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**"YOUR SONS AND STRANGERS":
LESSER-KNOWN BRITISH WRITERS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR**

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para la obtención del Grado de "Doctor"

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***"Your sons
and Strangers"***

The quotation "your sons and strangers" is from the Tom Wintringham poem 'Monument' (August 1937): "Your blood and ours was mingled, Huesca to Malaga;/ earth to which your sons and strangers/ Gave up the same breath." (Cunningham, 1980: pp. 304-7, ll. 25-7)

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AUTHOR: Paul Joseph Melia

ABSTRACT

Ralph Fox, Christopher Caudwell, John Cornford, Ralph Bates, Esmond Romilly, Julian Bell and Tom Wintringham were politically motivated Britons who felt compelled to help Spain's effort to combat Fascism. Apart from Julian Bell they were all Marxists who, at least in their published writing, hoped for a Communist revolution and expressed decidedly orthodox Communist opinions. They were dismissive of left-wing alternatives and portrayed the Soviet Union as evidence of the correctness of Marx's philosophy.

Spanish political life in the early to mid-1930s was much more turbulent than in Britain, as shown in the novels of Ralph Bates, an *émigré* in Spain, and Ramon J. Sender. Verbal and physical conflict was shown to be possible at any time, while groups like the Communists and Anarchists had an influence in Spain that did not exist in Britain. The political and social diversity and frequent incompatibility that Bates, Sender and other Spanish writers around this time depicted make the Civil War look inevitable.

In this dissertation I also look at the compulsion these writers felt to risk their lives in Spain, which remains somewhat enigmatic. The threat of Fascism, and in particular of Fascism menacing Britain, was probably enough to make these Marxists appreciate the relative benefits of a bourgeois democracy. Their experiences of the war suggest that they were not prepared or probably even psychologically suitable for enduring such an ordeal, and the fact that they were overseas under foreign command added to their difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

In Europe the 1930s was a time of phenomenal political and cultural energy. Many believe its defining moment was in the Spanish Civil War. Ralph Fox, Christopher Caudwell, Ralph Bates, Tom Wintringham, Julian Bell, Esmond Romilly and John Cornford all participated in the war due to a profound conviction that the future of the continent was in danger, and that it was their duty to put their lives at risk in its defence.

Any study of their writing and beliefs is compelled to address historical and philosophical issues. Their era, like our own, was marked by a global economic crisis which many countries tackled by cutting government expenditure, resulting in increased levels of hardship for millions of Europeans who already had difficult lives. However, a significant difference was the political response, which, before the Second World War, saw a dramatic bifurcation to the extremes, and which led to increased interest in Marxism across Europe (following the inauguration of a Communist government in Russia) and the growing influence of parties of the extreme Right, most manifest with the Fascist governments in Germany and Italy.

To consider these writers, active at a time when there was a popular and academic rush to embrace revolutionary politics throughout the continent, demands a recognition of the contemporary political environment: it would be absurd to portray them as if they were isolated from the economic and political circumstances of their time. Indeed, much of what the writers studied in this dissertation produced, whether of political philosophy, fiction or poetry, was in the form of a direct response to developing situations, coeval events and incidents from the recent past, and, in combination with their provocative beliefs, their published work was so characteristic of this era it is difficult to imagine it in another period. The overriding objective of those texts was to promote a specifically radical left-wing viewpoint, with the consequence that they predicted the inevitable collapse of Capitalism and the concomitant ascendancy of Socialism.

As the subject of this dissertation is writers from Britain who went to fight or help the war effort in Spain, the (relevant) history of those two nations is prerequisite. Inevitably, given their political views, they took a profound interest in momentous events and the quotidian welfare of other countries, especially the Soviet Union. Therefore, the concentration of this study is on these three nations (Britain and the Soviet Union in Part One and Spain in Part Two), while acknowledging the influence (whether perceived as positive or negative) of other countries within and outside Europe.

All but one of the writers was an avowed Marxist. However, Julian Bell, while not committed to any left-wing party or dogma, was as determinedly against the right-wing forces that then, to varying degrees and in varying styles, dominated European governmental life. As Marxists, these Britons were representative of the significant number of young adults who had adopted what, at the time, were the very modern Communist¹ tenets as their credo and hope for a better future. The extent of their public confidence was well illustrated in Ralph Fox's assurance that a Soviet Socialist Republic of Britain was imminent,

to which Ireland will probably join itself voluntarily when socialism is victorious there also. The four nations, their energies released, working in complete harmony, will be able to perform miracles of creative work that in a few years will put to shame the blundering performances of the imperialist clique which at present rules.
(Fox, 1935: p. 146)

While it is possible to argue that Fox was simply asserting a wish in the hope it would have an effect, in committing his prediction to print, he also left himself open to ridicule if the future was very different. More importantly, his assurance is absolutely consistent with the sentiments of a civilian who was prepared to risk his life in a foreign war for an analogous political cause.

This was, of course, in marked contrast to the attitudes of many of their parents' generation, particularly those who wished to protect the establishment from what they perceived to be a left-wing threat. The motives and fears of the older generation (roughly middle-aged in comparison to the young adults who are the subject of this study) were heterogeneous. Conservative politicians and supporters, including some within government, wanted to protect economic interests (which included the Empire) and often admired, whether grudgingly or wholeheartedly, Fascism as it existed in

¹ For example, the British Communist Party (CPGB) was founded in 1920.

Germany and Italy. Those from Julian Bell's circle, now known as the Bloomsbury Group, held liberal values, but through their unequivocal pacifism shared one ambition with those in the British government, that of avoiding military conflict. To the Communists both the liberal and conservative views were anathema, and the younger generation's rejection of pacifism bred mutual incomprehension.

It is fundamental to consider what these followers of Marxism thought it had to offer and to what extent they accepted its doctrine without criticism (always bearing in mind that when Romilly and Cornford first called themselves Communist during the early 1930s they were still at school). There were, of course, notable Marxist writers in other European countries in this decade, so that useful comparisons can be made between the declarations of the British writers and those of coeval Marxist thinkers such as Brecht, Trotsky and Benjamin, to see if the British counterparts showed a similar degree of flexibility of thought and felt able to question Marxist doctrine.

Finally, their attitudes to the Soviet Union, the only government attempting to practice Communism (nominally at least) at the time, provides a clear illustration, not just of the degree of their devotion to or detachment from this political system, but also of their views of international politics (before July 1936). It was not necessary to visit the Soviet Union (which may well have been courtesy of a government guided tour anyway) as there were accounts published, both as articles and books. For example, H. G. Wells (in 1920) and Maurice Hindus (in 1931) wrote detailed and balanced (at least to the extent they both included positive and negative aspects of what they witnessed) descriptions of social and political realities in the USSR, sufficient that anyone interested could have ascertained that the country was both far from a threat and a long way from a socio-economic miracle. Of these British Communists, only Fox and Wintringham visited Moscow, so the others were reliant on a combination of the reports of others and their own faith in inevitable Soviet success.

The second part of this study is about Spain, but not exclusively from a British perspective. To consider Spain in any era entails recognition of Spanish views: the foreigners' texts could plausibly reveal more about the writers than they do about their topic. In conjunction with indigenous writing it is possible to see sometimes surprising similarity of theme and, especially in stories and poems, more or less subtle differences in the authors' approaches to those subjects. Of these seven British writers, only three paid much attention to Spain before the war, in Ralph Bates' case because he had been living in Spain for several years. As someone who was politically active in the country

his pre-war and wartime fiction, particularly the novels *Lean Men* and *The Olive Field*, portray a dialectical crisis in Spanish politics in the 1930s. Indeed, the nature of the society, as seen by Bates, made the civil war look close to unavoidable.

Trotsky provided a very interesting alternative Marxist view, as he wrote quite extensively on the political situation in Spain from 1931 to 1939, and his forthright opinions are interesting to compare to those of Ralph Fox and John Cornford. Trotsky's close interest in Spain's political developments and its immediate destiny provides a valuable, if partial, commentary on the prologue to the war and indicates that the nation's welfare was seen by some as representative of many other nations.

As I did not believe it was legitimate simply to leave the depiction of Spain with the English and one Russian, I have attempted to analyse some similarities and differences of theme and treatment, especially between Bates and a selection of those who were Spanish contemporaries or immediate predecessors. The dominant figure, both in his work and to much of his generation of writers in Spain, is Ramon J. Sender, in the early 1930s an Anarchist, and then a Communist. The Sender novel that I concentrated on in this part is *Siete Domingos Rojos (Seven Red Sundays)*, which portrays a world with a remarkable resemblance to that of Bates' pre-war novels. Naturally, there are easy explanations for their correspondence – the authors' (eventually) similar political views and experiences, and that a state of volatility is a more interesting basis for a story – but clearly what is also implicit is that Spain at the time really was enduring tempestuous confrontations. Otherwise, the poets of the 'Generation of 1927' and the fiction writers of the 'Generation of 1898' clearly merited attention because of their primacy in Spanish literature at the time and the pertinence of their subject matter.

There are signs that aspects of recent Spanish literature influenced Bates' fiction set in Spain. While it is often not possible to prove a direct causal link – as opposed to either a shared feature being symptomatic of a trait in Spanish culture, or that the Spanish writer's influence in a particular respect had been absorbed into Spanish discourse – the similarity where it exists is significant in showing that Bates was culturally affected by his new home. These attitudes were sometimes manifest in ways that were certainly not congruent with his Marxist beliefs or his homologues in Spain (for example, his evident respect for Spanish aristocracy, and his antipathy for gypsies, though he viewed the latter as being generically oppressed).

Inevitably, the third and final part concentrates on experiences of the war. This involves assessing the writers' reasons for participating and the extent to which they acted autonomously or, for example, as the result of an anti-fascist *zeitgeist*. At any given time people who are committed to politics and are interested in the welfare of people in other countries have a theoretical reason for fighting overseas, but rarely feel sufficiently motivated to do so. The fact that hundreds from the same generation felt compelled to act, though generally they had had no military experience, begs the question as to why. One should be aware that the reasons may ultimately have been somewhat mysterious to the person concerned, even when a clear and logical justification was given.

The written accounts of their experiences in the war – of Spain, of being a soldier or, in Julian Bell's case, of being an ambulance driver – have one practical problem as regards Ralph Fox, Christopher Caudwell, John Cornford and Julian Bell: the texts are limited to a few contemporaneous letters, diary entries and poems. However, the others published their own versions of their experiences, Esmond Romilly with *Boadilla*, Tom Wintringham with *English Captain* and Ramon J. Sender provided a Spanish account of fighting for the government in *Contraataque* (translated as *War in Spain*). Ralph Bates edited the first eight issues of a journal for the Republican soldiers (*Volunteer for Liberty*) and wrote a collection of short stories (*Sirocco*) that either have relevance to the origins of the war, or describe a variety of effects it had, mostly on the local population.

None of the recurring themes of the British accounts were surprising. There were the strange and novel trials of serving in an army overseas that was not very well organized, which led to boredom, having to cope with poor equipment, confused and confusing orders, and brooding on the prospect of death or deformity. The multinational composition of the force resulted in communication problems and dogmatic generalizations about the capabilities and weaknesses of entire nationalities. The command structure also led to conflicts of interest, particularly due to the fact that from autumn 1936 two countries were effectively running the Loyalists' military strategy.

The Soviet Union's impact on the war and the Spanish cause remains a controversial subject, while these writers were unavoidably affected by the Soviets' presence, and so I believe it deserves some analysis in this study. Any retrospective study of these men's experiences as Communists putting their lives at risk while operating in a regime that was beholden to Moscow, requires more than an

acknowledgement of the Soviets' multifarious role in the war. However, their activities were so complex and involved that anything like a complete assessment could potentially overwhelm the rest of Part Three. Therefore, I have selected examples of some of their activities and attitudes to the war in Spain which, I believe, help to illustrate the atmosphere in the Republican forces and the pressures Marxists must have felt to choose between remaining loyal or abandoning their political beliefs.

A balanced assessment of the Soviets' role would have to recognize the invaluable nature of their support of the Spanish fight against Fascism (especially because of the Non-Intervention Agreement which allowed others to relinquish their duty to help a fellow democratic government under threat), and that the challenges they faced (such as the physical distance between Moscow and Madrid) were almost insuperable. Also, though, their preoccupation with traitors and treasonous activity was a skewed perception of a problem that existed, but in quite a different form to the Soviet version. While it is very interesting to see the hegemonic power the concept of treachery appears to have had over Soviet agents and their use of language to explain or justify their perceptions, the ruthless way in which they attempted to defeat it would have been more of a concern at the time and caused many to question their loyalty to the Communist Party (Ralph Bates abandoned Communism after the war, but Tom Wintringham remained faithful until his death). In particular, the Soviets' handling of the anti-Stalinist organization, the POUM, has become notorious for its combination of deceit and callousness. It exemplifies how the Soviets were able to conjure illusions, which in this case convinced few if any Spaniards, and on that basis act with terrifying dedication.

The main sources for an insight into the Soviets' part in the Spanish Civil War are Daniel Kowalsky's *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* and Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov's *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*. Both commentaries make use of once secret translated Soviet documents which were sent between operatives in Spain and their masters in Moscow (sometimes Stalin), and so provide a fascinating insight into their rationale at the time.

Details of battles and other strictly military matters from this war already have a copious literature and, unless relevant to a specific incident, would be extraneous to this study. The texts under review divide between those which report and give opinions on actual events, and those that are ostensibly fictional, though they may well contain allusions to real events and individuals, or otherwise aim to represent what the author

believed to have been essential to understanding those people at the time. They are distinguishable by the use of past tenses to describe historical writing and present tenses for invented stories and poems: in principle at least, the fictional events were no more real when they were written than they are now.

PART ONE: MARXISM

CHAPTER ONE: MARXIST BELIEF

I. 1. 1 BACKGROUND

In the early 1930s British Communist Party members like Ralph Fox² and Christopher Caudwell³ described the world in a starkly Manichean manner. Their outlook could be summarized as:

<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>
Proletariat	Bourgeoisie
Revolution	Status quo
Russian Empire	British Empire
Marx	Trotsky
Internationalism	Nationalism
Proletarian dictatorship	(Capitalist) Democracy
Marxist hegemony	Theoretical multiplicity
Engels	J. M. Keynes
Lenin	Ramsay MacDonald
British Communist Party	British Labour Party
Stalin	F. D. Roosevelt
Communism	Religion
Discipline	Anarchy
Collectivism	Individualism

² Ralph Fox (1900-1936) was a committed left-wing writer and a member of the CPGB (Communist Party of Great Britain) who visited the Soviet Union in 1920 and graduated from Oxford University in 1922. (Celada, 2009: pp. 110-1) As well as writing directly about Marxism he wrote, for example, about the British Empire, the threat of Fascism, and on literary theory.

³ Christopher Caudwell (1907-1937) wrote detective fiction (using his original name Christopher St. John Sprigg), works on Marxist philosophy, and more generally about artistic and scientific theory (including engineering and psycho-analysis). He joined the CPGB in 1935 and moved to a working-class area of London (Poplar) because of his political beliefs. (Celada, 2009: pp. 105-7) He has remained quite an influential figure for left-wing writers (for example, see Thompson, 1977).



Fig. 1. Ralph Fox.
(<http://www.albavolunteer.org/2010/11/memorial-to-ralph-fox-british-iber-moved/>)

Naturally, this simplified schema needs justification; but, more importantly, if it is seen to be proven then it begs the question as to why these views were so absolute. Taking such a stance indeed suggests that, among other reasons, it is the result of a siege mentality whereby Communism, being vilified by many people of influence, had to be presented by its supporters (at least in Britain) in an unassailable and easily understood form.

I. 1. 2 PRESSURE TO CONFORM

A very good indication of the pressure to be orthodox that must have existed for Communist party members (especially published writers) is provided by a review of Ralph Fox's biography of Lenin.⁴ The book, *Lenin: A Biography*, is almost exactly what could be expected from a comrade writing ten years after the leader's death: as a young adult Lenin is said to have been constantly fighting for the cause of the poor; had the revelatory experience of reading Marx and Engels, from which he "drew out the very essence of the teaching"; was imprisoned and exiled for his political work; and he was vehemently intolerant of the older more liberal "middle-class philistinism" (for example, the Fabianism of Sidney Webb), and of "a castrated, vulgarised, Sunday-school Marxism" in Russia. (Fox, 1934: pp. 25-32, 55-61, and 62-3) However, to Harry Pollitt (General Secretary of the CPGB from 1929-1956) its "petty bourgeois argumentation" would mean it "will be used by our enemies. It will bring a great deal of confusion into the ranks of the party and the workers." The reasons included Fox simply denying that Lenin acted as a German spy, "instead of showing the reader with anger and disgust all this vile, crude slander"; that according to Fox "Lenin 'constantly made mistakes' with regard to his judgment [sic.] of people surrounding him"; and "there is no sharp word with regard to Trotsky, but many words of praise.

⁴ Because I think the rather lengthy review and Fox's response give such a vivid idea of the atmosphere in British Communist Party circles at the time I have included transcripts of both in the Appendix.

This is alongside ‘mistakes’ by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.” (Fox papers, ‘On Ralph Fox’s work “Biography of Lenin”’ [Sept. 1933]: pp. 1-6)

It is no wonder that Fox responded. He countered, with some justification, that his book contained all that Pollitt had said it lacked: it was utterly orthodox. The pioneers were portrayed as infallible – “nowhere in the book is there even a hint that Marx, Engels or Lenin made any political mistakes” – while English comrades “think Trotsky is attacked on every possible occasion.” (Fox papers, ‘Reply to the criticism of my book “Lenin”’) It looks likely the criticism did not originate in London. Fox remarked that he had not been told “that serious criticisms were pending from comrades in Moscow” after he had sent the proofs there. As he did not hear of any complaints for two months he presumed Moscow had no objections to its publication. (Fox papers, ‘Reply to the criticism of my book “Lenin”’) It is apparent that he must have felt anxious about the book’s reception and its perceived diversion from an official version of

events, and his anxiety is easy to appreciate.

Fox’s book is indeed particularly revealing in its depiction of the main figures, and they make Pollitt’s criticisms all the more astonishing. Besides the eponymous leader, Stalin’s appearances show perception, loyalty in the face of a hostile (if misinformed) consensus, and a true understanding of Marxism. For



example, in 1917 “Stalin was among the first to rally the great weight of his authority behind the theses presented by Lenin”; it is claimed that Stalin probably saved Lenin’s life by convincing him not to stand trial in July 1917; and at a meeting to discuss war against Germany “Trotsky’s viewpoint gradually gathered a majority, only three of the more prominent leaders of the party supporting Lenin – Stalin, Sokolnikov and Zinoviev.” (Fox, 1934: p. 228, 237, and 269) Trotsky is mentioned in contrast to Stalin a few times, as with a secret meeting in 1919 when, as head of the military, “Trotsky found it better to be absent [...while] Lenin began to rely chiefly on Stalin in military questions”. Trotsky was not invariably described by Fox in a pejorative way⁵ (if he had

⁵ His oratory, notably in comparison to Lenin, was lauded. See p. 248, and 257.

no redeeming qualities how could his importance in the revolutionary movement have been explained?), but an attribute was often undermined by a significant failing: at first Lenin liked his energy and enthusiasm, and “was nearly a year finding Trotsky out”; and, though he was gifted, his ideas of revolution and “his mistrust of the peasant as ally, are the marks [...] of the petty-bourgeois in a hurry.” (ibid.: p. 285, 97, and pp. 283-4)

Largely, though, in Fox’s version of events Trotsky was the Bolshevik’s *bête noire* from the beginning. He arrived at Lenin’s door in London, “the most notorious” of the Socialist intellectuals, “so fond of listening to his own fiery speech”, “he found his chief pleasure in talking of himself”, and soon after at a meeting, while still in London, Trotsky was “full of fire and venom against Lenin”. At another meeting near the end of Lenin’s life, Trotsky’s proposals for state-run militarized unions, naturally opposed by Lenin and Stalin, were close to “the Fascist idea of corporations [...] more akin to the most extreme forms of capitalist monopoly than democratic Socialism”. (ibid.: p. 97, 102, and 299) That Pollitt, as a prominent British Communist, attacked Fox’s biography as being insufficiently in favour of the Soviet leaders and first Marxist philosophers, and of being too amicable towards Trotsky, illustrates that what was expected in publications was not just conformity but unquestioning homage to the party and its luminaries.

I. 1. 3 JOHN CORNFORD, JULIAN BELL AND RALPH BATES

However, it would be misleading to present rigid conformity solely as the result of pressure from fellow Communists. In John Cornford’s⁶ case it is evident that his desire for Marxism to be shown as correct and prove successful internationally, led him to accept the dogma as evident truths. His youth was also a factor. According to a letter from his mother by the age of fifteen he was already convinced of its value – “I often

⁶ Rupert John Cornford (1915-1936) came from an academic family (Charles Darwin was his great-grandfather). He went to Stowe Public School, where staff were said to have been tolerant of his unorthodox behaviour, and then in 1933 to Cambridge University (to study history), where he was politically very active. He became one of the first Britons to join the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War and died in Lopera (Jaén) on 21st December, 1936. (Stankys and Abrahams, 1966: p. 132, 155, 204, and 314)

wonder why Communism [...] attracts you so much? [sic]” (Cornford: p. 144).⁷ He became a member of the CPGB in March 1933 and demonstrated his commitment at



Fig. 3. John Cornford.
(Stansky and Abrahams, 1966)



Fig. 4. Julian Bell. (Stansky
and Abrahams, 2012)

university by purportedly working fourteen hours a day on politics. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 191, and 232)

His views were in marked contrast to his fellow Cantabrian, Julian Bell,⁸ who lacked sufficient enthusiasm even to have been ambivalent about Marxist ideology. After the 1922 General Election he declared himself “an out and out Socialist”, and at university he was said to have been of the Left but “always strongly critical of the Communists”, when his friends included the future Soviet spies Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt. He canvassed for the Labour Party in 1931, but by 1933, although he thought “most communists pretty tiresome”, he felt he would be obliged to join the party because “all my friends seem to have.” (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 37, 72, 151, and 175)⁹ With his occasionally flippant and fickle attitude to politics and his quasi-antagonistic feelings about Marxism, it is no surprise he disagreed with John Cornford. In correspondence (to be discussed in detail below) they took issue with each other, especially over the role of literature and its political implications. Inevitably, as their debate took place when they were young adults they must have been working out their own opinions,

⁷ Letter 27th November 1931 to John Cornford. This pre-dates Stansky and Abrahams assertion that he became interested in 1932. See p. 182. His mother’s statement suggests he had at least been thinking about Marxism for some time up to November 1931.

⁸ Julian Heward Bell (1908-1937) was the son of Clive Bell and Vanessa Stephen, and Virginia Woolf’s nephew. As a result he was brought up in the Bloomsbury Group. After a private education and a year in Paris he went to Cambridge University in 1927. He edited and wrote the introduction for a book of memoirs of First World War conscientious objectors, *We Did not Fight* (1933), and wrote two volumes of poetry, *Winter Movement* (1932) and *Work for the Winter* (1936). He went to China in August 1935 to work as a teacher and returned in March 1937, after having one of his many affairs. He took part in the Spanish Civil War as an ambulance driver and died in Brunete (Madrid) on 17th July, 1937. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 2, 45, 169, 109, 176, 184, 253, and 261)

⁹ Letters 10th August and December 1933

Cornford so that what he expressed would remain compatible with the teachings of Marx and Engels, and Bell as part of his attempt to achieve a coherent political outlook.



Fig. 5. Ralph Bates.
(<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw49315/Ralph-Bates/s/search/portrait/mw49315/Ralph-Bates&docid>)

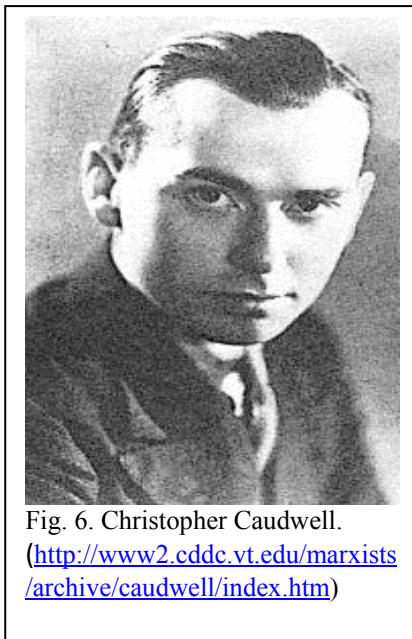
In contrast, Ralph Bates came from an engineering family and was active as a Communist in Britain and Spain.¹⁰In *The Dolphin in the Wood* he provided an intriguing view of his life as a child and young man, and of his political development. Even though the book has a disclaimer at the beginning that the story is fiction “AND HAS NO REFERENCE TO ANY REAL PERSONS LIVING OR DEAD”, it is “manifestly a version of his own early years” (Cunningham, 2000) (apart from the characters’ names, the details of Bates’ life correspond with the story). However, because the story was written in 1950, when Bates was living in the U.S.A. and was no

longer a Communist, his disillusion with his previous beliefs are evident. The text contains no mention of Communism or Marxism, neither is there any explicit mention of people as proletarian or bourgeois, though it is implicit and personally significant in his accounts of his time in the Royal Flying Corps. (Bates, 1950: pp. 79-80)

¹⁰ Ralph Bates (1899-2000) worked as a railway engineer from the age of sixteen, at seventeen joined the Royal Flying Corps (during the First World War) and then, in 1923, he went to Spain. He worked at the Barcelona docks, then as an itinerant mechanic and various other jobs, through which he played an active part in Spanish unions and politics. He wrote fiction based on his experiences and observations of Spanish life. He took part in the Spanish Civil War, mainly as a commissar, after which he travelled to Mexico and then to the U.S.A., where he taught (at New York University). (Bates, 1936: [p.1])

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL DIVISION

I. 2. 1 PROLETARIAN-BOURGEOIS DIALECTIC



The division of capitalist society into proletariat and bourgeoisie is a prerequisite of Marxist philosophy and so, on the face of it, should be an unproblematic inclusion in a dichotomy of Communist beliefs. At the start of the ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’ Marx explains that, “[o]ur epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie [...] has simplified the class antagonisms: Society as a whole is more and more splitting up [...] into two great hostile classes directly facing each other – the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat.” (Tucker: p. 474, ‘Manifesto of the

Communist Party’, 1848) Marx defined the dialectic as malignly creative – “Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to preserve *its own existence* and thereby the existence of [...] the proletariat” [Marx’s italics] – and benignly destructive – “The proletariat, on the other hand, is compelled to abolish itself and thereby its conditioning opposite – private property”. (ibid.: p. 133, ‘Alienation and Social Classes’, Marx, 1845) The result is an inherent and powerful conflict of interests which defines capitalism.

It is natural then that Caudwell gave considerable importance to the concepts of the bourgeois and proletariat and the implications. In the 228 pages of *Studies in a Dying Culture* by my count there are 75 references to “bourgeois” and the derivations,

“bourgeoisie” and “bourgeoisdom”. His overall view of the relationship of the two classes gives a cogent version of orthodox Marxism:

The bourgeois right of property leads to this, that on the one hand the world and all that society has created in it belongs to the bourgeois, and on the other hand stands the naked labourer, who is forced by the needs of his body to sell his labour-power to the bourgeois in order to feed himself and his master.

(ibid.: p. 100)

This is achieved through the property-owner (bourgeois) exercising “coercive power over the ‘free’ labourer”. (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 57) The antithetical relation is echoed in Caudwell’s view of history, in which the bourgeois’ “attempts at profit produce loss, at plenty poverty, at peace war. As his culture collapses all his efforts to shore it up hasten that collapse.” (Caudwell, 1937c: pp. 158-9) Superficially, this depiction is of the capitalist as a hapless figure who can do nothing right, but surely the Marxist view must be that any gains produced within the capitalist system inherently involves sacrifices for others, typically those less well off: ‘*Profit and wages remain as before in inverse proportion.*’ [Marx’s italics] (Tucker: p. 211, ‘Wage Labour and Capital’, 1849)

The strong sense of class prejudice that Bates felt in the Royal Flying Corps, which was “the beginning of my alienation”, stemmed from the fact “I was not a gentleman and one or two courageous snobs in the Wing had let me know it”. He used this to explain why he had not been chosen for flying duty. (Bates, 1950: pp. 76-8) What is significant in comparison to those writing from a theoretical Marxist standpoint is that its importance, the tragedy, does not exist much except at an individual level – no people are going to go hungry or otherwise suffer beyond the personal humiliation – and it has no Marxist terminology, yet it is still told from a Marxist perspective, describing a dialectical problem stemming from position in society and privilege.

In fact, as a description of an everyday situation, unfettered by philosophical jargon, it could be viewed as roughly corresponding to a Marxian directive. Marx and Engels lamented that German theoreticians were led astray by “philosophical phraseology”: “One has to ‘leave philosophy aside’ one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality [...] Philosophy and the study of

the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love.” (Marx, 1845-6: Ch. 3, ‘The Old Testament: Man’, 6, C, 4, ‘Humane Liberalism’) Bates’ realization in the Royal Flying Corps can be inferred as the dawn of his Communist sensibility: “the beginning of my alienation” followed a transformation when “personal friends, lads from Marlborough, Rugby, Eton and Harrow” became “lines of silent attention [...] from the circumference of foreign people to the centre, where I sat.” (Bates, 1950: pp. 76-7) Behind the politeness, perhaps even *noblesse oblige*, for the first time Bates perceived their ineluctable social difference, and ultimately that that social distinction was paramount.



Fig. 7. Esmond Romilly.
(Ingram)

As a slightly younger teenager (in 1933) Esmond Romilly¹¹ had also only known a socially restricted type of people. He recognized class division for the first time when he started to read the Communist newspaper the *Daily Worker* and realized “there was another world as well as the one in which I lived.” (Romilly, 1935: p. 181) Presumably, even as a boy he had seen servants or labourers but had remained indifferent to their circumstances. It is indicative of the rigidity of British society at the time, exemplified by a desire expressed by John Cornford’s mother: “When I think of the bus-drivers and asylum attendants & shop assistants & what-nots of the world. [sic] I know that later my life must lead me among more such, to shake me into proportion”. (Cornford: p. 142)¹² It reads rather like her grandfather (Charles Darwin) describing exotic creatures, but, rather than it providing an opportunity to sneer, the free nature of the correspondence means their opinions are more candidly expressed, even before they are

¹¹ Esmond Romilly (1918-1941) came from a well-connected family – he was known as Winston Churchill’s ‘red nephew’ – and as a boy thought of himself as a Conservative. In what appears to have been partly an act of youthful rebellion, which included publication of a school magazine (*Out of Bounds*) with his brother that caused outrage in predictable places (e.g. *The Daily Mail*), he became interested in Marxism. However, he remained hostile to membership of the party. (Ingram: pp. 2-3, 64-5, 41-5, and 104-5)

¹² Letter 24th November 1931

fully formed.¹³ John Cornford was, therefore, freer to depart from Marxist orthodoxy than those writing for publication. After praising Marx for his understanding and prescience in *Communist Manifesto* and *Wage Labour and Capital*, the precocious teenager found fault with the central theory:

Where it seems to me that he went wrong is in applying terms like the class-struggle (which is a legitimate abbreviation of what actually happens) as the whole and simple truth. It's far more complicated than he seemed to realize. But I believe that in this, too, his limitations are important in making him intelligible.
(ibid.: p. 151, letter September 1932)

I. 2. 2 PERCEIVED INJUSTICE

Doubtless for reasons of greater polemical effect, when he later wrote for a general readership Cornford also depicted society in terms of two opposing groups, with consequently very different experiences of rights and freedom. A society

where one class is oppressing another [...] the ruling class has no possible reason for disturbing the peace. It is only when two sections of the ruling class are at war with one another that one section will use the State against the other. And, even there, it handles the offenders with kid gloves. Compare the treatment of Clarence Hatry with that of an unemployed miner who 'steals' 6d. worth of coal.
(ibid.: p. 92, 'What Communism Stands For', pub. by Victor Gollancz in 1935)

His comparison is interesting. Hatry was convicted of issuing fraudulent stock certificates to raise money, and when his scam was revealed it helped to precipitate the Crash of 1929. He was sentenced to fourteen years in prison, but was released after nine, four years after Cornford's essay was published. (Hatry) Therefore, as an example of someone who escaped punishment because of his bourgeois credentials, it does not serve Cornford's purpose. However, the comparison to the miner's crime is very telling. It is important to note first that this 'crime' (of stealing coal) was not Cornford's invention: when Orwell lived in Wigan he saw that it was an everyday activity.¹⁴ What

¹³ As an example, John Cornford, as if interrupting himself while theorizing about capitalism: "(On 2nd thoughts most of this argument doesn't apply at all to Cole [...] Sorry. But it's helped me to get clear what I think.)" (Cornford: p. 162, letter autumn 1932)

¹⁴ "This business of robbing the dirt trains takes place every day in Wigan, at any rate in winter, and at more collieries than one. It is of course extremely dangerous. No one was hurt the afternoon I was there,

is salient is that, while Hatry's crime was for his own benefit, involved illusory productivity and played a part in undermining the economic system and the lives of an

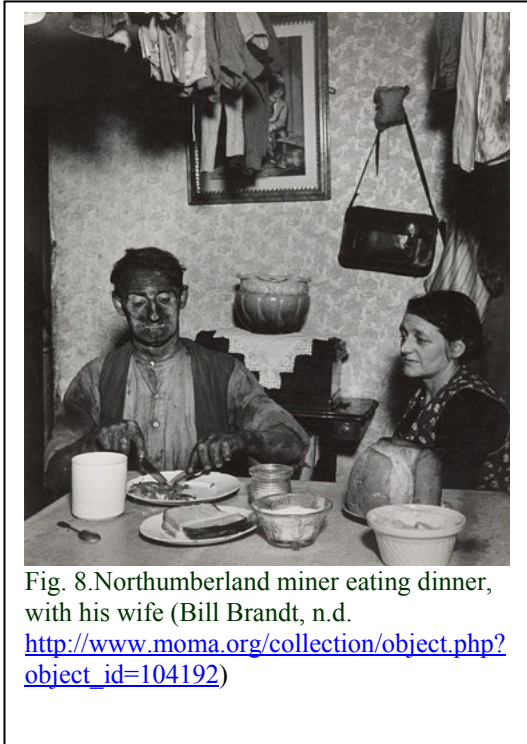


Fig. 8. Northumberland miner eating dinner, with his wife (Bill Brandt, n.d. http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=104192)

unknown number of people, a miner who took coal was taking risks for the sake of his family, was personally fundamental to the production of the coal, and by this act would have done no harm to anyone else, the pit-owners included.

As an image of British life in microcosm, for anyone who cared to give it some thought Cornford's juxtaposition was both damning (of the hopeless prospects for one class and the near omnipotence given to the other) and, by extension, ominous: how long would this situation be tolerated? Like Cornford, Caudwell saw Britain as having a

fundamentally two-tier society, because of which one's destiny was largely determined from birth. He illustrated the different realistic expectations of British subjects by using three representative men: one had a "modest income" and was educated; the second was a "sweated non-union shop assistant of Houndsditch, working seven days of the week"; and finally, one was unemployed, impecunious and suicidal. Of the three only the first, and by extension only a small minority of the British population, was free, while the others endured "a degrading slavery to environment." (Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 195-6) Access to learning was an important point. One of the greatest handicaps for any member of the working-classes in this period was the strict limitations on their rights to education. In 1938 only 14.3% of all British schoolchildren went to secondary school, while in 1939 "less than 1 per cent of British university students came from the working class." (Kitchen, 2006: p. 68) The situation troubled Caudwell. To show how crucial education was he came up with the vivid analogy of Bertrand Russell raised by a goat;

but a man had had both his legs cut off a few weeks earlier, and another man lost several fingers a week later. Technically it is stealing but, as everybody knows, if the coal were not stolen it would simply be wasted. Now and again, for form's sake, the colliery companies prosecute somebody for coal-picking, and in that morning's issue of the local paper there was a paragraph saying that two men had been fined ten shillings." (Orwell, 1937: Ch. 6)

unlike “his present state, he would be both illogical and impolite [...] Society made him, just as it makes a hat.” (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 214)¹⁵

I. 2. 3 BOURGEOIS COMMUNISTS

Caudwell was not brought up by goats either. His grandfather and father were journalists, and Christopher attended a private Catholic school (St. Benedict’s Ealing Priory) until he was 15 when, possibly because his father’s finances were reduced, he too became a journalist. (Caudwell, 1986: p. 2) In other words, he had a bourgeois childhood. Being a member of the class which exploits the workers (as with most of the writers studied here) must have concerned him and had an influence on his Marxism. However, he did not refer to any conflict between his origins and his adult politics in print. Instead, we have his portrayal of H. G. Wells,¹⁶ which in many ways reads like a self-portrait. It is an invective against the *petit bourgeois* (and as his definition includes bank managers and small shopkeepers, journalists, which Caudwell was, would also belong)¹⁷ “and of all the products of capitalism, none is more unlovely than this class.” It has the “horror” of becoming proletariat and is “rootless [...] lonely, and perpetually facing [...] an antagonistic world. It has, as a class, the perpetual desire to escape from what it was born to, upwards, to be rich, secure, a boss.” (Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 76-7) In Marxist terms this has some logic, because the *petit bourgeoisie*, being neither owner nor owned, does not belong in a dialectic vision of capitalist society. It is, of course, speculation how much the assertive tone draws from Caudwell’s own family experiences, but his rather sanguine depiction of proletarian life certainly reads like an outsider’s view: “unemployment, poverty and privation [...] One encounters them as a class, as companions in misfortune [...] that makes them easier to be sustained.” It was only the *petit bourgeoisie* who “are called upon to hate *each other*” [Caudwell’s italics] (ibid.: p. 78), as Caudwell was demonstrating.

¹⁵ He goes on to admit that Russell must have had gifts, that you ‘cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear or, except in special circumstances, a don out of a cretin.’ (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 215)

¹⁶ H. G. Wells may have been chosen as Caudwell’s exemplar of bourgeois malaise after Wells’ rather testy interview with Stalin which included the Briton’s objection “‘to this simplified classification of mankind into poor and rich.’” (Wells, 1934) Wells had also written of his 1920 visit to the Soviet Union in not entirely positive terms in *Russia in the Shadows* (to be discussed below).

¹⁷ In a list of ‘petty-bourgeoisie’ professions Ralph Fox included journalists. (Fox, 1935: p. 22)

One possible means of escape was “into the world of art and pure thought [...] A dominating interest in art will come to him perhaps as an interest in poetry, in the short story, in new novelist’s technique.” (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 7) Not, in fact, a description of the author but of Wells, who, like Caudwell, tried “to find work as a thinker and bring one’s scientific capabilities to the cash market” (Caudwell was a polymath who, for example, patented a design for a new type of gear and wrote profusely on aeronautics). (Caudwell, 1986: p. 4) An alternative he does not mention is that one could quench bourgeois aspirations by becoming a Marxist, and, at the time, people of his sort were necessary for the Communist Party: of the three types mentioned above – the educated man, the labourer and the unemployed – there was only one who could realistically have written and published thoughts on political theory.

As an illustration of the point, the 28th April 1934 issue of *Sunday Referee* included an article by the fifteen-year-old Esmond Romilly. The *Sunday Referee* was a national newspaper which around that time had a circulation of about 300,000, fairly modest but still more popular than the *Sunday Times* (Stannage), and one has to wonder how many articles written by the teenage sons of labourers or the unemployed (to use Caudwell’s examples) would have appeared in print.¹⁸ Ironically, Romilly’s article lamented that in the present system, “the world is divided into a large class of exploited and a small clique of exploiters, that capitalism can offer them [the exploited] nothing – not even a job.” He went on to declare that contemporary youth had a choice: to support the present “plutocracy”, or “to smash the capitalist system and lay the foundations of a classless society.” He also warned that public school pupils were no longer guaranteed good jobs, “and this no doubt accounts in no small part for the changed outlook of modern youth.” (Ingram: p. 82) It is notable that an explanation based on Marxist reasoning finishes with a threat which is solely due to the self-interest of privileged young people, perhaps making it all the more menacing for the *Referee*’s readers.

¹⁸ In a diary entry, George Orwell stressed the very different expectations the British had because of social class. For example, workers were paid wages which they had to wait for “as though being paid your wages at all was a favour”, while the middle class salaries were paid into their bank accounts. After a series of these experiences “the bourgeois goes through life expecting to get what he wants, within limits, the working-man always feels himself the slave of a more or less mysterious authority.” (Orwell, 2000: pp. 449-50, 7th March 1936)

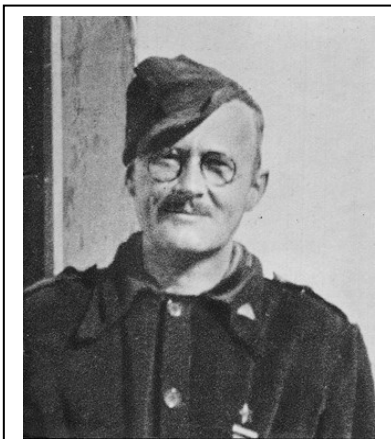


Fig. 9. Tom Wintringham.
(Purcell)

The social background of these writers showed that Romilly's analysis – that children or young adults from financially secure families no longer automatically accepted traditional societal mores – was justified. Ralph Fox was “from a comfortable middle-class home [...] finishing at Oxford”; (Pollitt, 1937) Tom Wintringham¹⁹ was from an eminent and prosperous Grimsby family (Purcell, 2004: p. 5) and he likewise went to Oxford (ibid.: p. 17); Esmond Romilly was Winston Churchill's nephew and he ran away from Wellington College (Romilly, 1937: intro., [p. 1]); John Cornford was a son of a Cambridge professor and great-grandson of Charles Darwin, (Stansky, 1966: p. 140 and p. 135) and he studied at Cambridge; (ibid.: p. 201) and Julian Bell was a nephew of Virginia Woolf and he also went to Cambridge. (ibid.: p. 4 and p. 42) Yet, apart from Bell (who remained left-wing but uncertain) they each, like Caudwell, worked for “*the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.*”²⁰ [Marx's italics] (Tucker: p. 538, ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’, Marx, 1875) This was in line with original Marxist tenets, both that “[t]he right to revolution was the only *really* ‘historical right’”, (Tucker: p. 571, ‘The Tactics of Social Democracy’, Engels, 1895) and the confident prediction that the right would be exercised: “The millions of proletarians and communists [...] will [...] bring their ‘existence’ into harmony with their ‘essence’ in a practical way, by means of a revolution.” (ibid.: p. 168, ‘The German Ideology’, Marx, 1846) Engels explained proletarian revolution more simply: it was a “[s]olution of the contradictions”, which would lead, in time, to man as “his own master – free.” (ibid.: p. 717, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, 1878)

¹⁹ Tom Wintringham (1898-1949) was born into a wealthy and locally influential family in north-east England. He studied History at Oxford, then tried to join the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War, but became a dispatch rider instead. He joined the CPGB, went to Moscow in 1923, and his political activities saw him arrested. He became recognised as a military expert and was made an officer in the Spanish Civil War, described in his selective account, *English Captain*. (Purcell: p. 5, 11, 17, 41, 52, 84 and 98)

²⁰ The uneasy paradox was summed up by Romilly as “living ‘materially in the one world, and spiritually in the other’.” (Ingram: p. 52)

CHAPTER THREE: REVOLUTION

I. 3. 1 INEVITABILITY

It is clearly vital for Marxists to believe in the efficacy of revolution. In what may well have been a conscious echo of Engels' words, Ralph Fox described a world of diminishing rights for workers and the strengthening of capitalist parasitism: "these deepening contradictions can only be solved by working-class revolution." (Fox, 1935: p. 16) Furthermore, they had no choice: "The working class [...] by its very position in society is compelled to fight for the abolition of all classes and of exploitation." (ibid.: p. 63) The obligation to fight implied that there was something at fault in those who did not fight, and Caudwell certainly agreed on this point. He wrote that as workers depended on "economic co-operation" to survive, the result in a bourgeois economy is that they "give into the hands of the big bourgeoisie the violent issues of life and death." The final image is a rather poetic, even cryptic, way of saying something like "the benefits of your labour", that manages to suggest that the manner of production is not passive or easy but a dangerous struggle ("violent"), and that it involves a form of ultimate sacrifice (they are "of life and death"). Even in the difficulty (for the reader) of the phrasing you have the need to consider the meaning and importance of the point, and you have a sense of the difficulties of workers' lives. In response, "[p]assive resistance is not a real programme [...] A man either participates in bourgeois economy, or he revolts and tries to establish another economy." (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 116)

By the same logic (that proletarian revolution is in the workers' interests) it is against the interests of the bourgeoisie: "ruling classes resist revolution violently and

must therefore be overthrown by force.” (ibid.: p.96) On one level it is obvious to say that those who have property, wealth and power will resist being deprived of it, but it works in at least two other ways: it is prophetic of the Spanish Civil War,²¹ and it reads as a reassurance, a call to show mettle. When Bates describes cousin Will’s rebellion, court-martial and execution it is synecdochal for an overdue national revolt: “nothing, nothing could wipe out the guilt that lay at someone else’s door, at a whole class of them, except they be swept away.” (Bates, 1950: pp. 162-5) Of course the First World War perfectly symbolized the innate flaws in British society for anyone on the Left, in which soldiers were obliged to endure terrible conditions and put their lives at risk for a cause they probably did not fully understand or sympathize with, under orders from officers who had traditionally been recruited from the social elite (though this was somewhat relaxed during the war due to the number of casualties).²² (Beckett: pp. 64-5) In the past peasants had been “forced by poverty to the shame of taking the Queen’s shilling and donning a red coat, had suffered and died bravely enough under their fox-hunting officers”; but the awful waste from 1914-18 “had brought a sharp consciousness of the class divisions in society”, hence the post-war revolutions around Europe. (Fox, 1935: p. ix, and xiii)

I. 3. 2 FEAR AND FREEDOM

In Bates’ story, the link between the worker’s intolerance and class rebellion is less direct. When Will was commanded to attack, and he believed “‘[w]e’d all a been to kingdom come if we’d ha’ done what ‘e said’”, instead he “‘did clout colonel [...] to show they men wasn’t to obey e’s daft order.’” After news of this act and his death the significance of his last day became “a rejection of the whole regime of hierarchical England [...] there was enough similarity between the false promises of a government

²¹ For example, just before the war General Mola told his right-wing followers they had to be “violent in the extreme to reduce as soon as possible the enemy [...] all leaders of political parties, societies and trade unions which are not linked to the movement will be imprisoned and exemplary punishment carried out on them in order to strangle any rebellion or strikes.” (Preston, 2006: pp. 93-4)

²² “As far as the officer class was concerned it was almost impossible for someone who had not been through this system to become an officer and a gentleman. An exclusive social and educational background, the gentlemanly ethos, a commitment to country pursuits, loyalty to institutions, self-confidence and physical courage were the qualities required, and they were almost totally associated with select areas of the middle class and definitely the upper class.” (Beckett: p. 65, ‘The Officers’, Keith Simpson) The Spanish army also had unfair recruitment practices, so that the rich could pay to avoid service, while the poor who served died in their thousands. (Salvadó: p. 4)

and the Pew's ill-faith to make total revolt plausible." That his reaction could be said to result from a personal grievance does not make it inappropriate. Beyond the audacity of Will's action, there is also the fact that only acceptance and fear of the colonel's conferred authority averted a collective rebellion: "*I did holler no sir and some other chaps did start cryin' in ditch.*" (Bates, 1950: pp. 162-3, and p. 165)

When he wrote to Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno also portrayed fear as an enemy, as significant as any section of the population: "The goal of the revolution is the abolition of fear." Adorno, though, did not necessarily think it was the workers who lacked courage. He thought a revolutionary movement which incorporated the proletariat with intellectuals was a useful way of making the non-proletarian non-bourgeois as well. It is a mutually beneficial interaction in which "the proletariat [...] needs us for knowledge as much as we need the proletariat to make the revolution." (Taylor, 1980: p.125)²³ Caudwell looks to have been less comfortable with this relationship, either denying that intellectuals share the workers' experience – can the intellectual "enjoy freedom which is sustained by the workers' unfreedom?" (Caudwell,1937b: p. 198) – or, twenty pages later, contradicting that idea – "the bourgeois intellectual asserts a measure of freedom that does not in fact exist, and is therefore unfree mentally and physically." (ibid.: p. 219) In both cases he blames the capitalist society, but the idea that intellectuals like him are relatively well off (in terms of liberty, life-style or materially) in an unjust social order was perhaps a result of guilt, or at least unease, at his comparative prosperity. The use of 'unfreedom' is also an awkward, if not impotent, neologism to convey the restricted nature of working class life. The second issue, that "all who live in bourgeois society [...] are unfree, for bourgeois society is not giving them what they desire" and that "[e]ven [Bertrand] Russell is unfree",²⁴ (ibid.: pp. 219-20) is a, more or less, rousing call to "become free by understanding the active nature of liberty, and by becoming conscious of the path they must follow to attain it." (ibid.: p. 228)

Curiously, elsewhere Caudwell blamed social discontent on the "possibilities of realisation for the individuality" in "highly civilised" societies: "None such complaints are voiced in savage society, for the possibility of freedom does not yet exist." Because nobody was truly free, even the bourgeoisie were potentially revolutionary and so "on

²³ Letter 1936

²⁴ Although he went to prison during the First World War, according to the logic of this statement he too was a captive of society despite being an eminent intellectual.

all sides arise protests”, though naturally the idea of frustrated ambition as a catalyst would still mean that the momentum would most likely come from the proletariat – “complaints which are the ideological counterpart of denunciations of malnutrition and unemployment in a world of plenty [...] They are the harbingers of revolution.” If, according to Caudwell, being jaundiced makes you Red, it is not in comparison with other parts of your society (“on all sides arise protest”), so it must be compared to an imagined or potential ‘you’ who has achieved the “undreamed-of possibilities of self-realisation”. (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 168) If no part of society was free then everybody was obliged to make whatever changes were necessary for liberty.

By a similar form of logic John Cornford viewed a position of impartiality as “a denial of the objective fact of class struggle”. Through “an objective study of the world as it is to-day, an objective contrast between the capitalist world and the Soviet Union, between the conditions of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in this country, can lead to only one conclusion – a revolutionary conclusion, which bourgeois ‘impartiality’ strives to mask.” When he wrote to his mother on the same subject he was inevitably less strident, but he still had the same ambition. This time he blamed the right-wing press, the middle-aged and “pre-war trade unionists” for promising or expecting a return to the Edwardian heyday of an “English industrial monopoly”, which was “holding back a powerful revolutionary movement here.” (Cornford: p. 59, and pp. 159-60)²⁵

Cornford was saying, in Marxist terms, that the illusory prosperity made class conflict appear less consequential, or that the workers were being bribed with bourgeois dreams of a better position and salary. (Fox, 1935: p. 21) Consistent with this, the reverse situation was seen by others as harbouring latent insurrection – that social inertia generates combustion – such as in Walter Benjamin’s repetition hypothesis. He gave examples of people, such as *flâneurs* and gamblers (notably not very proletarian), who were trapped in patterns of repetition. Unlike Caudwell’s belief that it is a source of resentment, Benjamin saw the effect as intoxicating; nevertheless these patterns “are invitations for interruption, and Benjamin is convinced that interruption is the truest revolutionary act.” (Ferris: p.191)²⁶ In 1920 and 1924 Tom Wintringham wrote what could be termed as either naïve or direct poems, both called ‘Revolution’, and the second of the two suggests that as the repetition is of a natural event – “The long tide stirring/ The people passing, pausing returning” (Purcell: p. 46, ll. 1-2) – it will lead to a

²⁵ ‘Left’, 1933-4, and letter, autumn 1932

²⁶ ‘Method and time: Benjamin’s Dialectical Images’, Max Pensky

natural, or inevitable, change. The success poetically of using an analogy of an environmental sequence is partly undermined when he clumsily switches to a bourgeois attack – “And the fear on the faces of the fat?” (ibid.: p. 46, l. 4) What might redeem Wintringham’s poem is that he does include hints of the natural world being part of the revolutionary process – through the image of those who “scarred the coloured hills with a grey plough” (ibid.: p. 47, l. 11) nature also has reason to rise up – and there is no doubt it is the proletariat who have the justified grievance: “they went into the mills, to the docks, to the deep sea,/ To the mines”. (ibid.: p. 47, ll. 9-10) More significant is that it reads as if it lacks political conviction or belief, not only in the success of a workers’ revolution, but that one will even take place: a government might hope to survive a diatribe that concludes, “boy’s hopes, boy’s dreams. Men will remember!” (ibid.: p. 47, ll. 11-12) The 1920 poem has a young man’s use of adjectives – “a network of weariness,/ Stifled by monotony, sameness, littleness” (ibid.: p. 39, ll. 3-4) – that at least could be the result of a passion for the cause. From “a trembling of the earth” (ibid.: p. 39, l. 8) he offers the reader a post-revolution prospect which comes across as ekphrasis of a communist chocolate box: “There is power for them, freedom, security, friendliness,/ Loveliness and laughter”. (ibid.: p. 39, ll. 13-14)

I. 3. 3 AFTER THE REVOLUTION

While there was unanimity in the call for revolution, the aftermath was a less well-defined prospect. Although Bates wrote that he had felt a revolution necessary, his sincerity led him to describe his forebodings on a visit to London about what would follow: “The complex bustle of the street, the sheer efficiency of the city, suddenly struck fear and a sickening weakness into my heart. They seemed to say that even if the revolution destroyed the Old Order we should be unable to put anything half so productive in its place.” (Bates, 1950: p. 262) It is manifestly not an admission that a committed and proselytizing Marxist could make in print, though one has to wonder how many of them privately dreaded that a revolution might lose more than it would gain. Regardless, in what they published there was only certainty of a much better future (in fact not very different to the right-wing promises of an “industrial monopoly” economy which Cornford dismissed), as with Ralph Fox’s vision of life after a proletarian uprising, which was grounded in economic and social aspirations and was

based on the most suitable example available: “The abolition of unemployment [...] the ending of agrarian poverty”; “It is no accident that the greatest advances in material well-being and general culture have been made by the Soviet workers precisely at a time when the misery of the people of the capitalist world has been exposed at its deepest”; and the Soviet system had achieved “the equal participation of woman in every sphere of life, which is only possible under socialism”. (Fox, 1935: p. 96, 97 and 98) This was mostly written in 1934 (ibid.: p. xvi) and any reader is forced to ask how much Fox knew about life for agricultural or other workers in the Soviet Union at the time. It should also be remembered that Fox was hardly alone in presenting the country as an example to which other nations should aspire.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOVIET UNION

I. 4. 1 THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND



Fig. 10. Kolkhoz promotion poster (left, individual farms – fighting and family; right, collective farms – culture and community) (Hindus: p. 216)

By the mid-1930s the first Soviet Five-Year Plan, which had initiated ‘collectivization’, had ended. Amongst what is now known about attempts to encourage (from around 1929) then force peasants to join collective farms, is that when peasants felt their ways of life threatened and resisted in desperation, the countryside collapsed into violence and chaos, so the government became more severe, often brutally so. Stalin branded *kulaks* (richer, more successful or less poor peasants, depending on your viewpoint) as enemies of the process and of the people, though some thought they should play an important role on the new farms, and he declared it was necessary for them to be

“liquidated as a class” (Kitchen: pp. 162-3) Meanwhile, the enmity between officials and peasants increased to the point that peasants murdered government agents. The government replied with shooting and executions on a mass scale, in one month in 1930 there were 40 a day. (Pares: p. 528) Following both terrible harvests and terrible official decisions in 1931 and 1932, a nationwide famine resulted in the deaths of millions of peasants. Movement was strictly controlled by the use of internal passports, which prevented starving peasants moving in the hope of a subsistence. A by-product of the policies was visible in the cities, where the children of kulaks and political prisoners, who were effectively orphans without state protection, were outcasts and a danger to others, and became criminals and prostitutes. Nevertheless, with the second Five-Year Plan (1933) the Soviet Union became a significant industrial power. (Kitchen: pp. 163-5)

I. 4. 2 WESTERN ACCOUNTS

The way accounts of life in the Soviet Union were reported in the West, especially in the early 1930s, was almost always a very partial view of events. Even when attempts were made to expose the real situation other Westerners were ready to deny it. In March 1933, after a tour of the Soviet Union, Gareth Jones published articles reporting on the famine he had encountered, where there were no potatoes or bread, and “millions are dying in the villages”. He cited an argument between a father and his Communist son: “‘Disease there [in a nearby town] is carrying away numbers of us workers and the little food there is uneatable.’ [...] The son cried back: ‘But look at the giants of industry.’” (Jones, 1933) However, Western journalists based in Moscow, most famously the Pulitzer Prize winner Walter Duranty, wrote a letter in response titled ‘Russians Hungry, Not Starving’, contradicting Jones’ claims. It is notable that six months later he wrote another article celebrating that “the harvest is splendid and all talk of famine now is ridiculous”. (Duranty).

It is easy to imagine the pressure that could be exerted on people in Moscow, like Duranty. Stalin also set up organizations used to influence Communists abroad and, because the Russian authorities have recently given access to the records from this time, we now know more about how Soviet groups like the Comintern operated. In her book *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-40*, Ludmila Stern has detailed how

committees were created (MORP for committed writers and VOKS for non-committed), (2007: pp. 6-7) and the methods that were used to encourage Westerners to write positively about the country. Lenin formed the Comintern in 1919 in order to make supporting the Soviet Union “the cardinal duty of Communists in all countries” and to deliver a “revolutionary message [... to] a Western audience without exposing the Comintern as its source.” (ibid.: pp. 38-9) In 1930, a writers’ committee was formed, known as MORP, to use art and literature “to influence the working class and youth”, though initially it was thought “intolerant and dogmatic.” (ibid.: pp. 49-50) In many Western countries there were also Societies of Friends of Soviet Russia through which the Soviet group VOKS hoped to use “cultural exchange and friendship” to achieve “Soviet political influence.” (ibid.: p. 97 and p. 120)

The methods of persuasion included publishing Russian translations of the writers’ work, sending them flattering letters and depositing money in Moscow bank accounts, which meant the writer would have to visit Russia to spend the money. (ibid.: pp. 179-83) Visits were carefully arranged to display a country that was economically and culturally successful, so that Jean-Richard and Marguerite Bloch were shown the educational facilities available to soldiers, and given “endless banquets” and a private railway carriage. (ibid.: pp. 19-22) When H. G. Wells made a pre-arranged tour of a school on his visit in 1920 the guide asked the children who their favourite author was in English literature and they replied that it was their guest: “Such comparatively trivial figures as Milton, Dickens and Shakespeare ran about intermittently between the feet of that literary colossus.” On a surprise visit to another school “we tested the extraordinary vogue of H. G. Wells”, but there he was unknown. (Wells, 1920: pp. 98-101)

However, indulging visitors was not always necessary. From 1929 to 1930 Maurice Hindus travelled around the Soviet Union and documented what he found in the book *Red Bread*. For Hindus it was a return journey to the land of his birth, which meant he needed no guide. As far as one can tell he faithfully recorded what the local people told him and what he saw, but the conclusion he drew (given at the beginning and end of the book) was incredibly sanguine, as if he reached it despite what he had found. His depiction, though ten years later, is indeed very similar to Wells’, but the latter’s conclusions were much more measured.

When a Communist friend wrote to Hindus about the exciting changes taking place, he foresaw that Russia was progressing “from a land of puny and ever decreasing land-holdings with a distressingly primitive agricultural technique” into one “of large

scale farms which neither the United States nor Canada nor the Argentine can rival”, and that what stood in the way was the Russian peasant, “[w]eighed down with inertia and as distrustful of strange ideas as is a wild animal of strange noises”. (Hindus: pp. 17-18) What he discovered was not a nation unified in purpose or in plenty. When he met peasants he heard of farmers producing less to avoid taxes; (ibid.: pp. 28-9) of the *koolacks* (richer peasants) who “raised wonderful” livestock, being deported, “the men blubbering like little children and pleading for their wives to remain”, and their children who died on the journey; (ibid.: pp. 142-3) and how seeing “in Moscow’s streets the multitudes waiting in queues for food, the spell cast by Revolutionary rhetoric fades, and one faces [...] the brutal intolerance [...] that has banished hundreds of honest doubters and non-conformists to far-away parts of the land, or to fates even worse.”

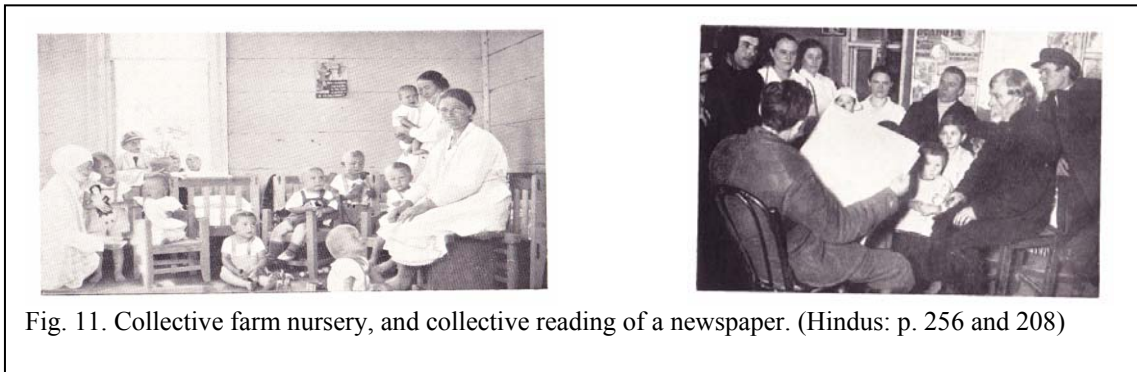


Fig. 11. Collective farm nursery, and collective reading of a newspaper. (Hindus: p. 256 and 208)

(ibid.: p. 87) At a railway station he was also “made aware of the desolation which the socialist offensive of the past winter had brought in its train” compared to the abundance of the year before, which meant there were long queues for the bread, herrings and “fly-specked cheese”. (ibid.: p. 109) Regardless of this though, Hindus could only envisage that “the *kolhoz* [collective farm] as a method of production has under Russian conditions indisputable and insuperable advantages”, (ibid.: p. 341) which included women having “more leisure and greater opportunity for recreation”, (ibid.: p. 343) and, while peasants have “been grumbling loudly and volubly”, his “earthly appetites are indeed being constantly played upon and expanded, and that alone is making him continually more demanding”. (ibid.: pp. 346-7)

What is pertinent is not Hindus’ lack of prescience, but that his determinedly positive interpretation is symptomatic of the *zeitgeist*. As Valentine Cunningham wrote, “[t]hirties’ writing is obsessed by utopia” (Bates, 1936: intro. [p. 1]) and for a Marxist its location was obvious. In spite of everything – famine, executions, deportations and pacts with Fascists – Tom Wintringham declared in 1941 “the Soviet Union proves itself clearly a success from every point of view”. (Purcell, 2004: p. 86) He had visited

Moscow in 1920 and experienced a variety of local culture: “Futurism and seven otherisms, each less comprehensible than the first. On the other hand there were soldiers without underclothing, hunger, typhus, broken bridges, empty factories, an immense, overwhelming effort to keep things going”. (ibid.: p. 86) With justification the plight of the population at this time can be substantially blamed on Tsar Nicholas II and his government, but whatever concern Wintringham had for “all the best living beings in Russia, Communist or not”, or however much he felt the need to verify what he heard about the country with “the most democratic and therefore the most influential mass organisations”, he did not visit a second time. (ibid.: p. 28)

Another visitor at this time was a target of Marxist opprobrium (as seen above) and there are aspects of his account which would have provoked them. In contrast to Fox’s biography of Lenin, Wells gave credit to “the genius of that ex-pacifist Trotsky” for making the Red Army an effective force, “a very remarkable achievement.” (Wells:

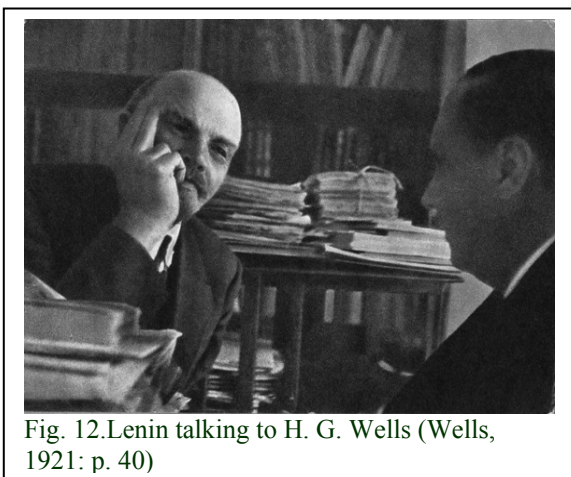


Fig. 12. Lenin talking to H. G. Wells (Wells, 1921: p. 40)

p. 64) Stalin was not mentioned. It must have been particularly irksome that the author not only met Lenin but that the two appear to have had a good rapport. As an indication of their bonhomie, Wells contrasted Lenin with people like Fox and Caudwell: “After the tiresome class-war fanatics I had been encountering among the Communists, men of formulae as

sterile as flints [...] this amazing little man, with his frank admission of the immensity and complication of the project of Communism [...] was very refreshing.” (ibid.: pp. 137-8) More offensive still was Wells’ very different attitude to Marx:

I have always regarded him as a Bore of the extremist sort. His vast unfinished work, *Das Kapital*, a cadence of wearisome volumes about such phantom unrealities as the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*, a book for ever maundering away into tedious secondary discussions, impresses me as a monument of pretentious pedantry [...]. Wherever we went, we encountered busts, portraits, and statues of Marx. About two-thirds of the face is beard, a vast solemn woolly uneventful beard [...]. It is exactly like *Das Kapital* in its inane abundance [...]

