

"Anti-Fascist" Capitalists Gave Whole Northern Front to Franco

The "anti-fascist" bourgeoisie has betrayed all of Northern Spain to Franco. The story of his treachery is a terrible lesson in the fatal role of the People's Front.

Bilbao and the industrial towns and iron and coal mines surrounding it constituted a concentrated industrial area second only to Catalonia. For war purposes, it was even superior to the Catalan area, which had to build its metallurgical plants up out of nothing when the civil war began. Bilbao should have become the center of Spain's greatest munitions source. From this material base, the northern armies should have driven sharply south toward Burgos and east against Navarre (heart of the fascist movement), to effect a junction with the Aragon front troops. The strategy dictated was of the most elementary kind.

The Basque capitalists, however, were the masters in the Biscayan region. As an English sphere of influence for centuries, it had no enthusiasm for joining Franco and his Italo-German allies. Neither, however, had the Basque bourgeoisie any intention of fighting to the death against Franco. Thanks to the aid of the Socialist and Communist parties, the Basque capitalists had not had their factories seized by the workers after July 19, 1936. But they had no guarantee that a loyalist victory over Franco would not be followed by seizure of their factories also.

Loss of San Sebastian

Its class interests determined the military conduct of the Basque regional government. This was seen as early as mid-September, 1936, when the fascists advanced on San Sebastian. Before the attack was well launched, the city was surrendered. Before the Basques retreated, they drove out of the city the CNT militiamen who wanted to destroy factory equipment and other useful materials to prevent them from falling into the hands of the fascists. As a further precaution, fifty armed Basque guards were left behind to protect the buildings. Thus the city was delivered intact to Franco. The bourgeoisie reasoned: destroyed property is gone forever; but if we eventually make peace with Franco, he may give us back our property.

When this happened, I wrote, on September 22, 1936, "The northern front has been betrayed." The anarchist ministers have since revealed that this was the opinion in the Caballero cabinet. What delayed the completion of outright betrayal for six months, however, was the stupidity of Franco's officers who took over San Sebastian. The fifty guards left behind to protect the buildings were shot. Bourgeois proprietors who had remained behind to make their peace with Franco were imprisoned, some of them executed. The inhabitants were terrorized. The Basque front stiffened—for a little while.

Seek Armistice

By December, however, the Basque government was again feeling its way to an armistice. While Madrid still rejected all negotiations for exchange of prisoners, the Basque negotiated such an agreement and, in reporting this, Augur, the "unofficial" voice of the British Foreign Office said: "The British have been working to promote local armistices between the rebels and loyalists. The offer of the Basque

Basque Government, Tool of Anglo-French Imperialists, Gave Up Cities Intact, Then Tried To Blame Their Treachery On Others

By Felix Morrow

government at Bilbao to conclude a Christmas truce was directly due to discreet intervention by British agents who hope this may lead to a complete suspension of hostilities" (New York Times, December 17, 1936). Nothing of this of course appeared in the loyalist press, where the censorship was in full blast.

Suppress Workers

The Basque bourgeoisie simply had no basic stake in fighting fascism. If the struggle involved serious sacrifice, they were ready to withdraw. One of the factors which gave them pause, however, was the growing CNT movement in this region. Whereupon the Stalinists and right wing socialists, sitting in the regional government with the bourgeoisie (the CNT had been dropped when the Defense Junta of September, 1936 gave way to the government), facilitated the betrayal. On the flimsiest pretext imaginable—the Basque government had invited the CNT militiamen to join in celebrating Easter Week and the CNT Regional Committee and press had indignantly denounced the religious ceremonial—the whole regional committee and the editorial staff of CNT del Norte were imprisoned on March 26, and the printing presses turned over to the Stalinists!

Role of Central Government

The loyalist government was of course aware of the danger, aware of Bilbao's failure to transform her plants for munitions purposes, aware of the criminal inactivity of the Basque front which enabled Mola to shift his troops southward to join the encirclement of Madrid. Why did the government do nothing about it? Because there was only one way to save the northern front: by confronting the Basque

bourgeoisie with a powerful united front of the proletarian forces in the region, ready to take power if the bourgeoisie faltered, and to prepare for this by ideological criticism of the Basque capitalists. That way, however, was alien to this government of reformists, Stalinists and bourgeoisie which, above all, feared to arouse the masses to political initiative.

As a government pledged to class collaboration even more completely than Caballero's, the Negrin government did nothing to counter the more and more brazen sabotage of the Basque bourgeoisie. This front was almost inactive, throughout the period from November 1936 to May, 1937, when the fascists moved to take it over altogether. The March coup against the CNT was followed by systematic repression of the workers, with public meetings prohibited. Thus the one force which might have prevented betrayal was crushed by the bourgeois-Stalinist bloc.

