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The End of Fascism?

The following is a slightly abridged version of an article which was published on 2nd May, 1945 in the well-known Swiss paper „St. Galler Tagblatt“ [1]:

Humanity now stands aghast before the corpse of the Third Reich. But the horror and disgust now generally expressed do not produce in us that moral satisfaction which we experience when the conscience of the world revolts against cruelty and suppression. This outcry now comes belatedly and rings false in the ears of those who went through the twelve years of the Third Reich fully conscious of the things which were going on around them. From the outset the Third Reich was built on lies and crimes, and except for those who shut their eyes to it everybody knew it. The foundation of the National Socialist dictatorship was laid by the Reichstag Fire. This faked "communist act of terror" was the justification for all the acts and measures of a terror regime which pretended to "save the Reich and the People". All oppositional movements were smashed up, their leaders taken into custody, their papers and houses requisitioned, the whole of Germany drowned in a wave of terror. Five days after the Reichstag Fire parliamentary elections were rushed through in this psychological atmosphere and gave legal power to the incendiaries. Germany then became submerged in the long night of murder and depravity and torch light processions. The autodafes [!] started, the extermination of culture, the national socialist education, the militarization and preparation for war; the horrors of the concentration camp and the unrestrained rule of sadism. On April 1st, 1933 the pogrom was announced officially by the press and by all loudspeakers - it was to become a permanent institution run by Julius Streicher [2] whose paper "Der Stuermer" [3] corrupted a whole generation of adolescents. All the horrors which to-day elicit the outcry of the world were for twelve years daily routine in Germany. There was no lack of publications, of witnesses, of documents. The murderers even crossed the frontiers: Theodor Lessing [4], Dollfuss and German emigrants who had escaped the Gestapo were murdered abroad by agents of the Third Reich.

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Why were these things consciously hushed up? How could it happen that the underworld which ruled Germany was considered abroad to be fit to be received at Courts, in Society, a suitable business partner, a power with whom to conclude agreements and even a Concordat? How could it happen that the statesmen of the European democracies in 1938 divided the world between themselves and Germany? "Nothing succeeds like success." The Third Reich had success. Now it has collapsed and the conscience of the world curses it and condemns it. The conscience of the world marches loyally with the strongest battalions. Let us leave aside high-sounding phrases: Germany has now to atone not for the crimes of National Socialism but for its political failure.

If that was all we would feel ashamed and hurt, but it would still be in tune with the "normal course of the world". The present indignation at the horrors of the concentration camps, however, is not simply hypocrisy and opportunism, not even with those who once admired the Third Reich and negotiated with it. Of course, they knew that people were being murdered and tortured in Germany - but they lacked imagination. Today, when faced with the horrible photographic documents, every observer is gripped with physical disgust. But this is not a moral but a physical reaction: Let us not confuse sensitivity with weakness of the nerves, and therefore overrate the moral effect of the present "atrocities propaganda". Many people are not capable of assisting a surgical operation without fainting or becoming sick; but would this prevent them from agreeing to the usefulness of such operations? Many people who approve of capital punishment could not watch an execution. In the same way, many who cannot stand the sight of pictures and reading the report on Buchenwald approved in principle of the "extermination of Marxism", the "liquidation of the red pest" which started in 1933. They regarded it as a salutary operation on the German body politic, and approved of it in the same way as they approved of the similar methods of Mussolini and Franco. They were prevented from participation in the process only by their weak nerves, not by their moral convictions. They looked upon Hitler as an agent of reaction, in the same way as Thyssen [5] and Krupp regarded him as an agent of reaction, and that was the secret of their sympathy. The Reichstag Fire? Should a respectable person do so much as lift a finger to exonerate communists, even if the charge is false? The concentration camps? Every authoritarian regime has its catacombs, but this must be ignored; Germany in 1933 needed a government with a "strong hand" who gave short shrift to agitators and enemies of the State. Had Hitler been a Franco or a Goering, had he loyally executed the orders of his customers, had he agreed in 1938 to accept the Munich bargain, he would be hailed to-day as a great crusader and the saviour of the Occident.

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It is a platitude but must be stressed again and again, for the phenomenon of National Socialism cannot be grasped and overcome without the recognition of this platitude; this St. Vitus [6] dance was born out of a bankrupt social system. When world economy collapsed fifteen years ago Germany was in the centre of the catastrophe. Ten million unemployed, ten million people fit to work with whom society did not know what to do, this meant that these human beings had lost their dignity, that their lives had become superfluous, senseless. It meant war of all against all and any slogan was effective which promised to "eliminate" a section of the population - the old, or the women, or the Jews, or the immigrants - to make room for the overflow. Human dignity, Freedom, Democracy? They were empty words which provoked the scorn of those who were thrown on the street like stray cats. The Republic had nothing to offer them but a ballot paper, until at the end the Reichstag was elected every half year, only to be dissolved after one session - and they sold their vote to the highest bidder, as this was the only thing left to them to sell. The highest bidders, however, were not the communists, for their coming to power was far-away and improbable; the highest bidder was Hitler, for he stood already in the vicinity of power, he was backed by important financiers, industrialists, the Junkers, big politicians and the military caste. And they were not disappointed in the hopes they had set on him - not at first.

