

Reviews

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, by Hugh Thomas; Eyre and Spottiswoode; 42s.

THE GRAND CAMOUFLAGE, by Burnett Bolloten; Hollis and Carter; 30s.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM AND WORLD REVOLUTION, by Günther Nollau; Hollis and Carter; 35s.

At last there is a definitive history of the Spanish Civil War in English. Mr Thomas does not conceal his sympathies with the defeated Republic, but he is admirably objective and in relation to two of the crucial issues—the atrocities on both sides and the foreign aid that sustained both sides—he does not allow his sympathies to colour the account. He seems to have read virtually everything that has appeared in print, and is relevant, since the beginning of the war and he has talked to many of the key witnesses both within and outside Spain. In particular, he has derived much precious information from the Basque clergy and politicians in exile, information that is especially valuable since, as Republicans and as ardent Catholics, the Basques are capable of insights necessarily difficult for the mass of Nationalists and Republicans. Mr Thomas's history is also timely. In the nature of things the present regime in Spain is living in its last days. What is to come is still unsure; and it is important that Spaniards and non-Spaniards should be in a position to survey the past without rancour and prejudice and draw from it such lessons as it may afford.

Two views of the War belong to mythology and not to history. The first sees the revolt of the generals as the last desperate resort of men who knew that a Communist *coup d'état*, sustained by the Soviet Union, was in preparation. The second sees the revolt as a Fascist conspiracy against a parliamentary democracy of the normal west European type. Both myths were propagated by the publicists, Spanish and foreign, of the two sides. Both have long been known to be false; but now that Mr Thomas's work is available there is no excuse for even the most cretinous of the partisans on either side to continue to propagate either of the myths. Incidentally, it is a just reflection that among the Catholic contemporaries of the War very few emerge with much credit; but of those who do emerge with credit M. Maritain and the English and French Dominicans, or most of them, deserve to be singled out, as refusing, under circumstances of extreme difficulty, to be terrorized and bamboozled into uncritical support for the Nationalist myth.

In the summer of 1936 Spain was in the grip of an incipient social revolution of a type altogether peculiar to Spanish conditions. The seizure of the great estates by the peasants; strikes in the basic industries; the burning of churches and the killing of priests and religious: none of these is without parallel in his-

tory; but the interconnections of the phenomena as a whole, and the political leadership—or lack of it—under which all this took place, these have no parallel. The revolution in the countryside was largely spontaneous; the industrial conflict in the cities was the revolt of a relatively inexperienced working class closer to the west European proletariat of the eighteen-forties and the Russian proletariat of 1905 than to the British or French working class in the twentieth century. The attacks upon churches and priests were a consequence of an identification, real or supposed, of the Church with the ruling and privileged classes to a degree without parallel in other parts of Europe since the French Revolution; and had for a century been the established pattern of Spanish revolt. Add to all this the pressure of two non-Spanish peoples, the Catalans and the Basques, for self-government, the administrative incompetence of the five-year-old Republic, the feebleness of the middle classes, Carlism in Navarre, a radical fascist party, the Falange, the disloyalty of the majority of the army chiefs to the regime they had sworn to serve, and it becomes evident that a social explosion could not have been prevented. The pathos of the Spanish revolution consists in its utopian character, represented by the predominance of anarcho-syndicalism with its fundamental opposition to the centralized power of any state. It is this utopian character of the revolution that enabled the Communists at a later stage, strengthened as they were by the policy of Non-Intervention which made the Soviet Union seem the only friend of the Republic, to play a decisive military and political role in the struggle.