(ibid.: pp. 67-9)

However, Wells was forgiving of the government, which inevitably faced serious problems. There had been “social dissolution” from 1917, but “for most of the

abominations committed the Bolsheviks are about as responsible as the Government of Australia”, and in 1920 their government was the only one that could prevent a “collapse [...] into peasant barbarism”. (ibid.: pp. 33-4, and 146-7) Signs of the possible degradation of the country were evident, as they were for Hindus, and especially in St. Petersburg. Many had to live without heating or sanitation, the city’s population looked “appallingly underfed”, the death-rate virtually quadrupled and the birth-rate halved. (ibid.: p. 26, 24, and 17) Like Hindus (and Trotsky), Wells too looked on the peasants as self-centred and effectively obstacles to national improvement. Conspicuously, unlike the malnourished Petersburgians, they looked “well fed, and I doubt if they are very much worse off than they were in 1914.” (ibid.: p. 20) His impressions may well have been accurate. Having acquired land, often through violence, from their old landlords they were allowed to use it for agriculture and keep whatever crops they needed to feed their family. The rest was to be given to the government to be distributed to the population. Instead, the peasants simply produced enough to sustain their family and no

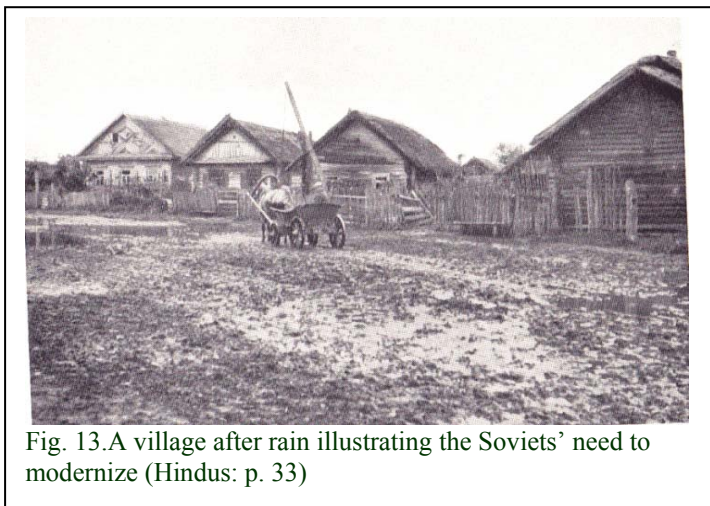


Fig. 13. A village after rain illustrating the Soviets’ need to modernize (Hindus: p. 33)

more, or sold the surplus on the black market. (Pares: p. 507, and Kitchen: p. 148)

As a group, from what these Communist supporters wrote, peasants did not readily comply with a Marxist dialectical view of society. On his return to Russia Maurice Hindus marvelled at “the

inertia, or laziness, or stupidity” of the peasants after seeing the lack of improvements to their village (no pavements, cobble-stones or foot-scrapers), (Hindus: p. 317) but he finished his visit confident that the government’s interventions “cannot but impress him [the peasant] with the importance and possibilities of organization. As time goes on he will learn more and more to appreciate its value and its power.” (ibid.: p. 347) Most of what Cornford thought about peasants he must have acquired from books, and his confident assertions sound familiar: that they made bad revolutionaries because their experience of life as property owners taught “them to compete with one another and not how to organise together”. (Cornford: p. 87) Peasants, compared to urban workers, were also seen as less suitable revolutionary material by Trotsky: “The peasant point of view

in economics, in politics, and in art, is more primitive, more limited, more egotistic than that of the proletariat.” (Trotsky, 1925: p. 182) Lenin reportedly considered them “selfish and illiterate”, but that was moderate compared to his English guest: “The peasants are absolutely illiterate and collectively stupid, capable of resisting interference but incapable of comprehensive foresight and organisation.²⁷ They will become a sort of human swamp in a state of division”. (Wells, 1920: p. 136, and 146)

Caudwell wanted to travel to the Soviet Union, he even had Russian lessons, (Caudwell, 1986: p. 217) but, in part because of the Spanish Civil War, he never went. It did not prevent him expressing confident opinions about the nation, sometimes based on other British travellers’ observations:

In Russia (ask the Webbs) there is more continuous and free discussion of every legislative and executive act by every adult than in any other country to-day. In Russia complete freedom of conscience, of the right to vote, to speak, to demonstrate, is guaranteed ... by the new Constitution. (ibid.: pp. 13-14)

This was written about the Soviet Union in 1936 and one might wonder how cosmopolitan the Webbs were; what is not in doubt is their interlocutor’s willingness to give them credence.²⁸ Among passages for his book *Illusion and Reality* which were later withdrawn, was the prediction that Russia, “like Egypt, Athens, Rome and France in their ideological heyday”, would “fertilize outworn civilisations, and create on their wrecks a new society, new science and new art”. (ibid.: p. 13) Presumably one “outworn civilisation” was Britain and another Spain. The Webbs’ good opinion, together with Mr. Shaw’s,²⁹ was welcomed in Cambridge as well, as evidence that “the Soviet system is in certain respects the highest form of democracy yet seen”; workers

²⁷ On this he agreed with Marx, who complained about “the idiocy of rural life”. (Kitchen: p. 146)

²⁸ Best known for their work for the constitutionally cautious Fabian Society, they were useful advocates for revolutionary Communism.

²⁹ The Soviets could be very hospitable. Soviet officials were very attentive to the Webbs and, for Shaw’s 75th birthday, he was the guest of honour at the Column Hall of the House of Unions in Moscow. In both cases, it was hoped the visitors would be positive about the Soviet Union when they went home. (Stern: p. 143, and 145) The Webbs went to some effort to gather information (though they did not understand Russian), spoke to many Soviet citizens through interpreters and witnessed shortages, but were dismissive when they were told of millions dying of starvation. (Overy: pp. 190-2) One eminent historian called their 1935 book, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization*, “the most preposterous book ever written about Soviet Russia.” (Taylor, 1965: p. 348)

were more impressed “that crisis and unemployment, that exploitation of class by class, have been wiped out”, and students by “the educational, cultural and scientific successes of socialism”. (Cornford: p. 107)³⁰ To Caudwell the Soviet Union provided a model of Marxist achievement in that “Russian workers are their own masters [...] there are no internal contradictions in their economy”. As a result, the danger to the rest of the world “is a danger to all bourgeois States in that her success is an inspiration to a proletarian revolution in every State.” (Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 108-9)

I. 4. 3 THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AGAINST THE BRITISH EMPIRE

It reads as if Caudwell expected or hoped for an empire of good example which, naturally, would be antithetical to one of “the vilest interests” (Tucker: p. 658, ‘On Imperialism in India’, Marx, 1853) i.e. the British in India, a region of the empire that received disproportionate attention from Marxists in Britain. Marx did not, in fact, find the idea of Britain as a foreign power running the affairs of India objectionable in principle: India’s “history is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.” His moral equanimity meant that what he asked was “whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian to India conquered by the Briton.” (ibid.: p. 659) The British did not do well in the comparison. Their culpability stemmed from the “profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation”. At home they are “defenders of property” and “our holy religion”, while in India they “resort to atrocious extortion [...] confiscate [...] the dividends of the *rajahs* [...] and] to make money out of pilgrims [...] take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut”. (ibid.: p. 663) However, he foresaw that, despite themselves, the British could benefit the Indians, mainly through technology: steam travel has made “the whole south-eastern ocean” accessible and the journey from England to India will soon be “shortened to eight days”; railways “may be easily made to subserve agricultural purposes” for distributing water (for irrigation) and food; and the railway will mean having to teach local people engineering, to “become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry.” (ibid.: pp. 660-2)

³⁰‘Communism in the Universities’, 1936

In a chapter entitled ‘The Teaching of Karl Marx’ Ralph Fox expresses very similar ideas to Marx about the British Empire: “Imperialism has developed to an extreme degree the contradictions and antagonisms of capitalist society [...] the robber, exploiting character of capitalist appropriation [...] is also nakedly exposed.” (Fox, 1935: p. 9) Eighty years before Marx had said that the “hypocrisy” and “barbarism” of capitalism “lies before our eyes [...] in] the colonies, where it goes naked [...] Did they not, in India, to borrow an expression of the great robber, Lord Clive himself, resort to atrocious extortion [...]?” (Tucker: p. 663) If the vocabulary had not changed much in that time, probably neither had the imperial behaviour. However, to Fox it was an inevitable result of capitalism that it “can only reproduce on an extended scale the social relations which it creates, relations based on exploitation of human labour power and expressed in enormous concentrations of wealth and luxury on the one hand and a vast sea of poverty, suffering and unemployment on the other.” (Fox, 1935: p. 20) A reader would not have to be an avowed Marxist to agree with this,³¹ while for Fox, as much as he might have detested the situation, it demonstrated what was done more discreetly at home: it was capitalism *in extremis*, the wealthy and powerful enacting laws to protect themselves while exploiting human and natural resources for their own benefits.

The British Empire, of course, had to be distinguishable from a current or prospective Russian Empire. However, to accept that one centred on Moscow was morally superior one had to accept that the British version was primarily driven by exploitation and the Russian version was for the liberty of the exploited. Interestingly, when Fox wrote that “the true interest of our [Communist] people” was in sympathy with “the Arabic, African and Indian peoples” it was “in supporting the freedom of the great movements for democracy and national liberty”, (Fox, 1937a: p. 148) conspicuously not the dictatorship of the proletariat. One can only guess why he did not think they were deserving of Communism, perhaps that at the time any kind of independence from colonial rule looked an ambitious enough prize, though he had written earlier “that only the communist revolution of the working class can lead humanity out of the vicious circle of war and poverty created by imperialism.” (Fox, 1935: pp. 9-10)

³¹ As an example, Campbell-Bannerman (Liberal Prime Minister, 1905-08) in 1899 spoke against “the vulgar and bastard Imperialism of [...] provocation and aggression [...] of grabbing everything even if we have no need for it ourselves.” (Brown, 1999: pp. 51-2)



Fig. 14. *Punch* cartoon, June 23rd 1936.
<http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000sfjOKYTTxCE>

One reason Caudwell believed a revolution in the colonies might have happened was through Russia’s righteous trading behaviour with other nations; that when competing with bourgeois countries “she does not seek backward countries on which to impose imperialist exploitation.” This is done, “not to gain Imperialistic advantage but in order to secure peace for herself and for the unfortunate proletariat of the bourgeois states.” However, unlike bourgeois empires, attacking

Russia would not stop its influence being felt in other countries because “the proletarian revolution will not come from Russia, it will come from inside”. (Caudwell, 1937: p. 109) Perhaps he did not know about “their moves in 1920 to reassert Russian control in their own turbulent frontier areas, their seizure of one of Persia’s provinces (Gilan), and their encouragement of autonomy in others” (Brown, 1999: p. 499); or their unsuccessful counter-attack against Poland that “reached the gates of Warsaw”, before the Poles drove them back, took large parts of the Ukraine and White Russia, and stopped the Soviets “placing world revolution before the interests of Russia.” (Pares: pp. 504-6) Or maybe he saw these as aberrations of Lenin’s time.

I. 4. 4 TROTSKY

Lenin’s ambitions in Poland had been against Trotsky’s advice, who thought the Poles probably would not “welcome the Red Army as liberators [...] and would rally to the call of national solidarity against the instrument of old-style Russian imperialism.” (Kitchen, 2006: p. 146) By the 1930s Trotsky’s opinions were given in exile, but remained prolific. A measure of his fall from grace (in the eyes of the Soviet

government) can be gained from the attitudes of the Communist Party members, Caudwell and Fox, though their actual differences of opinion from Trotsky's could be negligible. Often when Trotsky's name was mentioned it was synonymous with betrayal, as with the accusation of Trotsky's bourgeois consciousness that led him and others "to complete treachery"; (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 326) or the incredible claim that Trotsky and Zinoviev "attempted to restore capitalism" in Russia. (Fox, 1935: p. 61) An indication of his status can also be seen from the (by my estimate) 500-work bibliography at the end of *Illusion and Reality*, which is comprehensive enough to include a book by Nietzsche and another by Adam Smith, but nothing by Trotsky, as if he was close to diabolic and too dangerous even to read. Julian Bell, not a Party member, did not think so and regarded Trotsky as heroic, in similar ways to T. E. Lawrence and Michael Collins, leaders, unlike First World War generals with "obvious brilliance [...] untrained in classic doctrine, acting in open theatres, and unprovided with limitless resources". (Stansky, 1966: p. 118) Caudwell also thought that the nearest the wars of the twentieth century had come to producing a hero was T. E. Lawrence, and one of Caudwell's descriptions of the English officer sound apposite for the Russian nemesis: "What halted Lawrence on the nearside of achievement so that instead of becoming the communist hero, which his gifts and his hatred for the evils of capitalism fitted him for [...]? He was too intellectual." (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 20 and p. 39) Without access to Comintern documents it is difficult to gauge the part the organization played in Trotsky's vilification, but Lion Feuchtwanger's 1936 visit to the Soviet Union gives insight into the governmental intervention. (Stern, 2007: p. 162) For much of his stay his guide thought him a "sceptical and disapproving visitor", but then he was given a three-hour meeting with Stalin and afterwards his impressions were much more positive. He said that the word 'Stalin' is equated with "prosperity and growth in education" and Stalin had told him how Trotsky planned to overthrow him, "even if it meant conspiring with the Fascists".³² (ibid.: pp. 169-72)

³² Trotsky complained the accusation of 'fascism' for someone you disagreed with had become a reflex: 'Once there is a ready word, why think?' (Trotsky, 1931-9, 'The Revolution in Spain', 5, *Communism, Anarcho-Syndicalism, Social Democracy*, Jan. 1931)

CHAPTER FIVE: MARXIST THEORIES

I. 5. 1 LITERATURE

For the accusation that Trotsky was a potential Fascist accomplice to remain credible it would help if his work was not read. For a fellow Marxist, ignorance of his writing would also make it easier to express similar ideas to the outcast while accusing him of being a “counter-revolutionary” (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 96) (this about someone, for example, who praised the Russian Revolution as “the most ‘correct’, the most planful and the most finished of all revolutions.” (Trotsky, 1925: p. 95)) Caudwell and Trotsky felt the same about various topics, such as realism in fiction.³³ In an optimistic note in *Illusion and Reality* Caudwell thought that literature from 1930, towards the end of modernist experimentation, expressed “a revolt against bourgeois conditions by an alliance of the bourgeois ideologist or ‘craftsman’ with the proletariat [...] once again [it gave] a social value to all the technical resources”. (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 132) Compare that to Trotsky’s opinion (obviously about Russia’s past rather than Britain’s present and future) that the period of “most perfect realism [...] was] when a work was judged primarily by the social ideals of the author, [which] coincides with the period when the awakening intelligentsia [...] tried to make a ‘union’ with the ‘people’ against the old regime.” (Trotsky, 1925: p. 190) However, while the use of the term “realism” is convenient (it is hard to imagine Marxists like these two advocating unrealistic fiction) it is also problematic. In literature in English different readers might see examples of

³³ Trotsky compared reading Biely, a difficult Russian writer, to being ‘led into a house through the chimney’, (1925, p. 56)

realism in Fielding, Trollope, Joyce or Faulkner, and amongst their contemporaries there was a debate over how to categorise the concept.

Terry Eagleton cites the dialogue between Lukács and Brecht in which the former tried to define realism based on 19th century authors, while the latter wanted a broader definition where traditional ideas of verisimilitude was not a *sine qua non*, (Eagleton: pp. 70-2) but which included “unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power [...] making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.” (Taylor, 1980: p. 82)³⁴ In contrast to the present when “the price of books and the police have always ensured that there is a considerable distance between writer and people”, the people needed “to receive a faithful image of life from literature, and faithful images of life are actually of service only to the people, the broad working masses, and must therefore be absolutely comprehensible to them”. (ibid.: pp. 79-80) Ralph Fox referred to the same idea as a consensus, that “many British authors to-day feel there is no future for English literature unless we can have a closer co-operation of writers and the working class.” (Fox, 1937a: p. 160) He clarified his point, believing that up to the 1930s the reverse had happened, with reference to three British writers – H. G. Wells, Middleton Murry and D. H. Lawrence – who began as working class, but were “taken up by the clique of aristocratic and plutocratic dealers in culture [...] in each case, snobbery won.” (ibid.: p. 162)

The previous generation of writers did not meet Cornford’s standards either. Authors like Eliot, Pound, Lawrence and Joyce, in their different ways, failed to confront reality. Joyce’s “unintelligibility” was an escape from the actual, while *The Waste Land*, especially in its second part (which in its depiction “could hardly be bettered”), only described rather than analysed “the two classes”. In one essay Lawrence was said to be at fault for his life rather than his writing – his inability to understand what he had been writing about meant he ended “his life travelling all over the world in search of the ideal primitive community”. (Cornford: pp. 44-5)³⁵ Congruently, in another essay he blamed Lawrence for hating Bolsheviks as much as the bourgeoisie: in other words, Lawrence’s failure to realise Marxism was the resolution he sought led him to chasing social phantoms.

Because Cornford believed revolution was dynamic and the status quo by nature was “inertial”, if a writer did not participate in the class conflict, for example through

³⁴ ‘Popularity and Realism’, Brecht, 1938

³⁵ ‘Art and the Class-Struggle’, May 1933

impartiality, they added themselves “to the deadweight of the forces of reaction and inertia.” As Cornford made active and revolutionary synonymous, the contemporary authors he labelled as active produced works which were revolutionary Communist: Ernst Toller, Theodor Plivier (“the novelist of the revolt of the German navy”), and Eisenstein, “whose films [...] mark the peak of revolutionary art”. It was as if the only way for an artist to be dynamic at the time was to portray class conflict from a Marxist point of view. To find worthy examples in English literature³⁶ he had to go back to Kyd and Marlowe, who were “artists of the bourgeois revolution” against feudalism. The difference was that now the hero would not be “the great king or successful general, but the working class as a whole.” (Cornford: pp. 47-9)³⁷

It is hardly surprising that someone took issue with Cornford’s arguments, or that that person was an intimate of “hypersensitive” artists. (ibid.: p. 47) Superficially, the opposition between dynamism and inertia had obvious appeal – a young iconoclast attacking canonical literature and vindicating the act through his political convictions – but the general applicability of the terminology was not helpful to Cornford’s cause. A Marxist revolution may well be dynamic, but equally those enemies of Marxism, anarchy and capitalism, could hardly be blamed for inertia. Bell argued along similar lines that “Hitler and Mussolini are both thoroughly ‘dynamic’.” He believed that Cornford’s dream of revolutionary poetry was forlorn because to write it at all entailed assuming your place in “the European literary tradition.” Why this was more the case with poetry than novels or plays he did not explain, as if poems are inherently and always more technical, or that poets have to be more conscious of what has gone before. It could equally be argued that the length of time needed to write novels necessarily favours those who live comfortably; while writing a play implies the desire to stage it, an audacious expectation for someone not connected to that world. In fact, Bell viewed poetry as so distant from quotidian language that “songs and satires” would be needed for the sake of clarity, and those would “involve definite ‘writing down’ from intellectuals (culturally bourgeois) to proletarians.” (ibid.: pp. 51-2)³⁸ It is no wonder he never committed himself to Communism. Perhaps Bell’s assertion was based more on what he read than who he knew. Cornford pointed out that published literature was read

³⁶ The seventeen-year-old Cornford thought poets like Auden and Madge showed promise, but “the very youth of these, and their consequent inexperience of the revolutionary movement”, meant their future development, whether “towards a consistently revolutionary standpoint” or “a bourgeois literary career”, was unknown. (Cornford: p. 50)

³⁷ ‘The Class Front of Modern Art’, 3rd December 1933.

³⁸ Letter to the editor, *Student Vanguard*, January 1934.

“exclusively by the leisured classes”, and successful writers wrote “only what it pays a bourgeois publisher to publish”. In these circumstances, bourgeois authors write for “the leisured and cultured few who can devote themselves to the study of literature.” (ibid.: p. 54-5)³⁹ If he was thinking of modernist literature he could not be doubted,⁴⁰ but popular fiction in Britain in the 1930s included works by John Buchan, Agatha Christie and J. B. Priestley. Of contemporary literature in English, it was as if Cornford could only consider what was ‘elitist’ to be genuine. Perhaps he was betrayed by his education; or simply his theory could not accommodate literature that was popular but not Marxist.

I. 5. 2 A MANMADE FUTURE

It was not only literature that offered the prospect of a dynamic future. Some Marxists, such as Fox and Trotsky, also shared a faith in technology and scientific progress, sometimes to an incredible degree. Wells remarked on Lenin’s ambition for a “Utopia of the electricians”. The author was sceptical it was feasible in such a vast and sparsely populated country, but Lenin “sees the decaying railways replaced by a new electric transport, sees new roadways spreading throughout the land, sees a new and happier Communist industrialism rising again.” (Wells, 1920: pp. 135-6) Ten years later, Hindus saw its implementation and approved of the official adoption of new technology and methods, in a dialectic where the Communist developments (such as the collective farms) represented the modern, as opposed to the traditional ways of the peasants: ““The tractor station [...] helped them out with machines – tractors, reapers, mowers, threshing outfits [...] Soon they would begin to make silos, and by next year they hoped to have their barns surrounded with silos””, while an organizer complained: ““No use arguing with these people [...] They won’t have anything new.”” (Hindus: pp. 214-5, and p. 172) This was echoed by Trotsky’s belief that “[t]he proletarian revolution can be technically and culturally completed and justified only through electrification and not through a return to the candle”. (Trotsky, 1925: p. 83)

³⁹ ‘Parasitic versus Revolutionary Art’, January 1934

⁴⁰ When a friend admitted to Joyce that he found *Ulysses* incomprehensible Joyce replied, ““Only a few writers and teachers understand it.”” (Ellmann: p. 557)

By itself, the idea that a movement that saw itself as progressive should espouse technological innovation is natural, and in retrospect Lenin's ideas for a future Russia sound more rational than Utopian, while the prospect of humanity rescued by mechanization had a variety of proponents in Europe around this time. The Italian Futurist movement, although clearly not motivated by Marxism, had welcomed the iconoclastic future which they proclaimed was heralded by the contemporary technological revolution. In their manifesto, article 4 declared "that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath". Retrospectively it is a surprising boast for a car in 1909, but it was congruent with their demand for violent rejuvenation:

9. We want to glorify war – the only cure for the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill and contempt for woman.
 10. We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.
 [...] we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries. (Futurist)

They claimed their suitability for achieving this desire was based on them being not yet thirty, so that when they reached forty they should be succeeded by younger and stronger men. Auden⁴¹ and Spender were probably not the successors they had in mind,⁴² but some of the poetry they wrote in their twenties included similar sentiments to the Futurists. It was not only that they welcomed technology and its latent possibilities; they also celebrated its perceived conquest of traditional values, notably the natural world. In his emblematic poem 'The Pylons', the Wordsworthian scene of "stone, and cottages [...] and crumbling roads [...] sudden hidden villages" has now had to accommodate the view of pylons "Like whips of anger", which

[...] dwarfs our emerald country by its trek
 So tall with prophecy
 Dreaming of cities
 Where often clouds shall lean their swan-white neck.
 (Spender: ll. 1, 3, 4, 14, 17-20)

⁴¹ As Auden more or less rejected his poetic stances from the 1930s a decade later, (Auden: pp. XIV- XV) it could be wondered how fully committed he was to the sentiments he expressed. Regardless, they still remain indicative of a prevalent attitude of the time.

⁴² For example, Filippo Marinetti, the principle author of the manifesto, prospered through his friendship with Mussolini. (Murray: p. 257)

The poetic revolution, desecrating pastoralism, is metonymy for the effect technology is having on nature, imposing itself across the land without any respect for traditional mores. Auden used the image of a combine harvester for similar effect, where “the wheat/ In shy green stalks appears”, the machines as “monsters gasping lie,/ And sounds of riveting terrify” it is still best “to that strength belong”. (Auden, ‘Out on the lawn I lie in bed’: pp. 29-32)

Each of the above examples – Auden, Spender and the Futurists – showed their complete acceptance of a technological present (a state that was easier for young adults because it was all they had experienced), while being willing participants in whatever was to follow. However, some Marxists had visions of extraordinary pre-meditated interference with the natural world. The plans they advocated for the less foreseeable future were close to dystopian. Trotsky thought that

[t]he present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests, and of seashores, cannot be considered final [...] Man will [...] earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the earth, if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad. (ibid.: pp. 203-4)

Walter Benjamin defended the incredible proposals of 19th century utopian socialist Charles Fourier for suggesting that, as a consequence of “a beneficent division of labour [...] four moons would illuminate the night sky; ice would be removed from the polar cap; saltwater from the sea would no longer taste salty; and wild beasts would enter into the service of human beings.” Instead of “exploiting nature”, to do so would be to deliver “creations whose possibility slumbers in her womb”. (Benjamin: XI) Schemes advocated by Ralph Fox look to be products of the same intoxicated optimism. A German Marxist, Herman Sörgel, proposed “dams at both the Gibraltar Straits and the Dardanelles, the building of enormous power stations at the level of the Mediterranean falls, and the practical uniting of Europe and Africa.” Rather than it leading to a natural disaster, Fox thought that “all the Mediterranean countries would increase their territories by vast areas of fertile land in the most temperate climate in the world.” With such a positive outcome guaranteed, “a socialist Europe [...] would even be compelled to undertake and complete it.” (Fox, 1935: p. 89) These monumental projects have a few common traits, aside from the political beliefs of their advocates: nature should be

the servant of people; they were seen as a logical extension of the contemporary progress of science and technology; and none of the ideas had any more chance of being realised than their champions had of real political power.

I. 5. 3 MARX'S INFALLIBILITY

Whether Fox was aware or not, while being in accord with Trotsky he had contradicted a belief of Marx who had warned that “all progress in increasing the fertility of soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility.” (Tucker: p. 417, *Capital, Volume One*, 1867) In all likelihood Fox knew of neither. As the mention of Trotsky was invariably accompanied by criticism, so Marx's name implied infallible judgment and a state of inviolability. As Marxists it is natural that Caudwell and Fox should admire Marx's thought, but the level, in particular of Caudwell's admiration, was close to reverence. He wrote that Marx “first laid bare then the subject of history”, (Caudwell, 1937c: p. 134) and “the only school of scientific sociology was founded by Marx”. (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 185) Fox proclaimed that in “an unforgettable passage” from *Capital*, capitalism “bursts asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds”. The process of capitalist accumulation thus vividly described by Marx has reached its climax in our time”. (Fox, 1935: pp. 6-7) They were not alone in their uncritical acceptance; Lukács could write about the progenitor in a way that the word ‘Marx’ signified the truth of the associated statement, for example, in one paragraph: “Marx put Hegelian philosophy back on its feet [...] Marx shows that the relationship between the circulation of money and its agent [...] as Marx comments à propos of Adam Müller.” (Taylor, 1980: p. 38)⁴³

However, there were Marxist writers in the 1930s who questioned or even found fault with aspects of his thinking. Benjamin thought that Marx's ideas of commodities (in this context commodities are fetishized or given disproportionately high value as a legacy of older religious thinking) were not complete because the commodity's “delusional expression of collective utopian fantasies” was missing. (Ferris: pp. 183-4, Pensky) Marx's literary opinions also attracted reproach from Theodor Adorno, who thought his and Engels' praise for Dickens and Balzac misplaced (Lukács was in

⁴³ ‘Realism in the Balance’, Lukács, 1938

agreement with the original Marxists). Adorno called the novelists “romantic and archaic, pre-bourgeois”, and that the 19th century assessment may have been a result of “their polemic against the marketable romantic fiction so fashionable in their day.” (Taylor, 1980: p. 163)⁴⁴ *The Novel and the People* offers an interesting comparison to Adorno’s re-evaluation when, at the start of a chapter, Fox quotes Marx’s celebratory conclusion to an article about “[t]he present brilliant school of novelists in England, whose graphic and eloquent descriptions have revealed more political and social truths to the world than have all the politicians, publicists and moralists added together”. (Fox, 1937a: p. 75) It is presented without comment – the rest of the chapter considers French literature – presumably for the reader to infer that the truth of the quotation is so self-evident and so well expressed that to write more would be pointless.

Clearly Fox and Caudwell were writing proselytising books, but Brecht’s joke about Lukács’ (and, by extension, Marx’s and Engels’) literary advice, ‘Be like Balzac – only up-to-date!’ (Taylor, 1980: p.76)⁴⁵ could be made about Marx’s temporality. Instead, his writings’ prescience and relevance for the future, in its original form, is upheld as one of its most unassailable properties: “Marx showed that the proletariat in fact occupied the special historical position of the class destined to end classes, to bring about its own extinction as a class” (Caudwell, 1937c: p. 153); “his wonderfully accurate prophecy is dependent on his interpretation of history” (Cornford: p. 150); or how “Marx’s brilliant insight which led him to declare that the class struggle leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat is being proved correct.” (Fox, 1935: p. 121) Caudwell writes with particular public zeal when he uses an unlikely comparison between H. G. Wells and Marx, in which, not surprisingly, Wells does not fare well, for an acclamation of Marx’s posthumous achievements: “Each slump, each war, every new business transaction, every concentration of capital, every fresh exploitation every second of the development of bourgeois social relations, adds fresh force to the ideology of Marx [...] for the dawning consciousness of to-morrow.” He comes close to predicting a world where the sun never sets on Marxist countries:

It is Marx’s writing which appears to have overturned the government of one-sixth of a world and established a new order. It is Marx whose ideas in the remaining five-sixths are always the spear-point of social action and form the rallying point for the active forces of revolution in all countries. No one has moved into action behind the banner of Wells.

(Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 92-3, and 91-2)

⁴⁴ ‘Reconciliation under Duress’, Adorno, 1958

⁴⁵ ‘Against Georg Lukács’, Brecht, 1938

It is curious that, with the bathos of the final sentence, Caudwell is suggesting that Marx's significance was shown by the fact he had more political influence than a contemporary popular novelist, while his claim that "one-sixth of *a* world" (as if to remind us of our astronomical insignificance) was an indication of his exuberance. It was a rhetorical flourish that must have referred to the landmass of the Soviet Union as a proportion of the Earth's landmass, but since it was not geographical features that had become Communist, the more relevant proportion was that the Soviet population was in fact about one-twelfth or one-thirteenth of the global population.⁴⁶

I. 5. 4 INTERNATIONAL POPULARITY AGAINST NATIONALISM

For its advocates in the 1930s the importance of Communism becoming increasingly international was not only that it would show its growing popularity and political significance, but that it was also opposed to the nationalism promoted by Fascists. Caudwell expressed it as a choice between Communism, "to create the future", and going "back to old primitive values, to mythology, racialism, nationalism, hero-worship, and *participation mystique*." (ibid.: p. 56) The use of nationality and nationalism was also seen as a weapon for capitalists. In the same way workers with different skills were rewarded with different rates of pay, so "it is common practice to pay Welsh and Irish labourers lower rates than their English comrades" (Fox, 1935: p. 47); while an analogous type of exploitation, "the forcible prevention of the national development of weak nations by strong [...] arising from the contradictions of capitalist society" (Fox, 1937a: p. 52), was permitted between countries. As well as the deleterious effect such patterns of behaviour would obviously have on the exploited people, Fox, after Marx, believed "that 'no nation can be free which oppresses another.'" He took this to mean that it is the proletariat of a nation who lose in such a situation (he went on to write that "[c]apitalism draws immense financial and industrial strength from its oppression of subject peoples.") One reason was that what is done abroad can be "training in civil war against its own workers at home", and concomitant

⁴⁶ In 1930 the global population is estimated as 2,070,000,000, and in 1940 at 2,300,000,000. (World population at the 'United States Census Bureau' website) According to the 1937 Soviet census, for which statisticians were arrested, there were 162,003,225 people in the USSR. (Soviet population at the '[Korolevperevody](#)' U.K. website)

with this was that workers “can only win this struggle by opposing all forms of jingoism and nationalist oppression”. (Fox, 1935: p. 79)

Charing in *Lean Men* (a novel based in Barcelona) gives a similar reason for his view of nation: ““The insuperable barriers of class, nationality and race, and so forth, are what put sorrow in the world. And someone profits by them and so finds them profoundly beautiful, “richly” is the word.”” (Bates, 1934: p. 473) This statement places barriers of nationality and race as analogous to barriers of class in that they are man-made though no less real for that, and which some (and often the same people) are able to use for their own gain. However, the depiction of separation on the basis of nation as an artificial even a manipulative construct, also means that the political situations in other countries can be and, if you are committed to humanity’s well-being, should be your concern. One result was to find that the situation in the Soviet Union was an exemplar of good governance (as discussed above) in respect of their treatment of the populations of smaller neighbouring countries: “Under the leadership of the working class the former national minorities have in fact succeeded in developing the resources of their countries and their national culture in such a way as to avoid the hell of capitalist exploitation”. (Fox 1935: p. 79) As “national seclusion and self-sufficiency” (Fox, 1937a: p. 52) are to be avoided, reuniting ““disintegrated Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan”” under Soviet control is a benign act, as demonstrated by the way “it awakened dying peoples to new life, brought a renaissance of culture to old nationalities which for centuries had given nothing to the human store.” (Fox, 1935: p. 80) The Turkmenistan Embassy website, as an example, has a very different version of Stalin’s rule, instead that there was a rebellion in 1927 when “the Soviets lost control of the republic to a national resistance movement called the Turkmen freedom.” When Stalin regained control five years later he “executed thousands of Turkmenistan’s Communist leaders”. (Turkmenistan)

As well as the Soviet Union, the theoretical melting away of national boundaries meant these Britons took an interest in places like Germany, China and, of course, Spain. China was of particular interest because there was both a Communist rising and foreign interference; as Caudwell expressed it, “Japanese Imperialism, British banking, and American trade, unites with the bourgeois Kuomintang Government”, while the

“national rising, led by the Red Army of China, and growing constantly in fire and influence, is also inspired by the name of liberty”. So in China the country’s borders and separate identity are important, such that Marxism can be equated with nationalism: “Chinese nationalism, baffled and outraged for so long, finds its last ardent victorious issue in Communism.” (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 43) The possibility that a Briton’s empathy with a remote people like the Chinese is easier to maintain at a distance is suggested by Julian Bell’s experience when he travelled to China to work as a teacher. Having spent about six months there, he could not get excited about the chance of a China-Japan war, and European politics “seemed ‘real’ to Julian as nothing in China did”. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 252 and p. 272) It was said that Chinese friends did not understand “why he was so exercised about Spain”, while he showed little interest in China. (ibid.: p. 299)

The situations in China and India preoccupied Ralph Fox and he disapproved of both the Kuomintang and Congress parties as “little caucuses of landlords, factory-owners, lawyers and militarists”. As previously mentioned, Fox along with many of his fellow British Marxists, belonged to the same social grouping, and as the Chinese party had come to power through the fall of the emperor and the Indian party was in a struggle against the British Empire, Fox might have been expected to have shown them more sympathy. However, he explained that he believed them to be “caricatures of the democratic parties which arose in Europe to fight feudalism between 1830 and 1848.” So, to Fox, they may have chosen appropriate enemies – in China the monarchy, in India colonialism, and in nineteenth century Europe feudalism – but they would simply replace the outdated structures with “the capitalist and landlord forces of counter-revolution” who have “a craven fear of any development of freedom” and wish to maintain “the unbearable exploitation of the masses”. In other words, these parties wanted to replace the older tyranny with a bourgeois tyranny. (Fox, 1935: p. 75) There are a couple of important points to note from this statement, the first being that Fox is absolutely congruent with Marx, who wrote that history shows a development (not, of course, progress) from ancient Rome, to the feudalism of the Middle Ages up to the nineteenth century: “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society [...] has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression”. (Tucker: p. 474, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, Marx and Engels, 1848)

I. 5. 5 VARIATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

The other issue is his use of the word “democratic”, which he sometimes put in inverted commas, because from the above quotations Fox obviously did not believe people in general had power in this system (and no doubt ‘bourgeoisocracy’ was too *gauche* a neologism for him to commit to print). Half of the adult population, and then women under 30, were barred from voting in Britain until April 1928, (Taylor, 1965: p. 262) so for the British in the 1930s the concept of democracy as we now understand it must have been very nebulous. For Fox, as a Communist, the word ‘democracy’ was a euphemism because, whether in Britain or China, its purpose was to enable capitalist exploitation – “capitalist democracy is [...] only a concealed form of capitalist dictatorship”. In his version of the situation it was able to continue through disingenuously raising hopes: “The whole policy of social-democracy is ‘pure democracy,’ that it is possible for us to use it for the elimination of capitalist private property and the transition to socialism.” (Fox, 1935: p. 115)

Anyone hoping for the “elimination of capitalist private property”, or anything resembling that, from a Ramsay MacDonald government would have been very disappointed. They may have been given reason for expecting a more anti-capitalist approach because of Clause IV, Part 4 of the Labour Party Constitution (adopted for the 1918 election): “To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service.” (*Socialist Review*, ‘Subordinate Clause (4), November 1914’) In his contemporaneous book about the inter-war period Edward Thompson explained the disappointment, that though “Labour *looked* dangerous [...] This, under Ramsay MacDonald, turned out to be all blague and façade.” (Thompson, 1939: p. 151) To Thompson, they had promised much and delivered little:

What would have happened if the first Labour Government had made an effort to put in practice the doctrines it professed to believe? The effort would have gone down swiftly, in failure and a cloud of savage wrath. But [...] It would have left an inspiration that would have carried it to a real victory later: would have awed its enemies and enheartened its friends [...]

(ibid.: p. 160)

The repeated third conditional clauses – “would have happened”, “would have gone”, etc. – emphasize the disappointment with a past that could have changed Britain for the better and perhaps served as an example for others, but was possibly forever lost.

Fox’s opinion of the Labour Party was lower. He equated three unlikely political peers who were ultimately counter-productive to worthwhile change because of working within the capitalist system: “No amount of planning of the Roosevelt-Hitler-MacDonald type can alter fundamental features of capitalism”. (Fox, 1935: p. 38) It may read as Fox making a mischievous but ultimately invalid comparison, that the three came to power through variations of the democratic process and with power used forms of government interference to control economic life; nevertheless, there would be no challenge in differentiating Hitler from the other two. However, to Fox Fascism was a natural consequence of capitalist democracy. His description of the process was of capitalism in a state of decay becoming intolerable for workers and the *petit-bourgeoisie* so that previously unthinkable questions were asked – “[t]he whole system is questioned” – and the futility of democracy became apparent. Such conditions permit “the working class freedom to organise itself for the onslaught on capitalism”, while the representatives of the workers in this system make efforts at “‘constitutionally’ transforming capitalism into a system of ‘public corporations’”, left-wing activities are repressed and, if the working class cannot “strike back blow for blow”, “capitalism then makes use of its new weapon, flings off the democratic mask, and with this new mass basis establishes its terrorist dictatorship.” (ibid.: pp. 111-3) The key issue for Fox is that if the workers do not or cannot fight with equal or greater force, capitalist or bourgeois democracies will inevitably (in a time of economic crisis) slide into Fascism. Such a view is perfectly consistent with Marx’s belief

that all struggles within the State [...] are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another [...] Further, it follows that every class which is struggling for mastery [...] must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest as the general interest [...]

(Tucker: p. 160, *The German Ideology: Part I*, Marx, 1846)

Fox’s images of capitalism flinging “off its democratic mask” and becoming a “terrorist dictatorship” if the workers cannot fight back “blow for blow” was prescient of what was about to happen in Spain, with the important qualification that those who represented democracy opposed the terrorist dictatorship.

A Cambridge Union debate – “That this house, regarding Parliamentary institutions as an obstacle to progress, deplores the failure of Guy Fawkes” – gave an interesting indication of the state of political opinion at the time, in terms very similar to Fox’s views on democracy and fascism. John Cornford gave valid reasons not to have faith in British democracy: “the unfairness of the allegedly democratic systems [...] rural areas were favoured in Parliament; election expenses kept members of the working class from running for office [...] the Press made free choice in elections a farce.” However, Cornford was seconded by a student who believed democracy should have been replaced by a monarchic and aristocratic government and, consistent with those views, Cornford’s debate partner fought against the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 242) as if the British Parliamentary system was just about keeping Communism and Fascism, and the two social factions they represented, at bay. It should be noted that when Cornford used the word ‘democracy’ and its derivations in his writing it was ambiguous, so that it could mean that system which allowed the ascent of Fascism in Germany and the British Labour Party to make empty promises “of the wonderful things they will do when they come to power” through “the theory and practice of the democratic transition from Capitalism to Socialism” to which the Communist International was vehemently opposed. It could, though, also be a virtuous quality in the east, where the Soviet Union “is also the highest form of democracy yet seen.” (Cornford: p. 66-7, and p. 98)⁴⁷ He was effectively using the Western politician’s boast, with whatever legitimacy, to undermine the established European systems and eulogize the new Soviet system.

The Spanish workers in *Lean Men* (represented by a British author and central character) certainly did not look north in envy: “Among the working classes and the lower middle class [...] there was unanimous desire for something more advanced than a copy of English democracy.” That they were united around a negation is significant, with the lack of “disciplined political parties, of the Right as of the Left”, (Bates, 1934: p. 318) while the chance that Spain could become “the second workers’ state in Europe” meant that opposition from several quarters, especially to whoever held power, was guaranteed. For Bates (or the character Charing) as a Communist, the enemies and objectives were obvious, but, what could be described in simple terms – “the peaceful growth of capitalist “democracy” into working-class dictatorship [...] is impossible”,

⁴⁷ ‘The Struggle for Power in Western Europe’, spring 1934, and ‘What Communism Stands For’

rather “the working class could only solve the contradictions of capitalism by revolutionary means” (Fox, 1935: p. 49 and pp. 18-19) – was more complex in practice (as in early 1930s Spain). Whatever –ocracy took power would antagonise others, so if “conservative forces were democratically placed in power [...] The Monarchy and Church might maintain their grip on the reins of Government, but the inevitable violence of protest and suppression would split the country from end to end”. Even extending the franchise to women (at least in Spain) was seen as harmful to left-wing aspirations: “It was certain that the women would vote for reaction” (i.e. their voting would be reactionary),⁴⁸ but, ironically, because the Catholic hierarchy was opposed to female suffrage, it would be impossible “simultaneously to attack the Church”. (Bates, 1934: pp. 368-9)

Caudwell naturally saw democracy as lacking when compared to Communism in practice (i.e. in the Soviet Union), a country where “workers are their own masters” and Russia’s “success is an inspiration to a proletarian revolution in every state.” (Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 108-9) In similar terms, Fox lionised the Soviet political system as one in which there was “open criticism of all candidates for office”, (Fox, 1935: p. 146) which presumably included Stalin. To Caudwell the misguided political alternatives were exemplified by ‘Utopian socialists’ (personified by H. G. Wells), either having “the vague faith that somehow in some unspecified way, in some remote corner, the problems have all been miraculously solved”, or alternatively offering “their characterless, commercialised, hygienic, eugenic, Aryan-Fascist uniformity”. (Caudwell, 1937b: pp. 88-9)

It was in the duplicitous use of language that Caudwell charged the West, where values had changed (probably from the time of Engels’ adulthood) with the effect that “equality has in some strange way become domination by trust capital, freedom is wage-slavery and democracy is Fascist Imperialism”. (ibid.: p. 75) He did not

⁴⁸ According to Paul Preston the newly enfranchised Spanish women (in 1931) were not so homogenous or predictable; “women of both the left and the right were mobilized politically and socially as never before”, though “the right was far more successful than the left in mobilizing newly emancipated female voters to its cause.” Because the main motivation for the change came from the Socialist Party “much of this legislation was excoriated as godless by a majority of Catholic women influenced by their priests.” (Preston, 2006: p. 88) It was similarly hard to generalize in Britain where some believed young women to be potentially revolutionary and that they were the reason for Labour’s victory in 1929, though “more women voters probably benefited the Conservatives”. (Kitchen: p. 277 and 287, and Taylor, 1965: p. 262)

necessarily accept that the lofty bourgeois ideals of equality, freedom and democracy (“concepts that seemed to have meaning”) had existed before – it would have been difficult to show that Victorian Britain had been an especially egalitarian, free or democratic age and nation – but his purpose was to eviscerate contemporary socialists as a synecdoche for the Western political system. However, there is a problem with his simplified and, once again, rhetorical style. What he did not write, for example, is that freedom for some means wage-slavery for others, or that freedom in some areas is bought with wage-slavery in others. It is merely that freedom is the same as wage-slavery. In this passage democracy was also said to be the same as ‘Fascist Imperialism’, for which superficial impact on the reader comes with difficulties of understanding. Is “Fascist Imperialism” the type of Fascist expansionism (into other countries) practiced by Mussolini and later Hitler, and so, if “democracy is Fascist Imperialism”, did Caudwell really think there was no significant difference between the British and German governments of the time? From what appears further down the same page, where the diversity of socialist Utopias is shown as going from “Liberal Fascism to a Roosevelt Brain Trust”, he was using them as examples of very different political paradigms, from which it could be inferred he also thought political experiences in London and Berlin in 1935 were quite different. Alternatively, he could have meant that any imperialism, such as the British Empire, is by nature Fascist. This would be consistent with the Marxists’ opposition to colonial policy (as mentioned above), but British imperialism hardly began in the twentieth century and he was basing his argument on the recent mutability of these “bourgeois values”.

I. 5. 6 THE DANGERS OF WEAK SOCIALISM

At a time when values were “transformed into their opposites almost overnight”, Caudwell believed the responses of the Utopian socialists were inadequate because of their flexibility and “diverse solutions”, which would make intransigence an attribute, and from the ensuing “widely differing ideas” of those who were ostensibly similar, “nothing can result but a general cloudy vagueness inhibiting action.” (Caudwell, 1935: pp. 74-5) By the same logic effective political action stems from unity of beliefs, a clear objective and uninhibited action, exactly what Caudwell must have hoped for when he

went to fight in Spain. Engels had made the same criticisms of the Utopians (French, English and German), undermining Caudwell's claim that it was recent:

socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice [...] independent of time, space, and of the historical development of man [...] With all this, absolute truth, reason, and justice are different with the founder of each different school [...] conditioned by his subjective understanding, his conditions of existence.

What results is “a kind of eclectic, average socialism [...] a mish-mash allowing of the manifold shades of opinion”. (Tucker: pp. 693-4, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, Engels, 1878) There is an implied irony, that in reaching a compromise between various points of view the political movement is compromised, in trying to please everybody nobody is satisfied. The argument's force of reason is especially relevant for what, by negation, is attendant on Marxists: adherence to a dogmatic belief system is a virtue and variations are counter-productive, from which one could expect quite a strong interchangeability between writers, where the identity of the writer is subsumed by the fact he is a Marxist. As should have been evident so far Caudwell, Fox and Cornford expressed remarkably similar views, each one keen to maintain an orthodox Marxist outlook, unlike some of their continental coevals, such as Adorno and Benjamin, who were quite ready to question and, if necessary, find fault with the original texts.⁴⁹

Consistent with the virtues of an established doctrine, Fox rejected alternative parties that “attack the big capitalists, which call for a reform of the worst features of capitalism, for some means of closing the huge gap opening between the classes, parties which play with the slogans of socialism”, but in government defend “the interests of the capitalist class as a whole”. For him the quality of unity was an inherent feature of the proletariat: “The working class, by its place in production, is united in its nature and its interests.” He suggested the disparity and ultimate fluidity of these other political organisations by referring to several in one paragraph – the English Radicals, the Labour Party, the French Radical-Socialists, old Radicals and the Independent Labour Party – to outline their divisive effect on workers. (Fox, 1935: p. 46) By avoiding a diversity of opinion and “a mish-mash”, the benefits one could expect from homogeneity would include unity, and from unity British Marxists hoped for real progress. In post-First World War Britain Fox saw conditions as propitious: “over eight

⁴⁹ For example, see (previously mentioned) Benjamin's alterations of Marx on commodities (Ferris, 2004: pp. 183-4) and Adorno's criticisms of Marx's and Engels' praise of the perceived realism in Balzac's and Dickens' novels (Taylor, 1980, ‘Reconciliation under Duress’, Adorno: p. 163).

million were organised in trade unions” and “the anxiety of the ruling class is well reflected in memoirs”, while the 1926 General Strike showed “that before *a united working class* the number of persons upon whom capitalism can rely, outside its own armed forces, is ridiculously small.” [Fox’s italics] The problem was a lack of “political force in existence at that time to give direction and aim to the movement”, as the Labour Party and Union leaders were unfit for their roles. His accusation was that the “reformist leaders” (perhaps used ironically) were only reformist “before such revolutionary unity leads them into open betrayal and splitting of the workers’ forces”, (ibid.: p. 132) so that in betraying their members they were betraying whatever beliefs they had had, and their flexibility was their downfall.

By rejecting other left-wing parties Fox was opposing a contemporary movement. The Popular Front was “specifically a French phenomenon” (but representative of an international tendency), where a Socialist and Communist alliance came to power in 1936, and symbolized “the unity of the left in the face of the fascist danger”. (Kitchen, 2006: p. 325) Other Marxist writers were much more amenable to alternative political groups and saw the movement in a positive light. Ernst Bloch implicitly welcomed its plurality by rejecting the notion that “all forms of opposition to the ruling class which are not communist from the outset are lumped together with the ruling class [...] In the age of the Popular Front, to cling to such a black-and white approach seems less appropriate than ever; it is mechanical, not dialectical.” (Taylor, 1980: p.21)⁵⁰ The man criticized for his “mechanical” approach, Lukács, linked the new political movement to changes in literature where, through his praise of literary ‘realism’ (which included Cervantes and Thomas Mann) and his evaluation of “the one-dimensionality of modernism”, held that readers of realist literature are “made receptive for an understanding of the great progressive and democratic epochs of human history. This will prepare it for the new type of revolutionary democracy that is represented by the Popular Front.” (ibid.: pp. 56-7)⁵¹ Apart from the optimism both Bloch and Lukács clearly felt, that the coalition marked a new political era, Bloch’s comments could have been addressed to Fox, with the Briton’s attacks on all other left-wing organisations (quoted above) and his belief that that “only the communist revolution of the working class can lead humanity out of the vicious circle of war and poverty”. (Fox, 1935: pp. 9-10)

⁵⁰ ‘Discussing Expressionism’, 1938

⁵¹ ‘Realism in the Balance’, 1938

There were small-scale left-wing alliances in Britain, such as one formed between the Communist group (called the Socialist Society) and the Labour group at Cambridge University, when Oswald Mosley went to speak to the University Branch of the British Union of Fascists (in 1935). John Cornford was at the head of the protest and must have felt it successful because he became an advocate for the collaboration of different groups to form an anti-war movement:

War is the outcome of the economic rivalries of capitalist imperialist Powers, and can only be ended by the abolition of capitalism. The only effective way of fighting against war is *mass resistance* by the united front of the working class and their allies against all forms of militarism and war-preparations.
[Cornford's italics]

It was an undeniably Marxist view – “[w]ar [...] can only be ended by the abolition of capitalism” – but his anti-war standpoint found him in agreement with Christian groups. (Stansky, 1966: pp. 226-31)

There are two important reasons why Fox and Cornford would appear to have significantly different views on this issue: Cornford felt action was urgently required while Fox was more theoretical, using examples from the past (post-First World War and the General Strike); and Fox was writing about efforts to achieve positive results, unlike the Cambridge students' reactive protests.



Fig. 15. Oswald Mosley, East London, October 4th 1936.
(<http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107676.html>)

I. 5. 7 A PROSPECTIVE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT

Marx's phrase to describe a post-revolutionary state, “*the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*” [Marx's italics], (Tucker: p. 538, ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’, IV, 1875) even if what exactly it involved was not specified, certainly does not evoke an image of multi-party bonhomie. Another indication of how intolerant of alternative opinions a Communist state might have been would be in the ongoing

example of the Soviet Union, not just the only Communist state at the time, but for these Marxists (as already mentioned) a paragon of good government. Although it is popularly considered an example of a one-party state, a variety of dates are given for when this began and, as far as I can see, no law was passed outlawing other parties (by nature it is more difficult to verify that something does not exist). What is known is that during Lenin's rule (around 1921) "some 2,000 Mensheviks [left-wing rivals of the Bolsheviks] (Pares: p. 418) were arrested. In the following year some right-wing Social Revolutionaries were tried and executed, and leading Mensheviks and Cadets [a pre-revolutionary party of liberals and professionals (ibid.: p. 452)] were deported." (Kitchen, 2006: pp. 150-1) When Stalin was promoted to Secretary of the Party he declared, in 1923, that Russia would be called 'The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', which made a disparate group of peoples more cohesive, and determined the party that future governments should come from.

What some Marxist writers expected from the phase of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" – which was seen as an intermediary stage before that society became classless and, because governmental institutions would no longer be needed, stateless – was not always clear. Trotsky thought that initially there would be "a spirit of social hatred, which is a creative historic factor in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship. Under Socialism, solidarity will be the basis of society", bourgeois completion will be "sublimated" to more positive ends, and "political struggles will be eliminated" as these struggles are class-based (and there will be no classes). (Trotsky, 1925: pp. 187-8) Note that in the above quotation the "social hatred" of the "proletarian dictatorship" endured for all of a full-stop before becoming "solidarity". If it was written as a proselytizing text then, naturally, it would focus on the benefits, even though his prophesy ("the creation of new styles, will vitally engross all and everybody [...] All will be equally interested in the success of the whole [...] it will have nothing mean, no betrayals, no bribery") (ibid.: p. 189) comes across as delirious, in contrast to Caudwell's description of the process, as if taken from a physics textbook: "If we *wish* to move a stone, we *must* apply the leverage in the proper place. If we *wish* to change bourgeois social relations into communist, we *must* follow a certain path." [Caudwell's italics] Like Trotsky, Caudwell emphasized the short-term nature of the period when "[t]he have-nots, the proletariat, must take over the means of production [...] and] restraint, in the form of the coercive state, must remain in being as long as the bourgeoisie try to get back their former property [...] this stage is only temporary." The main difference is

Caudwell offers the Soviet Union as a shining example of this process in action (and why Trotsky did not is not a mystery): “as Russia shows, even in the dictatorship of the proletariat, before the classless State has come into being, man is already freer. He can avoid unemployment [...] and poverty [...] He is not asked to oppress his fellows.” (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 227)

For a Marxist a concern with the proletarian dictatorship, when they “must take the means of production”, and perhaps the main reason its intended temporary existence is emphasized, is that the proletariat in effect swap places with the bourgeoisie. Ralph Fox narrated the same sequence of events:

The party of the working class is that organised advanced guard which clearly sees that the class struggle must inevitably lead to a challenge of the whole property basis of capitalist society [...] and the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class. The party of the working class clearly sees that this dictatorship is itself but a transition to the abolishing of all classes [...]

(Fox, 1935: p. 47)

Again, it is a natural and inevitable metamorphosis without, apparently, the need for explanation, such as why, if they assume control, the workers would readily relinquish what the bourgeois, over centuries, have fought so hard to keep. Likewise, Cornford believed the process to be inevitable, and so without the need for explanation: after the resistance of “the old exploiting classes” was destroyed the State would “be enabled to disappear, to ‘wither away’.” (Cornford: p. 89) The Soviet Union also provided Fox with evidence that these developments are possible. Although he thought that “[t]he working class of the Soviet Union have shown that the [...] socialist, classless society is a reality”, (Fox, 1935: pp. 89-90) which reads as meaning the dictatorship of the proletariat had ended, on the next page he explains that from Socialism “the progress to Communism becomes possible and inevitable”, but that “[c]omplete Communism is still a long way off”. A partial explanation for this could be that Socialism means proletarian dictatorship and was the stage Russia was in, and Communism the final social idyll, except that the Soviet Union was already “classless”. It is noticeable once more that “the transition to Communism becomes possible and inevitable”. (ibid.: p. 91)

In Fox’s mind, if such changes had happened in “Tsarist Russia”, with “the numerical weakness of the working class and the small property-owning, middle-class character of the peasantry”, the same type of political revolution “in Britain, or Germany, or the United States” should have been more likely. (ibid.: pp. 129-30) Much

of this supposition comes from his faith in the fellow-feeling of workers – in this case the larger number of workers in the three capitalist countries he mentioned could be presumed to be on the side of the proletarian revolt – and that he saw this sense of comradeship making national boundaries irrelevant. In a chapter entitled ‘Communist Britain’ he anticipates the likely effect of “[t]he dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolutionary transition to socialism [...] in English⁵² conditions.” (ibid.: p. 128) He is not entirely sanguine about international reaction, even proposing the use of human shields to discourage air-raids (“the revolutionary government would concentrate hostages at every objective likely to be bombed by enemy aircraft”), (ibid.: p. 135) but he was confident that any attempts by foreign bourgeois of blocking trade to Britain would result in “an appeal over their heads to the workers and peasants in these countries”, and partly through self-interest, “[t]here is little doubt of the appeal being answered”. It would also become obvious, if it was not already, that “the solidarity of the colonial and the British worker is something more than a phrase”, and that a “successful revolution in any advanced capitalist country, Britain, France, Germany or Poland, would automatically place superiority in the hands of the working class on a *world scale*.” [Fox’s italics] (ibid.: pp. 136-7) His ideas of proletarian unity were not solely theoretical – he cited Australian workers supporting their British colleagues during the 1926 General Strike – though the proletariat could be more cooperative as a concept than in life. Canvassing for the Labour Party in Birmingham, Julian Bell complained to a French friend, “*les véritables prolétariens votent solidement pour les conservateurs, comme toujours*” (Stankys and Abrahams, 1966: pp. 392-3), and when Lenin met protesting workers in Petrograd in 1919 it is said that his reception was such that he “left in a towering rage [...] and 200 of the strikers were summarily executed”. (Kitchen, 2006: p. 147)

However, on condition that the dictatorship of the proletariat was capable “of securing at least a minimum of material comforts for its population”, it will be “a brief period of transition [...] the period of the social revolution, on a world scale, will not last months and not years, but decades – decades, but not centuries’. (Fox, 1935: p. 154) Ralph Fox thought, or wanted to give the impression, that the change was happening and discernible. Through statistics he portrayed Communism as achieving a surge in international popularity and significance, so that in China Communist membership had

⁵² He used ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ interchangeably.

grown from a few score in 1921 to 420,000 today [© 1935] [...] In Germany an organized army of 90,000 Communist workers maintains the fight against Hitler terror [...] which] suppresses Communism with a sadistic ferocity [...] Over 7,000 Japanese Communists are in prison [...] In fifteen years the army of Communists outside the Soviet Union has grown to a strength of 860,000.
(Fox, 1935: pp. 62-3)

I. 5. 8 RELIGION

If passages expressing the belief that others, regardless of nationality, will come to share your vision and understanding, about a period of suffering (dictatorship of the proletariat) before a paradisiacal existence (the true Communist, classless state), and the mostly (for British writers like Caudwell and Fox) unquestioning faith in the words of the eponymous figure (Marx), sound reminiscent of another way of life, it appears it had been mentioned to Ralph Fox. He denied “that Communism has the force of a religious faith and its doctrines the power of religious dogma” (though he admitted one similarity, that believers suffered persecutions) because Communists have “[w]orking-class solidarity, faith in the final victory of the workers’ cause, heroism in the face of the enemy [...] Communists express the real interests of the majority of mankind” and religious believers (specifically Christians) did not. (ibid.: pp. 63-4) A Marxist could go further, that not only does religion not support working-class empowerment but is an instrument to maintain the class structure and therefore proletarian exploitation. Marx had written that Christianity’s ascetic strictures had given it a socialist appearance but, in fact, helped the rich to indulge: “Christian socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.” (Tucker: p. 492, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’)

In his condemnation of what he saw as religion’s role in enabling an unjust dialectic in society to continue, Caudwell was more explicit. Historically he thought the nature of religion evolved from a genesis when the rewards were the preserve of the ruling class – “the Elysian fields are monopolized by them” – as if the after-life had a similar class-system to life on Earth. However, feeling doubly deprived “the exploited class” become restless, so as “spiritual goods [...] do not become less for being shared”, they too were offered a place in paradise. This was Caudwell’s account of Egyptian

religion until its “decaying empire”, but he made his reading of the practical (or terrestrial) use of such a system (of posthumous contentment) applicable to contemporary religions: “the increasing misery of the exploited class is reflected in the increasing loveliness of its after-life”. (Caudwell, 1937a: pp. 35-6)

To validate the idea that religion became effectively a weapon for the rulers to continue subjugating the majority and to counter revolution, Caudwell needed to explain why, in his terms, the masses were credulous (they believed in whatever religion they were told to, abided by its moral regime and were satisfied to endure worldly hardships for unknown spiritual reward), while those with power saw through religion as a sham and were still able to impose it on others for their convenience. Perhaps because he thought it too obvious, Caudwell did not remind his readers that any wealthy and pious Christian who read, ““Sell all thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven [...] For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God””, (King James Bible, 1769: Luke, Chapter 18) could not remain both wealthy and a committed Christian. Instead, he explained how the ruling class could have gone from belief to cynicism in a few generations, in their “increasing consciousness of the function of religion” which “is now primarily a function of class coercion”. (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 36 and 38) However, for the “exploited class” the religion “is not coercively enforced but is the spontaneous production of a collective spirit [...] of an undivided class [...] It is the art of the oppressed.” To say that, by making a virtue out of misfortune, the “emasculated class” condemn themselves to ineluctable misfortune, has a Marxist or even a condescending outsider’s logic (many find it easy to see other people’s religions fundamentally as vehicles of social injustice), but it depends on a low opinion of the mental acuity of an homogenous social multitude (“an undivided class”) that so few if any of them can see beyond “the idiocy of exploitation.” (ibid.: p. 36)

Part of its charm, more in a magical or mesmeric sense, is its resemblance to poetry, though not “great poetry [which] can only be written by the free.” (ibid.: p. 37) In an abstract and quite complex blend of anthropology and psycho-analysis he described religion as originally being a blend of science and art,⁵³ at a time when people

⁵³ This is made more confusing by his use of tenses: for what reads like an ancient process he used present forms (“Religion arises [...] science and art are still mingled”) as if it was a contemporary experience, and present perfect forms (“Man has not fully separated himself from the environment”) to suggest a process that was ongoing. It could be that rather than referring to religion in a particular place he wanted to give his ideas the style of scientific theory, events that are possible at any time.

are “not yet fully conscious of the contradiction between the ego and the environment”; but they are made increasingly aware of a difference, when “consciousness (the subject) has become separated from the environment (the object)”, science (the objective, “being accessible to practice”) becomes separated from art (the subjective, characterized by “flexibility and technical richness”). (ibid.: pp. 215-6) This both results from and results in a separation of people because of aspects like type and role, so thinkers and workers “become separated [...] Science [...] decomposes into a chaos of highly specialized, mutually contradictory sciences [...] Every scientist has as a rule an unscientific world-view.” From such a chaotic and alienating cognizance his description of what he calls “class-religion” is not a convincing *sequitur*, but fits into a world where ignorance informs as much as knowledge:

the growth of another world, not this material world but painted in glowing affective colours, is generated by the misery of the material world endured by the suffering class, for which they are compensated by future delights. Hence arises the inverted world of religion, inverted because the world of society is inverted.