It is no use talking now only of the crimes of the Third Reich and not of the achievements for the sake of which they were tolerated, achievements which aroused

the enthusiasm of all foreign travellers in Germany: The chimneys smoked once more, the plants were working again; motor roads throughout the Reich, luxury buildings, miracles of organisation were created overnight. And this "German Revolution" had taken place in complete order, it had solved economic and social problems without in the least changing the social structure. As could be heard everywhere at the time a "bloodless Revolution" had taken place, which meant that no civil war or expropriations had occurred, that everything that was done had been sanctioned by the Reich President, the Wehrmacht, the leading men of Finance and Industry. It was not difficult for this "German Revolution" and this "German Socialism" to meet with the approval of all those elements who were fond of order, but who by order meant the safeguarding of their property and their peace of mind, and not the safeguarding of Freedom and Justice.

In reality, no miracle had happened. One of the most efficient industries of the world had lain idle and was ready to be put to any use; the workers were prepared to work under any conditions, they were ready to make any sacrifice, to undergo any drill, for anything

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was preferable to what they had experienced in the past. And this industrial potential was handed over to the Nazis by the lords of industry and commerce, by the ministers and the industrial experts, by the whole of this helpless "elite". They could no longer master the dynamics of their own economy, but they did not resign, they put a lunatic at the helm instead. And this lunatic set the whole machinery in motion. Not only did he overcome the German crisis, but he also helped the East European agrarian countries to find a market and thus to emerge from their crisis, and finally he made a major contribution towards the western democracies' victory over their own economic problems by creating an armament boom, which was to lead up to a war boom. The cream of society in all countries admired this achievement. As late as March, 1939, the day after the German occupation of Prague the Federation of British Industries and the national Federation of German Industries concluded the so-called "Düsseldorf Agreement", which was nothing less than a Munich pact in the economic sphere which, however, could not take full effect. The "German Miracle" was the road of least resistance, it was a reconstruction of society without the demolition of its rotten foundation which went on rotting. This hybrid sky-scraper has collapsed, but even its debris are a gigantic testimonial of the stupidity of these purely reactionary forces who rather let a gang of lunatics play havoc with humanity than give up a single one of their vested interests, and even looked upon Hitler as a constructive force - and there is nothing to show that they have learned a lesson in the meantime.

The Peace which is suggested by the victors includes annexations and the transfer of populations, and thus contains all the elements of the Pax Germanica. ...

The following report was written at the beginning of April, 1945 by a Spanish Socialist in Toulouse.

The Spanish Emigration

The number of Spanish Republican refugees in France can now be reckoned as being about 120,000. Their distribution among political parties and Union organisations runs as follows: 30,000 members to the Spanish Libertarian movement (M.L.E.) which includes the Workers' National Confederation (C.N.T.), the Libertarian Youth (J.L.), and

the Iberian Anarchist Federation (F.A.I.). The other great Union, under Socialist inspiration, the General Workers' Union, numbers over

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7,000 members. These figures by no means reflect the real composition of forces in the country, as the people who crossed the frontier in 1939 included a disproportionately high percentage of the North-Eastern quarter of the peninsula, a region of traditional anarchist leanings. The Communist Party constitutes the skeleton of another important block, the National Union (U.N.), into which some small Republican groups and former individual members of the two big Trade Unions have found their way. It represents some 12,000 people. The Socialist Party has a membership of over 4,000. The rest belong to the Republican parties such as Left Republican Party, Radical Socialist Party, Republican Union, Left Republican Party of Catalonia, Catalan Action, Basque Nationalist etc., or else they remain unorganised. Most of these groups - except the Communists - join their forces through "Juntas" of Liberation which from Mexico spread to France and are now developing elsewhere.

The National Union is a new and heterogeneous organisation, the growth of which has been favoured by the lack of interest of Vichy and the occupying Germans towards the activities of Spanish exiles. As military pressure tightened, the Spanish Republicans enjoyed a comparative lull during which the Communist Party succeeded by intensive propaganda and occasional pressure in bringing together a group of lesser organisations into the "National Union". Much of its success was due to the lack of initiative, apathy and lack of drive among many of the former leaders and the constant feeling among the refugees that "something ought to be done". It appears that it is under their inspiration that the romantic though suicidal attempt to overthrow Franco in August, 1944 was made, when groups of military trained guerillas entered Spain and fought Franco's armies in the Pyrenees.

