

THE *Nation*

May 8, 1937

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“Fortune” Magazine

Left-Wing Writers Versus Right-Wing Editors

BY DWIGHT MACDONALD

✱

Roosevelt II and the Trusts

BY PAUL W. WARD

✱

Actors and Critics

BY MARY MCCARTHY

✱

With the International Brigade

BY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER IN SPAIN

THE *Nation*

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The Shape of Things

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MAY DAY IN EUROPE RAN A GAUNTLET OF guns. In Spain the day of working-class solidarity was filled with the roar of actual civil war as one segment of the world proletariat fought for its very life. In Moscow the Red Square and the sky overhead were black with machines for war against fascism, built with millions of Soviet rubles that might have gone into a higher standard of living. All over France, with the echo of Spain's struggle in their ears, hundreds of thousands of workers marched with impressive calm and orderliness, in the past year the French working class, in the face of great danger, has acquired a new sense of its responsibility and a new access of determination to keep the enemy back. In Berlin Hitler made a travesty of the day by turning it into a fascist festival. In Poland the celebration was not peaceful even though "several thousand" Communists had been arrested beforehand. Fascists distributed anti-Jewish leaflets and threw bombs at the Socialist parades. They succeeded in killing a five-year-old Jewish boy in the arms of his mother and in wounding several other persons.

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IN AMERICA THE GUNS SEEMED FARTHER away—though the Spanish war marched in the parade—and May Day, which was first celebrated as a working-class holiday in this country, took on a new significance in the light of the great union victories in automobiles and steel. New York put on its largest and most orderly parade, and in the industrial towns the day must have seemed brighter for the thousands of new union buttons flashing in the sun. For the first time, perhaps, many an American worker consciously joined the procession of international labor. May Day, 1937, demonstrated that the morale and solidarity of those workers of the world who are still free stand at a high level. But that happy reflection must be tempered by the solemn realization that during the next years they will be called upon—perhaps before another May Day—to face crises which will test every ounce of their unity and strength.

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MEMBERS OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE of the United States obviously live in a sort of Noah's Ark stranded on high ground to which floods never rise; they also wear blinders over their eyes and cotton in their ears, and they never read the newspapers—if one

With the International Brigade

[The following letter was written to a friend in America by a twenty-year-old member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, fighting with the government forces in Spain.]

DEAR —: In the first place, I can't give you any news. The boys here often wish that they could get a copy of the *New York Times* or the *Daily Worker*. Then they could get some news, even if inaccurate. I don't think anyone knows less about what's happening in a war than the soldier in it. If we see a Fascist bomber crash in front of us we know about it; if it crashes over the hill we either hear nothing about it, or we hear that the rebels attacked but were beaten back with terrific losses, and one of their tanks exploded. So I'll only tell you what I saw, and what men from the front have told me, and my own impressions.

Speaking of airplanes crashing, there's nothing more exciting than lying on the ground and watching a really good dog fight in the air. On our way here we went through a good bombing. We had just got out to eat at a little town when someone heard an airplane droning. Approaching us, low on the horizon, were three big dots marshaled by tiny specks. In half a minute they were three distant monoplanes, German bombers, surrounded by pursuit ships. In another thirty seconds they were the most terrifying things I have ever seen, three low, black, immense bombers directly overhead, dropping neat white packages which looked like ant's eggs. Curiously enough, every damn one of those packages was falling at me.

The mothers were herding their little children into doorways. Really a man can be cut just as deeply by flying metal as a child can; but these children with silky hair looked so defenseless and soft that I thought more of them than of myself. A few minutes later, when I was digging and pulling around debris, I recognized a little girl I had seen playing near us.

There were three of us in the ditch, one in front of me and one behind. They started discussing the war situation, with a local emphasis. "Look, they're dropping leaflets!" yelled one of them. He was a good soldier, but this was his first airplane raid. "Hell," said the other, "they look like bombs to me." Just then there was an earthquake and the trench started spinning like a roulette wheel. That was the first bomb. About the time I had cleared my head the next one dropped. If the first had been close, the next was almost on top of us. This gave rise to the thought: where would the third one be? It was close enough to send bricks whizzing above our heads, and our ears rang for hours, but still it missed us.

Suddenly there was a drone from another direction, and tiny planes with red wings flashed from a great blue cloud like lightning. There was a rattling like the little whirring noise-makers children use on Halloween. The sky was terrifically confused. Little red planes were climb-

ing, swooping, following little white planes or being followed by them.

The last two of the three bombers turned around with a sweep and started back. What happened to them I don't know. As they turned they dropped their bombs, all at once, but they were rushed and missed the town. One of them destroyed an olive grove, while the other prepared a dry hillside for cultivation. The first bomber dived down the valley at a terrible speed with a red-winged pursuit plane clinging behind it. I turned away for a second to watch the fighters above me stitching the sky, and when I turned back there was only a cloud of smoke from a hillside.

Then came the job of pulling wrecked houses to pieces to find the bodies, crushed out of shape but still alive. I won't go into that. The bombs had not injured any of the soldiers in town, but they had done a good deal of damage near the market. I saw over a dozen civilians, chiefly children, carried away from a house where they had been gathered. The United Socialist Youth (J. S. U.) is pushing plans to "make each village a fort" by having shock brigades build bomb-proof dugouts.