What exactly he meant by the conclusion, and especially the final “inverted”, is not explained, but as he was a Marxist it could be taken to mean that “the suffering class” should be “the ruling class” and vice versa. In fact, it serves the purpose of resolving how religions could still exist when they have been exposed “by the *conscious* illusion of art, by the *impersonal* truth of science”, in which science has been redeemed from being “a chaos of highly specialized, mutually contradictory sciences” by being “impersonal”, not “blended or ‘impure’”. (ibid.: pp. 216-7)

Caudwell reads as if he had difficulty in stating that “the emasculated class” were duped by religion without calling them dupes. In an unpublished short story, ‘The Mother Superior’, he described the last days of the title character and again the message is of the ultimate futility of a dedication to religion: “the whole conception of an active religious life was rooted in nullity.” (1932-7: p. 60) Jean Duparc and David Margolies believe his motivation was a rejection of the Catholicism of his upbringing, (ibid., intro.: p. 25) so that the nun could be taken as a rather unusual *alter ego*. Hence, she was no longer disturbed by premonitions “that religious orders would be expelled from England; that the government would secularise the schools; that there would be air raids; or a Communist revolution”. (ibid.: p. 68, ‘Mother Superior’) It was a future

someone like Caudwell would have anticipated, mostly in hope. Perhaps he thought it would be stretching credibility too much to have Mother Xavier make a death-bed conversion to Communism (apart from the fact it would be too late for someone who did not believe in an after-life). However, the same inside knowledge that enabled him to write about “the Poor Clares”, “Quietism” and “the parable of Martha and Mary”, (ibid.: p. 60) led him to describe Jesus as if he were an imperfect Marxist. He “evidently [...] had in mind a ‘People’s Republic’, in which goods would be shared in common, there would be neither master nor man, and exploitations would cease.” Caudwell’s version of Jesus in this sentence is indistinguishable from an admirer’s portrayal of Lenin. The timing of Jesus’ appearance on earth was propitious because “[f]or a long time the Roman Empire had been decaying”, while the Jewish hierarchy, because of coming from the “exploiting class”, had reached an understanding, similar to De Valera with the British Government (in 1936). Apparently contradicting himself, Caudwell saw the problem as being the “reformist instead of revolutionary approach” Jesus had taken – which Caudwell thought probably began “the very moment when he forbade Peter to use violence” – though he wrote that it had been “led by a revolutionary figure – Christ”. By claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus “could not seize power but [had to] assume it by prayer”, so founding a “mystery religion [...] criticising and yet stabilising real misery here.” (Caudwell, 1937c: pp. 55-7)

I. 5. 9 COMMUNIST FORCE AND DISCIPLINE AND BOURGEOIS ANARCHY

If Caudwell was, in essence, criticizing Jesus for being religious, the other noteworthy aspect to his assessment is that he thought events of nearly 2,000 years before could be instructive for contemporary politics. What is plain from it is the primacy afforded to revolution, that alternatives only serve to maintain the exploitative system, “stabilising real misery”, and that physical force is a necessary component (as with the supposition that a potential revolution became reformist when Jesus “forbade Peter to use violence”). Concomitant with the perceived need to act forcefully was the Marxian prerequisite of discipline which, in turn, meant a rejection of anarchy as a principle and Anarchy as a political movement. Marx and Engels both attacked anarchy in writing, especially as it was embodied by the 19th century Anarchist Bakunin. In Marx’s reading of Bakunin, it was essential to oppose the strategy “that during the time

of struggle to destroy the old society the proletariat still acts on the foundation of the old society [...] and uses means for its liberation which will fall away after the liberation”, as the alternative was a risible acquiescence: “Herr Bakunin deduces that it’s best for the proletariat not to undertake any action but to sit and wait”. (Tucker: p. 547, ‘After the Revolution’, 1875) In similar terms, Engels lambasted Bakunin’s strategy as making political impotence an objective: “To commit a political act, and especially to take part in an election, would be a betrayal of principles. The thing to do is to carry on propaganda, heap abuse on the state”. Because Anarchists believe “the state is the chief evil”, whatever form it takes, there would be no authority (“authority = state = an absolute evil”) and to Engels life in such a situation is unimaginable (though, as previously mentioned, pure Communism after the proletarian dictatorship is supposed to be stateless): “how these people propose to run a factory, operate a railway or steer a ship without having in the last resort one deciding will...they of course do not tell us.” (ibid.: pp. 728-9, ‘Versus the Anarchists’, 1872)

For 1930s Communist Party members the “one deciding will” was Stalin. However, it is important to remember that the advocacy of discipline against anarchy was a political theory and it had potential efficacy in conflicts like the Spanish Civil War. It is a Marxian tenet that the proletariat is “the immense majority”, and to make it the ““dangerous class””, (ibid.: p. 482, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’) to take advantage of its greater numbers, implies organization and discipline. The British Marxists were unequivocal about this, and in an echo of Marx, Fox based his optimism on numerical superiority engaged: “Capitalist decay, capitalist pessimism, capitalist poverty, capitalist violence, alike recoil before the enormous and relentless power or this movement of millions [...] which] will be victorious [...] because it is a movement of the immense majority of the people of the world”. (Fox, 1935: p. 149) The organizational strength would come through the initial involvement of members at conferences, “but in between these conferences the membership with unswerving discipline must carry out the decisions of its authoritative leaders and committees.” Note that despite the threatening tone of “unswerving”, Engels’ “one deciding will” has been dispersed into “leaders and committees”, what Fox called “the principle of democratic centralism”, (ibid.: p. 50) no doubt hoping to obscure the image of a tyrant.

Caudwell believed that organization was not just of benefit to Communism, but to mankind generally. As individuals, sent into a jungle, men “would wander through it as mere brutes [...] feral and dumb.”⁵⁴ Therefore, people in isolation would achieve very little because the productive intervention of others is necessary: “man’s behaviour, ideas, art, science, laws, ethics, technique are not in *him* [...] all the social relations expressed in all the possible interactions between man and man become, with Marx’s interpretation [...] something which makes the concrete man what he is.” [Caudwell’s italics] (Caudwell, 1937c: pp. 128-9) So civilization and culture are products of social interaction and, by extension, a rejection of individualism.

As a consequence, various anathemas like capitalism and bourgeois culture were labelled as individualistic and anarchic. Naturally, as a Marxist you could stress the self-interest and competitive basis of capitalist societies, but it would be more difficult to explain how, without a substantial organization in opposition, the immense majority could also remain the exploited class. It was an explanation Fox advanced, that “capitalist production is in its very nature planless and anarchic” and based on a contradiction: “Production in fact is in its very essence a *social* act, but ‘exchange and appropriation’ continue to be *individual* acts” [Fox’s italics]. (Fox, 1935: p. 4) Rather than an external cause, Caudwell thought that it was due to a psychological state of denial: “the bourgeois cannot admit himself to be a determined individual – to do so would be to uncover the determining relations which are all social relations”, and the “consciousness” of these relations he wrote, not surprisingly, was in Marxism. From the denial of reality or of Marxism, “the bourgeois reserves for himself an area of spontaneity or non-causality in all values”, and so “the development of bourgeois culture is the development of individualistic anarchy”. (Caudwell, 1937c: p. 72)

Interestingly, Caudwell held that the chaotic nature of capitalism was “responsible for the decomposition of bourgeois culture”. By “decomposition” he meant that “bourgeois intellectual confusion” could not achieve a “consistent world-view of dialectical materialism”, and if such a state were attained it would have a predictable result: “one can see bourgeois culture clearly. One has become a communist.” (ibid.: p. 237) The “consistent world-view” both expresses the desirability of a Marxist hegemony and echoes Engels’ wish for “one deciding will”. Likewise, when the Study Centre in *Lean Men*, a cover for a political group, grows in importance the causes for

⁵⁴ This is consistent with his previously mentioned hypothesis about the effect on Bertrand Russell if he had been raised by goats.

optimism are “the spontaneously hardening discipline and ever-growing activity”, and though Charing “had incessantly striven to avoid” leadership “he was compelled to exercise control. Alonso’s reply showed that he thoroughly understood his position.” (Bates, 1934: pp. 328-9) Not only is the Englishman obliged to be the Spaniards’ “deciding will”, but the willingness of the men – they behaved “spontaneously” and Alonso “thoroughly understood” – is key to the novel’s portrayal of Communist activity.

In direct opposition is Caudwell’s image of an anarchist, “a bourgeois so disgusted with the development of bourgeois society that he asserts the bourgeois creed in the most essential: complete ‘personal’ freedom, complete destruction of all social relations.” (Caudwell, 1937a: p. 120) Beyond the strange paradox stated here, that disgust with a concept leads some to embrace it more completely, his opinion that anarchism is an extreme form of bourgeoisdom and that what such people regard as “‘personal’ freedom” is actually a form of alienation is clear. Consistent with this condemnation, and Caudwell, Fox and Bates were certainly in unison on this, is the alternative of an organized Communist movement willingly following “one deciding will”. If you were of an appropriate class and in agreement with the policies and methods there should have been no problem, but, as with Foucault’s accusation against humanism, their Marxism was potentially as restrictive as it was liberating:

[it] promises emancipation at the cost of imposing uniformity and excluding those who don’t fit the mold of a genuine human being. Its *universal scope*, which at first seems so progressive in marking for emancipation women, persons of non-European descent, and the working poor who formerly had been denied their humanity, actually works by subjecting all persons to the hegemonic regimen and discipline of a single, universal code of behavior. (Gutting: p. 244)

PART TWO: SPAIN

CHAPTER SIX: THE VIEW FROM ABROAD

For the most part these writers did not pay special attention to Spain until the Fascist rebellion in July 1936. Ralph Bates was the clear exception because he lived in Spain where he was active in workers' organizations, so the country's political destiny was of particular concern to him. As he was exceptional in this regard, I will deal with his writings on the pre-Civil War situation separately from his British counterparts, looking at what he depicted and the manner in which he did this in the context of roughly contemporaneous Spanish literature (in English translations), and especially in comparison with Ramón J. Sender.⁵⁵

II. 6. 1 THE POLITICAL SITUATION

That the other writers did not concentrate on events in Spain does not mean they had a strictly parochial interest in politics. As well as



Fig. 16. Ramon J. Sender.
<http://lenguaielaslamas.blogspot.pt/2012/03/biografia-de-ramon-j-sender-i.html>

⁵⁵ Ramón José Sender Garcés (1901-1982) was a novelist and journalist. In 1923 he was sent to Morocco to serve as a soldier in the Rif war. On his return, he worked in Madrid as a journalist and became first an Anarchist then, after a visit to the Soviet Union, a Communist. He began writing novels in the 1920s and he was “considered by Baroja and others to be the most significant [novelist] of his generation”. He fought in the Spanish Civil War, in which he became a captain. (Ward, 1978: p. 539)

their natural interest in the Soviet people and their nascent (less than twenty-year-old) Communist government, within Europe alone there was the rise of Fascism in Germany, Italy and Portugal, and political turbulence elsewhere, for example in France and Austria. However, Spain was not forgotten and, from the evidence of his personal and published writings, John Cornford remained a keen observer of Spanish political life through the 1930s. Another Marxist who devoted a lot of his time and numerous texts to the subject was Leon Trotsky, a commitment indicated by his remark that “[n]ine-tenths of the work of the international Left must be concentrated upon Spain.” [Trotsky, 1931-9, “Nine-tenths of Our Activities for the Revolution in Spain” (July 8th1931)] These articles and letters (or at least those available) are from 1931 and the Civil War years. They indicate what distinguished his views from those of Communist Party members and to what extent the subsequent vilification of Trotskyists or supposed Trotskyists during the war in Spain was justified by his pronouncements.

As the Spanish government and ruling elite were subject to a series of sudden and momentous changes from 1930 to 1936 (which to a Communist would have looked like advances and reversals), it proved very difficult to maintain a position on some of the most important political paradigms. As a brief explanation or reminder, the main political events in Spain from 1930 to 1936 were the following: the military dictatorship



Fig. 17. Republic declared, Puerta del Sol, Madrid, 1931.
<http://argonautaimageson.org/document98.html>



Fig. 18. Depiction of Sanjurjo's rising.
 (Wilson: p. 27)

of Primo de Rivera ended in 1930; in April and June 1931 a Republican-Socialist coalition won elections, the king abdicated in April, and the Second Republic was declared; the monarchist General Sanjurjo led an unsuccessful coup in 1932; the far Right Falange movement was formed by Primo de Rivera's son, and right-wing parties won elections in 1933; the Catholic conservative CEDA movement joined the government in 1934, there were workers' uprisings in Asturias and Catalonia which the

army (led by Franco) suppressed in Asturias; and, in 1936, the coalition of left-wing and regional parties, the Popular Front, won the elections in February, Azaña became President in May, and the far right leader Calvo Sotelo was assassinated a few days before the army rebellion that led to the Civil War. (Carr, 2000, 'Chronology': p. 296)

The issues of central importance were: whether or not democracy was a credible system through which the will of the people could be realised; how far the resulting governments were effective in serving the people; and if these democratic governments were merely marking a transition towards either a Communist or Fascist future. The turbulent nature of Spanish politics at the time also impacted on these opinions. At different moments a Marxist may have found fault with the moderately left-wing governments or, alternatively, have welcomed them as far better than the right-wing alternatives, depending on whether the writer hoped for a proletarian revolution, or feared that a reactionary autocracy would follow. When John Cornford wrote 'The Situation in Catalonia' in 1936 after the war had begun (around September), he viewed the Popular Front government and its support for Catalan autonomy as exemplary. They had introduced the "40-hour week, 25-50 per cent. reduction in rents, 15% per cent. wage increases [...] Democratic liberties have been secured; Catalan autonomy is a fact [...] there is no friction whatever with the Madrid government". (Cornford: p. 109) Yet two years earlier, and symptomatic of how the outbreak of war had changed the attitude of some Marxists, he had written with despair about the way in which "Fascism develops quite logically out of capitalist democracy – it is no sense a revolutionary break with it." (ibid.: p. 65)⁵⁶ After the perceived successes of 1936, even if they did not "meet the needs of the situation [...] through the existing state machinery", he was hopeful that "[t]he leadership was passing into the hands of the workers' organisations" without antagonism on either side. (ibid.: pp. 109-10)

Trotsky had similar expectations in 1931 when he wrote of Spanish democracy as a stage towards a Communist end; he "assumed that the revolution will have to pass through the stage of parliamentarianism" (1931-9, 'The Revolution in Spain: sect. 4, January 1931)]; whereas, at the end of the war (in 1939), the passage from one system to another looked far less inevitable: "*the worst and most reactionary form of utopianism is the idea that it is possible to struggle against fascism without overthrowing the capitalist economy.*" [original italics] [ibid., 'Once Again on the

⁵⁶ 'The Struggle for Power in Western Europe'

Causes of the Defeat in Spain'(March 1939)]. Trotsky's difference in tone does not necessarily mean his views were modified by events.⁵⁷ He showed no faith in the elections of 1931, when he observed that "[a] great many workers in Spain imagine now that the basic questions of social life can be decided with the aid of the ballot. This illusion can only be shattered by experience." [ibid., 'The Spanish Revolution' (March, 1931)] For him the inherent problem with the system was that, since it was impossible to have a republic "that satisfied the interests of the bourgeoisie and those of the workers", the Republic operated as "a machine which the bourgeoisie uses to squeeze the sweat and blood of the workers and peasants"; [ibid., 'The Catalonian Federation's Platform'(June 12th 1931)] and, though the Spanish government made promises on reforms, it "does not dare to touch a single one of the social ulcers". (ibid., 'The Spanish Revolution') When they were in power he accused the Republican-Socialist government of fearing a move to the Left and wanting "the bourgeoisie to discipline and crush the workers." [ibid., 'Tactics Flowing from the Election Results'(July 1st 1931)]

The arduous lives of the nation's workers, and especially of the peasants in the south, should have been a natural reason for an interest in the Spanish political turbulence of the time. The *latifundio* system allowed large landowners to use agricultural workers at their convenience ("[t]he vast majority of the population remained a pool of cheap labour, subject to the whimsical authority of the administrators of the absentee landowners") who had to work throughout the daylight hours for wages that were barely enough to live on. (Salvadó: p. 6) Even their attempts to subsist, collecting firewood or crops from the ground, were known as "collective kleptomania" and treated as criminal. (Preston, 2006: p. 40, and p. 37) The peasants of one village, whose only food was wild asparagus and whatever rabbits they could find,⁵⁸ protested about their struggles and 24 were killed; (ibid.: p. 61) while measures to help, such as one that enabled tenant farmers to buy land they had worked for eighteen years, were ignored by those who stood to lose, (ibid.: p. 73) and when the

⁵⁷ In fact, his writings on Spain show a level of prescience by which he was able to foresee major political developments in the country. For example, he believed that workers from overseas would "follow with impassioned attention" the progress of Spanish workers who would one day "require not only their sympathy but also their co-operation." ('The Revolution in Spain', Jan. 24 1931, sect. 6); while he warned in a letter of 1931 that Spain resembled the Italy of 1918-19 which, of course, was taken over by Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship. (Letters, 'The Problems of the Spanish Revolution', Nov. 21st 1931)

⁵⁸ Of course, the struggle to feed your family was not a uniquely Spanish problem, and these writers were not worried about the Spaniards' counterparts in the Soviet Union, where there was almost no meat and "the vast mass of the people were chronically undernourished" (Kitchen, 2006: p. 87), and where the ardently pro-Soviet Maurice Hindus, for example, noted that two men who had been working at a collective farm until night-time had a dinner of potatoes, sour milk and bread. (Hindus: p. 234)

right-wing government took power in 1934 “[e]mployers and landowners celebrated the victory by cutting wages, sacking workers, evicting tenants and raising rents.” (ibid.: p. 66) However, judging by their available writings, specific sympathy for, or at least detailed knowledge of, the quotidian suffering in Spain was lacking amongst the British writers. Presumably, as they were orthodox Marxists the person’s class, whether proletarian (including peasants) or bourgeoisie, was sufficient information, and their particular circumstances were extraneous to the political issues.

Ralph Fox came closest to elaborating on their daily struggles on his journey to Portugal in the autumn of 1936 (and therefore after the Spanish Civil War had started) to observe Salazar’s Fascist tyranny and the easy relationship between Portugal and the Spanish rebels, when he thought the Portuguese tenant farmers worthy of description. The obvious inference for the reader to draw was that Portugal then was what Spain could become, and that the “swarthy peasants [... who] have to work so hard on the brown, burned-up earth, to pay so much for the little water to irrigate their parched fields [...] to produce port wine and cork for exports” (Fox, 1937b: p. 58) could equally have referred to any farmer from central or southern Iberia. What is revealing is that the portrait is justified by making his British readership feel culpable, at least those who drank port and used corks, symptomatic of a period in Europe when many continued to endure poverty during a time of a general and evident increase in prosperity. (Kitchen, 2006: p. 89)

Trotsky was also outraged at what in its “famished existence [...] the peasantry bears on its back [...] The lack of land, the lack of water, high rents [sic], antiquated implements, primitive tilling of the soil, high taxes” and so on, (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘The Revolution in Spain’, 1) but what was much more interesting to Trotsky and the British writers was their prescribed solution: naturally, a Communist revolution. In 1935 Cornford explained what he believed to be “The Pre-Conditions of Revolution”, quoting Lenin to show that “the class forces hostile” to a proletarian revolution should be disorganized to an internecine degree, and that the masses need to be “unselfishly resolute” for the uprising. Interestingly, he then quoted Stalin to explain what the Party should be like. It “is no true party if it limits its activities to a mere registration of the sufferings and thoughts of the toiling masses”,⁵⁹ which, as noted above, these writers did not feel worthy of much attention; the party “should lead the proletariat and not

⁵⁹ This is in contrast to someone like Orwell, not a Communist of course, who thought very differently and lived with or as a tramp, miner or hop-picker in order to describe their experiences.

drag in the rear.”” Cornford thought that only France’s and China’s Communist Parties “have reached this standard”, while Spain and nine other countries “are on the way.” Not having “a powerful and experienced revolutionary party” an opportunity was missed in Spain in 1931. (Cornford: pp. 98-100)⁶⁰

The election of a Republican government and the king’s voluntary exile in that year enabled Spain to make sudden advances towards modernity. (Salvadó: p. 31) However, because the increased workers’ rights, secularization and other democratic moves were offensive to vested interests and unenforceable, so the landowners and their supporters tried to return Spain to its pre-1931 structure of authority and privilege, (ibid.: p. 29 and p. 35) while the Spanish Communists saw the Republic as little different to previous regimes. Unfortunately for the Communists, even if their desire for change was strong they had very little impact on national politics.⁶¹ (ibid.: p. 37) Fox depicted the situation very differently, perhaps justified by rhetorical needs: “While capitalism is preparing for war...the working class is accumulating [...] energy and experience [...] for the overthrow of capitalism [...] In [...] Germany, Spain, Poland [...] the advanced workers are turning finally and irrevocably to Communism”. (Fox, 1935: p. 123) Trotsky also believed in the need to remove the Republican government, but in one week went from a zealous demand for “intermediary mass actions, demonstrations, clashes with the police and the troops [...] in which the communists will naturally be at the most exposed fighting points [...] in order to create a proletarian regime”, (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘Problems of the Spanish Revolution’, June 24th 1931) to disillusion that “[t]he weakness of Spanish communism is fully disclosed.” [ibid., ‘Tactics Flowing from the Election Results’(July 1st 1931)] Cornford, on the other hand, was determined to remain sanguine, and in an implicit *apologia* in 1934 he wrote that, though “the Communist Party saw clearly that at that moment insurrection was impossible, yet to have stood aside when the masses of the workers were moving into action would have forfeited their confidence for years to come”, (Cornford: p. 69)⁶² which is in direct contradiction to Stalin’s guidelines (as quoted above) that the Party should lead the workers, “not drag in the rear.”

⁶⁰ ‘What Communism Stands For’, 1935

⁶¹ Estimates of PCE membership in 1931 are between 120 and 3,000, and in 1933 25,000, but they “were regarded with more alarm than their numbers would have suggested as necessary.” (Thomas: p. 114, 111, and 116)

⁶² ‘Struggle for Power’

The Communists became involved with the *Alianza Obrera* (Workers' Alliance), which staged an easily and cruelly suppressed uprising in Asturias in October 1934. Leaders knew it “was doomed without support from the rest of Spain⁶³ but they opted to stay with their men”, i.e. rather than lead they were dragged in the rear. (Preston, 2006: pp. 78-9) The idea that those who were supposed to be directing these political organizations went along because that was what everybody else was doing, was



Fig. 19 Helios Gómez: *Face to face with the Guardia Civil*, October 1934. <http://www.christiebooks.com/ChristieBooksWP/2012/07/16/>

symptomatic of something both Trotsky and Cornford believed was a problem, the former in Spain and the latter in other parts of Europe: “The overwhelming majority of the Spanish proletariat does not know what organization means”; [Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘Spain: The Role of Strikes in Revolution’, (August 29th 1931)] and in Austria the revolution had failed because it “had to throw up its own leaders. It meant that the struggle began in an unorganised way”. (Cornford: pp. 73-4)⁶⁴

Although they were writing about different places and situations

there was agreement between them about the crucial elements for a revolution to succeed: good leadership, suitable members and thorough organization. Many Spaniards exhibited a distaste for at least two of these criteria by joining the Anarchists (often through the C.N.T. trade union), who made a virtue of disorganization which resulted in a series of violent protests that had little hope of succeeding and instead ended in death and injury. (Salvadó: p. 9) The Marxists’ attitude to this group is easy to imagine. Cornford complained that despite the fact they enjoyed support from “the majority of

⁶³ Trotsky had forebodings about exactly this problem, but about Catalonia rather than Asturias. In a letter from April 23rd 1931 he described the region as “the vanguard”, but acting alone “would be the greatest misfortune”.

⁶⁴ ‘Struggle for Power’

the Barcelona workers”, or that the F.A.I.⁶⁵ “is in fact a disciplined political party”, their “outbreaks of unplanned revolutionary violence [...] [meant] their leadership of the working class has been a record of continual and disastrous defeats.” (Cornford: p. 110)⁶⁶ In other words, their activities were counter-productive, which made Cornford’s claim that the Communists were obliged to follow “the Anarchist workers’ putsch”, and turn a “senseless terroristic putsch into a [fatally flawed] serious political struggle”, (ibid.: p. 69) doubly puzzling. In even less forgiving terms, Trotsky wrote that Anarchism “disarms the proletariat”, (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘The Revolution in Spain’, sect. 5) and “[t]he top leaders of anarcho-syndicalism represent the most masked, the most treacherous form of conciliationism with and servility toward the bourgeoisie”. (ibid., ‘Problems of the Spanish Revolution’)

II. 6. 2 THE ROYAL, CATHOLIC AND FASCIST ALLIANCE

In January 1931 Trotsky foresaw the bourgeois class in Spain would no longer require the services of the king:⁶⁷ “A combination of circumstances is possible, to be sure, in which the possessing classes are compelled to sacrifice the monarchy in order to save themselves.” (ibid., ‘The Revolution in Spain’, sect. 4) King Alfonso XIII left the country three months later. (Salvadó: p. 26) It is likely that Fox and his counterparts did not take much interest in the Spanish monarchy. When he was in Portugal, Fox confined himself to dismissing the last Portuguese king as “the devout and tubby little Manoel” and monarchs in general as having “a vulgarity of the mind bordering on the imbecile”, with rare exceptions who were “leaders of nations and the inspiration of their genius”. (Fox, 1937b: p. 48) Likewise, Caudwell derided the bourgeois, deprived of “rich emotional capabilities and social tenderness”, for having more or less fascist ambitions and “absurd and yet pathetic Royal Jubilee or Funeral enthusiasms”. (Caudwell, 1937b: p. 156) The impression these writers give is that monarchy was a bourgeois distraction of decreasing relevance, enabled in the past, according to Caudwell, through religion. In

⁶⁵ The *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* was a group founded in 1927 by Anarchist hard-liners “to maintain the ideological purity of the movement”. (Preston, 2006: p. 52)

⁶⁶ ‘The Situation in Catalonia’, 1936

⁶⁷ He compared the Spanish monarchy to an “Asian despotism” as opposed to “European absolutism”, and thought that it only differed from Czarism in that “it was constituted under the conditions of the decline of the country and the *decay* of the ruling classes.” (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘The Revolution in Spain’, sect. 1)

his paradigm Catholicism was a feudal hegemony. He specified that “the Spanish church (in which the Crown ends by being identified again with the feudal, land-owning grandees)” helped to maintain the status quo to prevent, in his words, “anarchy or communism”, through the combination of “the coercive, centralized State and the authoritarian Church”. Its success as a form of compulsion was achieved through “its inverted world of rich dreams to make up for the real misery of the peasant’s world”, so



Fig. 20. Carlist Requetés genuflecting.
<http://arlequinsworld.blogspot.pt/2012/03/los-anos-negros-1933-1936.html>

that it could be the religion of the rulers and ruled: “Catholicism remains ‘pure’, as the expression of the land-owning and primarily peasant-exploiting ruling classes, in Spain, Italy, South America and France, or, alternatively, as the religion of those exploited classes”. (Caudwell, 1937c: pp. 68-9) Similarly, Fox equated the Catholic Church “with political and social reaction, with obscurantism,

dirt, ignorance, and general unsavoriness.” Portugal, though its monarchy had “had the closest connections with the Church”, “has always been less priest-ridden than Spain”. (Fox, 1937b: p. 48 and p. 47) It was an opinion shared by Trotsky, who deplored the idea that the country supposedly had as many monks and nuns as high school students, (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘The Revolution in Spain’, sect. 1) doubtless to show that religion and restricted educational opportunities were natural companions (but as he did not provide statistics or a source for this claim it may well have been simply his impression).

There was a clear warning and the threat of a Fascist dénouement for Spain from these images of a repressive Catholic Church, which these writers believed was in existence to hold the poor in thrall and so ensure social inequality, a view which Ralph Fox saw resolutely vindicated when he visited Portugal eight years into its own Fascist dictatorship. He wanted to experience political life in what he jokingly called “‘The New Europe’”, (Fox, 1937b: p. 7) and in what would possibly be “The New



Fig. 21. The vehemently anti-Republican, Cardinal Segura. (Wilson: p. 29)

Spain”. The homogeneity of the new Fascist Europe was represented in the bar of the Victoria Hotel in Lisbon where the barman had “[t]he flag of Spanish reaction [...] flanked by the Swastika and the Italian flag”. (ibid.: p. 28) His summary of the Portuguese government’s budget encapsulated the brutal reality of life under Fascism, which “contains practically nothing for education, nothing whatever for health services or social insurance, very little for agriculture and less for industry [...] but] some forty per cent of its annual revenue [...] on its armed forces and police”.⁶⁸ (ibid.: p. 54) Fox had earlier warned that Fascism arises after workers are politically weakened and pacified, when capitalists try “to destroy the class organisations of the workers, to exterminate their revolutionary leaders”, first “in the name of ‘democracy’”, then, under



Fig. 22. Helios Gómez, depiction of the crimes of Moroccan troops sent to Asturias to put down the miners’ strike and proletarian rebellion, October 1934. <http://www.christiebooks.com/ChristieBooksWP/2012/07/16/>

the pretense of defending freedom, “[t]he repressive forces of the State are more and more used against the workers.” The “nationalist passions of the petty-bourgeois masses” are excited and, “[i]f the working class is unable to unite its ranks [...] to strike back blow for blow” then you have a “terrorist dictatorship.” (Fox, 1935, pp. 112-3)

It is a poignantly effective summary of what happened in Spain in the 1930s, no matter to what extent one agrees with the causes. Cornford also held that Fascism had a clear and rigid class basis, which succeeded by the political emasculation of the proletariat: “It

is the dictatorship of big capital, although its terrorist troops may be drawn from the petty bourgeoisie.” To a Marxist the inevitable consequence is that it “strives to cripple the working-class movement by murdering and torturing its leaders, suppressing its

⁶⁸ According to the Portuguese census from 1940 education was improving, since 1930 overall illiteracy rates had fallen from 61.8% to 49%, and 64.7% of males and 35.3% of females were educated until they were about fourteen (though, as these figures came from an unopposed government, the reality may have been somewhat worse). (Portuguese literacy)

legal organisations and press, removing the right to strike”. (Cornford: p. 64, ‘Struggle for Power’) Trotsky agreed, and indirectly warned Stalin that to be meek and passive was a fool’s counsel.⁶⁹ The answer was a strong and politically active proletariat, or instead, he cautioned in 1931, “[t]he defeat of the Spanish revolution [...] will lead almost automatically to the establishment in Spain of genuine Fascism on the style of Mussolini”. (Trotsky, 1931-9, ‘The Spanish Revolution’)

⁶⁹ With “the passivity and the hesitancy of the revolutionary party [...] genuine fascism would find a base in Spain.” (1931-9, ‘The Revolution in Spain’, sect. 5)

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VIEW FROM SPAIN

II. 7. 1 THE WRITERS

Insurrectionary actions played an important part in the lives and novels of Ralph Bates and Ramón J. Sender in pre-Civil War Spain. Although Sender's reputation as a writer is incomparably higher than his British counterpart's, their similarity in age, political temper and ambition, and fictional themes⁷⁰ mean that a comparison of some of their fiction could be very instructive about this period in Spain and its writers. Of other Spanish writers, the most famous group of immediate predecessors were those who were known as the Generation of 1898 (who wrote novels and short stories), and Bates' and Sender's coevals called the Generation of 1927.⁷¹ The two 'Generations' provide a useful literary sense of Spain at the time, as well as a gauge of the possible direct or indirect influence of that culture on Bates' writing.⁷²

Realist fiction in Spain, from the late 19th century, had an "imperative to create socio-mimetic fictions centred on the typical or representative people, manners, conflicts, and particular times, places, and settings of regional and national life." Although these features were supposed to be "[e]specially unattractive" to writers of

⁷⁰ Bates' work was thought to have been influenced by Sender's (though Bates denied it), and they knew each other. (Callahan, 1988, 'Ralph Bates': p. 377)

⁷¹ In either case though, the use of 'Generation' and the grouping together of the writers is a controversial designation.

⁷² As David Callahan has stated – "There had been no tradition of interest [in Britain] in contemporary Spanish writers since the first Spanish Golden Age in the 16th and 17th centuries" (David Callahan, 1993-4, p. 155) – British interest, even in erudite circles, in Spanish literature (i.e. from Spain) is limited (in my experience, readers do not feel motivated to go much beyond Cervantes and Lorca). Either as cause or effect, there is not an extensive choice of this national literature in English translation, and I did not find many translated texts available of these authors.

later movements, (Gies: p. 410)⁷³ they are evident, for example, in the fiction of Sender, and Ralph Bates' fiction fits the above description of Spanish Realism very closely, notably in his two pre-Civil War novels *Lean Men* (1934) and *The Olive Field* (1936). Near the end of his life, in correspondence with David Callahan in 1983, Bates claimed he was influenced by place, "of Catalonia in general and the Cerdanya in the Pyrenees in particular – as well as by the peasants and workers of the region." He denied that any Spanish writer of the time had had an influence on him, except perhaps the Catholic novelist José Maria de Pereda (1833-1906) – "although such is the difference between the two writers' outlook on practically everything that Bates suggests a love of mountains" was their only similarity. (Callahan, 1988: p. 376)⁷⁴ Therefore, according to Bates' own description his work had socio-political provenance and, conceivably, intentions. By portraying proletarian life in Spain as he found it, Bates' novels adhered to a Realist schema, of which the most dynamic feature was group confrontation.

II. 7. 2 CONFRONTATION

Conflicts, instigated by the syndicates and the agents of government (police,



Fig. 23. CNT-FAI fight with the police, Barcelona [?] 1934
<http://arlequinsworld.blogspot.pt/2012/03/los-anos-negros->

soldiers and civil guards) and by every type of political group, characterized Spanish life in the early twentieth century, and so were a virtually ineluctable theme of contemporary Spanish writing (at least if it was to reflect life in the nation at the time).⁷⁵ It is no surprise, then, that the three novels discussed below

are punctuated with group confrontations. The story of Sender's *Siete Domingos Rojos*

⁷³ 'The Realist Novel', Stephen Miller

⁷⁴ Callahan also thought Bates may have emulated Pereda's use of "episodic vignettes of a life lived close to the rhythms of nature".

⁷⁵ "[...] in the years since 1931 [until July 1936], Spanish politics had become sharpened to exclude compromise." (Thomas: p. 269)

(*Seven Red Sundays*) begins with a clash between “revolutionary workmen” and soldiers in which three workers’ leaders and a socialist politician are shot dead, and later has the funeral of those four men, when “there followed street fighting, sabotage and an attempt to institute a general strike throughout Spain.” (Sender, 1932: p. 7, translator’s introduction) Both *Lean Men* and *The Olive Field* culminate in uprisings, in the form of unresolved resolutions. The popular spirit appears quenched in both novels, after the narratives have built to a major revolt by workers and peasants that end, respectively, with the idea that “they would fight again soon, perhaps be defeated, no matter, the workers would lose every battle but the last” (Bates, 1934: p, 555); and in *The Olive Field*, with Lucía telling Caro, ““You will have the revolution to work for, husband.’ ‘Yes, that is true, we shall have to begin again. I have learned much.’” (Bates, 1936: p. 432) The bathos means that they would likely fail as proselytizing stories, though perhaps they could encourage those who were already converted.⁷⁶

By using specific locations (mostly Catalonia and the Pyrenees for the former, and Andalucía then Asturias in the latter) and particular times (1931 in *Lean Men*, and from 1932⁷⁷ to 1934, with the insurrection in October, in *The Olive Field*), (ibid.: p. 397) verisimilitude dictated that these rebellions could ultimately not do other than fail. In *Seven Red Sundays* Sender also used actual locations (various places in and near Madrid), but the year has to be inferred as some time between 1931 and 1932 (when it was first published). However, through having the revolts near the start and a little later in the novel (Sender, 1932: pp. 27-30, and 96-100) they are not given the crucial importance they have in Bates’ fictions. Abiding by the structure of the novel, these two clashes take place on the first and second Sundays of the ‘seven’. They are made, then, a regular or routine feature of life in Madrid at the time. This idea is reinforced in several ways. The very start of the novel has one of the main characters, Villacampa, as that chapter’s narrator, describing a calendar which prefigures the cyclical and natural essence of the events about to be described. (ibid.: p. 13) Villacampa also mentions Sertorius and Viriathus, who both appear in the calendar, and were Iberian heroes after defeating imperial Roman forces, (Carr, 2000: pp. 26-7)⁷⁸ giving a 2,000-year pedigree

⁷⁶ It is possible, of course, that as Bates wrote the novels in English he never expected for them to be read in Spain.

⁷⁷ 1931 is mentioned in references to the past (pp. 3 and 7), some time later a character (Lucía) gets pregnant (pp. 88-9), has an abortion (pp. 132-6), later gets pregnant again (p. 207), gets married, and after some months her husband agrees to look after the child (p. 359). By then it is July 1934 (p. 360).

⁷⁸ ‘Prehistoric and Roman Spain’, A. T. Fear

to the implicitly contumacious national character.⁷⁹ Insubordination is such a given (according to the terms of the novel) that, after a foiled assault on a gaol, an agent does not question the principle of the attack, only the methods: ““You got what you were asking for, when you tried to attack without a plan.”” (Sender, 1932: p. 243) It is a sentiment echoed by Samar, the novel’s hero, when he disavows any control over the process: ““We can do no more with our revolution than a meteorologist can do with the weather.”” (ibid.: p. 281)

Other Spaniards at the time who wrote of the imminence of political upheaval included the Marxist poet Rafael Alberti, who evoked revolution as an invincible and close to natural force in ‘A ghost stalks Europe’ (‘Un fantasma recorre Europa’, 1933). The inspiration for the poem is clearly the opening of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848): “A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of Old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre”. (Tucker: p. 473) In accordance with the original prediction, Alberti conjures up images of the established symbols of authority in panic – “the old families close the windows/ seal the doors/ and the priest runs in the dark to the Banks” – and the inevitability of left-wing success – “shut the prisons!/ His voice will crash against the walls [...] A ghost stalks Europe,/ the world./ We call him comrade.”⁸⁰

The impression that revolutionary fervour is ubiquitous and that it has the force of a natural phenomenon, is evident in *Lean Men*. Discontent in the army with the King was coupled with there not being “a city, town or reasonably large village in which a Revolutionary Committee had not existed”. (Bates, 1934: pp. 306-7) It is also notable that by making the main character British, the tendency to seek out conflict is not limited to the Spanish. When he chooses to work at the Barcelona docks Charing’s first reason is “the independent and belligerent spirit of the majority of the dockworkers”, and the fourth because “it was in the docks that the most disagreeable problem of the workers’ movement was most sharply focussed”, due to antipathy between rival unions. (ibid.: p. 58) As the enemy of an enemy was not always a friend – not only are there rivalries between parties but also between regions within parties – if “the driving force

⁷⁹ The three men shot and killed outside the theatre are: Germinal - as well as the novel by Zola about protesting miners, Germinal was the month of new growth in the French Republic (France, 1995: p. 343); Spartaco – Spartacus in Spanish, the Roman slave who rebelled; and Progreso, obviously refers to ‘progress’.

⁸⁰ My translation is of the lines: “la viejas familias cierran las ventanas,/ afianzan las puertas,/ y el padre corre a oscuras a los Bancos”, “cerrad las cárceles!/ Su voz se estrellará contra los muros”, and “Un fantasma recorre Europa,/ el mundo./ Nosotros le llamamos camarada.” (Alberti, 1992: pp. 61-2, ll. 1-3, 31-2 and 43-5)

was coming from Catalunya [it] would probably be sufficient to prevent union.” (ibid.: pp. 410-11)

Near the end of *The Olive Field* knowledge of Spanish locations robs a local insurrection of superficially momentous significance. There is the potentially misleading information that in “Gijón barricades were rising. In Oviedo the strikers had at once assaulted the Civil Guard barracks. From every mining town the miners were streaming down upon the capital”. (1936: p. 398) It is not possible to know if Bates was intentionally vague (he was writing for British readers), for without knowledge of Spanish geography (not knowing that Gijón and Oviedo are neighbouring cities in Asturias) or Spanish history, the reader might think “the capital” was Madrid and the revolt national (Bates could have clarified by writing, for example, “regional capital” instead). It makes the revelation, when troops are exacting revenge, more poignant that even Catalonia failed to join. (ibid.: pp. 418-9)

For Sender the anti-authoritarian mood almost exists by default, though, as previously mentioned, this is only within Madrid. Germinal’s mother, Star’s grandmother, extends its generational scope. She is hostile to the police – when they “came nosing, the old lady received them suitably and had some unsavoury language for them about their dirty job” – and she has access to her son’s hidden store of bombs, some of which she hopes to use “to finish up everything”. (Sender, 1932: p. 35, and 85) At the funeral the size, density and momentum of the crowd is “an avalanche” into which “[d]etectives insinuate themselves [...] but, uselessly, because they would have to search all of us and take all of us to prison.” (ibid.: p. 90) During a strike when “[e]ven the masters are treating the blacklegs as worthless slaves”, their strength “is that the Government never know where the enemy is. And these tactics are not our own, but come from the Spanish temperament [...] the most extraordinary events happen independently of any of the preparations which have been made.” (ibid.: pp. 71-2) This alludes to a mystery for the reader. There is no doubt about the desire “to force the *bourgeoisie* to declare a ‘state of war’” because “violence is the natural mainspring of all action and reaction, and without it there is no life”; (ibid.: p. 115, and 157) what is not clear is why. Instead of providing information about their troubles, the reader must infer from the dreams of a post-revolutionary Madrid, in which the workers “wished only to go on sleeping the illusion that they would wake up to a world without *bourgeoisie* and without slavery”, and from the heroic Samar’s hopes of “a Madrid finally conquered by the revolution. The countryman has taken off in hostage the

Director-General, the Archbishop, and the honourable bank-manager. Without these, Madrid was delightful in its gentle civilization, cultured and clean.” (ibid.: p. 132, and 206) These may be taken as vaguely honourable motives, but their vagueness is the issue: why the *bourgeoisie* and the Director-General were to blame (it is easy to imagine, but that is not being informed); what their pernicious effect on culture was; and, most telling of all, how serious these dreams were meant to be when the workers were said to be “sleeping an illusion”.

It is interesting to note that in his novella, *Réquiem por un campesino español* (*Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*), written in 1952 in exile,⁸¹ Sender is explicit about a source of political discontent. Paco, the central character, visits a couple who live in abject poverty in a cave, with a priest who is going there to give extreme unction. The misery and isolation Paco witnesses become a recurring theme: “Paco’s visit to the cave had had a big influence on everything that was to happen to him afterwards.” (Sender, 1952: p. 3 and p. 65) It could be inferred that the implied reader of the earlier novel (in which no explanation for the political rage was given) was a Spaniard in the 1930s who would have been familiar with the grievances, or that Sender did not think detailing social problems and their proposed remedies would have assisted the narrative; but there is the alternative that the actions are without motive, that the workers’ organizations were causing trouble simply because they could, something confirmed by the main character. When his girlfriend’s aunt expresses concern about the consequences of their activities, Samar realises: “We have force enough to try something definite, but we remain obstinately ignorant of what we want.” (Sender, 1932: p. 167) He later expresses his motivation as a pure hostility toward passivity or what he calls “sentiment”: “Sentiment decomposes individuals, and an organization of the masses based on sentiment decomposes the masses [...] A serene and tranquil republic will destroy you because all the time it is exposing your lazy and luxurious sentimentality.” (ibid.: p. 304)

The attitude displayed by the central character in *Lean Men* is very similar. Charing hoped “the republicans would, as the proverb put it, ‘sow breezes and reap hurricanes’. In that case they should be helped, provided his own work with the hurricanes was not hindered.” (Bates, 1934: p. 67) Not only does it vividly illustrate his insurrectionary volition, it also uses a meteorological analogy for the revolutionary act

⁸¹ The story is ostensibly set during the Spanish Civil War, but most of the text is composed of pre-Civil War memories.

(as with the example quoted above from *Seven Red Sundays*), as if it is unavoidable and irresistible, almost an act of God. However, this is incongruent with the degree of planning undertaken before the climactic street battle: “The tasks this evening were to draw up a classification of street routes [...] to organize the training of guides who should know these routes intimately [...] Day by day the “staff work” arrangements were being perfected, for nothing was to be left to haphazard chance.” (ibid.: p. 526) It certainly reads like a thoroughly arranged (and unnatural) “hurricane”, and clearly Bates, in devoting two pages to the planning, wanted the reader to recognize the participants’ serious intent, that this was not a frivolous diversion.

II. 7. 3 SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Among the motives for revolution Bates thought it important that his intended reader (conceivably British or American) should be made to understand the plight of the peasants. He used a journalistic diatribe to explain his outrage at laws which allowed Catalonian landholders to lease plots for “as long as possible. Too often it happened that a tenant would sink capital, health and the labour of years [...] only to see it taken from him [...] once the land had been disciplined.” While “petty farmers” suffered because of “land hunger”, owners “sank neither capital, thought nor labour into the soil, but enjoyed its fruits from a distance.” After giving examples of the agricultural wages in different regions, of which Salamanca and Segovia appear to have experienced the worst of the “mind-revolting hardship”, he attacked the touristic portrayal of “[t]he gay, music-loving peasant of Andalucía’ [...] What a colossal ignorance English writers showed [...] the country was starving and seething with the bitter spirit of savage revolt.” (ibid.: p. 222)

The discontents less specific motives for revolt are also poignant. Charing, in a thought that could have been Samar’s (in *Seven Red Sundays*), has not “been pitched into this battle by a blundering state in the hands of venal politicians, in order to bring into being the glittering chastity of endless peace conferences”; while a comrade of Charing’s, Texido, (using what could have been Trotsky’s words) warns that “if at the critical moment the revolutionary forces do not strike, the seizure of power by counter-revolution is automatic.” (ibid.: p. 541 and p. 412) Both comments are remarkably prophetic, bearing in mind that *Lean Men* was first published two years before the Civil

War. Texido's hypothesis, with its paradoxical threat (a counter-revolution which occurs before a revolution to pre-empt what the counter-revolutionaries fear) anticipated the military and governmental retribution from 1934-5,⁸² while Charing's (and probably Bates') disenchantment with "endless peace conferences" is eerie two years before the Non-Intervention Committee and Non-Intervention Agreement. In effect the committee forbade help to go to the elected Spanish government, but did nothing to stop military and other aid going to the Fascists. (Salvadó: pp. 72-3)⁸³

Intolerance is also a part of the natural order in *The Olive Field* in which even the local landowner, Don Fadrique, is in sympathy with people like Samar and Charing. When he sees a ruined chapel he feels that "beauty existed to be destroyed, it seemed, otherwise, timeless and too serene it would be a thing without significance, it would be no symbol". (Bates, 1936: p. 327) The paradoxical principle of healthy damage extends to the olive trees, which are grafted because "'the tree must be hurt if it is to be fruitful and profitable'". Although the rather laboured description ("first draw a letter T like this [...] we have to cut into the bark [...] soon the sap will flow" and so on) (ibid.: pp. 43-4) must be intended as a metaphor it is quite vague. If it were applied by the landowner to his workers, that their suffering is necessary for a good crop, it would be clearly anti-Marxist.

An encyclopaedia's definition of dolphins in the same novel also appears to be included as a political metaphor. Within it is an explanation for "the hatred the Mediterranean fishers bear the problematic beast. 'It plunges through their nets as if it saw them not in its lust for escaping fish [...] and falls upon the fish gathered within the net'". (ibid.: p. 288) It is immediately followed by the declaration that "'the Government is determined to maintain order'", with a complaint that "'governors appear to lack the precision of language once expected of their office.'" (ibid.: p. 289) The comparison is neither subtle nor precise, because while it implies innate uncontrollable force, if the fishermen are supposed to be behaving like the government (maintaining order with their net), it is contradictory to Bates' political beliefs that they are the ones doing the work (fishing) while the dolphins are plundering from them.

⁸² "The aftermath of October 1934 seemed to vindicate the CEDA's legalist strategy and effectively buried the vision of an inclusive republic governed by Republicans. Now a vicious counter-revolution began in earnest." (Salvadó: pp. 50-1)

⁸³ "Most Englishmen responsible for foreign policy wished that Spain would somehow vanish [...] Eden became gradually aware of the unwisdom of appeasement, though in August 1936, when Non-Intervention began, he had, according to his own admission, 'not learnt that it is dangerous to offer gestures to dictators, who are more likely to misinterpret than to follow them.'" (Thomas: p. 917)

Alternatively, if you wanted to credit Bates with prescience then the fishermen could be taken as the government, the fish as the voters or country, and the dolphins as the Fascists, taking what they could not gain legitimately.

The image of fishermen thwarted by a large sea creature has precedence with, for example, Blasco Ibáñez's story 'En el mar' ('At Sea', from around 1896), (Appelbaum, 2004: p. xii, intro.) always bearing in mind Bates' previously mentioned claim to have only been influenced by, at most, one Spanish author. A common trait in this 'Generation' of heterogeneous authors was that they "sympathized with the downtrodden", (ibid.: p. vi, intro.) and even if Spanish writers at this time were not unanimous about the solution,⁸⁴ works such as Pío Baroja's trilogy *La lucha por la vida* (*The Struggle for Life*, 1904-05) exhibited much that would typify Bates' novels, set in "a Madrid steeped in misery, a mixture of picaresque life and revolutionary conspiracy". (Gies, 2009: pp. 490-1)⁸⁵ In 'At Sea' Blasco Ibáñez demonstrated, above all, his sympathy for those who were struggling to subsist, in contrast to "an entire world that hadn't sensed the misfortune which had passed alongside it". (ibid.: p. 87) At the start of the story the massive "solitary tuna" other fishermen have talked about symbolizes a way out of poverty – "[t]here was no money in the house; they were in debt to the baker and the grocer". It is striking and crucial for the story that the fish represents a dangerous level of natural strength and energy so that, when it was hooked, "the boat shook, as if someone with colossal strength were tugging at it, halting its progress and trying to capsize it." (ibid.: p.77) Rather than admit the risks were too great, they pursue it, even after it has knocked a boy into the sea: "The sea gives us our food and the sea will swallow us". (ibid.: p. 83 and p. 87) The obvious message from this story is of desperate poverty and the consequent hazardous ambition, but to someone of the Left in 1930s Spain it could easily be read as the temptation of relieving that same desperate situation through revolution (through a single and desperate act), and the inherent sacrifices and rewards involved.

It is analogous to the harvest (in *The Olive Field*) when the pickers decide to keep the olives: "Don't wait for the day that will never come when the Government will give you the crops [...] They are yours". (Bates, 1936: p. 266) However, it is not the threat (from the Civil Guards) that undermines the harvest rebellion, as the workers

⁸⁴ Galdós, in plays like the commercially successful *Electra* (1901), wrote "against intolerance and fanaticism" and instead "projected his hope for a future guided by truth, personal freedom, and scientific objectivity", (Gies, 'The Theatre in Spain 1850-1900', David T. Gies: p. 445) i.e. very sober change.

⁸⁵ 'Great Masters of Spanish Modernism', Nil Santiáñez

outnumber the Guards – ““You’d have a lot of shooting to do, wouldn’t you? And one or two out of all that might have a gun”” – but the uncontrolled enthusiasm that means they collect unripe fruit and finish with a basket of olives which were “ill-picked and mixed with soil and leaves”. (ibid.: p. 267 and p. 269) It stands as a warning that despite having the circumstances of a just cause and overwhelming numbers in their favour, the desire to change the power structure alone was not a guarantee of achievement.

A clearer, and arguably clumsier, use of fish to represent a proletarian fight is the salmon lecture in *Lean Men*. By invitation, an ichthyologist speaks on the reproductive journey of the male salmon, and “even if it is stopped by a dam or waterfall it does not turn back [...] It must always seek the rich waters which are comfort and peace to the fish [...] Thousands die on the way.” (Bates, 1934: pp. 273-4) With the salmon as workers, the story is of the undeniable and wholly natural urge to find better circumstances and, again, the ultimate sacrifice inherent in the struggle, though the images in metaphorical terms are not subtle, as when “his developing sex organs compel him to search for more oxygen to sustain them and the changing life of his body.” (ibid.: p. 272)

II. 7. 4 THE FIGHT AGAINST PASSIVITY AND PRESERVATION

Beyond literature the focus of insurrectionary activity was in Catalonia (where, it will be recalled, Bates spent much of his time in Spain before the Civil War): “From 1920 to 1921 200 bombs went off in Barcelona. In 1921 alone there were 30 attempts on the lives of employers, 56 against policemen, and 142 against workers.” (Gies, 2009: p. 550)⁸⁶ Of course this level of violence was exceptional in national terms;⁸⁷ while much of Spain was “paralyzed by corrupt parliamentarianism, anti-Europeanism, and the circus of ‘flamenquismo’ -cum-bullfights – the ‘marasmo’ (‘paralysis’) deplored by the authors of the Generation of 1898 – Catalonia vibrated with expansive energies, social unrest”, (Gies, 2009: p. 514)⁸⁸ and in comparison to the energy of Barcelona Madrid was fairly sedentary. (Carr, 2000: p. 238)⁸⁹ Charing’s loaded statement before he leaves for Spain, that “[a] spot of action would be excellent”, (Bates, 1934: p. 18)

⁸⁶ ‘The Catalan Avant-Garde’, Joan Ramon Resina

⁸⁷ It “was such that it was dubbed the ‘Chicago of the Mediterranean’.” (Salvadó: p. 19)

⁸⁸ ‘Modernism in Catalonia’, Joan Ramon Resina

⁸⁹ ‘Liberalism and Reaction: 1833-1931’, Raymond Carr

contains an innate antipathy to calmness and stasis, something that typifies nearly all the sympathetic characters in Bates' and Sender's novels. The dichotomy (of dynamic resistance against invasive torpor) is presented at the start of *The Olive Field*, when memories of shooting in 1931 are followed by a description of the landscape in lengthy and leisurely sentences heavy with adjectives and adverbs, as with "the intense blue of the sky and violet haze of the heat-masked hills like ivory motes [doves], lazily circling after the first loud-winged flight." To be truly alive in such a place left you with little option: the "uniformity of hue which gave its lugubriousness to the landscape and overcast all the mentality of that place with its slow nostalgic quietude, against which man contended only with short-lived violence." (Bates, 1936: pp. 3-4)

It was not simply that Bates was longing for the drama of the English countryside; the opposition was felt by Spanish writers as well, typically between urban excitement and rural *ennui*. Azorín (before his mellow old age) wrote, for example in *La Voluntad* and *Azorín*, of "the daily life of Spanish villages; in them, there are too many hours, and life slips away monotonously – always the same faces, always the same landscapes, always the same words." (Gies, 2009: p. 492)⁹⁰ In Miguel de Unamuno's short story, 'El redondismo' ('Redondoism', 1914), Federico, to escape the "fiercely selfish lusts" of the city, moves to a small town where there is a political party, Redondo, and nearly all of the local population are members. The party's credo, Redondoism, "is the natural alliance of mediocrity with inertia. Its dogma is to do nothing and to be allowed to nap; it means not thinking." (Appelbaum, 2004: p. 17 and p. 19)

In *Seven Red Sundays*' story of the other side of Spain, with the concatenation of the urban with progress, there is one curious aberration (perhaps an intended inconsistency with the character). Samar often (as previously mentioned) tries to undo the "serene and tranquil Republic [which] will destroy you because all the time it is exposing your lazy and luxurious sentimentality"; but in his dreams of a utopian post-revolutionary Madrid "he wishes for it the emptiness of a village [...] An evening with the streets deserted, business at an end [...] delightful in its gentle civilization". (Sender, 1932: p. 304 and p. 206) Yet the degree of admiration he feels when he sees a train pass could not be greater, and neither could the contrast with his dream of Madrid. As if he is a futurist, or a Marxist (as seen in Part One, on Lenin, Fox and Trotsky), the train

⁹⁰ 'Great Masters of Spanish Modernism'

represents a thrilling future, “that torrent of iron, making them gasp, was a moment of magnificence [...] The mental image, precise, strong and powerful, kept him away from a reality which in itself was fantastic.” (ibid.: p. 287) Perhaps the consistent hope in his desires, and therefore what Samar stands for, is simply radical alteration, so that even what appears to be a sentimentally pastoral image, Madrid with “the emptiness of a village”, involves a revolutionary change.

Between the two Bates’ novels there is no doubting the greater appeal of city life. When Charing views Barcelona from a distance he imagines it as a volcano that stands for his political hopes: “The thin, lava-like streams of newly-built streets twinkled down the mountain-slopes into the effervescing sea of lava [...] a volcano eternally rumbling, upon which the order of Spanish society was built.” (Bates, 1934: p. 59) However, the countryside or natural world as it is (neither figurative nor affected by humanity) could be forbidding rather than inviting. In the Pyrenees during a thunderstorm Charing feels the night “was an omnipresent God of primeval wrath, a Jehovah of vast cunning and titanic power [...] with ineluctable hate of one man”. (ibid.: p. 488) In contrast, where people have an influence on the natural environment, the result is tawdry, as in the view at dusk in a part of Andalucía: “the old motor tires, the tangled and rusty wire, the burnt stones of gypsy camps, the rotting mattress which the children had dragged about the waste land as a chariot, the paper and the tins, all the melancholy detritus which everywhere confronts the beauty and grandeur of Spain.” (Bates, 1936: p.10)

Two significant points arise from this description: the reference to gypsies (on which topic more will follow); and the nature of the “detritus”. The objects, in terms of their original intention, could be described as bourgeois; the tyres are obviously for cars or motorbikes (relatively expensive forms of transport in the 1930s), the mattress a symbol of relaxation, and the paper and tins suggestive of advertising and consumption. The gypsies (or, by extension anyone who is not bourgeois) only have access to them now because they are functionally useless. The objects’ current worth (as rubbish) is the reverse of their former value, analogous to the manner in which political desires can sometimes effectively be negations of other doctrines⁹¹ (as in the way the detritus

⁹¹ It is neatly encapsulated in Orwell’s aphorism: “Nearly all creators of Utopia have resembled the man who has toothache, and therefore thinks that happiness consists in not having toothache.” (George Orwell, 1943)

“confronts the beauty and grandeur of Spain”, and how Samar’s Madrid has “the emptiness of a village”), so that the rubbish is inimical to the bourgeoisie.

II. 7. 5 DISCIPLES OF NEGATION

Spanish literature from around this time often features negation as a political or personal virtue. Some of the multifarious poetry of Luis Cernuda expresses “*horror a la vida*” through “a purely negative representation of an idealist conception of subjectivity”, (Insausti, 2006: pp. 105-6) markedly so with his poem ‘¿Son todos felices?’ (‘Is everyone happy?’, 1929):

Down then with virtue, order, poverty;
Down with everything, everything except defeat,
Defeat right up to the teeth, right up to that frozen space
Of a head split in two across solitudes
Knowing nothing more than that to live is to be alone with death.
(Morris, 1971: p. 191)

In these five lines Cernuda comes across as nihilistic, but in fact there is only one of these sentiments that Bates, or any other Marxist, could not endorse, that is the celebration of defeat. The idea of being at ease with the prospect of death was something at least overtly shared by Bates’ and Sender’s main characters. Charing (in *Lean Men*) “had concluded that death in itself was not a tragedy [...] Supposing a man fell in the battle of class, men indeed fell almost every day in such struggles, was one to be grief-stricken or cowardly about the matter? [...] He, Charing, would be [...] firm and unmoved”. The use of the word “cowardly” makes the question sound rhetorical and his answer redundant, and what reads like the ideal bravura of one who actually has little experience of mortality, is shown to be so in the next sentence: “The death of Arolas, a man he had known but a few days and with whose character he was not wholly in sympathy, had struck him a severe and unbalancing blow.” (Bates, 1934: p. 213) Samar, with more Latin display, in the prison riot that closes *Seven Red Sundays*, is delighted at the situation:

A mutiny! A mutiny!
Samar smiled joyfully. Life had begun again [...]
His heart was nearly bursting in his breast under the clamorous shouts.

“Freedom or death!”
And death, metaphysically and actually, is the only possible freedom.
(Sender, 1932: p. 308)

It is a very defiant way to end a novel, and Samar’s willing self-sacrifice – “Freedom or death!” – is congruent from someone who has a misanthropic and nihilistic passion like Cernuda’s, essentially rejecting all political and philosophical systems: “I hate you all! The happy and the unhappy! I hate you and despise you! For the imbecility of your outlook, for the feebleness of your passions, for your doubts and for your beliefs.” (ibid.: p. 305)

The more concrete and predictable rejections in Bates’ novels are summed up in Charing’s reverie by the Mediterranean: “he permitted himself to think what life would eventually be like in a society from which poverty, violence, the ceaseless battle of classes and war had been eliminated”. (1934: p. 329) It would be easy to be cynical about this, it is as platitudinous as a child’s three wishes (world peace and so on), but it contains an important political lesson that would have a major bearing on the Spanish Civil War. It would be difficult for anybody, certainly on the Left, to disagree, but a series of negations are not sufficient for constructive political policy; the actual aims and methods for achieving those ambitions are much more difficult to agree on.⁹² Presumably, everyone fighting on the government’s side in the Civil War would have agreed with Charing’s sentiments, as well as opposing the Fascist rebellion, but their differences of opinion about how to reach that state led to internecine fighting on the Republican side.⁹³ Sender’s description of Star (a sixteen-year-old girl in *Seven Red Sundays*) singing, far more effectively evokes revolutionary spirit, enthusiasm and a cause worth following: “A new harmony, controlled by laws as yet unknown, laws unrelated to the old *bourgeois* law, laws unrelated to the old morality, the new joy created by violence.” The generality of the new displacing the old for an experience of “a joy that was pure and simple” (1932: p. 224) is particularly appropriate where the alternative, a song about post-revolutionary policy from a sixteen-year-old, would be comically incongruous. Ironically, it is more convincing than Charing’s more straightforward seaside fantasy because it is more abstract, even though his is about a

⁹² His sentence continues with some aspirations, but these are just as abstract as the negations: it would be a society “where the spirit might drink as deeply as it wished of knowledge, of art, of music and all things lovely that haunt the tormented spirit of man.” (ibid.: p. 329)

⁹³ For example, in May 1937 in Barcelona, “[t]he CNT [Anarchists], the POUM [Trotskyists or supposed Trotskyists] and the extreme anarchist group [...] confronted the forces of the Generalitat and the PSUC [Socialists] for several days.” (Preston, 2006: p. 256)

future too distant to be foreseeable, while hers already exists in a “joy created by violence.”

II. 7. 6 GYPSY ALTERITY

The gypsies in *The Olive Field* are no more intelligible than the future is to Charing. In one paragraph some of the adjectives used to describe them are “motley [...] full-skirted, many-petticoated [...] bare blackened [...] beautiful [...] disarrayed [...] primitive [...] sad and cunning [...] filthy [...] hard, implacable liars, the good-tempered warmhearted crafty and stinking men.” (Bates, 1936: p. 218) It is certainly a vivid depiction that also shows the narrator’s egalitarianism has limits, reminiscent of Trotsky’s (amongst others’) view of peasants as alien to the proletariat and probably unsuitable for a revolution,⁹⁴ but more extreme and based on cliché or hearsay, while his apparently profound knowledge of these particular people (informing the prolix description) would be impossible to acquire in a few days (“On Saturday the caravans arrived”). The (so-called omniscient) narrator implicitly finds them both intriguing and dangerous, not simply with an obvious oxymoron like “warm-hearted crafty”, but in “many-petticoated” the reader can infer his (Charing’s or the narrator’s) curiosity, even desire for, what is hidden and unavailable to him, as well as its inclusion signalling the gypsies’ purported difference and love of extraneous adornment.

The obvious and immediate precursor in Spanish literature from a writer with an interest in gypsies was Federico García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano* (*Gypsy Ballad Book*, 1928), which had a great appeal for readers and critics. (Gies, 2009: p. 597)⁹⁵ Lorca used gypsy characters for tales of passion, such as this from ‘La casada infiel’ (‘The Unfaithful Wife’):

I took off my tie.
She took off her dress.
I, my belt with a revolver.
She, her four corsets [...]
Her thighs slipped away from me
like startled fish,
half filled with fire,

⁹⁴ “The peasant point of view in economics, in politics, and in art, is more primitive, more limited, more egotistic than that of the proletariat.” (Trotsky, 1925, p. 182)

⁹⁵ ‘Federico García Lorca’, Andrew A. Anderson

half filled with cold.
That night I raced
on the best of roads
mounted on a nacre filly
with no bridles and with no stirrups.⁹⁶

From these lines similarities with *The Olive Field* are striking: the strange and fascinating, mischievous and untrustworthy (“Her thighs slipped away”) nature of the woman; the excessive underwear; and her inherently contradictory nature (she has “fire” and “cold”). However, one interesting difference is that Lorca claimed that, rather than exclusively depicting gypsies in these poems, he wished it to be “essentially an Andalusian portrait”. (Ward: p. 474) Lorca felt that he had been born into a heterogeneous culture –“I believe that being from Granada inclines me to a sympathetic understanding of the persecuted, gypsies, Jews, blacks...the Moorishness that all of us hold within” (Rogers: p. 185) – and so was simply exploiting different aspects of his own heritage. In the poem’s depiction of liberty –the wife does not obey conventional strictures on marriage, and the horse is racing without bridles or stirrups – it details the achievement of forbidden sexuality, something David Callahan saw as plausibly representative of Lorca’s own challenging experiences of homosexuality. (Callahan, 2005: p. 49) The idea is perfectly consistent with Lorca’s use of gypsies, superficially nothing to do with the poet, but in fact people he felt were a part of his identity.

Bates, though, conspicuously made the gypsies outsiders in Andalucía. As their caravans have only recently arrived, “trailing over the dazzling lunar lands above the Huerta”, and have taken a preternatural (“dazzling lunar”) route from an unknown origin, they certainly do not belong. However, the difficulties they encounter because of their itinerant lifestyle are reasons for ephemeral sympathy, and for attacking governmental bureaucracy. Only the official is annoyed with them (supposedly), who is “compelled to endorse all the passes without which a gypsy may not move in Spain and which must be given afresh in every town, but a mass of petty litigation passed through his hands.” After an argument with the same official means that their papers are marked, resulting in trouble elsewhere and two of them going to prison, the narratorial

⁹⁶ This is my translation of: “Yo me quité la corbata./ Ella se quitó el vestido./ Yo el cinturón con revólver./ Ella sus cuatro corpiños [...] Sus muslos se me escapaban/ como peces sorprendidos,/ la mitad llenos de lumbre,/ la mitad llenos de frío./ Aquella noche corrí/ el mejor de los caminos,/ montado en potra de nácar/ sin bridas y sin estribos.” (Lorca, 2002: p. 366, ll. 24-27 and 32-39, ‘La casada infiel’)

condemnation is unequivocal, but it is not of officialdom: “This made no difference to the gypsies; that was their life, the life of the arrogant cringers.” (Bates, 1936: pp. 218-20) That the hostility has no explanation in the narrative and is in the form of a contradictory image – cringing is not the posture of someone who is arrogant – betrays genuine anger from a cause outside the story. One has to wonder what Bates would have said of the same words being used by a bourgeois author about proletarian characters in a similar situation.

CHAPTER EIGHT: POLITICAL BELIEFS

II. 8. 1 ANARCHISTS

Given Bates' hostile attitude displayed to the gypsies in *The Olive Field*, it is surprising they were allowed to intrude on the narrative – they occupy two pages and have no effect on other characters or events – and equally enigmatic is the cause of the hostility. Based on the last sentence (quoted above), their rootlessness and their purported nonchalance in the face of trouble was irritating, to some *payos*⁹⁷ at least. The portrayal of feckless Anarchists in these two novels is analogous, with frustration shown for what is framed as wilful behaviour. It is quite possible to see the position of the narrator (and probably author) as regards the Anarchists or gypsies in psycho-analytical terms, wherein the narrator is “that inner authority which Freud called the *super-ego* and Jung called the *moral complex*”, (Stevens, 2001: pp. 65-6) and the gypsies or Anarchists the *id*, “primitive, unorganized, and emotional: ‘the realm of the illogical’.” (Storr, 2001: p. 60) According to this interpretation the narrator's, and conceivably Bates', frustration would have been that, even though the disciplinarian could have experienced first-hand the ungoverned activities of the Anarchists, he would have been powerless to correct them.

