

SPAIN AND BRITAIN

by
the Rt. Hon. **DAVID LLOYD GEORGE**
O.M., M.P.

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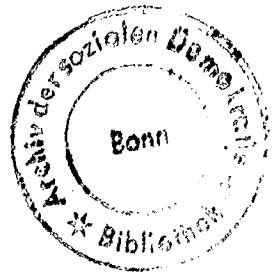
FOREWORD

THE American Friends of Spanish Democracy reprints this speech by the Hon. David Lloyd George given in the House of Commons last October because it so vividly portrays the effects of the non-intervention agreement on the support of democracy in Europe. What he says of the attitude and behavior of the European governments which are parties to the non-intervention pact applies with equal force to the United States Government under the Neutrality Act.

The American Friends of Spanish Democracy has repeatedly pointed out that the embargo on the shipment of all materials and supplies to both sides in Spain works out in practice to the advantage of the rebels, for the governments openly supporting Franco are able to buy freely in the American market while the governments recognizing the Loyalist Government refuse to permit the shipment of arms and supplies.

From the point of view of democracy, the effect of the non-intervention agreement and American neutrality is to encourage armed revolt against democratically-elected governments by giving rebels the assurance that if they refuse to accept a verdict at the polls they may resort to arms in the expectation of being treated on precisely the same basis as the legitimate government.

International law has long upheld the right of legally recognized governments to unrestricted trade with the countries recognizing them. The non-intervention pact and our Neutrality Act violate this principle of international law. The American Friends of Spanish Democracy



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has long urged the American Government to recognize under international law and American policy the right of the Spanish Government to buy freely in our market and to deny this right to the rebels. Only then can the cause of democracy abroad be served by a nation which professes its democracy at home.

(RT. REV.) ROBERT L. PADDOCK, *Chairman,*
American Friends of Spanish Democracy.

SPAIN AND BRITAIN

*The following speech was made
in the House of Commons by the
Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George,
on Thursday, October 28, 1937*

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: I propose to take part in this debate simply to call attention to the question of non-intervention and I shall confine myself to that topic because I am very seriously concerned as to what is happening. . . . What is the position with regard to non-intervention? Let us have a look at it. The right honorable gentleman has himself admitted repeated failures. It has gone on for fourteen months. Its history is discreditable in many respects and indeed in most respects dishonorable. It is definitely dishonorable in so far as the nations which have broken faith are concerned. It is discreditable to the intelligence of those who permitted them to do so and still remain members of that body.

Whether it has been a success or a failure depends entirely upon what point of view you take about the aim of that body. If its aim was to prevent the intervention of foreign powers, it has been a complete and an utter failure, an obvious failure, an admitted failure—nay more, a boasted failure. Men who took part in it and who made it a failure have been blustering about it. If its object was

to ensure equal terms between the combatants, it has failed and disgracefully failed. If its object was to secure peace and tranquillity in Europe and the world and the feeling that somehow or other you were getting an assurance that there would be no trouble—if that was the object, what have we? Crises, alarms, panics—all the rabbit warrens of the world in Paris, in London, in Wall Street, fluttering, excited, bewildered and running about here and there. There has been no assurance of peace or tranquillity or quietude such as is necessary in order to carry on the legitimate business of trade and commerce and finance. But if its object was—and it was with some of the parties—to give a definite and what may be a decisive advantage to the insurgents over the legitimate government of Spain, then, let me say at once, it has been a triumphant success.

I used certain figures, quoted from sources which, even from the point of view of honorable members opposite, would not be regarded as tainted. The *Sunday Times* more particularly is a steadfast supporter of the government. It is, I was going to say, one of the few, but, I will say, one of the several intelligent supporters they have. It is a very able paper—one of the most ably conducted papers in this country. Its news is generally reliable—it may be with the usual allowance which must always be made in these matters for a little political partisanship. The *Sunday Times* had a very remarkable article which has already been referred to in this House. It was by an impartial observer and appeared on last Sunday week. This observer had seen both sides, had been in communication with both sides, had received his information from both sides, and the figures which he gave as to the number of Italians, Germans, Russians and French there were approximately those which I had given when Signor Mussolini made that outrageous attack upon me in his papers

—and let me say that I felt flattered by his anger.