Bilbao Betrayed

The loss of Bilbao was an open act of treachery. "Not even the insurgent heavy guns," wrote the New York Times correspondent, "could have destroyed some of these underground fortifications, with their three armored concrete tiers and block houses spaced about three miles apart all the way to the Biscay coast. The Insurgents themselves say that the 'iron ring' of fortifications would never have been taken had not the Basques been outmaneuvered." "Outmaneuvered," however was a fascist euphemism for betrayal. This fact was admitted by the Basque governmental delegation in Paris, which put the blame on an engineer in charge of building fortifications, who had fled to Franco with the plans. But the engineer had fled months before. Why was not the

intervening period utilized to redesign the fortifications? But the alibi was a subterfuge. For, as any tyro in military science knew, mere possession of plans could not have solved the fascist problem of breaking through the fortifications. They were let through the iron ring.

It is an elementary axiom of military science that no large city can be captured until its massive buildings have been razed to the point where they offer no further protection to beleaguered troops. But the bourgeoisie did not wait for the shelling of Bilbao at all! On June 19, they surrendered Bilbao as they had San Sebastian. The London Times (June 21) reported that Assault and Civil Guards and regular Basque troops had previously driven out the Asturian militiamen and prevented a last-ditch defense.

Santander Falls

CNT and UGT press attempts to sound the alarm after Bilbao's fall were cut to ribbons by the censorship. The Basque general staff was permitted to remain in command of the retreating troops. When, within a few weeks, the fascists began a second offensive, the industrial town of Reinosa, key to Santander's defense collapsed, and once again the Basque made no attempt to defend the city itself.

Basque Alibi

The Basque officials fled on a British warship. At Bayonne, they issued an amazing statement, part of which we quote:

"In a terrain composed of great mountains and deep gorges, Franco's troops advanced with incomprehensible velocity.... This was an impossible or very difficult achievement and proves that the accidents of terrain were not

utilized for resisting Franco's army.... The Santander army's organization was undone from the moment the offensive began. Neither communications nor the sanitary services functioned.... Neither the general staff nor that of the Army of the North controlled the offensive at any moment.... Reinosa was surrendered to the enemy without time for evacuating the population. The artillery factory fell into the hands of the rebels with its shops for naval construction almost intact, including 38 batteries of artillery.

"...the Basque army realized that it had been the victim of treachery.... cannot explain in any reasonable way the fact that a terrain of eighty kilometres was lost in eight days...." Somebody committed treachery, but not we, was the sum and substance of this amazing document. But who, knowing anything of the CNT and Asturian militiamen, would imagine that they had not stood at their posts ready to fight to the death? On the other hand, the Basques could not name a battle in which they stood up to the last. The Basque document's alibi was threadbare. The bourgeoisie had been party to the treachery.

Others Implicated

That others were also treacherous, we are ready to concede to the Basque capitalists. As in Bilbao, so in Santander, yesterday's "loyal" Assault and Civil Guards were patrolling the streets, disarming Asturian militiamen, etc., before the fascists had even arrived. These police were directly under the Stalinist, Moron, director-general of police of Spain, who had dissolved the councils of anti-fascist guards, organized for cleansing the police of dubious elements. The treachery also involves that Supreme War Council, the "real functioning" of which had been one of the Stalinist demands which, they said, could only be satisfied by Negrin's cabinet. More, what of the two Stalinist ministers in the Basque government, who had fled from Bilbao even before their

(Continued on Page 8)

A POPULAR HANDBOOK OF THE TACTICS AND STRATEGY OF REVOLUTION! A CRUSHING INDICTMENT OF THE STALIN FRAME-UP REGIME!

They say:

"He marshals his evidence and argument with such mastery and cumulative force that the reader will probably regard this testimony not so much as a defense as an indictment. It is an indictment more powerful than any penned by Zola during the Dreyfus affair."

Sidney Hook, in the
New York Herald-Tribune

"This book is most readable. It contains Trotsky's final speech of summation which will, most likely, go down in history as one of the greatest indictments of all time. It contains Trotsky's record of his life, his relationship with Lenin, with Stalin and the defendants at the trial, his story of the oppositional fight with Stalin. And it contains a closely reasoned and brilliant analysis of every aspect of the Moscow trials."

—James T. Farrell, in the
Saturday Review of Literature.

"The Case Of Leon Trotsky"

The Verbatim Record of the Hearings of the Dewey
Commission in Mexico City

617 Pages

SPECIAL PRICE DURING THIS CAMPAIGN SALE: \$1.50

The Labor Book Shop

Rush all orders to

28 EAST 12th Street

New York, N. Y.