To what extent Anarchists as a whole deserved opprobrium is difficult to say because they certainly did not act as an homogenous or consistent unit, in itself something that would have aggravated a Communist at the time. Organizationally they were represented by the CNT syndicate and the FAI. The CNT was a fairly disparate organization whose “loose libertarian principles” meant that it struggled to define a

⁹⁷ This is the Spanish term used by *gitanos* to describe all non-gypsies. It has disparaging connotations, in common with synonymous gypsy terms for non-gypsies in other languages, suggesting, for example, an alien and unworthy people who are unable to live well. (Schneeweis: p. 113)

coherent approach or objective. (Salvadó: p. 37) The FAI was formed “in 1927 to maintain the ideological purity of the movement.” There was a split in 1931, with the FAI demanding a policy of constant revolutionary violence. They took over from the CNT and instigated a policy of ““revolutionary gymnastics”” until 1936. (Preston, 2006: p. 52) Regionally there were also differences in the attitude and behaviour of Anarchists, which included their relations with the local Communists (for example, in Sevilla in the 1930s there were on-going fights between groups of Communists and Anarcho-syndicalists). (Salvadó: p. 36) In Catalonia from the 1890s Anarchism provided an outlet for those men who felt the need for violence, and could do so for a political cause which suited their temperaments. After the First World War Catalonia witnessed strikes on a grand scale in confrontation with intransigent employers, and in Barcelona the result was fighting between CNT gunmen and thugs hired by the bosses. (Carr, 2000: p. 231)⁹⁸

Therefore, the difference in the settings of *Lean Men* (in Catalonia) and *The Olive Field* (in Andalucía and Asturias) could be expected to have a significant impact on the portrayal of the local Anarchists. *Seven Red Sundays* also had a different location (Madrid), but what was probably more telling were the authors’ political experiences. Whereas Bates was a Communist or sympathetic to Communism the whole time he was in Spain, Sender had been a member of the Anarchist union from 1930 to 1932, but, after visiting the U.S.S.R. in 1933, he decided “the Communist Party would be a more efficient revolutionary organisation”, (Sender, 1952, intro.: p. 2)⁹⁹ because he believed that any society “controls defects by limiting the freedom of everyone.” (1932, Author’s Preface: p. 12) If, as it appears, it was a rational rather than an emotional decision (and note that he had left the Anarchists at least a year before officially joining the Communists) then he probably felt no enmity towards his present or former colleagues, so that one could expect a fairly sympathetic depiction of the Anarchists. This extends to the harmonious co-existence of Anarchists and Communists (“we see communists and anarchists getting along”). (Callahan, 1988: p. 380) However, the mutable nature of the novel, adopting varied viewpoints (usually depending on the narrator or the speaker) throughout the story, means that, for example, the author gave the view that “the anarchosyndicalist phenomena are due to an excess of vitality in individuals and in

⁹⁸ ‘Liberalism and Reaction’

⁹⁹ As *Siete domingos rojos* first appeared in 1932 and was based on events from 1931, the probability is that Sender wrote it while he was in and possibly after he left the Anarchists, certainly before he visited the Soviet Union. (Ward, 1978: p. 539)

masses, to a generosity and exuberance characteristic of over-vitalized men and societies”; while the main female character, Star, said about her future partner, Villamarca: ““His face is tranquil and his eyes are steady and besides he speaks very little. The anarchists are like that””. (Sender, 1932: p. 12, and 44) Superficially both statements cannot be right, but the latter is only about the appearance of Anarchists, and taken together there could be a warning, especially to those in authority, that their natures and intentions are inscrutable.

There is no such assessment with Bates, suggesting that he did not consider them worth the thought. His attitude is clear enough through the manner he compares the reasonable requests made by socialist unions in Barcelona, rather “than striking for the wild demands usually put forward by the anarchists”; (1934: pp. 365-6) while the meeting that opens *The Olive Field* has an Anarchist speaker (and “agitator”), Aguiló, who condemns every national institution, though “he brought no arguments to bear upon the question, he advanced no data, but nevertheless the workers were excited by his denunciation.” As the gathering of fanciful Anarchists is attended by a Communist, Robledo, who has been drinking, the predictable consequence is an argument that becomes a fight. The cause of the trouble, though, is not that Robledo advocates Communist Party policy, such as that the workers should ““form their political party”” and be given land. Instead it is that Aguiló’s worth as a revolutionary figurehead, even as a man, is undermined when Robledo reveals Aguiló has written three letters to officials ““pleading for pardon [...] anything to crawl out of prison while there were three dead men in-.”” In confirmation of their collective lack of masculine virtues (possible metonymy for a perceived political ineffectiveness in the region), the crowd then attacked the isolated communist with furniture and knives, not fists. (Bates, 1936: pp. 13-17)

Bates’ clear antipathy was indicated from the start by the image of Aguiló, a caricature who was “frail-looking [...] thin lips tinged with blue [...] Thick glasses prevented his eyes, small and gray and discolored, from being easily seen”, (ibid: p. 12) which begs the question as to where his apparent charisma stemmed from, and anticipated the difficult relations the Communists would have with affiliates represented by people they found so distasteful. In contrast to Aguiló, Star (from *Seven Red Sundays*), an Anarchist from a family of Anarchists, is more appealing and tolerant. She believes her cat to be a communist, which is not a problem because “it seems to me all of us who are alive should join in the fight against capitalism”. At other times in the

novel there are fractures, such as a discussion between an Anarchist and some Communists on the correct way to proceed in their struggle and on the nature of liberty, but nobody is a grotesque and when they have incompatible differences, “they stopped the discussion by going off together.” Indeed, though this is said to be a routine experience – “Such discussions between communists and anarchists end badly” – the resolution is of mutual tolerance, a state personified in the character of Liberto, who “was not a communist, but he understood communism, nor was he an anarchist, although he was in harmony with the good-will and the intellectual single-mindedness of orthodox anarchism.” (Sender, 1932: p. 44 and pp. 210-12)

A similar level of understanding occurs with one gesture in the Barcelona of *Lean Men*, when history intrudes into the fiction. Angel Pestaña, a genuine and very active Anarchist in the region in the 1930s,¹⁰⁰ leads a group to the Communist dockers’ centre during a period when civil war was threatening, and meets the main character of the story to reassure him that “we are for the revolution [...] But this is not our moment, and if I understand your ideas, it is not yours.” As a result “anarchists had joined hands with the Centre, and some thousands of revolutionary workers gone on to the streets to smother the smouldering fires ignited so mysteriously.” (Bates, 1934: pp. 358-60) Bates’ motive for including a real Anarchist from the time to represent the conciliatory aspect of the organization could be that the two had met or, at least, that the Englishman knew of Pestaña and admired him for his foiled attempts at moderating the CNT’s policies.¹⁰¹

The author showed that he could also create fictitious Anarchists with admirable qualities, as with the two intermittent friends, Joaquín Caro and the guitarist Diego Mudarra. However, Bates’ low opinion of their politics surfaces when Caro admits to Robledo (the meeting dissenter mentioned above) that he has left the F.A.I. and, as Sender did, recognizes that their only hope is with Marxism. He explains that “I can see it’s no good; of course, you can’t make a revolution the way we’ve set about it, you want a party and a state”. (Bates, 1934: p. 193) Although the use of “of course” suggests he knew all the time that anarchism was a doomed enterprise, it is possible that he had a Damascene moment when he attempted to blow up Don Fadrique’s dam with

¹⁰⁰ In 1931, “under the leadership of the old guard, headed by the national secretary, the veteran Angel Pestaña, the CNT welcomed the Republic as a regime that seemingly inaugurated a period of hopes and liberties.” (Salvadó: p. 37)

¹⁰¹ Although Pestaña had spoken out against the persecution of Anarchists after a visit to Russia in 1920, he signalled his willingness to work with other parties through “the regime’s corporatism”. (Thomas: p. 65, and Salvadó: p. 22)

Mudarra, because it follows as a topic in their conversation, happened just before in the narrative sequence, and exemplifies the view of Anarchists as impetuous in contrast to the more considerate (soon-to-be) Communist, who is troubled by the consequences.

Initially, the prospect of the dam's destruction thrills Mudarra: "At once joyful excitement flooded into him; ah, this was going to be great, this was life and the fulfillment of the will. Action [...] Ah, the Deed, the joy of unfettered defiant Action." The nearest he comes to anticipating the effect is the chaos of the explosion: "he saw the great fan of orange-hued light soar up simultaneously against the background of boulders and tree branches and whirling trunks streaming up into the black night". (ibid.: p. 156) The unadulterated excitement is its own justification; even the landowner who also owns the dam has been forgotten. Mudarra's attitude is reminiscent of a "leap before you look" moment in *Seven Red Sundays*, when an unnamed Anarchist narrator in a confrontation with the Civil Guard explains that he has to throw a bomb: "I have lighted my fuse, and although it is not now absolutely necessary to throw it, as they are on the point of retreating, I can't keep the bomb in my hand [...] The explosion was violent." (Sender, 1932: p. 79) Both are instances of Anarchists displaying a puerile appetite for diversion with a total disregard of responsibility. However, Caro, probably seeing the errors of his ways politically as well as explosively, envisages the destruction of the peasants' livelihood: "'it's trees, it's crops, wheat, barley, potatoes, and all that; you can't do it, man.'" (Bates, 1936: p. 162)

It is ironic that the one who is about to leave the Anarchists should be the one who is concerned about the peasants' welfare, because in *Lean Men* and *Seven Red Sundays* Anarchism is described as a pastoral movement. Attending a concert, Charing's thoughts turn to politics and, based on what he believes are the Anarchists' musical tendencies, he feels he has gained an insight: "Anarchism was, he knew, of agricultural origin, a theory suited to the simpler and more personal problems of the countryside. In rebellion these men became peasants again". (Bates, 1934: p. 378) He exhibits a rather condescending and alien attitude to peasants, shown by other Marxists and quasi-Marxists at the time (for example, Trotsky and Maurice Hindus, as cited in Part One); and he continues, that "(t)he small-scale and primitive state of Spanish industry would favour anarchism".

While it was true that the Anarchist movements showed much more sympathy over the welfare of peasants than the Communists (Navarro), the claim that anarchism began with agricultural workers, used by Charing to vindicate his extrapolation, is not

confirmed by modern historians. Peasants and the urban proletariat felt discontent throughout the 19th century over their rights and living conditions, but it was only after 1868, when the inspirational Italian orator Giuseppe Fanelli arrived, (Preston, 2006: p. 24; and Salvadó: p. 7) that Anarchism as a political force in Spain emerged,¹⁰² especially “among the Barcelona proletariat and the *braceros*, the landless casual labourers of the great estates of Andalusia [...] it is perhaps most simply explained by the hostility of employers and landowners to any form of organization, leaving violence as the only alternative.” In relation to this version of the same history, Charing’s rather bland depiction, and in particular the idea that peasants inherently have “simpler and more personal problems”, reads as a desire to diminish the troubles of people, “described by Gerald Brenan as the most wretched, semi-starving working class in Europe.”¹⁰³ (Carr, 2000: p. 231)¹⁰⁴ There is added poignancy that Charing relieves himself of their “personal problems” – “personal” implies they are nobody else’s concern – so that he can relax in the relative luxury of a concert.¹⁰⁵

Samar finds his thoughts wandering pleasantly in a strikingly similar situation, relaxing in the country, where “[h]e communed with the clouds, the trees and the wind, turning his back on the city.” Again the quasi-Communist (see below) declares, “[t]he country is anarchical [...] the city communist. The country is elemental, straightforward and profound [...] the country disdains agricultural science, the trees botany, and the river geography. The machine, on the other hand, is a lover of statistics.” (Sender, 1932: p. 192) Rather than an invention of peasants, in this hypothesis Anarchism is a natural product of the countryside (the people who live there presumably would be as well, but they are not mentioned) where science has no control; but in the city science governs each process, as it is fundamentally organized and artificial, composed of man-made products and activities.

The corresponding sense that Anarchism appealed to or sprang from the emotions, as opposed to any form of logic, could explain why characters in *The Olive Field* and *Seven Red Sundays* equate it with Christianity. Robledo says that

¹⁰² Esdaile believes that Proudhon (1809-65) had already provoked interest in anarchic political ideas in Spain. (Esdaile: pp. 175-6)

¹⁰³ The competition was fierce for this unenviable accolade, so that it is debatable that Spaniards suffered the most. Obviously, after the First World War the populations of Germany and Austria struggled to survive, “[p]easants in Eastern Europe were reduced to abject penury”, a great majority of Soviets were malnourished, and a quarter of Western Europe was in poverty. (Kitchen: p. 87) Nevertheless, the point remains that life in Spain at the lower end of the social scale could be extremely arduous.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Liberalism and Reaction’

¹⁰⁵ The sentiment is not repeated in *The Olive Field*.

“philosophically Anarchism is nothing more than Christianity without God”, but he leaves the thought incomplete, even repeating the idea 100 pages later and again not offering an explanation, instead finding fault with the Church. (Bates, 1936: p. 74 and p. 184) The same comparison is made by Samar (a different writer about a different city, suggesting it may have been a fairly widespread idea at the time), but he is explicit about his reasons. It is acceptable “as a negation of the state. [However,] Abstract anarchism is a religion and doesn’t interest me, because, like all religions, it is based on superstition, and besides, aims at a utopia.” While the “utopia” is comprehensible – as a misty vision of a happily co-existing society without any form of authority or governance – their “superstition” is less so, and the implied explanation of their belief in “the spiritual factor” does not clarify. In isolation Samar’s words sound vague and tendentious, but the narrative that precedes and follows reads as if it is to vindicate the Marxist-Anarchist.¹⁰⁶ The narrator, *Germinal*’s cousin and an Anarchist, does not “exactly understand him [Samar]”, but uses religion to describe his feelings at the funeral of the three comrades: he feels “as I felt when I was a small boy in church. Naturally there are neither saints nor priests.” Later, he considers the comrades together: “The three compose a complete being. Espartaco the spirit, *Germinal* the body and *Progreso* the action. Samar wasn’t pleased with that.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 93-4) Once again, an Anarchist allows himself to be transported by emotion and in the process transforms three dead workers into a Holy Trinity.

II. 8. 2 COMMUNISTS

As a character who is probably making the same political movement that Sender made, Samar’s displeasure, tersely ending the emotional eulogy, emphasizes the degree of separation between Anarchists and Communists. The hint of enmity and the prospect that it may become manifest is often discernible, a state which is exacerbated by the recurring theme of Communists existing in relative isolation. Perhaps because of feeling politically alien, in Bates’ novels Communists are sometimes depicted as individuals in

¹⁰⁶ At various points in the novel it is suggested that Samar is a Communist and at others that he is an Anarchist. At one point Star states that “Samar isn’t an anarchist [...] He is a communist.” A little later she says that she is “disappointed with Samar. I thought he had more sense, that he was an anarchist”. In a meeting of Anarchists Samar is called “comrade”, but he is also said to be “poisoned with Marxism”. (Sender, 1932: p. 44, 137, 183, and 238) As characters are also narrators in this novel the reader has to rely on their statements as being (fictionally) valid.

an Anarchist crowd. In a previously cited example from *The Olive Field*, Robledo the Communist attends an Anarchist meeting; and in *Lean Men*, when Charing meets La Roja and she tells him about her politics, through his incredulity – “it was almost beyond belief that this girl should have declared herself a communist” (Bates, 1932: p. 88) – he shows his experience of how unusual such an affiliation was. Relative to their immediate rivals (the Socialists and the Anarchists) they remained the “still tiny [national] Communist party” (Carr, 2000: p. 247)¹⁰⁷ until the Civil War, a situation which caused either Charing or the narrator to wish near the end of *Lean Men* that they could “wrest the leadership of the masses from the anarchists”. (Bates, 1934: p. 506)

If Marx’s philosophy was not directly to blame for this predicament, there are signs that the Spanish and aspects of their character were not congruent with the international organization. In Bates’ novels the sense that Communism is an alien set of beliefs is expressed quite directly. The main Communist character in *Lean Men* is foreign (British), he receives orders from Moscow, and his reaction indicates that the official Communist Party (with headquarters in the Soviet Union) and Spanish politics are incompatible: “There had been a time when the prospect of seeing the Kremlin had been a glorious excitement to him. Now it seemed that its turreted image rose up and shut out the living, throbbing beauty of Spain from his mind.” (ibid.: p. 416) One of the most obvious differences between *Lean Men* and the later novel is the absence of a foreign character in *The Olive Field*. Bates may well have thought that Charing had the appearance of a Marxist missionary, imposing his beliefs on the more or less credulous natives. Far preferable, and more sanguine, was to have proselytizing in the hands of indigenous people. The most vocal Communist in *The Olive Field*, Robledo, places the blame directly on the available recruits when he speaks to a gathering of men of various political loyalties:

“it’s all very well [...] to rake up examples of primitive Communism still surviving in Spain, and its damned silly of you Anarchists to argue that the worker is ready to behave like a man [...] What the worker wants right now is land and no rent to pay and a good market, a woman to mount and children to drive. He’s got to be taught and kicked up the rear till he’ll want something better.”
(Bates, 1936: p. 229)

¹⁰⁷ ‘Spain from 1931 to the present’, Sebastian Balfour

It is entertaining, impossible to prove and equally impossible for a foreign character to say without sounding like an advocate of empire (whether Soviet, British or other) and it is almost possible to forget that although it is the opinion of a Spanish character, it is still written by a British author. In contrast, if Sender included a similar message in *Seven Red Sundays* he was too subtle for the reader to be sure.

The main Communist (or hybrid Communist-Anarchist) character in this novel, Samar, is ostensibly Spanish, but his name is Arabic.¹⁰⁸ (Arabic online dictionary) This was at a time when the Spanish were fighting Moors in Morocco, a war Sender had fought in, (Sender, 1932, intro.: pp. 7-8) so Samar's name could not have been much more implicitly alien or even inimical. He was also incongruous, as the novel would have it, by being partly or wholly Communist. The nature of the Spanish people is mentioned by an Anarchist during a street fight with Civil Guards (already mentioned), in which those shooting at the police are said to be acting randomly, or anarchically: "And these tactics are not our own, but come from the Spanish temperament." (ibid.: p. 71) Organization, on the other hand, was a *sine qua non* for Communists, and so Spain in the 1930s was not conducive.

Even the definition of what constituted Spain was being challenged by regions like Catalonia, and *Lean Men* was set in the midst of this struggle. For the Party the result was that "the Catalan and Balearic Communist Federation had split off from the official party". The reasons given were that the Third International did not "understand the Spanish situation", unofficially, "because the Madrid officials of the Party had continually manoeuvred against them within the International" and, Charing believed, that "the Workers' and Peasants' Block [...] were quite largely influenced by Catalan nationalism, and profited by deft appeals to it." The regional divisions meant that in Catalonia "the question was only one of how to make a revolution", and in Andalucía "constant disturbances and the admitted temper of desperation" showed "the same desire existed in the south." (Bates, 1934: pp. 410-11)

What is visible in the analysis of the Catalan separation is the voluntary diminution: rejecting the Third International, rejecting the national party and Madrid, and finally being guided by a block (the Workers' and Peasants' block) within the regional party. It is also symptomatic of a fractious and poorly functioning Communist unit that members in Catalonia (in north-east Spain) are reassured by shared

¹⁰⁸ The name derives from the Arabic for 'fruit'.

“desperation” in Andalucía (in the south-west), the other side of the country at a time when, as we have previously seen, the two regions represented the centres of Anarchist power. An assessment of the state of the Party at the time, which, as it includes the names of historical figures, can presumably be taken to represent Bates’ view of Spanish Communism in the early 1930s, gives an image of rivalries, mutual antagonism and the internecine “growth of all kinds of communist opinion.” Charing’s Centre and the Workers’ and Peasants’ Block had just over 1,000 members each and “the small Trotskyist faction headed by Andres Nin,¹⁰⁹ former secretary to the Russian ex-leader, was also active. The greatest personal difficulty, however [...] was one Quiñones, recently arrived from Madrid [...] a disciplined party was out of the question at this stage.” (ibid.: p. 367) It should be remembered that this was just about Catalonia. It is probably most interesting now for the degree to which it anticipates the internal disruption which undermined government forces in the Civil War.

However, a party that from within felt like it was in a state of disorder, to Mudarra, as an Anarchist, is conspiratorially hierarchical. The promise that after a revolution they can “settle the problems [...] means a new State, the Revolutionary Committee will decide and the party cliques; the workers won’t get a look in.” The consequence, therefore, would be pernicious: an alliance of workers’ organizations “meant Socialism, or Communism, instead of freedom.” (Bates, 1936: p. 374 and p. 376) Both the concept that a Communist state would be antithetical to freedom, and that it was a party in which decisions were made by a select few regardless of the workers’ wills, are present in *Seven Red Sundays*. An Anarchist cites the Soviet Union as proof that the political system does not offer hope: “In Russia there are plenty who feel oppressed.” (Sender, 1932: p. 211) It is tempting to see this as Sender’s view when it is possible he was still an Anarchist, just before he visited the Soviet Union to be convinced of the value of Communism. In an interesting parallel, Charing’s autobiography includes: “Short training visit to Moscow, great joy at finding things were better than I’d secretly believed.” (Bates, 1934: p. 17) In both of these examples there was the prospect before the visit that Charing (or Bates) and Sender were going to be so appalled by Soviet life they would be forced to look elsewhere for their political

¹⁰⁹ Andres Nin (1892-1937) lived in Russia in the 1920s and worked for Trotsky, but after broke away from the Communist Party and Trotsky’s influence. He was a founding member of the POUM, to be discussed in Part Three. (Salvadó: p. 137)

beliefs; with their relief that it appeared not so bad they felt confidence that the future should be Communist.

However, in the Madrid of Sender's novel faith in the organization is lacking. Espartaco is said to have "one hatred: the communists of the party." In his view they are bourgeois as is "their theoretical doctrine", and "his hatred became stronger after, one day, he had seen a fine young gentleman with the sickle and hammer, the emblem of the party, embroidered in silk on his shirt." The ostentatious display is offensive to one who "carried out whatsoever he was asked to undertake, without comment, without vain boasting". (Sender, 1932: p. 32) For a man to whom the cause is all, the appendages of membership and display are anathema, an idea in harmony with a novel in which the distinction between Communist and Anarchist is often not explicit, as if, because of their similar goals, the political labels do not matter. When Samar puts forward a proposal at a meeting where each person is called "Comrade", an old man objects that he "has written it under the evil inspiration of Marx", and Urbano laments that "it wasn't libertarianism". It then becomes clear, confirmed when Cipriano is said to have voted with Samar (as a Communist) despite his political allegiance, that the "Comrades" are Anarchists. The significant difference is more often, though not always, generational rather than by nominal allegiance, with older characters, such as the old man who objects to Marx's inspiration, frustrating the ambitions of the young. In another meeting a little later where they are all "Comrades", another of Samar's proposals is rejected and he supposes he lost because of four comrades who were arrested, whose absence he feels: "Not because they are wiser or more intelligent, but simply because they are young". Instead he was at the meeting with people who "disputed for the pleasure of disputation [...] they had such a sense of competence and satisfaction in losing themselves in their petty intellectual labyrinths, that it seemed as if they didn't really wish for the revolution." (ibid.: p. 147) Again, it is not made clear what the political loyalties of each participant are, so that the important dichotomies (aside from the obvious one of worker and bourgeoisie) are between youths and the elderly, the decisive and the garrulous, the active and the reactionary.

The dismissal of Marx is echoed by an Anarchist (who narrates the seventh chapter). Raised as a Marxist, he claims "Marx has made me more Marxist than himself." This supersession is going to bring a revolution closer, through "the logic of the spontaneous deed". (ibid.: p. 75) He speaks in direct contradiction to Samar, though they appear to share similar mixed beliefs. Despite his anarchistic tendencies, Samar's

single-minded devotion to the eponymous forefather is illustrated by his concern after thinking of his failure at one of the meetings: “They are men of tradition, we of hope. All that we are doing [...] brings up to the surface the hidden force, the living reserve of humanity which we represent’ [...] the fact that what he was thinking took him far away from Marx, disconcerted him.” (ibid.: p. 192) Such a regret is close to Marxism being followed as if it was a surrogate religion, with the messianic figure as a uniquely necessary and constant influence on the follower’s thoughts.

The use of Marxism to replace Catholicism is more explicit with Bates. A hypothesis of Charing’s about a fellow Communist posits his comrade’s political loyalties as the result of an unfulfilled religious obligation. He speculates that Masera, originally a Catholic, having shot a foreman could not confess because he would implicate others (which does not necessarily show ignorance of priests being bound to a rule of confidentiality, rather a sign that they felt Spanish priests at the time were not deserving of trust), and he was unable to live without absolution; “that comfort being impossible, he tried to become a communist”. What reads as an incongruous interjection (something Charing is inclined to do) during military manouvres in the mountains, is clumsily transformed into synecdoche, with Masera representing his nation: “‘Yes, that’s right,’ Texido nodded gravely. ‘His condition is like that of Spain itself.’” (Bates, 1934: p. 482)

CHAPTER NINE: SPANISH SOCIETY

II. 9. 1 THE CHURCH

The prevalence of Catholicism as an overbearing presence in early twentieth century literature set in Spain – represented for better, worse or as a curiosity – by itself is an indication of its impact on the life of Spaniards a century ago. In its use as a literary device the hold it exerted over the population is shown in various, sometimes paradoxical, forms; and its depiction, even from those who were avowedly against the Church as an institution, was certainly not relentlessly antagonistic. Masera's actions in the Pyrenees (which are said to be symptomatic of his nation) begin with him, despite his colleagues' warnings, breaking a statue of the Queen of Heaven because "[i]t's all superstition" and stealing the coins left there by pilgrims. He is told, "You'll come to a bad end and figure in sermons on sacrilege", although the comrades who warn him against the vandalism and theft are Anarchists or Communists. (ibid.: pp. 474-5) A little later at a ravine Masera, a building crane operator (i.e. someone who is normally comfortable with heights), refuses to cross. He attempts to assuage his conscience by throwing the stolen money away before crossing, but still cannot, "weeping on a bank below the first pitch". (ibid.: pp. 481-2)

As the view of an outsider about the Spanish, the clear implication is that the hold Catholicism has on the people is ultimately unshakable at a primordial emotional level. However, the suspicion that at least as much as wanting to provide an insight into the nature of the people, Bates had recognized a device that would enliven the story, is supported by Masera's end. In the street fighting in Barcelona, La Roja reports that he

was killed when he refused to show a letter to a guard, who then shot him through the head outside the cathedral's cloister doors. (ibid.: p. 547) It reads like the end of a Graham Greene novel, the lapsed Catholic and repentant blasphemer encountering divine justice outside the cathedral, but for a Communist author who thought Catholicism "a dangerous and historically finished cause", (Bates, 1936, intro.: [p. 7]) it comes across as rather a contrived way to resolve the story of Masera's contrition, implausibly trying to substantiate the foreigner's idea of the religion's miasmic power.

In a sign that the author may not have been convinced either, Bates' Spanish fiction has no other character switching between the polarities of religious faith and sacrilege. The most analogous incident in *The Olive Field* is the story of how a local sanctuary, of Mater Purissima, was damaged during fighting in May 1931; "the assault was resented by the majority of the workers, for the place was regarded with affection for its beauty and the comfort it gave." The statement is poised between showing that there was still local devotion to religious symbols which, presuming the majority of workers were not practicing Catholics, overcame any lack of piety; and damming it with mundane praise, as the same qualities could, for example, be said to exist in a tree or article of clothing. The latter interpretation would suggest anticipating a near-future of religious objects with solely secular purposes. Because May 1931 was also the time "when churches and convents had been burned in Málaga and other places in southern Spain", (ibid.: p. 3) there is the prospect of a future when what is left of Catholicism in Spain are monuments or symbols preserved as anachronistic objects of solace.

The image of the religion as a national institution devoid of religious meaning but still a central part of quotidian life, informed much of Sender's novella *Réquiem por un campesino español* (*Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*). Although ostensibly set in 1937, as the narrative centres around the parish priest's memories of a recently executed local young man, Paco, much of the story is pre-Civil War. The outwardly pious acts of Paco's family have prosaic motives, so that they give money to the church because it is traditional and Paco's father, "so indifferent in matters of religion", takes part as a penitent in the Holy Week procession because it may help with Paco's military service. (Sender, 1952: p. 45 and p. 73) The fact that it is the priest who mentions the ulterior motive indicates that the family's attitude is known well, but that the parents allow the boy to spend time with the priest shows a relaxed acceptance on all sides as to how things are and the hypocrisy it entails.

However, Paco also “drifted apart from Mosén Millán [the priest]”, a type of experience he had seen many times before: “The priest thought with sadness that when these youngsters grew up they drifted away from the church, but came back again when they reached old age because of the threat of death.” (ibid.: p. 67 and p. 69) From what we can see of the time, Sender’s image of a generally non-committed population – a situation referred to briefly in *Seven Red Sundays*, when “the peals of a church bell fell on the heedless working district” (Sender, 1932: p. 24) – was an accurate reflection of the times. In the 1930s “[f]ewer than one-fifth of Spaniards took communion at Easter, dropping to 5 per cent during the Civil War.” (Kitchen: p. 98) In 1931, “‘Spain’, Azaña declared incautiously, ‘is no longer Catholic.’” (Carr, 2000: p. 245)¹¹⁰ He must have counted on such a declaration being more popular than resented.

From selected works it is possible to detect the waning of Catholicism’s hegemonic power in Spain over the first few decades of the twentieth century. In the story ‘Beatriz’ by Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1900) the authority that figures in the church exercise is questioned, through a narrative about a chaplain exploiting his position of trust with the eponymous girl, but the problem is partly resolved by someone else from within the Church, a father confessor. (Appelbaum, 2004: pp. 37-59) In “Azorín’s” novella *Don Juan* (1922) the ardent lover is a purportedly repentant monk who was supposed to have been “profoundly transformed” after Mary’s intercession when he was close to death, but who continued to take a sensual interest in women. (ibid.: pp. 133-215) A common theme in both stories is that, though there is implicit criticism of figures within the narrative (and, conceivably, of the institution by the writers), there is an acceptance amongst the characters of the overall teachings and appropriateness of Catholicism. For example, in ‘Beatriz’ the girl’s mother, after asking a faith healer to damn the chaplain, reassures her, “I’ll order masses said, and God will forgive you.” Naturally, there is irony in her asking the devil to be summoned to curse a member of the clergy, with the intention of resolving it afterwards through the saying of masses, but within the environment of the story faith in the power of religion is strong. (Appelbaum, 2004: p. 57)

By the 1930s, in Bates’ and Sender’s novels, criticism was explicit and direct, and from *Lean Men* to *The Olive Field* an increasingly pejorative view of the Church is marked. In Bates’ earlier novel the negative views tend to be tempered by circumstance

¹¹⁰ ‘Spain from 1931’

and are countered by displays of piety in unexpected places. A doctor, Mariscal, who works in Barcelona complains of “the interference and inefficiency of the religious orders in the work and discipline of the hospitals”, citing the example of a badly treated patient: ““an anarchist and therefore an atheist, had refused to be wheeled into Mass on the Sunday, the sisters in charge had studiously ignored the man’s wants. For my part I am not an atheist, though the destruction of the power of the Church has become a national necessity in my eyes.”” (Bates, 1934: p. 77)

The fact that the specific complaints about the behaviour of nuns in hospitals and about the excessively dominant role of the Church are made by a believer means the call is for modification, with acceptance of its continuing place in Spanish society. There is an attack levelled at ““the cardinals, the bishops and the priests [who] pray for the king and the mighty ones of the land””, (ibid.: p. 209) but it is spoken by Charing, not a Spaniard or a believer. On the other hand, Ricardo, a pianist and brothel client, tells Charing that ““there was a prostitute [...] who would never take the cross from round her neck even in sinning [...] There are dozens of women in those places who never discard the cross or their beads.”” (ibid.: p. 498) The impression is of an author more or less enamoured of Spain who thought, in his first years there and regardless of his own beliefs, that Catholicism was an integral part of the national identity.

By *The Olive Field* his Spanish characters were much more acerbic. The novel was first published in 1936 and the obvious cause of the much more aggressive nature of the later book is the formation of a government under the influence of CEDA (from the autumn of 1934). (Carr, 2000: p. 249)¹¹¹ The *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* was a right-wing Catholic group formed to protect a variety of traditional Spanish institutions – such as the Church, the monarchy and landowners – and to remove Spain from what they perceived to be a state of anarchy. (Thomas: pp. 4-5, and Salvadó: pp. 41-2) Therefore, while representing Catholicism, it also represented a threat to anticipated freedom and rights for workers, and the combination is a key feature of Bates’ novel. The assaults in the novel are multifarious: verbal and physical, personal and institutional. At an individual level Father Soriano is the favoured target because of his close relations with the local landowner, Don Fadrique. In court, after refusing to swear an oath, the anarchist Mudarra accuses him of subterfuge and, in apparent proof of his guilt and cowardice, facing Mudarra, “his face became paler than

¹¹¹ ‘Spain from 1931’

ever and he trembled visibly”. (Bates, 1936: pp. 180-1) Later in the story, a page is printed in which the young priest is said to have “*dominated the mind of a weak and seedless aristocrat and oppressed us. He was false to his master* [original italics]”, by revealing the amount Don Fadrique spent on a book of music.

The priesthood is somewhat redeemed by Father Martínez (the older priest), who Mudarra believes is not deserving of punishment, though at fault: “the action of the Republic in persecuting Martínez was contemptible, even though he had once made foolish attacks upon the young Republic”. (ibid.: p. 176) However, the society this novel describes feels like it is a long way from one that would show priests automatic deference, exemplified by the *mayordomo*’s (Don Fadrique’s servant) outraged exclamation after a picnic: ““God’s teeth! There’s nothing so ugly as a sleeping priest in all Christendom, unless it’s a farrowing sow. Ugh!”” (ibid.: p. 85) At first glance it is a strange statement, as well as very offensive (and with blasphemous swearing), but then it is clear that in sleep one cannot disguise how one looks, so that the complaint means they are revealed for what they really are, in idleness, and it is repellent.

The local nuns are also viewed acrimoniously, for what they are believed to

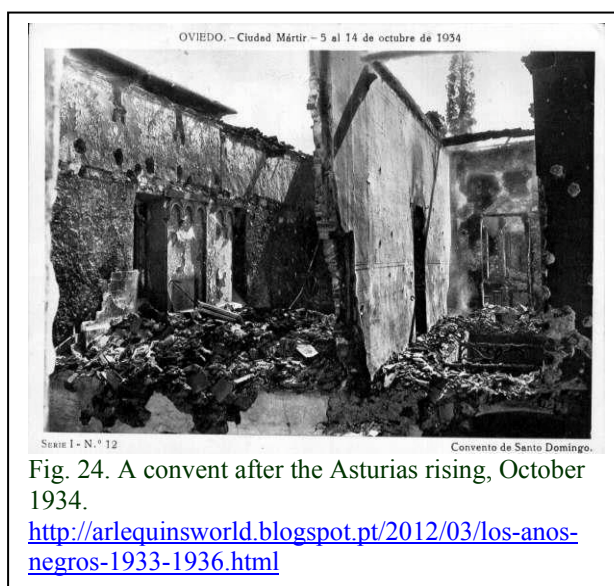


Fig. 24. A convent after the Asturias rising, October 1934.

<http://arlequinsworld.blogspot.pt/2012/03/los-anos-negros-1933-1936.html>

possess, according to some of the locals. After the destruction of the olive trees the nuns are expected to help, but only provide “fool’s soup”, while they and some Jesuits are believed to have six houses (ironically in Republican Square) and “a secret company to hold property, stocks and shares and all that.” A baker disputes the gossip, but even if the characters are not reliable narrators (a subject to

be addressed later on the subject of Don Fadrique), the significant issue is that the nuns and Jesuits are not aloof from invective. However, the laity is restrained with the nuns – “they had been shouted after, though such demonstrations were never forceful” (ibid.: pp. 333-4) – a reserve that is not shown to Catholic property and rituals.¹¹² During the

¹¹² In fact, destruction of churches did not start when the right-wing coalition took power in 1933-4. Two years earlier prime-minister Manuel Azaña had been moved to declare that “all the convents in Madrid are not worth the life of one Republican”, and twenty years before that Alejandro Lerrox had

trouble in Asturias Mudarra promises: “‘The cathedral in Oviedo [capital of Asturias] is going to be brought to the ground and every church in Asturias if I live and the dynamite lasts [...] Well, the Church has chosen to side with the lords of the earth, the bankers and the aristocrats and the little dons’”. (ibid.: p. 416) When the cathedral in Oviedo is about to be damaged in *The Olive Field* the plotters show relish in what they hope to destroy, the more precious and sacred (in this case synonymous) the greater the pleasure:

“Of course there’s art treasures, oh, yes, things of priceless beauty [...] there’s the Cross of the Angel, the book says it was made by two angels disguised as goldsmiths” [...] “The relics are the finest collection in Spain, they say” [...] “Some drops of blood sweated by a crucifix profaned by the Jews.”
“Well, we’re all ready for the fireworks,” said the Dynamiter [...] (ibid.: pp. 421-2)

They can be said to be delighting in the destruction of what their enemies most value, or they could be performing a more genuinely revolutionary act: removing the privileged status of these objects which they would have been taught to hold in reverence since childhood, which is apparent from their knowledge of the history and significance of the artefacts. The same loss of awe is inherent in what are possibly more antagonistic rebellious actions. The Good Friday procession, which is protected by the Civil Guard with loaded rifles and includes “twelve of the most prosperous of the gentlefolk of Villa Alta”, who have the honour and burden of being “the bearers of the paso of the Redeeming Faith”, is attacked by “procession-breakers”, first with stones, then petrol and wood. As an image of Christ “was flung into the flames [...] women fell upon their knees, white-faced, praying distractedly. ‘Barbarians! You condemn yourselves to hell,’ shouted Señora Robledo, ‘to hell, to hell.’” (ibid.: pp. 58-64)

This fictional incident reads like a reference to either of two attacks that Bates could have known about, which took place in Cadiz in October 1895 and Barcelona on June 7th 1896, when a Corpus Christi procession was the target of a bomb attack. In the first, what were described as “idle workingmen” threw stones at a rosary procession. (Rosary) A year later twelve people were killed and though Anarchists were accused, tortured and executed for it (in the ‘Montjuic Trials’) the real culprits remain unknown. It is even possible that the bomb was planted in order to have an excuse for targeting

encouraged “‘young barbarians’, to murder priests, sack and burn churches and ‘liberate’ nuns”, which came to fruition in Barcelona with the ‘Tragic Week’ of 1909. (Preston, 2006: p. 46 and p. 27)

Anarchists.¹¹³ (Gibson) A locally famous painting, which depicted the procession before the explosion, was acquired by the Museu d'Art Nacional de Catalunya in Barcelona in 1898 and has been there since, and so Bates may well have seen it. A striking difference between the picture and “the iconoclasts” of Los Olivares, is that with the former the painter subtly makes the culprit’s identity enigmatic: at the extreme right a man’s hat is lying on a low roof and next to it there is a small object like a grenade, but the man concerned is outside the frame. He is apparently observed by a smartly dressed man in the parade (in the centre foreground in front of the line of people in white) and so he may also be involved. Otherwise the crowd is oblivious. (Casas) However, the

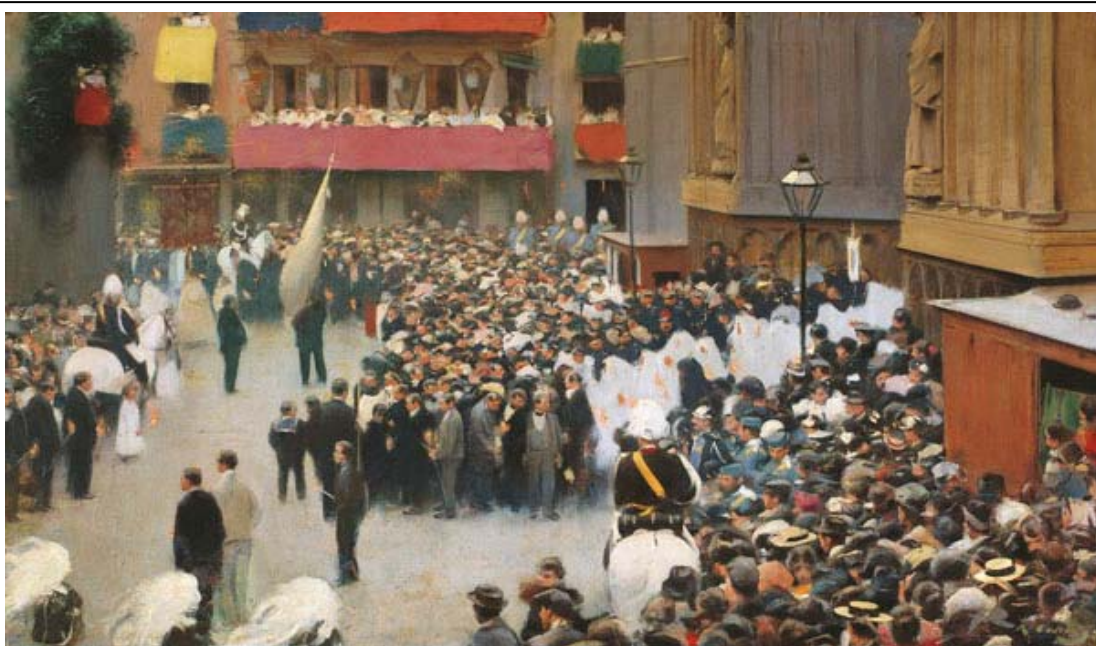


Fig. 25. Ramon Casas, *Corpus. Sortida de la processó de l'església de Santa Maria* [Corpus Christi Procession] Barcelona, 1896-1898.
<http://art.mnac.cat/fitxatecnica.html;jsessionid=a3447d33c87cf13a9d766e0f65759a22730bde870a9a43963d501a1322a86926?inventoryNumber=010903-000>

disruption in *The Olive Field* is fairly clearly, if somewhat implicitly, the fault of Anarchists, with the notable example of Mudarra zealously attacking the religious symbols, while the Communist Justo Robledo is indignant that “this is not the way to

¹¹³ “On 7 June 1896 a bomb was thrown at the tail-end of a Corpus Christi procession in Barcelona, killing twelve workers. The attack was attributed to the anarchists, who were then proliferating in the Catalan capital. It may, however, have been perpetrated by an ‘agent provocateur’ in the pay of the police (which would explain why no notabilities were killed). The authorities, at all events, reacted with great brutality. Anarchist suspects were rounded up, taken to the infamous military prison on the slopes of Montjuic, the mountain outside Barcelona overlooking the sea, and, in many cases, subjected to appalling tortures to make them confess. Several suspects died and one went mad. Five men, almost certainly innocent, were garrotted; and, of those acquitted, sixty-five were sent to the harsh penal settlement in Rio de Oro, in the Spanish Sahara. The Montjuic trials, held in December 1896, showed the other face of a country that eight years earlier, with the Barcelona International Exposition, had sought to impress the world by its modernity.” (Gibson)

make a revolution.” (Bates, 1936: pp. 65-6) Whether or not Bates had heard (from Communists?) that the Corpus Christi attack had been the work of those prosecuted, the function of the violent assault in his novel is to show Anarchist methods to be callous, misdirected and, most pernicious of all to Bates, politically counterproductive.

If Bates’ frequent use of anti-religious sentiment and activity in *The Olive Field* reflected what the author believed to be a contemporary Spanish phenomenon, then Sender’s depiction of these attitudes suggests he saw far less passion for opposing Catholicism. There is no physical aggression against the Church or its property either in *Seven Red Sundays* or in the priest’s memories in *Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*.¹¹⁴ Instead the characters limit themselves to vituperative remarks. Some are so banal as to undermine the speaker more than what he is attacking, as when Urbano rejects the notion that anarchism is like a religion because “[r]eligion and priests are rubbish.” (Sender, 1932: p. 117) La Jerónima is not eloquent either, but her plain-speaking and straightforward ideas are poignant. Mosén Millán, the priest, speaking at Paco’s baptism, insists “that the child had to be kept away from superstition”,¹¹⁵ but La Jerónima rejects Paco having a pre-ordained life: “The boy will be whatever he must be. Anything except a priest.” (Sender, 1952: p. 47) Because she obviously revels in a lack of decorum, such as when she tells a group, “I never married but behind the church I had all the men I fancied”, (ibid.: p. 79) she is perhaps more a self-styled iconoclast than one who specifically targets the Catholic Church. The shoemaker also uses mockery at the expense of priests – “priests are the only ones everyone calls father, except their children who call them uncle” (ibid.: p. 83) – the libertine and the shoemaker representing a more carefree and cheerful time before the Civil War and Franco’s regime. What their comments would not do is threaten the Church; rather they suggest mutual tolerance, that if they can continue speaking as they wish they are not at all troubled about the Church continuing as it has.

Naturally, Samar is more incisive, but still mocking. He praises “the attitude of archbishops, cardinals and Popes who are the upholders of faith and who, of course, don’t believe in God.’ [...] The ecclesiastical organization has lost its meaning for all intelligent people. The Catholic Church which has dazzled so many simpletons!”

¹¹⁴ As the novel is set in a rebel-held town in 1937 any contemporary destructive act against Church property or personnel would have been virtually impossible.

¹¹⁵ What reads like irony on Sender’s part (a priest wishing someone should avoid superstition) is confirmed when he hopes that Paco will “be a new Saul for Christianity”, i.e. the Saint Paul before his conversion, who persecuted Christians.

(Sender, 1932: pp. 271-2) However, unequivocal as Samar is about the organization, he reveals a less antagonistic attitude to Christ. The manner in which Jesus is equated to Samar and his colleagues would be considered blasphemous by a believer, but in so doing he credits the Christian messiah with revolutionary spirit (in a similar way to Caudwell's description), almost to the point of Him being an exemplar. In prison, "the house of dreams", Samar sees himself standing before naked crowds, and after declaring himself against both humanity and their beliefs, he offers himself as a redeemer: "But I could make you all happy [...] Remember that Jesus Christ thought much like me." According to Samar, the way Jesus did this was by offering them liberty through dreams: "Jesus Christ said that he brought freedom to men, and he was right as he knew how to intoxicate them with illusion and hope." (ibid.: p. 305 and p. 271) Samar comes very close to admitting that Spanish leaders like him were enchanting the credulous masses with false hope, and it exposes him as a would-be demagogue. His identification with Christ is so strong that he tells his lover she is obliged to choose between them; in convincing his bourgeois girlfriend to reject her father, an army colonel, he quotes Jesus ("the poor man whom you say in your prayers you love so much"): "He that loveth his father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." [...] Jesus offered an ideal. We offer you ours. Choose between God and me. Between your father and the revolution." (ibid.: p. 163) Sender again leaves his readers to decide which side to take in a bifurcation: one could choose to see Samar as resourceful and daring, or simply as suffering from delusions of grandeur, with no compromise available.

In contrast, while Paco (in *Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*) has similarities to Jesus, these manifest themselves quite subtly and are certainly never proclaimed by the character. The resemblances Graham Whittaker cites are Paco's execution with two others when, of course, he is innocent of any crimes; the priest's probable guilt in betraying Paco; and also Paco's posthumous return in an unrecognizable form (as a colt), which Whittaker sees, more improbably, as analogous to Christ's resurrection, when "Mary Magdalene, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the disciples in the boat on Lake Galilee failed to recognise Jesus". Paco's father's joke at the boy's baptismal feast – when he is asked if Paco is his son, he replies: "I don't know [...]"

He's my wife's, at least'" (Sender, 1952: pp. 18-19 and p. 41) – could also be taken as referring to the Immaculate Conception.¹¹⁶

Samar's sacrilegious audacity extends to confidence in their revolution, because "[t]he bearded God of the Hebrews made the world in six days, and our creation is in progress, and our triumph will be after the sixth day.'" As with the Bible his numbers are more metaphorical than mathematical, so that the sixth day "may last for years". (Sender, 1932: p. 282) Nevertheless, the affront to the Church stands, as much a provocation from the author as from the character. Bates, possibly in part because he lacked a Catholic upbringing in which religious figures and motifs were a feature of everyday life, did not approach Sender's direct or indirect attempts to challenge the inviolability of Catholicism. Perhaps the nearest he came to a religious analogy was in describing the sense of euphoria during olive picking: "the harvest was to all of them but the earth's joyful sacrifice to the God Man", an image undermined the next day when some of the "the God Man", specifically workers from Los Olivares and Puente Nuevo, fight. (Bates, 1936: p. 256 and p. 264)

In fact, Bates demonstrates a surprising level of narratorial sympathy and respect for some of his more pious characters, especially so in *Lean Men*, consistent with the greater antipathy to religion in the later novel. From each story two characters signify absolute and unquestioning faith, Señora Trepát and Pascual Caro (father of the previously mentioned Joaquin Caro, the Anarchist who becomes a Communist). What the two share is that they are old, as if to show that Catholicism in Spain is of the past, an idea reinforced by the first image of Pascual Caro who ploughs outside an Anarchist meeting (discussed above) where God is attacked as "a fantasy created by the mind, a self-deception practiced on oneself", while he sings with a "feeble voice" "and I shall tell forth/ The mysteries of Christ's Passion." (ibid.: pp. 11-13) Superficially, the message appears to be a clear one about Spain's past being represented by the old farmer, and the future by the relatively young Anarchists, but the reader's sympathy

¹¹⁶ There are other examples of characters comparable to Christ in Spanish literature around the turn of the century. For example, in Pérez Galdós' *Mercy (Misericordia)*, 1897) "the Christ-like figure of the old servant Benigna", whose "final words to Juliana, 'vete a tu casa, y no vuelvas a pecar' [go home and sin no more], which echo Christ's words to the adulterous woman in John 8:11." [Ward, p. 391] The cuckolded husband, Pedro Gailo, in Valle-Inclán's *Divine Words (Divinas Palabras)*, 1919) parodies moments from the life of Jesus. (Frost, 2010: p. 169)

naturally lies with the older Caro who is working with pleasure while those in the meeting are merely talking aggressively and without purpose. As another example in which Bates readily found fault with Anarchists, the result of this juxtaposition is that a life accepting religious tenets and social subjugation is preferable to one determined by the son's generation, with their parliament of acrimony.

There is a similar event in *Lean Men* when a group of young Republican men very politely arrest Señora Trepát after she tries to telephone a convent. When they discover her son to be a comrade of theirs one of them officiously tells her she is free to go, but the effect, combined with the news that her husband is leaving for Madrid with a maid, is that "her world, so ordered and intelligible was disappearing in a swirl of debris." (Bates, 1934: pp. 351-6) This fictional incident, rather than symbolizing the past and future, quite accurately reflects the temper of a time when the Republican government took steps to attack the Church in ways that achieved little beyond antagonizing the clergy and believers, as well as providing the Left's enemies with ammunition. (Salvadó: p. 33) Regardless of whether or not a lady was ever arrested for contacting a convent, Bates manages to encapsulate the dread many Catholics must have felt from 1931, and with considerable sympathy from the position of a Communist writer. His affinity is plainly evident, indeed he comes close to admiration, when he describes Señora Trepát's visit to Barcelona Cathedral (prior to her arrest), and likewise with his depiction of the routines and interior of Pascual Caro's house:

he came to the front of the house, crossed himself, and entered [...] Looking into the shrunken kindly face and tender eyes of her husband, Ana smiled [...] Pascual Caro, taking his rosary from a nail on the wall, sat down by the fire [...] as her husband continued to pray quietly, she commenced to peel the potatoes for supper. (Bates, 1936: p. 18)

It is conspicuous that, in keeping with the narrator's earnest tone, there is a desire to present the husband and wife as completely lacking in artifice, and their essential and religious duties as naturally congruent, maybe even interdependent. Again, what is unexpected from an author with Bates' political beliefs is how antithetical this couple are to being revolutionary.

With Señora Trepát the writer, though continuing to use the third person grammatical form for the character, in effect makes the description of her experiences at the cathedral her interior monologue:

To her surprise, no sooner had she set out for the Cathedral [...] than a large part of her anxiety disappeared [...] She dared not think of failure [...] return to St. Just would be too humiliating [...] she hoped the canon would recognize her; it would be awful to approach that dignitary and be rebuffed without even explaining her request.

For a pious woman in a cathedral, her thoughts remain mostly on very earthly matters – “the priest had been unshaven”, “[s]he rarely came to the cloister without a few titbits for the birds”, “the geese would never disturb themselves so much as to waddle over to the cloister rails” – and when her thoughts become more devotional, the spiritual is reached from a mundane base: “The silence of the Cathedral was peaceful, holy, but a little too awful, like the Holy Ghost”; and “[i]t was a beautiful thought of the church to place a fountain near one of the cloister doors [...] it was symbolic of the soul’s anxiety and of the church’s gracious ministration in this parched desert of life”. (Bates, 1934: pp. 336-9) It is admirable of Bates (as a male British atheist) to have written such a convincing evocation of the feelings of a female Spanish Catholic at a moment of religious and personal urgency, but her lack of religious sensation begs the question as to whether it was because of the writer’s limitations (that it was something he had never experienced and could not imagine); whether he wanted to show her as unable to escape the earthly because of everyday pressures; or whether it was a result of Bates feeling that even the apparently devout are more concerned with their immediate environment.

In the more abstruse world of Sender’s Madrid “the virtuous Emilia” can decide to plant a bomb and afterwards to confess the act to a priest, though, as a good Catholic she would not arrange to do something she knows is wrong and then expect to avoid culpability: “I am not asking for a penance. If he absolves me, good and well.” Her *sang-froid* in the face of her comrades’ outrage is explained later by the fact that the priest is an Anarchist: “If I go on confessing to him he’ll ask me to put a bomb in the archbishop’s house.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 122-3, and p. 193) The priest’s perceived hostility towards the archbishop is an example of how the Church represents and reinforces class division and conflict in these novels. Emilia has more fellow-feeling with her agnostic or atheist comrades than the priest has with his Catholic brother because the clergy are separated by a hierarchical system, a mirror of the overall rigid societal segregation.

In the conservative Aragón village of Sender's novella social differences are predictably decisive. At Paco's wedding, the guests, "[w]ithout realising it [...] had been placing themselves according to social hierarchies. Everyone was standing, except the priest [...] Each one's importance, according to personal assets, determined how near or far he was from the place of honour". (Sender, 1952: p. 81) That the people do this "without realising" implies unquestioning acceptance of the nature of the hierarchy and their position within it, and Mosén Millán, the priest, as metonymy for the Church, indicates that the institution is instrumental in fostering tolerance of social disparity.

II. 9. 2 AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

The priest shows his complete lack of sympathy when, in answer to Paco, who is troubled by the desperate poverty he has witnessed in a cave, Mosén Millán tells him not to be concerned: "What does it matter, Paco? When someone is dying, rich or poor, he's always alone [...] Life is like that and God who made it knows why.' [...] When God allows poverty and pain, he said, there's a reason." (ibid.: p. 63) Such a justification could be expected to foster acquiescence, but the implicit message in Sender's story is of mutual and active support between the Church and those few in positions of privilege. In a transparent image of this relationship, after waiting for the length of the novella to say mass, "[t]here was no one in the church, except Don Valeriano, Don Gumersind and Señor Cástulo", representatives of the richest families locally. More arcane is the covert link between the wealthy, the Church and the monarchy, which can be inferred from how long the priest says he has been praying for: "Fifty-one years repeating these prayers meant he could do it automatically". (ibid.: p. 121 and p. 37) The story is ostensibly set in 1937, which means he began his life either as a Catholic or as a priest (it is not made clear which) in 1876, the year of the constitution which legislated for a parliamentary system in which two parties took it in turns to form the government on the basis of rigged elections, the *turno pacífico*, and ultimate authority over laws and senators was given to the king. (Carr, 2000: p. 223)¹¹⁷ Virtually every conceivable form of electoral malpractice was used to achieve

¹¹⁷ 'Liberalism and Reaction'

pre-determined results for the purpose of cementing positions of power and social privilege. (Esdaile: pp. 144-9)

In Valle-Inclán's 'Beatriz' the link between monarchy, aristocracy and Catholicism is the historical background to the story. The "very devout" Countess is "from the house of Barbanzón, one of the oldest and most renowned, as was affirmed by letters patent of high nobility and certificates of minor nobility signed by King Charles I." Her father had fought in the Carlist wars in which he had naturally been a supporter of the monarchy, before "the lovely days of the Pope-King, [when] the Spanish nobleman was one of the foreign gentlemen with a courtier's position at the Vatican." The Countess renounced several titles because of a curse on any descendants who "paid taxes and contributions to any king who was not so by the grace of God [...] If, later on, she called herself Countess, it was through a papal ennoblement." Then the soon-to-be disgraced chaplain arrives "from Barbanzón, where he had been collecting rents from that estate", (Appelbaum, 2004: pp. 37-9) in other words taking money from the (at least, relatively) poor to give to the rich, enabling the aristocracy to continue living in the style to which it was accustomed.

The idea of the reciprocity and indivisibility of the link between the Catholic Church and the most favoured in Spanish society also informed Bates' novels. The pious Señora Trepat's family, especially her husband, is so noble it "caused her to stand a little removed from the more plebeian gatherings, with whom she rarely mixed." Her husband, Don Gumersind, though apparently oblivious to religious feeling, becomes deeply involved with the Church when he is commissioned for ironwork at the Collegiate Church in Torrellas, "quite the largest contract for smithing ever given to one forge in modern times, I should think." (Bates, 1934: p. 33 and p. 147) However, as with 'Beatriz', what looks to be beneficial contact with the clergy turns out to be destructive. In order to undertake the work he has to borrow twenty thousand pesetas and "the moneylenders insisted upon Trepat House as security." (ibid.: p. 286) Predictably, the loan is not a wise idea and Gumersind leaves for Madrid with "Damn all churches, damn all cathedrals," as his parting words. (ibid.: pp. 355-7) In a sense it is strange that Gumersind's dealings with Catholicism are toxic because extrapolated such a relationship would have meant these enemies of Communism (and so Bates) would have become enemies of each other, and Spanish history would have been very different. Bates perhaps acknowledges that there is something contradictory in what he

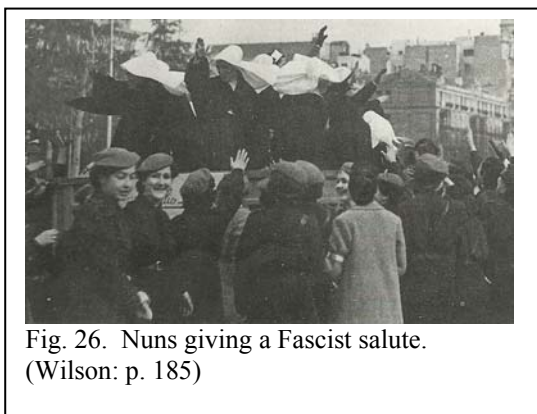
is depicting (that the Church could simultaneously encourage and undermine the status quo), but he explicitly puts the blame for this on the Church.

As represented by the ladies of the congregation, Señora Trepát's fellow-believers, Catholicism is synonymous with reactionary preservation, so that when they discuss fighting at the university they are concerned that the "building is as much disfigured by bullet marks as its traditions are by the red flag the students put over it." [...] 'I agree with "A.B.C." [a newspaper] which says that the universities ought to be shut down again [...] Do they think the Spanish nation will hold with their anarchistic dreams!'" (ibid.: pp. 284-5) However, Bates wrote in the same novel that the Church's position had become incompatible with conservative ideals, expounding a theory that could have been written by Christopher Caudwell:

The feudal order had been a perfect expression of a finely logical theory of humanity; so the future order must be, would be, equally logical, in its classless structure [...] For the present blundering anarchy of capitalism, planless, formless, intellectually fraudulent as it was, one thing only could prompt one to its defence, interest. That a church, itself not merely the fine flower but the very life principle of a logical order of society, should in effect blindly defend capitalism was a sardonic irony of planetary grandeur. (ibid.: p. 437)

A level of incongruence this profound, between its ideals and current purpose and between its members and its governing body, would surely be ominous for the welfare of the institution and probably mean dissipation.

By the next novel neither the Church's destruction nor a rift with the wealthier



members of its flock looked any more inevitable, and instead Bates shifted to a view of the two parties working together in subterfuge to undermine political progress and social justice, prophetic of their roles in the Civil War. The young priest, Soriano, who is suspected of abusing his position as confessor, makes "a brief criticism of

Socialism, Anarchism and Communism", (Bates, 1936: p. 176 and p. 250) and (as previously mentioned) virtually admits his guilt in secretive dealings involving the mayor and Don Fadrique. (ibid.: pp. 180-1) But the better regarded older priest, Martínez, also warns the landowner of Anarchist meetings and growing discontent, a

natural consequence of the clergy's dependence on "[t]he Marquis's quarterly grant". (ibid.: pp. 29-30 and p. 26) They are beholden to Fadrique for food as well, invited to dinner after mass and provided with an extravagant picnic: "'His lordship's wish is that you should honor him by accepting this lunch,' said the mayordomo [...] González took out five bottles of Valdepeñas and a bottle of muscatel, two bottles of Spanish champagne and a small bottle of cognac." (ibid.: p. 214 and p. 83) It is in pointed contrast to what the priests' serving boy is given: "she must give him the piece of bread and sausage which was his wage." (ibid.: p. 25) The maintenance of a structure which encourages the conspicuous indulgence of some – the priests' picnic is taken amongst local families – in proximity to hardship and malnutrition, Robledo attributes at least partly to "'the Church's attitude. Don't think! Leave that to those specially protected by grace [...] Pray, trust in God and Holy Church and you'll arrive at the perfection of heaven'". (ibid.: p. 247)

II. 9. 3 *NOBLESSE OBLIGE*

The aristocracy are, of course, potentially even greater symbols of social inequality, and Don Fadrique's extravagance in one payment is a recurring theme in the novel. When he buys a 16th century book of music it costs 20,000 pesetas. (ibid.: p. 31) Again, the natural juxtaposition (for a Marxist writer) occurs a few pages later when one of Fadrique's tenants pleads for the landowner to buy land or to reduce the rent so that the farmer can afford water from the reservoir which, of course, Fadrique owns. The Marquis' refusal "'means begging for me. We *cannot* pay, sir, we *cannot*.'" (ibid.: p. 49) The reader must infer that Fadrique can afford his way of life, such as buying books of 300-year-old music, because of exploiting his tenants, a perfectly valid representation of the situation in which "[t]he landowners' resistance to change" was set against "the staggering misery of a large percentage of the population" of southern Spain. (Salvadó: p. 36) However, once the young priest, Soriano, reveals the price paid for the music, local gossip inflates it from 20,000 to 50,000 then to 70,000 pesetas. (Bates, 1936: p. 291, p. 117 and p. 223) The indignation of the local peasants, therefore, becomes based on a false supposition and so, to an extent, undermines their cause. It is difficult to know why Bates would have included this bucolic hyperbole, apart from believing it to exist and playing a significant role in village life. If it was intended as a comic device its

unsuitability means that, being exemplary for the grievances of the Spanish poor overall (it is a grievance various peasants hold), their discontent stems as much as anything from not knowing the facts, and were they properly informed they would have less cause to complain of the injustice.

Fadrique's willingness to spend 20,000 pesetas on a book of music is also an instance of him acting as a guardian and conduit of history and culture. He does not have competition. However, he cannot "make much of" the music and so asks Mudarra, as a guitarist, to play it, and Lucía, Robledo's daughter, to sing. (ibid.: pp. 55-6) One can take this in two ways: there is an obvious point being made about the aristocrat as culturally sterile, needing the fertile peasants to bring the music to life; but without Fadrique their history would remain interred, and the link from present to past would be severed. He is frequently portrayed as someone who mentally prefers dwelling in the past; for example, before Mudarra arrives to see the music Fadrique's contemplation goes from candelabras ("splendid examples of early-fourteenth-century work") to a painting of choristers to (possibly related) musical scores by Renaissance composer Morales, to the identity of Pope Paul IV. Consistent with these anachronistic concerns, when he is cursed, "[t]he peasant had confused him with his grandfather" and "the whole line of Guevaras [the family name] stood as one man to bear the hate". (ibid.: pp. 47-50) Appropriately, his preoccupation over a woman is for Doña Inés, "not the shy, laughing girl he had married, but the frozen woman of the house of Guevara lying in her fruitless bed." (ibid.: p. 52) It is confirmed later that he has no heir: "These hills were a foundry of death and his line was sentenced to extirpation." (ibid.: p. 205) It could be that his devotion to the past is a result of him being the last Guevara, but it is equally possible to see his childless state as due to him being consumed by the past.