The *Sunday Times* said that there were 80,000 Italians and 10,000 Germans, and that on the side of the government there were 20,000 volunteers. In addition to the 90,000 Germans and Italians there was also a foreign legion, the number of which I do not know, and of course there were the Moors, who certainly are not Spaniards. On the side of the government he said there were these 20,000, but he also said that most of these were employed on work behind the lines and were not in the fighting line. But the most remarkable thing he said, and I believe it to be true from all I heard, was that there were only 2,000 Russians. We have had all this putting of Russia into the forefront which Count Grandi so very skilfully does. With great art and with Italian subtlety he always puts Russia in the forefront. There are 2,000 Russians there. I could quote corroboration of these figures from the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Times*. It is no use to quote the *News-Chronicle*, the *Manchester Guardian*, or the *Daily Herald*. I am quoting authorities which honorable and right honorable gentlemen opposite will not for a moment challenge as being at any rate too partial to the government of Spain.

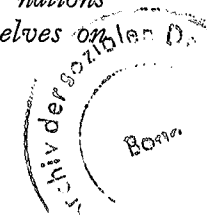
I think too much has been made of the aid which has been given, more particularly to the insurgents, in respect of volunteers, and too little of the help which has been given in respect of war materials. The victories won by General Franco have been victories which are almost attributable to an overwhelming supply of war material. If you had agreement tomorrow to withdraw every volunteer on both sides, non-intervention would have accorded a superiority to the insurgents which might make the difference between victory and defeat. Bilbao, Santander, Gijon, the Asturias, were all defended by as brave men as

ever went into battle—traditionally so, historically so and, if I may say so, racially so. But they had no munitions; they had no guns. On the other side you had every modern machine manufactured since the war—machines in the air, heavy guns and abundance of ammunition, and they just crashed their way through and there was practically no defense except the bare bodies of gallant men. That is what won there. The numbers were probably equal. That is exactly what has enabled the Japanese to win their victories now, at this moment. It is the fact that there is an overwhelming superiority in material. That was one of our dangers in the Great War. It was one of the reasons why the Russians were defeated in the Great War, because of that superiority. Not a word is said about that, about equalizing the conditions.

We are now probably on the eve of the decisive battle in this terrible war that will decide the fate of Spain. It may decide the fate of Europe. It may decide the issue of whether Europe is going to be controlled by democracy or by dictatorships. That battle will be fought, probably, within the next few weeks, even if it has not already begun, according to the news which appears. What will happen there? You will have the numbers on each side probably equal—brave men on both sides, with no fear of death when they are fighting for what they believe in—equal in courage, but that is where the equality comes to an end. On one side there will be more trained men, the best trained men that Italy could send out. You may say there are not 80,000, but there are 40,000, and 10,000 Germans—picked men, the picked officers of the Spanish Army. That makes some difference, but a still greater difference will be that on one side you will have a mass of heavy artillery which will shatter the defenses, and that on the other side such artillery as you have got

will be of the lighter kind that has no chance at all. I can assure the right honorable gentleman that that is so. That is the difference.

Who is responsible for that? Non-intervention. Who is responsible for keeping non-intervention alive? His Majesty's government. If democracy is beaten in this battle; whatever the consequences—[*An honorable member*: "It is not democracy"]. At any rate, if fascism is triumphant in this battle, His Majesty's government can claim that victory for themselves, and while this is going on the French frontier is closed. The only means by which any supplies could be sent in to the government of Spain from outside is closed. [*An honorable member*: "What about Marseilles?"] Marseilles? With Italian submarines sinking ships! But the battle is going on, and here we are, using the whole of our influence, our energies, our prestige, our powers of persuasion—and they are great—of the Foreign Secretary. What for? To prolong the conditions which, under the name of non-intervention, have simply made it impossible for the Spanish government to get adequate supplies, which it could have purchased, while at the same time, on the other side, Italy is pouring in men and ammunition. Three battalions within the last few days have gone from Italy to take part in this battle. If the aim of non-intervention was to give an unfair, undue advantage to the insurgents and the fascists in this battle, then non-intervention has been a complete success. You could not have maneuvered and intrigued more successfully to keep going conditions friendly to the insurgents and detrimental to the government. The fact of the matter is—and I say this deliberately—that *this Committee of Non-Intervention is the greatest and the basest fraud and deception ever perpetrated by great nations upon a weak people, and you are patting yourselves on the*



the back and saying, "Ah, it was on the point of dying, it was on the point of disappearing, but we saved it." So you have, but you will not have to live long before you realize what a blunder it is.