I meant to spend less time on the air raid and more on the state of the nation. What impresses one immediately is the complete, unbroken solidarity of all the workers and peasants in wanting the war won and the whole former state of affairs overturned. If one happens to whistle the "International" while going down the street, two or three people going the other way start singing it on the spot, and one can hear their voices going into the distance. The children are loaded with badges and with pictures of Largo Caballero, La Passionaria, and Pablo Iglesias, and will give the People's Front salute—clenched fist to shoulder—on the slightest provocation. For that matter the greeting used by everyone is *Salud*, with the clenched fist. I went to a fountain yesterday to get a drink. An old woman with a great pottery jug was there before me, but when she saw my International Brigade badge she wouldn't consider filling her jug before I had drunk. They catch us and read us letters—in Spanish, an unknown language—from their sons at the front, dose us with oranges, bread, and too much *vinosinto*, and when they turn us loose ask us to look up their brothers in Montevideo, Uruguay, when we return home. In fact, they are even more cordial to us than to their own boys, for we have come from a distant, almost mythical country to fight against the fascists and the landlords and the foreigners who send the bombing planes over their houses.

And we seem to be beating them. From everything I have seen we are forcing them back step by desperate step. Nobody any more considers the chance of their taking Madrid. A cockney expressed it to me like this: "So General Mola had to stop the advance on Madrid."

For why? 'Cause he had to wait for his white horse, so he could ride into Madrid in style. But while he was waiting, the Internationals came in, and the Anarchists from Barcelona and the Socialists from Asturias and the Communists from Guadarama, and Mola's white horse turned out to be a bloody white elephant."

News has been coming from Guadalajara which might mean that the war will be pretty short. But long or short there seems very little doubt about whose victory it will be.

Mobilize every possible group to give aid to Spain. Material aid is needed—the Non-Intervention Com-

mittee has given us plenty of moral aid. The Spaniards treat the Non-Intervention Committee with respect but suspicion. A friend of mine going to the front said to me: "I've got a rifle here. Now I'm just an average shot, but I put more faith in that rifle than I do in every damn non-intervention pact between here and Tahiti."

So get the boys busy mobilizing help and sentiment. This fight in Spain is extremely important for the future of the world. Those of us whose future is going to be connected with that of the world for any length of time should see that it's important to our future too.

Faternally yours, R. P.

Bloody Harlan

BY FREDERICK R. BARKLEY

THE bull-necked high sheriff of Harlan County, Kentucky, lifted his cold, heavy-lidded eyes to the chairman of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee with an air of hurt surprise. "Does the Senator feel it is a crime for a man to make money?" he asked. "Does the Senator want the whole United States on the relief rolls?"

The money in question was the \$102,000 which Theodore Middleton had just admitted he had made and invested in the three years and four months since he quit a policeman's job, at \$150 a month, to become chief of "Bloody" Harlan County's law-enforcement agencies, at \$5,925 a year. Of course, the sheriff had had \$1,000 in the bank and a small rented dairy farm at the start, back in January, 1934, but that hardly explained the extent of his accumulations.

The La Follette committee, however, had just finished hearing two weeks of testimony which explained pretty well the sheriff's sudden prosperity. Here are its highlights: Middleton was elected with the indorsement of the United Mine Workers on his promise to "clean up the county." The NRA was in operation and the U. M. W., working on Section 7-a, was again trying to organize. One of the high sheriff's first acts was to induce half a dozen of the largest operators to indorse his \$160,000 performance bond. This saved him about \$600 a year. Next he and Morris Saylor, the new county judge, became partners with the county's largest mine operator in the store in which this operator's workers had to spend their wage scrip. The store paid dividends of 170 per cent a year, \$2,400 a year to each partner. The sheriff and judge also opened the only wholesale liquor store in the county; no one else could get a liquor permit without their approval. A 400-acre dairy farm, stock in four coal companies, a downtown Harlan business block, a dairy plant, and a fat lot of "big board" securities were ultimately added to the sheriff's assets.

But his real business was enforcing the law. For this purpose, the committee brought out, he has appointed so far a total of 379 deputies, 104 of whom have lengthy

criminal records including mayhem and murder. A few of these deputies, usually two-gun men, are paid out of the sheriff's funds—one of them said he had to "kick back" almost half his salary—but the rest are paid by individual operators or the Harlan County Operators' Association. "Old Ben" Unthank, now missing, the association's pet operative, received monthly expenses up to \$2,300 in addition to his salary, and "no questions asked" about how he spent it.

The county prosecutor, Daniel Boone Smith, is also on coal-company pay rolls as a "labor adviser," and has from time to time obliged by dismissing charges against company-paid deputies—in one case because the complainant, a shooting victim, would "never be able to appear in court." Smith's predecessor, Elmon Middleton, a cousin of the sheriff's, who really tried to enforce the law, was blown up with dynamite in the heart of Harlan town.

More light was thrown on the Harlan County political and official set-up when it was brought out that the president of the Operators' Association is head of the Democratic County Committee and its secretary-treasurer is chief of the Republican County Committee. Under this set-up some 65,000 people—the bulk of the employables being native American coal miners—have lived for the past three years in a state of terror.

The technique of Harlan's operator-dominated political machine is as simple as it is brutal. It has two main objectives—to keep out of the county any outside U. M. W. organizers and to drive out or beat into subservience any residents who show signs of resistance to the encompassing tyranny. Some big mines, notably one United States Steel subsidiary, maintain their own armed thugs to police their company-owned towns and expel strangers without charge or warrant, but most of them depend on the sheriff's forces. Alone among coal-mining counties, Harlan is still unorganized.

From a long line of witnesses the committee has heard the sickening story of the last three years.

When sturdy seventy-two-year-old Lawrence Dwyer