However, if an interest in and connection with national history is not pernicious, Fadrique's predisposition is a redeeming feature of the aristocracy. It cannot be a coincidence that his era of interest is Spain's Golden Age, when the nation conquered much of the world as it was then understood by Europeans, and established an environment "of extraordinary artistic creativity and social peace [...] a century of Spanish preponderance, a sort of *Wunderkind* monarchy grew improbably into the world's farthest-flung imperial experiment." (Carr, 2000: p. 116)¹¹⁸ This triumphant memory is momentarily reborn when Soriano (the young priest), accused of betraying

¹¹⁸ 'The Improbable Empire', Felipe Fernández Armesto

the Marquis, uses the bishop as an excuse for leaving: ““Your bishop is my ... ‘ began Don Fadrique, and then the man in him withdrew behind the grandee, the extinguished grandeur of Spain.” (Bates, 1936: p. 292)

The admirable impression of him is ephemeral and the optimistic Marxist in Bates determines the Marquis’ dénouement. He has to leave by hitching a lift in the back of a lorry and he does not recognize his fellow passengers because, not only did he shun the present, but was also seldom involved with the work on his land. (ibid.: p. 328 and p. 206) Again there is a perplexing ambivalence in his humiliating departure. It is to be expected that Bates would have wanted big landowners to have accepted defeat as a rule in Spain, and he cannot be blamed for a lack of prescience; however, immediately afterwards his mere presence is proved to have been essential through the local “poverty caused by the dereliction of the olivars, which since Peral’s [Fadrique’s] departure had not been cultivated.” (ibid.: p. 333) The author finishes off the patrician family in *Lean Men* as well, when Don Gumersind leaves for Madrid and his wife is left alone: “What madness was coming over Trepát House she could not tell. It seemed as if she or the rest of the house were all crazy. Señora Trepát burst into tears over the table.” (Bates, 1934: p. 357) As it takes place in Barcelona rather than rural Andalucía no effects are felt by the wider community.

Like Fadrique, the father of Trepát House, Don Gumersind, also glories in how things were – “Back to the Middle Ages was his battle cry [...] when designs grew out of the metal and the tools instead of from paper and pencil” – and his family’s longevity – “Could not Don Gumersind recount the history of the Trepát family over three centuries of documented existence?” (ibid.: pp. 48-9) Gumersind’s real devotion is to metalwork, and he is shown to understand the subject by the fact Charing agrees with him. In a pre-prandial conversation that reads as a forced attempt at a metaphor, they discuss the relative merits of iron and steel. Charing explains why iron is superior as if Trepát was new to the study of metal, and the Spaniard welcomes the international consensus: “I am glad that the English practice has a similar opinion – an advanced nation, Guillermo, a *progressive* nation.” The obvious explanation for one character telling another something he already knows or, alternatively, the author telling the readers something they probably do not want to know – “an iron hook can be reset by the smith [...] It will then be as strong as upon originally leaving the forge [...] A steel hook reset has lost much of its former strength” (ibid.: pp. 134-5) – is that it has a political application. Because the interlocutors are at two ends of the political spectrum

it could refer to the necessity for Communists, Anarchists and Socialists to be prepared to have to fight back after defeats, and simultaneously serve as a warning to the monarchy and its supporters not to be too rigid.¹¹⁹

The Communist Charing gains access to the house and a six-course dinner through friendship with the family's Republican son Guillermo, and by "the workshop door, that is for customers and workpeople". (ibid.: p. 146 and pp. 130-2) The two pages detailing their failure to enter by a more respectable door emphasize, with the irony of someone who works on the docks being considered socially superior to workpeople, that we are entering with our guide (and narrative vehicle) Charing, a very different part of Spain, ironically ensuring we realise the privilege of experiencing this milieu rather than being confined to the working-class quarters. In *Seven Red Sundays* the societal chasm is bridged thanks to Samar's special allure for women, what, with deliberate ambiguity, could be called his lady-killer qualities. The contrary nature of their backgrounds and lives is said early on to make Samar and his girlfriend Amparo irreconcilable: "You are an anarchist. Or a communist. You won't wish to be married by the Church, and she won't be able to give up everything to go and suffer discomforts with you." Samar's awareness that it is ill-advised makes him disingenuous when he telephones Amparo in front of his colleagues: "He said curious things, in monosyllables, laughed unwillingly [...] his voice lowered to say something sweet [...] 'Oh, this telephone which in an instant brings together two worlds as different as the Earth and Mars!'" (Sender, 1932: p. 88)

However, in a similar fashion to the conversation between Charing and Don Gumersind, Samar is able to find areas of agreement with Amparo's father, an army colonel and so potentially his political nemesis: because "[t]he Colonel was an aristocrat and monarchist", Samar thinks they "share hatred of the present [Republican] Government and love for his daughter. These naturally unite us." (ibid.: p. 62 and p. 230) Either reason might just as naturally antagonize, and the flimsiness of believing that an enemy of your enemy must be a friend, or that an enamoured boyfriend and his girlfriend's father would inevitably have the same wishes for that woman are shown when he takes her virginity. (ibid.: pp. 235-6) Amparo confesses to betraying Samar to her father, and finally shoots herself feeling "an impure woman, not because of her

¹¹⁹ When Alfonso XIII abdicates Charing believes that the king could have survived with "reforms and relaxations", that "six months of the British civil service would have maintained the Spanish crown for another decade". However, through "the very character of the king [...] reform had been impossible." (Bates, 1934: p. 307)

night of love, but because of her treachery.” (ibid.: p. 247 and p. 253) At first glance, “treachery” refers to divulging details about a plot to her father – ““They are trying to make the regiment mutiny, Papa”” – but the impossibility of her relationship with Samar – she felt “unworthy [...] of her own family, of her childish dreams [...] the memory of her dead mother” (ibid.: p. 247) – means that her treachery was as much against her own class.

As the Colonel and his daughter are the main bourgeois characters (the others are the Moon and a *soi-disant* Argentine Anarchist) the troubles during the relationship and its brutal end suggest a strongly Marxist view of the class-divide: “is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal ‘contradiction’, the shock of body against body, as its final *dénouement*?” (Tucker: p. 219, ‘The Coming Upheaval’, Marx, 1847) From this perspective the fact that the bourgeois character dies and the proletariat survives is only to be expected, what is possible to invent at a personal level perhaps compensating for what proved much more difficult nationally. The resolution was adumbrated by Samar’s low opinion of her moral and intellectual character: “She knew nothing of capitalism, of social injustice, of the *bourgeoisie* [...] She accepted my love, became drunken with it, and wished to know nothing in the world I didn’t know.” (Sender, 1932: p. 61)¹²⁰ It is important to note that this is only his opinion, it is not validated by an omniscient narrator, but the subjective view is sufficient to indicate their incompatibility.

II. 9. 4 MEN, WOMEN AND MUTUAL ATTRACTION

In isolation Samar’s involvement in this relationship would be puzzling, but as an example of one of his interactions with women (teenagers or slightly older), the clear motivation for him is his libido, desire that is readily reciprocated. In this he is strikingly similar to the heroes of *Lean Men* and *The Olive Field*, Charing and Mudarra, whose psyches oblige them to desire and be desired, and all three have a comparatively inadequate counterpart (for Charing Alonso, for Samar Villacampa and for Mudarra Joaquín Caro) who each become attached to the woman rejected by the hero. The women are fully cognisant that with their new partners they are compromising: Teresa,

¹²⁰ Samar is similarly unimpressed by her father: “a formal man, weak in character, very little of a soldier, and with some of the straightforwardness and nobility of his daughter.” (p. 229)

La Roja, “had refused every suitor [...] She refused Alonso’s proffered love without breaking with him, but showed most liking for Francis [...] The nights when she asked him [Charing] to come to her room were filled with a deep contentment”. (Bates, 1934: p. 395) After Lucía rejects Mudarra’s post-coital proposal he leaves her, according to Lucía both correct and properly masculine behaviour: “I like Diego’s attitude better than yours [Caro’s] [...] He had what he wanted and when I wouldn’t marry him he cleared off and forgot me like a man. You don’t know what you want and you’ve been wanting me to tell you.” (Bates, 1936: p. 316) When they do get married Caro initially refuses to have Mudarra’s child in the house and “Lucía began to languish [...] when he embraced her she lay indifferently beneath him.” (ibid.: pp. 357-8)

It is quite a contrast to her experience with Mudarra: “his hot breath upon the corner of her mouth sent intolerable sensation coursing through her skin; gasping, she clutched him [...] her body shaking with terror and desire.” (ibid.: pp. 88-9)¹²¹ One might wonder what place this description, as if from a bodice-ripper, has in a novel on revolutionary politics, but it corresponds with the way both authors think it relevant to show how women (especially younger women or older girls) are attracted to these men. For example, when Charing visits Trepas House the daughter, Julia, treats him “with overdone disdain”, then stands “to get the window light on her best side”; (Bates, 1934: pp. 132-3) and the normally rational Star, after being kissed by Samar, thinks that “[i]f he drags me along with him, I don’t care. If they smash us up in the end, I don’t care! Only thinking of it makes my head swim”. (Sender, 1932: p. 142) It could be supposed that these irresistible men are authorial alter-egos, but if instead they represent revolutionary ideas, it might explain why they are especially attractive to *young* women and why the writers included these details.

There is an interesting difference to how these men respond. Charing is not only able to resist Teresa, he is English after all, he also believes it necessary for the cause. Modesty aside, he is able to recognize, ““You see, dear, you love me very much [...] Teresa, it wouldn’t be possible. Think! You know I am a servant of the movement””. (Bates, 1934: p. 266) On the other hand his Spanish homologues feel no political need to deny themselves sexual consummation or, in Mudarra’s case, marital commitment. He proposes to both Lucía and Conchita, and the latter keenly accepts the day before a general strike – ““I can’t wait, let us marry soon.’ ‘Yes,’ she whispered fiercely [...]

¹²¹ Their political behaviour is analogous, as when Mudarra is eager to blow up the reservoir, but (as previously discussed) Caro is reticent. (Bates, 1936: pp. 156-62)

‘Dieguito, you don’t have to wait, if you don’t want to.’ [...] ‘It’ll only be a little while – or I’ll bust’’. (Bates, 1936: pp. 396-7)

Samar is more prolific. As well as the night with his bourgeois girlfriend and making Star infatuated, he is followed by the Catholic Emilia because “‘You will think me mad, but I want a son.’” His ability to “satisfy her outspoken desires” (Sender, 1932: pp. 193-4) does not diminish his political desires, and is in contrast to Charing’s “unutterable relief that he had not taken her [Teresa’s] virginity from her.” (Bates, 1934: p. 266) Charing is close to Freud’s ideas of sublimation (repressing desire) as part of the artistic process, if his political acts are considered creative, in that he uses “unsatisfied libido” to nurture “‘the wishful constructions of his life’”. (Storr, 2001: p. 88) Mudarra and Samar, on the other hand are expressive of the Jungian belief, that rather than “conceiving psychic energy (or *libido* as Freud called it) as wholly sexual, Jung preferred to think of it as a more generalized ‘life force’, of which sexuality was just one mode of expression.” (Stevens, 2001: p. 22)

Marxist hopes for post-revolutionary relations were for an analogous state of sexual psychic energy to be achieved. Samar and his lovers exemplify what Engels predicted would follow “the impending effacement of capitalist production”:

a generation of men who never in all their lives have had occasion to purchase a woman’s surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of consideration other than that of real love [...] they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do.

(Tucker: p. 751, ‘The origin of family, private property and state’, Engels, 1884)

More ambitiously, Marx had earlier written that by transcending private property people could achieve “the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes”. These senses “relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing”. As a result “activity in direct association with others, etc., has become an organ for expressing my own *life*, and a mode of appropriating *human life*.” (ibid., ‘Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844’: pp. 87-8) Unlike the characters in Bates’ novels, who are more or less influenced by accepted convention, Sender’s hero (as far as any narrator in his stories can be relied upon) has virtually reached this promised state of non-attachment

and complete sensory experience (with one exception)¹²² and gained an incredible level of understanding. When Emilia offers herself to him in the hope of becoming pregnant Samar can see that she is a virgin, and afterwards, “Emilia was sure that she had conceived, but Samar knew better.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 193-4) Because Samar “knew”, rather than thought or believed, it presumably means that it is true, and that he has astonishing expertise either through experience or extra intuition afforded by his emancipated senses. Beyond suggesting that Samar has special gifts of divination, this particular insight fits with the novel’s anarchic spirit in which actions may have no consequences, as an Anarchist’s opposition to the government or authority is not done in order to replace it with an alternative order. Samar and Emilia’s act, therefore, is pure pleasure in the same way the protests are pure hostility.

II. 9. 5 UNWORLDLY WOMEN

Samar’s interaction with Emilia provides an obvious correlation between masculine experience and knowledge against feminine innocence and ignorance. Charing’s comrade, Martínez, apportions much of the blame for this perceived imbalance, and his difficulty in finding a good wife, on the Church:

“[it] forbids them politics, sets them against participating in affairs, drums its theory of life into their heads [...] this house and hearth theory of womenkind means the brothel in the background [...] I find myself hunting round for a girl with a spark of intelligence even in those places. There are a few, but damn few.”

His desire for an interesting female interlocutor, apparently a reason for going to brothels, is so strong it supersedes his political beliefs: “I’d rather marry a thoughtful monarchist than a bed and kitchen housekeeper.” (ibid.: pp. 242-3) The gaucheness of his speech probably results from the confusion of well-meaning sentiments: the Church has a pernicious effect; women are generally discouraged or prevented from acquiring knowledge and skills; and Martínez did not want to be seen as exploiting these victims (hence his search for intellectual prostitutes). However, this looks to be an over-stated

¹²² When Samar reads of Amparo’s death he does so with “the self-conscious pride of a murderer” and feigns indifference, but then he is afflicted: “With her his own spirit had died...life was impossible.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 255-59)

version of the divide in the country at the time in terms of worthwhile educational acquisitions. For example, in Spain in 1930 female literacy was at about 65% against male literacy of 81% (which included considerable regional variations, with the Levant and Eastern Andalucía the most disadvantaged, and northern areas, including Catalonia, with the highest rates). (Jerneck: p. 125) Nevertheless, many on the Left in Spain shared Martínez's view of women as uneducated, gullible and easily swayed by the Catholic Church, and so opposed female enfranchisement (passed as a law in 1931 and first exercised as a right in 1933). (Davies, 1998: p. 106) One parliamentarian who believed that Spanish women were not yet ready to vote in elections was Victoria Kent Siano, a Radical Socialist who argued that her gender should experience the Republic for a few years to appreciate its worth. She was contradicted in the *Cortes* by the Radical Clara Campoamor Rodríguez, who countered that by the same logic men no more deserved the right. Judging by the accounts, the consensus in parliament lay with postponement. (Cowans: pp. 141-5) Women were also the targets of satire. For example, in Luis de Vargas' popular theatrical comedies of the 1920s they were depicted, new to the city, as vulnerable ingénues. (Gies: p. 583)¹²³

What women knew or thought, or did not know or did not think is not to be confused with the subjugated legal status of women until 1931: “women were not permitted to sign contracts, to administer businesses or estates or to marry without risk of losing their jobs.”

(Preston, 2006: p. 88) The asymmetry in rights is a significant element in, for example Valle-Inclán's story 'Beatriz' (originally from 1900), in which all but one of the female characters are reliant on one of the men's good offices (or otherwise).



Fig. 27. Spanish women voting for the first time in 1933.
<http://arlequinsworld.blogspot.pt/2012/03/los-anos-negros-1933-1936.html>

The most obvious case of a woman who is effectively powerless because of her gender in this story is Beatriz, who has to endure the chaplain's abuse until the Father Confessor arrives. Her mother, the Countess, is also bound by a patriarchal system,

¹²³ 'The commercial stage, 1900-1936', Dru Dougherty

indicating that money and social standing do not make one exempt. She has given up titles because of her father's curse; her memories of her family's past only involve men (a king, marquis, a monk and a pope); she lives "like a noble prioress withdrawn in the sad, silent rooms of her palace"; and she has to solicit help even to discover what the chaplain is doing to her daughter. (Appelbaum: p. 41 and pp. 37-9) The one woman with authority, the faith healer, is so arcane that her existence is close to preternatural: her grandsons are "already old" and "her eyes were green, of the maleficent green found in abandoned fountains, where witches assemble." (ibid.: p. 55)

In Bates' or Sender's novels the nearest suggestion of a character being disadvantaged because of gender is through unwanted attention from men, either because the two authors thought that legally Spain was by then egalitarian, or that in their circles perceived gender differences were mostly not an issue. Star is attacked by a scarecrow, what is said to be the incarnation of a dead man, "most probably Don Fidel, who in life had his sexual desires unsatisfied, has made a lusty corpse". (Sender, 1932: p. 201) It is typically strange and difficult to know how to interpret – it could be comedic, alarming, or about how antiquated threats can come back to life. In Bates' more prosaic Spain, Teresa tells Charing that different men have tried to seduce her unsuccessfully, especially when she worked in a hotel, (Bates, 1934: pp. 172-3) possibly in recognition of how vulnerable young women could be, but just as likely to let the reader know that she is both good-looking and not easily tempted, so that when she falls for Charing it is all the more impressive. Teresa not only represents feminine charm and virtue, she also undermines Martínez's claim (in the same novel) of generic female ignorance. She goes looking for Charing, has information for him and, as proof of her perspicacity, is a Communist. (ibid.: pp. 87-8)

She would not have had any academic advantages at a state level and yet has escaped the fate Martínez (in the speech above, despairing of finding an intelligent Spanish woman) sees as almost inescapable for her gender, and one has to wonder about the condescending implication of his statement. According to his version, virtually half the population are credulous and helpless, not only taught fantasies, but also lacking the insight to question the mendacity. That the man's complaint of obtuseness may reflect as much something lacking in his own faculties is more clearly the situation with Villacampa's attitude to Star. Often in Sender's novel one character's opinion of another says more about the speaker, and this is especially the case when Villacampa claims that Star is not a suitable sweetheart because "[t]he poor girl has a lot to learn

yet”, or that civilization is stupid, “more stupid than Star”. (Sender, 1932: p. 18 and p. 157) His words are contradicted first by his increasingly clear interest in her; by her thoughts – “I have to live a life which is beautiful in a society which my father thought criminal, but I think merely foolish and simple”, and “I like men [...] But they must be comrades, because the others don’t seem to me any better than priests” (ibid.: p. 43) – ideas which, by her comrades’ standards, are wise; and other characters have a high opinion of her, such as when she tells Samar his relationship with Amparo has no future: “The simplicity of her words upsets me [...] The little girl [Star], although she doesn’t often offer an opinion, shows good sense when she does give one, Good sense which terrifies me.” (ibid.: p. 62) Instead, it is Villacampa’s unreadiness to deal with both the world and Star which is evident, exemplified by his reaction to their first kiss: “I find my lips on hers. But the touch sets up a current as when two wires join, and I jump off as if by an electric shock. I find myself two yards away from her. She has shut her eyes and is laughing.” His very physical response illustrates how vulnerable his ingenuousness makes him. He is, though, also saved by others’ ignorance. When he is potentially endangered by having shot a police agent, he is actually safe because the police are unaware: “‘If they knew it they would kill you.’ I agreed. But they don’t know it.” (ibid.: p. 200)

II. 9. 6 KNOWLEDGE AS POWER

Samar’s appetite for omniscience is said to be from his (vocational) nature: “‘Anyone would know you were a journalist. You want to know everything.’” (ibid.: p. 115) Although the speaker is annoyed, in Bates’ and Sender’s novels thirst for knowledge and mastery of a subject, in terms of knowledge or skills, are greatly esteemed and the latter was to prove very significant in the Civil War (often by omission) in the same ways they are integral to the fictional insurrections. Mudarra’s group in Oviedo includes someone only known as “the Dynamiter”, and nothing more is revealed about him than his specialist field. (Bates, 1936: pp. 421-3) His depiction signals single-mindedness of purpose, as well as reliance on the capacities of very specific individuals to have a significant impact. The degree to which their revolutionary endeavour is calculated is also evident before the rising in Barcelona (in Bates’ earlier novel): “Memory tests based upon the most recent psychological work of

Pear and Burt and the Americans were used in selecting couriers able safely to dispense with written messages.” (Bates, 1934: p. 526) Like the Dynamiter, Cypriano’s task in cutting Madrid’s power is hazardous – “[a] hair-wide contact through a scratch in the glove would be enough to turn him into a cinder” – but he succeeds because of his knowledge and experience. (Sender, 1932: pp. 119-20) Appropriately, the achievement in both cases is the destruction or disruption of what the bourgeoisie value. When the dynamite explodes in Oviedo,

[t]he arch of Santa Leucadia’s chapel collapsed and eleven centuries came to crumbling stone and billowing dust [...] The loveliness of gold and silver and intricate ivory, the glory of enamels and encrusted stones, the milk of the Virgin Mary and Saint Peter’s sandal all alike were buried beneath twenty feet of debris. (Bates, 1936: pp. 422-3)

The excited anticipation of the electrical saboteurs of Madrid is of people who hope “[t]o electrocute bourgeois Madrid now thronging the cafés [...] To burn the fuses, send invisible shocks through the electric heaters of their silken-sheeted beds”, so that, when completed, “the rest of Madrid, all that we can see from here, is quenched in darkness. A single man’s will has accomplished that.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 119-20)

Skill, in combination with labour, is also used as a mark of an alternative type of ownership and a geographical form of belonging. Ironically, what is subversive is also constructive. Before the first meeting in Madrid, some workers admire the building they helped to construct and the materials they used: “A good beam! A daughter of the forges of Biscay, tempered under swift hammers, shaped by the skill of workers in metal [...] All speak the same language, bolts, nuts artificial lights, and glass – machine, workshop, daily wages, disputes, strikes, revolts.” Progreso, a foreman, on release from prison goes straight back to the theatre: “My good walls, noble lines, curving steel and glass! How the light sings in the round eye of a gable! With what grace arrows of light shoot out from the hanging lanterns of the ceiling!” However, in 1930s Spanish society once the work has finished workers are not welcome, and Progreso is arrested again. The significance of a theatre in bourgeois terms is titillation: “Revues, knees, and thighs. Drama – domestic tragedies within the limits of the Common Law. Comedy – pleasant adulteries in a setting of fine sheets and honeyed words [...] Let their pretty girls show their thighs!” (ibid.: pp. 20-3) The contradictory results of the proletariat and bourgeoisie on the theatre is that the former have an anthropomorphic effect on objects

and material – for example, “daughter of the forges” or “the light sings” – whereas the latter are there for the reification and deconstruction of chorus girls, for their “knees, and thighs”: one group elevates by their skills, the others degrade through indolence. By this dichotomy, the reader is obliged to divide those who use the building in terms of their social class, and to decide whose theatre it is or should be.

A similar claim is implicitly made for Las Olivares on behalf of the workers. During the harvest Robledo expresses satisfaction at his own abilities – “‘Very good,’ he whispered, praising his skill in getting so far out on the bough” – and joy in the process – the world is only understood “through a calm monotony of purple-black fruit falling [...] out there was a ripe and lovely richness of olives and a calm unemotional greed entered him, like a spreading out of his own self to include the shining clusters” – while a competition between Lucía and Ursula Caro means “[t]he fruit showered out from both girls”. (Bates, 1936: pp. 244-6) This scene is in marked contrast to Don Fadrique’s inglorious efforts during the grafting, in which everything points to his not belonging: the workers are “astonished to see” him there; he needs to have the seasonal timing of work and reasons explained; and after less than two hours of work,¹²⁴ “[b]y five o’clock the Marquis was trembling with fatigue and the nauseating discomfort of sweat”. (ibid.: pp. 205-7) As the priest says in Azorín’s story *Don Juan*, “if we were to demand as many good qualities of masters as we do of servants, very few masters would be able to qualify as servants.” (Appelbaum, 2004: p. 137) According to the official laws the olive trees and lands are the Marquis’, but according to this episode he is an intruder, and it is the workers who are at home there. There can be little doubt that Bates was condemning a system in which landowners might not even live where the people paid them rent, while peasants could farm land for many years without ever having the right to purchase it. (Preston, 2006: pp. 73-4)

Charing is ostensibly (being a Briton in Spain) more of an alien than any of the other characters in these novels. However, his willingness to embrace the local culture includes him acquiring both the Castilian and Catalan languages. (Bates, 1934: p. 56) While on a mission to the French border at a time when speaking Catalan was still somewhat of a political act,¹²⁵ and aware he could be conspicuous, Charing uses his

¹²⁴ He invites the mayordomo for lunch at half-past two, and they start work after lunch and a horse-ride.

¹²⁵ There had been a revival in Catalan language and culture from the late 19th century *Renaixança*, following its suppression from around 1700 and a ban on plays that were exclusively in Catalan: “Authors responded (to the relish of their audiences) by casting the obligatory Spanish speakers as criminals,

linguistic abilities and what is important by bourgeois standards (being *charnego*¹²⁶) to hide what is relevant to him, that he is politically active in Barcelona: “He resolved at once to play the Englishman, searching for the romantic and antiquated, and not too well equipped linguistically, speaking in Castilian therefore.” (ibid.: p. 80) The way that Charing mimics being what he actually is from one perspective (a British traveller) is an instance of the motif of ignorance (by feigning ignorance he makes the police ignorant) as deceptive and a handicap when, from the same standpoint, education is a political duty and personal boon. *Lean Men* directly expresses the idea of ignorance as a weapon of the establishment in opposition to education as part of the revolutionaries’ armoury. When Charing is trying to decide if he has the right to kill a guard, he thinks that as “deliberate lying, political deceit, interest, cunning, treachery, ignorance, vanity were the guiding forces of government”, rationally speaking he had no loyalty to the state. (ibid.: p. 554)

An embodiment of Charing’s view of the government is Sender’s character Fau. As a police informer, he is hypothetically in the most powerful position of all, but in the event he is doubly ignorant, both of insurrectionary activities and of police behaviour. In a café the saboteurs (before they cut Madrid’s electricity) wait for Fau to leave after paying for beggars to eat and drink, in an echo of *Julius Caesar* “repeating that he was an honourable man”, before they declare him a spy. His largesse was with police money: “Have him followed and you’ll be convinced.” (Sender, 1932: pp. 116-7) Observed all night and into the morning, “it was really a miracle that he didn’t notice his followers.” When Fau goes to the police station to provide information the lights go out (because of the sabotage), which is both symbolic of how little he knows and as an omen of his fate. His reward is to be shown to other prisoners and then beaten: “The police went on beating with hearty goodwill. But they withdrew one of them who was putting all his might into it, sweating and red with anger”. (ibid.: pp. 125-9) Knowledge of the situation is synonymous with power, and most of it lies with the saboteurs (who then take electrical power from the *madrileños*). The police are only able to exercise power over Fau (not the real enemy), and it can only be exercised when he is proved to be utterly lacking in knowledge (otherwise, whatever they felt about him, he would be too valuable to abuse). One effect is that Fau’s paying for beggars (who “look like scum

authority figures, or military characters, figures that could be easily lampooned.” (Gies: pp. 470-75, ‘The Catalan *Renaixança*’, Joan Ramon Resina)

¹²⁶ Someone who was not born in Catalonia.

from a drain”) to eat and drink shows that money, an undeniable symbol of power within a capitalist hegemony, is comparatively inconsequential. The reader is also kept fully informed, to the extent that it is possible to know or sense what is going to follow, as when an inspector “smiled like a hyena” and an employee, who had tried to repair the fuse box, “was being carried, as he had burns on his arms caused by a shock”, just before Fau is physically assaulted by the police. Corresponding to the knowledge hierarchy, the reader is then in the same position as one of the revolutionary conspirators.

The manipulation of actual and imagined knowledge in *The Olive Field* is used by Mudarra’s future wife, Conchita, when she is questioned by a spy, and shortly after it is used in a similar manner by Mudarra. Being an anarchist, if Conchita was familiar with a city where a murder was committed approximately 600 km from Asturias (while she is living in Asturias), and by the logic of the Spanish authorities in the 1930s, it would make her highly suspicious: ““he showed me some snaps of Ciudad Real last night; there was one he said was of the principal square. I could see it wasn’t. He wanted me to say it wasn’t, I suppose.”” With the same rationale, Mudarra is summoned to Ciudad Real as a witness and is “allowed to go free in that city, agents following him to note whether he showed familiarity with that place. Only the invincible inefficiency of the Spanish police saved him; one of the agents called him by name in the street”. (Bates, 1936: pp. 375-6)

It is natural that if knowing more than your enemy is a prerequisite to achieving political volition, then there must be a voracious appetite for education. This is most manifest in the Barcelona of *Lean Men*. Although the Centre for Free Studies is set up as a cover for a political discussion group (which the authorities would not permit), “intensive education in Marxist theory”, the lectures (for example, about iron-forging and the salmon’s reproductive cycle), the “Bulletin” (with “literary features”), and the library – which included “the best of Spanish literature and a large body of technical craft books, this latter section being exceedingly popular” – were very successful: (Bates, 1934: p. 114 and p. 271) “Education, now on the increase, was almost fanatically revered”. (ibid.: pp. 367-8) The reference to the particular demand for technical books is quite possibly a gibe at the Republican government’s educational mission (after the timing of events in the novel, but which started before Bates wrote it) through which they tried to provide those without access to teachers or books, songs and works of literature, when they would have found practical guides for their daily lives

much more useful. (Salvadó: p. 30) Again, a latent effect of making the enemies of the authorities better informed is to make the government's position more precarious: Charing "felt that the new Centre was very likely to be a potent influence in the life of Barcelona, perhaps in the life of the country. It might conceivably be one of the innumerable forces which would some day produce a violent alteration of society throughout the country." (Bates, 1934: p. 114) The process and result of education is therefore taken to be antithetical to religion: the former making available whatever is known or sparks curiosity, and encouraging discontent if you are burdened with unmerited social disadvantages; the latter proscribing certain areas of knowledge and advocating complaisance in the face of inequality.

In *Requiem for a Spanish Peasant* the conflict between these two approaches to learning is an active dialectic, evident in Paco's changing relationship with Mosén Millán as Paco becomes an adult. What the priest teaches Paco is to examine within, as when he tells the boy to read the Ten Commandments, but not to question what looked wrong in society, (Sender, 1952: p. 55) which Paco does when they visit the poor couple in the cave. The point in the story when he is said to have "drifted apart from Mosén Millán" is a convergence: of his impending maturity ("he was almost as tall as his father"); of closer interaction with women ("[n]ot only did he [...] listen to the girls' conversation, but also replied to any rude words and crude remarks"); and of increased confidence ("some boys went there to swim completely naked" in front of washerwomen). (ibid.: pp. 63-7) In other words, detached from the priest's influence he began to discover the world. An implicit possibility (that is never quite explicit) is that Paco could teach the priest, suggested through the clergyman's prolonged memories of Paco's life and by his experience of Paco's death: "a man gave him Paco's watch [...] remembering the night he went with Paco to give extreme unction in the cave, wrapped the watch in the handkerchief and held it carefully in his joined hands. He was still unable to pray." (ibid.: p. 119)

People are even said to be able to learn from the olive trees in Andalucía about tolerance of adversity, but it is a strange lesson for a Communist to advocate:

The trees, whose immobility in the sapless winter had been a reproach to man's embitterment, whose sobriety of minute blossom had been a rebuke to license, whose stillness in the suffocating torment of August had been a doctrine of patience and whose harvest at its richest is ever a reproof to man from the meagre tillages he apportions life, the trees now stood like naked women in the

purest sunlight, with a woman's desire and gentle contempt awaiting the
searching hands of her lover. (Bates, 1936: p. 255)

Perhaps Bates let his poetical sensibilities take over because it is difficult to know what political or general lessons these anthropomorphic trees could teach. A Marxist would not be expected to encourage subject people to engage in “stillness” during “suffocating torment”, or for women to wait unflinchingly, as if part-buried, displaying what they have that may be tempting in the hope of attracting “searching hands”. The image of women as willing and passive subordinates is not one aspired to by the female characters in this novel, and it is the reverse of what Villacampa (in *Seven Red Sundays*) sees as humanly natural: “things are so badly arranged in this dirty *bourgeois* world, that we can't be natural, what they call natural, because then there would be too much violence.” (Sender, 1932: p. 157)

The vagueness of the hypothetical threat – what Villacampa means by ‘natural’ and how the violence would be different to the confrontational behaviour that is already a part of their everyday lives – typifies the fundamental uncertainty of Bates’ and Sender’s novels. It is possible Villacampa does not know what exactly he means, which is consistent with a world in which an Anarchist can see his political beliefs in religious terms, another character can be called simultaneously Marxist and an Anarchist, and the reader is left to feel perhaps at times the most ill-informed of all. In Bates’ less experimental novels political labels are sometimes informative and divisive, while at other times they may hide significant regional differences, so that (in an example given above) a Communist from Barcelona may have more fellow-feeling with an Anarchist (like Angel Pestaña) than with another Communist from Madrid.

Bates and Sender showed foresight. From this phenomenon of confusion and confrontation stemmed what was possibly the greatest problem, after the enemy, for those who went on to compose the Republican forces in the Civil War: they could not agree on, or often did not even know, what they wanted. In the meeting at the theatre, at the start of *Seven Red Sundays*, amongst the crowds, “Samar reflected, a little puzzled. What were these men seeking? What did they wish? He asked himself that every day, and yet he was with them, and with them full of faith. But whither?” (ibid.: p. 23) In the war there was no question for Anarchists, Communists or Socialists about opposing Fascism, but what they fought for was altogether more elusive and divisive.

PART THREE: WAR

CHAPTER TEN: WHY THEY WENT

Nearly a year after the war started, a booklet was published in the name of writers who included Auden, Spender and Pablo Neruda. "Authors Take Sides" was a compilation of the replies of authors from Britain and Ireland giving their views of the conflict in Spain. While the overwhelming majority wrote in support of the Republican government, their sympathy for the Spanish people and their horror of Fascism were not sufficient to send most of them to Spain. (Cunningham, 1986: pp. 51-7) One of them, who responded that as a Communist he was "bound to help in the fight against Fascism", and even wrote about the compulsion those who went must have felt as if he had taken up arms for the cause, still stayed at home, in itself an indication of the strength of feeling there must have been amongst his peers. Judging by his poem 'The Volunteer', Cecil Day Lewis did not have a very clear idea what moved his contemporaries to risk their lives for a land they did not know, something he is said to have felt guilty for not doing. (Day Lewis biography) In the poem he begins as if his purpose is to explain "What brought us to these wars", goes on to say what it was not (for example, "Glory, revenge or pay"), but instead "We came because our open eyes/ Could see no other way." (Cunningham, 1980: p. 314, ll. 1-2, 6, and 7-8) As will be seen below, the vagueness of this explanation is in fact a good summation of how those who actually went appear (because the evidence is limited) to have felt about their sudden desire to become soldiers overseas. The one specific reason Day Lewis gave, that "in a parched and stranger place/ We fight for England free", (ibid: ll. 21-2), i.e. that it would not remain a foreign problem, troubled many. Stephen Spender wrote that to accept Fascism abroad meant tolerating it at home, while, like her nephew (Julian Bell), Virginia Woolf was troubled both by the plight of the Spanish and by the "war

surrounding our island.”” (Rogers: pp. 180, and 147-8) For some who had expected to live as writers such reasons were enough to willingly expose themselves to mortal danger.

III. 10. 1 THE BRITISH VIEW OF FASCISM

When Ralph Fox managed to enter Portugal, soon after the officers' rebellion in Spain which began the civil war,¹²⁷ he predicted a continent redeemed by sacrifice: “So long as men will still fight and die for the cause of human freedom, there is not very much to be pessimistic about in the state of Europe.” (Fox, 1937b: p. 36) For a writer who, as seen in Part One, devoted himself to the cause of Communism and “had enormous Russian visas stamped all over his passport” (ibid: p. 12) the universality of his anti-malevolence is striking. Rather than promising a dictatorship of the proletariat he invoked “human freedom”. He cited Wordsworth and Landor in the same passage, certainly free spirits in their youths, but more specifically Englishmen who had been moved to action by events in Spain,¹²⁸ as opposed to communists, which suggests he was thinking of national and literary precedents to strengthen his resolve to volunteer.

What these “men” were fighting against in Fox's time was of course Fascism, which in Fox's statement is implicitly antithetical to freedom. In retrospect, opposition to such a political force is a given. However, it is important to remember that there were many in the 1930s outside Fascist states who admired or were prepared to tolerate this

¹²⁷ The exact date he went is uncertain: he gave no direct reference to it in the book, and there is no comprehensive biography of him. However, as he mentioned that many German airmen had passed through a Lisbon bar (p. 30) it must have been some time after July 1936, then he refers to a Portuguese mutiny from early September since when Portuguese sailors “had been ‘confined to barracks’”, and other events in September and October (p. 31) as a prologue to a conversation he had in Lisbon. Because an article he wrote, which was essentially a summary of the book *Portugal Now*, was published on 17th November 1936 (see Bibliography) (presumably after his return to England), it is likely that he was in Portugal in September to October 1936.

¹²⁸ “Spain inspired Wordsworth to his greatest greatest [sic.] piece of prose, and Landor marched with the armies of revolutionary Spain against the soldiers of the Holy Alliance.” (Fox, 1937b: p. 36) Wordsworth's “prose” presumably refers to *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain and Portugal, to Each Other, and to the Common Enemy, at this Crisis; and Specifically as Affected by the Convention of Cintra* (1809) in which he attacked an agreement made after Wellington had helped defeat French forces in Iberia, by which they were allowed to return to France with their weapons and plunder. (Wordsworth) Fox citing an example of a foreign army being rewarded for unprovoked aggression while the British government essentially co-operated is probably not a coincidence, though it would require an erudite reader to infer this.

Walter Savage Landor went to Spain in August 1808 to fight on the side of the Spanish patriots against the French and offered 10,000 Reals to rebuild the town of Venturada. (Saglia: p. 98)

ideology, the latter because they saw it as a lesser evil to Marxism. Symptomatic of British establishment nervousness was the press reaction when Esmond Romilly ran away from Wellington College. In what he described as a “‘kidnapped by Communists’ atmosphere”, he was reported to have been “‘Winston’s [Churchill’s] ‘Red’ Nephew””, “‘Under Influence of London Communists””, and was being pursued by Scotland Yard. The moral panic caused by a fifteen-year-old boy skipping school had been anticipated in a *Daily Mail* article on the Romilly brothers’ school magazine, *Out of Bounds*. It was evidence of a “‘RED MENACE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS”” following “‘a furtive supply of Communist propaganda through the post””. The journalist explained that Romilly’s generation were vulnerable (or in the words of the article, “abnormal”) because often they had lost their father and they “‘were born during the later war years when their mothers were suffering acute-anxiety.”” (Romilly: pp. 264-6 and p. 248) This was not only Fleet Street sensationalism, but symptomatic of wider concern: the brothers, while still at school, were being watched by the police because of their political beliefs. (Ingram: p. 57)

Given the choice, many British Conservatives sympathized with “Hitler’s national assertiveness”, and “preferred national socialism to the communism which was supposed to be the alternative.” Only under force of circumstance did their attitudes change. From the early 1930s right-wing politicians and their fellows in the media sluggishly reacted as they learnt about this novel paradigm, so that what may have begun as admiration in some cases took until 1939 to become enmity. (Taylor, 1965: pp. 374-5) As an indication of how long the British government were prepared to give the Fascists the benefit of the doubt, Edward Thompson quoted the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, speaking to the House of Commons on March 15th 1939, after German troops had invaded Czechoslovakia (beyond the Sudetenland): “‘These events cannot fail to be a cause of disturbance to the international situation. They are bound to administer a shock to confidence, all the more regrettable since confidence was beginning to revive!”” (Thompson, 1939: p. 201) Unfortunately for the Spanish Republican Government the year of the British Conservative Party’s collective awakening was also when Franco declared victory in the Civil War and became the Spanish Head of State (*Caudillo*).

III. 10. 2 RESTLESSNESS

For those on the left in Britain there was never any equivocation, and the unfolding of events through the decade (or as much of it as they lived to see) only served as a vindication of their hostility. Confronting Fascism was possible without

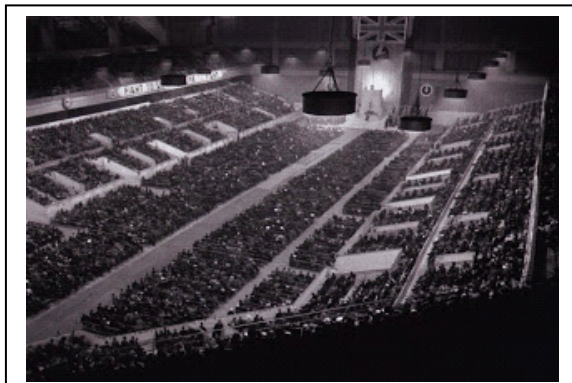


Fig. 28. British Union of Fascists, Earls Court, London, 1939. Attendance 20,000.

<http://nesbitchronicles.blogspot.pt/2010/08/british-union-of-fascists-meeting-1939.html>

travel, as when Esmond Romilly and Philip Toynbee¹²⁹ (still schoolboys) tried to disrupt a meeting of the British Union of Fascists in London (June 7th 1934) with heckling and knuckle-dusters. (Ingram: pp. 84-5) Nine months later John Cornford was part of a group of students in Cambridge who shouted “disapproval” at the B. U. F. (the British Union of Fascists) leader, Oswald

Mosley, and at this time “to break up a Fascist meeting was perhaps his highest enjoyment.” (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: pp. 227-8) It is evident in the above examples that both Romilly and Cornford thought it necessary, even a moral obligation, to undermine Fascism and to do so at some personal risk – they cannot have expected their opponents to have been tolerant. Indeed, there is the suggestion that they were partly motivated by the desire for excitement and adrenalin, rather than believing they might have thwarted or converted the “black-shirts” by shouting. Likewise, in his recollections of the war, Romilly admitted what motivated him to go to Spain was as much failure to find a good job at home: “if my circumstances in London had been completely satisfactory, I should have gone no further than sympathy.” Rather than diminishing the significance of their commitment, Romilly reminded us that behind what appeared to be an homogenous volition – “everybody who joined the International

¹²⁹ Philip Toynbee (1916-1981) was the son of the eminent historian Arnold J. Toynbee and was a British journalist and novelist. (Birch: p. 1001) Like Romilly he rebelled against his private education, and became the first Communist head of the Oxford Union. He visited Spain in December 1936 as a member of a student delegation. The expedition was probably financed and organized by the British Communist Party. (Toynbee)

Brigade had ‘political convictions’” – an individual’s situation was usually also decisive.¹³⁰ (Romilly: p. 22)

Romilly’s description of his pre-war life, working as a silk stocking salesman then for a film journal, was part of his attempt to make his book idiosyncratic, as well as providing a vivid illustration of his unsuitability as a soldier. (ibid: p. 26) His assumption that all the volunteers had “‘political convictions’” which he does not explain (even about himself) cannot be taken as wholly dismissive – he was willing to risk life or limb for those beliefs – instead that philosophical elucidation would not correspond with an image of him as spontaneous and adventurous.¹³¹ Although John Cornford took his political writing very seriously, he also (in a private letter from the front) admitted his participation as partly being an expression of youthful restlessness: “From the age of seventeen, I was in a kind of way tied down, and envied my contemporaries a good deal their freedom to bum about. And it was partly because I felt myself for the first time independent that I came out here.” (Cornford: p. 171)¹³² As described by his biographers, the grand significance of his flight from the very conventional environs of Cambridge University to become possibly the first Englishman to enlist in Spain¹³³ (ibid: p. 11) was, in the event, a diversion from a holiday in France to a fight that he expected to be over very quickly. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 314) Indeed, his own description of his flippant expectations make it sound like a rite of passage, from the child who “came out with the intention of staying a few days, firing a few shots, and then coming home”, to the grown-up who realised that “[y]ou can’t play at civil war, or fight with a reservation you don’t mean to get killed.” (Cornford, p. 174)¹³⁴ There are a few implications to this version of

¹³⁰ The available statistics indicate that very few of the volunteers from Britain were jobless – only about 1% were unemployed while about 80% had working-class jobs. (Baxell: p. 28)

¹³¹ “Spain provided yet another escape from the pedestrian and the routine [...] Esmond [...] would almost prefer to appear callous than to express his inner thoughts”. (Ingram: p. 117)

¹³² Letter 16th – 30th August 1936

¹³³ To claim Cornford as the first Briton to volunteer is open to conjecture. The artist Felicia Browne (of course not an *Englishman*) was already in Barcelona when the war started and she was allowed to join the Communist militia on 3rd August 1936. She was killed about three weeks later (the exact date is uncertain), attempting to blow up an enemy munitions train. (Browne) Hugh Thomas claims Nat Cohen and Sam Masters as “the first English volunteers in Spain”, (Thomas: p. 353) while a contemporary account shares the honour between the three. (Rust: pp. 20-1) They arrived in the early stages because they were cycling to the Workers’ Olympiad in Barcelona when the insurrection began, but there does not appear to be an exact date available for the beginning of their participation. Both were Jewish clothing workers from Stepney in London and they were Communists, Cohen being especially active: his political actions saw him arrested in and then deported from Argentina. (Smith: p. 88) In Spain Cohen became leader of the ‘Tom Mann Centuria’ and Masters was also a member. Cohen returned to England in April 1937 and Masters was killed in action in July 1937. (Baxell: p. 48 and 53)

¹³⁴ Letter 16th – 30th August 1936

becoming a soldier, beyond the evident sense that Cornford found the experience difficult to apprehend: that everyday life exists as a form of subdued reality; that most people, when confronted with a heightened awareness of existence as during a war, would struggle to cope; and, according to the above definition, without having such experiences many people in essence remain children.

III. 10. 3 FIGHTING PACIFISM AND THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Cornford's sudden entry into the war made it difficult for him to write about the political situation immediately following the officers' rebellion.¹³⁵ On the other hand, as Julian Bell only returned from China about six months after the war had started, he had both the opportunity to consider his views and a distinctly select readership to respond to his texts on the subject. Inevitably, living at such a physical and cultural distance from home his initial fears were that, with "our side beaten in Spain" the process could be repeated in his beloved France, and then to England. More specifically, he felt that "the only reasonable thing is to go and fight [...] all the things I care about, and people, are going to be in really serious danger in a year or two." He considered buying a revolver. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: pp. 227-8)¹³⁶ While he obviously objected to Fascism at a social and philosophical level, in this letter the image of him is of someone prepared to join a fight in a country he has given little thought to so that the same gang of villains will not threaten his home and family. Despite his antipathy to the far right, which was so natural to him he did not feel the need to explain it, and his use of "our side" to describe the Republicans in Spain, his politics did not move decisively left. He craved certainty and disliked "being a minority of one", but felt that Communists and Liberals were silly even if he was "moving Left in sentiment". He believed idealism, with Marxism as an example, had become anachronistic and that Machiavelli's dogma provided the answers for the new situation. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 288-9)¹³⁷ It was as if Fascism had changed the rules.

Because of his birth Bell's early experiences of life were extraordinary. Virginia Woolf was his aunt and, for example, the economist J. M. Keynes and the author E. M.

¹³⁵ His opinions on the pre-Civil War political nature of Spain and his optimism over developments in September 1936 are included in Part Two.

¹³⁶ Letter September [?] 1936

¹³⁷ Letters September 1936

Forster were family friends. It is important to bear in mind that, after hearing opinions from them and others in the Bloomsbury group throughout his childhood, it would have been an onerous challenge for a young adult to have a fundamental disagreement about one of their core beliefs. Bell did this in early 1937 when he wrote a letter, in the form of a long essay, to E. M. Forster (starting “My dear Morgan”) to justify participating in a war against Fascism. What he did was intellectually daunting, and could have been viewed by his family and friends of the previous generation as treacherous.

This dichotomy by age is, of course, easily explained. For those who had lived through the First World War as adults and witnessed the physical and psychological damage individuals had endured for what were, at best, convoluted reasons, an absolutist anti-war stance was a natural one to adopt. The vindication of this conflict as proof of the folly of military aggression was in the literature it generated. In English it was most famously in the poetry of Wilfred Owen¹³⁸ and Siegfried Sassoon,¹³⁹ and then in 1929, as if as an admonishment against forgetfulness,¹⁴⁰ Robert Graves’¹⁴¹ *Goodbye to All That* was published. In it he detailed his experiences as an officer in the trenches in clear and often graphic prose, exemplified by his contention that “even a miner can’t make a joke that sounds like a joke over a man who takes three hours to die, after the top part of his head has been taken off by a bullet fired at twenty yards’ range.” (Graves: p. 98) The plain brutality took its toll on the officer class, so that, according to Graves there was an inevitable psychological decline after a couple of months of active service which, after two years, in a few cases meant they “became dipsomaniacs. I knew three or four who had worked up to the point of two bottles of whisky a day”. Yet these men were still in command, and one he knew, “in three shows running, got his company needlessly destroyed because he was no longer capable of taking clear decisions.”

¹³⁸ Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) joined the army in 1915 as an officer. His experiences of war famously caused a revolutionary transformation in his poetry, and when he was hospitalized in 1917 his talent was recognized and encouraged by Siegfried Sassoon. He returned to the front and was killed in action a week before the Armistice was signed. (Birch: p. 744)

¹³⁹ Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) enlisted on the day the war started, but a broken arm delayed his military service until May 1915. He received the Military Cross, but later wrote a protest against the war’s purposes, which led to him being sent to hospital where he met Wilfred Owen. His poetry only gained in popularity after the war. As well as poetry he showed a lifelong love of the country, for example through hunting. (Birch: p. 884; and Sassoon: biography)

¹⁴⁰ Naturally, this is not to presume anything about the author’s intentions, especially one as evasive as Graves, who claimed that he had “more or less deliberately mixed in all the ingredients that I know are mixed into other popular books, specifically food and drink, murders, ghosts, kings, one’s mother, T. E. Lawrence and the Prince of Wales.” (Harvey: p. 139)

¹⁴¹ Robert Graves (1895-1985) joined the army in 1914 and initially wrote poetry, lived from 1926-1936 in Majorca (he left at the start of the civil war), lived in England during the Second World War, and after returned to Majorca. Although he continued to write poetry he is probably better known for his historical novels. (Birch: p. 436)

Inevitably, the inhuman training and military experiences rendered soldiers unfit for civilian life. (ibid: p. 172 and pp. 195-6) It helps to explain why post-war governmental institutions held that war was a product of ignorance (Taylor: p. 274) and also why there was a growth of pacifist groups in the mid-1930s, (Kitchen: pp. 251-3) no doubt concerned that the dreadful errors of a few years before were going to be repeated. It could also explain why there was a perceived lack of interest in military matters amongst the Left in Europe, at least until the mid-1930s. (Koestler: p. 183)

Most of Graves' readers were not in a position to dispute his version of events as they would not have had relevant, or any, military experience (it is in the nature of war memoirs). However, Sassoon was so dismayed at what he viewed as Graves' distortion of some facts that their friendship was broken for the next 24 years. Interestingly, he wrote that the anomalies would not be "noticeable to "the general public", but they are significant to those who shared your experiences." (Kendall: pp. 221-2) Sassoon portrayed the chasm between an (as he expressed it) homogenous civilian population and their military as a representation of the malign nature of war, implicitly only possible because its most zealous advocates were entirely untouched by it:

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go. ('Suicide in the trenches', ll. 9-12)

The natural hostility to a situation in which a population's enthusiasm and jingoism bears no relation to the sentiments and experiences of those fighting on their behalf, was also felt by Owen:

Shall they return to beatings of great bells
In wild train loads?
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells
May creep back, silent, to village wells
Up half-known roads. ('The Send-off', ll. 16-20)

Worse still was the idea that patriotism was a compelling motivation to risk one's life, again the rhetorical ardour being employed so that another could die joyfully in the cause of nation:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from his froth-corrupted lungs [...]
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
*Pro patria mori.*¹⁴²(‘*Dulce et Decorum Est*’, ll. 21-2 and 25-8)

It must be wondered to what extent these lines express personal remorse. Neither Owen, Sassoon nor Graves were pacifists to begin with. If they had been, in the phrase of the time, conscientious objectors they would not have volunteered for service and, of course, they could not have described life as a soldier. Extraordinarily, Owen wrote to reassure his mother that he would be able to enlist: “You fear I might never get into the army. Absurd! They take what they can get, even wrecks like me. The whole difficulty is getting out.” (Owen, letters)¹⁴³ Likewise, as a soldier he admitted to sometimes feeling excitement about attacks: “The sensations of going over the top are about as exhilarating as those dreams of falling over a precipice”. (Ibid)¹⁴⁴ This sensation would be incongruent in his war poetry, which is not to imply that his verse was disingenuous. He was quite open with his mother about at least some of what he had endured, for example, being stuck in a waterlogged hole with 25 other men: “Those fifty hours were the agony of my happy life [...] I nearly broke down and let myself drown in the water that was now slowly rising above my knees.” (ibid.)¹⁴⁵

In his ‘Declaration against the war’ of June 1917 Sassoon was careful not to lament his exposure to military life, but the reasons for it: the “[w]ar, which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest.” Therefore, he was “not protesting against the conduct of the war, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed.” His purpose was “to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the contrivance of agonies which they do not, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize.” (Sassoon: biography) It is difficult to read much of his war poetry without seeing it aimed at the destruction of “callous complacency”:

Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear [...]
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!
(Sassoon: ‘Attack’, ll. 8-9 and 13-14)

¹⁴² “It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one’s country.”

¹⁴³ To Susan Owen, 2nd August 1915

¹⁴⁴ To Colin Owen, 14th May 1917

¹⁴⁵ To Susan Owen, 16th January 1917

The appropriately slow and ponderous lines that lead up to the sudden interjection make it all the more shocking – an attack on the senses analogous to an explosion during an attack across ‘no man’s land’ – and raises the question as to whom he was appealing. The implied reader, that is the reader implied by the text, of Sassoon’s and Owen’s poetry and Graves’ memoir was clearly not anyone who had fought in the trenches: they would not have needed reminders of what they had experienced, or needed to have been convinced of the futility of their suffering.¹⁴⁶ If one implied reader was ‘the man on the Clapham omnibus’, so to were the politicians and generals who determined the policy of the war without suffering any of the consequences of military conflict. One could be skeptical about how many of these influential groups of men would have felt the desire to read First World War poetry, but for those literate civilians who chose to the feeling must have been inescapable that the tacticians and policy-makers who were to blame for the trauma and slaughter should have been obliged to read about and pay for the consequences of their decisions.

From a Marxist perspective such a dialectic, in which the patrician (and perfectly secure) senior officers and politicians were profligate with their men’s lives through their own incompetence was an inevitable consequence of the political system:

“Good morning; good morning!” the General said [...]
“He’s a cheery old card”, grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

* * *

But he murdered them both by his plan of attack.
(Sassoon: ‘The General’, I. 1 and II. 5-7)

The generals and their ilk who the soldiers were obeying were the real enemy, while they had no reason for antipathy with those they were fighting, as with Owen’s description of a posthumous encounter between supposedly hostile soldiers:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound tunnel [...]
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell [...]
“Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world [...]

¹⁴⁶ This is not to say, of course, that First World War soldiers never took an interest in First World War literature. It is well known that the three writers under discussion here read each others’ work, but the nature of the texts implies that the reader is ignorant of what it was like to be there.

I am the enemy you killed, my friend [...]
Let us sleep now..."

(Owen: 'Strange Meeting', ll. 1-2, 10, 16-18, 40 and 44)

In his introduction to Owen's collected poems Cecil Day Lewis claimed that "it is Owen, I believe, whose poetry comes home deepest to my own generation, so that we could never again think of war as anything but a vile, if necessary, evil." (Day Lewis: p.12) Instead of portraying himself and his contemporaries (which would have included some form of social, educational and cultural equivalence) as pacifists, the effect of the poetry was to turn war from a noble and admirable pursuit into "a vile, if necessary, evil." It must also have emphasized the necessity of capable and well-intentioned leadership, in contrast to the stereotype of a bumbling First World War general. Likewise, Sassoon did not become a resolute pacifist after his military experiences. Although he was associated with the Peace Pledge Union and did not respond to the 'Authors take sides' petition on the Spanish Civil War, in 1940 he publicly supported the war against Germany and then broke with the Peace Pledge Union. (Hemmings: p. 94, n. 17)

While it is not possible to summarize a generation's attitudes in one sentiment, what is evident is not only that Day Lewis' comments had first been vindicated by the Spanish Civil War, but that their parents' generation, or at least Julian Bell's insofar as it was represented by the Bloomsbury Group, was unequivocally intolerant of war.¹⁴⁷ For those who had been children during the First World War a degree of rational detachment on questions of morality and combat was easier to achieve than for those who had opposed it and learnt of its horrors while it continued. Julian Bell's situation exemplified this inter-generational conflict. He was forced to choose between loyalty to his elders and remaining true to his own convictions. As Peter Stansky indicates, Bell's feelings of personal responsibility – "It's impossible to let other people go and fight for what one believes in and refuse the risk oneself" – are not at all Machiavellian. It is a sign that just because he had advocated the Italian's approach he did not feel obliged to follow this political dogma slavishly. It is evident instead that, as in September 1936, he was still trying work out his own political beliefs, and the letter to Forster was part of that process. Amongst his doubts, however, he was certain that Fascism was a threat and explicit about why:

¹⁴⁷ It is possible to see the British governments' reluctance even to offer military assistance and instead to pursue appeasement, as partly symptomatic of their experiences of the First World War. There were, of course, other factors.

And fascism means, not only violence, but slavery, and will not only kill and torture, but will destroy all chance of reasoned, or reasonable or Christian opposition and will do its best, with violence and propaganda, to harry out of the world all liberal and humane ideas or men.

He would be vindicated. From this view he arrived at the syllogism that Fascism needed to be opposed and the only way of opposing it was militarily, so (in this case) war was not only acceptable but necessary. Because expecting somebody else to fight in your place for a cause you supported could only be seen as cowardice, you had a moral duty to enlist. Forster dismissively wrote that his “bunch of reasons” was typically Cantabrian, and Bell’s biographers thought he was rationalizing his enthusiasm for “[t]he soldier’s form of action [...] of excitement and courage”. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: pp. 247-50) However, around this time his rational form of desperation was shared by many who, as a result, felt compelled to take up arms or at least support military opposition.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, he was almost certainly rehearsing arguments to convince himself of “the military virtues” because of vehement opposition which, ultimately, he would not be able to overcome.

His mother, Vanessa Bell, was outraged by his wish to become a soldier. Under normal circumstances it would be difficult to counter such objections, but she appears to have had an especially powerful maternal influence on Julian. Like her husband, Clive Bell, she was a committed pacifist, to the extent that to them a justified war under any circumstances was inconceivable. Her son had signalled his ambivalence about pacifism in 1935 in his introduction to a collection of essays by conscientious objectors¹⁴⁹ from the First World War. To Bell the political nature of Europe had changed so significantly in the intervening twenty years that what had been commendable then was tantamount to frivolous in the 1930s. (Bell: pp. xi-xix) Again, Fascism demanded a bellicose response. The justification appears only to have been valid for the European continent though, and that probably because of its proximity to England and the English. When he wrote from China in early 1936 about a possible Japanese invasion he did not feel the least bit military: “I can’t think anything worth war [...] and knowing too that it’s not

¹⁴⁸ For example, Cecil Day Lewis wrote a pamphlet entitled ‘We’re not going to do NOTHING’ in 1936, attacking Aldous Huxley’s “theology of pacifism” which would be helpless against Fascism. (Overy, pp. 248-9) Just before the outbreak of World War Two, Edward Thompson also lamented that Hitler had succeeded “by degrees” because he was “dealing with a nation that has lost its character [...] count on its never finding in any particular act of aggression a sufficient excuse for taking up arms again.” (Thompson, 1939: p. 283)

¹⁴⁹ The book also included a poem by Siegfried Sassoon who, of course, was an officer and combatant.

my own country to get damaged [...] It [war] is the last horror, and I can't feel sure enough of any theory to outweigh that certainty." (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 212)¹⁵⁰ It is important to note that this was written to a friend and not his mother, so he, presumably, did not modify his opinions to gratify his reader.

However, when the theoretical debate about war became the possibility that Bell might fight and when the correspondent was his mother, the disquiet he must have felt is legible. In contrast to when his argument had been addressed to Forster and was supposedly full of Cambridge University rationale, that war had now become necessary. To his pacifist mother he blamed "one completely irrational side of my mind which cant [sic.] accept things like Fascist victories even in other countries, but wants to get out and do something." He claimed that "intellectually I agree with you", but "if I had been in England, and gone out [to Spain] at the beginning, I might now be in a position to make some difference". For that reason "perhaps you had better be prepared for my wanting to go, tho' thats [sic.] a different business indeed to going." (Stansky and Abraham, 2012: p. 238)¹⁵¹ The latter sentence is a visible expression of his desire to go to war, and (in the final deferential clause) of his utter inability as a son to declare the idea forcefully.

His inhibitions were understandable. His letter was probably in response to one from Vanessa. After lamenting the death of a "gifted" English woman (Felicia Browne) in Spain he was told to "think nearly all war is madness", because "its [sic.] mad to destroy the best things and people in the world", especially if it involved the destruction of "you and other young people, who are the only hope of the world for the next 40 or 50 years". As an alternative she suggested that "going as a war correspondent is different", implicitly because it is safer. (Marler: p. 423)¹⁵² Her natural parental concern reads primarily as a fear for his life rather than the more abstract wish of him not being a party to "madness" and "destruction". In the event Julian compromised by choosing to become an ambulance driver, (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: pp. 261-2) something that saved his mother from the horror of him being to blame for any carnage, and theoretically, as a non-combatant, it would also have meant he was not a target of enemy fire.

¹⁵⁰ Letter February 1936

¹⁵¹ Letter October 31st /November 1st 1936

¹⁵² Letter 10th – 11th October 1936

III. 10. 4 AN INEXPLICABLE COMPULSION

However, this was not a war fought according to a code of honour, even if the ruthless manner in which Franco's forces (with German, Italian and Moorish assistance) used military advantage for nefarious ends and went beyond the scope of what was considered ethical practice could not have been all that surprising to the Republican volunteers: it was a manifestation of what they detested and feared about Fascism. If anything, then, it makes their willing self-sacrifice all the more admirable. Furthermore, as the enemy were so clearly wrong to many people, Fascism had a cohesive effect on the political Left. When he explained the cause that brought the soldiers in his "English battalion" to Spain, Tom Wintringham wrote that they were from "the fellowship of those who believe that our small and precarious beginnings of civilization, all we value of personal happiness and social freedom, are being destroyed by Fascism." (Wintringham: p. 16) As with Julian Bell, this explanation suggests, alongside a magnanimity of purpose from anti-Fascists, the apprehension that in its expansionist nature the far-right contagion would spread closer to home, to "*our* small [...] beginnings of civilization [...] all *we* value".

More revealing are the autobiographical reasons he gave and which he claimed were influential in his case. The narrative of his antecedence and life was an attempt at a congruent progression or accumulation of experiences that should have led to Wintringham almost inevitably finding himself 1,000 miles from home fighting for the Spanish government. To begin, "[e]ight or nine generations back", there was a predecessor who, as a "Nonconformist hedge preacher", offended the authorities so consistently he "had his tongue torn out". Less significantly (it is followed by "To a lesser extent") was the time Wintringham, as a sick child, became fascinated by military history, including "skirmishes of Wellington's war in Spain." Finally, there was the trouble he got into as a politically active young man, "in prison for mutiny, sedition". (Wintringham: p. 98) Instead of the anecdotes individually or collectively convincing as stimuli though, the diverse stories read as someone casting around to explain something he did not fully understand, especially as the fate of a relative who had lived probably about two or three centuries before was given such prominence. There is a sense that a mood of ineluctable urgency was prevalent among this group of writers that was at least

partially indefinable, and which left many others untouched (notably the British government). It was a phenomenon that Virginia Woolf thought she could discern but not perceive: “I suppose it’s a fever in the blood of the younger generation which we cant [sic.] possibly understand. I have never known anyone of my generation have that feeling about a war.” (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 264)

Christopher Caudwell’s precise reasons for going to fight in Spain remain unknown. In their short biography of him, Duparc and Margolies state that, though he was a member of the Communist Party the British section of which “called ‘all able-bodied persons’ to participate in the defence of Madrid” in September 1936, they believed that it “seems certain: he was not asked to go.” (Caudwell, 1932-37: p. 10 and 14) They did not say why it “seems certain” and from the available letters it looks likely he did not discuss his move much at all with friends or family. Writing to his brother, he began, “Dear Theo, I expect it will be a surprise to you, but I am leaving for Spain on Friday.” He had only been told the day before, the government forces being “badly in need of drivers, who are in the Party or close to it”. (ibid: p. 232) So his participation was enabled through the British Communist Party, but how far it was the result of a request by them, of his choosing or, I suspect most likely, a combination of the two, is difficult to ascertain. He presumably knew of the urgent need for drivers through party officials, but, as with so much of the Communist Party’s and the Soviet Union’s role in the Spanish Civil War, the degree to which they exerted pressure is now conjecture.

The Soviet Union openly began helping the Spanish government when they sent arms on October 15th 1936 (Preston, 2006: p. 134), but they had already been preparing military aid for a month and Soviet officials had been in Spain in close contact with Spanish officials since August 27th. (Kowalsky: Chap. 2, pp. 3-4) It is easy to ascribe sinister motives to almost every Soviet act at the time – Stalin was in charge and the show trials had begun, while their work with the Spanish was necessarily secretive – and of those historians who have succumbed, Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov (in their otherwise valuable book *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*) are perhaps the most noteworthy. This is not to say that the Soviet Union behaved with charitable humility either. However, Stalin’s attitude (which was obviously decisive in terms of his country’s policy) at this time appears to have been very different when

dealing with international matters compared to his treatment of his own people. In general terms, he was looking to expand the country's influence by trying to ensure other nations were friendly; if, for example, Britain and France did not see the Soviets as a threat they would be more likely to trade. Therefore, importing Communist government to Western Europe would have been counterproductive. Another international concern for Stalin, despite the later Non-aggression pact with Hitler (in August 1939), was to prevent the growth of Fascism.