I will put another proposition. If the object of the Committee of Non-Intervention was to place Britain and France at a great disadvantage in any future war that may take place, this Committee has been a triumph.

I wonder how many have read Signor Mussolini's interview today, given to the *Daily Express*, one of the Prime Minister's comrades. He said, "There will be no immediate war." Anybody could see that, reading the signs, but when the question was put whether there would be a war later on, he would not guarantee that there would be no war. He said he wanted peace. Yes, he wants the peace of non-intervention in Abyssinia, until it is entirely conquered; he wants the peace of non-intervention in Spain, until Franco wins; he wants peace in Europe, until he and his fellow dictator are ready. I agree with the noble lord that in these matters you have got to face facts. Do not imagine that Signor Mussolini's Caesarian ambitions are confined to achieving a victory for General Franco. You have only to consider what he is doing, pouring his troops into Libya, conquering Abyssinia, interfering in Palestine, fortifying positions on the Red Sea, putting air and submarine bases in the Balearic Islands, and another in the Canaries, with German guns on the Straits of Gibraltar. Is he doing that merely to achieve a victory for General Franco? That is not the kind of man he is. He is a man of great ambitions, vast schemes; his speeches are full of the revival of the Roman Empire. He will not make war now. Neither he nor his ally is quite ready.

Those who think that we are going to have immediate war with Germany have not taken the trouble to examine

the conditions there. I have said it in this House over and over again. Let them read the articles in the *Daily Telegraph* written by General Temperley upon the German Army. Then they will know something of the possibilities of foreign affairs and of what may happen with the help of non-intervention. What does he say? He says we cannot have war without vast reserves. I have said it here over and over again, but it was mocked at. That is exactly what Germany has not, as he points out.

MR. EDEN: Nor Italy.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: Nor Italy, yet; I agree with the Foreign Secretary. But General Temperley points out that as the result of conscription this is the first year when trained men are passing into the Reserves. You have to get that process going on for years before you will get an army in Germany to be comparable with that of either Russia or France. As to all this talk which I have heard so often—light-hearted; may I say ill-informed? I hate to use the word "ignorant," but it is ignorant—about the imminence of war, there is nobody on the other side to make war, with the slightest chance of success, at the present moment. I do not say what may happen, to use Signor Mussolini's phrase, ultimately, when the reserves have been built up, but this is what I want to point out, that the dictators are securing the most menacing, threatening, formidable strategic positions when and if that time ever comes. Spain is one of the most dangerous bastions for an empire like ours or for France. Why did we attach so much importance to Gibraltar through the years? Because there was a conviction that it was vital to the protection of the route to the British Empire from the center, through to India and to Australia.

What has happened? I want to put this to patriotic members on both sides. I am not suggesting that there are

members in this House who, should the occasion arise, would not be patriotic, but there are Members in peace time whose patriotism may be obscured, the vision of whose patriotism may be obscured, and I want them to cast their eyes back five years and to look at what is happening now. I am going to ask them: Do they think that the strategic position of the British Empire in the event of war is as good now as it was five years ago? I say without any hesitation that it has definitely worsened, east and west. In China we have been driven from point to point in our trade, in our business, in our influence and in our prestige. But I am dealing with the Mediterranean. What is happening there? It is incredible. If anybody had said it a few years ago no one would have believed it would have been possible for us to regard it with equanimity as we are doing now. German guns are planted on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. Questions were put in the House the other day to the Secretary of State for War as to the origin of those guns. He declined to give the answer. Why? Because it would interfere with the life of the Committee of Non-Intervention. Sir Arthur Godley made it quite clear in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* that ships would be under the fire of those guns if there were a war.