Conversations to secure the support of the Catholics on the part of the National Union have failed, the former being reluctant to encourage what they see as a communist manoeuvre. The prestige once surrounding U.N. is now challenged by the increasing coherence in the ranks of the other political parties and Unions, to whom the initial success of U.N. has acted as a reactive.

In one point there is perfect agreement in the Spanish anti-fascist movement: Everyone feels that as long as Franco's regime remains and its crimes continue unpunished, the very principles on which the second world war has been fought and is still being fought are at stake. It is not quite so clear about the question of responsibilities on the Republican side, - where cases of minor guilt, political "mistakes", military responsibilities, maladministration of party and public funds and so on, may in the near future come to the fore. Here, the position of the Socialist Party is condensed in a few words by

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Frisou Gomez **[7]**, echoing a resolution passed last September:

"Revisions of accounts, accusations for responsibilities, in short, smothering of differences and sanctions must wait till we are back in our country."

The Libertarians hold a similar position. In a concrete case, when the attitude of two leading figures of the movement was called into question, the National Committee

barred for the time being the application of sanctions. Given the difficulties of consultation and the abnormal psychological conditions of exile this seems to be the most appropriate position, as forbidding rash measures.

The question of synchronised action between the two great Unions is bound to be of the utmost importance for the future of Spain. Both U.G.T. and C.N.T. are repeatedly stating their will to work together as allies. The success of this aim is, however, linked up with a query which cannot be answered yet. Will the Libertarians lead their movement into political action? It is generally felt that the tendency to do so is growing fast. As a precedent there can be mentioned the presence of Anarchist Ministers within the Cabinet during the Civil War. The opposite tendency, that of the traditional anarcho-syndicalists is represented by the weekly "IMPULSO" [8] which acts as a mouthpiece for the more doctrinaire elements within the organisation. Examples of a trend towards co-operation are mounting. When the Socialist and Republican parties founded in Mexico the "Junta" of National Liberation, Libertarians supported it, though it appears they lacked the necessary authority to make a formal entry; but in October last a similar Committee was built up in France with full Libertarian support and full membership. It may, incidentally, be pointed out here that in the public declaration signed by the "Junta" in France, the adherence of all its members to the Atlantic Charter was emphatically stated.

The juridical controversy centres round a main point. Has the last Republican "Cortes" - the Parliament upon which fell the burden of the last civil war - terminated its mandate? Here, while the Socialist Party thinks that the Republican Restoration implies the continuance of the institutions which owed their existence to the Constitution of 1931, thus postponing the issue of revision for the time being, the Anarchists have not formulated any definite opinion yet. Among the rest, a current view is that conditions now are so different that a complete reorganisation is necessary. The composition of the future government is still obscure. The Unions have been reluctant to support the former Premier lest Dr. Negrin's [9] policy should mean a continuance of communist supremacy - it is, however, too early to

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predict what will happen. [10] Senor Maura [11], whose activities have been so consistently reported in the British press, has also failed to secure the support of the Unions; his proposals, though candid, do not cover the minimum required by the workers' organisations, namely: immediate re-establishment of the Republican order, and absolute elimination of every instrument of fascist power and its supporting institutions, falanx, requetes (carlist militia), army, police, Civil Guard and so on, and speedy administration of justice. It may be worth while to emphasise here that army and police in Spain have nothing in common with their English counterparts. No commission can be obtained in the former unless the candidate has proved his absolute loyalty to fascist tenets while the Army has been meddling in politics and opposing popular demands for the last three quarters of a century.

We can now briefly sum up: Spanish politics suffer from two weak spots. On the one hand, doctrinaire contests weaken the influence of the Anarchist movement whenever quick action is required and turn the greatest single organisation of the country into an insoluble unknown. On the other hand, the traditional way of centring politics round the representative figures of the different parties tends to turn individual differences into Party feuds. Much energy has thus been spent in discussing whether the Socialist leader, Senor Prieto [12], was a fit person to represent the Spanish Republic as head of

the Commission sent to San Francisco by the "Junta" of Liberation in Mexico to provide the Conference with any information they might require regarding Spain, but no co-ordinating action has been undertaken to demand from the Conference that Republican Spain should be admitted with full membership - an obvious step by men who hold to be the only "de jure" representatives of its democratic period.

It is likely that, now that the Armistice in Europe brings the question of Spain again to the force, many differences will be set aside and a compromise will be reached among the different groups. The possibility of centring the core of all the main organisations in France instead of having them spread over two continents, ought to facilitate discussion and prepare the ground for a more harmonic action. The existence of two main comprehensive groups - the communist-inspired National Union and the "Junta" of National Liberation, representing the more democratic tendencies, is in itself a remarkable advance and points in this direction. The Spaniards cannot, after all, forget that "half the (civil) war was won for Franco by Germany, Italy and the Committee of Non-Intervention, and the other

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half was lost by the Republic on account of their political differences."

