

Spanish Anti-Fascist Movement Slandered by Church Hierarchy

By Felix Morrow

Signed by the Catholic hierarchy of Spain and by Cardinal Goma y Tomas, the Vatican's representative (who could scarcely have acted without the Pope's assent), a vicious attack on the anti-fascist forces, dated July 1, has now been published here (New York Times September 3, and the Catholic press). Its appearance undoubtedly signifies a new and unparalleled campaign by the Catholic Church against the loyalist forces. The task of analysing this document and exposing its downright falsehoods is an elementary duty in the fight against Franco.

The unusually reactionary character of the Spanish Church—a monarchical state institution until 1931—and its flagrant support of every reactionary movement of the last six years has alienated the sympathies of many Catholics—in England, France and America—who have grown up in a church without direct state functions.

Nevertheless, liberal-Catholic sympathy will now, at the least, cease to be articulated, due to direct Vatican support to Franco.

Must Tell Catholic Worker

The case against the Spanish Church is also a damning indictment of the Church everywhere which backs the Spanish hierarchy. The Loyalist Government, anxious to win the sympathy of Catholics abroad, has made the mistake of minimizing the extent to which the clergy and influential laymen of the church have sided with Franco; the Government has paraded such Catholics who support it, to prove that the Church is not an issue in the civil war. But the Church, as a politico-religious institution, with its army of priests, nuns and monks, is on Franco's side; that fact must be underlined, and the damning reasons given, in order to win to the anti-fascist movement every Catholic worker who can be taught to distinguish between his religious beliefs—to which he is entitled—and the reactionary institution and hierarchy who take advantage of his religious beliefs to align him against his fellow-workers.

Church Still Hypocritical

The Spanish Episcopate's letter still does not dare to admit the active role which the Church played in supporting Gil Robles' fascist movement, which laid the basis for Franco's, nor the Church's part in preparing the present civil war. Despite the testimony of numerous newspapermen and other neutral observers, who saw the caches of arms seized in churches and the clergy who manned machine-guns in the church towers, the letter merely enters a blanket denial. But it more than makes up for this claim of "neutrality", by its fervent defense of Franco's rebellion.

Responsibility for civil war is blamed on the republic. "Disregarding causes of minor bearing, it was the law-makers of 1931... which persisted in roughly twisting the path of our history.... The laws which developed its spirit were a violent and continuous attack against the national conscience. The rights of God being abolished and the church persecuted....". The republic is especially indicted for the burning of churches in 1931 and February-June, 1936.

What are the real facts? Every period of ferment under

the monarchy since 1812 has been accompanied by widespread burning of churches and killing of clergy. The hierarchy was simply part of the reactionary nobility. As a result, the peasantry burned churches for the same reason that they burned the manorial houses of the landowners: to symbolize their hatred of those who oppressed them. Burning of churches is an old and deeply rooted phenomenon in Spain. It is a lie, when the clergy letter claims that "hatred of religion came from Russia exported by Orientals" (a touch of anti-Semitism?).

Even Kings Fought Clergy

Even the most Catholic King Carlos III had been compelled to expel the Jesuits in 1767; Joseph Bonaparte had to dissolve the religious orders, and Mendizabel suppressed them in 1835. Even King Alfonso, after the Barcelona revolt of 1909, had to announce that he would "give expression to the public aspirations for the reduction and regulation of the excessive number of religious orders", and would establish religious freedom. Rome, however, changed Alfonso's mind for him. The Church frustrated every attempt to liberalize the regime—the last under the monarchy—in 1923, when it vetoed Premier Alhucemas' proposal to call a constituent Cortes and instead backed Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. To "vote liberal" was inscribed, in the catechism, as "mortal sin" (in 1931).

The Church never ceased its struggle for reaction. The Church burnings of May, 1931, of which the letter complains, were the masses' response to the cardinal-primate's injunction to Catholics to vote against the republicans in the pending elections. The government, far from "surrendering their power to the populace" responded as cruelly as Alfonso, shooting down the workers and declaring martial law until the movement subsided.

Economic Power of the Church

The reactionary role of the Church was intensified by the fact that it was owner of the largest concentration of capital in Spain. To cover up this fact, the hierarchy's letter says: "We are asked from abroad to say whether it is true that the Church in Spain owned one-third of the national territory.... It is an absurd accusation. The Church did not possess more than a few and insignificant portions of land, presbyteries and schools....". This is what is known as formal denial, which covers up the real truth.