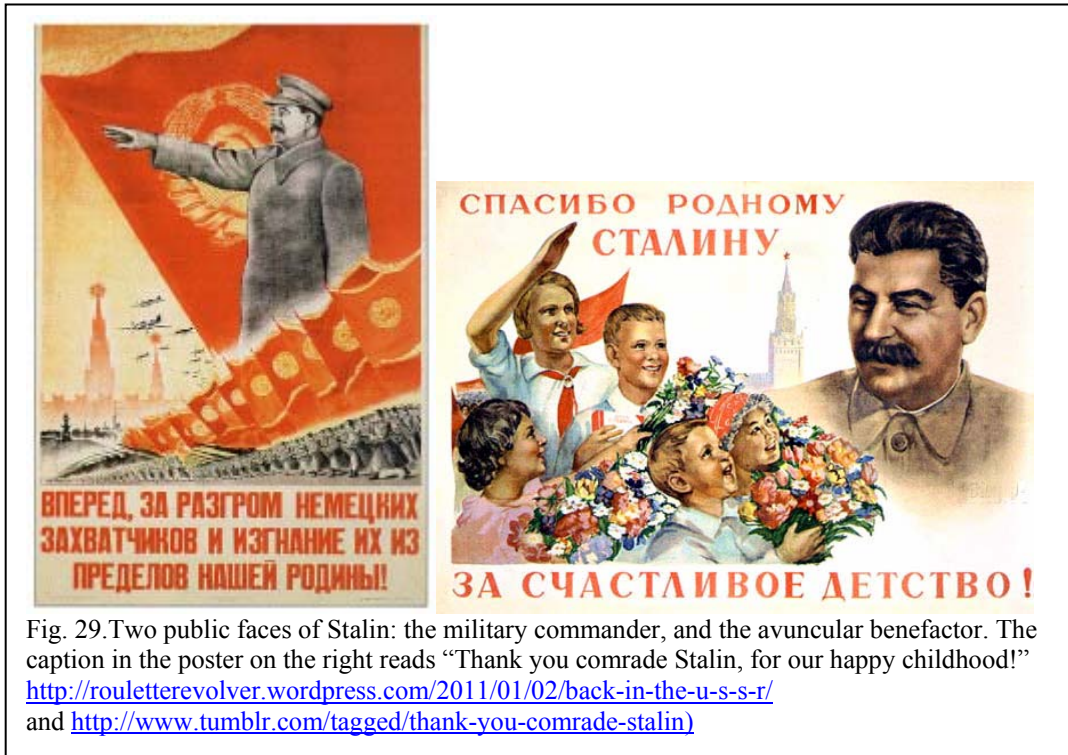


Fig. 29. Two public faces of Stalin: the military commander, and the avuncular benefactor. The caption in the poster on the right reads "Thank you comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood!" <http://roulette revolver.wordpress.com/2011/01/02/back-in-the-u-s-s-r/> and <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/thank-you-comrade-stalin>

CHAPTER ELEVEN: HELP AND INTERFERENCE

III. 11. 1 SOVIET AND FASCIST AMBITIONS AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The available evidence clearly indicates the Soviets' desire for Spain to remain a parliamentary democracy, more specifically to be known internationally as one. When the war was only a week old the Comintern¹⁵³ Secretariat warned against “the task of



Fig. 30. Two Spanish Communist Party posters supporting the Popular Front. (Wilson: p. 99)

creating soviets and try[ing] to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain”. Their officials should “not abandon the positions of the democratic regime in Spain at

¹⁵³ The Comintern was formed by Lenin in 1919 to co-ordinate Communist activity in different countries and to make “the unconditional support of the Soviet Republic [...] the cardinal duty of Communists in all countries.” (Stern: p. 38)

this point”’, but instead try to “unify the masses and to strengthen our own positions in a number of countries – in Spain, France, Belgium and so on”. (Radosh et al: pp. 11-13)¹⁵⁴ A few months later Stalin wrote to Largo Caballero asking him to do whatever necessary to “prevent the enemies of Spain from regarding it as a Communist Republic.” There was also the practical motive of sharing the burden of supporting the Spanish government. In February of the next year Stalin is reported to have been anxious for the Soviet Union not to appear too close to Spain by withdrawing “highly visible” diplomatic staff and “to declare that there are no special ties between the USSR and Spain...There are those in the English government who will come out in favor of aid if the USSR backs off”. (Kowalsky: Chap. 2, p. 9 and 11)¹⁵⁵ André Marty, a Comintern adviser in Spain, (Preston, 2006: p. 258) emphasized that they were “not fighting just to destroy fascism, but also for democratic rights”. Specifically, in such a Spain “every peasant receives his own plot of land and the right to farm his parcel forever [...] the protection of foreign enterprises” would be guaranteed, as would freedom of religion. (Radosh: p. 54)¹⁵⁶

Their attitude was in marked contrast, not surprisingly, to Trotsky’s. Just after the war had started he wrote that “[t]he victory means the end of the People’s Front [the Popular Front¹⁵⁷] and the beginning of Soviet Spain. The victorious revolution in Spain will inevitably spread out over the rest of Europe.” (Trotsky, 1931-9: ‘The Lesson of Spain’)¹⁵⁸ It is a salient example of the difference in international politics between wishes and practical goals, and between writing and being a head of state (without the benefit of the hindsight we have). In Trotsky’s vision of the future the passage from military victory to Marxist revolution in Spain, and then to a Communist continent is irresistible and inevitable.¹⁵⁹ There can be little doubt that Stalin would have welcomed this passage of events in principle, but he foresaw (hence why it was not retrospective) that even to reach the first stage, the military victory, would be a considerable challenge that would entail limiting subsequent ambitions.

¹⁵⁴ Document 23rd July 1936

¹⁵⁵ Letter 21st December 1936, and notes from a conversation with Spanish ambassador Marcelino Pascua 2nd February 1937

¹⁵⁶ Report, 10th October 1936.

¹⁵⁷ The Popular Front in Spain was a coalition of parties, including Socialists, Communists and Republicans, which came to power in the 1936 elections and continued as an increasingly fractious government through the war. (e.g. Graham: pp. 64-8 and 329)

¹⁵⁸ 30th July 1936.

¹⁵⁹ In Trotsky’s defence, as his article was written towards the end of July 1936 it was about the same time that Hitler and Mussolini began sending military equipment to Franco, so that the first stage of his predicted sequence (victory over the Rebels) looked much more likely. (Graham: pp. 105-6)

A major influence on Soviet Spanish Civil War policy, which had a major effect on how conciliatory they needed to appear, was the Non-Intervention Agreement and its selective failure as a treaty. Theoretically all foreign countries were prohibited from providing any military assistance to either side in Spain. Even this was considered unjust by many, the international community having a duty to help a democratically elected government fighting against an attempted military coup. (Salvadó: p. 73) In the event, while there was rigid enforcement to obstruct the loyalists obtaining weapons, the Germans and Italians ostentatiously contravened the regulations.¹⁶⁰ Naturally, it was not possible to send planes and other conspicuous military equipment covertly, and explicit reports were sent by journalists to newspapers in Europe.

When Arthur Koestler visited Portugal in late August 1936 he found evidence of Portuguese support for Franco – for example, the Hotel Aviz in Lisbon being used as the Burgos embassy – and he saw German pilots in Seville. In fact he was recognized by one and only just escaped arrest. (Koestler: p. 23-8) He returned to England and gave evidence to the Committee of Enquiry into Breaches of International Law Relating to Intervention in Spain and, amongst a list of testimonies of the active participation of German forces and material in the Rebel cause, Koestler gave the example of his being mistaken for a German pilot because there were so many in Lisbon and he was carrying a German newspaper. (Breaches Committee)¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, Ralph Fox, on his visit to Portugal in September to October 1936,¹⁶² likewise saw German pilots being looked after “by one of the Burgos [Francoist] ‘diplomats’” in a Lisbon bar, and decided the best way to find information was “to drink, circumspectly but steadily, in those bars where gossip and rebel Spaniards were to be found.” He was able to speak to some of those who worked at the Lisbon aerodrome and observed that “[s]taff cars of the Burgos government [...] drove openly about Lisbon, from the Hotel Aviz, their political headquarters, to the Victoria, their organizational centre”. He also saw, after an unsuccessful Portuguese sailor’s mutiny against Salazar’s dictatorship,¹⁶³ the military cargo being transferred: “Throughout August planes were being landed at Lisbon by German and Italian ships [...] They were assembled by German mechanics at the Lisbon airport”. Not only was it ignored in

¹⁶⁰ It is estimated that from the end of July 1936 to March 1937 Italy sent a total of 75,000 troops and Germany 17,000, 600-700 aircraft each, and 1,000 pieces of artillery each. (Thomas: pp. 937-44)

¹⁶¹ 3rd October 1936

¹⁶² See above for justification of this timing.

¹⁶³ A contemporary report of this incident from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 16th 1936, is available at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/17281307>

Britain, but the export of some aircraft (Fokkers) was made possible through KLM and a duplicitous British company. KLM sold the planes to the British company for an air service that did not exist, and the aircraft went directly to Burgos. Fox was also told by a British pilot that, when the Spanish Rebels heard British Airways had four spare Fokkers the Spaniards bought them, flew them to Bordeaux (with British pilots) from where, rejected by the French authorities, they were officially flown to Poland, but actually went to Spain (piloted by Polish Fascists). (Fox, 1937b: pp. 29-33)

It is interesting to note that Fox reports three of the four Fokkers crashed before arriving and among the first Italian planes sent to Spain (at the end of July 1936) one crashed in the sea, one crashed on land, and another made a forced landing in French Morocco, so that even before the Non-Intervention Agreement came into effect¹⁶⁴ it was common knowledge in European governmental circles that it was being breached. (Preston, 2006: p. 117) By the following year the Fascists' audacity and the British government's submissiveness led to the threat that any ship entering the Nervión (Bilbao's estuary and river) would be repelled, and also to the British cabinet's decision two days later that it would not offer protection to any British ship approaching Bilbao, which was then under siege and near to starvation. When George Steer, reporting for *The Times* and in Bilbao at the time, wrote that the threat was effectively a bluff and the waters were safe, a British ship entered and Steer's report of the act¹⁶⁵ and its jubilant reception meant that the British government had to retract their previous statement. (Preston, 2009: pp. 321-2)

A week later Steer's dinner was interrupted with news that Guernica was burning. He went directly to the town and wrote the most famous account of its destruction, 'The Tragedy of Guernica. Town Destroyed in Air Attack. Eye-Witness's Account', which included details of the German planes used, the calculated manner in which they attempted to kill as many civilians as possible, and President Euzkadi's condemnation of "German airmen in the service of the Spanish rebels". The article was published in various countries, but, following Francoist denials and pressure, *The Times* insisted Steer justify his report, which he did with details of the German equipment used and the discovery of a German pilot's log-book which showed his

¹⁶⁴ Germany agreed to join the Non-Intervention group of nations on August 24th 1936, in order to discourage other countries from helping the Spanish government, and the committee was inaugurated on September 9th. (Graham: p. 125)

¹⁶⁵ The article, "British ship runs the blockade", as it appeared in *The Argus, Melbourne* on April 21st 1937 is available at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/581309>

participation in the raid on Guernica. (ibid: pp. 322-30) Within two months Steer fled the Basque country and wrote no more for *The Times*. In 1939 he “‘began a libel suit against a critic who said he had left *The Times* over a dispute over the accuracy of the Guernica story’ and ‘the newspaper gave him little help.’” The newspaper, apparently hoping to wash their hands of Steer, in May 1939 said that from April to June 1937 he had been an “‘occasional correspondent’”, and in July 1939 that he had been doing “‘temporary work’” in Spain for *The Times*.¹⁶⁶ (Southworth: pp. 331-2)

In September 1937 the Nyon Conference was held because of “‘unknown’ submarines interfering with British and other shipping.” In fact, there was no mystery: they were known to be Italian, but Italy was invited anyway, which they declined, while Britain refused to invite Spain’s government. The Italians were asked to join the patrols (Graham: p. 317 and Salvadó: pp. 155-6) and in the final agreement it was stipulated that an unprovoked attack would lead to a counter-attack, that otherwise “‘participating Powers’” were free to use the Mediterranean, and neither Italy nor Germany were specifically mentioned.¹⁶⁷ (Nyon) One plausible motive for Britain’s and, by extension, France’s reticence to either oblige the Axis powers to abide by Non-Intervention or allow a democratically elected government to protect its position, is provided in Sender’s memoir of his war experiences, *Contraataque* (translated as *The War in Spain*). Towards the end of his book he portrays the conflict as in no way a civil war but, in effect, a colonial conquest, with Franco as a puppet, “‘the shameless cover for German and Italian imperialists.’” (Sender, 1937: pp. 288-9) If the principle of imperialism is a foreign power using whatever means necessary to exert control over the indigenous people, then the recent history of the British Empire in the 1930s would have meant Britain was culpable of similar acts to Germany and Italy, while the

¹⁶⁶ George Steer had already covered the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and shown sympathy for Haile Selassie and his people. When he published *Caesar in Abyssinia* it added to his and his newspaper’s infamy among Fascists. As a result the Rebels expelled him in late 1936. His status as a freelance reporter for *The Times* allowed him to write about what he had witnessed in the Basque territory (he finished writing the book and fled just as the Fascists took over) in *The Tree of Guernika*. It received very positive attention, including from the Basques, though George Orwell complained that Steer’s support for the Basque cause entailed him being anti-Spanish. (Preston, 2009: pp. 310-36) Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times* during this period, explained the newspaper’s timidity in regard to Germany as an early form of appeasement: “‘I did my utmost, night after night, to keep out anything which might have hurt their susceptibilities [...] No doubt they were annoyed by Steer’s first story of the bombing of Guernica, but its essential accuracy has never been disputed’”. Steer was acknowledged in an obituary *The Times* in 1944 – mentioning that he had been “‘a special correspondent for *The Times* in Spain, where the civil war raged’” – but in 1952 he was a celebrated part of their history: “‘His *Tree of Guernika* described his experiences with the Basques with a vigor his readers will not easily forget.’”(Southworth: p. 331-32)

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix 2

difference lay in the number of casualties and the manner of execution. For example, in 1937 in India on the North-West frontier the British had 50,000 soldiers, artillery, light tanks and aircraft and methods included remote air bombing – “its effects could often be concealed from critics” – though criticism at home of brutal methods led to a more moderate approach with the adoption of intimidation and greater local recruiting. (Brown and Roger: pp. 290-1) Events in Ireland, with the suppression of the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Black and Tans’ ruthless control tactics a few years later, were also recent enough that adopting a morally superior stance on Non-Intervention would have required the British to have taken a selective view of events.

By the same token, Britain and France were no more punitive with the Soviet Union. Stalin must have felt it possible that the Communist country’s participation would have alarmed the genuinely non-intervening governments to the extent that all foreign intervention was stopped. Stalin certainly had no illusions over the Soviets’ political image in the West. As well as wanting to “prevent the enemies of Spain from regarding it as a communist Republic”, he removed diplomats from Spain who could have been viewed as having too revolutionary an influence, so that, within a year, they had no diplomatic presence in Spain. (Kowalsky: chap. 2, p. 3) Early in 1937 a report from “our political informer in Spain” (possibly André Marty) and probably intended to be read by Stalin, portrayed “England” as wanting neither “a fascist Spain under the fist of Germany and Italy [... or] a Republican Spain, raised from the ruins of fascism and led by Communists, a free Spain [...] organized with the help of competent people [...] This is what England does not like.” Rather, they liked Largo Caballero as long as he thwarted the Communist party.

III. 11. 2 THE SOVIET SEARCH FOR ENEMIES

To add to the sense that they felt themselves pariahs in Europe, the informer continued that at a recent union conference and at a conference of the Second International in London they “were occupied with studying just one issue”; how to stop the growth of Communism in Spain. (Radosh: p. 174 and p. 192) Presumably, with the latter he is referring to the Labour and Socialist ‘International Conference on Spain’ held in March 1937, and from an exhaustive report (it runs to 104 pages) the main

references to Communism, amongst many other subjects discussed, show a much more ambivalent overall attitude. The Spanish Manuel Cordero (PSOE) believed that

the Spanish Communist Party in this situation has adapted itself to the realities of the situation in Spain. The Spanish Communist Party is defending the Spanish Republic the same as we are. The Spanish Communist Party is co-operating in the great effort of winning the civil war, not in order to install Communism in Spain, but in order to save the Republic of Spain. This is a declaration which has been made in the Communist newspapers on repeated occasions, and it is a clear proof that it doesn't constitute a peril to other countries.

Italian Socialist Pietro Nenni likewise portrayed the Soviets as saviours and Communism as anything but a threat:

It is said that Communism is growing in Spain. If it is then the reason is not difficult to understand. It is that the Spanish people have felt that Russia, above all, has stood by their side in their fight. To my mind it does not matter whether Spain goes Communist or Socialist, what matters is that they should be free to choose their form of Government.

Closer to the summary given in the informer's report, Pascual Tomás [PSOE] spoke of victory “in spite of Communist intervention”; and Emile Vandervelde [Belgian Health minister] that “friends in England are very acutely concerned with the developments of Communism”, while remembering that Spain has “received more effective help from Russia than from anyone else.” (International: p. 24 [orig. 22], p. 44 [42], p. 53 [51] and p. 65 [63]) It is not known whom the Soviet based in Spain received his information from (presumably he would not have travelled from Spain in war-time to attend two conferences in London), but its misrepresentation of what was said to fit a narrative of ubiquitous hostility is conspicuous.¹⁶⁸

The above report demonstrates that Soviet officials could find the evidence to feed a political persecution complex if they wished by simplifying a mixed picture.¹⁶⁹ Predictably, their reports from Spain dwelt on similar themes, which is not to say that

¹⁶⁸ Claud Cockburn, alias Frank Pitcairn, a British reporter and Communist, was sent on a similar mission in September 1936 (dressed as a Spaniard). He attended various conferences and tried to persuade the British Labour Party and unions to support the Spanish government and oppose non-intervention. (Lázaro: pp. 26-7)

¹⁶⁹ In Britain, while many Conservatives felt happier about Fascism (Taylor: p. 374), in a survey from January 1939, given the obligation of choosing between Communism and Fascism, 63% opted to go left and only 21% for the right-wing alternative, and British Communist Party membership went from 2,350 in 1930 to 18,000 in 1939 (admittedly dwarfed by Labour Party membership of 400,000). (Overy: p. 298 and p. 267)

they were not sometimes justified. Their central preoccupations were: certain individuals' dislike of Communists and Soviets, and their attempts to undermine the party and the country; lack of discipline and organization, especially in the army; and treacherous elements within, sometimes 'known' (for example, Trotskyists) and sometimes elusive. Nine months into the war an anonymous report (again possibly from André Marty) lamented prime-minister Caballero's attitude, interestingly subtly linked by the writer to the prime-minister's "fear of the masses and his contempt for them". The accusations about what he did in cabinet (and if it was true one has to wonder where the information came from) were that "he provokes the Communist ministers, permitting himself to say intolerable things, hoping that the Communist ministers will lose self-control and resign." He was also said to be trying to unite the (Socialist) UGT and (Anarchist) CNT against the Communists. More positively for Moscow, the same author reported that young people and Republicans were "working together with [...] and] expressing a bias for the Communist Party", and President Azaña threatened to resign if Communists were excluded from the foreign ministry. (Radosh: pp. 159-63)¹⁷⁰ In general terms at least, this information appears to have been accurate (he even goes on to quote Prieto from a Council of Ministers). The claims about sudden Communist popularity may sound less than credible, but from a year before the report PCE membership in fact had risen approximately twenty times (from 20,000 to 400,000) and they had taken over the JSU (Socialist Youth section). (Salvadó: p. 134) It was also the case that Caballero had a combative relationship both with the PCE and Soviet diplomats, more because of his position as Minister of War in which he objected to the policies that were advocated, no doubt forcefully, by the Communists. (Graham: pp. 210-2) Furthermore, an "extremely acrimonious" meeting did take place two months after the above report in which two PCE ministers, having tabled severe criticism of Caballero's war and public-order policies, walked out. (ibid: p. 299)

However, earlier in the same report the correspondent wrote his version of the Fascist triumph in Málaga: he explained it simply as the result of "treacherous activity" (twice) and "treasonous activity". The very particular way these terms were used was to introduce the fact that "the chiefs of the higher staffs of the Republican army" did not listen to advice. (Radosh: p.158) There are a few important aspects to this version of events. In fact, Málaga could not have defended itself for long, first against heavy

¹⁷⁰ Report 23rd March 1937

bombing from air and sea (they had no anti-aircraft guns), then against 10,000 troops. (Preston, 2006: p. 193) The officials within the city neither communicated with each other or military figures outside the city; and, with Madrid being favoured by the government, they had a minimal supply of weapons. Finally, the military strategy had its own shortcomings. (Graham: pp. 206-7) For an interesting comparison, Koestler provided an eye-witness account and he wrote that the city had been “betrayed by its leaders – deserted, delivered up to the slaughter.” However, his diagnosis also listed “the enemy’s superiority in war material”, inadequate local leaders, and a national government “which sent neither ships nor ‘planes nor war material to Málaga, and did not have the sense to replace incompetent leaders by good ones.” (Koestler: p. 216) Therefore, rather than a false representation Marty’s depiction is skewed, focusing on one point and ignoring several others that were at least equally important. It was as if the overriding tragedy of Málaga was that Communist advice was ignored. What is intriguing, though, is the use of “treacherous” and “treasonous”. There are many possible adjectives to describe someone who ignores or refuses advice – heedless, intransigent, misinformed, and so on – rather than the two used.

Intelligence agent and military adviser Berzin, codenamed Donizetti, had sent a very similar report the month before. Caballero was described as suffering from “massophobia”, which meant both a fear of the populace and their leaders (their party did not need stating). When Communist proposals were not used properly or at all it was called “sabotage” and the Generalitat of old officers did “counterrevolutionary and traitorous work” (as opposed to misguided, incompetent or similar less loaded terms). (Radosh: pp. 148-50) The portrayal of Caballero as afraid of the people does not sound like the same man now described as “the only figure capable of bringing the whole of organised labour [...] on board”, someone workers thought of “as a guarantee of their interests”, and “a veteran populist union leader”. (Graham: p. 131 and p. 271) In terms of semantics, the idea of different authors using similar words outside their usual context, and of often seeing two ideas as inseparable suggests a Foucaultian view of discourse which functions as “a system of rules more fundamental than the assertions of the individuals thinking in the space.” Politically and socially, “[i]ntolerable practices and institutions represent themselves as having no alternative”. (Gutting: introduction, p. 10) The systems can be *judicative*, they determine what is included and excluded, and

“*veridicative*”, they justify what is acceptable and unacceptable. (Gutting: p. 31)¹⁷¹ With the Soviets in Spain, negative criticism (often stemming from what was perceived as anti-Communism) was readily associated with treachery,¹⁷² while the Communist Party’s ambitions and the popular will were considered synonymous.

It is easy to infer that the intended readers in Moscow had already let it be known that this was their way of viewing the world, and if the agents were nervous about making a good impression they were right to be. After their return to the Soviet Union, very few of them lived to see the end of the Civil War. (Radosh: p. 93) In a chilling pair of letters Voroshilov, Soviet Minister of Defence, warned Berzin that not responding to a request for information should not happen again: “Recall this once and forever, that neither I, much less our higher authorities, can tolerate the slightest carelessness in either the execution of or reporting on assigned work.” Six months later, Voroshilov wrote to Shtern, a military adviser in Spain, about a supposed German-Soviet plot¹⁷³ that had been uncovered. He listed the eight accused, “these traitors”, said they would be shot the next day, then warned: “I believe that all are deserving of this punishment. We are now radically purifying the Red Army from all this base rot. ... All enemies of the people will soon be destroyed. Convey this information in detail to all our people.” (Kowalsky: Chap. 16, pp. 9-10)¹⁷⁴

III. 11. 3 LOYALTY AND COMMUNISM

Tom Wintringham’s experience of the war was overshadowed by an accusation against, and the arrest of his girlfriend for spying. What is conspicuous is its omission from his account of the war, *English Captain*. When his then girlfriend (later wife), Kitty Bowler (an American reporter) was arrested she was questioned by André Marty. Marty was known for his callous approach to work, “using terror to achieve these ends”, and the creation of punishment camps, which lost him the respect of Loyalist soldiers. (Radosh: p. 433) Kitty Bowler’s crime had been to try to deliver information about

¹⁷¹ ‘Foucault’s Mapping of History’, Thomas Flynn

¹⁷² This is not to say, of course, that espionage activities only existed in the Soviets’ imaginations; when the war ended it emerged that “Madrid military intelligence was riddled with spies.” (Graham: p. 395)

¹⁷³ “Marshal Tukhachevsky, the outstanding Soviet military mind”, was the accused ringleader. Soviet security “had skillfully prepared a wholly fictitious story of Tukhachevsky’s dealing with the Nazis in order to topple an impressive potential opponent.” By 1941 35,000 Soviet officers had been executed. (Kitchen, pp. 171-2)

¹⁷⁴ Telegrams, December 4th 1936 and June 10th 1937

machine-gun use to Republican troops, and amongst the reasons for suspicion were that she had “[v]isited Italy and Germany in 1933”, had one of Wintringham’s poems with her, and that she was a young woman travelling alone. She was allowed to go free, but had to leave Spain (though it took her six months to find out she had been expelled). (Purcell: pp. 123-4) As a result Wintringham was expelled from the British Communist Party (CPGB) in another drawn out process, partly a measure of his reluctance to go, from March to October 1938. (ibid: pp. 161-2)

The book, *English Captain*, was written in the same year, so if he was hoping to remain a party member it is natural he would not want to detail the reason for his expulsion. However, the book was reprinted in 1941 without alteration (Wintringham, pp. 9-12); in other words he decided to exclude an episode that would surely have made the book more interesting and so more popular, presumably from loyalty to Communism.¹⁷⁵ He also felt loyalty to Kitty Bowler – they were together until his death in 1949 (Purcell: pp. 245-6) – and it is quite possible that directly reconciling himself to the incident in which somebody had to be to blame, the Soviets/Communists or Bowler, required too much of a contortion. He did, though, provide an anecdote about a very young English commander who spent time with a woman he had met in Paris. She, “by due process of law, was convicted of espionage [...] An unfortunate affair.” (Wintringham: p. 40) In this story, the lady was justly convicted – “by due process of law” – and so had proven to have been duplicitous (unlike Kitty Bowler). By including the tale Wintringham was able to demonstrate his faith in the (Soviet) Communists and remain loyal to his partner.

In Sender’s memoirs, *The War in Spain*, evasiveness on the subject was not necessary. At the time he was a Communist – “Thinking that I was a communist, and I have very often been taken for one, and there would be nothing much in that, as I am one” – and was also chosen as a captain. (Sender, 1937: p. 19 and p. 161) The combination, which he shared with Wintringham, would have made him especially sensitive to the presence and absence of loyalty. When Sender’s group met two soldiers who were clearly intent on avoiding military conflict, the reluctant troops finally

¹⁷⁵ He demonstrated that he could remain genuinely committed to the cause and still disagree over individual policies. In a letter to his brother he claimed to “violently disagree with them [over their opposition to the war].” However, in a letter to the editor of *Tribune*, also from 1941, he was still a supporter: “To attack the Communists is to make it less likely that we can develop a united revolutionary movement which will include some or even the majority of them.” Throughout the 1940s Wintringham also continued to have faith in Stalin’s qualities as a leader, because, for example, he defended minorities and Wintringham claimed he had “called the 1939-1945 war a “just war of liberation” from the beginning”. (Purcell: p. 210 and pp. 244-5)

explained that their captain had deserted to the other side. Sender believed its significance could be understood through recent Spanish social history. In very Marxist terms he explained that in the past a Spanish officer's ultimate loyalty was to the king with "a supernatural order of divine right". In the new circumstances, he had to "give his life in defence of a juridical entity approved by a popularly elected parliament", and for that "human dignity and imagination were required", but a "son of rich landowners", through his experiences of life, lacked these qualities. (ibid: p. 34)

Quite succinctly, Sender implies that being loyal was contingent on a higher ideal (even if, as with the monarch, Sender thought it illusory) for which the individual would be prepared to risk everything; otherwise he was utterly unreliable. It also depicts a dialectic in which the wealthy are by nature monarchists with undeveloped minds, and the others (proletariat, petty-bourgeoisie, peasants?) were democrats with well-rounded outlooks on life (it would not have boded well for Julian Bell or Esmond Romilly had they been in his charge, acknowledging, of course, that they were not Spanish). From this perspective the civil war was symptomatic of an inherently internecine society and where your loyalty lay was determined from birth. A few pages later a colonel committed suicide rather than continue in "treachery", and one of the soldiers hoped that other officers would follow his example: "The logic of the war was becoming elemental, simple and terrible." (ibid: pp. 40-1)



Fig. 31. Obviously wealthy Fascist supporters, with one non-conformist (centre). (Wilson: p. 101)

In his account, most traitorous acts, at least on the Republican side, roughly corresponded to Sender's class-based paradigm. When fifteen men announced that they wanted to leave, Sender was not surprised because they were from the CNT, "which had rashly opened its doors to

members of the lower and even the upper middle classes with too great an eagerness to proselytize". However, this information is misleading. Sender used a combination of goading, insulting and scaremongering – "The Moors will reach your village tomorrow, they will sack your houses, rape your sisters and your daughters" – which was eventually successful. When the "traitors" returned, Sender explained their acceptance of what he had said as a result of their shared class:

I was struck by the fact that although I had called them cowards and traitors the day before – words that usually would have led to blows – they had all forgotten about it [...] They had received them impassively when the speaker was proletarian or a real peasant, without pretence, like themselves.

Indeed, their apparent disloyalty was at least in part justified, which resolves the contradiction that soldiers who were not wealthy could do such a thing. It was not because of cowardice or single moments of hardship, “[b]ut the little troubles repeated from day to day, shortness of food becoming the rule, the cold, and the unbearable emptiness of the long hours at the parapets.” Without a political education these experiences were intolerable. (ibid: p. 175, 176-7, 190 and 178-9)

The paradoxical way that Sender implied that the treacherous class in their forces were bourgeois at the start of a passage about deserters who, in the conclusion, were said to have been peasants or workers, could be read as undermining his Marxist depiction of traitors. It was certainly not Sender’s intention, clear from other examples (given below). What differentiates the proletariats’ desire to leave from others, including those damned as a social class, is that the workers did not have duplicitous or self-indulgent motives. One spy they caught was “a traditionalist and monarchist” who showed strange concern about the welfare of his corpse (not wanting to be executed near, and so buried in, the cemetery where he had been hiding); another “was neither a peasant nor a workman nor an employee. He looked like a cheap-jack or a fancy-man [...] A hypocrite and a coward when in danger.” Finally, there were the Civil Guards, until recently the protectors of the patrician society Sender hated, who were destroying the shape of their trousers from sleeping in them, “and that would demoralize them – usually so elegant – so that almost any day they might become traitors and desert to the enemy.” (ibid: p. 209, 187 and 80) Without needing to state it, Sender showed that, by his standards, the beliefs that determined loyalty on the other side – monarchy, individual comfort, concern for your posthumous destiny, or for your appearance – were all frivolous and invalid. The bourgeois showed the same facetious attitude in war as they had in peace. For example, in *Seven Red Sundays* their hedonistic attitude to theatre (“Revues, knees and thighs”), which is antithetical to the constructive and creative uses the workers make of it, so long as it is under proletarian control. (Sender, 1932: pp. 20-1)

There was also a desertion from the enemy, which naturally has different moral consequences. When a professor, who had been compelled to fight for Franco, fled to the government side his wife and baby were captured, starved and then the mother was shot. (Sender, 1937: pp. 107-8) In this episode Sender was able to show that the Rebels had reversed morality, that to stay true to such a cause and such people is to offend right. As he was writing of his experiences he was not able to do more than report other people's versions of events about life with the enemy, whereas in Ralph Bates' fictionalized stories of the war in his collection *Sirocco*, one novella-length account is set "in a village in territory controlled by Franco". (Bates, 1939: p. 267) Predictably, he narrates individual attempts to fight against Francoist authority – a teenager involved in a fight who was shot by a Moor before the time of the main events, and the dénouement, when the teenager's father hacks the secretary of the Falange to death with a sickle – but the social and personal depiction of the village is much less of a clear dichotomy than with the Spain of Sender. (ibid: pp. 294-5 and 321-2)

III. 11. 4 TRADITIONAL SPAIN AND THE FASCIST INCURSION

The more enigmatic nature of the story is indicated by an uncredited quotation at the beginning: "Solo, desamparado,/ Ciego sin lumbré en cárcel tenebrosa." [Alone, helpless,/ Blind without firelight in a dark prison.] By itself the quotation successfully prefigures a narrative involving a character who is, for example, imprisoned by geography and the resident political corruption. Identification of the poet, though, makes the inference more difficult. Garcilaso de la Vega was a soldier as well as a poet and lived for about 35 years in the early 1500s. These dual roles make him appropriate for a tale set in a war, but the fact he fought and died for the king, quite usual for a soldier at the time, renders him much less suitable for a writer in sympathy with Republicans. His age (from four centuries before) is also curious – there was, after all, a lot of very good and well-known very recent Spanish poetry – and even that he was heavily influenced by Italian poetry, could be seen to have made him incongruous. (Gies: p. 141 and pp. 160-4)¹⁷⁶ If this reads as over-earnest interpretation – as opposed to accepting simply that Bates liked the lines and thought them relevant – it should be

¹⁷⁶ 'Renaissance and Baroque', Jeremy Robbins and 'Renaissance Poetry', Julian Weiss

remembered that these paradoxical elements in the choice of Garcilaso de la Vega are consistent with tendencies of Bates already noted in Part Two of this study (such as his qualified admiration of the aristocracy and other traditional elements of Spanish life), and they anticipate odd features of characters and events within the story.

Despite his Marxism Bates showed quite a degree of respect for some religious characters,¹⁷⁷ aspects of the aristocracy, and, in tandem, Spanish history¹⁷⁸ (and Garcilaso de la Vega is a significant early figure of Spain's Golden Age which, as discussed previously, Bates showed a predilection for). The title of the story in *Sirocco*, 'Yoke', refers both to the implement used for ploughing, it is a rural community, and one of the symbols of the Falange (a Spanish Fascist party). Clearly, the ambiguity means the villagers are being constrained and treated like oxen by the new regime: the farmers are now livestock. The main objections come from Luis Encinas, who has a rebellious nature as a birth right. He quotes his father pouring scorn on those in power: "These fields will die of thirst, the village will die of hunger, but rulers will never die of shame." Luis is arrested for "speaking against the regime, in the tavern", and finally he attacks the Italian Falangist, Calpe: "sick with pain and the sight of blood [...] the peasant swung the blade with arm and wrist and the point flashed upwards, stabbing through scrotum and pelvis to the inner organs: With a terrible scream Calpe fell, his feet lashing, his face inhuman." (Bates, 1939: p. 317, 305, 310 and pp. 321-2)

Bates' desire for a resolution that is germane to Luis' life and the pastoral setting does stretch credulity – whether it is really possible to slice through an adult so easily with something designed to cut grass, or, in a village in Franco's zone, how likely it would have been that such a time-consuming murder of the secretary of the local Falange could have taken place without interference – but for the purpose of the story Luis shows commendable intolerance. Other aspects of the character, though, limit his appeal as an exemplary revolutionary. As betrayed by his family name – 'encinas' are a type of sturdy oak tree in Spain – he is of the past, in many ways he is stuck in the mud, if also durable like the tree. The description of him ploughing with oxen (very similar to the description of Pascual Caro in *The Olive Field*) shows that he is very skilful at what

¹⁷⁷ For example, in *The Olive Field* the hard-working farmer Pascual Caro who sings hymns as he ploughs (while the hot-headed Anarchists are having a meeting); and the maternal aristocrat in *Lean Men*, is described almost with empathy when she is walking around the cathedral. (Bates, 1936: p. 12, and 1934, pp. 337-9)

¹⁷⁸ Don Fadrique is extravagant with how he spends money on old books, music and other artefacts, but if he did not do so they, and by extension, the glories of Spain's history, would be lost. (Bates, 1936: pp. 31-48)

he does, but even as he is admired by a young doctor, she thinks that “it was like watching a mystery that might once have had power and influence over men, but the explicit memory of which had faded.” (Bates, 1939: pp. 290-1) In this light, that Fascism has brought a modern mechanized regime, his final act with the sickle has another meaning: as brutal and disturbing as the attack would have been for Calpe’s colleagues, Encinas’ crude method and choice of weapon means it would represent minimal danger to his enemies.¹⁷⁹

The older (male) doctor, Reyes, is also said to belong in the past, even by himself, and he violently protests about the new order as well, in his case by having the tavern destroyed. The way in which both of these figures feel so out of place and are willing to demonstrate their outrage so forcibly, is a sign of Bates’ revulsion at the idea that the new Fascist hegemony in any way represents a revival of previous Spanish eras, something they laid claim to in their declaration of *Reconquista*.¹⁸⁰ In many ways Reyes is so representative of the past he is more synecdoche than a character. Most obviously, his name – ‘kings’ in Spanish – is a legacy from before the 1930s, and as he “struggled all my life against the new ideas [...] the turbulent ones” – Calpe the Falangist describes him as a “Catholic



Fig. 32. A Fascist poster [“Through weapons. The Fatherland, Bread and Justice”] (Wilson: p.35)

conservative” – it is clear he is incompatible with the new style of politics (even he has had his books burned by the local militia). When he claims to be a peasant, an obvious contradiction of his name, he is in fact revealing that he possesses knowledge and an outlook at least partly admired by Bates. According to Reyes a peasant is one who “can only enjoy conversation about my own village [...] just as a peasant only loves fields that are his own”. Such a parochial attitude under normal circumstances could attract disdain, but during a civil war that was being manipulated by foreign powers for their

¹⁷⁹ It is possible it was meant to be seen as representative of the government forces’ inferior weapons and technology.

¹⁸⁰ As the period from roughly 750-1250 when Spanish Catholics gradually won back Spain from the Islamic Moors, *Reconquista* became a “national mythology [...] about the Catholic crusading of their medieval forebears [...] persons or processes which were deemed to have delayed or obstructed it could be criticized, marginalized, and vilified.” (Carr: ‘The Early Middle Ages’, Richard Fletcher, p. 63) Or, in the case of the Fascist *Reconquistadors*, used to conquer Spain again, as they proved with their heavy reliance on Moorish troops to win the 1930s war.

own ends,¹⁸¹ limiting your world view so strictly assumes an altruistic character. He also shows his peasant virtues in his concern for agricultural processes, in this case the olive oil press which his grandfather made of apple wood: “the new steel mill at the capitol has taken most of my olives. Only the old people, the die-hards, know that wood is best.” The steel future is a folly of youth. (Bates, 1939: pp. 312-3, p. 280 and 278)

Reyes demonstrates his incapacity to resist change as well. The first description of him suggests he stands if anything for aristocracy or luxury rather than peasantry, “asleep [...] seated in his armchair and surrounded, she saw, by a semi-circle of spittle; a cigar, fallen from his right hand, still smouldered on the floor.” It is a class lacking the vitality to continue, and like Don Fadrique in *The Olive Field*,¹⁸² Reyes has no successors, apparently not thinking it important. As a bachelor he had found his servant convenient: “Esperanza, his housekeeper, protestingly and with much ill-expressed repentance had been his mistress for a number of years, till Reyes’ own laziness had put an end to that practice, as he had called it.” It is an image of a man making his own immediate volition paramount – it is certainly difficult to know if the housekeeper’s protests are intended to be humorous or as a Marxist reproach against the doctor, the reification of the woman he pays. It is also symptomatic of his indolence, which makes him revel in “my Spain, three hundred houses and four fountains, a fair and a feast once a year, and everyone known to me”, and to “pray that we shall make a new Spain, a great Spain, able to make herself respected in the counsels of the world”, but means he will do nothing to achieve his ambition. (Bates, 1939: p. 273, 314 and 282)

It is hardly surprising, especially from a Marxist perspective, that the character



Fig. 33. Mass at the front. (Wilson: p. 104)

thinks so fondly of the past, not only because of being one of the most materially comfortable people locally, but also, as the mayor, having been one of the most powerful. He could feel contented because the other villagers accepted

the social structure as it was and simultaneously showed their deference and poverty, as when Luis Encinas gave Reyes two melons for treating his son (presumably that was all

¹⁸¹ Naturally there was foreign involvement on both sides, but, in simple terms, support for the Spanish government from outside only came as a response to Fascist aid for the other side.

¹⁸² Fadrique’s “line was dead, his seed had been evil in the womb of Inês [...] his line was sentenced to extirpation.” (Bates, 1936: p. 205)

they could offer). (ibid: p. 310 and 282) The reader can obviously infer that the older way of life was in need of change, but the lack of criticism from Bates suggests he had quite a wistful attitude to a rural Spain that in many respects was feudal, and the indolence could be viewed as contributing to an overall charm. As an author writing about the menace of Fascism his powers of social critique were limited – it would be more of a challenge, in a story of 60 pages, to portray the brutality of the present threat while also including a more gentle criticism of what had gone before – but his commitment to Communism looks to have been compromised. Indeed, the only mention of left-wing politics in any of the ‘War’ stories in *Sirocco* is a fugitive in ‘Yoke’ who is from the “Reds” part of Spain.¹⁸³ (Bates, 1939: p. 296)

Bates’ ambivalence, if not grudging admiration, for the old world that Reyes represents is evident in the doctor’s attack on the tavern. His moral worth is in his concern for the community and his belief that Spanish peasants do not “eat well enough to afford the luxury of poisoning his brain with neat alcohol” i.e. with *aguardiente*. The two objections that could be made – that his sudden passion and decisiveness are not credible after his apathetic depiction, and that he is not so worried about their poor nutrition – if anything show that Bates wanted his righteous qualities to be revealed in one dramatically significant gesture.¹⁸⁴ Reyes is spared the image of a crusading prohibitionist by his advocacy of drinking “honest-to-God wine, as I do”, and his righteousness is exemplified by the Falangist’s indifference to the peasants’ welfare. Within this is the dramatic irony that Calpe’s end has been anticipated in Reyes’ explanation of the harm the combination of *aguardiente* and a sickle can do, and the doctor’s prescience also links the two righteous acts of rebellion (wrecking the tavern and killing the Falangist). (Bates, 1939: pp. 276-7, p. 310 and pp. 321-2)

Bates later wrote of how the Spanish Civil War, “and the Nazi Soviet Pact, made me almost apolitical”, (Bates, letter February 1st 1987 [actually 1988¹⁸⁵]: p. 2) so that this story may signal a farewell to Communism. The symbol of the sickle is associated with the Marxist movement, just as the yoke was with the Falange, and Bates would, of course, have been aware of this. However, in the story the sickle’s use is more of a

¹⁸³ ‘The Miraculous Horde’ story includes anarchists and a reference to the Popular Front (Bates 1939: p. 203 and 219), but, though it was set in 1937, the conflict is tangential and it is not in the ‘War’ section of the book.

¹⁸⁴ The incident resembles when Christ, as a normally passive figure, chased the money changers from the temple.

¹⁸⁵ Although the letter was dated 1987, it was clearly typed in 1988 as it is a reply to a letter from 1988 and in his reply Bates refers to an article from the *Sunday Times* that he dates as from 1988.

gesture without any significant consequence, rather than the start of a revolutionary movement. Coupled with the fact that Encinas' attack was fuelled by 'firewater' (and so it was a drunken outburst), the portrayal would be of Communists being intemperate but with noble aims, while having no prospect of effecting meaningful change.

III. 11. 5 THE *VOLUNTEER FOR LIBERTY*

In apparent contradiction of his cooling political state was his work on the *Volunteer for Liberty*, an English language journal for the 15th International Brigade¹⁸⁶ which was initially edited by Bates. The content has a clear Communist and Soviet bias (a claim I will justify below) which, especially if Bates was losing his passion for politics, leads to obvious questions about whose idea the publication was, who was really directing it, and what its likely purpose was. According to his own later account Bates "was the only member of staff at Calle Velázquez¹⁸⁷ who spoke English." His "chief", at least for a time, was Luigi Gallo, otherwise known as Luigi Longo, from the Italian Communist Party Executive Committee, and he "was originally a Central HQ Commissariat appointee to a particular job, Editorship of the *Volunteer for Liberty*." (Bates, letter of July 8th 1986: p. 2) Bates' letter of discharge described him as "the Adjutant to the Political Commissar". He was discharged about two weeks after ending his work with the *Volunteer for Liberty*. (Bates, letter August 14th 1937)

Longo was the assistant in a unit headed by the French Communist André Marty to oversee the process of recruiting international volunteers (a process which often began with national Communist Parties dispatching the men), before he went to Spain to work for the Commissariat. (Salvadó: p. 78) Officially, the purpose of commissars was to improve morale and give practical advice to the troops, including political instruction. In fact, they were suspected by many to have been Communist agents and to have been involved in policing activities – removing undesirables and otherwise ensuring a strong Communist presence among the volunteers. (Graham: pp. 146-7, and Preston, 2009: pp. 212-3) If Bates' job was in the area of boosting morale and providing

¹⁸⁶ The brigade had diverse nationalities and no specific political allegiance, though it had predominantly Communist commanders (including Tom Wintringham). (Thomas: pp. 573-4)

¹⁸⁷ It was the location of the Madrid headquarters of the International Brigade. It is distinct from the Casa de Velázquez, the French Institute building in Madrid's University City, which during the fierce fighting in the autumn of 1936 was defended by the Polish Dombrowsky Battalion. (Thomas: p. 470)

information it is perfectly conceivable that he was asked to produce a journal for the troops. If the idea for the publication came from a Soviet-inspired institution, the nature of it could be safely guessed as well.

From his later account it is clear that Bates' work was heavily influenced by Soviets and Communists, though exactly how the system operated is less clear. He wrote that he was not "part of the inner circle" of Comintern, and that assignments for him came from "my old friend Harry Pollitt, at that time head of the British Communist Party." (Bates, letter February 1st 1987) From his denial of "inner circle" status it would still be safe to infer that he was a participant in the organization, which attempted to win "the Western masses through the creation of a large movement of public opinion favourable to the USSR." (Stern: p. 37) More puzzling is why, during a civil war a thousand miles away, when communication was a challenge, would he have been given assignments from London. Presuming that the older Bates' memory was not faulty, it can only mean that Pollitt was a conduit for Moscow, though it is still strange that these messages could not have been communicated by a Soviet agent.¹⁸⁸ In an image that perfectly symbolizes his political experiences at the time, he wrote that, "[t]he hammer and sickle badge was issued with my uniform (via the 5th Regiment).¹⁸⁹ Later I removed it".

Bates edited the first eight issues of *The Volunteer for Liberty*, from May 24th to July 26th 1937. Ostensibly, it represents no specific party. It is announced as the "organ of the international brigades" on the nameplate, next to an image of Earth (centred on Spain), and a soldier with a raised fist, and a gun with a bayonet in the other hand. In his explanation of their aims (in the first issue) the themes – "the history and set-up of the Spanish progressive movements [...] serious new articles [...] articles on military technique" – stem from "[c]onversations with comrades in the front line". There is no mention of any party. On the same page the main article describes the recent (over the previous ten days) fall of the Caballero government, the first unsuccessful attempt at a new cabinet, and the final new cabinet with Juan Negrín as prime-minister (including a

¹⁸⁸ Perhaps the line from Moscow to London and then to Spain was more reliable than that from Moscow to Spain, or less likely to be listened into by the Fascists. Or perhaps Moscow considered Pollitt more trustworthy than the Soviet agents in Spain.

¹⁸⁹ It was the Communist Party's regiment, known for its discipline and organization. (Preston, 2006: p. 170) It was supposed to have a network of commissars whose job it was to ensure the soldiers knew why they were fighting, in imitation of the Russian Red Army. The regiment was promoted "as a model of military efficiency", with some justification. (Thomas: pp. 309-10, and 327)

detailed description of its members and their political affiliation).¹⁹⁰ After recording the original government's fall, the journalist, quite possibly Ralph Bates, lists the demands of the parties and syndicates. The disparity is astonishing. The approximate size given to each organization is: Socialists - 4 lines; Basque Nationalists - 9 ½ lines; Republican Party - 2 lines; CNT - 6 lines; Catalan Left Party - 4 and 15 lines; Communist Party¹⁹¹ - 60 lines. The idea of having the Communist Party last is probably to obscure the bias of the coverage, but it also serves to imply that out of a sense of fair play the others were mentioned and then, once you had read the significant proposals, the previous ones could be forgotten.

Information on the other parties' proposals was restricted to the form of government they wanted and if they were in favour of or against Largo Caballero as its head. The Communists were afforded space for other details, notably military operations. Their initial points were expressed in anodyne terms, but they were aimed at weakening prime-ministerial control:

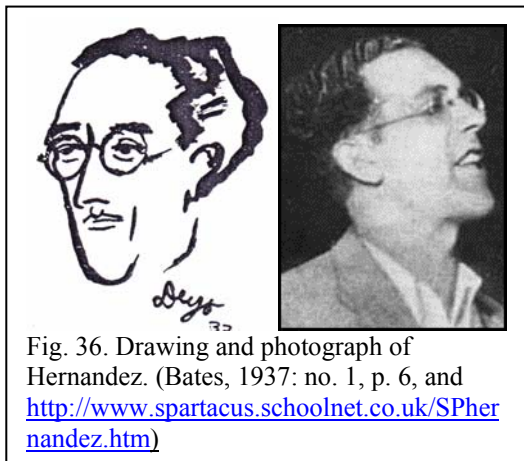
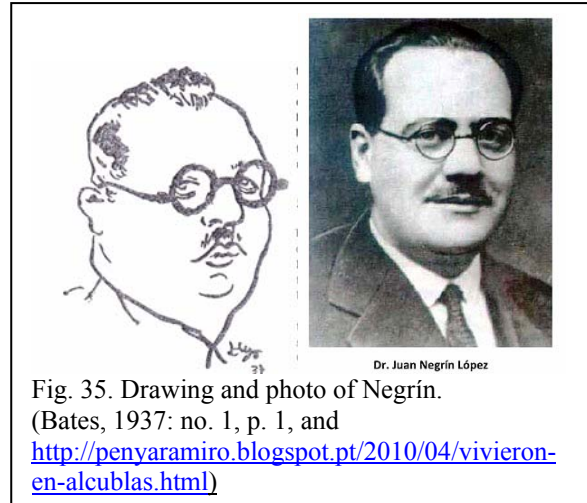
1. Democratic direction [sic] of the country [...] with collective discussion and decision by the cabinet [...]
5. The Prime Minister shall occupy himself exclusively with the work of his department, and the Ministry of War is to be held by another person.

Even though Largo Caballero had been replaced by Juan Negrín, these proposals were a clear reminder of the former's inability to cope with the War Ministry while he was also prime-minister, and when he was having disputes with Soviets and Spanish Communists. (Graham: pp. 133-41) Indeed, according to the Communist plans the powers of the Minister of War were to be significantly curtailed. In a simultaneously bland and threatening tone the second point began, "[t]he Supreme War Council must function normally". This was supposed to mean that it would "occupy itself with every military enterprise, jointly with the Minister of War." In case there was a misunderstanding about what "every military enterprise" entailed, the next sentence lists the "[a]ppointments to command, condition and armament of the troops, conduct of operations, etc." It is easy to imagine the potential problems this arrangement could have, but the third proposal, beyond reorganizing the General Staff, was for a

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix 3.

¹⁹¹ It does not say PCE or "Spanish Communist Party". Their proposals as reported are for more centralized decision-making and organization, a War Commissariat that is responsible to the ministry, "but shall control the political direction of its work."

Commander-in-Chief, “responsible to the Supreme War Council and the Ministry of



War, but with authority to plan and direct the whole of the Military operations of the People’s Army throughout the country.” Apart from how a Supreme War Council, a Minister of War and a Commander-in-Chief, people with essentially the same job, would co-operatively and efficiently function, what was conspicuously omitted was any suggestion as to who would decide on these appointments, what criteria they would use, and where the candidates would be found. The motivation for the proposals, which shines through the text, is Soviet concern over the conduct of the war and that their war material was being heedlessly wasted, more brutally an innate distrust of the competence of the Republican government. The report includes illustrations which are individual caricatures of Negrín and two ministers, Prieto and Hernández. The former two were Socialists (members of PSOE) and the latter a Communist. While the drawings fall short of lampooning anyone, verisimilitude was clearly not a priority and there is an obvious message with the two Socialists as corpulent and slothful figures, in

marked contrast to the alert Communist. (Bates, 1937: May 24th, p. 1 and 6) For the next

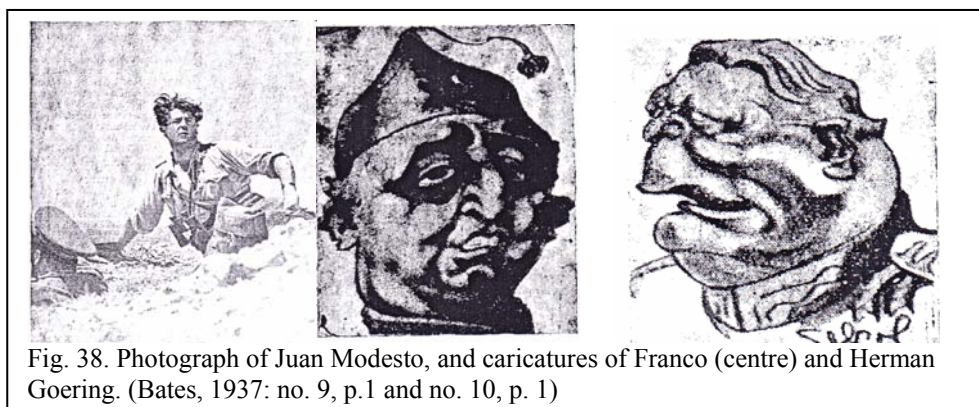


Fig. 38. Photograph of Juan Modesto, and caricatures of Franco (centre) and Herman Goering. (Bates, 1937: no. 9, p.1 and no. 10, p. 1)

seven issues that Bates edited, images of people are almost entirely photographs and nearly all are Communists: for example, in No. 2 there is a front page photograph of La Pasionaria¹⁹² saluting in a crowd, and “CAMPESSINO,¹⁹³ outstanding 5th Regiment leader now Brigadier General” inside; No. 4 has a large (almost half-page sized) photograph of “LITVINOF¹⁹⁴ Champion of a regenerated and effective League of Nations. Feared by Hitler and Mussolini”; No. 5 has a front page with individual photographs of José Diaz,¹⁹⁵ Luigi Gallo,¹⁹⁶ Maurice Thorez and Marcel Cachin,¹⁹⁷ and inside a large photograph of General Lukacs;¹⁹⁸ No. 6 has a photograph of “the Syakanovite [sic.] movement” soldiers drilling, and inside three photographs of people said to be from the same movement (on this page “Stakanovite”) engaged in engineering work;¹⁹⁹ No. 7 has a front page photograph of Antonio Mije,²⁰⁰ and inside a group of about 50 men including Ralph Bates; and inside No. 8 a photograph of a statue captioned as the “Soviet pavilion monument at the Paris exhibition.” The subjectivity

¹⁹² ‘La Pasionaria’ or Dolores Ibarruri (1895-1989) was a devout Catholic in her youth, before becoming an equally ardent Communist. She was famous as an orator (Thomas: p. 9) and coined the phrase “¡No Pasarán!” [“They will not pass!”]. (Salvado: p. 80)

¹⁹³ ‘El Campesino’ (The Peasant) was Valentín González (1904-1983), an illiterate and unpredictable Communist who was made a commander after proving himself in fierce battles. After the war, he emigrated to the U.S. and made claims about Communist conspiracies. (Preston, 2006: p. 280)

¹⁹⁴ Maxim Litvinov (1876-1951) was the U.S.S.R.’s People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs (1930-39). He achieved accords with various European countries (e.g. France and Poland) and the U.S.A., but opposed the pact with Germany. He was appointed Soviet Ambassador to the U.S.A. in 1941. (Litvinov)

¹⁹⁵ José Diaz Ramos (1896-1942) was a Secretary General, amongst other roles, of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). He had been an Anarchist and baker. He visited and received instructions from Moscow and he was the editor of the PCE journal, *Mundo Obrero*. (Thomas: p. 116)

¹⁹⁶ Already referred to as Bates’ “chief” and a leading Italian Communist.

¹⁹⁷ Both were leading figures in the French Communist Party (PCF). (Stern: p. 12 and 60)

¹⁹⁸ Pavol Lukacs, also known as Mata Zalka, was a Hungarian who joined and fought for the Soviet army before going to Spain. (Thomas: p. 468)

¹⁹⁹ The Stakanovite Movement was named after the famously productive Soviet miner Aleksei Stakhanov, and was intended to raise industrial productivity.

²⁰⁰ Mije was a leading PCE member and “one of the Republic’s four deputy commissar generals”. (Graham: p. 140)

did not end with Bates: the next issue's front page has a picture of Juan Modesto²⁰¹ in heroic military pose, and the following one, grotesque caricatures of Franco and Goering. (Bates, 1937)²⁰² Viewed as a group of images in terms of respect shown to the subjects, Negrín and Prieto would come between the esteemed Communists and the Fascist monsters, neither deserving of outright honour or reproach.

The articles have an interesting mixture of Communist coyness and blatant Soviet and Communist promotion. An obituary of General Lukacs, written by Luigi Longo, is featured with his photograph, but it omits any reference to his life in the Soviet Union or his communist beliefs; and in a later tribute to "Comrade George Brown", a British (Mancunian) Communist (Baxell: p. 22) written by Bates, though it is said that he and Bates "used often to talk of political work", Brown's politics received no direct mention. Instead it appears implicitly: "Comrade Lenin once said that for every Communist who falls a hundred will take his place."

More overtly, official Soviet opinions could be published as if the reader was fortunate to have access to them. An "intensely interesting article" by "a famous military scientist, A. Golubev"²⁰³ was printed under the headline "A SOVIET MILITARY SPECIALIST ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JARAMA BATTLES". It is a translation of an article that first appeared in the Soviet daily newspaper *Izvestia* (Известия), something one could safely assume Bates had not read in Russian and then asked to be translated. Soviet influence was also detectable on other subjects. In articles that specifically address politics a consistent theme was the uniting of left-wing parties and a recurring problem was the British Labour Party. In "TOWARDS ONE WORKERS PARTY" the BLP was held responsible for stopping help reaching Spain by "keeping step with Mr. Eden." However, José Diaz, the Spanish Communist, was more hopeful about Spain's political Left and did not see any profound difficulties between PCE and PSOE: "'there are no divergences of principle between the Parties. Both are inspired by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, whose best exponent and upholder is Comrade Stalin'". (Bates, 1937)²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Modesto was a highly regarded Communist general. (Preston, 2006: p. 250)

²⁰² June 1st, p. 1 and 7; June 15th, p. 6; June 22nd, p. 1 and 2; June 29th, p. 1 and 2; July 12th, p. 1 and 3; July 26th, p. 4; August 9th, p. 1; and August 16th, p. 1

²⁰³ Golubev was the journalist who wrote an article comparing the defence of Madrid in 1936 to that of Petrograd in 1919 (*Izvestia* 24th October), in an attempt to inspire resilience. Planes flew over the city with banners which read "'Imitate Petrograd!'" (Payne: p. 181)

²⁰⁴ July 26th, p. 3; June 22nd, p. 2; and June 8th, p. 1 and 7

Inevitably, what is written in the *Volunteer for Liberty* about the military effort, for example on tactics, or on the industrial challenge of providing the soldiers with weapons and ammunition, has organization, discipline and the removal of undesirables as recurring themes. The Fifth Regiment is singled out for praise because of its decisive contribution to the transformation of the army. The report, without much hyperbole, told of its progress from impromptu beginnings based on unions and parties, “when Madrid was defended by a bewildering and mosaic pattern” and with volunteers who would neither take orders nor fight, which went on to become an army run with exemplary organization. The Stakhanov Brigade (absent from any histories of the war I have seen) was claimed to have had a similar effect. Having begun with virtually nothing, except “courage and energy [it] inspired soldiers on the front line”, and achieved incredible records of production and expansion, “which in a way repeats the feat of the Fifth Regiment which [...] is strictly under control and every means are used to keep out possible disruptors, saboteurs and spies.” (Bates, 1937)²⁰⁵

III. 11. 6 THE POUM

Their stated wish to “cleanse the military apparatus of traitors” did not only mean those directly supporting Franco. A group that became particularly unwelcome, especially to the Soviets, was the POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* or the Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification) and the perceived problem with them lay in what they were also known as, used in a *Volunteer for Liberty* article about the end of Caballero’s government: “its errors had led to the Trotskyite’s revolt in Catalonia”. (Bates, 1937)²⁰⁶ The enmity between the two organizations, along with its causes and the draconian response, exemplified how the Soviets were to an extent justified in their desire for corrective measures, but then totally exceeded appropriate limits. As the Soviets were on one side of this confrontation, some of these British writers were compelled to accept what was done in the name of Communism or question their loyalty to the cause. Communists like Bates and Wintringham, especially as they had fairly senior positions, would have had a good idea of what was being done in the name of the party and the Soviet Union, and they were compelled to consider their fidelity to

²⁰⁵ June 1st, p. 1 and 7, June 29th, p. 1 and 2

²⁰⁶ July 26th, p. 3 and May 24th, p. 6

either. In the confusion and ignorance that typified recruitment of international volunteers (together with the recruits' zeal to help the Republican cause), many foreigners who found themselves in Barcelona had little idea what the POUM stood for, but imagined them to be better organized than the Anarchists, and not as strict as the Socialists. (Thomas: p. 289) As John Cornford was said to have found, they were also (relatively) very relaxed about aspiring members' political credentials. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 317)

What the POUM were accused of, how far the accusations were justified, and, of those charges, if some were viable as accusations, has led to a lot of conjecture on this specific subject, most famously by George Orwell (in *Homage to Catalonia*). Of particular interest is the manifestly corrupt way the Soviets used language to prosecute the POUM while explaining or excusing their own acts. The first question is whether or not the group were Trotskyites. The POUM originated²⁰⁷ as an anti-Stalinist party and Andreu Nin, one of its leading members, amongst other work in the Soviet Union had been Trotsky's secretary (Preston, 2006: pp. 7-8) and is said to have left Moscow in 1931 because of his opposition to Stalin's treatment of Trotsky. (Thomas: p. 114)

However, employees are not automatically guilty of the same crimes as their former bosses, and in this case Trotsky and Nin had public political differences. Just before the war Trotsky condemned the "former 'left communists'" such as Andreu Nin, for taking part in the Popular Front, (Trotsky, 1931-9)²⁰⁸ though the POUM still made many statements advocating a Marxist revolution. Actually, their policies were far less single-minded: they criticized Comintern for holding back a Spanish revolution and, in August 1936, openly spoke against executions of old Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, many of their members from Catalonia, where they were most popular, were middle-class with fairly moderate left-wing views (perhaps why Orwell did not feel too out of place). (Graham: pp. 235-6) Inevitably, Trotsky did not support what effectively (with the discrepancy between speech and action) was a half-hearted desire for revolution. He wrote that, while speaking of a theoretical revolution, the POUM used the Spanish political apparatus in the same way as other parties. This "rendered the vanguard impotent and the class without leadership", with the result that it was closer to the Popular Front than to Bolshevism. The POUM became "the chief

²⁰⁷ The POUM formed in 1935 from a Catalan Communist amalgam, the BOC (Bloc Obrer i Camperol), (Graham: pp. 48-9) a Marxist and anti-Stalinist group founded by Joaquin Maurin. The BOC's comparative popularity in Catalonia stifled the Communists in the same region. (Thomas: p. 114)

²⁰⁸ 'The Task in Spain', April 12th 1936

obstacle on the road to the creation of a revolutionary party [...] in its halfway measures, its indecisiveness and evasiveness [...] Revolution abhors centrism.” (Trotsky, 1931-9)²⁰⁹ Their political divergence appears not to have resulted in personal acrimony though, evident in documents discovered by the Italian Communist writer Paolo Spriano. In a letter to Jean Rous²¹⁰ at the POUM offices in Barcelona from August 1936, Trotsky included a message to “comrades” which expressed his hopes of visiting them in Barcelona, his willingness to help them in their struggle, and the need to maintain links with unions before a revolution. In a short note to Andreu Nin in October 1936 he wrote of his sorrow at the (incorrectly) reported news of Maurín’s²¹¹ death; and in August 1937 Trotsky denounced the Soviets for the accusations against and murder of Andreu Nin, despite his and Nin’s political separation since 1933. (Trotsky POUM documents)

Both POUM activists and Trotsky made public criticism of Stalin and Soviet policy in general, and neither escaped punishment. They did not limit their attacks to foreigners though. A POUM paper denounced *La Pasionaria* (referred to above) for her support of a post-war Popular Front government, “whatever its ideology.” To the POUM author, it was a sign that Communists were using “opportunist and bourgeois tactics”, confirmed by quoting other Spanish Communists, such as Antonio Mije asking for victory against “fascism within the framework of the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC.” These are contrasted with quotations from members of the POUM, for example Andreu Nin’s promise that, as the monarchy and feudalism had disappeared, “what will also collapse is the entire bourgeois economy”. (POUM article). The Popular Front was attacked too in the POUM newspaper *La Batalla*, as “a wicked diversion for the working class”, even though Nin was a minister and one would have thought one (Fascist) enemy would have been enough. (Salvadó: p. 138) Instead, they ensured the combined enmity of diverse left-wing parties. (Graham: p. 236) Consequently, when the Soviet Union went after them they could not count on support from other groups.

