

Spain at Gettysburg

Returning from the front to America, the author sees the civil war at a critical stage, and calls for arms for the government

By Gil Green

IT would be the height of wishful thinking to deny the gravity of the present danger confronting the Madrid government. Madrid is surrounded on three sides. Only the most heroic sacrifices have thus far kept the fascists from completing the circle. And yet, despite this situation, it would in our opinion be just as wrong to fall prey to the exaggerated boasts of Franco; to believe that the war is drawing to a rapid conclusion, and that the defeat of the republican forces is inevitable.

The Spanish Civil War will continue for many months. Even if the fascists succeed in completely surrounding Madrid and maintaining a siege, this still does not mean all is lost. It does not even mean that Madrid must fall, as it is no simple matter to take an armed fortified city of the size and population of Madrid. It is extremely important to bear this in mind, because with the passing of every week the anti-fascist forces become stronger, the fascist weaker. The time element is working in favor of the Spanish people and their government.

In order to make this clear it is necessary to deal with certain factors that are usually not taken into consideration by those who watch the progress of the civil war—factors which may yet become the determining ones.

First, it must be remembered that when the military clique started its putsch on July 17, this action was not a result of snap judgment. It was a culmination of some two years of preparation. Arms had been stored at safe places; fortifications had been built at strategic points; agreements with foreign powers were made in advance; and the leading personnel in the army was shifted in accordance with a preconceived plan. As a result of this, the vast bulk of the army, as well as most of the ammunition and arms, went to the fascist adventurers.

Thus the government had only a few experienced troops with which to defend itself. It had to depend on the inexperienced masses—and primarily the workers—to stop the fascists. To what extent this has been true is too little known in this country. A few weeks ago, while in Spain, I spent one day at the Somosierra front in the Guadarrama Mountains, where I held a discussion with General Galan, in charge of that front. He said that in the first few weeks of fighting, when Mola and his troops were breaking through the mountain passes, the workers of Madrid, most of them without arms, poured into the passes and corked them up with their own bodies. The first barricades from which the people fought were barricades of human bodies.

With the passing of the weeks of civil war,

the government has slowly but surely been hammering into shape its own armed forces. These are still inexperienced and poorly armed, yet more disciplined and better trained than they were a month ago. Nor was the creation of a new people's army an easy task. Certain internal dissensions confronted the anti-fascist forces when they tried to accomplish this. Many Anarchist leaders and their followers fought against the creation of a disciplined army with a unified command. This lack of a unified command more than any other reason explained the weakness of the government when it came to military strategy and the necessity to utilize completely all the resources of the nation for one single plan of defense.

This is being changed, however. In the fire of civil war, the masses are fast learning the need for discipline and unity. Only a few days ago the popular militia was turned into a real people's army: discipline was instituted, the death penalty for desertion and disobe-

dience decreed, and a unified centralized command established.

A second factor of no small importance is the question of the rear. The government has in its hand those sections of the country that are most highly developed industrially. The first exigencies of civil war forced large sections of workers to leave their shops, mines, or factories for the battlefields. Furthermore, many of the owners of the largest plants attempted to sabotage production and in this manner hindered the defense of the Republic. Later, when these industries were taken over by the government, another problem arose; the workers' committees could not learn overnight how to operate them properly.

Only when the Caballero cabinet came into office did the government start giving real attention to the rear with the result that this problem is gradually being solved. Its final solution will go a long way in helping to overcome the general arms shortage.

If the above are factors aiding the govern-



Aimé

"We'll teach 'em to say we use bullets, not ballots!"

ment forces, what does time have in store for the fascists? First, they have little or no mass base among the Spanish people. The Spanish masses, having tasted the bitter fruit of fascism before, refuse to bite again. This holds not alone for the workers, but for the broad masses of peasantry and middle classes. That is why Franco dare not and cannot create an army of Spaniards. At the moment his army is made up nearly in its entirety of Moroccans and Foreign Legionnaires. Thus the war in Spain assumes more and more the character of a foreign invasion: foreign troops financed, armed, and equipped by Italian and German fascism.

But if the Moroccan troops have to date been Franco's greatest single asset, they can easily become his greatest liability. The very use of Moorish troops helps to unify the masses of Spanish people against the invaders. Furthermore, these Moroccans are not accustomed to a cold climate, and in the coming weeks will not have a pleasant time of it on the mountain ranges surrounding Madrid. Last but not least, it must be remembered that the fascist forces, although highly trained, are relatively small, and that Franco has nearly exhausted his supply of reliable mercenary troops in Morocco. Once he is forced to use other than trained mercenary troops, his bullets and bayonets may find other targets than those for which they were intended.

This internal problem is one of the factors which spurs Franco in his attempt to take

Madrid at all costs and in the shortest possible time. The second factor is the situation on the other fronts. These are none too good for him.

In the Guadarrama Mountains the fighting has reached a stalemate. At the same time the battle for Oviedo is raging back and forth. When the last fascist nests are destroyed in Oviedo, the entire Asturian province will be in the hands of the government. This will enable the Asturian miners, the best fighters in all of Spain, to turn southward. Presently these excellent fighters can be pressing Mola's rear, forcing him to fight on two fronts.

On the Saragossa-Huesca front the fighting has also resulted in a stalemate which has lasted for weeks. The fascists, while holding Saragossa and Huesca, are decidedly on the defensive, and it is only a matter of time before the anti-fascist forces of Barcelona and Catalonia break through.

The province of Valencia has just started to build a conscript army. A large armed force moving from this direction towards Madrid can also force Franco to fight on two fronts, and in this manner make it possible for the Madrid defenders to find his most vulnerable points for attack.

That is why Franco, out of sheer desperation, must take Madrid and must take it rapidly, if he is to win the war. The longer Madrid holds out, the more desperate will his position become and the more difficult will it be for him to maintain his long line of com-

munications which already extends some two hundred miles south. Cut off from his base of supplies by guerrilla bands, his plight would certainly not be enviable.

SPAIN FACES ITS GETTYSBURG. If the masses of the world come to its defense with every form of material aid, the Spanish toilers will win their victory over fascism. The question before every class-conscious worker and intellectual, before every lover of liberty and freedom, is to come to the aid of the Spanish people. They need arms, medical supplies, food, and clothing. They need these desperately. We saw boys and girls fighting in the bitter cold of the Guadarrama Mountains wearing rope sandals as shoes and only light overalls to cover their bodies.

A mass movement must be created to permit the shipment of arms to the Spanish government. As the elected government of the Spanish people, as the recognized government of Spain, there is no reason why the Washington administration should deny it the right to trade freely with the United States.

The outcome of the Spanish struggle depends greatly upon the masses of the world and especially upon those of us who live in democratic countries such as the United States. The Spanish people need our help. To defend Spanish democracy is to defend the interests of the toilers of the world, is to give a decisive blow to world fascism.

We must not fail!



"It's a tough road, doggie."