The actual claim made concerning the Church's wealth is that it possessed something like a third of the nation's wealth. And this is a fact. Until 1868 the Church possessed more than a third of the land. The land then taken by the short-lived republic was so generously indemnified by the reaction, that the Church was launched on a career in industry and finance. Its monopolistic "agricultural credit" banks were the usurers of the countryside and its city banks the partners of industrial capitalism. Until 1931 the religious orders conducted regular industrial establishments (flour mill, laundries, sewing, clothing, etc.) with unpaid labor (orphans and "students") competing to great ad-

vantage with private industry. The economic power wielded by the Church can be gauged from the estimate, made in the Cortes in 1931, that the Jesuit order alone possessed one-third of the country's wealth. The lying lawyer's answer of the hierarchy cannot hide these facts.

The Church Army

One startling fact the hierarchy dare not mention: the vast size of the Church's personnel. In 1931 there were eighty to ninety thousand in 4,000 religious houses of the orders, and over 25,000 parish priests!

The claim that the "rights of God" were abolished and the "Church persecuted" under the 1931 Constitution is sheer falsehood. The "rights of God" may be a euphemism to describe the separation of church and state, since the hierarchy dare not defend too openly its opposition to a principle which the civilized world has so long accepted. The separation was, unfortunately, incomplete. Even government subventions to the clergy did not end with the official declaration of disestablishment, for the clergy continued to receive payments for education; the ousting of the Church from the schools was delayed.

The clerical orders were not to be molested, unless proven, like any other organization, detrimental to the commonweal, and there was a gentleman's agreement that this would apply only to the Jesuits, who were dissolved in January 1932, having been given plenty of opportunity to transfer most of their wealth.

This was the sum total of the Government's Church program in 1931. The Church has not the flimsiest case for complaint. On the contrary, it is the masses who must complain, since by its leniency toward the Church, the government left its power intact, and the Church used it against the republic and the workers.

Popular Front Leaves Church untouched

Even after the Church's alliance with Gil Robles in the "two black years" of 1931-1935, the Popular Front Government, assuming control of February, 1936, left the Church unscathed. Only its program on education affected the Church: the Popular Front was pledged to "impel with the same rhythm as in the first years of the Republic the creation of primary schools....". But that rhythm had scarcely touched the Church's unwarranted privileges in education.

The clergy repeat Franco's poppycock about Russia and the Spanish Communists "preparing for the breaking out of a revolution which could be predicted nearly at a fixed period," that on February 27 "the Russian Comintern resolved to decree the Spanish Revolution" and on May day, "hundreds of young people clamored openly in Madrid for bombs and pistols, powder and dynamite for the coming revolution," and that 150,000 armed shock troops and 100,000 reserves were prepared.

The truth unfortunately, is that the Stalinists had abandoned the perspective of revolution altogether, and that the working-class as a whole was unarmed and unprepared for the fascist rebellion. As for the circumstantial bit of detail about the youth on May day, it is curious that it now appears for the first time;

Y. P. S. L. Convention Organizes for Work

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tries, and provides for surveys and placement drives by the N.E.C. A number of other resolutions were more briefly considered and referred to the incoming National Committee. The age limit for new members was set at 23.

Workingclass Delegates

The outstanding fact about the convention, other than its directly political significance, was its composition. No other Socialist convention has approached it in its unmistakable demonstration of the existence of a really national movement (and a strong proletarian base) with firm connections with the mass movement. Some facts:

There were 104 delegates, only 29 of whom were from New York City. This proportion is itself unprecedented in the YPSL. It may be compared to the Clarity-Right-Wing rump "convention" in Philadelphia, with about 60 per cent New Yorkers (who represented fewer members than our New York delegation!). It may be compared with the recent convention of the Young Communist League, where over 40% were from N. Y.