It should further be taken into account that the ambiguous policy of the victorious Great Powers towards Spain in no ways helps towards a constructive policy. The feeling that the final settlement depends on a game of power politics rather than on the wishes and interests of the Spanish people, can only have a demoralising effect. Yet, if a fierce outburst of hate and revenge, following which the still bleeding peninsula gets out of everyone's control is to be avoided, the uncanny flirtation of the Democracies with Franco ought to be brought to an end, and a positive support given to the men and organisations which alone represent the democratic and progressive forces of the country. Only thus can the way be prepared for an orderly restoration and one of the last survivals of the fascist heritage be removed.

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - „*S[ank]t. Galler Tagblatt*“, 1839 als „*Tagblatt der Stadt St. Gallen*“ gegründete Schweizer Tageszeitung, seit 1910 „*St. Galler Tagblatt*“ genannt, amtliches Publikationsorgan für die Stadt und die benachbarten Gemeinden.

2 - *Julius Streicher* (1885-1946), deutscher NS-Politiker, bedenkenloser Antisemit, Gründer des antisemitischen Wochenblatts „*Der Stürmer*“ (1923), Teilnahme am Hitler-Putsch (1923), Gauleiter der NSDAP in Franken (1925-1940), vom internationalen Militärtribunal in Nürnberg zum Tode verurteilt (1946).

3 - „*Der Stürmer*“, 1920 als „*Stürmer*“ gegründete und 1923-1945 von *Julius Streicher* in Nürnberg verlegte und herausgegebene antisemitische Wochenzeitschrift, die die nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung und Judenvernichtung propagierte.

- 4 - *Theodor Lessing (1872-1933), deutsch-jüdischer Kulturphilosoph und politischer Publizist, Sozialist und Feminist, lebensphilosophisch beeinflusste, pessimistische Geschichtsdeutung und Zivilisationskritik, Habilitation scheitert am Widerstand gegen ihn als Jude, Privatdozent an der Technischen Hochschule Hannover (1907), Aufbau einer Volkshochschule in Hannover-Linden (1919), Flucht in die Tschechoslowakei (1933), von nationalsozialistischen Agenten ermordet (1933).*
- 5 - *„Thyssen“, deutscher Industrie- und Handelskonzern, Gründung (1871) durch August Thyssen (1842-1926), Erweiterung um die August-Thyssen-Hütte AG (1890), 1926-1935 Weiterführung durch Fritz Thyssen (1873-1951), wichtiger Finanzier und Förderer der NSDAP (ab 1923), der er 1931 beitrug, Wegbereiter der Kanzlerschaft Hitlers, MdR (1933), wegen Meinungsverschiedenheiten mit der NS-Führung (ab 1935, besonders wegen der Judenverfolgungen) Emigration in die Schweiz (1939), Verhaftung in Frankreich (1941), Konzentrationslager (bis 1945), nach Entnazifizierungsverfahren Auswanderung nach Argentinien (1948). Konzern heute Teil der Thyssen Krupp AG.*
- 6 - *St. Vitus = Veit (um 313), Märtyrer in Sizilien, unter anderem Schutzpatron der Apotheker, Gastwirte und Tänzer, Tod am 15. Juni (Sankt-Veits-Tag), Verehrung in Corvey (seit 836) und Prag (seit 1355, Veitsdom).*
- 7 - *Frisou Gomez, nach „Europe speaks“ spanischer Sozialist. Weitere biographische Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.*
- 8 - *„Impulso“, nach „Europe Speaks“ spanische Wochenzeitung. Weitere Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.*
- 9 - *Juan Negrín (1887-1956), spanischer republikanischer Politiker (PSOE), Universitätsprofessor für Physiologie und Anatomie, Finanzminister (1936-1937), Ministerpräsident (1937-1939), Exil (seit 1939), im Exil Präsident der Zweiten Spanischen Republik (bis 1945).*
- 10 - *Fußnote im Original: "Recently, a much greater measure of agreement on all these questions seems to have been reached."*
- 11 - *Senor Maura. Biographische Angaben konnten nicht ermittelt werden.*
- 12 - *Senior Prieto = Indalecio Prieto y Tuero (1883-1962), spanischer Politiker (PSOE), Wahl zum Abgeordneten der Cortes (1918), nach Errichtung der Zweiten Republik Finanzminister in der provisorischen Regierung (1931), Minister für Öffentliche Arbeiten im Kabinett Manuel Azaña, Austritt aus der Regierung (1933), gemeinsam mit Azaña Errichtung eines Wahlbündnisses von Sozialisten, Kommunisten und Unión Republicana (1936), Marine- und Luftwaffenminister (1936-1937), Verteidigungsministerium im Kabinett Negrín, Rückzug aus dem politischen Leben (1938), Exil in Mexiko (ab 1939).*