Soviet vexation, therefore, was understandable, but the response was ruthlessly disproportionate. Calls for revolution from the POUM’s spokesmen upset the policy of overt Spanish democracy (to reassure other Western governments) the Soviets were

²⁰⁹ ‘The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning’, ‘The Role of POUM’, “end of 1937”

²¹⁰ A French Trotskyist who went to Spain to liaise with the POUM, but his mission failed. (Jean Rous)

²¹¹ Joaquín Maurín was leader of the POUM before his arrest, when he was replaced by Andreu Nin. (Salvadó: p. 137)

pursuing in the hope of ending the Non-Intervention Agreement, (Preston, 2006: pp. 260-1) and it was a distraction from the military effort.²¹² However, judging by the documents sent between Spain and Moscow, the POUMists' attacks on the Soviet Union, including its internal affairs, were of much greater concern. Marchenko, the Soviet plenipotentiary in Spain, while hopeful the POUM's internal struggles ("between the frontline soldiers and the leadership [...] between the Valencia organization and the Central Committee") could be used against it, warned that it was "actually carrying out a savage offensive against the party, in deploying, especially lately, the vilest, most slanderous campaign against the USSR." A few days before, Nikonov, deputy head of the GRU (ГРУ in Russian, the 'Main Intelligence Directorate') was agitated about an oxymoronic adjunct: "Even worse scum is the small group of counterrevolutionary Trotskyists [...] who are carrying vile anti-Soviet activity". (Radosh: p. 140 and 132)²¹³

The phrase "counterrevolutionary Trotskyists" contradicts both Trotsky's writings and one of Moscow's potential grievances about the POUM, that they were upsetting Spain's image as a prospectively stable Western democracy. It is indicative of how the organization could be known by its acronym or, more incriminating, as followers of Trotsky, regardless of what policies they actually extolled. In a Manichean world such a use of language can be very useful for those in control. Once it was accepted that the POUM were Trotskyite, both by association and by the similarity of at least some of their public expressions with those of the Marxist writer, the terms became accepted as synonymous, so that any subsequent divergence by members of the Spanish party did not merit an assessment of their differences from Trotsky. Confirmation came from the exiled Russian's nefarious status and the POUMists' (courageous or foolish) attacks on the Soviet Union. As they were assigned enemy status and the names of those seen as inimical could be used interchangeably, in principle regardless of the facts, it is somewhat easier to comprehend an absurd Soviet accusation which was levelled at the POUM on several occasions.

After the trouble in Barcelona in May 1937 a series of Spanish and Soviet Communists alleged that the POUM had links with the Fascists. The day after the fighting between the Socialists, Anarchists, POUMists and government security forces had ended, José Díaz accused the POUM of being "disguised fascists who talk of

²¹² Maurín later regretted this untimely ambition: "The POUM executive never understood that the first priority had to be to win the war. They put the revolution before the war effort and they lost the war and the revolution, and they lost themselves in the process." (Preston, 2006: p. 262)

²¹³ Report, February 22nd 1937, and report, February 20th 1937

revolution in order to spread disorder” and, the same day, American Communist Robert Minor wrote that it had been a “fascist uprising led by Nin and Gorkin”.²¹⁴ The inference must be that any trouble that disrupted Republican attempts to prosecute the war helped the other side, and so such people deserved to have been suspected of working for or being in league with Franco. The theme was taken up two days later in a “Top secret” document sent to Moscow from an unnamed Soviet source in Spain. He stated that nobody doubted “the Spanish Trotskyists represent an organized detachment of Franco’s fifth column.” He cited broadcasts from “Radio Burgos, Salamanca and Seville” which directly encouraged the POUMists against the “red Bolsheviks of Spain.” He also quoted from the Díaz speech (referred to above) made at a “beautifully organized” meeting that was broadcast nationally. (Radosh: p. 175, 196, and pp. 200-1)²¹⁵ Something that is immediately clear is that a “Top secret” document which was sent to Moscow was not propaganda designed to influence, at least directly, the Spanish people. What looks crucial to an understanding of this message is the reference to the Díaz speech. If it had been heard throughout the country, the man writing to Moscow had to suppose his superiors would hear about the speech anyway and then they would wonder why he had not mentioned it. Having decided to mention the allegation, he had the choice of saying it was dubious or of being adamant about its credibility. The fact that he chose the latter course is most likely a measure of the people he worked for. It is certainly difficult to imagine any well-informed person in Spain giving it credence.²¹⁶

To what extent the Soviets believed individually in the POUM as fifth columnists, or, instead, participated in a rationale they mostly understood at a metaphorical level – by causing trouble for our side they were helping the other side which they must realise – is impossible to know. In a report from Catalonia an agent warned of the POUM’s “furious agitation and propaganda activity [...] these are inveterate enemies of the Soviet Union and the Spanish Popular Front – provocatively ruining all the measures capable of hastening the victory of the Spanish democratic revolution.” There is little in this a POUM spokesman could argue with, and the leap from this, as seen from outside the POUM, to calling them Fascist was perhaps less

²¹⁴ Ironically, Trotsky had complained six years earlier that the same label (of convenience) was used by the Soviets for those perceived as hostile (referred to in Part One).

²¹⁵ May 9th 1937 and May 11th 1937

²¹⁶ “It was not taken seriously by anyone in the Republican judiciary or polity who saw it.” (Graham, p. 345)

Olympian, at least from outside Spain. Once incorporated into the anti-POUM discourse, it became a way of attacking them and justifying their removal, as well as making them look very different from alternative Marxists. Within two weeks of the May troubles in Barcelona, an unidentified Soviet agent with the soubriquet Goratsy wrote of his hopes now that General Sebastian Pozas²¹⁷ had been made a military advisor: “our influence on military questions will undoubtedly grow through Pozas [...] the opportunity has arisen to put before Pozas the question of liquidating the POUM divisions.” (Radosh: p. 182 and 208)²¹⁸ Soviet journalist Mikhail Koltsov wrote articles describing the POUM as “a formation of Franco-Hitler-Mussolini agents [...] and Trotskyist-terrorist[s]” which were published in Communist newspapers across Europe. The level of rhetoric (using a compound of three names when the adjective ‘Fascist’ would have the same meaning) suggests the strong desire to convince as many people as possible to the greatest extent possible.

Viscount Chilston, then British ambassador in Moscow, reported the accusations made by Koltsov, but was clearly unconvinced: “the article continues [...] The Trotskists [sic.] are in fact the most dangerous detachment of Fascism [...] It may be [...] its purpose is to prepare the way in case of a Republican debacle in Spain”. (Preston, 2009: p. 224 and 230) However, this belief in the POUM’s ulterior pro-Fascist motives appears to have been held by British volunteers, such as Tom Wintringham. In September 1937 he wrote that there was evidence of a Fascist-POUM conspiracy, but it came from England. Someone called Stanford, who worked for the British Independent Labour Party, which sent recruits from Britain to the POUM in Spain, “says that shipments of supplies have been sent from Barcelona to the Fascists via P.O.U.M. lines”.²¹⁹ (Purcell: p. 146) This claim is intriguing because it is not clear if it resulted from any direct connection with Moscow or the Communist Party. From the formation of the British Communist Party in 1920 the B. I. L. P. “refused [...] to put themselves under the orders of Moscow” until the Spanish Civil War, when they united with the Communist Party and the Socialist League to form the Unity Campaign in January 1937 (Taylor: p. 143 and 397). Furthermore, by extension Sanford would have been accusing his own party of helping the Fascists (by recruiting for the POUM). In June 1937 the POUM was declared an illegal organization and the Spanish police began arresting its

²¹⁷ Former head of the Civil Guard and then Commander of the Army of the Centre in Spain. (Salvadó: p. 56 and Preston, 2006: p. 169)

²¹⁸ Report, n/d and report, May 19th 1937

²¹⁹ He also accused those calling for revolution of using that as a distraction for their illicit activities.

leaders. A lot of forged documents were produced to prove their involvement in covert pro-Franco activities, (Graham: pp. 286-7 and 344-5), and whether or not people were convinced their guilt had been proven, it is unlikely many outside the POUM lamented their proscription. They had been, at best, a nuisance and a distraction during an unfavourably asymmetrical war. However, some of the measures taken against members of the POUM could only have made them sympathetic figures. Andreu Nin was arrested by Soviet agents, tortured and executed. In line with the conspiracy theory, it was announced that he had been rescued by a Fascist squad. (Preston, 2006: p. 161) This obvious fantasy must have had a counter-productive effect, making Nin look heroic and the Soviets deceitful and brutal.

CHAPTER TWELVE: MILITARY CONFLICT

III. 12. 1 DISCIPLINE AND ORGANIZATION

In August 1936, two months after leaving Cambridge University, John Cornford arrived in Barcelona and, without pre-meditation, he enlisted with the POUM. It is possible that he was unable to prove himself anti-Fascist and the POUM were the only ones who would have him, as Tom Wintringham stated. It is also possible that his very positive impressions of the city on his arrival – it was ““free in the real sense. It is genuinely a dictatorship of the majority”” – and the POUM’s considerable presence there²²⁰ had some bearing. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: pp. 316-7)

In the event, he supported much that the POUM leadership opposed, and he was adamantly against their military approach. While he welcomed the Catalan government’s administration and their good relations with the government in Madrid, he was scornful of “the efforts of the semi-Trotskyist P. O. U. M. [...] to break the People’s Front”. As a consequence, “real leadership has passed into the hands of the Central Committee of the anti-Fascist militia.” Even the Anarchists were learning – “the old Anarchist Terrorist Utopianism is being driven back” – while the POUM “was carrying on its provocative campaign for the arming of every man, woman and child in Barcelona for ‘the second revolution’ at a time when all arms were wanted at the front.” They were oblivious to the circumstances: “It is a parody of the Bolshevik tactics of

²²⁰ At the end of 1935 the POUM was “the largest socialist party in Catalonia by some margin.” (Graham: p. 67)

1917: without taking into account that whilst Kerensky²²¹ was carrying on an Imperialist war, Companys and Casanovas²²² are fighting an anti-Fascist war.” Finally, the POUM militia “is the worst organised on the Aragon front”. (Cornford: ‘Situation in Catalonia’, September 1936, pp. 110-2) He was saved from the POUM by illness – Wintringham described him as “ill with fever and exhausted” – so he returned to England where he could safely write his caustic appraisal of his old brigade. (Stansky and Abrahams: p. 346 and 363)

Before the 1937 campaign against the POUM Wintringham had dismissed them and some Anarchists for the style of their military regime which was based on local units, debate about tactics, democratically elected commanders and freedom above discipline, as “all sheer silliness and disaster”. (Purcell: p. 100) He was not just a Communist, but considered “the leading Marxist expert on military affairs at present writing in English.” (ibid: p. 84) The combination of his politics and interests meant his preoccupation with organization and discipline within an army was close to inevitable. He strongly objected



Fig. 39. The Tom Mann Centuria. Wintringham is crouching (and bald) at the front. (Celada, 2009: p. 22)

to the men discussing orders, which “is a weakness, in war, if it hardens into a custom.” The futility of such practices “disgusted the quicker-witted men”, and agreement about, for example, changing the timetable proved impossible, implicitly because being a soldier involves regularly doing activities you would not choose to do.

The tautological nature of indiscipline was evident in fundamental matters such as the way men dressed: some “would leave their uniform jackets in billets (‘so as not to get ‘em dirty’) and parade in grey, brown or khaki sweaters. Belts were worn or not worn, as one pleased”. The danger of pedantry on the part of officers is clear, but the psychological experience of forcing yourself to dress in a way that shows deference to

²²¹ Through 1917 Kerensky, as Minister of War, tried to persuade increasingly reluctant Russian soldiers to continue fighting in the First World War. (Pares: pp. 492-3)

²²² Companys was the president of the *Generalitat* (Catalan government) and, from July 31st 1936, Casanovas was his successor, when Companys declared himself president of Catalonia. (Thomas: pp. 288-9)

those in command and subsumes the individual will to that of the group is, by implication, what Wintringham saw as a prerequisite for a successful army. After six weeks of heterogeneous training which involved the use of gas-masks and hand-grenades, route marches, firing on enemy planes, and Wintringham's contribution – "I lectured to hoarseness on machine-guns, on the strategy of the war in Spain, on 'communication, co-operation, obedience'" – they had "some very fair infantry." The Axis powers compelled their enemies to adopt this style of approach, to be an army rather than a militia: "a half-organized militia cannot stand up to a modern army for long – that is why an International Brigade was needed [...] We had to learn and teach 'communication, co-operation, obedience.'"²²³ (Wintringham: pp. 133-4, p. 47, 52, and 130)

According to Wintringham, the problems stemmed from the political nature of Spain (if not the European Left in general), attitudes and patterns of behaviour that are recognizable from the pre-war novels of Bates and especially Sender. In Wintringham's case there is also an unexpressed but evident faith in national stereotypes. The image of Spaniards who could not be taught to hide from enemy fire whenever possible, because "it was part of their morale, part of their courage, to take risks when bored", is a perfectly apposite description of some characters from *Seven Red Sundays*. A concomitant problem was that they could not have been taught to acquire rigorous northern attitudes. Shown a German trench, "the tidiness, the organization, the discipline, the self-made safety [...] they] just laughed. They could not take it as an example because its technique was too far ahead, too far away from their own." These sentiments were echoed by Ralph Fox, which could be taken as an indication of their validity, as well as how different British expectations of army life were: "The Spanish militia [...] Dressed in every variety of uniform or no uniform at all, with all kinds of arms, no particular march discipline [...] If some genius could arise to organize them they would certainly play hell with Franco, a revolutionary General Gordon perhaps." (Cunningham, 1986: p. 278) Behind the grudging admiration is the attitude, with both

²²³ It is a recurring motif in the book. It was a serious problem among the Republican forces as recruits often had little or no concept of obedience. The results were inevitable: notably desertions at crucial moments and consequent draconian punishments. This situation was exacerbated by the Communists' earned reputation for discipline, and the Anarchists' much more relaxed attitude. (Graham: pp. 373-4) However, even amongst Communists many recruits had the attitude that they were joining an unorthodox, more free-spirited and egalitarian type of army, to the natural frustration of their officers (like Wintringham). (Celada, 2009: pp. 30-2)

Wintringham and Fox, that they knew better than their hosts, the statement's colonial tone accentuated (in Fox's criticism) by the General Gordon comment.

Beyond the stereotypes of super-efficient Germans and reckless Spaniards (understandable to an extent after a group of nationalities had been thrown together in a state of crisis), the significance is that effective training was ultimately a forlorn wish. The pessimism was later undermined by the example of (according to Wintringham) a German appropriately called 'Carlos' (so bridging two cultures) who "by his genius for organization, is more responsible than any other man in Spain for Madrid's militia becoming a solid army."²²⁴ (Wintringham: p. 21, and 102)

However, Wintringham found it possible to sympathize with ingrained antipathy to his own military virtues, especially if it came from Communists: "Most of our carefree volunteers saw no point in doing things that displeased them [...] They had known the strain of resisting a world that listened to them very little". Those from other parties were less easy to forgive. Although many government supporters blamed Republican difficulties on their lack of arms because of the Non-Intervention Agreement, "the solution [...] was to be found as much in the neglected trade-union politics of Barcelona". (ibid.: p. 46, and 126) This point is parenthetical and unexplained, but still important, as he recognized their military campaign was hampered by insufficient armaments and yet one of the major causes, he claimed, was the political situation in Catalonia. Presumably he meant unions like the CNT and the POUM, as they had more influence in Barcelona than elsewhere in Spain and had, at best, contingent loyalty to the Popular Front government. He was perhaps suggesting that more countries, perhaps Britain and France, would have been willing to do or allow arms deals with the Spanish government if Catalonian Anarchists and Marxists behaved more responsibly, and in particular it could have been an indirect reference to the fighting in May 1937. The overall impression, though, is that he wanted to make a point, however vague, about how damaging structural disorganization in that part of Spain had been for the Republican cause.

As a commander something that concerned Wintringham perhaps more than predictable group infractions, were individuals who did not conform to military

²²⁴ Wintringham may well have been mistaken, or even misled by his faith in German efficiency. There was a 'Carlos', alternatively 'Comandante Carlos' or 'Carlos Contreras', originally called Vittorio Vidali, but he was an Italian Communist and one of the main organizers of the Fifth Regiment. (Bollotten: p. 267) He was "an indefatigable, ruthless and imaginative professional revolutionary [...] he also made the Fifth Regiment march in step by chartering the band of the Madrid UGT, under the direction of the composer Oropesa." (Thomas: p. 310)

expectations. Their potentially crucial role in a strategy revealed the extent of interdependency and the fatal cost of not playing your part. Wintringham led an attack that involved someone he called ‘O.’, but it failed because other soldiers “never breathed a word to me about O. being ‘yellow’.” The term is used as if it is an official designation or recognized medical condition, and its effect, for his comrades, is to make the man useless as a soldier. While O. said he had kept men in support of attacking troops he had lied: “His nerve must have gone completely”. The result – “[t]he Fascists who came along the stone wall were walking where O. should have had his men” – makes it a form of treachery, acting in a way contrary to what was expected and against the best interests of his colleagues. The failure to make a correct assessment of a recruit could also condemn a potentially valuable soldier to wasting his talents. A Jewish boy from London was from the Young Communist League (it has to be wondered if this fact magnified his abilities in Wintringham’s eyes). He did not march well, held that in a revolutionary army “discipline must be by agreement”, and that officers should be elected. “And I know Ralph Fox thought him a nuisance”. But he was a very good soldier with “the good Jew’s ability to endure the unendurable for a longer time than any other sort of man”. Despite this he was made a stretcher-bearer, and was killed helping a wounded man back to safety. Apart from the casual resort to racial theory – “the good Jew’s ability” – the overriding lesson was that strict discipline was not an infallible measure of a soldier: “All of us regretted his loss: many of us regretted that we had taken so grimly the boy’s ‘antics.’” (Wintringham: pp. 109-11 and 32-3)

For Wintringham the attack that came closest to demonstrating what good

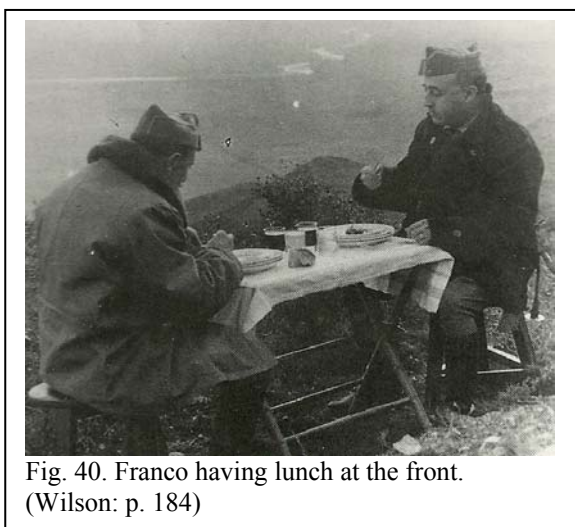


Fig. 40. Franco having lunch at the front.
(Wilson: p. 184)

military planning and organization could achieve, was the offensive across the Ebro River (from July 1938): “Tactically it was the most advanced thing we had yet done”. In many regards it was initially surprisingly successful, but the outcome, 113 days of fighting with 7,150 Republicans and 6,100 Fascists killed and the Republicans pushed back (Preston, 2006: pp. 288-91), undermined

his earlier claim that “[n]o war of liberation has been lost because of weight of armaments alone.” (ibid: p. 148 and 126) Franco, not known for strategic brilliance,

fought “a frontal battle of annihilation, taking advantage of his aerial and artillery pre-eminence to bleed the enemy, regardless of the human cost to his own side.” (Salvadó: p. 167) Against such an enemy, the insistence on strict adherence to petty matters of discipline looks to be partly a defence mechanism, a way of feeling you have control in what may have otherwise appeared a hopeless situation. It was an attitude shared by John Cornford. On his return to England from the front, he formed a unit of English volunteers to influence fellow Republicans to behave more correctly as soldiers. One of the volunteers explained that ““this group, by among other things, shaving every morning, and of course more importantly acting as a disciplined formation, would give some kind of example to the extremely irregular levies that were then fighting the war””. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 356)

As a good Communist, Cornford had often written of the benefits of organization, in analogous circumstances to a war where he was on the side of those fighting against unfair odds, “organization is the only weapon of the propertyless class.” (Cornford: p. 86) The importance of organization was a key point in the (previously mentioned) Communist demands printed in the *Volunteer for Liberty*, with the vaunted creation of “The Supreme War Council” and a commander “with authority to direct the whole of the Military operations”. (no. 1, p. 1 and 6) It is believed that Cornford’s recruiting of volunteers in England was originally a Comintern suggestion, with other Communists doing the same thing in various European countries, from which came the International Brigades.²²⁵ (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 360) Because of his initial combat experience with the POUM in Perdiguera – “then our total lack of discipline made itself felt”, and “I began to understand the planless nature of the attack” – he felt he had a better idea of how things should operate: ““After having seen all the mistakes in organization, all the inefficiency [...] I think I shall have far more confidence in my own organizing ability [...] There are a whole lot of things I think I could do if I understood the language.”” (Cornford: p. 180) In December 1936 Romilly met John Cornford, around that time “the most important incident” for Romilly, and Cornford “fitted into my category of Real Communists.” (Romilly: p. 64 and pp. 182-3) Although he called his definition “purely personal”, it was obviously not unique to Romilly: “a serious person, a rigid disciplinarian, a member of the Communist Party,

²²⁵ According to Kowalsky, Comintern arranged International Brigades’ recruitment, but so covertly that one volunteer thought the idea of joining ““arose spontaneously in the minds of men””. In the late 1960s Moscow admitted that the decision had been made ““to locate among the workers of different countries volunteers with military experience and send them to fight in Spain.”” (Kowalsky: Ch. 13, pp. 3-4)

interested in all the technical aspects of warfare, and lacking in any such selfish motive as fear or reckless courage.” (ibid: p. 64)

III. 12.2 ALIEN

Cornford was a very young man who suddenly found himself in a situation he did not comprehend. He was not only being shot at, but the chaotic nature of his colleagues' actions and his ignorance of Spanish must have made his enlistment feel like a futile and foolish gesture. He admitted to trying to return after what reads like a psychological trauma: “I felt so lonely and bad I tried to get a pass back to Barcelona. But the question was decided for me. Having joined I am in whether I like it or not [...] Altogether I've passed the worst days of mental crisis”. (Cornford, pp. 174-5) From his own words it could be inferred that *ennui* was a major factor: “Going into action. Thank God for something to do at last”. Certainly, he was not unique in this regard. On his arrival Ralph Fox complained that “[l]ife has gone by very slowly and somewhat monotonously”, something accentuated by feeling cut off from companions – “I remain on alone” – and information – “one knew far more in London about what is happening in Spain.” (Cunningham, 1986: p. 277)²²⁶ For Cornford the experience of being in an alien culture looks to have been as significant as anything. At the end of his letter he celebrated being with soldiers who presumably spoke some English: “The luckiest accident of the whole war was that which put me in touch with the German comrades [...] They are the finest people in some ways I've ever met.” This supposition is supported by his account earlier in the letter that an Italian who spoke broken English had left so he could only communicate in “very broken French” with a Catalan and as a result was “not only utterly lonely, but also feel a bit useless.” (Cornford: pp. 172-81)²²⁷ It is fairly safe to assume he had an ulterior motive for finding recruits in England.

The same sense of alienation is also implicit in his poem, ‘Full Moon at Tierz: Before the Storming of Huesca’:

Now the same night falls over Germany
And the impartial beauty of the stars
Lights from the unfeeling sky [...]
England is silent under the same moon [...]

(Cunningham, 1986: ll. 51-3 and 57, pp. 132-3)

²²⁶ Letter December 7th 1936

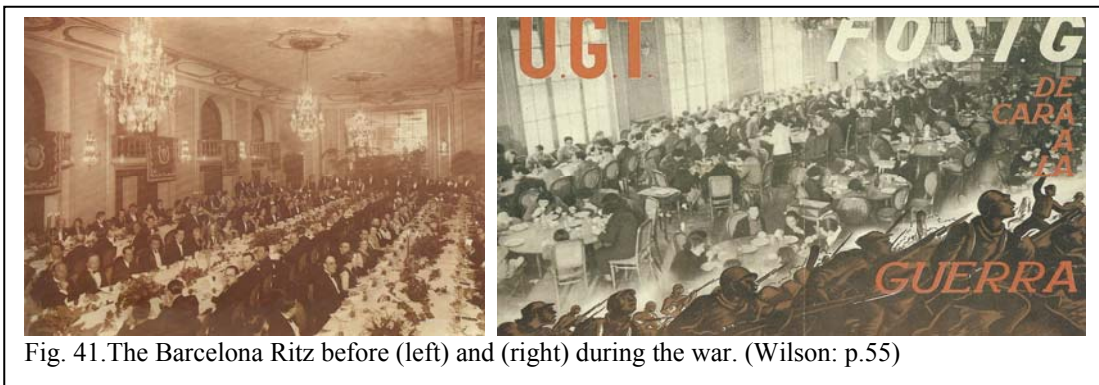
²²⁷ Letter August 16th-30th 1936

What unites Germany, England and later Spain is night, obviously lending itself to melancholy, and the apparently superfluous adjectives “impartial” and “unfeeling” read like the poet is making accusations, as if the sky should feel and the stars should be (politically) partial. Perhaps Cornford fitted another category too well, those Stephen Spender thought should not volunteer:

The qualities required apart from courage, are terrific narrowness and a religious dogmatism about the Communist Party line, or else toughness, cynicism and insensibility. The sensitive, the weak, the romantic, the enthusiastic, the truthful live in Hell there and cannot get away.

(Cunningham, 1986: p. 308, letter to Virginia Woolf, April 2nd 1937)

Interestingly, Spender was writing about why he did not think it a good idea for Julian Bell to join the International Brigades. If Bell corresponded to the type who would find it difficult to endure, his initial reaction is evidence of how dependent each individual’s experience was on accidents of specific time, place and company. Having arrived in Valencia in June (1937) Bell had to wait a few days for his orders, and wrote that it was like a “Mediterranean Holiday”, with picnics and bathing. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 267) Barcelona five months into the war impressed Caudwell even more, in ways that are inevitably comparable to Orwell’s famous entry into the city. It was “a wonderful sight” that offered a glimpse of what Caudwell hoped would follow a Republican victory: “hotels and offices have been requisitioned by the workers’ organisations [...] And on almost every building there are party posters [...] even posters for the emancipation of women and against prostitution and venereal disease. These posters are artistically of a high quality”. As well as the ubiquitous signs of



political activity, there were militia all over, and though this would normally be anathema to someone like Caudwell, then in Barcelona it was indicative of the people expressing their will, evident in a form of sartorial metamorphosis: “the way in which the militia seems to grow out of the ordinary workers, starting with red scarves, and

going on to caps, uniforms and arms, through every kind of transitional stage.” What it represented for him was Spain’s promised future, which would, of course, remain unrealised: “it is a wonderfully heartening sight to see the strength and rapid growth of the proletarian organisations here, and the movement towards unity, in spite of all attempts at disruption.” (Caudwell, 1932-7: pp. 233-5)

As Ralph Bates had lived in Spain for several years before the war started, one would not expect him to experience sudden existential or cultural shocks. What would have been new for him was life in his new home with masses of *extranjeros*. It is likely that he felt an awkward ambivalence, not exactly feeling British or Spanish. There are signs in his fiction that this was the case and that it left him in an uncomfortable position. In a story about Catalan fisherman during the war it is regretted, by implication, that some revolutionaries do not “have a sense of locality; I mean that he should know and love the country he works in, the *little* country.” This dogma has apparently been prompted by Germans and Italians bombing that part of the coast: “almost all out coast has been assaulted by men who did not love their own villages enough to stay in them, but must need go abroad to show their explosive love for humanity.” (Bates, 1939: pp. 204-5)²²⁸ Superficially it is an attack on German and Italian participation in a war against the people and legitimate government of another country, but it is not specific enough to exclude foreign volunteers for the other side, who also became soldiers because they needed “to show their explosive love for humanity.” This may well have been an unintended meaning, because Bates expressed profound admiration for those who fought on the Republican side. (Bates, letter February 1st 1987, p. 2) There is too the possibility that it expresses personal reproach from Bates, who did not love his own ‘village’ enough to stay in it.

From the fiction he wrote in Spain there is evidence that he was gradually leaving the country. As previously mentioned, one of the most conspicuous changes between *Lean Men* and *The Olive Field* (written about a year apart) is that in the earlier novel the central character is an Englishman, in many ways very similar to Bates, and in the latter the characters are all Spanish. In *Sirocco* the English are barely visible. In a story centres on a Barcelona prostitute one man is said to be English, but he has also claimed to be Austrian and he is called Francisco. No more is mentioned of his nationality so it is uncertain, though his name is obviously similar to Francis Charing

²²⁸ ‘The Miraculous Horde.1937’

from *Lean Men*, who also lives and works in Barcelona. (Bates, 1939: p. 78)²²⁹ In the first ‘War’ story the narrator is with Spanish troops – “a teacher from Badajoz”, Pablo, and so on – and one Yugoslav. The only reference to Bates’ fellow-countrymen is an English Battalion, positioned to the right of the 15th International, who cause problems with their trenches. The narrator has no name or nationality. His description of “the English Battalion, with whom we had some controversy”, together with his identification with the Spanish soldiers – “Our men put out a flag” – and, despite the story being written entirely in English, the narrator’s unmentioned use of Spanish (which he must have used to speak with the soldiers), certainly suggest a linguistic attempt to acquire indigenous status. (Bates, 1939: pp. 229-31)²³⁰

In the five stories under the heading ‘War’, the preponderance of references to foreigners are as enemies. France and the French feature more as an accident of geography, depicted as neighbours in a state of shame: “He had felt the spiritual discomfort of the French workers, who had had the fight taken out of them by their failure to help their like over the frontier.” (Bates, 1939: p. 364)²³¹ Even when a story features heroic foreigners, the same nation is condemned. The narrator discovers, after a bomb-blast, that of four Belgian volunteers two are girls, and “I saw all their story [...] tender, strong, shaven-headed girls in their lovers’ clothing [...] Dodging through France, hiding by day from the French police, at the command of despicable men.” (Bates, 1939: p. 249)²³² The description of these heroic young people being treated like criminals precisely because of their willing self-sacrifice is a telling indictment of the French, who are depicted *en masse* as aiding the enemy.

²²⁹ ‘The Quince. About 1922’

²³⁰ ‘Jarama Ballad. Spring 1937’

²³¹ ‘43rd Division: Dead Forest’

²³² ‘Brunete Ballad’

III. 12. 3 AN ENGINEERS' WAR

Likewise, in these stories Italians are exclusively hostile (naturally, Italians and Germans volunteered and fought for the Republican forces).²³³ Calpe, the previously mentioned Falangist who was assassinated with a scythe, is representative of a foreign takeover of the country. As soldiers, they are pursued across the Pyrenees by the expert climber Pere who “invariably thought of the Enemy as an Italian” and who, effectively, blames them and the Germans not only for interfering in another nation’s dispute, but for modernizing warfare:

The Italian and German invasion of Spain had changed the whole technical character of the war, the day of guerrillas seemed to have gone [...] The mechanical aid to the rebels was violating the nature of the Spaniard, he felt. Man to man, valor against valor [...] Not factory against factory, bald-headed engineer against a peasant, a coppersmith. (Bates, 1939: pp. 362-3)²³⁴

In this cogent lament at the emergence of warfare by machine, remoteness is crucial: the planes and weapons are operated from a distance and their technical superiority is achieved in a factory in another country, by an engineer who will probably never have to fight; and those who use the weapons are more distanced from having to confront the results of their work. One of the main effects of *extranjeros* is to have corrupted Spanish values, specifically of chivalry.²³⁵ It is indeed a regret one could imagine Don Quixote expressing. The Soviets, as characters or as a nation, are entirely absent from these stories.

Technological assistance in warfare did not, of course, begin with the Spanish Civil War. It is conceivable that soldiers of the time thought Archimedes’ catapult a regrettable development, and in the twentieth century British writers since at least thirty years before Bates had expressed their concerns about the effects of scientific and technological developments used in military conflicts. In the short story ‘The Land Ironclads’ (1903) and the novel *The War in the Air* (1908) H. G. Wells anticipated,

²³³ “Germany and Austria together contributed perhaps 3,000 troops [to the Republicans ...] Italy sent 3,350”. (Thomas: p. 942) Others think that approximately 5,000 Germans and Austrians fought for the Republicans. (e.g. Hopkins: p. 154)

²³⁴ ‘43rd Division: Dead Forest’

²³⁵ It is quite possible Bates was attacking the hypocrisy of Franco’s declared intention of restoring traditional moral codes, for example with imposed sartorial formality, which for women meant covering themselves “with protective modesty”. (Preston, 2006: p. 225) Their ethical double standards were analogous to fighting to preserve the *patria* with massive foreign assistance.

successively, the use of armoured vehicles (very similar to tanks) and aircraft in warfare. His prophetic gifts were not infallible: in his stories the tanks were irresistible and so a guarantee of victory, certainly not the case even by the 1930s; while in the latter, New York was devastated by German airships, “an ant-hill kicked to pieces by a fool!” (Wells, 1908: Ch. 7. 7) On the other hand, he did anticipate that human courage could be made irrelevant in the face of “atrociously unfair machines!”; (Wells, 1903: IV, p. 14) and that the scope of the new machines would make civilian populations potential targets: “People are torn away from the people they care for; homes are smashed, creatures full of life, and memories, and little peculiar gifts are scalded and smashed, and torn to pieces, and starved, and spoilt.” (Wells, 1908: 7. 7)

In the same way that Bates depicted contemporary combat as the triumph of “the bald-headed engineer”, so Wells compared the tank operations to “a good clerk posting a ledger, the riflemen moved their knobs and pressed their buttons”, and such unlikely combatants were victorious against a regiment of “terrible prowess”. (Wells, 1903: IV, pp. 13-14) His opprobrium for the imagined airships was more poignant and prescient, anticipating succinctly the Left’s complaints against military activity throughout the twentieth century:

The lives of countless men were spent in their service, their splendid genius, and patience of thousands of engineers and inventors, wealth and material beyond estimating; to their account we must put, stunted and starved lives on land, millions of children sent to toil unduly, innumerable opportunities of fine living undeveloped and lost.
(Wells, 1908: Ch. 5.5)

He also saw the nature of warfare with admirable clarity as it was to be, for example, in the Spanish Civil War. Those aviators, like the “splendidly non-moral” German pilot Prince Karl Albert, “who were neither excited nor, except for the remotest chance of a bullet, in any danger, poured death and destruction upon homes and crowds below.” (Wells, 1908: Ch. 4. 1 and 6. 6)

A few years later, those writing from their experiences of the trenches had a perspective that was different in two significant ways. Most obviously, whereas Wells wrote only about what he had imagined, poets like Sassoon and Owen used what they had witnessed and endured. They also wrote from the viewpoint of the target, as opposed to Wells’ view from above. The effect on their writing naturally meant it had more immediacy, but there were less predictable results. Sassoon’s vivid portrayal of an

assault by shells – “Four days the earth was rent and torn/ By bursting steel” (Sassoon: ‘Bombardment’, ll. 1-2) – concisely evokes the inhuman duration and the unnatural power of the new artillery, so that implicitly even the planet is damaged by the explosions. For Owen the menace was often difficult to appreciate, at least at first, as when “the flickering gunnery rumbles,/ Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.” (Owen: ‘Exposure’, ll. 8-9) The strangeness of the concept – the reader knows that it is not “some other war” and that the narrator should be aware that he is a potential target – suggests a possible mental fatigue or shock (and a denial of his true situation), at least in part the result of weapons like the gunnery.

In a similar way, the description of gas-shells falling in ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ – “tired, outstripped Five-nines that dropped behind” – gives them an unthreatening quality, appropriately quite abstract and mathematical as a reminder of the educated scientists responsible for their development. Of course they were hazardous, as the central figure in the poem proves through his slow and traumatic death: “the white eyes writhing in his face [...] the blood/ Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs”. (Owen: ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, ll. 8, 19, and 21-2) Unlike the direct and obvious effect of the shells in Sassoon’s poem, Owen’s victim suffers (to most readers) unknown problems over a prolonged period because of someone’s chemical erudition, a combination which makes the antagonist very sinister. This new type of war and the effect it has on the combatants likewise means that deserters and others that may previously have been despised as cowards could now be written about with a measure of sympathy; more exactly that such behaviour was a direct consequence of modern conflict. In a war where your enemy could be a weapon without a human adversary present, it could be seen as appropriate to die at your own hands through a self-inflicted wound, to somehow replace the absent enemy soldier: “Death had not missed [...] Not sniped? No. (Later they found the English ball.)” (Owen: ‘S.I.W.’, l. 2 and 5)

Sender’s experiences as a soldier and officer influenced his writing in similar ways, where actions no longer had their established significance, but existed in an often uncertain amoral-immoral area. As with Bates’ fiction, Sender’s wartime accounts portrayed modern innovations as simultaneously less human and more inhumane, and he included a similar dearth of foreigners. The major difference between his version of the war and Bates’ is that Sender wrote something that was ostensibly autobiographical while Bates’ were fictionalized. It is important to remember that from a total of very roughly 1,000,000 troops on the Republican side only about 35,000 were international

volunteers, of whom about 2,000 were British, (Thomas: pp. 838-9 and 941-2) a salutary reminder of the relatively small part they played. Therefore, rather than purposefully excluding allies from abroad, he may genuinely have had little contact with them, with the exception of the Soviets.²³⁶ As he became a captain (Sender, 1939: p. 161) he must have dealt, directly or indirectly, with Soviet personnel quite often. However, he only referred to them twice. To begin, he wrote dismissively of anti-Soviet suspicions, countering that moral bankruptcy was the preserve of the Fascist powers: “Since Hitler and Mussolini have shown that cynicism and treachery are more successful in politics than in private life [...] no one can be astonished that fables of Bolshevist plot, accusations of Russian spying, and of terrible schemes attributed to the republican leaders found ready credence with the ignorant feudalists”. However, there is only one example of their positive effect on fighting, when an anarchist watched a Soviet plane, “diving almost vertically, head-first, to machine-gun our enemies, he had to add to his delight the idea that inside the little aeroplane [...] there was a communist [...] where a communist was at work, there was something useful and efficient.” (Sender, 1937: p. 6 and 287) Again there is the remoteness concomitant with modern technological warfare, exemplified by Sender’s confident assertion about the pilot’s politics. Alternatively, it could be that by successfully using Soviet engineering in combat he is helping the cause of Communism and the pilot’s own political views were not relevant.

The use of German engineering was not only for a different purpose, but from a different ethical basis. Unlike the Soviet pilot’s targeting of enemy combatants, German planes, after several unsuccessful attempts, bombed two hospitals, something they had done many times before. It was a descent Sender found hard to comprehend:

For them it is a most agreeable objective [...] But that bombardment of hospitals excites a moral repulsion, shame of itself and its filthiness [...] I felt that shame, thinking about them [...] who were after all human beings, even if they were Germans or Spanish fascists [...] To sow confusion, to refuse to the wounded or to the dying a moment of peace in which to die [...]

It was evidence of a dystopia which Sender linked to Nietzsche and technological advances. Both had had a deleterious effect on “the German unintellectual middle-class”

²³⁶ Like Bates, Sender left Spain in 1938, ultimately to live in the United States, and he renounced Communism around the same time, but this book was written while he was still in Spain.

who had misunderstood the philosopher, so that the effect on a “draper’s assistant who [...] assumes an insolent and impertinent air on Sundays and at his dancing-hall” also “leads Hitler [...] to strut as a Napoleon with one hand on his breast and the other on his hip.” There was as well the contemporary hubris with which the same unintellectual middle-class thought “that what has always happened will happen no longer, because in the last thirty years mankind has used motor-cars and aeroplanes”. (Sender, 1937: pp. 238-40) The same attitude of presumptive superiority was evident in Mussolini’s reaction to the heavy defeat of the Italians at Guadalajara in March 1937: he said “that no Italian would be permitted to return alive until victory over the Republic had erased the shame of Guadalajara.” (Preston, 2006: pp. 196-7)

The effect of the fascistic or pseudo-Nietzschean hegemony was that technological and scientific progress entailed moral regression. When Sender experienced an attack by German planes he could marvel at the engineering achievements while also enduring the infernal and very deliberate result:

The aeroplanes gave a devastating impression of their security, force, power. They arrived [...] At once the mountain seemed to heave under us. Maelstroms of earth and smoke rose up around us [...] Then a short chain of explosions, and a blast of the explosive wave in our ears and open mouths. I felt something warm and wet on my forehead [...] Down below we heard the wounded mules. Each plane dropped four or five bombs simultaneously [...] We remained deafened, covered with soil, enveloped in smoke. I saw the five trimotors begin to wheel so as to come over us again. Their engines vibrated in the marrows of our bones [...] I found that on my forehead there were blood and brains which were not mine [...] Down below, the mules kept screaming. (Sender, 1937, p. 137)

Apart from the overall sense of sheer horror, these machines, and the people who made and operated them, are inimical to the natural order. This is not just the case for the people under attack, for example with the shocking image of the “blood and brains which were not mine” on his forehead, but geologically (the mountains) and with the mules. Although it may appear strange to a modern reader for these animals to be portrayed as victims of war, as will be shown below, they often featured in descriptions of bomb attacks at this time. The effectiveness of their inclusion comes not only from the fact that they are routinely, if unfairly, thought of as being insensitive and obtuse creatures; Sender’s use of succinct descriptions of their suffering oblige the reader to make a productive effort. The first reference to them implies noise – “we heard the wounded mules” – but the lack of a description of the sound entails imagining these

animals injured during this bombardment making enough noise to be heard above the plane engines, by people who were “deafened”. The second time the description is unnatural enough to sound surreal – “the mules kept screaming” – but only a reader who had been with mules in exactly this type of situation could question its accuracy, so that one is left to imagine the horrible image and its cause. The repeated use of “Down below”, accompanied by the repeated terrible punishment and the creature’s torment succinctly evokes Dante’s circles of hell.

To Sender, as with Ralph Bates, it was also vitally important to see this form of warfare as alien to the Spanish temperament and culture. References to foreigners are overwhelmingly about Fascists and their atrocities, while the victims, naturally, are Spanish. If what the enemy did was in the name of a *soi-disant* mission to save Spain, the author believed nobody was fooled: “The women [...would] murmur under the breath curses against Franco whom now no one thought of as the rebel leader, but as the shameless cover for German and Italian imperialism.” He presents his own view of the situation as the one held by, presumably, every Spaniard, because “no one” does not just refer to women: a careful reading shows that what “no one thought” is distinct as an act from the women’s curses. The homogeneity of a nation of Senders, each person with the same knowledge and political beliefs as the novelist, is a vivid illustration of his idealized Spaniard, something that may well have been a symptom of this combatant’s desperation: he tried to believe he was fighting and risking his life for a nation which would more or less follow his ideals, and it is consistent with Franco not acting as a Spaniard but as an agent of foreign imperialism.

Sender cited Don Quixote to stress that combat by machine both offended Spanish decorum and removed all sense of honour: he “said to Sancho that he did not wish arquebuses or pistols as these were vile weapons which in the hands of a weakling could kill a strong man at a distance [...] The machine sought us from the clouds and discharged its metal with impunity. The body could reinforce itself with another courage, that of the spirit; but it served us only to die.” It was an attitude exemplified by those who carried kitchen knives, which was all they could find, “to face the finest war material of Italy and Germany.” This was exactly why Spain would never belong to “German and Italian moneylenders”,²³⁷ but instead to people like Sender’s dead

²³⁷ Again this is congruent with Sender’s discourse, in which “German” and “Italian” were synonymous with “Fascism”, “enemy”, “evil”, etc. In fact, as previously mentioned, it is estimated that approximately 3,000-5,000 Germans and Austrians volunteered for the Republicans and a similar number of Italians.

comrade who, in dying, “had gathered up earth in his frenzy.” It was as if “he held in his hands the young breast of his betrothed [...] You have given it your life, but it too is yours for ever. It will be yours in the grave but also in the future and in history.” (Sender, 1937: pp. 288-9, p. 251, and pp. 141-3) It was still ominous that to Sender being a part of Spain’s future was only possible through death.

III. 12. 4 UNDER ATTACK

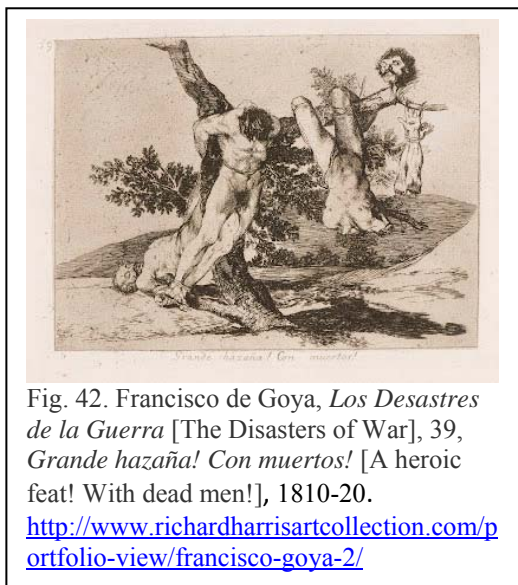


Fig. 42. Francisco de Goya, *Los Desastres de la Guerra* [The Disasters of War], 39, *Grande hazaña! Con muertos!* [A heroic feat! With dead men!], 1810-20. <http://www.richardharrisartcollection.com/ortfolio-view/francisco-goya-2/>

The threat the Fascists posed to Spanish culture is evident through Sender’s fears for the welfare of works by Goya, especially the series of etchings called *Horrors of the War* (elsewhere *The Disasters of War*). Goya and his works are naturally appropriate as synecdoche for the best that Spain has produced, of which the Fascist style of war would take no account. Further, referring to images called *Horrors of the War* is clearly apposite in a book about the Spanish Civil

War, but there is more relevance. Sender uses ekphrasis, for example of a famous picture: it is of “a man hanging from a tree with his legs cut off and nailed to branches alongside [...] At the foot he [Goya] had written, simply, ‘I saw this.’”²³⁸ (Sender, 1937: p. 281) What Goya had witnessed was Napoleon’s invasion of Spain,²³⁹ and many Spaniards “hated the foreigners – in particular the French troops, who behaved with

(Thomas: p. 942) It should be remembered that, for example, active Socialist and Communist movements in Italy were silenced by a campaign of violence, intimidation and targeted arrests by Fascists through the 1920s, (Kitchen: pp. 216-22) and in Austria left-wing discontent had resulted in a general strike and the July Revolt of 1927.

²³⁸ It looks as if Sender confused the inscription on image no. 44 with the image depicted in no. 39.

²³⁹ This example of a foreign and unpopular invasion was used by both sides to question the legitimacy of their opponents. It was referred to in Communist propaganda (under the supervision of Jesús Hernández and Antonio Mije), (Thomas: p. 279) La Pasionaria cited it in a radio broadcast in a call for “resistance throughout the country”, (Asprey, pp. 289-90) and the Fascists portrayed ideals like liberalism and Communism as innately non-Spanish so that their Spanish supporters were like those who had collaborated with the French in 1808. (Ealham: p. 57, ‘Nations in Arms Against the Invader’, Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas)



Fig. 43 Francisco de Goya, *La carga de los Mamelucos* [The Charge of the Mamelukes], 1808.

<http://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/galeria-on-line/galeria-on-line/obra/el-2-de-mayo-de-1808-en-madrid-la-lucha-con-los-mamelucos/>

almost 20th century savagery.”²⁴⁰ (Murray: p. 175) This antipathy is evident in Goya’s paintings. Whereas foreigners in his images of the war, whether French or (in ‘The Charge of the Mamelukes’) Moor, are innately hostile and dangerous to Spain and its people, in a pre-war portrayal of life in Spain of a large indigenous gathering in the ‘The San Isidro Meadows’ (1788) a prosperous and a sedentary, even disquietingly inert,²⁴¹ crowd are perfectly at ease with each other.²⁴² (Luna: pp. 184-5, and 196-7) The circumstances of war meant that both Goya and Sender responded with something close to xenophobia, and then, outside of the multinational conflict, they emigrated. (Murray: pp. 174-5)

However, their main concern was to bear witness to what they had witnessed of the inhuman treatment of the Spanish people. In a loaded statement Sender further confined locality and provenance, presumably for more than geographical reasons. His identification with the painter was affirmed with the author’s boast that “Goya came from my part of Spain”. If it can be taken to signify more than the relatively

²⁴⁰ This statement about implying the unanimous hatred of foreigners at the time needs to be qualified. For any foreign occupation to endure requires the co-operation of some of the local population, and in the case of Napoleon’s invasion many fairly eminent Spaniards assisted the French or otherwise welcomed their presence, sufficient in number that they were given their own description, *afrancesamientos* or *josefinos* (after the French ruler, Joseph Bonaparte). On the other hand, the French were tormented by local guerrillas. Wellington’s initially successful attacks from Portugal were welcomed by many in Spain, but others, fearing his ambitions, rejected him. (Esdaile: pp. 27-41)

²⁴¹ The only part of the picture which definitely shows movement is a woman pouring wine (right foreground).

²⁴² Because Goya painted for the French court, his hostility to the French regime was (at least initially) probably less absolute than might appear from his retrospective portrayals.



Fig. 44. Francisco de Goya, *La pradera de San Isidro* [San Isidro Meadow], 1788. (<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/online-gallery/on-line-gallery/zoom/1/obra/the-meadow-of-san-isidro/oimg>)

unremarkable fact that they were both from Aragón, then more relevantly in their part of Spain, i.e. from their type of Spaniard, military atrocities, in Sender's time most often committed by another type of Spaniard, would not be tolerated in silence. As Goya painted what he saw (emphasized by his added comments, such as "Yo lo vi" for image no. 44), so Sender's book "was intended as a counterattack [the *Contraataaque* of the Spanish title] on the 'lies' published by Nationalist propaganda against a liberal democratic Republic", (Sender, 1953: introduction, p. 3) and was published to expose the character of their ruthless enemy.

The complex nature of Sender's attitude, and conceivably an indication of the horrors he witnessed, meant he also asserted that he was striving for a quasi-visceral state, as if he saw a cultural influence as potentially harmful: "Although I am nothing if not an intellectual, I have tried to forget my reading and the effects of culture, and sometimes have managed to reach a point of perfection which in my view is that in which my thought is influenced by nothing but instinctive, natural and simple facts". In effect he had to, and wanted to, work at being primitive. From an earlier statement it would appear that this sentiment was a response to his experience of emotions, like hate and resentment, because "for many years I have sublimated these in intellectual conceptions". (Sender, 1937: p. 132, and 17)

The description of what Sender was trying to achieve is strikingly similar to one made in *Sirocco*. However, what for Sender was a voluntary and gradual process, with Bates was a sudden, imposed and traumatic experience. It follows an explosion, reported in a passage which, perhaps inevitably, resembles Sender's account of the bomb attack. There are the same momentarily inexplicable sensory impressions. What was "something warm and wet" on Sender's forehead, with Bates was instant loss of

vision: “I thought I was blinded [...] and I touched it [his face] with clay-daubed fingers and opened my eyes”. There is the invasive nature of the bombs even for those who are not hit. With Sender, for example, there was “the blast of the explosive wave in our ears and open mouths”, while Bates struggled for air – “I gasped, eyes shut, gulping deep, painful breaths”; and there were the same animals, either terrified or injured – “[t]he screaming mule plunged up the bank”. Bates’ way of coping is by “trying to think, ‘This is noise, no more than noise, pure sense data, nothing goes with it;’ but this time it didn’t work. Solipsism, dear comrades, is anterior to tri-nitro-toluene.” (Bates, 1939: pp. 244-5) The fairly enigmatic final statement presumably means that because solipsism had earlier origins than the explosive TNT, it is less powerful, and therefore progress, whether in Greek philosophy or military science (the two made comparable in Bates’ sentence), inevitably strives after greater and probably more malign potential. A clear difference between solipsism and (the effects of) TNT shows a progression from being self-contained and content with that state, to a material that is personally invasive in an utterly random manner, again (by negation) seeing virtue in not allowing one’s ambitions to go beyond familiar and autochthonous limits.

In Bates’ version, and it is close to incontestable, the effect of being under a bombardment is a theft of selfhood. While under fire he cannot respond: “All this was nothing. Fatigue, mortal fatigue, when tears will not flow and quickening fear has disappeared [...] ah, this is the truth of the war. When the brain sleeps in the moving body and fear goes”. The major difference with Sender’s willed condition is that the Spaniard wanted, if anything, to free his senses from being muted by his intellectual habits, whereas Bates’ narrator “was a shell, a husk that the dreary, drifting winds of indifference would blow away from the hard rocks of belief.” (Bates, 1939: pp. 244-5, and p. 248)²⁴³ Perhaps because he was better trained (or wanted to show it) Tom Wintringham felt himself severed from intellect and volition when “the loaded bombers crawling across the sky [...] grows to an actual sound”. Thereafter, “[b]ehaviour begins to replace ordinary living. The conditioned thing, the way of action trained into you, replaces all normal thinking and deciding.” Again, the machines represent a culmination of human production, “bigger than all the archangels of heaven, all-seeing, all-powerful.” As a military specialist Wintringham was more ambivalent about their

²⁴³ ‘Brunete Ballad’

significance, so that before another attack they “were for a moment the graceful fascinating things I have always loved to watch.”

His feeling of ephemeral detachment from awareness of what these “graceful fascinating things” were doing, and even from his own danger, serves to highlight at one level what an achievement of intelligence and industry the machines were, and so reinforces the malevolence of the intention. The effect of the bombs for those who were not hit was again described in a very physiological and internal way. The initial scream of the bombs “makes the sky into a spinning blue circular saw shearing through the bones that cover your head.” When one explodes nearby “the shock, blast, air-wave from its explosion wrenches at your throat, you choke; your eyes are blacked out; the noise of the explosion is not a noise but the defeat of your ears”. The instinct that takes over in such a situation reduces men to rudimentary organisms which, under attack, try to “cover somehow eyes, with their hands, stomach and sex with their legs.” (Cunningham, 1980: pp. 317-9, ‘It’s a Bohunk’)

In contrast, Romilly was flippant about the first air-raid in his narrative. He compared the scene to “the Sussex Downs during the visit of a party of trippers. The big event of the day was an air-raid, at about midday.” Perhaps the tone is inappropriate (though there were no casualties), but it is a cogent reminder of the limited and mostly unhelpful experiences most of these writers had had before the war. Romilly wrote that an advance on Fascist positions “was all rather like an O.T.C. [Officers’ Training Corps] Field Day²⁴⁴ – very hot, exhausting and disagreeable.” Unfortunately for Romilly even that modest knowledge was beyond him: at school “I had been a pacifist, and had refused to join the O.T.C., so I lacked even that experience.” (Romilly: p. 83, 68 and 26) Despite spending a year in China and having other worldly adventures Julian Bell’s analogy for his arrival in Spain was very naive: “‘It’s really rather fun [...] and all’s boy-scoutish in the highest.’” (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 266) At the other extreme, to help his partner understand the isolation he felt when he first joined the army – “the days I spent in the village alone were the hardest I have yet spent in my

²⁴⁴ A day of mock military activities in British private education. The Officers Training Corps was set up in British universities and a junior division in public schools in 1908 after the British army had experienced a shortage of officers in the Boer War. The hope was that some of those boys or undergraduates who had been given an idea of life as an officer, such as with the Field Days, would choose it as a career. During the First World War the OTC effectively became a production line for officers going to the front. (Officers) Giles Romilly, Esmond’s older brother, described the Field Days at Wellington College as “the hours spent lying on thistles, the hours spent scrambling breathlessly up and down hills”. When he decided to leave, as a “revolutionary” boy had done, the pressure to remain, citing loyalty to dormitory, school, king and country, was considerable. (Romilly, 1935: pp. 135-9)

whole life” – John Cornford called it “the same loneliness and isolation as the first term in a new school”. (Cornford: p. 180) What they lacked in literary evocation was expressive of the writers’ youth and ingenuous natures.



Fig. 45. A woman weeps over the body of her son.
(Wilson: p. 155)

Romilly’s tone was very different when he described two bombardments of Madrid. Although he was brief, he gave a good impression of the terror those attacks must have induced in the general population. He was trapped in a Metro station with a friend: “we tried to get out on to the street, but a panic-

stricken crowd made it impossible to move. The fear of suffocation was stronger than that of the bombs – women screamed and on the steps men were fighting to get inside the shelter.” As the bombs fell and exploded “each [was] the signal for screaming hysteria – then silence. The suspense was no less terrifying, we could see nothing but a thick wall of panic-stricken men and women.” The image of homogeneity – there is no individual choice (it was “impossible to move”) and little point in exercising it anyway regardless of gender and, one would guess, any other personal difference – showed that to be alive in Madrid at the time was to be victim to the collective trauma. Soon after, while Romilly was with his comrades waiting for an attack, another raid of 40 planes took place “on the thickly populated streets of Madrid.” But instead of being horrified Romilly was relieved: “I was glad at that moment – glad they were attacking defenceless women and children, glad that these monsters had passed over us [... they] killed twenty-five people in Fuencarral [in Madrid] and hit the hospital six times.” (Romilly: pp. 134-5, and p. 144) This time solipsism defeated nobility and Romilly could be admired for his candour, but it is still jarring to think of him supposedly feeling happy that “defenceless women and children” were the targets of several dozen powerful bombs.

Possibly his desire to make an impression on the reader with his soldier’s tales made him overstate his relief. However, the sentiment is consistent with what he wrote about the idea of killing the enemy as opposed to being under fire. From his experiences Romilly believed that if one was against war, or at least as far as he and his fellow

volunteers were concerned, it stemmed from feelings of self-preservation, not from altruistic motives: “If you do all the firing, all the attacking, all the shelling and bombing yourself, there is nothing to make you a pacifist [...] I have never been moved by the sight of our planes raining bombs on enemy troops or by the thought that I have perhaps scored a direct hit on a Moor.” No doubt such equanimity was only possible because Romilly believed in what he was fighting for: “the war in Spain, the war of modern death weapons, chosen by fascism, had to be fought and won.” Also, attacking, “talking about the artillery and the infantry and the tanks, executing a flank movement, carrying dispatches”, meant you were in nominal control. But “when all the death in the form of high speed lead and scraps of jagged metal and high explosive is coming in your direction”, the dispensation of death and injury was alarmingly chaotic. His fear of explosions was not a universal concern – for others it could have been machine-gun bullets or being taken prisoner or serious injury – but for Romilly, “waiting between the whine of shells falling near me made me sweat – not with nervous anticipation, not with excitement, or heat – but sweat with Fear.” (Romilly: pp. 168-9) The same relief that other people were being targeted meant that, when Cornford witnessed an aerial attack on Perdiguera, his “comrades on the roof were shouting for delight as each bomb landed”, and his efforts “to think of the thing in terms of flesh and blood and the horror of that village” failed: “I was also delighted.” (Cornford: p. 176)

Like Romilly, Sender wrote of how, under a bombardment of shells, a form of despair made some soldiers think of attacking: being “in the middle of overwhelming disorder and disorganization. These were enough to strike terror into the most valiant. We too had that fear, the fear of a complete chaos of which one was a part.” Paradoxically, he called the experience “exact and geometrical [so] that our terror seemed to be not an affection of our minds, but a mathematical abstraction.” The precision he perceived would have presumably been from the advanced level of engineering of the weapons, while the chaotic portrayal reflects the targeted soldiers’ inability to cope, meekly waiting for the next shell’s arrival. As with Romilly’s fear, control of the situation rested entirely with the enemy. Later, though, experience meant that “[w]e could tell within a few yards where each shell was going to land”, so that the mechanical excellence made the artillery predictable and somewhat neutered. Sender’s sense of ease was shown by his surrealist fantasy that, instead of causing pain, “[w]ere they to carry with them some anaesthetic, it would be beautiful to submit to be killed by these small and neat shells around whose waists is a rosy girdle of copper”. Indeed,

Sender rejoiced to “feel the same fear as the wounded earth, the rocks and the trees” while under attack, and wondered: ““If I survive, the day may be very close on which during hours of dull peace, days that are poisoned and worthless, I shall regret not having been killed to-day.”” (Sender, 1937: pp. 49-50, 172-3, and 142)

III. 12. 5 DEATH

The desire to end your life in battle was felt by many on the Republican side. According to Tom Wintringham, there was a death-wish epidemic, manifest in the oxymoronic phrase ““desertion to the front””. Intolerance of training, waiting and lack of combat led some “into danger and even to a death welcomed rather than feared.” Wintringham speculated that they could have been hoping to be posthumous heroes, but those “with this flaw in them break too easily.” He believed, when he admitted to being scared while avoiding machine-gun fire, that it was “a soldier’s job to be afraid at the right time.” (Wintringham: pp. 136-7, and p. 18) In fact, Wintringham confessed in 1940 (in *New Ways of War*) that the reality of war had been considerably more difficult to handle: at Jarama he wrote that he had repeated ““Why die crying? Why die crying?”” to conquer his fear, something he revealed as an example to those fighting in the Second World War that such experiences are not shameful in combat. (Purcell: p. 134) The individual’s instinct of preservation better guarantees his army’s survival. In his poem ‘British Medical Unit – Granien’ he lamented that

Too many people are in love with Death [...]
Acknowledge him neighbour and enemy, both
Hated and usual, best avoided when
Best known. (Cunningham, p. 149, ll. 1 and 3-5)

The idea of death’s ubiquity (in the mind if not in fact) would likely have had a polarising effect: familiarity either bred content or contempt, sometimes both in the same person. Although Sender expressed a death wish (referred to above), he also felt revulsion when it was “no metaphysical image, but palpable, evil-smelling, sickening”, in the form of two Fascist corpses he sat with for two days and nights. (Sender, 1937: p. 62) Two other deaths were to affect Sender more forcibly. Some “young gentlemen of

the Falange” executed his brother, Manuel, in Huesca: “His only crime was to have been mayor, popularly elected, for two years.” When Sender’s wife heard her two brothers had been killed by the Fascists, she asked for a passport to France and she was arrested: “A month after her arrest, they brought a priest who confessed her, and then took her to the cemetery, where they shot her.” When Sender tried to discover if there was any accusation against her, he found she had not been guilty “even of the charge they had made against her two brothers, of having voted with the Popular Front [...] The words I could use have not been spoken [...] The crime binds me more closely in an unchanging and eternal way to my people and to the fecund passions of the working people.” (ibid: pp. 304-6)

As far as I can ascertain Ralph Fox, Ralph Bates or Christopher Caudwell did not write about the anticipation of themselves killing or being killed (though Fox felt sanguine about Europe’s future if people were willing to “fight and die for the cause of human freedom”, which was previously mentioned). Letters written by Fox and Caudwell from Spain have survived, but the closest either came to the subject was a testimonial Caudwell wrote for a fallen comrade. (Cunningham, 1986: p. 280) Bates dealt with the experiences in his fiction. Following the massive bombardment (discussed above) the narrator finds a badly injured comrade, “lips chewed to bleeding shreds.” The narrator “blessed him with sweet death” (reminiscent of Keats’ claim to “have been half in love with easeful death”), and there follows a series of very pleasant associated analogies – “polished china upon white linen [...] golden evenings and the hoot of outgoing ships [...] a thrush among wet-leaved apple trees” – to suggest that to be left alive was a misfortune. (Bates, 1939: p. 248, ‘Brunete Ballad’) A more nonchalant attitude than with the non-fiction accounts is evident with the almost ridiculously heroic Pere.²⁴⁵ Like Sender, Pere spends time with two enemy corpses, but his reaction is free of sentiment: “That night he had unconcernedly slept four hours in the chapel porch. He had completely forgotten the killing within an hour of departure.” However, his *sang-froid* is in marked contrast to the way he feels when a maternal izard (mountain goat) is shot: “he fired, in anger at the izard’s death. Satisfaction surged through him impelling the blood fiercely through his body, the recoiling impact of

²⁴⁵ He “had fought magnificently during the retreat [...] For this he had been given the rank of lieutenant [...] he affected to ignore the promotion [...] His mountaineering skill fitted him for that lonely work [...] he was tireless and full of initiative”. (Bates, 1939: p. 327)

accomplished vengeance.” (Bates, 1939: p. 340, and 368)²⁴⁶ Bates’ purpose in creating this scarcely credible character is hard to know; perhaps he hoped it would be attractive to film producers. It does illustrate, at least, the chasm which can exist between war in fiction and the sincere testimony of those who took part.

As a theoretical sacrifice, or “metaphysical image”, Julian Bell wrote that, despite hating the idea of dying, and of “making people miserable”, he would “rather die in battle than any other way I can think of.” (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 237)²⁴⁷ More emphatically, and like Sender’s dread of an alternative future that is “poisoned and worthless”, he thought it better to be “killed in a reasonable sort of war against Fascists rather than just choking out”. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 286)²⁴⁸ He was not only prepared to die, but saw it as a duty for people like himself to take as many of the enemy down as possible: “The disgraceful part of the German business is not that they kill and torture their enemies; it is that socialists and communists let themselves be made prisoners instead of first killing as many Nazis as they can.” He could be criticized for not appreciating the circumstances in Germany for Socialists and Communists at the time, but it is unequivocal as a sign he was not a pacifist, and that his decision to become an ambulance driver must have been to spare his mother’s feelings. That job, of course, was not a soft option. He believed his ability to cope with what he witnessed of injured soldiers was because as a child he had been made to watch someone cutting a stag’s throat, as he explained to E. M. Forster. It meant “that I have reached the stage of contemplating a corpse in the road without a Baudlerian²⁴⁹ extravaganza of horror.” He saw “this making a moral principle of a physical squeamishness” the great weakness of religion and pacifism; “to hate war only because a battlefield of carrion makes you sick is hardly adequate: one hates a channel crossing on the same grounds, yet is, none the less, ready to go to France.” (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: p. 224, and 275) As this was written to an eminent figure who was a contemporary of his parents, the significance of it lies less in it forever making pacifism a redundant viewpoint, than that it marks a clear dichotomy between Julian Bell’s and the previous generation: for the young adults pacifism in the 1930s (directly

²⁴⁶ ‘43rd Division’

²⁴⁷ Letter December 16th 1936

²⁴⁸ Letter September 25th 1936

²⁴⁹ Baudelaire was an influence, for example, on *Howards End*, (Medalie: p. 86) which has two deaths that were given more than cursory treatment.

because of the threat of Fascism) was a morally indefensible belief, only possible for a cloistered and privileged few.

