

Spain Under the Republican Government



BY

SENORA MARGARITA CAMPS

(Lecturer in Biology at Barcelona University)

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Women's International League, International House,
55 Gower Street, London, W.C.1

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We hear a great deal these days about Spain and, of course, the war is bad enough, as all civil wars are, but we have to remember all the time (if we want to understand what is happening) that there is also a revolution going on. On account of this and of the interference of other countries, the Spanish Government is faced with a problem which bristles with difficulties.

We should like to state here a few of these difficulties.

Necessity for Educational Reform

The Spanish people were not on the whole politically prepared when the Republic came in in 1931. Although education was compulsory in theory in Spain as early as 1852, there were never schools enough for all the children. The ruling classes did not trouble about the education of the poor (or even their own children) and in spite of the efforts of what we should call liberals in this country, there were in Madrid in 1931, about 40,000 children without a school to go to; and I am afraid that this was not exceptional even for a great city.

Certainly there existed an "elite" that had worked very hard for many years at developing the desire for culture in the people, and the first republican government started a very active educational policy. They planned for the creation of the necessary 28,000 schools in four years; 2,000 were built in the first year, including the Pedagogical Mission, International University of Santander, and so on. But the educational basis of democracy cannot be created in a short time. It is difficult and slow work. The



country, however, expected the impossible and the Azana Government was overthrown before it had time to fulfil an important part of its programme. Disappointment followed and with the women voting for the first time and the active propaganda of the church, the centre and right wing won the election.

With the victory the agricultural and the educational reforms came to an end : children had to go on waiting for a vacancy in the schools and peasants to continue earning only two or three pesetas a day in Andalusia ; co-education was suppressed in the elementary schools ; the religious orders living in the country against the law (the concordat of the time of the Monarchy allowed only three) began to feel powerful again ; in the factories wages went down. All these measures were against the Constitution of the Republic, which all members had sworn to uphold.

Democracy and Social Revolution

The left wing organisations felt that they were losing the Republic, that the church, the army and the aristocracy would never give in without a revolution, and they rose on 6th October, 1934. The repression in Asturias was ruthless, and for the first time since the "Catholic Kings", the Moors were brought to the Peninsula and used in this repression.

In other countries of Europe there have been revolutions as early as the 16th century. Since the religious revolution of the Reformation, the church has been kept in its true place ; the political revolution followed a century later and initiated a form of modern democratic government which has progressed slowly and surely. The time for social revolution in every democratic country has come, but there is every hope that this too may be attained

in them without an explosion of violence. We in Spain are having all three revolutions at the same time, plus an international war waged on our soil.

It is true that churches have been burned and people shot or robbed. This, of course, is very regrettable, but we could hardly expect anything else from an impulsive and in some respects backward population, especially when from several churches, soldiery and priests were shooting on the crowd of unarmed workers ; when during the months that preceded the election nearly every church was a very active centre of political propaganda, and the repression of the Asturian revolt was fresh in the workers' memories. Notwithstanding this overexcited state of popular feeling, Durruti, the anarchist leader, succeeded in getting the Bishop of Barcelona safely on board a ship, and the leaders of all parties did their uttermost to help the Government to establish order at the earliest possible moment.

Government's Command of Situation

If you go now to Barcelona or to Valencia you will have a sense of security. You may or may not agree with the Government's ideas, but you will feel that there is a government that has command of the situation and which is doing its best not only to win the war, but also to improve conditions in the rearguard ; to save the artistic treasures of the past ; to prepare a better world for the new generation.

All the left wing parties are collaborating in both the Catalan and the central government (Republicans, Socialists, anarcho-syndicalists, communists) and whatever their differences may be they have in common a basic political programme.

The Refugee Problem

The refugees are admirably looked after by different organisations which work in co-ordination with the authority. All the help is voluntary, and voluntary contributions cover also part of the expenses incurred in the maintaining of a very large number of refugees.

Some of the children are distributed among families that apply for them, but the great majority go to colonies in the country (there are also a few in Barcelona, but because of the shortage of food they are discouraged). From the 1st-7th January was "Children's Week" and everyone tried to make the little ones happy. All received toys, some for the first time in their lives, and entertainments and nice books. There is a great shortage of fuel, but the children's colonies that I visited in Barcelona were heated. The plight of the refugees has had the effect of strengthening the sense of unity between Catalonia and the rest of the country.

The fields of the eastern part of Spain are all sown, but we are already lacking in many things (potatoes, meat, milk, sugar, etc.) and we are afraid that the real shortage of food has not yet begun, because we have to send what is necessary to the front, and besides an important agricultural part of Spain is in the hands of the rebels. The rationing cards that are soon to come into use will be a great help, but if the war lasts the problem of provisioning the population will be a very difficult one.

Most of the big factories are being socialised and controlled by a committee. For the moment they seem to go on very well, but no doubt they will experience many difficulties in the process of adapting themselves to the

new conditions (*i.e.*, in the importing of raw materials, of machinery from abroad because of the low rate of exchange, the finding of new markets, etc.).

Communism in Spain

I do not belong to any party and I do not know much about politics, but I would like to say a word about communism in Spain. In February last, at the time of the elections which brought in the Popular Front, there were in the whole country only 50,000 communists. Since July they have steadily increased their numbers for two main reasons: the splendid work they have done in Madrid in saving the artistic treasures, protecting intellectual workers and organising hospitals: and the help given by Russia at the moment that it was most needed. However, I do not believe that communist organisation will suit the Spanish character, and I think that a new type of government may evolve from this terrible convulsion.

The first thing now is to end the war, a task which may prove long and difficult if armed intervention by foreigners cannot be stopped.

MARGARITA CAMPS.

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