What would have happened in the Great War if Cape Gris Nez and Dover were in the hands of Germans with great guns? It would have stopped the traffic in the Channel. I am not sure whether, if the Germans had marched on to Calais at the beginning and planted great guns at Gris Nez, the Channel would not have been closed. It is much broader than the Straits of Gibraltar. The islands of Spain, which are in the most dangerous position from the point of view of a menace to the routes of France and Britain, are being taken practically in the hands of Italy

and Germany for submarine bases, for aerodromes, for heavy guns—and we are going to prolong the life of the Committee that has made this possible, and which has not only made it possible, but, if it is prolonged for a few days, may make it a certainty. [*Hon. Members*: “Hear, hear!”] I do not know whether that is a “Hear, hear” of approval or not, but I can assure right honorable gentlemen that it is not a matter for smiling. It is the gravest fact with which we are confronted.

LORD APSLEY: The right honorable gentleman will forgive me, but he alleged that honorable members were smiling. Does he know the caliber of the guns referred to? It was dealt with very fully in an answer given last Session. If he does not know the caliber he has no right to make these extremely alarming statements.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: If anyone gets up on behalf of the government and says that great guns planted on each side of the Straits of Gibraltar will not prevent the passage of ships there, I should be glad.

LORD APSLEY: How does the right honorable gentleman know they are great guns?

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: If anybody who is responsible—

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET SIR ROGER KEYES: I will say quite definitely that the possession of great guns on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar will not prevent the passage of ships through the Straits if we retain command of the sea.

MR. LLOYD GORGE: No one in this House is more ready to acknowledge the authority of the honorable and gallant gentleman than I am and to admire the achievements by which he won that authority, but the “if” which he puts in is a very vital one. We had the command of the sea when we tried to get through the Dardanelles, but on both sides there were the guns of Turkey, and I

still venture to say that where great ships failed to get through merchant ships could not go, and with great guns on both sides no amount of protection would be the least use. I venture to put my authority against that of the honorable and gallant gentleman, having been in charge of the protection of our merchant ships during the War.

SIR R. KEYES: As the right honorable gentleman has challenged my statement, I would like to say again quite definitely that guns on either shore of the Straits of Gibraltar could be masked by smoke and other means while ships were being passed through the Straits by night, and probably in the daytime also. If, however, the nation that possesses those guns had command of the sea and were able to patrol the Straits with surface craft, lay mine-fields and keep them maintained, then I grant the right honorable gentleman that it could close the Straits of Gibraltar.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: That satisfies me. I ask any honorable gentleman after that last statement whether that is his idea of our position in the Great War—precarious, dependent upon smoke screens, and our route to India dependent upon that very precarious and rather terrifying prospect. I thank the Admiral for coming to judgment. I gave way to the honorable and gallant gentleman out of courtesy, but my courtesy has been completely rewarded by the last answer which he has given. If it is the object of the government to make the Straits of Gibraltar—our passage to India—so precarious that only under these conditions would we be able to use it, then the Committee of Non-Intervention has been a great success.

The fact of the matter is that we have been retreating from one point to the other before dictators until we can retreat no further. I remember M. Briand telling me a story about M. Clemenceau, who was a great duellist.

He was fighting a duel with M. Deschanel, and the old Tiger was pressing his opponent hard and fiercely, as he would. His opponent was retreating and retreating before him until at last M. Clemenceau put his sword under his arm and said, "Monsieur is leaving us." That seems to be the attitude of the British government. Mussolini with his intrepidity, his dexterity and his audacity, is pressing and pressing with his rapier, and they are retreating, and now they are going to leave the field. It is a serious position. He makes a great pretense that he is fighting the Reds. When the war began the Anarchists for a short time were uppermost. They have been driven out. *The extremists have gone and the Spanish government has become a moderate one.* Even the present King's Speech is something beyond their dreams of reform. But the milder they became the further away they go from the Reds, and the more volunteers seem to pour in and the more guns and the more bombs. He is not fighting the Reds. He is not thinking of them at all. He is fighting the yellows wherever he meets them. What he wants is domination in the Mediterranean and in North Africa, the reconstruction of an empire. In order to do that he has to outmaneuver France and Britain, the two great democratic countries, and he has been fortunate enough to have a government in this country that helps him.