From Coast to Coast

The rest of the delegates were from centers of Young Socialist activity from coast to coast. (There were about 25 "out-of-town" delegates at the Clarity consolation party, including about a dozen or more from Philadelphia alone). Several of our California delegations were unable to come because of their inability to get away from their Socialist work; the delegation of ten Californians, however, gave an excellent cross-section of their work, including three seamen, a young Mexican agriculture worker, Fred Martinez, representing a circle recruited entirely from this field, and other mass workers. Delegations came also from Chicago, Akron, Youngstown, Cleveland, Boston, New Haven, Lynn, Syracuse, Ithaca, Rochester, Albany, Reading, Newark, Philadelphia, Louisville, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Eastern Pennsylvania, Indiana Harbor, etc.

There were 65 young workers among the delegates, the large majority active in their trade unions and unemployed organizations. Among them were three seamen; six C.I.O. organizers; three foodworkers; six W.P.A. unionists; two auto workers;

it is not to be found in the conservative press stories of that week! To speak less politely: the reverend fathers have constructed a pack of lies.

The most impudent sections of the letter are those dealing with atrocities. Fantastic claims are made against the loyalists, including a daintily-worded charge of wholesale rape: "The honor of women has not been respected, not even of those consecrated to God." Proofs? None, of course.

But Franco's vast and witnessed record of murdering—the tens of thousands executed in the bull-ring of Badajoz, the bombardment of unarmed people as at Guernica, etc. etc.—of this terrible story the priests blandly say: "Rejecting in the name of justice and of Christian charity every excess which may have been committed by error or by subordinates.... we affirm that there is an enormous and unbridgeable distance between the principles of justice, of its administration and of its application, on the one side and on the other."

Martinez for the agricultural workers; Ed Parker representing a circle made up entirely of young steel workers in the Chicago area; representatives also of the electrical and radio field; pocketbook workers; stenographers unions; truckdrivers, and others. Two delegates, out on bail, were facing jail sentences as a result of class-struggle activity—Ed. Parker indicted for inciting to riot and a comrade from California for beating up a scab.

Morale High

Nothing could exceed the unbounded enthusiasm and spirit of the delegates. On Thursday morning, while waiting for the NEC meeting to begin, the hall-full of delegates put on a spontaneous amateur show, with original and topical songs and imitations.

Comrade Cannon's address at the left wing conference preceding the convention met with a resounding reception. At the moment when the Clarityites shambled out of the hall, enthusiasm reached its height. Every last delegate at the completion of the convention, inspired, went back to his locality to build a mass League on the basis laid down by the convention.

Erber Re-Elected

By unanimous vote of the convention, Ernest Erber of Chicago was re-elected National Chairman. The new National Executive Committee was voted by acclamation to stand as follows:

Frank Demby, Hal Draper, Eleanor Fine, Manny Garrett, Anne Kracik, Oscar Schoenfeld, (New York); Yetta Barsh, Irving Bern, Nate Gould, (Chicago); Paula Aragon, Frank Ricco, Howard Rosen, Ray Sparrow (Calif.); Tarmo Hannula (Mass.); Al Lowenthal (Newark); Bob Stiler (Ohio); Alex Wolloid (Phila.) The alternates are: Ben Alexander (Upstate N. Y.); Bill Brody (Minn.); Irving Howe (New York); Fred Martinez (Calif.); Saul Mendelson (Newark); Paul Picquet (Chicago); Les Reid (Youngstown, Ohio).

The national officers will be, in addition to National Chairman Erber: National Secretary—Hal Draper; National Organizer—Nate Gould, Editor of the official organ of the League—Manny Garrett; National Student Director—Anne Kracik; Educational Director—Frank Demby. A National

Damning Evidence

Yet the priests have blundered. For, imbedded in their letter, is a damning admission of Franco's mass executions of prisoners and workers. It is introduced by the priests, boasting, to prove that atheism is not deep-rooted. Actually it proves that religious, Catholic workers, fought against the fascist rebellion. "When they were dying under the sactions of the law, our Communists have been reconciled in their vast majority to the God of their fathers. In Majorca, only 2 per cent have died impenitent in the southern regions no more than 20%; and in the north they do not reach, perhaps, 10%." After this testimony from their own mouths, what becomes of their drivel about "hatred of religion came from Russia"?

The letter of the Spanish Episcopate is contemptible in its hypocrisy, crooked in its facts, revolting in its social outlook. I have touched upon only a few of its more important falsehoods. These must be pointed out to Catholic workers.