic and Monarchist press to the maintenance of public morals deserves mention. Without the publication of these two morning and four evening newspapers the campaign of insidious rumour might have been far more effective. Only the employment of non-union labour enabled these journals to appear.

The northern mining district of Asturias, where the Civil Guards were overwhelmed by the rebels, was the scene of the greatest resistance, and only resolute military action under General Lopez Ochoa, backed by a cruiser and several aeroplanes, finally succeeded in quelling the outbreak, but not before a terrible toll of life had been taken. For over a fortnight the district was in complete control of the miners and only now are details filtering

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through of the terrible atrocities perpetrated, and not only on the one side be it stated in justice, for the African troops employed did not adopt kid-glove methods with the desperate miners. The credulity of the latter and their child-like faith in communist utopias can be gauged by the details of the activities during their fortnight of rule. Local soviets were established controlled by specially selected committees, money was abolished and paper tokens substituted. Needless to say the abolition of money did not prevent wholesale looting (despite strict orders to the contrary by the leaders) the biggest haul being the 14,000,000 pesetas (£350,000) stolen from the Banco de España at Oviedo, which city is now reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins as the result of the bombing and dynamiting it suffered. The University Library was completely destroyed and the famous *Cámara Santa* of the Cathedral partially damaged, many priceless relics and works of art lost for ever. Authentic details of the atrocities committed indicate that many religious lost their lives, including several priests, seminarians and Christian brothers. Teodomiro Menéndez, a member of the *U.G.T.* executive and Largo Caballero's right-hand man, was the organizer of the revolt in this province, aided by a local socialist Ramón Peña.

It is yet too early to prophecy with any certainty the outcome of the revolt, but one immediate effect apart from the natural popularity of the ministry among the middle and upper classes, has been to kill Catalan Home Rule. The commutation of twenty-one out of the twenty-three death penalties pronounced by the courts has had a favourable effect on public opinion at large, though the cabinet itself was not unanimous, the Right being against clemency in some cases. However, since it was known that the President, following the tradition of Salmeron in 1873, would refuse to sign any death sentences, the Right gave way. In the Cortes a full vote of confidence in the government was passed, Lerroux announcing a policy of 'retribution without cruelty,' which in the circumstances is wise. For the moment there is no danger of any recurrence of

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trouble; for the opposition is completely out of action, its leaders fled or imprisoned, its funds gone to swell the coffers of arms manufacturers (the sum of £1,000,000 has been mentioned in this connection), its organizations destroyed. At the moment of writing a censorship is imposed on press reports of speeches in the Cortes, a precautionary measure which is keeping the Socialists from attending. It may be stated in passing that rumour in Madrid has it that Professor Julian Besteiro, an opponent of the revolutionary tactic and a prominent Socialist is thinking of retiring from political life. The fact is significant.

To the outsider it may seem strange that the first majority government Spain has had since last November should meet with armed opposition from its 'democratic' opponents. Defeat at the polls was the reason for the revolt. Democracy, whilst providing Left and Socialist majorities, was an excellent instrument, but once it failed to do that it had to be jettisoned. In its place God alone knows what was to be a federal republic, a dictatorship of the proletariat, the rule of Bakounist Anarchy, a republic of soviets?

It is only natural that the defeated parties should seek help from Catalonia, the bulwark of the Republic. For not only was there a 'national' cleavage between Catalonia and the rest of Spain but also a political cleavage. Whereas Spain swung Right last November, Catalonia under the *Esquerra* had remained Left, despite partial gains by the *Lliga*. The *Esquerra* never lost control of Barcelona and was able to exercise control of the whole of the Generalitat.

An act of folly has lost the statute of autonomy, for now the central government has taken over once more many of the powers granted to Catalonia and it is well known that the *C.E.D.A.* seeks in the near future to revise the statute if not to abolish it completely. Many Catalans are now regretting the death of *El Avi* (Grandpa) as Francisco Maciá, the first president of the Generalitat, was familiarly termed; a much abler man than Companys, and one who

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would not have allowed himself to be forced into jeopardising his country's future by a group of misguided separatists within his own party. The difficulties which confronted Madrid and Barcelona arose from two radically different policies, the Generalitat having become synonymous with Left Wing Republicanism. To the Spanish Left it meant the last hope of winning back the republic. And that last hope failed dismally. The danger spot of the Peninsula for a few brief hours shifted from Andalusia where the predominant Anarcho-Syndicalism gave but feeble support to the revolt.

The future of Spain at present lies in the hands of moderate or conservative parties, and is largely dependent on the permanency of the alliance between Lerroux and Robles who are separated by wide ideological differences but who may agree for the moment to eschew controversial policies for the good of Spain. Undoubtedly the government has begun well by tempering justice with mercy, and if it continues to show to its political foes that tolerance which was denied to itself, a period of peace and stability may lie ahead, but that of course depends entirely on the two leaders. Certainly only a prolonged freedom from political and social upheavals can supply the opportunity so badly needed for undertaking the real 'reforms' the country so urgently requires.

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