Years before there was any prospect of a war in Spain John Cornford had declared himself effectively “ready to kill or be killed for the revolution”. (Cornford: pp. 167-8)²⁵⁰ However, in late 1936 it was clear that both were distinct possibilities and, in particular, the idea of sacrificing his own life for however noble a cause was troubling him. For example, in what he called his “last will and testament” he wrote to his pregnant girlfriend, Margot Heinemann, of how he had “worked for the party with all my strength, and loved you as much as I was capable of. If I am killed my life won’t be wasted. But I’ll be back.” (ibid: p. 171)²⁵¹ His assertion to have done all he could for his party and his lover give the impression he did not think he would be able to do anything for either of them again. There was an even stronger sense of foreboding in an untitled poem he dedicated to Margot Heinemann. He addresses his lover, first as a uniquely positive force – “Heart of the heartless world” – then as “The shadow that chills my view.” The latter image looks deliberately ambiguous, representing her absence together with the concept of a cold shadow in view as an omen of death. This is confirmed in the next stanza – “I am afraid to lose you,/ I am afraid of my fear” – and the final stanza lacks any of the forced optimism at the end of the letter above (“But I’ll be back”):

And if bad luck should lay my strength
Into the shallow grave,
Remember all the good you can;
Don’t forget my love. (ibid: p. 40, l. 1, 4, ll. 7-8, and 13-16)

²⁵⁰ Letter April 24th 1933

²⁵¹ Letter August 16th-30th 1936

POST-SCRIPT

- From 1937 Ralph Bates spent time in Mexico²⁵² and the U. S. A. working for the Communist Party. By 1940 he had settled in the U. S. A. and had left the Communist Party. He taught literature at New York and Columbia University from 1948 to 1968 and retired to the island of Naxos, Greece. He died in New York in 2000. (Celada, 2009: p. 100-1)
- Ramon J. Sender left the Communist Party and went to France in 1938, then moved to the U. S. A. the following year. He lived in exile in Mexico, along with other writers and intellectuals, before moving to the U. S. A. He remained a prolific writer and began to be published again in Spain with great success in 1965. He returned to Spain in the 1970s, but died in California in 1982. (Sender biography)
- Tom Wintringham caught typhoid and septicaemia in the spring of 1937, returned to fighting in the summer, when he was wounded and went back to England in November. Unlike many others, he remained a committed Communist throughout the 1940s. He gave military assistance to the British army in the Second World War. He died helping with the harvest on a farm in 1949. (Purcell: pp. 140-64, 169-88, and 245-6)
- After combat experience, in 1937 Esmond Romilly was not “in a fit mental or physical condition” to continue. He returned to England, then moved to the U. S. A. and later joined the Canadian Air Force. In November 1941 his plane was declared “missing in action”. (Ingram: p. 145, 146, 178, 205, and 232)
- Ralph Fox was killed on December 27th 1936 at Cordoba. (Celada, 2009: p. 111)
- Christopher Caudwell was killed covering a retreat at Jarama Valley on February 12th 1937, his first day of fighting. (Caudwell, 1932-37: pp. 15-16, introduction)
- It is not certain when or how John Cornford was killed, but it was roughly on December 27th 1936, his twenty-first birthday, at Lopera, Cordoba. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 390)
- On July 18th 1937 Julian Bell was hit by a German bomb while he was driving an ambulance near Brunete. He died twelve hours later. (Stansky and Abrahams, 2012: pp. 278-9)

²⁵² One report from 1938 stated he had gone to Mexico because he was involved in a Soviet plot to assassinate Trotsky. (Shachtman)

CONCLUSION

I believe the one characteristic which marked this group of writers and much of their generation, beyond their similar political outlooks, was their indomitable feelings of personal responsibility. As far as can be judged at this remove, this sense was so strong that they felt they had no option but to risk their lives in a conflict which, from a conventional perspective, was none of their concern.

Their preparedness was despite, judging by their accounts, being wholly unsuited to the shocks of life as a combatant. Even a previous interest in the military did not count for much, as in the case of Tom Wintringham. Their psychological types and education had fitted them for quite contrary roles. As the inappropriately named sculptor Victorio Macho said of himself: "I was here beside the people [...] not stoically, for stoicism was never the quality of the artist, but naked [...] with nerves strung taut like bows, with spirit a-flame." (Intellectuals: p. 28)²⁵³ The courage of these writers was that they participated in a war, where their English words would be to no effect, as ingenuous militants for a theoretical cause.

It is striking that that cause, by the time they came to volunteer, was no longer Marxism. They simply went to help defeat Fascism, and the prospect that Spain might continue to enjoy what these writers had previously disparaged, a bourgeois democracy, was sufficient incentive. This does not mean that such a stance or even sentiment was ubiquitous in Britain. As I have mentioned, to have vehemently opposed Fascism from the early to mid-1930s (before 1939) was almost invariably a sign of being of the Left. The hazard that Communism represented for British Conservatives meant that Fascism was a preferable alternative government (in other countries), which they hoped might somehow also help to quench left-wing fervour at home.

²⁵³ Letter, 3rd December 1936

Marxists like Fox, Cornford and Caudwell tried to stoke Communist ardour in Britain. It is perhaps one respect in which they differed from their contemporaries in Europe, and so could partly explain their more determinedly orthodox publications. In this regard, I believe the example of Cornford's letters to his mother in which he finds some of Marx's claims dubious and he appears to have been recording his thought processes, are significant. The relaxed attitude of writing to someone like your mother was quite different to the disciplined approach they presumably thought necessary when writing for publication. If their rigidly orthodox accounts of Marxism and, through it, the contemporary world were to an extent assumed, it is easier to explain why Caudwell, Fox and Cornford could suddenly decide they were obliged to fight for the cause of a capitalist democracy, something they had seen as fledgling Fascism only a few months before.

It was, of course, a propitious time to claim Marxist prescience and advocate a proletarian revolution: politicians in the capitalist west had shown their failings through the First World War and the financial collapse starting in 1929, which also indicated the fragility of capitalism as a system, previously a hegemony to all but a very few. The economic situation in the West had obvious similarities to the current state, especially of the European economy. To add to the image of a precarious and corrupt financial system, it was not those who most fervently supported it or who gained most from it who suffered the consequences of its decline. Workers paid when their masters (owners or politicians) failed, an indication that though the "bosses" were obviously not Marxist they operated according to a dialectical method (people of their class were treated humanely, while the proletariat were regarded like commodities). For example, in the 1930s, a time of widespread hunger, when a decline in prices was feared food stocks were destroyed. (Overy: p. 92) Once again, following the collapse in 2008, the powerless who likely gained least during an era of growth, speculation, and ill-advised indebtedness are now paying for those errors, and the hegemonic status of capitalism is at least in question. One interesting difference between now and the 1930s is that while there has been a revival of interest in Marxist theory, the excitement and promise it generated for some 80 years ago has not been repeated. I chose not to compare the two eras for various reasons – that it could be a distraction, the situations differ in significant ways – the most important of which being that the period in Europe between the wars is by itself remarkable enough to merit study without the need for comparison.

The Soviet Union loomed large over the decade and its significance, not just for these writers, but anyone with an interest in politics at the time, means that an assessment of what it really represented is essential. To avoid offering a counsel of despair, Communists needed to provide an example where economic or capitalist problems had been overcome. Whether one chose to advocate it as a model of ideal governance or use it as a terrible warning, there was some evidence to back your case. To cite it as proof of Communism's effectiveness in delivering rewarding lives to the previously exploited masses meant ignoring accounts of the suffering of a large section of the Soviet population (for example, in the Walter Duranty report of starvation and Maurice Hindus' account, *Red Bread*). In my opinion, when Communists wrote about the Soviet experience they thought of it as a symbol rather than a geographical location, although they were inevitably describing the experiences of people in a specific place. Certainly, there was no indication that any of the writers wanted to live there.

In contrast, Cornford's and Caudwell's very positive impressions of Spain, notably around Barcelona, on arrival in 1936, demonstrated how actually witnessing a form of political freedom made their outlooks much more amenable. When John Cornford recognized that the Catalan government – composed of the Republican Esquerra Party, the CNT Anarchists, and Popular Front group (Preston, 2006: p. 235) – had already granted better working conditions and wages, and had done so in harmony with the Popular Front government in Madrid, it was after his first experiences of fighting in Spain. (Stansky and Abrahams, 1966: p. 363) It is analogous to Caudwell's celebration of life in Barcelona because it was dominated by Anarchists. The fact that the events were taking place in a foreign country must also have helped the transformative process. In Britain there was genuine hardship, inequality and injustice, but, to a greater or lesser extent, this state of inequality had prevailed over a long period of time (arguably it had never been otherwise): Britain is renowned for its lack of revolutions. One has to wonder, indeed, if any of these Marxist writers expected a Communist revolution to occur at home. It is plausible that they argued for a hypothetical revolution because they believed the state of the nation demanded some sort of radical change, and while it remained socially frozen there was a need for their political texts. However, when a nearby country had clearly reached a decisive moment, theoretical politics were subsumed.

It is evident from both Ralph Bates' and Ramon J. Sender's novels that Spanish politics was a more empirical affair throughout the 1930s,²⁵⁴ and the turbulence was not only fictional. Catalonia and its capital had had a tradition of trouble, such that it earned the soubriquet "the Chicago of the Mediterranean", (Salvadó: p. 19) and, though Madrid was calmer, it was also witness to violent protests and church burnings, notably on Sunday 10th May 1931. (Esdaile: p. 290) I believe that the references to Spanish literature are invaluable for revealing the evident social and political unease which is present in the literature of the Generation of 1898, which developed into the heterogenous and combative environment of the 1920s and 1930s, and is such a prominent feature of the fiction and poetry. From our standpoint, the situation as portrayed by Sender and Bates serves as a dynamic prelude to a civil war. A significant difference between the two novelists, probably more than the consequences of their different nationalities, was that as an Anarchist (when he wrote *Seven Red Sundays*) Sender, or at least his characters, rejoiced in the act of insurgency, whereas the Communist Bates ended *Lean Men* anticipating the time when the workers would fight their last and successful battle, and in *The Olive Field* showed Communist characters as responsible and prudent in contrast to reckless Anarchists.

Of course the more obvious contrast between Bates and Sender is that one was a visitor to Spain and the other indigenous. From my conviction that it was not legitimate to undertake this study without recourse to contemporary Spanish literature, I was fortunate that Sender's novels exist. His vivid depictions of life in Spain, especially in *Seven Red Sundays*, proved invaluable for my work and allowed me to do what, as far as I can see, is most original about this research: combine the political thought, history and literature of the two countries at the same period. Based on my reading, most authors who write about the war focus on a specific topic – such as the International Brigades or the military aspects of the war – and even a study of the political beliefs of the participants (beyond attributing labels or descriptions of a few words) is very rare. Through Sender's writing I could refer to other Spanish novelists and poets more briefly and, by comparison, gain insights into Bates' depictions of Spanish society and politics.

For example, Bates' attitude to Anarchists was clearly inimical, as he demonstrated several times in *The Olive Field*. In the world of *Seven Red Sundays* the distinction between the two movements is much less clearly defined. The main

²⁵⁴ Cornford and Romilly were involved in fights with British Fascists, but these incidents were infrequent and pale besides the regular conflicts described in those novels set in Spain.

character, Samar, is called both, and qualities dogmatically ascribed as definitive attributes of one group by one character can be said to be defining of the other political approach by another character. It is typical of a novel in which much of the narration is by characters, and even their identity is not always clear or human (the Moon narrates one chapter), so that the reader can never feel entirely secure about how to interpret any single version of events. It is an anarchic novel:²⁵⁵ it has energy and sudden violence, and it has the chaos of multiple views as opposed to the homogeneity of individuals obeying a single view and purpose. Unlike Bates' more conventional fiction, it is liberated from the government of an omniscient or even an omnipotent narrator. With more space and resources I would like to have investigated Bates' hostility to Anarchists and gypsies, and his grudging admiration for Spanish Catholicism and the aristocracy, while acknowledging that they could still have remained enigmatic. Also, I would like to know how his and Sender's attitudes changed about the 1930s, especially their experiences of and reasons for rejecting Communism.

It is likely Bates objected, if only in thought, to many Soviet operations during the war, even though he evidently assisted them, as shown by his editorship of the *Volunteer for Liberty*. The pressure the Soviets tried exerting in less subtle forms than through a superficially Republican journal must have alarmed all those who knew about them, not least for reasons of personal welfare, and it patently existed in an atmosphere of contagious mistrust. From the documents now available it is possible to see that there was a collective *idée fixe* about treachery. In practice it meant that, for example, reports of lost battles (as at Málaga) blamed the defeat on betrayal to the exclusion of other reasons, or claimed those causes had stemmed directly from treason (by members of the government or military commanders). The epitome of this suspicion came with the brutal victimization of the POUM, the so-called Trotskyists from Catalonia. My decision to describe the events relating to this group in some detail was because they demonstrated the lengths the Soviet command were prepared to go to and the paradoxical state Soviet politics had reached in Spain. The group was accused of being Trotskyist because of personal links to Trotsky, but he criticized their tactics and they never sought his counsel about policy. What the writer and the organization shared was antipathy to Stalin and an open desire for revolution, even while there was a civil war. Both stances provoked a predictable reaction from Moscow. The view from there in

²⁵⁵ Sender went from being an Anarchist to a Communist about a year later.

essence was that Marxism, Communism and Stalinism were indistinguishable and should be understood as such. Therefore, to the Soviets claiming to be Marxist and anti-Stalinist should have been a logical absurdity. One result was that the POUM were held to be followers of Trotsky and “counter-revolutionary”, a charge which could only be understood if you believed in Stalin’s place as the figurehead of Communism and of the revolution. To achieve homogeneity, alternative forms of Marxism had to be destroyed by whatever means necessary, which ranged from negative propaganda to torture and execution.

Soviet intervention would have been welcomed initially by these writers, whatever they thought later, and reassured them about the decision to volunteer. However, their desire to defend what they had previously derided, a bourgeois democracy, implies a flexibility which is absent from their writing. Despite their politics being accepted as purely Communist by those studying this time, their actions suggest that the orthodoxy of their Marxism, as it was expressed, was above all a manifestation of their desire for decisive societal change. Ultimately, posthumous speculation would be invalid, but I hope that I have shown that none of them, including Caudwell, Cornford and Fox, participated because they expected victory to bring the Spanish people anything more revolutionary than their democratic rights.

The manner in which they volunteered was diametrically opposed to the recruiting process during the First World War, when patriotism and loyalty to the king were promoted as sufficient cause. However, the combat experiences were not very different. As the Spanish Civil War was only twenty years later and took place in close geographical proximity to the First World War, the resemblances are not surprising. The literature from soldiers who experienced most of the variations of horror and occasional exhilaration this new type of war entailed also attacked what were to be significant problems in the Spanish war. It soon became apparent that the senior officers in the British army had little idea of appropriate military tactics, and while the comfort of the men was given little or no thought, the amount of consideration which went into inflicting the maximum amount of death and injury on enemy soldiers was plainly considerable. The combination of these factors, notably on those who had not received any physical wound – for example, enduring prolonged periods in vermin-infested and insanitary conditions, hearing shells exploding nearby for days at a time, putting your life at risk for orders you guessed were ill-advised, and watching the effects of various weapons on your fellow soldiers – was physical and mental anguish.

In one respect there was a notable deterioration from the previous war: that is, the Fascists' determination to engage in the wholesale slaughter of civilians.²⁵⁶ It is curious that the Francoists were very worried that news of these atrocities should become known, yet when information became available, the difference in the international reaction was infinitesimal. At the start of the war the ruthless mass execution in Badajoz was reported and the dead bodies filmed by a Pathé cameraman (Preston, 2009: p. 159), and thereafter anybody who was interested could have readily found



Fig. 46. Some of those executed at Badajoz. (Wilson: p. 61)

information about similarly callous acts of mass intimidation. However, for all of the Francoists' concerns and bullying of reporters,²⁵⁷ they never changed their brutal tactics, and few if any people in power outside Spain appear to have had their minds changed by these revelations. Certainly, the Non-Intervention Agreement continued to allow the Fascists to benefit from the international state of resignation.

For Bates and Sender, to have endured what they had experienced, only to see the Republican forces lose and then Franco to stay in power for nearly forty years, must have been close to impossible for them to reconcile. For those who were sacrificed in that cause or died soon after, one can only guess that, for all of their regret to have acted in vain, they would have had the consolation that they had made an extraordinary gesture: writers and academics choosing to face bombs and bullets for the sake of a nation they had rarely thought about before. I think that in this regard I have successfully evoked some of the political atmosphere of that extraordinary decade, especially in Britain and Spain, and, as far as it is possible, conveyed what motivated their devotion to the cause of the exploited in Europe. What they had hoped to achieve by enlisting was consistent with why all but one of them had put their faith in Marxism, and then in a fair form of democracy to follow the defeat of Fascist aggression. In 1988 Ralph Bates, having given up on Communism and after a long career in American universities, had no doubt about the character of those who had volunteered with him: "I can only hope that historians in the future take proper views of the role that intellectuals

²⁵⁶ It could be argued that had the technology and opportunities been available in the First World War civilians would have fared much worse.

²⁵⁷ The above cameraman was put in prison and threatened with execution, but was released when Pathé gave Franco a carefully edited version of the film.

and artists took during the Spanish Civil War. They rallied to a lost cause with the best there is in humankind.”

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APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3

APPENDIX 1

[I have tried to retain the textual idiosyncracies (word spacing, misspelling, etc.) of the original documents as far as possible, but I have used '[sic.]' fairly selectively to prevent it being repetetive]

'ON RALPH FOX'S WORK "BIOGRAPHY OF LENIN"', by Harry Pollitt, September 1933

[p.1]

This work is a voluminous book of 313 pages issued in English in England. It is apparently not yet published and the copy examined is a trial one. The most strict demands should undoubtedly be made to such a work, care, conscientiousness, verification of parts and formulations, and a strict line. Such a book should expose by the way the present enemies of Leninism. However Fox's work does not answer to these demands. The work needs a serious revision in order to correct a number of theoretical mistakes, pure lapses, the getting rid of petty-bourgeois argumentation, etc. in order to be considered acceptable. In the text and on the margins I have marked the places needing revision. The remarks concern only the most essential corrections.

For example:

- p. 9 characterisation of Tolstoy
- p.31 characterisation of social forces in Russia at the end of the 19th century.
- p.40 condition of the Marxist circles in Petersburg at the beginning of the '90's [sic.].
- p.49 the relation of theory and practice.
- p.83 characterisation of Struve.
- p.105 relations of Lenin to Martov and Plekhanov.
- p.135 causes of the defeat of the 1905 revolution.
- pp. 238, 243, 257 and others – on Trotsky.
- p.244 Lenin's demand for the expulsion of Zinoviev and Kamenev from the Party.

In there and other places I have edited the corresponding text. But in the book there are a number of places with crude mistakes which should be completely changed.

But first of all, before going on to these remarks, one general remark. The author should get rid of his protective tone with regard to Lenin, of the pose of “objective” biographer of Lenin, which has led in places to an impermissibly liberal attitude to things, where there can only be direct attack and exposure, for example: the author posing as investigator writes that it was quite impossible Lenin should have been a German spy instead of showing the reader with anger and disgust all this vile, crude slander.

p. 27 Fox writes: “the Populists were able to make certain capital out of the fact that both Marx and Engels, acting on insufficient information, chiefly on the famous work of their friend the historian Kovalevsky, went some way towards accepting the views of the Populists on the role of the village commune in Russian society.”

Comrade Fox does not disclose whence [sic.] he derived this information. But it would have been worth while. Surely here it is a question of nothing more or less than of a mistake of Marx and Engels. By the way, this light, irresponsible means of disclosing and establishing “mistakes” of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, reminding one of the manner of the social-democratic “Marxists” of the Second International, is very frequently met with in Fox’s book. What really happened? In fact Marx and Engels gave an analysis of genius on the question of the Russian commune, Marx and Engels were Marxists of genius, Leninists in this question, forty years before October, rejecting [?] both the Menshevik conception of the “victory of socialism” when the majority of the people is [sic.] turned into proletarians, and the S.R. conception of the idealised commune, of the victory of Socialism without the leading role of the working class in the revolutionary reconstruction of society.

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Actually while analyzing the question of the Russian commune, on which, by the way, Marx collected rich material – Marx in 1881 formulated the law of the possibility of the non-capitalist road of development given the victory of the proletarian revolution and the reconstruction of agriculture on the basis of advanced technique, with the liquidation of private property in land. Fox should look at the correspondence with Vera Zasulich to be convinced of that. In short Com. Fox should have taken the trouble to get sufficient information in order to avoid the favourite method of the heroes of the Second International – that Marx and Engels owing to insufficient information said what seems quite different today. I am doubtful whether Fox in order to write his large work read as much as Marx and Engels read about the Russian village commune alone.

pp. 36 – 37. Here the Author characterises Populism. But the reader will understand nothing of this characterisation, especially as Fox, taking a world scale and “actualising” the theme, informs us that Gandhi, for example, is a contemporary Populist, and puts him alongside

Sun Yat-sen and Mazzini. The Author should have read the brilliant pages of Lenin himself of the Narodniks, the class sources of populism, their programme, their evolution, the criticism of populism, or even have taken it from any course of the history of the C.P.S.U. say Bubnov, Popov, Yaroslavsky. [sic.] (Short History, 1933 edition) in order to acquaint the English reader clearly with this question and not sow confusion where it will be particularly difficult to disentangle it.

p. 38. Placing Kautsky along with Plekhanov, the author says that he was only an educated interpreter of Marxism. But surely today the English public should be told a little more about Kautsky, let us say, how correctly that philistine interpreted Marx, - surely that is the chief question, when writing of people like Kautsky, what he is today, etc.

p. 65 and elsewhere. The author has heard that in the emigration and in exile there were squabbles, scandals, and with special feeling emphasises particularly that side of the emigration, as though the English reader needed it today, not to mention that in this way an untrue, philistine picture of revolutionary emigration is given and the chief in it is missed – the great ideological and organisational work of the revolutionaries. Comrade Fox should have read a couple of works on this, say, reminiscences [sic.] in our journals, Com. Piatnitsky's book, to give a more correct picture.

pp. 32, 66. In two places the author gives contradictory information. In one place he writes that Lenin, acting as counsel for the defence, always lost; in the second, he informs us that Lenin never once lost a case when acting in the cases of workers and peasants. Which to believe ?

p. 71. Speaking of the conflict between Marxists and Narodniks in exile in connection with Raichin's escape, Fox tells us that the Narodniks did not understand the new type of Party, when the interests of various individual conveniences must be sacrificed to the Party. As they say, he's put his foot in it here. Here least of all can one speak of a difference between Narodniks and S.ocial [sic.]-democrats, since in his teaching on the Party Lenin considered it possible to learn something from the Narodniks.

p. 73. The author says Bernstein's book is impossible to read today, as though the present writings of Kautsky are not ten times as disgusting as Bernstein's then.

[p. 3]

p. 84. Fox declares that the sole representative of Struvism in our time is President Masaryk of Czecho-Slovakia. Why is Masaryk so lucky and why is modern Struvism so unlucky? The reference to Masaryk only confuses the reader. We can hardly speak of Struvism in the strict sense today, but of Struvists like Masaryk, there are as many as you like.

p. 94 and elsewhere. With regard to the intelligentsia, the author is completely confused and has not given Marxism analysis of the question. Now it is revolutionary, now reactionary, now romantic, etc. and always the intelligentsia in general. For him the intelligentsia is a messy,

muddled [sic.] unstable class, which is only preserved today in the tales of Chekov and Yoncharov. What can one understand from that ? Surely Marxism teaches us to distinguish bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and proletarian intelligentsia. Fox has occupied a terribly “revolutionary” position with regard to the intelligentsia – he mocks at it, it is for him the source of all viciousness and the secret of its metamorphosis remains the author’s secret.

p. 96. It appears that the source of Menshevism in Russia was over-estimation of the national peculiarities of development of Russia – so says Fox. This is a new verity and not even like the truth. It seems superfluous for me to explain here our view on the historical, economic and class roots of Menshevism,

p. 97. The author says that Lenin “constantly made mistakes with regard to his judgment [sic.] of people surrounding him. [sic.] From what source does the author get such information, how does he confirm it ?

p. 101. It appears from the author that in drawing up the programme there were no disagreements over the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat between Lenin and Plekhanov. Fox has kept silent about the fact that Plekhanov [sic.] had definite hesitations in that question.

p. 111. and elsewhere. Fox very often, appositely and non-appositely uses the word “tragedy”. Ilyich’s brother dies “tragically” (surely better to say heroically), the revolution of 1905 is a tragedy and a “tragic revolution” p. 125 – surely not the Bolshevik view of that revolution [sic.] The years 1917-18 are also “tragic years” p. 166.

p. 113 and elsewhere. The author clearly liberalises – to express it mildly – with Azev and Malinovsky, going into psychological analysis etc. It seems Azev was a self-sacrificing, fiery fighter against the Russian aristocracy, he hated his employers in the Ochrans, etc. It seems to me that today especially we should use another language with regard to provocators [sic.], other words nearer the truth.

pp. 114 – 115. Fox allows a [sic.] number of mistakes with regard to the 1905 revolution. He says that Russia was supported against Japan not only by France but “also by other European powers”. Which ? I don’t know which “powers” in the plural. He reduces the cause of the Russo-Japanese war to the reduced budget of the Tsar’s family. Of course the Tsar and his family were not against filling their pockets at the expense of the workers’ and peasants’ blood, and that must be shown, but to reduce the cause of the Russo-Japanese war to that is to teach the English workers history according to Ilovaisky’s method.

pp. 116 – 84 and elsewhere. Fox is in general weak on the question of classes. On p. 84 he speaks of

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“the industrial middle class,” p.126 “the Russian middle class”, p.116 of the revolutionary “middle class,” etc. Evidently here he has in view the bourgeoisie, but who talks about the

bourgeoisie as “the middle class/ [sic.] Here Fox is evidently confusing the “middle estate” of feudal society, which the bourgeoisie then was, with the “middle class,” which the bourgeoisie as a class is not under capitalism.

pp.116-17. Accidentally or not, Com. Fox has used the imperialist terminology “Asiatic barbarians.”

p [sic.] p. 119. Fox says that in 1903 “Zubatov was removed and replaced by Gapon”, clearly simplifying the whole question of Gaponism and and [sic.] Gapon himself. The reader gets a distorted characterisation of the 9th of January and the relation of the revolutionary party to it.

p. 120. The fall of Port Arthur Fox calls a “day of natural shame.” Evidently “Asiatic barbarians” is not quite an accidental phrase.

p. 123. Lenin was still unknown in 1905 says Fox. The history of the C.P.S.U. says otherwise.

p. 127. The author in his characterisation of the position of Lenin, the Mensheviks, and Trotsky at the London Congress does not give a clear picture. There is nothing about transformation of the bourgeois democratic revolution into the socialist one, in general the disagreements with the Mensheviks are reduced to the question of participation in the Provisional Government, there is nothing about Trotsky’s permanent revolution except the bare statement that he was for the slogan “No Tsar and a Workers’ Government,” as though the English reader will understand anything from that.

p. 132. The author confuses the Soviets of workers’ deputies with Councils of Action. Of course there are features in common between them, but it is impossible to identify them. Today after the struggle with the German rights and Trotsky in 1923, it should not have been necessary to confuse this uestion [sic.].

p. 134. The Soviets in 1905 the author calls Trotskyist and Menshevik. Lenin, as we know, was not of this opinion. Whence does the [sic.] draw this information.? [sic.]

p. 136. It appears that in 1905 there was no party capable of leading the masses. The Bolsheviks were in their infancy and unknown. Lenin came to Russia too late and the revolution was consequently defeated, the revolutionary acts of 1906 – 07 were “the convulsions of people who did not care whether they lived or died”, etc. This is what comrade Fox tells us of the Revolution of 1905, of the party, of the reasons for the defeat of the revolution , etc. Anyone can see this smacks of a Trotskyist or purely Menshevik view of 1905. The chapter on 1905 is the weakest in the book and needs full revision.

p. 145. The reason for the non-participation of the Bolsheviks in the first Duma the author explains by the fact that the workers did not have electoral rights. What is this ? This turns the Bolsheviks into a kind of petty-bourgeois democrats. Of course the workers’ electoral rights were limited, but that did not decide the question then. By the way, it should have been mentioned why Lenin afterwards recognised the boycott of the First Duma by mistake.

p. 144 and elsewhere. In many places I have marked the tone and style of the author. Lenin quitted Russia “a land of terror and defeat,” etc.

p. 151. On the very important question of the Russian and American paths of development the author gave a confused characterisation. He saw the difference merely in that in the one case capitalism [sic.] is introduced from below, and in the other from above. But what will the English worker understand from that? At the worse, he will exclaim, it's all the same, what's the difference, may be its [sic.] even better from above, since that's a bloodless path. The confusion and lack of clarity are made stronger by the fact that apparently the second path brings on the struggle of the bourgeoisie with the working class. But doesn't the first also bring this also? It brings it even sharper, even more openly. The author should not have been abstruse but taken what Lenin says on this question [sic.]. Lenin in a simple translation would have been clearer to the English workers than in the “translation” and “popularisation” of the Englishman Fox.

p. 162. In Fox's interpretation it appears Lenin considered Tolstoy a revolutionary peasant writer. Here's a truth indeed. Fox should read Lenin's article on Tolstoy.

p. 167. Fascism Fox defines as a “religion of bandits.” After this the English worker will surely understand what Fascism is. In general the whole of the second chapter of Part 3 could be dispensed with.

p. 173. According to Fox the embryo of the Comintern was, it seems, created at the Copenhagen Congress of the Second International. Really creative spirit in the author

p. 184. According to Fox Bolshevism existed from 1903 only as a tendency, and not as party. It seems we are in vain holding the jubilee of the Second Congress, congress of the foundation of the Bolshevik Party.

p. 197. Fox gives a confused exposition of Leninist teaching on monopolies (I have corrected it in the text).

pp. 208, 206, 207. Quite unclear in Fox, incomplete and incorrect expression of the position of Trotsky and the “lefts” during the war and their disagreements with Lenin (the places marked in the text). By the way, instead of the national question, Fox speaks of “national discords”. It appears as though the national question is for the proletarian revolution. The same sort of question, as, let us say, the liquidation of the kulaks. Fox should read carefully Lenin's article “On a caricature of Marxism, or about imperialist economism.”

pp. 227 – 228. According to Fox, it appears that in the beginning of 1917 Stalin first supported Kamenev. What was Stalin's position in February and March. [sic.] Comrade Stalin himself has said (see “On the Opposition” pp.107-108). Why did Fox have to repeat the Trotskyist slander about Stalin's supporting Kamenev in 1917?

In general, with regard to Trotsky throughout the whole of Fox's book there is no sharp word with regard to Trotsky [sic.], but many words of praise. This is alongside the discovery of "mistakes" by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Can this be accidental?

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p. 248. According to Fox the decrees [sic.] of the Soviet power on the land was written by the S.R's [sic.] This is not quite so, Fox hasn't given the essence of the matter. The decree was drawn up by the peasant delegates from the localities, who in this question were under the influence of the R.R's [sic.] But that is not at all the same thing.

p. 257. Fox informs us with joy that after the left" [sic.] S.R's were admitted into the government the reaction lost all hope. Strange – then why the civil war?

p. 265. As with Azev and Malinovsky Fox [sic.] draws in romantic tones the people preparing the murder of Lenin.

p. 275. On the civil war Fox writes it was the struggle of "forces of anarchy against the government." But we thought it was the bourgeoisie and the landlords fighting against the workers and the peasants. In general on the period of the civil [sic.] war and war communism there are a number of mistakes and unclear places (military communism, Fox says "brought the whole natural economy of the country to catastrophe", socialism did not penetrate into the country, but [sic.] Fox writes "there was undoubtedly communism of consumption," among the workers during the civil war it seems "there were never any hesitations," etc.)

p. 291. The task of the proletarian state Fox defines as suppression and destruction of the old. And the construction of a new Socialist society ?

p. 292. Fox authoritatively declares that "in the USSR there is today more bureaucracy than in many capitalist countries." Is this confusion or a slander?

p. 300 According to Fox the policy of military communism was apparently the fulfillment [sic.] of Bukharin's arguments in his book, "Economics of the Transition Period", and NEP was "a decisive retreat from this policy!" That is how the biography of Lenin and the history of the Russian revolution is explained to the English workers.

p. 308. Fox declares that according to Lenin "socialist development can only be finally completed in a Socialist world". What does this mean? The question remains unclear – can socialism be built fully in one world or not? Why is this question mixed with the question of guarantees.

The general weakness of the book is that it almost completely fails in passing to expose contemporary imperialism and social democracy.

The book also says nothing about the importance of Lenin and Leninism for the English workers' movement. Can one issue a book of 313 pages for the English workers, even the more developed, and say nothing about why the English workers need such a book in their struggle?

These remarks it seems to me are sufficient to show that it is impossible to publish Fox's book in such form. It will be used by our enemies. It will bring a great deal of confusion into the ranks of the party and the workers. Do we need this?

“REPLY TO CRITICISM OF MY BOOK “LENIN”. Ralph Fox, September 1933

[p. 1]

A glance at this report will show that it claims that I have distorted Leninism on every single important point, used an imperialist vocabulary, been guilty of kindly feeling to provocateurs and the assassins of Lenin, called the Soviets in 1905 Menshevik and Trotskyist, slandered the Soviet Union, accused Marx and Lenin of mistakes, and given the impression that Trotsky was always right.

Comrades who know me will certainly want to know whether I have gone mad to have written such a book, since clearly such things could only have come from the vilest of counter-revolutionary Trotskyists, for whom [sic.] there can be no place in the workers' party.

I do not think I have exaggerated the picture which this report gives of my book and myself as author.

Here I would like to make it quite clear that the report does point out serious mistakes, mistakes which are perhaps (in one case certainly) unpardonable, and which I would certainly have altered at once, since they were accidental ones and in no way connected with a system of views, had I been informed of them at once, instead of two months after I had sent the copy for criticism and on the eve of the book's publication.

I accept many of the criticisms (I will deal with them below) and fully acknowledge the serious errors contained which I am willing and anxious to do everything in my power to correct.

But I wish it to be clearly understood that I reject absolutely the main conclusion of the reporter as to the Trotskyist character of this book and I want to state at once that I consider the whole manner and method of his report a gross distortion, based in some cases perhaps on misunderstanding, in others on deliberate twisting of my words, and in some cases even of deliberate invention. All the way through the report has kept deliberate silence on important passages which often throw an absolutely different light on places he has called in question. Or in other words he has also suppressed facts.

I will proceed now to answer the charges in detail.

I agree that I showed lack of responsibility in allowing the publisher to [sic.] hurry me as he did to book out, but even so I gave time for full criticism to reach me both from Comrades Pollitt and Williams, while there would also have been plenty of time to have got [sic.] the

reporter's criticism, had he cared to send it. The book was a month with comrades Pollitt and Williams and practically everyone [sic.] of their criticisms except one or two of minor character, was embodied in the final version.

Had I received even a telegram to say that serious criticisms were pending from comrades in Moscow I would have held the book up at allcosts [sic.]. I did not however. I got a wire that a review was ready and would follow that telegram. I waited, but nothing came, and as I could tell the publisher nothing definite, he having already postponed publication once went ahead. Had the report followed the telegram it would have arrived in time to have saved errors which certainly disfigure the book from creeping in. It did not come till some weeks later, why I do not know.

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I would like to assure comrades that even so, had the wire contained even a hint that the report was unfavourable I would have insisted on the book's being held up. However, I got no hint of this until a second wire, two months after the proofs had been sent to Moscow, calling for its withdrawal.

I showed this wire to Comrade Pollitt the same day, who told me to wire back and that I had failed to withdraw it as it was too late.

These are perhaps technical points, but I deal with them at some length as they have evidently been used to create an impression that here is some deep laid Trotskyist conspiracy to surprise the Party with a Trotskyist book on the Russian Revolution. I will now come to the political criticisms.

Here I must say I meet with some difficulty, because even now, four months after its despatch to Moscow, I have not got back the proof copy in which the reporter has marked many of his criticisms and suggested amendations [sic.].

To deal with those textual criticisms, which he has not elaborated, first.

p. 9. There is no characterisation of Tolstoy, only a statement, which I admit is wrong, that he can be connected with the "going to the people" movement of the 'sixties.

p. 31. There is no characterisation of social forces in Russia on this [sic.] page, the page preceding it, or the page following, so I do not know what it meant.

p. 40. I say the condition of the Marxist circles was far from enviable when Lenin first arrived from Samara in Petersburg and quote Lenin's own remark that he walked round Petersburg looking for a Marxist. At the same time I am carefull [sic.] to add that Lenin was probably exaggerating and describe in detail the existing Marxist circle which he joined.

p. 49. I take it this remark refers to the statement "Marxism was not to be learned from books or the study." Taken out of its context this certainly appears like an underestimation of theory. In its context, in relation to the conversation of Lenin with Lafargue, I don't think anyone could take it to mean anything but what I meant it to mean, that Lenin's very first

contact with Kautsky and German Social Democratic theory must have confirmed him in his knowledge that pedantic “Marxism”, the product of the study, was bound to lead to parliamentary opportunism.

p. 83. I should certainly have made it clear that Struve was from that section of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia who were distorting Marxism in the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie.

p. 105. I do not know exactly what is in question here. I say that when Lenin broke politically with Plekhanov and Martov he also broke with them personally, but that he always regretted the necessity of having to do so. This may not be so, but there is the best authority for saying so. See Krupskaya, Vol. I. pp. 108-9, English edition, with regard to Martov. There are many similar references to Lenin’s regard for Plekhanov.

p. 133. The causes of the defeat of 1905 are not dealt with on this page, so I do not know what is referred to.

pp. 235, 243, 257. There is no mention of Trotsky on p. 238 save to say that at this time (August 1917) he was a member of

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the Inter-District Party which then sympathised with the Bolsheviks. As it was at the time mentioned when the Inter-District Party dissolved itself and joined the Bolsheviks (they were accepted at the 6th Congress), end of August) [sic.]it seems to me this must be true.

p.213. Trotsky joined the Party in August, is here stated. According to Popov, History of V.K.P. 1930 edition, p. 233 the Inter-District Organisation united with the Bolsheviks on the eve of the 6th Congress and Trotsky joined with them.

p. 257. It is stated Trotsky was selected to head the delegation to Brest. If this is what is objected to, I can only say it is true.

p. 244. It is stated that after Kamenev and Zinoviev attacked in the press the decision of the E.C. to call for insurrection, Lenin called them deserters and demanded their expulsion. My authority for this is Lenin’s letter to members of the Party, first published 1927, in which he writes: “I say outright, I no longer consider either of these a comrade. And with all my strength shall fight for their expulsion from the Party both before the C.C. and before the Congress” (See Towards the Seizure of Power, Part 2).

First of the reporter’s more detailed criticisms.

Concerning my “tone” towards Lenin. I can only ask comrades to judge for themselves by reading. The example he gives and the way in which it is given (the actual text is pp. 222 – 223 of the book) I consider nonsense, besides a distortion of my actual words. He does not consider it necessary to mention that I call these stories about spies “the wildest accusations.” I merely add that Lenin thought he should take precautions against them, since he anticipated them, which is perfectly true.

p. 27. Here is certainly a mistake of mine, though I consider the conclusions drawn are absolutely unjustifiable. So little in common has my argumentation with the “2nd International” that it is drawn directly from M.N. Pokrovsky, who writes: “For a moment Marx himself wavered, and though he never actually admitted that Socialism might come out of the Russian commune (as the Narodniks, by misinterpreting one of his letters affirmed he did), he did not dissociate himself from that view sufficiently clearly. To be sure, too, he regarded the victory of the Socialist working class revolution in Western Europe as the necessary preliminary condition for Russia’s being able to elaborate Socialism on the basis of the commune.”

I do not say Marx made a mistake, any more than Comrade Pokrovsky said so. And here I would like to point out that all the way through his criticism the reporter has seized upon certain words, slightly changed them, and at once started to make the worst political accusations on the basis of these changes made by himself.

I made a mistake here in that I should have emphasised that Marx and Engels foresaw the eventual socialist development of Russian agriculture under the leadership of the working class.

The reporter, seizing on these few words of mine taken from Pokrovsky, entirely conceals, however, that it comes at the end of a whole page and a half in which I have described very fully and positively the interest taken by Marx and Engels in Russia, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx [deletion, appears to be of “So li tle of the”] and their close attention to revolutionary

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possibilities in Russia. So little of the “argumentation of the 2nd International” is there in this page that it contains the following attack on that argumentation: “He (Engels) was the acknowledged leader of German Social Democracy and was anxiously, even then, noting and fiercely combating those tendencies within which have ended in destruction.”

Here I must say with regard to the general charge about having discovered “mistakes” of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and employed the argumentation of the 2nd International that it is completely false.

This is one of the most serious charges that can be made against a Communist writer, yet nowhere in the book is there even a hint or suggestion that Marx, Engels or Lenin made any political mistakes. On the contrary I everywhere vigorously uphold their astonishing foresight and genius in solving by means of the Marxist method, the problems of world revolution. With regard to Comrade Stalin, there is one place where I say, and err very gravely in doing so, that he made a mistake. I will deal with this later, only saying here that stupid and dangerous though this mistake of mine is, it gives no ground for assuming that I have adopted an argumentation against the proletarian revolution.

The place I have given to comrade Stalin in my book is such as to make it quite clear I consider him the best disciple of Lenin and his leadership of the Party after Lenin's death as the natural and inevitable one.

pp. 36-37. Characterisation of Populism. The criticism says this is incomprehensible and that I should have read the brilliant pages of Lenin himself.

If the reporter knows so much about Lenin he should have recognised that the three characteristics of Populism which I give are taken from Lenin's article "The heritage we are renouncing" and largely in Lenin's own words. The article is printed in English in Vol. 1 of Selections from Lenin and I must ask comrades to refer to it themselves to judge the truth of this (pp. 12 – 21).

It is charged that in "actualising" the theme I have given Gandhi as an example of populism and set him beside Sun Yat-sen. The reporter simply cannot have read what I said which is that the essence of Gandhism and the classes from which it draws inspiration are different from Sun Yat-senism and populism, but that an "echo of populism" can be caught in it. An "echo" is a very different thing from identification – at least it is in English. I say elsewhere, p. 164, that Gandhi is the representativex [deletion] of the Indian bourgeoisie and landlords.

p. 38. The charge that I say nothing about Kautsky as an interpreter [sic.] of Marx is untrue. I never mention Kautsky anywhere without the utmost contempt and hatred. On p. 98, final version of the book, you will find that I link Trotsky and Kautsky together as "the chief propagandists against the life work of Lenin," i.e. against Bolshevism, revolutionary Marxism, and against the Soviet Union.

p. 65. The suggestion that I over-emphasise the unpleasant features of exile and emigration, while omitting its positive features, the immense work of revolutionary propaganda and organisation. I do not think there is any basis for this. I do not think there is any basis for this. Certainly the suggestion of the reporter that this unpleasant side should be omitted entirely for English readers I consider foolish. In this matter I have tried to take Krupakaya's "memoirs" as my basis, and Lenin's own letters. I do not think I have left out a single feature of the organising and propaganda work that was done and believe that it appears only [p. 5]

the more heroic and wonderful because of the very incidents that took place and the nervous atmosphere that was so often present. The note I have tried to give here is that of Lenin's own letter to Gorky quoted on p. 147.

pp. 32 – 66. Supposed contradictory information about Lenin's success in court. The report [sic.] must have dreaming. A reference to the pages will show that there is absolutely no xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx [deletion of "reference to the"] contradiction, and on p. 66 there is no statement that Lenin never lost a case, or anything like it. The information about Lenin's cases is taken from Leninsky Sboznik N. 2 and is absolutely correct.

p. 71. I hardly think Lenin took the behaviour of the Narodnik exiles over Raiching's escape as an example in the right attitude towards the Party. For his own point of view see "Letters to Relatives" note p. . [sic.] I have elsewhere in several places mentioned the debt of [sic.] the Narodniks in questions of conspiracy technique and similar matters.

p. 73. This is what I say – that his position is that of the 2nd International to day, and in the very same sentence, which to the English reader, who has not in general read Kautsky, is much more intelligible than a reference to the latter's writings.

p. 84. It was not necessary to have mentioned Masaryk. I did so because he is very well known to the English reader and so physically speaking a survivor, not ideologically. At least I always understood that Masaryk was closely connected with the legal Marxist group though of course, I may be wrong in this.

p. 94. The reporter has taken offence at a harmless anecdote related by Krupskaya of the exiles' "Com une" in London. I don't think it is correct to say that I take up an "ultra-revolutionary" position on this question, though I certainly agree that an analysis [sic.] of the different sections of the Russian intelligentsia should have been made. He says that the secret of its metamorphosis I kept to myself. At the end of the paragraph here criticised I state clearly enough that the influence of the working class and three revolutions is what has changed the intelligentsia.

p. 96. I think it is quite clear that I am not here dealing with the source of Menshevism and that I nowhere talk of the national peculiarities of [sic.] the development of Russia as being that source. I say what Lenin says in many places, that the Revolution in Russia had general national tasks to solve, that it was, in other words, necessary for it first to pass through its bourgeois-democratic stage, and that many socialist intellectuals who afterwards became Mensheviks were drawn into it by this bourgeois-democratic, national character, but that they did not believe that the working class could lead the revolution to a higher, socialist stage. I think xxxxx [deletion of "there"] this is perfectly correct, that it is a very necessary thing to explain to English readers who do not understand how intellectuals could be "revolutionary" at one stage of the revolution, suffer imprisonment and exile, and yet fight against the working class and socialism.

The reporter has either not understood what I have written, or else [sic.] distorted it to the absolute opposite of its meaning, or rather to no meaning at all.

p. 97. The source of this information, which simply mentions a trait that has no political significance at all, is Krupskaya's Memories. The man who never made a mistake in his first impressions of people does not exist. The greater the

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temperament, the more often is a man likely to be deceived at first impressions. Krupskaya even speaks a little ironically, mentioning Lenin's "romance" with a certain person as being quickly

over. The point is, and it is made here very emphatically, that Lenin never allowed himself to be deceived politically.

p. 101. It does not appear from me that there were no disagreements in drawing up the programme. The passage quoted has no reference whatever to the drawing up of the programme, but simply mentions, describing the debates at the Second Congress, that Plekhanov, afterwards to be a bitter enemy of the proletarian dictatorship, here spoke warmly for it.

p. 111. The word tragic in English also implies heroic and is the equivalent of the Russian “pathetic.”

p. 113. The materials with regard to Azev are taken from Pokrovsky Vo. 2. [sic.] and those with regard to Malinovsky from Badayev, without any change or addition by me. The reader who can get the impression from this book that Azev was a “fiery, self-sacrificing fighter against autocracy” must have a queer mind.

p. 114 - 15. The chapter on 1905 is, as the reporter says, the weakest in the book. There is no clear statement of the reasons for its defeat and the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, especially the Trotskyists, are not sufficiently dealt with. There are also some mistakes or unclear formulations. I do not, however, agree with some of the criticisms made by the reporter. These are as follows.

(1) Russo-Japanese war. The reference to Russia’s being backed by other powers than France on p. 114 is not to be the war itself but, as is quite clearly stated, to be period of Russian Far Eastern expansion. Pokrovsky Vol. 2 pp. 82-83 English edition gives considerable [sic.] space to German backing for this Far East expansion. The statement that the Powers saw in Russia the bulwark against disorder is not mine but Lenin’s.

(2) With reference to the Romanov’s. I do not attribute the war to their desire [sic.] for enrichment. I simply point out that the immediate cause of the war was the question of Korea, and that Romanov greed was chiefly responsible for the intransigent attitude on this question. Pokrovsky gives no less than five pages to this question of the Romanov’s and Korea, so he evidently considered it of some importance.

(3) Use of the term “middle classes”. Since the reporter comes to the conclusion that in each case I mean “bourgeoisie” I have evidently used [sic.] the term correctly. Of course the English reader understands by middle class what the Continental reader understands by bourgeoisie, by lower middle class, petty bourgeoisie, and so on. Marx understood this so well that when writing in the Chartist press and New York Tribune, he always used the term middle class for bourgeoisie. It is not so necessary today as the words “bourgeoisie”, “proletariat” are coming more into common use and I have therefore used them pretty often. But I think it is not an exaggeration to say that outside a very limited circle of active revolutionaries, English workers do not understand the meaning of these words yet – they are still words from a foreign language. All that the reporter says about middle estate and feudalism is therefore quite beside

the point – in England in feudal times the term middle class was quite unknown. It is a product of capitalism and the name given by the aristocratic landowning oligarchy to the new mercantile and industrial bourgeoisie.

[p. 7]

(4) “Iperialist [sic.] terminology”. It must be a very thick-headed reader who fails to see that the words “Asiatic barbarians” are used ironically to indicate the outlook of the Russian bourgeoisie.

(5) p. 119. The reporter is correct in saying this question is over-simplified, though I do indicate that it was the growing development of the class struggle which made the cruder methods of Zubatov impossible.

(6) Here again the reference is quite clearly to what the Russian bourgeoisie considered the day to be. The authority is again Pokrovsky.

(7) p. 123. Perhaps there is a slight exaggeration here, since it is clear that Lenin was known in all advanced revolutionary circles, and I have myself made the point before. But I think it is clear that I mean here he was still at the beginning of 1905, unknown to the masses. This was inevitable, since he lived illegally, wrote under various pseudonyms, and was bound by all the conditions of revolutionary life to remain unknown to the masses.

(8) The question of the Soviets. I mention the Councils of Action only that the English workers may understand that Soviets are not something purely Russian. Lenin, referring to the Council of Action in 1920 says, “The whole English bourgeois press has written that the ‘Council of Action’ means Soviets. And it was right. They were not called Soviets but in essence they were the same.” (Vol. 25 p. 434.) If I am not mistaken, both the E.C.C.I. resolution on the General Strike and Com. Manuilsky’s article in the C.I. also referred to the Councils of Action as being English Soviets – an alternative power. So the accusation of Trotskyism here [sic.] seems least of all in place. There is no comparison between the British Councils in 1920 and 1926 and the German ones in 1923.

(9) Nowhere have I said, suggested or can it be even implied [sic.] from my words, that the Soviets in 1905 were all Menshevik or Trotskyist. I state that the Petersburg Soviet had a strong Menshevik influence, which was correct. I mention that the Moscow Soviet was under Bolshevik influence and give this as one of the reasons why there was a rising in Moscow and not in Petersburg.

(10) I certainly agree there are serious defects in 1905 chapter, which I have indicated above. But it is distorting entirely the truth to suggest I say there was no party capable of leading the masses. The point I make, whether or not I do it clearly or correctly is another matter, is that in 1905 the allegiance of the workers was divided between three parties, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and S.R.’s [sic.], that the Bolsheviks, who were only in existence a year and a half, and had not yet succeeded in destroying these influences. I do not say they were

unknown – only that at the beginning of 1905 they were small underground groups of revolutionaries and that at the end of 1905 they were gaining decisive influence in the big towns – quite a different thing. I do not say the revolution was defeated because Lenin came to Russia too late, but that he came too late to exercise a decisive influence in the October events.

The statement about 1905 and 1907 is of course wrong and a serious mistake, as I have written above.

p. 145 The suggestion that the reason for the boycott of the Duma was the limitation of the workers' electoral rights is of course a bad mistake of mine.

[p. 8]

p. 151. The Prussian and American paths of development, I agree that perhaps more space should have been given and that there is one confused formulation, but the reporter again distorts and suppresses so as to make a completely twisted picture of what I say

I do not reduce the question (which is that of two different ways of establishing capitalism) simply to revolution from above or below. I point out the difference between the forms of property and class forces involved, and I make it clear that the American path leads directly to the Socialist revolution as the next step. I actually quote almost a whole page from Lenin's famous letter to Stepanov- Skvortsov, so that I do in fact take what Lenin says on the question. What is one to make, however, of the reporters' [sic.] own statement that the "Prussian" way is bloodless? Surely this is an extraordinary statement for a Marxist. Were the dictatorships of Napoleon III and Bismarck etc. bloodless? Was Stolypin's [sic.] effort to force the Prussian path bloodless ?

p. 112. Here again I can only assume that the reporter hasn't read the place he criticises. I don't say Tolstoy was a revolutionary peasant writer, or anything that the wildest imagination could twist into that. He tells me to read Lenin's article on Tolstoy when I quote at length, with hardly any comment of my own, from many articles written by Lenin on Tolstoy.

p. 167. Here again the reporter has misread the text. I say capitalism has created a gangster religion called Fascism. There is nothing in this which is not correct. The reference is not to Fascism as such, but to capitalist ideology in decay, when all the predatory elements in capitalism became most prominent and the progressive elements die. In its context the statement is right. Torn from it & [?] slightly twisted, of course it is not.

p. 173. To talk of the Copenhagen meeting of the lefts as the "embryo" of the C.I. is of course a mistake. It was an important step forward in the policy of a rupture with opportunism and centrism in the 2nd International.

p. 184. Not clearly formulated, of course, but nevertheless it is fairly plain if the whole sentence is read and not half of it, that I am referring to the formality of organisation – that officially only one Russian Social Democratic Labour Party existed till 1913.

p. 197. Apparently the reference is to the beginning of the 2nd paragraph. Certainly the fact that monopolies mean also an enormous growth of the social character of production should have been stressed.

pp. 205, 206, 207. I don't have the marked text so can't say what places are in question. With regard to the national question, I have made it abundantly clear in many places that I do not consider it only as a matter of "national rivalries". I do not understand the reference to the liquidation of the kulaks. Is the liquidation of the kulaks then a similar question ?

p. 227. This is a very serious mistake on my part. Of course Stalin did not at any time support Kamenev's position. I admit fully that this is a slander that has been used by the Trotskyists against Stalin and it has absolutely no business to appear in this book.

But I must state emphatically that so far as I am concerned it is an accident, and not part of a system. The whole place I give to Comrade Stalin in this book proves

[p. 9]

this. Stalin is shown as one of the builders of the Party, as being, with Lenin, the real organiser and leader of the Red Army.

What the reporter says about no sharp words about Trotsky but plenty of praise, and the discovery of mistakes by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, I consider to be malicious consense [sic.]. The reviewers of the bourgeois press with a sound class instinct have seen the truth all right, and of saying "nothing good about Trotsky," "sneering at Trotsky".

p.248. I am here giving the substance of Lenin's report on the land decree to the 2nd Congress of Soviets, part in paraphrase part in quotation. Lenin said: "Here voices will be raised that the decree itself and the mandate are drawn up by [sic.] the Socialist Revolutionaries. Let us grant it is so, and then follows the passage given by me in quotes. I later state the decree was drawn up "on the basis of the progress of the S.R.'s [sic.]" and show where nevertheless it materially differed from that programme.

p. 257. I do not say the reaction lost all hope. I say that after the mass of middle peasantry declared for the Soviet power, which was symbolised in the entry of the left S.R.'s [sic.] to the Government, there was no hope of the reaction succeeding. This is something absolutely different from the distortion given by the reporter.

p. 265. The passages complained of are translated literally from Bond-Bnuevich's "Three Attempts on Lenin." I think they give a very good picture of the bourgeoisie in a state of ideological collapse. They are certainly not, I think, calculated to rouse any sympathy for the assassins.

p. 275. In this passage the reporter gives such gross distortions and travesties it is hard to answer patiently. I do not on p. 275 or anywhere else describe the Civil War as a struggle of "forces of anarchy against the Government." What I say is quite different. The class forces in the Civil War come perfectly clearly out of the description.

I nowhere say that military communism “brought the whole national economy of the country to catastrophe,” or anything resembling this. The same with regard to the next “crime” I am accused of. I do not say “Socialism did not penetrate into the country.” I say there was no attempt to enforce socialist production in agriculture – which is absolutely true.

With regard to “Communism of consumption,” Lenin himself says “Communism of consumption is the condition for saving the workers. To save the workers we must not hesitate before any sacrifices.” But I will deal with this more fully later.

About the workers, there is no such remark or anything like it in the book. This is a pure invention of the reporter’s.

p. 291. Since the preceding sentence says the aim of the workers’ dictatorship is to build up a classless society, this also seems a superfluous criticism.

p. 292. No such passage appears in the book.

p. 300. This is a complete distortion of what I say. That Bukharin’s book was an attempt to justify theoretically the whole practice of military communism is a fact you can find [sic.] stated in any and every history of the Party. That the attempt [p. 10]

to build socialism on the basis of military communism was a mistake Lenin declared in a famous speech. “We have made this mistake, that we decided to carry out an immediate transition to Communist production and distribution. We decided that the peasants will give us on allotment [sic.] the amount of grain we need, and we shall allot [sic.] it to the factories and mills, and in this way we should get communist production and distribution.” From this position NEP was a temporary retreat. I think that I have explained this correctly.

p. 308. This critic is very hard to satisfy. I state quite unequivocally in the first half of the sentence Lenin thought socialism can and would be built in one country. The reference following is to “the final stages” i.e. to communism. What the critic means by “the xxx [deletion of “fin”] question of guarantees” I don’t know. No such question is dealt with here.

I have answered the detailed points as far as possible without having the annotated text. Certainly there are mistakes and weaknesses in my book. I have indicated some of them. Another general weakness is, I think, that I do not sufficiently stress that it was not because Lenin was wiser than anyone else that he did so much, but because he understood better than anyone else the Marxist method of analysing a situation. Certainly I have not neglected to say this, but I should have given it greater prominence [sic.].

I do most sincerely and indignantly repudiate the charges [sic.] of Trotskyism made and protest emphatically against the methods used to substantiate them. Finally, while agreeing I should have sent the MS. earlier for criticism, and that not to have done so shows lack of responsibility, I feel I must point out once more that had the reporter troubled to let me know

these mistakes, there was plenty of time to have corrected them. I still think that the book, whatever its faults, does no disservice to the Party, but the contrary.

Every English comrade who has read the book since publication has emphasised in their comments to me that they think Trotsky is attacked on every possible occasion – Comrade Arnot said his impression was I had some times even “dragged him in” to attack him where it wasn’t absolutely called for. Every single class-conscious bourgeois criticism is violently annoyed at the anti-Trotsky line, the “hero worship” of Lenin, etc. I quote the “Spectator” as typical of these:

“He would have served his cause better had he been less eager to advertise his own personal prejudices or those of the leaders of his party. It may beall [sic.] very well for the Soviet citizen who only has access to one side of the case; but the average English reader will be at first amused, and then disgusted to find Mr. Fox incapable of introducing Trotsky’s name without a sneer or an approbious epiteht [sic.]”

In short the impression made on every single read [sic.] so far, bourgeois or communist, is exactly the opposite of that made on my critic. Borrowing his own words I feel justified in asking, “Can this be accidental?” He certainly creates a very extraordinary position.

APPENDIX 2

The Nyon Agreement

The agreement included:

“Whereas arising out of the Spanish conflict attacks have been repeatedly committed in the Mediterranean by submarines against merchant ships not belonging to either of the conflicting Spanish parties; and

Whereas these attacks are violations of the rules of international law referred to in Part IV of the Treaty of London of 22 April 1930, with regard to the sinking of merchant ships and constitute acts contrary to the most elementary dictates of humanity, which should be justly treated as acts of piracy; [...]

it is necessary in the first place to agree upon certain special collective measures against piratical acts by submarines:

In view thereof the undersigned, being authorized to this effect by their respective Governments, have met in conference at Nyon between the 9 and the 14 September 1937, and have agreed upon the following provisions which shall enter immediately into force:

[...]

II. Any submarine which attacks such a ship in a manner contrary to the rules of international law referred to in the International Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armaments signed in London on 22 April 1930, and confirmed in the Protocol signed in London on 6 November 1936, shall be counter-attacked and, if possible, destroyed.

[...]

1. In the western Mediterranean and in the Malta Channel, with the exception of the Tyrrhenean Sea, which may form the subject of special arrangements, the British and French fleets will

operate both on the high seas and in the territorial waters of the participating Powers, in accordance with the division of the area agreed upon between the two Governments.

2. In the eastern Mediterranean,

(a) Each of the participating Powers will operate in its own territorial waters; (b) On the high seas, with the exception of the Adriatic Sea, the British and French fleets will operate up to the entrance to the Dardanelles, in those areas where there is reason to apprehend danger to shipping in accordance with the division of the area agreed upon between the two Governments. The other participating Governments possessing a sea border on the Mediterranean undertake, within the limit of their resources, to furnish these fleets any assistance that may be asked for; in particular, they will permit them to take action in their territorial waters and to use such of their ports as they shall indicate.

[...]

(a) Except as stated in (b) and (c) below, no submarine will be sent to sea within the Mediterranean.

(b) Submarines may proceed on passage after notification to the other participating Powers, provided that they proceed on the surface and are accompanied by a surface ship.

(c) Each participating Power reserves for purposes of exercises certain areas defined in Annex I hereto in which its submarines are exempt from the restrictions mentioned in (a) or (b). The participating Powers further undertake not to allow the presence in their respective territorial waters of any foreign submarines except in case of urgent distress, or where the conditions prescribed in sub-paragraph (b) above are fulfilled.

[...]

VII. Nothing in the present agreement restricts the right of any participating Power to send its surface vessels to any part of the Mediterranean.”

APPENDIX 3

THE HISTORY OF THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS

Spain Behind The Popular Front

GOVERNMENT'S NEW PROGRAMME OF ACTION

[FROM *The Volunteer for Liberty*, Volume 1, no. 1, May 24 1937, p. 1 and 6]

On Saturday May 15, the Spanish Government resigned. At once party and trade union leaders began their consultations with President Azaña. All organizations demanded a Popular Front Government, but the following definite demands were made.

The Socialist Party asked for a complete change in policy on the part of the ministry of Gobernacion (Public Order, etc.).

The Basque Nationalist Party proposed that a Socialist, able to inspire confidence abroad, should be Prime Minister and that the control of land, air, and marine forces should be vested in one minister of war. The party also stated that Largo Caballero had lost the confidence of the Popular Front parties.

The left Republican Party also demanded a centralized war ministry.

The C. N. T. declared that the Government should be primarily based on the trade unions (syndicates) and should be headed by Largo Caballero; it should have the assistance of the anti-fascist block.

The Catalan Left party wished the new government to be in closer contact with the Cortes (the Congress or Parliament).

As a result of this conversation, at 2:15 P. M. comrade Largo Caballero was entrusted with the task of forming the government.

During the afternoon the C. N. T. issued a statement which declared:

1. It declined responsibility for the present crisis.
2. It would not enter any government in which Largo Caballero was not both Prime Minister and Minister of War.
3. The new government must be based on the syndicates (unions) with collaboration of the political parties.

(N.B. – Anarcho-sindicalist theory declares that the working class has no need of a political party. Until February 1936, the C. N. T. has not voted at elections.)

The Executive Committee of the U. G. T. also announced that it would not enter any government in which Largo Caballero was not Prime Minister and Minister of War. Then the leaders of the C. N. T. and the U. G. T. were in agreement about the posts Largo Caballero should occupy.

Toward evening of Saturday the Communist Party put an eight point document before comrade Largo Caballero. The following are the most important items.

1. Democratic direction of the country, in military, economic, and political matters, with collective discussion and decision by the cabinet.
2. The supreme War Council must function normally and is to occupy itself with every military enterprise, jointly with the Minister of War. Appointments to command, condition and armament of the troops, conduct of operations, etc., were to be the field of this council.
3. Immediate re-organisation of the General Staff and appointment of a Commander in Chief, responsible to the Supreme War Council, and the Ministry of War, but with the whole of the military operations of the People's Army throughout the country.
4. Reorganization of the War Commissariat and creation of a new directive committee, to be composed of delegates of all organizations entering the government. It shall be responsible to the Ministry of War and to the Supreme Council of War, but shall control the political direction of its work.
5. The Prime Minister shall occupy himself exclusively with the work of this department, and the Ministry of War is to be held by another person.

The final point proposes that Government program shall be drawn up and made public on the same day the cabinet takes office. These opinions were amplified in a letter addressed to the President by comrade José Díaz. The Communist Party demanded the thorough reorganization of the entire war machinery in all its aspects, the conducting of the Nation's industry and economic life to a central plan designed to end the war speedily, and the inflexible [sic.] maintenance [sic.] of public order and the suppression of provocation.

On Saturday evening "Mundo Obrero" in a leading article informed the Government's resignation had been necessary because its errors had led to the Trotskyite's [sic.] revolt in Catalonia, and had been reflected in the present military inactivity and the chaotic state of Spanish industry.

Sunday, May 16.

During the morning Largo Caballero made public his plans for a new cabinet. It was as follows [...the article continues with the composition of the failed cabinet, the deals to set up another, the composition of the new cabinet, and, in particular, U. G. T.'s reaction.]