The role of the Communist Party is studied in detail by Dr Bolloten. (It is a pity that what is essentially a work of scholarship should have been given a catchpenny title and a dust-cover and blurb that seem to promise 'sensational revelations', as though in its main features the role of the Communists had not been very well known for twenty years.) It is clear that throughout the Communists were the creatures of Soviet foreign policy and that with an insane logic they strove to realize all the consequences of this policy in Spanish society. Far from being the spearhead and leadership of the Spanish revolution, they were the most counter-revolutionary party on the Republican side. With few roots in the Spanish working class, they became the representatives in the Republican coalition of the rich peasants, the white-collar workers and the army commanders. From portraying in their propaganda the Republic as essentially a middle-class institution—this was a necessary requirement of Soviet foreign policy with its striving to bring about an international Popular Front—they proceeded, using cajolery, terror, and threats that a policy too far to the Left would result in the loss of Soviet supplies, to do all they could to undo the social revolution, especially in the countryside. This explains (Dr Bolloten misses this on the whole) their deep hostility to the Socialists and Anarchists and the ease with which they were able to achieve good working arrangements with such non-socialist and plainly 'bourgeois' politicians as Dr Negrin. About all this Dr Bolloten is a little simple-minded. He is so much the prisoner of the American dogma that to work with Communists is in any circumstances to be

wicked and a tool of the Communists, that he never asks himself what Dr Negrin, for example, ought to have done. Given the policy of Non-Intervention which did not in the least bind the Germans and the Italians and which made the Soviet Union the principal source of war material; given that the Communists were the only consistent exponents of the policy of a disciplined army and a unified command; given that the best commanders (for example, Lister) were Communists and the most reliable sections of the army those under Communist influence, Negrin, had he not supported the Communists, would have had to throw all his influence behind Caballero and the C.N.T. It cannot be doubted that this would have been politically and militarily disastrous. Of course, the other policy was in the end disastrous too; but this could not have been known at the time; for the European war might well have begun before September 1939 and with this Non-Intervention would have come to an end. Dr Bolloten seems to suggest that the triumph of the Communists in the later stages of the War was an instance of all those later coalitions in which the Communists ended by devouring the other parties. But this is completely to misread the situation. There is no evidence that Negrin ever had any illusions about the Communists: he simply judged that it was necessary to compromise with them in order to fight the war. He was not wrong. The real architects of the Communist victory and the defeat of the Republic were Britain and France, through the Non-Intervention Committee.

Why did Franco win the war? Even Mr Thomas does not give a straight answer to this question; and the whole matter is so confused that perhaps no straight answer can be given. What comes out is Franco's political capacity. He was faced with a coalition on his own side almost as unruly as the Republican coalition. While he had the bulk of the armed forces, including the mercenary African troops, on his side, the peasantry outside Navarre was hostile and the workers were altogether opposed to him. Even the middle classes were by no means wholly behind him. But he kept the alliance together with the greatest skill, showed throughout the quiet calculation that has marked his entire career and used the Italians and the Germans without becoming their creature. How important was the Italian and German aid? The Italians seem not to have been, despite their vast numbers, much help. The German help was perhaps decisive at the beginning and the end of the war. What is evident from Mr Thomas's account is that for most of the time the Germans treated the war in exactly the same way as the Soviet Union: as a military laboratory; and as a means of feeling their way politically against their enemies. The Germans could have won the war for Franco, as the Soviet Union could have won the war for the Republic, had they been willing to intervene on a bigger scale; but this was a risk they were not prepared to take until it became plain in 1939 that there were no limits to what the British and the French were prepared to tolerate; and by that time the Soviet Union was liquidating its Spanish liabilities, for Stalin was now feeling his way towards a German alliance.

It is hard to strike a moral balance sheet. The conduct of the war, since it was

a civil war, consisted not only in the military campaign but also in the repression of the civilian population. In this the conduct of both sides was vile. On balance—setting aside the Communist repression of those to the left of them—the conduct of the Nationalists was the more repulsive. Dr Bolloten quotes a Catholic observer to this effect.

Blood, a great deal of innocent blood, was shed on both sides . . . But the most radical difference as far as the Republican zone was concerned—which does not justify, but at least explains, the excesses—lies in the very fact of the insurrection. The Army, almost the entire secret police, the administration of justice, whatever police forces there were, whose duty it was to maintain order, revolted, leaving the legal government defenceless. The latter was compelled to arm the people . . . Is it surprising that during the first few days of the revolt these uncontrolled elements did as they pleased? . . . What cannot be explained, and even less justified, are the crimes, much greater in number and in sadism, that were committed in the fascist zone where an army and a police force existed, where the people were not armed and the common-law prisoners remained in jail. Yet those crimes were committed precisely by that army, by that police force, by those educated young gentlemen who lacked for nothing and who boasted of their Catholicism.

I have already remarked that the question of the relations of non-Communists with the Communists is raised by Dr Bolloten in his book. Dr Nollau's study of the history of Communism from the October Revolution to our own day provides some material with which to answer the question. It is in itself a fairly routine performance. The analyses are superficial. The Bibliography is very poor and in some respects inexplicable: second-rate and irrelevant works abound in it and works of fundamental importance are missing. It is on the whole accurate, though some of the slips are very odd—Andrés Nin is referred to as 'the Spanish Communist'. What it does, simply by telling the story of the Comintern, and of the Communist movement since the Comintern's dissolution, faithfully if with no great penetration, is to bring out how very different Communism to-day is from Communism between, say, 1924 and the death of Stalin. The death of Stalin, Khrushchev's report to the Twentieth Party Congress and the Chinese revolution have combined to produce a Communist movement much more various and enigmatic than it was during the 'monolithic' period. It is important to note, for example, that the Hungarian Revolution crushed by the Red Army was essentially a revolution led by a section of the Hungarian Communist Party and that the Polish 'October' owed much, not only to the pressure of the Polish masses but also to the skill and courage of Gomulka and his colleagues. It is often said that generals think of the next war in terms of the one in which they learned their trade. There is an equal danger that politicians and their advisers in the western world will interpret contemporary Communism in accordance with the stereotype they derive from a study of Communism in the Stalinist period. It is no longer axiomatic that the Communist party of a particular country is either monolithic in itself or bound to Moscow by agree-

ment on policy or by subjection to its discipline. Above all, it is dangerous to assume—as, to the confusion of the United States and its allies, the Central Intelligence Agency seems to assume—that where the Communists are a part of a coalition, as in Laos or Cuba, the coalition is necessarily a Communist ‘front’. This may be so in particular cases but each case needs to be looked at with some care. It is assumed that, for example, the Communists use Dr Castro for their own purposes; but it is also conceivable that Dr Castro is using the Communists; and it is not even any longer sensible to assume that the purposes and policies of particular Communist parties are clear and unambiguous. At one time it was very clear that one could assume a preoccupation with the aims of Soviet foreign policy and the extension of Soviet power. This can no longer be assumed without argument. Mr Khrushchkev, at least, has learned this the hard way.

J. M. CAMERON

ENGLISH FRIARS AND ANTIQUITY IN THE EARLY XIVth CENTURY, by Beryl Smalley; Basil Blackwell; 45s.

In his famous Rede lecture on the Two Cultures, literary and scientific, which divide our society Sir Charles Snow did not call the literary culture ‘humanist’. There was no reason why he should; ‘humanist’ in its special literary sense is an archaic word except in history books, and Sir Charles was not much concerned with past history. He avoided even the more abstract, less historical term ‘humanism’. And yet that powerful lecture of his often came into my mind as I read Miss Smalley’s learned and witty study of the mental climate of the early fourteenth century.

This may seem odd. It is a far cry from Sir Charles’s very contemporary preoccupations to that little group of late medieval English friars whom Miss Smalley has rescued from what may seem to have been a perfectly natural oblivion. But the truth is that she has given us one of those rare pieces of specialized scholarship which do really illuminate the course of history outside their particular field of observation—in this case the span of time between the age of Aquinas and the age of the Renaissance, that elusive and complex period in between when humanism emerged as the cultural rival to scholasticism. It is only with its earlier stages that Miss Smalley is concerned in this book; and even then only as an issue subordinate to her main concern; but her judgment is so clear and she has prepared her ground so well that what she in effect provides might serve as a useful *prolegomenon*, from a new and unexpected angle, to the whole history of post-medieval humanism.

The ground is prepared in the ‘central block’, as she calls it, of her book, a study of the biblical lectures and commentaries of seven English friars (five Dominicans and two Franciscans), all writing between about 1320 and 1350. She calls them ‘the classicizing group’ for the interest they took in pagan antiquity, an interest which in the two most gifted of them, Thomas Waleys O.P.,